Friedrich Nietzsche

AND EUROPEAN NIHILISM

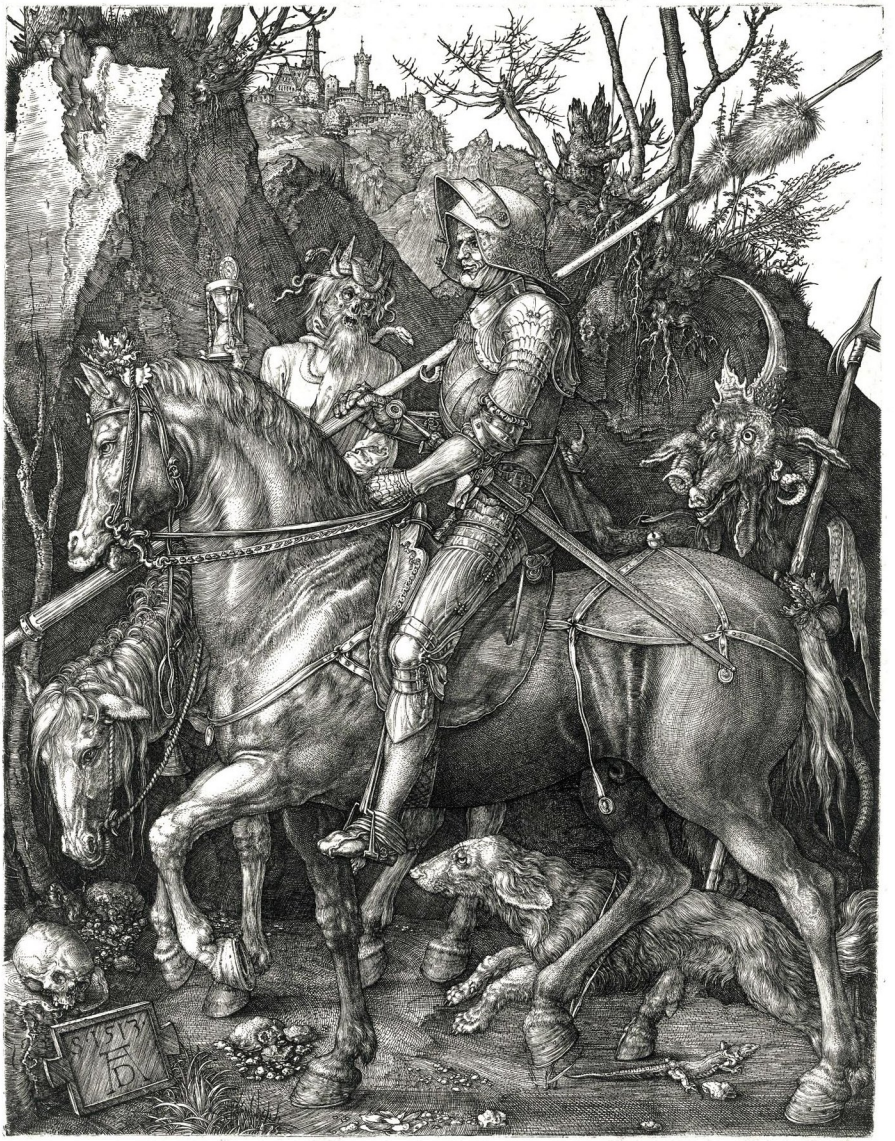

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

An author should always be suspicious of what he writes about. It is most likely that he writes about what preoccupies him—but the things that preoccupy him may very well be the things that worry him, disturb him, instil fear in him. And what he writes about may therefore very well be an attempt to exorcise the peril, to bury it under words, or at least to appropriate it to such a degree that it loses some of its alarming effects.

But there may be other reasons that the subject is imposed on him. Some people can't help but to venture into territory hazardous to them. In the same way that it is hard to keep your tongue from straying onto the damaged tooth, causing you to experience its pain time and again; in the same way that chasms and bridges may exert a fearful temptation, so the perilous subject can become irresistible to an author. Nihilism is an ideal subject for authors who know both tendencies: let the reader be warned.

The original Dutch version of this book (Nijmegen: Vantilt 2012) owed its existence to a suggestion from publisher Henk Hoeks to write a commentary to Nietzsche's famous Lenzer Heide text on European nihilism. The groundwork was laid in classes I taught on the subject at Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands). Owing to an invitation from the KNAW (Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences) to work at NIAS (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study) for a year, the class material was expanded and could be turned into a book. After having taught classes on the subject at KU Leuven (Belgium) and at the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa) and having presented parts of the material at international conferences, it proved to be worthwhile for the book to be reworked, extended and translated into English. Two MA-students from Stellenbosch, David Versteeg and Vasti Calitz, provided the translation, which was then accepted by the editors of the series "Nietzsche Now" with Cambridge Scholars Publishing. A fellowship at STIAS (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study) offered the possibility to revise the manuscript and finalise the translation.

I would like to thank the editors of the Dutch and English publishing companies for their confidence, the students at various universities for their stimulating attention and questions, my extremely industrious translators for their assiduous work, and finally NIAS and STIAS and their

staff-members for the ideal conditions that allow a scholar to do what scholars ought to do: read, think, and write.

Nijmegen/Stellenbosch, 29 November 2017.

INTRODUCTION

"Nihilism is standing at the gate: from where does this uncanniest of guests come to us?" (NF 2 [127] 12.125). Nietzsche often describes nihilism as something menacing, as a catastrophe. He suggests that it is something in wait for us, that it will inevitably come and have terrible consequences: "it starts with homelessness / with evil it ends" (NF 11 [335] 13.144, our transl.). At the end of the nineteenth century he writes that this gloomy but fateful event will take place in the coming two centuries (e.g. NF 11 [119] 13.57; NF 11 [411] 13.189): that means we are right in the middle of it.

This book discusses Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism. Here is the most prominent question: why do we not seem worried by what Nietzsche believed to be the most ominous event of all times? What did Nietzsche see or what did he believe he saw, why was it so menacing, and why do we not experience it in the same way? Was Nietzsche mistaken? Or are we deaf and blind to what is taking place?

To answer these questions, I will make use of Nietzsche's published texts as well as his unpublished notes. A list of all the texts in which the term nihili* occurs is included in Appendix B. I have selected a number of Nietzsche's most important texts on the subject which I will treat extensively: these texts are quoted in full in Appendix A. I expand on these texts in the chapters of this book and provide them with commentary. For this reason, I give attention to the philosophical, cultural and political prehistory of the term, that is to say: prior to the sense in which Nietzsche was to employ it (chapter I) and to the manner in which the thematics of nihilism arise and develop in his thought (chapter II). Most consideration is given to the interpretation of Nietzsche's own answer to the question of where nihilism comes from and what it means (chapter III). It transpires that we have to distinguish between different types and phases of nihilism. We will also find that, instead of prematurely talking about "overcoming nihilism", we rather have to ask ourselves in what stage of this history of nihilism we find ourselves. This approach is significantly different from the way Nietzsche's thoughts on the subject have been interpreted and worked out by most thinkers in the past, as we will see in Chapter IV. In Chapter V we explicitly engage the question that has driven our enquiry from the start and that our findings

will have made more urgent still: what do these thoughts on nihilism have to do with *us*, and what is the reason we appear far less shocked than Nietzsche would have thought appropriate?

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY OF NIHILISM UNTIL NIETZSCHE

Though the term "nihilism" is at present often associated with Nietzsche's philosophy (and not without reason), its history is far older. And although it is rather Nietzsche's use of the term than its previous history which made it "philosophically vital" (White 1987, 29), it is probably important to look at the latter for a correct understanding of the former. To understand Nietzsche's use of the term it is likely that Russian nihilism, French literature, literary criticism, and essayistics of the 19th century will be of importance; sections 4 and 5 of this chapter cover these topics. But the history of term and concept go back much further; further even than the explicit use of the term, which we first encounter in the eighteenth century and the ensuing cultural significance the term gains in the nineteenth century. This earlier history will also provide an important clarification of Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism in several different ways.

When Nietzsche explicitly talks about "the history of European nihilism" (in text 8 from Appendix A, for example), that is generally intended as a history of the (near) future, that is to say, "of the next two centuries" (text 9). But he is certainly aware of the fact that this history has deep roots. He points towards all sorts of moments in that previous history, which he himself, however, never fully elaborates; later authors have compiled it as a more continuous story (cf. Riedel 1978, Müller-Lauter 1984, Gillespie 1995, Weller 2011 and the literature mentioned therein). In what follows, then, I will, with the help of these authors, describe the most important lines to be drawn from this history, until the point where Nietzsche's role begins. According to various authors, the history of nihilism starts with Christianity, although, as we will see (in § III.2 on GS 370), Nietzsche will have that phase preceded by Greek culture. In the end, the roots of nihilism are thus the very same as those of European culture writ large: Greek culture (*Griechenthum*) and Christianity (*Christenthum*).

I.1 Ontology: Christianity

Although Christianity plays a crucial role in Nietzsche's interpretation of nihilism, I will not yet deal with it in this chapter. After all, we are not investigating *Nietzsche's* explanation of nihilism and Christianity's part in that here, but rather the *pre*history of Nietzsche's interpretation. And the part Christianity plays does not coincide with what Nietzsche has to say about it. This is because a very important origin of nihilism lies in a Christian thesis that does *not* take up an important role in Nietzsche's thought at all: the thesis that God created all of reality "out of nothing": *creatio ex nihilo*.[1] This thesis contradicts most of what Greek philosophy took to be more or less self-evident: a thing is always born from something else, and thus no thing can ever be born out of nothing. The first formulation of this principle is generally ascribed to Parmenides, but is summarised in the Latin phrase: *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

The thesis of the creation out of nothing can indeed be called Christian, even if it appears to rely on the story of creation from the Jewish Old Testament. That is because this thesis bears on the Christian interpretation of the Jewish creation myth instead of the Jewish text as such. All we read in Genesis 1:1 is that "in the beginning God created heaven and earth". In fact, present-day exegetes say the text does not speak of "creation" at all, but rather of "separation" (Van Wolde 2009). Separation presupposes there is something to be separated, in which case there is no creation out of nothing.[2] Nevertheless, it remains a thesis developed by Christian interpretation, which has subsequently played an important role in the way thought has developed. Incidentally, the expression can be found in the Old Testament, albeit in the apocryphal

[1] To be clear: what *does not* play an important role in Nietzsche's thinking is the *ex nihilo* character of creation. The thought that reality is created by God and everything that goes with it (that it wouldn't exist without God, and that it can only be called good and orderly due to its being created by God) certainly does, as an object of Nietzsche's critique, play an important role: we will encounter it later on. Cf. e.g. the pastiche of the start of John's gospel in HH II MOM 22: "The most serious parody I have ever heard is the following: 'in the beginning was the madness, and the madness *was*, by God!, and God (divine) was the madness'". "Madness" is Hollingdale's translation of "*Unsinn*", which in Greek would be "*alogia"*, the opposite of the famous "*Logos*" in the gospel-text. Moreover, cf. § III.1 and § III.2 of this book.

[2] As a matter of fact, this wouldn't make much difference, since it would only replace the "nothing" by "chaos": although there would not be a creation out of nothing, creation would start with separating and so creating identifiable entities out of inextricable chaos.

book of the Maccabees, 7:28: "So I urge you, my child, to look at the sky and the earth. Consider everything you see there, and realize that God made it all from nothing, just as he made the human race" (Good News Translation).

But the implications for the philosophical understanding of what was allegedly created out of nothing are far more important than the textual foundation of the thesis that it was created that way. All reality (because everything is created by God, after all) is hereby marked by a fundamental nihility. Not only *what* reality is, but even *that* it is, depends entirely on this act of creation. There would be nothing without God, nor would reality be worth "anything"; and from here the assumption that it *will not be* anything without God either is easily made. If God stops creating or caring (a type of care the Christian tradition refers to as a continual creation: *creatio continua*), or if He dies, as Nietzsche will suggest He did, reality will disappear too, will be reduced to nothing, annihilated. Reality only exists between its *creatio ex nihilo* at the start and its *annihilatio* at the end. All reality is thus dependent on something or someone that does not really belong to that reality itself, but is of another order: God, or—as we will see in the next section—his successor: the thinking or willing subject.

In this way, the thesis of a creation out of nothing introduces a fundamental (dis)qualification of reality and a fundamental distinction between this reality and something else, or perhaps between different types of reality: this, our reality, is suspended between an original nothing and an eventual nothing and is for that reason inevitably contingent and transient. This contingency separates our reality from another reality, one that is necessary and eternal. And from here it is once more but a small jump to the assumption that the changeable reality can only be understood and judged in light of that eternal reality. We are reminded of Plato's doctrine of the Ideas, according to which visible reality is but the changeable imitation of eternal essences as they are known by the philosophers. It is not without reason that Nietzsche called Christianity "Platonism for the people" (BGE Preface, 3).

The identification of the eternal reality with a personal God is characteristic of the Christian version of the Platonic-metaphysical schema. This God has to be omnipotent, because he is the sole cause of all that exists. The interpretation of this omnipotence subsequently experiences an important radicalisation towards the end of the Middle Ages. For if God is omnipotent, he cannot be bound by anything, not even by the essences, like those said to exist in the Platonic realm of Ideas. That is why the nominalism of the late Middle Ages will claim such essences to

lack any real existence (as Platonic realism supposed they had), instead only existing as words, as names (*nomina*) with which we try and make do in our thought and speech. Of course, this places the truth-value of our own speech in a different perspective. But humankind should in any case refrain from thinking it can grasp the principles of God's creationary work: in his omnipotence, God is not bound to any principle, not even that of reason—which after all is itself created by God. God does not create according to a rational plan (for us to discover by our own reason), but out of free will. The voluntarism of the late Middle Ages stands in opposition to the rationalism of high Scholasticism. God cannot be bound to any truth or goodness or beauty which he did not himself create, meaning that he had willed it in absolute freedom.

However, this voluntaristic radicalisation of divine omnipotence runs the risk of turning into its own antithesis—as any radicalism might. For if God's arbitrariness has caused reality to contain no traces of a rationality that might explain why it is structured the way it is, then rational beings like us no longer need any knowledge of God when we try to understand the way this reality is structured. It is no coincidence that modern science is born out of this voluntaristic turn in theology and metaphysics. The consolidation of God's omnipotence paradoxically becomes an important step in the emancipation of human reason.

Manfred Riedel (1978, 377) provides us with a striking example: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) does not start his political theory or his physics from a conception of a good and rational order, but from the opposite side: he *constructs* a scientific or political reality from chaos and loose elements. He does not think we should look for an underlying schema in order to understand reality. Instead, we should break apart and analyse the given relations and construct from these loose elements an order that works, which is to say: an order that answers to our desires. As God created out of free will, so human will becomes a guiding force in technology. Technology is thus not only an extension of, but already present at the foundation of modern science. The operation Hobbes employs to get from the reality as we encounter it to the elements from which he is able to build his own construction he calls *annihilatio*: man begins his own work of creation by first reducing creation to the nothing from which it came.[3] The destructiveness of later revolutionary nihilists

[3] Cf. Hobbes (1999), *De Corpore* part II, chapter VII, where the first few sentences mention *privatio* (privation), *ficta sublatio* (fictitious removal) and *annihilatio* (annihilation, literally: turning-into-nihility) as the most suitable manner of starting a science of nature (*doctrina naturalis).*

essentially repeats this schema (see § I.4): demolishing the given situation as a necessary preparation for the erection of a new world.

But this is too quick a jump to a period beyond the late Middle Ages and early modernity, and into a different realm than that of ontology. Before we get there, we should pursue the historic line and replace the ontological perspective with that of epistemology.

I.2 Epistemology: modernity

Metaphysics was ontology, but became epistemology. This is a result of the development that was mentioned in the previous section: the order of being (Greek: *to on*) no longer directs the understanding of reality. Instead, we must ensure that we improve our own knowing (our *epistèmè*) and make it as pure and perspicacious as possible. Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) has a treatise on the purification of the intellect which precedes his metaphysics; René Descartes (1596-1650) reflects in detail on the method and rule of thought. This is necessary because the voluntaristic God gives no guarantees in respect of our knowledge; we cannot trust the created natural world to exhibit rational order nor can we trust our senses or even our intellect: an evil demon might deceive us even in our reasoning. The manner in which Descartes escapes from this problematic situation is well-known: his methodical doubting leads him to the undoubtable certainty of the *cogito ergo sum*: "I think, therefore I am".

At this point I would only like to point out two aspects of Descartes' discovery at the start of modernity that connect it to nihilism. *Firstly*, Descartes only gains his new certainty by negating all apparent knowledge. When he subsequently constructs an entire knowledge of the world on the foundation of this first certainty it may not be a creation out of nothing, but it is one predicated on the destruction of everything that was traditionally taken to be authoritative. The emancipation from authority remains one of the important motifs in nihilism. Nietzsche also makes this connection, when he calls Descartes the "grandfather of the Revolution" (BGE 191, 104).

Secondly, Descartes' certainty at the hand of his methodical doubting ultimately relies on an act of will. The certainty of the cogito, after all, is that although I may be able to doubt everything else, I cannot doubt my doubting, at least not without thereby affirming my doubting. When I doubt, I thereby confirm myself as doubting, and therefore as thinking. But although Descartes takes *dubitatio* to be a *cogitatio*, we should acknowledge that doubting is in fact an act of will. We are thus dealing with the act by which the will conquers its own doubts by the act of

doubting and in this so doing posits itself. Gillespie (1995, 46) mentions "the will's self-grounding act" and its "self-creation". This sheds some light on what we already saw with Hobbes: man not only emancipates himself from the voluntaristic God and his capricious omnipotence, but he does so by placing himself in God's position: he grounds himself, at least as a willing and thinking being, and in this sense "creates" himself. And because the outside world can subsequently only be rehabilitated from doubt by his own thinking, this creator can also become "master and possessor of nature" (*maître et possesseur de la nature*) (Descartes 2007).[4]

Descartes methodically doubted the reliability of the senses. But empiricism, which depends upon these very senses, likewise became possible by the very same voluntarism that led to Descartes' rationalism. In order to simply look at nature ourselves, to experiment with her, to establish the kinds of relations we observe and the things to be accomplished in light of our knowledge of them, we surely do not require knowledge of a God that acts arbitrarily. Doubts about the reliability of such observations and knowledge do however return, for example in the scepticism of David Hume (1711-1776) and in its reworking by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant's solution to the problem of scepticism is the final step in the *pre*history of nihilism, which is the step that introduces its explicit history.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998, for example in B 19 and B 788) Kant recognises that Hume is right to the extent that mere observation does not present us with true knowledge. We may see all kinds of things, or rather, we may receive all kinds of impressions, but the identification of those impressions and especially the relationships between the things we see (which is what turns sensory impressions into *observation* and *knowledge*), are not so much received as constructed. Human understanding imposes certain patterns on impressions, and it is only by virtue of these patterns that we can say that we observe things and posit, for example, relationships of causality. But that means we really only have knowledge of reality to the extent that we ourselves construct it, of reality in the way it appears to beings like us; or, in Kant's terminology: that we only have knowledge of *phenomenal* reality. Reality apart from our understanding of it, reality as it is in itself, the *Ding an sich* or *noumenal* reality, necessarily remains unknown.

[4] In Part Six of his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes writes that knowledge built on a certain foundation can literally make us "*comme maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*" ("as it were, the masters and possessors of nature" (2007). In the "*comme*" ("as it were") lies a small, but not unimportant nuance by virtue of which the religious Descartes remains at some distance of total revolution.

Many authors have taken this idealism, the thesis claiming there is no reality outside of our own thought of which we can say anything useful, as an important seed of nihilism. One of Kant's contemporaries, Daniel Jenisch, already criticises his thinking as early as 1796, calling it "transcendental-idealistic nihilism" (Riedel 1978, 380; our translation). But the nihilistic potential of Kantian thought becomes especially clear in the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814)—who, like Nietzsche after him, was a student at the famous Schulpforta gymnasium.

Fichte was to claim that the idea of a noumenal reality ultimately still emanates from that same thinking subject, or in Fichte's terminology, from the same "I" that constitutes phenomenal reality. *Everything* thus comes back to this "I". By discovering that all the things it might think have no reality apart from that thinking, it at the same time discovers the absolute reality of the thinking "I". This does not of course refer to my empirical "I", as distinguished from somebody else's, but to an absolute "I", that comes into existence through the reflection in which the thinking "I" distinguishes and separates itself from everything that is empirical and particular; the absolute "I" from which all empirical "I's" are abstracted and which thus stands at the foundation of all things: of the "not-I" because that is constituted through its thinking, and of the "I" itself because it posits itself in that act of thinking. The association with the voluntaristic creator-God is obvious: only this time it is not a God outside of us, but the "I" inside of us that appears as an absolute creator and *causa sui*. All reality is stripped of its independence and practically dissolves into the act of creation by that absolute "I".

If there is no reality without our own constitution thereof, then that which we constitute is not anything on its own; on its own, it is mere appearance, nothing, *nihil*. This holds for *all* reality—including the reality that religion calls "God". It is thus not completely incomprehensible that Fichte was accused of atheism. And it is against the backdrop of the fear of atheism that we must understand the reproach of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), who in a kind of open letter to Fichte (the *Sendschreiben an Fichte* from 1799) calls his manner of thought "nihilism".

Nietzsche never studied idealism after Kant and most likely read neither Fichte nor Jacobi.[5] But he certainly would have taken note of it, albeit in roundabout ways. One of these detours could have been *Les Misérables*, the novel by Victor Hugo (1802-1885). In the novel, nihilism is defined and criticised as a reduction of the infinite to a concept of

[5] Cf. Brobjer 2008.

thought.[6] In the time that his notes on nihilism originated Nietzsche was reading some works by and especially about Hugo, whom he never did regard very highly.[7]

A different, far more important and remarkable detour is the American author Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882): important because his essays were among Nietzsche's favourite literature; remarkable because of his interpretation of idealism. Emerson explicitly refers to Jacobi and Fichte in an essay about a figure whom he calls "The Transcendentalist": one who posits that in the end, all reality is a reflection of thinking. For Emerson, however, "this transfer of the world into the consciousness" (1908, 345) presents no danger, but rather a promise, an ideal of unification with the world as is also pursued in Buddhism (an association which, as we will see, Nietzsche also encounters in Schopenhauer). Emerson does not think that a complete realisation of this ideal exists and that it may even be impossible in "our" times—but those who manage to accomplish it to its furthest extent are of great importance to society. They point to that which reaches beyond the lowly interests of the times, and they are called geniuses; their existence and development is continually threatened; they will inevitably be misunderstood and are to be recognised by their loneliness and their retreat from everything that can be called useful in society. We recognise various aspects of Nietzsche's representation of the genius, the free spirit, and even the overman (*Übermensch*) in this description of the transcendentalist, who appears to be Emerson's version of the very figure Jacobi criticises for being a "nihilist".

And while Emerson does not employ the term "nihilism", it is with him that we see at least one aspect of its meaning appear in a positive sense for the first time. Emerson's text was written in 1842, just before 1848, which will be called the year of revolutions in Europe. Even though Emerson makes no connection with political revolutions, we will see that the term will be used with this positive meaning in that context especially.

Various authors have pointed out that the philosopher Fichte, by his radicalisation of idealism, unintentionally became a father of the modern revolutions, something Jacobi also suggests. In 1799, the year in which Napoleon's *coup d'état* brings an end to the French Revolution, Jacobi points out that any creation by Fichte's absolute "I" solely takes place by virtue of the negation of the independence of reality, and, in this sense, its

[6] Cf. Victor Hugo as cited in Weller 2011, 21ff.

[7] According to Nietzsche, Hugo was an example of contemporary decadence: he was to be to literature what Wagner was to be to music. Whether Nietzsche read the novel *Les Misérables* himself is not known (at least not to me). Cf. Le Rider 2006.

annihilation or destruction: "By destroying I learned to create" ("*Vernichtend lernte ich erschaffen*": cited by Riedel 1978, 382; our translation).

I.3 The demonic will: romanticism

Before we can further elaborate on this revolutionary form of nihilism we still need to face another, darker side (though one that will also work itself into the figure of the revolutionary): the dark side of the all-illuminating sun of the absolute I. This dark side is found in Romanticism (cf. Riedel 1978, 383-387; Gillespie 1995, Ch. IV).

The absolute "I" constitutes ("posits") itself and eventually constitutes all reality as known reality. It posits this self-constituting or self-confirming act (Fichte calls it a *Tathandlung*) as a radically free act of will. Romanticism will place a special emphasis on this aspect, in a manner that will prove to have two remarkable implications.

Firstly, it will emphasise the negative moment we already referred to: the affirmation of the "I" takes place through the negation of a separate reality. But this negation of all independent reality leads to the enthronement of the "I" in a world of complete emptiness. It has no other, no reality to face, no communion in which to engage. There is naught but the nothingness and loneliness in which and from which the "I" creates its own world. The "I" becomes an endless egotist in a world that is eerily empty. William Lovell, from the novel bearing the same name by Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), discovers himself to be "the only law in all of nature, the law everything obeys" but immediately concludes that: "I lose myself in a large, endless desert…" (as cited by Hillebrand 1984, 96; our transl.). The metaphors the romantic uses make it clear that his world is ruled by death, night and boredom.

In the second place, this terrifying vision reflects back onto its creator: within the world it has created, the "I" discerns its own—apparently destructive—representations and desires! The emotions of the empirical "I" (such as boredom, or terror) are not in response to an outside—there is no outside, after all—but an experience of the self-positing or self-confirming activity of the (absolute) "I". It becomes clear that the creator isn't the bright light of reason, but a dark force. The absolute "I" becomes a demonic power that the empirical "I" is at the mercy of. The protagonists of romantic literature all convey a certain aspect of this capitulation to the demonic: the William Lovell from Tieck's 1795 novel has been called "the first nihilist in German literature" (Hillebrand, 1984, 95, our transl.), but he is soon accompanied by Julius from Schlegel's *Lucinde* (1799),

Roquairol from Jean Paul's *Titan* (1800-1803), Byron's *Manfred* (1817) and many others. Goethe's *Faust* can be added to this list too, though in his case the demonic is eventually controlled and tamed by the godly: Mephistopheles is "[p]art of that force which would do evil evermore, and yet creates the good" (Goethe 1990, 159). For the real romantics, reason or self-control has no power over the demonic forces. The subject has no choice but to be swept along by the devils it has conjured up, it decays in its own immorality and is dragged along in misery; it tries to find itself by uniting itself with the demonic inside itself. To achieve this, it must of course break through the norms and conventions by which civil society upholds itself, which is how we once more approach the negativity previously encountered, and which also earned romanticism the reproach of being nihilistic.

A good example of the relationship between idealism and romanticism and the critique this relationship engenders can be found in a text by Jean Paul (1763-1825), in which he criticises his contemporaries. Moreover, his criticism reminds us of the charge of atheism already levelled against Fichte, and does so in a manner that brings to mind the way in which Nietzsche will later depict the death of God. I am alluding to the famous text in which Jean Paul evokes a nightmare: *The dead Christ proclaims that there is no God*. His intention, as he writes in his introduction, is to provide a counterbalance to the "suffocating fumes" that come from "the school of Atheistic doctrine". Indeed, "in all this wide universe there is none so utterly solitary and alone as a denier of God" (1897, 260). The accompanying horror is depicted as a dreamscape of a graveyard in which the dead leave their graves and call out to Christ, asking whether it is true that there is no God: Christ confirms this. He has fruitlessly looked for his Father everywhere and found nothing but eternal chaos. All reality, all light is swallowed by the immeasurable emptiness of an eternal night. Christ, too, is desperate and torn by this discovery, which, after all, renders not only his suffering but that of all people utterly meaningless. His shocking confession leads to a variation of the desperate words on the cross: "O Father, Father! Where is that boundless breast of thine, that I may rest upon it?" (264).

In the introduction to this dream it immediately becomes clear that Jean Paul sees a connection between atheism and the characteristics of idealism and romanticism described earlier: he says his dream is directed at the magisters trapped in critical philosophy. And it soon becomes clear that his criticism is directed at the way idealism dissolves all reality into nothingness and leaves nothing but the I. When the poet emerges from the terrible dream it transpires that both nature and a "gladsome, short-lived

world" suddenly exist once more. He supposes that atheism has caused the universe to explode into aimlessly wandering points of "I's" (265). The omnipotence of the "I" is in despair, as a result of the emptiness it produces. This creation's demonic character becomes clear in the desperate outcry: "Alas! If every soul be its own father and creator, why shall it not be its own destroying angel too?" (264).[8]

We can also find the connection between (Fichtean) idealism and romanticism in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). His main work, *The World as Will and Representation*, will leave an indelible mark on the young Nietzsche and would later become the prime example of one of the versions of nihilism he would criticise. Schopenhauer, who briefly studied under Fichte but soon became disenchanted with him, sought to develop his own method to continue Kant's thought and its distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal world. Where Fichte still annuls this distinction by positing the noumenal world as a product of the "I" too, Schopenhauer proposed his own way of doing so. He suggests that (and in this we recognise romanticism once more) the "I" does not in fact stand at the foundation of everything, but is itself the product of an aspiring force: the will. It is not the "I" that is the absolute, the *Ding an sich*, but the will, ruling absolutely; not reason, but an irrational demonic force. This will produces the things and human beings who are each of them ruled by a blind dynamic that guarantees continual dissatisfaction: either for lacking the thing they strive after or for the boredom of already having acquired it. And in the end, all striving is futile: death destroys every success. Life is a tragedy. Deliverance is only possible on the condition—and to the extent—that the will can be denied. Only then can we escape the meaningless cycle the will continually forces us back into again (Gillespie 1995, 186-197, Riedel 1978, 399). Schopenhauer presents salvation as entering into nothingness; he refers to Buddhism's nirvana. And though Schopenhauer does not, to the best of my knowledge, use the term "nihilism", it is understandable that his thinking was labelled as such, even before Nietzsche did so (Müller-Lauter 1984, § 6; Gillespie 1995, 290 note 27).

Romanticism is the earliest form of opposition to modernity, an opposition that has also been labelled "modernism". Both in philosophy as in literature this modernism will aim its criticism at modernity and its adhering values,

[8] It is tempting to connect this to Nietzsche's poem *Between Birds of Prey* (*Zwischen Raubvögeln*) in which Zarathustra's experience of nihilism appears to be portrayed ("between two nothings / a question mark") and where it is twice suggested that this makes the lonely knower of the self his own executioner: "*Self Thinker! Self Hangman!*" (DD, 273).

and above all at the belief it has in the power of reason. This modernity will subsequently be characterised as "nihilistic" in very different ways (progressive and "leftist" or reactionary and "rightist') (Weller 2011, 8ff.). We thus find that both critic and criticised can be called "nihilist", reiterating the polysemy of the term once more.

I.4 Revolution and the transformation of nihilism into something positive[9]

Schopenhauer doesn't only assert himself in opposition to Fichte, but also in opposition to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The latter had attempted to tame the negative parts of Fichtean idealism by integrating them into a development by which the spirit comes to realise itself. A thesis calls forth an antithesis, and they are reconciled to each other in a higher unity; a force calls forth a counterforce, by which calling a stronger force comes about: negation is but a moment in a dialectical development. But instead of curbing the demonic forces, Hegel conjures them up, at least amongst the Young Hegelians and revolutionaries, and especially in Russia.

Hegel was widely read amongst these revolutionaries. Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) translated texts by Fichte and Hegel, Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) and Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836-1861) were both seminarians who became revolutionaries after reading Hegel and Feuerbach. Riedel (1978, 393) writes that for a while, "Hegelianism" and "nihilism' had more or less the same meaning.

When, as Hegel explains, negation is a moment in a development, destruction and revolution are justified. The old must be toppled for the new to become possible. Even the synthesis, in its own turn, must be negated if it does not answer to the ideal. When Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881) answered calls for renewal and liberalisation with a number of reforms, these reforms—in spite of his intentions—became the start of a radicalisation of the revolution (Siljak 2008, 34ff.). There was a growing conviction amongst many people that only a complete destruction of the old could pave the way to a new world. Improving the world starts by destroying what currently exists. For as the new is further idealised and expanded, it necessitates more destruction; and to the extent that the old is stronger and more encompassing, this destructive energy represses the

[9] For this part of the history and more references to literature cf. Gillespie 1995, ch. V; Riedel 1978, 390-404; Cassedy 2004, 1638ff. For Russian nihilism, see Grillaert 2011. Other sources are explicitly mentioned in the text.

idea of the goal of the destruction as well as any mitigating effect that might flow from it. The constructive or constitutive meaning of the negation does not just bind itself to, but even threatens to be supplanted by the demonic anger at the hand of which it is occurring. The revolutionary potential, which has already shone through on a number of occasions in the development of thought, encounters the material conditions necessary for its fruition halfway through the nineteenth century (1848!).

The most important consequence this has for the development of the meaning of the term "nihilism" is that, for the first time, it is used in an affirmative sense. In both Emerson and Schopenhauer, we already came across the positive meaning afforded to themes we could link to nihilism. But now the term itself and even the destruction it points to start to have a positive ring. It should be mentioned that the term does still retain its pejorative meaning (especially by those who oppose the revolution), signifying atheism, hedonism, and egoism as the representative trademarks of an era fallen into disrepair. But it is telling that from here on, and especially in Russia, the term is no longer used exclusively as condemnation or profanity directed at others, but also as an honorary title a revolutionary can claim for him or herself: a meaning that swiftly spreads due to the manner in which it speaks to the literary imagination.[10]

Nihilism increasingly comes to represent the fight in which freedom seeks to realise itself, a modern stance that substitutes traditions for its own insights, a vision cast toward the future rather than the past, an experimentalism that goes hand in hand with anti-traditionalism and emancipation, and an orientation that relies on natural empirical science instead of the knowledge of history that pursues erudition: physiology instead of philology—an opposition we recognise in Nietzsche's work too, and one he provides with his very own interpretation.[11] Nietzsche probably

[10] Alongside of the authors and works here discussed, there are further examples of literary depictions of nihilism (though it is not clear whether or not Nietzsche read them): Karl Immermann, *Die Epigonen* (1823-1835), Ernst Willkomm, *Die Europamüden* (1838), and Karl Gutzkow (an author who in general was harshly judged by Nietzsche, in multiple texts), *Die Ritter vom Geiste* (1850/51) and *Die Nihilisten* (1853/56). Also cf. Hillebrand 1984 and Hofer 1969.

[11] Cf. Zwart 2000; Van Tongeren 2012-a. In *Fathers and Sons*, Turgenev's 1919 novel, (still to be discussed) the son takes Pushkin's poems from his father's hands and gives him Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* (*Force and Matter,* 1855) instead, in which all reality is reduced to chemical and biological processes. Nietzsche actually mocks this Büchner, who he refers to as "this fanatic friend of matter" (our transl.), for example in NF 30 [20] 7.740. For Büchner's popularity amongst Russian revolutionaries and nihilists, cf. Siljak 2008, 48ff.

encounters this positive, revolutionary, and emancipatory meaning of "nihilism" in at least two ways.[12]

Firstly, he must have been made familiar with the thoughts of Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) through Malwida von Meysenbug (1816-1903). Nietzsche got to know von Meysenbug in 1872 and they regularly met thereafter: they maintained an intensive correspondence until 1889.[13]

Malwida was a governess and teacher in Alexander Herzen's family for some time and afterwards raised their daughter Olga like her own. According to many, Herzen, who has been called the father of Russian socialism, played an indispensable role in spreading the new, positive, emancipatory, and libertarian meaning of the term "nihilism" (Siljak 2008, 44ff.).

Secondly, and predominantly, Nietzsche came to know this positive usage of the term "nihilism" through *Fathers and Sons*, a novel by Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), who moreover knew Herzen quite well himself. The novel appeared in 1862 and had an immense influence on both the Russian revolutionary youth as well as the ones whom they opposed (Siljak, 50ff.): Nietzsche read the French translation in 1876. The novel's main character, Bazarov, is a nihilist. Some say he was based on Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov (Moss 2002, 78), while others recognise the anarchist Bakunin in his ideas (Weller 2011, 23), and about whom Herzen had already published an essay in 1869. It is with pride that his friend Arkady introduces this nihilist Bazarov to his father Nikolai and his uncle Pavel. I will cite a long passage to illustrate the two generations' clash in manners of thinking and living:

> "What exactly is your Bazarov?" he enquired of Arkady. / "What is he?" Arkady repeated smiling. "Do you really want me to tell you what he is, Uncle?" / "If you please, my nephew." / "He is a Nihilist." / "A what?" exclaimed Nikolai Petrovitch, while even Paul Petrovitch paused in the act of raising a knife to the edge of which there was a morsel of butter adhering. / "A Nihilist," repeated Arkady. /"A Nihilist?" queried Nikolai Petrovitch. "I imagine that that must be a term derived from the Latin nihil or 'nothing.' It denotes, I presume, a man who—a man who—well, a man who declines to accept anything." / "Or a man who declines to respect anything," hazarded Paul Petrovitch as he re-applied himself to the butter. / "No, a man who treats things solely from the critical point of view," corrected Arkady. / "But the two things are one and the same, are they

[12] Cf. Brobjer (2008, 88) who mentions only the second of these.

[13] Cf. Nietzsche/Meysenbug 2004. For an interesting detail on the role that nihilism played in the relationship between Nietzsche and Malwida von Meysenbug cf. the following footnote as well.

> not?" queried Paul Petrovitch. / "Oh no. A Nihilist is a man who declines to bow to authority, or to accept any principle on trust, however sanctified it may be." / "And to what can that lead?" asked Paul Petrovitch. / "It depends upon the individual. In one man's case, it may lead to good; in that of another, to evil." / "I see. But we elders view things differently. We folk of the older generation believe that without principles" (Paul Petrovitch pronounced the word softly, and with a French accent, whereas Arkady had pronounced it with an emphasis on the leading syllable)—"without principles it is impossible to take a single step in life, or to draw a single breath. Mais vous avez changé tout cela. God send you health and a general's rank, Messieurs Nihil—how do you pronounce it?" / "Ni-hi-lists," said Arkady distinctly. / "Quite so (formerly we had Hegelists, and now they have become Nihilists) —God send you health and a general's rank, but also let us see how you will contrive to exist in an absolute void, an airless vacuum. Pray ring the bell, brother Nikolai, for it is time for me to take my cocoa."
> Turgenyev 1921, 60-63

Still more resoundingly positive are Chernyshevsky, in his novel *What is to be done* (1863; cf. Siljak 2008, 56ff.), and Sergey Nechayev (1847-1882) in his *Catechism of a revolutionary* (1869; cf. Siljak 2008, 119ff.), in which a limitless commitment to destruction is professed. This Nechayev and his view of the revolutionary probably stood model for the character of Pyotr Verkhovensky in the novel *Demons* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), which was read and admired by Nietzsche late in 1887. Nietzsche takes down citations, makes summaries and formulates his own commentaries (NF 11 [331-351] 12.141-153) during his reading of the book; it clearly makes a deep impression on him.

From these notes, it becomes clear that another character from the same book has caught his attention: Kirillov, the nihilist who kills himself to prove that God doesn't exist. Nietzsche writes multiple notes in which he tries to reconstruct the "logic of atheism" (NF 11 [331-334] 13.141-144, our transl.): Is suicide inevitable now we know that God doesn't exist? Or is it necessary in order to prove that God does not exist; or is it perhaps "the most complete way man can prove his independence"? Does the nihilist who commits suicide act in a manner consistent with his unbelief, or is he a fanatic who sacrifices everything to this unbelief, as the believer did to his religious beliefs? This is the figure—a common occurrence amongst Russian nihilists—Nietzsche may have in mind when he writes of "nihilism á la Petersburg (meaning the *belief in unbelief* even to the point of martyrdom)" (GS 347, Appendix A text 12). Kirilov's case makes it clear that atheism (of which we have seen that it is connected to nihilism from the beginning), too, gets a new role in this revolutionary

phase of the term. It becomes a part of the fight for liberation that is taking place under the banner of nihilism—and reveals its paradoxical implications.

I.5 France and decadence

This last part in the history of the term nihilism brings us to Nietzsche, whose own understanding of the term we will receive a more detailed discussion in the following chapters. It is certainly possible to draw more lines from this history than I have done here—for such efforts I refer to the literature already cited. But there is still one aspect of this prehistory that I would like to briefly touch upon myself, in light of its immediate importance for Nietzsche: the way in which the term functioned in French culture of the nineteenth century.

In the eighteenth century Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740-1814) already describes the nihilist (or "*rienniste"*) as a person who believes in nothing and whom nothing interests.[14] Mercier's description is clearly pejorative; he criticises nihilism, which he believes harks back to Descartes and is the final consequence of atheism (Hofer 1969). But his description of the term will receive a less judgemental meaning as it works through into the nineteenth century, when the term will be employed to describe the spirit of decadence. And this decadent literature of the nineteenth century in particular had a major influence on Nietzsche's thought.[15]

The young Nietzsche reads Ernest Renan intensively (1823-1892). At first he finds him useful for his criticism of David Friedrich Strauss (Nietzsche's first *Untimely Meditation* engages his ideas), but he increasingly detects a romantic-metaphysical flight in Renan's work, a

[14] Cf. Müller-Lauter 1984, § 4. Curiously, Müller-Lauter fails to mention that a similar description of nihilists already appears in St. Augustine, at least according to Malwida von Meysenbug's *Lebensabend einer Idealistin* (which only appeared in 1898), 1922, part II, 227: "In 382 AD St. Augustine wrote: '*Nihilisti apellantur quia nihil credunt et nihil docent*' ('they were called nihilists, because they did not believe anything nor taught anything'). He spoke of a community whose goal was the negation and destruction of everything that existed. Therefore even this is nothing new, only the dynamite is a modern addition." (our transl.)

[15] Cf. Campioni 2009, on which much of the rest of this paragraph relies as well. Also cf. Brobjer 2008, 88, Kuhn 1992, 42ff.; and furthermore Weller 2011, 17ff., who notes several other early (eighteenth century) mentions of the term: in J.B.L. Crevier's theological context (*Histoire de l'université de Paris,* 1761*)*, "nihilism" is supposedly the term for the heresy that claims Jesus' humanity is "nothing", and in Anacharsis Cloots' political-theological context (*L'orateur du genre-humain*, 1791), "nihilism" would indicate *both* the non-theistic *as well as* the atheistic position of the republic of a sovereign people.

flight he is critical of. When at a later time he reads Paul Bourget (1852-1935) and Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808-1889), he recognises his own criticism in their diagnosis of Renan's thought as morbid and impotent (Nietzsche appears to allude to Barbey's calling Renan a "eunuch" in GM III 26, 159). There is another description they employ: "nihilistic".

This diagnosis forms a part what draws Nietzsche to contemporary French culture: the rediscovery of the renaissance man as an example of good health, existing in the control of the multiplicity of forces that man gathers within himself on the one hand, and the articulation of decadence as the powerlessness and sickness of not being able to appropriately organise this multiplicity on the other. The first he found mostly in authors like Stendhal (Marie-Henry Beyle, 1783-1842), Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) and Ferdinand Brunetière (1849-1906), the second predominantly in Bourget and the brothers Edmond (1822-1896) and Jules (1830-1870) de Goncourt. But these two aspects belong together, not only for the way in which the strength of the one portrays the weakness of the other and vice versa, but also because strength and weakness both emanate from the same: the entangling of multiplicity of forces, tendencies and possibilities. Similar to the (Italian) Renaissance, this modern era is also characterised by such multiplicity and mixing. The breaching of the fixed structures of the earlier medieval feudal system and the current emergence of large cities cause "race"[16] and rank to mix. The tension this creates, not only within society at large but within individuals too, always contains two elements. On the one hand, it can give rise to the greatness of extraordinary people, like the great rulers and artists of the Renaissance (Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Cesare Borgia) or more current examples like Napoleon or Byron's literary creation Manfred. On the other hand, this chaos threatens the individual, whose natural inclination is to protect itself from this threat by escaping into religion, intoxication, or the masses.

"Nihilism" (alongside "aestheticism", "dilettantism", and sometimes "naturalism" and "romanticism" too) is one of the terms that signifies this last-mentioned aspect of modern man and culture. The metropolis, and Paris in particular, is the laboratory in which this typical illness of the times can be studied. French literature and literary criticism, discussing Russian literature too (like Brunetière's *Le Roman naturaliste*, published

[16] The term "race" is here used in the very broad range of meaning attributed to it in the early nineteenth century. For an extensive study on this usage, cf. Schank 2000, as well as the upcoming § II.3.

in 1883 and republished in 1884, when it was read by Nietzsche[17]), the emerging French psychiatry (Théodore-Armand Ribot, 1839-1916, Charles Féré, 1857-1907[18]) and Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883, read by Nietzsche in that year) as well as his *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1885, read by Nietzsche from that year onward) are some examples of the manner in which Nietzsche takes note of the results of this enterprise.

But Russian literature, in which a related diagnosis is discovered, is also swiftly translated into French and absorbed within the delineated framework. Nietzsche reads both Dostoyevsky (a version of *Notes from the Underground* and *Demons*, amongst others), Tolstoy (*Ma Religion* or *What I Believe*), as well as Turgenev (*Fathers and Sons*) in French translation. He reads this last book after finding a strong recommendation in *Lettres à une inconnue* by Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), a friend of Stendhal's. Both in French and Russian literature Nietzsche reads that "nihilism" no longer denotes only condemnation, but rather at the same time presents a diagnosis of a fascinating condition and which is further recognised by the critic as present within himself. It is exactly these self-critical aspects exhibited by the French literature on nihilism that will play an important role in Nietzsche's own elaboration of the concept.

[17] Brunetière writes about Chernyshevsky's book *What Is to Be Done?* in his essay on *Le Roman du nihilisme russe* (1883, 29-50). He calls it a book that "is only of moderate importance as a work of art, but that deserves to be known as an expression of Russian radicalism" (30, our transl.). He concludes that the author shows Turgenev's sketch of nihilists in his Fathers and Sons was justified. Brobjer (2008, 168) mentions that "Nietzsche possessed his [Brunetière's] *Le roman naturaliste* (Paris 1884 [sic]) and had fairly heavily annotated the chapter 'Le roman du nihilisme', 29-50, in it".

[18] For the significance of these psychiatrists to Nietzsche cf. Cowan 2005, 48, note 1, and Hermens 2015.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEME OF NIHILISM IN THE WORK OF NIETZSCHE

II.1 Overview of life and works

Instead of presenting a complete overview of Nietzsche's life and his works, I will confine myself to a periodisation of his writings, contextualised by the various phases discernible in his life.[19]

Nietzsche produced an immense amount of writing in his relatively short life. Even if we leave the strictly philological publications (which he mostly wrote as a student and a young professor in Basel) out of our reckoning, as well as the books whose publication he did not live to see and of which we cannot really claim to have an authoritative final version, the number of books published between 1872 and the end of 1888 still comes to 15. Four other books were ready for publication and had been sent to the publisher, albeit—as always, in Nietzsche's case—in provisional form. Alongside of these 19 books there are thousands of pages of notes. The *Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA),* which gathers all his philosophical writings from 1869 until the last notes from January 1889, comes to over 8000 pages. Within such a vast expanse of work a measure of development will naturally be found: with due care, this development may be articulated into a number of different periods. There is, however, always a certain risk involved when one defines different periods in an author's works, and that holds true in this case too. Lou Salomé would be the first to try and come to terms with Nietzsche's multifaceted and changeable writing in this (periodising) manner (Andreas-Salomé 1988) and various other authors have presented their own variations of such divisions too. The following general description is in line with the prevalent ideas on the matter. On the condition that we do not place too much value on these divisions, such periodising may be useful in virtue of the way it will frame

[19] For a more extensive biography, Janz (1978) remains the best choice.

the more detailed description (found in § II.2) of the manner in which the theme of nihilism appears in Nietzsche's work.

In 1869 Nietzsche was appointed professor in classical philology at the University of Basel. While he did write and finish a number of texts from the start of his time there, he did not publish his first book until 1872: *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik (The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music)*. The book starts by presenting a hypothesis on the rise and decline of Greek tragedy, but along the way it becomes clear (and actually was already noticeable in the initial "Foreword to Richard Wagner") that it contains a critique of contemporary culture. Even in his first publication Nietzsche stayed true to what he presented as his wish or intention at the end of his inaugural speech: *philosophia facta est quae philologia fuit* (what philology was has now been made into philosophy)[20]: his study of Greek and Roman antiquity is guided (if not so much in his teaching, the more so in his publications) by a philosophy that concerns itself with the life of both culture and individual. We can even claim that he is concerned with the meaning of life. In *The Birth of Tragedy* we find the famous dictum that existence and the world can only be justified aesthetically, which is to say that this is the only way they can appear as meaningful (BT 5, 52, and 24, 141).

This becomes clearer still in the four *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (Untimely Meditations)*, which Nietzsche published between 1873 and 1876. The second essay, *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben (On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life)*, presents a critique of historicism from a perspective of concern for "the health of a human being, a people or a culture" (UM II.1, 131). The third essay, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher (Schopenhauer as Educator)*, explicitly deals with the meaning of life and the question "What is life worth as such?" (UM III.3, 146). It is also around this time that Nietzsche defines the philosopher as "cultural physician". He has the intention to produce an entire *Untimely Meditation* under this title; but even though this never materialises, the thematics and direction of his thought can certainly be characterised by that formula.[21]

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[20] Nietzsche, *Homer und die klassische Philologie* (*Homer and Classical Philology*) (1869). The text does not form a part of the KSA, but does appear in KGW, part II.1, and on *Nietzsche Online*. The quote is Nietzsche's reversal of Seneca's critique (from letter 108.23) on conventional education, in which it is philosophy that has become philology: *quae philosophia fuit, facta philologia est.*

[21] Cf. NF 23 [15] 7.545; Letter to E. Rohde 22-3-1873 (KSB 4.136), and for an elaboration thereof: Van Tongeren 2008.

The discrepancy between the role Nietzsche wanted to take up as cultural physician and his actual work as professor of classical philology must have contributed to his decision to take leave from his position in 1879. His poor health, however, was undoubtedly the main reason: his physical condition and frequent migraine attacks made working an impossibility. From that time, he lived off a small pension, moving through Europe without a fixed abode. The Engadin in Switzerland, southern France, and northern Italy were the areas he predominantly kept returning to in an attempt to find the most accommodating climate for his frail health. He lived in boarding houses, often only for a short while, varying from a number of days to a couple of months. While he still read a fair amount when his eyes allowed him, for the most part he passed his days by walking. He would take down notes along the way, which he worked out in the evenings and early mornings; he gathered these notes in the books that appear from this point onward, which he enjoyed referring to as his "walking books". *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches (Human, All Too Human)* appears in 1878 but largely owes its existence to the years 1876/1877, when Nietzsche was on sick leave and spent prolonged time with his friend Paul Rée in Sorrento, courtesy of Malwida von Meysenbug's invitation. *Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche (Mixed Opinions and Maxims* 1879) and *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten (The Wanderer and his Shadow* 1880) are collated into *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches, zweiter Band (Human, All Too Human, Volume II)* in 1886. I also attribute *Morgenröthe (Daybreak* 1881) to this period.

In this second period of his writing (1876-1881), Nietzsche remains a cultural physician, albeit in a somewhat different manner than before. His distinction between and his discussion of the various domains of culture is clearer now, distinguishing between the domain of knowing (especially metaphysics, but philosophy more broadly and increasingly the sciences too), the domain of believing (religion, and especially Christianity), the domain of acting (morally, in the first place, but also social life and politics), and the domain of creation (art). He stops writing lengthy treatises, instead favouring short aphorisms, each of which investigates a particular aspect of culture.

But the main difference in respect of the first period is that his primary occupation is no longer comprised of a search for the meaning of cultural and individual life. Instead, he seeks to interrogate the prevailing interpretations of that meaning. He realises that a good doctor must first diagnose, which requires one to look beyond the symptoms in order to find what underlies them. But as is often the case, the patient in question has also become attached to his symptoms, tasking the diagnostician with

the painful job of deflating his illusions. Both his lifestyle and diagnostic practice as well as the type of texts he is writing drive Nietzsche to an ever-greater distance from conventional ways of life. It can be difficult to take part in the practices one has simultaneously understood and debunked as illusions. Solitude becomes a prominent theme; the wanderer is often alone with himself or his shadow, but he examines himself too. For he is nevertheless a part of the culture he is interrogating, even if he seeks to maintain a critical distance from it.

The thinker finds the laboratory where he can conduct his experimental research within himself: "we ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs" (GS 319, 253). The strongest motive discernible in the third period is that "life is the means to knowledge", "an experiment" (GS 324, 255) for those who wish to comprehend and know, for those driven by the "passion for knowledge" (e.g. GS 107, 164). The start of this period is characterised by *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science)*, a book published in 1882. What was already visible in earlier periods, now comes to apply in full. What he wrote in an earlier note (NF 29 [213] 7.715, quoting—without explicit reference—from the gospel of Luke 4:23) is repeated in this period: "physician, help yourself" (Z I "On the Gift-Giving Virtue" 2, 188). In this period Nietzsche knows himself to be "physician and patient in one".[22]

That last quote is from the preface to the second edition of *Human, All Too Human, Volume II* (Preface 5, 212) and therefore dates from 1886, towards the end of the third period, which plays out between 1881 and 1887. At the end of the first edition of *The Gay Science*, the first book of this period, we find formulated the idea of "the eternal recurrence of the same" (GS 341, 274), to which we will return (in § III.3). The thought "sprung itself" upon Nietzsche in the summer of 1881 and became (along with the "teachings" on the *Übermensch*) the principal content of Zarathustra's appearance. *Also sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) tells the tale of a teacher who himself turns out to be student of the very message he promulgates. And so we come upon self-reflexivity in this book too, which is indeed a characteristic of this period.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra appeared in four instalments between 1883 and 1885. This book, which Nietzsche has described as the centre and pinnacle of all of his works, was followed by new editions of previous works, to which he then added new prefaces and additional parts in some instances too. These reflections on his earlier work, in which he moreover describes the history of his own development, once more provide us with

[22] Further cf. Van Tongeren 2008 for more on this theme.

evidence of the extent to which the thinker becomes the subject of his own critical investigation. This is especially relevant to the last two books from this period: *Jenseits von Gut und Böse (Beyond Good and Evil,* 1886) and *Zur Genealogie der Moral (On the Genealogy of Morals,* 1887). The self-criticism that characterises this period reaches its apex with these works: here Nietzsche holds himself to be fully accountable for the fact that the ills of culture permeate even his own diagnosis thereof.

If Nietzsche asks after meaning in the first period, and the second period's criticism debunks the prevailing answers to that question, the third period increasingly shows the question itself to be at the heart of the problem. For the very question after the meaning of life precisely threatens to loosen itself, as such, from that life, threatens to turn into a will that by its willing places itself in opposition to life and so turns against life: "an aversion to life" ("*einen Widerwillen gegen das Leben*"), "*a will to nothingness*" (GM III 28, 163). And it is in this way that the question itself turns out to be nihilistic. This nihilistic question, which has controlled the entire history of culture and is propelled by the philosophical search for truth, turns out to be at work in the free spirit's questioning and undermining of the highest values of this culture. The apprehension of this problem, a problem the thinker is, marks the third period of Nietzsche's writing.

The fourth period (starting at the end of 1887) is relatively short, because it is interrupted by the madness that finally engulfs Nietzsche in January of the year 1889. This reason alone makes the fourth period the hardest to characterise. Nietzsche reached extreme levels of productivity. He prepared five books in about eighteen months, two of which were published while he was still capable of witnessing it*: Der Fall Wagner (The Case of Wagner)* and *Götzen-Dämmerung (The Twilight of the Idols)*, both published in 1888. The *Dionysos-Dithyramben (Dionysian-Dithyrambs)* a collection of poetry, appears in 1889, as well as *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, although Nietzsche himself still had that last book retracted. The publication of the other books he had prepared, *Der Antichrist (The Antichrist)* and *Ecce Homo*, was stalled until 1895 and 1908 respectively.

The last-mentioned book may be the most fitting to characterise the final period of Nietzsche's writing. No longer is Nietzsche the thinker that investigates culture from a distance, who diagnoses its ills and criticises the ways in which that illness hides and proliferates. Instead, he increasingly becomes the person who stages himself as the field upon

which criticism and self-criticism go to battle.[23] Instead of describing Wagner in the books about him, he stages the antithesis of Nietzsche vs. Wagner. In *The Antichrist* religion appears to overcome itself in what the book's subtitle calls "A Curse on Christianity", which is completely devoted to the figure of Jesus. And Nietzsche signs off *Ecce Homo* by opposing "the crucified", as a symbol of the nihilistic culture he has criticised, and "Dionysus", as the symbol of the complete affirmation of life: a contradiction for a signature, as if he himself has become this conflict (EH Destiny 9, 335)

Nietzsche lived for a further twelve years following his mental breakdown, until he died on the 25th of August 1900. He was initially taken care of by his mother and later by his sister Elisabeth, who increasingly attempted to gain control over his philosophical enterprise as left behind in his unpublished notes, from which she compiles a book, published in 1901 under the title of *Der Wille zur Macht (The Will to Power)*. I will discuss this in some detail in § III.1. But before we get there I would like to thoroughly emphasise the meaning of the theme of nihilism in the development of Nietzsche's thought.

II.2 The central position of the theme of nihilism

The terms "nihilism" and "nihilistic" make their first appearance in some notes drawn up in 1880; they are used with relative frequency between the autumn of 1885 and the same of 1888, but disappear completely starting from November of that year.[24] In the books that Nietzsche published or prepared, we find the terms from 1886 *(Beyond Good and Evil)* until the end. They most often appear in *The Genealogy of Morals*, especially in its third part. It is clear that we encounter Nietzsche's engagement with nihilism, or at least his explicit use of its terminology, especially in the third period of his thought's development (as outlined in the previous section), and to a lesser extent in the fourth.

[23] In several publications Enrico Müller (2002 and 2015) suggests an interpretation of an important aspect of Nietzsche's thought: one that is very important for a characterisation of this last period of Nietzsche's authorship. Arguing from the point of the "anti-Aristotelian theory of tragedy" from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which corporeality and pathos take up central positions, he claims that Nietzsche had already sought to incorporate a transformation from thought into pathos from as early as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the result of which may then be recognised in the last phase of his work.

[24] For a complete list of all references cf. Appendix B.

And it is precisely in this third period that Nietzsche's thought reaches its apex and (more importantly) properly discovers its own problematics. Every thinker, all thought develops gradually. On the one hand, this development is guided by a problem, by the questions the thinker asks himself. But on the other hand, it is often only along the way that he discovers what has preoccupied him, or rather: what has gripped him. This is especially clear in Nietzsche's development: it becomes most apparent when we pay attention to the kinds of questions he asks and the manner in which his questions gradually become the expression of his "problem", his "task".[25]

In *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* we find that Nietzsche uses his questions as stylistic instruments. He employs questions to introduce and structure his argument and to regularly bring the reader's attention back to the question at hand. But these questions do not quite indicate what the texts are actually about. They do not express the actual problematics of his thought, but are merely an instrument for the structuring of an argument that deals with other issues. The distance that separates the questions asked and the intended issues appears to be a reflection of the disparity Nietzsche experienced in the first period as professor of classical philology, when he actually wanted to be a philosophical cultural critic.

Only in the aphoristic books from *Human, All Too Human* onward do Nietzsche's questions really come into their own. Here the questions become more urgent than they previously were. If up until this point it was Nietzsche the author who asked and suggested questions, he now increasingly obeys a questioning that imposes itself, or perhaps we ought to say that he obeys something within himself that imposes questions upon him: he discerns an "inclination" for asking those kinds of questions mankind would rather forget (HH I 1, 12). When he does ask questions, these are often not as purely rhetorical as they were before, not merely the presentation of a question for which he already had the answer. On the contrary: at times, he hardly seems capable of properly expressing the question pressing upon him: "A question seems to lie heavily on our tongue and yet refuses to be uttered: whether one *could* consciously reside in untruth?" (HH I 34, 29). We find more and more instances where texts end with one or multiple questions—and again they often are not rhetorical questions in the traditional sense of the word.[26]

[25] The following is further elaborated in Van Tongeren 2012-b.
[26] Cf. e.g. HH I 230, 261, and 481.

The thinker isn't as much a director of his own questions as he is an audience to the questions he hears within himself. The many dialogue texts we find from *Human, All Too Human, Volume II* onward are a clear symptom of this. The title of the second part of this book bears special significance: *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. In the prologue, the wanderer addresses his shadow: "There are a couple of hundred questions pressing upon my soul, and the time you have in which to answer them is perhaps only brief" (HH II WS, 302). Ever more strongly we find that the questions also start applying to his own questioning. We find a fine example of this in the aphorism in which Nietzsche writes that nothing is self-evident to the thinker and everything is open to debate—even the duty he experiences to seek the truth. This means that Nietzsche takes his own questions to be problematic, "questionable", and worth questioning: "the element required to *heat* the machine seems to be the same element as is to be investigated by means of the machine" (HH II WS 43, 321).

This feature will gradually become stronger. According to the preface later inserted into *Daybreak*, Nietzsche starts undermining the faith in morality in this book. In fact, he had already started doing so, but in this book the existential character of the self-questioning and its connection with this undermining of morality becomes clearer. It becomes increasingly clear that this self-questioning, the enquiry into his own enquiring, the questions for his own questioning, these suspicious examinations (D 523, 208) of his own questions ("What am I really *doing*? And why am *I* doing it?" D 196, 116-117) are experienced as moral obligations. It is, after all, a type of honesty (D 482, 485) that requires courage and various other "virtues" (D 18, 18). The thinker that has questioned every morality as thoroughly as possible eventually must confront his own questioning and finds another morality to survive within them: "even we are still addressed by a 'thou shalt'" (D Preface 4, 4). And these moral attributes of self-enquiry become increasingly problematic.

This becomes especially clear in the period of Nietzsche's writing we have described as his third, the period starting with *The Gay Science*, but to which the preface later added to *Daybreak* (the quotation in the previous paragraph was taken from this preface) also belongs. The fervent relation of the thinker to his own thinking, the "passion for knowledge" (GS 107 and 123) of which it has been discovered that it is itself a moral quality, thereby turns out to be a threat to life too. Because the person that passionately searches for the truth will combat every falsity, even when that falsehood is pleasant or indeed vital, and even when this truth-searching is driven by such a vital lie. The thinker will have to trespass the boundaries of morality if it should transpire that that morality is itself a

falsehood. But the intellectual consciousness that forces him to do so remains a—moral—consciousness; even the passionate search for truth is driven by morality. The inner conflict becomes ever fiercer. The thinker becomes an arena wherein the urge to live and the urge to know go to battle:

> A thinker is now that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for their first fight, after the impulse for truth has *proved* to be a life-preserving power too. Compared to the significance of this fight, everything else is a matter of indifference: the ultimate question about the conditions of life has been posed here, and we confront the first attempt to answer this question by experiment. To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment.
> GS 110, 171

It is clear that this brings us to a crucial point in the development of Nietzsche's philosophy and in his thoughts on nihilism in particular. For it is exactly this experiment Nietzsche will later depict as the nihilistic alternative: does it not force us either to destroy that which we venerate, or else to destroy ourselves? And aren't both nihilistic? (GS 346, 287) We will discuss this text more extensively in § III.2.

That experiment is the problem of Nietzsche's thought, the "charge" or "task" ("*Aufgabe*") he has come to discover. In a text dating from 1886 he speaks of "the way to 'myself', to *my* task. That concealed and imperious something for which we for long have no name until it finally proves to be our *task*" (HH II Preface 4, 210). It is clear that the phrases "my task" and "our task" appear most often at the start of what I have labelled Nietzsche's third period. But this task is not one that is easily settled; it deals with a problem not easily solved. The final question is a *practical* question, one that can only be answered in *practice*, with a certain way of life; and is therefore a question with an answer that is never complete, nor one that an author can give to his readers in writing. Therein lies the reason for my earlier characterisation (in (§ III.1) of the fourth period, which is expressed by the title of his last published work: *Ecce Homo*.

The third period is therefore the most important in the development of Nietzsche's thought. It is not by coincidence that in this period, the period in which he discovers his own question, he on several occasions remarks that, in hindsight, he has recognised or discovered the unity in his work. He perceives that his writings "have something that…unites them together" (HH I Preface 1, 5) and writes: "rather do our ideas…grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit" (GM Preface 2, 16). These thoughts culminate in the nihilistic alternative (GS 346, 287), in the

problem of nihilism as it comes to fruition within this thinker. We will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

As we previously noted, the terms "nihilism" and "nihilist(ic)" appear more often in *The Genealogy of Morals* than in any other published work. We encounter them most often in the third part of the book, which deals with this question: "what is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" The ascetic ideal in art, philosophy, science, morality and religion stands for all the ways in which a meaning has been conferred upon life in the history of our culture. Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, with God as guarantor of the three, have given meaning to the suffering experienced by mankind and thereby protected it from meaninglessness, from "any kind of suicidal nihilism" (GM III 28, 162). Nietzsche's critique of these ascetic ideals consists in showing that these ideals of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are false constructions, and that by placing life in the light of these illusory ideals they in fact robbed it of its true meaning. With his critique, he attempts to destroy the wall of protection that was raised against an original nihilism (the meaninglessness of the suffering experienced) and showcases the nihilistic nature of this protection (because it appraises life from an illusory ideal). His philosophy is thus simultaneously a critique and a realisation of nihilism. This entanglement comes into its strongest expression when he realises that the nihilistic value of truth works itself through into his critique of these nihilistic ideals. This entanglement alone is reason enough to call talk of overcoming nihilism premature:

> And here I again touch on my problem, on our problem, my *unknown* friends (for as yet I *know* of no friend): what meaning would *our* whole being possess if it were not this, that in us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself *as a problem*? As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness—there can be no doubt of that—morality will gradually *perish* now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe—the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles.—
> GM III 27, 161[27]

This text forms the end of the section, at the start of which Nietzsche has written that he wants to tackle these issues "more fully and seriously in another connection" and intends to do so under the following title: "*On the history of European nihilism*" (GM III 27, 159-160). We find a design for

[27] For a more elaborate analysis of GM from this perspective I refer to Van Tongeren 2012-a.

such a history in his unpublished notes (Appendix A, text 2), which we will focus on in Chapter III, in an exposition of Nietzsche's "theory" of nihilism. But before that I will set out, for each period of Nietzsche's thinking, to give the most important steps in the development of the terminological context of the theme of nihilism throughout his work.

II.3 Pessimism—nihilism—decadence

What Nietzsche indicates by the term nihilism is closely connected with two other terms, the first of which we encounter early on in his writing, the second only towards its end: pessimism and decadence respectively.

In the first period of his thought (1869-1875) there is no mention of any "nihilism" yet: "pessimism", on the other hand, gets mentioned regularly. That pessimism is in the first place an indication of a metaphysics he encounters in Schopenhauer on the one side and in some of the pre-Socratic Greeks on the other. According to Nietzsche, this metaphysics offers a "profound…view of the world" suggesting that all reality is one and that all evil emanates from an unavoidable individuation: the impulse by which elements of the primal unity become independent (BT 10, 74). For this reason, (individuated) existence is marked by suffering. Schopenhauer continuously emphasises the folly of human striving, that by the many attempts to escape its misery the human only prolongs it. But Anaximander also already knew that all that exists must eventually perish (PTAG 4, 48). Whereas he still sees this as the sign of a type of order or justice, Democritus is still more radical: for him the world is "without moral… meaning". Nietzsche calls this "the pessimism of fate" (NF 23 [35] 7.555, our transl.). "Pessimism is the effect of knowledge of the absolute illogicality of the order of the world" (NF 3 [51] 7.74, our translation.).

This metaphysics becomes dangerous when it leads to a "practical pessimism", which is to say suicide, or murder, or even to "a gruesome ethic of genocide motivated by pity" (BT 15, 96). According to Nietzsche, these are very real threats when there is no art, religion or science to guard against it. There is, however, a different threat, more prominent in our time and culture, as encountered amongst a different kind of "practical pessimists". So strongly are they guided by the realisation that the world is to end and that everything is meaningless that they shut themselves off from all misery. They hope that it will last for the time they are around, but even if that shouldn't be the case, they make peace with that fact too: "that is their feeling and thus they live an *ironic* existence" (UM II.7, 100).

However, the type of protection against this kind of practical pessimism that is the most widespread is also dangerous. Both science and morality as well as politics seek to combat the dangers of pessimism with all kinds of optimism: Socrates denied the inevitability of evil and ascribed it to a lack of knowledge (BT 15, 97). His "theoretical optimism" sits well with the moral optimism that identifies knowledge and virtue with each other: if we just could know in the right manner, we wouldn't want or do anything other than what is good. Nietzsche recognises this optimism in his own culture, both in the "idyllic tendency" of the opera as in the socialist conviction that man is good-natured (BT 19, 117). This optimism is especially dangerous because it is mendacious and so refuses to acknowledge the absurdity of life and existence.

Nietzsche sets two things in particular against this: firstly, the art of the tragedies from the high point of Greek culture, which he hopes will be revived in Wagner's art. Tragedy, according to Nietzsche, was the way in which the Greeks could both recognise and at the same time make the absurdity of existence bearable, or even enjoyable: "for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*" (BT 5, 52). This is why Nietzsche thinks culture and pessimism belong together, as the tragic Greek culture clearly shows (cf. NF 3 [62] 7.77 and NF 5 [50] 7.105). It is precisely the recognition of the absurdity of reality that gives rise to the artistic creation that can protect us from practical pessimism in a truthful manner. For this reason, pessimism "has existed for as long as the longing for culture has existed" (UM III 5, 161). In this early period of Nietzsche's work, he holds that an ethics of pessimism, or an "ethical foundation of the pessimistic tragedy" is possible too. This lies in the heroism of Prometheus, who fights against the absurdity of the world (ST, KSA 1.617), which Nietzsche also recognizes in the "rigid moralism" of people like Kant and especially Schopenhauer: "We *do our duty* and *curse the enormous weight of the presence*…Dürer's engraving of knight, death and devil as symbol of our existence." (NF 9 [85] 7.305, our transl.). Nietzsche owned a copy of this engraving, of which he was very fond. He compares Schopenhauer with the knight doing his duty, despite the absurdity represented by death and the devil and without any hope that he will overcome them (BT 20, 123).[28]

What is important for Nietzsche is that while tragic art and ethics may shield us from what pessimism shows us, it does not shut our eyes for it.

[28] This heroic figure of nihilism is encountered once more at a later stage, especially in Camus' existentialism, which was strongly inspired by Nietzsche. Cf. for example his *Myth of Sisyphus* (originally 1942) or the figure of Dr. Rieux in his novel *The Plague* (originally 1947).

Against the mendacity of optimism stands the truthfulness of pessimism. And it will remain that way, even when Nietzsche will after this replace the metaphysics of pessimism with historical and psychological analyses of nihilism. What will change in the following period, amongst others, is that instead of evoking the exemplary pessimists, a lot more emphasis comes to lie on the critique of everything that opposes them. This is clearly announced in a note from 1875, which Nietzsche underlined in its entirety:

> *I dream of a fellowship of people that know no reservation, that are reckless and would be called 'destroyers': they apply the measure of their criticism in every instance and sacrifice themselves for the truth. That which is questionable and deceptive must come to light! We do not want to build too early, we do not know if we will ever be able to build and whether it may be best not to build at all. Lazy pessimists exist, resigners—we want no part of them.*
> NF 5 [30] 8.48, our translation

But more is to change in this second discernible period (1876-1881). The most important change is that pessimism itself gets interrogated. This is not the tragic Greek pessimism; it concerns Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimism to a certain extent,[29] but mainly deals with a fashionable variety like the one Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) in particular constructed in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) from a mix of Hegel and Schopenhauer's thought.[30]

While Greek pessimism was *contrasted* with morality and religion in the first period, the last two, and Christian morality and religion in particular, are now being described as pessimistic phenomena themselves. Nietzsche now holds that pessimism is foundational to religion: for example, people think too pessimistically about themselves to attribute their experience of happiness to themselves, so they invent a God to whom they can (D 62, 38). Contemporary pessimists need God in order to get rid

[29] Cf. e.g. NF 3 [102] 9.75, in which Nietzsche takes Schopenhauer's pessimism *ad absurdum* by claiming that a metaphysical pessimist should in fact rejoice when someone suffers (seeing that that person then experiences and recognises the true nature of reality), and should suffer when someone experiences joy, so that pity, from Schopenhauer's point of view, should be both stupid and perverse. Also cf. NF 5 [1] 8, 10.188.

[30] Nietzsche reads the book in 1873 and immediately makes many notes, all of which highly critical; cf. NF 29 [51v] 7.646f. He continues to criticise and mock Von Hartmann for years in his notes; cf. e.g. the note from the summer of 1885, NF 35 [46] 11.532.

of their own mess (HH II WS 46, 322). They need this God to make sense of all the negativity they experience: "The ethics of every pessimistic religion consists in escape routes from suicide" (NF 19 [41] 8.340, our transl.). Hence this pessimism poses no opposition to a moral worldview but instead relies on it: because one believes in morality, one bemoans the world that doesn't live up to that morality (cf. NF 6 [173] 9.241). In other words, Nietzsche increasingly discovers pessimism in morality and religion, as well as the moral and religious background of pessimism.

It is no coincidence this is the time the thought of the death of God appears for the first time: the parable of the prisoners in *The Wanderer and his Shadow* (HH II WS 84, 331) is a clear precursor to the famous speech of the madman (GS 125) which we will discuss in detail (see § III.2 and § V.1). The death of God means the end of both optimism and pessimism according to Nietzsche. There is no longer a creator to whom the goodness of the world must be ascribed or who is to be shielded from the evils we encounter within it. The world is not divine nor does it have any inherent value and therefore can be as little praised for its goodness as it can be reproached for its badness (HH I 28, 27).

"Pessimism" therefore no longer stands for the realisation that the world does not make sense, but for the moral and religious protection against the experience of an absurd world. Maybe we should say that Nietzsche here starts distinguishing *a different kind* of pessimism *alongside* the Greek variety. And he does sometimes distinguish between a powerful pessimism and a tired and sickly version thereof (e.g. D 42, 29). He sometimes puts the term in inverted commas to distinguish this criticised (and "poisoned" NF 27 [49] 8.496) variety from the shape in which it was previously praised: "'Pessimists' are intelligent folk with a ruined stomach: by their heads they take revenge upon their bad metabolism" (NF 38 [1] 8.575, our transl.).[31] While in the first period the term referred to Greek health, it is now mostly associated with illness, infirmity, age, impotence and ugliness.[32] But this distinction definitely is not always, nor consistently, applied. Nor does he ever explicitly connect the two; the earlier usage of the term seems forgotten.

This is also the first period in which Nietzsche uses the terms "nihilist" and "nihilism", but (not counting a quotation from a letter[33]) only three

[31] Nietzsche will later on apply this specifically to Thomas Carlyle, when he calls his viewpoint "pessimism as a poorly digested dinner" (TI Skirmishes 1, 513).
[32] Cf. e.g. D 114 and 409, 3.106 and 254; NF 3 [77, 83] 9.67, 68; NF 4 [194, 202] 9.148, 150.
[33] In a letter to Peter Gast (= Heinrich Köselitz) on the 13th of March 1881 Nietzsche alludes to his "heartrending (*herzbrecherische*) nihilism" (KSB 6.68,

times and solely in the unpublished notes. Even more, when he works out the ideas noted there and uses them in a work that is to be published,[34] he drops the words nihilist/m.

Later on we will see that the two (opposite) meanings for pessimism we have so far encountered also feature in his use of the word nihilism. In two of the three early notes in which the term "nihilism" appears we may suspect a third and new meaning, which may at times also be given to the term "pessimism". *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* (HH II MOM 11, 217) holds that true free spirits are sometimes labelled as "pessimists of the intellect". This resembles Nietzsche's suggestion that Russian nihilists truly were free spirits (NF 4 [108] 9.127); it may also be recognised in a cryptic note from 1881: "To the extent in which every brighter horizon appears as nihilism" (NF 12 [57] 9.586, our transl.). "Pessimism" and "nihilism" can also refer to a freer way of thinking than the criticised pessimism, a way of thinking that questions that very pessimism.

The third period—as we already have seen—is the most important for the use of term "nihilism". But it is also the period in which "pessimism" appears most frequently. Both terms appear in all published works of this period, with the exception of the *Zarathustra*,[35] and their meanings start to become entwined. I will briefly explain what Nietzsche says about pessimism in this period and how that becomes connected to the new term: nihilism.

We first find a continued critique of moral pessimism. Pessimism is superficial, because it remains connected to morality and belongs (together with hedonism, utilitarianism and eudaimonism) to the moral ways of thinking.[36] And in fact all of morality, especially slave morality (cf. BGE 260, 204), belongs to this pessimistic way of thinking: after all, it constantly condemns life as it is and suffers as a result, because life doesn't live up to

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our transl.). He thereby cites an (incorrect) translation of an expression used by Edouard Schuré, a music critic and publicist, in a letter to Richard Wagner, where Schuré writes of Nietzsche's "nihilisme écoeuré", which means: "disgusting nihilism".

[34] We recognise NF 4 [103] 9.125 in D 304, and NF 4 [108] 9.127 in D 20.

[35] In many ways, the book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* stands on its own. It has a completely idiosyncratic style and vocabulary. That doesn't take away from the fact that many of the themes in Nietzsche's work can be identified in it. This also goes for certain types of pessimism and nihilism, which are represented by the "tarantula" in part 2 and the "fortune teller" in part 4 for example, as becomes clear from NF 13 [1] 10.415 and NF 29 [23] 11.342.

[36] Cf. BGE 225, 153; NF 39 [15] 11.625; NF 1 [161] 12.46, NF 6 [25] 12.242.

these moral values. For this reason, Nietzsche can, alongside Socrates (GS 340, 272), also count Kant and Luther to the ranks of the pessimists (D Preface 3, 3). But this pessimism, which has an aversion to life, this pessimism of world-weariness (cf. GM II 7, 69), is now distinguished from other kinds of pessimism. It gets its own name: it is "*romantic pessimism*" (HH II Preface 7, 213).

One of the most remarkable features of this period is that Nietzsche seeks to distinguish this criticised pessimism from another kind of pessimism. He does this in a new foreword to *The Birth of Tragedy*, by referring back to Greek pessimism. In an "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" from 1886, 14 years after this first book was published, he wonders whether or not that book may have been a symptom of pessimism too. He answers by stating that he was in fact looking for a new kind of pessimism—one that is healthy instead of being sick. To make that clear he also adds a subtitle to the new edition of his book: *Greek Culture and Pessimism*.[37]

This "attempt at self-criticism" forms part of the new forewords Nietzsche was to write for his previously published books after his Zarathustra-experience. It is remarkable that the thematics of pessimism play an important role in these prefaces (all except the one to *The Gay Science*, but there it comes to the fore in the newly added fifth book; see § III.2). As in many other texts from this period, these prefaces portray his search for a different kind of pessimism than the one criticised: this time not by returning to the Greeks, but by moving forward, that is to say: by deepening the criticised pessimism in order to move through it into a form that would follow from it. Nietzsche recognises that he himself was a pessimist in the form he criticises (cf. NF 8 [21] 10.341 and 25 [11] 11.13). He has, however, overcome it. The history of infirmity and healing of the free spirit he outlines in the prefaces to both parts of *Human, All Too Human* are marked as a "fundamental *cure* against all pessimism" (HH I 5, 9). We will however see that this overcoming of pessimism does not mean Nietzsche claims to have overcome nihilism completely.

In the preface to the second part of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche says that he already was in the "midst of…*the critique and likewise the intensifying of pessimism as understood hitherto*" (HH II Preface, 209) at the time of the third *Untimely Meditation*, which was about Schopenhauer. The critique is extended and intensified when Nietzsche determines that the moral grounds supporting conventional pessimism in fact rein that

[37] "Griechenthum und Pessimismus"; Kaufmann translates less appropriately: "Hellenism and Pessimism".

pessimism in and so bring it into perspective. Faith in morality protects the pessimist against what should in fact be the consequence of his point of view, that is to say, to leave the life he judges so pessimistically. Nor did Schopenhauer draw that conclusion: he was too moral to really be a pessimist (cf. BGE 186, 98 and GM III 7, 104). The intensifying consists of criticising that very morality.

I suspect that the expressions "pessimism of the intellect" (NF 24 [28] 10.661) and "intellectual pessimism" (NF 26 [407] 11.258, our transl.) play an important role in this criticism, to the extent that they indicate how Nietzsche, by placing stricter demands on truthfulness, brings the mendacity of morality itself to light (see § III.1). In this sense, he criticises morals "*out of morality*!" (D Preface 4, 4). On the one hand, it will mean that he himself remains pessimistic because of this. Nietzsche indeed refers to his own position as one of "moralistic pessimism" (NF 9 [126] 12.410) and views himself as an "earnest *continuer* of Schopenhauer's pessimism" (NF 27 [78] 11.294, our transl). But on the other hand, this moralism is simultaneously a "self-sublimation of morality" (D Preface 4, 5), and one who has superseded morality can no longer truly be a pessimist, at least not in the sense in which it was criticised (cf. NF 2 [197] 12.164).

The intensified pessimism no longer condemns life for failing to answer to the moral ideal, but determines (without judging, as it lacks the benchmarks necessary to do so) that there are no grounds for morality nor any meaning for existence: "That which follows pessimism is the teaching of the ***meaning****lessness of existence*" (NF 26 [326] 11.236, our transl.). This is what Nietzsche labels as *his* pessimism, "my new version of *pessimism*" (NF 10 [3] 12.455).[38] From here, he outlines two new possibilities. Firstly, to him who has arrived at this place, pessimism can become an instrument, a "hammer" by which he can destroy all that is but half-boiled pessimism, and by the aid of which he can select those who can handle the new pessimism.[39] Secondly, only the person who has so deeply penetrated pessimism can be the person that may perchance discover a new ideal, an upside-down ideal, one that does not condemn the world but affirms it (BGE 56, 68). Extreme pessimism demands a counterweight; laughing cannot be invented save by the creature that suffers the most (NF 36 [49] 11.571).

> This *pessimism of strength* also ends in a *theodicy*, i.e., in an absolute affirmation of the world—but for the very reasons that formerly led one to

[38] Cf. NF 39 [15] 11.625; NF 2 [128] 12.127, NF 6 [25] 12.242.
[39] Cf. NF 35 [82] 11.547; NF 2 [100] 12.110 and many other texts from this period.

> deny it—and in this fashion to a conception of this world as the actually-*achieved highest possible ideal*…
> NF 10[21] 12.467f., our translation[40]

Both the different forms of pessimism as well as the total affirmation it results in will be encountered in virtually identical wording when we look at what Nietzsche has to say about nihilism: pessimism and nihilism are strongly intertwined in this period. Sometimes Nietzsche distinguishes them, when he speaks of a "development from *pessimism to nihilism*" (NF 9 [107] 12.396), of a "*logic of pessimism up to the furthest point of nihilism*" (NF 10 [192] 12.571) and when, for example, he calls pessimism a "preliminary form of nihilism" (NF 10 [58] 12.491). In other places the terms appear to be more or less synonymous, when he labels "the *most extreme* form of pessimism" as "genuine *nihilism*", for example.[41]

In the last period of Nietzsche's writing we see that "pessimism" becomes more prominent than "nihilism" once again. For the most part, we find the same subject matter as in the previous periods: a critique of "moral" pessimism, especially of Von Hartmann's version, the opposition between the criticised pessimism and Nietzsche's "own" version thereof (e.g. NF 11 [135] 13.62) and the identification of all manner of forms from contemporary culture as pessimistic. We further find that Nietzsche himself starts using his pessimism as the instrument we have previously described. He points out that (the criticised) pessimists should be drawing the consequences of their views: they should commit suicide, so proving themselves by denying themselves (TI Skirmishes 36, 537). When we consider the terminological connection between pessimism and nihilism it comes to our attention that nihilism is the clearer of the terms: when Nietzsche talks about pessimism he continually needs to distinguish *his* version from the version he is criticising. "Nihilism" only points to the first: "man has…misused 'pessimism' in a manner that gropes about like contagion: they have overseen the problem we live in, that we *are*—".[42]

A number of new things come to our attention. In the first place, we find the terms "indignation" and "pessimism" put together on a number of

[40] Also cf. NF 34 [204] 11.489f. and NF 10 [3] 12.455.
[41] NF 10 [22] 12.468; also cf. NF 2 [101]12.111, where "pessimism" and "nihilism" appear to be synonymous, and NF 35 [82] 11.547, where the "pessimistic…way of thinking" is identified with an "ecstatic nihilism".
[42] NF 14 [227] 13.398 (our transl.). Also cf. NF 13 [3] 13.214 and NF 14 [24], 229.

occasions.[43] This expresses the way the analysis of pessimism is linked to the genealogical connection between morality and ressentiment, as Nietzsche presented it in *The Genealogy of Morals*. What is also new—in relation to the previous period, if not to the first period—is the opposition of pessimism and art (e.g. NF 14 [47] 13.241). The art he refers to is the tragic art of the Greeks in particular. To this end, tragedy must be properly understood, and not in the way Aristotle (whose interpretation now turns out to be pessimistic) did.[44] Instead of differentiating between Greek culture and modernity as two different kinds of pessimism, Nietzsche appears rather to oppose tragic art and pessimism. In *Ecce Homo* he writes "that Greeks were *not* pessimists" (EH Birth 1, 270).

The most important change however is a different one, which will also bring us to our third term: "decadence". Notwithstanding an early mention in the notes of 1876/1877 and a few in the period 1884-1886, Nietzsche exclusively uses this term in final years of his notes.[45] In part, "decadence" is a different name to describe the same elements gathered under the terms "pessimism" and "nihilism". All kinds of people and affairs labelled "pessimistic" and/or "nihilistic" at an earlier time now appear as being decadent: Christianity and Buddhism are decadent religions (e.g. A 20, 586), morals previously called pessimistic become decadent,[46] the ascetic ideal is decadent (EH Genealogy, 312) and the same holds for anarchism (TI Skirmishes 34, 535) and contemporary politics (TI Skirmishes 39, 543). In art, Wagner is decadent; in philosophy: Socrates and Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer and Spencer; in literature: Dostoyevsky, etc.[47] The opposition between "classical" and "romantic" pessimism, still to be discussed in light of GS 370 (see § III.2), now returns as an opposition of classical and decadent aesthetic (CW Epilogue, 192) and romantic pessimism is explained as decadence of concepts and valuations (NF 14 [25] 13.229).

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[43] Cf. A 57, 645. At times he even combines them into one word, "Entrüstungs-Pessimismus", in NF 11[158] 13.75. NF 15[30] 13.423 and NF 15[32] 13.427.
[44] cf. TI Skirmishes 24, 530.
[45] For early references cf. respectively NF 23 [140] 8.454; NF 25 [141] 11.51; NF 35 [27] 11.520 and NF 2 [111] 12.117. From the end of 1886 the term occurs hundreds of times. The term is used several times in Nietzsche's letters before 1885: to Franz Overbeck (5-9-1881, KSB 6.127), to Heinrich Köselitz (25-7-1882, KSB 6.231) and to Carl Fuchs (mid-April 1886, KSB 7.177).
[46] Cf. e.g. TI Morality 5, 483; TI Skirmishes 35, 536; NF 14 [210] 13.389.
[47] Cf. in the following order: CW, passim; TI Socrates 4, 475; TI Ancients 2, 557; A 11, 578; WA Brief 4, 6.21; TI Skirmishes 37, 540; NF 14 [222] 13.395.

But the term "decadence" is not solely a new term for that which we already knew under another name—it is also a new explanation thereof. By this name, Nietzsche connects his description of the phenomenon with the diagnosis of culture and especially of literature he came across predominantly in French authors (see § I.5) and provides (in partial conjunction with this French literature) a physiological explanation of the described phenomenon. When Paul Bourget writes about the typical melancholy of his time, which manifests itself as "nihilism with the Slavs", "pessimism with the Germans" and "bizarre neurosis" under the Latin people (Bourget 1883, 15ff., cited in Kuhn 1992, 54, our translation), he also can be seen to connect the three terms we deal with in this paragraph. And this diagnostician also appears to know himself to be "physician and patient in one person" (HH II Preface 5, 212). But in actual fact the diagnostic phase has been left behind. Nietzsche moves on to an account or explanation of the diagnosed disease, and, in a certain sense, to therapy.

His explanation consists at least in part of a clarification of, or a connection with, "physiological" phenomena. Pessimists are "physiologically speaking decadents" (NF 15 [34] 13.428 our transl.), pessimism is an "expression of physiological decadence" (NF 17 [8] 13.529 our transl.). The term "decadence" refers to a number of phenomena, as Nietzsche and the French authors observe them in contemporary culture. This culture is partially characterised by the mixing of what used to be separate: historical eras were separated by time, but are now collected in historic writings and museums; different cultures used to live far apart, but thanks to anthropological curiosity are now gathered for museums and for science. Furthermore, due to increasing migration they now also exist within one historical era and geographical area: they are mixing. More and more, different classes, different "races",[48] different kinds of people increasingly mix in the same manner: large cities in particular are a kind of laboratory where one can observe what is happening in culture, broadly construed, as if through a magnifying glass. According to Nietzsche this pluralisation has two sides; it can work out in two different ways. It may cause "magical, elusive, incredible" and truly great figures to come into existence, but more often it will lead to the kind of people who cannot deal with the chaos, only longing for somewhere to escape its unrest (cf. BGE 200, 111). It leads to "anarchy" and "disgregation" among those who cannot bring order or control to this plurality, which in turn leads to

[48] Cf. Schank 2000 for a detailed explanation of the usage of the term "race" in the nineteenth century, and particularly in Nietzsche.

"paralysis, arduousness, torpidity *or* hostility and chaos" (CW 7, 170). On a physiological level this for the most part manifests itself in a high sensitivity towards stimuli and a lack of power to slow down or arrest these stimuli. Nietzsche describes this "physiologically overexcitability" (TI Skirmishes 37, 540); he supposes that the most extreme form of the accompanying psychological conditions can be witnessed in a madhouse, but that "Pascal's *moral pessimism*", the "*metaphysical pessimism* of the Vedanta philosophy", the "social pessimism of the anarchists", and the "compassion-pessimism (like Tolstoy's)" belong to the same disease (NF 11 [228] 13.89f., our transl.).

However, this physiological language does not only operate as an account and explanation of the disease of the times, but probably also forms a part of Nietzsche's therapeutic practice, which I referred to earlier as his use of pessimism as an instrument. He challenges, polemicises, offends. In this way, he attempts to reach a result that is beneficial, at least to the extent that it draws a distinction between those who understand and those who do not, and between those who take note of it and those who close themselves off.

Here we come upon some of the most difficult aspects of Nietzsche's late writings: the scathing criticism on those people or groups of people represented as being sick or degenerate, which becomes even more unpalatable by virtue of the physiological language Nietzsche employs.[49] In this regard I would like to point to a final feature of Nietzsche's use of the term decadence in this last period. I had previously (in § II.1) said that this last period is one where Nietzsche mostly stages himself as the battlefield or arena where the conflict between disease and health, weakness and power, ascetic ideal and Dionysian affirmation is played out. This becomes very clear in his use of the term "decadence": "I know both, I am both": "ascent and decline", "a decadent and a *beginning*" (EH Wise 1, 223). Such is the extent to which Nietzsche claims to be a child of the times, that he has experienced the disease of that time in its entirety. He does not necessarily accuse or condemn others, but rather represents the conflict between the sickness of the times and the chances of health that lie within it. He claims to have penetrated this sickness and that conflict further than any other. But not even he can simply pass through it. While he writes that he "*ceased* to be a pessimist" he in the same text presents himself as someone who *is* (not *was*) decadent: "apart from the fact that I am decadent, I am also the opposite" (EH Wise 2, 224).

[49] Cf. in this regard especially: Janske Hermens's article on *Entartung*/*Degeneration* in the *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch*.

CHAPTER THREE

NIETZSCHE'S "THEORY" OF NIHILISM

In the previous chapter, we saw how the theme of nihilism appears and is developed in the unpublished notes prior to appearing in published works. Nietzsche has no systematic theory of nihilism to speak of. This is acknowledged by Elisabeth Kuhn, author of *Nietzsches Philosophie des europäischen Nihilismus* (1992), the most comprehensive book on the subject up to this point.[50] She claims that Nietzsche's thought on nihilism is a "perspectivist spiralling", in which the meaning of the term changes, where "nihilism" is divided and differentiated into multiple sub-concepts, gradually becoming richer because of it (Kuhn 2000, 297).

Several of Nietzsche's notes do suggest attempts at systematisation (cf. e.g. Appendix A texts 8 and 10). In text 8 Nietzsche distinguishes the four periods that we will discuss later on (see § III.3). But Nietzsche did not have any of these systemising notes published and continued experimenting with different schemas in his notes. It is furthermore remarkable that the contents of these notes tend to be quite elaborate at their beginning but become ever terser closer toward the end, where they merely contain allusions. It is as if he keeps undertaking new attempts, but then quickly abandons the systematic character of the endeavour. In spite of this, Elisabeth Kuhn still attempts to schematise and systematise all of Nietzsche's remarks on nihilism. She does so by reconstructing a periodisation on the one hand, and by sketching an outline of the various forms in which nihilism appears on the other.

Kuhn distinguishes between the prehistory of nihilism, its history, and the period beyond nihilism. The *prehistory* includes the history of European culture from its Greek origins, via the influence of Christianity up and until the period of the Enlightenment. When Nietzsche writes about the development of pessimism into nihilism (text 5), this to some extent relates to the prehistory, but also to the earlier periods of nihilism

[50] In 2015 Eike Brock published an even more comprehensive study, which also includes a summarizing overview of the most important "classical" and recent research-literature to the subject (Brock 2015, 12-58).

itself. After all, the actual *history* of nihilism can once more be subdivided into different periods, like the four Nietzsche distinguishes, of which only the third represents "actual", or "complete" nihilism (text 8). But this history can be imagined differently still, in such a way that Nietzsche himself operates as pivot or turning point: after all, he forms the middle ground between the types of eighteenth and nineteenth century nihilism he describes on the one hand, and the figures he summons and foresees on the other: the free spirits and Zarathustra. The midpoint of that period is constituted by Nietzsche's *diagnosis* of nihilism, as he claimed to have presented it in his "Law against Christianity", dated 30 September 1888 ("of the false calendar", but "on the day of salvation, the first day of the year one" in the new calendar). This text forms a part of the unpublished notes too—Nietzsche even pasted a blank sheet of paper over it[51]—but the editors of the critical edition added it to *The Antichrist* as an appendix (KSA 6.254). What happened before that date Nietzsche gathers in an *anamnesis*, while he suggests what will happen afterwards in a *prognosis*. One part of this prognosis relates to the periods of nihilism that are yet to come, another part to what will come after that. The free spirits—as we will see in closer detail in § III.2—also belong to the history of nihilism, even if they are ahead of their time. The same goes for the figure of Zarathustra, however much he may be a figure from the future. Only when that which the free spirits foresee and what Zarathustra teaches is realised, only when it is embodied in new "people", "people" who have transcended the human, post-human people, overmen, *Übermenschen*, only then is the period after nihilism to begin.

Alongside of this periodisation, Kuhn distinguishes six different forms of nihilism according to Nietzsche. These appearances can in part be chronologically reconstructed, appearing between the start of the second and the end of the fourth of the periods Nietzsche divides the history of nihilism into. But the different appearances can also occur at the same time, reminding us that periodisation does not mean strict chronological succession. According to Kuhn, the first of the 6 different appearances of nihilism, *first nihilism*, manifests itself in the psychological effects of the discovery that unity, purpose, and truth are our own fictions (see text 4 and 6) and in the consequences this has for religion, morality, (natural) science, politics, economy, history, and art (cf. text 1). Secondly, we find *actual* or *complete nihilism*, which "reflects" upon the previous (cf. text 4, 7 and 9). This reflection allows for the distinction between *passive*

[51] Cf. for a reconstruction of the vicissitudes of this text, which is only one page long, KSA, volume 14, 448-453.

nihilism, which resigns itself to an incapacity to believe in the unmasked fictions any longer, and *active nihilism*, which is strong enough to actually contest these fictions and throw them overboard (cf. text 3). The manner in which these manifestations are still tied to outdated fictions was to be overcome in *radical nihilism*, which Nietzsche executes in his thought on the self-overcoming of morals and in the *most extreme nihilism* of freely experimenting, the possibility of which his thought would at least seek to facilitate.

In what follows I will not give another comprehensive periodisation or systematisation of the various appearances of nihilism until I reach the very end of the chapter (§ III.4). Instead, I attempt to sketch Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism along a number of lines and to interpret them in light of a number of his texts; primarily those taken up in Appendix A, though I will include some others too. To this end we will have to practise the art of slow reading (cf. D Preface 5) and learn what Nietzsche expects from his readers, which is to say: to do that for which "one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a 'modern man': *rumination*" (GM Preface 8, 23).[52]

The texts I have gathered in Appendix A of this book provide a start for both a typology and a psychology of nihilism, as well as sketches of the history of its development. While all of these texts originate from the same period, clear differences remain between the unpublished notes (texts 1-10) and the three published in *The Gay Science* (texts 11-13): I will continue to distinguish between them here.

In my discussion of the published texts (§ III.2) I will deal with the psychology of nihilism, giving particular attention to a typology of the different kinds of nihilism, even though these also appear in the unpublished notes. For this reason, I will precede this discussion by looking into the unpublished notes (§ III.1), giving special attention to the famous text Nietzsche wrote on European nihilism in Lenzer Heide in the year 1887 (text 2). From here I will direct my attention to the history of the development of nihilism, guided in particular by the way this comes to fore in texts 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of our selection (§ III.3).

III.1 Nietzsche's analysis of European nihilism

At the end of *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche announces that he is still to write a book on "the history of European nihilism". This book he is

[52] For Nietzsche's penmanship and his requirements on how to approach the art of reading his work (properly) cf. Van Tongeren 2000-a, Ch. II.

supposedly preparing is designated "***The Will to Power**, an Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*" (GM III 27, 160). That book never came, at least not from Nietzsche's hand. But in the unpublished notes we do find many indications for the book's contents. Because I will be using many of these unpublished notes here, we will first examine the status of these notes.

Nietzsche's legacy

Nietzsche himself explicitly abandoned his plans for a book under the title of *The Will to Power* and replaced it with other plans, some of which he was still able to execute himself.[53] But irrespective of this, Nietzsche's sister, together with a number of her co-workers at the Nietzsche archives (which she established after he had sunken into insanity), put together a book under that very title and claimed that this was her brother's most important work. *The Will To Power: An Attempt at A Revaluation of All Values* appeared in 1901, one year after Nietzsche's death, and again in 1906, in a second and much expanded edition. While the book does contain notes from Nietzsche's legacy, it also includes many (mostly small but unacknowledged) additions from its editors; furthermore, these editors regularly felt the need to correct Nietzsche's texts, particularly by leaving out pieces of text, cutting them up and distributing them across the work. Of the many plans Nietzsche made for his book the editors used only one, but their selection and arrangement of the texts can hardly be attributed to Nietzsche.

Nevertheless, this edition had an enormous impact on the reception of Nietzsche's thought. Only in the fifties of the previous century did Karl Schlechta rectify a number of the falsifications. Instead of publishing these texts as an important posthumous work by Nietzsche he now published them as a collection of notes, which he—as far as possible—arranged in chronological order.[54] However, fourteen years later (in 1968) Walter Kaufmann published an English translation of the original compilation and under the original title: *The Will to Power*.[55] He only mentioned the approximate dates of origin of the fragments (and gave some explanatory notes). In his introduction he criticizes "Karl Schlechta's arrangement" as

[53] For a more extensive overview of the history of Nietzsche's unpublished writings and the *Will to Power,* I refer the reader to KSA, volume 14, 383-400.
[54] "Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtzigerjahre", in: Karl Schlechta 1954-1956 (Hrsg.), *Nietzsche, Werke in drei Bänden*, Volume III. München: Hanser.
[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, 1968. *The Will to Power.* Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, edited by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage.

"utterly pointless, and indeed explicable only as an over-reaction…: it represents an attempt to render *The Will to Power* all but unreadable" (xiv). Kaufmann defended his decision to follow "the old systematic arrangement" mainly because "for all its faults, this arrangement has the virtue of making it easy for the reader to locate passages and to read straight through a lot of notes dealing with art or religion or the theory of knowledge" (xv). This arrangement, however, was never Nietzsche's in the first place. Some years before Kaufmann continued the success of Elisabeth's compilation, the Italians Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari started working on a critical edition of Nietzsche's writings.[56] They put a definitive end to the myth of Nietzsche's most important work and, where possible, published his legacy in the same shape and order in which it came into being. Even though the English-speaking world in particular still regularly cites from the corrupted *The Will to Power*, there being no complete translation of the critical edition, this is not quite acceptable any more. That is why I will cite from the unpublished notes as found in Colli and Montinari's edition. Where there were no English translations available, these texts have been translated for the purposes of this edition.

Publishing "unpublished notes" necessitates certain decisions: what is pertinent, philosophically speaking, and what is not?[57] In between his notes, Nietzsche habitually took down shopping lists, lists of walks taken or yet to take and sums to determine how much money he had left. Furthermore, Nietzsche's writing is often so hard to read that deciphering it will inevitably lead to some interpretative fuzziness. For these reasons, doubts about the reliability of the critical edition were already being raised while it was still in the making. When that edition was completed around the turn of the century, a decision was made to republish the notes from

[56] Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, from 1967 with de Gruyter in Berlin (the Italian version with Adelphi from 1964). Alongside of Nietzsche's text this edition also contains parts with critical apparatus and commentary (*Nachberichte*); it counts 9 sections and some 50 volumes by now. Especially the volumes containing *Nachberichte* have not yet been completed. A good and affordable pocket edition did become available in 1980, which contains some commentary too; the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) in 15 volumes. In 2001, moreover, the complete works of the critical edition, including the corrections made to it, have also been made available on *Nietzsche Online*: http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/nietzsche.

[57] Jacques Derrida's 1979 essay (originally 1977) on the matter has become famous. In it, he wonders what the philosophical relevance could be of the little sentence that was taken up by Colli & Montinari (and which Nietzsche had put in parentheses): "I forgot my umbrella" (*Ich habe meinen Regenschirm vergessen*) (NF 12 [62] 9.587, our transl.)

Nietzsche's last years (1885-1889)—the notes from which the supposed main work was comprised—but this time without any selection process: the pages of Nietzsche's notepads and notebooks are printed in the way they are found, in a "topographic" or "topological" edition.[58] This means that the handwriting has been converted to type, but is otherwise identical to the notebooks. The notes appear in the colour, position and size in which they were once taken down: large and small, left to right, but also from the top down or the other way around. Another look was taken at the deciphering of the handwriting, resulting in some substantial changes.[59]

The Lenzer Heide text

One of the texts that bears great significance for our topic provides a fine example of the vicissitudes of the unpublished notes and neatly portrays what the critical edition in general and the new topographical edition in particular offer in terms of extra information compared to earlier versions. I am referring to the so-called Lenzer Heide text (Appendix A, text 2). Nietzsche happened to provide this text with a title himself: *European nihilism*.

After Nietzsche spent the winter of 1886/1887 in Nice, he moved back to Switzerland in spring to settle in Sils Maria for the summer. In that winter or perhaps early spring, but in any case while still in Nice, he discovered Dostoyevsky and read, amongst others, his *Notes from the Underground*, a book that may be taken as a highly critical psychological portrait of the nihilist.[60] En route, in Canobbio in the south of Switzerland,

[58] Nietzsche, *Werke*, Abteilung IX: *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß ab Frühjahr 1885 in differenzierter Transkription.* Edited by Marie-Luise Haase and Michael Kohlenbach (Volume 1-3), Marie-Luise Haase and Martin Stingelin (Volume 4-9) and Marie-Luise Haase and Hubert Thüring (Volume 10ff.). Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, from 2001. Parts IX. 1-3 were published in 2001, the most recent part (IX.10) was published in 2015. The facsimile manuscripts are on the accompanying CD. Both are currently also available from *Nietzsche Online*.

[59] For a look behind the scenes of the people deciphering the handwriting, and for some startling examples of mistakes in Montinari's deciphering, cf. the articles by Beat Röllin and René Stockmar (2007) and by Marie-Luise Haase (2007). The latest and best version of the texts are available on *Nietzsche Online*. The latest corrections have also been applied to the selection of texts included in this book, some of which are substantial.

[60] Nietzsche read the book in a French translation: Theodor [sic!] Dostoiewsky, 1886, *L'esprit souterrain*, trad. et adapté par E. Halpérine-Kampinsky et Ch. Morice. Paris: Plon. This edition strongly deviates from the one we have come to be familiar with. It contains two texts: a curious compilation of a shortened version

he corrected the proofs for the fifth part of *The Gay Science*, which would be added, together with a new preface and the Songs of Prince Vogelfrei, to a new edition of that book. Despite his becoming aware of the fact that, even with his new publisher, his books hardly sold (it transpires that *Beyond Good and Evil* only sold 114 copies in a year, even though 66 copies were sent off for reviews), he felt that he would very soon have to take decisive action, to erect a "coherent structure of thought" (letter to Fr. Overbeck, 24 March 1887, KSB 8.49), that millennia of European history were kindling a catastrophic confrontation within him (to Overbeck, 14 April 1887, KSA 8.57f.). But he simultaneously feels extremely fatigued, melancholic and sick from all his travelling. Via Zürich, Amden, and Chur he aimed to reach the Engadin. But he was trapped in Chur for a month instead (from the 8th of May till the 8th of June), as it was too cold high up in the mountains and the Julier pass wasn't yet clear of snow. He made extensive use of the local library and had his clothes mended at this time too. He eventually decided to travel to the Engadin, but as there was still too much snow he ends up detained in Lenzer Heide. He stayed there for four days, even considered to spend the summer there, but then decided to proceed to the higher-up Sils Maria, where he retrieved his usual place of residence amongst the remainders of an avalanche (Benders & Oettermann 2000, 659-666). Midway his short stay in Lenzer Heide he writes the text *European nihilism*, number 5[71] in Colli and Montinari's edition (KSA 12.211-217; text 2 in Appendix A).

This text plays a crucial role in the history of Nietzsche's reception, due in part to Heidegger's interpretation of it.[61] However, in the 1906 edition of *The Will to Power*—which is the version Heidegger had to make use of—this text is not presented in its entirety: it had been cut up into four pieces and lacks Nietzsche's numbering of the paragraphs: Nietzsche's first and second paragraph reappear as paragraph 4 and 5 of the first part from the first chapter in the first book of Nietzsche's so-called systematic main work. Number 3 only comes up much later, now as

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of the two pieces from the *Notes from the Underground* as we currently know it; this compilation is titled "Lisa" and included into part II of the French edition; it is preceded, as text I, by a much earlier text of the author, currently known as "the Landlady" but which is titled "Katia" here. Cf. Miller 1973, 207. Miller extensively analyses why Nietzsche felt so strongly drawn to this first part too, even though critics generally take it to be one of Dostoyevsky's least successful works. Incidentally, in a letter to Franz Overbeck Nietzsche calls the second part (the shortened version of the present *Notes*) "a stroke of psychological genius, a sort of self-ridicule of the 'γνωθι σεαυτόν'" (23 February 1887, KSB 8.28).

[61] Cf. Riedel 2000-b, 39ff.; cf. also Riedel 2000-a.

paragraph 114 in the third part of the second chapter, and the rest of the text—including small "corrections"—is inserted in between these sections: appearing as paragraph 55 in the fourth part of the first chapter. Moreover, the inscription above the text has been removed from this corrupted edition, erasing its title and its place and date of writing.

That final detail is no insignificant one either. The fact that Nietzsche added this inscription to his text—albeit in hindsight[62]—tells us something about the programmatic character he would have ascribed to it. Its title suggests that he saw it as an independent treatise or otherwise as an outline for such a treatise. Recording the place and date indicate its importance to him. Considering how it became customary to refer to this text as the "Lenzer Heide fragment" in the literature, though its presence in Nietzsche's notes is in no way "fragmented", is indicative of the curious manner in which his unpublished writings have been handed down.

The unusual—and very *un*fragmented—nature of this text becomes clear in another way too. It immediately stands out from the pages, even when merely browsing through the "topographical" or "topological" edition. The text is an exception to the chaos that generally marks the pages (now made visible thanks to this new edition). Nietzsche made peculiar use of his notebooks. He regularly filled his books from back to front instead of the other way around. Sometimes he only used the left-hand page, keeping the right-hand page open for possible use later on. Other times he jumped between pages, using the left- and right-hand side intermittently, mixing up the order of the notes. He would sometimes open up his book and writes on both pages as if they were one continuous page, in an uninterrupted line reaching across the two pages. He regularly applied changes to previous notes, and often he used empty spots on pages he had already written to make a note of something that bore no relation to what was already on the page: thoughts, but also shopping lists or other practical matters he wanted to remember. It is also important to realise that many of the notes are a quick and provisional record of a flash of thought that demanded apprehending: sometimes taken during a walk (Nietzsche took 6 to 8 hour walks practically every day), other times taken in dimly lit rooms: the notes are often sloppy and full of erasures. As a result, his notes may often seem completely chaotic—and taking a look at the state of the actual notebooks (as they are now available in facsimile) serves to

[62] That Nietzsche added this inscription afterwards can be surmised from the fact that it is located at the bottom of a page which for the rest contains other notes. The actual text starts at the top of a new page. Were he to have immediately started with title and date, he would have marked them at the top of the page. I am indebted to a conversation with Werner Stegmaier for this reconstruction.

confirm this impression. But as said, the so-called "Lenzer Heide text" is an exception in this regard: practically free of erasures, only an occasional insertion, divided into neatly numbered paragraphs and boasting a title and an indication of the time and place the text came into being. It's almost as if it is the definitive version based on earlier drafts—but without any indication of the whereabouts of these drafts.

Still, we should not lose sight of the fact that Nietzsche never published this version, however "definitive" it may seem. It remains an unpublished note, leaving us to guess whether it was truly completed; and if it was, whether Nietzsche still planned on using it: he may have already discarded the thought and replaced it with others. The fact that more than ten corrections have been applied in the new critical edition to Colli and Montinari's version of the text is an indication of the importance of this new edition as much as it is of the note's status as a draft, especially so given that some of the corrections are quite important for a proper understanding of the text. We don't know if Nietzsche considered it to be a blueprint or a completed pamphlet. But in either case, the status of the unpublished note is different to that of the published works. This fact, however, needn't keep us from interpreting the text. We are not in the first instance concerned with establishing historically what Nietzsche "definitely" or "ultimately" meant to say, but are rather attempting to trace the meaning and consequences his thoughts on nihilism have for us, no matter when he had or formulated them. This remarkable text will be the starting point of my efforts to do so, but I will be making use of other parts from his unpublished writings too.

European nihilism[63]

The terms "nihilism" and (though only once) "nihilists" appear twelve times in the Lenzer Heide text (not including the title) and in ten of its sixteen sections, but not always with the same meaning. Sometimes the type of nihilism is specified, like the "practical and theoretical" in § 1, the "first" (§ 3), "our present-day" (§ 5), "the most extreme form of" (§ 6), or "active" (§ 13). There are apparently different kinds or instances of nihilism, all of which can be gathered under the formulation used in the title: European nihilism.

[63] The subject matter of this section, the relation between Europe and nihilism (the allegedly European nature of nihilism and the nihilistic nature of Europe) is at the core of a project I started in 2017 in collaboration with Brazilian and South African colleagues, in order to find out whether "a view from abroad", or "leaving the town" as Nietzsche calls it in GS 380, might shed new light on it.

We find the link between Europe and nihilism in other texts too,[64] though never clearly explained: "the terrifying Either/Or" that GS 346 ends with, thrusts itself onto "us Europeans". We find the same feature in many other texts:

> For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.
> text 9, § 2

Nietzsche's use of the term "European Nihilism" could indicate that other, non-European forms exist too. Buddhism does indeed appear to be an example (and may even be the only one): a religion that is not European in origin, which according to Nietzsche is clearly nihilistic insofar as it ignores the world as it is (KSA 304 [204] 11.490).[65] Nietzsche, by the way, will mostly refer to this religion in order to aid him in describing (European) nihilism as a European form of Buddhism (as in § 12 of the Lenzer Heide text).

But first and foremost, the expression "European nihilism" marks nihilism, or at least the kind of nihilism that Nietzsche is concerned with, as a typically European phenomenon. It belongs to Europe and European culture. The connection between both of these has to do with a number of Europe's typical characteristics,[66] while at the same time indicating what is at stake in nihilism. I will describe some of these characteristics in this section and save the most important one for the section following the next, "Truthfulness".

"Europe" signifies a large diversity of historical periods, national cultures, peoples, classes and "races". Present-day Europe has reached an important juncture in its development, in so far as much of this diversity seems to be gathering in one modern European culture. Not only is Europe becoming more politically united (a process that had already started in

[64] The expression "European Buddhism" appears more often, but almost exclusively in an indication of the title of a book or chapter that is still to be written: GM III 27, 5.408; NF 2 [131] 12.131, NF 5 [75] 12.218, NF 5 [97] 12.225, NF 6 [26] 12.243 and 246, NF 7 [64] 12.318, NF 9 [1] 12.339, NF 11 [150] 13.71 = text 8, NF 11 [328] 13.140, NF 13 [3] 13.214, NF 14 [114] 13.291 and NF 18 [17], 13. 538].

[65] For Nietzsche's use of the term "Buddhism" cf. the article "Buddhismus" in the *Nietzsche Wörterbuch*.

[66] Cf. also the article "Europe" in the *Nietzsche Wörterbuch*, particularly category 3/4, part II.3 and II.4.

Nietzsche's time), but especially historiography, democracy and other "modern ideas" (BGE 10, 17) are causing an ever-increasing number of these differences to be collected in a mixture that, according to Nietzsche, is in some respects questionable. The sciences of history and cultural anthropology, having come into existence or come to thrive in the nineteenth century, bring differing cultures and historical periods together in a museum-like collection. Mass-culture expels the distinctions between high and low, democracy gives everyone equal rights and fosters egalitarianism; the emancipation of women diminishes the "most abysmal antagonism" between the sexes (BGE 238, 166).

All of these developments lead to the existence of a European mixed breed, a hotchperson (*Mischmensch*, BGE 223, 150) who might develop in one of two possible directions. It is possible that the tensions which characterise European culture and history are also developing within the individual European, who then—like a taut bow (BGE Preface, 4)—will be able to reach distant targets. After all, this person has opposite poles within himself: both the blood of martyrs (KSA 2 [207] 12.168) as well as the realisation that all faith is a lie! Together, this kind of combination can yield the kind of tragic tension that leads to creative expression in great minds (cf. GS 337 and BGE 200). More likely, however, is a development in the other direction: the differences will fade, or the burden of the tension between them will be evaded by apathy or some other kind of intoxication. In general, the modern European will have a sceptical attitude which he uses to make all differences relative. He will suffer from that typically European disease (BGE 208, 130), become increasingly ugly, sick and weak, and because of it regard himself with evermore self-contempt (BGE 222, 150). And: "what is nihilism today, if it is not *that*? —We are weary of *man*" (GM I 2, 44).

In a very peculiar manner we recognise once more the diversity of European culture in two of its main origins. These lie in Greece and more specifically in Greek philosophy on the one hand, and in Judaism and Christianity on the other. According to Nietzsche both of these, which he generally refers to as "Greek culture" and "Christianity" ('*Griechenthum*' and '*Christenthum'*; cf. e.g. A 51, 632), could and should be able to form a productive relationship of tension (cf. e.g. GM I 16, 52)[67], whereas they in fact take on a remarkable bond when they bring about nihilism. It is with good reason that in one of the many sketches for a layout for his "Contribution to the History of European Nihilism" Nietzsche immediately mentions these two causes: "Christianity nihilistic / the preparation

[67] I have elaborated on this in Van Tongeren 2000-b.

thereof: ancient philosophy" (NF 14 [114] 13.291 our transl.). Though I will expand on this later, we are already finding that it is partially due to this relationship (between European culture on the one hand and Greek culture and Christianity on the other) that nihilism, which knocks on the door but is not yet recognised by most people, can be called a typically European phenomenon. Europe is a mixture, a hotchpotch, with all due consequences. Coincidentally, this does not mean nihilism is restricted to Europe. On the contrary: it will spread to all countries "dominated by the influence of Europe" (BGE 202, 115).

There is another reason why nihilism must be called a typically European phenomenon. We find more on this matter in § 3 and § 13 of text 2 (as well as in text 1), which shows why it became possible for nihilism to emerge, why that is happening "now" and in Europe, as well as why it tends to go unnoticed.

Nietzsche believes the preconditions for the genesis of nihilism as well as the reason for its concealment to lie in European prosperity and security, both of which have only increased since the 19th century, though not without serious crises. Nihilism is not caused by things going badly, but precisely because we are doing so well. The manner in which Nietzsche describes our prosperous condition evokes an astonishingly familiar image. These days, Europe no longer needs an antidote to nihilism (see § 3). We have surrounded ourselves with so much safety and comfort that we have no reason to fear the emptiness we live in. Nor do we experience that emptiness first-hand: we have banished many insecurities and insured ourselves against anything that might happen to us; we have laid chance in chains by means of technology so that we have but few natural calamities to fear; by comfortably organising our lives we tamed absurdity so we no longer need worry about its pointlessness: instead, we amuse ourselves with it. We no longer need the "immense *multiplication* of the *value of man*" (§ 3) due to all of the ways in which life has become comfortable and safe. It is no longer necessary to endlessly proclaim the infinite dignity of mankind. We can even ridicule that kind of a reliance and call it relative. We no longer need to fear the power of evil because we have so contained it that we can flirt with it, can enjoy the "flowers of evil" (Baudelaire). Our power over ourselves and our world has grown so far that we do not have to take recourse to moral, philosophical or religious constructs. A God as guarantor of meaning and order has become "much too extreme a hypothesis" for us to stomach (§ 3).

We will give Nietzsche's famous text about the death of God more attention further on, where we will see that that death is proclaimed by a

fool ("The Madman") to people "who did not believe in God" (GS 125; see §III.2 and § V.1). The message of God's death is the message of the approaching nihilism; a nihilism which becomes visible due to the "God" hypothesis eroding and becoming superfluous. That is to say: it *can* become visible, but it does not happen immediately nor is it self-evident that it will. The walls of protection can be torn down because we believe we have nothing to fear: are we not getting on wonderfully! "'God, morality, submissiveness' were remedies on terribly deep levels of misery" (§ 13). "God" was an antidote to the meaninglessness of suffering: Christian morality gave meaning to that suffering. It was given a meaningful position in an order that was good: be that as punishment for sins, as ordeals in this existence or as a sacrifice by the chosen. Our "relative prosperity" (§ 13) has done away with most suffering nowadays. But that we are doing well merely means that we need no longer suffer from insecurity and discomfort: and this is the kind of suffering that harshly confronts us with its own meaninglessness. But while our suffering may have been greatly mitigated, meaninglessness itself, and that is to say the meaninglessness which forms the actual grounds of suffering, has not. Life's meaninglessness (that there is no order, no truth, no purpose) may be most acutely experienced in pain and discomfort, but it is actually no less threatening in comfort and pleasure—it just takes longer for us to realise it. The realisation will always come first to those who suffer, to the less fortunate; from there, it will come to us when our own comfort is threatened, by wars or revolutions, which themselves can easily be unchained by those less fortunate.

But outside of our relative comfort, there is something else hiding or stalling the nihilistic consequences of the death of God. The reason for our belief that we no longer need the hypothesis "God" also makes it harder for us to see how that hypothesis has influenced us. We will see that we have internalised that hypothesis in ways that cause us to confirm it even as we deny it. And that discovery is yet another confrontation with the threat of nihilism.

The preceding nihilism

Nietzsche distinguishes between different kinds and different phases (or "periods") of nihilism within European nihilism. The Lenzer Heide text, which does not take the form of a chronological history of nihilism, starts with the "Christian morality hypothesis" and claims that it was "the great *antidote* against practical and theoretical *nihilism*". This means that the Christian morality hypothesis is preceded by practical and theoretical

nihilism, or at least by the threat thereof. Considering Nietzsche's view that Christianity is Platonism for the people (BGE Preface, 3), we can assume this threat precedes Plato's philosophy too.

And true enough, the Greeks living in times prior to Socrates and Plato also "knew" that life is suffering. They expressed this knowledge in the art of tragedy: "all the celebrated figures of the Greek stage…are mere masks of this original hero, Dionysus" (BT 10, 73). Dionysus is a god who suffers, and what he suffers from is what Nietzsche (along with Schopenhauer) calls "individuation". We can translate that as "existing in a particular form": after all, everything that comes into being, that exists in a certain form, will perish (Anaximander). But this knowledge already starts to subside in Euripides' time: with Euripides being the last of the three great writers of tragedies, tragedy dies. Euripides starts to explain and justify the mythical story of tragedy, with the help of Socrates (BT 11, 76). The dreadful experiences of the older tragedies are replaced by thoughts and theoretical considerations that seek to illustrate and explain the dreadful. These theories then need to be supplemented with strong affects in order to realise something of the effect of the original story (BT 12, 83). While the original tragedies managed to express and turn into art the deep—and pessimistic—awareness of life as suffering, tragedy dies when it is utilised as an illustration in the service of an—optimistic—theory (BT 14, 91) which seeks to both rationally explain and morally justify suffering. Rationality and morality take control over and hide the Dionysian reality: it is they that form this "great *antidote* against practical and theoretical *nihilism*".

One is tempted to draw a parallel between the suffering god Dionysus and the suffering Christ. But while both conquer suffering, the first does so in unceasing repetition which in turn becomes an affirmation of suffering, where the second does it in the context of a story about justification, explaining that Jesus' suffering and death should in principle put an end to all suffering and death. And where Dionysus is the God whose suffering brings glory and divinity to life, the Christian God is "invented as a counter-concept of life", is "the whole hostility unto death against life synthesized in this concept in a gruesome unity!" (EH Destiny 8, 334). There is significance to Nietzsche's ending, and thus, in certain sense, his signing off in *Ecce Homo*, with "*Dionysus versus the crucified.* __"[68]

[68] Gerd Schank wrote an important study about this signature, with special attention to the meaning the word "gegen" has in it (1993). I extensively deal with the distinction between the two kinds of suffering in § III.2

The tragic Greeks would have known suffering; they may have been "pessimists", but they weren't nihilists, at least not in the way we are now, now that this medicine for the "hypothesis of Christian morality" appears to have lost its power. This may provide us with an explanation for the fact that we rarely find any account of this first phase of nihilism, of this "preceding" nihilism, being elaborated as nihilism. Nietzsche usually starts his history of nihilism with the decline of the "antidote", the protective wall against the first, "preceding", nihilism. But any protection assumes something to be protected from. In the Lenzer Heide text he introduces it as the thing against which we try to protect ourselves, calling it "practical and theoretical nihilism". It is for this reason that I label it "first" or "preceding nihilism". We see this more explicitly in the second section of text 3. After formulating his hypothesis on nihilism in the first section of the text, he identifies the "assumption" behind this "hypothesis" in the second. The assumption says "that there is no truth, that there is no absolute nature of things nor a 'thing-in-itself". This, too, is merely nihilism—even the most extreme nihilism". I take this "assumption" and thereby this "most extreme nihilism" to be preceding nihilism, although, as we will see, Nietzsche will use the term "most extreme" for a different phase or semblance of nihilism as well.

What causes this great antidote, this hypothesis of Christian morality, to lose its force, and how does this cause genuine nihilism to come into existence? The antidote loses its force because it is undermined. Nietzsche describes how it happens and what causes it to have such extreme effects in § 2 and 4 of the Lenzer Heide text. An explanation will allow us to tie it in with what we have just seen. During the apogee of tragedy, the Greeks understood the meaninglessness of existence. But from Socrates and Plato onwards, Greek philosophy obscured this knowledge behind a theory of true reality. This philosophy tied itself to a morality that was to be radicalised and popularised by Christianity. The history of nihilism really gets underway at the hands of this connection between (philosophically perverted) Greek culture and Christianity.

This (Greco-Christian) morality contains an element that undermines it from the inside out: truthfulness, which will eventually unmask the mendacity of the entire moral and metaphysical edifice. As a result, the original meaninglessness reappears, and more violent than ever: morality and philosophy strengthened our faith in meaning to such an extent that we can no longer go without it. Truthfulness can therefore be said to play a double role in the history of nihilism: it both forms a pact with the "hypothesis of Christian morality" which conceals reality *and* breaches

that concealment. The complicated position truthfulness takes up dictates we take a closer look at it.

Truthfulness

In an important book on *Nihilism and Culture* (1960/1980), Dutch cultural sociologist Johan Goudsblom explains why it is our culture is "essentially" nihilist, and why our relation to truth goes to the core of that nihilism.[69] Though his book is not a study on Nietzsche, it is strongly inspired by Nietzsche and his thoughts on nihilism. That our "European" culture is "essentially" nihilistic is my formulation of what Goudsblom explains in terms of "his" theory of culture. This theory is made up of two components: "cultural science", which studies so-called "elements of culture", and "culturology", which deals with the way these elements mould human behaviour and show themselves in that behaviour (Goudsblom 1980, 76). Cultural elements are the ways in which a culture on the one hand provides people with possibilities, and gives them a task and guidance on the other. For example, traffic technologies provide us with the means to transport ourselves, but also task us with being mobile, not to be bound to one place.

And so the author claims that our current culture is characterised, amongst other things, by having nihilism as one of these cultural elements. Goudsblom describes "nihilism", or, more accurately, "the nihilist problematic" as "the realization that essential truth is missing. One has to know the truth in order to know how to act, but the truth is unknowable" (87).

Goudsblom starts by explaining why we need truth. To live as humans, we need to maintain a certain distance from our own impulses: we need to be able to judge them, and thus need a criterion we can trust, that is: a criterion that counts as "true". In this way the idea of "truth" or of the value of truth can be labelled as a cultural element which to a large extent has determined and guided our European culture. After all, it allowed for many things to become possible and did in fact function as a task: "assuming that the possession of truth…is possible for mankind, it follows automatically that it is desirable to pursue it" (104). And the very moment it becomes clear that this truth requires critical examination, a moment

[69] The original version from 1960 (in Dutch: *Nihilisme en Cultuur*) was published in an English translation in 1980 (*Nihilism and Culture*). This paragraph's page numbers refer to Goudsblom 1980.

Goudsblom identifies with Socrates' activity, the "truth imperative" enters into culture (110).

Goudsblom goes on to explain how this truth imperative carries the principle of its own undermining: every attempt to tell the truth must in turn be critically examined, and so the very principle is subverted by scepticism. If this eventually causes one to decide that what is true is indeterminable and therefore inaccessible, the thought that there may be no truth emerges. But if the manner in which we lead our lives (which is the way in which we determine and select impulses) is made dependent upon that truth, we can no longer make use of its ability to guide our actions when it disappears: "nothing is true, everything is justified" (135). In a certain sense, this introduces nihilism as cultural element. But only "in a certain sense", because there is a problem: the comma in the quoted nihilistic exclamation faces another logical conclusion: "*because* nothing is true, *therefore* everything is justified", by which this thesis is still bound to the truth imperative. Nihilism remains indebted to the very truth imperative it denies.

The truth imperative is superseded by something else only when this paradoxicality in the denial of truth itself becomes pivotal and a new possibility and task opens up. But instead of saying that one thing is "superseded" by another here—the truth imperative has not disappeared, after all, but lives on, albeit as a problem—we would perhaps do better to refer to it as an "amplification". Here Goudsblom no longer uses the term nihilism, but writes about the "nihilistic problematic". This resides in the awareness that nihilism itself, understood as a problematising of the truth imperative, is still partially guided by the truth imperative. Goudsblom attributes the discovery of this nihilist problematic to Nietzsche (138). This problematic subsequently becomes a new cultural element, but one that is now threatened from within on a permanent basis, threatened by the danger that the denial of meaning and truth is embraced as a new kind of truth. Let's take a look at how Nietzsche himself describes this problematic in the texts we have gathered in Appendix A in this book[70].

The will to truth is a most ambiguous affair: on the one hand, it is focused on real, genuine knowledge: it desires to not be deceived and develops at the hand of critical and sometimes painful examination. On the other hand, it does so in a world which according to Nietzsche (following

[70] While what we find explained here is done so at the hand of texts from Nietzsche's legacy, it could also be exemplified at the hand of a text Nietzsche did publish: the short chapter called "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable" out of *The Twilight of the Idols*, 485, in which Nietzsche gives a very brief history of truth and its self-undermining.

the Greeks) is characterised by the fact that "that there is no truth, that there is no absolute nature of things nor a 'thing-in-itself'" (text 3). But this means that the will is itself a type of deceit: it fashions a truth that does not exist.

We find ourselves in a reality where nothing is fixed: where everything ceaselessly changes; where everything that comes into existence will ultimately perish. It is easy to understand why the human longs for stability in these conditions, all the more in light of the way its suffering seems linked to this changeability and transience. One easily becomes the plaything of chance when everything is always changing: and if everything will eventually perish, every attempt to remain upright is doomed from the outset. In an attempt to find some solid ground, humans try to guard themselves from deception by appearances. Our senses, for example, are products of such appearances: we think we see something which in reality is not there; we think we are experiencing something when really we are dreaming. It is not without reason that Descartes' methodological doubting starts with sensory information. This doubt is an instrument of reason seeking out true knowledge, knowledge of reality as it "really" is. In text 4, Nietzsche writes that "the senses deceive, reason corrects the errors; *consequently*, one concluded, reason is the road to the constant; the *least sensual* ideas must be closest to the 'true world'". Truth is identified with what is permanent, rather than changeable and transient; truth therefore belongs to a world from which any suffering at the hand of this transience has been banished. In summary: the world as it *should* be, exists; this world we live in is an error—this world of ours should *not* exist.

It turns out that the search for truth can itself be called nihilistic, even in its earliest shape, to the extent that it is a negation of the "world in which we live": it is as if it says that "this world of ours ought not to exist" (text 4). For this reason Nietzsche may at times label philosophy (as well as morality and religion, with which it has formed an alliance; see text 4) "nihilistic".

But it may be more appropriate to keep referring to a preceding form of nihilism here, a form we may more aptly term pessimism, even if it is a pessimism that contains and prepares nihilism (text 5). At the end of his *Critique of nihilism* (text 6) we find Nietzsche writing that "*belief in the categories of reason* is the cause of nihilism". But there is another step to be taken before this cause can come to expression; it is the step that will bring the nihilistic operation of the will to truth to light.

For the will to truth that previously constructed a true world is the same to eventually turn on this world: this happens "as soon as man

realises how that other world is merely assembled out of psychological needs". In the Lenzer Heide text this is only said with relation to morality: "among the forces nurtured by morality was *truthfulness*: *this* ultimately turns on morality" (§ 2). But the same will go for philosophy and religion. In section one, Nietzsche explains the Christian moral hypothesis at the hand of three theses: (1) humans have absolute value: they are not contingent or transient; (2) evil has meaning and is no argument against God; and (3) adequate knowledge of the true reality is possible. This consecutively designates morality, religion and philosophy and science. All three of them are founded on illusions motivated by our desire for stability. We ourselves constructed this absolute value of humankind, this divine order, and this intelligibility of reality as a means to the end of self-preservation. The will to truth finally discovers this "*partiality* of its viewpoint", this intentionality, this "*teleology*".

Nietzsche uses a similar set of three in text 6, though in a different order, to indicate the domains in which the will to truth conducts its unmasking. The categories he employs there are "aim", "unity", and "being" or "truth". I will render this three-stroke in a free interpretation in order to further explain the far-reaching operations of the will to truth. Using the numbering from the Lenzer Heide text, we find the following succession in text 6: We looked for meaning in all events. We understood the world in which everything changes and perishes as a process and a development towards a goal. Even those who believe that reality will eventually dissolve into nothing understand this development to be one directed towards a *goal*, and "any goal at least constitutes some meaning". But "now one suddenly understands that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*…" (2). Humankind was able to believe in its own (absolute) value as a result of his constructing a comprehensive "unity", a systematically organised "wholeness". It was as if he said that while it may seem that all of our actions are of little consequence; that humans live, and especially die, meaninglessly, it is ultimately part of a larger plan. This apparently meaningless existence derives its meaning and significance from the function it performs as a part of the larger whole. But according to Nietzsche, the will to truth discovers that this larger whole, this "generality" does not exist (1). There was still a solution to the fact that goal and unity are typically not visible within sensory reality: this reality of becoming was merely to be an apparent reality. For this reason, a *true* world of *being* was constructed. Any doubts concerning purpose and unity, about meaning and order could be absorbed by this reference to a true world, a world to be known through metaphysics. In fact, the only available knowledge, true knowledge, would be knowledge of this world.

For that which keeps changing cannot "be", and therefore cannot be known as something which "is". True knowledge is only available of the true world. But at this point it is precisely the desire for truth that reveals this true world to be a construct erected to protect ourselves from meaninglessness, chaos, and transience (3).

Nietzsche presents these three figures as three causes of nihilism. It is where nihilism, narrowly construed, comes into existence, here where the will to truth unmasks its own constructions. This seems clear, convincing; it also seems to explain why this nihilism is so threatening, why Nietzsche can label it a catastrophe. The will to truth robs us from all our stability. But is it in fact clear that this is something terrible? What stops us from experiencing this unmasking of our threefold illusion as a liberation? A child that loses its belief in Santa Claus may be disappointed and confused for a while, but it quickly transpires that the actual celebration by no means disappears. On the contrary, it can be more freely enjoyed now that the threat of punishment for being naughty has been lifted and the incalculable Santa has been replaced by parents, who are far more understandable and reliable. What keeps us from living an untroubled and free life, now that we no longer need to deal with an ultimate meaning which sometimes lays heavy demands on us, an underlying unity that lies too deep to perceive it in our own lives, and a true reality that keeps us from experiencing and enjoying everything available to us in this reality?

The answer to these questions is most clearly articulated in text 5:

> Finally: one discovers from which material one has erected the "true world": and now all one has left is the rejected world and *even ascribes this supreme disillusionment to its reprehensibility*. With this, *nihilism* makes its appearance: the *condemning values* are all that remain—and nothing else!

The unmasking is not liberating at all, because the desire that motivated all the illusions does not disappear along with the recognition of these illusions. Nor is it (and more importantly so) a matter of adjustment (like that of a child who has just understood Santa Claus to be an illusion), because the unmasking has only worked to fuel this desire. We created illusions because we could not endure a world deprived of any meaning, order, and truth. And now meaning, order, and truth have proven to be illusory constructs themselves. Without meaning, order and truth that world becomes inhospitable in every respect. We used to have our dreams, by which we could at least briefly escape from reality: now even our dreams remind us that they are only dreams: in our desire for truth we come to realise that this desire constructs only illusions, without any hope

of escape. We used to yearn for another life, because this life was absurd; now we discover that this desire is itself a part of that absurdity: "We now notice in ourselves needs, implanted by the long-held morality interpretation, which now appear to us as needs to untruth: conversely it is on them that the value for which we bear to live seems to depend" (text 2 § 2).

Once more we can enquire into the reasons for wanting to leave such a reality. Did not the unmasking finally allow us to make a home for ourselves in a reality wherein we deceived ourselves for too long, and only in order to escape it? Why does this desire persist? Only now do we arrive at the heart of nihilism.

The desire persists for two reasons: firstly, because it has permeated all areas of life and thus causes our entire life to be infected when the desire is frustrated; secondly, because it confirms itself in performing this nihilistic critique. The will to truth itself holds the constructions of the will to truth to the light and eventually turns against them. We feel the unmasking engages us because it appears true to us; we remain attached to the truth of the discovery that truth does not exist. Our unmasking would be nothing but a question of adjustment without it, and nihilism would be a temporary phase. But because nihilism implies its own denial, because this is a snake that bites its own tail and a malady that has returned to the cure, that is why it is the deeply profound event Nietzsche believes it to be, of which we barely see the end, if we can see it at all.

The different forms of nihilism that Nietzsche describes, as well as the phases of their development he foresees, can only be understood in this light. For this reason we will have to take a closer look at both of these points.

"All that must collapse"

In GS 343 (279) Nietzsche expresses his wonder for our ongoing cheerfulness in spite of nihilism, here appearing in the shape of the death of God. He explains it as follows: the event is so momentous that the news of its occurrence would not be likely to reach us,

> much less may one suppose that many people know as yet *what* this event really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it

(something I will return to in § III.2). A similar description of the impact of the effects of nihilism, for which "only the *eyes* for those signs are

missing", can be found in text 7. And this extent of the effects of nihilism's influence was of course already implied in the trinity of purpose, unity and truth discussed earlier.

In the first place, nihilism signifies the decline of *Christianity*: according to Nietzsche, it was precisely this Christianity which underlined the importance of the truthfulness it is now succumbing to, now that this truthfulness is unmasking the Christian explanation of the world and its history as a lie. We can relate this Christian explanation of truthfulness to Christ's identification with Truth ("I am the way, the truth and the life", John 14:6), but what is of particular importance here is the way in which the Christian tradition has commingled itself with the Greek search for truth. Goudsblom, as we have seen, extensively describes how the "truth imperative" developed as a "cultural element" from the earliest Greek thinkers onward (102-143). The relationship between Greek thought and monotheistic Christianity allowed the truth we sought to take on an absolute dimension, while further increasing the necessity of finding this truth in light of one's personal salvation. Whether faith was reconciled with reason (as in scholastic rationalism) or opposed to it (producing evermore reactions throughout history, from Tertullian to Kierkegaard), truth remains the highest ideal, always demanding absolute devotion to itself. In his studies on sexuality from 1976-1984 (English translations 1978-1986), Michel Foucault unearthed an interesting line in the history of truth. Amongst other things, these studies analysed confession and, in a later and secularised version, psychotherapy, as practices in which the search for truth (taking the shape of pronouncement of truth over oneself) are subtly elaborated, which made clear how much this will to truth was an instrument through which to exert power.

This passion for truth, thus intensified by Christianity, eventually transfers its passions onto the Christian myth. Indeed: who in the present time can really still believe that Jesus is the son of God, raised from the dead, yet to return to pronounce judgement? While our unbelief oftentimes, and in fact most of the time, is made up of indifference, Nietzsche points (precisely in virtue of the will to truth which operates within him too) towards its far-reaching consequences. After all, he believes that everything founded on faith in the existence and rule of God will be toppled by doubting or unmasking it: the "backlash from 'God is the Truth'" is the "fanatical belief 'Everything is false'" (text 1, I.2).

In this way nihilism also touches upon *morality*. The moral interpretation lacks any foundation once the metaphysical world has collapsed at the hands of the will to truth (text 1, I.3). The moral interpretation of the world gave evil its moral meaning, which means it is

either our fault (*malum culpae*) or the rightful punishment for our own wrongdoing (*malum poenae*), or no evil at all, but only an apparent evil for those of us mired too deeply in our limited perspective. But this interpretation assumes a moral order behind or under reality as we usually perceive it. Even Immanuel Kant, who developed a fully secular and autonomous ethics, couldn't help relying on a "true reality". After all, virtue isn't always rewarded in the sensory world of the here and now—so this must happen in a different world yet to come. The will to truth has destroyed this true reality and taken morality with it. Motives driven by morality have also become suspect in principle. Once we discover that the moral order is a construction we erected ourselves, from the vantage point of some or other need ("if it turned out that even that 'will to morality' was just concealing this 'will to power'"; text 2, § 9), even these moral convictions and ideals will prove a symptom of our need rather than a sign of moral prowess. And all moral convictions have indeed become something open to discussion for many people these days. They are easily taken as hot air, mere window-dressing. Moralism is profanity: the fashionable philosophies of the art of living only provide "options": they can be chosen, but they are not compulsory. But how are we to live without holding on to moral convictions—what would happen if we were actually to throw all moral rules overboard?

The least we can say is that the destruction of morality will also rob *politics and economics* of their support. When no moral principles remain intact, politics and morality cannot be bound to them. But politics and economics are in fact deeply shaped by utterly "moral" practices; they are the institutionalisation of the notion of justice: it is not without reason that they ultimately rely on moral principles for the arguments they make. If they no longer have any foundation, these principles become masks; they "have gradually become affectations" (text 1, I.6). And in fact, this is exactly how we speak about politics and business these days: the moral message conveyed (fair sharing, freedom and responsibility, corporate social responsibility) is immediately suspected to conceal underlying interests. When we then distrust politicians and managers or accuse them of "insincerity" (text 1, I.6), it becomes clear how strongly the will to truth is at work within nihilism. But it also shows us how problematic this makes nihilism: because what is the value of seeking truth after nihilism has razed it to the ground?

There are many more things that topple in the wake of morality. Nietzsche suggests that, until now, science and philosophy were also kept on morality's leash (text 1, I.4). Science is once more a good example of how the will to truth is at odds with itself. Science is always driven by the

search for truth. This truth, however, was one long guided and restricted by moral convictions. Science was possible because reality was knowable and intelligible, an order governed by laws. By exploring the law-like patterns of reality, science was able to recognise the goodness of God's creation and why humankind was its pinnacle. But the will to truth slowly forces us to doubt this knowledge. "Since Copernicus, man has been rolling from the centre towards x" (text 1, I.5). Our long-time methods for gathering and constructing truth have nurtured a need for comforting and affirming knowledge. Now that science no longer provides affirmation, but rather takes it from us, anti-scientific attitudes are easily fostered. Aside from the effects the undermining of morality has on science, the will to truth's self-questioning (and -undermining) doubtlessly has a direct influence on philosophy and science too. Both seek knowledge of the truth, and in order to do so, they distinguish between an apparent and a true world, where the true—metaphysical—world has been associated with lawfulness and objectivity (text 4). When all of this turns out to be an interpretation, a projection (text 4) motivated by our needs rather than a mirroring of reality, what is left to be said of the scientific and philosophical quest for knowledge and insight?

In conclusion, Nietzsche also mentions *art* and the "absolute *un*originality of its position in the modern world" (text 1, I.7). But the problem in respect of art, I think, takes on a substantially different form than that of the other areas we have dealt with. In this text, I would suggest Nietzsche is pointing towards the inability of art to be truly original and to actually create; creative art needs to be able to believe in itself and the aesthetic values (cf. text 10) it devotes itself to. But how can this be possible when it unmasks that belief as myth, thus discovering the mendacity by which it masks or compensates for her own ineptitude to create values at all? Does anything remain to be done, other than deliberate destruction or postmodern citation, perhaps the parodying of what was made in the past? Nietzsche is specifically thinking of romantic art, which seeks to awe and captivate its spectators by artificial means, in the realisation that it is all pretence.

With the exception of art, the same really holds for all areas: nihilism leads to an awareness of, or feeling that humankind has, in all of its pursuits up till now (moral, political, economic), in its beliefs (religion) and its knowledge (science and philosophy) actually wasted its best efforts on building mendacious constructions while believing it was putting itself at the service of higher values: "Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long *waste* of strength, the agony of the 'in vain'" (text 6). Conversely, humankind has continuously *strived* to create constructions and interpretations

in art, but is now no longer capable of doing so. We hereby take a new step in the analysis of nihilism: the step towards the underlying quality of life, both the one from which earlier constructions were erected, as well as the one from where the reactions to the nihilistic undermining of those constructions take place. Our attention for these constructions will allow us to distinguish between different shapes and phases of nihilism.

Symptomatology of nihilism

A symptomatological description of nihilism presents this nihilism as a symptom of something that underlies it. What does this crisis tell us about the people who have brought this upon themselves, about the people (to a greater or lesser degree, sooner or later) experiencing it? It is important that we distinguish between the symptomatological description and interpretation of the order (the "Christian morality hypothesis") which collapses because of nihilism on the one hand and the description and interpretation of this collapse or destruction on the other. Both, however, present an ambiguous image. Nihilism itself is "ambiguous" through and through: Nietzsche underlines the word "ambiguous" twice in text 3.

Submerged beneath the creation of a world ruled by truth, unity and meaning, lies a need. Evidently humankind suffers at the hands of change and transience; for this reason it creates a world where everything is what it is and remains this way forever (text 4). In order to believe in its own value, it has made itself dependent on a value that encompasses it (text 6). This does not only demonstrate a human need (for stability, for recognition), and thus a suffering to the extent that this need remains unsatisfied; but also a dependency on something else in order to fulfil that need. The needy human proves incapable of satisfying its own needs, to produce what it needs on its own, and for this reason hands itself over to an objective, higher order. This kind of need belongs to an "unproductive, *suffering* kind; a kind weary of life" (text 4), a kind of human that cannot handle the way life presents itself (as changeable and transient) in the first instance. It is morality that ensures these kinds of people are protected "from despair and the leap into nothingness" (text 2, § 9).

The world created by this need is thus created in secret, which is to say in a way that doesn't acknowledge itself as a creation. Notwithstanding the few who were aware of their creative power in the design of a world of order and regularity (Nietzsche at times suspects Plato to be this kind of artist, albeit it one who started to believe in his own creations), the majority does not believe this world to be a creation, but a true reality. This "creation" then becomes ambiguously productive: it produces a need

for untruth (i.e. for this creation that mendaciously presents itself as reality) but simultaneously produces a need for truth (because the creation presents itself under the guise of truth). This ambiguous need then leads to the nihilistic alternative: we discover our need for a world we need to unmask as being untrue, but the truth we hereby bring to light simultaneously makes our lives unbearable. "This antagonism—*not* valuing what we know, and no longer being permitted to value what we would like to hoodwink ourselves with—results in a disintegration process" (text 2, § 2) which Nietzsche labels "nihilism". "A nihilist is someone who is of the judgement that the world as it is, ought *not* to be, and that the world as it ought to be, does not exist" (text 4). The nihilist hangs to the norm of "truth" in his unmasking of the "true world" constructed by that norm: "With this, *nihilism* makes its appearance: the *condemning values* are all that remain—and nothing else!" (text 5).

But the symptomatological reading reaches a deeper layer and there discovers further ambiguity. Because what kind of power or need expresses itself in the unmasking of the true world? The unmasking may itself be an expression of a variety of conditions—conditions Nietzsche divides into two categories: strength or weakness (cf. text 3, 4 and 6). The unmasking of the true world as a lie could be the effect of an incapacity for further creation or to bring new creations into existence; but it can also be the expression of the kind of strength that no longer has a need for faith in these kinds of creations. Perhaps we should put it differently: the true world is the kind of creation that requires perpetual creating in order to survive. Science and philosophy, for example, develop from a spiritualistic metaphysics to a materialistic science; but throughout these changes the idea that there is a real, true world to be discovered is continuously nurtured. Morality is continuously under discussion and might develop from an authoritarian and conventional morality into an anti-authoritarian ideology of authenticity; but in this way, it keeps reaffirming the notion of a true separation between good and evil. Religion is evolving: no longer is the Christian God the true one, opposed by the false gods of other religions; it is rather a name for "the divine", recognised and worshipped in many different ways: but the position of the divine, from where reality is illuminated, is maintained throughout. That is to say: the creation of a true world is not a single event, but occurs as *creatio continua*.

These circumstances help us to understand the ambiguity of the rupture taking place, now that the mendacity, the fictional character of all creation has been brought to light. This may either stem from the inability to continue that creative work, or from a strength without need for these creations. In the first case we are dealing with "an unproductive, suffering

kind, a kind weary of life"; in the second with an "opposite kind" (text 4). The first kind has become incapable of believing in the fabrications any longer: whether it be by animating an existing interpretation, or by creating a new one. But at the same time it does require such an interpretation, even the belief that it isn't an interpretation, but the truth. Only with this help can it still find meaning and orientation in life. Thus, the first kind of people can no longer believe in what they nevertheless need. The second kind no longer requires this belief, or at least supposes that it no longer requires it (text 4). For the one, the discovery that we created the true world ourselves means the end of meaning and orientation, where for the other it means the start of a liberating activity. Only disappointment (text 6) remains for the first, and passivity, whether in despair or in resignation; for the second the activity of destroying everything that stands in the way of total liberation starts now. Both are forms of nihilism. Nietzsche calls the first "passive", the second "active" nihilism (text 3). And there may only be room for a creative interaction with the absence of a true world, for something beyond nihilism, when this destruction has been completed.

Different forms of nihilism seem to be appearing. In order to present a closer characterisation and for deepening of the problematic of nihilism we now turn our attention to the texts from *The Gay Science* included in Appendix A. We will continue the explanation of the Lenzer Heide text and other unpublished notes after this (§ III.3).

III.2 Types of nihilism

At the time of its first publication, in 1882, *The Gay Science* was a book made up out of four parts or (as Nietzsche calls them) "books", and the poems selected in the Prelude in German Rhymes. A new edition was published in 1887, which includes a (new) preface, a fifth book containing 41 aphorisms, and an "appendix" with 14 poems, titled Songs of Prince Vogelfrei. The aphorisms included in the collection of texts in Appendix A (aphorisms 346, 347 and 370) are all from this fifth book, so we will start by taking a look at its background.

The writings of 1886/1887

This new edition and this fifth book of *The Gay Science*, like the many other texts published in 1886/1887—*Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), and also the introductions to the new

editions of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886), both volumes of *Human, All Too Human* (1886) and *Daybreak* (1887)—are characteristic of this period.

Incidentally, the new editions and introductions were partially motivated by external considerations. Nietzsche books sold poorly. He thought this was partially owing to his publisher, Ernst Schmeitzner in Chemnitz. Nietzsche wanted to take his books somewhere else, the more so considering that Schmeitzner was publishing an increasing amount of anti-Semitic literature, which he did not want to be associated with (cf. letter to Overbeck, December 1885, KSB 8.117). After long and complicated negotiations he managed to have all of the unsold copies (printed, but not yet bound) taken over by a different publisher: E.W. Fritzsch in Leipzig. Amongst others, Nietzsche wrote the new introductions to five of his previously published books, and sometimes made other additions to aid in the selling of these books: the fifth book and the poems of *The Gay Science*, and a closing poem to the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* for example. Its sequels, *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* and *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, which had previously been published in succession, were now released as a second volume of *Human, All Too Human*. The new editions then weren't actually new prints of the old book, but the printed parts of the first edition, to which new texts had been added.

However, these external, "commercial" considerations don't detract from the fact that these texts will also, and maybe even predominantly, serve another purpose, or will at least be given a different function. In light of the publishing of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (whose 4 parts were printed between 1883 and 1885) they provide an incentive to re-evaluate his earlier (pre-*Zarathustra*) work and to re-interpret it at the hand of the experiences and insights Nietzsche had gained in the meantime. This perhaps explains why the book Nietzsche made most additions to was the one last published before the *Zarathustra*: *The Gay Science*. The last aphorism from the fourth book (342) already made the transition to the *Zarathustra* explicit: the text under the title *Incipit tragoedia* essentially makes up the opening paragraph of that following work. The last aphorism before the epilogue of the added fifth book (382) ends with the same formula as the title of the ending of the fourth book: "tragedy begins". This attempt to both form a bridge and mark a caesura between the works preceding and following the *Zarathustra* can in fact be found in all the texts that originate in 1886/1887: *Beyond Good and Evil* comes into being following a plan to rework the earlier *Human, All Too Human* and moreover ends with a paean to Dionysus, a reference to his first book, *The*

Birth of Tragedy.[71] At the start of *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche sets forth a history of the origins and development of his own thoughts on morality, which he will further develop in that same book. And in the new introductions to previously published books he describes the development of the free spirit, which on the whole corresponds his own development (HH I and II, D, GS), or else provides "self-criticism" on the earlier work from the perspective of the insights gained in the meantime (BT).

The problematic indicated by the term "nihilism" plays no small part here. This is the moment the term enters into the published work: in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in the *Attempt at Self-Criticism*, which the new edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* opens with, and in *The Genealogy of Morals* as well as in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*. And at this exact point we are in a good position to see the way Nietzsche's retrospection into his earlier work is tied to the thematics of nihilism.

The fifth book of *The Gay Science*

Looking for the structure in Nietzsche's books is as precarious as it is unavoidable. Unavoidable, because we can't help but look for guidance amidst the aphoristic plurality: precarious due to the way the many possibilities available for structuring a text influence the resulting interpretation. It is with due caution that I present the following suggestions for the structure of the fifth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*.[72] It is merely a general indication, as much as is necessary to adequately provide the background to the two texts I want to discuss.

The first five aphorisms (343-347) immediately set the tone. They constitute—much like the *exordium* in a classical rhetoric speech—the introduction in which the theme is presented and tension is built. This is followed by its working out in different phases: *narratio* and *argumentatio*, following a classical rhetorical schema (348-363). The final part (364-382) forms the *peroratio*, detailing the consequences for author and reader. The text is closed with an epilogue (383).

The opening (343) immediately reaches back to the earlier edition of GS, and more specifically to the famous 125th aphorism in the third book:

[71] Cf. Groddeck 1997, 195.

[72] In a tome of a book, Werner Stegmaier (2012) works out his years of study on this fifth book of GS aphorism by aphorism. My own construction has in part come about in conversations with him, even though he doesn't necessarily share my conclusion. For a further step in my own interpretation of this fifth book of GS, see van Tongeren 2017.

> *The madman*. —Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed* him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto." Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then: "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—*and yet they have done it themselves*".

The text reveals a painful misunderstanding: the fool informs the unbelievers that God is dead. The severity of that occasion is evoked by a long series of images but cannot possibly be conveyed to those who already know.[73] The fact that the messenger tries to convey his message to

[73] Also cf. Jean Paul's 1897 text, cited in § I.3, p. 12f, which (after the first sentence) starts as follows: "Men, as a class, deny God's existence with about the

unbelievers who are evidently unmoved seems to suggest that he has not quite figured out what his message should be. This is precisely where the first text in the fifth book starts (343). And while the message relayed is still "far too great, too distant, too remote for the multitude's capacity for comprehension" for it to "be thought of as having arrived yet", there are some who nevertheless realise that "the sun seems to have set" and that "our old world must appear more like evening by the day, more mistrustful, stranger, 'older'". We can expect the messenger and the author himself to form a part of these few. But in turn, this also becomes problematic: it transpires that not only the unbelievers at the market are unconcerned, but that "even we", "we philosophers and "free spirits"", are "perhaps still too much under the impression of the *initial consequences* of this event" to be suitably worried and alarmed. Instead, "we" are merry and cheerful. The title of aphorism 343 inquires "*[w]as es mit unserer Heiterkeit auf sich hat*"—it inquires, with some concern, after "[t]he meaning of our cheerfulness".

So are we introduced to the most important question of this fifth part of the book: how are we faring, what it is that we really are, we who know "that 'God is dead', that belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable". The title of this fifth book is "We fearless ones" and its second part is made up of texts where "we", in some shape or form, come to speak about ourselves. The death of God is an indication of nihilism. At the heart of the fifth book we find "those of us" who realise that nihilism stands at the door. In preparation, the first half encounters nihilism a number of times, in the three domains in which it shows itself: believing, knowing, and acting, in other words religion, philosophy/science, and morality. They appear in succession in the first three aphorisms (343-345), and again (though not always in the same order) in 348-352 and in 357-359.[74]

The link between these three domains and the main theme of the fifth part of *The Gay Science* (what does that say about "us", who are more or less aware of it?) lends itself to be read as an allusion to Kant's work. In his *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1998, A805/B833) he wrote that all of philosophy can be condensed into three questions: what can I know, what should I do, and what may I hope for? These three questions, which we of

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same small amount of true consideration, conviction and feeling as that with which most individual men admit it". I will discuss GS 125 more extensively in § V.1

[74] I thus agree with Patrick Wotling (2010, 103) who says that it is in fact nihilism that is the primary topic of GS's fifth book, from where we can distinguish two different lines: the analysis of nihilism on the one hand, an analysis of "us" on the other, or, in Wotling's words: of the figure of the philosopher and his task.

course recognise as the three domains of knowledge, morality and religion, are bundled into one question in his *Logic* (A 25): "what is man?" Nietzsche seems to repeat this structure and give it his own twist: the three aphorisms dealing with faith, knowledge and action respectively, each of which ends with a reference to "us" (343: "the sea, *our* sea, lies open again", 344: "—if God himself should prove our most enduring lie" and 345: "precisely this is our task") are followed by the section in which Nietzsche himself summarises these three domains: "*Unser Fragezeichen*—", "our question mark". Instead of "what is man", he asks "who are we"? More precisely: instead of asking and answering that question he demonstrates what nihilism means for "us" in relation to faith, knowledge and action, or even—as we will see—for the question, the question-mark that we *are*.

GS 346: Our question mark

Aphorism 346 (text 11) has four parts. The first few lines make up the introduction, leading into the questions we are currently dealing with: "Who are we anyway?" This question is followed by an answer in two parts. On the one hand "we" are different to the others who still reside within the old orders of religion, knowledge, and morality. But this self-description ends in a question, and we can detect some hesitation in it: "But wait!" ("*Wie aber?*"). In the second part of the answer it emerges that—on the other hand—we ourselves fall back into the same schemas we thought we had left behind, through the very way we thought we were different. This finally precipitates the conclusion, which is "the terrible Either/Or" that seems to condemn us to nihilism all the same.

In the twofold answer to the questioning who we are, we find a description of different forms of nihilism on the one hand, but an indication of the difficulty in escaping the lie nihilism had unmasked on the other. "We" are thoroughly aware of the death of God, and realise that there is nothing to ground morality on because of that. But this is just the start. Not only are we unlike the believers in God and morality, we are also different from the first generation of atheists and immoralists: those who fanatically clawed at their liberation, who became martyrs to their conviction, and so forged a new faith from their lack of it. In GS 347 (text 12) Nietzsche will recognise this attitude in what he calls "nihilism à la Petersburg (meaning the *belief in unbelief* even to the point of martyrdom)". Unlike these fanatical atheists and immoralists we "simply know" that the world we inhabit is "ungodly, a-moral, 'inhuman'", and that morality and religion were products of our own need to revere, to

cherish ideals, and measure reality according to these ideals in particular. This "frigid" insight is the first way the third of the three domains appears. Up till now, Nietzsche had only dealt with morality and religion. Only here does the third domain, that of knowledge, come into play, and it carries out a crucial role. Because this is where the answer to the question after who we are starts shifting; this is the start of the passage from the one side to the other.

At first glance this knowledge seems to form the core of what separates us from the fanatics who, in their liberation of religion and morality, reproduce the old faith and devotion once more: whereas we don't only know that these old ideals rest on falsities, but are also careful not to cherish the old ideal at the hand of this insight. That is exactly what is done by those who, after they have discovered that the world is neither godly nor moral, condemn the world for its ungodliness and amorality. Nietzsche has those pessimists in mind who essentially adhere to the same pattern as the Buddhists and Christians before them: they condemn the true world for not answering to—fictitious—ideals. We know the world isn't divine, but that does not mean it is has any less value.

But at this point the answer to the question makes a decisive shift. Because the old opposition between ideal and reality appears to repeat itself in our own knowing, this time in the shape of a true insight, according to which factually presented fictions are measured and on the grounds of which they are appraised. This shifting had started earlier, when Nietzsche declared the human to be a reverent animal, an animal that cherishes ideals, but to which he added that "he is also mistrustful". It becomes apparent that this distrust, this will to truth at work within it, portrays the very characteristics also present in this reverent animal. Our suspicions repeat the schema: we judge or despise the true human, with its lies and its fictions, in the name of the truth by which we manage to endure in life. Just as pessimism repeated the schema of Christianity, so do we repeat the schema of pessimism.

What is to come from this? A terrible alternative, according to Nietzsche: terrible—as will become clear—because both distinguishable options come down to the same thing. Buddhism, Christianity, pessimistic criticism of both, even the criticism *there*of leads to a condemnation of actual humankind in the name of a venerated ideal. Nietzsche calls this kind of condemnation "nihilism". In order to steer clear of this kind of nihilism, one should condemn the ideals in whose name the condemnation takes place, instead of condemning oneself. But seeing that this kind of critique of our ideals requires we guide ourselves by another ideal, which is truth; seeing that we can't help but revere, seeing that we even revere

the suspicion within ourselves, the second part of the alternative appears to amount to the same thing.[75]

Even those who at first appeared different end up sinking into the Petersburgian model! It is hard to miss the connection between this psychology of nihilism and Dostoyevsky, whom Nietzsche praised for his psychological acuity (in his description of Kirilov in the novel *Demons*, for example). Kirilov takes up arms against every illusion in his passionate search for truthfulness, even in his own life. Life and lust are too susceptible to illusion and self-deceit, and so he seeks pain, eventually committing suicide as the ultimate act of authenticity.

Nihilism seems inevitable the moment we realise that the question we ask is an instance of the very thing we question. Nihilism proves to be a problem with no way out, a question lacking satisfactory answers. The difference between Nietzsche and Kirilov is that the latter draws the paradoxical conclusion, hereby annulling the paradox, while Nietzsche points out the paradox: he is aware of it, tries to maintain it as paradox and to bear it out in thought. The attempt to answer the aphorism's question ("who are we anyway"?) ends in a question mark: "This is *our* question mark". Which means as much as: we *are* this problem, we *are* a question or question mark.

To illustrate this last point in a different way, I refer to two texts from the same period. Firstly, the opening section of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). The will to truth is the explicit subject here, "that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect". Nietzsche states that it is time we question this will to truth ourselves, this will that has led us to ask so many other questions. Not only do we slowly come to ask ourselves who or what causes us to ask questions, *what* part of us wants the truth, but in the end, we also discover that it is not clear *why* we want truth nor what the value of this sought-after truth really is… and we discover that we nevertheless want a true answer to that question: "The problem of the value of truth came before us—or was it we who came before the problem? Who of us is Oedipus here? Who the Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question marks" (BGE 1, 9). In the same way that GS 346 suggests we have become a question mark ourselves, BGE says that we have become a meeting place for questions and question marks.

[75] In BGE 214 (145) we find a similar notion: "we" certainly have different values than our ancestors did, but if we go looking for ours, we prove to repeat the very faith in values our ancestors had. I will come back to this point in a further discussion of GS 346 in § V.2

In the second place, I refer to the ending of the book in which the term "nihilism" appears the most out of all the texts Nietzsche himself published: *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). The last essay of that book is on "ascetic ideals"; ideals which—like all ideals and all reverence—always contain a negation, a condemnation of that which they are opposed to. We recognise the theme from GS 346. The move he there explicitly worked out is clear from the very start in GM: truthfulness, by whose aid we unmasked Christianity and its mendacious morality, this truthfulness itself belongs to that Christian morality. In the second to last section of this essay he draws a conclusion on the matter, whose very formulations appear to be a clear reference to GS 346:

> After Christian truthfulness has drawn one conclusion after another, it will finally draw the *strongest conclusion*, that *against* itself; this will, however, happen when it asks itself, "*What does all will to truth mean?*" …and here I touch on my problem again, on our problem, my *unknown* friends (—for as yet I know of no friend): what meaning does *our whole* being possess if it were not this, that in us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as *problem*?
> GM III 27, 161

The pessimism from GS 346 is a type of nihilism, but even those criticising pessimism do not seem capable of escaping nihilism themselves. If there is any answer to the question "who are we?", the answer is: "we critics of nihilism—we are also nihilists". But this does not mean there is no difference here. At the least there remains a question, *our* question, *our* question mark.

I'm suggesting a second meaning to the final sentence of aphorism 346 here, and will set out to support it by reference to yet another text from the same period: the new preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, the "attempt at self-criticism". Here Nietzsche explains what his first book was about, and in which ways his attempts to develop it were still flawed, allowing his intentions to be misunderstood. In the new introduction he describes its central question as follows: "Is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts…? Is there a pessimism of *strength*?" (BT Attempt 1, 17).

If we were to take this pessimism, as we did in GS 346, as an indication of nihilism, Nietzsche's question asks whether different *kinds* of pessimism, different *kinds* of nihilism should be differentiated. Here we find a way to understand GS 346's conclusion: Yes, we too are nihilists, but are there not distinct kinds of nihilism?

"We", the "we" taking up such a prominent place in *The Gay Science*'s fifth book, whose identity GS 346 enquired after, we are the personification of the problem of nihilism. As such, however, we do not coincide with this nihilism we bring to light. There are different kinds of nihilism: aphorism 370 (text 13) will even distinguish between five different kinds. Let us proceed to find out what these kinds are.

GS 370: What is romanticism?

The term "nihilism" does not appear in this aphorism. Instead, the title professes "romanticism" to be the actual topic. This romanticism mostly turns up in the guise of romantic pessimism, standing opposed to Dionysian pessimism. As such, they are two forms of pessimism I will designate as types of nihilism.

The opposition of the romantic and the Dionysian (pessimism) we already find in the text we just made use of: the new introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* (cf. particularly § 6). Both texts happen to be closely related: GS 370 also starts with the attempt at self-criticism, which was central to the new introduction, where Nietzsche admits to having initially been mistaken in his assessment of contemporary culture, and of Wagner's music in particular. He writes that he has failed to appreciate its romanticism (BT Attempt 6, 25). It shouldn't come as a surprise that our text from *The Gay Science*, verbatim for large tracts of it, reappears in one of Nietzsche's final books, the book dedicated solely to his relationship with Wagner: *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1889), in the chapter called "We Antipodes". What is surprising is that the later version has seen the disappearance of the term "romanticism". This serves to reinforce my impression that the terms "romanticism", "pessimism", "nihilism" and even "decadence" (which in *Nietzsche contra Wagner* is added to the text copied from GS 370 as it is to a related text, the "Epilogue" to *The Case of Wagner*, published in 1888) should be grouped together as a cluster. While their meaning isn't always identical, all of them are in service of Nietzsche's attempt to give both diagnosis and prognosis of his (and our) times. We will see that he develops an instrument for this diagnosis in GS 370.

Our text is at the start of the second part of *The Gay Science*'s fifth book, the part which, as I previously wrote, deals with the relevance for author and reader of what was described in the prior section: the way nihilism announces itself in religion, morality, and philosophy/science. This meaning is developed in the texts the author presents himself in: the effects the analyses had in store for him, like his solitude and reclusion

(364, 365), his cynical honesty (368, 379), the struggle to be understood (371, 381, 383) his displacement (377), the way in which he looks back on his travails (376, 378, 383), the preconditions he needs to comply with, or what makes him suitable for his own task (369, 374, 375, 380, 382); texts in which, on the one hand, he draws a distinction between himself and others: his contemporaries who don't yet understand what he has brought to light (366, 367), and other philosophers and scholars (372, 373) but where, on the other hand, he looks out for like-minded people, for friends (377, 381, 383).

This has made it clear that the effects of nihilism that the author has asserted and analysed are marked by selection and differentiation. The theme of a separation (and differentiation) of spirits was already announced in GS 346 and 347. We have seen this distinction problematised by Nietzsche's indication that "we" both are *and* are not differentiated from others. We also saw how this leads to the question after a distinction between types of pessimism or nihilism, a distinction personified in aphorism 347 by the opposition of "the believer" and "the free spirit". Aphorism 370 will develop the criterion for the desired distinction.

The text's structure is somewhat complicated. For this reason, I have structured it by inserting numbers and letters. We first encounter an introduction [1], in which we recognise the attempt at self-criticism from the new introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy*. We then find the question that makes up the title of the aphorism ("What is romanticism") repeated, after which the actual discourse starts [2]. This consists mainly of the description of two distinctions [b-1 and b-2]. These are prefaced by a thesis which introduces fundamental presupposition [a] and followed by a linking of both distinctions [c]. This linkage gives rise to the ending [3], which isn't so much a conclusion as the promise of a future figure.

Life is suffering

In the new introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche explains that the actual question that concerned him in the book was whether or not there are other forms of pessimism than the one he had criticised (for being "romantic"). He was not necessarily concerned with something other than pessimism, but rather with other forms *of* pessimism. We recognise this enquiry in our text too, when—following the reference to self-criticism—he starts with this fundamental presupposition: *life is suffering*. The content of this presupposition is hardly argued for or explained, save by reference to the fact that life consists of growth and struggle. In *The Birth of Tragedy* we read that the Greeks were aware of

this—meaning the Greeks who preceded the point at which this awareness was reasoned away by Socrates and philosophy. Nietzsche cites a Greek folk story to illustrate this view of life: an old chronicle about the (proverbially rich) king Midas, who managed to capture a single wise Silenus:

> When Silenus at last fell into his hands, the king asked what was the best most desirable of all things for man. Fixed and immovable, the demigod said not a word, till at last, urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh and broke out into these words: "Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is—to die soon." … The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence.
> BT 3, 42

Nietzsche does not take the idea of life as suffering from the Greeks alone: he takes it from Schopenhauer as well. Life is persistently driven on by the will; when you lack the things you strive for you are unhappy for the duration of their absence; once you have obtained them, your boredom makes you unhappy. Furthermore, every fulfilment of this willing shall perish; and no matter what you achieve, death will be the ultimate victor and you will lose everything once more:

> The ceaseless efforts to banish suffering achieve nothing more than a change in its form. This is essentially want, lack, care for the maintenance of life. If, which is very difficult, we have succeeded in removing pain in this form, it at once appears on the scene in a thousand others, varying according to age and circumstances, such as sexual impulse, passionate love, jealousy, envy, hatred, anxiety, ambition, avarice, sickness, and so on. Finally, if it cannot find entry in any other shape, it comes in the sad, grey garment of weariness, satiety, and boredom, against which many different attempts are made. Even if we ultimately succeed in driving these away, it will hardly be done without letting pain in again in one of the previous forms, and thus starting the dance once more at the beginning; for every human life is tossed backwards and forwards between pain and boredom.
> Schopenhauer 1969, 315

This characterisation of life as Sisyphean labour clearly shows that is not scarcity or toil that causes us to suffer in life, but rather life's own meaninglessness. In the last section of *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche

writes that the problem doesn't quite lie in the suffering of humankind itself, but rather in the absence of any meaning for that suffering:

> *[H]e* did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning. He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was *not* suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, '*why* do I suffer?' … The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far.
> GM III 28, 162

That life is suffering applies to all of reality at a fundamental level; it is a continual fight between different forces, as various pre-Socratic philosophers already recognised; a fight in which everything will eventually perish. For humankind, however, life is suffering in a very particular way, and for two reasons. First of all, the human is the sickliest of all animals: out of all the animals it has alienated itself the furthest from its instincts. Incidentally, this also means it has become the most interesting animal (cf. GM I 6, 33, and II 22, 93; A 14, 580). Nietzsche has distinctly illustrated this suffering in one of his early texts, when he suggests that humankind is envious of the happiness of animals and wants the animal to explain its happiness. "The animal would like to answer, and say: 'The reason is I always forget what I was going to say'—but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering" (UM II.1, 61).

Secondly, and related to this first point, humankind suffers even further at the hands of his quest for a reason, for a purpose or goal in this life of suffering, which isn't available: "man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfil one more condition of existence than any other animal: man *has* to believe, to know, from time to time *why* he exists" (GS 1, 75). For this reason, it goes on to develop morals and religions or ascetic ideals, though they only function to conceal the thorough lacking and fundamental suffering fastened to its life. These morals and religions and philosophies for the concealment of this fundamental fact are therefore constructed only after the advent of the thing they seek to conceal. But this also tells us that we can only recognise what they have concealed *after* these various constructs have been disassembled. I am going to return to this preliminary phase and describe it as the primeval phase in nihilism's developmental history (see § III.3).

GS 370 presents us with no such history, but rather depicts moments taken from this history as positions that can be differentiated and

summarised in a synchronic model.[76] These positions are rendered visible by the aid of two distinctions.

The foremost distinction

We have just seen that morals, religions, and philosophies are disguises of the fundamental absence of meaning. The introduction of the first distinction immediately links into this: "Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers." (text 13, [2a]). If at this point Nietzsche only mentions art and morality, leaving religion and morality out of the equation, this is due to the self-criticism already mentioned in the first part of the text [1]. After all, that introduction concerned his previous relationship to Wagner (and his art) and Schopenhauer (and his philosophy). But there is no doubt that, as with philosophy and art, we can distinguish between different kinds of morality and religion—even if it seems that Nietzsche often associates them with one kind in particular: the one he criticises most frequently.

The first distinction is between two kinds of suffering (text 13 [2b-1]): it is possible both to suffer from the abundance of life, or to suffer from its scarcity. This formulation is ambiguous because to "suffer from" can be understood in different ways: as an indication of a subjectively experienced suffering (like the suffering which causes me to see a doctor), or as an objective explanation of suffering (like the diagnoses drawn up by a doctor). My interpretation of this distinction is motivated in part by the remainder of the text: those abundant in vitality, those who possess the necessary strength to create and bring forth, suffer differently to those who don't, or at least in a manner much diminished. Both do suffer, which is to say: both are aware of the meaningless contingency and transience of existence; but the first can look it in the eye, while the second will attempt to conceal it, producing the kinds of art, philosophy, morality, and religion aimed at such concealment; the first will affirm existence for the sake of its transience too, while the second will seek deliverance from this meaningless existence. Suffering from an abundance of life is called Dionysian, while suffering from its poverty is called romantic.

[76] Cf. Heller (1978, 30) too, who says of this text that Nietzsche seems to only set up antitheses in it; but further on in the text he shows that they are actually moments in a dialectical process.

At the end of the text Nietzsche seems to suggest that the opposition between the two may also be called an opposition between romanticism and classicism. He invokes Goethe's famous distinction in doing so: "the classical is health, the romantic, disease" (Goethe 1982, 487, our translation).[77] But Nietzsche adds that this opposition of romanticism and classicism has become trite and for this reason offers insufficient insight. He will go on to complicate this basic dualistic opposition accordingly. And not only by simply connecting the first opposition to the second, but by starting within the first opposition, by emphasising that both of its members embody types of pessimism. After all, both know that life is suffering. The difference lies in the way they process this knowledge: Dionysian pessimism accepts and affirms suffering, where romantic pessimism denies it and looks for opportunities to be optimistic. But these descriptions remain abstract: we need a second distinction in order to proceed to tangible examples. But before we move on to this second distinction, I will illustrate the first one from a different angle.

As it turns out, we encounter this first opposition in a number of other texts too. In the new introduction to *The Gay Science* Nietzsche distinguishes between two kinds of philosophers: "In some it is their deprivations that philosophize; in others, their riches and strengths" (GS Preface 2, 33). In GS 349 (292) he claims that nature is full of abundance, not deprivation. We come across the same opposition in the unpublished notes, like dissatisfaction versus abundance (NF 2 [114] 12.119) or hunger versus plenitude.

The epilogue to *The Case of Wagner* also alludes to this opposition, but furnishes it with a remarkable exposition. In the first place, it is expanded by terms like "rising" versus "descending life" and connected to the opposition between "classical" and "decadent" as well as "master morality" and "Christian morality". But in the second place the text's central claim appears to be that "these opposite forms in the optics of value are *both* necessary" (CW Epilogue, 191). In the same way that optics is concerned with the events that occur when light falls onto objects, this value-optics studies the events that take place when that light is coloured by (different kinds of) values. These different kinds (kinds of values and kinds of people who allow themselves to be led by them) can be separated into two groups, *both* of which this text claims are necessary. Nietzsche is warning us against too facile a reading, assigning what is described into a "good" class or a "bad" one, pleading instead *for* the one and against the other.

[77] Also cf. Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, part 2, 2 April 1829.

Our text distinguishes these two types on the basis of two different needs: the need for peace, for deliverance, for befuddlement or sedation, or for an order that reassures and provides confidence; this is opposed by a need to create, to bring forth. And in fact, the second type is hardly expressed as a need, and certainly not a kind of "neediness", but rather as a force capable of accepting whatever comes its way. The first need tries to remove or deny the source of suffering, the second accepts and affirms it.

This first distinction, [2b-1], receives by far the most attention and is explicitly called the most important one. It is more fundamental and for this reason more important to those who wish to look "deeper", under the surface, thus: more important to the diagnostician.

The second distinction

There is another, second distinction Nietzsche uses for his diagnostics (text 13 [2b-2]). Alongside of the two kinds of suffering he also distinguishes two kinds of desire as being determinative for human culture, i.e. for philosophy, art, morality and religion. Like the first one, this second distinction is also a diagnostic tool for interpretation: it tries to say something about what lies *under* the surface, submerged below the immediately visible. This second distinction is nevertheless closer to the surface than the first: it is more obvious and more easily recognised.

Human culture and human creations are in the service of the life of suffering, allowing them to be interpreted according to the quality of life that determines how this suffering is to be endured or avoided. But they can also result from two different kinds of desire, kinds which Nietzsche distinguishes by virtue of their orientation or direction. He designates them as a desire for becoming, for change and thus for a destruction of what currently exists on the one hand; and a desire for being, for eternalisation, rigidity and fixation on the other.

Nietzsche then proceeds to connect these two distinctions (text 13 [2c]). Both the interpretation of the second distinction in terms of the *direction* of the desire, as well as the fact that Nietzsche characterises the two distinctions as being differently weighted suggests that we can understand them at the hand of the "two kinds of causes" he distinguishes in aphorism 360 from *The Gay Science*. He places "the cause of acting" on one side and "the cause of acting in a particular way" on the other. In GS 360 Nietzsche describes the first cause as "a quantum of dammed-up energy waiting to…be used up"; the second as that by which this force expresses itself in a certain way. Here Nietzsche uses an image he takes

from the physicist Julius Robert von Mayer (1814-1878), but which is really quite misleading: the first cause is the powder keg, the second is the match. It is misleading because what Nietzsche actually wants to say is that the first cause explains *why* there is any motion at all, while the second only determines its direction.

And while both are significant nor can each go without the other, Nietzsche holds the first cause to be far more important than the second. In GS 370, the first is found in the quality of life, in its abundance or its poverty, in the capacity to either affirm an essentially meaningless life and reality, or the need to deny it. But affirmation and denial may occur in different ways, in different directions: they may be aimed at a perpetuation of what is, or at its change. In their own turn, both perpetuation and change appear entirely different, due to resulting either from abundance or from poverty. Both qualities of life (first distinction) can express themselves in very different ways. And the affirmation and denial of what exists, which the second distinction relates to, only receives its identity by virtue of that quality of life the first distinction is concerned with.

Perhaps we will better understand the two directions of desire as temporal categories: the primary focus of works of art, philosophies, morals, and religions can be aimed at the *future*, and attempt to criticise, change, or destroy the present (prevailing points of view, existing relationships, reality as we encounter it) in its service. But they can also be primarily focused on the *present* and seek its perpetuation or even its exaltation. However, orientation on the future or the present may be motivated in very different ways, and the role of the *past* will vary according to the configuration.

A weak life suffers from the burden of the past: it will either be (perpetuatingly) stuck in the past, which then becomes the enduring present, or otherwise (transformingly) curse the past along with the present and strive to change it. A strong or abundant life doesn't allow itself to be trapped in the past, but will (transformingly) change even that which it was into a product of its own will, or else (perpetuatingly) discover that past and future are merely the two sides of that gate called "moment" (cf. Z III "*On the Vision and the Riddle*" and "*The Convalescent*"). We can only really provide concrete examples after the two distinctions have been connected to each other.

Table

When the two distinctions are combined we are presented with four different figures. Changing and destroying can either stem from

abundance or from poverty. In the first case, we are dealing with an affirming, creative force which doesn't attach itself to any one kind of creation, but on the contrary is capable of wiping out any created form. In the second case the change isn't as much an effect of a continually renewed creation as it is a complete denial, a total negation of what exists. Similarly, perpetuation may take place in two radically different ways: it can be the expression of gratitude, in which reality is cherished and the love for it celebrated. But it can also derive from hate and fear and the inability to accept the plurality and transience of the world; in this case it exists as an attempt to reduce everything to one dogmatic form. It is only at this point that we have developed the diagnostic instrument at the hand of which we can analyse reality.

The four different forms may be brought into a table. Real phenomena can be situated in one of the table's four squares. Nietzsche himself does this with the following people and phenomena:

		Every creation stems from a desire for:	
		A. Perpetuation	B. Destruction
Pessimism: every creation is in service of the life that is suffering from either/or:	I. its abundance	dithyrambic, Rubens, Goethe, (Homer)	Dionysian
	II. its poverty	romantic pessimism, Schopenhauer, Wagner	anarchism

At the end of the text (text 13 [3]) Nietzsche opposes romantic pessimism to a classical form of pessimism: the pessimism of the future, or Dionysian pessimism. If we—as I have suggested—should in fact label all four of these forms as "pessimistic", this last opposition is a repetition of the first distinction. In that case suffering from abundance (I) is Dionysian,

classical and healthy, where suffering from poverty (II) is romantic. But we have now learnt that each of these contain two more forms, A and B.

This schema reminds us of the various kinds of nihilism we distinguished at the end of § III.1: we are now in a position to try and connect the kinds of pessimism distinguished in GS 370 (see above table) with the different forms of nihilism we encountered in order to arrive at a typology of types of nihilism.

The fundamental presupposition of aphorism 370 ("life is suffering") is easily spotted in the Lenzer Heide text's preceding nihilism. On the next page I repeat the table on the basis of this assumption, but this time complete it with the different kinds of nihilism Nietzsche mentions in his works and especially and in his notes.[78] The main categories from the previously constructed table are italicised; the numbers following the terms refer to the unpublished notes (and their potentially numbered parts) taken up in Appendix A; ER denotes the "eternal recurrence of the same" (the "*ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*", on which more in § III.3). Nietzsche's underlining has not been included in the table.

We find that the terms sharing a single quadrant are still not necessarily of the same order, and multiple kinds of nihilism can once more be discerned within the four quadrants. Some terms even feature in multiple quadrants. The distinctions still require refining, as do the different ways in which Nietzsche employs the term "nihilism". One might go about doing this by placing the various distinguished kinds of nihilism on a line of development. This line mostly runs counter clockwise from the left bottom quadrant to the left top of the table. A description of this line will hopefully provide some more nuances. For this reason, we now transition from a synchronic presentation of the kinds of nihilism to a diachronic presentation of the history of its development. Our attention will mainly be focused on Nietzsche's unpublished notes, but there will also be an attempt to extend the line of his nineteenth-century texts into our twenty-first century circumstances.

[78] It is in part Yannick Souladié's (2010) interpretation in this exercise that I follow, but I use other texts too, alongside of the ones he uses.

		Perpetuating ER	*Destructive* active nihilism (3)
Base proposition: practical and theoretical nihilism (2,1), first nihilism (2,3), extreme nihilism (3), nihilism as a normal phenomenon.	*from abundance: Dionysian, healthy* Nihilism as a sign of intensified strength of spirit (3), complete nihilism (9)	ER for the strongest (2, 16), self-overcoming of nihilism (10)	Free spirit (347)
	from poverty: romantic, sickly Pathos of the 'in vain' (4); nihilism as in-between period (4), the terrifying Either/Or (GS 346)	The Christian moral explanation (1,1;3), the most extreme form of nihilism (2,6), ER as a curse (2,14), exhausted nihilism (3), passive nihilism (3), Buddhism (1, 3;3), European Buddhism, pessimism, and hedonism (5), nihilism as a psychological condition (6)	Radical rejection of values, meaning, and desirability (1, 1; 2,2), European form of Buddhism: *doing no* (2, 12), disintegration (3), nihilism *a la* Petersburg (GS 347)

III.3 The history of nihilism's development

We have seen that Nietzsche's thesis of nihilism is entwined with his idea of the "death of God". But it has also become clear that this death of God is preceded by two phases: the phase of the "hypothesis of Christian morality" (the construct "God")—which is itself nihilistic—and, prior to

this, by the first nihilism, the pessimism of the Greeks. When Nietzsche sketches an outline for Contributions to the history of European Nihilism (NF 11[150] 13.71= text 8), he is really only dealing with the phase that is summarised by the phrase "the death of God". We will now discuss the four periods he distinguishes within this third phase: the period of unclarity, that of certainty, that of the three great affects and the catastrophic period.

The period of unclarity

This first period concerns a type of nihilism that still precedes its explicit appearance: it is the phase that follows the reign of the "hypothesis of Christian morality", but precedes its irrevocable unmasking. The nihilism of this period seeks to "conserve the old without losing the new". It is the first reaction to the corrosion of the old beliefs, the period in which the old creations are adjusted in order to try and salvage them: morality becomes more pluralistic, religion less dogmatic, philosophy more critical—but in all of these adjustments the old faith is retained. Nihilism does not quite yet break through during the time these adjustments remain successful.

It seems that humankind still holds enough creative power to allow it to adjust its creations according to its circumstances in this period. It includes doubt as a part of its faith, pluralism as a part of its morality of respect for and tolerance of different points of view, scepticism as a part of its epistemology and relativism as a part of an ironic interaction with the "truth" of the grand narratives. My description explicitly seeks to evoke the association with the contemporary figures of theology, ethics, and metaphysics. We, in the twenty-first century, still appear to reside in this period, which is to stay: still on the eve of the event Nietzsche thought to foresee. This could perhaps explain why the terrible threat of that event does not yet seem to be a matter of concern.

It may also explain why Nietzsche relinquishes the term and theme of nihilism after a number of years, instead concentrating on a number of its sub-themes. These sub-themes are particularly focused on this early period of the third phase of nihilism; I will mention the three most important ones. In the first instance, physiological conditions increasingly come to the fore: conditions determining the distinction between those who are still and those who are no longer capable of recreating the old creations, between the "strong" and the *"Schlechtweggekommenen"* or "unfortunate", where this last term is explicitly interpreted physiologically (text 2, § 14). I will get back to this when we arrive at the "period of catastrophe". Secondly, the critique of Christianity becomes increasingly fierce: it is the

critique of that which keeps the breakthrough of nihilism at bay. Nietzsche initially sees *The Antichrist* (written in 1888, first published in 1895) as the first part of his planned *Transvaluation of All Values*[79] (*Umwertung aller Werte*), until it eventually comes to take that place itself. The third theme that arises from the last period of Nietzsche's writing on the theme of nihilism is that of decadence. I will spend some more time on this here, because of the way it characterises the next, second period of the "history of European nihilism".

The period of clarity

We have already come across Nietzsche's introduction to decadence as a diagnosis of the times in § I.5, principally due to a number of French authors. It is especially in the works by Paul Bourget and the brothers De Goncourt that Nietzsche finds the diagnosis of a decadence of culture (which for these authors specifically meant a decadence of literature) that is no longer capable of organising the plurality of material into a coherent whole. And both in the literature as well as in the painting and music of the nineteenth century we encounter the proliferation of parts unable to find their natural place in the larger whole. This is very clear in one of the masterpieces of decadent literature, J.-K. Huysmans' *Against Nature*, a book that in its novelistic form falls apart into essentially unconnected chapters, which themselves disintegrate into endlessly detailed descriptions of smells, books, drinks, and so on. Regarding decadent literature, Nietzsche himself writes that:

> What is the sign of every *literary decadence*? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole—the whole is no longer a whole.
> CW 7, 170

And Nietzsche recognises this same feature in all domains of culture:

> But this is the simile of every style of *decadence*: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disgregation of the will, "freedom of the individual", to use moral terms—expanded into a political theory, "*equal* rights for al". Life, *equal* vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life pushed back into the

[79] The English-speaking Nietzsche scholarship sometimes distinguishes between "Revaluation" and "Transvaluation". Nietzsche himself doesn't make this distinction and uses only this one term, "Umwertung".

> smallest forms; the rest, *poor* in life. 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 artefact. —
> CW 7, 170

This decadence, or rather, this realisation that "*all the old ideals* are *hostile to life* (born from decadence and determining it, no matter how well dressed it is in morality's Sunday best)" is one of the characteristics of the second period Nietzsche identifies in text 8: "*the period of clarity*". But we recognise the characteristic here described most clearly in text 3. That is where Nietzsche describes "passive nihilism" as a "sign of weakness", a sign that

> the force of the spirit may be wearied, *exhausted*, so that the goals and the values that have prevailed *so far* are no longer appropriate and are no longer believed—; that the synthesis of values and goals (on which every strong culture rests) dissolves, so that the individual values wage war on each other: disintegration.

In the absence of any organisational unity, collections are all that remain. Decadents are collectors. Most museums (like the large national museums: the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the museums on Berlin's Museum-Island, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam) date from the end of the eighteenth or the first half of the nineteenth century: when Europeans turned into collectors. It may prove interesting to pursue the manner in which the great collection we have in the Internet could be understood in a similar manner.

One may recognise other elements of decadence in culture from the nineteenth century right up until our time: the experience of evil's attractive force in *Les fleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil*) by Charles Baudelaire or in popular TV (e.g. the American show *Temptation Island*, replicated in many different countries); the combination of the quest for ever stronger impulses and the longing for sedation or intoxication with a desensitising effect; feeling alienated from nature, to the extent that we can only experience it through culture, and through art in particular, et cetera. It isn't hard to come to the conclusion that "we" indeed are decadent. In 1887/1888 Nietzsche writes: "What I am telling is the story of the coming two centuries…" (text 7).

We should really consider decadence to still form part of "*the period of unclarity*". It is rather the *awareness* thereof that characterises the new, second period in the history of nihilism, "*the period of clarity*". In the

same way that we "understand" the peculiarities of the strange cultures we find in the museum, without any engagement from our side, so do we understand our own ideals even though we cannot believe in them any longer. Our natural and historical sciences teach us that the factual world provides no foundation for these kind of ideals (text 8). We still understand them, but only as the means by which we have sought to shield ourselves "from practical and theoretical *nihilism*" (text 2, § 1). We understand that these ideals resulted from an infirm life, that they maintain this infirm life and thus are "hostile to life"; "we *understand* the old and are far from strong enough for something new" (text 8).

The period of the three great affects

This awareness duly leads to the third period in the history of European nihilism, "the period of the three great affects". In text 8, Nietzsche lists these affects, without any further explanation, as being contempt, pity, and destruction. But there are more, and they can be organised in different ways.

The sense that everything is in vain plays a key role. These words come up time and again in the unpublished notes, as if they were a refrain (cf. text 2, § 4 and 5, text 4 and 6). The values and ideals which previously gave life its meaning have been unmasked; now everything appears meaningless. Text 6 calls it "the torment of the 'in vain'", text 4 "the pathos of 'in vain'". This last description holds some ambiguity; "as pathos at the same time an *inconsequence* of the nihilist" (text 4). Pathos is that turning point at which passive nihilism turns into active nihilism (and so moves in our table, from the bottom left quadrant to the one on the bottom right).

The feelings identified with passive nihilism are disappointment, shame, and despair resulting from the loss of security: disappointment that the purpose we used to believe in has dissipated; shame for the fact that we fooled ourselves for so long (text 6); despair or "desperate embitterment" because what kept us from despair, which is morality, now falls away (text 2, § 9). In the Lenzer Heide text Nietzsche elaborates the previous function of that morality in two important ways. Firstly, it was important for the weak, which is to say those who felt powerless against other, stronger people. Secondly (and partially as a result of this) it taught the weak to despise and hate. This second point is especially important, because this hate, on the one hand, shows exactly what is at work in all morality, and explains why passive nihilism can turn into active nihilism on the other. Morality is fed by hatred towards the strong. Apparently it

was easier to endure powerlessness against nature than endure it against people who were more powerful, and became enemies as a result. That is to be expected, because one suspects other people have an intention and the freedom to behave in a different manner from the way they are actually behaving. That is why one can blame other people, but cannot blame nature. Or so it seems, until Nietzsche stands this on its head. In *The Genealogy of Morals* he writes that, while it is understandable that the lambs are angry at the large birds of prey, this doesn't justify their anger. After all, birds of prey are simply birds of prey and cannot choose to act as if they were lambs:

> To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that is should express itself as strength… Popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to so. But there is no such substratum.
> GM 1 13, 45

The underlying thesis claims that people and animals, like all the rest of nature, are marked by will to power. Nietzsche first uses this famous or infamous term in the *Zarathustra*; it is explained in *Beyond Good and Evil* (specifically in § 22 and 36) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (specifically in part II, § 12) and plays an important role in many of the unpublished notes dealing with the themes of nihilism (cf. text 2, 9, and 10).

Without spending too much time on it here,[80] we can summarise Nietzsche's understanding of the will to power as well as his (hypo)thesis that everything is will to power in the following way: "will to power" does not refer to some or other particular subject seeking power, but is a name for reality, a perspective from which reality appears as an everlasting battle. There are no "things", no "substrates" to which one can ascribe characteristics, no acting "subjects"; there is only an eternal battle from combating "forces", continually seeking to subjugate one another. And these "forces" shouldn't be taken in such a way that they refer to a substrate under the operation: there is only operation, which consists of an attempt to rule, to overthrow, to subjugate. Nietzsche often refers to this same operation as an interpretation:

[80] For a more extensive discussion and references to further literature: Van Tongeren 2000-a, 154-174.

> all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation…the whole history of a 'thing', an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations.
> GM II 12, 77

Reality as will to power means that it exists as an everlasting battle of overpowering interpretations.

In § 9 and 10 of the Lenzer Heide text we find passive nihilism explained at the hand of the notion of the will to power. Nietzsche's explanation strongly resembles the way he is to elucidate the concept in especially the first part of *The Genealogy of Morals*, a text he will write shortly after this one. Initially, the weak blame the strong for subjugating them. Morality is the cultivation of this blame: with the help of morality and its interpretive possibilities the weak can both justify their own behaviour and condemn the strong. After all, morality professes humans to have free will, and thus the strong could have acted otherwise. In addition to this, morality also teaches that although the oppressors may be strong, they are evil. And while the oppressed may be weak, they are good. And in this way, as well as by the promise of the eventual rule of justice in which the good will reign, the weak are consoled. But now truthfulness uncovers the hidden "teleology" (text 2, § 2) of this entire construction. Not only does this cause the weak to lose their consolation, their right "to hate and despise most profoundly what is the fundamental characteristic of the rulers: *their will to power*" (§ 9), they also discover their own morality as a will to power: an interpretation which seeks to gain mastery over life and in this way to bring the strong under its yoke. The weak discover that their hatred and contempt are a figure of the same will to power that they hate in the strong. Not only do they lose their protection, but, to the extent that their morality continues to exist within them, they also receive reason to hate and despise themselves.

In this last segment we once more discover an account of the turning of passive nihilism into its active counterpart. Passive nihilism is despair, "desperate embitterment" (§ 9). But because morality does not simply vanish after being uncovered as mendacity, it not only ceases to protect: it also provides the impulse for self-hatred and self-destruction. Not only does the loss of their protection cause the weak to be destroyed, they destroy themselves because they are condemnable according to their own criteria (§ 10). For, as Nietzsche writes: "extreme positions are replaced not by moderate ones, rather by equally extreme but *opposite* ones" (§ 4).

The old morality continues to work in the active destruction of all the things it used to protect in many different ways. Nietzsche mentions the

following "symptoms of this self-destruction of the unfortunate: self-vivisection, poisoning, intoxication, romanticism, particularly the instinctive need for actions which *make deadly enemies* of the powerful (—as if one were breeding one's own executioners)" (§ 11). This "self-vivisection" reminds us of the self-hatred, which comes into being as a consequence of encountering the hated will to power *within* one's own protection against it. We previously encountered "poisoning" and "intoxication" as effects of decadence, or of the romanticism we discussed in light of GS 370.

It is remarkable that the dissipation of morality always seems to unleash a kind of fanaticism, something Nietzsche calls a "tremendous generalization" and designates as "pathological": "the inference *that there is no meaning at all*" (text 3). This can be understood in light of what he writes in the Lenzer Heide text. As the "Christian morality hypothesis" (§ 1) was the only ruling interpretation of reality, there is absolutely nothing left when it falls away: "*[o]ne* interpretation has collapsed, but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it appears as though there is no sense in existence whatsoever, as though everything is *in vain*" (§ 4). Because there was only one way in which reality could receive meaning, that reality is void of all meaning the moment this one perspective is lost. And because morality does not disappear the moment it is uncovered, because faith does not disappear with the insight that God is dead, people now start believing "in the absolute immorality of nature" with the same intensity, and they now experience the meaninglessness of the reality they live in with the same intensity with which they previously experienced its meaning.

This fanaticism becomes most obvious in the last of the "*symptoms* of this self-destruction" (§ 11). Here Nietzsche seems to refer to revolutionary movements that come into being in the wake of nihilistic experience (also see § I.4). When morality falls away, the weak no longer have reason to resign themselves to their subordinate position, but claim power themselves (§ 12). If there is nothing that has any meaning, then everything that retains the pretence of meaning must be destroyed (the reader will remember the description of the nihilist in Turgenev's novel; see § I.4): every rank, every position of power must be demolished. "Hatred against the order of rank" (text 5): this is how nihilism can turn into an "violent force of *destruction*" (text 3).

It is not entirely clear if Nietzsche thinks active nihilism follows on the passive, or if it is the other way around. We probably shouldn't be thinking along the lines of a progression here at all, but rather of two forms of the necessary and catastrophic development (text 9) of that nihilism. It is

curious that Nietzsche designates both of them as "Buddhism": Indian Buddhism is the "most celebrated form" of the "wearied" passive nihilism (text 3). But in the Lenzer Heide text he designates active nihilism (which "destroy[s] that which does not perish"; text 5) as "the European form of Buddhism" (§ 12). The two appearances are fixed to each other. In the "period of the three great affects" nihilistic experience vacillates between activity and passivity, destructiveness and resignation, revolutionary rebellion and hedonistic comfort or intoxicating daze. It may be for this reason that Nietzsche calls nihilism an "intermediate state" (text 3): a situation with two faces, of which we—even in our times—now encounter the one, then the other: here the one, there the other.

The period of catastrophe

The fourth and last period of the history of European nihilism is designated "*the period of catastrophe*". Its description refers to "the rise of a doctrine that *sifts* men…" (text 8). The Lenzer Heide text (in §§ 5-8 and 13-16) gives us more information about this "doctrine", the doctrine of the "eternal recurrence". In this way, we come upon another catchphrase in Nietzsche's thinking, alongside of the "will to power"; once more we can only briefly elucidate it.[81]

Nietzsche became familiar with the thought of the "eternal recurrence of the same" early on: not only had he come across it in the ancient Greeks[82] and in Heraclitus in particular (cf. PTAG 6, 1.829 and EH BT 3, 273) and in the Pythagoreans (UM II 2, 109), but also in David Hume (cf. NF 29 [86] 7.667f.), Schopenhauer, Leopardi, Von Hartmann and others (cf. Weyembergh 1977, 34f.). But before the thought becomes his own "doctrine", it is in the first place an experience. The first recording of that experience is a famous one, furnished with place and date, like the Lenzer Heide text: "early August 1881 in Sils Maria, 6000 feet above sea level and much higher above all human affairs—" (NF 11 [141] 9.494; cf. also EH Za 1, 295). The reason this thought makes such a deep impression on Nietzsche is as unclear as the rock on which he got the thought is unremarkable. But a deep impression it made—so much so that it was a turning point in his life and he sought to immediately proclaim it as doctrine in order to be able to incorporate it himself:

[81] For an extended discussion, see: Van Tongeren 2000-a, 291-300, and Skirl 2000, also for references to further literature.

[82] According to Löwith (1997, 39) Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence is a failed attempt to return, contrary to the Christian notion, to a Greek interpretation of time, history and the world.

> What do we do with the rest of our life—we who have spent the most part of it in the most fundamental ignorance? We teach the doctrine—it is the surest way for us to incorporate it ourselves. Our form of bliss, as teacher of the most grandiose doctrine.
> NF 11 [141] 9.494; our translation

Many of the subsequent notes make it clear that for a while Nietzsche attempted to ground this thought scientifically: within infinite time, every finite unit of force must already have realised every possible situation, every possible configuration of forces before (and infinitely often). He even makes plans to study physics with Lou Salomé and Paul Rée in Paris, in order to develop a scientific proof for this idea. While these plans quickly fade into the background, the Lenzer Heide text still claims that the idea of eternal recurrence necessarily follows from the "energy of matter and strength", that it is "the *most scientific* of all possible hypotheses" (§ 6), and has "*erudite* presuppositions" (§ 13).

But that which follows from the thought will become more important than the manner in which it is grounded. This implication presents an alternative, which Nietzsche simultaneously presents as a test (the "doctrine that sifts men…"; text 8). This alternative is provided in the shape of a discussion with Spinoza (§ 6-9). It follows from the thought itself: if everything recurs eternally, then reality is not a process aimed towards a goal. While Nietzsche does take reality as occurrence, as a dynamic and a process, he does not allow for any kind of teleological interpretation, be it as Christian Salvation History, a more or less utopian faith in progress, or even its reversal as in a "finale in nothingness": "if existence were to have [an end goal], it must already [for its existence in unending time] have been reached" (§ 6). This articulation makes it clear that the denial of a final goal can be interpreted in two ways: it can mean that everything is completely meaningless, but it can also mean that everything is perfect. The eternal recurrence of the same may just as well mean that the process has already achieved its goal as that it means the process will never end. It could indicate that the process never reaches a position from where it can be vindicated, that Sisyphus's stone never remains atop the mountain, that his efforts will never be rewarded. But one may reverse this conclusion too: if there is no final goal to be realised, nothing can fail to realise it nor is there ever anything lacking from that process. In other words, "everything" would then be "perfect, divine, eternal" (§ 7).

Nietzsche sketches the two sides of this alternative—one the fateful reality of our times, the other a possibility, perhaps realised by Spinoza—in very different ways. The first is sometimes referred to as "the most

extreme form of nihilism", though Nietzsche can also be found to use the expression "European form of Buddhism" (§ 6) in its place (and thus in a different sense from its usage in § 12). The idea of eternal recurrence is the most extreme form of nihilism, because it endlessly repeats the nihilistic experience of the futility of everything: not even this will come to end. Not even Silenus' second—and suboptimal—suggestion ("to die swiftly"; see § III.2) offers solace any more.

The other part of the alternative is the "pantheistic affirmation of all things" (§ 7), which Nietzsche suspects Spinoza to have possessed. However, "his case is just an individual case" (§ 8). His reasons for leaving Spinoza behind again (even though he counts him as one of his "ancestors", along with Heraclitus, Empedocles and Goethe: NF 25 [454] 11.134[83]) are not entirely clear. There seem to be two reasons: firstly, Spinoza is an exception himself, and secondly, he could only affirm reality due to its *logical* necessity. This second reason is decisive: Spinoza was an exception because only someone like him could live in a way that reduced life to the knowledge of logical relations, to "conceptual web-spinning" (TI Skirmishes 23, 528): "what was left of Spinoza, *amor intellectualis dei*, is mere clatter and no more than that: What is *amor*, what *deus*, if there is not a drop of blood in them?" (GS 372, 333). Spinoza is the "logician [for whom] absolute consistency and objective dialectic alone are enough to reconcile it to everything…" (text 6). By the "logicality of his fundamental instinct [Spinoza] was triumphant" over the meaninglessness of a world without telos. But that logical instinct is a sign of anaemia; it only gains victory through a negation of the blood, of life. In this way it does not ultimately affirm *"[e]very fundamental characteristic* at the basis of *every* event, as expressed in every event" (§ 8), but only that which is logical in our purposeless existence. And so

[83] In a letter from the summer of 1881 Nietzsche asks Franz Overbeck for Kuno Fischer's book on Spinoza (July 8, 1881, KSB 6.101) and writes—evidently on the basis of reading that book—on the 30th of July of the same year, once more from Sils Maria, that he has discovered a predecessor in Spinoza, that he shares both the general sense of his work ("to make of knowledge the most powerful affect", our transl.) as well as five main points from his thought, and as a result his loneliness has become shared (KSB 6.111). In relation to the problematics of nihilism, a letter written to Nietzsche is of interest, written by F.W. van Eeden (the father of the well-known Dutch author Frederik van Eeden), in which he criticises the "old sickly morality" of self-control and, here referring to Spinoza, places "the highest morality" in its stead, which is to exist in an "ever more spacious intellectual containment of the world", an "ascending into totality", of which he literally says that it "cannot be nihilism, but much rather *totalism*" (23 October 1885; KGB III.4, nr. 305, 66).

Nietzsche's question from § 7 remains unanswered: "[i]f we remove finality from the process, can we *nevertheless* still affirm the process?".

In the last paragraphs our text turns this idea of eternal recurrence into "a doctrine that sifts men (text 8), in other words, into a kind of selective instrument. Doubtlessly the best-known way this idea appears as a touchstone is GS 341. Here Nietzsche produces a demon who makes clear that:

> This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence… The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!

It is because it forces you to react that the idea is a touchstone, and the reaction will *either* be one of horror *or* one of gratitude. The alternative does not permit you to accept the one but deny the other aspect of your life: everything is interlinked; this concerns "*every* event" (text 2, § 8). This question confronts you in respect of every aspect of your life: "do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" (GS 341). And your answer demonstrates to which type of people you belong.

In the Lenzer Heide text Nietzsche characterises these types in what he labels a "physiological" manner, meaning: in terms of "healthy" and "unhealthy", "strong" and "weak". The strong and healthy are those who neither have faith in the hypothesis of Christian morality, nor require the (equally zealous) faith in its destruction, which is to say: those who can go without extreme positions; who do not need believe in the absolute value of the human in order to believe in themselves, who do not only recognise the chance and absurdity of reality but even like it (§ 15). The question in § 16, of how such people would think of eternal recurrence, is answered in a note from the period in which Nietzsche first wrote down the idea:

> First the necessary—and this as beautiful and perfect as you can! 'Love what is necessary'—amor fati, that would be my morality, prove all that is good and lift it out of its terrible origin toward yourself.
> NF 15 [20] 9.643, our translation

The weak and unhealthy are those who express their inability to recognise this absurdity in a blind destructiveness. So weak is their faith in their own self, that when it lacks a foundation, they can only affirm themselves by negating or destroying everything they once held sacred. And this

destructiveness will keep reinforcing itself through the realisation that it too is meaningless, because it is endlessly recurring (§ 14).

Nietzsche believes that this separation of spirits, a true *crisis* in the original, Greek sense of the word, has a purifying effect. Not only will it clean away all delusions, those who cannot do without these delusions clear themselves away by their own destructiveness. The strong will emerge as strong by the same token.

It is remarkable that Nietzsche emphasises, at the beginning as well as at the end of § 14, that this is not a "political" distinction to him and that the "*hierarchy* of *forces*" that he foresees will be "initiated" is meant to be "[a]t one remove from all existing social orders". We are not dealing with a hierarchy of rulers and subjects in a political or societal sense, but rather with a cultural divide between people who cannot cope with life (or the truth about it) and therefore express themselves negatively, and those who lovingly accept the absurdity of life.

III.4 Conclusion

In distinguishing the many types, phases and periods of nihilism, it becomes clear that there is no comprehensive, systematic theory of nihilism in Nietzsche's work. At the peril of obscuring that insight and covering once more the many nuances that have become visible, I would still attempt to provide a manner of comprehensive overview of the main trajectory of the development of European nihilism according to Nietzsche.[84] Incidentally, that we are able to speak of a "development" at all does not take away the fact that there need not be a continual and unambiguous progression. Different people or peoples can be in different phases, and there can moreover be relapses into a previous phase.

Nietzsche can be said to distinguish four phases or stages of nihilism. These four phases comprise the whole history of European culture from the pre-Socratic Greeks to his own 19th century and beyond that up to our current days. The shortest possible summary—in an inverted chronological

[84] The summary below is a revised version of what I wrote as a position paper for a conference, organised in Nijmegen, December 2015, under the title "Beyond Nihilism?". The proceedings of the conference (Bremmers et al., 2018) show an interesting range of reactions to Nietzsche's challenge. For a different interpretation of the development of European nihilism, also cf. Alan White's (1987) interesting article. While he refers to "types" of nihilism, he does explicitly make these types form part of a development. White differentiates between religious, radical and completed nihilism respectively, reserving the name of European nihilism only for the second type.

order, meant to indicate the dynamics of the development—would probably read as follows: Nihilism is (4) the conscious experience of an antagonism, that is the result of (3) the decline of (2) the protective structure that was built to hide (1) the absurdity of life and world.

Nihilism-1 is sometimes also indicated as "Greek pessimism", but seems to me to be the basis of Nietzsche's concept of nihilism. Nihilism-2 is Nietzsche's way of referring to the history of European culture from Plato (and Christianity's "Platonism for the people") up to and including the 19th century. Nihilism-3 refers to what has been happening since then, i.e. what Nietzsche sometimes labels as "the death of God", what he describes as the history of the centuries to come and with regard to which he makes all these further distinctions (such as that between active and passive, complete and incomplete nihilism, etc.). Nihilism-4 finally stands for the way in which Nietzsche acknowledges to be caught himself in the nihilism that he for the first time diagnosed.

Nihilism is therefore not only, and not primarily, the corrosion or undermining of "meaning" as it is summarised in the expression "the death of God" (nihilism-3). On the contrary: "God" is, according to Nietzsche, itself a nihilistic concept; the history of European philosophy, science, morality, politics, religion and art is itself deeply nihilistic (in the sense of nihilism-2). It is only because of the nihilistic structure of European culture that the death of God has become possible and is (and will continue to be) such a threatening event. It is only because "truth" or the idea(l) of truth and the "will to truth" have been the driving force of European culture that they could eventually undermine the whole construction centred around them; a construction that, on the one hand, has protected us against the view that there is no truth, but that, on the other hand, has done so by imagining a true world behind or beyond all apparent (contingent etc.) reality: a construction that—in Beckett's words—has left us "waiting for Godot", even accepting that Mr. Godot "won't come this evening", so as not to acknowledge that there is no Godot.[85]

That there is no Godot, no God, no absolute principle of truth, beauty or goodness, makes human existence extremely difficult. Human beings—at least since the time of Socrates, who by bringing "the tragic age of the Greek" to an end left humans incapable of enduring chaos and absurdity without denying it—cannot live without the difference between true and false, good and bad, beautiful and ugly: they cannot live without that which is indicated by these words—that is, without "meaning".

[85] Cf. Beckett 1956, 50 and 91.

Nihilism-2 is the nihilism inherent to the very construction that was supposed to provide us with that meaning and protect us against nihilism-1. It consists, to put it very briefly, in the denial of the apparent world in the name of a true world. The contingency of this world is put in perspective by the eternity of the true world; the evil of this world, by the goodness of its creator and by our moral duty or ethical ideal; the imperfection of factual reality, by the perfection of the ideal. The ideality of the true world is, according to Nietzsche, a devaluation of the real world. The history of nihilistic European culture can therefore be summarized as the history of the construction of an ideal world, the history of "idealism" in this sense.

Nietzsche famously completes this history of the construction of an ideal world with the history of its de(con)struction, and summarizes the whole process in *Twilight of the Idols* as the history of an error, the "*Geschichte eines Irrthums*" (TI, True World, 485). For ultimately this ideal world succumbs to its own unreality: "All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming" (GM III 27, 161). The search for truth unmasks the idea of truth as an illusion, the moral virtue of honesty undermines the mendacious morality of which it is a part. Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics and of morality is not the cause of perdition, it only brings the self-undermining force of the idealist construction to the fore.

In his critique of nihilism-2 Nietzsche is constantly aware of the self-referentiality of this critique. This is most apparent in the critique of the will to truth or truthfulness, which is itself motivated precisely by what it criticizes. But the same is the case in all domains of Nietzsche's critique of nihilism. He is aware of the fact that in his critique of the traditional ideals he repeats the old idealism.

This self-referentiality becomes extremely clear in the third essay of his *Genealogy of Morals*, which is about ideals. It is not, as most interpreters claim, only about a particular type of ideal, the so-called "ascetic" ideal, but rather about the asceticism of all ideals, and about the way these ideals continue to pervade everything we think and do and create, even Nietzsche's own critique of these very ideals. In his critique of ideals he remains dependent upon an ideal, even if it is one for which he is still searching.

Nietzsche's critique of nihilism repeats the criticized structures, but does not do so naively. It expressly demonstrates how this critique necessarily gets entangled in these idealist structures, and concludes that the recognition of this inevitability is a point beyond which one cannot go: "what meaning would our whole being possess if it were not this, that in

us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a problem?" (GM III 27, 161).

This might possibly be called nihilism-4: Nietzsche's own nihilism. And it is this nihilism of which there is for him—in my interpretation—no beyond. What Nietzsche adds to what he describes as the history of nihilistic thinking is not very hopeful: we remain caught in the longing for what we cannot believe in any longer; or we cannot but criticize the ideals that we need in order to live: "This antagonism, not to value what we see through, and not being allowed to value what we would like to lie to ourselves, results in a process of dissolution." (NF 1887 5[71] § 2, KSA 12.212, our transl.) Although there are some texts (but only very few) in which Nietzsche speaks of "the overcoming of pessimism" or the "self-overcoming of nihilism", I wonder whether this is more than a question, more than a "perhaps". But I will take up that question when we discuss the history of the reception of Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

NIHILISM IN THE HISTORY OF NIETZSCHE'S RECEPTION

Though it is barely over a hundred years old, the breadth of the history of Nietzsche's reception is unsurveyable: it is unlikely there are many other philosophers about whom as much has been written as there has about Nietzsche. Every year, many hundreds of new books and articles are published on (the themes present in) his work. When typing in the keyword "nihilism", the *Weimarer Nietzsche Bibliographie*[86]—which itself is far from complete—identifies more than 700 titles. The circumstances currently characterising philosophy make it impossible for specialists to read everything published in their own field of expertise, with all due consequences.

Maybe this situation can itself be explained as a form of nihilism and its problematic. After all, we also experience the absence of fixed points of orientation in this limited field. The need for orientation is always on the increase due to the profusion of publications, but on the whole every instrument or advice aimed at orientation is itself fundamentally suspect: no-one can read everything, so how ought one to choose from the vast array, or even from the range of criteria which should help you to choose? And the cause of this situation reminds us of the structure of self-effacement Nietzsche uses to describe morality: for it is precisely our striving after increased knowledge that causes this ever-growing knowledge to be stored "outside" of us, and we have less knowledge "within" us; it is the striving after improved quality of scientific research which doesn't only increase the chances of real fraud, but also the instances of small deceits: references copied from the internet, bibliographies with books that were never read.

The ambiguity of the effects of the situation also allow for a further parallel to be drawn from what Nietzsche says about nihilism. On the one hand, the inability to read everything frees us from following the beaten

[86] This database is—freely—available on the internet: http://ora-web.swkk.de/swk-db/niebiblio/

track, or from the prison of purported knowledge, thereby enabling us to find new roads. On the other hand, dangers lurk in this kind of situation too: relativistic erraticism or cynical contempt in disregarding what has already been published; the temptation to rely on criteria that derive their authority from economic or other positions of power (the big publishing houses, the "top journals", and the farce that results from it, or vice versa), the tendency toward a fundamentalist clinging to traditional authorities, denying new insights any space to grow. Here too the way out is hard to imagine, and we moreover note that those at the heart of the problem hardly seem concerned, but rather hasten in a direction that only exacerbates the problem: they write a new book.

And I do the same, and I too will refrain from attempting to provide an oversight of all the things that have been said in relation to Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism, instead highlighting only a few interpretations.[87] I will spend some time on Martin Heidegger (§ IV.1) and Gianni Vattimo's (§ IV.2) interactions with nihilism. In the closing paragraph (§ IV.3) I will provide a short indication of some other lines in the history of the reception of Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism, including Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, Richard Schacht and Bernard Reginster. I will predominantly be led in all of this by this book's central questions: what does the idea of nihilism mean; what does it mean to *us*; what constitutes its terrifying character; and how can we seem so unperturbed by what Nietzsche thought to be catastrophic?

IV.1 Martin Heidegger

In a note taken down as preparation for his lectures on Nietzsche, in the academic year of 1936/1937, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) explains his meaning: "to determine and present Nietzsche's 'metaphysical' grounding point. How he poses and answers the *question of being*" (1985, 280, our transl.).[88] And that is what Heidegger does—not only in this course, but also in the many other lecture series he presented on Nietzsche between

[87] Weller's 2011 book provides an accessible overview of the history of the concept of nihilism from the start of modernism (nineteenth century). Nietzsche figures as its crux: the period preceding him is prehistory; the authors following have all in some way been influenced by him. This results in the book being a (naturally incomplete) history of the critical reception of Nietzsche's concept of nihilism too.

[88] Unless it is otherwise indicated, all references in this paragraph refer to Heidegger's texts as they are taken up in the bibliography. Quotations with references to German editions are rendered in our translation.

1936 and 1946. These are mainly on the will to power, on eternal recurrence, and on nihilism, as well as a few other topics, which Heidegger believes are the concepts that summarise Nietzsche's metaphysics. Both the importance as well as the limitations of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche stem from this focus on metaphysics.

Importance and limitation

On the one hand Heidegger's lectures strongly contributed to the removal of Nietzsche's thought from the sphere of fascist ideology and from the types of world views and ideological cults it had turned up in the first half of the twentieth century. Heidegger, however, wasn't the only person nor the first to oppose this cult or take Nietzsche seriously as a philosopher. In the German speaking world Karl Löwith and Karl Jaspers had already published books in which Nietzsche was presented as an important existentialist philosopher, in 1935 and 1936 respectively.[89] In the work of the French existentialist Albert Camus Nietzsche played an important role throughout, something that comes to expression most clearly in *L'homme révolté*, published in 1951, in which Camus writes his own version of the history of European nihilism.[90] The Anglophone world saw Walter Kaufmann, a Jewish thinker and poet who had fled Nazi Germany, publish an introduction to Nietzsche's thought in 1950, in which he forcefully opposed the appropriation of that thought by the Nazi's, which he in turn showed to belong to the great tradition of German philosophy and culture.[91] Although Heidegger presented his lectures in 1936, they were only published in 1961 (and in an adapted rendition).[92] Despite this

[89] Karl Löwith, 1978. *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, translation of *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen,* Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. Karl Jaspers, 1936. *Vernunft und Existenz. Fünf Vorlesungen.* Groningen: Wolters, 1935 (later published by Piper in München), and *Nietzsche. Einführung in das Verhältnis seines Philosophierens.* Berlin: Springer. It is curious that, in his lectures, Heidegger is extremely negative about Jaspers' interpretation, which he calls the "biggest counterfeit" (1985, 278). Also cf. Heidegger, 1986, 28, where he comments that the first fundamental flaw of Jaspers' book on Nietzsche is "that he writes this kind of book altogether" (our transl.).

[90] 1951, Paris: Gallimard. English translation: 2000, *The Rebel*. Translated by Anthony Bower. London: Penguin Books.

[91] Walter Kaufmann, 1950. *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist.* Princeton: University Press.

[92] In the following presentation of Heidegger's interpretation I will also make use of these lecture texts themselves, as they have in the meantime become available in

relatively late publication, and the fact that—unlike the previously mentioned authors—Heidegger's writing was only ever read by colleagues and not by a larger public, his interpretation of Nietzsche became widely influential. It is for a great extent thanks to Heidegger that Nietzsche was taken seriously as a philosopher and took up a place in the history of Western philosophy, particularly in metaphysics.

The thematics of nihilism, too, came to the centre of attention due to Heidegger, although he once more was not the first nor only one to write about this, as is clear from the work of some of the authors that were already mentioned. The work of Albert Camus, which is marked by the experience of nihilism and meaninglessness, was being published from the year 1937 onward, while the German thinker Karl Löwith had already published an essay on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in 1933 (before he too had to flee his country for being a Jew), describing them as two authors who were respectively looking for a theological and a philosophical "victory over nihilism" (see Löwith 1987). But Heidegger is the first to put nihilism at the core of Nietzsche's thought as a result of his way of interpreting Nietzsche's philosophy. From the outset, he focuses on what he believes to be the actual or essential content of Nietzsche's thought from the outset, as it is to be found—once more according to Heidegger—not in the published work, but only in the unpublished notes (1979, I, 10). He summarises this essential thought in the following keywords: "nihilism", "revaluation of all values hitherto", "will to power", "eternal recurrence of the same", and "Overman", five concepts which Heidegger believes describe Nietzsche's position in metaphysics (1986, 10). They demonstrate the logical conclusion of a development that has characterised Western metaphysics, from as early as its inception with Plato, but especially through the turn it takes with Descartes.

On the other hand, however, this clarifies what is problematic about Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche. The history of metaphysics of which Nietzsche forms a part exactly coincides with the history as Heidegger reconstructs it: the one in which the most fundamental question is never asked, namely "the question after Being-in-itself". Thus, Heidegger's

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the *Gesamtausgabe*, especially volumes 43 (1985) and 48 (1986) and, to a lesser extent, 87 (2004). When comparing the text to the rendition Heidegger published in 1961, it comes to our attention that Heidegger left the main text more or less untouched, but that he left out examples (which were often curious and related to current wartime conditions) and especially the very lengthy and enlightening recapitulations, which he indicates as "summaries", but wherein he often heads in a new direction. When I refer to the original German editions of Heidegger's writings, the translation will be ours.

lectures on Nietzsche are, to a large extent, not as much about Nietzsche as they are about Heidegger's own thoughts on being, and on the history of metaphysics as a history of the forgetfulness of being, or more strongly put: of the abandonment of being (1961 II, 355). According to Heidegger Nietzsche does not escape this history, but rather takes up a prominent position within it. To explain this, I will first have to indicate what metaphysics really is. In order to do so I will be mainly focusing on Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche's thesis regarding European nihilism.[93]

Nietzsche's completion of metaphysics

Metaphysics is "first philosophy", which amongst other things means: a philosophical reflection on reality which isn't yet guided by preceding theoretical distinctions within that reality. The distinctions between natural philosophy, philosophy of language, philosophy of religion, moral philosophy et cetera, presume that we already distinguish various parts of reality. But these distinctions are preceded by first philosophy or metaphysics, which seeks to think about what this thing we call "reality" really is. Before one can think about a certain domain of reality, after all, one must first ask what it means that—in Heidegger's language— "there are…beings at all instead of nothing" (2000, 1). In his explanation, what this really means is that, before you can talk about being, let alone about a certain domain of being, you need to reflect on the Being of beings.

But metaphysics does not in fact do this, instead evading the question about the Being of beings, thus forgetting that this evasion allows it to be led in the direction of a certain—though implicit and unreflected—answer to that question. Instead of asking about the Being of beings, metaphysics only asks after what being is (cf. 1986, 151). Thus, Being is only mentioned as the being of beings and therefore is always already explained from a particular being-conception (meaning a particular understanding of being). But the fact that Being always "happens", or opens itself up in a particular way, in every understanding-of-being, is something that is not realised

[93] This relates to two publications especially: the lectures on *Nietzsche, der europäische Nihilismus* from 1940's second trimester (1986) and *Die Seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus* (Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being) from 1944-1946, which appeared in: 1961, II, 335-398. Contrary to these lectures, in which Heidegger develops his critical analysis of Nietzsche's thought through a thorough reading and discussion of his texts, and which portray a lot of respect for Nietzsche on Heidegger's part, his notes for his seminars on Nietzsche in 1937 and 1944 mostly distinguish themselves by their negative and critical rejection of Nietzsche: "everything remains superficial" (2004, 39).

throughout the history of metaphysics. For example: the fact that reality (as being) was for a long time taken as God's creation, means that it is an implicit assumption that "being" means "made", or "created". But *the fact that* this is the dominant meaning of Being, or *the fact that* Being appears in this way, is not reflected on.

Heidegger expresses the thesis that Being itself, as Being, is not discussed, by remarking that in the history of metaphysics "Being is nothing" (1982, 203). And this idea that Being is nothing, that there is no attention for the event of Being in the appearance of beings, or rather: that Being retreats from the beings it causes to be,[94] this is what Heidegger's nihilism consists of. Given that this forgetting or this retreat takes place in metaphysics (1982, 356), which is to stay: in the way we conceive of reality, this means that the entire history of metaphysics—from Plato to Nietzsche—is a history of nihilism.[95]

Metaphysics is (the rule of) nihilism. Heidegger also calls this rule of nihilism "the essential occurring of nihilism" (1982, 202). That is why he can say that, seen from the essential occurring of nihilism, Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism is but the completion of nihilism (1982, 219). Hence, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche's philosophy of nihilism is itself one of the forms of the nihilistic history of metaphysics as he narrates it. And this is why he writes that a "confrontation with" ("*Auseinandersetzung mit*") Nietzsche is only adequate if the account includes the entirety of western metaphysics (1986, 104).

In this way, Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism are understood as a figure inside the history of nihilism in Heidegger's sense. This—Nietzschean—figure, in Heidegger's language, exists in the thesis "that basically there 'is' nothing to beings as such" (1982, 200). To understand this, we will have to return once more to Heidegger's reconstruction of the history of metaphysics.

As we said, the history of metaphysics was always about being: Being is only dealt with as the being of being. Being is not explicitly considered

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[94] Particularly in *Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being* Heidegger strongly emphasises that "the nature of nihilism" is "an occurrence of Being itself" (1961, II, 343).

[95] Cf. 1982, 205: "the metaphysics of Plato is no less nihilistic than that of Nietzsche"; and 1961, II, 350: "*Die Metaphysik ist als solche der eigentliche Nihilismus*" ("Metaphysics as such is the actual nihilism"). Also cf. 1986, 44: "*Nietzsches Begriff des Nihilismus ist selbst ein nihilistischer Begriff. Nietzsche vermag daher das verborgene Wesen des Nihilismus…nicht zu erkennen*" ("Nietzsche's concept of nihilism is itself a nihilistisch concept. Nietzsche is not able to acknowledge the hidden reign of nihilism").

in these metaphysics, but is unthinkingly implied, when it tries to say *what* being is, and to explain what it means *that* it is. The first Heidegger sums up in the term "*essentia*", the second in the term "*existentia*". He then goes on to show how all sorts of positions in the history of metaphysics since Plato have thought about the existence and essence of being, and how it remains unthought that "Being" happens, that it takes place within these stipulations. Instead, Being is always understood from the position of beings (in which Being already "occurs" in a particular way). To understand in which way this applies to Nietzsche's case, Heidegger maintains that the history from Descartes onward is of special importance.

Heidegger explains[96] that Descartes conceives of Being as objectivity, which means as being-represented by the knowing subject. Being is "what already lies-before of itself". This is where "that dominance of the subjective come[s] that guides modern humanity and its understanding of the world" (180). Via Kant, Leibniz, Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer this "understanding-of-being" develops into the position we find in Nietzsche. In a critical consideration of Nietzsche's critique of Descartes (198f.) Heidegger shows that Descartes' design of being as "represented" is the foundation for Nietzsche's interpretation of being as "will to power" (224). In Nietzsche, the subject has developed from a knowing to a willing subject: "the *ego cogito* is reduced to an *ego volo* and this *velle* is interpreted as willing in the sense of will to power" (242). Knowledge has become "interpretation", "positing", determining, which is to say: willing, or in Nietzsche's language: a function of will to power. As Descartes understood Being as "objectivity" because it was thought as "posited-before-the-knowing-subject", so—according to Heidegger—Nietzsche's Being becomes a "value", because it is thought as "determined-" or "posited-by-will-to-power".[97] Being is then thought from the position of being (will to power) and not as Being in itself (1982, 203; 1986, 33).

According to Heidegger, reality for Nietzsche is intrinsically (that is to say *qua* essence) will to power, and exists (or is *qua* existence) in the

[96] Cf. especially Heidegger 1986, 103-115 and 159-258. Unless indicated, the numbers in parentheses in this paragraph and those following refer to part 48 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (Heidegger 1986).

[97] Heidegger 1986, 107: "*Die Werte entstammen der Wertsetzung, diese entspricht dem Willen zur Macht*" ("Values derive from value-positing, which corresponds to the will to power"); and 115: "*Wille zur Macht und Wert-setzung sind* dasselbe" ("Will to power and value-positing are *the same*"). Also cf. 1982, 220.

eternal recurrence of the same.[98] The will to power is after all not a striving for power in which it would come to rest, but a constant intensification of power (29f.): it has no goal outside of itself and keeps spinning within itself, so to speak (7). The thesis of the death of God is for Heidegger a clear part of the thesis of eternal recurrence (1982, 210; 1986, 8): both convey that the will to power does not rely on some sort of principle nor does it lead to some kind of end goal. "God" and "morality" are names of an extra-sensory world in which values would be founded, which is to say that they are products of a powerless will to power, one that does not have the courage to perceive itself as establishing value (124f.). But when taking humankind's increasing self-consciousness into account, as well as its growing past the human-as-it-is into the overhuman (*Übermensch*), it becomes clear that there is no foundation or criterion for the values it posits as will to power outside of the power-willing itself (130f.).

For Nietzsche, the discovery of reality as value, as value-establishing through the will to power, combined with the discovery of the death of God (namely: of the demise of the principles or ideals or highest values that reigned until now), implies that the road is clear for an emancipation of these traditional values and for a new valuation, by which the human as will to power subjects all of reality to itself: a "revaluation of all values" (*Umwertung aller Werte*). But given that there is no criterion, no highest value to which the positing of value (the will to power) is subjected, such a new valuation is only possible for the few that can handle that freedom. This means that only those who have moved past the current state of humanity, the *Übermenschen*, will be capable of "acquiring absolute sovereignty over the earth" (9). But in the end, every value is suspended in a vacuum, and in this sense—according to Heidegger, and as cited—"Being is nothing" for Nietzsche.

While this makes Nietzsche the pre-eminent philosopher of nihilism, it does not necessarily make him its vanquisher. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's thinking on nihilism proceeds in a way that is itself nihilistic. Nietzsche's nihilism relates to types of being, which he shows to be products or forms of a power-willing, and not in the final instance upheld or sanctioned by anything. This is why nihilism can have two sides for Nietzsche or can be seen as an interim period: the period in which reality is discovered as a valuation, as will to power, causing the undermining of

[98] Cf. Heidegger 1982, 201: "Nietzsche's fundamental experience says that the being *is* a being as will to power in the mode of the eternal recurrence of the same". Also cf. 1986, 6ff.

the values that were held to be self-evident on the one hand, but in which the possibility for a new valuation is opened up on the other (73-80). Nietzsche—still according to Heidegger—conceived of himself as that transformation, in which the destructive nihilism transitions into the overcoming of nihilism (4), or in which nihilism in the negative sense transitions into nihilism as a "divine way of thinking" (137). But Heidegger argues that Nietzsche in this way proves to which extent his "*Umwertung*" remains a part of nihilistic metaphysics, conceiving of "being" as a value and forgetting to ask after Being itself, through which beings may appear as will to power. Nietzsche thinks that nihilism shows that being loses its ground, that the ground disappears from under the values, making everything worthless to the weak, but opening up a maximum of freedom for experimental valuation for the strong. Heidegger points to the fact that the *actual* nihilism consists in this, that the appearance of being ("*Umwertung*" included) as a value remains unquestioned. Thus, for Heidegger, Nietzsche is not the conqueror of this nihilism, but its consummator.[99]

The inevitable reign of technology

Nihilism has hereby received a different meaning to the one it had with Nietzsche. Indeed, Heidegger himself raises the question of how his concept of nihilism relates to the "actual nihilism" as Nietzsche conceives of it (1982, 229). In the first instance Heidegger's nihilism appears to be far more abstract and at a distance of the concrete and existential—even catastrophic—meaning suggested by Nietzsche's texts on nihilism. But once we realise the extent to which (what Heidegger calls) metaphysics works through and is determinant of all the aspects of our everyday reality, this impression turns out to be false.

In modern metaphysics since Descartes, the metaphysics of which Nietzsche's thought is the consummation, has—as said—always been thought from the kind of being that is the subject, and humankind thinks itself to be that subject: "metaphysics is anthropomorphism" (133; cf. also 1982 IV, 83). That subject is initially the knowing subject, and it becomes the willing subject in Nietzsche: "in the doctrine of the *Übermensch* Descartes celebrates his highest victory" (53). Now, this interpretation of man as subject correlates to a conception of reality as represented for or

[99] Cf. Heidegger 1982, 219: "Thought in terms of the *essence* of nihilism, Nietzsche's overcoming is merely the *fulfilment* of nihilism." For the preceding part of this particular paragraph, cf. 1961 II, 374f.

willed and designed by that subject. And this sits well with a composure towards reality that looks for certain knowledge and guaranteed control. Heidegger believes this signals the start of the era in which everything unreservedly and completely becomes an object for the subject, in which everything is in principle submitted to the subject and becomes entirely at its disposal, including humankind itself. Being itself is no longer heard: in its stead, all being appears as available, calculable and manageable.

Heidegger thus holds that all the forms of technology and the manner in which it controls our world are a result of nihilism (14) (and not its cause, as popular views sometimes maintain). Technology is the physical appearance of a metaphysics that is nihilistic in its essence (1961 II, 378-387):

> [T]he metaphysics of the will to power is inescapably unconditional anthropomorphism. No longer is the humanisation of the world naively enacted, but it is knowingly and deliberately organised and with all available means.
> Heidegger 1961 II, 157

The success of this technological system is at the same time the explanation for the fact that we do not experience its threat as such. On the contrary, we enjoy and keep perfecting it, without realising the manner in which this causes us to advance on the nihilistic wasteland. The ultimate form of this development consists in the reduction of the human, conceived as the site where Being could appear, to a product of a particular understanding-of-being. And it hardly matters whether humankind considers itself as being free and of the highest value or as a product of circumstances and structures and as material for experiments (e.g. "transhuman" or "species-improving" ones). In both senses this nihilism, which Heidegger thinks will dominate the following period, threatens humankind with the destruction of its essence (1982, 245).

Heidegger further maintains that his concept of nihilism is more radical, to the extent that it now becomes clear—and contrary to what Nietzsche suggested—that there is no escape from it at all. For as soon as we would oppose this nihilism, oppose this failure of Being to appear as Being, we would simply be falling back into it. After all, resisting it would suggest that humankind could represent Being, would betray that it would want to subject the event of Being to itself. It would thus conceive of Being as an object of its own representation and will, and thus from a being, namely the being it itself is, interpreted as a subject (1961 II, 366ff.). Heidegger nevertheless takes pleasure in citing the first lines from Hölderlin's poem *Patmos*: "The god / is near, and hard to grasp. / But

where there is danger/ A rescuing element grows as well" (2004, 39). But this deliverance cannot be forced nor guaranteed. The only thing possible—and Heidegger thinks it is required—is to make oneself amenable. This happens by taking a step back (1961 II, 389), a step that takes us out of metaphysics and into an "other questioning" (48, 151) or a different kind of thinking, the step towards a "resignation" in which Being is "left to be".[100] In opposition to the optimistic triumphalism of technology, in which a particular understanding-of-being forgets what it forgets, a forgetfulness of this triumphalism should be taken into account, or in Heidegger's words: the urgency of a lack of urgency, the predicament of lacking a sense of predicament (1961 II, 392f.). Perhaps we can even state it in terms of this book's underlying concern: the threat that lies encapsulated in the fact that this threat does not seem to concern anyone, that nobody appears to be afraid of it.

Distance

Heidegger takes Nietzsche as the representative of "classical nihilism", incidentally a term of which he falsely suggests that Nietzsche also uses it (e.g. 102f.). This classical nihilism is said to reside completely within the boundaries of metaphysics, which is nihilistic in its entirety and from which we may only be able to escape by the thinking of Being. But no matter how impressive Heidegger's slow-paced readings from certain fragments of the unpublished notes may be, they can often be seen to contravene what Nietzsche himself had written.[101] And however justified his critique of the shoddy job performed by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and her co-workers in compiling *The Will to Power*, it remains a fact that Heidegger's own interpretation is solely based on Nietzsche's unpublished

[100] Cf. Heidegger 1982, 225: "Instead of such overcoming, only one thing is necessary, namely, that thinking, encouraged by Being itself, simply thinks to encounter Being in its default as such". Also cf. Heidegger 1959 in this regard: this is where he develops the notion of "Gelassenheit".

[101] For example: Heidegger immediately connects Nietzsche's one-time designation of the concepts "goal", "unity" and "truth" as "categories" in NF 11 [99] 13.48 with Aristotle's doctrine of categories, and claims that this shows "how decidedly and thoughtlessly Nietzsche is thinking along the path of metaphysics" ("*wie entschieden und bedenkenlos Nietzsche in der Bahn der Metaphysik denkt"*) (1986, 69); "it betrays that he persists in the fundamental position of metaphysics" ("*verrät, daß er in der Grundstellung der Metaphysik verharrt"*) (1986, 85).

notes, disregarding important texts Nietzsche himself had published.[102] Heidegger created his own selection from the unpublished notes (21), and this selection once more turns out to be a questionable one, as becomes clear when we compare the texts Heidegger used with those in the critical edition we currently have at our disposal.[103]

On the one hand, Heidegger foregrounded the concept "nihilism" and its role in Nietzsche's thought by his interpretation of it, and it is for an important part thanks to him that Nietzsche's thought on nihilism was and still is attributed with a significant role. But on the other hand, Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche stands in the service of the elaboration and presentation of his own philosophy of Being to such an extent that Nietzsche's own thoughts threaten to be dispelled from it. In the same way that Heidegger's interpretation granted nihilism a meaning that provided him with reason to distance himself from Nietzsche, this very interpretation has been reason for other authors to distance themselves from Heidegger. But so influential was Heidegger's engagement with nihilism that even the interpretations that turn against Heidegger are at least in part a result of his work.

Just as Heidegger helped liberate Nietzsche's thought from the clutches of certain world views and political ideologies, so Heidegger's thought had to be freed from his own philosophy of Being after him. In the next part I will discuss one of the ways in which this took place.

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[102] In GS 346, for example (see text 11 and its explanation in § III.2), where Nietzsche criticises "*die ganze Attitüde 'Mensch gegen Welt*'" and calls it laughable, but also reflects on what it means for him to mock it, leading him to wonder if there isn't nihilism hiding in his mockery. This text doesn't receive any attention in Heidegger, who emphasises that Nietzsche's metaphysics is pure anthropomorphism (cf. Heidegger 1986, 157ff.).

[103] For example: Heidegger (cf. 1986, 46-54, 74, 77) attributes much importance to the supposed title of one of the texts he had selected from the *Nachlass* ("the downfall of cosmological values" ["*Hinfall der kosmologischen Werte*"]), but this doesn't even appear in Colli and Montinari's edition; compare § 12 from *The Will to Power* with NF 11 [99] 13.46f. (text 6). Another example is given by Yannick Souladié (2010, 88ff.): he claims that Heidegger's interpretation of nihilism's "ambiguity" ("devaluing" and "revaluing"), as presented in his essay on "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'" (1957, 193-247) rests for a large part on a misreading of a version of what the current edition refers to as NF 9 [35] 12.350-352 (text 3), which had mistakenly been split in two.

IV.2 Gianni Vattimo

Nihilism also plays a central role in the interpretation of Nietzsche by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (born 1936). Vattimo's own reading of Nietzsche takes place in conversation with Heidegger and is strongly influenced by him too. Nevertheless, certain aspects of his interpretation are radically opposed to Heidegger's. Vattimo does not only read Nietzsche in light of Heidegger's explanation, but also goes on to interpret Heidegger from Nietzsche's perspective.[104] In this way he sets out to show that not Nietzsche but rather Heidegger remains confined within the history of metaphysics and goes on to reach a remarkable thesis concerning nihilism. This thesis not only allows him to describe the irreversible advance of nihilism as a threat, but also to experience it as a liberation. I will attempt to explain how this is possible at the hand of the meaning of nihilism as Vattimo construes it, how he ties that meaning to the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger, and how this shift from threat to liberation comes into being.

Latent and manifest, active and passive nihilism

Vattimo starts by distinguishing two meanings or "senses" of nihilism (2006, 134-141), following Nietzsche's distinction between active and passive nihilism (cf. text 3). He then proceeds by distinguishing different aspects or ways in which this nihilism may be experienced within both senses.

Both active and passive nihilism are a reaction to the decline of a self-evidence at the hand of which a certain kind of metaphysics, morality and religion have held sway. Religion situated both the first cause as well as the final purpose of the world outside of that world; morality positioned the meaning of human life outside of this life and attributed freedom and responsibility to humankind, so that it could be blamed for failing to realise that meaning; metaphysics enabled these constructions with concepts such as the soul, free will, truth, cosmos, history, etc.; all these constructions were themselves already *latently* nihilistic (2006, 17). But the moment their foundations started crumbling their nihilistic nature became *manifest*. The death of God, moral relativism, the fraying of the cogito's certainty, the undermining of the belief in the objective given-ness of nature, as well as the belief in history as a horizon that provides

[104] Cf. his article "Nietzsche, Heidegger's Interpreter", in: Vattimo 2006, for example. From here on, the parenthesised numbers will refer to pages of Vattimo's publications.

orientation, or, in Lyotard's words, the disappearance of the grand authoritative narrative and its being replaced by many contingent narratives (2002, 15): all this *portrays* the nihilism that was already contained in these—now collapsing—constructions. *All* meaning appears to have disappeared along with the collapse of these constructions: since God died, everything is permitted; if man is not free, we can no longer distinguish between good and evil; if there is no objective truth, everything becomes relative and meaningless. Since the meaning of the world was made dependent on a construction that falls away, this meaning itself falls away too (2006, 12f.). As we have seen earlier, active and passive nihilism are *different reactions* to, as well as the result of, this development.

At its core, *passive* nihilism consists in this, that it refuses to accept that which it at the same time laments (2006, 135). And while Vattimo doesn't expand on this himself, we can presumably further distinguish between the different forms this refusal might take. One form consists in reverting to lost positions. After all, even in our times people can still hold on to faith in God, truth, and morality, and point their finger in accusation of those undermining that faith. This is the nihilism (for holding on to nihilistic constructions) of those who accuse others of nihilism (for undermining these constructions). One can also replace the lost positions with surrogates: humanism as a surrogate religion (see § V.2); science as a surrogate metaphysics and some or other form of Darwinism as a surrogate foundation of morality. Yet another, and the most passive form of refusal consists in a fatalistic complaint, resigning to the lack of support without truly accepting it: "politicians are not to be trusted", "the media lie", "scientific knowledge is not founded on justified paradigms and is thus founded on assumptions", "quality is but a name for the prevailing opinion", "everything is relative, nothing really matters": the negativity present in these judgements secretly relies on the exact thing one can no longer believe in: truthfulness, objectivity, real quality.

Vattimo (2006, 135) describes *active* nihilism at the hand of one of Nietzsche's texts, (who, coincidentally, does not employ this term in the text) called "The rise of nihilism":

> Nihilism is not just a contemplation of the "In vain!", and not just the belief that everything deserves to perish: one puts one's hand to it, one *makes it perish*… That is, perhaps, illogical: but the nihilist doesn't believe in the compulsion to be *logical*… Nihilism is the state of strong spirits and wills: and for these it's not possible to stop at the No 'of judgement"—the *No of the deed* springs from their nature. An-nihil-ation by the hand is seconded by annihilation by the judgement.
> NF 11[123] 13.59f., our translation

Active nihilism actively undermines the pretensions of (what is in principle already nihilistic) metaphysics, morality and religion. But where Nietzsche's text primarily evokes an association with revolutionary violence, Vattimo is concerned with working out a different form of this active nihilism. He reproaches Heidegger for the way his reading of Nietzsche, and especially his "doctrine of the will to power" has involved Nietzsche's thought with the great violence of the twentieth century, whether that violence hailed from Stalinist Russia, Western capitalism or Nazi Germany (2006, 142f.). Instead of developing this kind of violent relation between nihilism and the logic of power, Vattimo will instead work out nihilism in a way that connects it to what he calls a "weakening".

Liberation through weakening

Nietzsche was no revolutionary in his actions, but he did conceive of himself as a nihilist from the perspective of active nihilism. Vattimo (2006, 33f.) shows that Nietzsche already "said no" to the idea of an objectively given nature as the basis for knowledge from a young age (in *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*) and to history as a horizon for existence (in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*). The later, aphoristic books (Vattimo writes about *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science* in particular) show a comprehensive and continual undermining of religious, moral and scientific frameworks.

Vattimo's own interpretation of Nietzschean nihilism starts (e.g. in 2006, 34 and 153f.) by establishing that Nietzsche's criticism should be distinguished from what we generally take as "critique", "unmasking", and "demythologizing". These terms generally appear to rely on a *true* reality, held to be distorted by myths, on the true form *under* the mask, on some kind of foundation in relation to which all moral, metaphysical and scientific ideas can be marked as mendacious constructions; they suggest a call for an honest admission of the previous deceit, thus arriving at a new and true truthfulness, as if critique is a mere prelude to a "positive" philosophy by which it would supposedly be followed (2006, 160). But it is characteristic of Nietzsche, and herein lies the essence of his nihilism, that he also criticises his own hunger for truth itself, that this truthfulness and this appeal to a true reality are also exposed as a "lie". Vattimo does not think any positive philosophy follows on the destruction of the old preconceptions, but rather that Nietzsche's positive philosophy lies *within* the criticism itself.

The radical nature of this critique, in abandoning *every* reference to a foundation or an essential reality, has a liberating effect, one of which

Vattimo holds that it will clear the way for a new way of living and thinking. There is no true reality to take the place of the myth: instead there is a new myth, or even better: new myths, plural. These new myths differ from the old ones to the extent that they no longer proffer themselves as the true representation of reality or of the meaning of life. There will be many narratives to replace the one narrative:

> The end of ideology is also the triumph of ideologies, of the multiple interpretations of the world seen for what they are, that make individual choice and decision ineluctable.
> Vattimo 2006, 128

Nevertheless, we should not envision this "liberation" as too promising or simple an affair. Vattimo regularly emphasises the challenges of living with interpretations which you acknowledge to be interpretations, which is to say: without believing in their metaphysical truth. For this reason, he recognises that you need to be willing to and capable of taking extreme risks, to live dangerously: you need to be capable of transcending the struggle for self-preservation (2006, 139)[105]. Instead of being a position of power, it is one of weakness.

"Weakness" is an important term within Vattimo's engagement with Heidegger. In earlier works he used to present his hermeneutical philosophy as "weak thinking" or a "weak ontology".[106] He takes this to mean that hermeneutics conceives of reality as interpretation, as interpretation constantly coming to pass. Even the interpreter and that

[105] This is the reason Vattimo distances himself from all kinds of vitalistic interpretations of Nietzsche. He doesn't only count the (mostly German) "right wing" interpretations to these, but also (left wing) French authors like Deleuze and Foucault; he even holds that Rorty's pragmatism is to be counted among them. Cf. 2006, 137ff.

[106] Cf. in particular Vattimo's contribution in the collection he edited along with Pier Aldo Rovatti, which they published as *Il pensiero debole* (Milano, Feltrinelli, 2006). Also cf. 2002, 22: "What I have proposed to call weak thought emphasizes this aspect of Heidegger's recollection: the leap in the abyss of tradition is also the weakening of Being, insofar as it shakes all claims to peremptoriness advanced by metaphysic's ontological structures … the idea of weakening: i.e., consummation of strong structures on the theoretical level (from the metaphysical metanarrative to local rationality; from the belief in the objectivity of knowledge to the awareness of the hermeneutic character of truth) and on the level of individual and social existence (from the subject centred on the evidence of self-consciousness to psychoanalysis's subject; from the despotic State to the constitutional State, and so on)".

which is being interpreted are themselves interpretations. There is no reality that can be discerned to be outside of every interpretation. In this way, Vattimo maintains that Being disappears or "weakens". To state it differently: "vanishing" or "weakening" is discovered to be "the 'essential' character of Being itself" (2006, 140).

Vattimo holds that victory over traditional metaphysics lies in this "ontological hermeneutics" and in the profound connection between hermeneutics and nihilism, a development in which Nietzsche has thus been pivotal (2006, 74f.). And this is also the reason why he uses Nietzsche to criticise Heidegger. Heidegger locates Nietzsche within the history of metaphysics and nihilism, which he suggests only a different kind of thinking (namely his own thought of Being) could lead us out of. But Vattimo maintains that it is precisely by his waiting for a different speaking and thinking—one that is to free us from the nihilism engendered in the rule of technology—that Heidegger in fact leads us back into a metaphysics from which Nietzsche's nihilism can free us. Heidegger's purported moving beyond nihilism (even though he doesn't call it "overcoming", but "*Verwindung*"; 2002, 121), causes him to be held captive within a metaphysical belief in a true speaking about Being itself. Vattimo doesn't look for this liberation beyond nihilism, but in it:

> The overcoming of metaphysics is not the reversal of the metaphysical forgetting of Being; it is that very forgetting (nihilism) taken to its extreme consequences.
> Vattimo 2006, 189

He isn't so much interested in our liberation from nihilistic metaphysics, as he is in learning to view—and affirm—nihilism as "the way in which metaphysics has come to closure and in which Being reveals itself, gives itself, as event" (2002, 24).

The history of nihilism becomes Salvation History

On the one hand, Vattimo can appear more radical than Heidegger when he admits there can be no release from nihilism, but on the other, this strips nihilism from its apocalyptic character, changing it into a hope and a promise. These last terms rightly evoke religious associations. And curiously enough, Vattimo even develops a type of theology of nihilism, testifying that it is exactly by his immersion in nihilism that he has come

to faith: "of having recovered Christianity—in the form of believing that I believe—through Nietzsche and Heidegger" (2002, 3).[107]

He holds that the deterioration or weakening of Being is itself Salvation History: in this "weakening" Being gives itself as an event; herein is effected the "emptying" (*kenosis*) of the God who in the history of onto-theology was taken to be the highest Being and principle of Being. The eternal divine, which from the perspective of a true world functioned as cause, governance and destination of our worldly reality, is weakened to a worldly occasion without an absolute anchor. This process, which we also designate as "secularisation", has thus turned into Salvation History, into the "constitutive trait of an authentic religious experience" and into "the very essence of Christianity" (1999, 21 and 50). Secularisation doesn't refer to the period in which humankind averts itself from the divine in order to turn towards the world and become of the world; it is rather the manner in which the divine distances itself from itself as metaphysical category, meaning: as distinct from the worldly, as wholly different.[108] In this way secularisation and nihilism are the historic realisation of the Gospel's message: God has become human, the divine has become world, Being is weakened to occurring; "since God can no longer be upheld as an ultimate foundation, as the absolute metaphysical structure of the real, it is possible, once again, to believe in God" (2002, 6).[109]

It may seem as if this has taken us far from Nietzsche's thought. But Vattimo expressly ties into what Heidegger took to be the great themes of that thought:

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[107] Also cf. Vattimo 2000, where he indicates, in a conversation with Dutch philosopher Ger Groot, that this doesn't mean he wants to Christianise Nietzsche, but does claim that his "idea of nihilism contained a lot of Christianity". The most important text in relation to this "nihilistic creed" is Vattimo 1998.

[108] According to Vattimo, the representation of God as "absolute Other" (Karl Barth), and especially the more or less secular version of the same as he encounters in Levinas and Derrida, doesn't so much correspond to the God of the New, but rather to the God of the Old Testament (2002, 37). But do also cf chapter thereof. Karen Carr, 1992, where she claims that Barth's understanding of the absolute otherness of God means that Nietzsche's nihilistic experience, as the absolute absence of meaning and comfort, is made identical to the only true form of Christian faith! Perhaps this explains this theologian's particular attention to Nietzsche.

[109] At this time, Vattimo (1999, 38) forges the connection with Girard's thesis and idea of "the dissolution of the sacred as violence". Vattimo's thesis is of course accompanied—as Nietzsche's is too—by a sharp distinction between Jesus' message and institutional Christianity.

> [T]he *ewige Wiederkehr*, the *Übermensch* and the *Wille zur Macht* form a compact of ideas, only to be coherently read when they are taken in the sense of what must be called the liberation of plurality.
> Vattimo 2006, 165[110]

The *Wille zur Macht* receives the least amount of attention in Vattimo, though he enjoys referring to BGE 22, where Nietzsche criticises the physical (and metaphysical) interpretation of the world, presents his thesis on the world as will to power and then ends with "[s]upposing that this is also only interpretation—…well, so much the better. —"

Vattimo takes the *ewige Wiederkehr* to be the culmination of his critique of culture, because it expresses that (contrary to what metaphysics has always claimed) becoming or occurring has no direction nor meaning other than this becoming or occurring itself, and because this brings humankind to the crucial realisation that its own self is at stake. For the "hermeneutic-temporal continuity" of the subject (2006, 156) disappears when future and past can no longer be distinguished. No longer is the subject the source or master of its own decisions or interpretations, seeing that these have always already taken place countless times (2006, 132f.). From here he will refer to the third term too, which receives most of Vattimo's attention: the *Übermensch*.

That name, *Übermensch*, in Vattimo's conception does not refer to a kind of superhuman, but rather to the decline of the subject. After presenting the idea of the eternal recurrence in what was originally the penultimate aphorism of *The Gay Science*, aphorism 341, the final aphorism follows with the start of the *Zarathustra*. That text is titled *Incipit tragoedia* and ends with "Thus Zarathustra began to go under". According to Vattimo, the *Übermensch* primarily represents this decline, which he interprets as the dissolution of the metaphysical subject (which is the very thing of which Heidegger thought the *Übermensch* to be the pinnacle). In Nietzsche's radical hermeneutics, even the interpreting subject comes to an end (2000, 156). Life amidst a multiplicity of interpretations, in the knowledge that there is no reality outside of interpretation, nor that one is oneself such an "under-lying reality" (i.e. subject), but a multiplicity of interpretations, causing the "individual" to be more of a "dividual" (2000,

[110] Also cf. Vattimo 2006, 187, which shows even more emphatically the extent to which his critique of Heidegger remains indebted to Heidegger's interpretation, something he coincidentally does recognise himself: "concepts like the will to power, eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch* gain meaning as the ways in which Being comes into being at the end of metaphysics".

163), requires a radical transformation of the subject. Only a transformed human being, which is to say: an *Übermensch*, is capable of doing so.

Vattimo's *Übermensch* is no tyrant who arranges the world according to its will. On the contrary! He often turns back to § 15 of the Lenzer Heide text, in which Nietzsche answers the question of who will prove themselves to be *strongest* in the following way:

> The most moderate, those who have no *need* of extreme dogmas, those who not only concede but love a good measure of chance and nonsense, those who can conceive of man with a significant reduction in his value without thereby becoming small and weak.[111]

This moderation reminds us of the "weakening" mentioned earlier. It is exactly through that which nihilism causes us to lose that it can become a liberation or a cure. The text of Nietzsche to which Vattimo probably refers to most often combines much of the aforementioned, and at its start expresses the doubleness of decline and liberation in terms of a double emotion:

> *The consciousness of appearance*. —How wonderful and new and yet how gruesome and ironic I find my position vis-á-vis the whole of existence in the light of my insight! I have discovered for myself that the human and animal past, indeed the whole primal age and past of all sentient being continues in me to invent, to love, to hate, and to infer. I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish—as a somnambulist must go on dreaming lest he fall. What is "appearance" for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown *x* or remove from it! Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective and goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that this is appearance and will-o'-the-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing more—that among all these dreamers, I, too, who "know", am dancing my dance; that the knower is a means for prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence; and that the sublime consistency and inter-relatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to *preserve* the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers and thus also the *continuation of the dream*.
> GS 54, 116

[111] See Appendix A, text 2. Löwith (1987, 72ff.) happens to claim that Nietzsche himself certainly wasn't one of these "moderate" spirits.

IV.3 And furthermore

Heidegger's interpretation does the most justice to the comprehensive and far-reaching nature of the meaning Nietzsche accords to nihilism, but transforms this meaning into an element of his own thought to such an extent that Nietzsche would no longer recognise himself in it. Vattimo's interpretation does the most justice to the epochal meaning Nietzsche ascribed to himself as the thinker of nihilism and to his thesis that in him, nihilism conquers itself. But at the same time his Christian-theological slant appears to distance itself somewhat too far from Nietzsche's self-conception.

Both authors provide an interpretation of Nietzsche's thought that is strong but at the same time up for debate—even heavily debated. The meaning of their reception of Nietzsche's thought on nihilism can amongst other things be gauged from the extent to which their interpretation is in turn received and criticised. A short discussion of the way this was done by one of Nietzsche's most important interpreters of the last decades, the German author Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, will here suffice. After this I will briefly refer to some examples by representatives from the Anglophone reception of Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism, as well as to some other aspects from this history of the reception.

Müller-Lauter's reception of the reception

Wolfgang Müller-Lauter (1924-2001) didn't so much present his own interpretation of Nietzsche as that he, in his many and in-depth studies, criticised Heidegger's interpretation of the same (and Vattimo's to a lesser extent).[112] He has especially shown the degree to which Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche made Nietzsche a part of his own thinking of Being, and the misinterpretation caused by this. At the heart of his critique is the manner in which Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's notion of reality as will to power. The way Descartes understood "being", namely as

[112] Müller-Lauter's most important book on Nietzsche is *Nietzsche. Seine Philosophie der Gegensätze und die Gegensätze seiner Philosophie*. Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1971 (English translation: *Nietzsche. His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*; Translated David J. Parent. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). In 1999 and 2000 he published three volumes of *Nietzsche-Interpretationen*, a collection of his articles on Nietzsche (which had been partially published but were often significantly reworked for this edition). For Müller-Lauters critique of Heidegger (and Vattimo) the third part bears special significance (2000, 159ff.).

"represented by and for a subject" would according to Heidegger be brought to its furthest extreme in Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, because it would make of this "representing" a "presenting ("*setzen*", "*wertsetzen*") or 'willing'. In understanding being as what is represented (which in the end is what is immediate, available, usable) the understanding of being in metaphysics was to show itself, which would come to completion in Nietzsche's thought and find its realisation in the rule of technology.

But according to Müller-Lauter Heidegger did not see how Nietzsche's conception of the will to power in fact implies a radical break with the metaphysical tradition. Will to power is—as Müller-Lauter keeps reiterating—a name of an endless multiplication, devoid of an underlying subject, devoid of any final unit (beings) to which this willing can be ascribed. On the contrary, Nietzsche's thesis of the will to power makes (relations of) power dominant over the relata, and makes every being secondary in relation to the continual becoming. The biologism and vitalism Heidegger reads in Nietzsche is tribute to his incomprehension of this thoroughgoing plurality and of the primacy of becoming in Nietzsche's thought.

In the end Müller-Lauter—like Löwith had already done and Vattimo did once more—will stand Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche on its head: while Heidegger holds Nietzsche's thought to be metaphysical for the way it allegedly understood Being from a perspective of being, the opposite is in fact true: when Heidegger talks about a Being "beyond all being" he remains caught up in metaphysics as conceived from Nietzsche's perspective.

Müller-Lauter further establishes that Vattimo also recognises this slant towards a "Beyond" in Heidegger, and that he opposes it with his thesis on the "weakening of being" (2000, 301-339). Instead of a pursuit of what lies beyond nihilism and the "neglect of being", Vattimo suggests a deepening of nihilism, in which the experience of urgency is itself transformed into an experience of liberation. When truth claims become interpretations, when "strong" conceptions learn to acknowledge their own "weakness", it is then that Vattimo believes the emancipatory effects of nihilism will break through. But Müller-Lauter shows that in so doing Vattimo bisects Nietzsche and doesn't do justice to his reference to a future in which new and strong values will be created. Vattimo ignores the decidedness of the judgement of taste and the many references to violent activity in Nietzsche's thought, instead trying to establish the will to power as a hermeneutic game of interpretations. This leads to a "reduction" of the concept of nihilism as we find it in Nietzsche (and Heidegger), which Müller-Lauter feels to become abundantly clear when

Vattimo suggests that his hermeneutic "weakening" leads to a recognition of Christianity and an ethics of charity within nihilism.

The Anglophone reception

There are many more testimonies to the ways in which Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism have been received than the two discussed here. For example, Karen Carr contrasts two interesting poles in this reception at the hand of the dialectical theologian Karl Barth and the pragmatist Richard Rorty (Carr 1992, ch. 6). To Barth, nihilism is the situation which shows that the human attribution of meaning doesn't yield any true meaning, giving rise to the ungrounded hope of faith (ch. 3), whereas nihilism to Rorty, as it was to Vattimo, is itself the liberating message: it is the discovery that the thing we were looking for does not exist at all and therefore needn't be missed either (ch. 5). In their opposing ways, Barth and Rorty display a characteristic shared by many theories that have received Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism: they are predominantly interested in the question of how we can liberate ourselves from, or possibly overcome nihilism.

The Anglophone tradition in particular sees authors paying less attention to what Nietzsche himself writes about nihilism, than on what he is assumed to say about what should be done to combat or overcome nihilism. For example, Harold Langsam immediately claims, at the start of his article, that "the nihilist holds that there are no legitimate values of any kind" (1997, 235). He goes on to argue that "Nietzsche wishes the nihilist to see that we are free to adopt a different perspective, […one] that proclaims the value of creating value" (1997, 238). While he admits to this being an ambiguous value ("The value of creating value is, by its nature, an unstable value; the measure of its success is its destruction", 1997, 249), we recognise nothing of the way in which—as I have shown—Nietzsche believes us to be trapped in nihilism.

In his 1973 "Nietzsche and Nihilism" article Richard Schacht criticises Arthur Danto's (Nietzsche as Philosopher, 1965, specifically Ch. 1: "Philosophical Nihilism") theses that Nietzsche's thought is a "philosophy of Nihilism". Based on a collection of texts taken from the Will to Power he swiftly concludes that Nietzsche nowhere takes himself to "unreservedly and unconditionally" (1973, 71) be a nihilist.[113] He then goes on to

[113] An interesting detail is that Schacht (1967, 67) cites from The Will to Power, from a footnote that Kaufmann added to section 69, in which he (Kaufmann) cites from one of many schema's Nietzsche designed: "We can abolish either our

extensively characterise Nietzsche's thought on the basis of two possible meanings of the term nihilism that Schacht had come up with himself:

> 'Nihilism' in the philosophical sense of the term may be defined either as the doctrine that nothing true can be said about reality, or (more narrowly) as the doctrine that there are no objectively valid axiological principles. Schacht 1973, 65

Schacht does not believe Nietzsche to take up a nihilistic position from a metaphysical (epistemological) or from an axiological perspective, because he only repudiates "those metaphysical systems which traditionally have prevailed in Western thought" and "those moralities which have prevailed in Western culture", instead of "any metaphysics at all" or "morality as such" (1973, 87).

Where for Heidegger Nietzsche was merely the person who brought nihilism to completion and not the one who overcame it, for Schacht he is only nihilism's commentator and critic, uncontaminated by it, or at least passed beyond contamination. However different these interpretations may be, they converge in the following way: they are so interested in the overcoming of nihilism that they cannot do justice to the extent to which Nietzsche believes us to be caught and entangled in it. This excessive attention to "overcoming nihilism" is even more remarkable given its almost complete absence in Nietzsche's own work. "Self-overcoming of nihilism" ("*Selbstüberwindung des* Nihilismus") is the only phrase used a number of times: three, to be exact, and only in the unpublished notes, and never accompanied by any further development, in a very brief outline of what was probably intended as the chapters or sections of a book. Nietzsche puts together a host of similar outlines and plans in this final period. In NF 9[127] 12.410 the expression appears, without any explanation, as one of four headings. In NF 9[164] 12.432 it is used as one of these headings again, now with an explanatory note: "An effort to say yes to everything that was denied until now" ("*Versuch, Ja zu sagen zu*

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reverence [for traditional values] or ourselves. The latter constitutes nihilism." The parenthesised words are Schacht's contribution. He does not appear to notice that Nietzsche used this note in GS 346, and there adds the following to it: "but would not the former also be—nihilism? —This is our question mark." This last addition (a fine example of the manner in which Nietzsche edited his notes for publication!) points to the distressed and disturbing self-referentiality of what I have called nihilism-4. Coincidentally Kaufmann also tries to alleviate this disturbing element in a footnote to his translation of GS 346: "Here two forms of nihilism are mentioned, and it is clear that Nietzsche is not a nihilist in either sense" (footnote 18 to GS 346, translation W. Kaufmann).

Allem, was bisher verneint wurde"). Finally, NF 13[4] 13.215 has the expression too, once more in the plan for a book, of which the third part's title was to be: "On the self-overcoming of nihilism" ("*Von der Selbstüberwindung des Nihilismus*"). Below this are three subtitles for chapters, in which the will to power was to be developed as a respectively psychological, physiological, and historico-sociological reflection. Where Nietzsche thus hardly mentions it at all, secondary literature, as explained, contain manifold references to an "overcoming of nihilism'.

Bernard Reginster unquestionably wrote the most comprehensive and important book on Nietzsche's thought on nihilism in the English-speaking world: *The Affirmation of Life*. The subtitle of this book reads: "Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism", immediately making it clear that he goes as far as turning Nietzsche's alleged thought into the central theme of his book.[114] The starting point of his argument is a distinction between two conceptions of nihilism he finds in Nietzsche, which he designates "nihilism as disorientation" and "nihilism as despair". The first consists of a denial of the existence of objective values, the second in the conviction that our highest values cannot be realised (Reginster 2006, 25-28). His interpretation of the overcoming of nihilism is based on an explanation of the will to power, in which he emphasises the fact that this will does not seek a certain kind of power, which would cause it to be satisfied, but continually seeks to overcome resistance, as this is what causes the power to be felt (2006, 124ff.). That would entail that this will does not only seek to overcome resistance, but also seeks that resistance itself, and hence the suffering that accompanies it too. Those who realise this are then able to affirm the untenability of values (and the suffering implied by it), without having to defend themselves against the meaninglessness of personal striving at the hand of illusory constructions (2006, 229ff.).

And so we also find Reginster turning out to be a fine example of the interpretations that are mostly interested in this notion that does not feature in Nietzsche's thought. Reginster's book is rightly discussed at length in the spheres of Nietzsche scholarship. Eva Strober (2007), Ken Gemes (2008) and Ariela Tubert (2009) have provided extensive discussions. *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (Spring 2012) provided the

[114] Reginster has only one incidental reference to Heidegger (limited to the introduction to his book), in which he mentions the importance of the Nachlass in relation to the published works, and the role that Heidegger played in the valuation of the unpublished notes (Reginster 2006, 16). In spite of this single reference, not only his emphasis on the "overcoming of nihilism", but also his interpretation of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power both strongly resemble Heidegger's interpretation.

book with ample attention, with commentaries by Maudemarie Clark, Nadeem Hussain and Ivan Soll, and an extended reaction by Reginster himself. But while the criticism deals with various aspects of his interpretation, the central role he attributes to the theme of the overcoming of nihilism is not questioned at any point. While I have sought to emphasise the terrifying meaning Nietzsche thought nihilism to have, these interpretations—in some way, sooner or later—all choose to describe the terror Nietzsche so vividly accentuated in such a way that it works to limit the gravity of this terror, by positing that nihilism is only tied to a certain conception of metaphysics, the knowledge of morality, which can in principle be substituted with another one.

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This is also one of the conclusions drawn by Shane Weller, who describes modernism and postmodernism in literature and philosophy as an array of positions concerned with nihilism and Nietzsche's conceptualisation thereof. He maintains that everything written on nihilism in Nietzsche's wake has either passed by its *Unheimlichkeit* or not given it the recognition it is due (2011, 40). He does, however, show a number of exceptions to this conclusion, as can be illustrated through a summary of the most important authors he deals with. According to Weller, the works of authors as different as Oswald Spengler and Ernst Jünger on the one side and the likes of Leo Strauss, Theodore W. Adorno, Maurice Blanchot, and Emil Cioran on the other, of Dadaist artists like Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, of literary authors like Gottfried Benn, Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, Paul Celan, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, André Malraux, Samuel Beckett, and Henry Miller, as well as the work of postmodern authors, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Giorgio Agamben in particular, are not thinkable nor comprehensible in the absence of Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism. Nor does Weller deny that its terrifying aspects reverberate through or even are foregrounded in the work of such authors as Cioran and Beckett. He furthermore thinks the role art or aesthetics plays in the reception is a remarkable one. He holds that, whether they are concerned with an overcoming of nihilism or a coming to terms with it, in some way or another these authors all locate the capacity to do so within the aesthetic. And in doing so they take up an important motif in Nietzsche's thought. After all, Nietzsche thought art was "the great temptress to life, the great stimulus for life" (NF 11 [415] 13.194, our transl.), "the only superior counterforce against all will to a denial of life" (NF 14 [17] 13.225, our transl. cf. also Weller, 80f.).

The relationship between nihilism and art has not received much attention in my own book which has primarily focused on the threat of nihilism. The same goes for the connection between nihilism and politics, including that which Nietzsche labels as "great politics".[115] This subject also warrants the writing of an important history of reception, a painful history due to the relation between nihilism on the one hand and fascism and national-socialism on the other. Not only does fascism react against a contemporary culture that is labelled as being nihilistic, it is itself criticised for its own nihilism too. Ernst Jünger's book *Der Arbeiter* (1932) comfortably fits the first pattern: the fascist critique of the nihilism of bourgeois culture; where his later book, *Über die Linie* (1951) accuses the national socialists of nihilism and so fits into the second pattern (cf. Weller, 43f.). In the first case the term is used to designate a sickly and weak morality, in the second to designate the absence of moral convictions, leaving nothing but the law of violence and causing ideas to function as instruments for the manipulation of masses at best. This last designation is what Hermann Rauschning (who was active as national socialist politician in Danzig before he left the party in 1934 and became a fierce critic of the movement) refers to when he labels national socialism as a "nihilistic revolution" (as the original German title of his 1939-a reads). In Menno ter Braak's introduction to the Dutch edition of that book this dualism appears once more: "one should therefore take care to distinguish, that there are two kinds of nihilism: one for aristocratic spirits, one for plebeian spirits" (Rauschning 1939-b, vii).[116] And the latter rely on

[115] Nietzsche, coincidentally, hardly makes this connection. In NF 26 [335] 11.238 he criticises contemporary German politics and opposes the Russian nihilists (whose sentiments convey a "stronger urge towards greatness") with the English utilitarians. He calls politics one of the domains in which nihilism becomes visible in a number of texts on nihilism: NF 2 [127] (= text 1), NF 2 [131] 12. 129, NF 7 [8] 12.291, NF 9 [35] (= text 3), NF 9 [126] 12.409; NF 11 [371] 13.166, NF 14 [137] 13.321 (also cf. § III.1). For politics also relies on moral criteria and will suffer the consequences of their undermining. A characteristic of political nihilism is that principles become show and that mediocrity, insincerity and "*Augenblicks-Dienerei*" ("service to the moment"); NF 2 [131] 12.130) as well as a "*kosmopolitische Anfühlerei*" ("cosmopolitical intuition"; NF 9 [126] 12.409) prevail. The term "great politics ("*grosse Politik*") appears once, in a sketch for a text on nihilism, which doesn't happen to receive any further development (NF 12 [2] 13.211). Toward the end of § III.3 I have indicated that Nietzsche's distinction between the weak and the strong in the Lenzer Heide text (§ 14) is not intended in a political sense.

[116] It is shocking to notice how many characteristics of national socialism as Rauschning describes it are shared by populist political movements and parties in

Nietzsche too, albeit without much merit. In his (later to be unmasked as forged) talks with Hitler, Rauschning writes that

> [i]t was in this mood that Hitler once conferred on me the privilege of learning his views on morality and things of the spirit. They were a mixture of misunderstood Nietzsche and popularised ideas of a certain tendency in philosophy.[117]
> Rauschning 1939-c, 220

This last remark takes us back to this book's central question: how should we then understand Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism, its terrifying meaning, and the reasons it seems to hardly concern us? In the next and final chapter we return to this question one last time.

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our time: the absence of an ideology in the service of opportunistic behaviour in political discussion, absence of a structure that might be scrutinised: none but the leader determines the course of action: critique of the judiciary in name of the people's interest; use of scapegoats to absorb societal discontent, et cetera.

[117] Rauschning 1939-c, 220; also cf. 1939-b, 97 where he claims that the political nihilism of national socialism is "nothing but a vulgar rehash of the nihilistic perspective of an intellectual elite from some thirty or forty years back" (our transl.).

CHAPTER FIVE

A THREAT THAT NOBODY APPEARS AFRAID OF

At the end of this book we must return to the question presented in the introduction. While it was the driving force behind every previous chapter, it also remained in the background: it is the question asking what Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism might mean for us. This question has two striking tenets: first, the catastrophic and ominous character that Nietzsche believed this nihilism to have; second the fact that, in spite of this, we—much like Nietzsche's contemporaries, coincidentally—do not seem too impressed by it. In the words of Rudiger Safranski: "contemporary nihilism holds nothing dramatic" (2001, 29, our transl.). Does nihilism still pose a threat to us? What does the threat consist in, and how come it hardly seems to bother us?

V.1 The unimaginable meaning of the death of God

We have encountered nihilism's complex meaning—its different phases and forms. When Nietzsche writes that it stands at the door, he is talking about nihilism-3, the penultimate phase of a long development. On the one hand, this phase is merely the consequence of earlier phases, but on the other, it is called the most ominous, because it is to open our eyes to the nihilism present in the preceding phases. The death of God was to show us how we have made the meaning of life dependent upon that God. Undermining the putative foundation and the principles of truth and intelligibility, goodness and order or beauty and meaning wouldn't just make us lose things; it would have us discover that we had always believed in an illusion, something that was never actually there. It would have made us to be like orphans who have just discovered that their recently deceased parents were not their real parents. And if life moreover derived its meaning from those parents, what remains?

But even that image is not yet satisfactory: everything to be learned from one's parents—alleged or otherwise—is on the whole backed up and

affirmed through other sources. Other people were taught more or less the same things by their parents. Society, tradition, culture, institutions—they all support parental authority, or constitute their replacement when these parents fall away. But what if all these other sources also run dry, or turn out to rest on illusions themselves… It is hard to find an adequate comparison—one that properly portrays the importance of the situation. It is not without reason that the madman on the market place (GS 125; cited almost in its entirety on page 71) employs hyperbole: the sea drained, the earth unchained, the horizon wiped out, the sun extinguished. This presents us with a preliminary answer to our question of why the ominous character is only barely revealed to us: it is because it is practically unimaginable.

And it is not just that we are *hardly capable* of imagining it: as long as enough of the decaying structure remains, we don't even *have* to imagine it. The supporting construction that is necessary to raise the building may be discarded once it has been erected. And when the supporting pillars or central columns collapse, the building may still remain standing due to the integrity of its parts. And if even the roof were to collapse, there would be enough places for us to seek shelter, especially if the good weather holds, which is to say: as long as we live comfortably (cf. text 2, § 3 and 13, and § III.1)

For a while many people believed that God was the source and guarantor of morality. Where this belief in God disappeared, it was initially replaced by the common sense of bourgeois society. As once noted by a Dutch senator, we did not seem to have needed Moses and his God for the ten commandments: if a few reasonable gentlemen were to engage in friendly conversation they would have reached the same result. When bourgeois society lost its natural authority, a Darwinist science turned out to lead us to more or less the same result. Don't contemporary ethologists claim that even primates experience empathy, altruism, and a sense of justice? Why would we worry about the death of a God when his successors spread the same message?

Let's take a closer look at the text containing the speech of the madman (GS 125). In the second instance, it emerges that the madman does know the answer to his own question of where God has gone: "*We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers." And as if this allegation is not enough to disconcert them, he gives a lengthy succession of metaphors which aim to express the terrible and impossible thing "we" have committed: now that the work of creation has become undone, everything will disappear into the eternal night. How—for God's sake, for heaven's sake: for whose or what sake, really?—were we able to

accomplish this? How will we ever be able to justify this act, to take its blame upon ourselves, to carry its burden, to cleanse ourselves from the stain the blood of the murder has left on us? This deed is too vast for us. Just as we cannot create ourselves, we cannot murder our creator! "Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" Through his bluster the madman has at least caused his listeners to remain silent. The text tells us they no longer make fun of him: they "were silent and stared at him in astonishment".

But most of them probably recovered from their shock rather swiftly. Maybe they comforted themselves at the hand of the last words of the madman's raging sermon. Maybe they thought themselves to be gods indeed that they—as the text adds—"for the sake of this deed… will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto", to a new era, one that has reckoned with all the earlier foolishness. Is it not precisely by the acknowledgement that man has killed God just as he created Him before that man has shown his greatness? The "higher history" he has since made a part of has only now become *his* history: no longer a Salvation History which God makes him a part of, but his own history, in which he creates and cultivates himself, and his own world, where he brings forth creation and leaves it behind again. Did humankind not take an important step forward the moment it discovered its own creations as created: when it discovered itself as the maker of its own world, of itself, indeed, even as the maker of his own Maker? Might it not feel quite content after the first shock has been overcome?

In that case, then the madman's story would have been nothing but a small ripple in the ever-smooth surface of self-confidence. The bystanders had a brief scare at the hand of a rhetoric that presented their own autonomous activity a little too dramatically, but they recuperate almost immediately and receive their divine status with a sense of self-worth that befits the situation. Certainly, to be worthy of this deed we had to become gods ourselves. But this means we were already gods when we committed it, when we murdered God, and even when we created Him! Maybe the crowd's silence is no sign of shock at all—maybe they are simply puzzled he is making such a racket about something they have long known. But can this be the meaning of the text? Are those listening to the madman the ideal readers of Nietzsche's text?

We ought not to forget that these listeners are portrayed as people "who did not believe in God". These aren't believers whom the madman confronts with the non-existence of a God they believe in, but rather unbelievers. But in spite of this—or is it because of this?—they do not understand what the madman is trying to say. According to the messenger,

the message is not understood. Those for whom God does not exist do not understand what it means that there is no God, nor what it means that they—"we"—killed that God, just as we had created Him.

The text tells the reader that the listeners do not understand what the madman is saying. But this means that the reader who takes up the text in the same way as the listeners took up the madman's message don't understand the point either. We should be warned!

But why then should the listeners be shocked by the madman's message? It cannot be the case that they should be shocked at the absence of a God—they already knew about that. Does the shock perhaps lie in their own killing of that God? But why would that be shocking, let alone terrible? Is the madman accusing them? Were they not *supposed* to do what he says they have done? It seems unlikely. Not only does the deed's internal logic oppose this kind of interpretation (those who win a revolution are right per definition: if God could have been killed, he couldn't have been God: in this case the murderer has only brought something to light that was already the case anyway, but mistakenly remained unnoticed!), the madman furthermore asserts that this deed should be compared to thunder and lightning, with the birth and death of stars. In other words, it has to do with natural phenomena rather than human actions, let alone the kind of actions they can be held accountable and responsible for. The "*—and yet they have done it themselves*" is re-emphasised at the end of madman's fervent oration. They are his last words, if we don't count the epilogue, which Nietzsche added later.[118]

The aspect that is shocking apparently consists in this, that the human has killed God, but cannot be reproached for it. The deed is too vast for this: too vast or grandiose to be reproached, but also too epochal, too comprehensive, with consequences that are too unforeseeable to be praised. Humans have done something that they cannot be held accountable for, something that they cannot claim as their own. This contains the shock and this is not understood, this cannot be understood by those listening. They are light years away from understanding.

Should we not start by recognising that the text doesn't so much want to tell us that God is dead, or that this would be shocking when taken on its own; doesn't it instead seek to tell us something about humankind rather than God, who in any case is no longer there? About a humankind that has left faith in God behind themselves, has conquered it, and is now charged with its own self-interpretation? The text does not seem to address believers, nor does it have much to say about those believers and the God

[118] Cf. the various earlier stages of the text, as indicated in KSA, part 14, 256ff.

they believe or believed in. The text addresses the unbelievers, the atheists, and says something about them, about those who did it themselves and now need to do it themselves; about humanists, and about the human as they imagine it to be.

V.2 Humanism is no alternative

The Gay Science is the text that contains the madman's discourse. In its first edition, this book ends with the announcement of Zarathustra's history. Aphorism 342's title, *Incipit tragoedia*, throws an ominous light on the history that starts there: the history of Zarathustra's going under.

Similar to when the madman proclaims the death of God (in the early phases of the text from *The Gay Science* Zarathustra initially took up the role that was later given to the madman![119]), the people listening to the speech that starts Zarathustra's history also do not understand what it is about. And the same danger lies in wait for the readers here as did with the text from GS 125: they may not accurately gauge how serious the situation is. Zarathustra shows his listeners that they are falsely enamoured with themselves; that their hedonism, which looks for pleasure in intoxicants and seeks to further mask the pain of death with medication,[120] is not a sign of refinement and progress, but rather of reprehensibility and an end. The human era has passed—something else will come now, something beyond the human, the *Übermensch*. The going under of Zarathustra announced in aphorism 342 *of The Gay Science* is that start of the decline of humans. Hence, *Incipit tragoedia*.

As already seen in § III.2, Nietzsche uses the fifth book The Gay Science—added after his *Zarathustra*—to return to the various themes he dealt with in the first four books of the first edition. This fifth book is called *Wir Furchtlosen*, "We Fearless Ones". Fearlessness is evidently required to deal with the "gay science" at hand! We are reminded of the horror the call of nihilism evokes.

Where the first four books resulted in the announcement of tragedy, the fifth book presents the previous four in light of the tragedy that has since unfolded (in the *Zarathustra*). GS 343 starts by recalling the message of the death of God. The effects of his death are designated by terms such as "breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm", and here they are further developed in relation to morality. Even *if* some morality

[119] Cf. the "Vorstufe" cited in KSA, part 14, 25ff.
[120] Cf. Z Prologue 5, 130: "A little poison now and then: that makes for agreeable dreams. And much poison in the end, for an agreeable death."

was possible after this occasion, it would have to be one that is wholly discontinuous with the "whole of our European" tradition. What could that possibly be? Has this European tradition given us anything other than that which we at present like to refer to as our "Christian and humanist values and norms"? What else can European morality be, other than human morality, a humanism with Greek, Roman, Jewish, Christian and Germanic roots?

GS 344 sets out to undermine another essential element of European culture and tradition: our belief in truth. Nietzsche thinks science, truth and truthfulness are but remnants of the old belief in God. Even today's "godless anti-metaphysicians" still turn out to be pious in this regard.

After using GS 345 to point out the effects of the death of God on morality and the subsequent problematisation of morality, GS 346 (text 11) explicitly states what was always already in the background: if this occasion has such far-reaching implications for humankind, then it also does so for ourselves, which is to say: for the person pointing out these far-reaching consequences. As we have already seen (§ III.2), this aphorism, titled *Our question mark*, ends with the nihilistic alternative.

What is remarkable about this text is that humans and humanity keep appearing on the same line with God and the divine. At the heart of the argument made in the aphorism lies the notion that humans have always lived in the opposition of a world as it should (ideally) be, and as that world is in reality. This was the opposition of God and world for a long time, or of divine and human world. But following the death of God this same opposition seems to crop up again, now in a new shape: the opposition of man and world, "man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world" (GS 346). God is no longer the norm: man is. In a free translation: no longer God's ten commandments, but the universal declaration of human rights; no longer an estimation and judgement of the factual world from an eschatological perspective, but an estimation and judgement from the perspective of progress and our responsibility in light of it. What Nietzsche is trying to address is the "monstrous insipidity of this pose" by which "we encounter the juxtaposition of 'man *and* world,' separated by the sublime presumption of the little word 'and'!" (GS 346).

God's replacement by humans isn't as much the solution of a problem as it is its extension. The problem is that the death of God leaves us altogether without any criterion, not even for a critique of those who don't know about this occasion. The person who recognises this knows "our question mark": that person knows itself to *be* a problem with no solution. This terrifying suspicion can be felt in the radical rhetoric of the madman

in GS 125. Here is where we face the logic that forces a transition from the death of God to the death of the human.

At first sight, God's death appears to be liberating for humankind: no external authority, no limits to the possibilities of experimentation and investigation; to voyage as a Columbus to worlds unknown and believed by many to be non-existent; to subject oneself and others to boundless experimenting; to vivisect oneself,[121] and not only metaphorically: why not also in the literal sense of contemporary biomedical sciences and technology? As Dostoyevsky, whom Nietzsche admired, suggests in the conversations Alyosha has with his brothers Ivan and Dmitri: "If God is dead, everything is permitted".[122]

There is no point in arguing that not everything is permitted, and that humankind needs to and can take their own responsibility; that we, autonomous as we are, need to set down the "rules for the human zoo".[123] Because how would that be possible? After all, there is no longer any criterion left to distinguish what is and is not permitted! No criterion can stand firm against the violence of those powerful enough not to heed it. If God is unmasked as an anthropomorphic invention or projection of humans, this may seem like a liberating thought at first glance, but humankind subsequently discovers the anthropomorphism of its entire world. It transpires that this newly attained position in the centre of the world relies on nothing but its own desire to be the centre. And as this desire cannot justify itself, so it can only lead to a battle without rules.

Three phases can be distinguished in the development of the thesis of the death of God, each of which are two-sided—the one hopeful, the other ominous. All three are phases of active nihilism, which belong in the "period of the three great affects" and the "period of catastrophe" in the "history of nihilism's development" (§ III.3). Nietzsche's books suggest that he consecutively runs through these periods himself (cf. § II.1). They seem—in the final "question mark" (GS 346) of what I called nihilism-4 (§ III.4)—to end in a departure from humans and humanism.

The first phase to follow the murder, or to follow its first discovery, is the one in which the presence of the old God is discovered in all other domains of human culture, and in which the (over)courageous deed is repeated in respect of all of the old God's shadow-forms. The belief in

[121] Cf. e.g. BGE 186, 212, 218, 244.

[122] Contrary to what is often assumed, this statement does not figure in *The Brothers Karamazov* as such, but its suggestion is definitely present in a number of conversations; cf. book II, ch.7, book V, ch. 5, book XI, ch. 4. I am grateful to Philippe Lepers for his cautioning; also cf. his book from 2010, 94.

[123] Cf. Sloterdijk 2009.

truth as conceived by metaphysics, the belief in the moral ideal of Christian European culture, the belief in the ideal of art, the figure of art as it prevails in that same culture: all these lofty ideals turn out to be "human, all-too-human" constructs that have now lost their divine guarantee. They will fall like dominoes after the first divine first stone has toppled. They belong to that which "must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it" (GS 343, 279). And the infection isn't restricted to traditional metaphysics: scientific truth and its belief in progress of and through knowledge, even the logic no man of knowledge can escape and the very language in which he must express himself—all of them are contaminated: "I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar" (TI Reason 5, 483). Not just Christian morality, but also the institutions of the society in which it is at work, the political ideals of factions combating each other, as well as the conception of democracy or the ideal of peace that reconciles them: they all rest upon the dissipated point of orientation. This slowly causes *Human, All Too Human*'s optimism to be tempered. The dedication to Voltaire vanishes from the second edition in 1886. *Daybreak's* tone (1881) betrays an increasing amount of unrest and alarm, and *The Gay Science*'s (1882) madman makes it clear that a naive optimism is at the least misplaced. After the grand ideals of our culture are designated as being "human, all-too-human" interpretations, the question after what remains of our world, our lives once these ideals disappear becomes increasingly urgent. But in this first phase any alarm is still kept in check by the sense of freedom provided by the blurring of all the old borders.

This changes in the second phase. When the distinction between true and untrue, and especially when the value we attach to the truth, in the final instance rests on the moral notion that (self-)deception is not preferable, then this also holds for the critic's truthfulness. The critic now becomes subject to his own criticism. What could motivate an exposition of mendacity or naivety in others, if the same—obsolete—moral ideal turns out to be at work in both critic and criticised? Who knows—maybe truth is not better than the lie at all! Maybe life fares better amongst lies. Did the cunning not always come off better than the honest? And does life not seem better "aimed at semblance, meaning error, deception, simulation, delusion, self-delusion" (GS 344, 282)? But if this is true, the prevailing morality preaching truthfulness may also be one of these lies. What kind of life does it promote? Is it not a sickly or weak kind of life, a life that wants to destroy itself and uses morality to this end? Would a different kind of people not devise a different kind of morality? It is with this

question that Nietzsche ends off the Lenzer Heide text (text 2 § 16). He increasingly experiments with the possibility that stronger, healthier, and more powerful people might develop a stronger, healthier, and more powerful morality—that they may have already developed such a morality in those parts of history that present a different image than presides. Even playing with the possibility of these thoughts is disconcerting. If different ways of life, different perspectives lead to different moralities, and if there is nothing to guarantee the correctness of any morality, doesn't this present the battle of moralities as inescapable? Doesn't this mean war has the final say? But why, from which perspective, would peace and stability be better than war? Even now the (over)courageous tone of elitism, violence, and the pleasure in cruelty still drown out the alarm these questions evoke: who would blame the birds of prey for hungering after little lambs? (GM I 13, 45). But the polemic tone of this callous rhetoric can hardly miss its effect: we have come upon the trail of something shocking and disconcerting.

The third phase in the development of the thesis of God's death presents a new and decisive move. Even the increasing presence of the alarm in the previous phases was still a projection from a human perspective, whichever kind it may have been. But why should the human perspective be attributed with such influence? In developing the idea of the death of God, humankind has indeed made itself into a god, or at least has placed itself in God's position. Where God once represented the highest point of view, this position now appears reserved for humankind.

God and the gods once put all human solicitude into perspective. It was Heraclitus who wrote that good and evil don't exist for God (fragment B 102). Job is given to understand that humans should not think they can fathom God's plans and intentions. But God and gods have simultaneously created a very special position for humans. The pagan gods vied with humans, who were their most prominent sparring partners, and whom they moreover resembled to a large degree, especially in lust, jealousy and resourceful malevolence. The God of the Jews and Christians created them after His own image. And now that He is dead, humans have indeed become the centre of the world, refusing to be put into perspective by anything or anybody. Even the eerie message of the madman confirms the human's central position: for without humans, there could be no eeriness.

The third phase in the development of this message could well consist in a departure from the illusion that humans are of the highest concern. The naturalism of the second phase is helpful in this regard: when nature is not a creation preceded by a meaning-giving purpose and significance, at the least it becomes harder for humans to think that nature revolves

around them or around what they could take to be its meaning. Humans cease to be what creation is purposed for, cease to be the centre of nature, the destination of natural development et cetera, and change into a passing moment of a motion without beginning or end, or in any case a motion without a destination. The human subjection of the world to their desires becomes a form of hubris—if a blameless one (cf. GM III 9, 113), which, though it may slow down the decline of humankind for a short while, will not be able to stop it. Because for what reason would the will to power, which shows itself in human behaviour, not also be the law to which all reality conforms (BGE 36, 47)? And why would this will to power, after producing humankind, not also develop beyond this particular phase of human existence, disappearing the human back into the eternal motion where it, like the waves on a beach, brings forth shapes and washes them away again?[124]

In the first phase Nietzsche still talks of humans and speaks on behalf of free spirits. In the second phase, he speculates about the development of "the human species" and especially about different kinds of people. In the third he delivers his message as a prophet who addresses us from the future,[125] "as a spirit of adventuring and pioneering that has already lost its way once in every labyrinth of the future; as a soothsayer bird-spirit who *looks back* when relating what will come" (text 9). And he doesn't appear to bring other kinds of people onto stage there, but instead calls up something beyond the human, "a beyond-human", an "*Übermensch*".

Does this not sound the end of all our—religious or secular-humanistic—ideals in relation to the world and ourselves? Haven't these come to be the representations of the one-day-species of "clever beasts [that] invented knowing", as Nietzsche put it in an early text?[126] Should we not recognise that even the unmasking of false ideals can itself no longer function as an ideal according to which we organise our lives? Indeed, even the abolition of our reverences is itself a form of nihilism (GS 346).

V.3 Is life amongst nihilism possible?

It is hard to imagine what this could mean: it seems too paradoxical to be possible. Should we be worried? *Can* we worry in a suitable manner?

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[124] Cf. the famous final passage in: Michel Foucault, 1970. *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*) New York: Pantheon Books.

[125] Z II On the Land of Education, 231 suggests that Zarathustra comes from the future.

[126] Cf. *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1872),

Even if we were to worry, we would thereby prove that we haven't yet rid ourselves from the old values! Whoever worries about what disappears reveals the old values still alive within them. Whoever frets while asserting that the belief in God or the awareness of a fundamental difference between good and evil is disappearing reveals their attachment to these things by manner of their distress. Those who complain about what is giving way are not rid of it themselves. At the most they observe that others have lost the way, or that the way has become less visible in these times. But they know these things to be there—no matter how hard they are to find: the way, the truth, the meaning of life. The quest for these things may be difficult and the absence of any results painful, but the knowledge that what is sought surely does exist infuses the enterprise with meaning.

But how would one search for what does not exist? Shouldn't this be the place where we look for the final nihilism: in the awareness that there is nothing to look for? But how can that still be terrible? If radical nihilism were to consist in our failing to feel the absence of what isn't there, how can it still be a threat that ominously looms? This kind of radical nihilism seems more like salvation than a threat.

We appear to be forced into the paradoxical conclusion which states that whosoever still takes nihilism to be a threat hasn't embroiled themselves deeply enough into nihilism, and whosoever does radically realise this, can no longer discern it to be a threat: a true nihilist has already moved beyond nihilism. By manner of the way we seek to penetrate the significance of the matter we appear to move past its significance. But how can we accomplish this in a way that doesn't simply ignore it? How to look for the thing that terrifies us?

We recognise this paradox in the interpretations we encountered in the earlier descriptions of ways in which Nietzsche's thesis on nihilism has been interpreted. Heidegger, for whom nihilism consists in the forgetting of Being, makes it clear that we even forget this forgetting, so that the urgency of our situation comes to lie in the extent to which we lack a sense of urgency (cf. § IV.1). Conversely, Vattimo foregrounds the liberating side of this paradox when he interprets the demise or weakening of truth as the true meaning of an evangelical truthfulness (cf. § IV.2). But in both cases the terrifying threat has rather disappeared: in the one it has grown so large that (and because) we do not feel it, in the other it has turned into a hopeful promise. Should we say that the theme of nihilism causes philosophical interpretation to reach the limit of its potential? Does philosophy's own nature, its own search for insight, perhaps unavoidably come to stand outside of the thing it is searching for? Just as in Kafka's

parable "Before the law" from his novel *The Trial* "a man from the countryside" never gains "entry" to the law, never gets to know or understand this law, which nevertheless has him in its grip?

Kafka is one of the most important "modernist" authors in whose work nihilism plays a crucial role (Weller, 110-124). Our paradoxical relation to nihilism may better come to expression within literature than it does in philosophical expositions: on the one hand, we stand inside of it, on the other we resist. But this resistance does not bring us outside of nihilism nor are we completely locked into it. We need the alarm for its meaning to sink in, but in this state of alarm we grab hold of those things for which nihilism is sounding the death knell.

One of the ways that allows this paradoxical relationship to come to expression is one that philosophy tends to struggle with: humour. Authors like Kafka and Beckett present us with a certain type of alienating and painful histories in which there is always some humour: just enough to lift the despair without actually banishing it. These two scenes from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (originally published in 1953, with an English edition in 1956) in which Vladimir and Estragon's attempts to end their lives keep on getting mired in clownish clumsiness present an excellent example:

> Vladimir: What do we do now? / Estragon: Wait. / Vladimir: Yes, but while waiting. / Estragon: What about hanging ourselves? / Vladimir: Hmm. It'd give us an erection. / Estragon: (highly excited) An erection! / Vladimir: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that? / Estragon: Let's hang ourselves immediately! / Vladimir: From a bough? (They go towards the tree). I wouldn't trust it. / Estragon: We can always try. / Vladimir: Go ahead. / Estragon: After you. / Vladimir: No, no, you first./ Estragon: Why me? / Vladimir: You're lighter than I am. / Estragon: Just so! / Vladimir: I don't understand. / Estragon: Use your intelligence, can't you? (Vladimir uses his intelligence). / Vladimir: (finally) I remain the in the dark. / Estragon: This is how it is (He reflects). The bough… the bough… (Angrily). Use your head, can't you? / Vladimir: You're my only hope. / Estragon: (with effort). Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi heavy—bough break—Didi alone. Whereas—/ Vladimir: I hadn't thought of that. / Estragon: If it hangs you it'll hang anything. / Vladimir: But am I heavier than you? / Estragon: So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly. / Vladimir: Well? What are we going to do? / Estragon: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.
> Beckett 1956, 17-18

> Estragon: Why don't we hang ourselves? / Vladimir: With what? / Estragon: You haven't got a bit of rope? / Vladimir: No. / Estragon: Then we can't. (Silence)/ Vladimir: Let's go. Estragon: Wait, there's my belt. /

> Vladimir: It's too short. / Estragon: You could hang onto my legs./ Vladimir: And who'd hang onto mine?/ Estragon: True./ Vladimir: Show me all the same. (Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.) It might do in a pinch. But is it strong enough?/ Estragon: We'll soon see. Here. (They each take an end of the cord and pull). / Vladimir: Not worth a curse. (Silence) / Estragon: You say we have to come back tomorrow? / Vladimir: Yes. / Estragon: Then we can bring a good bit of rope.
> Beckett, 1956, 93-94

Where philosophical texts keep trying to solve puzzles, literature has different ways to keep the paradox in existence with greater ease. From the nineteenth century onward literature shows a tremendous variation in representations of nihilism, as Weller (2011) and Harbers (2013) show. But much of this literature may have become too canonised for the terrifying meaning of this nihilism to get through to us. It is surprising to read that Karl Löwith writes that authors such as Marcel Proust, André Gide, Thomas Mann, Aldous Huxley, André Malraux, and D.H. Lawrence, in contrast to the great novelists from Cervantes to Dickens and Balzac to Tolstoy, "no longer create an authentic human world", but only analyse; that they "convey a disheartening truth about human beings, in connection with which the human being as such disappears" (Löwith 1995, 197, cited in Weller 2011, 79). We, in the meantime, have become accustomed to worse. Contemporary authors appear to present us with far stronger evocations of nihilism as a sinister guest.

For example, Michel Houllebecq's novel *Atomised*[127] presents a stark picture of two men, half-brothers, that don't know love and for whom nothing is of worth. One of the brothers, Michel, is a brilliant scientist who busies himself conducting what we would call "transhuman" research these days: molecular-biological research into the possibilities to clone and improve humans; but he can hardly be said to be passionate. The other, Bruno, does not really seem to do anything; he is mostly after adventurous sex; that seems to be the only way he can feel anything anymore. Both of their lives are empty and cold without any prospect of a meaning that would provide some satisfaction. Is this a sketch of what a nihilistic life would look like?

[127] Michel Houellebecq, 2000. *Atomised*. London: Vintage; translation of 1998, *Les particules élémentaires*. Paris: Flammarion.

V.4 Gaming Instinct

I return to this question once more by means of a presentation of another novel, one that was published in 2004, in another attempt to answer the question of whether or not we are able to truly imagine nihilism, what this means for us on a practical level, and why it nevertheless remains so far removed from us.

In *Gaming Instinct* by German author Juli Zeh,[128] we find confirmation of our previous paradoxical conclusion: that a person who is truly nihilistic has moved beyond nihilism: the main characters, who live extremely nihilistically, explicitly call themselves "post-nihilists". By representing the paradox in a poignant story with tangible figures, the novel is probably better equipped to explain what a nihilistic life would be than a philosophical essay is.

The story unfolds on and around an expensive private secondary school, the Ernst-Bloch Gymnasium in Bonn. The principal, along with most of the teachers, represent the hypocritical establishment; most of the students are typical teenagers. Amidst these unmistakable students and teachers, the main characters are anomalous: two hyper-intelligent students, Ada and Alev, and two divergent teachers: the erudite and sharp but misanthropic Höfling, the history teacher, and the idealistic and good-natured Szymon Smutek, a Polish dissident who fled his communist country and now teaches German and physical education.

When Höfling brands Ada and Alev "nihilists" after losing a class discussion, Alev corrects him with the following remark: "It's worse… At least the nihilists believed there was something they *couldn't* believe in." To which Ada says that they see themselves as "the nihilists' descendants" (Zeh 2010, 250, our transl.); "We have nothing we can't believe in" (393). In a different place in the book Smutek ascertains that these students "believe there is nothing to believe in". Ada responds: "Not even that… Nietzsche is dead. His successors are dead. The successors' replacements are dead. And those who wanted to resurrect those replacements are dead too" (286). The sustaining of their own lives appears to be but a meaningless postponement of death. When Höfling commits suicide

[128] Unfortunately, there is not yet an English translation of this book available: for the purposes of this book all references have been translated from the Dutch and all page numbers refer to the Dutch translation from 2010. Also c.f. Harbers (2013) who briefly discusses this novel as one example of how nihilism seems to return in contemporary literature recently, "maybe as a reaction to the 'cheerful' postmodern relativism" (Harbers 2013, 35, our transl.).

shortly after the discussion just mentioned, they know: "he becomes one of us by what he has done" (252).

Ada and Alev have indeed moved beyond the concern of passive nihilism and the fanaticism of active nihilism. They have also left the heroic nihilism, as described by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Plague* and *The Rebel*: the nihilism of the person that provides life with meaning by revolting against the meaningless fate of mankind, even though he knows that this protest is itself pointless. Ada "could never take Sisyphus as anything other than an idiot" (290). Nihilism seems to have come to completion in Ada and Alev. They are "children of nothingness" (357). Can they show us whether there is human life that remains after it, and if, or for however far it is the case, what it means to live this (post)nihilistically?

Ada takes her "indifference towards personal existence" to be "the greatest gift" nature has given her (300). She is convinced that people are not made up of much more than their bodies, which operate according to physiological laws. Human behaviour can be explained according to causes, not according to reasons: "Humanity's biggest scourge was made of 'why?' and you did well to limit the operational area of that question as much as possible" (89). Thus, she does not have any reasons or intentions when she—fifteen years of age—allows herself to be used when a group of boys wants to treat one of the group to sleeping with a girl.

From the moment Alev joins the school, he fascinates Ada, who feels nothing but despise for practically everybody else. Alev does not only match Ada's intelligence, but also has more or less the same life views. He even has a better way of presenting them in a kind of nihilistic ideology. On his first day of school he left the Polish teacher speechless by addressing him in Polish and adding that "as you undoubtedly know, … most things in life are a matter of…the will to power" (99). In a different discussion, he says that

> every random event on this planet can be explained at the hand of the holy trinity of the highest human law… Cowardliness, stupidity, egotism, …the axes of the three-dimensional system of the coordinates of all behaviour.
> Zeh 2010, 364.

Prompted to do so by Ada, he formulates his nihilistic credo in the following manner:

> Looking for meaning is merely a way to keep yourself occupied…akin to a crossword puzzle in which you intentionally wrote down the first word incorrectly. A game of solitaire with an incomplete set of cards. You can use it to kill time. But you could also just leave it be.
> Zeh 2010, 114

He holds that wanting something or striving after it is a waste of time. "Doing nothing and wanting nothing is the only worthy manner to honour the time-god" (114). On the one hand, his unwillingness to act in a way we would normally call productive appears to stand in contrast with his intellectual acumen, but it on the other hand is a good representation of the way in which this intellect is employed. Just like Ada, he knows that reasons, choices, decisions, all the concepts at the hand of which humans ascribe freedom and dignity to themselves, are illusions: "There is no for and against, there are no reasons for right or left. Human decision is nothing but a magnificently rehearsed game" (146).

That is what Ada learns from Alev: "That everything was really a game. Not MERELY a game but A GAME" (373). The "gaming instinct" is all "that remains when you strip humans of all their valuative concepts" (437). Playing is all that remains in such a world, but the game Ada and Alev play is a game like the ones animals play, more precise: like predators playing with their prey.[129] The difference between human and animal is merely that the gaming instinct "does not dissipate when sexual maturity is reached" amongst humans: "that instinct lives forever" (416). The only thing that might make this game "human" is its immorality; but it is only immoral in and for the reader, not for the protagonists themselves. Their game consists of Ada seducing the idealistic teacher Smutek and Alex taking pictures of their weekly sex to blackmail him. Ada lets her body be made use of, and both students make use of their teacher Smutek to get money out of him.

> Pragmatism, Ada had once said, replaces everything those big ideas, ideologies and religions…once had to offer. Pragmatism keeps us from becoming criminals, or makes them of us if that should be what is be necessary.
> Zeh 2010, 412

By the persisting blackmail they cause the man to get into ever deeper trouble. Eventually Ada stops; one day she simply stops showing up because she has no more interest in the game. Smutek's humanity comes

[129] Robert Musil's famous book, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man without Qualities*) (1930-1932) plays an important role in the novel. In it we find the following remark: "we think we understand a cat, for instance, sitting in front of a cage staring up at a fat, fair canary hopping up and down, or battling a mouse, letting it go, then batting it again, just to see it run away once more" (*The Man without Qualities,* Vol 1, 70). I am grateful to Franca Verbeek for reminding me of this passage.

to expression when he aims his anger and outrage at Alev, beating him up. The consequent court case has a surprising end for the reader, but not for Alev. He uses game theory to calculate what the end to the game ought to be, and is satisfied when he can explain to the judge that this case, too, is exactly correct (444). This game is also an event that unfolds according to laws, laws that factually rule, but have to meaning or intention.

However shocking the reader may experience the way in which the novel presents us with an image of people living (post)nihilistically may be, that impression needs to be adjusted in two ways. Firstly, the novel once more (or still) contains traces of a faith the protagonists apparently have not yet left behind them. We find an example of this when the nihilists seem to justify their ideas by referring to the horrors in our world:

> Where is the soul when Germans march in all directions to sow death and damnation across half the globe? Where is she, when children play football with the heads of other children? Is the soul that area where the feeling of not being able to abide the crimes of our species sits next to the capacity to do exactly the same? …I have no need for a soul. Whatever it is that could be damaged in me simply isn't there.
> Zeh 2010, 436

Even though they appear to factually ascertain violence and expose its treacherous concealment, the description still contains a protest that in turn reveals an ideal. This becomes even more clear in the conclusion of Ada's defence in court:

> In this phase of transition, in a lawless, chaotic and unsurveyable world, nothing is more dangerous than lies and treachery—and nothing more deserving of recognition than honesty. … Since we have lost faith and truth along with it, the only difference that remains lies between treachery and honesty.
> Zeh 2010, 444

Truthfulness takes the place of truth and appears to guide the actions of these descendants of nihilism. But isn't this once more an ideal, and is truthfulness not a striving for truth, to the same truth that was deemed not to exist? Before I return to this I will first add a second remark to the suggestion that what we see here is a (post)nihilistic life.

When we are gripped by the stark vision this kind of life presents us with it serves to confirm that our own position is outside and on the other side of such a life. When we experience horror, this confirms our dependence on the values that such a vision has cast overboard. This may be the reason literature is better equipped to show us what nihilism means: by being able

to present us with realistic figures, people we feel we can identify with—even though in this case we may feel more for the victims of the nihilists than for the nihilists themselves. But the fact remains that we can close the book, put it away, and tell ourselves that our reality is not as bad as theirs. The book is a laboratory inside of which we gain an experimental experience—but one that we can also lock and leave behind, so that nothing could escape from its pages. The confrontation with the threat of nihilism needn't concern us too much in light of its experimental character.

This is why, at the end, I come back to Nietzsche once more. He too was driven by the truthfulness which Ada appeals to. But he did *admit* the old ideal of truth reappeared in this truthfulness; he realised that his undermining of the ideals tarnished the spirit of his own project too, in this way becoming a "rendezvous…of questions and question marks" (BGE 1, 9); see § III.2). If it seems that Nietzsche experiences the threat of nihilism to a greater extent than his contemporaries and even his present-day readership does, the reason may be that he fashioned himself into a laboratory and there experimented on himself. This turned his laboratory into a labyrinth from which he could no longer free himself. To put it differently: where literature allows for the author and reader to remain at a distance from the story's characters, in Nietzsche all of these appear to coalesce. I will develop this thought at the hand of a number of texts in which he explicitly brings himself into play.

V.5 Nietzsche's experiment

Nietzsche's "experimentalism" has not been short of attention since Walter Kaufmann introduced the term in 1950.[130] Nietzsche does not employ the term himself, but does (albeit only once) mention his "experimental philosophy" ("*Experimental-Philosophie*") (NF 16[32] 13.492). Friedrich Kaulbach published a book under that title[131] in which he, just as Hans Seigfried did later,[132] interprets Nietzsche's experiment from a Kantian perspective as an instrument of transcendental-philosophical analysis. Lester Hunt attributed an important role to experimentalism in his presentation of a type of Nietzschean virtue ethics (Hunt 1991, 106-111).[133] Some authors

[130] Kaufmann 1974 (originally published in 1950). Kaufmann points out that while Nietzsche does not use the term "experimentalism" himself, he does use "Experiment" (more than a hundred times, including derivatives) and "*Versuch*" (over 800 times).
[131] Kaulbach, 1980.
[132] Seigfried, 1989.
[133] Cf. also 134-144 and 164-170 of the same work.

emphasise the role of experimental science in Nietzsche's use of the term "experiment", others tend to focus on Nietzsche's own use of the term; sometimes in his criticism of existing positions in metaphysics and ethics, other times in the construction of their "own" theory. Volker Gerhardt collects ten characteristics of Nietzsche's thought in a "reconstruction" of his "Experimental-Philosophie" and points out that in his *Essays*—which Nietzsche read with enthusiasm—R.W. Emerson refers to himself as an experimenter (Gerhardt 1986).[134] Rebecca Bamford provides a clear overview of the most recent interpretations (Bamford 2016). In what follows I would like to introduce a new element into the discussion which in my opinion has not received enough attention: the manner in which Nietzsche's experimenting relates to the way in which his thought critically refers back to itself, especially when it relates to the problematic of nihilism.

When we described the history of the development of Nietzsche's thought (particularly in § II.1 and II.2) we found that he only really discovers his own and true question when (or to the extent that) his thinking becomes self-referential, which is to say: when he himself is included in his practice of questioning everything. For as long as he limits himself to a criticism of the scientific, philosophical, cultural, societal, and other forms of metaphysics, morality, and religion he himself observes and opposes, he is not fundamentally different than many other critics, who eventually, just like the times they criticise, are passed over and forgotten. His critique becomes genuinely radical and untimely when it starts to include himself and his own criticism too; when the questions he asks discover that they themselves are "questionable" and when he realises that it is his questioning that should itself to be interrogated (BGE 1, 9), which causes the ground to disappear from under his feet and all support to vanish. This is the moment his thinking transcends the status of the kind of experiment from which one can withdraw as soon as everyday life is re-joined. The experiment becomes existential: "the real question mark is posed for the first time, that the destiny of the soul changes, the hand moves forward, the tragedy *begins*" (GS 382, 347). This tragedy consists in the thinker himself becoming the battlefield upon which the "will to truth" takes up arms against its own presupposition, being life and the lies or illusions life requires:

> the ultimate question about the conditions of life has been posed here, and we confront the first attempt to answer this question by experiment. To

[134] Cf. especially page 47.

> what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment.
> GS 110, 171

As we saw in § III.1, this question is also the very core of nihilism's problematic. The will to truth undermines itself, it inevitably emerges from this self-undermining and leads to the discovery that it is precisely the thinker in whom "the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a *problem*" (GM III 27, 161). For this reason, he can no longer naively continue his search for truth, but he cannot keep on naively undermining every alleged truth either; he can only still be both of them himself, seeker and underminer at the same time and in their problematic combination: he can only *be* the problem himself. Nietzsche gradually develops this realisation, until it comes to full expression in the period from which his thoughts on European nihilism originate.

And it is exactly in this period that Nietzsche re-reads his earlier works and writes new prefaces for their new editions (cf. § II.1 and II.3). This confrontation with and reflection on his own texts, and the prefaces that come to express them, are of great importance for an accurate conception of the existential turn in Nietzsche's thinking and for an answer to the question after what his thoughts on nihilism can tell us. Let us explicitly return to these and other prefaces being written between 1885 and 1887.[135]

Authors generally make use of prefaces to bridge the gap between book and reader or to help the reader over the bridge and lead them into the book.[136] Authors posit themselves as the first and privileged readers of their book, who, because they have already read it, can tell other readers what it is about, what kind of people should read it and for which reasons, and how it is best read. Of course, this may come to expression in different ways and it may be concealed to a lesser or greater extent. It may certainly belong to the rhetorical possibilities of the preface-genre to tempt the reader into reading the book by discouraging or even forbidding him to do so. Nietzsche increasingly appears to do this starting from his *Zarathustra*, a book which the subtitle claims is "for all and none". In a

[135] The following has been more extensively developed in Van Tongeren 2012-c.

[136] If there were no distance between author/book and reader, a preface would be superfluous. Nietzsche appears to entertain this thought in the text that *The Wanderer and his Shadow* starts with (from as early as the 1880 edition), which precedes the numbered aphorisms, making it appear as a kind of preface without being called one. This is where we read the wanderer and his shadow are "good friends", and then: "And so enough preamble!" (HH II WS, 301).

sketch for the preface to a new edition of the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* he writes that "one needs to write a new preface, not just to invite people, but also to chase them away" (NF 40 [66] 11.667, our transl.). This could be an attempt to select readers, "to chase away most of them" (NF 26 [244] 11.214, our transl.) and to seduce only those readers who feel drawn by what is forbidden or dangerous. It could also be an expression of the sense that there are no suitable readers at all, or at least not yet. At around the same time the previous notes originate from, Nietzsche writes:

> To keep asking yourself more strictly: who to write for? —For much of what I have conceived, I found none to be ready; and Zarathustra is proof that no matter how clear someone may speak: no one hears him in any case.
> NF 26 [243] 11.212, our translation

Who does one address in the prefaces of books that no-one reads? I would suspect that Nietzsche's awareness of being an author without readers is at least one of the reasons his work takes a new and important turn. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which had been published in sections, sold so few copies that the publisher refused to release the fourth part, and Nietzsche's own resources only allowed for a run of forty books. And his previous works didn't fare much better: Nietzsche's publisher even obstructed his attempts to move to a different publisher due to the supply of unsold books (see § III.2). I suspect this caused Nietzsche to become a reader of his own books in a new sense. But at the least he started re-reading them in order to "re-present" his works from the previous four to fourteen years. This effectively turned him into a second reader. He now no longer was the author who read the book first and used this as the basis for telling future readers what he had written, and why and how to read the book, but instead turned into a real reader, who discovered something new in these books—even if they are his own books—and relates his reading experiences in these prefaces added afterwards.

Nietzsche had already formulated three demands on his readers in an early preface to his lectures on the future of educational institutions:

> The reader I expect something from, should have three qualities. He should be at ease and read without hurry. He should not keep inserting himself and his 'civilisation'. He should not, finally, at the end, let's say as a result, expect new tables.
> P 2, 1.761, our translation

We recognise these demands in the new prefaces to *Daybreak* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. The quality of being calm in particular returns in the notion of "reading as an *art*" (GM Preface 8, 23), which is to say: in the art of "slow reading" (D Preface 5, 5). But in the new prefaces from 1886 and 1887 we find still more elements that are of much consequence for the question at hand. Outside of the sevenfold repetition of the word "slowness", what is especially pertinent in the last section of the new preface to *Dawn/Daybreak* is that both author and book are explicitly separated *and* identified. At its start we read that "we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of *lento*", where at its conclusion Nietzsche calls on his readers to read properly with the following words: "this book desires for itself only perfect readers and philologists: *learn* to read me well!—" (D Preface 5, 5).

In the last paragraph of the preface to *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche expresses what he had just done himself as demand on and condition to his reader: to "first read [his] earlier writings and [not spare] some trouble in doing so". The required art of proper reading is explicated in two ways: the reader must have been "both profoundly wounded and at the same time profoundly delighted" by every word (especially in the case of the *Zarathustra*). And, he adds, aphorisms shouldn't just be read, they also and especially need to be deciphered. The prerequisite for this kind of art of reading he labels "rumination" (GM Preface 8, 22).

I think we can take the contents of both forewords together and—at the very least *also*—take them as Nietzsche's report on his own experience of reading. By slowly re-reading his books (and rumination can only be done slowly), he has, in a way, reincorporated that which he has read (much like a cow mixes the grass with its gastric juices to incorporate it into its body). He has made the book into something he himself is. Or rather: by properly reading, he has found himself within his books. In the new prefaces he gives report of his reading experiences, in which he has discovered that his books "have something that distinguishes them and unites them together" (HH I Preface, 5). In the new preface to the second part of *Human, All Too Human* he says of his own texts that "'I' am in them, together with everything that was inimical to me, *ego ipsissimus*, indeed, if a yet prouder expression be permitted, *ego ipsissimum*." (HH II Preface, 209). This neuter form may refer to the body (the Latin "*corpus*" is neuter)[137] and could in this way remind us of the incorporation owing to the rumination. In the new preface to *The Gay Science* Nietzsche is so forthright in talking

[137] I thank dr. Vincent Hunink for this suggestion; the German reads "der Leib" after all.

about himself, about the process of sickness and health he passed through, that he eventually has an imagined interlocutor call out: "But let us leave Herr Nietzsche: what is it to us that Herr Nietzsche has become well again?" (GS Preface 2, 33).

It is as if Nietzsche himself calls us to attention: this is not about him! It is about the task at hand, in our case about the meaning of European nihilism and its terrifying character. What do these prefaces teach us about this?

Up until now the prefaces of 1885-1887 have not appeared as a means to coax readers into reading the relevant books, but rather seemed to give report of the way in which he was brought to revisit his books: he discovers himself in his books and realises he has written himself into their pages. If he makes clear how one should read, he does so by describing how *he* has read them: in such a way that he found himself within them. But this means that by the re-reading Nietzsche has discovered this history of sickness and healing, to which he believes his books attest, as the subject his philosophy is concerned with. And indeed it does not concern Herr Nietzsche, but the task at hand; but in a certain sense this task (again the neuter "ipsissimum" proves meaningful) is Nietzsche himself.

Nietzsche's philosophy both is and is not about Herr Nietzsche. It is *not* about him in the sense of the *particularity* of this person that happens to be Friedrich Nietzsche, who may or may not be able to relay his experiences. In the sketch of a much earlier preface he writes about people who only read prefaces, saying they are not interested in what someone has to say, but only wish to satisfy their curiosity at the hand of vain and pompous words; he thinks this "hunger after the personal" to be despicable and decides that "from now on no preface will say anything about me at all" (NF 2 [27] 7.55f., our transl.). And even in *Beyond Good and Evil* he still writes that he is "mortally sick of everything subjective and of his accursed ipsissimosity" (BGE 207, 126).

But his philosophy *does* concern the *singularity* connected to what it results in, and it results in the experiment to answer this question: to what extent does truth, which is to say the will to truth to the extent that nihilism has problematised it, endure incorporation? (GS 110, 171). The problem of European nihilism concerns everybody—irrespective of the problem being recognised and experienced or not. But its "solution" cannot be expressed in general terms: instead it can only be brought into practice in the singularity of an experimental life. This means that, in Zarathustra's words "*the* way—that does not exist" (Z III On the Spirit of Gravity 2, 307). But it also means that Nietzsche's "experience", his

"history of illness and recovery", wasn't "[his] personal experience alone" (HH II Preface 5, 213), from which it follows that the prefaces describing this development do not only concern Herr Nietzsche.

EPILOGUE: PREFACE

Prefaces, particularly prefaces to philosophical books, are paradoxical texts most of the time. They mean to bring the reader in from the outside, but either try to accomplish this from the outside (leaving one to wonder how they would get in) or else from the inside (which begs the question of how they would reach the reader who is still on the outside). Hegel developed this paradox by employing a seventy-page long preface to his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*) in order to make clear that the preface to a philosophical text is "not only superfluous, but…inadequate and contrary to its purpose" (Hegel 2005, 63).[138] His argument is focused around the "matter" philosophy deals with: truth. Hegel believes this can only be found in a systematic whole and is therefore never to be "indicated" or "summarised" in a preface.

Kierkegaard took this paradox to its extreme by writing a book that only contains prefaces, and especially by his preface to this book, in which he uses all kinds of tactics to show that this book is not a book nor is the preface a preface.[139] And that book, once more, deals with truth. For even though Kierkegaard holds that philosophical book are about truth, he claims that this truth never resides in what the book is "about", but in the subjective relation the reader has to it. And the more paradoxical a text, the stronger this relation will turn out to be.[140]

The preface proves to be a suitable place to experiment with the truth. As I noted earlier, Nietzsche turns himself into the laboratory in which he carries out his experiment with truth. By re-reading his own books and in turn writing them new prefaces he discovers where his philosophy leads. The prefaces transform the books into a preliminary, so to speak; a preface to the experiment of a singular life. Nietzsche's texts that follow the

[138] For the difficulties of the preface in general and Hegel's preface to the *Phänomenologie* in particular, cf. Derrida 2004 (first chapter), Derrida 1972, and especially Hester IJsselling's excellent dissertation from 1997.
[139] Kierkegaard, *Prefaces* (1997, 3-13).
[140] Kierkegaard, *Unwissenschaftliche Nachschrift* (1976, 328ff.).

moment of this discovery, which are the texts that contain the term "nihilism", are the texts this experiment takes place in.

In his case, that experiment is called: "Nietzsche". In yours, reader, it is called:… This book was merely a preface.

APPENDIX A

NIETZSCHE'S TEXTS ON NIHILISM

When Nietzsche writes about nihilism, he almost always writes with a pathos that makes the seriousness and weight of the matter abundantly clear. But this does not take away from the fact that the term "nihilism" doesn't occur very often in Nietzsche's writing, especially not in the texts he prepared for publication himself.

In the current standard edition, the *Kritische Studienausgabe of the Sämtliche Werke* (KSA), translated by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, the words "nihilism", "nihilist" and "nihilistic" only appear in 168 pieces of text (that is to say: separately numbered paragraphs, aphorisms, or notes). There are an additional 8 letters or outlines of letters in which Nietzsche uses the term. In several texts the terms occur multiple times, so that all together we encounter them about 300 times: of which only some ten percent in the published works, the rest in unpublished notes. The concept "nihilism" is not very prominent in the published texts, but it is in many—though certainly not all—of the unpublished notes. This means that the majority of Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism were never published by him: they remained asides, attempts, sketches, and notes.

Moreover, the period of his thought in which he employs the concept "nihilism" is comparatively short. Almost all the texts that use the word originate from a time spanning from the middle of 1885 to the autumn of 1888: about three and a half years. It no longer appears in his final notes (Nietzsche descends into madness in January of 1889).

Counter to this limited role of the *term* "nihilism" however, is the fact that what Nietzsche is indicating by this term is sometimes signified by other words, of which at least some instances already occur at an earlier time, like "pessimism" or "romanticism", or terms that are interwoven with it, like "decadence" in his final period. I have presented an overview of the ways and periods in which the concept "nihilism" and related concepts appear in Nietzsche's writings in Chapter II.

In this appendix, the most important of Nietzsche's texts (at least for my purposes) on nihilism are brought together, beginning with ten texts from the *Nachlass*, in chronological order. The thematics of nihilism is

most explicitly present in these. I particularly selected those notes that contained a more or less systematic discussion and that—for this reason—have played important roles in the previous chapters. Appendix B contains a list with *all* occurrences of the word "nihilism" or a related form. After these ten texts from the *Nachlass* follow three aphorisms from the fifth book of *The Gay Science*. Though the word 'nihilism' hardly occurs at all, the aphorisms do deal with the thematics indicated by the term.

The texts from *The Gay Science* have been taken from Walter Kaufmann's translation. Due to the absence of a complete English translation of the *Nachlass*, the texts—when they were available at all—have been taken from various different translations. All existing translations have been modified, to a greater or lesser extent, on the basis of the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA), or—regarding the *Nachlass*—of the most recent editions of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke* (KGW), *Abteilung IX* (for the importance of this most recent addition to the KGW and for the difficulties of making use of the late Nachlass, see chapter III.1). Where there were no translated texts available I have provided them myself.

I.1 Nachlass

Text 1. Nihilism stands at the door

1885/1886 (NL 2 [127] 12.125-127) (Nietzsche 2003: *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, transl. Kate Sturge, 83-84)

Nihilism is standing at the gate: from where does this uncanniest of guests come to us?—

I. 1. Starting point: it is an *error* to point to 'social hardship' or 'physiological degeneration' and also corruption as the *cause* of nihilism., These can still be interpreted in very different ways. Instead, it's in a *very particular interpretation*, the Christian-moral one, that nihilism is found. This is the most respectable, sympathetic age. Distress—psychological, bodily, intellectual distress—alone is in any case not capable of bringing forth nihilism, i.e, the radical rejection of value, meaning, desirability, on its own

2. The collapse of Christianity—brought about by its morality (indissoluble from it—), which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, highly developed by Christianity, is *disgusted* at the falseness and mendacity of the whole Christian interpretation of world and history. A backlash from 'God is the

Truth' into the fanatical belief 'Everything is false'. Buddhism of the *deed*...

3. The decisive thing is scepticism towards morality. The collapse of the *moral* interpretation of the world, its *sanction* lost once it has tried to flee into a beyond: ending up in nihilism, 'everything is meaningless' (the impracticability of one interpretation of the world, one to which tremendous energies have been dedicated—arouses the suspicion that *all* interpretations of the world may be false—). Buddhist trait, longing for nothingness. (Indian Buddhism does *not* have a fundamentally moral development behind it, which is why in its nihilism there is only morality which hasn't been overcome: existence as punishment, existence as error combined; thus, error as punishment—a moral valuation). The philosophical attempts to overcome the 'moral God' (Hegel, pantheism). Overcoming the popular ideals: the sage. The saint. The poet. Antagonism of 'true' and 'beautiful' and 'good'——

4. Against 'meaninglessness' on the one hand, against moral value judgements on the other: to what extent all science and philosophy up to now were subjected to moral judgements? and whether making an enemy of science isn't part of the bargain? Or anti-scientism? Critique of Spinozism. Christian value judgements residually present everywhere in socialist and positivist systems. What lacks is a *critique of Christian morality*.

5. the nihilist consequences of the present-day natural science (as well as its attempts to slip away into the beyond). Its practice finally *results* in self-disintegration, a turn against *itself*, an anti-scientism. —Since Copernicus, man has been rolling from the centre towards x.

6. The nihilist consequences of the political and economic way of thinking where all 'principles' have gradually become affectations: the fragrance of mediocrity, meanness, insincerity, etc. Nationalism, anarchism, etc. Punishment. What is lacking is a *redeeming* class and man, the justifiers—

7. The nihilist consequences of historiography and of the *'practical* historians', i.e. of the Romantics. The position of art: absolute *un*-originality of its position in the modern world. Its growing darker. Goethe as so-called Olympian.

8. Art and the preparation of nihilism: romanticism (the end of Wagner's Nibelungen—).

Text 2. European Nihilism

1887 (NF 5[71] 12.211-217) (Nietzsche 2010-a: *The Nietzsche Reader* by Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, p. 385-389)

European Nihilism

Lenzer Heide 10 June 1887

1.

What *advantages* did the Christian morality hypothesis offer?

1) it conferred on man an absolute *value*, in contrast to his smallness and contingency in the flux of becoming and passing away

2) it served the advocates of God to the extent that, despite suffering and evil, it let the world have the character of *perfection*—including this "freedom"—and evil appeared full of *sense*

3) it assumed man possessed a *knowledge* [*Wissen*] of absolute values in man and thus gave him *adequate knowledge* [*Erkenntniss*] of precisely the most important thing

it prevented man from despising himself as man, from taking a position against life, from despairing of knowing [*Erkennen*]: it was a *means of preservation*;—in sum: morality was the great *antidote* against practical and theoretical *nihilism*.

2.

But among the forces nurtured by morality was *truthfulness*: *this* ultimately turns on morality, discovers its *teleology*, the *partiality* of its viewpoint—and now the *insight* into this long-ingrained mendacity, which one despairs of throwing off, acts precisely as a stimulus. To nihilism. We now notice in ourselves needs, implanted the by long-held morality interpretation, which now appear to us as needs to untruth: conversely it is on them that the value for which we bear to live seems to depend. This antagonism—*not* valuing what we know [*erkennen*], and no longer being *permitted* to value what we would like to hoodwink ourselves with—results in a disintegration process.

3.

In fact we no longer need an antidote against the *first* nihilism so much: life is no longer so uncertain, contingent, senseless in our Europe. Such an immense *multiplication* of the *value* of man, of the value of evil etc. is not so necessary now; we can stand a significant *reduction* in this value and

concede a good deal of nonsense, and chance: the *power* that man has achieved now permits a *reduction* in the disciplinary measures, of which the moral interpretation was the strongest. "God" is much too extreme a hypothesis.

4.

But extreme positions are replaced not by moderate ones, rather by equally extreme but *opposite* ones. And so the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in purposelessness and senselessness, is the psychologically necessary *affect* once belief in God and an essentially moral order can no longer be sustained. Nihilism now appears, *not* because aversion to existence is greater than before, but because people have begun to mistrust any "sense" in evil, even in existence. *One* interpretation has collapsed, but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it appears as though there is no sense in existence whatsoever, as though everything is *in vain.*

5.

It remains to be demonstrated that this 'in vain!' is the character of our present-day nihilism. Mistrust of our previous evaluations increases, leading to the question: 'aren't all "values" lures which allow the whole comedy to drag on without ever getting closer to a solution?' With an 'in vain,' with no aim or purpose, *duration* is the *most paralyzing* thought, especially when one realizes one is being duped but is powerless to prevent oneself being duped.

6.

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without sense or aim, but inevitably returning, without a finale in nothingness: 'the eternal return.'

This is the most extreme form of nihilism: nothingness (the "senseless") eternally!

European form of Buddhism: energy of matter [*Stoffes* and strength *forces* one into such a belief. It is the *most scientific* of all possible hypotheses. We deny final goals: if existence had one, it would have to have been reached.

7.

Thus we can understand that an antithesis to pantheism is being striven for here: since 'everything perfect, divine, eternal' forces one *likewise into a belief in the 'eternal recurrence.*' Query: has morality also made this pantheistic affirmation of all things become impossible? At bottom, after

all, only the moral God has been overcome. Does it make any sense to imagine a god 'beyond good and evil'? Would a pantheism in *this* sense be possible? If we remove finality from the process, can we *nevertheless* still affirm the process? —This would be the case if something within that process were being *achieved* at its every moment—and always the same.

Spinoza reached such an affirmative position, to the extent that every moment has a *logical* necessity: and with the logicality of his fundamental instinct he was triumphant over *such* a constitution of the world.

8.

But his case is just an individual case. *Every fundamental characteristic* at the basis of *every* event, as expressed in every event, would need to impel any individual who felt it was *his* fundamental characteristic to welcome triumphantly every moment of existence in general. It would need this fundamental characteristic in oneself to be felt precisely as a good, valuable, with pleasure.

9.

Now *morality* has protected life from despair and the leap into nothingness in the kind of people and classes who were violated and oppressed by *people* for it is powerlessness in the face of people, *not* powerlessness in the face of nature, that generates the most desperate embitterment against existence. Morality has treated the powerful, the violent, the 'masters' in general as the enemies against whom the common man must be protected, *i.e. first of all encouraged, strengthened.* Consequently morality has taught to *hate* and *despise* most profoundly what is the fundamental characteristic of the rulers: *their will to power*. To abolish, deny, break down this morality: that would mean providing the most hated drive with an *opposite* sensation and evaluation. If the sufferer, the oppressed man *lost his belief* in having a *right* to his contempt of the will to power, he would enter the stage of hopeless desperation. This would be the case if this trait were essential to life, if it turned out that even that 'will to morality' was just concealing this 'will to power', that even that hatred and contempt is still a power-will [*Machtwille*]. The oppressed man would realize that he is *in the same boat* as the oppressor and that he has no *prerogative* over him, no *higher status* than him.

10.

Rather *the other way around*! There is nothing about life that has value except the degree of power—assuming, of course, that life itself is the will to power. Morality protected from nihilism *those who turned out badly* by

granting *everyone* an infinite value, a metaphysical value, and placing them in an order which did not correspond to that of worldly power and hierarchy: it taught submissiveness, humility etc. *Provided that the belief in this morality collapses*, those who turned out badly would no longer have their consolation—and they would *perish*.

11.

This *perishing* presents itself as a—*self-ruination*, as an instinctive selection of that which *must destroy*. *Symptoms* of this self-destruction by those who turned out badly: self-vivisection, poisoning, intoxication, romanticism, above all the instinctive need for actions which make *deadly enemies* of the powerful (—as if one were breeding one's own executioners); the *will to destruction* as the will of an even deeper instinct, the instinct of self-destruction, of the *will into nothingness*.

12.

Nihilism as a symptom of the fact that those who turned out badly have no consolation left: that they destroy in order to be destroyed, that, relieved of morality, they no longer have any reason to 'surrender themselves'—that they position themselves on the territory of the opposing principle and *want power* for themselves, too, by *forcing* the powerful to be their executioners. This is the European form of Buddhism: *doing no,* after all existence has lost its 'sense'.

13.

It is not that "distress", for example, has got greater: on the contrary! "God, morality, submissivenesss" were remedies on terribly deep levels of misery: *active nihilism* appears when the conditions are, relatively speaking, much more favorably disposed. For morality to be felt to have been overcome already presupposes quite a degree of spiritual culture; this in turn presupposes relative prosperity. A certain spiritual fatigue, reaching the point of hopeless scepticism directed *against* philosophers as a result of the long struggle between philosophical opinions, likewise characterizes the by no means *lowly* standing of the nihilists. Think of the situation in which the Buddha appeared. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence would have *erudite* presuppositions (such as the teacher Buddha had, e.g. concept of causality etc.).

14.

Now what does 'turned out badly' mean? Above all *physiologically*: no longer politically. The *unhealthiest* kind of man in Europe (of all classes) is the ground of this nihilism: they will feel that belief in the eternal recurrence is a *curse* which, once you are struck by it, makes you no longer baulk at any action; not being passively extinguished, but *making* everything that is so senseless and aimless be extinguished: although it is only a spasm, a blind rage on realizing that everything has existed for eternities—including this moment of nihilism and lust for destruction. —The *VALUE of such a crisis* is that it *cleanses,* that it forces together related elements and makes them ruin each other, that it allocates common tasks to people of opposing mentalities—also bringing to light the weaker, more insecure among them and thus initiating *a hierarchy* of *forces* from the point of view of health: acknowledging commanders as commanders, obeyers as obeyers. At one remove from all existing social orders, of course.

15.

Who will prove to be the *strongest* in this? The most moderate, those who have no *need* of extreme dogmas, those who not only concede but love a good measure of chance and nonsense, those who can conceive of man with a significant reduction in his value without thereby becoming small and weak: the richest in health who can cope with the most misfortunes and so have no great fear of misfortunes—men who *are sure of their power* and represent with conscious pride the *achievement* of human strength.

16.

How would such a man think of the eternal recurrence? —

Text 3. Active and Passive Nihilism

1887 (NF 9 [35] 12.350-352) (Nietzsche 2003: *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, transl. Kate Sturge p. 146-147)

I. *Nihilism as a NORMAL condition*.

Nihilism: the goal is lacking; an answer to the 'Why?' is lacking. What does nihilism mean? —*That the highest values lost their value.*

It is *AMBIGUOUS*:

A)) Nihilism as a sign of the *increased power of the spirit:* as *ACTIVE NIHILISM.*

It may be a sign of *strength*: the force of the spirit may have grown so much that the goals it has had *so far* ('convictions', articles of faith) are no longer appropriate

—for a belief generally expresses the constraints of *conditions of existence*, submission to the authority of the circumstances under which a being *prospers, grows, gains in power*…

On the other hand a sign that one's strength is *insufficient* to productive *posit* for oneself a new goal, a 'Why?, a belief.

It achieves its *MAXIMUM* of relative force as a violent force of *DESTRUCTION*: *as active nihilism*. The opposite would be weary nihilism that no longer *attacks:* its most celebrated form Buddhism: as *passivist* nihilism.

Nihilism represents a pathological *intermediate state* (what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference *that there is no meaning at all*): whether because the productive forces are not yet strong enough or because decadence is still hesitating and has not yet invented the resources it needs.

B)) Nihilism as a *decline and retreat of the spirit's power: PASSIVE NIHILISM*:

as a sign of weakness: the force of the spirit may be wearied, *exhausted,* so that the goals and values that have prevailed *so far* are no longer appropriate and are no longer believed—

that the synthesis of values and goals (on which every strong culture rests) dissolves, so that the individual values wage war on each other: disintegration

that everything which revives, heals, soothes, benumbs comes to the fore in a variety of *disguises*: religious, or moral or political or aesthetic, etc.

2. *PRESUPPOSITION OF THIS HYPOTHESIS*

That there is no truth; that there is no absolute nature of things, no 'thing-in-itself'

—*this is itself a nihilism*, and indeed *the most extreme one*. It places the *value* of things precisely in the fact that *no* reality corresponds and has corresponded to that value, which is instead only a symptom of force on the part of the *value-positers,* a simplification *for the purposes of life*

Text 4. Let us reflect

1887 (NF 9 [60]12.364-367) (Nietzsche 1968: *The Will To Power*, transl. W. Kaufmann & R. Hollingdale, Section 585, pp. 316-319)

Unparalleled SELF-EXAMINATION: not becoming conscious of oneself as individual but as humankind. *Let us reflect, let us think back; let us follow the highways and byways*

A. Man seeks 'the truth': a world that is not in contradiction with itself, that does not deceive, does not change, a *true* world—a world in which one does not suffer. Contradiction, deception, change—causes of suffering! He does not doubt the existence of a world as it ought to be; he would like to seek out the road to it. (Indian critique: even the 'ego' as apparent, as *not*-real)

Whence does man here derive the concept *reality?* —

Why is it that he derives *suffering* from change, deception, contradiction? Why not rather his happiness?...—

The contempt, the hatred for all that perishes, changes, varies: — whence comes that valuation of what is permanent?

Apparently the will to truth here merely is the desire for a *world of the permanent*.

The senses deceive, reason corrects the errancies; consequently, it was concluded, reason is the road to the permanent; the *least sensory* ideas must be closest to the 'true world.' —It is from the senses that most misfortunes come—they are deceivers, deluders, destroyers:

Happiness can be guaranteed only by Being; change and happiness exclude one another. The highest desire is therefore directed at unification with Being. That is the *formula* for *road* to the highest happiness.

In summa: The world as it *ought* to be, exists; this world in which we live is an errancy, —this world of ours ought *not* to exist.

It transpires that belief in Being is but a consequence: the actual *primum mobile* is the disbelief in becoming, the mistrust of becoming, the disparaging of all that becomes.

What kind of man thinks like this? An unproductive *suffering kind*; a kind weary of life. If we were to imagine the opposite kind of man, it would not need to believe in what has Being; moreover, it would despise it, as dead, tedious, indifferent...

The belief that the world as it óught to be, also *is,* truly exists, is a belief of the unproductive, *who do not desire to create a world* as it ought

to be. They posit her as already available, they seek means and ways of reaching her. 'Will to *truth'—as impotence of the will to create*

recognising that something	
is so and so	antagonism in the gradation of power
acting so that something	of the different natures.
becomes so and so.	

Fiction of a world that corresponds to our desires: psychological artifice and interpretations to tie everything we revere and find pleasant to that *true world.*

'Will to truth' is at this level essentially *the art of interpretation;* which nevertheless requires the power of interpretation.

The same species of man, grown another degree *poorer*, *no longer in possession of the strength* to interpret, to create fictions, and we arrive at the *nihilist.* A nihilist is someone who is of the judgement that the world as it is, ought *not* to be, and that the world as it ought to be, does not exist. Thus existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no point: the pathos of the "in vain" is the pathos of the nihilist—as pathos at the same time an *inconsequence* of the nihilist

Whoever is not capable of laying his will into things, whoever is will-less and powerless, at the least still lays some *meaning* into them, that is to say the belief that there is already a will that must be working and willing in things

It is an indicator of *willpower* to what extent you can do without meaning in things, to what extent you can endure living in a meaningless world: *because you organize a small portion of it yourself.*

The *philosophical, objective outlook* can for this reason be a sign of the lack of will and power. For strength organizes what is adjacent and closest; 'the knowing' who desire only to *ascertain* what is, are people who cannot determine of anything *how it ought to be*.

Artists an intermediary kind: they at least capture an image of what ought to be—they are productive to the extent that they actually *apply changes* and transform things; unlike the knowing, who leave everything as it is.

Connection between the philosophers and the pessimistic religions: the same species of man (—they ascribe *the highest degree of reality to the most highly valued things* .

Connection between the philosophers and moral people and their measures of values. (The *moral* explanation of the world as **meaning**: after the decline of religious meaning—

Victory over the philosophers, by *destruction* of the world of Being: intermediary period of nihilism: before there is sufficient power to reverse

the values and to deify and approve becoming, the apparent world as the *only* world.

B. Nihilism as a normal phenomenon can be a symptom of increasing *strength* or of increasing *weakness*

partly, because the strength to *create*, to *will*, has so increased, that it no longer requires these global interpretations and attributions of *meaning* ('closer-lying tasks', the state etc.)

partly because even the creative power to create *meaning* has declined and disillusionment becomes the dominant condition.

The incapacity to *believe* in a 'meaning', the 'disbelief'

What *science* means in regard to both possibilities?

1) As indication of strength and self-control, as the *being able* to do without healing, comfort-filled worlds of illusion
2) as undermining, dissecting, disillusioning, weakening

C. The belief in the truth, the need to have a hold on something of which it is believed true: psychological reduction beyond all currently existing m feelings of value. Fear, laziness

—in the same way *disbelief:* reduction. To what extent it acquires a *new value* if a true world does not exist at all (this once more releases the value feelings that have hitherto been *squandered* on the world of Being)

Text 5. From pessimism to nihilism

1887 (NF 9 [107]12.396-398) (Nietzsche 1968: *The Will To Power*, transl. W. Kaufmann & R. Hollingdale, Sections 26, 35 and 37)

Development of *pessimism*
into nihilism.

Denaturalization of *values*. Scholasticism of values. Values, detached and idealistic, condemningly turn *against* action, instead of dominating and guiding it.

Opposites brought in and set in the place of natural degrees and ranks. Hatred against the order of rank. The oppositions suit a plebeian age, because they are easier to *apprehend*

The *rejected* world, in view of an artificially built 'true, valuable' one

Finally: one discovers from which material one has erected the 'true world': and now all one has left is the rejected world and *even ascribes this supreme disillusionment to its reprehensibility*

With this, *nihilism* makes its appearance: the *condemning values* are all that remain—and nothing else!

Here the *problem of strength and weakness* originates:

1. the weak perish of it
2. the stronger destroy that which does not perish
3. the strongest overcome the condemning judgments.

—together this constitutes the TRAGIC ERA

Contribution to the critique of pessimism

The 'predominance of *suffering over pleasure*' or the opposite (hedonism): these two doctrines are already signposts to n(ihilism), *nihilistic...*

for in both of these cases no other ultimate *meaning* is posited except the appearance of pleasure or displeasure.

But that is how a kind of person speaks that no longer dares to posit a will, a purpose, a *meaning*: —very healthy kind of man does absolutely not measure the value of life at the hand of of these trivialities. Moreover it may well be possible that with a *preponderance* of suffering there is *nevertheless* an instance of a mighty will, a *saying-yes* to life; a *requiring-of* this preponderance

'Life is not worth the effort; 'resignation'; 'why the tears?..' —a weak and sentimental way of thinking. 'Un monstre gai vaut mieux qu'un sentimental ennuyeux' ['A gay monster is worth more than a sentimental bore'.*"* Voltaire (our translation)]

The pessimism of the decision makers: the 'wherefore' after a terrible struggle, even after gaining a victory. That there is something a hundred times *more important* than the question of whether *we* feel good or bad: basic instinct of all strong natures—and consequently also whether *others* feel well or not. In sum, that we have a *goal* for which one does not hesitate to offer *human sacrifices*, to risk every danger, to take upon oneself whatever is painful and most painful: the *great passion*.

Text 6. Nihilism as a psychological state

1887/1888 (NF 11[99] 13.46-49) (Nietzsche 2003: *Writings from the Late Notebooks,* transl. Kate Sturge, p. 217-219)

Critique of nihilism. —

1.

Nihilism as a *psychological state* will have to come about *firstly* when we have sought in everything that happens a 'meaning' it doesn't contain, so

that in the end the searcher loses courage. Nihilism is then the becoming conscious of the long *squandering* of our strength, the torment of the 'in vain', the uncertainty, the lack of opportunity somehow to recuperate, to calm oneself about something—being ashamed towards oneself as if one had *deceived* oneself for far too long… That *meaning* might have been: the 'fulfilment' of a highest canon of morality in all that happens in the moral order of the world; or increasing love and harmony in the interaction of beings, or coming closer to a general state of happiness; or even setting off on the path to a general state of nothingness—any goal is still a meaning. What all these kinds of ideas share is that the process aims to *achieve* something: —and now it is realised that becoming aims for *nothing*, achieves *nothing*... Hence, disappointment about a supposed *purpose of becoming* as a cause of nihilism whether in regard to a particular purpose, or, more generally, realizing the inadequacy of all those hypotheses of purpose up to now which have concerned the whole of 'evolution' (—man *no longer* a collaborator in, let along the centre of becoming)

Nihilism as a psychological state comes about *secondly* when a *wholeness,* a *systematisation*, even an *organisation* has been posited within and below everything that happens: so that the soul, hungering to admire and revere, now feasts in the total idea of a supreme form of dominion and administration (—in the case of logician's soul, absolute consistency and objective dialectic alone are enough to reconcile it to everything…). Some kind of unity, any form of 'monism': and as a result of this belief, man feels deeply connected with and dependent on a whole that is infinitely superior to him, a mode of the deity … 'The well-being of the whole demands the sacrifice of the individual'… but behold, there *is* no such whole! At bottom, man has lost his belief in his own value if he ceases to be the vehicle for an infinitely valuable whole: i.e, he conceived of such a whole *in order to be able to believe in his own value*.

Nihilism as a psychological state has a *third* and *last* form. Given these two *insights*, that becoming does not aim to achieve anything and that all becoming is not governed by a great unity in which the individual could submerge himself as in an element of supreme value—given these, there remains an *escape*: to condemn this whole world of becoming as a deception, and to invent a world that lies beyond it as the *true* world. But as soon as man realizes how that other world is merely assembled out of psychological needs and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism arises, one which include *disbelief in any metaphysical world* —which forbids itself belief in a *true* world. Having arrived at this standpoint, one admits that the reality of becoming is the *only* reality,

forbids oneself every kind of secret route to worlds beyond and false divinities—but *cannot endure this world which one yet does not want to deny*...

—What, at bottom, has happened? The feeling of *valuelessness* was reached on understanding that neither the concept of '*purpose'*, nor the concept of *'unity'*, nor the concept of *'truth'* may be used to interpret the total character of existence. Nothing is aimed for and achieved with it, there is no overarching unity in the diversity of events; the character of existence is not 'true', is *false*...., one simply no longer has any reason to talk oneself into there being a true world…

In short: the categories 'purpose', 'unity', 'being', by means of which we put a value into the world, we now *extract* again—and now the world looks valueless…

2.

Assuming we have recognised how the world may no longer be *interpreted* with these *three* categories and that upon this recognition the world begins to be without value for us: then we must ask *where* our belief in these three categories comes from—let us see if it isn't possible to cancel our belief in *them*. Once we have *devaluated* these three categories, demonstrating that they can't be applied to the universe *ceases to be a reason to devaluate the universe*.

***

Result: *belief in the categories of reason* is the cause of nihilism, —we have measured the value of the world against categories *that refer to a purely invented world.*

***

Final result: all the values by means of which up to now we first tried to make the world estimable to us and with which, once they proved inapplicable, we then *devaluated* it—all these values are, calculated psychologically, the results of particular perspectives of usefulness for the preservation and enhancement of human formations of rule, and only falsely *projected* into the essence of things. It's still the *hyperbolic naivety* of man, positing himself as the meaning of things and the measure of their value…

Text 7. I describe what is to come

1887/1888 (NF 11 [119] 13.56f.) (our transl.)

For the preface.

I describe what is to come: the rise of nihilism. I can describe here, because something necessary is taking place here: its signs are everywhere, only the *eyes* for those signs are missing. I praise, I object not *that* it is to come: I believe that one of the biggest *crises* is now taking place, a moment of humankind's utter self-reflection, if he will come out on top, if he will get the better of this crisis, that is a question of his strength: it is *possible*...

for the time being modern man believes now in this, then in that *value*, in order to subsequently discard it again: the chain of surviving and dismissed values becomes ever longer; the *void* and the *lack of values* becomes ever-more tangible; the motion is unstoppable—although there have been attempts in grand style to delay the development—

Finally he ventures a critique of values in general; he knows their origins; he knows enough to not believe in any value; *pathos* is there, the new trepidation…

What I am telling is the story of the coming two centuries...

Text 8. History of European Nihilism

1887/1888 (NF 11 [150] 13.71) (Nietzsche 1968: *The Will to Power*, transl. W. Kaufmann & R. Hollingdale section 56, p. 39)

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF
EUROPEAN NIHILISM

The period of UNCLARITY, of all sorts of efforts to conserve the old and not letting go of the new.

The period of CLARITY: one *understands* that the old and the new are fundamentally opposed: the old values born of the declining and the new ones of the ascending life—<that> knowledge of nature and history no longer permits us such 'hope',

—that *all old ideals* are ideals hostile to life (born of decadence and determinants of decadence, no matter how beautifully clothed in morality's Sunday best)—we *understand* the old and are far from strong enough for something new.

The period of **the three great affects**

of contempt
of pity
of destruction
The period of **catastrophe**
the advent of a doctrine that *sifts* men…
that drives the weak to decisions, and does the same with the strong

Text 9. The history of the next two centuries

1887/1888 (NF 11 [411] 13.189f.) (Nietzsche 1968: *The Will to Power*, transl. W. Kaufmann & R. Hollingdale, Preface, p. 3-4)

Preface.

1.

Great things demand that one must either be silent or speak with greatness: with greatness—that means cynically and with innocence.

2.

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism*. This history can be related even now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now from a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving with a torturing tension that is growing by the decade as if toward a catastrophe: restlessly, violently, at a terrific speed, like a river that wants to reach *its final point*, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.

3.

—Whosoever speaks here, conversely, has done nothing so far but *reflect*: as philosopher and solitary by instinct, who found it in his advantage to stand aside, to remain outside, to practice patience, to procrastinate, to stay behind; as a spirit of adventuring and pioneering that has already lost its way once in every labyrinth of the future; as a soothsayer bird-spirit who *looks back* when relating what will come; as the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the final pointof nihilism, to the end, who has it behind, outside, beneath himself…

4.

For one should not misjudge the meaning of the title that this gospel of the future is to receive. '*The Will to Power*: Attempt to revaluate all values'—with this formula a *countermovement* is brought to expression, regarding both principle and task; a movement that in some future will take the place of that perfect nihilism; but that does presuppose it, logically and psychologically, and certainly can come only *after* and *out* of it. For why has the advent of nihilism become *necessary* from now on? Because the values we have hitherto held draw their final consequence in it themselves; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must first experience nihilism before we can find out what value these 'values' really had... We require, at some point, *new values*...

Text 10. Advent and self-overcoming of nihilism

1888 (NF 13[4] 132.215) (our translation)

A. *Concerning the rise of nihilism.*
1. 'Truth'. On the value of truth. Belief in truth. —Decline of this highest value. Summary of everything that has been done to counter it.
2. Decline of every kind of belief.
3. Decline of all ruling types

B. *Concerning the necessity of nihilism.*
4. Provenance of the values held highest up till now.
5. What moralists and moral systems mean.
6. Contribution to a critique of the aesthetic values.

C. Concerning the self-overcoming of nihilism.
7. The will to power: psychological meditation.
8. The will to power: physiological meditation.
9. The will to power: historical-sociological meditation.

D. The conquerors and the conquered.
10. Concerning the privilege of the very few.
11. The hammer: doctrine of eternal recurrence.
12. Concerning the order of values.

Every book 150 pages.
Every chapter 50

I.2 From *The Gay Science,* book 5 (1887)

Text 11. GS 346, 3.579-581

Our question mark. — But you do not understand this? Indeed, people will have trouble understanding us. We are looking for words; perhaps we are also looking for ears. Who are we anyway? If we simply called ourselves, using an old expression, godless, or unbelievers, or perhaps immoralists, we do not believe that this would even come close to designating us: We are all three in such an advanced stage that one—that *you*, my curious friends—could never comprehend how we feel at this point. Ours is no longer the bitterness and passion of the person who has torn himself away and still feels compelled to turn his unbelief into a new belief, a purpose, a martyrdom. We have become cold, hard, and tough in the realization that the way of this world is anything but divine; even by human standards it is not rational, merciful, or just. We know it well, the world in which we live is ungodly, immoral, "inhuman"—we have interpreted it far too long in a false and mendacious way, in accordance with the wishes of our reverence, which is to say, according to our *needs*. For man is a reverent animal. But he is also mistrustful: and that the world is *not* worth what we thought it was, that is about as certain as anything of which our mistrust has finally got hold. The more mistrust, the more philosophy. We are far from claiming that the world is worth *less*: indeed it would seem laughable to us today if man were to insist on inventing values that were supposed to *excel* the value of the actual world, —this is precisely what we have turned our backs on as an extravagant aberration of human vanity and unreason that for a long time was not recognized as such. It found its final expression in modern pessimism, and a more ancient and stronger expression in the teaching of Buddha; but it is part of Christianity also, if more doubtfully and ambiguously so but not for that reason any less seductive. The whole pose of "man *against* the world,', of man as a "world-negating" principle, of man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting—the monstrous insipidity of this pose has finally come home to us and we are sick of it, —we laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition of "man *and* world," separated by the sublime presumption of the little word "and"! But look! When we laugh like that, have we not simply carried the contempt for man one step further? And thus also pessimism, the contempt for that existence which is knowable by *us*? Have we not exposed ourselves to the suspicion of an opposition, an opposition between the world in which we were at home up to now with our reverences—that perhaps made it possible for us to *endure* life—and

another world that *consists of us*. This inexorable, fundamental, and deepest suspicion about ourselves that is more and more gaining worse and worse control of us Europeans and that could easily confront coming generations with the terrifying Either/Or: “Either abolish your reverences or—*yourselves*!" The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be—nihilism? —This is *our* question mark.

Text 12. GS 347, 3.581-583

Believers and their need to believe. —How much one needs a *faith* in order to flourish, how much that is “firm" and that one does not wish to be shaken because one *clings* to it, —that is a measure of the degree of one's strength (or, to put the point more clearly, of one's weakness). Christianity, it seems to me, is still needed by most people in old Europe even today; therefore it still finds believers. For this is how man is: An article of faith could be refuted before him a thousand times—if he needed it, he would consider it “true” again and again, in accordance with that famous "'proof of strength" of which the Bible speaks. Metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is that impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form. The demand that one *wants* by all means that something should be firm (while on account of the ardor of this demand one is easier and more negligent about the demonstration of this certainty): this, too, is still the demand for a support, a prop, in short, that *instinct of weakness* which, to be sure, does not create religious, metaphysical systems, and convictions of all kinds but—conserves them. Actually, what is steaming around all of these positivistic systems is the vapor of a certain pessimistic gloom, something that smells of weariness, fatalism, disappointment, and fear of new disappointments—or else ostentatious wrath, a bad mood, the anarchism of indignation, and whatever other symptoms and masquerades of the feeling of weakness there may be. Even the vehemence with which our most intelligent contemporaries lose themselves in wretched nooks and crannies, for example, into patriotism (I mean what the French call chauvinisme and the Germans "German") or into petty aesthetic creeds after the manner of French naturalisme (which drags up and bares only that part of nature which inspires nausea and simultaneous amazement—today people like to call this part La verite vraie—) or into nihilism á la Petersburg (meaning the *belief in unbelief* even to the point of martyrdom) always manifests above all the *need* for a faith, a support, backbone, something to fall back on. Faith is always coveted most and needed most urgently where will is lacking: for will, as the affect of command, is the

decisive sign of sovereignty and strength. In other words, the less one knows how to command, the more urgently one covets someone who commands, who commands severely—a god, prince, class physician, father confessor, dogma, or party conscience. From this one might perhaps gather that the two world religions, Buddhism and Christianity, may have owed their origin and above all their sudden spread to a tremendous collapse and *disease of the will*. And that is what actually happened: both religions encountered a situation in which the will had become diseased, giving rise to a demand that had become utterly desperate for some “thou shalt." Both religions taught fanaticism in ages in which the will had become exhausted, and thus they offered innumerable people some support, a new possibility of willing, some delight in willing. For fanaticism is the only "strength of the will”, that even the weak and insecure can be brought to attain, being a sort of hypnotism of the whole system of the senses and the intellect for the benefit of an excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling that henceforth becomes dominant—which the Christian calls his *faith*. Once a human being reaches the fundamental conviction that he must be commanded, he becomes a “believer”; conversely, one could conceive of such a pleasure and power of self-determination, such a *freedom* of the will that the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence.

Text 13. GS 370, 3.619-622

(additions in [ ] for the purpose of the explanation on pp. 77-87)

What is romanticism? —[1] It may perhaps be recalled, at least among my friends, that initially I approached the modern world with a few crude errors and overestimations and, in any case, *hopefully*. I understood—who knows on the basis of what personal experiences? —the philosophical pessimism of the nineteenth century as if it were a symptom of a superior force of thought, of more audacious courage, and of more triumphant *fullness* of life than had characterized the eighteenth century, the age of Hume, Kant, Condillac, and the sensualists. Thus tragic insight appeared to me as the distinctive *luxury* of our culture, as its most precious, noblest, and most dangerous squandering, but, in view of its over-richness, as a *permissible* luxury. In the same way, I reinterpreted German music for myself as if it signified a Dionysian power of the German soul: I believed

that I heard in it the earthquake through which some primeval force that had been dammed up for ages finally liberated itself—indifferent whether everything else that one calls culture might begin to tremble. You see, what I failed to recognize at that time both in philosophical pessimism and in German music was what is really their distinctive character—their *romanticism*. [2] What is romanticism? [2a] Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. [2b-1] But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *overfullness of life,* they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight; —and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life* and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemptiom [*sic*] from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness. All romanticism in art and insight corresponds to the dual needs of the *latter type*, and that included (and includes) Schopenhauer as well as Richard Wagner, to name the two most famous and pronounced romantics whom I *misunderstood* at that time—*not*, incidentally, to their disadvantage, as one need not hesitate in all fairness to admit. He that is richest in the fullness of life, the Dionysian god and man, cannot only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable but even the terrible deed and any luxury of destruction, decomposition, and negation. In his case, what is evil, absurd, and ugly seems, as it were, permissible, owing to an excess of procreating, fertilizing energies that can still turn any desert into lush farmland. Conversely, those who suffer most and are poorest in life would need above all mildness, peacefulness, and goodness in thought as well as deed, if possible, also a god who would be truly a god for the sick, a healer and savior; also logic, the conceptual understandability of existence—for logic calms and gives confidence—in short, a certain warm narrowness that keeps away fear and encloses one in optimistic horizons. Thus I gradually learned to understand Epicurus, the opposite of a Dionysian pessimist; also the "Christian" who is actually only a kind of Epicurean; both are essentially romantics. —And my eye grew ever sharper for that most difficult and captious form of *backward inference* in which the most mistakes are made—the backward inference from the work to the maker, from the deed to the doer, from the ideal to those who *need it*, from every way of thinking and valuing to the commanding need behind it. —Regarding all aesthetic values I now avail myself of this main distinction: I ask in every instance, "is it hunger or super-abundance that has here become creative?" [2b-2] At first glance, another distinction may seem preferable—it is far more obvious—namely the question whether the desire to fix, to immortalize, the desire for *being*

prompted creation, or the desire for destruction. For change, for future, for *becoming*. [2c] But both of these kinds of desire are seen to be ambiguous when one considers them more closely; they can be interpreted in accordance with the first scheme that is, as it seems to me, preferable. The desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, "Dionysian"); but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, *must* destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them. —To understand this feeling, consider our anarchists closely. The will to *immortalize* also requires a dual interpretation. It can be prompted, first) by gratitude and love; —art with this origin will always be an art of apotheoses, perhaps dithyrambic like Rubens, or blissfully mocking like Hafiz, or bright and gracious like Goethe, spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things. But it can also be the tyrannic will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and would like to turn what is most personal, singular, and narrow, the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion—one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing *his own* image, the image of *his* torture, on them, branding them with it. This last version is *romantic pessimism* in its most expressive form, whether it be Schopenhauer's philosophy of will or Wagner's music—romantic pessimism, the last *great* event in the fate of our culture. [3] (That there still *could* be an altogether different kind of pessimism, a classical type—this premonition and vision belongs to me as inseparable from me, as my proprium and ipsissimum; only the word "classical" offends my ears, it is far too trite and has become round and indistinct. I call this pessimism of the future—for it comes! I see it coming! —*Dionysian* pessimism.)

APPENDIX B

TEXTS CONTAINING THE TERM "NIHILI*"

The following list contains all the texts that include the terms that are central to this book. First are the texts from published works, in the order in which they have been published; then follow the texts from the posthumous fragments in chronological order. All references are to the KSA (work section volume.page). For the published works a reference to the English title is added between brackets. The texts from the posthumous notes are accompanied by a reference that gives: section-number, KSA-volume and page-number. Volume 9 contains the notes from 1880 and 1881, volume 10 those from 1882, volume 11 the ones from 1884 and 1885, volume 12 notes from 1885 until 1887 and volume 13 the notes from 1887 and 1888. Finally, the occurrences in Nietzsche's letters are listed with references to addressee, date, and volume- and page number in the KSB.

Published Writings

work section volume.page	**exact wording**
GT Versuch 7 1.21 (BT Attempt 7)	Nihilismus
FW 346 3.581 (GS 346)	Nihilismus (2x)
FW 347 3.582 (GS 347)	Nihilismus
JGB 10 5.23 (BGE 10)	Nihilismus
JGB 208 5.137 (BGE 208)	Ein neuentdecktes russisches Nihilin
GM Vorrede 5 5.252 (GM preface 5)	Nihilismus
GM I.12 5.278 (GM I.12)	Nihilismus
GM II.12 5.316 (GM II.12)	Spencers…administrativen Nihilismus
GM II.21 5.331 (GM II.21)	Nihilistische Abkehr
GM II.24 5.336 (GM II.24)	Nihilismus, Antinihilist

GM III.4 5.344 (GM III.4)	Nihilistisch
GM III.14 5.368 (GM III.14)	Nihilismus
GM III.24 5.398 (GM III.24)	Nihilisten
GM III.26 5.406 (GM III.26)	Nihilistisch, Nihilisten
GM III.27 5.408 (GM III.27)	Europäischen Nihilismus
GM III.28 5.411 (GM III.28)	Nihilismus
Wa Nachschrift 6.43 (CW Epilogue)	nihilistischen
GD, Sprüche 34 6.64 (TI Maxims 34)	Nihilist
GD Streifzüge 21 6.125 (TI Skirmishes 21)	nihilistischen (2x)
GD Streifzüge 32 6.131 (TI Skirmishes 32)	Nihilist
GD Streifzüge 50 6.152 (TI Skirmishes 50)	nihilistisches
AC 6 6.172 (A 6)	nihilistische
AC 7 6.173 (A 7)	nihilistisch, Nihilismus
AC 9 6.176 (A 9)	nihilistische
AC 11 6.177 (A 11)	Nihilist
AC 20 6.186 (A 20)	nihilistische
AC 58 6.247 (A 58)	Nihilist
EH Bücher GT 1 6.300 (EH Books BT 1)	Nihilisten
EH Bücher GT 1 6.310 (EH Books BT 1)	nihilistisch
EH Bücher GT 2 6.311 (EH Books BT 2)	Nihilisten

Posthumous Notes

4[103] 9.125	Nihilisten
4[108] 9.127	Russischen Nihilisten, Nihilisten
12[57] 9.586	Nihilism
2[4] 10.43	Nihilismus
25[264] 11.80	Nihilisten
25[281] 11.83	Nihilisten
26[335] 11.238	Russische Nihilisten
27[23] 11.281	Nihilismus
32[22] 11.418	nihilistische katastrophe
34[204] 11.490	nihilistischen Religion, Nihilisten
35[82] 11.547	Nihilismus
2[100] 12.109	Nihilismus & nihilistischen
2[101] 12.111	Nihilismus
2[113] 12.118	nihilistischen
2[118] 12.120	Nihilismus
2[122] 12.122	Nihilismus
2[127] 12.125	Nihilismus (7x), nihilistischen (3x)
2[131] 12.129	Nihilismus (5x), nihilistischer
5[50] 12.201	Nihilismus
5[57] 12.206	Nihilismus
5[70] 12.210	Nihilismus
5[71] 12.211	europäische Nihilismus, Nihilismus (11x), Nihilisten
5[75] 12.218	europäischen Nihilismus
5[97] 12.225	europäische Nihilismus
6[26] 12.243	europäischen Nihilismus (2x)
7[8] 12.291	Nihilismus (7x), nihilistische
7[31] 12.306	Nihilismus
7[43] 12.309	Nihilismus
7[54] 12.312	Nihilismus
7[61] 12.315	Nihilismus
7[64]12.318	europäische Nihilismus, Nihilismus (2x)
8[1] 12.323	Nihilism
9[1] 12.339	europäischen Nihilismus

9[35] 12.350	Nihilism (11x)
9[39] 12.353	Nihilism
9[41] 12.354	Nihilism (2x)
9[43] 12.355	Nihilism
9[44] 12.357	Nihilism, Nihilisten
9[60] 12.364	Nihilisten (2x), Nihilist, Nihilisten-Pathos, Nihilismus, Nihilism
9[62] 12.368	Nihilisirung
9[82] 12.377	nihilistische Katastrophe
9[83] 12.377	Nihilismus
9[84] 12.378	Nihilistische
9[95] 12.388	Nihilism
9[107] 12.396	Nihilism (2x), Nihilistisch
9[110]12.398	Nihilism
9[123] 12.407	Nihilisten, Nihilist (2x)
9[126] 12.409	Nihilism
9[127] 12.410	Nihilismus (3x)
9[164] 12.432	Nihilismus (2x)
9[179] 12.443	Nihilismus
9[186] 12.449	Nihilism
10[22] 12.468	nihilistische, Nihilism
10[42] 12.476	Nihilism (2x), Nihilismus
10[43] 12.476	Nihilist, Nihilisten
10[52] 12.481	Nihilism, nihilistische
10[58] 12.490	Nihilism (2x)
10[132] 12.531	Nihilismus
10[150] 12.539	Nihilism
10[168] 12.555	nihilistisch
10[192] 12.571	Nihilismus (2x)
11[10] 13.12	Nihilisten
11[97] 13.45	Nihilist (2x)
11[99] 13.46	Nihilism (2x), Nihilismus (6x)
11[108] 13.51	Nihilismus, Nihilisten-Glaube
11[119] 13.56	Nihilismus
11[123] 13.59	Nihilismus, Nihilism, Nihilist

11[149] 13.70	Nihilismus
11[150] 13.71	europäischen Nihilismus
11[228] 13.89	Nihilismus
11[229] 13.90	Nihilisten
11[280] 13.106	Nihilist
11[326] 13.138	Nihilismus
11[327] 13.139	Nihilisten
11[328] 13.140	Nihilismus, Nihilisten & europäischen Nihilism
11[332] 13.142	Nihilisten (2x)
11[335] 13.144	Nihilismus
11[341] 13.147	Nihilist, Nihilisten
11[361] 13.159	Nihilismus
11[370] 13.166	nihilistische
11[371] 13.166	nihilistische
11[372] 13.167	nihilistische
11[373] 13.167	nihilistischen
11[379] 13.178	Nihilist
11[411] 13.189	Nihilismus (5x), Nihilist, Nihilism
12[1] 13.195	Nihilismus (12x), Nihilism (3x), nihilistisches, Nihilisten, Nihilist
12[2] 13.211	Nihilismus
13[1] 13.213	Nihilismus
13[2] 13.213	Nihilismus
13[3] 13.214	europäischen Nihilism
13[4] 13.215	Nihilismus (3x)
14[6] 13.220	christlich-nihilistische
14[9] 13.221	Nihilismus (4x) & Nihilism
14[10] 13.222	nihilistische
14[13] 13.223	nihilistischen Religionen (2x)
14[17] 13.225	antinihilistische
14[24] 13.229	Nihilismus
14[25] 13.229	nihilistischen Religionen, nihilistisch
14[29] 13.231	Nihilist
14[32] 13.234	nihilistische

14[74] 13.255	Nihilismus
14[86] 13.264	Nihilism
14[91] 13.267	nihilistischen
14[94] 13.271	Nihilismus
14[99] 13.276	nihilistischer
14[100] 13.278	Nihilisten
14[114] 13.291	europäischen Nihilismus, nihilistisch
14[135] 13.319	nihilistischen Religionen
14[137] 13.321	nihilistischen Religionen, nihilistischen Werthe
14[156] 13.340	nihilistisches Abzeichen
14[169] 13.355	Nihilismus
14[174] 13.360	nihilistischen Religionen
14[182] 13.365	Nihilismus
14[227] 13.398	nihilistisch
15[10] 13.409	Nihilismus
15[13] 13.412	Nihilismus
15[16] 13.415	Nihilist
15[32] 13.427	Nihilismus
15[44] 13.438	Nihilsten
16[30] 13.491	Nihilismus
16[32] 13.492	Nihilismus
16[51] 13.503	Nihilismus
16[72] 13.509	Nihilismus
16[77] 13.511	nihilistische
17[1] 13.519	nihilistischen Bewegung, nihilistische Fälschung
17[3] 13.520	antinihilistische & Nihilismus
17[4] 13.523	Nihilistische
17[6] 13.527	Nihilismus
17[7] 13.528	nihilistische Instinkt, nihilistischen Tendenz, Nihilismus
17[8] 13.529	Nihilismus
17[9] 13.529	Nihilist
18[8] 13.534	Nihilist
18[17] 13.537	Europäischen Nihilismus

19[8] 13.545	nihilistischen
22[3] 13.585	nihilistische Denkungsweise
22[14] 13.589	nihilistischen
22[24] 13.594	Nihilismus (3x)
23[3] 13.601	nihilistische
23[13] 13.613	nihilistischer

Letters

Heinrich Köselitz 13-3-1881, 6.68	"herzbrecherische Nihilismus"
Franz Overbeck 24-3-1887, 8.48	Nihilisten
Erwin Rohde 23-5-1887, 8.81	drei gründliche Nihilisten
Heinrich Köselitz 8-9-1887, 8.144	Nihilismus
Heinrich Köselitz 10-11-1887, 8.192	Nihilismus
Georg Brandes 27-3-1888, 8.278f.	Nihilist
Elisabeth Förster 31-3-1888, 8.281	Deinen philosophisch-nihilistischen Nichtsnutz von Bruder
Carl Fuchs 30-6-1888, 8.346	"Nihilist"

APPENDIX C

NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Nietzsche's texts are generally cited from an English translation. Existing translations have been used for the texts Nietzsche himself had published—they are given in the bibliography. There is no complete translation for the posthumous fragments in existence, but the parts that have been translated have been consulted where possible. However, I have consistently made corrections to all texts on the basis of a comparison with the German edition of the 2001ff. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden. München/Berlin: DTV/de Gruyter 1980* (KSA), or, where necessary, of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke (KGW),* especially *Abteilung IX: Der handschriftliche Nachlaß ab Frühjahr 1885 in differenzierter Transkription. Herausgegeben von Marie-Luise Haase und Michael Kohlenbach. Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter*, available online at Nietzsche-Online since 2010 (http://www.degruyter.com/view/db/nietzsche). In the posthumous fragments this sometimes leads to significant changes. In the case of the published works the corrections are usually limited to removing paragraphs that Nietzsche didn't make, and providing italics where Nietzsche had underlined words.

When referring to Nietzsche's texts the following sigla are used, listed here in alphabetical order according to the English titles, with inclusion of the German title and the year of publication or completion. In the text, the indication of the relevant book is generally followed by the aphorism's number and the page number of the translation that was used. Texts from the posthumously published fragments also include the number of the volume and the page number in the KSA.

A	The Antichrist (Der Antichrist. Fluch auf das Christenthum 1888/1895)
AOM	"Assorted Opinions and Maxims" (Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche (1879, in 1886 as the first part of HH II)
BGE	Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft 1886)

BT	The Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik 1872)
CW	The Case of Wagner (Der Fall Wagner. Ein Musikanten-Problem 1888)
D	Daybreak (Morgenröthe. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurtheile 1881)
DD	Dionysian-Dithyrambs (Dionysos-Dithyramben 1889)
EH	Ecce Homo. (Ecce Homo. Wie man wird, was man ist 1888/1908)
GM	On the Genealogy of Morals (Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift 1887)
GS	The Gay Science (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft 1882/1887)
HH	Human, All Too Human (Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. 1878/1886) Volume II of HH has two parts: AOM and WS
KGW	Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Begr. von Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari. Fortgef. von V. Gerhardt, N. Miller, W. Müller-Lauter & K. Pestalozzi. Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1967ff.
KSA	Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden. Hrsg. von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, München/Berlin: DTV/de Gruyter 1980.
KSB	Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden. Hrsg. von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, München/Berlin: DTV/de Gruyter 1986.
NcW	Nietzsche contra Wagner. (Nietzsche contra Wagner. Aktenstücke eines Psychologen 1889)
NF	Nachgelassene Fragmente. The numbers following the siglum respectively refer to the number of the relevant note and the number of the volume and pagenumber in the KSA. (NL 2[127] 12.125 = note 2[127] in volume 12, page 125 of KSA).
P	Prefaces to Unwritten Works (Fünf Vorreden zu fünf ungeschriebenen Büchern 1872)
ST	Socrates and Tragedy (Socrates und die Tragödie 1870)
TI	Twilight of the Idols (Götzendämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt 1888)
TL	On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense (Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne 1873)
UM	Untimely Meditations (Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I t/m IV
UM I	David Strauss (David Strauss der Bekenner und Schriftsteller 1873)

UM II On the Use and Disadvantage of History (Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben 1874)
UM III Schopenhauer as Educator (Schopenhauer als Erzieher 1874)
UM IV Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (Richard Wagner in Bayreuth 1876)
WP The Will to Power (selection from the unpublished notes from between 1883 and 1888, Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe 1906/1911)
WS The Wanderer and his Shadow (Der Wanderer und sein Schatten (1880, in 1886 als tweede deel van HH II)
Z Thus spoke Zarathustra (Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen 1883-1885)

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