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Dennis Vanden Auweele

EXCEEDING REASON

FREEDOM AND RELIGION IN SCHELLING AND NIETZSCHE

NEW STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

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EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 2/12/2023 7:07 AM via
AN: 2[illegible]17 ; Dennis Vanden Auweele.; Exceeding Reason : Freedom and Religion in Schelling and Nietzsche
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Dennis Vanden Auweele

Exceeding Reason

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New Studies in the History and Historiography of Philosophy

Edited by
Gerald Hartung and Sebastian Luft

Volume 6

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ISBN 978-3-11-061775-7
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-061811-2
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-061845-7
ISSN 2364-3161

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020941885

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

© 2020 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston
Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

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Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings

Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey (1798)
William Wordsworth

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To Joleen
who is joyful, kind
and full of blessings

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Acknowledgments

Schelling and Nietzsche make their readers work for it. Extensive and sustained attention to their work allows one to listen in on an edifying monologue. This can be addicting: one more page, one more thought! Sometimes there is more truth in one page, even one line, of Schelling or Nietzsche than in some of the voluminous books of their contemporaries. After I felt I had come to a good understanding of their thought, I needed to turn those monologues into a dialogue. This was my greatest challenge yet, and this book is my very attempting of that: a dialogue on the topics of freedom, reason and religion between Schelling and Nietzsche. I hope to have done right by both Fritz's.

That undertaking proved ambitious, perhaps even arrogant. This was especially so since I was also looking for a new way of doing metaphysics. I felt blessed by meetings with philosophers that suffered my arrogance and did not mind entertaining the possibility for a congenial encounter between Schelling and Nietzsche. I would be remiss if I did not mention my conversations with William Desmond, Henning Tegtmeyer, Agata Bielik-Robson, Jason Wirth, Jonathan Head and Yu Xia. Some of these chapters were presented at various conferences where they met with sporty opposition. I want to thank in particular the organizers and attendees of various conferences organized by the Friedrich Nietzsche Society, the UK Nietzsche Society and the Nietzsche Gesellschaft. I've had some of the most enlightening discussions on German idealism at the conference 'The Philosophy of Negation: The Concept of the Negative in Classical German Philosophy', organized by Gregory Moss. I am particularly grateful to Agata Bielik-Robson for hosting and engaging me at the University of Nottingham, where I managed to push this book forward like never before.

Reading such existentially-engaging authors has its inherent dangers. One loses oneself so very easily. Schelling and Nietzsche kept battling it out in my head long after I put down their books. The gentle grace and loving patience of dear Joleen unfailingly brought me back. I sing a song in her honor. "Let's talk that sun into setting / Just need the sound of your voice / Need that calming and the comfort / Something to drown out the noise" (Defeater, 'I don't mind').

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-202

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Abbreviations and Translation

See bibliography for translations and editions used – if no translation is available, I provide my own.

Works by Schelling cited with pagination of *Sämmtliche Werke* with the exception of *Original Version of the Philosophy of Revelation* and the *Paulus Nachschrift of the Philosophy of Revelation* (which follows the edition's page numbers).

STI	System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)
PR	Philosophy and Religion (1804)
F	Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom (1809)
SV	Stuttgart Private Lectures (1810)
W1,2,3	The Ages of the World (draft of respectively 1811, 1813 and 1815)
GNP	On the History of Modern Philosophy (Munich Lectures of 1827) – I add between [] the page numbers of the translation here as well.
SW	The System of the Ages of the World (Munich Lectures of 1827/28)
UO	Original Version [*Urfassung*] of the Philosophy of Revelation (Munich Lectures of 1831/32).
GPP	The Grounding of Positive Philosophy (Berlin Lectures of 1842/43)
HKM	Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology (Berlin Lectures of 1842)
O	Philosophy of Revelation (Berlin Lectures of 1841/42, Paulus Nachschrift)

Works by Nietzsche cited with number of aphorism and, if non-consecutive, section title.

GT	The Birth of Tragedy (1872/1886)
UB	Untimely Meditations (1876)
MAM	Human, All Too Human (1888)
M	Daybreak (1881)
FW	The Gay Science (1882)
Z	Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883)
JGB	Beyond Good and Evil (1886)
GM	On the Genealogy of Morals (1887)
A	The Antichrist (1888)
GD	Twilight of the Idols (1888)
EH	Ecce Homo (1888)

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-204

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Introduction

One of the main tasks of philosophy has been to come up with a systematic representation of reality that stands tall in the face of that reality. This involves coming to a conceptual representation of reality that accounts for all of the vicissitudes of life, for all the mess that is (human) nature, but also for some of the intuitive closeness as well as the staggering displacement of what is involved in knowing ourselves and the world. *Philosophy should account for the highest heaven and the deepest abyss*. For some time now, it has been reckoned that traditional philosophy has failed to live up to that task mainly because the overly rationalist and systematic impulses of philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Hegel was forced to exclude from their philosophical vision those aspects that unsettle, perhaps even collapse upon itself, the systematic pretensions of philosophical thought. In response, postmodern philosophy has taken it upon itself to reformulate the central task of the practice of philosophy, which now becomes the intellectual duty to arouse hesitation, even equivocity, when it is claimed that things can be understood in a singular, philosophical vision. The abyss came back, so to speak, with a vengeance. The purpose of philosophy in the Continental tradition seems now more focused on thinking difference rather than systematic unity.

Philosophical reflection on reason, freedom and religion is often at the centre of this postmodern reservation, at least to those thinkers who are not downright atheist. Is reason capable of comprehensively understanding freedom and religion? Or can reason, at best, understand their incomprehensibility? Freedom and religion were traditionally cloaked with a mantle of transcendence, their origin and purpose divine rather than worldly, and their miscomprehension throughout the modern tradition is mirrored in the miscomprehension of God. Those postmodern thinkers keen on deconstructing traditional philosophy point out that the tradition has done a poor task of thinking about God. Modern sallies into religious territories were thought to be overly univocalizing and levelling, more of a raiding party than a diplomatic mission, and they have turned God into a being amongst beings that could be understood through immanent rationality. Heidegger would say that this approach misses the constitutive difference between immanent forms of rational thought and the poetry of transcendence. There is some truth to this: there has been a long and lamentable tradition of turning God as transcendence into – to use a term of William Desmond (2003; 2008) – a "counterfeit double" of himself, where the transcendence of God is not thought of as absolute transcendence, but as the reversal of human finitude, the sum total of immanent being or even the world-historical process itself. Philosophical modernity tended towards a

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flattening of discourse – more *géometrie* than *finesse* as Blaise Pascal would put it. Jean-Luc Marion is quite emphatic when he responds that this means we ought to remove ourselves urgently from metaphysics, at least if we hope to think God appropriately:

> [So as to come to] nonidolatrous thought of God, which alone releases 'God' from his quotation marks by disengaging his apprehension from the conditions posed by onto-theo-logy, one would have to manage to think God outside of metaphysics insofar as metaphysics infallibility leads, by way of blasphemy (proof), to the twilight of the idols (conceptual atheism) [. . .] the step back out of metaphysics seems an urgent task.
>
> (Marion 2012, p. 37)

For some, the loud postmodern calling for silence when it comes to metaphysics can be a well-deserved respite from the clamoring of rationalist philosophy. Has it not made such a mess of thinking about God? For a time then, it seemed like the silence of systematical thought and the death of metaphysics was a fitting conclusion. I have come to think that this recourse falls victim to another, equally dissatisfying extreme. It tends to reject most forms of reason out of hand.

I think John Manoussakis puts things quite well: "The field where philosophical thinking runs the greatest risk of losing itself (but also, the field where it receives the greatest promise to regain itself) is that which concerns the question of God" (2004, p. 53). While not subscribing to Manoussakis' phenomenological retrieval of God, I do take the two sides of his philosophical calling seriously. The project of this book is then twofold. First, it takes up a number of 19th-century thinkers and joins them on a voyage to think about the 'risk' of thinking freedom, religion and God with the dangers of an overexposure to rationalism. These attempts evacuate the touch of transcendence and divine incomprehensibility. An overexposure to rationalism has serious repercussions that range from a lack of animation in thought and action, to a dearth of cultural creativity, and even to a potential self-enclosure of thought within itself and so it becomes unwilling to engage with its meaningful others (such as religion). From this perspective, reason and metaphysics are dangerous and risky because they impede human flourishing. Second, the same authors will be used to discuss what could be gained by a more finessed account of freedom and religion that takes seriously their intimation of transcendence. Heidegger's step back from metaphysics should not be the final move in the long and laudable history of philosophy: there is thought after silence. We step back in order to brace ourselves for a jump into the race anew. The new metaphysics ought to take the silence seriously: our newly-developed philosophy cannot slide back into old patterns and rightly-criticized ways of thinking – *no new wine in old*

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barrels.[1] A new metaphysics is to emerge, one that is more hospitable to the *chiaroscuro* of reality and that recognizes hierarchical distinction and difference.

Where do we start? Do we start from the ground up, back to phenomena, to the thing itself? Do we condemn all past philosophers in one sitting as guilty by association with the philosophical times of what is now known as onto-theo-logic? This is one tactic, fashionable for a while with those that Dominique Janicaud associated with the theological turn in phenomenology (*le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie* – see Janicaud 1991). The likes of Levinas, Ricoeur, Marion, Courtine, Chretien and Henry sought to rethink the revelation of transcendence from within phenomenology through the givenness of transcendence. In the last decades, the rigor of this movement has ossified in deconstructive postmodern theology. Following the indications of Jacques Derrida and now championed by Jack Caputo, this approach avoids any and all metaphysics, (strong) theology and metaphysics to focus exclusively upon the event of God, which is a happening that cannot be contained in its immanent shell (Caputo 2006, 2013 and 2015). Here, to think about God after the death of the God of tradition means to do as little thinking as humanly possible. There is something deeply unsatisfying about this.[2] I recognize that there is good reason to let reflection on freedom and religion start with

---

1 In his *In Praise of Heteronomy*, Merold Westphal argues that those postmodern theologies that most vociferously want to get away from modern claims to universal reason are usually the ones that repeat similar mistakes: "Certain postmodern theologies are only partly different from the modern theologies from which they seek to distance themselves. [. . .]. They have taken the hermeneutical turn and do not profess to speak as the voice of some universal view from nowhere. But if their understanding of reason is postmodern in this sense, they give it the same hegemony as their Enlightenment predecessors over the special revelation on which the 'religions of the book' seek to ground themselves. [. . .] Just as some postmodern thinkers have not abandoned the Enlightenment ideal of epistemic and social critique, so some have not abandoned the project of religion within the limits of reason alone. It should be noted that their faith in the resultant religions can be just as strong and (epistemically) intolerant as the faiths that seek to ground themselves on special revelation. But they are faiths, nevertheless – rival faiths" (Westphal 2017, p. 214). It is easy to agree with Westphal: any theology that emerges from the destruction of old beliefs is at risk of becoming a new dogmatism. So we should look for a theology that is willing to reconstruct itself at every turn, one that builds itself up and deflates only moments after. This is what I will call an organic metaphysics.

2 One objection is how this immediately invalidates any historically mediated, determinate faith. This is a matter of discussion between Jack Caputo and Merold Westphal. Westphal proposes a different, more moderate use of postmodern, deconstructive philosophy, namely one wherein this is a reminder of human limitations rather than a caution against any and all metaphysics. Their discussion is featured extensively in the volume: *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion* (Simmons Stephen Minister (eds.) 2012). Caputo's response is almost snippy: "I think they are trying to build an umbrella for when the postmodern rains come, whereas for me postmodernism means singing in the rain" (Caputo 2012, p. 272).

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their immanent revelation – real, empirical, historical – but why must it end there as well? Why can revelation, in whatever ambiguous form that it might occur, not set into motion a process of philosophical reflection that is renewed, rethought and revamped by the confrontation with divinity? I think I would call this an organic metaphysics *a posteriori*. This strategy is not new, but became especially fashionable from the early 19th century onwards as dialectical philosophy.

Much of the merit of dialectical philosophy has been lost today.[3] I recognize the real dangers in an overly rational-systematic approach, but the anti-rationalist, deconstructive approach has its own pitfalls. This returns us to an age-old question: do we focus on a reductive sense of reason, and thereby reality, to suit our designs, or do we become passive recipients of a truth that may lie beyond our powers of discernment? Truth hardly ever lies in extremes, and a good number of contemporary thinkers are invested in overcoming a binary opposition between reason and revelation. This a daunting challenge, one that forces reason and revelation to rethink themselves. This is captured admirably by David C. Schindler:

> There has to be a radical openness to the transcendent that defines the very essence of reason, or else God's self-revelation will be an utterly foreign sound, beyond the spectrum of reason's receptive capacities. In this case, man will be essentially deaf to God's call. On the other hand, if revelation does *not* exceed this spectrum, it would seem to imply that God's capacity to reveal himself is *measured* by reason's natural aptitude. In this case, philosophy would simply take the place of theology. (Schindler 2017, p. 118)

3 With a tinge of postmodern cynicism, Caputo calls his deconstructive philosophy of religion a decapitated Hegelianism, one where there is no longer a sense of recognition (*Anerkennung*): "Kierkegaard introduced the first postmodernism when his Johannes Climacus quipped that according to the metaphysics of absolute knowledge God came into this world in order to schedule a consult with German metaphysicians about the makeup of the divine nature. There is thus a considerable *Gnosis* still clinging to Hegel, an unmistakably Gnostic insistence on knowing, on *Wissen* and *Begriff*. That is why [. . .] what I am calling a theology of the insistence of the event is a heretical version of Hegel, a variant postmodern Hegelianism, a kind of hybrid or even headless Hegelianism without the Concept according to the strange logic of the *sans*" (Caputo 2013, p. 92). This idea appears as well in a number of other thinkers, such as Catherine Malabou (2005) and Slavoj Žižek (2009). I hesitate whether this really has to be the endpoint. Why cannot a moment of philosophical discernment follow up on the revelation of the divine? If philosophy is poor in itself and empty of real being, can it not be enriched through revelation? Does it really have to be reason *or* revelation; perhaps reason *and* revelation? For discussion, see my 'Reconciliation, Incarnation, and Headless Hegelianism' (Vanden Auweele 2017d).

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I cannot delve deep into all potential ways of resolving this difficulty, but they range from re-appreciating analogy of being [*analogia entis*] most often from within phenomenology (e.g. Maritain 1953; Masterson 2013; Ward 1996; Pryzwara 1932), re-appreciating metaphysics (Desmond 2008; Pattison 2011) or even Augustinian thought (Milbank 1990 and 2003). What unites these very diverse philosophical projects is that they seek something other than a binary opposition between faith and reason.

The present monograph gladly joins the rebellion. It takes up a position against the very idea that reason and faith are destined to be locked in antagonism. My proposition is to look for a non-dogmatic, organic metaphysics, which is a self-refreshing and self-renewing system of thought that understands that its configurations of things must be receptive to ever-new revelations. This is self-(re)construction. This metaphysics has a knowledge of the absolute that is not absolute knowing. My following suggestion might be the most scandalous yet, as I think such a thing can already be found in two unlikely nineteenth-century philosophers: the Prince of the Romantics, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854), especially his later work (1809 onwards), and the last disciple of the philosopher/god Dionysus, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).

My primary reason for turning to post-Kantian philosophy is for its recuperation of dialectical ways of thinking. I sense that this is what drew Markus Gabriel in his *Transcendental Ontology* to post-Kantian idealism generally; namely, that it navigates in between what he calls "one-sided (and despite itself scientistic) contemporary Anglo-American transcendental epistemology and the return of ontology in recent French philosophy (Badiou, Meillassoux)" (Gabriel 2011, p. ix). Gabriel stays neatly within the limits of a sort of transcendental philosophy, though one not burdened by the subjectivism that most detect in Kant. For me, however, the turn to post-Kantian philosophy is a turn to, and return of, a kind of metaphysics. This is not the metaphysics attacked by Kant, the rationalist kind of metaphysics practiced by the likes of Leibniz, Wolff and Baumgarten. Instead, it is a sort of metaphysics that is closer to Platonic dialogue and Thomist analogy. What particularly draws me to post-Kantian ways of thinking is its dual interest in mediating difference and recognizing opposition. Schelling famously thought that the "main weakness of all modern philosophy" is that it "lacks an intermediate concept" which results in that "everything that does not *have being* is nothing, and everything that is not spiritual in the highest sense is material in the crudest sense, and everything that is not morally free is mechanical, and everything that is not intelligent is uncomprehending" (W3 286). Unlike Gabriel, I will not put Schelling and Hegel into dialogue on these issues. Despite obvious areas of conversation, I think that the more fundamental dialogue is to be had between Schelling and Nietzsche (see chapter one).

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Schelling was among the first to object to a tendency of philosophy to fixate on opposition rather than seeking the possibility of interpenetration (what Hegel would come to call *Verstandphilosophie*). He blames Descartes for deadlocking modern philosophy in opposition between the spiritual and the material: "Matter and spirit were brought into that unholy (incurable) Cartesian conflict" (W 3284). Modern thought's original sin is dualism. There are lines to be drawn from the Protestant reform to this tendency in philosophy (faith *against* reason rather than the Catholic faith seeking reason), which makes Nietzsche a keen observer when he pointed out that for classical German philosophy – at the very least up to, and including, Kant – it was "the protestant minister" who was "the grandfather of German philosophy, Protestantism itself is its *peccatum originale*" (A 10).

Schelling and Nietzsche are thus allied in their opposition to stark dualisms.[4] In the more radical forms of dialectical thought, such as Hegel's absolute idealism, this leads to such an overemphasis on mediation as self-mediation that ultimately sacrifices distinctiveness. In Hegelian thought, what is ultimately the difference between religion, art and philosophy except for their modes of representation? Does there remain an opposition between freedom and nature, God and world? Hegel gets perhaps too excited about dialectics. In Schelling and Nietzsche, I find a dialectical philosophy that is more appreciative of the fact that transcendence reveals and hides itself, of the fact that nature is brimming with ambiguous significance and nihilistic emptiness, of the fact that freedom and determination intermingle, and of the fact that human beings are powerful mediators for absolute value, but also insignificant in the grand scheme of things. In other words, with Schelling and Nietzsche, philosophy slowly comes to grips with the thought that metaphysics is a divine game of hide-and-seek, of reaching out and touching, of speaking and holding one's breath – illustrated beautifully by Isaac Luria's Cabbalistic notion of *tzimtzum* (known to Schelling through Jacob Boehme, Franz von Baader and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger).

It is for the promise of the finesse of dialectical nuance that we put our hopes in Schelling and Nietzsche. Immediately, the looming shadow of Heidegger's

4 While early modern philosophy had a Protestant pedigree, the 19th century took more to Christian esotericism. This influence was noticed early on by the left-Hegelian Ferdinand Christian Baur in his *Die Christliche Gnosis* (1835). For more current discussion on how these influences operate, see the work of Cyril O'Regan (1994 and 2011) and Glenn Alexander Magee (2001). For discussion specifically of the influence of the theosophy of Franz von Baader, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger and Jacob Böhme on Schelling, see the work of Roswitha Dörendahl, (2011, pp. 46–60). For specific discussion of *tzimtzum* in Hegel and Schelling, see the work of Agata Bielik-Robson, (2017, pp. 32–50).

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critique of Schelling and Nietzsche cautions against this move. While Schelling hoped to escape ontotheology, he was ultimately unsuccessful, according to Heidegger, because he still thinks the arational ground of being in relationship to existing being. In other words, Heidegger sees Schelling as still falling prey to anthropomorphism (see Heidegger 1985, esp. pp 161–164). Similarly, while Nietzsche certainly heralds the end of metaphysics, he is – according to Heidegger – still caught in typically metaphysical ways of thinking, as evidenced by the triad of will to power, eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch* (see Heidegger 1984, esp. pp. 198–208 and 1987). Schelling and Nietzsche are stepping away from metaphysics, but do not yet the step back from metaphysics.

Part of Heidegger's critique is on point. But perhaps then, it is not really critique? Perhaps the ways of doing philosophy in Schelling and Nietzsche, as between metaphysical system and deconstructing phenomenology, is where the truth can be found? The truth, Plato taught us long ago, is where the extremes can meet, somewhere in between (*metaxu*) the down and dirty and the high and mighty. In Schelling and Nietzsche, we find both critique and (re)construction. With Schelling, we will show how an excessive rationalism, an inorganic ethics, and a deflationary or 'rational' religion have led philosophy to its impoverishment. Somewhat surprisingly, these are the main topics that Nietzsche equally takes up in his cultural criticism of European society. The similarities between their analyses are uncanny and will be engaged in detail throughout the first part of this study. What the main challenges of philosophy – the debilitating materialism, the unmediating dualism of Jacobi and Kant, the voracious rationalism of Hegel – had in common is that they lacked a proper philosophy of nature or, to use terms that foreshadow-) Nietzsche, they lacked life and animation. In the second part, Schelling and Nietzsche will be given the opportunity to display their escape from this situation through advancing a new understanding of freedom. They show how freedom grows from within, is part of, and navigates our given nature. Freedom is both an openness and a self-enclosure, and always at risk of too much openness or closure. In the final part, we will see where such freedom ends up when wrestling with religion and mythology. For Schelling, such a rethinking of freedom ends up in a metaphysical empiricism, one that is receptive to the historical revelations of transcendence, and that consummates in a free subjection to 'philosophical religion' – which reaches a somewhat unexpected level of Christian orthodoxy. For Nietzsche, Schelling seems like a Romantic who is homesick for Christianity. When he attempted self-criticism in 1886 of his firstborn *The Birth of Tragedy*, he notices this to be common among Romantics:

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> It is very probably that it will *end* like this, that *you* will end like this, namely 'comforted', as it is written, despite all your training of yourselves for what is grave and terrifying, 'metaphysically comforted', ending, in short as Romantics end, namely as *Christians*.
> (GT, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism', 7)

Despite his rants against dialectics and dialectical philosophy, Nietzsche's own thought is surprisingly dialectical in nature. Rather than univocally extricating certain problematic aspects of culture, Nietzsche always tries to harness the vast panoply of different drives, thoughts and behaviours in order to come to higher forms of humanity. In stark distinction to the common view of Hegelian dialectics, Nietzsche refuses to think of such a process as ever finalized; instead, the creative potential of humanity must be tested, time and again, against changing conditions. Such testing has to be supported by a broader framework, which could rightly be called (and Nietzsche does this at times) a religion. Nietzsche hopes to found a religion in terms of an education (*Bildung*) towards the uplifting of the species by navigating tension, not releasing it, through such things as bravery, festivals and laughter.

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Chapter 1
Schelling and Nietzsche: A Philosophical Discussion?

Let's first get rid of a pesky interjection: are (the later) Schelling and Nietzsche thinkers amenable to philosophical dialogue? I think yes, but truth be told, Nietzsche's general awareness of Schelling's philosophy – and of his *Spätphilosophie* in particular – was limited at best. Nietzsche did not enjoy a classical training in philosophy and Schelling's later works were not widely available. There is little use in arguing for any direct influence of Schelling on Nietzsche. There are other ways, however, that the two could be put into fruitful dialogue.

There are some figures between Schelling and Nietzsche that might have funneled some of Schelling's thoughts to Nietzsche, such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Ludwig von Feuerbach, Eduard von Hartmann and Jacob Burckhardt.[5] But even here the evidence of significant influence is disappointingly circumstantial. The situation is not helped along by the fact that Nietzsche was quite secretive of his sources, probably because he wanted to project an image of himself as a free spirit, untimely and "not much of a reader" (see EH, 'Why I am so Wise').[6] My aim is not to find some hidden notes or library receipt cards that prove how Nietzsche would huddle under his bedsheets at night to read Schelling's books. Instead, I venture here to show that Schelling and Nietzsche share in a nexus of philosophical concerns and interests, a bond of *consanguinity* if you will, that

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5 No one can plausibly deny that there is a nexus of influence and influencing between Schelling and Nietzsche. Martin Heidegger lectured extensively on Schelling and Nietzsche both, even admitting their influence on his thought. Schopenhauer was a well-known adversary of Schelling, indicted Schelling with plagiarizing Kant and would be indicted with plagiarizing Schelling himself. Schopenhauer's influence on Nietzsche is no secret. Schelling and Nietzsche share at least one common enemy, namely the optimistic *Schulphilosophie* of Hegel. Paul Tillich would write two dissertations on Schelling and his later theology was decisively influenced by Nietzsche. Kierkegaard attended with disappointment Schelling's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation* and Nietzsche was convinced to study Kierkegaard, at the suggestion of Georg Brandes, but lost his sanity before attending to the matter.

6 The work of Thomas Brobjer is a godsend that catalogues Nietzsche's reading of canonical thinkers and his contemporaries. Here, we find that Nietzsche did come to a general awareness of German Idealism from reading Karl Fortlage's *Genetische Geschichte der Philosophie seit Kant* in 1864 (Brobjer 2008, p. 46). Additionally, Nietzsche intensively studied the work of Eduard von Hartmann, who owes a remarkable debt to Schelling (Brobjer 2008, p. 53). Finally, Nietzsche was very enthusiastic when reading Friedrich Lange' *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (1866).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-002

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connects them more intimately than most readers would recognize. Many readers in the history of philosophy might even find this more moderate claim difficult to swallow since it is hard to imagine a constructive dialogue between Nietzsche and Schelling, between, on the one hand, the despiser of Christianity, the hater of metaphysics, the denier of morality and the renouncer of philosophical system, and, on the other hand, the justifier of Christianity, the builder of metaphysics, the grounder of moral good and evil and the enthusiast of systematic thought. I will show that both of them recognized a similar problem in Western philosophy, how they initially believed in Romanticism as a solution to this problem, how they lost faith in Romanticism and in what divergent directions they ultimately parted ways.

A historical-interpretative difficulty further renders a dialogue between Schelling and Nietzsche problematic. Schelling had an incredibly long career, publishing material from the age of eighteen and lecturing well into his sixties, even seventies. Nietzsche had a relatively short, but incredibly turbulent philosophical lifespan. Both of them lacked the sort of consistency of those philosophers who let their thoughts develop at length. This usually means that any engagement with Schelling and Nietzsche is almost always prefaced by an account, sometimes ridiculously detailed, of which period, which books and even which chapters are under discussion. There is no denying that Schelling and Nietzsche did not remain fully consistent from their earliest to latest works. No true philosopher can. Schelling's ideological trajectory tends to be split up into three periods: early idealism and philosophy of nature (up until around 1804), middle Romanticism (until the abandonment of the *Weltalter* project roughly around 1830) and later philosophical religion (mostly the lectures in Munich and Berlin, which were prepared in Erlangen). Nietzsche's philosophical trajectory is usually presented as moving from youthful Christian piety (abandoned formally when he abandoned his studies in theology) to Wagnerian Romanticism (up until 1876), through positivism and free spirits (up until 1882), towards overhumanity, will to power and anti-Christianity (until his mental collapse in 1889). There is truth to this periodization. Scholarship on their philosophical trajectories has done historical research a service by showing the developments, small and large, of their thought. This cannot, however, be an end in itself. When one compartmentalizes a philosopher's thought excessively, then this tends to obfuscate the continuity, evolution and development between these periods of thought. One misses how one way of thinking gives over to another way of thinking: one misses the dynamic of philosophy itself. Scholars who focus only on distinct periods in a philosopher's development remind me of one of Hegel's more memorable quips in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, where he compares merely historical scholars to "countinghouse clerks, who keep the ledgers and accounts of other people's wealth, a wealth that passes through their hands without

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their retaining any of it, clerks who act only for others without acquiring assets of their own" (Hegel 2006, p. 44).

Schelling and Nietzsche are *invested* in their philosophy. They have put their money down. This means that they have to keep rigorously honest about their views and allow their thinking to evolve if the need would arise. In hindsight, they saw their earlier thought as youthful, incomplete and even an embarrassment (I shudder myself when rereading my first published articles). Nietzsche admits this openly: "But I assert that there has never been a philosopher who has not in the end looked down on the philosophy of his youth with contempt, or at the least with mistrust" (MAM 253).[7] The truth is in the whole: not that the final thought is the most complete, but that their development shows the dynamic of thought itself.

At one point in their development, respectively middle and early, Schelling and Nietzsche are most amenable to conversation; namely, when they are generally considered to be Romantics. At that time, they sought to rekindle a more passionate engagement with reality, assisted by art and religion, through focusing on vitality, will and energy. Most, if not all, of the comparative scholarship has indeed built from that period. Nevertheless, the work here can be quickly summarized. In 1935, Otto Kein pioneered with his *Das Apollinische und Dionysische bei Nietzsche und Schelling,* and six decades later, J.E. Wilson's would publish his impressive study of the impact of Schelling on Nietzsche's earliest work (1996). More recently, there has been the work of Dieter Jähnig on art in Schelling and Nietzsche (2011), Bernard Freydberg's study of the darker regions of modern thought, entitled *A Dark History of Modern Philosophy* (2017), and, while not directly on Schelling and Nietzsche, George Williamson's *The Longing for Myth in Germany* (2004) is a helpful tool that sketches the contours of 19th-century philosophy of religion. My point of departure will be the Romantic preoccupations of Schelling and Nietzsche, wherein they are diagnosing similar difficulties in European thought and culture. My real interest lies, however, in how they seek to overcome these difficulties and what determinative role is played by freedom and religion in such an undertaking. In other words, I am interested in how and why they abandoned Romanticism. For the sake of clarity, this means that I will take up Schelling's work mainly, but not exclusively, from 1809 onwards, and with Nietzsche, my focus will be on his work between 1881 and 1887.[8]

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7 Also in *Ecce Homo*: "Great poets create *only* from their own reality – to the point where they cannot stand their work anymore afterwards" (EH, 'Why I am so clever', 4).

8 Nietzsche's latest works, *The Antichrist* and *Twilight of the Idols*, strike me as are coarse and even un-Nietzschean. There, I find a purposely dumbed-down Nietzsche, something very similar – in

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In the remainder of this chapter, I outline the general points of this reading. Schelling departed on a philosophical voyage in 1809 with his *Freiheitsschrift* that would last more than four decades, a voyage in which he was developing a system of philosophy that should be "strong enough to endure the test [*Probe*] of life, strong enough not to pale [*erblassen*] in front of cold reality" (UO 3). There was a time in the 20th century that philosophers would baulk at attempts to philosophical completeness and suspect that they are excessively hegemonic, oppressive and lacking in a certain kind of finesse (see, for instance, the work of Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault). Schelling was no stranger to these very same concerns. For him as well, philosophy must become more organic, more lively and more attuned to reality. This does not force Schelling to shy away from giving a systematic account of reality, as he calls it a 'world system' (*Weltsystem*), which should "[. . .] not exclude anything (for instance, nature), not subordinate anything one-sidedly or suppress anything altogether" (SV 5).

Schelling believes that a certain premise (*Voraussetzung*) of much philosophical thought has obfuscated the search for a good philosophical system. In his lectures known as the *System of the Ages of the World* (Munich, 1827/28), Schelling asserts that "we are justified in presuming that all previous attempts in philosophy have at bottom entertained a false premise and a common fault" (SW 10). That common flaw is what Schelling sometimes calls "the Eleatic presupposition", which set up a philosophical tradition opposed to the less successful "Ionic tradition" (a tradition thus preferring being over becoming, Parmenides over Heraclitus). This tradition thought about reality in a one-sided, non-dialectical and uniformly abstract fashion, a pernicious mistake that Schelling seeks to correct. He does so, not by abandoning 'being', but by giving 'becoming' its proper dues. Initially attracted to a more systematic form of Kant's transcendental idealism, Schelling would become increasingly hesitant about the capacity for idealism to attain such an organic world-system, at least if it would remain devoid of realism. Particularly after 1800, Schelling would slowly move away from Fichtean idealism and, from the 1820s on, he would become a

scope, topic and often even argument! – to Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*, the volumes that brought Schopenhauer popular acclaim. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche admits to this coarseness when he reflects upon *Beyond Good and Evil*: "After the yea-saying part of my task had been solved it was time for the no-saying, *no-doing* half: the revaluation of values so far, the great war, – summoning a day of decision [. . .] All my writings from this point on have been fish hooks: perhaps I know how to fish as well as anyone? . . . It was not my fault if nothing was *caught*. *There weren't any fish* . . ." (EH, 'Beyond Good and Evil', 1). These works are simplified and provocative, more palatable to people not inclined to nuance, which might ultimately invite them to reading Nietzsche's more nuanced views in earlier works. Coarse works for coarse ears.

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vocal opponent of Hegel's dialectical philosophy of absolute spirit. As he matured, Schelling became ever more hesitant about whether (dialectal) philosophy is capable of sublating the opposition between thinking and being – or whether it is even desirable to do so. Hegelian sublation is a move from lack to determination and holistic completeness; for Schelling, however, all becoming must move from contradiction to creation to new contradiction. Hegel's dialectic is blind to the messy and murky, even agonistic, layers of reality:

> In the Hegelian philosophy the beginning point behaves in relation to what follows it as a mere minus, as a lack, an emptiness, which is filled and is admittedly, as such, negated as emptiness, but in this there is as little to overcome as there is in filling an empty vessel; it all happens quite peacefully – there is no opposition between being and nothing, they do not do anything to each other. (GNP 157 [143])

Contrary to Hegel, one of Schelling's philosophical innovations is a more compelling view of dialectics, a view that recognizes how there is something which cannot be taken up in abstract concepts. Schelling famously calls this "the indivisible remainder" (*der nie aufgehende Rest*) in *Freedom-Essay*. It will be a consistent hallmark of Schelling's thought, and the very means by which Schelling believes that philosophy can rejuvenate, refresh, rethink or, in short, develop itself. That remainder is the passion of philosophy, the gift of madness that propels thinking, that which is in excess of philosophical system. Philosophy does not stare in wonder at that which forms a nicely structured and systematic unity. Philosophy is spurred on by that which upsets that unity and harmony – any college lecturer will tell you that a class on evil, suffering and violence draws in more students that one on goodness, happiness and charity. Sublating the wonder at the bottom of philosophy means sublating philosophy itself. Instead, philosophy must be bold enough to return to wonder at that which is in excess to determinate thought. As Schelling states: "Not only poets, but also philosophers, have their ecstasies. They need this in order to be safe, through the feeling of the indescribable reality of that higher representation, against the coerced concepts of an empty dialectic that lacks enthusiasm" (W3 203). Plato knew this as well: "The best things we have come from madness" (Plato 1997, p. 522 [244a]).

Schelling believed that the philosophical tradition was unsuccessful in thinking about the whole of reality in an organic world-system because it dealt inappropriately with the remainder (*Rest*). But, ironically, the majority of Schelling's contemporaries (and similarly many today) believe that Schelling was not successful in achieving that goal either. The standard way of receiving Schelling's philosophy throughout history has seen its development as an ideological decline, where Schelling gradually degenerated from idealism to Romanticism and

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ultimately to Christian orthodoxy.[9] In this standard view, the early Schelling is a stepping stone to Hegelian philosophy, while the later Schelling is an overly-Christian reinterpretation of dialectics and Romanticism. Perhaps one of the most explicit iterations of this view was made by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856):

> I think that the philosophical career of Mr. Schelling ended with the attempt to intuit the absolute intellectually. A greater thinker now emerges who develops *Naturphilosophie* into a complete system, who explains with this synthesis the entire world of appearances, who adds even grander ideas to the grand ideas of his predecessors, and who carries out the synthesis in every discipline, thus grounding it scientifically. He is a pupil of Mr. Schelling, but a pupil who gradually assumed all of the power of his teacher in the realm of philosophy; seeking dominance, he outgrew Schelling, and finally cast him out into the darkness. It is the great Hegel. (Heine 2007, pp. 110–11)

This deflationary view of the relevance of Schelling's (later) philosophy would have to ignore, and indeed often did, the innovations of Schelling's later philosophy, which is not a homesick Christianity but a move away and beyond idealism (and realism) for good reasons. A more promising way to think of Schelling's philosophical journey is as the continuous, dialectical development of certain ideas (as he himself would argue in his philosophy of revelation) which must remain open to new things that upset a previously self-enclosed system. Regrettably, as we shall discern near the very end of our discussion, Schelling did not stay faithful to his own greatest insight and, under the weight of some theological pressure, seems to prefer the relative completeness of a Christian orthodox philosophy of revelation (Schelling was brought to Berlin mainly to be a counterweight to Hegel's deflationary reading of Christianity). This is what many in the audience at Schelling's Berlin lectures experienced as well, namely that his tone turned strikingly orthodox, not least regarding his thoughts on incarnation, revelation and Christology.[10]

While Schelling himself might have come to embrace Christianity in the end, the premises, arguments and general trajectory of his philosophy could be taken, perhaps even more naturally, into a different direction. Friedrich Nietzsche might then very well be a more faithful Schellingian, a truer follower of Heraclitus, and of the task to think in more organic terms. My claim is most certainly not that Nietzsche received this philosophical calling from Schelling: throughout a grand total of fifteen direct references to Schelling in his published and unpublished oeuvre, Nietzsche is quite happy simply to mock Schelling as just one more Tübingen theologian. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche puts things most clearly: "Germans are only

9 For one example of this, see Medley (2015, pp. 59–76).

10 For discussion, see White (1983, pp. 187 ff).

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ever inscribed in the annals of epistemology under equivocal names, they have only ever produced 'unconscious' counterfeiters (– Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Schleiermacher deserve this epithet as much as Kant and Leibniz, they are all just *Schleiermachers* –)" (EH, 'The Case of Wagner', 3).[11] All of the philosophers that Nietzsche mentions are counterfeit, deceitful (*hinterlistig*) and even unconscious theologians: they do not know that they are merely providing a philosophical justification for their customary and traditional faith in Christianity.

Martin Heidegger writes that Schelling's *Freedom-Essay* "attains the acme of the metaphysics of German Idealism" (1985, p. 165). This could be read to suggest that Schelling's philosophy after *Freedom-Essay* goes beyond and even outdoes German Idealism. Indeed, as the 19th century progressed, Schelling would set the agenda for theological discussion,[12] and in philosophical circles one gradually notices a lack of confidence in Hegelian dialectic and idealist reason: philosophy is to be taken down to earth. If there is to be metaphysics at all, it ought to be an empirical or experiential metaphysics (something one finds in the later Schelling, Schopenhauer, Feuerbach and, arguably, even Nietzsche). When philosophy is brought down to earth, more existential concerns arise – which helps explain Schopenhauer's popularity in the 1860s and 1870s.[13] It is easy to forget that Schelling was remarkably attractive to the existentialists, with the famous exception of Kierkegaard.[14] Schelling laid some groundwork for this turn towards experience, nature and more existential concerns, which might have – through many twists and turns – led to Nietzsche's view that "the only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves something [is] to see [*zu versuchen*] whether one can live in accordance with it" (UB, 'Schopenhauer', 8).

Let us now take a view at Nietzsche. My reading will not be overly concerned with one of the main points of the postmodernist reading of Nietzsche;

11 Nietzsche's pun is lost in translation: a *Schleier-macher* is literally someone who makes a veil or disguise.

12 See particularly the work of Johannes Zachhuber (2013).

13 In his monograph *Weltschmerz*, Frederick Beiser gives an overview of the twists and turns of philosophy from the 1860s onwards (Beiser 2016). Dealing especially with the school of pessimism, neo-Kantianism and positivism, Beiser shows that all philosophers were brought down to earth by the impressive and progressively more influential pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. This general context will be of importance for our discussion of Nietzsche.

14 Gabriel Marcel and Paul Tillich each wrote their doctoral dissertations (Tillich even two!) on Schelling's philosophy. Marcel's dissertation was entitled *Coleridge et Schelling* (1909); Tillich wrote a philosophical dissertation entitled *Der religionsgeschichtliche Konstruktion in Schellings positiver Philosophie, ihre Voraussetzung und Prinzipien* (1910) and a theological one entitled *Mystik und Schuldbewustsein in Schellings Philosophischer Entwicklung* (1912).

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namely, that Nietzsche is to be read compartmentalized, episodic and perspectival. Such a method is not as self-evident as many would believe today: it only really started to gain traction in the decade or two after World War II. Prior, readers of Nietzsche were far more willing to take a more holistic approach to Nietzsche's thought.[15] Early scholarship – which tended to set the tone for some time to come – saw Nietzsche mainly as a critical, even negative thinker. For instance, Georg Brandes' *Aristokratischer Radikalismus* (1890) and Alois Riehl's *Friedrich Nietzsche, der Künstler und der Denker* (1897) both mostly emphasize the critical elements of Nietzsche's thought. This changed decisively around the turn of the century, when it became impossible as a German intellectual (and even beyond Germany) to avoid what Richard Krummel calls "the Nietzsche-problem" (Krummel 1998). Though appropriated from all sorts of angles – Christian theology not in the least – and regardless of Nietzsche's enthusiastic tirades against Germany, he slowly became, partly through the efforts of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, a nationalist symbol of German, Arian greatness. The work of Karl Löwith, Thomas Mann and Oswald Spengler is important here, but Heidegger's metaphysical reading of Nietzsche's work set the tone for many years.[16]

Because most Nietzsche-enthusiasts were associated with German nationalism, his thought would become *non grata* in philosophy after World War II. Throughout the 1960s, this gradually shifted when he started to be read as an anticipation of postmodernism rather than a modern metaphysician.[17] Gilles Deleuze (1962) and Jacques Derrida (1978) are important, but the most influential intervention is Johann Wolfgang von Müller-Lauter's *Nietzsche: Seine Philosophie der Gegensätze und die Gegensätze Seiner Philosophie* (1971). Müller-Lauter argues that a close-reading of Nietzsche's text – one free of the overriding authority of illegitimate texts such as *The Will to Power* – shows a fair amount of contradictions within Nietzsche's thought, contradictions that can be explored and deepened, but never overcome. Since then, holistic readings of Nietzsche's thought are suspect, perhaps sinful because participating in Heidegger's original sin. This

15 The overview provided by Steven Aschheim remains a valuable resource to understand the historical reception and appropriation of Nietzsche's thought (Aschheim 1992).

16 Rüdiger Safranski's reconstruction of the early appropriation of Nietzsche for German nationalism remains pertinent here (Safranski 2003).

17 The very earliest philosophical rehabilitation of Nietzsche came from the then 29 years old German-American, Jewish convert Walter Kaufmann. In 1950, he would publish his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* and spend a major part of his academic life translating Nietzsche's work into English.

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has led to a phenomenon called the 'postmodernist Nietzsche' which appropriates Nietzsche as an early defender of perspectivism and postmodernism.[18]

While championed by notable scholars such as Deleuze, Derrida, Müller-Lauter and others,[19] this approach is losing ground to a renewed interest in finding some of the central structuring elements of Nietzsche's thought.[20] But what exactly could be the building blocks that elucidate the vastly-diverging directions of Nietzsche's thought? I argue that a basic unifying impetus in Nietzsche's thought – one that is not altogether dissimilar of Schelling's philosophy – is the desire to rethink in more vital and organic terms such concepts as freedom, nature and religion. It is a desire to overcome the univocal hegemony of a purely rationalist approach in order to show how these above-mentioned topics are in excess of simple rational determination. Most of the traditional reception of Nietzsche would think such an enterprise, to bring Nietzsche and religion together, is a lost cause. Arthur Danto, for instance, argues that Nietzsche's philosophy lacks systematic unity – in his view, one could place any aphorism anywhere and read Nietzsche's works in any succession – caused by Nietzsche's "singular lack of architectonic talent, a failing shown not only in his philosophical writings but also in his musical compositions" (Danto 1967, p. 22). If there is, according to Danto, any element central to Nietzsche's teachings, it is nihilism as the dismantling of any system of beliefs (ethics, religion, science, even art). More charitable to Nietzsche, R.J. Hollingdale believes that Nietzsche's primary concern was to shift view from a metaphysical, towards a more perspectival, notion of truth. What this means for his relationship to religion and Christianity is summarized as follows: "In so far as [Nietzsche's] philosophy is, as a whole and in all its parts, incompatible with Christianity, this assertion of the fact now needs no further elucidation" (Hollingdale 1973, p. 186).

More recently, scholarship has been moving into a different direction. I agree with the general idea of Bruce Benson's *Pious Nietzsche*, that Nietzsche aspired not to break all forms of piety and religion, but that he "moves – or attempts to move – from one faith to *another*" (Benson 2008, p. 15). According to Benson, this is achieved by overcoming the very need for redemption through a musical *askesis* (a proper harmony) which, in the service of life, gives style to one's character and counteracts decadence. If scholars generally appreciate a religious dimension to

18 The following works come to mind particularly: Nehamas (1985); van Tongeren (2000); Pippin (2010).

19 Good collections of essays on the postmodernist reading of Nietzsche are: Koelb (ed. 1990); Krell and Wood (eds. 1988).

20 Some interesting works that seek more wholeness in Nietzsche-interpretation: Murray (1999); Reginster (2006); Richardson (1996); Sadler (1995).

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Nietzsche's thought, it is usually conceived in an individualistic sense, that of providing creative energy for life affirmation. Julian Young has cogently pointed out, however, that Nietzsche entertains a sense of "religious communitarianism", not only in his early work, but throughout the entirety of his philosophy. Despite his break with Wagnerism, "Nietzsche's fundamental concern, his highest value, lies with the flourishing of community, and to the end he believes that this can happen only through the flourishing of communal religion" (Young 2006, p. 2). Both Benson and Young are right to point out the overt religious concerns – both individualistically and communally – of Nietzsche throughout the entirety of his philosophical development.[21] Nietzsche's discomfort is thus not with religion *per se*, but in the way that religion has been hijacked by "the *degenerate* instinct that turns against life with subterranean vindictiveness (- Christianity, Schopenhauer's philosophy, and in a certain sense even Plato's philosophy, the whole of idealism as typical forms)", an instinct he opposes with his own idea, "a formula of the *highest affirmation* born out of fullness, out of overfullness, an unreserved yea-saying even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything questionable and strange about existence" (EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 2). One of my contributions to this debate, I hope, is to show how Nietzsche's philosophy is tied to the general concerns of 19th-century German thought, with an emphasis on issues that bear similarity to Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*.

21 Similarly, Laurence Lampert concludes from a reading of *Beyond Good and Evil* that Nietzsche sees "a new possibility for religion arising out of the crisis caused by the Enlightenment's successful fight against our religion; eternal return appears to be the essential item in a possible religion of the future" (Lampert 2006, p. 141).

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Part I: **Dualism, Rationalism and Cultural Fatigue**

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Chapter 2
Excessive Rationalism

The philosophical problems engaged by Schelling shapeshift into cultural problems in Nietzsche's thought. The first and most decisive among these problems is the decadent outgrowth of a reductive rationalism, which has its tentacles in a myriad of philosophical concerns. For one, an excessive form of rationalism leads towards a lifeless and mechanistic understanding of reality, which is a problem which crystallized in the most important legacy of Spinoza in the 18th and early 19th century, namely the Pantheism-struggle (*Pantheismusstreit*). Spinoza's conclusion was ultimately convincing: which showed to Schelling that modern thought has taken a problematic turn in thinking about the triad of God, world and freedom. Or worse, that it has started from false and problematic premises. This false premise would sometimes be called "Eleatism", which is a view that identifies reason with being. Perhaps surprisingly, Nietzsche was equally a vocal opponent of the excesses of rationalism. To him, rationalism can, in extreme forms, devalue life: it can overemphasize the redeeming potential of determinate knowledge, it can expose humanity to an excess of historical awareness, and it can become an unhealthy attempt to remove all error from human life.

The Curious Case of Spinoza

Hegel once quipped that the philosophical *Wunderkind* Schelling went through his philosophical education in the public eye. Indeed, from a very young age (some notable work already appeared in 1793, at the age of 18!), Schelling would publish work that attracted attention. I would not want to be judged by work at 18 and so we will start to pay attention to Schelling at 29, from 1804 onwards.[22] From that point, Schelling would incrementally start to rethink some of the very premises of Western thought, premises whose problematic nature only becomes apparent when they are brought to their natural conclusion. This can take on three distinct forms: Kantian transcendental idealism, Spinozist materialism and Jacobi's fideism (Fichte and Hegel are a different story).

To understand what Schelling found to be so objectionable about these positions, we will have to sketch the ideological context of the early 19th century.

22 While I will briefly discuss *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), I will not deal extensively with these early works of Schelling. For excellent discussion of these works, see Iber (1994).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-003

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Since the later 18th century, it was recognized that a purely idealist and a purely realist philosophy were problematic. Defining these positions is difficult, but one can note generally that realism holds there to be a (higher and more real) reality independent from our experience of the world; idealism, however, emphasizes the subjective basis of our experience and therefore argues that objective experience (i.e. experience of an objective world not mediated by our subjective consciousness) is impossible. Towards the end of the 18th century, the difficulties with these positions became clear: idealism is incapable of attaining to a sense of objective reality and realism is incapable of sustaining a sense of freedom. The choice is thus between giving up freedom or being. This divide was likely the most intensively-debated issue (but surely also afterwards[23]) in what Eckhart Förster (2012) called 'the twenty-five years of philosophy' (1781–1806).[24]

Perhaps the most influential and notable intervention in this debate came in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), which is to date still usually read as an attempt to secure the validity of natural science against Humean criticism (as he himself declares in *Prolegomena*). One of Kant's primary motivations was also the abovementioned divide between idealism and realism, which is clear in a famous letter to Christian Garve:

> It was not the investigation into the existence of God, nor in the immorality of the soul etc. that was my point of departure, but rather the antinomy of pure reason: 'the world has a beginning-; it has no beginning etc. up until the fourth: there is freedom, – over and against: there is no freedom, everything is determined by natural necessity; it was this that first awoke me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason, so as to resolve the scandal of the apparent contradiction [*Widerspruch*] of reason with itself. (Kant 1900 ff., band 12, pp. 257–258)

Kant's position on the matter, which he called "transcendental idealism", is well-known: all experience is subjective, but it is caused by an objective world that remains unknown. It implies that all knowledge is systematic (because categorized by means of *a priori* concepts), but also that there is freedom (since the in-itself is beyond *a priori* categorization). It bears mentioning – although we cannot attend to that here – that Kant's practical philosophy provides some nuance to this picture.[25]

If we take the *First Critique* as our guide, Kant solved the debate between idealism and realism by separating the phenomenal realm of system from the

23 For instance, this is an overt concern for Schopenhauer in the first part of *The World as Will and Representation* (1818/19). For discussion, see Vanden Auweele (2017a, pp. 30–46).

24 Kant had declared in his *first Critique* (1781) that philosophy had begun and Hegel proudly announced in 1806 that philosophy had been completed.

25 For more extensive discussion, see Vanden Auweele (2019a).

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noumenal realm of freedom (see Kant 1999, pp. 532–546 [A 532–558 / B 560–586]). From 1804 onwards (perhaps not coincidentally the year that Kant died), Schelling returns to this issue with a fresh pair of philosophical eyes. Schelling's more aloof contemporary, Arthur Schopenhauer, believed that Kant had conclusively settled the matter in 1781/1787, and Schelling's own further explorations are but a plagiarism of Kant.[26] Most philosophers, aside from Schopenhauer, did find something to be wanting in Kant's solution, with the main objection that Kant's solution was overly dualistic. Transcendental idealism left un(der)explained how the noumenal (freedom) was supposed to have effect upon the phenomenal (system). This problem was signalled repeatedly to Kant, very pressingly by his contemporary Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) and Kant himself attempted a new solution in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. But this solution was taken with insufficient seriousness in post-Kantian debates on the matter – this is certainly true for Hegel, Jacobi, Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer.[27] Whether Kant's philosophy is really to be read as so dualistic remains a matter of debate.[28]

In the late 18th and early 19th century, German philosophy sought to develop a more openly-dialectical relationship between system and freedom. This sets a double agenda for philosophy: on the one hand, to account for the strongest possible sense of being (system) and freedom; on the other hand, to allow being and freedom to interact organically. Initially, Schelling was invested in a Fichtean philosophy of identity, but he progressively lost faith in this project at least from 1804 onwards. For Schelling, the German *Pantheismusstreit* was the crystallization of a fundamental problem with Western thought, and even Fichte was somehow guilty by association. Schelling made the bold move then to rehabilitate pantheism.

There are historical reasons that explain why Schelling tends to pantheism in 1809. Schelling collided with Friedrich Jacobi (1743–1819) in 1807 after Schelling's lecture *On the Relationship of the Arts to Nature* [*Uber das Verhältnis der Künste zu der Natur*] at the *Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Jacobi

26 Schopenhauer would call this plagiarism on Schelling's side: "So here Schelling stands to Kant in the fortunate position of Amerigo to Columbus: someone else's discovery is stamped with his name" (Schopenhauer 2009, p. 97 [83].

27 For more elaborate discussion of this point: Vanden Auweele (2017a, pp. 10–13).

28 Since these discussions, there remains a scholarly controversy about what amounts to the proper reading of Kant's transcendental idealism. Initially, it was read as a dualistic view of freedom and determinism. Since the work of John Rawls, there was developed a more perspectival approach to Kant's idealism. For this, see Allison (1990); Hudson (1994, pp. 22–27); Palmquist (1993). More recently, Lucy Allais has argued for a return to the more traditional viewpoint (Allais 2015).

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was the president of this academy from 1807 to 1812). Jacobi had made a career out of demonizing philosophers for their association with Spinoza and pantheism (going back to his discussions with Lessing and Mendelssohn in the 1780s).[29] Schelling might have feared reprisal from Jacobi, and he wrote *Freedom-Essay* in 1809 as a pre-emptive defence of his position. Jacobi might even have already made some allegations, as Schelling opens that essay with a reference to *Philosophy and Religion*, where he had discussed the topic of freedom only briefly, but this "has not prevented others from following their own pleasure and, apparently without regard to the content of [*Philosophy and Religion*], from ascribing definite views to him even if these were altogether out of keeping with that work" (F 334) – which also might have been a reference to Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852), one of Schelling's closest interlocutors.

Another historical reason why Schelling visits pantheism is due to the recent work of another close interlocutor, Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829). In his *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808), Schlegel had made the point that "pantheism teaches that everything is good because everything is one thing, and every semblance of what we call injustice or evil is only an empty illusion [*Täuschung*]" (Schlegel 1808, p. 97). Schopenhauer made a similar point some years later: "Any pantheism must ultimately founder on the unavoidable demands of ethics, and then on the evils and sufferings of the world" (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 605 [677]). Schlegel would even add that pantheism ultimately signifies that there is no freedom. These two points – pantheism as harmony and determinism – are some of Schelling's major considerations in his *Freedom-Essay* (1809). Schelling mentions Schlegel explicitly as someone who sees pantheism as a "system of pure reason" (F 338n), and he faults Schlegel for not taking this as an opportunity to "communicate his own views on the origin of evil and its relation to the good" (F 353n).

Schelling attempted a more comprehensive debate with Schlegel on this issue in the first draft of *The Ages of the World* (W1 87–92). Here, Schelling makes mention of an "inspired writer [*geistreicher Schriftsteller*]" who has shown how the three "great original systems of all religion and philosophy first arose," namely emanation, dualism and pantheism (W1 88). In Schelling's view, Schlegel indeed had a number of correct intuitions, but failed ultimately to get all the necessary elements of the meaning of pantheism right. As such, one could read Schelling's

29 The Pantheism-struggle was initially a discussion whether Lessing had affinities with pantheism. Mendelssohn defended Lessing and Jacobi attacked him. For a more detailed reconstruction, see Snow (1996, pp. 14–24).

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Freedom-Essay and attempts at *The Ages of the World* as a way to come to a more appropriate understanding of pantheism. We will leave the details of Schlegel's account to the side and focus on Schelling's take on pantheism, and Spinoza's form thereof.

Spinoza's philosophy, and the pantheism within it, was considered to be fatalism. Fatalism denies freedom, both human and divine. Spinozism is the philosophical view that there is one substance (God) with an infinite amount of attributes, which, in turn, is considered the sum total of all existing things as God (*Deus sive natura*). Much like Spinoza's ban from the Amsterdam synagogue (a ban that is to date not assuaged), Spinozism was banned from philosophy. Shortly after Schelling arrived at Jena in 1798, Fichte became implicated in this discussion after arousing suspicions of Spinozism following his *Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung* (1798). Schelling refused to discard the important philosophical innovation of Fichte and the salience of pantheism along with Spinoza, although early on he did recognize the problems with Spinozism. In fact, it would not be a far stretch to read Schelling's middle philosophy as an attempt to reconcile Fichte's idealism with Spinozism: "Spinozism in its rigidity could be regarded like Pygmalion's statue, needing to be given a soul through the warm breath of love" (F 350) – Fichte's idealism is that breath of love. Elsewhere, Schelling writes: "Fichte's true significance is to have been the antithesis of Spinoza" (GPP 54).

How did Schelling's rethinking of pantheism turn out? Jacobi indirectly attacked Schelling in *Of Divine Things and their Revelation* [*Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung*] (1811). Two main criticisms were levelled at Schelling. On the one hand, that by making nature divine, Schelling denies the distinction between ethics and a philosophy of nature (and so also between freedom and necessity). On the other hand, that Schelling's philosophy of identity is Spinozistic, and therefore fatalistic and atheist (for more on this topic, see Polke 2018, pp. 7–30). Schelling responded to Jacobi's indirect criticism in his *Manuscripts on Divine Things* [*Denkmal von den göttlichen Dingen*] (1812) mainly by restating his distinction between ground and existence (for more on Schelling's response, see Arnold 2018, pp. 31–49). This discussion is sometimes called the *Dispute about Divine Things* [*Streit um die göttlichen Dinge*] (1811/12).[30]

30 Martin Heidegger's reconstruction of the events surrounding Schelling's rejoinder to Jacobi are still very insightful (see: Heidegger (1985, pp. 66–68)).

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The Problem with Idealism and Realism

The above is history; what follows now, philosophy. Schelling will increasingly take up a meta-position – much like Kant did – with regard to the divide between idealism and realism. He became interested in the following question: why are we forced to choose between being (realism) and freedom (idealism)? Schelling had fallen into this trap himself at one point: in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling starts philosophy from the subject; in his *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling starts philosophy from the object. At the time, the default recourse was to argue for a more robust sense of idealism, which, some years later, would crystallize in Hegel's absolute idealism. Even though many still read Schelling as a stepping stone to Hegel's philosophy, Schelling was well aware of the dangers of a stronger sense of idealism. Idealism lacks being: if knowledge is subjective, there is no bridge towards a pure experience of being. This is especially problematic for absolute being, God, since if even this must be dependent upon subjective thought, how can we have any guarantee that God is not just a fiction, a figment of human imagination? Hegel later suggested that thought or reason equals reality (*was vernünftig ist, das ist Wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*) – a point that Schelling would never accept.

The problem with idealism becomes most apparent in the way Kant discussed the ontological argument for the existence of God. This discussion emerged mostly from the Cartesian reformulation of the argument, not Anselm's original argument. In the Cartesian form, it is usually summarized along the lines of the following syllogism:

> Premise 1: The concept of God must encompass the highest of all possible predicates;
> Premise 2: 'Being' is a higher possible predicate than 'non-being';
> Conclusion: Therefore, God must necessarily have being to the highest extent.

The ontological argument has continued to capture philosophical imaginations ever since. Some thinkers – especially those associated with negative theology – take issue with the major premise because it reduces God to a determinate concept. For instance, Blaise Pascal wrote that "if there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, he has no relation to us: we are, therefore, incapable to know either what he is, or if he is" (Pascal 2013, p. 109).[31] This problem pertains mostly to the Cartesian reformulation of the argument (although

31 More recently, Patrick Masterson raised a similar point by arguing that we cannot establish at the outset of our investigation that "the idea of God, as the necessarily existing greatest

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Thomas Aquinas deployed similar arguments against it). In the formulation used by Anselm in *Proslogion*, the major premise defines God as *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*, which is usually translated as "which nothing greater is able to be thought" (Anselm 2013, p. 23). In Latin, one uses a comparative in a negative description to suggest a superlative, which means that a more colloquial translation is 'the greatest which can be thought'. This is how the argument was translated and rephrased in modern philosophy. In so doing, the negation was lost. But Anselm emphasized how important this negation is in his discussion with Gaunilo, where he is emphatic that *quo nihil maius* (nothing greater) is not the same as *maius omnibus* (the greatest of all). For Anselm, God is never a determinate concept of perfection, but a negative and limiting concept.[32]

Kant signaled a different problem with the ontological argument. He takes issue with the minor premise, where he argued that 'being' or 'existence' is not a real or rational predicate: "Being is obviously not a real predicate, i.e. a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves" (Kant 1999, p 567 [B 626/ A 599]). Only the non-existence of a self-contradictory object (e.g. a square circle) can be adduced from its concept, not the existence of a non-contradictory object. Unicorns potentially exist, but that does not mean that they do exist. Reason *per se* can only show the conceptual relationship of ideas, not their existence. The ontological argument shows, at best, that *if* God exists, he must *necessarily* exist. Schelling agrees with Kant's critique: "The Cartesian argument goes as follows: the highest being (the highest potency) cannot exist contingently [*zufällig*], but must exist necessarily [*notwendig*] – that is, *if* it exists! *That* it exists, does not follow" (O 154; see also W1 105–106).

Kant's destruction of the ontological argument thus aims to show that objective being is not an object of rational inquiry since rational thought cannot extend beyond subjective consciousness. Thought has no bearing on being: since idealism believes human beings to be caught up in thought alone, this would mean that there is no access to being. Kant did still assume the existence of a noumenon as the cause of sensory intuition, which shows that even he felt unnerved by the conclusion of his argument. Schelling shares in this unease: a more radical idealism would strip the Kantian noumenon from philosophy and accept that there is only subjective thought. For Schelling, this will not do. Philosophy cannot be merely abstract thought, but must somehow relate to

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conceivable perfection, is in fact a coherent and positively possible idea rather than a contradictory one" (Masterson 2013, p. 37).

32 For more discussion on the ontological argument and its readings in the early 19th century, see Vanden Auweele (2017b, pp. 99–112).

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something real: the "requirement of philosophy is not something abstract, but something real [*nicht eine abstrakte, sondern eine wirkliche*]" (UO 65).

We can gather two things from Kant's discussion of the ontological argument. First, the ontological argument misconstrues the real being of God since it relegates God to an absolute, perfect, necessary being. This takes away all freedom and liveliness from God.[33] Second, and more importantly, Schelling notes that "as little as the ontological argument could prove the existence of God, it must have, if it had been correctly understood, nonetheless led to the beginning of the positive philosophy" (GPP 158). We will attend to Schelling's negative and positive philosophy in more detail later (chapter seven). The point is straightforward: if one develops a rational philosophy to its limits, and one still lacks (access to) being, then one must recognize the limitations of purely rationalist and idealist philosophy. For Schelling, the ontological argument should have taught philosophers that they must start from God as pure being since the regressive method of developing from the concept of God to God's being necessarily falls short. There are no ideas or concepts that are capable of knowing such a thing (one cannot even call it a thing):

> But in God it is precisely *that* by virtue of which he is what groundlessly exists, which Kant called the abyss of human reason, and what is this other than that before which reason stands motionless, by which reason is devoured in the face of which it is momentarily nothing and capable of nothing. (GPP 164)

To insist upon a rational-idealist philosophy after its limitations had become apparent is just stubbornness. The limitations of idealism should show that it needs to be amended with something else. In his middle period, Schelling would speak of as a "higher realism", which is the interpenetration of idealism and realism; the later Schelling would speak of a metaphysical empiricism that is receptive to the revelations of a positive philosophy.

The idealistic and rationalist preoccupations of Western philosophy had left philosophy bereft of being. But this is not even the whole story. Rationalist thought tends to be overly self-insistent and will therefore extend itself beyond its boundaries (Hegel's philosophy is a good example). This means that a purely rationalist (*reinrationale*) philosophy will impose its own principles upon being, and thereby conjure up a totally deficient philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*). But nature does not bend to purely rationalist principles. Idealist and rationalist thought generally thinks of reality as expressing a singular and reasonable principle (reason, spirit, logos, etc.), so that everything can potentially be understood through that principle alone. In dialogue with Hegel – who saw in history the dialectical,

33 For more extensive discussion of this topic, see Kozdra (2016, pp. 163–220).

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progressive development of the self-consciousness of freedom – Schelling emphasized the non-dialectical opposition to the self-expansion of rational thought. This means that there are retractions in (natural) history, human societies and even in individuals that are not a springboard towards greater unity. In *The Ages of the World*, Schelling puts this most emphatically: “Idealism, which really consists in the denial and non-acknowledgment of that negating primordial force [but] without this force, God is that empty infinite that modern philosophy has in its stead” (W3 212). Without an actual counterforce to self-expansion (which is contraction), our view of reality becomes an empty infinite that simply causally self-expresses. To be truly alive, there must be some contradiction in nature and even in God.[34]

Idealistic philosophy is therefore heir to a long tradition in philosophy that univocally sees reality in terms of rational, self-preserving principles. There is no real access to being here. But the solution does not come through a return to, or stronger version of, realism. This position has an even more damning problem because, in its extremes especially, it leads to the denial of freedom. This implication emerged powerfully in the fatalism of Spinoza and, even more prominently, in French materialism. These philosophical views resulted in the lifeless and spiritless relegation of reality to a mechanistic universe.[35] Empirical reflection on the intricacies and causal connections between objects does not

34 Philosophy has a long tradition of smoothening out the idea of God, stemming from a desire to take up the religious idea of God and turn it into a coherent philosophical concept. Pascal was famously averse to this undertaking since here God is no longer recognizable as the God of religious passion: this is the God of the scientists and philosophers, not the one of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. One cannot relate to a being of supreme perfection and reality or, as Heidegger would say, one cannot dance and pray to such a God. What is real must be somehow flawed. William Desmond illustrates such an intuition by a German ploy to upset the economy of the United Kingdom in the Second World War. The Germans would drop fake British currency on the isle in an attempt to cause confusion and distrust under the British. Initially successful, the counterfeits were easy to detect after a certain time: “During World War II German counterfeits of British currency were very successful in sowing confusion, until it was noticed that the notes of the counterfeits were ‘perfect,’ while the notes of true currency always had a small flaw. The true with flaws were backed by creditworthiness, the perfect and false by nothing trustworthy” (Desmond 2012 p. 447n).

35 The consequences of this reductionist interpretation as a God without freedom, consciousness or becoming are highly detrimental for a philosophy of nature. But there is an upside to Spinoza’s doctrine, one that Schelling is willing to recognize with some measure of sarcasm: “Spinozism is really the doctrine which sends thought into retirement, into complete quiescence; in its highest conclusions it is the system of a perfect theoretical and practical quietism, which can appear beneficent in the tempestuousness of a thought which never rests and always moves; as Lucretius describes the state of such a peace: *sauve, mari magno*, it is sweet to watch the distress of others in a wild sea from a distant bank” (GNP 52 [66]).

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seem to allow one to infer to a strong sense of freedom. Schelling believed that without the overriding influence of idealism, empirical reflection will remain 'blind' to freedom – like merely idealistic philosophy remains 'empty' of being.

To make a choice between idealism and realism means losing something. For this reason, Schelling seeks a philosophical view, initially dubbed "higher realism", which would attain a strong sense of objective being and an equally strong sense of freedom. Kant's solution to the difficulty was to confine these aspects to a phenomenal and noumenal realm respectively, but this option proves overly dualistic to Schelling. To accomplish his own solution, Schelling had to find a new sense of ontology, one that is capable of thinking about freedom and system in more organic terms. Nietzsche will have similar qualms with the philosophical tradition.

Socratic Optimism

Schelling's engagement with the Pantheism-struggle signals a dilemma with the modern quest for rational determinacy in philosophical thought: in order to make reality as understandable as possible, Western philosophy seems happy either to deprive it of its excessive elements (a hyperrationalist God, freedom, mysticism, etc.) and avoid equivocity, or to rethink such elements in such a way that they fit neatly within their rationalized concept. It was Spinoza's first and last objective to understand at whatever cost: *humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere*. It is in this fundamental light – this basic criticism of an excessive rationalism – that we ought to read Nietzsche's persistent cautions and warnings against an overemphasis on knowing and determinacy.

For Schelling, the Pantheism-struggle signalled that European philosophy had hit a dead end: the very premises that underlie this tradition were incapable of navigating towards a true philosophy. Nietzsche will use stronger and harsher terms: Europe is sick, degenerated, uncultured or even decadent. It is that sickness that we will explore here, especially in connection with this excessive emphasis on knowing. The sickness relates primarily to the (sub)ordination of different libidinal drives, which can go awry in many ways. The two most common problems are the following. First, one drive could be cultivated so excessively that it overpowers or subverts all other drives. This would make an individual inorganic and artificial. In *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (hereafter, *Zarathustra*), Nietzsche uses the image of the "inverted cripple", which is one "who [has] too little of everything and too much of one thing" (Z, 'On Redemption'). Second, the drives could lack an organizing or ruling principle; they lack what Nietzsche likes to call "style" (e.g. FW 290), which leads to complete anarchy of the drives. In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche uses the image

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of the “motley paint pot” to describe this type of individual (Z, ‘On the Land of Education’). This individual becomes sterile and incapable of belief simply because too many things – that is, values, customs and beliefs – speak through it.

Nietzsche recognizes that both a tyrannical organization and a lack of organization can have detrimental effects on human flourishing. In Schellingian terms, one would say that a philosophy that is uniquely rationalist (*reinrational*) or a philosophy that avoids intermediation (dualism) is problematic. Nietzsche holds that any individual is a conglomerate of a vast panoply of drives, which constantly interact agonistically, and of which we have no particular control. There are drives to simplicity and multiplicity, to truth and illusion, to reason and mysticism, and so on. One drive can attempt to subdue or overpower another drive entirely, especially if that drive is supported by a cultural legitimacy to come to prominence. There is no separate intellect that supervises the drives. Nietzsche puts this plainly in *Daybreak*:

> *That* one *desires* to combat the vehemence of a drive at all, however, does not stand within our own power; nor does the choice of any particular method; nor does the success or failure of this method. What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of *another drive* which is a *rival* of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us. (M 109)

There are then a whole host of factors that weigh in on which drives rise to prominence. Nietzsche never advocates in favor of the complete castration of our drives, but aims towards molding or sculpting the drives so that they express a full and lively organic individual.

The cultural problems which Nietzsche detects all relate to such an imbalance in the (organization of the) drives. Mostly known for his tirades against the predominance of the drive for self-control that is expressed in Christian self-negation, Nietzsche was well aware that self-control is more widespread than just Christianity (see, especially, the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*). What Nietzsche identifies in his mature philosophy as the “ascetic drive” is an (excessive) desire for control which attempts to render everything, even the self, into an object that can be known and controlled. Such an attitude betrays a non-affirmative disposition. Nietzsche’s earlier work is a good point of departure for understanding this, where the “ascetic drive” can emerge in three forms. First, it can emerge in terms of Socratism, an incapacity for mysticism, entirely insensitive to the extra-logical, hyperbolic elements of reality. Second, it can appear in terms of a voracious appetite for knowledge disconnected from any augmentation of life, which comes up most clearly in Nietzsche’s hesitations with regard to the study of history for the sake of accuracy and truth. Third, it may even arrive in the positivist and scientific desire to debunk error – the science of uncovering

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errors is itself an error. The decadent consummation of all knowledge without the finessed filter of a discerning taste is fuelled by the rationally-optimistic belief that simple understanding – at whatever price: *fiat veritas, pereat vita* – leads towards contentment, power and creativity. This makes modern humanity into an undiscerning glutton: "Modern man understands how to digest many things, indeed almost everything – it is his kind of ambition: but he would be of a higher order if he did *not* understand it" (M 171).

Let us begin with the problem of inquisitive minds incapable of mysticism. In Nietzsche's first publication, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche believed Attic tragedy to be a careful balancing act of Dionysiac awareness of the excesses and sufferings of human existence (usually represented in terms of the lamentable fate of the tragic protagonist) with Apolline semblance (*Schein*) designed to make such tragic awareness bearable through sublime exaltation or comic discharge (see especially: GT 7). This careful balance – or "marriage" as he also calls it (GT 4) – was upset by a tendency in Euripides, who became increasingly less interested in the original purpose of tragedy, and aspired to greater accuracy in his playwriting. Instead of beautifying reality, Euripides sought to put reality on stage: "Thanks to [Euripides] people from everyday life pushed their way out of the audience and on to the stage; the mirror which once revealed only great and bold features now became painfully true to life, reproducing conscientiously even the lines which nature had drawn badly" (GT 11).

For Nietzsche, Euripidean tragedy was no longer a means by which the Greek people could discharge their nervous tensions with suffering and excess, but instead became an instrument for education and moralization. This shift in purpose, so continues Nietzsche, can only be explained in terms of a gradual weakening of the Dionysiac awareness of excess. While Euripides famously put Dionysus on stage in *The Bacchae*, he was also the one who pushed the very idea of excess in human existence off the stage. Simply by considering himself capable of representing Dionysus on stage, Nietzsche sees Euripides suggesting that even Dionysus – the god of excess and immeasurableness – can be represented faithfully: "The tendency of Euripides, which was to expel the original and all-powerful Dionysiac element from tragedy and to re-build tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysiac art, morality, and view of the world" (GT 12). Euripides, for Nietzsche, did in the end recognize that "Dionysos is too powerful". But it was too late: "By the time the poet recanted, this tendency was already victorious" (GT 12).

For Nietzsche, the ideological basis of the turn to morality and rationality in Greek theater was a distinct feeling of revolt towards the mystical dimensions of Greek culture, intimately felt by Euripides and shared by his contemporary Socrates. As neither of these figures were particularly privy to intuitive awareness

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of the profound mysteries of reality, they revolted against these mysteries by over-developing their realistic, rationalistic and logical nature. Euripides and Socrates were not geniuses: they lacked an intuitive awareness of the higher regions of reality and, out of resentment for their deficiencies, they deployed and solidified their practical skills (see, e.g., JGB 191). While the Dionysiac mystics had an acute and intuitive awareness of the depths of existence, Socrates and Euripides remained on the surface of things because they lacked the profundity to realize there was anything deeper (in contrast to other Greek playwright who stayed on the surface of things, out of profundity): "What we observe here is a monstrous lack of any capacity for mysticism, so that Socrates could be described as the specific *non-mystic*, in whom logical nature is just as over-developed, thanks to some superfetation, as instinctive wisdom is in the mystic" (GT 13).

For Nietzsche, the Socratic turn outwards, away from the inner mysteries, is typical of an incapacity to affirm and give style to one's own chaos. In other words, over-developing one particular aspect of one's nature is a flight away from the *chiaroscuro* of human life. There is an illustrative connection here with vanity, a character flaw that Nietzsche often associates with artists (e.g. FW 36 and 87; Z, 'Of the Poets'). Nietzsche calls Socrates vain: he has a lack of (inner) beauty which expresses as an unhealthy obsession with beautifying, rationalizing and cataloging by means of clear definitions ('what is the good?', 'what is the beautiful?', etc.). This results in resentment towards those who possess inner beauty, those who are capable of revering themselves rather than an ideal or a deity. Vanity is then an extension of resentment, a connection that Ruth Abbey echoes by calling vanity "a dearth of self-love, and this inability to affirm and love the self characterizes the slavish mentality [of resentment] in Nietzsche's later works" (Abbey 2000, p. 44).

Abbey continues to make an twofold distinction between vanity and the more widely known Nietzschean concept of resentment. First, vain people lack self-love and therefore look to others for self-affirmation, but resentful people suffer inwardly and look for others to blame for their suffering. Second, vain people feel the need to gain ascendancy over other people in order to affirm themselves, but resentful people tend to bring others down rather than raise themselves (Abbey 2000, p. 45). So while Socrates was set upon beautifying reality through overemphasizing Apollo, he could only do so if he found the world and himself to be ugly. Socrates was more vain than resentful, which explains why Nietzsche would attack Socrates for his ugliness: "Socrates was descended from the lowest segment of society: Socrates was plebeian. We know, we can still see how ugly he was" (GD, 'The Problem of Socrates', 3). The purpose of what Nietzsche earlier calls "aesthetic Socratism" (see GT 14) is to elevate beauty – preferably in something

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Socrates himself possesses (i.e. reason) – but, as Bruce Benson rightly notes, this hides a nasty truth: "The assumption of the need for correction of the soul – as if its natural state was somehow deficient – is already a manifestation of decadence, and that decadence is simply expanded and developed by the correction" (Benson 2008, p. 87).

Not all desire for beautification is bad, however. In the preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche turns ecstatic when he discusses the Greek way of life: "They know how to *live*: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words – in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial – *out of profundity*!" (FW, 'Preface'). This is not at all dissonant with the foregoing attack on Socrates' vanity. When Nietzsche wrote the preface to *The Gay Science* (1886), he would add a fifth book where he distinguishes between two drives for creation and destruction: "Is it hunger or superabundance that have become creative here?" (FW 370). One can create and destroy something from both of these. Socratic beautification happens from lack, a lack of inner health, while the Ancient Greeks beautified because of an abundance of life affirmation. In fact, after *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche will never more waver on the idea that human beings need their surfaces, ideals, myths and so on (we will return to this point extensively). The idea is announced in *The Gay Science* 24, where Nietzsche brings up the distinction between beautifying and bettering, respectively connected to 'feminine' and 'male' discontented types (FW 24). Male discontentment seeks to uproot difficulty, while feminine discontentment promotes escape from hardship through illusion. It is because of feminine discontentment that Europe has in fact (Nietzsche is thinking of Romanticism) been kept in a state of distress. Through these heightened states of distress, Europe has been capable of producing genius (FW 24).

Thus, for Nietzsche, Socrates' intervention in Greek life was not from abundance. He aimed purposely to disregard those elements of existence that are in excess of rational thought. Socratism is thus considered by Nietzsche in terms of an optimism, one which believes that rational dialectics is capable, by itself, not only to understand reality but also to provide shelter against its excesses:

> One also finds a profound *delusion* which first appeared in the person of Socrates, namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting it*. (GT 15; cf. GD, 'The Problem of Socrates', 4)

The very essence of tragedy was, according to Nietzsche, just the opposite of Socratism; namely, the conviction that knowledge does not emancipate. How much release did Oedipus experience when he realized that he had wedded and

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bedded his mother, and killed his father? How much succor was to come from the ghost of Hamlet's father that he was murdered by his brother? What relief did Creon's edict bring to Antigone that one of her brothers was not to be buried? Tragedy instructs that ignorance is bliss and knowledge is suffering. Tragedy equally teaches that the truly valiant of spirit will decide to stay on the surface of things because they know all too well that an abyss lurks underneath (which, on occasion, erupts with violent energy). In overt opposition to the "practical pessimism" of tragedy, "Socrates is the archetype of the theoretical optimist whose belief that the nature of things can be discovered leads him to attribute to knowledge and understanding the power of a panacea [*Universalmedizin*], and who understands error to be inherently evil" (GT 15).[36]

For Nietzsche, if everything can be known, then everything is essentially, or at least potentially, rational. Add, too, that other important innovation of Socrates; namely, the connection between knowledge and the good. *Only ignorance is vice*. If everything can be known, and therefore also controlled, then everything is good – there is no fate or chance. This syllogism was popularized by Christianity – Christianity being Platonism "for the people" (JGB, 'Preface') – by providing both knowledge and salvation through complete surrender to God. Here, the Christian God is altogether different from the Greek gods: they were subject to fate and chance (through the *Moirai*) while the Christian God is in complete control (see, for instance, M 130). If, therefore, Christians know of a way to please the one, all-powerful God, then human beings themselves would be in complete control: full control through full surrender to faith. Christian ethics, even Christian grace, is an expression of a will to power that cannot cope with a lack of control. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche insists that we desist in thinking about reality as univocally chance, univocally purpose, or even in terms of chance and purpose. Reality is neither chance nor purpose, but simply *is*: "Those iron hands of necessity which shake the dice-box of chance play their game for an infinite length of time: so that there *have* to be throws which exactly resemble purposiveness and rationality of every degree" (M 130). The idea is repeated in *The Gay Science*: "Once you know that there

36 Panacea was the Greek goddess of universal healing (from 'pan', everything and 'akos', medicine). Nietzsche then reads Socrates as dictating that knowledge is a potion for universal healing. While Nietzsche does not himself use the term panacea, he uses the German *Universalmedizin*, this German term undoubtedly reminds any classical philologist of the goddess Panacea. Interestingly, in Greek mythology Panacea is the daughter of Asclepius and Epione – famously, Socrates admits to owing a rooster to Asclepius on his deathbed. Asclepius himself is son to Apollo, which sets a whole of three generations of Greek deities, from Apollo, to Asclepius, to Panacea, squarely in the camp of Socrates and against Nietzsche.

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are no purposes, you also know that there is no accident; for only against a world of purposes does the word 'accident' have a meaning" (FW 109).

Nietzsche believes that the attitude of aspiring towards control is still widespread in European culture. Instead of being able to cope with chance events and great dangers, Germans in particular have a tendency to arrange everything up to its minutest aspects: "For I see how everyone is convinced that struggle and bravery are no longer required, but that, on the contrary, most things are regulated in the finest possible way and that in any case everything that needed doing has long since been done" (UB, 'Strauss', 1). Despair sets in, not when one is capable of recognizing and affirming chance in everyday life, but when one manically attempts to control every aspect of life, only to discover that some things are beyond our control. When European society has developed its theoretical system of thought to its fullest extent, and then suddenly feels cheated since this system of thought cannot fully control and comprehend everything, there might arouse a flicker of hope: "At present, however, science, spurred on by its powerful delusions, is hurrying unstoppably to its limits, where the optimism hidden in the essence of logic will founder and break up" (GT 15). Optimism might fall apart when it gets pushed to extremes. Just as Schelling believed that the purely rationalist, negative philosophy will ultimately founder when it overextends itself, so Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* hoped to cultivate a more tragic perspective on these things.

Historical Oversaturation

For Nietzsche, Socratic optimism is an excessive desire for an out-of-bounds intelligibility that deregulates humanity's drives for wholeness by giving surplus importance to only one particular drive. The desire reduces the excessive to the measurable. A second and related way by which excessive rationalism has deprived Europe of its culture-forming and creative energies is through the explosion of historical awareness. The increase in historical knowledge was relatively recent in Europe (having a real start somewhere in the 18th century), and ought to be understood against the background of the universalism and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. Many intellectuals – most of whom belonged to the Romantic movement – felt that the Enlightenment's emphasis on universality deprives human beings of a more determinate and particular horizon of thought. The Enlightenment had made human beings, namely, into global citizens, members of a rational religion and adherents to a universal ethic. The Romantics, in turn, sought to recover a sense of a more circumscribed communities, sometimes in terms of national identity, through delving into the history of a nation in order

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to find certain identifying traits: e.g., Johann Gottfried von Herder's interest in folklore or folksong; the brothers Grimm's collection of folk stories. For Nietzsche, national identity was a balm for the loss of (religious) identity.[37]

Often in the service of a political agenda (e.g. Germany's unification), the interest in rekindling national and community identities brought to life an interest in mythology. George Williamson notes that

> it was the postrevolutionary experience of historical rupture and religious crisis, interpreted in the light of neohumanist *Bildung*, that led the early Romantics to call for a 'new mythology' and encouraged certain nationalist writers to construct a specifically 'German' mythology. (Williamson 2004, p. 4)

The lack of particular identity made European peoples feel lacking in wholeness which, in turn, engendered a drive to find features of the past that promised to reunify a community – even if this new identity was mostly a fabrication (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).[38] The need for identity encouraged an explosion of historical research in Germany throughout the 19th century that hoped to uncover the more particularizing traits of peoples. This had dramatic effects on religion and mythology which we will discuss in chapter four. Nietzsche, a professor of classical philology in Basel, had the luxury of looking back upon this project with some detachment, and while not overtly dismissive of attempts to mine the past for inspiring figures, he was aware that a healthy culture needs a careful balancing of knowing and forgetting, especially when it comes to the study of its history. Just as he believed that some aspects of the world remain outside of rational determination, so Nietzsche emphasizes that some events are in excess of rational recollection.

For Nietzsche, the study of history can, at its best, serve to strengthen cultural unity. But at its worst, an excess of historical awareness can damage that culture's liveliness. This precarious balance between knowing and not-knowing is pointed to suggestively at the start of the second *Untimely Mediations*, entitled 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life':

> And this is a universal law: a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centred to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end. Cheerfulness, the good conscience, the joyful deed, confidence in the future – all of them depend, in the case of the individual as of a nation, on the existence of a line dividing the bright and discernible from the unilluminable and

37 For an excellent contextualization of Nietzsche's philosophy of history, see Jensen (2013).
38 For instance, it is worthwhile to note that the kilt was only associated with the wider culture of Scotland from the 19th century onwards.

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> dark; *on one's being just as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time*; on the possession of a powerful instinct for sensing when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically. (UB, 'History', 1 – my emphasis)

The nuance of Nietzsche's argument is enlightening: it provides the contours of a more organic dialectic between knowing and unknowing. When a culture lacks historical awareness, this culture cuts the bonds with its past so that the present no longer forms a continuum between past and future. When a culture overindulges in historical awareness, the amassed insights can make it difficult for that culture to flourish because of the weight of the past. *Everything passes, except the past*.

Many read Nietzsche as if only making the latter point; namely, that one ought to be able to distance oneself from a past and be a free spirit. Nietzsche still agrees, however, with the Romantic idea that cultural and philosophical traditions are paramount to a culture's viability. This is apparent from his method of genealogy. Already prepared in *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche argues that too many "think of 'man' as an *aeterna veritas*, as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things" (MAM, 'Of First and Last Things', 2). This is a lack of "historical sense", which would make them aware that there "are no *eternal facts*, just as there are no absolute truths" (MAM, 'Of First and Last Things', 2). Nietzsche's method of genealogy thus wants to historicize humanity (especially morality), and show how these have formed over a long span of time. It is only with the historical awareness of Western Man, developing from Greek antiquity via Christianity to the present, that Europe can find its own horizon of creation.

Nietzsche is no naïve Romantic, pining for an illusory sense of wholeness through historical science. In the *Untimely Mediations*, he famously warns against an oversaturation of historical awareness: "*There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture*" (UB, 'History', 1). Nietzsche elucidates this harm throughout the essay, engaging with five problems which are caused by an oversaturation of historical awareness:

> Such an excess creates that contrast between inner and outer which we have just discussed, and thereby weakens the personality; it leads an age to imagine that it possesses the rarest of virtues, justice, to a greater degree than any other age; it disrupts the instincts of a people, and hinders the individual no less than the whole in the attainment of maturity; it implants the belief, harmful at any time, in the old age of mankind, the belief that one is a latecomer and epigone; it leads an age into a dangerous mood of irony in regard to itself and subsequently into the even more dangerous mood of cynicism.
> (UB, 'History', 5)

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Interestingly, the solution to the problems in the *Untimely Meditations* reaches back to *The Birth of Tragedy*: rather than science, it is art and religion which are the more appropriate tools to work with a culture's history:

> It is only through such truthfulness that the distress, the inner misery, of modern man will come to light, and that, in place of that anxious concealment through convention and masquerade, art and religion, true ancillaries, will be able to continue to implant a culture which corresponds to real needs and does not, as present-day universal education teaches it to do, deceive itself as to these needs and thereby become a walking lie.
>
> (UB, 'History', 5)

Positive science abstractly investigates all aspects of a history equally, regardless of whether knowledge of those aspects of history promote or damage human flourishing. Science is indiscriminately voracious or – to use a later term of Nietzsche's – decadent. It lacks a discerning taste that can distinguish the higher from the lower.

Those engaged in historical science might retort that the essence of their craft is just to be an objective and just investigation of history. When then its findings are to the displeasure of some individuals, it has not the right to hide its findings. Nietzsche consistently questions whether this is truly just or rather a veil for resentment masquerading as objectivity (see: UB, 'History', 6). For Nietzsche, the historian, just as any other individual, is not impartial when investigating history: he wants objectivity, an oversaturation of historical awareness that makes him unfazed by any historical detail. But such oversaturation of knowledge turns the historian into a machine: "Are there still human beings, one then asks oneself, or perhaps only thinking-, writing- and speaking-machines" (UB, 'History', 5). One telling illustration of the historian that Nietzsche draws is the eunuch:

> This is a race of eunuchs, and to a eunuch one woman is like another, simply a woman, woman in herself, the eternally unapproachable – and it is thus a matter of indifference what they do so long as history itself is kept nice and 'objective', bearing in mind that those who want to keep it so are for ever incapable of making history themselves.
>
> (UB, 'History', 5)

Because of their own incapacity to navigate harmoniously and playfully in life, the historian seeks to *castrate* life of its exuberant dimensions. The historian's drive for objectivity overwhelms the passion for creation, which breeds resentment towards others who are, in fact, creative. Thus the historian is, in his drives and affects, akin to anti-mystics such as Socrates and Euripides, who also recoiled from the excessive dimensions of human existence.

Like aesthetic Socratism, historical science is an attempt to objectify reality. But for Nietzsche, this can only be achieved by downplaying or ignoring those elements in thought and history that appear in excess to thought. Historians

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make history mundane by investigating its minutest elements. For Nietzsche, the tragic Greek knew better than engage in accurate historiography. The artful drive in the pre-Socratic Greeks was concerned with life, not accuracy, and then aimed to devise a mask that makes bearable the intrinsic suffering of existence. The Greeks were superficial, not because of ignorance but “out of profundity” (FW, ‘Preface’, 4). There are “events that are so delicate that it is best to cover them up with some coarseness and make them unrecognizable” (JGB 40). In order to love life, one must render oneself oblivious to some things.

This reminds me of a story of folklore which Nietzsche undoubtedly knew but never engaged in detail (he mentions it once without further detail: NL 11 1885 1[172]), namely Melusine. The most famous version of this story was compiled by Jean d’Arras around the end of the 14th century: a fairy-like creature called Melusine promises a knight great wealth if he marries her. There is only one condition: one day per month she is to be locked in the tower away from his gaze. When curiosity gets the better of the knight, he peers through the keyhole and sees Melusine bathing: the bottom half of her body was like a serpent. This filled the knight with repulsion and he becomes incapable of loving Melusine. The morale of the story seems to be that men ought to leave women their secrets, for if they would know what dwells underneath female beauty they might find them not quite so attractive anymore. More generally, the story suggests that a degree of not-knowing might be necessary to remain positively disposed towards existence. This means that error, illusion and ignorance are necessary conditions for life.

Nietzsche’s point merits consideration, even today. Western Europe in particular has been suffering from a lacking of singularity, both nationally and continentally. On the one hand, there are anti-European movements that aspire towards smaller blocks of unity (Brexit being the most obvious). On the other hand, there are attempts within national states to circumscribe their own national identity. In Belgium and the Netherlands, there have been heated debates on a national canon, which is a series of historical events that narrate the important milestones of that nations’ history. Initial drafts of these had a tendency to highlight only the positive aspects of that nations’ history and tend to minimize or even leave out its infelicities and crimes (slave trade, colonization, collaboration, etc.). In retort, mostly those on the political (extreme) left suggest a national identity concerned more, and perhaps even excessively, with these latter. Both sides of the debate fall into a different trap for which Nietzsche warned: either an excess of forgetting or of rumination. Both of these are unhelpful for a flourishing national identity.

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Error and Illusion

Rationalist optimism and historical oversaturation are responses to the excess of determination in reality, where the choice is made to obfuscate or ignore these excessive elements. A final element of Nietzsche's disapproval towards rationalist optimism is the general desire to stave off error, mistake, appearance, illusion and deception.

Even Nietzsche, the sceptical philosopher with the hammer who debunks all illusion, still consistently emphasizes the value of error and illusion. He might very well be unique in this regard in the history of philosophy. Nietzsche knew that a consistent attempt to wage war against untruth hides resentment. This is touched on for the first time in the first part of Nietzsche's most positivistic book, *Human all too Human* ('Of first and last things'). Many years after writing this book, Nietzsche would think of *Human all too Human* as emerging from a moment of crisis, an extreme position that was momentarily necessary to convalesce from his Romantic enthusiasm (EH, 'Human all too Human', 1).[39] Now, and for a first time in aphoristic form, Nietzsche would offer a series of scathing remarks at time-tested philosophical prejudices, such as belief in absolute truth (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 2), a metaphysical world (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 9–10) and the thing-in-itself (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 16).

Nietzsche's general tactic in *Human all too Human* is to uncover metaphysical notions as false ideas. In order to move beyond such false ideas, we ought to embrace scepticism. For Nietzsche at that time, scepticism would be a sign of health and vigour that allows a culture to overcome illusion and prejudice. One example among many is Nietzsche's views of Christian sinfulness: "Consider, for example, that Christian distress of mind that comes from sighing over one's inner depravity and care for one's salvation – all conceptions originating in nothing but errors of reason and deserving, not satisfaction, but obliteration" (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 27). A more sceptical attitude towards such topics would allow for a more life-affirmative attitude.

39 After finishing *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche made extensive attempts to have *Human all too Human* (first and second book) destroyed. He wanted to replace the book initially with a new edition, which could serve as an introductory work to *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. The undertaking failed, however, and the new, second edition of *Human all too Human* would become *Beyond Good and Evil*. Instead then of destroying the book, Nietzsche decided to add a foreword that shows how he became a philosopher, namely by going through all sorts of different experiences. For excellent discussion of this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, see Lampert (2017).

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Many years later, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche would shift views. At this time, scepticism was no longer the expression of a healthy and vibrant culture, but a physiological condition caused by "weak nerves or a sickly constitution" (JGB 208). The diversity of values and beliefs in European humanity makes it difficult to affirm any proposition. Scepticism is here not thought of as a sign of strength and restraint, but rather as the inability to make a commitment. It is for this reason, Nietzsche believes, that democracy came to thrive in Europe, which allows European peoples to exercise, from day to day, different wills. In opposition, Nietzsche argues, and I will return to that below, that we should acquire "*a single will*" (JGB 208), not a hodgepodge diversity.

After *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche becomes far less appreciative of positivism and scepticism. This did not happen because he changed his mind on the truthfulness of certain metaphysical ideas, but rather because he saw the purpose of certain erroneous concepts. Something of this view is already present in *Human all too Human*, although there it is seen as a "temporary need". For instance, he writes that "it is *error* that has made mankind so profound, tender, inventive as to produce such a flower as the arts and religions" (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 29). Indeed, Nietzsche admits humanity's (temporary) need for the illogical (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 31), for incorrect judgments (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 32) and for error (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 33). In fact, he is categorical that the illogical and erroneous are central aspects of human existence: "Only very naïve people are capable of believing that the nature of man could be transformed into a purely logical one. [. . .] Even the most rational man from time to time needs to recover nature, that is to say his *illogical original relationship with all things*" (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 31). So, even in *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche is aware that human nature needs illusions to sustain the pursuit of excellence:

> The whole of human life is sunk deeply in untruth; the individual cannot draw it out of this well without thereby growing profoundly disillusioned about his own past, without finding his present motives, such as that of honour, absurd, and pouring mockery and contempt on the passions which reach out to the future and promise happiness in it.
> (MAM, 'Of first and last things', 34)

The shift from *Human all too Human* to his later philosophy is then more a recognition of the fact that humanity will *always* need illusions, not merely now. In a way, Nietzsche became more of a pessimist with regard to the possibility of living without error.

Let us move away from the text for the moment and try to trace more systematically why Nietzsche believes that error, illusions and unreason are necessary

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commodities for human beings. For Schelling, this is a metaphysical project that shows how reason can only emerge from unreason. For Nietzsche, the point is more psychological: to excise error entirely from human life leads towards ressentment and life denial. Especially from *The Gay Science* onwards, Nietzsche would venture upon a process of self-diagnosis, trying to discover under what conditions he sought to progress beyond past delusions, and what sort of libidinal process lay at the bottom of this attempt as to be without error. There is no doubt that Nietzsche is a philosopher interested in working towards the future, but his interest in the future is conditioned by the here and now. This means that the hope for a better future through overcoming illusions may not come at the expense of the present.[40] One can orient oneself towards the future in such a way – for instance, in hoping for progress – that the present is devalued or that the past is maligned. This is what Nietzsche found so upsetting about Christian eschatology: the hopes for Kingdom Come had to damn the world.

When Nietzsche reflected back on *The Gay Science* in the autumn of 1886 near Genua, he recognized that his own dealings with positivism in *Human all too Human* and *Daybreak* were a sign of disease. His desire for a better future had devalued both past and present. This was caused by his disillusionment with the Romantic ideal which resulted in his first hopes for a new health that had dominated his earliest publications (especially *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations*). *The Gay Science* then signified the vibrancy of a body returning to health and strength, not quite healthy yet, but on its way. These first moments of convalescence are occasions for reflections on the way disease had overtaken Nietzsche. So he writes that:

> All those bold lunacies of metaphysics, especially answers to the question about the *value* of existence, may always be considered first of all as symptoms of certain *bodies*; and if such world affirmations or world negations lack altogether any grain of significance when measured scientifically, they give the historian and psychologist all the more valuable hints as symptoms of the body, of its success or failure, its fullness, power and highhandedness in history, or of its frustrations, fatigues, impoverishments, its premonitions of the end, its will to an end. (FW, 'Preface', 2)

Nietzsche's own search – against religion and art – for a way to measure adequately the value of existence through science were expressions of a bodily sickness, expressing itself in terms of metaphysics as a desire towards an end.

40 Werner Stegmaier reflects helpfully on this point by linking Nietzsche's stance towards the future with 'orientation': how do we orient ourselves in the here and now so that the future will look bright. See Stegmaier (2016, pp. 384–401).

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The philosopher with the hammer has a certain purpose – namely to beautify and disillusion reality – but the very desire to beautify hides a resentfulness towards reality. As such, Nietzsche must find a new way of relating to truth and falsehood, an approach that does not dismiss entirely the value of falsehood or, at the very least, one that does not wage a war against falsehood, the ugly and the evil. With *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche grew weary of the nay-saying of his previous work, and now returns to the affirmation of his earliest publication: "No, we have grown sick of this bad taste, this will to truth, to 'truth at any price', this youthful madness in the love of truth" (FW, 'Preface', 4). After having suffered this disease of truth at any price, Nietzsche feels in need of more affirmation, and such affirmation requires a good measure of illusion, error, and appearance: "Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, to be present everywhere, to understand and 'know' everything" (FW, 'Preface', 4).

It should not come as a surprise, then, that in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche becomes most appreciative of the will to appearances, to semblance, in order to make life more bearable. In Book Two of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche begins by berating those "realists" who claim to have an unclouded, sober view of reality (e.g. positivists). Similar to his charge against the objectivity of the historians, the realists do not realize that they are impassioned when they desire an objective view of reality. Nietzsche, however, is proud that he is aware at least of his "drunkenness". But, and this is the main point of his argument, Nietzsche is equally aware that one need not necessarily sober up from drunkenness, recover from illusion. In fact, he equates the idea of the sobriety of the realists with his own desire to sober up: "And perhaps our good will to transcend drunkenness is just as respectable as our belief that you are altogether *incapable* of drunkenness" (FW 57).

This careful balancing of drunkenness and sobriety is illustrated by a number of topics addressed in Book II of *The Gay Science*. One topic concerns men's relationship with women, who Nietzsche thinks are best admired at a distance (e.g. FW 60) and allowed to keep their secrets (FW 74). As illustrated by the story mentioned above about Melusine, Nietzsche thinks that any search for absolute truth tends to make affirmation and love difficult. But for Nietzsche, this is also what happened to Christianity, which was researched so vigorously that it became unbelievable (see chapter four). An author, often praised by Nietzsche for his probing insight into human psychology, is Jonathan Swift, whose *The Lady's Dressing Room* (1732) contains a similar lesson. The protagonist Strephon waits upon Celia to get ready for their encounter and starts to riffle through her belongings. He is taken aback by the filth he encounters and runs away screaming when he notices something Celia left behind in the toilet. According to Swift and

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Nietzsche, Strephon would have been better off in his ignorance. This is why Nietzsche appreciates art in service to the cultural health of a society. Art is capable of telling lies with a good conscience, it is the "cult of the untrue" and "the *good* will to appearance" (FW 107). Without art we could not stomach "the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science" as "*honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide" (FW 107). This means that the scientific uncovering of illusions and errors probes too deeply into the abyss of things and thereby militates against a passionate affirmation of life, which always needs a good measure of ignorance.

For Nietzsche, besides its proclivity to induce nausea, science – like the historian or Socrates – is not entitled to its alleged objectivity or justice. Instead, science is equally impassioned by certain drives and desires: "*In order that this cultivation begins* [of the scientific spirit], must there not be some prior conviction – and indeed one so authoritative and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself? We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no 'presuppositionless' science" (FW 344). Like most other things, science has a fundamental pathos, a relentless pursuit of truth at any cost, that it cannot justify. According to Nietzsche, one would do well to question this will to truth from the perspective of the affirmation of life, for there is no way to know in advance whether truth will turn out to be better than a lie. Therefore, there is no reason to trust truth unconditionally: "What do you know in advance about the character of existence to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditionally distrustful or of the unconditionally trusting?" (FW 344). For science, however, truth does not have to be useful or life-enhancing, it perseveres "*in spite of* the fact that the disutility and dangerousness of 'the will to truth' or 'truth at any price' is proved to it constantly" (FW 344).

Science then appears as if based on an unprovable foundational belief in the unconditional value of truth:

> It is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests – that even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine. (FW 344)

Science did not work out this unconditional duty to truth by itself, but Nietzsche thinks of this as a Christian virtue. Christianity suggests that to allow one to be deceived (by others or by oneself) means to give in to evil (think of Adam and Eve's original sin; the Temptations of Christ, etc.). This is a position germane to most of Western philosophy: not-knowing, deception, ignorance – all of these are evil (e.g. Plato). Positivist science is thus a continuation of the foundational

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beliefs of Christianity, which does not mean that science has not played an important role in subverting Christianity. Nietzsche thinks that Christianity subverted itself by giving birth to science: "One can see *what* it was that actually triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was taken ever more rigorously; the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price" (FW 357). The scientific exploration of history, nature, human biology and so much more has dismantled the Christian narrative that all is the work of a benevolent creator. Through coming to truth by this process, human beings are once again capable of honestly questioning the value of existence as they are no longer curtailed by traditional faith. For this reason, too, Schopenhauer is to Nietzsche the first "admitted and uncompromising atheist among us Germans [. . .]. The ungodliness of existence counted for him as something given, palpable, indisputable" (FW 357). To Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's answer was "something hasty, youthful, a mere compromise, a way or remaining and staying stuck in precisely those Christian and ascetic moral perspectives in which one had *renounced faith* along with the faith in God. But he *posed* the question" (FW 357).

This brings the circle round: Socratic rationalism aligns knowledge, happiness and goodness, which is taken over by Christian morality, and then subverted by positive science. Science, however, is itself equally the expression of the ascetic ideal that enthralled Socrates and Christianity; it takes over their obsession with truth at any cost. For Nietzsche, this does not necessarily work to the benefit of human flourishing: an excessive rationalism, an overflow of historical consciousness and the positivist debunking of illusions all have a detrimental effect on creativity and general life affirmation. With this, Nietzsche wages an open war against the philosophical tendencies of his time: idealism, historicism and positivism. Nietzsche does not absolutely dismiss the relevance of truth, he only warns against an overemphasis on the value of truth (we return to this in chapter nine).

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Chapter 3
Goodness, Evil and the Tradition

Rationalism is not limited to matters of a merely speculative or epistemological nature. Because of an overemphasis on finite determination, moral philosophy also has a tendency to determine evil and goodness strictly, which most often means that it subordinates evil to good, and thereby denying evil its own principle. Evil becomes the absence of goodness, rather than the presence of itself, which removes most, if not all, 'evil' from 'evil'. Mainly through the interventions of Kant and Schelling, there emerged a tendency to think of evil on its own terms and with its own, unique principle – it is Kant who coined the term "radical evil" to signal the self-establishing nature of evil.[41] Nietzsche's immoralism continues on this trend, as we will see, by proposing that evil's own principle might even be beneficial to human prospering: evil is in itself necessary for development.

Evil, the Eleatic Tradition and Immoralism

We paused our reading of Schelling's philosophy above at the point where he recognizes the need for a drastic rethinking of (the relationship between) freedom and system. For Schelling, this objective connects to rethinking the very idea of evil: true freedom must entail the positive and real capacity (*Vermögen*) for good and evil.[42] Freedom has been misunderstood because evil has been misunderstood, and evil was misunderstood because of the Eleatic presupposition of Western thought; that is, the assumption that reality can be understood comprehensively as (self-expressive) being. This assumption obfuscates the regressive tendencies that inhere in reality.

The Eleatic tradition thinks of reality as the consequence of one positive principle which leads to, according to Schelling, the incapacity to think cogently about the type of negativity that is part and parcel of evil. While a good number of Christian and Christian-inspired thinkers, especially some mystics of the later Middle Ages and early modern times, tempered this focus on being as

41 For more detail on Kant's usage of this notion, see Reboul (1971), Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (eds.), (2010) and Madore (2011).

42 I will not here rehearse a detailed exegesis of Schelling's argument for the ground of evil in nature. Rather, I will take Schelling's intentions to rethink evil more radically as a riposte to the dominance of a particular way of thinking about evil in the tradition. For the former, see Vanden Auweele (2019b, pp. 235–253).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-004

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pure – Schelling particularly appreciates John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) and Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) – the Eleatic inclinations of philosophy re-emerged powerfully with Descartes and most subsequent modern philosophers. For Schelling, there has certainly been no dearth of attempts to explain negativity in the philosophical tradition, but these attempts start from the idea that evil, suffering and violence must be an expression of self-expressing being: evil, suffering and violence are expressions of pure being. Historical events typically render such an explanation (and, ultimately, justification) of evil problematic. In the 18th century, this was the Lisbon earthquake. In the 19th century, this was the terror that followed the French Revolution. In the early 20th century, this was the industrialized mass carnage of the First World War. In the mid-20th century, this were the genocides of totalitarian regimes (Fascist and Communist alike). For Schelling, the Eleatic tradition makes an account of evil into a justification of evil. But this sort of evil – a more radical evil – was simultaneously believed to be unjustifiable, and therefore it could not be understood or explained – this is born out explicitly in Levinas' famous essay on 'useless suffering' (1999, pp. 156–167).

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* attended to a similar topic; that is, the impressive wastefulness and mass extinction that occur in natural history. Schelling raised this issue to the Eleatic tradition: if life is what disseminates, multiplies and perseveres, how is profound regression (in whatever form) to be understood? Nietzsche will be tempted to read this as the expression of an exuberance in life: "In nature, it is not distress which *rules,* but rather abundance, squandering – even to the point of absurdity" (FW 349). How exactly are these to be understood as expressions of the effort of being [*conatus essendi*]? The final work – and so also this sentence – on this book was made in the period of quarantine during the March 2020 outbreak of Covid19 (I expect more outbreaks to come): how is such an epidemic, exactly, an expression of the dissemination of being? To explain such negativity uniquely in privative terms seems shortsighted. Life cannot simply be preservation. To understand nature solely in terms of the conservation of life, and not take into account its terrible wastefulness, is a step down from a comprehensive view of nature. And do not speak to me of the individual's limited point of view and that we could see life's dissemination properly if we knew all. Perhaps, some say, life disseminates best during moments of ravenous destruction – the germs, viruses and bacteria seem to be doing rather well! But is life flourishing? I think not, and to suggest as much is a callous and perfidious curse on the very real suffering of so many.

There is something more real and persisting to violence, destruction, regression and evil than the Eleatic tradition had been willing to recognize. Whether Schelling's criticism is fair towards that tradition can be called into

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question. We will disregard that last issue.[43] Schelling's point is best understood as in continuation of Kant's views of evil in the first part of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793/94). There, Kant had emphasized that evil could not simply be explained in terms of a lack of intelligence (Plato), insight (Leibniz) or resolve (Augustine). Throughout his *Religionsschrift* (the finer points of which I cannot explore here), Kant oscillates between trying to comprehend evil and admitting its ultimate incomprehensibility.[44] Kant comes to some level of comprehension of evil as he calls evil the overturning of the moral hierarchy between sensuous and rational motives. The root possibility of this capacity, however, is without a further ground: there is no rational reason as to why there is evil – evil is its own ground, root (*radix*).[45] This has two impressive consequences for our discussion of Schelling. First, the attraction to evil cannot be extirpated from human nature, "the completed moral improvement of the human race, is universally derided as sheer fantasy [*als Schwärmerei allgemein verlacht wird*]" (Kant 1996b, p. 81 [6:34]). Second, the ground of evil lies in our power of choice (*Willkür*) as something that tempts us to submit freely to evil (not in our reasoning or in our sensuous nature).

Schelling joins Kant in opposing a long tradition in philosophy that reduces evil to a privation or negation of goodness. He continues on Kant by showing that if evil has no rational ground – that is, if it cannot be made fully comprehensible through purely rational motives – then its actuality must precede its concept. In other words, the existence of evil exceeds any conceptual account of evil. Schelling therefore excludes *a priori* three typical ways of thinking about evil. The first option denies any and all positive element in evil: "In evil there is nothing at all positive, or – otherwise expressed – that evil does not exist at all" (F 353). For Plato, human beings that act in an evil way simply lack knowledge

43 A thorough discussion of the great variety of ways that traditional Western thought has dealt with evil is beyond the scope of the present work. Schelling (and Kant) is likely overly-reductive in his assessment of that tradition. For excellent overviews of the philosophical engagement with evil, see Bernstein (2002) and Flescher (2013).

44 I have dealt with Kant's account of evil in great detail in my *Pessimism in Kant's Ethics and Rational Religion* (2019, pp. 108–119). For an analysis roughly in line with my own, see Michalson (1990).

45 Pablo Muchnik shows how the instability of Kant's notion of evil has invited two interpretative strategies. On the one hand, some scholars, such as Allen Wood, argue that evil is for Kant mostly a social phenomenon that could be overcome by social progress. On the other hand, other scholars, such as Henry Allison, argue that evil is for Kant transcendentally grounded in the free choice (*Willkür*) and so cannot be extirpated. Kant seems to want his cake and eat it too: he alludes to an overcoming of evil while at the same time denying that human forces could extirpate evil from human nature (Muchnik 2009).

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or insight, and would not act in such a way if they would be properly educated.[46] For Leibniz, any evil is a necessary aspect of a properly organized, divinely structured universe, and a view *sub specie aeternitatis* would show the goodness of reality (or that such a reality could not exist without a certain measure of counterpurposiveness). For Spinoza, there is no such thing as evil, only differing measurements of perfection that range from the lowest to the ultimate perfection, but none of these is evil *per se*, rather a lack of a higher grade of perfection. Schelling refutes these views by pointing out that evil as lack or the impotency of goodness could explain at best the absence of goodness, not the presence of evil: "The feebleness and inefficacy of the reasonable principle can indeed be a basis for the lack of good and virtuous actions, but it cannot be a basis for actions that are positively bad and opposed to virtue" (F 371).

The second typical way of thinking about evil admits that there is something positive in evil, but that this positive element is good rather than evil: "Now if it is assumed that there is something positive in evil, then this positive element also comes from God. It may be objected to this, that what is positive in evil, insofar as it is positive, is good" (F 353). In the first approach, evil is the privation or absence of a goodness; in the second, evil is not entirely parasitic upon goodness but rather stands in a dialectical relationship to goodness. According to Augustine, for instance, human beings have a free will that allows them to choose self-critically and, of their own accord, to submit to God. This is a central aspect of Christianity, an aspect sometimes forgotten in its 'missionary zeal': a conversion that does not occur freely is not genuine. I suspect that this is the reason why in many if not most depictions of Mother Mary at the *Annunciation* – the announcement that she would give birth to the son of God – she is standing at a lectern. What are the odds that a young virgin girl (likely between 13 and 14 years old), living in Nazareth nine months before Christ and betrothed to a carpenter could read? The reason that Mary is depicted as literate is to support the view that she was a strong, smart and capable person – she was able to deny revelation and God. Zeus did not always leave this as an option. Similarly, Augustine believed that the merit of a human being's good behavior, even their conversion, can only have value if they are equally capable of evil and atheism – capable of 'no'. The positive element in doing evil is then

46 Plato nowhere deals with the problem of evil in a systematic fashion. In *Republic*, he claims that it is reasonable to expect the universe to be a just place, and any evil that befalls a person must either be a punishment well-deserved or the good in disguise: "We must suppose that the same is true of a just person who falls into poverty or disease or some other apparent evil, namely, that this will end well for him, either during his lifetime or afterwards" (Plato 1997, pp. 1216–1217 [613a]).

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our freedom, but that freedom is actually something good because it allows for the real conversion to God.

This second solution does not work for Schelling because it insufficiently recognizes how evil is grounded in itself, and not ultimately serves a teleological or eschatological end-goal. One could say that this second view is too dialectical, as it engages evil with good so that ultimately evil can be called a powerful motor for the progress of good. Schelling does not object to having good and evil in a dialectical relationship, but this cannot be to the detriment of the singular unicity of either term. Philosophy must allow for a kind of evil that cannot *a priori* be considered an assistant to moral development. In other words, if we can understand evil, it can only happen *a posteriori*, not *a priori* – there is no guarantee that evil ends up well (it might, but it does not *need* to).

The third and final typical way of thinking about evil is the Manichean position, which held that there are two equally eternal, equally infinite powers, one of goodness and one of evil. Schelling condemns this interpretation vehemently: it would throw us "into the arms of dualism" which is not a philosophically satisfying position, but rather "only a system of self-destruction and the despair of reason" (F 354). Schelling's own position can easily be mistaken for a modern recuperation of Manicheism, but then divorced from its religious, theological and mythological elements. This assumption is faulty: Schelling is in opposition to the Manicheist, dualist reading of goodness and evil because of its improper grasp of the dialectical interrelationship between good and evil. Good and evil are, for Schelling, not merely self-subsisting realities but feed off each other. If one could say that the second option has *too much dialectics*, this third option has *too little*, and secludes evil from playing a productive role in interaction with the good. In fact, this option makes the opposite mistake of the second option; namely, it settles on the nature of evil *a priori* by not even entertaining the possibility for evil to navigate dialectically with the good. Again, for Schelling evil should be understood from its own reality, thus in an *a posteriori* fashion, rather than pigeonholed from the beginning.

Schelling thus follows Kant in trying to think of good and evil as equally real things. Whenever we in some way or other subordinate evil to goodness, then we are on a slippery slope to denying the reality of evil. This does not force Schelling, however, into the opposite direction of the 'self-destruction and despair of reason' that thinks of evil as the wholly Other of goodness. Instead, good and evil are cooperative principles in the comprehensive system of reality. If and when we prioritize good over evil, then we fail to account properly for the organism of nature, which requires destruction as much as creation. Through its conceptual relegation of evil to goodness (destruction to affirmation), the Eleatic tradition has built up to a stale and non-dialectical view of

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reality that lacks spirit and animation. Nietzsche's critique of the morality of custom hits a similar note.

The Eleatic tradition has three schemes to think about evil: absence, privation or opposition. Each of these in some way denies that evil must be taken as, on the one hand, a self-subsisting principle that, on the other hand, is in a dialectical relationship to the good. A proper philosophy of nature and freedom must, according to Schelling, account for the relationship of good and evil as if dialectically mediating *inter pares*. In the next sections, I will point out more comprehensively how Nietzsche's immoralism ought to be read along similar lines; namely, as restoring evil to its proper standing. Immoralism does not mean the promotion of immoral actions, but suggests that Nietzsche wishes to re-evaluate the value and underlining impulse behind moral judgment:

> It goes without saying that I do not deny – unless I am a fool – that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged – but I think the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*. (M 119)

Immoralism means taking a step back and evaluating what is traditionally construed as good and evil (for some moralists, this is already a vicious act). Nietzsche investigates the value of our moral values, which is not to deny the powerful motivational force that moral judgments have upon actions. Instead, immoralism means that the fundamental premises and beliefs of morality are based upon faulty judgments. He puts this point concisely in *Daybreak*:

> To deny that moral judgments are based on truths. Here it is admitted that they really are motives for action, but that in this way it is *errors* which, as the basis of all moral judgment, impel men to their moral actions [. . .] Thus I deny morality as I deny alchemy, that is, I deny their premises: but I do *not* deny that there have been alchemists who believed in these premises and acted in accordance with them. (M 103)[47]

Both Schelling and Nietzsche step back from the traditional view of morality which recognizes the usefulness of moral goodness only. In this view, evil is either reducible to goodness (privation) or the polar opposite of goodness (Manicheism). For both philosophers, the dominance of such a view ought to be countered by returning to a more original, more natural and, most importantly, more organic interpenetration and intermediation of good and evil.

While Schelling uncovers the Eleatic presuppositions of Western moral thought, Nietzsche will dig into the underground of morality. This underground is not divine revelation, rational or natural law, but an attempt to temper those

47 For an extensive review of significance of immoralism for Nietzsche, see Berkowitz (1995).

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naturally-productive drives such as selfishness, suffering, cruelty and contest. In other words, morality has weakened Western societies:

> Our *good* morality is to blame for this pitiableness of our civilisation. Our weak, unmanly, social concepts of good and evil and their tremendous ascendancy over body and soul have finally weakened all bodies and souls and snapped the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men, the pillars of a *strong* civilisation: where one still encounters *bad* morality one beholds the last ruins of these pillars. (M 163)

In order to make his point, Nietzsche will wage no less than a war on Western morality by means of a twofold strategy; that is, a genealogical investigation of the history of morality, and an aesthetic critique of ascetic values. These two avenues of attack are symbiotic: by uncovering the ugliness of the past of ascetic morality, Nietzsche hopes to arouse repugnance for ascetic morality. The manure that nourishes morality makes its flowers less appealing.

This is an area of commonality between Nietzsche and Schelling: Schelling nor Nietzsche are concerned primarily with giving a scientifically-accurate rendering of the past (even though they do and must present their findings in such a way). Anthony Jensen has cogently argued that Nietzsche, in particular, is opposed to the dominant historiographies of his day: unhistorical philosophy (e.g., Plato, Schopenhauer), objective historiography (e.g., Ranke) and teleological views of history (Hegel, Marx). Instead, genealogy is "a historically contingent anti-realist representation set within and constructed to convince a specific and determinate type of perspective" (Jensen 2013, p. 157). Nietzsche's genealogy does not aim to provide an objective account of history, and neither is it mere fabrication; rather, it seeks to deal with historical causes in "an anti-realist" way, which "serves to highlight which cause the historian values as the most significant factor in the causal process and hopes to convince like-minded readers of the same by increasing their familiarity with the situation under investigation" (Jensen 2013, p. 162). Nietzsche's genealogy serves not only to represent how history has evolved, but also to show a mythological or proto-historical moral past, where a more natural and organic perspective reigns, and which was upset by an artificial, human intervention. Katia Hay is then right to point out that both Schelling and Nietzsche want to secure a future by recovering something of this organic past (Hay 2015, pp. 167–186). This point ought, however, not to be overextended: Schelling does not aspire to a return to mythological consciousness, and Nietzsche does not advocate a return to master-slave morality. Both Schelling and Nietzsche hope to recover the organicism of the past not to harken back to some long lost forgotten times, but so that the human interventions that have led humanity astray can create a tension, allowing for a higher state of humanity. For Nietzsche, mankind can

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become more sophisticated through Christianity; for Schelling, the error of paganism allows humanity to entertain a more philosophically-sophisticated religion. Organicism thus means to incorporate rationalism and asceticism into a higher morality, what Nietzsche called a "Caesar with the soul of Christ" and Schelling calls a "philosophical religion".

Tradition and Custom

Let's start by making some notes on Nietzsche's well-known assault on morality. His point is summarized well in *Daybreak* 50:

> Just as savages are quickly ruined and then perish through 'fire-water' [*Feuerwasser*], so mankind as a whole has been slowly and thoroughly ruined through the feelings made drunk by *spiritual* fire-waters and by those who have kept alive the desire for them: perhaps it will go on to perish by them. (M 50)

Morality is an intoxicant, a narcotic – it overpowers the natural senses and causes bewilderment and stupidity. Sufficient exposure to morality makes one an addict, which then results in the inebriated state becoming seen as the normal condition. Similar things apply to humanity's need for metaphysics: enduring exposure to metaphysics makes metaphysics appear normal and natural (see FW 1). But for Nietzsche, not all forms of intoxication are bad: some forms of intoxication are revelries that celebrate life – much like a proper amount of alcohol can liven up a party. Intoxication is only problematic when it becomes escapism. Escapism in morality flees the contingent and individual, fluctuating and organic world by means of an universalized, stagnant and inorganic morality. Daniel Conway helpfully notes that it is the element of universalism in moralities such as Christianity that so upset Nietzsche:

> A universally binding morality would necessarily erect a monolithic moral ideal, thereby reducing a plurality of human types and kinds to a lowest common denominator. Ethical laws should (and do) bind collectively, but only across a limited number of individuals, such as constitute a people, race, tribe, or community. (Conway 1997, p. 30)

Nietzsche uses different terms to describe the underlying features of a universalized, stagnant and inorganic morality. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche's first work of immoralism, this is called the morality of "custom and tradition"; in *Genealogy*, this view is broadened to encompass everything that falls under the "ascetic ideal".

Let us begin with Nietzsche's critique of the morality of tradition in *Daybreak*. Nietzsche starts from the assumption that moral values do not derive from divine revelation (Christianity), a natural moral sense (Hutcheson), a rational categorical

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duty (Kant) or the intimate recognition of indistinctness of (human) beings (Schopenhauer). In an essay familiar to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer once made the observation that "in all ages there has been much good preaching of morals; but the grounding of them has always been in a grave state" (Schopenhauer 2009, p. 120 [113]). Schopenhauer means that philosophers generally agree what behavior is virtuous and what behavior is vicious, but there has been no dearth of disagreement on the grounds of virtue and vice. Nietzsche claims then to have found the real ground for moral evaluations, namely custom and tradition: "Morality is nothing other (therefore *no more*!) than obedience to customs, of whatever kind they may be; customs, however, are the *traditional* way of behaving and evaluating" (M 9).

Nietzsche's point seems simplistic, though further notes in *Daybreak* make it more complex. For Nietzsche, customs are not necessary a bad thing: there can be a lot of wisdom in custom and tradition, which allow human beings to develop themselves as if standing on the shoulders of their ancestors. For Nietzsche in *Daybreak*, moral judgments have their root in customary ways of acting that, at one point, were instituted to organize a society: morality is all about hierarchies. Moral values are value judgments that typically arise organically to differentiate between higher and lower things (people, objects, ideas, places, etc.). Moral values judge for a society what counts as good and what counts as bad, which usually originates in a hierarchy between the few and the many. As a society and its members change, evolve and adapt, so must their moral valuations.

This is the image of a mythological past that Nietzsche postulates. It has two important elements; namely, on the one hand, a culture or people (*Volk*) that believes in a certain moral valuation which, on the other hand, becomes challenged and refreshed by free spirits. These two elements make the past more organic than our contemporary age. A culture or people is inaugurated through great individuals who set a clear hierarchy of values: "The ones who created the peoples were the creators, they hung a faith and a love over them, and thus they served life" (Z, 'On the New Idol'). These hierarchies play out on different fields, such as politics (leaders/rabble), art (beautiful/ugly), religion (holy/profane), ethics (good/bad). Over time, the force of these hierarchies tends to wane, which fosters the possibility for free spirits to emerge which question these hierarchies. Through challenge (often called corruption or degeneration), the people are forced to adapt to incorporate those challenges within an ever-evolving body. This usually happens when a new great individual establishes new hierarchies that, ideally, take up the original hierarchies and the challenges to those hierarchies. This is what Nietzsche calls the "law of ebb and flood" (FW 1). It is the development of humanity, making human

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beings more refined, comprehensive and powerful and so breeding the human animal towards new heights.

Such development is in no way teleological. Nietzsche has no determinate end-goal in mind. Nietzsche's way of thinking about moral development builds from similar premises as Schelling's rethinking of good and evil. To think appropriately about the (moral) development of humanity, this must be done *a posteriori*. *Philosophy starts at nightfall, when Minerva's owl spreads its wings*. The value of a certain development can only be assessed from what is happening and its effects. For instance, there was no way to predict whether the slave revolt in morality was going to have positive or deleterious effects on humanity. What is sure, however, is that as humanity is allowed to develop continuously, it can learn from its past and develop towards a better future. For Nietzsche, what is key is that humanity develops, not to what it develops.

But for Nietzsche, something has gone amiss with the way Western society has been developing. Rather than organically engaging tradition with dissent, Western society has become stale or inorganic, and the morality of custom no longer adapts to changing circumstances. Society has developed so that it no longer develops. This can happen because of two causes: either a culture could universalize their morality or a culture could turn its hierarchical judgments topsy-turvy. Both of these occurred at the same time in what Nietzsche calls the "slave revolt in morality". In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche is most concerned with the former; namely, how moral judgments have become rigid and, through time, and became bred into our instincts so thoroughly that we have an instinctive feeling for morality. In *Genealogy*, Nietzsche is focused on the latter cause, adding that the dominant moral judgments turn the moral axiology between noble and lower values on their head. Together, this means that Western society has rigidified a backwards sense of morality.

The main point in *Daybreak* is that our moral feelings are the rigidified judgments of our ancestors: "To trust one's feelings – means to give more obedience to one's grandfather and grandmother and their grandparents than to the gods which are in *us*: our reason and our experience" (M 35). Morality is not based upon prudential considerations, but upon an immediate effect on our willing. Attempts to justify morality in a rational way – such as in the German tradition of practical philosophy – hope to sustain the idea that morality is ultimately the proper rational course of action, up to the point that Kant would argue morality to be grounded in *a priori* reason.[48] This is what Nietzsche

48 For Nietzsche, the dominant way of dealing with morality in the Western tradition has been to provide a ground for morality, or: to justify morality: "They wanted morality to be

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points to when he says that “all things that live long are gradually so saturated with reason that their origin in unreason becomes improbable” (M 1). This sentiment mirrors Schelling’s point that an excessive focus on rationalism leads to a devaluation, or even denial, of the irrational origin of reason. As reason is naturally dialectical, it tends to overextend its own purview and spread over those things that are beyond its domain. What Nietzsche adds is that if we accustom ourselves to feeling and thinking in a certain way (e.g., in a stagnant moral fashion), we are prone to assume that such behavior is the proper and rational course. Reason forgets unreason.

A morality of tradition dissuades the emergence of higher individuals and therefore stunts organic growth, evolution and adaptation. For Nietzsche, this can happen in a variety of ways. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche singles out Christianity for its consistent attacks against higher individuals: “You should not beautify Christianity or try to dress it up: it has waged a *war to the death* against this *higher* type of person, it has banned all the basic instincts of this type” (A 5). The effect of Christianity’s absolute dominance is that Western society turned into a stale, non-dialectical society, filled with reverence to custom for the sake of tradition. Western history has bred the herd-instinct into man to such an extent that he dislike any fundamental claims to superiority. This is the effect that Nietzsche finds most objectionable in moralities which revere tradition; namely, that it instantiates “a higher authority which one obeys, not because it commands what is *useful* to us, but because it *commands*” (A 5). Such a tradition dissuades individuality and originality: “Under the dominion of the morality of custom, originality of every kind has acquired a bad conscience” (M 9).

Suffering Suffering

The morality of custom and tradition dissuades dissidence by cultivating an outlook on sin, suffering and punishment: a morality of custom understands suffering as punishment for a sin. Similarly, Schelling notes that the Eleatic tradition does not recognize evil *simpliciter,* but only as somehow part and parcel of an eschatological or soteriological process. Let us unpack this here.

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grounded, – and every philosopher so far has thought that he has provided a ground for morality” (JGB 186). This means basically that morality has been taken as a given, as something beyond question: “The problem of morality itself has been *missing* from every ‘science of morals’ so far: there was no suspicion that anything was really a problem”, which means that grounding morality meant a “good *faith* in the dominant morality” (JGB 186).

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To regard suffering as punishment for sin seems, to me, an immense psychological cruelty. Through thinking of all suffering as punishment (and no human life is devoid of suffering), we have come to think of ourselves as sinful and in need of repentance. The more we suffer, the more we need to repent. For example, if someone has lost a child, this means that they have transgressed against morality to such an extent that their punishment is just. Not only do they suffer the pain of their loss, but they also suffer from the view that they are sinful. This robs reality of its innocence, as Nietzsche points out:

> Not only has [the concept of punishment] been implanted into the consequences of our actions – and how dreadful and repugnant to reason even this is, to conceive cause and effect as cause and punishment! – but they have gone further and, through this infamous mode of interpretation with the aid of the concept of punishment, robbed of its innocence the whole purely chance character of events. (M 13)

This moralized sense of thinking about human events is impervious to falsification: even without detectable transgression, existence itself can still be seen as sinful (original sin). Christianity leaves nothing to chance (see, e.g., M 130) and so all suffering is the consequence of sin. And all sin ought to be atoned for, all debts are to be paid.[49]

By negating the very possibility of innocence and chance, Western morality (and particularly Christianity) has come to believe that everything was orchestrated through a rational or moral plan: there is a mysterious and divine will behind everything. As I stated above in the discussion of Schelling, evil is not thought to have its own essence and principle, but is ultimately subordinated to a greater plan. So when Nietzsche and Schelling emphasize, to the contrary, that not everything is orchestrated by means of a moral or rational plan, that there are events that could not be foreseen *a priori*, then not everything ought, nor even can, be explained in terms of morality or rationality (see, e.g., FW 127).

Both Nietzsche and Schelling are thus intent upon recovering a ground for such things as destruction, evil and cruelty that is not linked ultimately to a morality of sin and punishment. This means that evil can be its own ground; that is, not derived from a higher, more ultimate sense of goodness or justice without falling into the trap of Gnosticism or Manicheism. Nevertheless, by

49 Nietzsche insinuates, however, that a more proper sense of redemption obliterates the need for redemption at all: that we must no longer think of suffering and existence as sinful. This is mirrored in Nietzsche's discussion of the opposition between chance and purpose. When we let go of the idea that the world is a purposeful whole, we also let go of the idea of chance. He calls this to de-deify nature, which is a redemption: "When will all these shadows of God no longer darken us? When will we have completely de-deified nature? When may we begin to *naturalize* humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?" (FW 109)

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working towards such a goal, Schelling is not only capable of properly appreciating the destructive dimensions of reality, he is also capable of re-instituting a sense of innocence to suffering, where suffering is not condoned and justified by recourse to a higher good. There is then suffering and destruction, not as part of a grand divine plan, but simply as such. Similarly, Nietzsche aims to say that there is just suffering that requires no moral qualification in terms of sin or punishment; next to its rational and uplifting dimension, reality has its irrationalities and destructions.

Schelling's attack on the Eleatic tradition in morality was motivated by the way that it conceptualizes evil within a univocally rationalistic system. Nietzsche takes Schelling's concerns one step further by emphasizing the pernicious underlying presupposition of this strategy: namely, that to align evil, suffering, punishment and sin robs reality of its innocence. Nietzsche rethinks good and evil so that suffering is no longer seen as punishment for a transgression: "'And in *summa*: what is it you really want changed?' – We want to cease making causes into sinners and consequences into executioners" (M 208). In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche suggests hesitantly that science can accomplish such a turnaround of perspective, as an increase in science might lay bare the true, non-moral causes of events (e.g. M 10–12). This implies that we may come to recognize that events and things do not have qualities in themselves or absolute values; rather, human beings have conferred values upon things. When reflecting on what makes certain people or things laughable, Nietzsche writes:

> How does laughter originate? We have thought the matter over and finally decided that there is nothing good, nothing beautiful, nothing sublime, nothing evil in itself, but that there are states of soul in which we impose such words upon things external to and within us. We have *taken back* the predicates of things, or at least remembered that it was we who *lent* them to them: – let us take care that this insight does not deprive us of the *capacity* to lend, and that we have not become at the same time *richer* and *greedier*.
> (M 210)

From this, we gather that Nietzsche is not opposed to conferring values and predicates upon things, but that we must recognize these values as man-made, and therefore open to reproof, correction and development. Nietzsche's wish is that we are unburdened of the idea of eternal values and, as we relinquish the idea that values have a divine, natural or rational origin, we are once again capable of creating new values and therefore also of more organically entering a dialogue with reality.

We have explored above how a morality that ties sin, punishment and suffering together impedes the creation of values since it promotes the idea that events and things have value in themselves. As a consequence, a morality of custom and tradition arises that tends to militate against suffering: if suffering

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is a consequence of, and even punishment for, sin, then suffering is something to be avoided at all costs. Christianity and its offshoots, therefore, work to undo suffering and sin – after, according to Nietzsche, it had created the idea of sin and guilt in the first place[50] – and even after Christianity had lost its dominance, this way of thinking has given rise to moralities based upon compassion (Schopenhauer) and utilitarianism (Mill, Bentham) that still try to alleviate suffering. Nietzsche points out in retort that profound suffering can breed creation; the more profound the suffering, the more impressive the creation can be. The sentiment is captured in famous lines from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> You want, if possible (and no 'if possible' is crazier) to *abolish suffering*. And us? – it looks as though *we* would prefer it to be heightened and made even worse than it has ever been! Well-being as you understand it – that is no goal; it looks to us like an *end*! – a condition that immediately renders people ridiculous and despicable – that makes their decline into something *desirable!* The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – don't you know that *this* discipline has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far? (JGB 225)

Through incorporating or assimilating those wounds that are struck upon our body or spirit by suffering, we can be brought to a more refined and advanced way of thinking. Those who are intent upon avoiding suffering at all cost have the privilege of living a life of comfort ("the last human"), but they do so while losing some of the more powerful motivators for creativity. Schopenhauer also notes that to expedite suffering from the world entirely would have catastrophic consequences:

> Suppose this race were transported to a *fool's paradise*, where everything grew on its own and the pigeons flew around already roasted, and everyone found his dearly beloved and held on to her without difficulty. There some would die of boredom, or hang themselves, but some would assault, throttle and murder each other, and thus cause more suffering for themselves than nature now places on them. (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 264 [311])

Some of the more exalted works of art are similarly born from the physical or spiritual pain of the artist. A free spirit would then seek out hazardous situations with a potential for suffering and danger simply because this would put his mind to creation. We have, occasionally, to vacate our comfort zones and safe spaces.

50 See, e.g.: "Christianity, with its contempt for the world, made a *virtue* of ignorance, Christian innocence, perhaps because the most frequent result of this innocence is, as aforesaid, guilt, the feeling of guilt and despair, and thus a virtue which leads to Heaven via a detour through Hell: for only then can the gloomy propylaea of Christian salvation open up, only then will there be any point to the promise of a posthumous *second innocence* – it is one of Christianity's fairest inventions" (M 321).

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Nietzsche has more in common with Schopenhauer on the subject than is often recognized. Schopenhauer believed it be an *a priori* fact that life is mired in suffering, which is by itself a motive against affirming life. Schopenhauer's argument is fairly straightforward: if it can be shown that suffering is a more potent and prominent aspect of (human) existence than happiness, then existence itself is to be regarded an ill. Schopenhauer settles this point by suggesting that "the very existence of evil already decides the matter" (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 591 [661]). If there is even the slightest trace of suffering in (human) existence, then that existence is not worth living. Schopenhauer takes this position because he is convinced of the privative nature of happiness and the positive nature of suffering: "We feel pain, but not painlessness; we feel worry, but not freedom from worry; we feel fear but not security" (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 590 [659]). Happiness is really just the absence of pain, much like satiety is the absence of hunger and thirst. As such, happiness is a zero-condition (one that is not really felt) and suffering is negative (really, and painfully, felt). No matter how many zeros we add up, the total remains at zero.[51]

Despite the way in which Nietzsche often frames his opposition to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche does also praise Schopenhauer for taking suffering seriously again as an issue of philosophical attention: "It is said of Schopenhauer, and with justice, that after they had been neglected for so long he again took seriously the sufferings of mankind" (M 52). Indeed, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche agree that suffering is a means towards a higher state of being. Schopenhauer's general point is that if "the veil of *maya*, the *principium individuationis*, is lifted from a human being's eyes", then that human being will no longer make "the egoistic distinction between his person and that of others" which results in that this individual "regards the endless suffering of all living things as his own" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 405 [447]). Because of that overdose of suffering, his intellect exerts such power over his will that the will is brought to "turning away from life" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 406 [448]). Schopenhauer continues that some people are brought to the "personal *experience* of suffering" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 419 [463]). Suffering is a way to salvation:

> The will must be broken by personal experience of great suffering before its self-negation can come into play. Then we see a man who has gone through all the stages of increasing

51 Recently, Sandra Shapshay has mounted an argument to counter the all-pervasive image of Schopenhauer as the philosopher of pessimism, the Dürer-knight as Nietzsche called him, in favor of seeing him as more of a philosopher of hope. A discussion of this falls outside the scope of this work (see: Shapshay 2019).

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> difficulty brought to the brink of despair amid the most violent resistance, – we see him suddenly retreat into himself, recognize himself and the world, change his whole being, raise himself above himself and all suffering; purified and sanctified by this suffering, with unassailable peace, blissfulness and sublimity, we see him willingly renounce everything that he had previously desired with such violent intensity, and cheerfully embrace death. The silver gleam is the negation of the will, i.e. redemption, that suddenly emerges from the purifying flame of suffering. (Schopenhauer 2010, pp. 419–420 [464])

The difference between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is that, for the latter, suffering is a means beyond affirming life, and for Nietzsche, suffering has to be embraced as an energetic principle that fuels our creativity. Nietzsche would likely agree with Schopenhauer's analysis of the human condition, but he would make the important addition: most people seem quite willing to accommodate suffering – from momentary discomfort to intense pain – for the sake of something they hold dear. In fact, the value individuals attach to objects, people or ideas cannot be measured appropriately in terms of the amount of happiness they derive from them, but rather from the amount of pain they are willing to endure for it. This means that, in the end, even suffering is life-affirming.

A Pity

Schopenhauer returned European philosophy to a fundamental question: what is the worth of existence? This question shaped the next half a century of philosophical discussion. Schopenhauer decided to attempt this puzzle of existence by means of the same antidotes that had been around for centuries, such as self-abnegation and compassion. The solution is to de-individualize, either because being an individual is sinful (Christianity) or because it is the source of suffering (Schopenhauer). To be rid of suffering, all we have to do is transition into nothingness. Schopenhauer's ethical imperative was thus not unlike Christianity; namely, compassion with the suffering Other and self-denial.

Nietzsche was no fan of this general attitude: "There is also a wonderful and fair-sounding unanimity in the demand that the ego has to deny itself until, in the form of adaptation to the whole, it again acquires its firmly set circle of rights and duties", which results in nothing but the "fundamental re-molding, indeed weakening and abolition of the *individual*" (M 132). For Nietzsche, while most people allege that their incentive to de-individualize is the love of the Other (or of God), it is really buoyed through self-hatred. Pascal was, to Nietzsche, a more

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straightforward Christian when he spoke of *le moi haïssable* (see M 63). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche puts it as follows:

> This self-hatred belongs to the darkening and increasing ugliness of Europe, which has been growing for a hundred years now [. . .]: *if it is not the cause!* The man of 'modern ideas', this proud ape, is exceedingly unhappy with himself: this is clear. He suffers: and his vanity would have it that he only pities . . . (JGB 222)

Through being compassionate, human beings lose something. Either human beings lose themselves in the Other and so forego from their individuality that might give rise to creation, or human beings are demeaned by compassion and pity: "To offer pity is as good as to offer contempt" (M 135).[52]

By undoing human beings of their particularizing features (to de-individualize), pity makes human beings contemptible. Moreover, for Nietzsche pity is a drain on vitality. This is expressed with the least possible amount of nuance in *The Antichrist*. Two examples will suffice. First, "pity is the opposite of the tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings: pity has a depressive effect. You lose strength when you pity" (A 7). Second, "pity preserves things that are ripe for decline, it defends things that have been disowned and condemned by life, and it gives a depressive and questionable character to life itself by keeping alive an abundance of failures of every type" (A 7). By busying oneself over a life that is dying, Nietzsche continues, pity keeps alive what should die. Pity deprives human beings of energies better spent elsewhere as the pitiable object should simply be left to perish. Pity also has a tendency to collapse the distance between individuals. It equalizes the one who suffers and the one who pities. Nietzsche singles this out as something particularly objectionable about the ethics of pity: "My problem with people who pity is that they easily lose any sense of shame or respect, or any sensitivity for distances, that pity quickly begins to smell of the mob and is almost indistinguishable from bad manners" (EH, 'Why I am so Wise', 4).

From the above, we can gather that Nietzsche's ethics opposes pity because it militates against suffering, it *uglies* humanity by de-individualizing and keeps alive what should perish, and it collapses the difference between individuals. However, this should not lead us to believe that Nietzsche opposes all forms of care for human beings and even all forms of pity. His objection to pity

52 In response to Nietzsche's scathing critique of compassion, numerous authors of the early 20th century became interested in uncovering a sense of 'active compassion' that allows both the self and the Other to retain their individuality despite standing in a relationship of moral dependence. For discussion how this idea is developed in Max Scheler and Mikhail Bakhtin (both inspired by Dostoevsky), see Wyman (2016).

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is specifically geared towards a certain way of understanding Other-relating. In *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's protagonist lives a better form of Other-relating, one for which the theoretical foundation is provided in *Beyond Good and Evil* 225, where Nietzsche speaks of a higher sense of pity: "*Our* pity is a higher, more far-sighted pity: – we see how humanity is becoming smaller, how *you* are making it smaller!" (JGB 225).

This aphorism begins with a repetition of how Nietzsche thinks that suffering is an incentive to creativity:

> The tension that breeds strength into the unhappy soul, its shudder at the sight of great destruction, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, surviving, interpreting, and exploiting unhappiness, and whatever depth, secrecy, whatever masks, spirit, cunning, greatness it has been given: – weren't these gifts of suffering, of the disciple of great suffering?
> (JGB 225)

Suffering can unleash the creator in man, but if there is a creator in humanity, there might also be a creature. There is something that creates and something that is being created. In Nietzsche's thought, this will ultimately concern a very specific sense of self-creation (see chapter six), but it contains echoes of the Kantian distinction between the one *who gives the law*, and the one *who receives the law*. This distinction led Kant to postulate a *homo noumenon* as legislator of moral laws and a *homo phenomenon* as subject to those laws. Kant was aware of the bipolarity in human nature, but he conceived of this bipolarity in a metaphysical register, where the creator is exalted over the creature. Nietzsche remains rigorously anti-metaphysical by uniting creature and creator in the same substance: "In human beings, *creature* and *creator* are combined: in humans there is material, fragments, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in humans there is also creator, maker, hammer-hardness, spectator-divinity and seventh day: – do you understand this contrast?" (JGB 225).

If one pities another human being, this pity can then be directed towards the creature or the creator. Generally, pities tends to be directed towards the creature: "And that *your* pity is aimed at the 'creature in humans'" which for Nietzsche is the part of humanity that should not be sustained, but "molded, broken, forged, born, burnt, seared and purified, – at what necessarily needs to *suffer* and *should* suffer" (JGB 225). The part of the human being which is then made to suffer is released from suffering by pity. The human being orients himself towards that part of the Other in loving care, a part which should be shaped and molded. These parts are the more basic instincts, such as the pursuance of pleasure, social needs and metaphysical comfort. Pity validates, then, the lower part of the human being. There is another kind of pity, however, which is directed at the creator in man: "And *our* pity – don't you realize who our *inverted*

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pity is aimed at when it fights against your pity as the worst of all pampering and weaknesses?" (JGB 225). The creator in man is what hopes to shape the vast panoply of difference into a cultured self. This might not happen because of a variety of reasons, and we can pity the suffering of the creator in man. Pity of the creator means pity for the part in the human being which is subdued from expressing itself. Nietzsche pities those individuals who are barred from strong self-expression through morality and societal custom. Nietzsche feels moved to release the creator in man and subdue the creature.

To release the creator in the human being is the general concern of *Zarathustra* IV (which we will discuss in much more detail in chapter nine). Zarathustra hears a cry of distress from the 'higher man', an individual who has lost his standing and strength because of the onslaught of nihilism. He does not pity him as a suffering creature, but as a suffering creator who is thwarted from originality and creation. He is then not concerned with releasing the higher man from suffering – "there are problems that are higher than any problems of pleasure, pain, or pity; and any philosophy that stops with these is a piece of naiveté" (JGB 225) – but rather with alleviating obstacles to their self-creation. He gives shelter so that the higher man can convalesce, regain himself, and return to the world. Even this pity, however, is but a detour for Nietzsche's most important project: "My suffering and my pity – what do they matter! Do I strive for *happiness*? I strive for my *work*!" (Z, 'The Sign').

The moral duty for pity is thus a consequence of a morality of custom that connects sin, suffering and punishment. If suffering is to be avoided at all costs because it is the punishment for sin, then pity becomes a straightforward requirement of morality. Nietzsche attacks on pity are then to be read mainly in terms his particular difficulties with this theoretical framework, and not as an attempt to undo any sense of Other-relating. In the following, we will discuss how this particular form of morality has become dominant.

On the Origin of the Morality of Custom

For Nietzsche, traditional morality has a problematic Other-relating which has a negative influence on the cultural health of Europe through a rigidified morality of custom, a causal view of sin and suffering, and a general opposition to suffering and the promotion of pity. Morality has opposed strong, vigorous, self-activated action in favor of weak, debilitated, passive obedience to custom. Nietzsche's issue is not so much with obedience *per se*, but with obedience that has become sovereign, and human beings that no longer know how to command. There can be a more productive sense of obedience; that is, *an obedience to self*, for which European man has been prepared by the morality of custom.

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In order to arrive at such a higher obedience, there ought to be a way to break the hegemony of the morality of custom. And in order to do that, we have to uncover the root cause of how this weak morality has risen to such prominence. The task involves making a number of notes on Nietzsche's famous genealogical analysis of morality.[53]

Nietzsche argues that accounts of the history of morality hitherto have failed to regard morality *as a problem*. Instead, they have assumed that Western morality is the one true morality, a mistake for which Nietzsche singles out the English historians of morality:

> These historians of morality (particularly, the Englishmen) do not amount to much: usually they themselves unsuspectingly stand under the command of a particular morality and, without knowing it, serve as its shield-bearers and followers, for example, by sharing that popular superstition of Christian Europe which people keep repeating so naively to this day, that what is characteristic of morality is selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice, or sympathy and compassion. (FW 345)

It is hard not to see these comments as reflective of Nietzsche's embitterment with his erstwhile companion Paul Rée (1849–1901). Author of *The Origin of the Moral Sensations* (1877) and the third part of Nietzsche's love triangle with Lou Salomé, Paul Rée attempted a scientific interrogation of the history of our moral sensations. Nietzsche's own genealogical account seeks to outdo Rée's account by beginning before their point of departure, a history prior to the history of Western morality (much like Schelling, in *The Ages of the World*, seeks to uncover what happened before the beginning). This makes Western morality look like an aberration rather than the rule.

Nietzsche's interest in uncovering the mythological proto-history of Western morality is twofold; namely, on the one hand, to describe a more natural and organic sense of morality and, on the other hand, to discredit the artificial and unnatural form that Western morality has assumed. This two fold concern coalesces in one pertinent question: if Western morality is an unnatural aberration, what are the conditions under which it emerged? How can an unnatural abomination corrupt nature? This is how Nietzsche frames the driving question behind his genealogy:

> Under what conditions did man invent the value judgments good and evil? *And what value do they themselves have?* Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human

53 I will confine my notes to those issues helpful in clarifying Nietzsche's philosophy of freedom and religion. For a more detailed engagement with Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, see Janaway (2007) and Hatab (2008).

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> flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future? (GM, 'Preface', 3)

Nietzsche takes a similar route as Schelling: some things can only be understood *a posteriori*. This means that the essence and possibility of the slave revolt in morality can only be understood from its actuality: it could not be predicted. The three consecutive essays of *On the Genealogy of Morals* deal respectively with how moral values emerged (slave revolt), how they became widespread (the promotion of guilt) and how they continue as the ascetic ideal in much of Western civilization.

Nietzsche's reversal of most histories of morality occurs in his opening move. Instead of considering morality as Other-oriented, Nietzsche traces the notion of goodness to a self-relationship:

> The real breeding-ground for the concept 'good' has been sought and located in the wrong place by this theory: the judgment 'good' does *not* emanate from those to whom goodness is shown! Instead it has been 'the good' themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good. (GM, 'First Essay', 2)

His well-known alternative to the more common histories of morality is that moral good does not originate in the other, on whom good is bestowed, but from those who are at a distance from commonality and capable of expressing their nature directly, without concern for effectiveness or usefulness:

> It was from this *pathos of distance* that they first claimed the right to create values and give these values names: usefulness was none of their concern! [. . .] The standpoint of usefulness is as alien and inappropriate as it can be to such a heated eruption of the highest rank-ordering and rank-defining value judgments. (GM, 'First Essay', 2)

The noble was the one who spontaneously determined what counts as good. This was the default standard of morality, which includes a constant refreshing of moral good and evil through the value-creating of the noble. The noble did not adhere to a pre-set morality of custom, but took 'good' to mean nobility and 'bad' to mean slavishness.

The pre-history of morality is more a foundational myth for Nietzsche than an actual state of affairs. It makes no sense to ask when it took place, but it serves the purpose of a pre-Lapsarian Garden of Eden in Nietzsche's philosophy. It is a story that undergirds all possible narratives that unfold from its many layers. There is an innocence in this sense of being, an innocence that is more innate than acquired. Like in most foundational myths, Nietzsche presents an organic state of origin wherein human beings lived in *harmony* with nature. This does not mean that human beings live in peace, but rather that they are themselves *in tune*

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with nature (which is itself quite violent at times). Human beings, however, fell *out of tune* – they fell out of the *cadence* of life and now are *decadent*. Christians have their original sin; Nietzsche has his slave revolt in morality.

For Nietzsche, there were different classes of people, each with their own function, in the organic state of nature. Most importantly, society had a class of the people who are ruled, a class of aristocracy who secure the physical integrity of the people and a class of priests who maintain the psychological health of the nation. The slave revolt begins with a conflict between the priestly and noble class: the physically-powerless priestly class sought to manifest their will to power through means more cunning than direct might. They riled up the masses against the aristocracy by turning the noble moral valuations on their head: slavishness now becomes good and, more importantly, nobility becomes evil. Not only does this dramatically overturn previous moral evaluations – which would not be problematic for Nietzsche *per se* – but it promoted the idea that whomever does not adhere to slavish values of self-abnegation and compassion is evil. Every noble impulse becomes morally suspect.

The world turned upside down is not univocally deplored by Nietzsche. In fact, Nietzsche sees the slave revolt as a dialectical process that potentially enriches humanity. The slave revolt has created the means for Western societies to refine their inner life, to become more intelligent than during its brutish stage of aristocratic morality: "The history of mankind would be far too stupid a thing if it had not had the intellect of the powerless injected into it" (GM, 'First Essay', 7). As long as the slave revolt was a tug of war between the noble and the priest, the doer and the thinker, there was a healthy and organic interplay between strength and refinement that could be mutually enriching. This is where Nietzsche comes to entertain the image of a higher type, "a Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ", as the perfect dialectical tension of the most profound inwardness and most powerful nobility (see Desmond 1999, pp. 27–61).

The healthy dialectical interplay between priestly intellect and noble strength was halted by an intervention that Nietzsche attributes to the Jews. The Jews were a group of priestly people who simply lacked the capacity for navigating dialectically with noble morality, and out of *ressentiment* for their impoverished state, they sought revenge against aristocratic values: "The Jews, that priestly people, which in the last resort was able to gain satisfaction from its enemies and conquerors only through a radical reevaluation of their values, that is, through an act of *the most deliberate revenge*" (GM, 'First Essay', 7). Nietzsche continues that

> it was the Jews who, rejecting the aristocratic equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed) ventured, with awe-inspiring consistency, to bring about a reversal and held it in the teeth of the most unfathomable hatred (the hatred of the powerless),

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> saying: 'Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!' (GM, 'First Essay', 7)

As a result, the Jews successfully instituted a right of sole ownership to priestly, ascetic values (see, also, JGB 195). For Nietzsche, the problem is not so much that the Jews introduced ascetic values – for there were already quite widespread – but that these were introduced to command unique and sole ownership of morals, and so also without an engagement with noble values. The slave revolt is then not a mere opposition to noble values, it exalts a totally new sense of morality.

"The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality" Nietzsche writes "occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values" (GM, 'First Essay', 10). Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment* has been discussed widely among scholars (e.g. Reginster 1997, pp. 281–306; Wallace 2007, pp. 110–137). Let me start with Peter Poellner's helpful notes on the four essential components of *ressentiment*. First, *ressentiment* is a sensation of frustration that is caused by other individuals. Second, such frustration in turn causes negative emotions to these others. Third, the original frustration combines with the negative emotions and induces a desire for superiority over these others. Fourth, the subject takes up or develops a new evaluative framework wherein this superiority is justified (Poellner 2011, pp. 123–124). Poellner's definition helpfully distinguishes *ressentiment*, which has a creative dimension, from more mundane experiences of discontentment. In Nietzsche's genealogy, the priest functions primarily to provide the evaluative framework wherein the weaker individuals of a society can safely discharge their *ressentiment*. This is where religion gains truth, namely as a means towards purification:

> We have every right to call Christianity in particular a large treasure-trove of the most ingenious means of consolation, so much to refresh, soothe and narcotize is piled up inside it, so many of the most dangerous and most daring risks are taken for the purpose, it has been so especially subtle, so refined, so southerly refined in guessing which emotions to stimulate in order to conquer the deep depression, the leaden fatigue and the black melancholy of the psychologically obstructed, at least temporarily. (GM, 'Third Essay', 17)

The purpose of any religion is to "fight against a certain weariness and heaviness that has become epidemic" (GM, 'Third Essay', 17). Religion is a means for discharging *ressentiment*.[54]

54 Guy Elgat rightly adds to Poellner's definition that *ressentiment* is principally outward looking: "*Ressentiment* is instinctively outward looking and does not spontaneously engage in

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But the slave revolt went further than merely providing an evaluative framework wherein the weaker individuals could discharge their *ressentiment*. It became an absolute moral standard. Against the perspectivism of organic morality, the slave revolt introduced a radically new mode of moral evaluation. This required, in turn, a new set of tools to justify moral obligation: if morality is based upon self-abnegation, a human being – even the noble – must be capable of adhering to those duties. In other words, a human being must have a complex internal life, with a free will capable of navigating the myriad of his drives and elevating one over the other. In turn, this makes the human being fundamentally predictable, someone who controls or restrains certain drives to the benefit of others. A human being becomes capable of promising that he will act in a certain way, he takes accountability for his behavior in the past, present and future.

But again, accountability and responsibility are not concepts from which Nietzsche would distance himself fundamentally when he preaches immoralism. Instead, he believes that the capacity to be held accountable can ideally lead the "blond beast" from an uncultured state, through a bad culture, towards a self-styled culture. The bad culture here has the merit of grooming human beings for a higher purpose, sovereignty. This sovereign individual – who we will discuss in detail in chapter six – is unlikely to emerge in Nietzsche's present culture because all true freedom has acquired a bad conscience under the hegemony of the morality of custom. Bad conscience emerges when the drives are no longer capable, or allowed, to express outwardly and therefore turn inwards:

> Lacking external enemies and obstacles, and forced into the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, man impatiently ripped himself apart, persecuted himself, gnawed at himself, gave himself no peace and abused himself, this animal who battered himself raw on the bars of his cage and who is supposed to be 'tamed'. (GM, 'Second Essay', 16)

Barred from enjoying the wild adventures of dialectically engaging with the outside world, "man, full of emptiness and torn apart with homesickness for the desert, has had to create from within himself an adventure, a torture-chamber, an unsafe and hazardous wilderness" (GM, 'Second Essay', 16).

The dominant morality is then a morality in accordance with "the instinct of the herd animal man" (JGB 202). Such an instinct does not belong uniquely

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introspection in its search for the cause of one's pain: it is an eye that looks outside and is as default blind to the inside". This means that *ressentiment* is oblivious to the fact that the frustration inflicted upon the individual has its primary cause in the superiority of the other, which also means in the inferiority of the self: it is the self's weakness which is the real cause of frustration, but the resentful agent refuses to accept this conclusion. Instead, the resentful agent blames the other wholeheartedly for his frustration (Elgat 2016, p. 250).

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to a certain type of person, but it is an ubiquitous aspect of all individuals. There is strength and weakness, mastery and slavery, in every individual: "In fact, you sometimes find them sharply juxtaposed – inside the same person even, within a single soul" (JGB 260). There is no shame in the herd instinct as such, the problem is when this herd instinct drowns out or overpowers – with a cultural legitimacy of a morality of custom to do so – the instincts to more direct power. As such, Nietzsche writes close to the conclusion of *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "I can think of hardly anything that has sapped the *health* and racial strength of precisely the Europeans so destructively as this [ascetic] ideal; without any exaggeration we are entitled to call it the *real catastrophe* in the history of the health of European man" (GM, 'Third Essay', 21). What is then to be done? The proper way of navigating the drives is to introduce a good culture of sovereignty. But through the workings of herd morality, and the dominance of a morality of custom, such sovereignty is impeded and human beings are deprived of the energies to engage creatively with the world.

To conclude this section, Nietzsche seeks to – as does Schelling – rethink morality, especially the concepts of good and evil, in an organic interrelationship rather than in dogmatic superimposition. Both in their original configuration (as 'good' and 'bad') and in their dogmatic form (as 'good' and 'evil'), there is a lively interaction between these concepts, which can serve to energize individuals and cultures. Problems emerge when a morality of custom and tradition exalts a certain sense of moral goodness, and through this militates against all evil and suffering. This would lead to a stale, non-dialectical perspective on reality which has detrimental effects on human prospering.

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Chapter 4
Mythology, Religion and Identity

Nietzsche and Schelling both recognize the egregious effects of an excessive rationalism, which impedes creativity because it forces things into shallow intelligibility, and a non-organic morality, which refuses to engage the good dialectically with evil. These concerns coalesce in a highly complex assessment of religion, mythology and politics. Schelling and Nietzsche both realize that the abovementioned concerns arise to a large extent because of an infelicitous composure towards myth and religion, which has deplorable political effects.

Schelling's recovery of a philosophical religion and Nietzsche's vitriol against Christian religion – both of which we discuss at length below – can only be plausibly explained by the deep disappointment felt by a lover who sees his beloved go astray. Religion is supposed to be the life blood of a people's thinking, acting and aspiring. Nietzsche says as much in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

> That the conception of gods does not, as *such*, necessarily lead to that deterioration of the imagination which we had to think about for a moment, that there are *nobler* ways of making use of the invention of gods than man's self-crucifixion and self-abuse, ways in which Europe excelled during the last millennia, – this can fortunately be deduced from any glance at the *Greek gods*, these reflections of noble and proud men in whom the *animal* in man felt deified, did *not* tear itself apart and did *not* rage against itself!
>
> (GM, 'Second Essay', 23)

If Western man lacks direction and vigor, this must be because it lacks a religion that cultivates such dispositions. From very early on in his philosophical life, Nietzsche was convinced that the dominant religion in the West – with its prayer, ascetics, compassion and categorical obedience – had run its course: "The belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable" (FW 343). Nietzsche does not univocally celebrate the absence of higher truths, but he remains hopeful for a new and better religion to emerge. Early on, in a clumsily construed note of 1875, Nietzsche would write as follows:

> There is no more help in prayer or ascetics or vision. If this is all religion is, then there is no more religion for me. My religion – if one can still call it that – is labouring for elevation of the species [*der Arbeit für die Erzeugung des Genius*]; education is all about hope, all comfort is art. Education is the love for the created, an excess of life beyond self-love. Religion is 'to love beyond ourselves'. The work of art is a reflection of such love beyond oneself and a perfect one. (NL 8 1875 5[22])

Although Nietzsche would later be disgusted by the very thought of having followers – in *Ecce Homo*, he famously writes: "I do not *want* any 'true believers',

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-005

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I think I am too malicious to believe in myself, I never speak to the masses . . . I have a real fear that someday people will consider me *holy*: you will guess why I am publishing this book *beforehand*" (EH, 'Why I am a Destiny, 1) – he never abandoned his philosophical preoccupation with developing something highly akin to a religion to assist the elevation of the species (see chapter nine).[55]

When read carefully, Schelling is not far from Nietzsche when he ardently criticizes the so-called "rational religion" (*Vernunftreligion*) of his day, given expression especially in Kant and Hegel. Rational religion demotes religious faith under philosophical reason: religion may repeat, in different words or form, what reason argues. For Kant, religion can then be an assistant to practical reason that potentially cultivates moral resolve (through ideas, practices, etc.). For Hegel, religion is the symbolic expression – more potent than art but below philosophy – of the self-development of spirit (*Geist*). But for Schelling, such rationalization of religion ultimately makes religion obsolete, which in turn also bars access to the super-rational truth that is given expression in mythology and revelation. And, in consequence, human beings are cut off from the fuel of irrational madness that is provided by religion and mythology.

Enlightenment Universalism and *Volk*

Schelling and Nietzsche point fingers at the modern tendency to rationalize religion, wherein the content of religion is made to accord with universal reason. Religion should be more about the particular and particularizing, rather than the universal and universalizing. In Schelling's thought, universalizing takes shape in terms of a relegation of revelation under rationality; in Nietzsche's thought, this is the process wherein religion relinquishes its mythological character and becomes historical. Both of these processes lead towards the evacuation of the more tantalizing elements of religion, which, in turn, results in religion unable to play its most vital function. As Heidegger would make the point later on, this leads to a God as the highest idea of reason, the *causa sui*,

55 It can be helpful to distinguish between faith and religion in Nietzsche. Nietzsche is far from a terminologically-consistent thinker, but he does allude at times to a strong distinction between these: for instance, in two unpublished fragments (written very close to each other) Nietzsche first claims that "the free spirit is the most religious human being [*religiöseste Mensch*] there is" and that "the believer [*gläubige Mensch*] is the opposite of the religious person [*religiösen Menschen*]" (resp. NL 10 1882 1[74]) and NL 10 1882 1[77]). As such, faith is then a set of propositional beliefs; religion is an experience of transcendent excess.

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but to such a God “man can neither pray nor sacrifice [. . .]. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god” (Heidegger 1969, p. 72).

These concerns are situated in a longer intellectual history. According to Nietzsche, Europe has developed in such a way that it has a faith, that is, a set of propositional beliefs, but no longer a religion or mythology; that is, a lived experience of transcendent excess. In his earliest work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche would make a plea for the inversion of history, namely to move from our modern, theoretical culture back to a tragic culture that enjoyed a life-affirming and mythology. Schelling similarly argued for a new mythology in one of his earliest works:

> Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with it all those sciences it has guided toward perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source. Nor is it in general difficult to say what the medium of this return of science to poetry will be; for in mythology such a medium existed, before the occurrence of a breach now seemingly beyond repair. But how a new mythology is itself to arise, which shall be the creation, not of some individual author, but of a new race, personifying, as it were, one single poet – that is a problem whose solution can be looked for only in the future destinies of the world, and in the course of history to come. (STI 629)

The need for a new mythology means two things: Europe lacks mythology and such a lack is problematic. Here, Schelling echoes the insights of many Romantic thinkers such as Herder, the Schlegels and the Grimms.

While Romanticism is surely a complex phenomenon,[56] one pervasive concern (especially in the German context) was that the universality to which the Enlightenment had aspired resulted in European man feeling robbed of his horizon of orientation. For instance, Kant’s ethics is a universal and rational ethics, which applies invariably to all rational beings. Kant’s politics is cosmopolitan politics that seeks to unite all rational beings in a worldwide federation. Kant’s rational religion is a universal religion, which could appeal to all rational beings invariably. Such universalism aims to oppose tribalism, nationalism and conflict through a project of unification, but it failed to recognize how most individuals (with the exception of some “very free spirits”) require a more particular and narrow identity to orient themselves in life. This resulted, towards the end of the 18th century and especially in the early 19th century, in a lively interest in the potentially-distinguishing features of different peoples (*Völker*) as a means

56 For a fairly comprehensive overview of the themes that emerges throughout European Romanticism, see Dupré (2013).

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towards giving more determinate orientation to human beings. Not entirely disowning the salubrious effects of Enlightenment universalism, the Romantics initially sought to complement this with reclaiming a home for European man who was suffering from homesickness (*Heimweh*).

Elements that were especially potent to secure a more particular identity were language, history, mythology and folklore. In a famous address to the Prussian Academy, Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) declared that German language is German history – that a language houses, narrates and undergirds the very essence of a people. A particular language, and its particular structure, was then thought of as the primal mythology that had given shape to a people (*Volk*). Enlightenment had assassinated such a primal mythology and the Romantics sought to recover this, which was put emphatically by the author (now assumed to be Hegel) of the *Oldest System Program of German Idealism* (1796/1797). Here, it was argued that a new mythology was to emerge to unite the broken hegemony of European society, and that this new mythology must have its foundation in reason. In his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800), Schelling's close friend Friedrich Schlegel argued similarly that a new mythology must emerge that would be the new central point (*Mittelpunkt*) of political and ethical life. He believed, contrary to Hegel, that such can only arise from art, not from reason. A religion based upon reason is no religion at all. At the time of *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling was in general agreement with Schlegel, and also saw art as the best candidate to provide a synthesis of conscious (reason) and unconscious forces (nature). However, as Schelling grew philosophically, he would no longer conceptualize such things in terms of mythology or art, but instead as revelation and positive philosophy.[57]

One element complicating these discussions was what is now sometimes called the 'Orientalism' of Romanticism. At the same time that the Romantics sought to procure a more particular identity for the European peoples, there was an explosion of information about Middle and Far Eastern mythology and religion. For instance, the French Indologist Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) published in 1801–2 the first translation of the *Oupnek'hat* (better known as *Upanishads*) in Latin. He had authored, but never published, a French translation. Although translated only fragmentarily, these texts gave a window into Indian mythology and given the antiquity of these sources, they were believed to be very original sources of profound wisdom, not tainted by philosophical hermeneutics like much of European mythology. Schopenhauer famously adored these texts, even the translation provided

57 For further discussion of the historical context, see Williamson (2004, pp. 56–71).

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by Anquetil-Duperron: "I read this translation with the fullest confidence, which is immediately and joyfully confirmed. For how the Oupnek'hat thoroughly breathes the holy spirit of the *Vedas*!" (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 356 [422]) I note this as slightly awkward given that Anquetil-Duperron transliterated the Sanskrit directly into Latin and kept the original grammar. The text is very awkward and given Schopenhauer's dedication to flawless prose, he would be expected to malign the poor writing of Anquetil-Duperron.[58]

The most staggering feature of this sudden explosion of access to Indian lore were the remarkable similarities between European and Indian mythology. Philologists and philosophers were generally aware of the similarities between different European myths (Greek, Roman, Germanic, Norse) and also their likeness to Egyptian mythology. This was generally explained by mutual influencing, but the similarities of the great European mythologies to these ancients Indian texts was not likely to emerge from historical influencing. Therefore, Romanticism was stuck trying to accomplish two seemingly contradictory goals: on the one hand, it sought to account for the particularizing features of a people through their distinctive mythology while, on the other hand, trying to account for the many inner similarities, what Schelling calls a "spirit of consanguinity" (HKM 62), between these different mythologies.

One highly influential interlocutor in this debate was the now largely forgotten Marburg philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858). Between 1810 and 1812, Creuzer published his *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (a second edition appeared between 1819 and 1821, which featured two extra volumes by Creuzer's student Franz Joseph Mone). Throughout the next three decades, Creuzer's argument set the tone for discussions about the interactions between mythologies and peoples. He was particularly influential within philosophy with a clear impact upon Schlegel, Schelling and Hegel, but he was rather controversial in philology, evident from his exchanges with Johann Heinrich Voss (see: Stewart 2013/14, pp. 13–34; Williamson 2004, pp. 121–150). Creuzer's notoriety and direct influence gradually disappears after 1840. For instance, Nietzsche –

58 Schopenhauer was initially exposed to Indian lore through Friedrich Majer, an orientalist that frequented Johanna Schopenhauer's literary salons. Majer had published an influential monograph in 1818 on the subject of Indian religion, which was titled *Brahma oder die Religion der Inder als Brahmaismus* (see: Hübscher 1988, p. 68; Magee 1997, p. 14; Nicholls 1999, pp. 176–177). Urs App notes, however, that Schopenhauer's introduction to Indian thought was layered: during his student years, Schopenhauer regularly attended a class by one Professor Heeren on Asia-related studies. Most of the class dealt with geographical issues, but there was some of discussion of the Vedas and Brahma. Schopenhauer had already checked out some library books on Indian thought before associating with Majer, and he had read *Das Asiatische Magasin* of Julius Klaproth (App 2006, pp. 35–76).

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a trained philologist – mentions Creuzer nowhere (while Schopenhauer still has some critical remarks in his writings[59]), but he did loan Creuzer's book from the Basel library when preparing *The Birth of Tragedy* (Crescenzi 1994, p. 407; Frank 1993, pp. 39–44).

Creuzer's argument was that mythology first emerged when the Indian Brahmans were given a primal revelation (*Uroffenbarung*) that they put into narrative form because its message could not be communicated in propositional language. These narratives usually emerged in terms of what Creuzer called symbols, which were attempts to communicate the 'union of opposites' where differences between the higher and lower disappear. The very nature of the revealed message could not be expressed clearly in rational language: "The truth of a salutary teaching meets its goal directly in the image but would be lost on the broad road of understanding" (Creuzer 1978, p. 7). These narratives travelled to the Middle East (giving rise to Judaism) then to Egypt (giving rise to Egyptian mythology) and finally crossed the Mediterranean (giving rise to Pelasgian mythology and all subsequent European mythologies). This means that all mythologies have the same fundamental message, but that this message is most clearly, authentically and immediately given expression in Brahmanism. Creuzer held Greek culture in high regard, but he did not believe it wise to "cut off the roots of Greek myths that continue into different countries" (Creuzer 1978, p. xviii).

It was generally reckoned that Creuzer had accounted for the inner similarity between different mythologies, but that he had failed to account sufficiently for the emergence of veritable peoples from the different mythologies. It is on this subject that Schelling engages Creuzer in his *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (1842). Schelling is not entirely upfront as to how much his own theory owes to Creuzer's, and instead of engaging Creuzer in detail, Schelling decides to focus on one vital aspect, namely the idea of an original distortion.[60] Original distortion means that a formal doctrine of monotheism became distorted in a certain time and place. Schelling takes issue with this idea because it cannot account sufficiently for the self-subsisting nature of

59 For instance, Schopenhauer ridicules Creuzer's general theory: "Creuzer's grim and overmeticulous interpretation of mythology, conducted with endless diffuseness and tormenting long-windedness, as the depository of physical and metaphysical truths deliberately set forth in them, I must dispatch using Aristotle's refutation: 'As concerns mythical drivel, it is not worthwhile to consider it seriously" (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 368 [435]).

60 For more elaborate discussion of the debate between Schelling and Creuzer, see Tilliette (2002, pp. 57–67).

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respective individual mythologies. Therefore, Schelling claims that a formal doctrine of monotheism that preceded individualized mythologies cannot be viable: "A preceding theism that would have degenerated into polytheism will always be found impossible" (HKM 80). Mythology must have arisen out of equivocal feeling, which is communicated in different ways through different languages. In other words, there is no spatio-temporally locatable first revelation, but there is a continuous, intimate and immediate self-revelation of being in human consciousness. This self-revelation is then understood differently by different peoples because of the nature of their own language.

We return to Schelling's philosophy of mythology extensively below. The overarching point is here that Schelling understood the different mythologies of the world to be expressive of an immediate, inwards revelation of being to different peoples given expression differently through their proper languages. Such mythologies are persistent and develop by means of their own inner logic, which can ultimately create a very rich panoply of mythological stories and images. For our present discussion, it is then important to note how Schelling claims that different peoples are formed by means of different mythologies, and that the disappearance of the cultural homogeneity of a people could then only be explained by means of a lack of mythology. This has, according to the early Nietzsche, disastrous consequences for societal well-being. In our time, he writes, we find an

> excessive lust for knowledge, the same unsatisfied delight in discovery, the same enormous growth in worldliness, and alongside these things a homeless roaming-about, a greedy scramble to grab a place at the tables of others, frivolous deification of the present, or a dull, numbed turning away from it, all of this *sub specie saeculi*. (GT 23)

One of the reasons for this lack of culture is that modern man has lost his mythology, which is his horizon for creation and self-transcendence. Mythology and religion are the kind of things that provide the content, scope and impetus for artistic creation. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes: "Without myth, however, all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement" (GT 23). While free spirits feel constrained by a fixed horizon, the *Volk* requires a well-developed culture based upon a communal mythology that would keep nihilistic despair at bay. Nietzsche's abuse of Buddhism and Christianity is therefore not based upon their providing such a horizon of thought, but because they do so in a life-denying way. He would even playfully abuse Christianity as a "boring religion": "Almost two thousand years and not one new god! And all the

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while, this pathetic God of Christian monotono-theism instead, acting as if it had any right to exist" (A 19; Cf. GD, 'Reason' in Philosophy', 1).[61]

Rational Religion and the Relegation of Revelation under Reason

Schelling and Nietzsche point to similar causes to explain the disappearance of mythology: the attempt of 'rational religion' (*Vernunftreligion*) to relegate revelation under rationality. While Schelling suggests that this is a problem with our philosophical disposition towards religion, Nietzsche believes that such a rationalistic approach inheres in Christianity. For this reason, Nietzsche points to the auto-deconstruction of Christianity.

Schelling's argument against the ruling view of religion of his day is that rationalist philosophy makes revelation to be, at best, the historical clothing of the *a priori*, universal essence of rational religion. For instance, Kant's account of religion within the limits (*Grenze*) of bare (*blossen*) reason argues that historical faiths repeat – more lively, more embodied and more palatable to finite intellects – what practical rationality had proposed already. In his view, there is pure religious faith which uses particular and historical faith as its vehicle. If that historical faith is in tune with pure religious faith – which serves to educate human beings morally – then it is a moral religion, rather than a religion of currying-favor (*Gunstbewerbung*). Even though Kant was too coy to admit it, he believed (and hoped) that historical faith could be dispensed with entirely were it not for human finitude. All that matters in the end is pure religious faith (which is morality), and historical faith – while necessary for the initial founding of religious faith – can be a hindrance to this end.

Kant's hesitations with regard to historical faith were not untimely. Throughout most of the Enlightenment – most notably in the French *Siècle des Lumières* and the Scottish Enlightenment – revelation as a special source of information was intensely criticized. This happened not only in the scathing and brutal attacks of the French *philosophes*, but even more influentially

61 This explains why Nietzsche prefers the Old to the New Testament. In the latter, the central goal seems to be a universal community; in the former, the sole audience for the message is the Jewish people. The Old Testament speaks only to a select number of people who are united in a singular style: "The *Old* Testament – well, that is something quite different: every respect for the Old Testament! I find in it great men, heroic landscape and something of utmost rarity on earth, the incomparable naivety of the *strong heart*; even more, I find a people" (GM, 'Third Essay', 22).

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in David Hume's skeptical attack on historical revelation in 'On Miracles'. Hume's argument was as clear as it was effective: it will always be more reasonable to doubt the testimony of someone who claims to have witnessed a miracle or supernatural revelation, for instance that he or she is lying or delusional, than accept that something of the sort has actually taken place. The burden of proof for miracles is impressive. The German *Aufklärung* was generally less anti-religious than the French *philosophes* and certainly less anti-clerical than the Scottish Enlighteners. Kant never denies the possibility of miracles, but a rational religion "must render faith in miracles in general dispensable" (Kant 1996b, p. 122 [6:84]). These miracles may continue to serve as a myth of institution to religious faith (a *fait divers*, if you will) but these may not play a role of significance in moral faith. When and if miracles confuse or counteract our normal worldview, we find that "reason is as paralyzed" (Kant 1996b, p. 124 [6:86]). While Kant is more moderate than others, he believes that any sort of revelation of divinity – whether through mystical experience, personal intimation or miracles – is morally hazardous and rationally confounding. If philosophy is to make any use of revelation, it is to happen within the limits (*Grenze*) of bare reason: revelation ought to be put to the test of critical reason.

Kant holds all elements of a historical faith – that is, its miracles, traditions and particular beliefs – as dispensable, something which he admits in his infamous 'double footnote' (a footnote appended to a footnote) in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Kant 1996b, p. 162 [6:135n]).[62] In the main body of the text, Kant discusses the providential idea of a Kingdom of God on earth where the moral principle is triumphant over its adversaries. To Kant, this Kingdom of Heaven is a "symbolic representation aimed merely at stimulating greater hope and courage and effort in achieving it" (Kant 1996b, p. 161 [6:134]). In other words, the ultimate victory of the moral principle over evil is a regulative idea that serves to cultivate moral resolve and counteracts possible despair when faced with adversity. For Kant, this Kingdom of Heaven tends to be represented symbolically as the blending of the heavenly with the earthly, "the very

62 There are a good number of scholars who suggest that Kant has a more moderate, even more Christian, attitude towards historical faith. These scholars read Kant's *Religion* as a justification for an authentic sense of Christianity. See particularly: Palmquist (1989, pp. 65–75; 2000; 2010, pp. 530–53), Firestone and Palmquist, (Eds.) (2006), Firestone and Jacobs (2008); Mariña (1997, pp. 379–400); Firestone, Jacobs and Joiner (eds.) (2017). This interpretation has been challenged widely. As I have argued elsewhere, the supposedly Christian elements in Kant's philosophy of religion are part only of Kant's philosophical pessimism (Vanden Auweele 2015, pp. 373–394; Vanden Auweele 2014, pp. 175–190).

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form of a church is dissolved; the vicar on earth enters the same class as the human beings who are now elevated to him as citizens of Heaven, and so God is all in all" (Kant 1996b, p. 162 [6:135]). This image is to be read, as the footnote clarifies, as that those elements of a historical faith (holy books, rituals, traditions, prophecy) that are not purely rational or moral (which might have been necessary to establish, preserve and spread a faith) must come to an end. According to Kant, different historical faiths – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, etc. – are opposed because of their outward clothing, and if they have a kernel of true, moral faith, they could unite in one cosmopolitan community if only they would dispense with these divisive elements. The task of the philosophical educator of society is then to "diligently work for [that historical faith goes over into religious faith], through the continuous development of the pure religion of reason out of its present still indispensable shell" (Kant 1996b, p. 162 [6:135n]). Interestingly, he appends a footnote to this footnote where he suggests that historical faith will not literally disappear since it might still have to serve some purpose, but that it is of such a form that it "can cease" (Kant 1996b, p. 162 [6:135n]). To put Kant's point bluntly: historical faith should become such that it is obsolete and channel only pure moral faith.

Kant's well-meaning attempts at universalizing religious faith ultimately lead to the evacuation of everything religious or mythological from faith. In Kant's configuration, religion becomes the embodiment of rational morality. In a countermove, Schelling takes a stand for the hyper-rational nature of religion and revelation against Kant and those who either dismissed revelation wholesale or sought to reduce it to reason. His objection is that an honest philosophical engagement with revelation cannot *a priori* diminish revelation: "As its first principle, it must be proposed (and was proposed) that this combination of philosophy and revelation does not occur at the cost either of philosophy or of revelation, that neither component will relinquish anything nor suffer any violence" (GPP 142).

Hegel's philosophy is sometimes read in terms of a similar recuperation of the philosophical significance of historical revelation. And that much is indeed true: Hegel reads the dialectical development of history as the process of the self-revelation or self-realization of God. The whole of history is the whole of the truth of God or spirit (*Geist*). But this should hint that Hegel is working from a rather unorthodox interpretation of revelation: God has, unbeknownst to all involved, revealed himself in world-history and it is the task of the philosophical researcher of history to uncover this. God's revelation is not an ephemeral vision of eternity bestowed upon a few worthy, but the continuing development of history wherein God uses the "cunning of reason" (*List der Vernunft*) so as to gradually and dialectically reveal himself throughout history (Hegel 1969, p. 746).

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The logic that Hegel generally employs in order to uncover the dialectical manifestation and development of spirit happens throughout history. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,*[63] he shows how that logic would have been at work in the history of world-religions: the concept (*Begriff*) of religion becomes manifested in a chain of particular religions which, through the mediation of a historical development, comes to know itself. In other words, the historical incarnation of the concept of religion comes to recognize itself as an expression of *Geist*. This happens most explicitly in the consummate or revealed religion of Christianity, while previous religions have not come to that full self-realization. While Hegel is more appreciative of other religions than most of his contemporaries, he does lump together religions of magic, Daoism, Buddhism, Lamaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Egyptian mythology, Greek mythology, Judaism and Roman mythology. He believes that religions preceding Christianity lack self-consciousness of themselves as the development of spirit while Christianity is self-conscious of itself as spirit. In revealed religion, "religion is for the first time what is revelatory, is manifested, when the concept of religion is for itself, i.e., when religion or its concept has become objective to itself – not in limited, finite objectivity, but such that it is objective to itself in accord with its concept" (Hegel 2006, p. 392 [177–178]).

When applied to more specific forms of revelation such as miracles, Hegel expresses a certain ambivalence: on the one hand, miracles can bring about "a kind of verification for human beings as sentient beings" but, on the other hand, these are at best "only the beginning of verification" (Hegel 2006, p. 396 [182]). Hegel means to say that miracles are a means to direct human beings to the supernatural, but these cannot institute real or spirited (*geistliche*) religion, which can only be verified "from within and through itself; it is confirmed only in and through itself" (Hegel 2006, p. 396 [182]). This means that while an individual recognizes the truth of spirit because he has witnessed a miracle, he has not really recognized the truth of spirit in the most comprehensive fashion. True confirmation comes from immediate, inner recognition, not external verification. A true religion cannot be supported through beliefs in miracles, which is a view that Hegel also attributes to Jesus

63 Hegel delivered these lectures four times (1821, 1824, 1827 and 1831) where the penultimate version of 1827 is the one most often researched and referenced by scholars. Hegel never published these lectures himself. There are some very interesting additions and shifts in positions between the earliest and the later versions of these lectures. In the earliest version, Hegel was fulminating particularly against the 'theology of feeling' (Schleiermacher) whereas in later versions he became more interested in attacking rational dogmatism. For further discussion, see Buterin (2011, pp. 789–821); di Giovanni (2003, pp. 365–383); Williams (2012).

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Christ: “Christ himself rejects miracles as a genuine criterion for truth”, and Hegel continues that “verification by miracles, as well as the attack upon miracles, belong to a lower sphere that concerns us not at all” (Hegel 2006, p. 397 [182]).

The authentic witness to divinity is what Hegel calls the ‘witness of spirit’, namely the philosopher who has recognized the dialectical developmental process of world history as the revelation of God. While Hegel did recuperate history as a central aspect of religion, his general strategy did not satisfy those who desired a more robust rehabilitation of revelation. The problem with Hegel’s view was twofold: on the one hand, Hegel did not provide any resources to recognize the uniqueness of Christian revelation (other religions also reveal God albeit it in a more fragmented sense) and, on the other hand, Hegel did not allow revelation to reveal something in excess of reason.

These two difficulties made Schelling’s philosophical argument a welcome relief for many, particularly in his emphasis on not only the necessity of revelation for a comprehensive philosophy but also its hyper-rational nature. Against Hegel and Kant, Schelling argued that revelation contains something in excess of reason: “If revelation contained nothing more than what is in reason, then it would have absolutely no interest; its sole interest can only consist in the fact that it contains something that exceeds reason, something that is more than what reason contains” (GPP 142–143). Schelling has then given cause to believe that philosophy ought to remain open to revelation, else it would be a system of reason without access to something that precedes and exceeds being. Philosophy may not close itself off from the irrational. If it does, then it is at risk of obviating all myth from philosophy in such a way that thought must inspire itself. Undoubtedly, this recuperation of revelation was the main reason why theologians – Catholic and Protestant alike – initially put their hopes in Schelling, such as the Tübingen theologians Johann Sebastian Drey (1777–1853), Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) and Johannes Evangelist von Kuhn (1806–1887). They were remiss, however, in that they did not heed Schelling’s own advice: “Whoever seeks to listen to me listens to the end” (GPP 143). By ‘revelation’, Schelling does not think exclusively of the overriding power of Biblical Scripture or the testimony of those who witnessed divine miracles, but the experience of the whole of reality as itself a revelation of divinity. Christian revelation is but “the top of the pyramid” (SW 85). We return to this extensively in chapter seven.

Schelling criticizes his contemporaries because they tended to rationalize religion and therefore cut it off from the *a posteriori*, the revelatory. By doing so, they decapitated religion and put themselves on a slippery slope to making

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religion and revelation obsolete. Namely, if religion gives voice – in an incomplete, unconscious or limited fashion – to a philosophical truth, and that philosophical truth becomes steadily more available, then it naturally follows that religion will slowly but certainly disappear. Schelling argues that rather than overcoming religion, philosophy must remain open to the revelations of religion and continuously relate to these in a dialectical fashion: only the revelation of something hyper-rational can help the system of reality to evolve. In Nietzschean language, only the negative (the weak, the free spirits, the corrupted) are capable of introducing something altogether new.

Christianity's Self-Deconstruction

In the fourth part of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduces the "ugliest human being" who Zarathustra deems to be the murderer of God: "I recognize you alright" he spoke with a voice of bronze: '*You are the murderer of God!*" (Z, 'The Ugliest Human Being'). Combine this with Nietzsche's famous declaration in *The Gay Science* 125 that "we, human beings" have murdered God, then the implication seems to be that God died because humanity became so incredibly ugly. What makes humanity and the world ugly? Christianity. Nietzsche writes: "The Christian decision to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad" (FW 130).

Christianity is responsible for the death of God. This play of images is in need of some clarification. The most helpful clue to understanding how the interplay operates between Christianity, humanity, ugliness and the death of God is in *The Gay Science* 357. Here, Nietzsche asserts the following: "One can see *what* it was that actually triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was taken ever more rigorously; the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price" (FW 357). Christianity introduced a will to (self-)knowledge into humanity that has resulted in the subversion of Christianity. In his early works, Nietzsche is categorical that the historical approach to Christianity, most evident in the early work of Strauss and the work of Renan, has resulted in the death of Christianity:

> For this is usually how religions die. It happens when the mythical presuppositions of a religion become systematized as a finished sum of historical events under the severe, intellectual gaze of orthodox dogmatism, and people begin to defend anxiously the credibility of the myths while resisting every natural tendency within them to go on living and to

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> throw out new shoots – in other words, when the feeling for myth dies and is replaced by the claim of religion to have historical foundations. (GT 10)[64]

The first steps towards the deconstruction of religion are set then when a religion understands itself historically. What is particular about Judaism and Christianity (and Islam, though Nietzsche hardly mentions this) is that these religions frame their mythological narrative against a historical background. For example, Christ comes to a country burdened by Roman occupancy, as prophesized by previous, historical figures, and promises a Kingdom of Heaven in a future to come. Christianity has a tendency to regard itself as historical rather than mythological. This means that Christianity's validation stands or falls with it making good on its claims historically and empirically. Greek and Roman mythology are less prone to fall into this trap because their narratives are not typically framed against the background of human history. This explains why, in Nietzsche's own 'fifth gospel', *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, any references to particular places or times are avoided: it is a book not only for everyone and no one, but also always and never.[65]

Historical accuracy was further problematized by means of a typically Christian pre-occupation with conscientiousness and honesty. The 19th-century Lutheranism with which Nietzsche was most readily acquainted – which underwent serious Pietist influences – made a virtue out of self-screening and introspection. Good Christians are supposed to investigate their own consciousness as thoroughly as possible so as to recognize most profoundly their sinfulness.

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64 Nietzsche repeats this point in *Untimely Meditations*: "A religion, for example, which is intended to be transformed into historical knowledge under the hegemony of pure historical justice, a religion which is intended to be understood through and through as an object of science and learning, will when this process is at an end also be found to have been destroyed" (UB, 'History', 7).

65 Nietzsche wrote the opening paragraph of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* at least three times. In an unpublished fragment titled 'Midday and Eternity' of 1881, Nietzsche writes: "Zarathustra, born at the lak Urmi, loses his home when he was thirty years of age and went into the province of Aria where he wrote the Zend-Avesta in the ten years of his solitude in the mountains" (NL9 1881 11[195]). Not only does this fragment provide information about Zarathustra's activities in his ten-year solitude, it also localizes Zarathustra's place of birth (Urmi, the province of Aria). In the first publication of this paragraph in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: "When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his homeland lake Urmi and went into the mountains" (FW 342). Nietzsche here still mentions the lake Urmi but not the province of Aria. In the final version of this paragraph, in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, the line becomes: "When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains" (Z, 'Prologue', 1). Nietzsche gradually abandoned any elements that could localize Zarathustra in time or place.

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The Christian should be aware of every little sin, every counter-moral incentive and every perversion. This proclivity to self-investigation must ultimately affect Christianity itself: the Christian was conditioned to be inquisitive, searching, uncovering, seeking truth at any cost. It is not hard to see why Christianity is Platonism "for the people": ignorance is vice. Nietzsche's points here were confirmed in great detail by many authors of the 20th century interested in finding the roots of Western secularization (Hans Blumenberg, Marcel Gauchet, Jean-Luc Nancy). The Christian virtue of conscientiousness resulted in Christianity becoming incredible. The Greeks, to the contrary, were more superficial – and with good reason!

For Nietzsche, the primary basis of belief in Christianity became the historical and factual accuracy of the Gospels. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah because of the accounts given by his contemporaries of the miraculous events surrounding his life and death. In Nietzsche's and Schelling's day, the work of David Strauss (1808–1874) unwillingly cut such a basis for belief into pieces. Nietzsche's early engagement with Strauss can help clarify Nietzsche's multi-faceted approach to the absence of mythology. First a student at the *Tübinger Stift*, and enthralled by the philosophy of Schelling, Böhme and Schleiermacher, Strauss found himself failing as a pastor and lecturer, after which he decided to move to Berlin to study under Hegel and Schleiermacher (the former died, however, before Strauss arrived). Towards the end of his life, Hegel had tacitly given the conservative theologians in Berlin (the right-Hegelians) leisure to reconcile his thought with orthodox Protestantism, which together with Schelling's arrival in Berlin made the philosophy faculty tilt towards conservativism.[66] Influenced by Christian Baur at Tübingen, Strauss did not take to this conservatism and started, in fact, to oppose historical criticism. He believed to be with Hegel on this: "Hegel was personally no friend of historical criticism. It annoyed him, as it annoyed Goethe, to see the heroic figures of antiquity, to which their highest feeling clung lovingly, gnawed at by critical doubt" (Strauss 1983, p. 8). Strauss intended to move away from the debate between rationalists and super-rationalists that read the Bible as conveying historical, factual events. Instead, he interpreted the Bible as an institutional legend or myth, by showing the paradoxes and contradictions of a literal reading. His hope was then to undercut this historical approach to Christianity in favor of a more mythological approach. Despite Strauss' intent to revamp Christianity through re-instituting the Bible as myth, his debunking of the factual truth of the Bible was by far his weightiest contribution to theology. This is

66 For discussion of this timeframe, see Williamson (2004, pp. 155–165).

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the irony of Strauss' intervention in theology: his attempt to revitalize Christianity by lampooning a historical foundation resulted in the slow death of Christianity. Christians would rather let go of Christianity rather than the historical approach.

This brief gloss of Strauss' interest would make one suspect that Nietzsche comes out in favor of Strauss. Yet, Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditation* on Strauss is no less than a scathing critique. Part of this is due to the particular historical conditions of Nietzsche's engagement with Strauss. Strauss engaged in a very public discussion with Ernst Renan in 1870, where Strauss would reveal himself to be a nationalist that glorified Germany's spiritualty and military prowess (two topics that open Nietzsche's damning critique of Strauss in *Untimely Meditations*). As a result of this debate, Strauss would rise to uncanny heights in the German bourgeoisie and, emboldened by his new standing, he would offer up his final say on religion in *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872). Like Germany as a whole, Strauss claimed to be beyond Christianity, but such a dearth has to be filled by a new faith that would be based upon a feeling of dependence upon the universe.

Nietzsche's harsh stance against Strauss illustrates Nietzsche's own complex attitude toward mythology and religion. In fact, for Nietzsche the young and old Strauss made two different mistakes: the young Strauss made the mistake of approaching religion historically (even if to show the problems of a historical approach), the later Strauss sought to erect an inorganic and artificial 'new faith'. Nietzsche's qualms with an artificial new mythology came up clearly in a note of late 1870, where he speaks about his time as having an "artificially inoculated religion" which cannot be long for this world: "Either we die because of this religion or this religion dies because of us. I believe in the primal Germanic [*Urgemanisch*] idea: all gods must die" (NL7 5[115] 124–5). Any attempts to create religions and deities artificially are not likely to find much of a grounding in a culture, mostly so because new gods typically arise when they topple old gods. A new religion must then emerge as a religion that has overcome a previous religion – Zarathustra must topple the ascetic ideal. Anyone who would consciously try to found a religion, like anyone who consciously strives to create a great piece of art, is an imposter. The true artist (*Kunstler*) is the vessel for drives that are not under conscious control, and does not seek out confirmation from the masses. The true Messiah would deny being the Messiah.

Nietzsche's engagement with Strauss shows there to be a problem with religions that are overly historical (because this bars honest belief in this religion) and religions that are overly artificial and universal (as these do not appeal to human beings). Both of these are versions of rationalized religions, where belief

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in a certain faith is supported by historical or rational argument. These were supposed to soften the fanaticism and irrationalism typically associated with religion. Nietzsche recognizes that, ever since the Enlightenment, there have been various attempts to soften religion by disconnecting it from its elements that appeared to be in excess of rationality. We have discussed above how this was an overt aim of Kant and Hegel, but one should note equally the work of British philosophers such as John Locke (1999), Samuel Clarke (1998), John Toland (1978). These attempts, by Strauss and others, to deal with the rational or historical foundation of Christian faith furthered unbelief in Christian mythology. As George Williamson puts it, "Nietzsche saw liberal theology as symptomatic of a 'historical-critical' trend in modern intellectual culture that had robbed Europe of its myths" (Williamson 2004, p. 246). When and if theology is partnered with historical science, this will work to the detriment, even destruction, of religion. Historical science, and rational religion generally, tends to demystify religion, which makes it incredible (*credo quia absurdum*):

> All living things require an atmosphere around them, a mysterious misty vapour; if they are deprived of this envelope, if a religion, an art, a genius is condemned to resolve as a star without atmosphere, we should no longer be surprised if they quickly wither and grow hard and unfruitful. (UB, 'History', 7)

Like Schelling, Nietzsche would also attack Hegel and Schleiermacher on this point. With regard to Hegel, Nietzsche believes that Hegel strives towards such a pure expression of religion or Christianity that it becomes bereft of any real import:

> For some time yet the Hegelian philosophy still smouldering in older heads may assist in propagating this innocence, perhaps by teaching one how to distinguish the 'idea of Christianity' from its manifold imperfect 'phenomenal forms' and even to convince oneself that it is the 'preferred tendency of the idea' to reveal itself in ever purer forms, and at last in its purest, most transparent, indeed hardly visible form, in the brains of the contemporary *theologus liberalis vulgaris*. (UB, 'History', 7)

Despite their impressive differences, Nietzsche voices a similar complaint at the address of Schleiermacher:

> When we find the 'greatest theologian of the century' characterizing Christianity as the religion which can 'discover itself in all existing and in several other barely possible religions', and when the 'true church' is supposed to be that which 'becomes a flowing mass, where there are no contours, where every part is now here, now there, and everything blends peacefully together' – again, what are we to think? (UB, 'History', 7)

One of the things that Nietzsche found problematic about this is that the attempts by liberal theologians to reconstruct Christianity have a tendency to

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render Christianity into a stagnant and self-enclosed system of belief. Hegel is famous for introducing history as an important element for understanding the concept (*Begriff*) of religion, but he still did believe that there is an eternal essence of religion that is progressively reached through history. Christianity became then identified with a specific set of beliefs, a stale and unevolving system, so that it became impossible for it to adapt to changing circumstances.

Let us briefly turn to one of Schelling's reflections on the proper and improper use of the term 'system': a bad system is a "self-enclosure of ready-made truths [*eine Geschlossenheit ausgemachter Wahrheiten*]" which holds on "to one and the same point of view"; a good system is a "harmonious succession", not a "standing still, but development towards the organism of science" (SW 19). Proper ways to think about reality must develop organically over time and refuse to be pinned down at any determinate moment. Applied to religion, this means that when one historicizes or rationalizes religion, it becomes difficult or impossible for religion to develop organically. In order words, a lively culture is always part of a long tradition of investigating its own nature and its own purpose from within a broader tradition. When one believes to have found the essential nature of a culture (or religion), one forecloses the possibility for this tradition to develop further. Nietzsche alleges in *Untimely Mediations* that the persona called the 'cultural philistine' is responsible for disrupting the natural evolution of culture because this persona believes that there is no need to evolve any further. They have arbitrarily chosen a certain perspective and now believe this to be universally valid, rather than fostering the continuous development of culture:

> How is it possible that a type such as the cultural philistine could have come into existence and, once extant, could acquire the authority of supreme arbiter over all the problems of German culture; how is this possible, after there has filed past us a whole line of great heroic figures whose every movement, every feature, whose questioning voice, whose burning eye, betrayed but one thing: *that they were seekers*, and that what they were seeking with such perseverance was precisely that which the cultural philistine fancied he already possessed: a genuine, original German culture. (UB, 'Strauss', 2)

Why do systems of thought, and indeed even culture, succumb to a tendency to self-enclose? While Schelling would point to a tendency within reason itself to finalize its system of thought, Nietzsche's points the finger at a more existential motive: the desire for stability and ease. Most individual minds lack what John Keats has called 'negative capabilities', namely "the capacity to find oneself in mystery, uncertainty and doubt without the irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 1899, p. 277). Similar to Socrates' resentment towards mysticism, the cultural philistine exalted their own baser nature and condemned those who emphasize the importance of search and experiment: "With the craftiness

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pertaining to baser natures, however, [the cultural philistine] took the opportunity thus afforded to cast suspicion on seeking as such and to promote a comfortable consciousness of having already found" (UB, 'Strauss', 2). The cultural philistine cannot live with a sceptical suspension of truth and therefore, more or less arbitrarily, decides upon a certain timeless and absolute truth.

This means that the evolution within Christianity to find a rational or historical foundation for Christian faith has inadvertently caused the destruction of Christianity. A rationalized Christianity was too 'ugly' and devoid of inner life. When something is defined too narrowly or stringently, this can no longer adapt to changing circumstances. The moment that one ventures to define something, that is the moment that one is distanced from the thing. The quest to provide a foundation for Christianity was a sign that Christianity was becoming unbelievable. And when the main religion of a nation or people becomes unbelievable, it is but a slippery slope to how that very nation fails to recognize itself as a whole. It fails to entertain a religion; it lacks a lived faith, and then it loses faith *in itself*.

Identity and Nation

Mythologies and religions are the kind of things that have historically provided an organic identity to a people. When these function well, they allow for determinate and inspiring value-systems to coexist with free-thinking individuals that encourage such systems to evolve continuously in what Schelling calls a 'harmonious succession'. Nietzsche is often, too often, read as a staunch individualist who believes that the only boon of a society is its production of free thinkers. Raymond Geuss puts it very explicitly as follows: "Nietzsche specifically affirms a form of extreme individualism, holding that the value of any social group consists not in the common or general group [. . .] but in the well-being and achievements of the 'highest individuals'" (Geuss 2019, p. 402). Bernard Williams says something similar about *The Gay Science*: "This book, like all his others, makes it clear that any life worth living must involve daring, individuality and creative bloody-mindedness" (Williams 2001, p. xiv). I argue that, like in morality and religion, Nietzsche is not principally opposed to (national) identities; instead, he laments the specific form these have taken in Western Europe. Here as well, harmonious succession is swapped in for stagnation, a stalemate, part of which Nietzsche blames on an inauthentic and inorganic way of relating to national identity.

The opening paragraph of *The Gay Science* gives an apt illustration of the organic way in which societies ideally develop. Nietzsche starts by noting how

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those individuals which a society deigns to be evil are the ones that (pre)serve it best. This is so because the evil person challenges the ruling customs, morality and/or religion of a society, and only through such challenges can society hope to evolve, adapt and reorganize: anything that goes unopposed becomes flaccid. Most societies seek to justify human existence in a certain way, where reflection provides reasons for why a certain course of action, or even existence as such, is worthwhile. Over time, these given reasons become a matter of scrutiny, suspicion and ultimately mockery, then the ground of a society starts to shake. Great ideals die through laughter:

> There is no denying *in the long run* each of these great teachers of a purpose was vanquished by laugher, reason and nature: the brief tragedy always changed and returned into the eternal comedy of existence, and the 'waves of uncountable laugher' – to cite Aeschylus – must in the end also come crashing down on the greatest of these tragedians. (FW 1)

The bulk of humanity cannot live in the emptiness of pure laughter. This would make life unbearably light, and some things must be taken seriously so as to affirm life in all its forms. This is what Nietzsche signals with his oft-quoted phrase: "If you have your own 'why?' in life, you can get along with almost any 'how?'" (GD 12). If you have something to take seriously, this will allow you to endure the hardships of life.

This is the reason why every culture ought to put something off limits from comedy: *that is not funny!* When one stumbles upon this, one finds the heart of the culture. Some things are so fundamental to a culture, that even to justify these would be problematic. For instance, Western democracies fundamentally believe in the equality of all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. It would not be difficult to make the case, however, that some individuals are better than others in certain aspects. Does the opinion of an expert not matter more than the opinion of a novice? Does the vote of a highly-schooled individual not carry more weight than an uncaring simpleton? Even only asking such questions is already a sort of transgression, and most Westerners would almost mechanically reply that 'all are equal' – most national constitutions take this as 'self-evident'. I am not arguing that such a thing is problematic, to the contrary, but only wish to point out that even liberal democracy has certain foundational beliefs.

Nietzsche believes that even the most foundational beliefs of any society are prone to crumble because of scrutiny and doubt. Ultimately, these foundations become the subject of ridicule and they founder on the voraciousness of laughter, which is the natural way of cultural change. Nietzsche calls this the "law of ebb and flood" (FW 1). A healthy culture will be able to accommodate

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the change of values, but when a culture attempts to *stem the tide* and bar the possibility for something to be ridiculed, it equally bars that culture's development. If a culture cannot let something die when its time has come, then this is a sign of its sickness. This explains, again, Nietzsche's charge against the cultural philistine in *Untimely Mediations*: the philistine bars the possibility for culture to transition smoothly between different perspectives and sets of value, in a similar way that Schelling had fulminated against an excessively rationalist, systematic philosophy that nervously self-enclosed against outside influences (that is, revelations).

For Nietzsche, societies are instituted through strong, outward hierarchies or cultures: a hierarchical religion (sacred and profane), ethics (good and bad), art (beautiful and ugly) and politics (rulers and people). A society that is cultured, which is what Nietzsche called a *Volk*, discerns between higher and lower things; in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche calls this a 'delicate digestion' that does not ingest just about anything (EH, 'Why I am so Clever', 1). This is a culture that flourishes. Such flourishing tends to result from, as *Human all too Human* shows, "sharing habitual and undiscussable principles," which gives over to a "living sense of a community" (MAM 244). From such a culture full and well-rounded individuals emerge: "Here good, sound custom grows strong, here the subordination of the individual is learned and firmness imparted to character as a gift at birth and subsequently augmented" (MAM 244). Nietzsche dreads, most vocally in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, that there would arise such a general weakening of humanity that all culture is lost. Humanity as a whole would then become incapable of discerning between the higher and the lower: "Everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was!" (Z, 'The Soothsayer'). For Nietzsche, democracy in particular, but also rational religion and slave-ethics, are signs that human beings have lost the fortitude to impose themselves. This results in that human beings become gluttons or decadent in that they assimilate and digest just about anything.

A cultured people is not devoid of development. These societies indeed develop over a prolonged amount of time. Nietzsche uses the term *Volk* to describe a well-cultured people (a term that was later abused by the Nazis). In *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, he writes: "Somewhere still there are peoples and herds [*Völker und Heerden*], but not where we live, my brothers: here there are states" (Z, 'On the New Idol'). He marks the difference between a state and a people as follows: "The ones who created the peoples were the creators, they hung a faith and a love over them, and thus they served life. The one who set traps for the many and call them 'state' are annihilators, they hang a sword and a hundred cravings over them" (Z, 'On the New Idol'). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche clarifies that a *Volk* is instituted by strong hierarchies but, after time,

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the reliance upon these hierarchies wanes as societies fall prey to "corruption", namely when its members no longer uncritically adhere to traditional virtues and morals (FW 23). The energies that were typically directed outwardly, which often given rise to profound cruelty and violence, now turn inwards: "I concede only that cruelty now *refines* itself and that its older forms henceforth offend taste, but wounding and torturing with word and eye reaches its highest cultivation in times of corruption – it is now alone that *malice* and the delight in malice are born" (FW 23). These dynamics between outward and inwards, strength and corruption, are quite natural. When corruption comes to peak level, a breaking point is reached where a great individual (a 'tyrant') tends to emerge that imposes a new order upon a society that is crumbling from inner conflict: "In truth they need peace from without because they have enough unrest and work within" (FW 23). This leads towards a new form of class distinctions and the immediate discharge of energies, reinvigorating that society through the organic development of societal politics. Such development does not negate moments of weakness, but takes these up into new configurations.

The identity of a *Volk* is thus instituted by great individuals that create new systems of ethics, new mythologies and new great politics. European society has reached a spiritual crisis, according to Nietzsche, where its creative energies are clogged up through spiritual self-conflict, and therefore it is in need of a great person to emerge that redirects its energies. In the previous chapters, we have discussed the contributions of rationalism, tradition and custom, and the rationalization of mythology, on this spiritual conflict. The last element in this is how European society has grown suspicious of great individuals. Nietzsche often invokes the images of Rome and Greece as aristocratic societies, both of which faced a spiritual crisis that they initially were capable of overcoming through the emergence of a great person (Caesar and Alexander). But when democratic tendencies – bolstered by Christianity, Socratism and the ascetic ideal generally – sap the spiritual lifeblood from such a society then such great individuals are unlikely to emerge and even more unlikely to be taken seriously. That society can therefore not transition beyond its spiritual crisis into a new sense of cultural wholeness, but is damned to remain trapped within self-conflicted division. Despite its sickness, the old society simply will not perish:

> Life – that is: continually shedding something that wants to die; Life – that is: being cruel and inexorable against anything that is growing weak and old in us, and not just in us. Life – therefore means: being devoid of respect for the dying, the wretched, the aged? Always being a murderer? And yet old Moses said: 'Thou shalt not kill' (FW 26)

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Christianity, democracy and Socratism are therefore hostile towards life simply because they do not allow a previous state of being to die: they hang on desperately to their own views and thereby stunt the organic growth of a society.

A healthy society therefore needs the counterbalancing of a cultured *Volk* that is given new ideals by great individuals, the latter of which are necessarily free (or evil) spirits. Nietzsche is quite clear that great individuals are needed to allow a society to transcend its weakness: "It is precisely at this injured and weakened spot that the whole body is as it were *inoculated* with something new: its strength must, however, be as a whole sufficient to receive this new thing into its blood and to assimilate it" (MAM 244). What does not kill a culture can make it stronger in the same way that a person struck with deafness might find a way to enhance his other senses. In order to evolve, a culture requires such wounds; the Roman Empire was quite capable of sustaining itself but it required the emergence of Christianity for it to transition to a more spiritual, more refined culture. As Nietzsche puts it: "The strongest nature *preserves* the type, the weaker help it to *evolve*" (MAM 244).

A strong, self-developing, self-preserving culture must be faced with degeneration, decadence and weakness. This is equally how Schelling thought of the dialectical development in his philosophy of nature, where true development cannot ever solely depend upon self-realization but in fact must build from the abyss of darkness and self-retraction (we return to this in chapter five). Nietzsche is clear that both of these are needed in a healthy culture: "Firstly the augmentation of the stabilizing force through the union of minds in belief and communal feeling; then the possibility of the attainment of higher goals through the occurrence of degenerate natures and, as a consequence of them, partial weakenings and injurings of the stabilizing force" (MAM 244). This holds true for cultures as well as individuals, who can also use weaknesses to their advantage insofar as they are able to style these within their character: "Rarely is a degeneration, a mutilation, even a vice and physical or moral damage in general without an advantage in some other direction" (MAM 244).

There are, however, two ways to respond to a weakness or disease arising in culture: it might paralyze further an already-weakened culture, or it can be incorporated (*einverleiben*) or assimilated (*assimiliren*) within that culture. For Nietzsche, Christianity is a good example of a failed attempt at cultural appropriation by a culture already weakened by Socratism. European culture could have made good use of Christianity but it had allowed the wound to fester, rather than finding a way to incorporate Christianity into its organic development. Roman culture could have been refined spiritually by Christianity – by providing more of an inner, spiritual life – without that culture succumbing to decadence. The Romans would have to be able to give asceticism a place in its

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culture, but the ascetic ideal became dominant and overpowered Roman culture. Rather than incorporating Christianity into the healthy body of European culture, the body went into what could be called a hyperactive, auto-immune disorder: the culture turned against its own system of flourishing, destroying its resilience. If Greek and Roman culture was strong enough, it would have been capable of making a better use of Christianity: "A people that becomes somewhere weak and fragile but is as a whole still strong and healthy is capable of absorbing the infection of the new and incorporating [*einzuverleiben*] it to its own advantage" (MAM 244).

Having discussed in detail the 'weakness' that is needed for a society to evolve, let us now turn our attention to what Nietzsche believes to be a strong, resilient culture. This brings us to a topic that many readers of Nietzsche would prefer to avoid: national identity. Nietzsche lived through the times of the German unification (1871), which was supposed to provide a sense of togetherness and wholeness to the scattered German people. There should be a Germany above the Germans (*Deutschland über Alles*). The difficulty of how to accomplish this politically paled in comparison as to how to accomplish this culturally. The problem was already signalled by a young Hegel in 1796:

> Except perhaps for Luther in the eyes of Protestants, what heroes could we have had, we who were never a nation? . . . We are without any religious imagery which is homegrown or linked to our history, and we are without any political imagery whatever; all that we have is the remains of an imagery of our own, lurking amid the common people under the name of superstition (Hegel 1948, pp. 146–147 – translation modified).

Throughout the Romantic era, the need for a proper German culture was a pressing concern. One of the reasons for this was that the incessant tendency within the European continent for war, especially between France, Germany and Russia. If the newly-formed German state was going to become a powerful player on the European continent, it would need to find a way for its citizens to feel a sense of belonging.[67]

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67 Similar ploys emerged in other European countries. For instance, the French sought to make cultural alliances with other major players on the European continent, especially Russia. To this purpose, it became a mandate of French diplomats to find ways to close the gap between French and Russian culture. One of the consequences of this was that Russian literature was translated into French, far from accurately, in order for the French to feel kinship to the Russians. These translations were called *des belles infidels*. Incidentally, Nietzsche became of victim of this diplomatic ploy when he found a book by Dostoevsky, with heavy editorial revisions, in a bookstore in Nice: *L'esprit souterrain*. The editing of this work made it impossible for Nietzsche to recognize its satirical and grotesque nature, which made Nietzsche fall in love with the work. This lasted until Georg Brandes pointed out to Nietzsche that Dostoevsky was

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One factor in German unification was the imposition of Prussian cultural homogeneity through nationalism, which is the view of the unique historical significance of the German people, culture and history which then serves to justify a German state that exalts the typical tropes of German identity. After a long historical development, it is this ideology that fostered the Nazi's quest for Aryan purity and a Jew-free German state, an ideology for which the Nazis happily cited Nietzsche. There is no denying that Nietzsche deplores the loss of a communal mythology and national identity, but it is now a well-established aspect of his philosophy that he vehemently attacks the Germans nationalists and anti-Semites, and clearly prefers to look upon himself as a 'good European'. The famous line in the 'Preface' of *Beyond Good and Evil* is a good illustration: "But we, who are neither Jesuits nor democrats, nor even German enough, we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free spirits" (JGB 'Preface'). Elsewhere, he thinks that the European implementation of a national state is still very immature:

> What gets called a 'nation' in Europe today (and is really more a *res facta* than *nata* – every once in a while a *res ficta et picta* will look exactly the same) is, in any case, something young, easily changed, and in a state of becoming, not yet a race let alone the sort of *aere perennius* that the Jewish type is. (JGB 251)

With this in mind, most authors assume that Nietzsche's philosophy would have nothing to do with nationalism and that he simply prefers the vast diversity of a European nation. Diane Morgan summarizes well how most think Nietzsche's views of national identity:

> It is an artificial construction, an old-fashioned concept, which is rapidly becoming anachronistic. [. . .]. Nietzsche scholars have been eager to insist on such a reading of the philosopher's standpoint on nationalism. Understandably they have wanted to distance his works from the attempts of sympathizers with National Socialism to pressgang them into the service of the Third Reich. (Morgan 2006, p. 455)

Morgan is right in this. For instance, George Williamson holds that "Nietzsche rejected any appeal to the *Volk* in either politics or aesthetics" (Williamson 2004, p. 279). While most scholars recognize some nationalism in the final sections of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the mature Nietzsche is more of a 'good European' than a German (Gooding-Williams 2001, pp. 101–117; Rupschus 2013). For this reason, most scholars have focused on Nietzsche's idea of Europe to discover his views of politics. Christian Emden reads Nietzsche's Europe in opposition to more localized, *Volkish* communities: in his view, Nietzsche would advance

really a fairly orthodox Christian. For extensive discussion of this topic, see Boulogne (2019, pp. 21–38).

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"his 'idea of Europe' as a possible alternative to the political culture of moral communities", where Emden thinks of Europe as "more open than the nation state and less vague than humanity" (Emden 2008, p. 286).

Diane Morgan adds, and I concur, that such a reading is misleading, especially since Nietzsche's attitude towards national identity is far more complex. On the one hand, Nietzsche is indeed often unfavourably disposed towards the idea of a national state, and particularly the German state, because of its oppressive effects on the creative energy of its citizens (see particularly FW 377: 'We who are homeless'). On the other hand, Nietzsche is not a defender of a global cosmopolitan community. Nietzsche certainly had hopes for Europe, but his Europe is not to be identified with our contemporary Europe. For Nietzsche, Europe was an entity wider than the nation state but more workable than a global community.[68] Nietzsche thus had high hopes for a European identity which does not submit Europe to motley diversity and neither falls prey to the egregious effects of the nation-state.[69]

Let us engage this topic where it becomes most prevalent; that is, the ninth part of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Addressing his readers repeatedly as "good Europeans", Nietzsche argues against the shallow nationalism of the day and hopes that a European spirit will find a way to unite individuals by mean of a physiological process, one wherein the national types of a nation become so mixed that the European will become a type of its own:

> An immense *physiological* process is taking place and constantly gaining ground – the process of increasing similarity between Europeans, their growing detachment from the conditions under which climate- or class-bound races originate, their increasing independence from that *determinate* milieu where for centuries the same demands would be inscribed on the soul and the body – and so the slow approach of an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of person who, physiologically speaking, is typified by a maximal degree of the art and force of adaptation. (JGB 242)

Nietzsche envisions a new type of man to emerge, a European man, with great powers for adaptation. This man would be able to transcend national boundaries, strict ethical systems or constricting styles. But still a particular type of man that belongs to the *Volk* of Europe: he would still be enlisted in a style and culture, but he would be capable of organically transitioning towards new styles and cultures (something which has been made difficult by rationalism, the ethics of custom and Christianity). A good illustration of how European

68 For more extensive discussion of this: Emden 2008, pp. 286–323.
69 For discussion of Nietzsche's hopes for Europe, see Elbe (2003), Martin (1995, pp. 141–144), Parkes (1993, pp. 585–590).

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man would still belong to a style, not simple a hodge-podge of diversity, can be found when Nietzsche engages a potential threat to Europe from Russia:

> I mean the sort of increase [in willpower] in the threat Russia poses that would force Europe into choosing to become equally threatening and, specifically, *to acquire a single will* by means of a new caste that would rule over Europe, a long, terrible will of its own, that could give itself millennia-long goals: – so that the long, spun-out comedy of Europe's petty provincialism and its dynastic as well as democratic fragmentation of the will could finally come to an end. (JGB 208)

Nietzsche's advocacy of "the singular will" is a sign that he saw the European state as a host of diverse individuals that are united under a project, one that might simply be an enlargement of scale with regard to a national identity. Europe should become a third empire, after the Greek and Roman empire, but not one that is subordinated to any national identity (as Hitler's *Third Reich* sought to accomplish), but one that collects and orchestrates the vast diversity of the European people into a cultured style capable of fending off egregious influences from inside and outside.

This is not what has happened in Europe, so says Nietzsche, which has chosen a 'state' (*Staat*) over a 'people' (*Volk*). A state is a collection of non-unified individuals where the leadership is expressed in terms of the collective will of these individuals: a herd without a shepherd. The democratic state heralds the "death of peoples" (Z, 'On the New Idol') as a "people" is made whole through an organizing principle, often imposed by a strong individual. While the democratic state alleges to be the people, it does not provide a unity of wholeness to that society but rather allows expression of the most diverse, most disjointed and radically opposed views and ideologies. A real people is erected, on the contrary, by a creator who "hung a faith and a love over them, and thus they served life" (Z, 'On the New Idol'). The essence of a people is that they have been given a purpose, a hierarchy of values, and an idea of the good life which exceeds the lawgiving of the sum total of the people. A people has designed its own table of values, it has its own language, its own religion. But, for Nietzsche, a democratic state does not subscribe to a particular view of morality or custom. Instead, the state serves to preserve those who would most likely perish if there was such a thing as a morality of strength: "The state was invented for the superfluous" (Z, 'On the New Idol'). Within the confines of the democratic state, those of a lower hierarchical standing are preserved, even exalted, and they are allowed to strive for the power to rule. Higher individuals cannot flourish within the democratic state.

Because of his dread of the democratic state, Nietzsche recognizes some of the benefits of a more circumscribed sense of community. Indeed, Nietzsche is

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extremely sensitive to the need for an identity, and he can often be read as trying to cultivate a powerful idea of a people (*Volk*) that could be the cultural vehicle for the uplifting of humanity.[70] But just as Christianity did not fulfil the function of a proper religion, for Nietzsche nationalism cannot accomplish properly the need for identity. The reason for this is, first and foremost, that nationalism oppresses singular, higher individuals, seeking to enlist them within the national state, instead of allowing them to be above, and thus inspire, the national state. For this purpose, one can read Nietzsche's reflections on the great English, French and German individuals of the 19th century who either "hide themselves" (JGB 254) or are really just mediocre (JGB 251–256).

Nietzsche's reservations do not diminish the importance that he attaches to nation states, national identities and even national pride. Nietzsche is not opposed to a strong culture, he is merely disappointed with how culture has panned out in Europe and especially in Germany. Great individuals are supposed to be the motor of culture, providing new insights, leadership and dissidence, so that society does not go stale. However, for Nietzsche the so-called great individuals of the 19th century tend to be populists and conformists rather than free spirits (he, obviously, makes some exceptions now and again). Nietzsche opens the third book of *Daybreak* with the lament that free-thinkers might submit to custom for the sake of social peace (e.g. an atheist who marries in church because of his pious relatives). But this is particularly problematic because at that point "an already mighty, anciently established and irrationally recognized custom should be once more confirmed by a person recognized as rational", which might incline people to think that this custom begets "the sanction of rationality itself" (M 149). When exalted individuals support a custom, the people feel justified in continuing and validating this custom.

A great individual cannot be a conformist and, as a result, Nietzsche is committed to call out fake greatness among those who claim or are said to be great. Yet, Nietzsche not-so-secretly hopes for true greatness in Germany to emerge as great individuals are the only true sign of a great culture.[71] Nietzsche

70 Nietzsche was disappointed with the German state. Any German that would subscribe to the heavily-politicized idea of 'Germanness' was not a good German. For someone to be an excellent individual, he would have to be an European. When reflecting on Schopenhauer's effect on the German state, he clarifies as much as follows: "[Schopenhauer] ist einer der bestgebildeten Deutschen, das will sagen ein Europäer. Ein guter Deutscher – man verzeihe mir's, wenn ich es zehnmal wiederhole – ist kein Deutscher mehr" (NL11 1884 26[412]).

71 In 'On Redemption' in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra addresses a number of cripples and tells them about 'inverse cripples'. These are individuals who are just "one big eye, or one big maw or one big belly or some other big thing" (Z, 'On Redemption'). Nietzsche is thinking of individuals who cultivate only one aspect of themselves, such as an athlete that can only

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is then disappointed with 19th-century German culture, especially when we look at the "most read German philosopher, the most heard German composer and the most respected German statesman" (M 167), respectively Schopenhauer, Wagner and Bismarck. Nietzsche questions their greatness in terms of their resentment towards worldly life: "Not *above* things or on his knees before things – both could have been called German – but *against* things!" (M 167). There might indeed be some individual traits of these three individuals that are admirable, but most aspects of them are lamentable. In order to revere these individuals as 'great', one would have to forget a lot: "And what an enormous amount 'the rest' is that one would have to forget if one wanted to go on being a wholesale admirer of these great men of our age!" (M 167). Clearly, Nietzsche finds that German culture ought to have great individuals to be revered, but the German heroes of his present age simply do not warrant such reverence: German culture assigns greatness to individuals who are fragmentary, un-stylized shadows of greatness.

The assertions are somewhat paradoxical from our point of view. German culture had actually become more interesting to the Europeans since the late 18th and especially 19th century. Introductory classes on the history of philosophy usually deal with French thinkers throughout the 16–17th century (Descartes, Pascal, Montaigne, Malebranche) then with the English philosophers of the 17th–18th century (Berkeley, Locke, Hume) and from the end of the 18th to well into the 19th century with German thinkers (Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer). When Germany seemed to be, in the eyes of Europe, on its cultural high point, Nietzsche chastises it for a lack of cultural style and grandeur: German culture "was unworthy of the interest, emulation and imitation it inspired" (M 190). Early 19th-century Germans – Nietzsche singles out Schiller, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Hegel and even Schelling (probably only considering his early, published work) – are pitiable because, among other things, "their desire for brilliant, boneless generalities, together with the intention of seeing everything (characters, passions, ages, customs) in as beautiful a light as possible" (M 190). He calls this a "soft, good-natured, silver-glistering idealism" (M 190), a hollow desire to stay on the surface of things, unaware of the hardship and self-devouring devilry of life.

Germany had not only brought forth pitiable philosophers, according to Nietzsche, but these philosophers' dealings with Christianity had resulted in a

run 100 meters or a scholar who only knows one subject. This subject is supposed to detail how human beings – even those who are thought of as 'great human beings' – are fragmentary and "grisly accidents" (Z, 'On Redemption', 110). Similarly, the great individuals of German culture are thought to be fragmented accidents, and not whole, self-styled human beings (Nietzsche generally makes an exception for Goethe in this respect).

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rationalization and nationalization of Christianity. Such an approach – Nietzsche singles out Hegel and Schleiermacher – was terribly lacking in depth. In retort, Nietzsche praises the way the French have dealt with Christianity, which had given rise to spectacular individuals. Nietzsche almost turns ecstatic when discussing Pascal, who stands "in unity of fervour, spirit and honesty the first of all Christians – and consider what has to be united here";[72] or Fénelon, who is "the perfect and dazzling expression of *ecclesiastical culture* in all its strength", or Madame de Guyon and the French Quietists, who are "all that the fire and eloquence of the apostle Paul endeavoured to discover in the sublime, loving, silent and enraptured semi-divine state of the Christian has here become truth" (M 192). While Nietzsche clearly does not side with Christianity in all its elements, he points out here how Christianity has affected the French nation in an altogether-different way than it had affected the German nation. In France, it had created great individuals of depth, power and unity; in Germany, Christianity has given rise to fragmented rationalists.

It should then be unsurprising that Book III of *Daybreak* closes with a number of scathing remarks at the expense of German culture. First, he criticizes how Germany had been hostile towards the efforts of the Enlightenment to think of reality in a more sceptical fashion. Germans responded by philosophically re-introducing speculative dialectics, Romanticism reaching back and honouring primitive sensibilities, thinking of science as laden with symbolical significance. Instead, we must "now carry further forward [the Enlightenment]" (M 197). Second, he criticizes Germany for its attitude towards morality: Germans are particularly good at obeying, a nation of soldiers not equipped to depend upon themselves. For instance, "whenever a German did anything great, he did it because he was obliged to do it, in a state of bravery, with clenched teeth, the tensest reflection and often with magnanimity" (M 207). German greatness consists in the capacity to obey unconditionally, to believe unconditionally (which is where Nietzsche equates Kant and Luther). And yet, the book ends with a note of hope. When the time comes that obedience is no longer possible (if morality and religion are unbelievable), then the German might be capable of the greatest of all things, namely obedience to himself: "When the German gets into the state in which he is capable of great things, *he always raises himself above morality*! And how should he not? He now has

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72 In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche calls Pascal "Christianity's most instructive victim" because he was "massacred slowly, first physically then psychologically, the whole logic of this most horrible form of inhuman cruelty" (EH, 'Why I am so Clever', 3)

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something novel he has to do, namely to command – himself or others!" (M 207). We examine this idea in depth in chapter six.

This brings our circle round and we are back at the first paragraph of *Daybreak* III, namely "the need for little deviant acts" (M 149): Germany has been so accustomed to obeying, and looks for so many different justifications for obeying custom, that they forgot to destroy, command and create. There is hope for German culture, however, since "a German is capable of great things" if only he would direct his energy towards commanding rather than obeying (M 207). Particularly, the German has to take command of himself, stylize his individual character into something cultured. But in order to do so, Nietzsche has to change the way in which Germans think about reality, so that hopefully after some time they will naturally be disposed differently towards reality: "We have to *learn to think differently* – in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: to *feel differently*" (M 103). German culture as a whole must shift directions in order for true great individuals to appear.

We will discuss in more detail in the coming chapters in what way Nietzsche aims to reinvigorate culture. In closing, how can we resolve the lack of mythology, organic development and the wholeness of a *Volk*? All of these difficulties signal that Western culture has lost its horizon for creation because it was unable to incorporate those elements of sickness within its organic development. In *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche's most positivistic work, the solution lies in an unknown future where we leave behind religion and art. Indeed, Western culture might have a religious past for which they feel ashamed, but they should look upon that past as a way beyond religion, beyond sickness: "Throw off discontent with your nature, forgive yourself your ego, for in any event you possess in yourself a ladder with a hundred rungs upon which you can climb to knowledge" (MAM 292). A strong culture can only emerge out of and against weakness and decadence, darkness provides the means for light: "Is it not precisely from *this* soil, which you sometimes find so displeasing, the soil of unclear thinking, that many of the most splendid fruits of more ancient cultures grew up?" (MAM 292)[73] We redeem the past in virtue of the future, not

73 Slightly ironically, Nietzsche will consider his excessive enthusiasm towards science and positivism in *Human all too Human* and *Daybreak* as a sickness from which he had to convalesce. From *The Gay Science* onwards, Nietzsche would fulminate against scientific suspicion as one more expression of a metaphysical sickness. But, as mentioned here, he retained the belief that if an individual or even culture manages to work through such sickness, they would emerge stronger and more refined: "From such abysses, from such severe illness, also from the illness of severe suspicion, one returns *newborn*, having shed one's skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a more tender tongue for all good things,

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as embracing it unreservedly – religion does seem to be at its end, according to *Human all too Human:* "But one must be able to see beyond them, outgrow them" (MAM 292). There, he implores human beings to become part of a culture that becomes healthy again by overcoming Christianity:

> You have it in your hands to achieve the absorption of all your experience – your experiments, errors, faults, delusions, passions, your love and your hope – into your goal without remainder. This goal is yourself to become a necessary chain of rings of culture and from this necessity to recognize the necessity inherent in the course of culture in general (MAM 292).

This view is somewhat of an excessive reaction against his earlier Romanticism, and will be tempered in those books to come, which we discuss below

In conclusion, Schelling and Nietzsche have given arguments against the process wherein a religion, mythology or identity becomes rationalized or historicized because this turns its identity stagnant and incapable of evolution and transformation. When such a stagnant identity is faced with adversity and opposition, one is forced to relinquish it altogether as it has become incapable of adapting to changing circumstances. Christianity's moral virtue of truthfulness has uncovered the true source of Christianity, and by this has rendered belief in Christianity impossible without allowing for a transition into a new mythology. Nihilism and a lack of culture is what remains.

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with merrier senses, joyful with a more dangerous second innocence, more childlike, and at the same time a hundred times subtler than one had ever been before" (FW, 'Preface', 4).

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Part II: **Organicism, Freedom and Self-Formation**

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Chapter 5
Living Nature and Freedom in Schelling

The first step to move beyond the difficulties outlined in the chapters above (excessive rationalism, stale conception of good and evil, lack of mythology and identity) is to advance a more vital concept of freedom. Schelling regards freedom not as the rational capacity to choose between opposing options (*liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*), which regards freedom as opposed to necessitation and even nature (e.g., Kant's sense of noumenal freedom). Instead, freedom becomes the essence of reality: freedom is essential and our essence is freedom. Schelling works towards a more organic interrelationship between freedom and nature where nature is the expression of freedom. Nietzsche equally sees freedom as emergent from, and tangling with, nature. What is germane to both Schelling's and Nietzsche's points of views is that freedom is not in radical opposition to the givenness of nature, but works with and through what is given. In this sense, freedom builds from a ground that is not freedom, but that reaches beyond that ground. There is then at the same time dependency upon and opposition to the ground. The intention to rebel simply and conclusively against a given in nature is testament to an aberration from nature – which is what Nietzsche calls 'decadence' or 'corruption' and Schelling calls 'sickness'. But this does not force human beings to remain merely in the natural ground of being: *the highest heaven and the deepest abyss do and must coexist*. The present chapter develops Schelling's argument regarding freedom mainly from the perspective of *Freedom-Essay*, *The Ages of the World* and some adjoining texts; the next chapter builds an account of freedom from Nietzsche's mature works.

Pantheism Rethought

The Pantheism-Controversy brought the philosophical chasm between idealism and realism to a climax. Instead of favouring either option, Schelling argued that these result in an insufficiently organic view of reality, where nature and freedom are thought in radical opposition. Somewhat surprisingly and certainly untimely, Schelling argues that pantheism, that is, the view of the immanence of all things in God, is a promising alternative to idealism and realism. If Schelling's position in *Freedom-Essay* is read carefully, one finds that the pantheism there advanced is already well on its way towards the more systematically constructed philosophical religion of the *Spätphilosophie*.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-006

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That Schelling works from an unorthodox understanding of pantheism in *Freedom-Essay* can be made clear from a quick look at the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* (delivered shortly after the *Freedom-Essay*). There, Schelling notes two mistakes that typically occur when thinking about the absolute, namely as either "special, cut off, singular, existing wholly for itself being", which is deism, or that one thinks of the absolute in such a way which leaves it no "special, own, for itself being", which is pantheism (SP 438). Schelling's sense of pantheism in *Freedom-Essay* cannot be summarized as the latter. In that essay, pantheism sees the relationship between world and God as a duality-in-unity, which is a view that recognizes the distinctness of the world and God, nature and freedom, but also captures these as expressive of an organic unity. This position can be confounding, and the confusion is in part to be attributed to the success of the Eleatic tradition in philosophy. This has brought philosophy to "an unholy and false binary" between two equally-unappealing, opposed points of view: austere dualism or lifeless unity. This means that modern philosophy is forced to choose between thinking about reality in terms of two radically opposing realms or one realm of unopposed unity: "Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, lacerated [*zerissen*] the world into body and spirit and hence, the unity was lost in favour of duality. Spinoza had unified them into a single, albeit dead, substance and had lost duality in favour of unity" (W3 340–341).

Schelling believes that pantheism has been woefully misunderstood as the identification of God and world. To him, such a thing would be "horrifying" because the "true prime matter of all life and existence is precisely what is horrifying" (W3 339). Pantheism cannot be thought of in terms of "the assurance of the harmony and wonderfully blessed unity of the cosmos", which is a naïve point of view that has become "a burden to any sensible person" (W3 339). It is unclear who Schelling envisions with this remark, though the use of "harmony" suggests Leibniz (who was not a pantheist), but could also point to the above-mentioned dispute between Schelling and Schlegel. Schelling makes this claim at the close of the first part of *The Ages of the World* after having detailed the "terrible loneliness" of first nature or God as ground of being. According to Schelling, the primordial nature of God (Being) is determined by means of two principles: "Two principles are already in what is necessary of God: the outpouring, outstretching, self-giving being, and an equivalently eternal force of selfhood, of retreat into itself, of Being in itself" (W3 211). This makes the innermost nature of God into an eternal contradiction between contraction and extension, or a rotary motion where every force has a counterforce. This means that insofar as God is the ground of being (unconscious nature), he is without an "other" or without "freedom" (which is only possible through an "other"). Somehow, and how exactly will always be the philosopher's stone to Schelling,

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freedom arose from within the ground of being, which means the outflowing of an "other" to God through God's will (W3 257–258). This Other is nature. In the confrontation with the Other, God comes to himself and builds up to freedom – the distance to himself that the Other inaugurates allows for self-possession on the part of God. In the final draft of *The Ages of the World*, freedom wells up because of a profound frustration with the neurotic self-enclosure of the rotary motion. If there is no freedom that emerges from this back and forth between expansion and creation, nothing ever emerges from out of the anonymity of being.[74]

The first concept that Schelling employs to think of freedom as emergent from the anonymity of a rotary movement is that of pantheism. In 1809, Schelling advances the thesis that pantheism means that everything is *in God*: "It cannot be denied that if pantheism meant nothing but the doctrine of the immanence of all things in God, every rational view would have to adhere to this teaching in some sense or other" (F 339).[75] According to this reading, pantheism's claim that God is the world is to be read as that the world or nature is emergent from (and retreats back into) God. This is a sense of Romantic naturalism, which thinks of everything as emerging from and returning to a primordial nature.[76] Schelling does not use the term naturalism because it was associated

74 It is on this topic that the drafts of *The Ages of the World* differ most intensely. The differences are summarized by Slavoj Žižek as follows: "First draft: "The primordial Freedom *qua* Will that wants nothing '*contracts*' being – that is, condenses itself into a contracted point of material density – *of necessity*, not through an act of free decision"; "The second draft, which goes farthest in the direction of Freedom, endeavors to conceive *the primordial contraction itself as a free act*: as soon as the primordial Freedom actualizes itself, as soon as it turns into an actual Will, it splits into two opposed Wills, so that the tension is here strictly internal to freedom"; "Schelling avoids the problem of the passage of freedom to existence [in the third draft] by conceiving the starting point of the entire process, the primordial Freedom, as a 'synthetic principle', as the simultaneity of freedom and necessary existence" (Žižek 1997, pp. 34–35). I will not engage here with Schelling's development over the three drafts of *The Ages of the World*.

75 Throughout the 1820s, Hegel would be accused of pantheism and defended himself on grounds similar to Schelling. Hegel claimed that "it has never occurred to anyone to say that everything, all individual things collectively, in their individuality and contingency, are God". For Hegel, true pantheism (which he decries more favourably but still avoids) is "the view that the divine in all things is only the universal aspect of their content, the *essence* of things". Hegel attacks Spinoza for 'acosmism', namely that his philosophy denies the actuality of individual things (Hegel 2006, p. 123 [273]).

76 For discussion of naturalism in the 19th century generally, see Rueger (2012, pp. 169–200).

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with French materialism and Spinozist fatalism, the latter of which Schelling distances himself from as follows:

> My system is different from Spinoza because of the abundance of development, through a self-moving principle and the consequence of the potencies from causa sui. Spinoza's system understands the forms of finite being only as *moments of development*, which Spinoza understands as modifications of the causa sui, also as dead forms. (SW 55)

The generic sense of naturalism sees nature as a modification of eternal substance. This allows nature little of a being or even a freedom of its own – nature is dead to naturalism. A more lively understanding of nature acknowledges the eternal back and forth in nature as expansion and retraction. This was the goal of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. In his Berlin Lectures, Schelling explains why a proper philosophy of nature has been absent in Western thought:

> The reason for this lies precisely in the fact that man has *separated* himself from nature and in the fact that – as experience shows – man was by no means merely destined to be the goal or culmination of a process independent of him, but was rather destined to be himself the originator and creator of a new process, of a second world that would lift itself above the first. (GPP 6)

In other words, Western thought has a tendency to be dualistic: spirit *or* nature; freedom *or* determination. By then separating humanity fundamentally from nature, making humanity into a separate entity, nature must almost necessarily become unfree and inanimate. This is a dreadful simplification – insufficiently dialectic nor organic – of the relationship between freedom and nature. For Schelling, there is a dialectical process in which human beings emerge from anonymous nature, towards claiming an identity, towards a recognition of the togetherness of individuality and then a re-immersion in nature and God in philosophical religion.

Let us focus on how freedom and individuality emerge from primordial nature. The main distinguishing feature between Schelling and the German idealists (Fichte and Hegel) is that he believes we must start from outside of reason. Reason, freedom or individuality are not *causa sui*, but emerge from unreason, unfreedom and anonymity. What is more, the step beyond unreason is not once and for all time: there ever remains the danger of regression. An individual is a process rather than a state of being. We will attend to this at length below, but it merits pointing out that Nietzsche fundamentally agrees with Schelling on this point. To him, individuality must always emerge from, and is at risk of returning to, anonymity and herd-like existence. In *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, he writes: "Delight in the herd is older than delight in the ego"; "The You is older than the I" (Z, 'On Thousand and One Goals'). If individuality is emergent from, and at risk of retuning to, nature, then one must fundamentally rethink freedom

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and individuality. This can no longer be thought of dualistically as if freedom was merely the Other of nature. Freedom cannot be absolute independence from nature, but must imply a negotiation between self and Other. This is what Nietzsche calls “dancing in chains” (JGB 226; MAM, ‘The Wanderer’, 140), to which we turn in the next chapter.

Schelling’s criticism of modern philosophy is that freedom and reason are not considered in such a dialectical relationship with nature. Most modern philosophy thinks of human beings as special, unique individuals that do not easily blend in with the rest of reality. For Schelling, a true system of philosophy ought to recognize both the intimacy and the distance that human beings enjoy with nature; a true system explains reality and does not impose itself upon reality. A true system is revealed or *a posteriori*, not invented. In his first private lecture in Stuttgart, Schelling emphasized that “the true system cannot be *invented* [*erfunden*], it can only as an in-itself, namely in divine understanding, already *present* [*vorhandenes*] system be found” (SV 421–422). Elsewhere, he repeats that “our endeavor to discern and be alive to an object must (one still has to repeat it) never have the intention of imputing something to it but rather only of inducing it to giving itself to be known” (HKM 4). Schelling reproaches previous systematic philosophers for their attempts to systematize the world, while the true task of philosophy is to discover the already present system of reality. Pantheism would be the system that correctly captures the relationship between freedom and system.

Freedom, System and the Copula

Schelling finds the history of philosophy replete with reflections on (human) freedom and how freedom relates to a causally-systematic account of reality. Rather than to reduce either of these to the other, Schelling aims for an account that justifies both in themselves as well as in relation to one another. Without hesitation, Schelling accepts that the “feeling of freedom is ingrained in every individual” (F 336) and that “individual freedom in some manner or other has a place in the universe, it matters not whether this be thought of realistically or idealistically” (F 337). Schelling’s goal is to conceptualize an account of pantheism that does justice to three basic elements: (1) primordial nature is completely determined in a totalitarian unity, (2) existing reality comes to be through a free act of will and (3) existing things are caught in a negative dialectic between freedom and necessity, between asserting themselves as individuals and disappearing in totalitarian unity. In order to achieve these objectives, one has to conceptualize the strongest possible sense of freedom and the strongest sense

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of determination, neither of which is reducible to the other. The three traditional ways of thinking about freedom and systematic determination fail to live up to these standards.

The first view of the relationship between freedom and system manages to retain these requirements to the fullest possible extent, but it does so at the cost of denying knowledge of the interrelationship between freedom and system. According to this view, human beings lack a divine understanding of things, and are only capable of grasping a temporally and spatially fragmented reality because they miss the view *sub specie aeternitatis* that would allow them to puzzle the whole of things together. This point applies to the most influential account of freedom at the time, namely Kant's concluding discussion of autonomy in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1784). This text was considered to be Kant's foremost text on ethics by most early 19th-century philosophers.[77] Kant's reasoning in *Groundwork* III is notoriously difficult – Karl Ameriks once called it "a riddle wrapped within an enigma – and all this is covered by a shroud for good measure. The riddle is the argument itself, the enigma is Kant's attitude to it before and after its composition, and the shroud is the story of its evaluation" (Ameriks 2003, p. 226). Freedom is, to Kant, a subjectively-necessary presupposition of practical reason that makes practical agency comprehensible (especially moral autonomy and responsibility). However, freedom cannot itself be rendered intelligible because it belongs to noumenal rather than phenomenal reality: Kant writes that "every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect," (Kant 1996a, p. 95 [4:448]) which means that freedom as the capacity for rational deliberation and legislation is an *a priori* necessary assumption for any rational being under the apodictic commands of the moral law. This assumption can never be explained fully since freedom is beyond the realm of the understanding (*Verstand*). If one would insist on providing a wholesale account of freedom, one would be forced to "leave the philosophical ground of explanation behind;" to this suggestion, Kant gleefully adds that "[he has] no other [ground of explanation]" (Kant 1996a, p. 107 [4:462]). We can at most become self-critically conscious of the subjective limitations of our finite rational intellect and simply assume freedom as a practical postulate next to the apparent causally-determined phenomenal world: "And thus we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the

77 Schopenhauer (2009, pp. 123–125 [117–120]) would even lament the contributions of the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Hegel is the exception to this rule, who engages Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* in his *Philosophy of Right*.

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moral imperative, but we nevertheless comprehend its *incomprehensibility*" (Kant 1996a, p. 108 [4:463]).

Despite fine-tuning these arguments in later works, Kant does not waver: some things are beyond the reach of human understanding, so human beings can at most arrive at the self-awareness of their limitations, and fill in the gaps with practical faith. Schelling's objection to Kant's agnosticism is well-known, but most people know Schelling's point as Hegel's. According to Schelling, if Kant alleges that a divine understanding could comprehend the compatibility of freedom and system, he has committed himself to two claims. First, that system and freedom are indeed compatible; second, that a divine understanding could cognize that compatibility. This implies that we know, to some extent, what a divine understanding is, if we know that it cognizes the compatibility between system and freedom. This implies further that philosophy must to some extent also be able to understand the compatibility of freedom and system: philosophy "comprehends the god outside through the god within himself by keeping his mind pure and unclouded by evil" (F 337). A proper and unclouded reflection upon the concepts of freedom and system approximates divine understanding.

In *The Ages of the World*, Schelling claims that we can understand the total system of reality simply because we participate in reality. As such, we require a discourse with ourselves to make our own essence divulge its history: we require a "doubling of ourselves, this secret intercourse between the two essences, one questioning and one answering, one ignorant though seeking to know and one knowledgeable without knowing its knowledge" (W1 115). Some traces are left of the prehistoric past of nature that we might find if we investigate our own inner nature carefully: "Not only human events but even the history of nature has its monuments, and one can well say that they do not leave a single stage along the lengthy path of creation without leaving behind a mark" (W1 116). This is already a first step towards Schelling's philosophy *a posteriori*, namely that he recognizes that the past can only be known mediately through discourse with our own essence. Rational concepts can themselves not expose our essence – the past is prior to concepts. We need a sense of inspiration then, else we are led to nothing but "belabored concepts of a sterile and dispirited dialectic" (W1 117). As such, Schelling emphasizes that the cooperation between freedom and necessity can be known through a prolonged process of introspection that is not primarily led by rational concepts, but by vision and intuition.

The second view of the compatibility of freedom and system relegates freedom under systematic totality, which means that freedom is sacrificed for the sake of a totally systematic view of reality. This is what Schelling indicts upon two of his favourite targets around the time of *Freedom-Essay*: Spinoza and

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French materialism. These authors would argue that freedom is an illusion brought on by a limited understanding of reality, while those who understand reality and its causal mechanism more comprehensively will come to the conclusion that all agency is predetermined by antecedent, physical causes. Rather than arguing against this point of view, Schelling is content to give a account of its emergence through the Eleatic presupposition of modern thought. He does not mince words when he attacks this view: this is “to withdraw from the conflict by foreswearing reason” which to him “looks more like flight than victory” (F 338). In Schelling’s view, there is an indisputable feeling of freedom ingrained in the human subject that has to be elucidated in a truthful manner, not dismissed as an illusion.

The third and final view takes the opposite approach and relegates system under freedom, which means that one sacrifices a systematic view of reality in favour of freedom. Schelling is likely considering the idealism of his one-time compatriot Fichte, who would have argued that “there are only individual wills each being a center for itself and, in Fichte’s phrase, each Ego being the absolute Substance” (F 337). This means that there is nothing but the most singular individuality in each separate will, each positing its own absolute. How does one account for the interaction and potential harmonious unity of these individual wills? Fichte’s solution was to think of God as the underlying moral world-order that connected each will. According to Schelling, this reduces God to nothing but impersonal, unfree causality (F 338).

Writing on Schelling’s philosophy, Heidegger makes an insightful note with regard to this third view. He writes as follows: “System cannot be denied since it itself is necessarily posited with the positing of the fact of human freedom. How so? If the freedom of the individual really exists, this means that it exists in some way together with the totality of the world” (Heidegger 1985, p. 49). Heidegger argues here that it might be possible to have a systematic view of reality that denies any meaningful sense of freedom. Spinoza proved as much. This univocally systematic view of reality is upset by the fact of a freedom that imposes itself on human consciousness, which in Schelling’s philosophy (as in Kant’s) is a fact whose factuality depends on human consciousness. However, it is not possible to relinquish a systematic view of reality: without system, one could not have freedom – if all is freedom, then nothing is free. There is an “existential coexistence” between freedom and system (Heidegger 1985, p. 49).

These three views of the relationship between freedom and system each sacrifice something: understanding, freedom or system. Schelling is willing to give up none of these, and to do so he prepares a different understanding of pantheism which accounts for both the freedom of individual beings and the

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causal determinations of natural reality. He accomplishes this by suggesting a different way of reading the copula 'is' in the proposition 'God is the world'. Germane to these three solutions is that its frame of reference is that freedom and system are thought of as dualistic, where "reason is found only in man, the conviction that all thought and knowledge are completely subjective and that Nature altogether lacks reason and thought, and also by the universally prevalent mechanistic attitude" (F 333). Schelling seeks to correct this dualistic understanding of freedom and system:

> It is not difficult to observe that the main weakness of all modern philosophy lies in the lack of an intermediate concept and hence, such that, for instance, everything that does not *have being* is nothing, and everything that is not spiritual in the highest sense is material in the crudest sense, and everything that is not morally free is mechanical, and everything that is not intelligent is uncomprehending. (W3 286)

Schelling hopes to remedy this weakness by suggesting a more dynamic understanding, in which nature is determined by freedom and freedom is determined by nature. Perhaps the best way to express Schelling's position is that reality is *between freedom and system*, or that reality is a tangled intermediary between the extremes of absolute freedom and absolute determination.

In the 18th and 19th century, pantheism was synonymous with Spinoza, which in turn implied fatalism. Schelling admits that "the fatalistic point of view can be combined with pantheism is undeniable" but adds that fatalism is "not essentially tied to it is made clear by the fact that many are driven to this pantheistic outlook precisely because of the liveliest sense of freedom" (F 339). Pantheism can be a fatalism, but not necessarily. Spinozism is fatalism, which means that there is a different reason – one unrelated to pantheism – why Spinoza is a fatalist. Pantheism is acquitted from the charge of fatalism, which Schelling accomplishes by discussing the law of identity. In the proposition 'God is the world' the term 'God' is the subject, 'world' is the predicate and 'is' is the copula. The copula tends to be read throughout the western tradition – which Schelling relates to the elevation of Parmenides over Heraclitus, Elea over Ionia – in terms of the law of identity: 'being' transcends 'becoming'. This implies that the subject of the proposition is identified with the predicate. So in the proposition 'God is the world' this would imply that God is identical to the world. When read in such a way, there can be no mistake that pantheism implies a "total identification of God with all things, a confusion of creature and creator" (F 340). In this frame of thought, there is not distinction whatsoever between God and the world or between, to use Spinoza's terms, *natura naturans* (nature naturing) and *natura naturata* (nature natured) – *Deus sive natura*.

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Is this really the most obvious way of interpreting the relationship implied in the copula? For instance, the proposition 'the sky is blue' similarly relates a predicate to a subject but we are not inclined to claim the identity between 'sky' and 'blue'. Instead, we would say that this proposition indicates that the sky expresses or posits itself as blue. This would be a more natural way to read the relationship implied in the copula, a relationship that is perhaps more Ionic than Eleatic. This explains why Schelling suggests that the problem of the identification of God and world in pantheism derives from "a general misunderstanding of the law of identity or of the meaning of the copula in judgment" (F 341).

After *Freedom-Essay*, Schelling returns a few times to the copula. In *The Ages of the World*, Schelling repeats that "in no judgment whatsoever, not even in the merely tautological, is it expressed that the combined (the subject and the predicate) are one and the same" (W3 213). Instead, the proposition 'God is the world' claims that there is something that puts God and the world into a relationship of possibility, expression and actuality. God has the potency to express as world; the world is a potency or a possibility of God; the world can emanate from the free act of God. This means that we can claim at the same time that 'God is existence' (in terms of a self-subsisting entity) and that 'God is ground' (in terms of nature), because the 'is' does not identify a specific relationship between existence/ground and God. The only identity that is claimed is the one of the link itself: "There is only an identity of the being, of the link (of the copula). The true meaning of every judgment, for instance, A is B, can only be this: *that which* is A is *that which* is B, or *that which* is A and *that which* is B are one and the same" (W3 213).

As he became more sensitive to the subtleties of language, Schelling would suggest that the misreading of 'is' as identification rather than possibility is supported by the very structure of Western languages. The difference between Western and Arabic usages of the copula is that the latter "constructs the copula with an accusative" (UO 53). For instance, in Latin ones says *homo est sapiens* while if we would use Arabic structure this would read, in Latin, *homo est sapientem* (which is obviously incorrect in Latin). The benefit of the latter mode of expression is that it is intuitively clear that something is predicated upon the subject without the suggestion that the subject and predicate are identical. When one broadly says that a subject (A) is something (B), we must allow for A to be different from B but that A can potentially express as B or that A is possibly B. Human beings can self-express as thinking, God can self-express as world and the sky can self-express as blue. But this leaves open the possibility for human beings not to be thinking, God not to be world and the sky not to be blue. This means two things: (1) the subject is something different from the

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predicate and (2) the subject can express the predicate (or not). In the original version of the *Lectures on Revelation* (1831), Schelling writes:

> When I say: A is B, this means that A is the subject of B. From this one can think of two cases. Namely (1) A is for itself something without B because the proposition would be tautological if it itself were B. [. . .]. Also in the proposition: A is B – A could be something else than B. Because it could be something different, one makes the possible being against B into a mere potency (possibility). B is only B insofar as it has the possibility in itself not to be B while it is reduced to a mere potency. (UO 52–53)

This is an altogether-different way of reading the coupling of subject and predicate. Schelling's reading is more dynamic since the subject can possibly express itself as its predicate. This explains why he calls the relationship specified by the copula one of "antecedent and the consequent" (F 342): the world is the consequence of God or the world is the self-revelation of God. According to a widespread anecdote, Heidegger was once asked in an interview which term, 'being' or 'time', was the most important in his book *Being and Time* – his impish answer was 'and' ('*und*'). Similarly, the most important term for Schelling in the proposition 'God is the world' is 'is': Schelling's philosophy is concerned with ontology, not theology per se. Perhaps not coincidentally then, it was Heidegger who suggested that by focussing on the copula 'is', Schelling shifts from a theological focus on the identity of God towards the ontological question of being: "The 'is' signifies a manner of stating Being, *on he on*. Thus, if the question of *pantheism* as the question of a system shifts to the question of the 'is', that means the theological question necessarily changes to the ontological question" (Heidegger 1985, p. 75).

In the *Lectures on Revelation*, Schelling clarifies this ontological basis by drawing a distinction between possible-being (*sein-können*) and pure-being (*rein-Seiende*). Possible-being 'is' pure-being: possible-being flows over into pure-being, which in turn might flow back into possible-being. In other words, possibility and actuality are limiting concepts caught in a negative dialectic: "The one is the relative negation of the other – as possible-being it is the negation of being in itself, as pure being it is the negation of possible-being" (UO 58). But this distinction between possible-being (in *Freedom* called *Grund*) and pure-being (in *Freedom* called *Existenz*) is not a dualism (*Zweiheit*) but rather a doubleness (*Doppelheit*): "This is the only correct dualism, namely a dualism which at the same time admits a unity" (F 359n). In *The Ages of the World*, Schelling calls this the unity of unity and opposition (W1 66). The same absolute substance is marked by a double nature of possibility and actuality; both are character traits of the absolute: "Just that what in its first character is possible-being is in its second character what becomes being or pure-being" (UO 42).

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Schelling's emphasis on a reality which also contains possible-being can be explained in terms of his misgivings about the Eleatic Western tradition, which views reality as pure-being or existence only. Here, the first and final principle of reality is univocally self-expressive, self-substantiating being which does not allow for dynamic life. Here, there is no vacillating from possible-being to pure-being. The oscillations of reality, its very life force, might be explained in singular vision, but not through a singular principle. One is none; one principle remains unopposed and all of reality is dead: "We have to accept at the onset of philosophy not, like Parmenides, a totally dead principle, but rather a principle limited in movement" (UO 51). Many philosophers prior to Schelling had turned a blind eye to the irrational foundation or ground of reality in possible-being; Schelling compares them to an ostrich who would rather bury his head in the sand than recognize blind being (UO 33). Even those philosophers who have recognized that reality flows from a ground of being have made the mistake of letting pure-being or existence overcome its ground determinatively. For Schelling, however, there is the ever-lurking danger of regress. In other words, the ground of being is not something that is determinatively overcome. Schelling writes: "[Possible-being] does not go over blindly into the future, it does not lose itself" (UO 63).

Will and Inspiration

This reformulation of the meaning of the copula dismantles the hesitations one might have with regard to pantheism.[78] Pantheism implies not the identification of God and world, but that the world is the consequence of God transitioning through an act of will from possible to pure being (with the possibility of regressing back into the blind, irrational ground of being; see especially W3 265–267). Let us now focus on another worry related to pantheism, namely that

78 Schelling will not retain his allegiance to the word 'pantheism'. Already in *The Ages of the World*¸ pantheism is called a moment of transition (e.g. W1 43–53) and, later, in the *Spätphilosophie*, Schelling shifts significantly towards favouring monotheism and philosophical religion. I do not think this is a shift in position, rather in terminology. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation*, he opposes his concept of monotheism to pantheism because the latter retains God as pure being while, in the former, God is beyond being (O 191–192). Whether or not this critique equally applies to Schelling's rethinking of pantheism in *Freedom-Essay* seems unlikely. Here, Schelling had retained the distinction between God and world: the unity of unity and opposition.

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it strips individuality and freedom from things, that it would mean that “things are as naught, that this system does away with all individuality” (F 343).[79]

Schelling’s response to this difficulty mirrors his response to the earlier objection that pantheism denies freedom. Now, he argues that the Eleatic tradition misunderstands generation and dependence. Simply because something is a created thing that is part of a greater whole does not mean that it lacks independence and individuality. According to previous philosophers (especially Descartes and Spinoza), finite being is a mere modification of infinite substance, which would indeed leave finite being with no essence of its own. In this interpretation, there is no room for action (*Actus*) or the will that mediates between the infinite and the finite. For this reason, Schelling grew appreciative of Jakob Böhme (1575–1642) because, in his theosophy, individual things pour out of the infinite rather than arise as a mere modification or negation of the infinite.[80] Böhme’s view had the advantage of conceptualizing the emergence of finite things in an actual, historical chain of events.

We need not spend all that much time on Böhme since Schelling would argue that this explanation has an intrinsic difficulty. Indeed, it is the same objection that Schelling makes to the neo-Platonic theory of emanation. Starting at least from *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), Schelling recognizes that while emanation and theosophy perceive creation as an act, they fail to recognize this as a free act. Especially in his later philosophy, Schelling would say that Hegel makes the same mistake: “Jacob Boehme says: divine freedom vomits itself into nature. Hegel says: divine freedom releases nature. What is one to think of this notion of releasing? This much is clear: the biggest compliment one can pay to this notion is to call it theosophical” (GNP 130 [155]). In *Philosophy and Religion*, Schelling defines emanation as the view that “the pouring out [*Ausflüsse*] from the godhead in gradual portions and distancing from the primal source is how this goes over in its opposite (matter, privation)” (PR 35–36). For Schelling, this explanation of the emergence of finite things is inadequate for two reasons. First, it does not explain how finite things acquire a nature of their own: how can a mechanical process in the absolute produce something that is not absolute? Second, this explanation makes (the being of) God the author of all things, and so also of

79 Scholars of Spinoza are at odds about whether Spinoza allows or does not allow for individual things to exist: on the one hand, Spinoza clearly argues that substance is one with itself and unchanging but, on the other hand, Spinoza allows for individual modes to be generated and destroyed. For discussion of this topic from within Spinoza’s philosophy, see Winkler (2016, pp. 89–113).

80 For discussion of the influence of Böhme on German Idealism generally, see Muratori (2012), Dörendahl, (2011, pp. 46–60) and Bielik-Robson (2017, pp. 32–50).

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evil. In order to avoid these two difficulties, Schelling argues that the transition from the primal source cannot happen through emanation but must occur as an act of will, which explains the unique characteristics and personal freedom of finite things. As such, pure being cannot emanate from possible being, and pure being cannot be its own cause. We are in need of an intermediary term, something which is neither being, nor possibility, namely (free) will: "In the final and highest instance there is no other Being than Will. Will is primordial Being, and all predicates apply to it alone – groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation! All philosophy strives only to find this highest expression" (F 350).[81]

Through thinking about the act of generation as an act of free creation, Schelling believes he can dismantle the objection that pantheism blocks individuality. His point seems fair enough: any human being is generally considered to be not its own ground. We are conceived and raised by our parents, shaped and moulded by our formal education, inspired by our heroes and scarred by our traumas. Surely, to a far higher extent we are made into what we are than we are in control of our own being. But our dependency does not exclude genuine, individual independence: we rebel against our parents, rethink our education, forget about our childhood heroes and overcome our traumas. The fact that we are produced does not make us mindless productions. Schelling points out that "dependence does not exclude autonomy or even freedom" because the relationship of dependence merely signals that the dependent entity is "a consequence of that upon which it is dependent" (F 346). We have the capacity to emerge from our determination. This is what Schelling identifies as having "a real past", namely something that is put in the past through a de-cision (*Ent-Scheidung*): "How few people know anything of a real past! Without a vital present, born by a real division [*Scheidung*] from the past, no such thing exists" (W1 11).

The most perfect creation inspires freedom in the created. There is a lot to be recommended in this view. Let me illustrate: in the famous children's novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, the craftsman Geppetto manufactures the eponymously-named wooden doll Pinocchio. Despite the masterfulness of

81 The notion of 'will' has been central to Schelling's project even since *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). There, he defines what he thought of at that time as the highest task of philosophy, namely "how can we think both of presentations as conforming to objects, and objects as conforming to presentations?" (STI 11). Put slightly differently, how can there be a continuum between subjective consciousness and the objects in the world. At that time, Schelling would point to "a predetermined harmony", which suggests that the "same activity which is consciously productive in free action, is productive without consciousness in bringing about the world" (STI 11–12). Nature is brought forth by something that we consciously experience as 'willing', which, at that time, Schelling thinks is expressed in aesthetics.

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Geppetto's craftsmanship, the doll was still lacking something: it was not a 'real boy'. The 'realness' of Pinocchio involves the capacity to dissent from any given authority. Pinocchio's mischievous rebellions are attempts to affirm his realness, which comes up in his capacity to dissent from the truth (which famously enlarged his nose). The capacity to lie proves that Pinocchio is no puppet on a string. Schelling agrees that true creation must work up to an inspired freedom for the produced. He writes that "God is not a God of the dead but of the living. It is incomprehensible that an all-perfect Being could rejoice in even the most perfect mechanism possible" (F 346).

This view of generation was not widely recognized prior to Schelling because of the modern presupposition to think dualistically about freedom and system. Through distancing the realm of system from the realm of freedom, there resulted a sense of materialism: "At that time [the Enlightenment] all minds had fallen victim to the mechanistic trend of thought which attained the pinnacle of its nefariousness in French atheism" (F 348). Materialism can only think of causality in terms of mechanical production, which ultimately gives rise to a view of reality as

> dead substance, without all inner life; through this rightly decayed into atoms, into dust of bodies that only through their form (something external) work (no original quality); and from this will not only nature be explained, but also being itself, the mechanism of spirit – *système de la nature*, the lowest or French materialism. (SV 444–445)

German philosophy had opposed this trend by developing various forms of idealism that would defend freedom and spirit from reductionism. This was achieved, however, through opposing realism (as realism is the opponent of freedom in this way of thinking). Schelling reads Kant's interventions in philosophy as conceding that there is no scientific or rational defence of free will or God, but that these can be safeguarded only by means of retreating to practical feeling. In other words, the Germans went "back to the Heart, to inwardness of feeling and to faith" (F 348).

The result of the reductionist-materialist view of nature was that God must be distanced from the realm of reason or nature. If nature is a deterministic, systematic whole then to ally God with nature makes God into nothing more than blind mechanism. This explains the panicky reaction to pantheism in German philosophy: if God is the world, then God is as dead as the world. In response, German philosophy removed God from nature and reason both, rightly opposing pan-rationalism in their dealings with topics of a moral and religious nature. In the words of Kant, they sought to "deny [*aufheben*] knowledge [*Wissen*] in order to make room for faith [*Glaube*]" (Kant 1999, p. 117 [B xxx]). The reality of God and freedom has to be safeguarded even if this

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meant to take refuge in dualism (Kant) or fideism (Jacobi). Both Kant and Schelling realized that there is an extra-logical element to reality that cannot simply be ignored, even though they were not entirely capable of properly allying it to a philosophical system. If one insists on a pan-rationalist approach to realty (like Spinoza) then one must ultimately say that "reality is merely a logical nexus and that freedom and action mean nothing" (GPP 95).

For Schelling, this view of a panrationalism cannot hold. There are aspects of reality that do not fit neatly within a system of reason:

> The extra-logical nature of existence rebels so decisively against this that even those who, consistent with their concepts, explain the world and even their own existence as the mere logical consequence of some kind of original necessity do not have the words they want and must rather, forsaking the standpoint of pure through, reach for expressions that are entirely unsuitable, and indeed impossible, from their standpoint. (GPP 95)

Schelling has shown that the doctrine that all things are immanent in God, or pantheism, does not necessarily entail that things lack freedom or well up from an irrational source. In fact, the most impressive realization of Schelling's philosophy is a rethinking of nature as alive and spirited, which in turn can only be explained by an absolutely free cause. The immanence of God is not to be blamed for reductive determinism. Spinozism is then fatalism, not

> because it lets things be conceived in God [. . .]. Spinoza must then be a fatalist for another reason, entirely independent of this. The error of his system is by no means due to the fact that he posits all *things in God*, but to the fact that they are *things* – to the abstract conception of the world and its creatures. (F 349)

The problem with Spinoza is the materialist, reductive determinism which made for the "lifelessness of his system, the harshness of its form, the bareness of its concepts and expressions, the relentless austerity of its definitions; this admirably in accord with the abstract outlook" (F 349). Schelling continues to suggest that "Spinozism in its rigidity could be regarded like Pygmalion's statue, needing to be given a soul through the warm breath of love" (F 350). This means that one must develop a 'higher realism' as the "mutual interpenetration of realism and idealism" (F 350). Elsewhere, he calls this "the unity of unity and opposition" (W1 63). This is a position that accounts equally for the primordial unity of things (realism or pantheism) as well as the dualistic separation of things from that unity (idealism). Since, for Schelling, Spinoza is the foremost realist and Fichte the foremost idealist, this means that Schelling aims to combine the systematicity of Spinoza with the liveliness of freedom in Fichte: "Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is its body; only the two together constitute a living whole" (F 356); "When German Idealism emerged in its highest intensification with Fichte, the fundamental thought of the I, that is, of a living unity of that which

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has being [*Seienden*] and Being [*Sein*], aroused the hope of an elevated Spinozism that led to what is vital" (W3 342). In his *Spätphilosophie*, Schelling will become less and less appreciative of Fichte to accomplish this end, since Fichte would be similarly trapped in a merely negative philosophy. He would reframe the difference between Spinoza's and his pantheism in terms of a logical and historical relationship between God and finite things.

Living Nature

Schelling's rehabilitation of pantheism is geared towards providing a different understanding of the interplay between freedom and system, one that is more dynamic than those put forward by realism (especially reductionist materialism) and transcendental idealism (Kantian dualism). Schelling achieves such by rethinking the ontological import of the proposition 'God is the world' in terms of potency and actuality, of becoming rather than identity: "The concept of becoming is the only one adequate to the nature of things" (F 358–359). The ontology which follows from this insight has three central points that we will explore in this and the next section: there is a necessary, primal nature that is brimming with contradicting life forces; from within that primal nature, God breaks through and assumes ('contracts') being through a free act of will; that free act of will inspires nature to be taken up in a spirited process of self-elevation and gives life to individuality.[82]

Primal nature is brimming with contradicting life forces. In particular, Schelling evokes a theory of potencies (*Potenzenlehre*), which is his elaboration of the three inner drives of necessary being.[83] These three potencies are the governing principles of all happenings, natural, historical and even cognitive. Only freedom is exempt from the governance of the potencies. In *Freedom-Essay*, these potencies relate to "being insofar as it is the mere basis of existence" (F 357) or what he calls in *The Ages of the World* "what is necessary" or "the nature" of God in his purity (*Lauterkeit*). This triad of principles governing the necessary are in a negative dialectic, that is, an increase in strength of one principle coincides with an increase in opposition from another principle. In other words, as one principle expresses itself more dominantly, so do the other

82 For an extensive discussion of the philosophical issues at stake in the different drafts of *The Ages of the World*, see Peetz (2018, pp. 143–180).
83 For elaborate discussion of the history, development and import of the *Potenzenlehre*, see Schwarz (1935, pp. 118–148), Loer (1974), Grün (1993, pp. 174–195), Müllter-Bergen (2006, pp. 271–295).

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principles respond more strongly. If such opposition did not occur, one of the potencies would develop to excess and go over into nothingness. To exist, things have to be in tension. These three principles or potencies are "an eternal No, the highest Being-in-itself, an eternal withdrawal of its being into itself"; "the eternal Yes, an eternal outstretching, giving, and communicating of its being"; and, "the unity of the Yes and the No" (W3 218). In the first draft of *The Ages of the World* (see especially W1 67–73), this triad of principles was understood in Trinitarian terms, that is, Father (undifferentiated, pantheist unity), Son (dualism and separation) and Holy Spirit (the unity of unity and opposition). While his naming of these principles changes, Schelling keeps these as the three co-dependent drives that determine the inner nature of all, move from self-retraction in undifferentiated unity towards self-expansion and differentiation, and ultimately move to unity in differentiation. These principles remain in tension and contradiction with each other, with no Archimedean resting point, only eternal striving and counterbalancing: "Were the first nature in harmony with itself, it would remain so" – but nature does not sit still (W3 219).[84]

This focus on tension and negative dialectics is one element of Schelling's philosophy of nature that we will uncover in Nietzsche as well. While these principles of expansion and retraction have no point of departure in time, there is a sort of logical interrelationship. The necessary must start with self-retraction and self-restriction: "What is altogether first in God, in the living God, the eternal beginning of itself in itself, is that God restricts itself, denies itself, withdraws its essence from the outside and retreats into itself" (W3 225). This is the pantheism that is 'horrifying', the complete submersion of all things in the godhead – no freedom, no distance, no individuality. Through gathering everything within itself, the pressure of that situation becomes unbearable, which then becomes counteracted by the second potency, self-expansion: "The divine nature does not allow that it is just an eternal No and an eternal denial of itself. It is an equally valid part of its nature that it is a being of all beings, the infinitely self-granting

84 This does seem like a point that Schelling took up more emphatically in the latest draft of *Weltalter*. In the first draft, he thinks of the interplay of forces within primal nature as more graceful and peaceful: "Here one is to think neither of a struggle between subject and object nor of a conflict of forces within objective being. It is much rather as if, in graceful interplay, such tensions dissolve themselves in the joy of mutually discovering one another and being discovered" (W1 30). This led to serious problems in explaining the move outside of the purity of nature in itself, which in the first draft is understood in terms of the will of the first nature to know itself and therefore contract itself into spiritualized matter (W1 17–20). It is only after such self-recognition, in the first draft, that real opposition takes form. In the latest draft – which I generally follow in the main body of the text – this is understood in terms of self-release out of the rotation of being in itself.

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and self-communicating being" (W3 225). Self-retreating anonymity is countered by self-expanding manifestation.

The interplay between contracting and releasing is literally and figuratively the beating heart of life. Life is "what eternally circulates within itself, a kind of circle because the lowest always runs into the highest, and the highest again in the lowest" (W3 229). This twofold of principles will return in Nietzsche's philosophy under various guises, such as Apollo and Dionysus. What is peculiar about Schelling's theory of potencies is that even the play between expansion and retraction must have a countering force, which brings him to the third of the potencies: the drive for harmony or balance. This third force seeks to stop motion, to find a place of rest – which, if it becomes dominant, is challenged by the inner antagonism of the first two potencies. Nothing is without challenge in the primal nature: retraction is challenged by expansion and vice versa, and the contradiction of the first and second potency is challenged by the balancing of the third (and vice versa). There is no end to opposition: "Having arrived at its peak, the movement of itself retreats back into its beginning" (W3 228).

These three potencies are the pre-rational, pre-conceptual inner essence of life, history and unconscious thought. Instead of holding that nature, history and thought are inert or self-cultivating – which would be the view of 'French materialism' and Spinozism – for Schelling the primordial beginning is a rotary motion. Rather than harmony, nature is a Sisyphean laboring, an expanding into the higher regions and retreating into the lower depths. This is where we had begun our explorations of Schelling's rethinking of nature and freedom, at the horror of the circle without beginning or end. If the circle is without beginning or end, it is something that happens before the real beginning. It is pre-worldly time. In other words, this is the untold story of the eternal past, a proto-historical and mythic narrative from which other narratives emerge. Everything starts with freedom, with the Word: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1), but freedom itself is preceded by a story before time and the beginning, a story that underlies and undergirds history, one that is retold again and again.

Within that circular and rotary motion, there gradually starts to emerge the faintest sense of (self-)consciousness. According to Schelling's first draft of *die Weltalter*, the lucid purity (*Lauterkeit*) of the primal nature is "nothing but grace, love, and simplicity" (W1 16). It begins its self-rotation from a desire to know itself:

> Unable to distinguish itself from itself, it cannot be truly aware of itself. It is a going into itself, a playful searching for and finding of self, that is all the more blissful the more soulful it is. In this way it gives rise to the lustful desire to have itself and to perceive itself externally. (W1 17)

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In that playful activity of coming to know itself, the primal nature stands to become conscious of itself. As self-consciousness grows, so does the awareness of the horror of the circularity of the proto-historical narrative of life. The paradox is clear: we are slowly becoming aware that we are not (yet) existing, that we are trapped in a determinism of primal drives. This is the experience of dreaming, then realizing that one is dreaming, and yet being unable to wake from the dream. Imagine then to wake from the dream, only to find that the dream repeats. Slavoj Žižek illustrates the horror of primordial being excellently:

> The horror of this rotary motion resides in the fact that it is no longer impersonal: God already exists as One, as the Subject who suffers and endures the antagonism of drives. Here Schelling provides a precise definition of anxiety: anxiety arises when a subject experiences simultaneously the impossibility of closing itself up, of withdrawing fully into itself, and the impossibility of opening itself up, admitting an Otherness, so that it is caught in a vicious cycle of pulsation – every attempt at creation-expansion-externalization repeatedly 'aborts', collapses back into itself. (Žižek 1996, p. 24)

The agonal condition naturally creates consciousness which then fosters a desire to escape the rotary motion of the drives. The primal nature must somehow build up distance from itself; its closeness to itself is stifling. This is what Schelling powerfully describes as the "unremitting urge to be" or "an eternally insatiable obsession with Being" (W3 231–232). There stirs within the nature of God something that comes to desire a break with the hegemony of determination: "But there is born in God himself an inward, imaginative response, corresponding to this longing, which is the first stirring of divine Being in its still dark depths" (F 360). Even God comes to himself, albeit through his own being; or better, God comes to be *despite* his own being.

The term 'contraction' is illustrative here. This has a twofold meaning for Schelling. It is first and foremost the activity by which God contracts his own essence, creates space for another in which it inaugurates a distance from itself. This is the moment of holding one's own breath so as to let something else be. But contraction is also picking up something, contracting a disease. Schelling describes the first moment of creation, of God contracting himself and creating space for an Other, as the moment wherein a purely-spiritualized matter comes to be (W1 23–30). This can also be a moment of revolt, a moment of what Lacan called the mirror stage, where God is repulsed by his reflection. This cannot be I – not I! This forces God back into a circle: "This is the dire fate of all life, that to become comprehensible to itself, it seeks constriction, demanding narrowness over breadth. But after constricting itself and discovering what it feels like to be, it demands once again to return into openness" (W1 34). God cannot, however, return to the lucid purity of unknowing: it has come to consciousness and has contracted being. At any point that God contracts himself so as to

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know himself, he must subsequently take up more being. Being is a disease, which fills God to the point of excess. Indigestion follows, and God must project life at a distance from himself. We are now in the stage of a distance from God, the divine vomit and garbage.

Perhaps the last lines above were an imposition upon Schelling's text. He owes significantly to Lurianic Kabbalah and Böhme's Christian interpretation of that text. Yet, he tried to oppose the idea that the world is divine garbage. Instead, the world must come into existence from a divine choice. We find the fullest explanation of this process in the first draft of *The Ages of the World*. There, he writes that "in the ever-growing fullness of its interiority, [primordial nature] does nothing other than to seek the word through which it can be expressed" (W1 57). The Father contracts into the Son; not a dualism but a "loosening [*Lösung*]" (W1 61). God contracts himself for the sake of the Son, out of pure love, in order to become a better self: "The original or selfish self only has its freedom through the other and better self" (W1 98). This means that, through glimpsing the Son, the Father becomes free to deny himself. Freedom becomes possible in the Father not through himself, but through pre-seeing the Son.

Schelling abandoned this line of thought. The likely reason is that God could not possibly have pre-seen the Son. Freedom must exist: God acts to break necessity. He remains without an awareness of what happens in the moment of freedom. As such, in the later drafts of *The Ages of the World*, various attempts are made to think the moment of creation as more of an act of freedom that wells up from within the primordial essence of God. The last draft depicts this in terms of a frustration with the excess of self. Life itself would not transcend necessity if the desire – the desire for freedom to be – is not put into action. History and nature would be nothing more than "an eternal exhaling and inhaling, a constant interchange between life and death" if freedom was not manifested through an act of will (W3 232). This is where Schelling got stuck in *The Ages of the World*. In the third draft, Schelling portrays this in terms of the moment when all the potencies, at the same time, "sacrifice being that which has being" and move towards a "reciprocal inexistence" (W3 232). The agonal rotary motion can only be annulled by the self-negation of the potencies, the negation of the necessary, which is the free, extra-logical act of God to halt the necessary. This is a liberation that comes through the creation of something Other, something that allows the potencies to find rest. The free self-revelation of God out of his potencies cuts off the necessary nature of God: God becomes freedom. But in that freedom, these potencies are taken up in the free will of God. Mind that they can re-emerge in their full horror:

> If an organic being becomes sick, forces appear that previously lay concealed in it. Or if the copula of the unity dissolves altogether and if the life forces that were previously

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> subjugated by something higher are deserted by the ruling spirit and can freely follow their own inclinations and manners of acting, then something terrible becomes manifest which we had no sense of during life and which was held down by the magic of life. And what was once an object of adoration or love becomes an object of fear and the most terrible abjection. For when the abysses of the human heart open up in evil and that terrible thought comes to the fore that should have been buried eternally in night and darkness, we first know what lies in the human in accordance with its possibility and how human nature, for itself or left to itself, is actually constituted. (W3 268)[85]

It is understanding this sense of freedom that will haunt Schelling in developing his later philosophy. He does not manage to render comprehensible the freedom that breaks necessity. The reason, as simple as it is unremitting, is that the freedom to be free has to be without conceptual understanding: if freedom could be understood, it would not be freedom. Therefore, any understanding of freedom must start with the act of freedom (*a posteriori*) rather than with the thought of freedom (*a priori*).

(Divine) Freedom

Let us dwell some more on how freedom emerges and how it relates to nature. Schelling's point in *The Ages of the World* and *Freedom-Essay* is that God's free act of will break the agonal, rotary motion of the drives. Perhaps because he was at that time mulling over Hegel's criticism of his philosophy of identity, Schelling would repeatedly state that this is a process, not something that occurs like "a shot from a gun": "The darkness of the spirit cannot be overcome suddenly or in one fell swoop. The world is not a riddle whose solution could be given with a single word" (W3 208). God's self-revelation is not only a process, it is *in process*, it is always emerging from the anonymity of being and even returning into it. For Schelling, this aligns with Biblical orthodoxy: the most "certified [*urkundlichere*] declaration" of the right use of the term God comes from the Bible. To Moses' question, "'what shall I call you?', God answered: 'Call me, I will be, who I will be: this is my name'" (UO 88; see also W3 269–274).

God creates through a free act of will that wells up from the unconscious rotary motion of the drives. One could say that God inserts himself into the

85 One could think of historical moments of mass extinction as times when the retractive drive is operating at full potential. There are moments when God's self-expansion is drawn back into the anonymity of blind being. When God no long extends himself over being, then being becomes barren. For further discussion, see Wirth (2015).

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world out of his anonymous purity. This is a difficult point to grasp and an illustration here is helpful. The rotary motion at the heart of being seems to be something of a never-ending story, which brings to mind Michael Ende's magisterial narrative *Die unendliche Geschichte* (1979) that inspired Wolfgang Petersen's cult fantasy movie *The NeverEnding Story* (1984). In this narrative, the bookish youngster Bastian Balthasar Bux flees the assaults of his peers and seeks refuge in a bookstore. Here, he catches the owner reading a very special and dangerous book that can include the reader in the narrative. Bux 'borrows' this book, runs back home and starts reading in the quiet seclusion of his attic. The story within the story goes that the magical kingdom of *Phantásien* (fantasy or imagination) is mortally threatened by the devouring of the *Nichts* (Nothing). The young and sickly ruler of *Phantásien*, known only as the childlike empress (*die kindliche Kaiserin*), sends out a hero by name of Atréju to find a cure for the empress' disease and in doing so save the kingdom.

Atréju's name is Greek (*Atreus*) and means 'without fear', the other (inverted) of the cowardly Bux. Bux and Atréju together form the duality of principles, retraction and self-manifestation, a duality that is epitomized by Bux refusing to import himself into the narrative (self-retraction). Bux is not yet aware or conscious of himself as taking part in the narrative; he goes with the flow. Bux is the primal purity of being, completely retracted in himself. Atréju is the one that really moves the story forward but his agency is in vain, alas. This is a sign that when the principles of retraction and expansion isolate in their own realms, there can be no real story and so despite Atréju's valiant efforts, there seems to be no escape from the nothing. Slowly but surely, the kingdom of *Phantásien* will be devoured by the *Nichts*. Despite being called out, Bux fails (or refuses?) to recognize that he has a role to play in the story. This is brought to a dramatic climax when only a tiny grain of sand remains of *Phantásien* and Atréju and the childlike empress call out to Bux for his imagination to erect a new world. Startled by being called *by name* (personal), Bux recognizes that his contribution to the narrative is not merely the receptivity of a passive reader, but that his creative imagination is as much part of the narrative as the story itself. What is more, it seems to me, is that all creativity is ultimately but the mimicry of the primal creativity of nature. In an uncanny act of will, Bux imports himself into the narrative and creates a new world, a new story and so a new adventure can begin.

When Bux returns to the 'real' world, he finds the book gone – he is no longer merely a reader, but a participant in the never-ending story. He has imported himself, through an act of will and imagination, into the story. This act becomes possible at a moment of profound crisis when the *Nichts* threatens to usurp reality wholesale. It is at the climax of agonal self-enclosure that creation

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becomes possible. When Bux returns to the book store so as to apologize for his theft (and loss) of the book, the owner evasively claims that he had never owned the book to which Bux refers. It turns out that the book store owner was also a visitor of *Phantásien* and now it is time for the book to bring about a new adventure, 'but that's another story'. I remember being terrified as a kid of the movie adaptation of this book, partly because of the scary form of the dragon Falkor, the dog Gmork and the devouring *Nichts*. Looking back, part of my fright might have been caused by the breaking of boundaries, by the revelation that the reader was as much part of the story as the writer. There is no fundamental distance between the reader and the story, human beings and nature: we remain in the midst of things. What is even more frightening perhaps is that tale is never ending, the *Nichts* always lurking and potentially returning to devour everything. Being conscious of the circular nature of the proto-historical narrative of life is agonal. The paradox is clear: we are conscious of the fact that we are not yet existing, that we are trapped in a circle. This is when and where reality can truly come to be, namely through an act of free will.

This is the point that Schelling did not fully grasp in his middle period. Let us follow Schelling's argument in *The Ages of the World* (3rd draft) in order to transition more smoothly towards his later view of freedom. The guiding question here is the following: if free will emerges from darkness and unreason, can there be a concept (*Begriff*) of free will? There has been a long and rather dominant tradition in philosophy – roughly coinciding with the above-mentioned Eleatic tradition – which relates will to normative rationality. This does not mean that a will always acts in accordance with the highest rational or moral laws but that will is always purposively directed at some end. Willing is always willing something, it has a goal in mind and is not arbitrary. This goal appears to the will as something desirable or good.

Kant's view of will is a good case in point. For Kant, the will (*Wille*) is the entirety of the deliberative-executive (*Willkür*) and law-giving (also called *Wille*) faculty of the human being. Kant attributes a different sense of autonomy to these faculties: the deliberative power of choice is negatively free, that is, only determined by means of the free incorporation of interests; the lawgiving will is positively free, that is, as legislating rational laws. Full autonomy implies the capacity to take up rational laws without sensuous interest (*ohne Neigung*) but out of respect (*Achtung*) for the moral law. The power of choice never acts haphazardly because it can only self-determine whenever it has become interested in a certain course of action. For Kant, there would be only a veritable capacity

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for choice insofar as human beings have a determinate and justified goal in mind. Pure lawlessness is to Kant "an absurdity" (Kant 1996a, p. 94 [4:446]).[86]

While Kant's discussion of radical evil could be seen as a first correction of this view (see Vanden Auweele 2013, pp. 31–52; also Vanden Auweele 2017, pp. 107–115), the Eleatic tradition assumed that reason always informs willing. Schelling's contemporary Schopenhauer was adamant in his opposition to that viewpoint:

> The will to life is not a consequence of our knowledge of life, it is nothing like a conclusion from premises and is in general nothing secondary; rather it is primary and unconditioned, the premise of all premises and for that very reason it is where philosophy must *start from*. (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 375 [410])

For Schopenhauer, willing precedes and underlies cognition. This is a point where Schelling and Schopenhauer converge, namely in their critique of the rationality of willing. As Roswitha Dörendahl puts it, Schelling's "main critique of Kant's moral philosophy regards the coinciding of ought and will" (Dörendahl 2011, p. 239). Schopenhauer argued that the will is a force from behind (*vis a tergo*) rather than goal-oriented (*vis a finalis*). Schelling similarly argues that willing is something that propels forward rather than attracts, a desire to break the anonymous and agonal rotary motion of blind nature. In the first draft of *The Ages of the World* (W1 92–100), the will is still understood as willing something higher (the Father willing the Son), but this point is determinatively abandoned in future drafts. The will is propelled onwards because of frustration with its current state of being. Schopenhauer does take this to extremes, as for him the will in itself is utterly without rhyme or reason: "In fact the absence of all goals, of all boundaries, belongs to the essence of the will in itself, which is an endless striving" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 188 [195]). Schopenhauer does believe that we can come to know the will through reflecting on our bodily agency; Schelling, more metaphysically, points out that we can come to know free will *a posteriori*, not *a priori* because it cannot be foreseen rationally. The will is what breaks the *a priori*, and can thus only be cognized *a posteriori*.

Because of his Schopenhauerian inspiration, Nietzsche came to express a similar view with regard to causality, willing, and goals. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche calls it one of his "most essential steps forward" that he has unfolded how most acting is primarily caused by "a quantum of dammed-up energy waiting to be used somehow, for something" (FW 360). The end to which this cause is directed, is really "quite insignificant", by which Nietzsche means that all "purposes" or "vocations" are "relatively random, arbitrary, nearly indifferent

86 Kant's position is usually called motivational hedonism, see McCarty (2009).

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in relation to the enormous force of energy that presses on" (FW 360). Nietzsche does not dismiss the possibility that an individual can come to some level of control in directing his energy in life, but that such control is far less impressive than the metaphysical tradition alleged. The quantum of energy is the stream and individuals are at best the helmsman. In most cases, human beings are not even the helmsman, but their so-called goals are justifications for the direction in which they are swept anyway: "Is the 'goal', the 'purpose', not often enough a beautifying pretext, a self-deception of vanity after the fact that does not want to acknowledge that the ship is *following* the current into which it has entered accidentally? That is 'wills' to go that way *because it – must?*" (FW 360).

Schelling has not quite gone the entirety of the way of Nietzsche in understanding the will and its purposes. In the *Urfassung* of the *Lectures on Revelation* (1831), Schelling takes 'will' as something between potency (concept) and actuality (being).[87] Will is the connecting term that enables the progression from the necessary ground of being to existence. But this means that will emerges from the ground of being, it is the expression of, equally, the outreaching and the retracting. As such, will can emerge as something that desires expansion, but also something that desires regression. There is no such thing as straightforward and simple rational willing in Schelling's philosophy: willing is a middle term between potency and act, between ground and freedom and, most importantly, between darkness and light.

Given that Schelling introduces a sense of regression and unreason in willing, this is bound to have its impact on freedom. Schelling's view is complex: freedom emerges from within the necessary, but it is a desire to bring the unruly basis of being or nature to order. This act of self-revelation is not simply born from the unruly, but remains marked by it:

> The unruly lies ever in the depths as though it might again break through, and order and form nowhere appear to have been original, but it seems as though what had initially been unruly had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the irreducible remainder [*nie* a*ufgehende Rest*] which cannot be resolved into reason by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths. Out of this which is unreasonable, reason in the true sense is born. Without this preceding gloom, creation would have no reality; darkness is its necessary heritage. (F 359–360)[88]

Freedom is that which brings order to chaos; or, freedom is that which opposes chaotic necessity. In doing so, freedom must be marked by chaos and necessity.

87 E.g. "Dieses dritte ist nur zu bestimmen als das zu sein und nicht zu sein erst wirklich freie, weil es im Wollen nicht aufhört, als Wille zu bestehen (UO 59)"
88 For a thought-provoking psychological reading of this topic, see Žižek (1996).

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Compare this to how an alcoholic might one day amass the willpower to quit drinking. For the remainder of his life, if he was a seriously-committed alcoholic, he would be pre-occupied on a daily basis with not drinking. Free will is the constant vigilance to ward off the onslaught of regression back into primordial chaos. There is no recipe for that, no concept that would neatly define the very nature of freedom.

The issue of the non-conceptual nature of freedom came to prominence in a letter to Schelling by one of Schelling's closest interlocutors, Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer. In that letter, Eschenmayer retorted to Schelling's *Freedom-Essay* that "freedom could never become a concept [*Begriff*]" (Wirth 2015, p. 162). Eschenmayer's objection to Schelling must be understood within the context of a Kantian meaning of the term 'concept'. Kant uses the term *Verstandsbegriff* (category of the understanding) to denote the objects of the faculty of human reason that determine intuitions.[89] For Kant, these concepts are *a priori*, timeless and can be applied determinatively to intuitions. For Kant, freedom was not such a concept simply because it cannot be determinatively applied to specific intuitions.

Schelling's philosophy appears generally in agreement with this point of view: an *a priori*, timeless concept of freedom would not be particularly lively. In his later lectures, Schelling will put this point even more emphatically: "For a free action is something more than what allows itself to be discerned in mere *thought*. Opposed to this view however, stands everything that is an actual *happening* [*Geschehen*], that is resolve and action, and that extends beyond the sensible world" (GPP 114). At the time of *Freedom-Essay*, Schelling would respond to Eschenmayer's objection by returning to the idea of the indivisible remainder, namely that "freedom can never be taken up fully into the concept, and there must always be a remainder [*Rest*] that does not resolve into the concept" (Wirth 2015, p. 173). Free will is that which brings about order, concepts and understanding, but because freedom is the origin of order, it cannot be conceptual itself. The very basis of freedom is the unruly. This insight has repercussions that were not to the liking of some of Schelling's contemporaries: "The faint-hearted [*weibischen*] complains that the unreasonable is in this way made into the root of reason, night into the beginning of light [. . .]" (F 360). For

89 For a more thorough account of the discussion between Schelling and Eschenmayer on *Freedom-Essay*, see Lauer (2015, pp. 197–208).

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instance, Schelling's argument famously annoyed Hegel, whose issue with Schelling is summarized by Avital Ronell:

> In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel chastised Schelling for placing stupidity at the origin of being. Hegel, for once, was unnerved. Clearly, the imputation of originary [sic] stupidity to human *Dasein* was an 'issue' for Hegel, tripping him up, effecting a phenomenal misreading. Schelling posits a primitive, permanent chaos, an absence of intelligence that gives rise to intelligence. Presumptuous man has refused to admit the possibility of such abyssal origins and is seen defending himself with moral reason.
> (Ronell 2002, p. 37)

This is indeed part of Hegel's discomfort, but more important, and more annoyingly to Hegel, is Schelling's suggestion that intelligence can never exhaustively overcome stupidity.[90] One cannot exhaustively describe the irrationality that precedes rationality by means of rational concepts, which in turn means that reality can never be captured exhaustively in a purely rational (*reinrational*) philosophy. Schelling has many prosaic phrases for that intuition: "All birth is a birth out of darkness into light [. . .] and only out of the darkness of unreason (out of feeling, out of longing, the sublime mother of understanding) grow clear thoughts" (F 360). Schelling then seems to suggest that what lies at the origin of being can never be properly described using rational language and concepts. In *The Ages of the World* (a few lines that return in all the three known drafts), he would write:

> Since the beginning, many have desired to penetrate this silent realm of the past prior to the world in order to get, in actual comprehension, behind the great process of which they are in part cooperative members and in part sympathetic members. But most of them lacked the requisite humility and self-denial because they wanted to tackle everything at once with supreme concepts. And if anything whatsoever checks the reader's entrance into this prehistoric time, it is precisely that rash being that wants rather to dazzle right from the beginning with spiritual concepts and expressions rather than descend to the natural beginnings of that life. (W3 286)

But it does not follow from Schelling's criticism of "supreme concepts" that other discourses, such as art and religion, might not prove to be more up to the challenge. Schelling's discourse throughout the various drafts of *The Ages of*

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90 The initial diremption between Hegel and Schelling is usually framed in terms of the historical mediation of the absolute's self-realization. In the preface of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel mocks Schelling by saying that absolute knowledge starts like a shot from a gun: the absolute comes to be immediately from the darkness of incomprehension. In response, Hegel would introduce a long historical process wherein absolute spirit slowly but surely reconciles historical incarnation with its concept. Especially in his *Spätphilosophie*, Schelling will similarly seek to incorporate a sense of the historical but in more eschatological than teleological terms. For extensive discussion, see Lawrence (1989, pp. 10–39).

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the World is certainly more poetic than was common for philosophers at the time. Poetic language might be able to capture something about reality that remains untouched by rational investigation. In the introduction (e.g. W1 115), Schelling calls this a 'dialogue with oneself' where introspection looks for the traces of the pre-conceptual origin of the self.

In his earliest works, Schelling believed that human beings have a special rational intuition – a sort of introspective guide – that could help to acquaint human beings with that which lies beyond conceptual thought. He alludes to this every now and again: "Certainly one who could write completely the history of their own life would also have, in a small epitome, concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos" (W3 207). In the later lectures, Schelling abandons the possibility of such special intuition in favor of a philosophy *a posteriori*. In the Berlin *Lectures on the Grounding of Positive Philosophy,* Schelling attempts a criticism of Böhme that could very well have been directed at his own *The Ages of the World*:

> J. Böhme always starts at the beginning, repeatedly explicating the amply explained beginnings without ever going on any farther or ever even leaving that position. In these beginnings he is always astounding, a true drama of one whose nature is to wrestle with oneself, yearning for freedom and serenity, but who is incapable of ever changing over into real motion, instead circling around the very same point. As soon as J. Böhme goes beyond the beginning and into concrete reality one can no longer follow him. (GPP 124)

In the *Spätphilosophie* (which we will explore in more detail in chapter seven and eight), Schelling would emphasize that freedom can only be known *a posteriori* because *a priori* knowledge of freedom would render freedom into some form of conceptual necessitation. In his reflections around the time of *Freedom-Essay*, Schelling became more and more interested in coming to terms with how God emerges out of blind being as an act of freedom. He gradually became convinced that the only way to account appropriately for this is to follow a mode of operation that moves from 'prius to posterius', not from 'posterius to prius'. This means that we cannot infer from 'given being' to the 'ground of being', but we must find some way to cognize 'original being' and explain 'given being' from that ground. In that respect, Schelling came upon a concept of God as *Herr des Seins* – lord over being. Early in his later reflections on this topic (at least from the *Erlangen Lectures* onwards), Schelling would establish – as Grzegorz Kozdra (2016, p. 57) insightfully points out – three criteria to rethink the relationship between God and world: (1) that the existence of the world is not coincidental, but neither is logically necessary; (2) that the ground of the existence of the world is in a free act; and (3) that a free author must have caused the organism of the world. This is really the bedrock of Schelling's

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critique of the modern philosophical tradition: they lack a proper concept of divine freedom and creation (see also Dörendahl 2011, pp. 139–178).

In his Munich Lectures on *The System of the Ages of the World* (1827/1828), Schelling would overtly contrast, on the one hand, a logical connection of finite things to God (under which he includes emanation) and, on the other hand, a historical connection of finite things to God. Tradition has followed the former; he the latter. He writes that a logical connection is one wherein finite things are "a simple, necessary consequence of the divine idea, a consequence that *modo aeterno*, eternally, as one says, without contribution of his will follows" (SW 10). Schelling's alternative means that "God has created the world freely – by which one does not proclaim a logical fact, only an act" (SW 10). This emphasis on freedom is what will increase throughout Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*: the act of creation cannot simply be a mechanical process, whether through emanation or waste (*Abfall*). When reflecting upon Hegel's philosophy, Schelling remarks that "Hegel calls nature the *Abfall* of the idea from itself" (SW 80), a term reminiscent of Böhmian theosophy. But for Schelling, this view will no longer do: the process of waste or descent lacks the full sense of freedom that Schelling seeks to recover. Without divine freedom, there can be no human freedom; if the descent from God is mechanical, all of nature is mechanical. So the consequence of Hegel's (but also many others') frame of thought is that "the fresh air in the philosophy of nature is dissolved into dry concepts [*trockene Begriffe*]; the fresh luxuriant products of nature [*die frischen üppigen Naturprodukte*] are but metamorphoses of concepts; the blooming garden of nature has changed into a dead herbarium in which one can collect the individuals concepts" (SW 80).

But if freedom is an act, a reality and not a necessity, how can it be properly understood by philosophy? Is this a concept beyond the limits of philosophy, like it was for Kant? This is a question that Schelling left unanswered for quite a while, his efforts at an answer in the various drafts of *The Ages of the World* notwithstanding. So it should not come as a surprise that Schelling becomes increasingly interested in a number of phenomena that divulge certain bits of information about God and the original act of freedom that allowed the world to be.

Being Drawn in by the Darkness

Our focus has thus far been on the general concepts of freedom, nature and God. Let us now turn to how these impact human freedom. Despite what its title might make one suspect, Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* only really starts to consider human freedom over halfway the treatise (roughly from F 372 onwards). The reason for this is that human

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freedom is to be understood in analogy to God's freedom. Human beings have to emerge from the anonymity of blind being through an act of free will (not their own, but God's). Human freedom becomes, for Schelling, the capacity for good and evil, a capacity enabled by the dual determination of human freedom by light and darkness.

The act of free will by which human beings first emerge out of the anonymity of pure being is not the human being's own, but God's: human beings come to be from the barrenness of nature through an act of will by God. This is what Schelling calls "creation". Schelling puts this metaphorically in the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* as follows: "Human beings relate to God like flowers to the sun. Flowers only rise from the gloomy earth and reveal themselves in the light through the workings of the sun, they nevertheless remains dependent upon his root" (SV 458). This gives human beings a dual determination through nature or darkness and God or light, which results in terse oscillations between the light of God's revelation and the darkness of the ground of being. Humanity is free from, but also attracted to, both. Therefore their very being is a choice: "Because the human being stands between the not-being of nature and the absolute-being of God, he is free from both" (SV 458). This means that human beings are supposed to repeat within themselves that first act of creation wherein they are distanced from anonymity. Being human means to stave off insignificance.

Schelling's famous definition of freedom is that "the real and vital conception of freedom is that it is a possibility [*Vermögen*] of good and evil" (F 352). Freedom is not merely the capacity to be undetermined by antecedent causes, but the very capacity to choose between radically opposing possibilities. Human beings have a genuine interest in either option: "Just as there is an enthusiasm [*Enthusiasmus*] for the good, there is also a zeal [*Begeisterung*] for evil" (F 372; translation modified). Freedom without the very real capacity for opposing options is not real freedom. For Schelling, this capacity is enabled by the twofold principle in human nature: the light that emerges out of darkness and the darkness that recedes back into chaos. The principle of darkness is not evil per se, since any and all human being is determined through this twofold principle. What establishes a human being as good or evil relates to the connection that our selfhood willingly makes to light or darkness:

> Just as it is nowise the intelligent principle, or the principle of light, in itself which operates in the good, but only this principle combined with selfhood, that is, elevated to spirit; in the same way evil is not derived from the principle of finitude in itself, but only from the dark or selfish principle which has been brought into intimacy with the center.
> (F 372)

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Good and evil are choices. Human beings come into existence, as rational and free beings, determined through the two poles of light and darkness. The ground of being is not only that from which existence emerges, but also that to which it ultimately returns: there is flourishing and then there is regression. Schelling's philosophy of freedom is similar to his philosophy of nature: not a simple and syrupy embrace of nature in its creative potential, but also the recognition of the tremendous destructive potential in nature. This was missed by many who would come to call themselves Schellingians, as Heinrich Heine observed: "Like schoolboys set free after sighing the whole day under the burden of words and figures in narrow classrooms, the pupils of Mr. Schelling stormed outside into nature, into the fragrant and sunny Real, let out cries of joy, turned somersaults, and made a grand spectacle" (Heine 2007, p. 108). Instead, Schelling believes that a philosophy of nature must equally understand death and decay: "The Godhead sits enthroned over a world of terrors" (W3 268).

Human freedom is in the midst of this *chiaroscuro* of a reality. For Schelling, this complex understanding of nature, animation and freedom must remain obscure in any univocally rationalist philosophy, since such animation through freedom necessarily precedes and prefigures rational thought. It implies that any purely rationalist outlook on reality must necessarily obscure the unruly. To put things in slightly less Schellingian terms, there is an primordial element to reality that stubbornly refuses to neatly fit into any system of rational coherency. This means that the selfhood of human beings is a tension, rather than a harmony, between allying the principle of darkness and the principle of light. All created things have two principles, namely "the one by which they are separated from God" and "the one by which they are unified with God" (F 362). Straddled between these two principles, human beings are in the center of nature with a clear duty, namely to connect their selfhood to the principle of light, and as such growing, flourishing and perishing alongside the world-spirit. As we will discuss in the next chapter, Nietzsche similarly prefers those ways of acting that are conducive to flourishing in tandem with life and the will, but unlike Schelling, he would not frame this in terms of a moral obligation.

There is, however, an element in Schelling's account of human freedom that renders flourishing difficult, namely the allure of the dark principle by which human beings seek to elevate their creaturely particularity over spirit. This means that human beings place themselves on the periphery of being, attempting to disconnect themselves from the bristling nexus of life-forces. Nietzsche would speak of degeneration, decadence or sickness, where a part refuses to navigate playfully with the whole. Human beings can engage and attempt to harmonize with nature or they can break away from nature. For Schelling, these are equally appealing options since these are the two wills in

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the human being, namely the will to unite with the harmony of things and the will to stand on the periphery of things – human beings are "the deepest [abyss] [*Abgrund*] and the highest heaven" (F 363). While this seemingly damns human beings to a life of struggle, they are the only ones who can emerge out of the darkness of their nature: "Only in man, then, is the Word completely articulate" (F 364). Animals lack this possibility, they are forced into harmony with nature. Human beings, however, can freely submit to the harmony or oppose it: "Man can only stand above or beneath animals" (F 373).

Unlike animals, human beings have a capacity for spirit, which is the capacity for self-creation in terms they see fit. Schelling defines 'spirit' as "the will beholding itself in complete freedom, no longer the tool of the universal will operating in nature, but above and outside all nature" (F 364). This means that self-will has the possibility to aspire to a universality that only properly belongs to the universal will. In that case, the self-will positions itself as absolute with regard to its claims, and disconnects from the greater harmony of things: "It may seek to be at the periphery, which it is, but only insofar as it remains at the center [. . .] it may seek to be free as a creature" (F 365). Evil occurs when the self-will refuses to attune to the universal will. Evil is "this very exaltation of self-will" (HF 365). While in God the self-will is the basis from which the universal will grows, human beings have the possibility to reverse this relationship and subordinate the universal will to the will of the ground: "To exalt the basis above the cause, and to use that spirit which it received only from the center, outside the center and against the creature, which leads to disorganization within itself and outside itself" (F 365). Evil occurs when the self-will abandons the center where it ought to be. Schelling draws a comparison with disease: "Disease is indeed nothing essential and is actually only an illusion of life and the mere meteoric appearance of it – a swaying between being and non-being – but nonetheless announces itself in feeling as something very real" (F 366). It should then be clear that, for Schelling, evil is a positively-achieved perversion of a certain proper ordering of things. Paying credit to Franz Baader, Schelling notes that the "only correct conception of evil [is] a positive perversion or reversal of the principles" (F 366). Having now outlined Schelling's general theory of human freedom, we can now focus more closely on how such freedom operates.

There is a huge body of scholarship that tracks the dynamics of Kant's account of evil to Schelling's in *Freedom-Essay*, where it is usually reckoned that Schelling provides a more robust, quasi-Manichean account of evil than Kant (see: Kosch 2014, p. 147, Courtine 2010, pp. 95–116, Florig 2010, p. 152, Gardner 2017, p. 142 and Baumgarten 2000, pp. 447–459). I hesitate whether Kant's and

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Schelling's accounts really differ that much (see Vanden Auweele 2019b), as was indicated by that most devoted of Kantians, Arthur Schopenhauer:

> Meanwhile I ought not to mention this without making the charge – in honour of truth and *Kant* – that here, when [Schelling] is expounding one of the most important and admirable, and indeed, in my estimation, the most profoundly significant of all Kantian doctrines, *Schelling* does not clearly state that what he is currently presenting, as far as its content is concerned, belongs to Kant. (Schopenhauer 2009, p. 97 [83])

Instead of following this strategy, it might be more illuminating to try to understand Schelling's argument from his own development on this issue. Let us therefore start from an earlier work of Schelling, namely *Philosophie und Religion* (1804). This essay was written largely in response to Eschenmayer's *Die Philosophie in ihrem Übergange zur Nichtphilosophie* (1803), which in turn was written to respond to Schelling's *Bruno oder über das göttliche und natürliche Princip der Dinge* (1802). These essays attempt to answer a twofold question: how do finite things emerge from the absolute and how do they relate to the absolute after their genesis. We have already touched briefly Schelling's discussion with emanation and *Abfall*. The term *Abfall* is difficult to translate as it means both 'descent' (fall-down) and 'waste' or 'garbage'. In *Bruno*, Schelling had always stressed that one must explain the descent of finite things from the absolute in terms of the potencies within the absolute itself. There can be no force operative from the outside upon the absolute – the 'ground of being' is within the absolute, not outside of it.

In order to meet this criterion, Eschenmayer had claimed that one can only think of the finite in terms of a modification or emanation from the absolute. Schelling makes two objections to this line of thought: it fails to account for, on the one hand, the characteristics and nature of finite things (which cannot be mere modifications or downgraded versions of the absolute) and, on the other hand, the possibility of evil that emerges together with creation. We have attended to the former objection above; let us now focus on the latter. According to the view of creation as emanation (or a mechanical production) "matter, the nothing has no positive character per se; only after the reflection [*Abglanz*] of the good has come into conflict with matter does it take a positive character and becomes the *evil* principle" (PR 38). This view, in other words, deprives matter of its own principles and character – it becomes lifeless. As such, Schelling refutes this view, in *Philosophy and Religion*, in terms of the distancing or descent (*Abfall*) from the absolute: "The absolute is the only reality, finite things on the contrary are not real; their foundation cannot lie in a *communication* of reality to them or their substrate, which would be a communication from the absolute, it can only be in a *distancing* [*Entfernung*], in a *descent* from the

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absolute" (PR 38). This descent from the absolute explains how finite things have their own character and nature, and how they are capable of rejecting the absolute in favour of that nature.

It is unclear how Schelling retrospectively assesses this theory in *Freedom-Essay*. In its Preface (F 334), Schelling declares that the *Freedom-Essay* serves as a clarification and expansion upon *Philosophy and Religion*. And yet, the term *Abfall* is only mentioned twice throughout *Freedom-Essay* (F 372, 375) and does not make a noteworthy positive appearance in the *Spätphilosophie*. Given Schelling's views of evil in *Freedom-Essay*, he likely detected a problem: finite being still remains derivative from and, for all intents and purposes, a weak (and involuntary) expression of the absolute. Therefore, the weakness and finitude of the finite is what explains its dissent from goodness. However, *Freedom-Essay* emphatically argues that freedom is the capacity of the choice for good and evil, with the important addition that human beings ought to choose for the good. But if finite being is but the garbage that absolute being secretes, why would there be a normative duty to align with the absolute? What rights can one claim on something that is thrown away?

Therefore, already in *Freedom-Essay*, Schelling is hinting at a more fundamental act of free will, of creation, that creates finite being. Through creation, human beings beget the power of spirit (*Geist*), which allows them to stand over and above the principle of light and darkness, just as God is able to silence all potencies within himself in order to create freely. Human beings are then to choose between allying their spirit to the principle of light or the principle of darkness. Therefore, in the space of a few pages (F 362–366), Schelling makes the first steps in rethinking the relationship between God, finite things and human beings by means of free creation. What is more, Schelling starts to introduce a topic that will become ever-more prominent in his work after *Freedom-Essay*, namely history (*Geschichte*). The development of the absolute in nature is a historical process that takes place in terms of an eschatological development towards higher perfection, towards the complete consummation of nature with spirit. Creatures called forth by the free will of the absolute have increasingly grown to become more attuned towards that consummation of nature with spirit, so they will have more distinct and powerful faculties. Human beings are then special finite things, since they are the latest, most complete articulation of divine freedom:

> It can readily be seen that in the tension of longing necessary to bring things completely to birth the innermost nexus of the forces can only be released in a graded evolution, and at every stage in the division of forces there is developed out of nature a new being whose soul must be all the more perfect the more differently [*geschieden*] it contains what was left undifferentiated [*ungeschieden*] in the others. (F 362)

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All finite things are marked by two principles, namely the one by which they are separated from God (the principle of the basis or of anonymous nature) and the one by which they can connect to God (the principle of light or personality). Revelation is thus an "inner transmutation, or revelation in light of what was originally the principle of darkness" (F 362). God's revelation brings dark nature into the light of particularity.

Since human beings are brought out of nature into light, into personality, they are marked by the two wills of their nature: "The self-will of creatures stands opposed to reason as universal will" where in the best case scenario the universal will "makes use of the former and subordinates it to itself as a mere tool" (F 363). The self-will of human beings is supposed to be guided towards the universal will: human beings are to choose freely for the universal. While Schelling's use of language is not as dry as Kant's, their viewpoints here seem almost exactly the same: human beings have sensuous and rational interests, neither of which are in themselves evil, but for good to be achieved the sensuous is to be subordinated to the rational, the particular to the universal. In God, these two wills coincide: the self-will of the absolute is the will to revelation, the universal will. Human beings are then a strange conglomerate of a divided self in relative independence from God. Only in humanity does freedom emerge, freedom to unite the principle of darkness to light, which means to subordinate the self-will to the universal will. But this very possibility creates the space for the other option, namely to "cut the nexus of forces" (F 372). The intended unity between the principle of darkness and light can be broken by man, which "constitutes the possibility of good and evil" (F 364).

And Back to the Light

Selfhood (or personality) makes human beings free or independent from light and darkness. Freedom can then be used to elevate that personality to spirit by reconnecting with the nexus of natural forces, or that same freedom can seek to be a merely creaturely freedom over and against the absolute. Evil would be the free choice to elevate the self-will out of darkness. The best analogy for this is sickness, namely a "disorder which entered nature through a misuse of freedom" (F 366). Dis-ease is dis-order to be cured through restoring order. Has Schelling then, via a protracted metaphysical detour, merely reasserted the traditional privative view of evil? This does not seem to be the case, because disorder is based on something very real (the solicitation to evil) and announces itself as something equally real as the good. A better description, which Schelling occasionally uses, is to call evil a "false unity of principles" (e.g. F 371). In order to

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account for the possibility of such a false unity, one is in need of something positive, that is, choice.

Despite having a more full-bodied understanding of evil than some traditional interpretations, Schelling does not succumb to Manicheism. Notwithstanding that evil has its own ground in the absolute, that ground is not evil per se. It is the necessary condition or basis for God's self-revelation: "For every nature can be revealed only in its opposite" (F 373). Creation must exert itself upon something that is not yet enlightened: "In the beginning of creation, which was nothing other than the birth of light, the dark principle had to be there as its basis so that light could be raised out of it" (F 377). In order to understand Schelling's point, it is helpful to make a distinction here that Schelling will make more consistently in his later works, namely between a first and second creation (both are also called a revelation). First, there is the immediate, inwards revelation of God in mythic consciousness; second, there is the mediated, externalized revelation of God in determinate religion. In *Freedom-Essay,* Schelling explains this distinction in terms of 'light' and 'spirit', where immediate revelation is the work of light and mediate revelation is the work of spirit: "The birth of spirit is the realm of history, as the birth of light is the realm of nature" (F 377). Elsewhere, Schelling mentions that only a 'second revelation' can reconcile human beings to nature, the first revelation then is original creation (SV 463). There is a development from first to second revelation: "What was present in the act [*Actus*] of creation will also be present in [the act of revelation], only more emphatic and more personal" (O 410). The involuntary first revelation makes the human being – by meandering through mythology (see chapter eight) – receptive to the second revelation, which can then be accepted (or rejected) freely: "The first beginning of creation is the longing of the One to give birth to itself, or the will of the depths. The second is the will of love through which the word is pronounced in nature and through which God first makes himself personal" (F 395).

The first revelation prepares and enables human freedom by opening human beings to doubt, error and paganism; the second revelation exposes human beings to truth, certainty and revelation. The freedom gathered in the former allows for meaningful submission in the latter: "*The creator has given the created the power to doubt his own work*" (O 253). Because of these two senses of revelation, human beings are enabled to connect their selfhood to the principle of light (good) or darkness (evil). The choice by which man does so is not temporal but proto-historical or intelligible: freedom follows "immediately from the intelligible nature of man" (F 384). This is what Kant would call the intelligible character, but in Schelling it is now understood in more of a dynamic relationship with the empirical character. Strangely, then, this means that the timeless character of any individual is the expression of freedom. Schelling's example is telling: "That

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Judas became a traitor to Christ, neither he or any creature could alter; nonetheless he betrayed Christ not under compulsion but willingly and with full freedom" (F 386). If we act in an evil fashion, this is always in expression of our freedom.

What does such mean for conversion? Schelling notes that the proper consequence of this view is that it "cuts out all conversions from good to evil and *vice versa* for man, at least in this life" (F 389). If it were true that "human or divine aid – for some aid man always needs – determines him to change his conduct to the good", the very capacity to accept such aid (*Hülfe*) would have to be "found in that initial act because of which he is this individual and not another" (F 389). And yet, Schelling does not appear to dismiss all possibility for conversion: anyone who has not experienced this "transmutation" is exposed to an "inner voice" which "never ceases to urge him to accomplish this transmutation" (F 389). Assuming that the good principle can never die out entirely, there will always be a solicitation to convert to the good, but the very capacity to respond to this inner voice must already be an aspect of the human being's proto-historical choice that determines his own being. This means that conversion from evil to good is possible (and, supposedly, *vice versa*) but it must be part of the proto-historical choice. Insofar as human beings do not "positively shut out" this possibility, there will be hope (F 389).

After discussing conversion, Schelling's mind dwells on something which he calls "religiousness" (*Religiosität*). In his view, evil is a disturbance of a harmonious link (which ought to have been there) between the principles of light and darkness. Instead of allowing light and dark to cooperate, evil disturbs this link by elevating the principle of darkness and particularity over light and universality. Schelling then thinks of religiousness as "conscientiousness, or acting in accordance with one's knowledge, and not acting contrary to the light of understanding" (F 392). The light of understanding allows one to recognize that light and darkness ought to be linked. Schelling here refers to one possible etymology of religion, namely *re-ligare*, meaning to re-establish a link. So for Schelling, religiousness is an awareness of the intimate link between light and dark, and the subsequent elevation of the principle of love over egotism.

Yet sadly, for Schelling, most human beings lack such religiousness and are prone to take the duties of the moral law as merely conditional, which means that they observe those duties only insofar as they accord with their principle of self-love. To act in such a way is to deceive oneself: one believes they are acting righteously, while actually straying from the categorical commands of duty. So Schelling claims that "the spirit of man lays itself open to the spirit of lies and falsehood through false imagination and learning oriented towards non-being" (F 391). Schelling believes that the allure of evil depends

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upon the working of a false imagination that paints morally-questionable behaviour as morally good. Whenever human beings deceive themselves for a sufficiently long period of time, their very being becomes evil. This is the essence of human freedom for Schelling, namely that human beings act in accordance with their own being, one that they have chosen for themselves: "Man's being is essentially *his own deed*" (F 385). From the very beginning, human beings choose – or better: have chosen – between good and evil, and are equally attracted to both, on the one hand, the ground of being and, on the other hand, being itself. In this "state of innocence" only a human being "can determine himself", a determination that "occurs outside of time" (F 391). Schelling cautions that this should not be read as a prehistorical choice which "precedes life in time" but as something that "occurs throughout time as an act eternal by its own nature" (F 385–386). The consequence of this view is that human agency naturally flows from the self-chosen being of man. There is a proto-historical choice that determines whether man can choose to be good or evil.

Schelling's attempts to rethink pantheism lead towards a more organic sense of nature that is brimming with contradictory life forces, and self-actualizes in an act of freedom. This freedom could not be foreseen or predicted; it is not known *a priori*, but can only be cognized *a posteriori*. Having been actualized through divine freedom, human beings find themselves at a crossroads between connecting their selfhood to light or darkness, universality or creaturely particularity. In the following chapter, we will attend to how Nietzsche's rethinking of freedom follows a similar avenue.

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Chapter 6
Culture, Style and Sovereignty in Nietzsche

Schelling was uncomfortable with those overly-dualistic systems of thought that separated reason and freedom from nature. Such systems resulted in a philosophical view of reality that was lifeless and mechanistic, that robbed thought of its real, factual and historical origin, that removed freedom and spirit entirely from nature, and that emptied out religion and God into meagre, rationalized shells of their former glory. The solution, he believes, begins with a more animated view of nature and freedom, where nature is brimming with opposing life forces and freedom is the very real capacity to choose how to navigate this *chiaroscuro*. Freedom then emerges from the anonymity of blind being, but cannot be uniquely self-asserting. Instead, freedom must find a way to navigate, in a wholesome fashion, the givenness of being.

This general point seems to me convincing. The result is that two things can fundamentally go awry in freedom: either one is incapable of acclaiming freedom from blind being or one insists on freedom for its own sake and refuses to return to given nature. Diagnosing when things go wrong, happens to be Nietzsche's speciality. The former problem is identified with 'the herd', the latter with 'ressentiment'. Freedom, also for Nietzsche, requires both distancing and competition as well as affirmation and tragic acceptance. The result of an improper composure towards freedom is that contemporary culture is exhibiting signs of "a deep weakening [*Schwächung*], of weariness [*Ermüdung*], of old age, of declining energies!" (FW 377). In the present chapter, I propose a reading of Nietzsche's views of culture, style and sovereignty as trying to find a wholesome way to navigate both the upwards (overcoming) and downwards (being overcome) trajectories of being an individual.[91]

The Problem of Culture

There are two ways to read Nietzsche's problem with European culture. The first one, which is most clearly laid out in the earlier philosophy (up to *The Gay Science*), is that Europe *lacks* culture. In the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche

91 Some readers of Nietzsche make the claim that Nietzsche abandons the ideas of cultural organization in favor of antagonism in his mature work (e.g., Brock 2015, pp. 4–11; Pearson 2019, pp. 508–533). I contest this claim and want to show that organization, ideally, includes an element of antagonism for the mature Nietzsche.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-007

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defines culture as "unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people [*Volk*]" (UB, 'Strauss', 1). He adds that Germany does not have a unity but a "chaotic jumble of all styles" (UB, 'Strauss', 1). A style brings unity to multiplicity, not so much by suppressing individuality but by discerning between higher and lower things. Style does not flatten things out, but coordinates with a measure of finesse. The purpose of culture, and style, is to differentiate between good and bad; or in other words, a culture allows individuals or societies to select how they include the different aspects that belong to themselves in their selfhood. An individual or society is then capable of warding off the egregious effects of those things that chain human beings in ways that are inorganic. Style, like taste, allows one to reject certain things and savour others; style makes one capable of discerning between higher and lower things; style makes one capable, in particular, of ostracizing those elements that are hostile to human flourishing:

> Culture is liberation, the removal of all the weeds, rubble and vermin that want to attack the tender buds of the plant, an out-streaming of light and warmth, the gentle rustling of nocturnal rain, it is imitation and worship of nature where nature is in her motherly and merciful mood. (UB, 'Schopenhauer', 1)

The second way to read Nietzsche's discontentment with his contemporary Germany and Europe is not that they lack culture, but that it is *bad* culture. This analysis becomes more prominent in his works from *The Gay Science* onwards. This has become known as Nietzsche's charge that Europe is decadent or degenerated. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche gives his most straightforward definition of degeneration: "I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt [*verdorben*] when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it *prefers* things that will harm it" (AC 6). Corruption means that an individual (or a culture) is self-destructive, that one has developed a frame of reference wherein one becomes suspicious of life-affirming instincts and is therefore disinclined to exercise one's will to power. As Nietzsche puts it in *Twilight of the Idols*: "To *have* to fight the instincts – that is the formula for decadence" (GD, 'The Problem of Socrates', 11).

I want to show in this section that these two forms of a problematic culture, either as lack of culture or a bad culture, are neither in opposition nor in contradiction. In fact, Nietzsche seems to suggest, as I have come to understand him, that the lack of culture results from a protracted bad culture, which then goes on to constitute a bad culture of its own – the lack of culture becomes a culture of itself. Put otherwise, the protracted exposure to a Christian culture has caused the deconstruction of Christianity, which generated a democratic culture, defined by a veritable lack of overarching culture. The solution is that higher individuals – artist,

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philosopher, creator – outperform those who merely pretend to be great, that is, actors (*Schauspielers*), and effectuate a more life-affirming culture. But in order for a philosopher to achieve this on a larger scale, he must first succeed in culturing himself. The creator must work through a process wherein he provides a life-affirming wholeness to his own multiplicity of drives. This is what Nietzsche, in different forms and with differing grades of success, tries to achieve through "giving style to one's character" in *The Gay Science*, the "sovereign individual" in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the "Übermensch" in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. The focus in the present chapter will then be on how the individual achieves such unity in himself. But before attending to that it is helpful to lay out more extensively the problem of culture.

There are revealing parallels with Rousseau, as Keith Ansell-Pearson has demonstrated (1991), who believed that culture can have a detrimental effect on human flourishing. Some would then argue that Nietzsche, like Rousseau, hopes to instantiate a return to nature (see Lemm 2009; Lightbody 2017). This argument is generally based on *Beyond Good and Evil* 230, where Nietzsche discusses the fundamental "will of the spirit in human beings" in terms of three elements, namely "simplicity out of multiplicity", "a suddenly emerging resolution in favour of ignorance and arbitrary termination" and "the willingness to deceive other spirits" (JGB 230). These are the natural and innocent drives which orient the human being in nature; but this simple truth has been obfuscated by "metaphysical bird catchers" who seduce human beings into thinking "You are more!" (JGB 230) – perhaps a reference to the Jesuit motto of *plus est en vous*. From this, one could surmise that Nietzsche holds culture generally to be an attempt to veil the basic truth that human beings are quite plainly natural will to power, and his own purpose is then to "translate humanity back into nature" where "the text of *homo natura* must be recognized even underneath these fawning colors and painted surfaces" (JGB 230; see also FW 109).

To assign overriding importance to *Beyond Good and Evil* 230 can be misleading. One compelling reason why is that Nietzsche (like Schelling) does not start from a strong dualistic view of nature and culture. All expressions of culture – even if they appear unnatural – are already always undergirded by the "text of *homo natura*". Therefore, Nietzsche would assess the benefit of what we generally call culture from the perspective of a natural project of human flourishing. If culture can be an assistant to flourishing, this can be taken up within the multiplicity of the human being. This thought is already contained in the closing paragraph of *The Wanderer and his Shadow* (1880):

> Many chains have been laid upon man so that he should no longer behave like an animal: and he has in truth become gentler, more spiritual, more joyful, more reflective than any

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> animal is. Now, however, he suffers from having worn his chains for so long, from being deprived for so long of clear air and free movement: – these chains, however, I shall never cease from repeating, are those heavy and pregnant errors contained in the conceptions of morality, religion and metaphysics. (MAM II.350)

Nietzsche's ambivalence about the "chains" of culture (morality, religion and metaphysics) is illustrative. On the one hand, culture can deprive one of freedom and creativity to such an extent that humanity as a whole suffers (a 'bad' culture). On the other hand, these have made man gentler, more spiritual, joyful and reflective in such a way that they augment life.

For Nietzsche, culture and culturing processes do not necessarily oppose human flourishing if such processes can build from a proper understanding of human nature. This is evidenced by a good number of passages. For instance, after a long charge against the priestly class and their egregious effects on humanity in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche adds that "man first became an *interesting animal* on the foundation of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priest, and that the human soul became *deep* in the higher sense and turned *evil* for the first time" (GM, 'First Essay', 6). This means that Nietzsche is not univocally dismissive of culture, style and identity, but he warns that such things as morality, religion and metaphysics can and have overextended their usefulness and generated serious difficulties. For instance, a religion that refuses to pass over into history when it expires – as in the 'death of God' – can continue as a nihilistic drain on vital energies. The solution to that danger is not abdicating any and all chains, but rather to find a way of "dancing in our chains" (JGB 226; MAM, 'The Wanderer', 140).

The problem of culture is usually understood in terms of 'nihilism'. While it appears elsewhere (GT, 'Versuch', 7; JGB 10), this term acquires a special prominence in Nietzsche's thought from 1886 onwards, especially in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In one rather extensive note of June 10th 1887, best known as the Lenzer Heide-fragment, Nietzsche gives us an idea of what constitutes nihilism (NL12 1887 5[71]1–16). Nietzsche argues that the Christian moral hypothesis (*christlichte Moral-Hypothese*) was a means for self-preservation: it allowed human beings absolute worth, it called the world perfect despite its evil and suffering, and it placed a desire for knowledge in the human animal. Thus, Christian morality and metaphysics are not nihilistic, nor do they lead to a lack of culture. Christianity – like all religions – is, and was, a counter to debilitating nihilism. This point is missed by some scholars. For instance, Bernard Reginster believes that nihilism is a radical repudiation of the world that grows out of the Christian moral hypothesis (2006, p. 28). One author, Kaitlyn Creasyn (Creasy 2018, p. 32) builds a similar argument on a fragment (NL12 1887 2[127] 125), where it should actually be quite clear and apparent that this is not the case. In this

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fragment, Nietzsche questions wherefrom nihilism arrived and he declares his point of departure to be that nihilism "in a very specific meaning is in the Christian-moral". He continues to note that the downfall of Christianity and its morality (because of its own morality of truthfulness) has created nihilism. So, in a way, it is true that nihilism follows from Christianity but not as cause and effect, rather that the disappearance of Christianity allows nihilism to emerge in full force. Of course, Nietzsche thought Christianity was a poor culture and an ersatz means of preservation against nihilism, but nevertheless for a long time Christianity did provide a means to counter nihilism. When Christianity overcame itself, it ultimately did create a vacuum that brought out the full force of nihilism. There was no new god to replace the Christian god.

In his later works, Nietzsche would continue his reflections on nihilism and point out how the current lack of culture in Western society is the result of a long-lasting *bad culture*. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche points out that the dominant culture in the West has had the purpose "to breed a tame and civilized animal, a *household pet*, out of the beast of prey 'man'" (GM, 'First Essay', 11). A culture that domesticates man instead of providing the means for a wholesome, dialectical expression of his instincts makes human beings "instruments of culture", which "are a disgrace to man, more a grounds for suspicion of, or an argument against, 'culture' in general!" (GM, 'First Essay', 11). In this sense, and in this sense only, Nietzsche expresses a homesickness for the uncultured state of man, wherein at the very least there were still traces of authenticity. That uncultured person did inspire fear in the eyes of his contemporaries, while there is simply nothing to fear or admire in contemporary man:

> What constitutes *our* aversion to 'man' today? – for we *suffer* from man, no doubt about that. – *Not* fear; rather, the fact that we have nothing to fear from man; that 'man' is first and foremost a teeming mass of worms; that the 'tame man', who is incurably mediocre and unedifying, has already learnt to view himself as the aim and the pinnacle, the meaning of history, the 'higher man'. (GM, 'First Essay', 11; cf. GM, 'Third Essay', 14)

A bad culture restricts unhealthily the expression of man's drives by putting a moral check on self-expression as such. This causes an obstruction within man where he can no longer direct his egoism and cruelty outwards, which is why these drives turn inwards and poison with a bad conscience: "All instincts which are not discharged outwardly *turn inwards* – this is what I call the *internalization* of man" (GM, 'Second Essay', 16).

When a society lacks good culture it can come close to something like a clinical depression, wherein individuals become incapable of externalizing

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their energies in a wholesome fashion.[92] The culture weighs down upon the individual, which results in European man forfeiting the drives to expand, overpower and overcome: "Today we see nothing that wants to expand, we suspect that things will just continue to decline, getting thinner, better-natured, cleverer, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian" (GM, 'First Essay', 12). What is even worse, German culture had happily acquiesced to its depression. The problem of culture is then not just this lack of an energetic, vitalizing culture that imbues individuals with creative, artistic and intellectual prowess, but also that Europeans individuals appear unfazed by this problematic and even take pride in their mediocre existence.[93] The problem of culture is thus not only about a lack of a strong dominant culture, but also about the lack of concern for the lack of a strong dominant culture. Nietzsche's solution is then to (re-)institute a personal and societal culture that is conducive to creative and affirmative behaviour.

Giving Style to One's Character

Individuals and society at large are best served by a life-affirming culture. In the coming sections, the focus is on how individuals come to a proper culture through an organic sense of freedom. A first, sustained attempt in Nietzsche's mature thought to think positively of human self-culturing makes its appearance in *The Gay Science* 290. Here, it becomes clear that Nietzsche does not think of freedom primarily in terms of a *liberum arbitrium* or the free choice between differing options (FW 290; also apparent in JGB 21). One is not at liberty to choose the individual components of one's personality, which means that culturing cannot mean castration, and it cannot involve ostracizing certain component of one's personality. Instead, Nietzsche reads good culture as the capacity for incorporation (*einverleiben*), which is the process wherein all aspects of a personality or society are taken up within the wholeness of a well-styled and life-supporting way of being. Schelling, in the first draft of *The Ages of the World*, says something similar: the hallmark feature of real being is

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92 The French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg comes to a similar conclusion with regards to 21st-century French culture. He believes there is something called a *malaise français*, where a growing individualism deprives individuals of social cohesion resulting in a general state of ambiguous discontentment similar to clinical depression (Ehrenberg 1995, 1998 and 2010).

93 This problem is summarized well by the title and subtitle of a book published by Paul van Tongeren which, translated from the Dutch, reads as *European Nihilism. Friedrich Nietzsche on a threat about which no one seems to care* (van Tongeren 2012).

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"wanting one's self, accepting what belongs to one, pulling oneself together, positing oneself as a whole being, all amounting to one thing and this alone is an active true, existence" (W1 22).

Alexander Nehamas (1985) was among the first to draw attention to this trope in Nietzsche's thought, arguing that "style" or "self-creation" is alike to how an author of a literary text forges a coherent narrative out of a number of disparate events. Some scholars have objected to using this idea of artistic self-creation (or Nehamas' understanding of it) as a reading guide to Nietzsche's philosophy. Robert Pippin, for one, argues that such a view has four major difficulties: (1) It requires a metaphysical account for a capacity for self-style that is lacking in Nietzsche; (2) it is implausible for one to weave all aspects of one's life into a single whole; (3) Nietzsche often emphasizes the involuntary aspect of self-creation; and (4) self-creation builds on a confusion of author and his creation (Pippin 2009, pp. 77–79; similar point in Brian Leiter 1998, p. 219). Similarly opposing Nehamas' reading of self-creation, Paul Franco argues that, on the one hand, the emphasis on harmony in self-creation underrates the role of conflict and contest for Nietzsche's thought and, on the other hand, does not sufficiently take into account Nietzsche's point that there is no ultimate subject behind agency (Franco 2018, p. 53). Pippin and Franco raise legitimate concerns with regard to Nehamas' reading of self-creation without thereby delegitimizing this feature of Nietzsche's thought wholesale. A careful reading of style – augmented by his views of sovereignty and overcoming – does amount to a more or less coherent doctrine. A cultured or affirmative philosophy ought then to find a way to incorporate all traits of an individual within the harmony of a well-stylized individuality, similar to how Schelling does not seek to cancel out "nature" or "darkness", but attempts to engage this in a negative dialectics with "freedom" and "light".[94]

The project of giving style to one's character makes its most prominent appearance in *The Gay Science* 290:

> To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye (FW 290).

94 One example of this strategy is the *ressentiment* of the noble in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Noble individuals are not without *ressentiment* or envy, but immediately direct their resentment outwards according to a certain style so that it cannot corrupt the inner disposition of the noble: "When *ressentiment* does occur in the noble man himself, it is consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction, and therefore it does not *poison*" (GM, 'First Essay', 10).

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Individuals that style their character are capable of making their strengths and weaknesses appear as an intricate part of their individuality. Nietzsche rarely provides examples of this feat (occasionally, one is given to think of Goethe as a good example), but one could think of many. The physical ugliness of Socrates which became an intricate part of his person. The excessively large nose of Cleopatra, which was admired by many. The nervous stammering of Hegel, incredibly vexing to his students, but which became fashionable among philosophy professor after Hegel rose to fame. Schopenhauer's failure as an academic philosopher, which made him into the most famous non-academic philosopher of the century. These individuals made their infelicities into something that blended with their personalities. Giving style to a character means the ability to take an amalgam of traits that are beautiful and strong, ugly and weak, and blend these into a wholeness. To some extent, one can chisel away at the ugly aspects of one's nature and construct a more beautiful persona, but there comes a point where one can overcome no more. Then one is supposed to give style to one's weaknesses.

This view of how to deal with one's infelicities puts Nietzsche immediately into conversation with Schopenhauer's hugely-influential essay *Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual* (1851). That work was discussed extensively by many of Nietzsche's contemporaries, including Nietzsche's lifelong friend Paul Deussen – especially in his *Die Philosophie der Bibel* (published only in 1913 as part of his series *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen*) – and later by Sigmund Freud. Freud even admits to Lou Salomé in a letter that this essay brought him to the very idea of a death drive (Freud and Andreas-Salomé 1966, p. 109). In this essay, Schopenhauer argues that "life having run its course [would appear] to be a well-rounded, complete work of art, although previously, when it was still in the making, often neither plan nor purpose could be recognized, as in every newly laid out work of art" (Schopenhauer 2014, pp. 182–183 [220]). In his sixties, looking back upon his life, Schopenhauer recognizes that all the disparate pieces of life make a wholeness and that, so he continues, means that all the suffering and misery of the past could potentially be redeemed in virtue of having led to the fullness of a complete work of art. Schopenhauer even adds the mind-boggling conclusion – seemingly inconsistent with the rest of his philosophy – that such providence might imply that life itself will lead to the denial of life:

> Now since we have concluded from the results of my serious philosophy (in contrast to mere professorial or comic philosophy) that the will's turning away from life is the

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> ultimate aim of temporal existence, we must assume that we shall all be gradually guided *in that direction* in a way individually suited to us, thus often through long detours (Schopenhauer 2014, p. 236).

Similar to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche thinks that a well-styled individual is a work of art and expressive of a singular taste: "In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small – whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it's enough that it was one taste!" (FW 290). There is one steady, adaptive and uniform project or idea that has worked its way through all the multifaceted aspects of an individual. Style is not systematic subordination: a person with style reveals different aspects of his personhood in the appropriate situation, putting weight on them as he sees fit at a certain occasion (what Schelling above called a "harmonious succession"). A systematizer, contrary to a stylist, would attempt to provide equal weight to all different aspects of his personhood. Nietzsche puts the distinction between system and style plainly in *Daybreak*: "Systematizers practice a kind of play-acting: in as much as they want to fill out a system and round off its horizon, they have to try to present their weaker qualities in the same style as their stronger – they try to impersonate whole and uniformly strong natures" (M 318). A system levels distinction; style enlists multiplicity itself for its projects.

The problem of a lack of style in an individual is illustrated by a metaphor in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. The town of "The motley cow" (*die bunte Kuh*) is filled with a variegated and diffuse number of individuals, from whom the totality in no way forms a unity (no organic culture). This is the meaning of the German term '*bunt*', along the lines of heterogeneous or multi-colored. This town and its inhabitants are in a sort of anarchy, a patchwork of different drives and ideas that lacks a unitary vision or purpose. Zarathustra describes the potential future of these people as "paint pots," who are "written full with the characters of the past, and even these characters painted over with new characters". Nietzsche calls these people "motley, all ages and peoples peek from your veils; motley, all customs and beliefs speak from your gestures" (Z, 'On the land of Education'). While such individuals appear to be full of various cultures, they are in fact empty of a dominant culture.

Nietzsche returns to this issue in *Beyond Good and Evil* 208, where he connects the hodge-podge of modern human beings to their skepticism. The argument is ideology under the guise of biology. Because of a great variety of different ideals and drives that suddenly and inorganically mix in European man (through the mixing of races and classes), the body lacks "a center of balance, a center of gravity and the assurance of a pendulum" (JGB 208). The consequence of such is a

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"paralysis of the will" (JGB 208), because human beings have taken in more than they can process. This reminds of an image in the second *Untimely Meditation* that illustrates the oversaturation of (historical) knowledge, namely of "a snake that has swallowed rabbits whole and now lies in the sun and avoids all unnecessary movement" (UB, 'Use and Disadvantage', 4). In fact, in *Beyond Good and Evil* 224, Nietzsche ties the paralysis of the will to Europe's historical sense: "The 'historical sense' practically amounts to a sense and instinct for everything, a taste and tongue for everything: by which it immediately shows itself to be an *ignoble* sense" (JGB 224). Through attempting to ingest almost everything – eyes bigger than the stomach – European man has caused his own disability. To bring unity to such multiplicity is no mean feat, and yet it is Nietzsche's hope that Europe will ultimately develop "*a single will,*" which finally abandons "petty politics" in favor of "great politics" (JGB 208).

Decadent gluttons "gobble down any food" (UB, 'Use and Disadvantage', 3), while cultured individuals are picky as to what to take upon themselves. For Nietzsche, health implies selectiveness, and the healthy individual

> works out how to repair damages, he uses mishaps to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger. He instinctively gathers *his* totality from everything he sees, hears, experiences: he is a principle of selection, he lets many things fall by the wayside. He is always in his *own* company, whether dealing with books, people, or landscapes: he honours by *choosing*, by *permitting*, by *trusting*". (EH, Why I am so Wise', 2)

Such selectiveness is tied up with race, ancestry, culture, individuality, personal traits, etc. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for good health. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says that "good style *in itself* – this is *pure stupidity*, just 'idealism', somewhat like 'Beauty *in itself*', 'the Good *in itself*', the 'thing *in itself*'" (EH, 'Why I write such Good Books', 4). He illustrates this further by an extensive review of his ancestry (EH, 'Why I am so Wise') and diet (EH, 'Why I am so Clever'). Culture and style are then basically "an instinct for *self-defence*. Not seeing much, not hearing much, not letting many things come close – this is a first principle of cleverness and the first proof that you are not just a piece of chance but rather a necessity. The usual word for this instinct of self-defence is *taste*" (EH, 'Why I am so Clever, 8).[95]

95 Many of Nietzsche's claims about himself throughout *Ecce Homo* border on the preposterous, the ravings of a deluded ego-maniac who thinks himself of Polish noble descent. Because of its proximity to Nietzsche's mental breakdown, many scholars have felt justified in simply ignoring *Ecce Homo*. Nicholas More rightly points out, however, that *Ecce Homo*'s hyperboles, even falsehoods, are caused by its genre, its style: Mennipean Satire. The book as a whole is an exercise in coming to terms with past infelicities through self-mockery. More's book is a must-read for understanding Nietzsche's purpose in *Ecce Homo* (More 2014).

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Given Nietzsche's commitment to dissidence and free-spiritedness, it might appear awkward for him to subscribe to the idea of a unity or style. Nietzsche attempts a first answer to this issue in *The Gay Science* 290, where he distinguishes between two ways in which an individual can experience the unity created by a singular, lawlike vision. On the one hand, strong and affirmative individuals will recognize the merit of subordination to such a vision and the development of their individuality is seen as their fate. Instead of militating against (or only grudgingly going along), they decide to embrace their fate: "It will be the strong and domineering natures who experience their most exquisite pleasure under such coercion, in being bound by but also perfected under their own law" (FW 290). On the other hand, weaker natures are incapable of such a charitable engagement with their fate and so become slaves. They will oppose the unitary style as much as they can or they will succumb to it only as much is absolutely necessary: "It is the weak characters with no power over themselves who *hate* the constraint of style: they that, if this bitterly evil compulsion were to be imposed on them, would have to become *commonplace* under it – they become slaves as soon as they serve; they hate to serve" (FW 290).

Weaker natures will feel constrained by style because they cannot manage to take up a style as part of themselves: they only obey grudgingly. Stronger natures, instead, do not experience a unitary style as a compulsion but rather as something involved their nature. For weaker natures, style is a poison: "The poison from which the weaker nature perishes strengthens the strong man – and he does not call it poison" (FW 19). In other words, a strong nature interiorizes his fate (as, e.g., an inner demon) while a weak nature exteriorizes it (as, e.g., a tyrannical godhead). To a strong nature, nothing is ultimately external to himself, he remains always in his own company (see, e.g., FW 166) and the strong nature attains self-satisfaction through blending his individuality with his fate. He becomes a wonderful, exalted image for others: "For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself – be it through this or that poetry or art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold!" (FW 290).

Weaker natures tend to be calculative and prudential (cf. FW 3), which means that they struggle to see the benefit and reasonableness of blending with a fatality. They are incapable of recognizing the non-instrumental importance of what exceeds prudence. An individual with "*great style*", however, "does not need to prove [him]self" and "rests fatalistically within *[him]self*, a law among laws" (GD, 'Skirmishes', 11). Schelling had laid some groundwork for this view by chastising any philosophy that remains content with the merely negative, a philosophy solely based in the rational interrelationship of concepts. Such a negative philosophy lacks the hint of genius that is provided by

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hyper-rational positive philosophy. Whatever does not yet fit in the systematic architectonics of self-developmental reason must be made to fit within this, even if this means that it is deprived of its more scintillating aspects. Nietzsche's sense of giving style to one's character fundamentally rethinks the relationship between freedom and the givenness of the drives. Instead of suggesting that one can control the drives, or succumbing to the opposite view of complete determination through the drives, Nietzsche comes to a more promising view of self-creation.

Will, Virtue and Spirit

The Gay Science 290 is Nietzsche's first experiment to rethink freedom more organically. This will become more developed in *Beyond Good and Evil* 19, 188 and 230, where Nietzsche explores how, when taking up a style, it is both an act of autonomy and heteronomy. While we might assimilate a style as our fate, the style itself remains an imposition. These explorations lead Nietzsche to a number of reflections on virtue (*Tugend*) and spirit (*Geist*), which give agents the tools to identify more comprehensively with their assimilated style.

More than any other thinker of his time, Nietzsche is attentive to the fact that willing is highly complex. He notably assaults Schopenhauer and the Darwinian philosophers, with whom 'will' becomes something all too clear and neat. In *The World as Will and Representation* (Volume 1), Schopenhauer emphasized the idea that our will is known intimately and immediately through our body, which is the immediate objecthood (*Objektität*) of the will. Contrary to Schopenhauer's claim of immediate access to our will, Nietzsche emphasizes that "willing strikes me as, above all, something *complicated*, something unified only in a word" (JGB 19).[96] Nietzsche untangles the complexity of willing through pointing our attention to three elements. First, there is a plurality of composures towards the object of willing: "In every act of willing there is, to begin with, a plurality of feelings, namely: the feeling of the state *away from which*, the feeling of the state *towards which*, and the feeling of this 'away from' and 'towards' themselves" (JGB 19). Second,

96 Nietzsche's point is not fair to Schopenhauer. While in the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer puts forward the argument that any human being knows his essence to be will (see paragraphs 18–20), he clarifies in the second volume that knowledge of the will lacks the clarity of representational knowledge: "And there is a limit; reflection presses on to it, and can illuminate the night of our existence *this far*, even though the horizon always remains dark" (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 607 [677]). For further discussion: Vanden Auweele 2017a, pp. 56–61.

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there is an element in the will that takes command: "In every act of will there is a commandeering thought" (JGB 19). Third, there is an element in will that is affected by something: willing is also "fundamentally an *affect*, and specifically the affect of the command" (JGB 19). The term 'will' brings this multiplicity, a mixture of commanding and obeying, into a unity. Nietzsche repeats this view in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: "All living is obeying. And this is the second thing that I heard: the one who cannot obey himself is commanded. Such is the nature of living. This however is the third thing that I heard: that commanding is harder than obeying" (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming').

There is no dearth of scholarship that discusses Nietzsche's emphasis on the commanding element in will, namely the capacity to bring a multiplicity into a unity. Let me point out three scholars who have made a serious contribution to understanding this element in Nietzsche's thought. Simon May makes the point that in a free self "a maximum number of drives of maximal power is organized into an evolving hierarchy", and that the "more *effectively* the drives are ordered into a hierarchy – the more control the self has over itself and over the circumstances with which it is faced – the more it is autonomous" (May 2009, pp. 89–90). May therefore shows that Nietzsche aspires to the cultivation of a holistic self whose organization results in the creation of a self. The self emerges from the organization of the multiplicity of the drives. Paul Katsafanas makes a similar point when exploring the hallmark features of "genuine agency" for Nietzsche. According to Katsafanas, genuine agency results from "unity": "What then distinguishes genuine actions from mere behaviors? Nietzsche marks the distinction with his concept of *unity*. Genuine actions are those springing from unified agents" (Katsafanas 2016, p. 165).[97] Ken Gemes correctly notes that "Nietzsche wants to reject the notion that in doing such and such one might have done otherwise, yet he wants to affirm that genuine agency is possible, if only for a select few" (Gemes 2009, p. 34). To clarify what he means by 'genuine agency', Gemes invokes the image of the sovereign individual that has styled himself in such a way that he is the proud owner of a singular will, one that lacks the idea of a *liberum arbitrium*, but who is capable of admitting and identifying with his agency: to act freely means to act in accordance with one's consistent character. Selfhood emerges from a more or less stable attitude towards one's drives. The unified agent is an agent that is self-styled in accordance to a relatively homogenous set of rules.

97 This view has three implications, namely that such unity is unrelated to the distinction between freedom and determination; that unity concerns the relationship between the drives and conscious thought; and that unity exemplifies a stable reaction towards this agency, even if new information emerges about the causes of that agency (Katsafanas 2016., pp. 164–196).

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Katsafanas, Gemes and May make excellent points when it comes to Nietzsche's attempts to think of unified and self-styled behavior. One element that is largely absent from their analyses is how bringing unity to multiplicity involves an element of obedience, even if this is obedience to self – whatever such self might ultimately mean.[98] Nietzsche's equivocal composure towards virtue-morality is a good illustration of this element of obedience (see also: Swanton 2006, pp. 291–304). For Nietzsche, virtues are general rules of behavior that channel and navigate the different interests of an individual in such a way that they are expressive of a higher unity or a solid character. Some sense of virtue-ethics seems to align well with Nietzsche's view of style and self-creation. He writes in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: "I love the one who does not want to have too many virtues. One virtue is more virtue than two, because it is more of a hook on which his doom may hang" (Z, 'Prologue', 4). A virtue is to be our own invention, our own imposition upon ourselves.

When Nietzsche speaks out against virtue-ethics, he usually refers to how this type of morality perceives virtue as uniquely super-imposed. Against this, Nietzsche emphasizes in *The Antichrist*: "One more word against Kant as a *moralist*. A virtue needs to be our *own* invention, our *own* most personal need and self-defence: in any other sense, a virtue is just dangerous" (AC 11). In Kant's practical philosophy, the complexity of human beings legislating and obeying the moral law is an antinomy. For Kant, the one who legislates has to be distinct from the one who obeys, which forced him to introduce the distinction between a human being as sensible and as intelligible being (Kant 1996a, pp. 512–514 [6:379–382] and 543–544 [6:417–418]). Nietzsche does not seem to recognize Kant's intelligible self as a valid part of the agent's selfhood, therefore thinks virtue and the categorical imperative are a heteronomous imposition. This might be part of why Nietzsche suggests that "the categorical imperative smells of cruelty" (GM, 'Second Essay', 6).

But regardless of its origin – reason, revelation or ourselves – for Nietzsche a virtue is an imposition, any morality is a "piece of tyranny against both 'nature' and 'reason'" (JGB 188). Even the morality of styling a character forces the individual into organizing his nature, but Nietzsche argues that everything great has come about by "tyranny of such arbitrary laws" (JGB 188). To read Nietzsche as propagating a Sartrian ethics of radical autonomy misses the point. For Nietzsche,

98 William Desmond makes a good point on Nietzsche's sense of self-creation and autonomy: still trapped in the Kantian antinomy between "giving the law" and "being given the law". Some sense of heteronomy seems unavoidable, even if we are merely obedient to ourselves (Desmond 2001, pp. 151–162). For a sustained reflection on this topic, see my 'Silence, Excess, and Autonomy' (Vanden Auweele 2018b, pp. 195–208).

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radical autonomy would mean the total lack of an organizing principle, a complete lack of law or style, which is not creative at all since it lacks a horizon from which to create. Creativity does not only require dissidence and originality, but also the capacity to obey oneself in a certain direction for a sufficiently long time:

> I will say it again: what seems to be essential 'in Heaven and on Earth' is that there be *obedience* in one direction for a long time. In the long term, this always brings and has brought about something that makes life on Earth worth living – for instance: virtue, art, music, dance, reason, intellect – something that transfigures, something refined, fantastic, divine. (JGB 188)

Slightly ironically, Nietzsche then believes that the way Christianity has subdued European man has created the spiritual life and tension that enables overcoming Christianity. Only against the dogmatism of Christianity does styling one's character become possible, since before Christianity, the strong did not know how to obey and the weak did not know how to command:

> The long, spiritual will to interpret every event according to a Christian scheme and to rediscover and justify the Christian God in every chance event, – all this violence, arbitrariness, harshness, terror, and anti-reason has shown itself to be the means through which strength, reckless curiosity, and subtle agility have been bred into the European spirit. (JGB 188)

A lack of style is just the incapacity to discern what to absorb and what to express. One is in need of profound cruelty for a profound culture: "Almost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization and deepening of *cruelty*" (JGB 229). But cruelty, even cruelty inflicted upon oneself, is not without its pleasures: "There is abundant, overabundant pleasure in your own suffering too, in making yourself suffer" (JGB 188). The tension brought about through the gradual self-overcoming of Christianity creates a complex inner life in the individual: where the weak know not only obeying but also commanding and the strong know how to command and obey. Christian ethics has taught the strong individual to become obedient to a style, but now the strong individual has to learn how to obey himself; or, he is to learn how to incorporate style as an aspect of personhood. Obedience must be something we do naturally, it should become a second nature rather than an imposition: "To demand that duty must *always* be something of a burden – as Kant does – means to demand that it should never become habit and custom: in this demand there is concealed a remnant of ascetic cruelty" (M 339).

This point is revisited in *Beyond Good and Evil* 230, where Nietzsche calls 'spirit' (*Geist*) the aspect of human psychology that aims to provide a sense of wholeness to the person: "The commanding element (whatever it is) that is generally called 'spirit' wants to dominate itself and its surroundings, and to feel

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its domination: it wills simplicity out of multiplicity, it is a binding, subduing, domineering, and truly masterful will" (JGB 230). This is the aspect of style and culture that has been central to our discussion now, namely the attempt to assimilate foreign elements into the self:

> The power of spirit to appropriate foreign elements manifests itself in a strong tendency to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the manifold, to disregard or push aside utter inconsistencies: just as it will arbitrarily select certain aspects or outlines of the foreign, of any piece of the 'external world', for stronger emphasis, stress or falsification in its own interests. (JGB 230)

This is also what is generally thought of as the doctrine of will to power, where the feeling of growth is an increase of power. This is the hallmark essence of all drives, namely to increase themselves through what Nietzsche calls voluptuousness, lust to rule and selfishness (Z, 'On the Three Evils'). This is the basis of all life: "It aims at growth, or, more particularly the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increasing strength" (JGB 230).

What Nietzsche adds of importance in *Beyond Good and Evil* 230 is that this drive for simplicity and subsumption is counterweighed by a drive towards multiplicity, which is an inclination towards masks and appearances. The strong will to power is opposed by a "resolution in favor of ignorance and arbitrary termination", which includes even the "occasional will to be deceived" (JGB 230). The will that aims to command also at times desires to be subdued by what it has hitherto commanded – what we will call 'overcoming' and 'being overcome'. This motif is poetically narrated in 'The Night Song' of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, where the protagonist laments his incapacity to receive: "I am light; oh that I were night! But this is my loneliness, that I am girded by light" (Z, 'The Night Song').

Nietzsche's complex take on affirmation and bestowing will be discussed towards the end of this chapter. For now, *Beyond Good and Evil* 230 makes it clear that there is a tension between the will to simplicity and multiplicity, between streamlining all the drives and affirming their multiplicity. Artistic creation can emerge from the tension between these wills: such tension puts the individual somewhere between immersion into a univocal world order and a vast panoply of difference, between multiplicity and unity (which, again, is what style is). This is probably the most fertile of tensions: "*This* will to appearances, to simplification, to masks, to cloaks, in short, to surfaces – since every surface is a cloak – meets *resistance* from that sublime tendency of the knower, who treats and *wants* to treat things in a profound, multiple, thorough manner" (JGB 230). In other words, an individual with spirit ought not only to weave his vast panoply of difference into a unity, but also allow for the occasional

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dissidence and (self)deception. This is what I believe Nietzsche aims to accomplish with his view of sovereignty.

Incorporation and Sovereignty

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche is moving towards the view that freedom is not only the expression of virtuous unity, but also the affirmation of what is beyond one's capacity to make in into unity. Richard White uses Nietzsche's term "sovereignty" for this, a term that arises first in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Sovereignty is a new attempt to think of a balance between commanding and obeying: "For Nietzsche, then, true sovereignty involves self-appropriation, though it also requires an absolute 'openness' to the forces of life; and for this to be possible, true sovereignty must involve self-dispossession and a continual self-overcoming that refuses any final determination" (White 1997, p. 22). Nietzsche thinks of sovereignty in a Greek sense, where the powerful heroes of the mythic epos recognize their fatality and style their lives in accordance with their fate – not 'a' fate, but 'their' fate. This implies that individuals should navigate, in the most careful way possible, all different aspects of their personality, and in such a way that this process can contribute to the grand style or culture of the individual.

Nietzsche's conception of styling one's character is akin to the interplay and tension between Schelling's potencies, a fertile tension not meant to be dissipated. Out of the opposition between the desire to create a univocal picture, and the equally primordial outstretching tendency to multiplicity, there can emerge a vision of spirit that aims for a wholeness throughout diversity. While Nietzsche is consistently harsh on dialectics in philosophy (see, e.g., AC 32 and GD, 'The Problem of Socrates', 5–7), it is not hard to recognize some sort of dialectics here. But unlike Hegelian dialectics, Nietzsche does not aim to undo tension wholesale. Rather, he aims to use and reuse the tension towards ever-new creation. This is a wholeness that is not in denial of plurality, nor is it simply an undiscriminating acceptance of such multiplicity.

Many things can go wrong in this process. Most obvious is an abundance of either multiplicity or univocity. Nietzsche is more psychologically-minded than Schelling, the former fleshes out how things might go wrong, and what effects this might have on human flourishing. A constitutive part of a virtuous, spirited and well-styled individuality means to be willing and able to affirm fatality, that is, accept that which does not merge into the style of the individual. How exactly should a weakness, ugliness or poverty be affirmed within a stylized character? In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes that "the ugly that could not be removed is concealed" (FW 290). This is one strategy, namely to uproot something that

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would offend our taste, but this is not always a successful strategy: some things might be impossible to uproot. Nietzsche explores a number of strategies to deal with such problems.

Another strategy is mentioned in *The Gay Science* 17, namely to make weaknesses and infelicities appear necessary. In this brief passage, Nietzsche invokes the image of a gardener who has a small, rather pitiable stream of water passing though his garden. In order to beautify the smallness of the stream, the gardener ought to make the stream appear as if its smallness was necessary. In and of itself, the stream has no aesthetic potential because of its poverty, but when that poverty becomes a part of the totality of the garden, the pitiable stream is taken up in the scenery: "That is what the wise gardener does when he places the poor little stream in his garden in the arms of a nymph and thus finds a motive for its poverty: and who wouldn't need nymphs as he does?" (FW 17). Infelicities that cannot be uprooted have to be given an air of necessity rather than contingency. This image of making poverty appear necessary is an inversion of well-known formulation of *amor fati* in *The Gay Science* 276. At the beginning of book four, Nietzsche writes that he endeavors to

> learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them – thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on. I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer!. (FW 276)

In an earlier note on *amor fati*, Nietzsche had called it a morality of "loving the necessary" (NL 9 1881 15[20]; see also: NL 9 1881 16[22]). As such, Nietzsche means something quite different by "style" and "*amor fati*"; the former is a means to make the weak appear necessary, the latter is a morality of loving the necessary.

Styling one's character is a process wherein the disparate aspects of a personality are blended to form a unity. Such a unity should not to be read in terms of a structural imposition, but rather as a constant dialectical tension from which true creation naturally flows. This is brought out by an image from *Thus spoke Zarathustra*:

> Ultimately all your passions became virtues and all your devils became angels. Once you had wild dogs in your cellar, but ultimately they transformed into birds and lovely singers. Out of your poisons you brewed your balsam; your cow, melancholy, you milked – now you drink the sweet milk of its udder. And now nothing evil grows anymore out of you, unless it is the evil that grows from the struggle among your virtues.
> (Z, 'On the Passions of Pleasure and Pain')

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Nietzsche's views of "incorporation" (*Einverleibung*) and "sovereignty" (*Souveränität*) are helpful to understand the transformation that Nietzsche hints towards here. These processes, however, as I will argue towards the end of this section, cannot provide an answer to the difficulty of total life affirmation, which must also include the element of *amor fati*.

Let us start with incorporation. Paul Franco offers a helpful definition: "The process by which something becomes useful or serviceable for life and ultimately contributes to the preservation or enhancement of life" (Franco 2011, p. 102; see also Franck 2012, pp. 298–309). Nietzsche suggests that certain drives or external forces that at first might appear opposed to the consolidation of a subjective, personal identity could be absorbed within this identity, which is itself a conglomerate of drives, and subsequently employed to the benefit of the enhancement of life. Life itself is the perpetual attempt to assimilate the what is other into the self in order to manifest a more potent self. The purpose of this process is, what Nietzsche calls in an unpublished fragment, the "lightening [*Erleichterung*] of life" (NL 9 1881 11[141]). What once appears as a burden (such as a fate, an ugliness, poverty, etc.), becomes reversed into sometimes that supports and augments life:

> What most irritated before operates now totally different: it is now perceived as a *game* and put to the side (the passions and work) as a life in untruth principally discarded, but as shape and charm enjoyed and cared for. We position ourselves as children in front of that which earlier constituted the seriousness of being. (NL 9 1881 11[141])

Herman Siemens' discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy of hate brings out something similar: while Nietzsche often praises the motivational forces of hatred for contest, he did also recognize the self-destructive dimensions of hatred (Siemens 2015). In order to counter the latter, Nietzsche takes recourse "to contain and exploit the energetic resources of hatred by drawing on the *idealizing powers intrinsic to hatred*" (Siemens 2015, pp. 776–777). Siemens suggests we can come to "acknowledge the necessity of hatred for life and seek ways to harness and master its destructive energy for constructive ends" (Siemens 2015, pp. 782–783). This is incorporation: to take up the energetic potential of something that is potentially destructive for the sake of a (self-)creative project.

Incorporation is thus a process wherein something that initially appears contrary to the style of the individual is taken up and transformed in such a way that is expresses a necessary component of that style. This view continues in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* under the name of "sovereignty". Despite his opposition to free will as Kantian *liberum arbitrium* (see, e.g., MAM 39; JGB 21; AC 15), Nietzsche here invokes the idea of the sovereign individual (*souveraine Individuum*) in a positive sense (GM, 'Second Essay', 2). The sovereign individual

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is someone who has “the right to make promises [*der versprechen darf*]” (GM, ‘Second Essay’, 2). There is some serious discussion about how to read these passages. Most of the scholarship claims that Nietzsche posits the sovereign individual as an ideal, but three authors have cautioned against doing so. First, signaling the obvious tension with Nietzsche’s critique of free will, Brian Leiter has suggested that Nietzsche invokes the image of the sovereign individual ironically (Leiter 2002). Second, noting that the sovereign individual does not appear in Nietzsche’s other writings, Christa Davis Acampora argues that “Nietzsche most certainly is not upholding what he calls ‘the sovereign individual’ as an ideal for which we should strive” (Acampora 2004, p. 147). Her argument builds on that the translation of “der versprechen darf” is better rendered as “who is permitted to promise” or “who is capable of promising”. While the classic English translation is indeed misleading (Nietzsche’s makes no mention of a ‘right to promise’), I am not sure about Acampora’s alternative translation – the German *dürfen* is usually rendered as ‘may’ or ‘can’. Third, Lawrence Hatab notes how the modern idea of ‘autonomy’ is used by Nietzsche almost always in terms of moralization and accountability – two notions which invert master morality (Hatab 1995, pp. 37–38).

My interpretation is that sovereignty is one more experiment that Nietzsche devised to conceptualize a non-modern view of freedom, similar to what was called aboven “virtue”, “style” and “spirit” (see also Henrich 2018, p. 36). I do not see the merit in arguing that Nietzsche ridicules the idea of a sovereign individual, given his description of this type as “the ripest fruit on its tree, like only to itself, having freed itself from the morality of custom, an autonomous, supra-ethical individual (because ‘autonomous’ and ‘ethical’ are mutually exclusive)” (GM, ‘Second Essay’, 2) – all of which are predicates that Nietzsche generally praises.

Let us attend to the main difficulty that scholars identify with Nietzsche’s sovereign individual. If Nietzsche entertains a non-normative ethics that lacks a capacity for free choice, how is it possible that the sovereign individual takes responsibility for his behavior? This is a paradox that has troubled Nietzschean scholarship for some time and in different forms: how does one reconcile Nietzsche’s obvious preference for certain ways of behavior with the lack of a capacity to alter our behavior (see also: Grillaert 2006, pp. 42–60; Solomon 2002, pp. 63–87)? This paradox also appears with Schopenhauer, who emphasizes the descriptive nature of his own ethics but who holds, at the same time, that compassion is a moral good and asceticism is the (emeritus) highest good (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 389 [428]). For Schopenhauer, the non-normative basis for preferring a certain idea, perspective or practice stems from its attunement to a profound philosophical truth. In other words, the degree to which certain

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perspectives are capable of facing and incorporating the truth – that is, the measure in which they are truthful – is equally the measure to which these perspectives are desirable. For Schopenhauer, this means that the degree to which actions or ideas are saturated by, and the consequence of, the deep dark truth that life is the expression of agonal will, is the same degree to which that action or idea becomes preferable. In this sense, Schopenhauer retains his very strict sense of determinism, since our behavior is univocally determined by motives, but he allows for certain types of behavior to be more estimable because they more comprehensively incorporate or assimilate reality. The more truth one is capable of absorbing, the more estimable one is as a person. What Nietzsche adds, counter to Schopenhauer, is that the amount of truth a person attempts to assimilate should never exceed his capacities for absorption: "The strength of a spirit would be proportionate to how much of the 'truth' he could withstand – or, to put it more clearly, to what extent he *needs* it to be thinned out, veiled over, sweetened up, dumbed down, and lied about" (JGB 39).

For Nietzsche, there is a dialectics between strength and truth, where the amount of truth cannot exceed a person's capacities. Would it be possible for any individual to be entirely without veils? An individual who can face the truth head on? I think this is what Nietzsche is describing when he speaks of the sovereign individual. The sovereign individual has matured in such a way – through ages of breeding – that he can organize the plethora of his drives in a singular direction. Two things are needed to become sovereign: namely the ability to command and the ability to obey. Christianity has succeeded in breeding the capacity to obey in the human animal through constant exposure to divine commandments. Nietzsche builds up a tension at the beginning of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* between two active powers in the human being: forgetfulness and memory. Forgetfulness is necessary to make room for new things and to be affirmative. Forgetfulness is the prerogative of the noble, who immediately discharges his drives. Throughout the years, and especially given the working of ascetic, Christian morality, there has been bred into the human animal "a counter-device, memory" (GM, 'Second essay', 1). Memory responds to forgetfulness as "an active *desire* to not let go, a desire to keep on desiring what has been" (GM, 'Second essay', 1). Memory is the capacity to keep a sense of regularity in what has been desired in the past and carry this onwards towards the future. Through memory, then, the human being becomes "*reliable, regular, necessary*, even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable for his own *future*!" (GM, 'Second essay', 1)

Some might read Nietzsche here as providing a genealogy of how human beings have become domesticated, and that Nietzsche wants to translate human

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beings back into nature. I think this view misses the finer points of Nietzsche's engagement with memory and responsibility. Indeed, Nietzsche does argue that the morality of custom aimed to make man "necessary, uniform, a peer amongst peers, orderly and consequently predictable" (GM, 'Second essay', 2). Such morality of custom results in diminishing individuality and creativity, subduing the more instinctive and individualist drives in humanity. But the morality of custom could also be seen as serving a historical purpose: namely, it created the inner conflict needed for humanity to reach towards a higher goal. We are supposed to reach the overcoming of the morality of custom, but not to regress back to a more primitive stage. We ought to take up the fruits of the morality of custom – that is, the autonomous capacity to will, memory and conscience – and employ this in a supra-ethical fashion. The regularity and styling with which humanity has been made familiar has now to occur in a more life-affirmative, individual and creative fashion.

The ideals of self-styling and sovereignty aim at the same goal. They are ethical ideals for the cultivation of a sense of individuality, which blends a whole host of different drives into an agonistic coherency, in order to render human kind more aesthetically appealing. This is similar to how Schelling saw the need for human beings to blend their twofold dialectic of retraction (obedience) and expansion (command). This need led Schelling, as we will see below, back to a certain form of Christianity. For Nietzsche, it is time to leave Christianity and hope for new, powerful beings to emerge. These beings would have a surplus of strength to command (like the masters of yore), but would be equally the product of Christian ethics. This is the sovereign individual: the individual that combines the highest sense of strength (Caesar) with the highest capacity for obedience (soul of Christ).

Overcoming Oneself

The ideal of sovereignty is appealing. But the question remains: what ought to be done when human beings are confronted with things that they are unable to blend into their character or style. One solution is mentioned in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: "Oh you human beings, in the stone sleeps an image, the image of my images! A shame it must sleep in the hardest, ugliest stone! Now my hammer rages cruelly against its prison. Shards shower from the stone: what do I care? I want to perfect it" (Z, 'On the Blessed Isles'). The ugly that cannot be incorporated is removed: Zarathustra chisels away at the stone in order to make it into a beautiful work of art. He identifies this with the project of the Overman. But what

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if this project is not possible? What if something ugly will recur endlessly despite our best attempts to remove or incorporate it?

Nietzschean sovereignty appears, at first, close to a Stoic sense of virtue-morality. There is no mistaking Nietzsche's occasional praise of Stoicism: "And if our genuine honesty nevertheless gets tired one day and sighs and stretches its limbs and finds us too harsh and would rather things were better, easier, gentler, like an agreeable vice: we will stay *harsh*, we, who are the last of the Stoics!" (JGB 227). But more often than these words of praise, Nietzsche took to criticizing Stoicism because of its ultimate goal: that is, to remove suffering from human existence wholesale. The measure in which this end-goal is achieved would correlate with a diminished capacity for creation.[99] Suffering breeds creation, which makes Stoicism one more expression of the ascetic ideal that seeks to constrain rather than affirm life.[100] Nietzsche's hesitations with regard to Stoicism suggest that the Stoic ideals of self-sufficiency [*autarkeia*] and equanimity [*apatheia*] are not helpful towards understanding the sovereignty of the affirmative individual. Nietzsche's sovereign individual is capable of self-creation, while at the same time recognizes and affirms the contingent, uncontrollable, even tragic, aspects of reality. Style and sovereignty allow an individual to relinquish the need for absolute control over his drives since he recognizes the wholeness by which his drives self-express. At its heart, Stoicism is an attempt for full control through a self-discipline [*askesis*] that relinquishes the need for control of the outer world.

Nietzsche's rethinking of freedom and affirmation comes to a climax in the drama of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. I cannot do justice here to all the complexity of that monograph, and instead will focus my attention on how certain developments in that narrative divulge vital information about Nietzsche's rethinking of freedom. A careful reading of *Zarathustra* can show that its themes continue other aspects and concerns of Nietzsche prior to and after its publication. The first major

99 Nietzsche's hesitations with regard to Stoicism echo some of Schopenhauer's qualms with Stoicism. For Schopenhauer, Stoicism hardens the heart against suffering, which diminishes the soteriological potential of suffering: "The aim of Stoicism, *ataraxia*," Schopenhauer writes, "[is] a mere hardening and insensibility to the blows of fate, achieved by always keeping in mind the brevity of life, the emptiness of pleasure, and the inconstancy of happiness, and also an understanding that the difference between happiness and unhappiness is much smaller than our anticipation of them leads us to expect" (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 168 [174]). Schopenhauer does add approvingly that "Stoicism can also be thought of as a spiritual dietetics according to which the mind must be hardened against unhappiness, danger, loss, injustice, treachery, betrayal, disdain and the idiocy of men just as the body can be hardened against the influences of the wind and weather, against hardship and exertion" (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 168 [174]).

100 For discussion of how Nietzsche slowly distanced himself from Stoicism throughout *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science*, see Ure (2009, pp. 66–84).

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clue to understanding *Zarathustra* is in its most recurring epigram (sometimes in slightly different form): "Humanity is something that must be overcome" (e.g., Z, 'Prologue', 3; 'On the Passions of Pleasure and Pain'; 'On War and Warriors'; etc.). It indicates two vital pieces of information: first, there is a deplorable state with problematic features, identified as 'humanity'; second, the process of overcoming of humanity, which is identified as the 'Overhuman' (*Übermensch*), is preferable to mere humanity. The traits of 'humanity' that Zarathustra finds deplorable have been discussed above: excessive rationalism and prudence, an overextension of a morality of custom, and a lack of cultural wholeness. This problematic state is overcome by means of inculcating a new ideal that is in opposition to the inertia of mere humanity, which Zarathustra himself achieves by distancing himself from the herd of humanity. Nietzsche clarifies in *Ecce Homo* that he intended his *Zarathustra* to serve as a counter-ideal to the dominance of the Christian, ascetic ideal: "How did the ascetic ideal acquire such incredible power? [. . .] Above all, there was no counter-ideal – until Zarathustra" (EH, 'The Genealogy of Morality').

We can expect the protagonist of *Zarathustra* to develop gradually towards this ideal of overhumanity himself. There is some discussion in the literature whether the ideal of overhumanity really ought to serve such a central role in Nietzsche's thought, especially given that its occurrence is confined mostly to *Zarathustra*. For instance, Brian Leiter writes that "in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche spoke of the 'superhuman' as a kind of ideal higher type. This particular concept, however, simply drops out of his mature work" (Leiter 2002, p. 115). But I find myself in agreement with Paul Loeb who argues that Nietzsche's formulation of the ideal higher type of the overhuman supersedes his previous, and even future, attempts to formulate the highest type for humanity (Loeb 2010, pp. 208–213). Indeed, the term *Übermensch* does not appear as prominently in any of Nietzsche other works. Some references do occur in a limited number of places (e.g., GM, 'First Essay', 16; A 4; GD, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', 37) and as an adjective the term does feature in some pre-Zarathustra (e.g. MAM 164; M 60) and post-Zarathustra works (e.g. FW 382).

Some hallmark features of the overhuman ideal are prepared outside of *Zarathustra*. The first of these features is the capacity to live affirmatively without certainty or stability. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche phrases this as follows: "The extent to which one needs a *faith* in order to flourish, how much that is 'firm' and that one does not want shaken because one *clings* to it – that is a measure of the degree of one's strength (or, to speak more clearly, one's weakness)" (FW 347; cf. JGB 39). Something similar is discussed in *Ecce Homo*, there termed as 'truthfulness',: "How much truth can a spirit tolerate, how much truth is it willing to risk? This increasingly became the real measure of value for

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me" (EH, 'Preface', 3). The more one is able to recognize the absence of ultimate values, the more one is estimable and free. There is an inverse relationship between the strength and truthfulness of an individual and their need for faith and firm beliefs. Since "man is a venerating animal" (FW 346), overhumanity means relinquishing such stability.

In Nietzsche's writings, lacking the need for stability has a complex relationship to creativity. If an overhuman being does not require any sort of stability, but can cheerfully embrace nihilism, then such a being would not *need* to be creative. Normal creativity is spurred onwards by needs, desires, wants – in short, by needfulness and prudential considerations. The creativity of the overhuman does not emerge from such poverty, however, but from an exuberance of will. For this reason, Nietzsche introduces, aside from weakness and strength, the conceptual couple of health and sickness. Any combination of these is possible: a strong will can be healthy or sick, a weak will can be healthy or sick. The opposition strength/weakness determines how far a human being requires stability; the opposition health/sickness determines whether a will affirms or denies life. The relative strength of a creation does not determine its value; there are plenty of strong wills that are sick, such as those which spearheaded democracy, Christianity, Buddhism, socialism, etc. When a sick will is strong, it creates life-denying ideas:

> Around all these positivistic systems hover the fumes of a certain pessimistic gloom, something of a weariness, fatalism, disappointment, fear of a new disappointment – or else self-dramatizing rage, a bad mood, the anarchism of exasperation and whatever other symptoms or masquerades there are of the feeling of weakness. (FW 347)

A healthy will creates with a more robust sense of earthiness, which Nietzsche identifies with pagan religions or aesthetic creativity. The relative strength or weakness of a will influences whether such a will is capable of, on the one hand, expressing itself (a weak will cannot easily self-express) and, on the other hand, letting go of a system of thought when it has run its course. Weak individuals are therefore not necessarily unhealthy, they are simply incapable of destruction and letting go. For healthy individuals, letting go of a thought, habit or belief is a joyous occasion: "And one day its time is up; the good thing parts from me, not as something that now disgusts me but peacefully and sated with me, as I with it, and as if we ought to be grateful to each other and so shake hands to say farewell" (FW 295).

An example of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought can be found in *The Gay Science 370*. Here, Nietzsche laments his erstwhile enthusiasm for Schopenhauer and Wagner, and even admits to having misjudged the pessimism that they supposedly expressed. Schopenhauer and Wagner had very sick, but equally strong,

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wills. Their creations are an attempt to assuage and cure suffering. This is not a problem per se, but there are two types of suffering: one of the healthy will and one of the sick will:

> There are two types of sufferers: first, those who suffer from a *superabundance of life* – they want a Dionysiac art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life; then, those who suffer from an *impoverishment of life* and seek quiet, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and insight. (FW 370)

This means that Nietzsche does not primarily judge an artwork, metaphysics or ideal in terms of its intrinsic character, but he makes a "*backward inference*" where he investigates what sort of desire gave rise to these creations (FW 370). In this, the primary distinction then becomes: "Whether the creation was caused by a desire for fixing, for immortalizing, for *being*, or rather by a desire for destruction, for change, for novelty, for future, for *becoming*" (FW 370). Even destruction, Nietzsche admits, can be a sign of weakness and impoverishment; and even the will to immortalize can be prompted by "gratitude and love" (FW 370).[101]

A pessimism like of Wagner and Schopenhauer requires redemption, but Nietzsche leaves open a window for a "pessimism of the future" which is a "*Dionysiac* pessimism" (FW 370). A Dionysiac pessimism is one that recognizes the suffering of the world and of individuals, but at the same time cheerfully and valiantly (perhaps also tragically) creates ideals and new systems of thought. Creativity requires the capacity to dwell in uncertainty for a while, to suffer profoundly (preferably from an abundance of life),[102] and then let the benefits of that suffering gush from

101 Such immortalization is not unconnected to religion. For instance, Nietzsche saw Greek mythology as an expression of gratitude: "What is amazing about the religiosity of the ancient Greeks is the excessive amount of gratitude that flows out from it: – it takes a very noble type of person to face nature and life like *this*! – Later, when the rabble gained prominence in Greece, religion became overgrown with *fear* as well, and Christianity was on the horizon. – " (JGB 49).

102 This topic is touched upon again in *The Antichrist* where Nietzsche emphasizes that the greatness of an individual is measured in terms of its capacity to be and remain skeptical: "Make no mistake about it: great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic. The vigour, the *freedom* that comes from the strength and super-strength of spirit *proves* itself through scepticism" (A 54). He continues that "a spirit who wills greatness and also wills the means to it is necessary a sceptic" and that "the freedom from every sort of conviction, being *able* to see freely, is *part* of strength" (A 54). He illustrates this point by relating passion to convictions: those who are of faith are used by their convictions; those of passion use, and use up, their convictions: "Great passion uses convictions and uses them up, it does not subordinate itself to them, – it knows its own sovereignty" (A 54).

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the creator as gifts of love. Nietzsche emphasizes mostly the free nature of the type of the creator. For instance, near the end of *The Gay Science*:

> The ideal of a spirit that plays naively, i.e. not deliberately but from overflowing, abundance and power, with everything that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine; [. . .] the ideal of a human, superhuman well-being and benevolence that will often enough appear *inhuman* – for example, when it places itself next to all earthly seriousness heretofore, all forms of solemnity in gesture, word, tone, look, morality, and task as if it were their most incarnate and involuntary parody- and in spite of all this, it is perhaps only with it that *the great seriousness* really emerges; that the real question mark is posed for the first time; that the destiny of the soul changes; that hand of the clock moves forward; the tragedy begins. (FW 382)

Such an adventurous and experimental stance cannot be maintained indefinitely. No one can live unendingly in insecurity; even philosophers want a tenured position at some point! Nietzsche presents this overhuman person, then, as a (regulative) ideal, not as something real and actual. There has never been a single individual capable of living without security entirely.

These are the main traits that Nietzsche uses, outside of *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, to describe someone who is overhuman: skeptical, adventurous, without certainty, and healthy (see also FW 283 and 335). Note that such things as affirmation of fatality (*amor fati*), affirmation of eternal recurrence or backwards-willing are not mentioned in these aphorisms. They are not ways to achieve the overhuman ideal, but challenge it. They challenge whether the desire for new things is conducive to life-affirmation. This is one of the most important contributions of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* to Nietzsche's moral ideals of overcoming and affirmation: namely, that a passion for overcoming and distance (skepticism) can be detrimental to life-affirmation. In short, strength can impede spiritual health. As such, the voyage of Zarathustra brings him to a threshold, and he has to make a decision: continue towards overhuman self-overcoming, or affirm life. It is a question of whether one can command without obeying. For one who is engrossed in skepticism and self-cultivation, there is never a point of finalization where one is capable of saying that 'it is good'. The image that comes to mind is the one of Shakespeare's Macbeth, who is incapable of affirming his murderous deed and slowly descends into madness. He cannot even finish a prayer: "But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen'? / I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' / Stuck in my throat" (Shakespeare 2015, [2.2.32–34]).

In the remainder of this section, we will investigate the traits of Nietzsche's initial ideal of overhumanity and its relationship to self-overcoming, and how this ideal gradually becomes exposed to its limitations throughout *Zarathustra*. Let us start with a few words on Nietzsche's protagonist, the elusive Zarathustra,

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named after the Persian prophet Zoroaster.[103] In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche traces a clear relationship between Zoroaster and Zarathustra: the former inaugurated the moral-metaphysical worldview, the latter overcomes it: "Zarathustra *created* this fateful error of morality: this means that he has to be the first to *recognize* it" (EH, 'Why I am a Destiny', 3). In line with the definition of truthfulness discussed above – truthfulness as the capacity to live without stability – Nietzsche calls Zarathustra "more truthful than any other thinker" and the polar opposite of "the *cowardice* of 'idealists'" (EH, 'Why I am a Destiny', 3). Zarathustra is by nature a free spirit who feels impeded by ready-made systems of thought and prefers to remain in his own company, his own creations and his own solitude (*Einsamkeit*). Because of the strength of his will, Zarathustra is different from most of humanity, who have founded religions for their sick will to attempt an escape from reality: "It is not a 'prophet' speaking here, not one of those awful amalgams of sickness and will to power known as founders of religions" (EH, 'Preface', 4). This is the case because Zarathustra does not demand belief like most prophets; the value of his creations does not depend upon recognition by others. Only actors (*Schauspielers*) require the affirmation of the people, a real artist (*Künstler*) simply acts (see, e.g., FW 361; Z, 'On the Flies of the Market Place'). Others will surely benefit from Zarathustra's message, but Zarathustra has himself no particular need for followers: he does not enjoy their pleads, praise, fears and prayers. A free spirit like Zarathustra lacks any idealist metaphysics that would provide purpose to his life, and therefore is most truthful about reality. But the same free-spiritedness also puts Zarathustra in the greatest

103 The Persian prophet lived most likely between the 6th and 10th century BCE and started a religious cult, similar to later Manicheism, which thought of the world as a battlefield between good and evil. Because of the many differences between Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Zoroaster, some scholars claim no specific inspiration – besides the name – of the latter on the former. For instance, David Aiken argues that Nietzsche's Zarathustra is "a creation of pure fiction" (Aiken 2006, p. 70). Building on Nietzsche's general library, scholars have been able to trace Nietzsche's awareness of Zoroaster. Joel Westerdaele rightly points out that Nietzsche was in possession of Friedrich Anton Heller von Hellwald's *Culturgeschichte in ihren natürliche Entwicklung bis zur Gegenwart* (1875), where certain assertions are made about Zoroaster that blend well with Zarathustra. First, Hellwald translates 'Zoroaster' as 'golden star', which aligns with Nietzsche's identification of Zarathustra with the sun. Recent philological scholarship shows that Zoroaster is better translated as 'having brave camels' or 'longing for old camels'. Second, Hellwald provides some historical and geographical detail to Zoroaster's life, who is supposed to have lived near the city Urmia, close to a lake with the same name. In FW 342 – though not in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* – Nietzsche mentions the lake Urmi as the birthplace of Zarathustra. Finally, Hellwald alleges that Zoroaster was born with a throbbing head, laughing – the importance of laughter for Zarathustra goes without saying (Westerdaele 2006, pp. 47–69; see also Higgins 1999, pp. 82–98).

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danger when he is confronted with something that threatens his cheerfulness in affirming life. The lightness and cheerfulness of Zarathustra is challenged by the weight of the eternal recurrence, a challenge Nietzsche alleges Zarathustra overcomes:

> How someone with the hardest, the most terrible insight into reality, who has thought 'the most abysmal thought', can nonetheless see it *not* as an objection to existence, not even to its eternal return, – but instead find one more reason in it for *himself to be* the eternal yes to all things. (EH, 'Thus spoke Zarathustra', 6)[104]

Zarathustra is then a sort of tragic hero that faces the most abysmal challenge within himself.

Let us now unfold the different layers of Nietzsche's ideal of the overhuman up to the point that it becomes challenged by the great seriousness of eternal recurrence. Next to the aforementioned sense of adventurousness, *Zarathustra* makes mention of three important elements as the hallmark features of the *Übermensch*: overcoming (*überwinden*), a willingness to go under (*untergehen*) and faithfulness to the earth. The first element, overcoming, states that all that exists is in a state of change and development. This is a natural and organic progression to a higher state of affairs: "All creatures so far have created something beyond themselves; and you want to be the ebb of this great flood and would even rather go back to animals than overcome humans?" (Z, 'Prologue', 3). The second element, a willingness to go under, declares that such organic development is a justification, even redemption, of humanity: by progressing beyond themselves, and sacrificing themselves in the process, humanity is redeemed of its less desirable aspects: "I love those who do not first seek behind the starts for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, who instead sacrifice themselves for the earth, so that the earth may one day become the overhuman's" (Z, 'Prologue', 4); "I love the one who makes of his virtue his desire and his doom: thus for the sake of his virtue he wants to live and to live no more" (Z, 'Prologue', 4); "I love the one whose soul squanders itself, who wants no thanks and gives none back: for he always gives and does not want to preserve himself" (Z, 'Prologue', 4). Finally, the overhuman's faithfulness to the earth means that they is willing to overcome themselves, even sacrifice themselves, not because of some heavenly or otherworldly reward, but because of their love for the earth and of life: "I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to

104 This is in tune with Nietzsche's idea that Zarathustra is the freest, most honest person. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche maintains that freedom can be measured only "by the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort to stay aloft. One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome" (GD, 'Skirmishes', 38).

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you of extraterrestrial hopes!" (Z, 'Prologue', 3). The overhuman is thus an individual that is willing to perish in the organic development of humanity to a higher state of affairs.

The direct opposite of the overhuman is "the last human being" (*der letzte Mensch*). This type is introduced as a radicalization of certain deplorable human traits, most importantly the human desire for security, stability and ease. There is a proclivity in human nature to sacrifice all danger and adventure for the sake of a comfortable life: "The time approaches when human beings no longer launch the arrow of their longing beyond the human, and the string of their bow will have forgotten how to whir" (Z, 'Prologue', 5). Michael Gillespie points out how, for Nietzsche, the last human being is the last possible type of human being before regressing to the status of beast (Gillespie 2017, pp. 29–31). As such, Gillespie reads the 'last' in 'last human being' as a biological type on the verge of succumbing to animality. The 'last' here signifies not so much an abyss of potential regression, but instead signals how the last human being no longer aims to create beyond himself. The last human being believes to have reached a state of quiet, complacent perfection. But for Nietzsche, the last human being has not yet come: he is a potential future, and is supposed to arouse the contempt of the masses. Nietzsche lets Zarathustra play naive obliviousness to the fact that the masses of humanity enjoy stability – humanity being a venerating animal – and therefore vastly prefers the last human being to the overhuman.

Instead, then, of addressing the masses of humanity, Nietzsche aims his message at a few select individuals. The agency of the type of the over-human is drawn out most clearly in three sections towards the end of the first part of *Zarathustra*: 'On the Way of the Creator', 'On the Free Death' and 'On the Bestowing Virtue'. The first of these sections emphasizes the solitude of those who are creative: creativity requires distance from the customary and traditional values of the herd. Such a desire for dissidence can emerge in any individual, often brought on by contempt for the herd and an innate impulse towards individuality. But what is emphasized in this section is that one has to earn the right to solitude. Dissidence as such is without value, only when it leads to creation does dissidence acquire merit: "You call yourself free? Your dominating thought I want to hear, and not that you escaped a yoke [. . .] Free from what? What does Zarathustra care! But brightly your eyes should signal to me: free *for what*?" (Z, 'On the Way of the Creator'). This is similar to Zarathustra's later assault on the character called "Zarathustra's Ape" (see: Z, 'On Passing By').

The first section ends with Zarathustra's praise for those who "create over and beyond himself and thus perishes" (Z, 'On the Way of the Creator'). This leads straight into the next relevant section, 'On the Free Death', where Zarathustra

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preaches that one ought to "die at the right time" (Z, 'On the Free Death'). A proper death is when one "does *his* death, victorious, surrounded by those who hope and promise" (Z, 'On the Free Death'). This is what Zarathustra calls the "free death", where an individual is willing and capable of letting go of life when their strength is at its end: "And out of reverence for his goal and heir he will no longer hang withered wreaths in the sanctuary of life" (Z, 'On the Free Death'). Living too long can be detrimental to one's work and – just as it is possible to die too early, when one has not allowed one's thoughts to fully mature – one can die too late. Interestingly, Nietzsche mentions "the Hebrew Jesus" here, next to Zarathustra, the only individual mentioned by name throughout *Zarathustra*, and believes that "he died too early; he himself would have recanted his teaching if he had reached my age" (Z, 'On the Free Death'). In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche repeats much of this: "Dying proudly when it is no longer feasible to live proudly. Death chosen freely, death at the right time, carried out with lucidity and cheerfulness, surrounded by children and witnesses" (GD, 'Skirmishes', 36).

Laurence Lampert makes the suggestion that Zarathustra betrays his own teachings at the end of the first part of *Zarathustra*: if one's death can and ought to serve the lustre of one's ideals, should not Zarathustra willingly surrender to death at the end of *Zarathustra* I? Why does he remain in the world as a spectator, curious about how humanity deals with his message, and why does he not – unlike his two most powerful adversaries, Christ and Socrates – willingly go into inexistence for the furtherance of his goal (Lampert 1986, pp. 71–73)? This brings to mind a cult leader who demands more commitment to the ideals of the cult from his followers than from himself. Instead of pointing to Zarathustra's all too human weakness, Zarathustra has not yet emptied out his usefulness towards his goal. The task is not yet done. I doubt that the task can ever really be done. Paul Loeb has argued – though the point is certainly contested – that Zarathustra does in fact die at the conclusion of Part III, with Part IV chronologically taking place between the final sections of Part III (Loeb 2010, pp. 85–118).[105]

The creative individual is free from the masses, sets himself a goal and a purpose, and is very willing to die when he can no longer serve that purpose. This view is realised in the final section of *Zarathustra* I: 'On the Bestowing Virtue'. Here, Nietzsche declares that seeking solitude, the gathering of

105 Paul Loeb has argued – though the point is certainly contested – that Zarathustra does in fact die at the conclusion of Part III, with Part IV chronologically taking place between the final sections of Part III (Loeb 2010, pp. 85–118. A number of articles in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* number 41 of 2011 challenge Loeb's claims explicitly. See especially Stern (2011) and del Caro (2011).

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energies within oneself, serves a higher purpose, namely to let this energy "gush back from your well as gifts of your love" (Z, 'On the Bestowing Virtue', 1). This explains why Zarathustra descends to mankind:

> Like you, I must *go down* as the human beings say, to whom I want to descend. So bless me now, your quiet eye that can look upon even an all too great happiness without envy! Bless the cup that wants to flow over, such that water flows golden from it and everywhere carries the reflection of your bliss!. (Z, 'Prologue', 1)

This is the hallmark feature of a 'healthy' will, namely that it is naturally creative and even imposes itself upon others. These others will benefit also from the creativity of the overhuman, because they themselves lack the strength for creation: they require the legislation of the overhuman who hangs a purpose over humanity. The overhuman styles those who cannot style themselves.

Zarathustra opposes this naturally healthy selfishness to "another selfishness, one all too poor, a hungering one that always wants to steal; that selfishness of the sick, the sick selfishness" (Z, 'On the Bestowing Virtue', 1). This is the sick will, of which we spoke earlier, which does not support life affirmation and self-overcoming, but leads to degeneration (*Entartung*). Instead, the healthy bestowing virtue will lead humanity to new heights: "Upwards goes our way, over from genus [*Art*] to super-genus [*Über-Art*]" (Z, 'On the Bestowing Virtue', 1). Such a bestowing virtue should become humanity's new culture or style: all the myriad expressions of one's individuality should be geared towards the upwards elevation of humanity. *Zarathustra* connects the bestowing virtue to Nietzsche's previous thoughts of virtue and character-styling: "It is power, this new virtue; it is a ruling thought and around it a wise soul: a golden sun and around it the snake of knowledge" (Z, 'On the Bestowing Virtue', 1).

The narrative of part one of *Zarathustra* ends with an impressive reversal of Jesus' speech in Matthew 16:24: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'". Zarathustra, however, claims that those who really follow him would do well not to follow him: "Now I bid you to lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you" (Z, 'On the Bestowing Virtue', 3). In the Gospels, Saint Peter's denial of Christ was a lack of faith, but for Zarathustra, denial is the first condition for "discipleship". Only when his disciples have claimed their freedom from their human all too human ways will Zarathustra return to them – again as a reversal of how Jesus and the Holy Spirit return to the Apostles at their moment of confirmation of Christ (not denial).

For Nietzsche, the purpose of the overhuman ideal is to augment the aspiration towards more self-reliance and affirmation, not ascetic faith. Ascetic

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faith empties out human beings and blocks them from gathering within themselves the energy and momentum to reach ever higher. In the aphorism 'Excelsior' of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche mentions a number of obstructions to self-elevation and, quasi-religiously, forbids these blockages for those individuals who would reach higher. Some of these include: never to pray again, never to rest on trust, not to have an avenger or corrector for your life, and to will the eternal return of war and peace (FW 285). The overhuman must renounce all of these if he aspires to godlike status: "Man will rise ever higher when he no longer *flows off* into a god" (FW 285).

Despite Nietzsche's courageous tone, the question that becomes central in *Zarathustra* II and onwards is whether self-reliance and individuality can have detrimental effects on life affirmation. The fuel for individuality is contempt for the herd of humanity, but contempt should not exist for its sake alone: it should be cultured in such a way that it propels towards overhumanity. Otherwise, contempt is but one short step from *ressentiment*. In this, contempt is a dangerous tool as it can overtake the individual: then the very pursuit of overhumanity burdens a spirit to such an extent that life affirmation become highly problematic.

And Being Overcome

Nietzsche's ultimate aim is life affirmation, which can be achieved best through culturing a human being by means of a life-affirmative ideal. There are two, oft-missed axes here: health and sickness, weakness and strength. Nietzsche can abide with weakness easily, which desires for stability and clarity, but not with sickness, which would poison and deny life. Better a healthy weakness than a sick strength. In this closing section, we will develop in more detail what exactly the weakness of the healthy individual might mean, and how it ought to be taken up in an affirmative philosophy. This will naturally lead us to Nietzsche's religious concerns, which will be detailed in full in the final chapter of this monograph.

Nowhere does Nietzsche more ably discuss the demandingness of a strong and healthy will than in *Zarathustra* II. The final, highest and strongest affirmation of life would imply overcoming even overcoming itself; in other words, we have to overcome the need to redeem existence. There is an extent to which the creative will can stylize and beautify, but this will ineluctably find its capacities matched at some point. When that point arrives, the will must have along with its beautifying and stylizing impulse for overhumanity – which paints life in terms of a wholeness directed towards creativity as a necessity – also a general

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willingness to affirm fatality and accident. A strong will must necessary come up to such a point because real strength seeks out opposition, not ease.

In *Zarathustra*, the protagonist is always watchful for ever-higher mountains to scale, more intense struggles to overcome. Flight from difficulty is flight from life. This is what Nietzsche identifies in the second preface of *The Birth of Tragedy* as a pessimism of strength: “Is there a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual preference for the hard, gruesome, malevolent and problematic aspects of existence which comes from a feeling of well-being, from overflowing health, from an *abundance* of existence?” (GT, ‘Attempt at Self-Criticism’, 1). What then, if and when, strength meets its match? What happens when one can climb no higher? Can even weakness be celebrated? Nietzsche touches upon these questions in *Daybreak* 271 under the title of ‘the festive mood’ (*die Feststimmung*). Nietzsche proposes a paradox. That the more one aspires to power, the more one can feel relief at being overcome:

> It is to precisely those people who strive most hotly after power that it is indescribably pleasant to feel themselves *overcome*! Suddenly and deeply to sink into a feeling as into a whirlpool! To let the reins be torn from one’s grasp and to look on at a movement going who knows where. (M 271)

Nietzsche recognizes a happiness in being overcome, a release of self, because this provides “a relaxation of tension, a throwing-off of the great burden, an effortless falling as though by the pull of gravity” (M 271). Employing the vertical imagery frequently used in *Zarathustra*, namely of rising and descending, Nietzsche illustrates the festive mood as “the dream of the mountaineer who, though his *goal* may be above him, goes wearily to sleep on his way and dreams of the *happiness of the opposite course* – of effortless falling” (M 271). Anyone who has pursued power for a long time will benefit from occasional festivals wherein he can enjoy the utter release of the pursuit of power. After such, “one is again freer, more refreshed, colder, more severe, and again resumes one’s unwearying quest for its opposite: for *power*” (M 271).

The festive mood is not a singular aberration, but a common trait of Nietzsche’s philosophy. In fact, one could venture the claim that Nietzsche experimented with devising a way for weakness to serve as reinforcing life affirmation. Weakness must become seen in such a way that it becomes a festival in favor of life affirmation, which would in turn invigorate the individual’s attempts at sovereignty. Many accounts of Nietzsche’s philosophy tend to either disregard the downward trajectory of Nietzsche’s philosophy or to interpret it in terms of self-overcoming. This would make the downward trajectory privative. For instance, Laurence Lampert discusses the vertical imagery – going up and down – of *Zarathustra* as “not contradictory, but rather, different and complementary

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ways of characterizing Zarathustra's course" (Lampert 1986, p. 16). By this, he means that Zarathustra's first and final purpose is to cultivate an earthly pursuit of overhuman excellence. I think this view is an error. It disregards the valuable contribution of a release of self, an affirmation of the fatalistic, which cannot be taken up into an overhuman project of self-cultivation. Human beings are essentially double, "a going over and a going under" (Z, 'On The Higher Man', 3).

This is brought out powerfully in *Zarathustra* II, most clearly in the centrally-located succession of songs. The first of these songs, "The Night Song", was the first section Nietzsche wrote for *Zarathustra* II when he was *not* enjoying a stay in Rome (which explains the imagery of fountains: see EH, 'Zarathustra', 4). The sections preceding "The Night Song" repeated some of the essentials of *Zarathustra* I, emphasizing in particular the distinction between Zarathustra's overhuman ideal and the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche is particularly harsh on those who preach egalitarianism (Z, 'The Child with the Mirror', 'On the Rabble', 'On the Tarantulas'), an ethic of pity (Z, 'On the Pitying') and false virtue and truth (Z, 'On the Virtuous', 'On the Famous Wise Men'). His opposition to these different types of human beings is that they are insufficiently distanced from the masses of humanity: their values are human values. Ascetics have all too readily allowed themselves to fuse with the masses of humanity. Zarathustra's wisdom is different from all hitherto wise men, his wisdom is a "wild Wisdom" (Z, 'On the Famous Wise Men' and 'On the Child with the Mirror'), which is at a distance from ordinary, more prudential, wisdom.

The three consecutive songs that follow 'On the Famous Wise Men' – which all end with "thus sang" instead of "thus spoke" Zarathustra – are illustrations of some of the challenges that are faced by a wild wisdom. These challenges are not external to wild wisdom, but are intrinsic challenges to the strength required for cultivating a wild wisdom. A desire to overcome any all too human limitations is faced with the difficulty of solitude, cheerfulness and persistence – respectively, though only roughly, akin to the theological concepts of sanctification, eternal security and justification. The first of this challenges may be called the "loneliness of the creator", that is, the occasional desire for even the strongest of individuals to relinquish their individuality and be overcome themselves. This is what we discussed above as the festive mood in *Daybreak*. Zarathustra is quite clear that he experiences such bouts: "An unstilled, an unstillable something is in me; it wants to be heard. A craving for love is in me, which itself speaks the language of love. I am light; oh that I were night! But this is my loneliness, that I am girded by light" (Z, 'The Night Song'). For the first time, Zarathustra comes close to expressing a sort of weariness in bestowing, a loneliness of giving, and a subsequent desire to experience a sense of

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self-absolution. Up until now, Zarathustra has sung the praises of the freedom of spirit that distances itself from the herd of humanity, that manifests a self out of the diversity of its drives, and subsequently imposes itself upon mere humanity. The difficulty is not resolved in the song.

The song might have been inspired by Novalis' famous *Hymnen an die Nacht* (1800), which is a poem that came to Novalis (1772–1801) while holding a wake at the grave of his betrothed Sophie von Kühn (1782–1797). The poem expresses a deep melancholy (*Wehmut*) at the incapacity to stand the light. The poet arrives at a sense of release through night-inspiration (*Nachtsbegeisterung*), which comes to him through a flash of twilight (*Dämmerungsschauer*) that allows for momentary absorption into the void. Some speculate that this episode narrates Novalis' contemplation of suicide, which he forfeits in the last verses only through the loving caress of the Virgin Mary. Both Novalis and Zarathustra aim to flee the light, but Zarathustra cannot escape the light because he is a 'shining star'. This puts a terrible burden upon Zarathustra.

The creator feels a weariness because of his inability to take anything for granted (or: to have faith). This is further illustrated in *Zarathustra* Part IV, wherein the persona of Zarathustra's shadow is solitude turned extreme: "I've already sat on every surface, like weary dust I have slept on mirrors and window panes: *Everything takes from me, nothing gives, and I grow thin* – I almost resemble a shadow" (Z, 'The Shadow' – my emphasis). Zarathustra's shadow laments – as does Zarathustra in 'The Night Song' – that he does not know the joy of receiving. This results in that Zarathustra's shadow embraces the lack of truth as a new, absolute truth: "Nothing is true, all is permitted" (Z, 'The Shadow'). Zarathustra is honestly moved by the plight of his shadow, and he recognizes that "to such restless ones as you even a jail ends up looking like bliss" (Z, 'The Shadow'). The difficulty is tackled by offering Zarathustra's shadow a moment of respite: it can briefly enjoy the relief of Zarathustra's cave in order to convalesce.

The loneliness of the creator is a first challenge to the wild wisdom of Zarathustra. The next section, 'The Dance Song', introduces a second challenge, which will be taken up a second time in *Zarathustra* Part III, 'The Other Dance Song'. In the former song, Zarathustra sings in mockery of "the spirit of gravity, my supreme highest and most powerful enemy" (Z, 'The Dance Song') – an opponent that was first introduced in 'On Reading and Writing'. The spirit of gravity is the personification of those ideas, sentiments and drives that would thwart a joyful and cheerful expression of wild Wisdom. Where Zarathustra aims to rise higher, the spirit of gravity is what keeps Zarathustra grounded. 'The Dance Song' is based upon a love triangle between Zarathustra, his wild Wisdom and an elusive mistress called Life. Zarathustra has love for Life and his wisdom both,

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but he admits to wisdom that "at bottom I love only life – and verily, most when I hate it!" (Z, 'The Dance Song'). This clarifies that Zarathustra's wisdom is subservient to his love for Life, that wisdom might have to take a backseat if the affirmation of Life is impeded by the pursuit of wisdom. Remember: wisdom is Zarathustra's creative attempts to distance himself, to create new ideals, and to use resentment to coax humanity towards overhumanity. At this point, one would be justified in wondering whether there might not emerge a potential conflict between Life and Wisdom, and which mistress Zarathustra is willing to abandon for the sake of the other. Zarathustra appears oblivious to a potential conflict and even claims that: "I am fond of wisdom and often too fond; that is because she reminds me so much of life" (Z, 'The Dance Song'). Like Wisdom, Life also always seeks to overcome itself: Zarathustra loves Life *as* will to power because Life *is* will to power. But what if Life's will to power will grow to hamper Zarathustra's will to power? This is the central topic of 'The Other Dance Song'.

In the third and longest of the songs in *Zarathustra* II, 'The Grave Song', Zarathustra turns towards a theme that will become more prominent in a later section, 'On Redemption', namely the past. Zarathustra laments all the things of his youth that he has lost. In particular, Zarathustra laments that he has lost "the wisdom of my youth, once; truly, the speech of a gay wisdom!" (Z, 'The Grave Song'). Zarathustra feels as if the onslaught of time is a challenge to his cheerfulness, his cheerful advocacy of Wild Wisdom. He feels overcome by nausea and resentment: "Once I pledged to renounce all nausea; then you transformed those near and nearest me into boils of pus" ('The Grave Song'). Zarathustra's pledge to "overcome nausea" might be a reference to the section 'Sanctus Januaris' of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche makes the resolution to be affirmative (FW 276). That affirmative attitude is now being challenged. Time has thrown obstacles in Zarathustra's path and he feels his cheerfulness dimmed. He is still some ways from his cheer in *The Gay Science*: "And one day its time is up; the good thing parts from me, not as something that now disgusts me but peacefully and sated with me, as I with it, and as if we ought to be grateful to each other and so shake hands to say farewell" (FW 295). The spirit of gravity is doing its work, but Zarathustra manages to continue onwards on the basis of his strength of will: "How did I bear it? How did I overturn and overcome such wounds? How did my soul rise again from these graves? Yes, there is something invulnerable, unburiable in me, something that explodes boulders: it is called *my will*" (Z, 'The Grave Song').

The three songs, strategically located in the center of *Zarathustra* II, are a clue that the subsequent sections will gradually explore the most potent difficulties to Zarathustra's ideal of overhumanity. Zarathustra first breaks down his view of "the nature of all that lives" in 'On Self-Overcoming', which is

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threefold: first, "All living is an obeying"; second, "the one who cannot obey himself is commanded"; third, "commanding is harder than obeying" (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming'). All agency is ultimately directed towards acquiring ascendancy over other things. Even obedience is an attempt to acquire power, most often over things that are below the agent: the corporal obeys the lieutenant so that he might command the private, while the private obeys so that he might climb the ranks. All life aims to acquire the highest and most power over others.

Zarathustra adduces two important consequences from this view. First, there is no such thing as a will to existence or a will to live: "The one who shot at truth with the words, 'will to existence' [*Willen zu Dasein*] did not hit it: this will – does not exist!" (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming'). It is unclear whether Nietzsche refers to Schopenhauer with this passage, since the latter's preferential term is "will to life" (*Wille zum Leben*). It could be that Nietzsche was envisioning some form of Darwinism, since when Nietzsche refers to Schopenhauer he more often uses the term "will to life", but Nietzsche does connect "will to existence" to pessimism in a later fragment (NL 12 1887 10[192]). Whatever its origin, Nietzsche objects to such a thing as a "will to existence" simply because he finds it evident that many things in existence are regarded higher than life itself: "Much is esteemed more highly by life than life itself" (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming'). This leads to the second consequence, namely that the moral values of good and evil are not in life itself, but emerge as a consequence of an exercise of will to power: "Your will and your values you set upon the river of becoming" (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming'). Nietzsche is not opposed to those who seek to impose themselves on the river of becoming, but celebrates the creativity of those who erect a culture of good and evil. There is no such thing as everlasting values, but rather an organic process wherein values are destroyed and others created: "And whoever must be a creator in good and evil – truly, he must first be an annihilator and break values" (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming').

There are a number of tirades against those who would misunderstand creativity. First, in "On the Sublime Ones", Zarathustra maligns those who claim to have overcome themselves through asceticism. These de-individualized individuals have renounced all tasting and disputing, but "all life is disputing of taste and tasting" (Z, 'On the Sublime Ones'). Second, in "On the Land of Education", Zarathustra has a prophetic view of a potential future wherein humanity has become sterile because it has become incapable of styling the diversity of their ideals and drives: "Motley, all ages and peoples peek from your veils; motley, all customs and beliefs speak from your gestures" (Z, 'On the Land of Education'). Creativity requires a zeal to collect oneself, a 'belief in believing', that aims towards a higher future. Third, in 'On Immaculate Perception' Zarathustra rants against those who claim to have a 'view from nowhere'. These individuals claim

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that their highest bliss comes from contemplation: "And to me the *immaculate* perception of all things would be that I desire nothing from things, except that I might lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes" (Z, 'On Immaculate Perception'). On the contrary, Zarathustra argues that all knowing is an expression of desire, and real desire is hot-blooded. Finally, in 'On Scholars' Zarathustra voices a similar complaint at scholars: recalling Nietzsche's own past as a philologist, Zarathustra attacks the lack of wisdom, daring and self-elevation in these scholars.

The foregoing brings out a tension again: on the one hand, there is the invocation to create one's own values; on the other hand, there is the fear for a decapitating nihilism because of the ultimate valuelessness of being. These two go hand in hand: if all values are manmade, then there is no more ultimate value, and then all might be meaningless. From the section "On the Sublime Ones", Nietzsche turns to this difficulty and progressively comes to suggest that a more ultimate value could lie in life-affirmation rather than in creation as such. Indeed, while creation is the hallmark of an affirmative individual, it can also lead towards life-denial because of the weariness of constant creation (evidenced from the songs discussed above). This gradually introduces the importance of release and being overcome for life-affirmation.

The final four sections of *Zarathustra* II then turn towards the very dire and realistic danger of a humanity that has tired of creation. At this point, Zarathustra does not only recognize how this peril might befall ascetics, democrats, contemplative ones and scholars, but it might also fall upon himself. This is put into words the first time by a soothsayer (*Wahrsager*), who prophesizes that

> a great sadness [will] descend over humanity. The best became weary of their works [. . .] Everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was! [. . .] All work was for naught, our wine has become poison, the evil eye seared yellow our fields and hearts [. . .] We have already become too weary to die. (Z, 'The Soothsayer')

The message of the soothsayer has an immediate effect on Zarathustra because it connects to some of the feelings of exasperation that he himself had suffered. In response, Zarathustra retreats into himself, into a deep sleep, where he has his own prophetic dream. In that dream, Zarathustra has "renounced all life", he is a "night watchman and guardian of graves" and "the brightness of midnight was about me always, loneliness crouched beside her, and thirdly, death-rattle silence" (Z, 'The Soothsayer'). These elements are reminiscent of the accusations Zarathustra made throughout Part I and II to, among others, the virtuous ones, the despisers of the body, priests and metaphysicians.

In that state of silent despair – or quiet desperation, as Thoreau might say – Zarathustra is tormented by a sense of claustrophobia: "But even more terrible and heart-constricting was the silence that set in around me when the gate fell

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quiet, and I sat alone in this treacherous silence" (Z, 'The Soothsayer'). This imagery of silence is particularly telling. Throughout the three consecutive songs, Zarathustra hesitated in which way to express his love for Life. The songs themselves end with "thus sang" – not "thus spoke" – Zarathustra, and "The Night Song" even seduces Zarathustra to silence. At this point, silence is a threat to Zarathustra, who with wild Wisdom in hand seeks to impose himself upon life. Where others grow silent, Zarathustra will be the shining star that keeps creating. The prophecy of the soothsayer announces that Zarathustra himself might eventually tire of his work. Returning to silence would then announce the failure of Zarathustra's work: for one who strives towards an ethic of self-creation, there is probably nothing more terrifying than being forced into silence. Zarathustra's dream is then an omen of a time when Zarathustra can rise no higher, that he will be forced into a release of self. The final point of *Zarathustra*, as I read it, is then to come to embrace such an occasional release.

The narrative of *Zarathustra* does not follow a straight line to this conclusion. Zarathustra's dream – which is based on Nietzsche's own recurring dream – continues on a seemingly more optimistic note. Zarathustra's silence is broken by three loud "blows [. . .] like thundering" upon a gate, in response to which Zarathustra shouted: "Alpa! Who bears his ashes to the mountain?" (Z, 'The Soothsayer') After that, a gust of wind throws open the gate and tosses in a coffin full of "children, angels, owls, fools and butterflies that mocked [Zarathustra]" (Z, 'The Soothsayer').[106] This sequence of scenes requires some careful exegesis. The exclamation "Alpa" could have a variety of meanings. It could simply be an uttering of dismay, such as 'alas' or 'wretched', which would signal the discontent of the gatekeeper who is rattled by the loud noise. In German, a nightmare is an *Alptraum*, where Alp refers to a mythological creature that would cause nightmares.[107] When preparing this section of *Zarathustra* II in the summer of 1883, Nietzsche used the term repeatedly in fragment form. Among these, there are two

106 The German line here includes the words '*Fratzen*' (masks/grimaces) and '*höhnte*' (to mock). Accordingly, the line recalls the verse in the first chapter of the second part in which Zarathustra notices, in a mirror held by a child, a devil's mask (*Fratze*) and agonizing laughter (*Hohnlachen*). In the latter, Zarathustra asserts from this that his teaching is in danger because it is not treated with seriousness. Accordingly, this reinforces my point that the dream articulates a challenge waged against Zarathustra's teachings.

107 Nietzsche experiences this dream himself and told his friend Reinhart von Seydlitz about it in the summer of 1877. Climbing a mountaintop, he was carrying his own ashes and suddenly heard the Alpa-line. We have no record of Nietzsche ever narrating the dream to Von Seydlitz other than the latter's account. In a number of *Nachlass* fragments, we do find that Nietzsche has had a dream similar to Zarathustra's dream. Von Seydlitz discusses Nietzsche's dream in his: *Wann, warum, was und wie ich schrieb*.

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fragments that could provide a clue. In a first fragment, Zarathustra claims that he desires to be the shattering wind, the Alpa, who terrorizes those who are asleep.[108] In a second fragment, Zarathustra takes Alpa as a sign of distress, one wherein he yearns for his silence to be broken and to feel reconnected to people.[109] The double meaning attached to this sentiment is what makes the text in *Zarathustra* so complex: the dream signals at the same time Zarathustra's disconnection from humanity (his loneliness) and his desire to be at a distance from people (his exaltation). It is not unlike the famous *Stachelschweine*-dilemma in Schopenhauer's philosophy:

> On a cold winter's day a community of porcupines huddled very close together to protect themselves from freezing through their mutual warmth. However, they soon felt one another's quills, which then forced them apart. Now when the need for warmth brought them closer together again, that second drawback repeated itself so that they were tossed back and forth between both kinds of suffering. (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 584 [690])

This is the human lot, according to Schopenhauer: "This is how the need for society, arising from the emptiness and monotony of our inner selves, drives people together; but their numerous repulsive qualities and unbearable flaws push them apart again" (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 584 [690–691]). Only those who have "a lot of his own inner warmth prefer to stay away from society in order neither to cause trouble nor to receive it" (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 585 [691]). As we saw in Schelling, there is a negative dialectics between creating distance by imposing oneself (light) and seeking closeness by submerging oneself (dark). Nietzsche uses the same imagery of noon and midnight as the highpoints of these respective aspects of human freedom which, when they come to their climax, naturally evolve into their opposite: the more we are distanced, the more closeness we seek; the more close, the more we desire distance. This is also narrated in terms of Zarathustra's vertical movement: up the mountain and down to the people. There is no resolution to this difficulty and the tension itself cannot be sublated permanently, otherwise life would develop no more.

Zarathustra has yet to come to the insight that self-release and submersion are equally necessary aspects of development as his own attempt to creativity. Paul Loeb reads this differently. In his view, *Zarathustra* is a dialectically-

108 "*Alpa*, rief ich, *Alpa*, *Alpa*. Wer trägt seine Asche zu Berge? Welch überwundenes Leben kommt zu mir, dem Nacht- und Grabwächter> Als ich euch träumte, träumte ich meinen schwersten Traum. Also will ich euer Schrecken sein – eure Ohnmacht und euer Wachwerden" (NL 10 1883 10[10]).

109 "Ach, ihr kennt sie nicht, die doppelte Stille, die herzzerschnürende. *Alpa*! schrie ich. Die Furcht und Sehnsucht schrie aus mir: eine Stimme wollte ich wieder hören Eine Stimme von Menschen her, wie sie ein Wind oder ein Vogel davon trägt. Starker Wille?" (NL 10 1883 13[3]).

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mediating process wherein Zarathustra gradually achieves his goal of self-cultivation as *Übermensch*: the dream is a prophetic image, Zarathustra has not yet reached his highest goal because he has yet to become master of the past (Loeb 2010, pp. 119–147). On the contrary, I believe that the prophetic image signals something deeply awry with Zarathustra's goal of exclusive self-cultivation, because it forgets the merits of self-release. In fact, one of Zarathustra's disciples explains the dream to Zarathustra in a way similar to Loeb's interpretation, but the section ends with Zarathustra gazing "long into the face of the disciple who had served as the dream interpreter, and he shook his head" (Z, 'The Soothsayer'). At the very least, this should signal that any univocal reading of Zarathustra as progressively accomplishing his quest is overly simplistic.

As *Zarathustra Part* II continues, its protagonist remains ardently focused upon his attempts to cultivate his creativity and meet his greatest challenge head on. In "On Redemption", the experience of loneliness in the previous sections moves Zarathustra to the people. Zarathustra is waylaid by a number of "cripples", that is, individuals who are bereft of something or who have a deformity. Mimicking the biblical narrative of Jesus healing of the crippled man (Matthew 9), one of the cripples implores Zarathustra to do likewise and thereby gain the faith of the cripples. This is what is generally thought of as redemption, namely to remove certain aspects or traits from someone that they might find infelicitous. For Zarathustra, however, the very desire to do so is a sign of a character that is not sufficiently affirmative, that is not capable of stylizing the myriad of traits of his personality into an artistic whole. As such, Zarathustra responds in terms of Nietzsche's critique of utilitarianism and socialism: when one takes away the suffering of an agent, one steals from them an impulse toward creativity. Zarathustra says: "If one takes the hump from the hunchback, then one takes his spirit too" (Z, 'On Redemption'). Taking away a deformity means taking away an occasion for self-overcoming.

Zarathustra's actual concern is not so much with these cripples, but rather with those who are deemed "great human beings", namely individuals who have mustered great prowess in a single field. He calls this an "inverse cripple who [has] too little of everything and too much of one thing" (Z, 'On Redemption'). A stylized individual is neither cripple nor inverse cripple; it is neither someone who feels cheated by life or someone who claims greatness because of a singular trait. A great individual is someone who blends a large variety into a wholeness, someone who can make his accidental traits into necessary aspects of his personality. Alas, this is not the state of mankind: "This is what is most frightening to my eyes, that I find mankind in ruins and scattered about as if on a battle field or a butcher field. And if my gaze flees from now to the past; it always finds the

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same: fragments and limbs and grisly accidents – but no human beings!" (Z, 'On Redemption').

Zarathustra then repeats that it is his purpose to render mankind into a necessary wholeness: "And all my creating and striving amounts to this, that I create and piece together into one, what is now fragment and riddle and grisly accident" (Z, 'On Redemption'). Thus, the power of the will might be capable of blending together grisly accident into a wholeness, but Zarathustra here stumbles upon a challenge that he already faced himself in 'The Grave Song', namely that the will is "impotent against that which has been – it is an angry spectator of everything past" (Z, 'On Redemption'). There are infelicitous aspects of one's past that one is incapable of transforming into a wholeness, some past events that weigh down on cheerful life affirmation. The Christian solution was to suffer in order to redeem the past, most ostensibly in how the vicarious atonement of Christ could relieve a penitent from original sin. Against this, Zarathustra claims that "no deed can be annihilated; how could it be undone through punishment?" (Z, 'On Redemption') In his essay *Transcendent Speculation of the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual*, Schopenhauer hesitantly suggests that past suffering can be redeemed by virtue of leading towards a higher state of being; in his case, denial of the will. But for Nietzsche, this does not truly redeem the past, it does not transform 'thus it was' into 'I willed it' simply because one still regards the past as infelicitous. A truly affirmative view of life would have to embrace the past as it is, to see it as necessary and not in terms of it bringing about a higher state of being.

The problem is not solved in any obvious way in 'On Redemption'. The closing line of the section even suggests that Zarathustra's optimistic teaching to his pupils contrasts with his own lack of strength for backward willing: "But why does Zarathustra speak otherwise to his pupils – than to himself?" (Z, 'On Redemption'). This notion of backward willing was prepared in *The Gay Science* 34, which reads:

> Every great human being exerts a retroactive force: for his sake all of history is put on the scale again, and a thousand secrets of the past crawl out of their hiding places – into *his* sunshine. There is no telling what may yet become a part of history. Maybe the past is still essentially undiscovered! So many retroactive forces are still needed! (FW 34)

The suggestion here seems to be that a great human being makes it so that the past is re-assessed in virtue of his achievement. For instance, the history of Rome will be read differently before and after Caesar: the so-called corruption of Rome is justified by his triumph. Another example: if Nietzsche achieves his goal of overcoming Christianity, then we would read the history of Europe quite differently than if he did not emerge. The great individual is someone who even

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changes our composure towards the past, who makes it possible to affirm an infelicitous past in the beyond-human affirmation achieved by that great individual.[110]

Towards the end of Part II, Zarathustra is gradually coming to the emotive realization that any life that simply seeks self-cultivation is bound to be confronted with certain, perhaps insurmountable, obstacles, most clearly evidenced by his tangling with the challenge of eternal recurrence throughout *Zarathustra* III. I will not deal with that issue here.[111] Rather, I will focus on two more sections and how these weigh in on our discussion of freedom, namely the final section of *Zarathustra* II, "The Stillest Hour", and the penultimate section of *Zarathustra* III, "The Other Dance Song". "The Stillest Hour" is Zarathustra's high point of hesitation. Much alike to the end of the first part, Zarathustra must once again retreat into his solitude, but now he does so "unwillingly" (Z, 'The Stillest Hour'). This equivocal section seems to be a cliffhanger; that is, it announces that Zarathustra's greatest challenge is yet to come and that Zarathustra fears that this is "beyond [his] strength" (Z, 'The Stillest Hour'). This lack of strength is that Zarathustra has acquired knowledge of something, but also that he hesitates to give it voice: "Indeed, I know it, but I do not want to speak it!" (Z, 'The Stillest Hour'). This section never reveals what exactly this knowledge is, but it amounts to one particularly great challenge that he could – but does not – present to his disciples. He spares his disciples the last and greatest challenge, a challenge he must first face alone in his solitude. If one reads such statements in conjunction with the opening of Part III, where Zarathustra says that: "I am standing now before my last peak and before what has been saved for me the longest time" (Z, 'The Wanderer'), then this naturally reads that Zarathustra has become intimately aware of the challenge of eternal recurrence but lacks the power – at present, at least – to face that challenge. Zarathustra admits to a lack of strength at the end of Part II, but this lack of strength will reveal to be a lack of proper perspective, not strength. I mean that in the drama of *Zarathustra* III, it is revealed to Zarathustra that the affirmation of life in the most extreme form – which is eternal recurrence – cannot be achieved merely by wild Wisdom, but must include a factor of silent affirmation. This comes to its most obvious climax in the penultimate section of *Zarathustra* III; that is, "The Other Dance Song".

"The Other Dance Song" is one of Nietzsche's most scintillating pieces of writing. The subtle imagery, the sudden changes in perspective, not to mention

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110 Monika Langer points out that Book Four of *The Gay Science* could also be seen as a precursor to backward willing. That book starts with an invocation of St. Januaris: Janus, the two-headed figure who looks at the past and the future simultaneously, see Langer (2010, p. 165).
111 On this topic, I recommend the work of Hatab (2004) Gillespie (2017, pp. 27–62).

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the elusive conclusion, are some of the most profound of his thoughts. The section is constructed in three parts; that is, a dance, a dialogue and a song. The dance is Zarathustra's attempts to approach, or seek intimacy with, the personification of life, but his advances are frustrated when Life dodges his advances: "I leaped over to you; you dodged my advance, retreating deftly; and only the licking, fleeing, trailing tongues of your hair were left me!" (Z, 'The Other Dance Song', 1). This continues on for quite a while: "I dance after you, and follow your trail using any clue. Where are you? Give me your hand! Even a finger will do!" (Z, 'The Other Dance Song', 1). After having his advances frustrated, Zarathustra tires of Life's elusiveness and shouts out: "I am truly tired of always playing your sheepish shepherd! You witch, if I have so far sung for you, now *you* for me will – yell! To the beat of my whip you will dance so and yell so! But did I forget the whip? – Oh no! – " (Z, 'The Other Dance Song', 1).

Zarathustra's playful dance with Life is a metaphor for his pursuit of overhumanity, and Life's elusiveness is a metaphor for Zarathustra's frustrations about his incapacity to be univocally affirmative. Some aspects of Life do seem to thwart or even oppose Zarathustra's attempts at self-cultivation; in particular, Zarathustra is upset about that "the small human beings recur eternally" (Z, 'The Convalescent', 2). To put it differently, there is no way to determinatively overcome humanity once and for all, but overhumanity will remain perennially an aspirational ideal that will be occasionally frustrated. In "The Other Dance Song", Zarathustra admits that his affirmative love for life can easily turn hostile and ascetic: instead of affirmation of life, now there emerges a more controlling attitude towards life ("the whip"). Any lover that desires control over his beloved will soon find that the appeal of the beloved disappears: possession is miles away from love. Affirmation requires the acceptance of the high and the low, the necessary and the accidental, the active and the passive.

An important rhetorical aspect of "The Other Dance Song" is that Nietzsche plays with the volume of the encounter between Zarathustra and Life. A vociferous and rambunctious dance is suddenly interrupted, the music stops playing, when Zarathustra shouts from the top of his lungs that he wants to control Life. The volume lowers as Zarathustra and Life engage head on: from "answering", to "speaking softly" to "whispering" (Z, 'The Other Dance Song', 2). In that conversation, Life appeals first and foremost to Zarathustra's own strategy in "The Dance Song", namely to emphasize how Zarathustra's Wild Wisdom is highly akin to herself: "We are both a couple of real do-no-good and do-no-evils!" (Z, 'The Other Dance Song', 2). Life senses intuitively that this strategy does not work and she fears that Zarathustra may turn out to be unfaithful, preferring his Wisdom over her. This would mean that Zarathustra privileges his pursuit of overhumanity, creativity and style over his affirmation of life. There is no

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denying that Zarathustra and Nietzsche take very seriously the quest of overhumanity, as they believe that only this will make reality bearable.

It seems that Zarathustra and Life have come to a stalemate. It is within Zarathustra's nature to pursue overhumanity, but now that pursuit might require his infidelity to Life. This is the tension between creativity and acceptance, now brought to a narrative highpoint in Zarathustra's face-to-face meeting with Life. At such a point, creative and autonomous language must come to a halt in favor of a different way of speaking. For this, Zarathustra's final answer to Life borders silence, a whisper: "'Yes', I answered, hesitating, 'But you also know – 'And I said something in her ear, right in between her tangled yellow, foolish shaggy locks'" (Z', The Other Dance Song', 2). Life's answer is ecstatic and Zarathustra admits that at this point he "loved life more than [he] ever loved all [his] wisdom" (Z', The Other Dance Song', 2).

As in any festival, the words spoken by Zarathustra are of secondary importance to the emotive and libidinal function of the festival. Zarathustra's 'speeches' have come to silence and recourse is taken to song, first one praising deep eternity (Z, 'The Other Dance Song', 3) and then one as general affirmation of life (Z, 'The Seven Seals'). These songs celebrate Zarathustra's capacity to affirm a silence, a moment of downward movement that relaxes tension, which dialectically strengthens his pursuit of overhumanity. But this project is never completed and therefore *Zarathustra* has no ending. This festival is a preamble to how Nietzsche sees religion at work in a tragic philosophy, as a means for the relaxation of tension and to inculcate bravery in the face of opposition. We will turn to that in the final chapter.

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Part III: **Mythology, Revelation and Religion**

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Chapter 7
Making Way for Revelation in Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*

These final chapters attend to the role of religion, broadly construed, in inculcating and advancing Schelling's and Nietzsche's rethinking of freedom as the solution to the deplorable state of Western thought and culture. The problem at hand takes on two guises. First, it can arise as a lack of vision in terms of how different elements of thought and reality stand in a dialectical interrelation, which for Schelling means an austere dualism, and for Nietzsche mean a motley blanket of non-stylized drives. Second, it can arise in terms of a totalitarian unity, in which just one aspect of an individual or culture usurps ultimate authority, which to Schelling is an excessive and reductive rationalism, and for Nietzsche is a univocal focus on intelligibility and historicity. In response, both Schelling and Nietzsche conceptualize a more vibrant and lively concept of freedom that mediates between absolute distinction and dialectical unity, which generally sees freedom as a terse tension between moulding and affirming the givenness of things.

The next step is to find a way to know and experience this freedom to the highest possible extent. I argue in this chapter – and those to come – that this can only occur for Schelling, as well as Nietzsche, through a complex and nuanced view of religion. The present chapter discusses how Schelling opens up the possibility to take revelation seriously again at a time when this was philosophically discouraged as a relevant source of information. Revelation became a major point for Schelling because of an inconsistency within *The Ages of the World*. Here, Schelling attempted to show by means of rational argument how creation and revelation must have transpired. But if creation and revelation are acts of freedom, then it must mean that they cannot be known *a priori*, only *a posteriori*. God's act of creation is an absolutely free act, not "a simple, necessary consequence of the divine idea, a consequence that *modo aeterno*, eternally, as one says, without contribution of his will follows". It must be a historical (*geschichtlicht*) act, which means that "God has created the world freely – by which one does not proclaim a logical fact, only an act" (SW 10).

Reconciling this inconsistency is then the general concern of Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*, a period that roughly started when he abandoned the project of *The Ages of the World* and started formally with his *Lectures at Erlangen* (1820 to 1826), but developed more comprehensively in Munich (1826–1841) and reached its climax in the much-anticipated Berlin Lectures (1841–1854).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-008

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Are there unsurmountable differences between the earlier and later philosophies of Schelling?[112] Schelling organically developed his philosophy which, at times, requires one to refine, rethink or even abandon certain ideas or even axioms. Schelling dreaded, even in his earliest philosophy, that rational thought might close in on itself and lock out new revelations. Saitya Brata Das makes an excellent point on this, worth quoting at length:

> Already in 1795, that is, at the instituting instance of dialectical-speculative thought, Schelling opens up a split, a *setting apart* and a *separation* between the unconditional demand (the demand for the unconditional) and a never to be accomplished totality of conditional predicates. He thereby exposes a wound or a caesura that is never to be repaired but only to be intensified in the wake Friedrich Jacobi's deconstruction of philosophy. Gestures towards the exit *of* philosophy *from* philosophy are already manifest in the early Schellingian thought. (Das 2016, p. 44)

To find the way out of the maze of philosophy, one is bound to make a few wrong turns. For instance, in an early essay entitled "Is a Philosophy of History Possible?" (1797), Schelling answers this eponymous question in the negative: if philosophy is systematic and *a priori*, and history is a constant back and forth, then a philosophy of history is impossible. Yet, as we will see in this chapter, in his *Spätphilosophie* Schelling would open the possibility for a philosophy of history *a posteriori*, one that starts to philosophize from historical revelation rather than one that tries to offer an *a priori* system of history.[113] Another example: when Schelling reflects back on his earliest engagement with Spinoza: "No one can hope to progress to the true and the complete in philosophy who has not at least once in his life lost himself in the abyss of Spinozism" (GNP 53 [66]). Getting lost can be cathartic: it can silence a certain way of thinking to make room for something else. In a famous letter to Hegel (February 1796), Schelling writes: "For us as well [Schelling means Lessing, Fichte and himself]

112 Some would allege that there are insurmountable differences between Schelling's earlier and his later views of philosophy. For instance, Slavoj Žižek argues that there is an unbridgeable gap between the middle and the later Schelling: "However, the gap that separates the *Stuttgart Seminars* from Schelling's late 'positive philosophy' remains unbridgeable: in late Schelling, God possesses His Being in advance; the process of Creation therefore concerns another being, not the being of God himself. As such, Creation is no longer the painful process of self-clarification and self-differentiation – one is even tempted to say: self-castration – God had to endure, but involves a activity performed from a safe distance" (Žižek 1996, p. 37; see also Medley 2015). In the following pages, a different reading of Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* is developed which interprets his shifts in position as an organic development rather than an unbridgeable gap.
113 For Schelling's evolution on this point and dialogue with Hegel, see Ameriks 2019, pp. 153–169.

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the orthodox concepts of God are no more. My reply is that we get even further than a personal being. I have in the interim become a Spinozist" (Hegel 1984, p. 32). Let us start exploring the way out of the maze.

Transcendental Idealism and Negative philosophy

The first step towards understanding Schelling's project in the later philosophy requires explaining his distinction between negative and positive philosophy, which is laid out near the end of his *Lectures on the Grounding of Positive Philosophy*:

> We have called the negative philosophy primarily a science of reason. This can make the positive philosophy appear as if it were a science opposed to reason. But the true relationship is this: in the former, reason proceeds from its immediate but contingent content, progressively liberating itself from that which is contingent, so that in a necessary progression it arrives at its enduring content. But it arrives at this without having to reach it as something actual: the content remains stuck in the mere idea. The *positive* philosophy proceeds from that which is entirely outside of reason, but reason submits to this only in order to immediately enter again into its rightful domain. (GPP 170–171)

We will start by addressing the intricate, complex relationship between negative and positive philosophy.[114] The main point is that if we want to understand God and religion as something more than the dry, watered-down counterfeit of themselves – which, for Schelling, is how modern philosophy has reduced them – we ought to move beyond a merely rationalist approach. But how can self-reflective reason open up towards something beyond reason? In Schelling's language: how can negative philosophy open up towards positive philosophy?

Negative philosophy is the science of systematic reason that details the necessary, causal and conceptual connections between thought-objects; positive philosophy is the science or practice of philosophy that deals with real, historical and free being. There has been a debate about the hierarchical relationship between the negative and positive way of doing philosophy, a discussion started by Horst Fuhrmans and Walter Schulz. Fuhrmans gave precedence to the positive over the negative (Furhmans 1940 and 1954), Schulz did the reverse

114 I will not delve into the different forms and discussions of negative philosophy in Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*, as I will be concerned mostly with Schelling's general discussion of the relationship between negative and positive philosophy. For a very extensive account of Schelling's negative philosophy, see Krüger 2008, pp. 101–156.

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(1975).[115] The very discussion sounds un-Schellingian: hierarchical subordination appears dualistic. Instead, we should recognize that Schelling abstractly divides philosophy into two necessary aspects that cannot ultimately be separated – like the inside and the outside of a teapot. This is what Xavier Tilliete called the 'doubling' (*dédoublement*) of philosophy (Tilliete 1994, pp. 54–69 and 1987, pp. 182–199 – see also Roux 2016, pp. 17–21). Schelling does not oppose negative philosophy (Fichte) but shows where it must make room for the positive; Schelling does not oppose the positive philosophy (Jacobi) but requires it to gives itself over to rational thought.[116]

The distinction between negative and positive philosophy did not start with Schelling. Bruce Matthews alleges it to have a Kantian pedigree: "Schelling's understanding of positive philosophy flows seamlessly from Kant's own demarcation of the sphere of practical philosophy made in the *First Critique*; that is everything that follows from freedom. Positive philosophy explores the rebellious extra-logical nature of existence" (Matthews 2007, p. 16). This remarks merits closer inspection. Kant separates philosophy into a theoretical and practical part, but he did emphasize the unity of these while stressing the overriding primacy of practical reason:

> But if pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law proves it to be, it is still only one and the same reason which, whether from a theoretical or a practical perspective, judges according to a priori principles; and then it is clear that, even from the first perspective its capacity does not extend to establishing certain propositions affirmatively, although they do not contradict it, *as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest* of pure reason it must accept them – indeed as something offered to it from another source, which has not grown on its own land but yet is sufficiently authenticated – and try to compare and connect them with everything that it has within its power as speculative reason, being mindful, however, that these are not its insights but are yet extensions of its use from another, namely a practical perspective; and this is not in the least opposed to its interest, which consists in the restriction of speculative mischief. (Kant 1996a, p. 237 [5:121])

For Schelling, the interplay between negative and positive philosophy is more dynamic: human reasoning is brought to positive philosophy through negative philosophy and then uses negative philosophy to incorporate the positive. For a comprehensive, systematically-evolving philosophy, reason needs negative

115 For further discussion of the controversy, see Hutter (1996, pp. 15–40) and Krüger (2008, pp. 31–35).

116 For more of a systematic overview of the distinction between negative and positive philosophy, see Tritten (2012, pp. 30–52).

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and positive philosophy in a dual-unity, which means that, at the same time, they limit and complement each other.

Kant argued that the noumenal ideas – the soul, the thing-in-itself, the world, God – are in excess of theoretical reason. If one then wants to think of God as something transcending the sphere of immanence – and the lamentable consequences of Spinozist philosophy suggest that we do – then we must assume that the being of God is prior to and in excess of conceptual thought. This is where philosophy must admit to its own poverty: philosophical concepts seem empty and useless when it comes to describing what exceeds those concepts. But is this really where philosophy comes to die, with the releasing but equally constricting awareness of its infirmity? If this were the case, then Schelling would have drawn the same conclusion as Kant did in his *First Critique:* knowledge that builds from empirical intuitions (*Anschaaung*) is categorized by the transcendental apparatus of the subjective mind – the pure intuitions of time and space, as well as the categories of the understanding – in such a way that the original source of intuition is unknown. We know the *effects* of what is beyond thought, but not what *is* beyond thought. Kant did recognize that there ought to be an external source to empirical intuition in order to account for the spontaneity of empirical experience, a noumenon. Kant's argument was rightly called out for being paradoxical: how can one rationally presuppose something that cannot be known? This seems to be an ambiguous case of simultaneous knowing and not-knowing. In response, Kant thoroughly reworked the section "On the ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena" in the B-edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and distinguished between a noumenon in negative and positive senses. In the negative sense, a noumenon is "a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition, because we abstract from the manner of our intuition of it" (Kant 1999, p. 360 [B 307]). In this sense, a noumenon is merely an abstract thought-construction, a concept at the very limits of what can be thought conceptually, one at which thought arrives through abstraction of all forms of sensible intuition (all that is contingent) so as to retain only the thing-in-itself.[117] For Kant, a noumenon can only be used legitimately in this sense, namely as a limit concept. Conversely, a noumenon in a positive sense is "an object of a non-sensible intuition". It requires "a special kind of intuition, namely intellectual intuition, which, however, is not our own, and the possibility of which we cannot understand" (Kant 1999, pp. 360–361 [B 307]). Any special

117 For further discussion of how Kant arrived at the idea of a negative noumenon, see Rescher (2000, pp. 5–20).

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capacities that would give human beings access to what is beyond thought are simply inadmissible and romantic visions [*Schwärmerei*].

But after his *First Critique*, Kant was forced to witness the next step in transcendental philosophy, for instance in Fichte's philosophy and Schelling's earliest philosophy. Here, a very special sense of intellectual intuition was assumed to provide access to metaphysics. In a contribution to the *Berliner Monatschrift* known as *On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy* (1796), Kant laments this development:

> Away with ratiocination [*Vernünftelei*] from concepts, which attempts the task only by the roundabout [*Umschweif*] method of general attributes, and which, before it yet has a matter which it can grasp immediately, first demands specific forms to which it may subject this matter! And given also that reason can offer no further explanation whatever about the legitimacy of the outcome of these, its high insights, there remains nevertheless a fact: 'Philosophy has its secrets that can be felt'. (Kant 2002, p. 436 [8:395])

Some years later (originally 1813, reworked edition in 1847), Arthur Schopenhauer would join Kant in his hesitations, wary of such projects that assign to human beings a special capacity of immediate intellection. In his view, this trend simply assumed

> a completely imaginary, or in plain language, a made-up faculty, in which one had something like a little window that opened upon the superlunary, or indeed the supernatural world, a window through which could be received, fully finished and prepared, all the truths that old-fashioned, honest, reflective, and deliberative reason had previously troubled itself with and struggled over in vain for centuries. (Schopenhauer 2012, p. 116 [123])

And again, many years later, Kant would find an unlikely ally in Friedrich Nietzsche; although the latter blames the former for opening the door to this trend. Nietzsche remarks that Kant had discovered "a new faculty in humans" (JGB 11), namely a faculty to know synthetic judgments *a priori*. This was convenient since Kant had sought to answer the question: 'How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?', and his answer has been "*by virtue of a faculty*, which is to say: *enabled by an ability*" (JGB 11). The argument had given rise to "the honeymoon of German philosophy [. . .]; all the young theologians of the Tübingen seminary ran off into the bushes – they were all looking for 'faculties'" (JGB 11).

Kant had urged to confine the concept of the noumenon to a negative and regulative function, a necessary, rational presupposition, a line beyond which thought can but may not pass. This argument did not last long. One of Kant's earliest and most notable critics was G.E. Schulze – perhaps not coincidentally Schopenhauer's primary instructor in philosophy – pointed out in his anonymously published *Aenesidemus* (1792) that there was an obvious error in Kant's argument. After Kant had convincingly shown that the forms of experience (such

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as time, space and causality) uniquely apply to phenomenal reality, he proceeded to assign causal effectiveness to the thing-in-itself: which is, by his own definition, beyond phenomenal reality. Despite his general allegiance to Kant in matters of epistemology, Schopenhauer would repeat Schulze's argument:

> Kant grounded the presupposition of the thing in itself in an inference according to the law of causality, namely that empirical intuition, or more precisely the sensation in our sense organs that generates empirical intuition, must have an external cause. But according to his own, correct, discovery, we are familiar with the law of causality a priori; consequently it is a function of our intellect, and thus subjective in origin.
>
> (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 463 [516])

If Schulze's argument is read charitably (which is something Fichte, Schelling and even Schopenhauer did), the conclusion is not that we ought to discard the idea of a noumenon but that we cannot think about the connection between the noumenon and phenomenon in terms of causality.[118]

But Kant had pre-emptively provided a solution to this difficulty in his *Second* and *Third Critique*. According to Kant's practical philosophy, the moral law is an *a priori* necessary self-legislation. This buoys the assumption that the moral law must be consistent and cogent and, as such, whatever inferences are necessary to support the consistency of the moral law are rationally valid. Note that such rational validity is only practical, not theoretical, and so does not reveal anything theoretical, speculative or empirical about reality. This means that whatever is a necessary, enabling condition of practical morality must be postulated as practically real. In effect, this means that it is rationally justifiable to assume for human beings that they are free, that they have an immortal soul and that there exists a God who serves as a judicator that aligns happiness with virtuous merit.

And so, lo and behold, there is a bridge beyond finitude through practical rationality. But this has a whiff of wishful thinking: one *wants* to believe that God is real, the soul is immortal and that human beings are free in order to justify moral duty. This objection was raised to Kant by Thomas Wizenmann, and Kant responds in the *Second Critique* (Kant 1996a, p. 255n [5:143n]). Very generally, one could wonder why reality must be such that it enables and supports morality? Is it not more often the case that reality appears indifferent to moral considerations? And what of morality, isn't it also merely a product of a certain conditioning, a self-inflicted cruelty? The world does not have to be a certain

118 The central reason for Schopenhauer's re-interpretation of transcendental idealism stems from this problem. Schopenhauer is convinced that transcendental idealism implies that phenomenal and noumenal reality are *toto genere* different, and that the relationship between these cannot be causal. See Vanden Auweele 2017b, pp. 99–112.

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way simply because we desire it to be so, regardless of whether this desire is rational or not. Nietzsche writes in *The Anti-Christ*:

> Why did the world of German scholars, three-quarters of whom are pastors' and teachers' sons, go into such fits of delight at the appearance of *Kant* –, why were Germans so convinced [. . .] that Kant marked a change for the *better*? The theologian instinct of the German scholar had guessed just *what* was possible again . . . a hidden path to the old ideal lay open; the concept of a '*true* world', the concept of morality as the *essence* of the world (– the two most vicious errors in existence!) were once again (thanks to an exceedingly canny scepticism), if not provable, then at least no longer *refutable* . . . Reason, the *right* of reason, does not extent that far. (AC 10).

Transcendental philosophy is thus forced between a number of awkward alternatives. Either it retains a sense of dualism and denies then knowledge of that which exceeds our intuitions. Or, practical reason is a way beyond the merely phenomenal, but then Kant thinks of the noumenal in extension of phenomenal rationality. In neither of these ways, transcendental idealism cannot access something that which is beyond (or before) rationality. In the following, we will discuss how Schelling allows for a move beyond merely negative philosophy.

The Move Beyond Mere Finitude: Negative to Positive Philosophy (and Back Again)

Libraries have been filled to the brim with attempts to dismantle these objections to Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy. Let us practice impiety and take for granted that Kant's two arguments that would connect noumenal to phenomenal reality – either through causality or practical rationality – cannot these objections. If this is the case, transcendental philosophy leaves no avenue for subjective consciousness to reach beyond itself. Fichte would agree, and therefore argued that the transcendental ego must posit the absolute by itself. Although initially agreeing with Fichte, Schelling would later depart in another direction.

Schelling moves away from transcendental philosophy from his middle period onwards. Is this progress or regression? Is Schelling's last philosophy, his positive philosophy "science from the beginning" (SW 78), an improvement upon Kant or a step back from Kant? Each side has its supporters. The earliest reception of Schelling's Berlin Lectures was happy to dismiss Schelling's last move as mysticism and theological orthodoxy. In the 20th century, the argument was made – initially by Horst Fuhrmans and Xavier Tilliette – that Schelling breaks free from the bonds of German idealism and consequently he is no longer subject to Kant's auto-critique of reason because he no longer moves within

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(transcendental) idealism (Fuhrmans 1956/57, pp. 302–323, Tilliete 1970). A different reading suggests that Schelling's last philosophy is not so much in opposition to Kant and idealist philosophy, but it argues (convincingly or not) for the need to take up certain forgotten or abused ideas in higher idealist philosophy. Schelling does not deny but improves upon Kantian philosophy or, as Lother Knatz calls it, Schelling's later philosophy is "not stepping back from but going beyond Kant" (Knatz 1999, p. 14 – my translation).[119] This means that Schelling takes up the general framework of Kantian philosophy but, through reflection on certain elements of reality that are not sufficiently accounted for in this framework, he is forced to move beyond transcendental idealism. Similarly, Alex Hutter and Tyler Tritten argue that Schelling radicalizes Kant's transcendental idealism by inverting it: "The Late Schelling, contrary to his easy dismissal as mystic and conservative, does not critique Kant by abandoning Kant in favor of a pre-critical dogmatics, but he rather radicalizes Kant's critical transcendentalism by inverting it" (Tritten 2017, p. 142; see also Hutter 1996). Kant's starting point is within reason, Schelling's is outside of reason.

Schelling's own remarks on Kant's philosophy might clarify this issue. Schelling believes that Kant did philosophy a service by publicly dismantling traditional metaphysics – even though Schelling believes that it had already collapsed well before Kant (GPP 39–41). Traditional metaphysics was problematic because "the knowledge [produced by it] was simply artificial, since the coherency it achieved was merely a coherency in thoughts, not in the matter itself" (GPP 41). The collapse of traditional metaphysics could make the philosopher do two things: "Either he must abandon metaphysics altogether, that is, all knowledge of that which lies outside and beyond experience, or he must search for another way to arrive at it" (GPP 42). On the theoretical level, Kant took the first approach; on the practical level, he took the second. Schelling wonders, however, whether there is not a theoretical means by which one can arrive at supersensible knowledge. Schelling thought that Kantian philosophy did not give fair consideration to certain angles for achieving this. Reflecting on his own engagement with Kant while lecturing in Berlin, Schelling admitted that "it was clear to me ever since my study of Kantian philosophy that this could not be the whole of philosophy" (O 137). What was missing in particular were those elements of reality that are beyond subjective and systematic reason.

Schelling would say that Kant's transcendental way of doing philosophy is 'negative'. The reason for this, to put things provocatively, is because Kant

119 For similar appraisals of Schelling's later philosophy, see Kasper (1965) and Medley (2015, p. 59).

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lacks a robust sense of negation. For Kant, the negation of reason happens within reason alone, and so his philosophy cannot extend to something existing *per se* without concept. The nothing remains always relative to the something. This was drawn out by Schopenhauer near the close of his *opus magnum*, *The World as Will and Representation*, where he attacks Kant for his troublesome concept of an absolute nothing:

> I must begin by noting that the concept of *nothing* is an essentially relative one, and always refers to something particular that it negates. People (namely Kant) have ascribed this quality only to the *nihil privativum*, which is indicated by a '-' in contrast to a '+', where the '-' can be made into a '+' by looking at things from the opposite perspective; they oppose the *nihil privativum* to the *nihil negativum*, which would be nothing in every respect, and is illustrated with the example of a logical contradiction that cancels itself out. But considered more closely, an absolute nothing, a true *nihil negativum* is not even conceivable. (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 436 [484])

Schopenhauer here refers to Kant's often-neglected table of nothing (Kant 1999, pp. 382–383 [A 290–292/B 347–349]). Schopenhauer might have a point: when one stays within transcendental idealism, an absolute nothing – which has no relationship to reason – is inconceivable. And yet, it is the inconceivable that is the enabling condition of whatever can be conceived.

Kant's theoretical philosophy, further elaborated by Fichte (and the early Schelling), is what Schelling considers a fully-formed negative philosophy. This way of doing philosophy is not wrong, only (self)limited: its main preoccupation is to provide a comprehensive, self-enclosed systematic account of reality that conceptually relates essences and objects to one another. Schelling himself defines it as follows: "[. . .] a science that is wholly a priori, in itself progressing and in itself enclosed, which brings about everything out of itself; a pure science of reason" (O 101). Negative philosophy is a system enclosed within itself, within subjective reason, which was the ultimate goal of modern philosophy that was completed by Kant and Fichte. Modern philosophy was idealistic, namely, uniquely concerned with subjective thought and no longer invested in finding the object behind or above thought: "We have found already the direction that philosophy took since Descartes: He said 'I think' and no longer could we penetrate into the object of thought" (SW 44).

Such a system of rational consistency can be finished, according to Schelling, but at the point of its completion this system appears still to be lacking in real being. This is the case because negative philosophy has no bearing on real being, "she would be true, even if nothing ever exists" (O 147). For this reason, one may not identify Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* with negative philosophy. Sean McGrath rightly notes that "while the method of nature-philosophy is plainly a priori, it is not entirely clear that nature-philosophy is

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merely negative. In his 1841 retrospective on negative philosophy, Schelling says that nature-philosophy was impelled by a genuine search for the real" (MCGrath 2016, p. 122). *Naturphilosophie* was indeed a searching for being, for the real, but it did so on different grounds than positive philosophy: it did not look to existing nature but to ideal nature. Positive philosophy takes up a different methodology, one that starts from the immediate revelation of real, historical and factual being, which is beyond conceptual representation and cognition, a philosophy "that guides human beings beyond mere representation" (SW 78). When reason has finished its system, reason looks to what is beyond the system. Schelling makes use of the phrasing, "to get to the bottom of things":

> But what is here, at 'the bottom of the issue'? Not being, for this, on the contrary, is what lies on the surface of the issue, that which immediately comes to mind, and, thus, what is already presupposed in all this: if I want to get to the bottom of an issue, for example, an event, then the issue – in this instance, the event – must already be given. At the bottom of this issue, is therefore, not being, but the essence, the potency, the cause. (GPP 75–76)

A similar concern moved Arthur Schopenhauer in his *opus magnum* beyond merely representational reality to reality-in-itself or, Schelling's terms, from negative to positive philosophy:

> But what goads us to further research is simply the fact that we are not satisfied with knowing that we have representations, that they are such and such, and that they are joined according to this or that law whose general expression is always the principle of sufficient reason. We want to know the meaning of those representations: we ask if this world is nothing more than representation; in which case it would have to pass over us like an insubstantial dram or ghostly phantasm, not worth our notice; or in fact whether it is something else, something more, and if so, what this could be.
> (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 123 [117–118])

Schopenhauer's concerns in 1818/19 have a somewhat existential ring, but for Schelling the issue is mostly metaphysical. If real things are the subject of philosophy proper, what enables such things to be? This is the same question that is posed in *Freedom-Essay*; namely, what is the ground of being. Negative philosophy has a systematic principle by which it aims to reduce all contingencies. For Fichte, this was the 'I' and, for the early Schelling, this is the identity (or indifference) of subject and object. But what underlies this first principle of reason? What enables, precedes and exceeds reason?

But these questions are regressive, not progressive: we start from conceptual thought and return to its ground rather than starting from the ground and progressing towards thought. In other words, it is still a negative philosophy, a science that aims to move beyond all factors contingent in order to get to a first principle: "The science that accomplishes this elimination of what is contingent

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in the first concepts of being – and with this frees being itself – is critical, is of the negative type, and possesses in its result what we have called being itself, yet still only in thought" (GPP 79). When one arrives then at this first principle, one recognizes it as the limit-concept of being: "Philosophical rationalism came to closure and completion in itself; the goal of a mere science of reason was reached completely. Arrived at its end, it must necessarily recognize its limits" (SW 54). For Schelling, this is why positive philosophy has eluded many modern philosophers: they had not yet come to full closure with regard to rationalist philosophy. Only when negative philosophy is completed does one become aware of the fact that something is still missing, namely real and historical being. Therefore, at most negative philosophy can lead to positive philosophy only in terms that negative philosophy hands a task (*Aufgabe*) to positive philosophy, namely to find real being:

> The negative philosophy does not have to prove the object of the next philosophy as actual; the conclusion of the one is not the beginning of the other. The negative provides its end merely as a task, not a principle. The means to complete the task must be given to the positive by itself. (O 138)

Schelling believes that Kant and Fichte brought rational philosophy to its completion. But philosophy itself was still incomplete: it lacked a sense of (absolute) being. This is where positive philosophy was supposed to begin.

But, alas for Schelling, the history of thought went in a different direction. *Enter Hegel*. Hegelian philosophy sought to remedy the lack of negative philosophy through pushing rational, negative philosophy beyond its limits. Hegel's reach, to paraphrase Robert Browning, exceeded his grasp. In so doing, Hegel effectively collapsed the distinction between positive and negative philosophy, applying the principles of negative to positive philosophy. In other words, Hegel identified conceptual reason with real being as if these were co-originary, identical things: what is real is reasonable and what is reasonable is real. For Schelling, Hegel's philosophy shows that negative philosophy is self-insisting: it tends not only to behave like a science of reason but also a science of being. If that is the case, then the principle of negative philosophy determines God through rational principles, which engages God into a necessary process of self-development. God "takes refuge in the concept [*in den Begriff flüchtet*]" (Hegel 2006, p. 267). For Schelling, the problem with Hegel's philosophy is not that it is a negative philosophy, but its fundamental error "consists precisely in that it wants to be positive" or that "the philosophy that Hegel presented is the negative driven beyond its limits" (GPP 80). Negative philosophy by itself is not "wrong, only lacking [. . .] Logical systems become wrong when they exclude the positive and propose themselves as positive" (SW 12). Hegel illegitimately applied the

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principle of negative philosophy to being itself, to positive philosophy, which is beyond the scope of that principle. In other words, Hegel starts only from within reason, but does not ask what comes before reason: "The whole world is at it were caught in the nets of the understanding or reason, but the question is how it has fallen into these nets, since there is clearly something else and *more* than mere reason, yes something that strives beyond these boundaries" (GNP 121 [147]).

Mildly agitated by Hegel's success, Schelling argues that Hegel's innovations miss the constitutive and necessary difference between a system that completes the system of thought and a system that starts from the very beginning, a beginning that must precede thought and can therefore not be reasonable. Contrary to Hegel, Schelling recognizes that a different philosophy is required to know being:

> But to know in its own purity, through the exclusion of contingent being, that this being itself *exists above* that being: this can no longer be a task of that negative science, but of a different one, which in contrast is to be called a positive science, and for which that negative science first sought the proper and highest object. (GPP 79)

Here, Schelling sides with Kant over Hegel: rational reflection is moved to accept a noumenon as the first beginning of sensory intuition and rational thought. That first beginning, real being, is not something that can be cognized through rational thought. Kant "shows in general how futile it is for reason to attempt through inferences to reach beyond itself to existence" (GPP 83). But whether or not such a noumenon can be known "in its own purity" at all, not merely inferred as a thought-construct (Kant), will require a capacity for special intuition. Against Kant, Schelling believes that such special intellectual intuition is available to human beings, not because (some) human beings have extraordinary capacities (this would minimize the fall from the absolute), but because being reveals itself spontaneously.

Regardless of the complex nexus of historical interrelationships – which implicate not only Hegel and Kant, but also Fichte, Spinoza and Böhme – Schelling's point is straightforward. We are in need of a fully-developed negative philosophy that, at its conclusion, is self-critically limited to the domain of its applicability: "I will expound the true negative philosophy, which, aware of itself, in noble abstinence completes itself within its limits as the greatest benefit – at least for the moment – that can be accorded the human spirit" (GPP 81). Paramount to the successful completion of negative philosophy is to know where the limits lie. Schelling is remarkably vague on this issue. As long as one is engaged in negative philosophy, one is not necessarily aware of the fact that one is moving closer to a limit that will inaugurate positive philosophy. Yet, the more carefully one designs, structures and completes negative philosophy, the

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clearer it becomes that negative philosophy is to be complemented with a positive philosophy:

> Only the correctly understood negative philosophy leads to the positive philosophy; conversely, the positive philosophy is first possible only in contrast to the correctly understood negative. Only the latter's withdrawal back into its limits makes the former discernable and then, not only possible, but also necessary". (GPP 80)

Elsewhere, Schelling writes that "the more purely the negative philosophy was put forth, the more forcefully the positive had to rise up in contrast to it" (GPP 86). As an analogy, one could think of the process of developing a negative philosophy as the rotary movement of the divine in *The Ages of the World*: the agonal circular motion of retracting and expanding in the ground of being. From within that rotary motion, there is born a desire for true existence, which is a desire to break the necessity of the ground in creation and self-revelation, an equivocal yearning for a real beginning. Similarly, the construction of negative philosophy remains trapped within conceptual thought and, when this is finalized, a yearning breaks through for a more positive, more real, beginning of philosophy. The self-enclosure of rational thought reaches outwards. But this reaching outwards does not mean that negative philosophy organically flows over into positive philosophy; instead, negative philosophy reaches its highest, ultimate point and then offers this point up to positive philosophy as its point of departure, its task to complete:

> The foundation that we of course recognize from the *perspective* of the negative (but not of the positive) philosophy is not to be understood as though the end of the negative philosophy would be the beginning of the positive. This is not so. The former hands over its final concept to the positive only as a demand, not as a *principle* (GPP 92–93).

The Hegelian mistake is that negative philosophy usurps positive philosophy; a different mistake is to believe that positive philosophy should supplant negative philosophy. Negative and positive philosophy are two necessary sides of one philosophical system. Schelling illustrates this carefully as follows:

> If a matter requires two elements, A and B, and I find myself at first only in possession of one, A, then the fact that B is added to A, or that I now no longer have merely A, but possess rather A + B, does not in fact *change* A. What is only prevented is that I believe through the mere possession of A to already possess or to be able to attain what is only first possible through the addition of B. (GPP 81)

In fact, the real danger for philosophy is if either the negative or the positive philosophy attempts to supplant the other. Schelling reads Jacobi's fideism as a project wherein the positive philosophy seeks to invalidate the negative: Jacobi re-introduced the idea of a hyper-rational revelation of the absolute, but did it in

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such a way that rational thought ought to be annulled. Jacobi was right, according to Schelling, to warn of the nihilistic consequences of a purely negative philosophy, but he should not have done this at the expense of rational thought (see, especially, GNP 183–188 [164–168]). The true aim of philosophy ought to be developing a tense togetherness of positive and negative philosophy, wherein each one leads towards, limits and enriches the other. Positive philosophy provides the material which negative philosophy aims to formalize in a system of reason. Here, Schelling makes an illuminating analogy with Copernicus: "When Copernicus set up his system, he did not go beyond all representations, but only beyond the representations which he just corrected. Philosophy must also become understandable for human representation, and its triumph is to bring closer the absolute νοητον [intelligibility] of human representation" (SW 79). Schelling carefully seeks a middle position between pan-rationalism and fideism, which at one point he calls metaphysical empiricism.

Metaphysical Empiricism

While negative philosophy starts by stripping away those aspects of thought which are contingent in order to arrive at a first and highest principle, positive philosophy must begin from the real, historical and factual revelation of being: "For the positive can begin purely of itself with even the simple words: I want that which is *above* being [*Seyn*], that which is not merely being [*Seyende*], but what is more than this, the *Lord* of being [Herr *des Seins*]" (GPP 93). The philosophical position that Schelling believes best captures such a view is, slightly paradoxically, named 'metaphysical empiricism', that is, the position that the metaphysical manifests itself empirically, or in other words, that which is in excess of conceptual thought reveals itself in reality and can therefore be known *a posteriori* rather than *a priori*. There are clues then, breadcrumbs if you will, that lead from reality to God – no stairways to Heaven, though, only indirect signs of divine presence in the wholeness of nature. To understand these, one needs to see the whole as well as the particular.

Empiricism, for Schelling, is the philosophical position that accepts the authority of something given, and subsequently responds by investigating the rationale of that givenness. Rationalism, to the contrary, does not accept the authority of the given and focuses exclusively on the mere interrelatedness of ideas.[120] With

120 Schelling proposes his definitions of rationalism and empiricism as true descriptions of these phenomena. While not entirely implausible, they remain fairly abstract representations

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this definition of empiricism in mind, Schelling distinguishes four different senses of empiricism: epistemological empiricism, mystical empiricism, theosophy and metaphysical empiricism (the second and third are sometimes identified with each other). Epistemological empiricism claims that "all knowledge is limited to experience through the senses, in which everything supersensible is either denied as such or as a possible object of knowledge" (GPP 115). This seems to be the form of empiricism that is most widely recognized in philosophy, namely one which only recognizes the authority of that which can be experienced empirically. Schelling detects an illegitimate presupposition in this view; namely that even the absolute authority of empirical observation cannot, as such, exclude the possibility of the experience of the super-sensible. Even if one defines the super-sensible as that which transcends the sensible world, the super-sensible would still have to represent itself in the sensible world in order to be real. Accordingly, epistemological empiricism cannot reject the possibility that there can be knowledge of the super-sensible:

> Now suppose that the discussion was about an intelligence in the world, assumed to have a free will for action – this intelligence would likewise not be knowable a priori, but only through its deeds that occur in experience. Although a supersensible being, it will nonetheless be something that can only be known commensurate with experience. Empiricism as such, therefore, hardly excludes all knowledge of the supersensible. (GPP 113)

An important disclaimer: Schelling's appeal to the experience of the supersensible should not be read in terms of historical miracles or the intimate experience of God in private feeling. As will be discussed more fully below, the experience of the supersensible occurs in the philosophical realization of the historical (*geschichtlich*) revelation of being (or God).[121]

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of the fullness of rationalist and empiricist philosophers, most of which are not pigeonholed quite as easily. For instance, most of German Idealism maligned Descartes as the inventor of rationalist thought and the dualism between thinking and nature. However, Descartes was very receptive to the interplay between thinking and nature, for one in his extensive account of the passions of the soul (see Guenancia 2010). For Schelling, these conceptualizations of rationalism and empiricism play a role in his suggestive reconstruction of the trajectory of philosophical thought, not as veracious accounts of the real essence of rationalist or empiricist thought. For extensive discussion of Schelling's rethinking of the distinction of rationalism and empiricism (see Roux 2016, pp. 89–130).

121 Schelling's usage of the term 'historical' is another terminological conundrum. Most readers in Schelling's time would be reminded of the so-called historical arguments for the existence of God, most notably the miracles of Jesus Christ and the Saints. For Schelling, however, historical has more of a Hegelian connotation, namely the totality of a developmental process where, in the purview of the entirety of its content, we are revealed something about the

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Mystical empiricism is the view that "the supersensible can become an actual object of experience, whereby it goes without saying that this experience cannot be of the merely sensuous type but must have something about it that is inherently mysterious, mystical" (GPP 115). Schelling is thinking of Jacobi, who proposes "a philosophy that goes beyond all external facts but nevertheless relies on the inner fact of an irresistible *feeling* to convince us of the existence of God while holding that reason inevitably leads to atheism, fatalism, and, thus, to a blind system of necessity" (GPP 115–116). What Schelling finds objectionable about this type of empiricism is that it opposes rationalism (even philosophy as such) wholesale, since this type of mysticism believes that rationalism *inevitably* leads to atheism, fatalism, etc. In other words, mystical empiricism is a philosophical position that hopes to supplant negative philosophy in favor of an irrational, positive philosophy. This is then not a positive *philosophy* at all since such mystical empiricism leaves no room for philosophical deduction: the transcendent arrives, and we are nothing but passive receptacles. Alexandra Roux phrases the distinction between Schelling and Jacobi aptly:

> Like Jacobi, [Schelling] effectively thinks that the cycle of rationality (of possibilities purely conceptual) is only the 'cycle of necessity'. He does not hold, however, that we cannot break through this cycle or that, for the purpose of breaking the circle, we have to retire rational thought purely and simply. Rather, he holds that it is through freely penetrating in this circle that the non-necessary or the absolutely free 'makes itself intelligible'. (Roux 2016, pp. 23–24 – my translation)

The mistake on Jacobi's part is to remain trapped in the kind of dualism between faith and reason, freedom and nature, which Schelling dismantled in his higher realism of *Freedom-Essay* and *The Ages of the World*. According to Schelling's argument, there is good reason to assume more of a porosity or fluidity between freedom and nature, between faith and reason, than modern philosophy – with its binary oppositions and lack of intermediate terminology – was able to recognize.

Mystical empiricism is empty as a philosophical position because it provides no satisfactory content to the experience of the absolute. According to Schelling,

> all those who celebrated this thing of feeling [*Gefühlswesen*], went down with *mental exhaustion* [geistiger Auszehrung], their faith itself was without content as could be no other according to the nature of the matter – to such an extent that the human spirit was truly to be lamented if it could not strive from more powerful and higher things. (SW 58)

super-sensible: "The expression 'historical', when used by philosophy, refers, thus, not to the manner of knowing *in it*, but exclusively to *the content* of the knowing" (GPP 138n).

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Jacobi's point was that God was known immediately to human beings because of the immediate certainty of faith, and not through whatever form of rational deduction (speculative or dialectical). Schelling, however, claims that any knowledge of God must be mediated by something "given, factual, historical [*Gegebenes, Tatsächliches, Geschehens*]" by which God becomes "concrete, real and empirical [*konkreter, reeller und empirischer*]" (SW 59). Jacobi's reluctance to mediate philosophical knowledge by historical events (even though, ironically, Jacobi contributed significantly to the philosophical re-evaluation of history by rejecting Kant's rational religion) is a type of self-willed ignorance: we happily do not think about, but simply believe in, God. This ignorance is not of the Socratic kind – one that recognizes its own limitations – but it is an attempt to ignore certain aspects of reality. Philosophy must be a science, in Schelling's view, that "includes all and does not exclude anything" (SW 59), but at the same time, everything should be included on its proper terms, and not needlessly reduced to a dry-cut system of thought. While an absolute sense of rational philosophy would ignore the need for revelation, Jacobi's emphatic insistence on faith alone (*sola fide*) ignores the possibility that revelation is mediated through philosophical thought. Schelling does not recognize any significant difference on this score between the earlier and later Jacobi – he would have simply swapped the term 'faith' for 'reason' in his later work.

The third type of empiricism that Schelling discusses is theosophy; that is, a mystical wisdom tradition mostly represented by Jacob Böhme (who was influenced by medieval mysticism, especially Meister Eckhart, and the Lurianic interpretation of Kabbalah). This philosophy is similar to, but distinct from, Gnosticism, and believes that certain inspired individuals partake in the divine godhead so that they mystically know the process through which God manifests in nature. These individuals are then able to fuse with the godhead through mystical self-absolution. Schelling puts the point of theosophy as follows: "[Theosophy] attributes an immediate *vision* of divine nature and of the divine origin of things to itself" (GNP 204 [179]). Unsurprisingly, Böhme's thought was outside Christian orthodoxy; Böhme himself was chased out of Dresden. Many philosophers naturally oppose enthusiastic raving. Kant remarked: "Mohammed's paradise or the fusion with the Deity of the theosophists and mystics would obtrude their monstrosities on reason according to the taste of each, and one might as well have no reason at all as surrender it in such a way to all sorts of dreams" (Kant 1996a, p. 237 [5:120–121]).

In his middle period, Schelling did not feel bound to Christian orthodoxy, and discusses Böhme's thought in glowing terms: even to the point that his *The Ages of the World* could be read as his own attempt at theosophy. But while there are incredible overlaps between Schelling's project in *The Ages of the*

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World and Böhmian theosophy, there are equally important distinctions. Schelling himself remarks in the introduction that "theosophy is much ahead of philosophy in depth, fullness, and vitality of content" and much of philosophy is "unnatural and conceited art" (W3 204). There is a liveliness in theosophy that is missing in much of dry and austere philosophy. However, Schelling hints that, while theosophy might have a higher possession of its object, its form and understanding of that object ought to be subjected to more consistent philosophical understanding. This stance becomes more apparent as Schelling becomes more critical of Böhme's thought from 1820 onwards. Generally speaking, Schelling remains appreciative of Böhme (e.g. GNP 209 [183]), but he finds fault in theosophy for its excessive impositions of a rationalism on its object. In fact, Schelling would increasingly connect and liken theosophy to Hegelian dialectics. I do not see this as so much a shift but a change of emphasis.

In his retrospective on Böhme's and his own thought in the later philosophy, Schelling provides the following definition of theosophy:

> The supersensible is made into an object of actual experience through which a possible ecstasy of the human essence in God is assumed, the consequence of which is a necessary, infallible vision not merely into the divine essence, but into the essence of creation and every phase of that process as well. (GPP 119)

Theosophy depends on a special revelation which is rendered in the form of mystical illumination. The difference, if any, with mystical empiricism is usually that theosophist illumination reveals a vision of the coming-to-be of the world through certain (super)natural processes, while mystical empiricism is not so much interested in the coming-to-be of the world through natural processes, but only in (a)historical faith. In the repeated attempts to write the first part of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling wanted to show how reality manifested from its eternal past in the rotary motion of the abyssal ground of being. This is similar to theosophy; however, for Schelling the mediator between the ground of being and reality was to be some sense of free will, not simply a mechanical or natural process of 'emanation', '*Abfall*' or 'release'.

I think this best explains Schelling's ambivalence when it comes to Böhme's theosophy. Against the tendencies of modern philosophy, Böhme sought to think about the genesis of the world from God in terms of a historical chain of events rather than a mere modification of thought-objects. Schelling believed that, for thinkers such as Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, immanent reality was a mere modification of the absolute substance, while for Böhme immanent reality was in consequence of God's being:

> What lies at the heart of theosophy, wherever it achieves, at the very least, a substantive scientific or speculative significance – which in particular lies at the heart of Jacob

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> Böhme's theosophy – is the laudable aspiration to comprehend the emergence of things from God as an *actual* chain of events. (GPP 121)

To put the point slightly differently, modern philosophy generally lacked an account of creation as God's self-revelation and, lacking such account, they were deprived of the tools to read immanent reality as inspired by freedom and abounding with divine presence. This is the determinate upshot of theosophy over modern philosophy, namely that it reads the natural world as a consequence of God.

But the problem with Böhme's account was that it ultimately thought of that genesis in terms of a natural, physical and determinate process: "Jacob Böhme however, does not known of any other way to bring this about than by involving the deity itself in a natural process" (GPP 121). In Böhme's thought, creation is a process of necessity, not of freedom. Tyler Tritten points out three reasons why Schelling objects to Böhme's theosophy in his *Spätphilosophie*. First, "this thesis neglects the effects of the Fall, i.e. the presence of evil, distortion, privation, estrangement etc." (Tritten 2012, p. 56). That much is true: indeed, Schelling thinks that there is more of a disjunction between finite being and transcendent divinity. He would lecture about this as follows:

> The essence of humankind has not remained in the place where it was placed by the original creation, that humankind has again lost its central position in relation to things [. . .]. Such a catastrophe of humanity is assumed in some form or other in all religions, under the name of a 'Fall' in Christian Religion. (GNP 205 [180])

Through its fall from divine nature, immanent being necessarily begets its own character; because of this disjunction, a direct, mystical connection to God is highly implausible. Instead, Schelling emphasizes that any knowledge of God is mediated, real and historical – knowledge of God comes from God, not from human nature. This does not mean that humanity has lost *all* connection to God, only that such a link is murky, muddled-up and in need of the revealing light of metaphysical revelation and philosophical thought.

The second reason pointed out by Tritten is that theosophy "posits a god that moves itself but not one that acts" (Tritten 2012, p. 56). Again, theosophy thinks of God in terms of something that mechanically flows over into reality without any apparent act of free will in the creation of the world. Here is where Schelling aligns Hegel with theosophy, as he regards both as seeing the genesis of the world as a necessary process.

The final reason why Schelling objects to Böhme's theosophy, according to Tritten, is that "Böhme's god does not act but must first give birth to itself, i.e. give itself being" (Tritten 2012, p. 56n). This is where some authors, such as Tritten, claim to detect a radical shift in Schelling's middle and later philosophy: in the

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middle period, Schelling's God has to emerge out of its own ground; in the later period, Schelling's God is pure actuality. I recognize a shift of emphasis between the middle and later Schelling. In the middle period, Schelling says that God becomes God (pure act out of pure possibility) through the creation of the world (which is variously understood as an act of begetting, frustration or freedom). In the later period, Schelling's God seems to have already collected himself prior to the creation of the world, for all of eternity. However, the difference is not as impressive. Schelling's difficulty with Böhme's account is not entirely that God has to give birth to himself, but that the process through which this occurs remains incomprehensible in Böhme's philosophy. Schelling writes:

> J. Böhme always starts at the beginning, repeatedly explicating this amply explained beginnings without ever going on any farther or ever even leaving that position. In these beginnings he is always astounding, a true drama of one whose nature is to wrestle with oneself, yearning for freedom and serenity, but who is incapable of ever changing into real motion, instead circling around the very same point. As soon as J. Böhme goes beyond the beginning and into concrete reality one can no longer follow him. (GPP 124)

Schelling's critique of Böhme is therefore not an implicit critique of the higher realism of *The Ages of the World*; instead, Schelling believes to have solved a difficulty in theosophy; namely, by taking it up in a metaphysical empiricism, he can explain how God moves from primordial being into real being. The problem is that theosophy wanted to think this transition from the primordial drives of God; for the latest Schelling, this must involve the incomprehensible happening of freedom. Freedom is without concept because, if it were, freedom would be reduced to some form of rational necessity. As such, Schelling's critique of Böhme is not to be read as a critique of his earlier position, but as a consolidation of higher realism where it is freedom, not necessity, which speaks the word and creates the world. In his *Spätphilosophie*, Schelling had himself simply come to the realization – most likely because of the repeated failures of *The Ages of the World* – that (divine) freedom cannot be made intelligible *a priori*.

As Schelling became more antagonistic to Hegel, he did also to Böhme. Schelling came to believe that there is no ultimate difference between Hegelian "release" (*Entlassen*) and Böhmian theosophy, as they both imply that the creation of the world was a determinate process by which God comes to terms with himself: "The characteristic feature of the positive philosophy, however, consists precisely in that it rejects all processes in *this sense*, namely in which God would not only be the logical but also the actual result of a process" (GPP 121). This might seem awry with Schelling's higher realism, but appearances are deceiving. In higher realism, God as logical foundation transforms, by way of pure action, into God as existing; when the potencies of His nature freely self-abnegate. While

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this process occurs outside of time, the true beginning of God is pure act, no more potency, in a proto-historical past. This is the decision by which God is God, pure act and creator of the world, which Schelling believes is utterly lacking in Hegelian and Böhmian philosophy. The boon of theosophy is that it recognizes how philosophy must transcend rationalism (while Hegelianism remains oblivious to this): "Theosophy *strives* to move beyond rationalism without, however, being capable of actually wresting away rationalism's substantial knowledge. The knowledge in which rationalism has its essence is to be called *substantial* to the extent that it excludes all *actus*. [. . .]. The God of a truly historical and positive philosophy however does not *move*, he *acts*" (GPP 124–125).

Given Schelling's objections to the three 'lower' types of empiricism, we can now summarize the central aspects of metaphysical empiricism. Metaphysical empiricism accepts the following: against epistemological empiricism, the possibility of revelation of the super-sensible; against mystical empiricism, the capacity to inquire rationally into the revelation of the super-sensible; and, against theosophy, the creation of the world as an act of free will, not a merely natural or rational process. The starting point of positive philosophy as a metaphysical empiricism, according to Schelling, must then be the absolute transcendent which reveals itself in the immanent processes of the world: "Positive philosophy begins with the *completely transcendent being* and it can no longer be just a relative *prius* like the potency that serves as the basis of the science of reason" (GPP 127). The beginning is empirical simply because it cannot proceed *a priori* from reason alone: the beginning is something given, real, factual and historical. If the act of creation is truly an act of freedom (an utter lack of necessity), then it can only be known by its effects, because reason can only conceptualize necessary, not free, relationships: "If we put in its [Hegelian thought] place that great, quiet, simple and sublime teaching that God created the world out of his own will, then there is no doubt that the free decision [*Entschluss*] of the Creator and his deed can only be known a posteriori" (SW 72). Schelling's point is that human beings are capable of knowing God and the act of creation because they themselves partake in the freedom that created the world, but that act of freedom cannot be inferred from a merely rationalist system. We need something in excess of systematic thought which has the potential to transform the system, namely revelation.

The Empirical Revelation of the Metaphysical

Schelling has given a philosophical foundation to consider revelation seriously again after Kant had firmly relegated revelation to be the historical clothing of the *a priori*, universal essence of rational religion. For Kant, historical faiths

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repeat – more lively, more embodied and more palatable to finite intellects – what practical rationality had proposed already. Even though Kant was too coy to admit it, he believed (and hoped) that historical faith could be dispensed with entirely were it not for human finitude. All that matters in the end is pure religious faith (which is an assist to morality), and historical faith – while necessary for the initial founding of religious faith – can be a hindrance to this end. Hegel would recuperate historical faith in some capacity as a central aspect of the development of spirit, but ultimately he would relegate it to an incomplete expression of reason. Schelling, however, would propose a more robust sense of revelation as the inspiration of a positive philosophy.

Against Kant, Schelling takes a stand for the hyper-rational nature of revelation.[122] His objection is that a philosophical engagement with revelation cannot diminish revelation (or philosophy for that matter): "As its first principle, it must be proposed (and was proposed) that this combination of philosophy and revelation does not occur at the cost either of philosophy or of revelation, that neither component will relinquish anything nor suffer any violence" (GPP 142). Throughout modern times, however, the general sentiment was that reason, rather than revelation, is to be trusted. Some of this was motivated by the business of religious individuals to abuse revelation in order to serve their own purposes. These self-proclaimed prophets abuse the gullibility of individuals, which, among others, Schopenhauer would assault:

> Among the many harsh and deplorable aspects of the human lot it is not the least that we exist without knowing whence, whither and wherefore; whoever has been seized and permeated by this feeling will scarcely be able to avoid sensing a certain exasperation towards those who pretend to have special information regarding the matter, which they want to share with us under the name of revelations. – I wish to advise the gentlemen of the revelation not to speak so much of revelation these days, or else some day it could well be revealed to them what revelation really is. (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 325 [383])

Revelation was considered detrimental to philosophical thought, providing a partisan interpretation of the world and humanity's place within it. Ultimately, many dismissed revelation as detrimental to the highest ideal of philosophy.

Schelling has a different disposition with regard to revelation. This was clear in the earliest draft of *The Ages of the World*, where Schelling emphasizes – a point foreshadowing his later positive philosophy – the need for a revelation in philosophy: "Without the light of revelation a scholarly researcher would never

122 Schelling addresses the texts on religion by Kant and Fichte explicitly in his *Lectures on Revelation*: O 416–417.

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be in the position to follow with natural ease the inner going forth of the first divine actions, guided by concepts that are as straightforward and human as they need to be" (W1 70). If philosophy nonetheless shies away from Christianity and revelation – as a purely negative philosophy might do – then "they simply become more and more entangled in their own thoughts, losing themselves in the end in what is vacuous and sterile" (W1 70).

Hegel's philosophy is sometimes read as a recuperation of the philosophical significance of historical revelation. Hegel reads the dialectical development of history as the process of the self-revelation or self-realization of God. The whole of history is the whole of the truth of God or spirit. But this should hint that Hegel is working from a rather unorthodox interpretation of revelation. To him, revelation is no longer the singular, historical and prophetic exposure of divinity upon an individual or a people. Instead, revelation is something in need of philosophical decipherment: God has, unbeknownst to all involved, revealed himself in world-history and it is the task of the philosophical researcher of history to uncover that revelation. This is what is generally called retroactivity (*Nachträglichkeit*): something that comes second in the order of knowing is first in the order of being. For Hegel, we *know* that spirit permeates history long after nature *is* permeated by spirit. For Hegel, then, God's revelation is not an ephemeral vision of eternity bestowed upon a few worthy prophets, but a continuing development wherein God uses the "cunning of reason" (*List der Vernunft*) to gradually and dialectically reveal Himself throughout history (Hegel 1969, p. 746).

For Schelling, the problem with Hegel's view was twofold. On the one hand, Hegel did not provide any resources to recognize the uniqueness of Christian revelation (other religions also reveal God albeit it in a more fragmented sense). On the other hand, Hegel did not allow revelation to reveal something in excess of reason. By 'revelation', Schelling does not think exclusively of the overriding power of Biblical Scripture or the testimony of those who witnessed divine miracles, but the experience of the whole of reality *per se* as a revelation of divinity. Christian revelation is but "the top of the pyramid" (SW 85).

We will discuss the different forms of revelation, and let's start with the most obvious: Christianity. While lecturing in Munich, Schelling did not shy away from calling his philosophy quintessentially Christian: "The real and decisive name for my philosophy is Christian philosophy, and I have taken this crucial thing seriously" (SW 9). But what he means by this is rather equivocal: not that his philosophy takes certain Christian teachings as orthodox truth, but that it takes Christianity as an object of inquiry, an object he seeks to justify using philosophical reason: "My philosophy sets a system for Christianity as a ground that will persevere from beginning to end" (SW 85). The historical

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content of Christianity requires philosophical justification because Christianity has been – according to Schelling at least – most successful compared to other religions in explaining the world, and can therefore serve as a guide towards a higher philosophy.

In a note from 1846 – where he attacks how the "new theology" from Tübingen takes texts to be the only source of knowledge – Schelling advances a more daring view of Christianity. Christianity would claim that "a ground for it is laid together with the ground of the world", which means that Christianity would give expression to the essence of reality. But Schelling does not accept this as incontrovertibly true: one has to make the experiment and see whether the claim holds.[123] In his Lectures, Schelling does seem to suggest that he has made this experiment, and found Christianity to be, in fact, expressive of a deep truth: "We must recognize something higher in Christ; human consciousness was elevated to general consciousness through Christianity, only through Christianity did the higher and grander perspectives come in life and philosophy" (SW 86). But Christianity does not exhaust the content of revelation. Schelling was part of an avant-garde that took other religions very seriously. If one wants to call Schelling's positive philosophy typically Christian, one would need to have a very peculiar sense of Christianity in mind:

> That person for whom *true* philosophy and *Christian* philosophy are synonymous expressions must above all form a higher idea of Christianity itself than the habitual notion that Christianity is a merely historical phenomenon that first appeared in the world approximately eighteen hundred years ago. He must grasp Christianity as that which is truly universal. (GPP 136)

The whole myriad of religious traditions form the totality of the revelation of divinity, but then only understood by means of a very specific rationale.

> If [revelation] is to be substantiated at all, it will only be substantiated in a higher historical context, in a higher context that extends beyond itself and Christianity as a special phenomenon, thus, in a context different from the one we usually have in mind. [. . .] The concept of Christianity as a revelation is possible only in the context not merely of earlier (Old Testament) revelations, but only within the context of religious development overall, and especially of Heathendom. (GPP 143–144)

123 The note in full reads as follows: "Aber das Christentum selbst behauptet, ein Grund zu ihm sei gelegt mit dem Weltgrund, es sei dem Wesen nach vorhanden, seit, ja bevor der Welt Grund gelegt worden. Weil das Christentum dies versichert, darum ist es freilich noch nicht wahr, es muss sich erst so finden, eh' man es annimmt, aber es muss doch erst der Versuch gemacht werden" (Schelling 1998, p. 19).

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This means that not only the religions of the book (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) are revelations, but also all forms of pre-Christian religions.

But even adding other religions does not exhaust what Schelling means by revelation. In his Munich Lectures on the *System of the Ages of the World*, he clarifies that there are three sources of external or metaphysical experience that ground positive philosophy:

> Nature is a book written from the inside and the outside, it is divine revelation and Holy Scripture. But he who moves to nature without an idea of God shall read nothing in it, then it is not a primitive original revelation, not a holy scripture, only a marginal note. [. . .] But history is also in and for itself as little intelligible as nature. And then remains the Holy Scripture itself as immediate and specific revelation of God to man. (SW 84–85)

Nature and history are – next to Biblical Scripture – sources of revelation. These revelations can be approached without an appropriate metaphysics, which means without an appropriate *Naturphilosophie* or *Geschichtsphilosophie*, which results in nature and history being conceived in reductionist terms. This impedes their capacity to reveal themselves as revelation. Schelling therefore introduces a hierarchy between these three sources of revelation: "Nature must be enlightened through history, and history must receive its light from revelation" (SW 85). This means that successive forms of revelation invite re-interpretation of what came before: we think of nature differently after we have lived through mythology, and we think of mythology differently after Christian revelation. History could not be foreseen from nature and revelation could not be foreseen from history. Accordingly, the general term 'revelation' is, for Schelling, a continuous process that moves from a state of nature, through a state of history, towards Christian revelation without ever fully overcoming any of these states. Nature, history and Christianity are revelations that prepare, prefigure and even enable philosophical, systematic thought. These are the positive and real elements, the empirical revelation of the metaphysical, that are necessary preambles to philosophical thought. Without these, there is no access to being or God.

This returns us to Hegel's most powerful critique of Schelling's philosophy of identity. In the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel writes that Schelling jumps into the system of reason as if one enters in a race: suddenly and immediately, as if by the shot of a gun. In his philosophy of identity, one emerges from the principle of identity or indifference and moves far too suddenly towards being. Schelling's attempts after 1809 – most obviously in *Freedom-Essay* and *The Ages of the World* – to overcome this difficulty by including an understanding of history in his philosophy. But has Schelling really been successful in overcoming Hegel's criticism by including revelation as the source of philosophical thought? History works differently for Schelling

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compared to Hegel: for Schelling, the historical is the real, factual givenness of being, while for Hegel it is the teleological process by which God reconciles his empirical manifestation with his concept. In other words, the factual revelation of God in Schelling's philosophy is still that which fairly immediately launches us into the race of rational thought.

Alexandra Roux counters this sort of Hegelian criticism of Schelling's later thought well by pointing out two things, both of which have figured in our previous discussion of positive philosophy. First, Schelling actually rejects any direct, metaphysical revelations of God that does not mediate with rational thought. A direct revelation can take on two shapes; namely, on the one hand, the exterior and historical (in the common sense) revelation of God (e.g. miracles) and, on the other hand, the inward and universal revelation of God such as in Jacobi's reliance on the immediate certainty of faith. These two approaches are rejected by Schelling because they can only prove reliable if one first establishes a philosophy that validates them as reliable (a positive philosophy). Second, philosophical thought does not start from the absolute beginning, but must always work backwards from the consequences of God, namely from the revelation of God. God is known in his consequences, not in himself. This is why, again, a complete system of thought requires a positive philosophy that establishes and validates what the true, legitimate consequences are of God (Roux 2016, pp. 71–80).

For Schelling, revelation – in his broad sense of nature, history and Christianity – is the starting point of philosophical thought, from which it can work towards an understanding of divinity that is not merely rational speculation or fideism. Revelation does this by providing philosophy with something in excess of reason: "Revelation must contain something that transcends reason" (O 98). In other words, the revelation of being releases negative philosophy from its systematic self-enclosure and provides a vantage point for positive philosophy. The most distinctive difference between negative and positive philosophy when it comes to their ultimate aims has to do with 'systematicity': negative philosophy aims to complete itself, positive philosophy can never be completed; "[Negative philosophy] is an entirely self-enclosed science that has arrived at an unchanging conclusion, and is, thus, in *this* sense a *system*; in contrast, the positive philosophy cannot in the same sense be called a system precisely because it is never absolutely closed" (GPP 133). Negative philosophy hopes to complete itself, and positive philosophy is destined to remain open. Elsewhere, Schelling distinguishes between two different senses of a system:

> System in the bad sense occurs as lack of viability, that is seen as a self-enclosure of ready-made truths. Bad systems originate from holding on to one and the same point of

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> view. [. . .] Only system means also harmonious succession, like the rhythm of notes in music. The better side of system is not such a standing still, but development until the organism of science. (SW 19)

All philosophical thought ought to be systematic in that it interrelates different aspects of thought or reality to one another. Problems occur when a system is closed, when it pretends to be final. The reason why positive philosophy is incapable of becoming a finalized system is that the revelation of God is not some fixed moment in the dim and distant past or the foreseeable future, but it is rather a continuous, historical happening. Positive philosophy will always be refreshed by the ever-renewing confrontation with revelation: "This entire philosophy is, therefore, an always advancing knowledge, always nothing other than a *philo-sophia*, never rigid or stagnant, and, thus, in this sense, a dogmatic science" (GPP 132).

This inability to finalize revelation does not paralyze philosophical reason. Philosophy is rather revitalized by revelation which, for Schelling, must mean that philosophy is quite capable of taking up revelation. If one believes in a revelation, one naturally aims to understand and corroborate that revelation: "True belief would have had to prove itself here by the fact that no effort was spared to discover the mediations [*Vermittlungen*] via which that *in which* belief believes was also made plausible to reason and the strictest science" (GNP 202 [178]). Revelation does not paralyze but inspires reason. This does not mean that reason takes up revelation as something in accordance with truths that it can reach on its own accord. This would ultimately be Hegel's view. Opposing this, Schelling writes in the Berlin *Lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation* that "revelation is knowledge that becomes part of us through experience" (O 251). Revelation cannot be foreseen but must be absorbed: revelation cannot be conjured up through systematic reason alone (we are in need of experience), but philosophical reason can also incorporate revelation. Revelation does not remain in excess of reason, but serves to inspire reason beyond its temporary limitations. Revelation allows philosophy to see something for a first time, which afterwards can be perceived by positive philosophy without revelation:

> Philosophy would not have known some things without revelation, or at least it would not have discerned them as it has. Yet philosophy can now see these objects with its own eyes, since in regard to all truths, even the revealed, it is only *philosophy* to the extent that it transforms them into independent truths known for oneself. (GPP 137)

The reason why revelation is capable of allowing reason to self-transcend is because reason itself has an inner impetus to move beyond its own limitations – a propensity to be dialectical which, according to Kant, had to be kept in check. As such, revelation appeals to something that is already at work within (negative)

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philosophy: “Still it is by no means just revelation that requires philosophy to advance beyond the merely logical systems; as we have seen, it is a necessity that lies in philosophy itself that propels it beyond the merely logical” (GPP 138).

Revelation is a necessary assistant to philosophy that opens up negative philosophy to a revelation of being, which a positive philosophy can take up within itself in such a way that the initial revelation is no longer necessary. However, this does not entitle philosophy to self-enclose, once again, after it has exhausted a particular revelation. The living, historical body of revelation might reveal new things. A positive philosophy that believes itself to be finished is ultimately more of a negative than a positive philosophy. A positive philosophy is always to start anew, not from any concept that is at the ready, but from the revelatory confrontation with being:

> In the positive philosophy, therefore, I do not proceed from the concept of God, as the argument and the former metaphysics had attempted to do. Rather, I must do away with precisely this concept, the concept of *God*, in order to proceed from that which just exists, in which nothing at all is thought other than just that which just exists, to see whether the divine is to be reached from it. (GPP 158)

I take the main aim of Schelling’s philosophy after *The Ages of the World* to create space for nature, history and religion to reveal something that was not available to merely negative reason. If such a philosophy aspires to become a system, it should become an organic system that remains responsive to new revelations. Our truth at any point is never the whole truth. I take this to be a very attractive position that gives a metaphysical backbone to the philosophy of free-spiritedness that Nietzsche aims to cultivate. Obviously, we have now merely spelled out the methodology that a complete philosophy – positive and negative – ought to follow. But where does it lead? In the next chapter, we will find out how this methodology high in heterodox potential nevertheless leads Schelling back to a suspicious level of Christian orthodoxy.

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Chapter 8
The Revealed: On Myth, Monotheism and Philosophical Religion

There is more to revelation than what the rational eye can see. Revelation provides something new to philosophy, a novelty that ideally is taken up by philosophy. By advancing this point of view, Schelling carefully navigates in between Hegel's, Jacobi's and Kant's views of revelation. Schelling puts revelation and faith within and beyond philosophy; not radically outside of reason, but not reducible to reason either. Schelling understands why theologians are generally skeptical about claims that revelation is not radically in surplus of reason. If and when one thinks that reason alone can know God, it is just a small step towards thinking that God is conjured up by human reason. It means that all truth in religion can and should be cognized from within the bounds of mere reason alone:

> The theologians are quite right when they have had something to object or to rebuke in philosophy, since if the philosophers were to succeed in cobbling together complete agreement between the teachings of Christianity and philosophy, some could, through the temptation of the devil, hit upon the idea that Christianity itself is nothing other than a human invention, a work either of the thinking or slyly ingenious faculty of reason. (GPP 108)

Schelling believes that a religion built upon the sole foundation of reason is no religion at all. At best, this results in a counterfeit double of reason; religion, however, exceeds reason. This does not lead Schelling to fideism, however, as he makes a compelling case for a philosophy that is to be penetrated, impregnated and newly born by revelation – a philosophical religion.

Nietzsche has similarly pointed out how the modern project of a rational religion means to hollow out religion and deprive it of its mysteries, irrationalities and its hyperboles. This is a point that Schelling would gladly support:

> What was the endeavor of all modern theology other than a gradual idealization and emptying of Christianity? [. . .]. Likewise, this age could only avail itself of a God from whose concept all power and force had been removed. This is a God whose highest form of expression of life consists in thinking or knowing and which, besides this, is nothing but an empty schematizing of itself. (W3 342)

Schelling's one-time roommate Hegel was equally skeptical about rational religion, as it removes all the liveliness and appeal from religion. Jack Caputo puts

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-009

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Hegel's objection to a religion based upon rationality (*Verstand*) alone as follows:

> *Verstand* is all about entities, propositions, and proofs and it misses the living organic matrix by which genuine theological thinking is nourished. [. . .] Everything that is truly interesting about religion, everything substantive and enlivening, Hegel said, is being left out – all the warm blood and vitality, all the 'spirit', all the 'revelatory force', all the *Sache* [matter] of Christianity. (Caputo 2013, p. 89)

These attempts at a religion of reason are, to Hegel, inappropriate because they render religion mundane: "Christ is dragged down to the level of human affairs, not to the level of the commonplace but still to that of the human, into the sphere of a mode of action of which pagans such as Socrates have also been capable" (Hegel 2006, p. 83 [67]). This complaint was very timely. Even Hegel's arch-nemesis, Arthur Schopenhauer, argued against the defenders of rational religion who "try to interpret out [*hinauszuexegesieren*] everything truly Christian, which leaves them with a remainder that is true in neither a literal nor an allegorical sense, but rather mere platitude, practically Judaism, or at most a shallow Pelagianism, or worst of all a vile optimism that is utterly foreign to genuine Christianity" (Schopenhauer, 2018, p. 177 [184]).

Schelling is in a diverse company, of Hegel and Schopenhauer, who abhorred the rationalizing of religion: "Nothing is gloomier [*trübseliger*] than the business of all rationalists [*Geschäft aller Rationalisten*], who want to make rational that which is beyond all reason" (O 256). But Schelling's ultimate interest in the matter was rather different than the old man Hegel and the misanthropic sage of Frankfurt, as he aimed to recuperate the hyper-rational nature of revelation. For Schopenhauer and Hegel, religion revealed something truthful that was in excess of mere rationality (*Verstand*), but that could ultimately be framed in terms of philosophical or dialectical reason (*Vernuft*). Hegel did not ultimately recover religion as such. This was Feuerbach's critique of the Right Hegelians, those who saw Hegel's philosophy as the reconciliation of reason with faith. For Feuerbach, if Hegel manages to reconcile faith and reason, he achieved this only by removing everything specific in faith from faith: "God as God – the infinite, universal, non-anthropomorphic being of the understanding, has no more significance for religion than a fundamental general principle has for a special science" (Feuerbach 1989, p. 44). For Feuerbach, however, this results in an analysis of Christianity as the religion of the "disuniting of man from himself" (Feuerbach 1989, p. 33). In response, he argues in favor of a more humanized religion, a religion of and for humanity, which provides ideals and aims for human beings without disconnecting them from their own nature.

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Schelling's thought chimes with Feuerbach's central claim: the rationalization of religion coincided with a rationalizing, even deadening, of God. In rational religion, God is given only a regulative function, as an idea or ideal of reason that brings to closure the system of negative philosophy. In Kant's philosophy, God appears little more than a divine bookkeeper that aligns merit with just reward in a rationally-postulated eternal life. But this hesitation with regard to rational religion did not push Schelling, and neither did it push Nietzsche, into the opposite direction: simple mysticism, irrationalism or fideism. Schelling wants to uphold a distinction between the finite and infinite in higher realism, which recognizes the constitutive difference between immanence and transcendence: immanence is not a modification of transcendence and neither is transcendence the inversed projection of immanence. For Schelling, immanence is, indeed, marked by transcendence, not because reality would have been mechanically produced through God's self-development, but by an outreaching of a free act of will.

Next to recognizing a vertical nexus of counterbalancing pressures, there are equally the horizontal pressures of temporality in Schelling's recognition of the eternal past, the eternal present and the eternal future as central determinations of human reality: we are here and now, always departing from somewhere and going somewhere else. Reality never coincides with any isolated understanding of its present, past or future but is always a tangled matrix of these three aspects of temporality.[124] There is no direct pathway from immanent rationality to transcendence, which would have left the door open for rationalist idolatry. Instead, all knowledge of higher things is mediated through real, concrete and historical events. This is a point that Schelling made against Jacobi's notion that faith is a direct doorway from human beings to God:

> It is a misfortune for philosophy when faith and trust fail in attaining great results; in this respect precisely it has to be pointed out that the most important is not reached immediately but only through mediation. As such, there must be faith that the knowledge of the true can be reached through many mediations. (SW 64)

124 Martin Heidegger famously argued in *Sein und Zeit* that the philosophical tradition only had a very abstract, inorganic understanding of time. It is unclear whether Heidegger would include Schelling in this indictment, an author he knew particularly well (especially *Freedom-Essay*). Especially from *The Ages of the World* onwards, Schelling would attempt a more organic understanding of temporality, largely because he aims to recover the historicity of freedom and religion. For an excellent mediation on Schelling's rethinking of temporality in virtue of his understanding of revelation: Jean-François Courtine, 'Temporalité et révélation'. In: *Le dernier Schelling: Raison et positivité*. Edited by Jean-Francois Courtine and Jean-Francois Marquet (Paris: Vrin, 1994), pp. 9–30.

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We will explore in this chapter what exactly is revealed in mythology and Christianity beyond the negative system of reason.

In the Beginning

> Oh let the one come who teaches us true theism! By this, I do not *merely* mean the creation of the world *out of* God, but the creation of the world in time out of God. (SW 105)

How does this this mutual enrichment of philosophy and revelation work? In his final philosophy, Schelling advances the claim that theism – which is the view of a personal, transcendent and free creator – is the only cogent metaphysical view. This does seem to conflict with Schelling's celebration of pantheism in *Freedom-Essay*, but we would do well to investigate Schelling's unique interpretation of theism and pantheism before accusing him of inconsistency. His *Spätphilosophie* has made way to speak about that which transcends subjective consciousness through an openness to revelation in a positive philosophy. Let us now investigate what is revealed.

For Schelling, theism is not the casual and easy-going result of a clear-cut revelation by positive philosophy. That would be too easy! Perhaps because of Hegel's accusations in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Schelling is hesitant to arrive out of the night in which all cows are grey through the shot of a gun at absolute knowing. Instead, when philosophy starts from the absolute origin of being – which is necessarily pre-rational, blind being – then we have only found the departure point of positive philosophy, which is "not yet a personal God, but the blind being of Spinoza, which exists prior to all thinking" (O 155). At the time of the philosophy of identity, Schelling might have been guilty of thinking that one knows God through identifying God with the all. A contemporary of Schelling, Johann Christian August Heinroth (1773–1843), would write after reading Schelling's *Freedom-Essay*:

> For what kind of knowledge do we take from Schelling's ingenious achievements, as well as from the equally ingenious premonitions of the ancient Orient? We do not learn to know the All or the One, but we have to content ourselves with empty postulates and formulas, whose last and highest is A=A. (Heinroth 1829, p. 313)[125]

125 In an unpublished note, Schopenhauer wryly engages Heinroth's critique of Schelling: "Es ist tröstlich, dass selbst so ein elender Queerkopf wie Heinroth dies einsieht und erkennt. Freilich hebt die Malice und Scheelsucht Jeden über sich selbst hinaus, und der stumpfe wird scharfsinnig wenn es Andrer Fehler gilt" (Schopenhauer 2017, p. 43 [31,1]).

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This criticism holds for Schelling's earliest philosophy. In his later work, however, Schelling can counter it. Here, Schelling indeed thinks of a blind being as the absolute *prius* of philosophy beyond which one cannot think, or that blind being is not an existing thing, but being itself; that is, what goes over into existence or what is potentially existing. Thus the starting point of positive philosophy is blind, unprethinkable (*unvordenklich*) being, which is itself not a concept or a potency. It is what Markus Gabriel calls, the "always-already as such" (Gabriel 2011, p. 65). The transition beyond the unthinking being is not by thought, but through act, where act (*Actus*) is the connecting term, or the very transitioning, between blind being and existing being. This connects to Schelling's rethinking of the copula, where the proposition 'being is rational' would mean that blind being goes over into rational being. This means that a sort of pantheism still precedes and prefigures theism.

How is it possible to think about the unprethinkable beginning? If such a beginning is what allows thought to be, if it is the very source of intelligibility, then how can it be intelligible? Schelling's answer is that the beginning *becomes* intelligibility, but it is not itself intelligible – not yet caught in the nets of understanding and reason. The beginning of reason cannot be reason but becomes reason. In this, Schelling is close to Neoplatonism: the source of intelligibility (one) precedes intelligibility (*nous*) but equally gives itself over to intelligibility. The difference with Neoplatonism is that Schelling holds that, as being is given to thought, the source of intelligibility must be something that can be cognized in some way. That cognition is not based on rational concepts and self-activating, as in negative philosophy, but it is rather receptive to the revelation of the limits of conceptual thought. Schelling writes that "it is a false objection when one says that we cannot imagine any reality that precedes all possibility! Indeed, human productions can only be foreseen from their possibility. But there are also things that can first be seen through their reality [*durch ihre Wirklichkeit*]" (O 161). Most things can only be known through their possibility, their concept, but some things can only be known at first through their actuality: if something is actual, it must equally be possible. From that thing's actuality, one can then start to philosophize. So the reality of unprethinkable being cannot be deduced from conceptual thought. This is what Schelling's recurring critique of the ontological argument shows: the mere interrelationship of concepts does not support an understanding of being. The being of being can only be known through the reality of being. To put things less metaphysically: the reality of that which precedes and exceeds conceptual thought can only be exposed in its revelation and subsequently known through a philosophy that is open to such revelation. This is, as Markus Gabriel points

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out, a "*reversed ontological proof*": instead of moving from essence to being, Schelling moves from being to essence (see Gabriel 2011, pp. 94–97).

The first moment of revelation is creation (*Schöpfung*), which is when divine freedom halts anonymous, blind being. To paraphrase *The Ages of the World*, God suspends the rotary motion and, through an act of will, gives light to the world. In humanity, creation has reached its pinnacle since human beings are not merely capable of partaking in freedom, but are equally capable of recognizing God as the creator. Insofar as God exists merely as lord over being (*Herrn des Seins*), God remains unknown to humanity. Here, God remains a vague mythic memory of a primal time in which human beings were united in divine consciousness. For human beings to posit authentically God as the creator, we are in need of something else: "While God knows himself as the lord over being, he lacks something; namely, to be recognized [*Erkanntwerden*]" (O 189). God is not the anonymous creator, destined to be forgotten by his creations. Neither is God an unmoved first mover that retracts entirely after creation. God is to be recognized as the creator, as the beginning and end of creation.

Such deliberations lead Schelling to consider monotheism as the eschatological end-goal of the process of creation. Schelling recognizes the need to recuperate something of monotheism, which he defines as follows:

> The true God, so it is said, is the living one. But the living one can only be the one that comes forth out of his unthinking being [*der aus seinem unvordenkliche Sein heraustretend*] by claiming this being for a moment and so liberating his own being from it, which is done to posit his being as spirit by which is given the possibility to be the creator, through which his unprethinkable being is opposed to another being. (O 191)

Schelling's German translates poorly into English, and it is dense even for German standards! The four elements of importance are the following. First, God emerges out of unprethinkable, blind being (in *Freedom-Essay*, the ground of being). Second, this emergence happens through the freely-willed suspension of necessity by claiming being (in *The Ages of the World*, halting the rotary motion). Third, through this suspension, God posits himself as spirit (*Geist*), which is an act of creation. Fourth, this creation emerges out of unprethinkable being, but becomes opposed to this being through the inspiration by spirit. It thinks God merely as absolute or pure substance. Pure substance does not emerge from unprethinkable being and, since it does not emerge, it is not alive. Traditional theism saps all life from God. In the *Spätphilosophie,* Schelling also opposes traditional forms of pantheism because they collapse the distinction between God and the godhead: God is here reduced to his creation. True monotheism thinks of the living and creative God. Schelling is then in opposition to traditional theism because he finds this to be, ultimately, atheistic!

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This view of monotheism leads towards a conception of God in Christian Trinitarian terms: the unity of God with himself can only be considered a unity-through-three, where God is the unity of three potencies; namely, unprethinkable being, extended reality and spirit. Hegel similarly attempted to recover Trinitarian thought, but did so in more symbolic terms.[126] Schelling's more robust recovery of the trinity means that he thinks of these three potencies in terms of personalities – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – that in total make up the three-unity of God (see: O 194–198). The conclusion of the threefold process of creation is the creation of humanity, where human beings can and "should find rest in God" (O 199). This invites the question, however, that if humanity is the summit of creation, why humanity itself has set into motion new processes, even a "new tension [*Spannung*]?" (O 199). In other words, if creation is a deliberate process to create a being, that is, humanity, which is spiritually enriched by divine revelation, why does humanity set into motion a process that may distance itself or even reject God? Or, as Schelling puts the question: "How was a world outside of God, or paganism, possible?" (O 199) To answer this question, Schelling delves into the philosophy of mythology.

Philosophy of Mythology

For Schelling, a 'philosophy of mythology' means that myth becomes a historical object of philosophical attention, much in the same way that 'nature' became the object of philosophical attention in a philosophy of nature. When and if something becomes the object of philosophical investigation, the inquiry is not concerned with contingencies but rather with the essence of what is under investigation. As such, a philosophy of mythology is an "investigation that proceeds beyond the mere fact (here the *existence* of mythology) and inquires about the nature, the *essence* of mythology" (HKM 5).

126 Because of his recovery of the symbol of the Trinity, Hegel continues to be popular among contemporary theologians. Cyril O'Regan points out that "a major, if not the major, reason accounting for Hegel's attractiveness in contemporary theological circles is Hegel's recovery of the symbol of the Trinity" (O'Regan 2014, p. 205). Specifically, the idea of incarnation – namely that knowledge of God must necessarily pass through the monstrosity (*Ungeheure*) of historical mediation – is in fashion. The problem with Hegelian dialects is, however, that the process of historical mediation is reconciled with the concept of God in such a way that the distinctiveness between world and God collapses.

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Schelling does not make a consistent distinction between myth and mythology, but such a distinction can be helpful for understanding his argument.[127] Mythology is the vast panoply of stories, fables and beliefs that usually relate to a pre-historical time where human beings were in more direct connection to gods. Such stories were at one time written down by famous poets such as Homer and Hesiod, who poetically improved upon certain stories that were shared in a narrative or oral tradition. The poets did not invent mythology, they merely formalized and dramatized already-existing narratives. But even these pre-existing oral traditions are, arguably, not the origin of these narratives, as these likely originate in a more original mythic consciousness: these stories were lived and experienced before they were told. The written tradition got its material from the oral tradition, and the oral tradition got its material from somewhere, and this 'somewhere' is what we will call 'myth' or 'mythic consciousness'.

The mythology of various peoples arose when those people gradually distanced themselves from an original, mythic consciousness. This distancing was achieved through adding of a certain type of reason (*logos*) to myth (*mythos*), hence mythology. Mythology is our latent memory of that mythic consciousness, and our reason and language made it possible for human beings to emerge from a dark, immediate immersion in myth by imposing systematic reason upon that experience. Mythology is then a philosophical-poetical invention that humanity owes to its poets: "The system of the gods, which is the *history* of the gods, the Hellenics owe to Hesiod and Homer" (HKM 17). Myth as such, however, is an original state of consciousness that precedes all philosophy and poetry. Schelling, and Romantic thinkers in general (but also Nietzsche), are very interested in uncovering the primal consciousness of humanity, before reason reshaped our thought, because it shows something which precedes reason.

Schelling starts his 1842 Berlin lectures by engaging with more dismissive views of the nature of mythology before advancing his own view that mythology is the unconscious-instinctive self-revelation of the gods. This strategy is parallel to his rethinking of evil, where he dismantles first the privative views of evil only to advance his own view afterwards. Schelling is convinced that "all other and more obvious views must first be explained as *impossible,* and it itself must have become the *only possible* one, before we can consider it as grounded" (HKM 5). There are two – to Schelling, more obvious – views that

127 In his very first publication *Über Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosophie der ältesten Welt* (1793), written at the age of eighteen (!), Schelling does make a distinction between an oral and a written tradition. The written tradition is a degeneration of the oral tradition; the oral tradition, in turn, struggles with conveying the essence of the mythic message. For discussion of this essay, see Freydberg (2017, pp. 87–89).

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have to be dealt with before we can confidently engage in a philosophy of mythology; namely, the view that mythology is a poetic invention, and that mythology is a furtive form of philosophy. Schelling disarms both of these views by means of a similar argument: mythic consciousness precedes both poetry and philosophy (and self-consciousness as such), and so cannot have its source in poetry or philosophy.

For Schelling, the poetic view believes that "the mythological representations have been generated not with the intent to *assert* or *teach* something but rather only in order to satisfy a (of course, at first incomprehensible) poetic drive for invention. Thus, the explanation would bring along with itself the exclusion of every doctrinal meaning" (HKM 11–12). According to this view, mythology does not have a particular meaning or truth; rather, it is an invention of pure imagination. Schelling's major objection to such a view is that it leaves unexplained why different peoples all across the world were inclined to express this artistic drive in terms of stories about the relationships between and the histories of the gods. In other words, the poetic interpretation does not explain how "humanity, or a primordial people, or people at all, were in their earliest times equally seized upon by an irresistible inner drive and how they would have produced a poetry whose content was the gods and the history of the gods" (HKM 15). Simply assigning this to coincidence seems unlikely, especially given that, as Schelling believes, the different mythologies all across the world exhibit impressive similarities, to such an extent that arbitrary, poetic invention becomes highly implausible.

Schelling's objection to the poetic view is actually odd. In the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling suggests that artistic creations are subjective, individual inventions of singular individuals, but this is far removed from the perspective Schelling had entertained in his previous philosophy of art. Moëra Saule puts the issue here as follows:

> In this sense, the whole of mythology as grounded in poesy is a mythology without intention to instruct, to learn anything. But as we have seen in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the poetic creation is not simply subjective, but the work of genius is that which represents or exteriorizes the absolute. (Saule 2011, p. 64 – my translation)

If art and mythology give expression to the absolute, why does Schelling paint such a negative picture of the poetic interpretation of mythology? Saule suggests that the resolution to this paradox lies in that – as Schelling discusses in his dialogue *Bruno* (1803) – art expresses the absolute without understanding: art is the intuitive, non-cognitive expression of the absolute. To the contrary, mythology understands itself as a representation of the absolute. This reading does not hold, I believe, since Schelling is quite clear that mythology, much like art, is an

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unintentional-instinctive invention, so an invention without self-understanding. Human beings develop mythologies just as birds build nests: the artist becomes a vessel that channels the absolute in artful creation. Therefore, Schelling's early aesthetics and philosophy of mythology are highly similar, but at the opening of the *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling is using the term "poetry" in a narrower, non-technical sense: that which is simply invented by an individual without any necessary genius inspiration of the absolute. If Schelling would tie the philosophy of mythology to his philosophy of art, one would find remarkable overlaps indeed.

If not poetic whim, then what is the ground of mythology? That ground must lie in what Schelling calls a "dark consciousness" that preceded the mythology of the poets: the gods were "thematically present prior to both poets, only in a dark consciousness, chaotically" and Homer and Hesiod allowed the gods to emerge out of this darkness (HKM 17). Homer and Hesiod added poetry to mythic consciousness, but the "the dark foundry, the first forging place of mythology, lies beyond all poesy" (HKM 18). In fact, the very existence of these poets signals that human beings have exited from this unconscious, unfree immersion within mythic consciousness: "The two oldest poets, as *poets*, would designate the end of the unfree condition" (HKM 18). Human beings now have the ability to relate differently to the gods.

Schelling thus opposes the view that mythology is without truth because mythology must have a ground in something that preceded itself. But why must this ground be a dark consciousness? For instance, Hegel argued that mythology is an incomplete, fragmented and unconscious representation of rational spirit. The ground for mythology then lies in reason rather than in darkness; it only seems unreasonable and dark until reason recognizes mythology as spirit. Schelling finds himself opposing this view as well. According to him, the idea that there is doctrinal truth in mythology has been expressed predominantly in terms of an allegorical interpretation of mythology:

> Truth is in mythology, but not in mythology as such; especially since it is the doctrine and history of the *gods*, and thus seems to have a religious meaning. Thus mythology says or seems to say something different than is meant, and the interpretation appropriate to the articulated viewpoint is generally, and taken in the broadest sense of the word, *allegorical*. (HKM 26)

This interpretation believes that any truth there is to mythology is of an ethical (Bacon), historical (Euhemeros) or scientific (Heyne, Hermann) nature.

Schelling has an extensive discussion of the various forms of this allegorical interpretation, but there is one objection that refutes all of them. Like poetry, philosophy did not precede mythology but rather proceeds from mythology: "Just as

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little as poetry did philosophy precede mythology" (HKM 46). Whenever one examines the religious history of various peoples around the world, it becomes clear that they were believers in mythology before they were poets or philosophers. According to the allegorical interpretation, however, a philosopher would have to have conjured up mythological images to get across a secular, natural truth. This is quite absurd. Schelling does not deny that ethical, scientific or historical concepts can be added to myth (just like poetry is added to mythic consciousness), but this is itself not the generative ground – or 'foundry' – of mythology. Philosophy is an exit from the darkness of the mythic consciousness (the *unvordenklich*), not the generative ground of that consciousness.

With this, Schelling has disarmed two of the most obvious candidates to interpret mythology: mythology as a purely poetic invention and mythology as an allegory for philosophical truth. His counterargument to both perspectives is that both poetry and philosophy are at a distance from the original birthing place of mythology; namely, a mythic consciousness where these stories were lived rather than recounted. There are actually two elements common to the philosophical and poetic interpretation of mythology: they find myth to be a *conscious* invention by an *individual*. In other words, both interpretations make mythology into artificial products of singular minds. Schelling's objection to this approach mirrors his grievances with the theory of the finite world as an emanation from God: this is overtly logical and lacks a real, historical basis. His higher realism in mind, Schelling writes that "indeed in general mythology would not be only a *natural* product, but rather an organic one; this is certainly a meaningful step in comparison to the merely mechanistic type of explanation" (HKM 53).

Myths cannot simply be one individual's invention because of "the great and irrefutable fact of the inner affinity between the mythologies of the most varied and otherwise most dissimilar peoples" (HKM 61). Schelling detected not merely that certain themes or stories overlap in different mythologies, but also a "similarity of consanguinity" (HKM 62); that is, kinship between the various mythologies that is difficult to explain as mere coincidence. Schelling also notes the difficulty that one individual faces in convincing an entire people to take up his invention as their religion (although this could be what Nietzsche hopes with *Zarathustra*):

> To create a mythology, to impart to it that authentication and reality in the minds of men – which is necessary in order to reach the degree of popularity that it requires even in poetic usage – exceeds the ability of any individual person, and even that of a number of them who could unite themselves toward such a goal. (HKM 56)

Schelling opposes the idea that mythology is an intentional and individual invention. Mythology must emerge differently, in a way that explains the strong

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similarities between different mythologies, but also their differences. As such, Schelling suggests that a people (*Volk*), which is a group that is united under a communal language, instinctively gives rise to a mythology:

> Mythology is here a product of an unintentional-intentional, instinctive invention, which, on the one hand, would hold at a distance from itself everything merely fabricated and artificial but, on the other hand, would, at the same time, allow the deepest meaning and the soundest relations inherent in mythology be seen as not merely contingent. (HKM 53)

This means that the similarities between different mythologies are derived from a similar, instinctive and typically human experience; the differences between mythologies are explained by the different language used to render those experiences intelligible. The consciousness of a people – itself one step removed from the general, un-individualized consciousness of humanity – is co-emergent with that people's particular mythology:

> Nothing else remains except that [mythology] emerges with [a people] simultaneously, as *its* individual popular consciousness, with which the people steps forth out of the general consciousness of mankind, and, by virtue of which, it is only this people, separated from every other, no less than it is through its language. (HKM 65)

The people and their mythology emerge together.

Schelling's consideration of mythology connects smoothly with his broader concerns in positive philosophy, namely to uncover those historical, concrete acts that precede and prefigure subjective thought. Mythology develops from something that anticipates rationality since rationality is an exit from mythology or, as one could put it also, *mytho-logos* is the first step away from dark, mythic consciousness, which is carried further by a philosophy of *logos* or a science of reason. In order then to transcend the self-enclosure that has resulted from developing such a science of reason until its systematic conclusion, one needs to reach out and consider the way that historical acts have and continue to affect human consciousness. Mythology is, for that purpose, a prime candidate since it is "above all a *historical* phenomenon" (HKM 55). Now then, what does the historical phenomenon of mythology teach humans beings that they could not access through a merely negative philosophy?

What Mythology teaches

If mythology is not a deliberate invention of a philosophical or poetical nature, then for Schelling the only remaining option is that mythology is what it purports to be; namely, a religious doctrine of the system and history of the gods: "Mythology is originally meant as the doctrine of the gods and history of the gods, that is,

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originally [it] has *religious meaning*" (HKM 67). This is what Schelling calls a "tautegorical" (*tautegorisch*) interpretation of mythology, which explains the emergence and development of mythology itself alone.[128]

Tautegorical means that something expresses the same thing with different words. Therefore, different mythologies express the same thing – the system and history of the gods – with different words and names. This is what Schelling also calls a religious meaning in mythology, namely that there is something fundamentally similar at work in all mythologies. But, a religious meaning in mythology does not necessarily imply that religion is true. For instance, one such religious interpretation of mythology is given by David Hume's in his *A Natural History of Religion* (1757). Here, he explains mythological explanations of reality as psychological responses to certain experiences, a psychological coping mechanism, which induces human beings to deify natural happenings. In this case, mythology is indeed something religious but the whole of religion is dismissed as false. The foundation of all mythology (and religion) is then for Hume in something very real, but a rational mind would find better ways to deal with this.

More recently, the field of the cognitive science of religion has developed a more complex form of Hume's argument, which includes the hypothesis of the hyperactive agency detection device (HADD). This view holds that agents who are prone to detect deliberate agency behind otherwise impersonal natural processes have an evolutionary benefit. The cost for misjudging agency is higher than the cost for misjudging non-agency. When two primates, for instance, wander the savanna and hear a noise, the one who flees because he thinks of an evil spirit has a higher chance to survive and reproduce than the one who assumes the noise to be the wind – especially if the noise turns out to be a lion! Mythology then seems to have evolutionary benefit.

There is no real engagement with the arguments of evolutionary theory on mythology in Schelling's work. That theory was only in its infancy at that time. His arguments against such a view might have then lost their force. His general point would be that these sort of explanations render the emergence and especially the content of mythology contingent. Why not different coping or communication mechanisms? Why not a different content to mythology? Such

128 Schelling took the term 'tautegorical' from Coleridge, who came to it in his *On the Prometheus of Aeschylus* after reading Schelling's *The Deities of Samothrace*. Numerous English commentators attack Coleridge for taking over too much from Schelling. As a riposte, Schelling charitably adopted Coleridge's term 'tautegorical' in order to balm any indictments of plagiarism on Coleridge's part. However, Schelling did fear that Coleridge's use of this term left open an avenue for an allegorical interpretation and, as such, he decided to radicalize Coleridge's usage of that term (see HKM 187 note e).

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contingency conflicts with mythology's universal emergence and the impressive similarities between different mythologies. The universal emergence and similarities can only be accounted for, according to Schelling, if all mythology has a universal, non-contingent source or ground. Hence the need for a positive philosophy that cognizes that ground. This ground can be internal (e.g. an internal sense) or external (a primal revelation) to humanity.

If we accept that mythology must have a universal and non-contingent cause, whether internal or external, then the challenge becomes how to account for the universal polytheistic form of mythology. To put things succinctly: why would one universal cause of mythology express as a plurality, both internally as a multiplicity of gods, and externally as many different mythologies? For Schelling, there are three ways to answer that question. First, the universal ground of mythology arrives only at the end of mythology, which is an approach taken by many Christian authors, who hold that the true God emerges only at the end of mythology (*terminus ad quem*). This means that the ground of God, that is, the different potencies of God, are the cause of mythology. The actual cause of mythology would then be a vague, indistinct and confused religious sentiment, a memory of humanity's connection to divinity. According to this explanation, "the immediate object of human knowledge remains nature, or the sensible world; God is only the dark, vague goal that is strived for and that is first sought in nature" (HKM 76). This first view was championed by many of the British empiricists, such as Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, who claim that a vague, instinctive awareness of God gave rise to a whole panoply of different gods. Schelling's objection to this view is similar to his objection against naturalism as a whole; namely, that this view has mythology arise through a "purely immanent and simultaneously necessary movement" (HKM 77). According to this scheme, mythology would not be a historical act which requires an actual intervention by God. Mythology is plainly error here, and the error is potentially set right by the true revelation of God which destroys the world of paganism. This explanation is burdened by the same difficulty as the psychological explanation offered by Hume, namely that it cannot account for the universal emergence and vast similarities between the great world mythologies.

A second option was extensively debated during the early nineteenth century: the true revelation is at the very beginning of philosophy (*terminus ad quo*), a revelation that was subsequently distorted. An influential version of this argument was proposed by the Marburg philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer (who we have discussed in some detail in chapter four).[129] Creuzer had argued that the

129 Schelling was very well aware of Creuzer. In fact, Creuzer expresses gratitude to Schelling in the second preface of his main work for Schelling's comments (Creuzer 1978, p. x).

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mythology of the Greeks (known through Homer and Hesiod) was derived from a more original revelation, an *Uroffenbarung*, imposed upon Indian or Brahmanic clerics. These clerics realized that the content of this revelation could not be put convincingly into the language of philosophy, and so they created narratives that conveyed the general message to the people. These narratives spread beyond India and started to lead a life of their own: in the Middle East, they gave rise to Judaism; in Egypt, they started Egyptian mythology; crossing the Mediterranean, they created Pelagianism, which spread and gave rise to all the European mythologies. Creuzer held that the essence of these narratives was "the symbol", that is, the union of the infinite and finite – which is a point that would be contested extensively by his fellow philologists. The primal symbol communicated something of a gendered dynamic, a dialectics of succession between male and female. This was the communal essence to all mythologies, most clearly expressed in its original version (Brahmanism) which became obscured or distorted as it passed through different peoples and ages.

Schelling never gives sufficient credit to Creuzer as a predecessor to his theory. A reason for this might be that there were a number of diverging interests in the way German Romanticism dealt with mythology. On the one hand, there was a general fascination with the Orient, which was taken to be profound and mystical (e.g., Creuzer, Schlegel, and Schopenhauer). On the other hand, there was an overt interest in exalting Western philosophy, Western language and Christianity (e.g. Hegel and Schelling). Creuzer's work was a powerful challenge to the latter interest, since he was responsible for a whole new approach to mythology, one that recognized the similarities between all the great world mythologies. Especially volatile was his argument that Greek and Biblical mythology were ultimately dependent upon Brahmanist cosmology. This debate even involved Goethe at one point, but the most direct opponents of Creuzer were philologists Gottfried Hermann and Johann Heinrich Voss. Schelling's Berlin *Lectures on Mythology* come relatively late to this debate (it was at its height in the 1820s and 1830s) and he feels confident to dismiss Creuzer's theory. For Schelling, while the first option of a "vague religious instinct" could not account for the similarities between different mythologies, Creuzer's theory of "original distortion" could not explain the unicity of, and distinctions between, mythologies. A good theory of mythology must account for how the great mythologies are similar and yet distinct in the most radical sense possible.

Schelling suggests his own, third option: mythology emerges by a historical, real act of revelation by God, where God is both the point of departure and the end of mythology (*terminus ad quem* and *terminus ad quo*). This connects to

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Schelling's overall emphasis to think about religion, not in the abstract, but in concrete and historical terms:

> A religious doctrine that would have been in mankind *independent* of human invention: such a doctrine could only be one *divinely* revealed. Thus, an entirely new domain of explanation as such would have been entered, for a divine revelation is a real relation of God to human consciousness. The *actus* of revelation itself is a real event. (HKM 81)

The historical revelation of God precedes all monotheism and is equally the teleological endpoint of mythological revelation: we start from God and return to God – which is why Schelling's philosophy of history is more correctly called eschatology, not teleology. Schelling therefore agrees with both former explanations: God must be the initial cause and endpoint of mythology, a monotheism must precede the polytheism of mythology. "It is no longer merely *philosophically* asserted that polytheism, which it really is, presupposes monotheism; here monotheism has become a historical presupposition of mythology, while it itself is again derived from a *historical fact*" (HKM 91). The main task for Schelling is then to explain how an original monotheism degenerated into a polytheism. How did truth become error?

Schelling starts from the assumption that primordial humanity was not divided into different spiritual peoples (with different mythologies), but that humanity was one and totally immersed in a unitary consciousness with God. At one point in history, actually at the inaugural point of history, this unitary existence was fragmented through the emergence of different peoples (*Völker*). This moment did not occur because of a spatial dispersion, but a spiritual dispersion; the diversification of humanity was caused by a spiritual scission: "An *inner* – and for just that reason indissoluble and irreversible – separation like that existing between peoples cannot at all be effected *externally*" (HKM 95). The spatial relocation of humanity was not the cause but the consequence of spiritual division: "Instead of being the causes, divergent directions of physical development were on the contrary themselves only an attendant appearance of the great spiritual movements that had to be conjoined with the first emergence and formation of peoples" (HKM 99–100).

The spiritual element that caused the disruptive state of humanity cannot simply be a sort of natural degeneration or *Abfall* (which is what Creuzer held). It must be caused by a positive element: it resulted in immense projects, such as nations, mythologies and cultures. Schelling points here to the development of language: "The emergence of language is inseparable from the emergence of peoples" (HKM 100). Because of language, different groups of individuals gave their own wording to the highest principle (e.g. Uranos, Elohim, Brahma, etc). While they attempted to denote the same highest principle, the diversity of

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names gave rise to different mythologies which follow the same principles. In other words, all mythologies express the same thing, but they do so by means of different words.

Schelling's solution might be intuitively persuasive, it does merely shift the explanatory difficulty: if different peoples emerge through different languages, how do different languages emerge? But Schelling has an answer. Languages emerge because of the "tremoring *of consciousness itself*" (HKM 103). If God is what unites humanity in its primordial state – wherein "a *God* which *entirely* filled consciousness, which was common to all mankind, a God that, as it were, pulled them into its own unity, denied to it every movement, every divergence" (HKM 104) – then only a power at least as potent as the first can break that unity: the rupture of consciousness can only happen given a new 'God': language itself. For Schelling, language is the fall away from God, an original sin if you will, which instantiates a distance between humanity and God. The initial unity with God in primordial times was a nameless and unconscious unity: "The unity of the human species, which preceded the separation, a unity of human species that we can likewise just as little think without a positive cause, could have been preserved through nothing so decisively as *through the consciousness of One universal God common to all humanity*" (HKM 119).

Humanity only became humanity – that is, a separate entity consciously outside of God – through language: God reveals Himself as Other to humanity, and then human beings find a way to appropriately name God. This moment of creation did not necessarily flow from God's being, but was an act of pure, incomprehensible and inexplicable freedom. Given freedom and language, human beings try to articulate the vague remembrance of an original principle of unity, but simply by virtue of giving different names to that original unity, humanity spiritually splits itself up into different peoples. Schelling is not oblivious to the similarities this explanation has to the Biblical parable of Babel, where an overconfident, unitary humanity became scattered (as punishment for their overconfidence, *hubris*) into different peoples by the emergence of language.

Schelling's account for the emergence of different peoples through language is not unique. For instance, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky would a few decades later write a short story with a similar motif. In "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877), a person who has become been convinced that "nothing in the world mattered" and who, because of "an unmistakeable spite against mankind", decides to kill himself (Dostoevsky 2008, resp. pp. 2 and 3). While planning the deed, his actions are clumsily thwarted by a terrified little girl who sought aid for her mother. Now unable to commit to the deed, the ridiculous man goes home, falls asleep and dreams a dream that rekindles his love for life. The dream reveals to him the original, pre-Lapsarian state of

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humanity: “The earth untarnished by the Fall; on it lived people who had not sinned” (Dostoevsky 2008, p. 18). While these original human beings were not scientifically advanced, they had a “knowledge higher and deeper than ours” (Dostoevsky 2008, p. 19) These are a people in a primal unity with God, who “had no temples, but they had a real living and uninterrupted sense of oneness with the whole of the universe” (Dostoevsky 2008, p. 21) Without offering much of an explanation how exactly, the ridiculous man claims that he has corrupted this Eden-like society, which became clear through their “struggle for separation, for isolation, for individuality, for mine and thine. They began to talk in different languages” (Dostoevsky 2008, p. 25). The emergence of isolation, differentiation and language as such is attributed, by Dostoevsky, to a reversal of the idea that desire or feeling guides knowledge into the idea that “knowledge is higher than feeling” (Dostoevsky 2008, p. 26). Very akin to Schelling’s view, the emergence of language is to be attributed to the steady elevation of determinate knowledge over feeling, which can have nihilistic consequences when thinking (negative philosophy) turns out to be quite incapable of reaching out to something real (positive philosophy). The ambiguous desire for the real, for connection and unity, inspires a “yearning melancholy that at times approached insufferable sorrow,” (Dostoevsky 2008, p. 22) a thought that obviously aligns well with the Romantic idea of a human *sehnsucht*: a melancholy for a more authentic, intimate experience of reality and divinity (such as in Goethe’s famous poem *selige Sehnsucht*).

Dostoevsky thought this yearning could be resolved by means of an existential engagement with Christian faith where grace might befall human beings who venture through profound suffering: the protagonists of *The Brothers Karamzov* and *Crime and Punishment*, respectively Alyosha Karamazov and Rodion Raskolnkov, are good examples (see Vanden Auweele 2016, pp. 279–296). Schelling’s argument lines up with Dostoevsky’s vision that separation and language cause a disruption, not only between people but also between human beings and God. But while language was the cause of diremption, Schelling takes language to be the key towards a reclaimed unity, namely when the proper words to denote God are revealed. This can arise only after a more explicit revelation of God which is, in Biblical Scripture, portrayed as the fusion of language at Pentecost:

> In the entire sequence of religious history only one thing can be compared to the event of the *confusion of language*: the momentarily re-established linguistic unity at Pentecost, with which Christianity, destined to again link the whole human species to the unity through the knowledge of the *one* true God, begins its great path. (HKM 108–109)

The monotheism that preceded polytheism is ‘relative’ since it allows for a plurality of gods to follow. Real monotheism happens with real revelation, which

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occurs only after humanity has developed language, split up into different peoples, lived through this diremption, and ultimately is confronted with God's direct revelation in Christ. In other words, mythology and language prepare for revelation, and without the process wherein humanity separates itself from original consciousness, there could be no revelation. Schelling's argument therefore is that mythological stories are our latent memories of a not-yet-conscious unity with God. This is then relevant for our present investigation since it warrants that mythology teaches us something that preceded conscious thought, or in other words, something that is pre-rational. This is then an important revelation that enriches philosophy beyond the merely negative. The specifics of this are best laid out by engaging with Schelling's interpretation of the Dionysia or Eleusinian mysteries.

Dionysus and the Coming of the Light

For Schelling, human beings are initially united in a mythic consciousness that is ruptured through the spiritual workings of language, which creates a second god next to the the unitary consciousness in God. It was "with this attempt [*Versuch*] to be as God that the glory of God was lost [. . .]. Man was also lord of the potencies, but only to keep them (for God) in an indissoluble unity" (O 201). As discussed more fully in *Freedom-Essay*, human beings ought to connect religiously the principles of light and darkness, but this bond can be torn, and so the principle of darkness can be elevated over the unity of the principles. In the *Berlin Lectures on Revelation*, Schelling argues that such a reconnection can only take place in a philosophical religion, which is a religion in which one freely submits to revealed truth.

Schelling's philosophy of mythology is incredibly complex.[130] The basic gist is that humanity has exited from mythic consciousness and developed a myriad of different mythologies, they have fallen into error, and now harken for a way to return to truth. Schelling's argument could be summarized in three decisive moments: first, the moment of a primal, monotheistic and unknown unity with God; second, the moment of diremption, a cleaving of the unity by means of language which sets into motion a theogonic process of different gods; third, a moment where distinct gods are recognized as expressions of one and the same

130 Good discussions can be found in Dupré (2007, pp. 1–20), Beach (1994) and Wilson (1996, pp. 81–108).

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deity.[131] In his lectures, Schelling entertains extensive discussion with regard to how the three greatest world mythologies, i.e. Indian, Egyptian and Greek (these are the only 'finished' or fully developed mythologies), work through a certain process from unity towards diremption to new unity, ultimately harkening forward to a future wherein the lost unity with the origin is reclaimed. That moment of reclaiming always fails and the result is that a new tension emerges, a new set of gods: "An actual polytheism could only take place in humanity through violent struggles; the pain that is caused by the unity lost could only be redeemed when polytheism is recognized as a mere transition so that a future religion would restore the unity lost" (O 248).

Let us turn our attention to the final moment in mythology, namely the recognition of all successive gods as the expression (or as "singular masks") of one and the same God. This brings us to an important link between Schelling and Nietzsche, namely their views of Dionysus and the Eleusinian Mysteries.[132] Schelling's interest in Dionysus was not uncommon in the Romantic era (Hölderlin's poem *Brot und Wein* is another typical example), but his systematic discussion of Dionysus brought this deity into philosophical debates in an unprecedented way. Nietzsche was not present at Schelling's lectures, but some of the greatest minds of the times were present and one of those was Nietzsche's cherished Basel colleague, Jacob Burckhardt.[133]

Schelling's basic assessment of mythology is that theogonies are a symbolic and deified representation of the very development of consciousness, which moves through the three potencies of retraction, expansion and reconciliation. Mythology reveals something of the unconscious structure of consciousness,

131 See: "(1) Des ungeistigen oder ausser sich seienden Gottes, (2) des sich selbst in die Geistigkeit zurückbildenden und (3) des als reiner Geist hervortretenden Gottes als Momente eines und desselben Gottes erscheinen müssen" (O 329).

132 Nietzsche's focus is more on the timeless idea of Dionysus and less on how he was portrayed in the Mysteries. In an unpublished fragment, Nietzsche recognizes that the Dionysian festival and the Mysteries were the most serious aspects of Greek religion: "Offenbar waren doch die dionysischen Festspiele das Ernsthafteste ihrer Religion – mit Ausnahme der *Mysterien* – in denen aber wieder dramatische Aufführungen stattfanden" (NL 7 1870 5[104]).

133 There is a plausible connection between Burckhardt's interpretation of cultural history and Schelling's views of mythology. Burckhardt agreed with Schelling that an account of a people of the past could not merely, like an antiquarian, collect all disparate facts and figures of that people. Instead, Burckhardt sought to establish a 'cultural history' which "aims at the inner core of bygone humanity, and at describing what manner of people these were, what they wished for, thought, perceived and were capable of. In the process it arrives at what is constant, and finally this constant comes to seem greater and more important than the ephemeral, and qualities greater and more instructive than actions" Burckhardt hoped to find "the *eternal* Greek". (Burckhardt 1998, resp. p. 5 and 6)

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which is also the structure of organic nature and history. In other words, mythology reveals something preceding conscious thought which, in turn, might inform humanity about the structure and purpose of being itself. Mythology is humanity's latent memory of our unity with nature and God. Because of what is at stake, Schelling carefully sifted through the records that remain of the different mythologies of the world, find their common elements, and philosophically analyse the relevance of the processes common to these mythologies. But as historical, philosophical and even poetical development had a tendency to transform the pure content of mythology, for Schelling the best records are those that most extensively approximate original, mythic consciousness. For this reason, Schelling is particularly interested in Pelasgian mythology, which is supposedly the common mythology of all peoples around the Aegean Sea before they became Egyptian or Greek (see: O 233; Cf. Tilliette 2002, pp. 83 ff).

Schelling makes a bold claim: the process of theogony in all of the world's mythologies shows how the hegemony of a male, dominating principle is interrupted by the doings of a female principle. The male principle is usually associated with rule, transcendence and unity, while the female principle tends to be associated with nature, immanence and differentiation. What Schelling found particularly interesting about the female principle is that she is always ambiguous: part of the first principle (often as wife) but also the herald of the future (often as mother). For instance, the reign of Uranos ('the sky') is broken when Gaia ('the earth') conspires with her son Kronos ('time'): the mother-son rebellion is completed in the symbol of the undoing the manhood of the first principle (in this case, castration). The old is made to be without force ('impotent') and the new takes over. This process repeats itself: when the new male principle (Kronos), assumes the role of domination and his significant other (Rhea), wife to him but mother to his successor (Zeus), gives birth to the Olympians who will eventually overthrow the male principle. The cycle is unending.

For Schelling, the mythological process is structured by the interrelationship of the potencies: the dominating principle collects everything within himself, the expansive principles creates something outside the dominating principle, and reconciliation happens in something that is both old and new, infinite and finite. In other words, this is a moving from undifferentiated unity through differentiation towards differentiated unity. This is a self-sustaining chain of events, one that can only really be broken by means of something absolutely new and totally unnecessary occurring. This new occurrence would allow for the transition out of the tension between the old and the new, the male and the female. According to Schelling, this happens in the revelation of the true God in revealed religion. But before that moment, between the past of myth and the future of Christianity, there lies something of particular interest to Schelling, namely the Eleusinian or

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Dionysiac Mysteries. These mysteries bring mythology to a higher consciousness and a careful consideration of them shows that "the Mysteries themselves are nothing but the knowledge or consciousness of mythology; a higher and comprehending consciousness [*das Bewusstsein der Mythologie, das Höheres begreifende Bewusstsein*], whose content are the three principles from which we have derived the whole of mythology" (O 320).

The Eleusinian Mysteries were named for the town of Eleusis, near Athens, famous for its theatrical performances in celebration of the cult of Demeter. These mysteries are among the oldest mythological festivities and their form was widespread around the Aegean sea. As some of the oldest sources of mythological consciousness, for Schelling they hold the key to understanding the mythological process in their protagonists Demeter, Persephone and Dionysus. Let us begin with Demeter, who is "*the consciousness that stands between the real and the freeing god*, which still obeys the first but is already in the overcoming by the second" (O 226). Louis Dupré explains the role of Demeter as that "the goddess of agriculture stands between the world of the past, dominated by the oppressive power of Kronos, and the world of the future, liberated by Dionysus" (Dupré 2013, p. 325). Demeter is one in a long line of female transitional figures from a first to a second principle, but what makes Demeter and Persephone particularly interesting to Schelling is that they precede the Greek pantheon: Demeter is sometimes called Demeter Pelasgus because of her link to pre-Greek, Pelasgian mythology. In the same way that Uranos and Gaia (or Kronos and Rheia) procreated – to the downfall of the male principle – Demeter procreates with Zeus to give birth to Persephone, which sets into motion a chain of events that inaugurates the end of mythological polytheism. Demeter is not coincidentally the goddess of agriculture, which historically is what brings nomadic existence to its end, and enables civilized and sedentary existence. Agriculture is what enables humanity to remain in one place, to decide upon a culture and ruling principles, without the mythological rotary progression of first, second and third principles.

Schelling notes that the centrality of Demeter and agriculture to the Eleusinian Mysteries is mirrored in the Biblical narrative of Genesis: the firstborn son of Adam and Eve is Cain, a farmer, the second son Abel, a shepherd (Genesis 4:2). When the time comes for Cain and Abel to sacrifice to God, Cain's sacrifice is refused in favour of the more voluminous sacrifice of Abel. Abel's herd has done well while Cain's crops had not. (Might this be because Abel's herd had ravaged his brother's nutritious crops and there were no civil laws around to sue for damages?) In his anger and jealousy, Cain kills Abel and is subsequently punished: his crops will barely hold in the ground, which will force him and his people to lead a nomadic existence. For Schelling, early humanity was not yet ready to settle down, as they had to be scattered into different peoples, mainly the clan of Cain and the clan of

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Sem: the righteous, chosen people untainted by Cain's crime (Abraham came from the clan of Sem, hence that Jews are called Semites). Before the Messiah can reinstitute unity, there was still a long list of events to occur. Mankind must go through ever greater division and even hostile opposition before becoming one in Christ.

Demeter is thus the principle which inaugurates the transition from unitary mythic consciousness to the scattering of peoples. She is caught between the old and the new, which becomes most powerfully portrayed by her daughter Persephone (also called Proserpina) who tests her individual freedom and wanders from her mother. Adam and Eve tested their freedom in overstepping divine law and paid a dear price. So did Persephone: she is kidnapped by her uncle Hades. When that blissful unity between Demeter and Persephone is broken, Demeter goes on a search for Persephone. Schelling reads this in terms of nostalgia, a desire to return to the golden age under Kronos. Ultimately failing in her attempts to retrieve her daughter, Demeter strikes a deal with Hades that Persephone is allowed to live with her mother for half the year. Persephone is an image of freedom, which is itself both cause and sign of the fall from primal unity, which can lead to reconciliation (Demeter) but also to a new fall (Hades). Persephone is the consciousness of the fall from primal unity, which engenders the equal (six months out of twelve) possibility of freedom for higher and lower things. Freedom is the equal capacity to good *and* evil.

Schelling extrapolates further: the tension in mythology is between the principle of absolute unity and the principle of generative nature, a tension between the absolute and nature. Either the absolute dominates nature (pantheism) or the absolute is excluded from nature (naturalism or deism), which reminds of the opposition between idealism and realism. Schelling's rethinking of pantheism as a higher realism seeks to overcome the binary opposition between immanence and transcendence. Not only is philosophy entangled in the problem of binary oppositions that it seeks to reconcile, this is the very structure of subconscious thought itself. The tension between the first and second principle requires a third principle capable of reconciling the first two: "The main concept of the Greek mysteries is the reconciliation of the consciousness that is wounded by the separation [*Trennung*] from the real God" (O 230). In this case, Uranos, Kronos and Zeus are the 'real gods' of undifferentiated unity; consciousness separates itself from that unity by means of the principle of differentiation, which are Gaia, Rhea and Demeter. This state of cleavage ought to be overcome: which brings us to the third protagonist of the Eleusinian mysteries, Dionysus.

The character of Dionysus is best known from his appearances in one of Euripides' later tragedies *The Bacchae*. Roughly speaking, this play sets the stage for a conflict between, on the one hand, a human, temporal and political order and, on the other hand, a divine, timeless and religious order. When the God

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Dionysus arrives in Thebes from Asia Minor, King Pentheus forcibly tries to halt the influence of this new god. Pentheus might have good cause to be apprehensive of this new deity since the Dionysiac cults were known to the Greeks as secretive, orgiastic gatherings wherein human beings relinquished their individuality in music and alcohol-induced ecstasy. Ceremonies frequently involved tearing apart a living animal and eating it raw! Dionysus was associated with the vegetative life of the seasons, of life being reborn in the spring and dying in the fall. His companions were usually hybrids of one creature and another, such as satyrs. Dionysus, to the Greeks generally, represented the unmediated unity of human existence, the voracious coming-to-be and perishing of all life, and the disruption of the well-ordered structure of Greek cosmos (which means 'jewel' literally). During the ceremonies, human beings dressed and acted as animals, men as women, kings as paupers. All of this was a huge threat to the Greeks' well-ordered and cosmically-balanced existence. In *The Bacchae*, Pentheus dresses up as an animal in order to attend secretly one of the Dionysiac festivals but, through a whole host of complex circumstances, is torn apart by the companions of Dionysus, called the Maenads, which are led by Pentheus' own mother Agave.

The way Euripides depicts Dionysus makes him a representative of life in all its voraciousness with little to no regard for individuality. Dionysus was an opponent of the well-structured Greek Pantheon, which was carefully planned as a worldview wherein (individual) life was meaningful within a greater whole. Dionysus opposes such meaningfulness. He proposes his own redemption by foregoing individuality and experiencing the pleasure of complete immersion in unmediated unity. Read in this way, one would think that Dionysus is just another appearance – after Uranos, Kronos and Zeus – of the unmediated unity in which human beings lose their individuality, a unity that in turn must be broken through the opposition of a second, female principle. However, Schelling provides a more nuanced, more charitable reading of Dionysus which builds from the Eleusinian Mysteries rather than Euripides' play. The idea that Dionysus opposes the Greek Pantheon and looks forward towards Christ will be central to Schelling's discussion (Nietzsche's reading of Dionysus is quite different).

In the Mysteries, Dionysus is three different, dialectically-related characters: Zagreus (son of Zeus and Persephone), the Theban Bacchus (son of Zeus and the mortal Semele) and Iakchos (son of Zeus and Demeter). A few decades after Schelling's discussion of Dionysus in the Greek mysteries, Nietzsche would advance the thesis – preposterous to his philological contemporaries – that all tragic heroes are nothing but masks for Dionysus:

> It is a matter of indisputable historical record that the only subject-matter of Greek tragedy, in its earliest form, was the suffering of Dionysus, and that for a long time the only hero

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> present on the stage was, accordingly, Dionysus. [. . .] All the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus, etc. are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysus. (GT 10)

Schelling says something similar about Dionysus in the Eleusinian mysteries: "The deities of the Mysteries are not only in indissoluble connection but also one God, or the successive personalities of one God. They are only different forms or moments of one and the same God" (O 237). This means that the three forms of Dionysus are, as a whole, the progressive and holistic identity of Dionysus, but also that the Mysteries are testament to the consciousness that one and the same god dialectically manifests in mythology. All gods are masks of one and the same god, and the recognition of this is what makes the Eleusinian Mysteries a "higher consciousness" of mythology.

Through attaining a higher consciousness of what goes on in mythology – the successive gods as masks of one and the same god – the Mysteries prepare for a way out of mythology. This manifested in the figure of Dionysus. The three forms of Dionysus are the principle of past, present and future: "The first Dionysus is lord of the past, the second of the present and the last of the future" (O 245). For Schelling, that is the very nature of mythological consciousness, namely a remembrance of the past, an occupation with the present and a foreseeing of the future. Consciousness itself is not immersed at any point entirely in past, present of future, but is perennially co-determined by all three elements. These are, of course not coincidentally, the three 'ages' of the world in Schelling's *The Ages of the World*.

In Schelling, Dionysus becomes a shelter against the mythic power of the first principle: the God of intoxication allows human beings to choose for or against the first principle. Dionysus is the principle that creates a distance between the first voracious principle and human beings by allowing human beings to choose freely for or against intoxication and ecstasy. Or, put differently, Dionysiac orgy prods or shakes human beings into a new state of being, as J.E. Wilson writes: "Dionysus 'stirs' [*erschüttert*] human beings: he puts them in the spirited, staggering, at first frightening, but transcending orgasm of mythological development" (Wilson 1996, p. 84 – my translation). For the early Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Dionysus will univocally be the principle of ecstatic submersion, but Schelling points out something more fundamental about Dionysus. With Dionysus, human beings will for the first time get the chance to choose for ecstasy as opposed to an involuntary submersion into the first principle. Dionysus rouses the selfhood of the individual in a yet-still-fragmentary and piecemeal fashion. Through that possibility for an exit, human beings distance themselves from that original consciousness and so transition from *mythos to mythos-logos*.

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The selfhood aroused for a first time by Dionysus is a transition into paganism, into error and evil (as Schelling puts it). But that transition is not merely a fall, but also the enabling condition of a free return. This signals a last and telling feature of Dionysus: the God looking towards the future. For Schelling, Dionysus Iakchos is a sign of the future, of a new God to come that will undo the fragmentation in polytheism: "The last content of the Mysteries was the complete liberation from polytheism, a complete overcoming of it, but only in the future. Therefore, monotheism is to some extent already celebrated as that which has been shown to be coming" (O 384). Thus, the real secret behind the Eleusinian Mysteries is in Dionysus. He foreshadows the destruction of many gods in favour of the God to come. Schelling enumerates many signs of this prophesies (see especially O 236–250), but undoubtedly the best illustration of Dionysus Iakchos foreseeing the future is his iconic rendering as the child "at mother's breast" (O 240). This reminds of Jesus Christ's depiction at his mother's breast. In other words, for Schelling the progression of Dionysus in the different forms shows this god gradually taking up more freedom. Whereas Zagreus and the Theban Bacchus were forced to act against the 'real god', Dionysus Iakchos – the boy or child god – is free to act, free to create. But for Schelling, Dionysus Iakchos is not a grand finale that prophetically reveals the full content of mythic consciousness. Instead, the final conclusion of the mythological process is in the whole process. The whole of consciousness is in the dialectical tension between the three forms of Dionysus where the present (Theban Bacchus) has been generated through the demise of the past (Zagreus) and leads towards the future (Iakchos).

The Eleusianian Mysteries were kept a secret (hence, mystery): only those of the highest initiation could learn about the future that Dionysus would inaugurate. For Schelling, this is the future of the "god who comes", of Christ. Louis Dupré summarizes as follows:

> *Iakchos*, the third Dionysus, popularly depicted as a child at Demeter's breast, was called 'the god who comes', the god of the future. That future had to remain secret because the god who was to bring the theogonic process to an end threatened not only the other gods but the very social system that rested on them. In his poem 'Brod und Wein', Hölderlin had compared Dionysus to Christ, the one who was to come and openly to proclaim the end of the ancient gods. (Dupré 2013, p. 326)

Dionysus is the principle that enables reconciliation between the past of mythology and the future of a freely-revealed religion. In Dionysus, the three potencies gradually start to claim freedom from the mythological process. In many ways, Dionysus prepares for Christ: born from a divine father and mortal mother, killed and resurrected. In his power over life and death, Dionysus is

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the first step in overcoming mythological consciousness where human beings are no longer enslaved by the first principle or caught in a dialectical opposition between the first and second principle. For Schelling, Dionysus indicates the way out of mythology.[134]

Christology and Philosophical Religion

Schelling rethinks topics that are prone to controversy, especially when one considers his more orthodox Christian interlocutors. Some of Schelling's claims must have appeared veritably scandalous: God becomes God when his act of free will creates the world; creation is not something that works *ex nihilo* (in the common sense of the term) but the work of light and spirit that inspires barren nature; evil is a very real capacity of human freedom and a necessary consequence of God's revelation; rational thought is incapable of attaining to being, which is why revelation through nature, history and God is necessary; Pagan mythology is inspired by a primal revelation of God who is not-yet-fully God – an outflowing of God's essence, not an act of will; the Dionysiac mysteries are a preparation for Christian revelation. Come at this point of completion, the reader (or better, listener) of Schelling's arguments in his lectures is must have been eagerly awaiting: which scandalous thesis would conclude Schelling's philosophy of revelation? The suspense was immense, alike to the finale of *Game of Thrones* in 2019. What scandalous twist was going to bring to completion one of the greatest stories ever told? But not unlike the finale of George R. R. Martin's sage, Schelling's ending was anti-climactic.[135]

Schelling had given us earlier clues – some as early as the *Lectures on the System of the Ages of the World* (1827/1828) – that the final conclusion is in traditional Christianity: "The key to world history lies in the divine economy which was initially obscured but revealed in Christ" (SW 133). There are other clues as well: nature, history, mythology, as well as Christianity as a spiritual and

134 For further discussion of Dionysus in Schelling's philosophy of mythology, see Lawrence (1989, pp. 173–184), Tilliete (2002, pp. 91–94) and Beach (1994, pp. 205–230). Carlos João Correia has pointed out that some sense of Nietzsche's 'death of God' is already prepared in Schelling. Not only does the mythological God die, but, as we will see, a stagnant, ossified view of God has to make way for a more vitalist understanding of God (Correia 2015, pp. 154–166).

135 The premises of Schelling's philosophy might contradict his own conclusion. If history is a continuous process of opposition, development and new revelation, then even Christianity is something which, so we must assume, has to be overcome at some point. In the end, Christianity can be nothing more than a mediator of knowledge about God, not the final document, signed and sealed, on the nature of the divine (see Saule 2011, pp. 81–85).

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historical phenomenon in need of a philosophical basis. Schelling merely claims that any philosophical account of reality that aims at comprehensive systematicity cannot simply ignore Christianity, because then a large part of human experience and history is ignored. Instead, "philosophy must strengthen and complete itself [*erstarken und vervollkommnen*] by Christianity. A philosophy that does not understand Christianity will remain below true understanding because Christianity has as much reality as nature" (SW 12–13).

For Schelling, mythology ought to be seen as a historical phenomenon that is irreducible to poetry or philosophy. Christianity is therefore not the absolute Other to mythology and paganism, but, so Schelling argues in the *Berlin Lectures on Revelation*, "the principles of mythology are the same as the principle of revelation" (O 250). The difference between these principles is that "the representations that mythology produces are a necessary process" while revelation "is to be thought as something that requires an act and relationship outside of consciousness which has been given freely to humanity through the freest of causes, God" (O 250; cf. O 401–409). Mythology is the consequence of divine will, and revelation is a free act of divine will: "Mythology is the consequence, not the revelation, of a divine will" (O 252). Mythology is the latent consciousness of that very process wherein man distanced himself from the gods, where the end-process of mythology (Dionysus) looks towards the future for a reconciliation with God.

Where the first creation was the involuntary revelation of God in mythic consciousness, Christian revelation is the second: "Through the revelation there is introduced a new and second creation, she herself is a completely free act" (O 253). Above, we have discussed in what way revelation relates to philosophical reason: revelation is capable of widening the scope of philosophy in that she holds something beyond reason that can be incorporated by reason. Revelation is a total of three processes, namely nature, history and Christianity, all of which are capable of enlarging human understanding without ever allowing philosophy to finalize its understanding of reality. There is always more that can be revealed. These three sources of revelation are therefore to be understood as empirical facts, which means that they are something to be dealt with and not explained away by means of a previously constituted system of thought. Philosophy must not first provide a grounding for nature, history and Christianity, but must accept these as a fact and then enlarge its understanding of reality so that nature, history and Christianity – in all their glory, not in an overly reductive account – are given their fair dues: "Christianity should not be proved but should be considered as a fact [*Tatsache*], as a phenomenon [*Erscheinung*], which I want to explain as much as possible from its premises" (O 259). Religion renews philosophy.

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In the final analysis, Schelling shifts direction and turns towards Christian orthodoxy. Schelling no longer appears to hold that faith renews reason in an open dialectic, but that faith allows human reason to transcend all hesitation: “Faith is all doubt overcoming certainty [*allen Zweifel aufhebende Gewissheit*], and therefore the end of knowledge [*Ende des Wissens*]” (O 254). Christian faith – understood as best as possible by philosophy – is the grand conclusion of philosophical thought. After God had revealed Himself, human beings ought to “expand the narrowness of their concepts to the greatness of the divine,” (O 254) and with the revealed knowledge of Christianity, humanity has reached its endpoint or, as Schelling calls it, the end of search and discovery (*finis quaerendi et inveniendi*) “where human knowledge must confess that beyond it, she cannot progress [*nicht weiter fortschreiten zu können*]” (O 257).

This conclusion is opposed to the more organic premises of Schelling’s *Spätphilosophie*. Some authors have tried to make a case for that Schelling does not seek refuge in simple orthodoxy. For instance, Dale Snow argues that

> it would be a serious, if understandable, mistake to see the concentration on Christianity [in the *Spätphilosophie*] as a covert return to the faith of his fathers on the part of an aging and embittered thinker. Even in very late writings, Schelling makes no attempt to hide the fact that his first allegiance is to philosophy, not religion. (Snow 1996, p. 182)

Similarly, Jason Wirth argues that “Schelling does not introduce a reactionary Christianity in order to recoil from the problem of revelation” (Wirth 2015, p. 49) and Sean McGrath makes the point that “Schelling purports to go beyond theology by transforming the central Christian dogmas into historical and metaphysical claims that are fully intelligible and defensible (if not demonstrable) by reason alone” (McGrath 2016, p. 121). We will follow Schelling’s argument in the remainder of this chapter in order to assess whether or not Schelling retreats back into Christianity.

Schelling’s starting point is that Christianity reveals certain truths that are initially beyond human comprehension. He references the Pauline motif of the folly and weakness of God (1 Corinthians 1:18–25), which alludes to those acts of God that appear like weakness and folly to human understanding and which, most importantly, allows his creations to be free. Quite literally, there is no way to make rational sense (within a system of negative philosophy) of why there should be freedom (because freedom is only known *a posteriori*). Similarly, when reflecting upon the Christian commandment to love one’s enemies, Schelling writes:

> To love one’s enemies is beyond reason. The will of God in its relationship to the human race alienated from him is a secret and beyond all reason! This can be said without being unreasonable. Because of this, God’s decision is not incomprehensible, simply because it

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> stands in a perfect relationship to the extraordinary event [*außerordentlichen Ereignis*] to which it relates and to the greatness of God. (O 256)

The task of a philosophy of revelation is not to shirk away from trying to understand the extraordinary, but to accept the extraordinary as a real fact and account for it on its proper terms. As such, Christianity is to be accepted as an incontrovertible fact, related to, but not reducible to, other historical phenomena.

Schelling treats Christianity in an altogether different manner than nature and history. Christianity is thought of as the final act in the progress of revelation. There are two relevant elements to Christianity: a Christology and an ecclesiology.[136] With regard his Christology, Schelling bases his argument on Scripture, and takes Christ to be a being who has a pre-existence in God (O 271–277), who becomes incarnated in the world (*Menschwerdung*) as a revelation of the divine while retaining his distinctiveness from the divine (O 285–299), and who ultimately dies a martyr's death in order to enable the reconciliation of humanity with God (O 299–303). In other words, Schelling subscribes to the traditional Christology of his time. He sees Christ as a non-necessary but accidental (*zufällige*) being; that is, a second personality of the divine nature with existence outside of God (*außergöttliche Existenz*) (O 260–263). Christ breaks out of his pre-existence into existence (potential being becomes actual being) and becomes man, which Schelling accepts as an act: "Here we are yet again confronted with a fact, of the freely chosen becoming-human [*Menschwerdung*] of Christ" (O 286). The assumption of humanity renders Christ's connection to God into one of freedom or choice, rather than necessity. Schelling finds an illustration in the Biblical narrative of the Temptations of Christ (Matthew 4:1–11, Mark 1:12–13, Luke 4:1–13), where Christ is tempted by the devil, which is "the power of darkness aroused again by man, the God-negating principle" (O 263), to renounce God and take on full humanity. That is, to establish himself the negation of God.

For Schelling, the Temptations narrative show the choice offered to Christ to disconnect permanently his own principle of differentiation (Son) from the divine principle of unity (Father). If this link is severed, there could be no subsequent reconciliation: through refusing the offer of the devil, Christ remains in a position in which he can mediate between humanity and God. This mediating role is revealed,

136 In 1846, Schelling read some of Ferdinand Christian Baur – most likely his *Der Kritik und der Fanatiker*, which was a polemic against D.F. Strauss on the method of New Testament Studies – and found that Baur's main goal was to "disconnect the emergence of Christianity from the person of Christ" ("die Entstehung des Christentums von der Person Christi abzulösen" (Schelling 1998, p. 29)). Schelling, instead, deduces all that is relevant of Christianity from the person of Christ.

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for instance, in two crucial moments of Christ's life: his martyr's death and his resurrection. The sacrifice of Christ is testament to Christ unwavering allegiance to God. Humanity as a whole did not succeed in their allegiance to God, but has erred through mythology and paganism. Christ provides the possibility for realigning humanity with God through his voluntary death, which rejects a more closed-minded and radically-individual sense of selfhood in favor of a non-mythic ecstasy in God (see also Wilson 1996, pp. 93–94). Christ's coming brings an end to what Schelling calls humanity's "ecstatic history [*ekstatische Geschichte*]", where humanity is trapped in a self-alienated consciousness (O 293). With the death of Christ did "die the whole of heathendom" and humanity entered into "external real history [*äußere wirkliche Geschichte*]" (O 293). Christ provides the possibility to break the cycle of searching for God, if only humanity manages to become inspired by Christ's sacrifice.

A thought: if God is truly God, could reconciliation not occur without the assumption of humanity and death of Christ? Why all the bloodshed, misery and sorrow? Schelling's answer makes the following twofold consideration. On the one hand, Christ is a being that is entirely good, the incarnation of perfect morality, and he remains in faithful servitude to the Father up to his very death. Because of his perfect morality, there is literally *no reason* why Christ would have to be sacrificed. On the other hand, human beings have more radically disconnected their selfhood from God, which entails that human beings often lack the means and resolve to turn decidedly to God. Humanity needs to sacrifice its selfhood to reconnect with God, but they cannot; Christ does not need to sacrifice his selfhood to connect with God, but he does. The voluntary, guilt-free sacrifice of Christ inaugurates the historical reconciliation with God: "Christ has done for and in man what human beings could not do for themselves and Christ did not need to do for himself" (O 303).

The second element of the persona of Christ which – for Schelling, reveals his mediating role with God – is his resurrection: the signal of the victory of light over darkness and God over error. The resurrection provides the means for the further reconciliation of humanity with God: "After Christ had placed through his life, suffering and death *the seed* of a life growing eternally, he has trustfully wished that this seed would develop under the storms of this world" (O 341). The development of this seed happens in Schelling's ecclesiology, which is the successive development of the Christian church through its Petrine (Catholic), Pauline (Protestant) and Johannine (future) forms. The process of reconciliation does not happen 'in one fell swoop' (as Hegel alleged of Schelling at one point), but requires a dialectical mediation through certain historical forms. Schelling defines churches as follows: "*Peter* is the lawgiver, the one who grounds, the stable one. *Paul* broke out as a fire, he is Elias, he represents the principle of

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development, of movement, of freedom in the Christian church. *John is the apostle of the future*" (O 317).

The Petrine Church is focused on 'exteriority', which means that it sought to spread the message of the life and voluntary death of Christ (O 316–325). The Petrine Church sought to spread the message of the life and voluntary death of Christ, a church that looks to the past. The Petrine Church focused on exteriority; the Pauline Church is the church of inwardness. The former is the Catholic Church, the latter is the Protestant Church, prodding Catholicism into renewal. Schelling is rather harsh on the Catholic Church, comparing the pope to the antichrist and faulting Catholicism for excessive interest in worldly things (O 318). Like Peter the Apostle, the Catholic Church has denied Christ; though, again like Peter, the Catholic Church can come to repent and return to the person of Christ through Paul. Schelling explains the Reformation as a consciousness of the "higher laws from a divine understanding" (O 319). Rising up against the torpor of the Catholic Church, the Protestant church seeks revitalization. These churches ought to exist in a negative dialectic; that is, as a tension between externalization and inwardness. Schelling is quite proud that the Catholic and Protestant Churches co-exist in Germany (O 320).

Schelling hopes that the dialectical tension between the Petrine and Pauline Churches will be resolved by the Johannine Church of the future. Even the Protestant Church is, to Schelling, merely "a form of passage [*Durchgangsform*]" (O 320) and, at best, "a principle of disruption" (O 321). Whatever this Johannine Church is or looks like, remains unclear in Schelling's philosophy. Let me venture a guess. The Apostle John was, until relatively recently, widely credited with writing the Book of Revelation, the apocalyptical ending of the world. All of humanity would be brought into unison in a New Jerusalem after the destruction of the old world.

The final position of Schelling thus seems to be that the revelations of Christianity brings knowledge and searching to self-completion. Seemingly, then, in opposition to the general spirit of his other Berlin lectures, Schelling emphasizes that "every movement is in essence a searching for rest" and that "the idea of an endless process, an endless progress, is the most bleak and empty of all thoughts" (O 411). Philosophy finds its completion in taking up Christianity as the philosophical religion. As long as religion remains external and in tension, there is no final reconciliation between humanity and God. This can only happen when a human being freely chooses to re-inscribe himself in God. That final end of a philosophical religion in a Johannine church is what Jason Wirth calls Schelling's "drunken sobriety," namely to choose willingly to submit to religion (Wirth 2015, pp. 112–121). But this submission, as he continues, is not to any particular orthodoxy or tradition: "Schelling is, paradoxically,

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a *religious atheist*. The idea of God is not the idea of any sort of thing; God names the unthinged, *das Unbedingte*" (Wirth 2015, p. 117). But this is not how Schelling's final argument was received.

Apostacy

Schelling claims that, in and through Christianity, philosophy finds its highest truths. Does this thus once and for all close Schelling's project for a system of the world (*Weltsystem*) that does not pale in the face of reality? In his reflections on positive philosophy from his time in Munich Schelling fulminates against any view of reality that has pretentions to systematic wholeness:

> System in the bad sense occurs as lack of viability [*Mangel an Entwicklungsfähigkeit*], that is seen as a self-enclosure of ready-made truths. Bad systems originate from holding on to one and the same point of view. [. . .] Except system also means harmonious succession [*harmonische aufeinanderfolge*], like the rhythm of notes in music. The better side of system is not such a standing still, but development towards the organism of science. (SW 19)

In the earliest draft of *The Ages of the World*, the point is put similarly:

> System in the bad sense of the word, like anything noxious, is what is at a standstill, what lacks the strength for development and enhancement and seeing things through. Thus the difference between the different systems arises from the fact that they become stuck at a certain standpoint. The perspective itself is not anything false, but only the fact that one gets stuck there. At home in a true and comprehensive system, one is always able to educate oneself and develop things further. (W1 48)

And yet, at the closing point of his philosophical thought, Christianity does seem to finalize Schelling's philosophy. With the coming of the Johannine Church that reconciles the interior with the exterior, the system of the world comes to completion. Humanity would do well to drink deeply from the well of Christianity. In short, one could say that for Schelling, it is Dionysus *and then* the Crucified; for Nietzsche, as we discuss below, it will always be Dionysus *against* the Crucified.

Many of those in attendance at Schelling's lectures, and those engaging his philosophy afterwards, felt that Schelling had failed at marrying realism to idealism because in the end he took refuge in Christianity. For instance, in the second preface to *The Essence of Christianity* (1843), Young Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach sets himself a similar goal as Schelling. He claims that his

> philosophy has for its principle, not the Substance of Spinoza, not the *ego* of Kant and Fichte, not the absolute identity of Schelling, not the Absolute Mind of Hegel, in short, no

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> abstract, merely conceptual being, but a *real* being, the true *Ens realissimum* – man; its principle, therefore, is in the highest degree positive and real. (Feuerbach 1989, p. xv)

After reading this second preface, Karl Marx took to his pen and wrote to Feuerbach: "From your preface to the 2nd edition of *Das Wesen des Christentums*, I am almost led to conclude that you are engaged on a fuller work on *Schelling* or that you have something about this windbag in mind. Now that would be a marvelous beginning" (Marx and Engels, 1962 – letter of October 3, 1843). Marx recognized that Feuerbach's point of departure is Schelling's point of departure; their point of finalization is quite different. In fact, Marx becomes rather strident about the fact that Schelling is ultimately dishonest:

> How cunningly Herr von Schelling enticed the French, first of all the weak, eclectic *Cousin*, then even the gifted Leroux. For Pierre Leroux and his like still regard Schelling as the man who replaced transcendental idealism by rational realism, abstract thought by thought with flesh and blood, specialized philosophy by world philosophy! To the French romantics and mystics he cries: "I, the union of philosophy and theology," to the French materialists: "I, the union of flesh and idea," to the French sceptics: "I, the destroyer of dogmatism," in a word, "I . . . Schelling!"' (Marx and Engels, 1962 – letter of October 3, 1843)

The only thing that Schelling was indeed capable of uniting was "philosophy and diplomacy" – meaning that Marx took Schelling to be a philosophical populist. The young Marx was therefore hopeful that Feuerbach would bring to completion the initial project of Schelling:

> You are just the man for this because you are *Schelling in reverse*. The *sincere thought* – we may believe the best of our opponent – of the *young* Schelling for the realization, of which however he did not possess the necessary qualities except imagination, he had no energy but vanity, no driving force but opium, no organ but the irritability of a feminine perceptivity, this sincere thought of his youth, which in his case remained a fantastic youthful dream, has become truth, reality manly seriousness in your case.
> (Marx and Engels, 1962 – letter of October 3, 1843)

Feuerbach was Schelling in reverse much like Marx would become Hegel turned upside-down.

When scholars specializing in Schelling turned to the issue, for a long time Schelling's later philosophy was unquestionably considered a return to Christianity. The pioneering work of Horst Fuhrmans has taken Schelling's work after 1809 (especially of *The Ages of the World*) as an "explicative theism": moving from Romantic pantheism to an organic form of monotheism (Fuhrmans 1954). Yet, this does not seem to be the case for most of the Munich lectures, where Schelling is not particularly interested in philosophical or theological orthodoxy: he is more interested in engaging Christianity as a potential source of philosophical wisdom. Furthermore, in the Berlin lectures, Schelling opposes the

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organicism of his earlier philosophy: "Every movement is in essence a searching for rest [*Suchen nach Ruhe*]" (O 411). While Schelling was always clear that negative philosophy aspired to such self-completion, he seems now to suggest that even positive philosophy will come to a "standing still" and even calls "the idea of an endless process, an endless progress, the most bleak and empty of all thoughts" (O 411). This seems like a fairly radical shift in perspective: did Schelling return to Christianity, homesick after his idealistic and then Romantic debauchery?

In his last lectures, Schelling argues that humanity has moved from the mistake (*Irrtum*) of paganism and mythology, through the twists and turns of (negative) philosophy, to the completion of positive philosophy in Christianity, which ultimately leads to a philosophical religion. Perhaps Schelling thought of Christianity itself as an organic and living body that remains open to new revelations, which would mean that Christianity is the positive philosophy that perennially finds itself renewed? This is a very charitable and attractive reading of Schelling's philosophy of revelation, but one that cannot be backed up from the surviving text. Revelation is here revealed as something that halts and overrides philosophical thought. The problem with revelation is that one cannot decisively judge which revelations are authentic and which are not: what are one's criteria for thinking of something as a true revelation of being or God? As such, Schelling could be read as reacting defensively and taking established, conservative Christianity as the highest source of real revelation.

Jason Wirth opposes this view, for "Schelling does not introduce a reactionary Christianity in order to recoil from the problem of revelation" (Wirth 2015, p. 49). According to Wirth, Schelling does not discuss Christianity as a doctrine (*Lehre*), but rather as a fact that gives to thought. This does seems to be the case in the earliest draft of *The Ages of the World*: "Vibrant and living insight has been substantially damaged by the way the higher truths have been dogmatically and brusquely put before us in the form of isolated propositions. Genuine revelation represents everything in a process of movement and becoming" (W1 71). According to this perspective, Schelling aims thus to provide an account of the very possibility of religion while remaining a philosopher unbiased towards confessional faith: "I doubt whether the Christian idea is one that can be presented in a comprehensible fashion without progressively unfolding and developing it in a way that is perhaps possible only through the science of philosophy" (W1 71). Whether Wirth's argument still applies to the latest Schelling depends on a specific reading of the consecutive Petrine, Pauline and Johannine Churches: the first associated with the worldly power of Roman Catholicism, the second associated with the invisible Protestant Church, and the third associated with the future, united Church. The truly universal church is always still to come. Attractive as Wirth's argument may

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be, the main problem with Schelling's recourse to Christian orthodoxy is, not that Schelling subscribes to any particular Christian denomination, but that Schelling allows Christianity to have the authority to bring philosophical doubt and wonder to its end. Even though the content of Christianity necessarily retains its mystery, the mysteries of Christianity explain the mysteries of the universe – if our philosophy understand them properly. This leaves the door open for dogmatism anew.

Perhaps a return to the safe soil of Christianity is a danger that inheres in the Romantic opposition to rationalism? When Nietzsche wrote the second preface of *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, he is ambivalent about his firstborn: praising the courage of its author, he laments not only its style, but also the way in which this piece of Romanticism had yearned for metaphysical solace to the German cultural problem of world-weariness. Even in his most charitable bouts of redeeming his youthful self's enthusiasm, he cannot forgive how his earlier Romantic preoccupations had yearned for metaphysical comfort. And, in that sense, the first edition was a masked Christianity. Despite its seriousness in dealing with matters that are grave, terrifying and destructive, the Romantic encounter with the abyss of existence easily leads back to metaphysics. Nietzsche writes in response to his earlier appeal to metaphysical comfort:

> It is very probable that it will *end* like this, that *you* will end like this, namely 'comforted', as it is written, despite all your training of yourselves for what is grave and terrifying, 'metaphysically comforted', ending, in short as Romantics end, namely as *Christians*.
> (GT, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism, § 7)

Romantics have a tendency to end up Christians. Nietzsche is clear: this is flight, cowardice, an attempt to escape those aspects that make life difficult to deal with. Instead, one should learn to find comfort in this world, i.e. "you should learn to *laugh*, my young friends, if you are really determined to remain pessimists. Perhaps then, as men who laugh, you will some day send all attempts at metaphysical solace to Hell – with metaphysics the first to go!" (GT, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism', § 7). Nietzsche could easily have been speaking about Schelling: a Romantic who turned out Christian.[137] Schelling could stomach the terror of the *Naturphilosophie*, the godhead enthroned on skulls, and the unending, continuous revelation of new things only when he was young.

137 Nietzsche's views here are not untimely. It was rather common to denounce Romanticism as sick (Goethe and Hegel), mad (Heine) or destructive (Kierkegaard). For Nietzsche, Romanticism was an unphilosophical, uncritical form of enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*). This does seem to be generally unfair to Romanticism and its subtle recovery of Platonic realism in German idealism, as well as its recovery of new forms of art and religion. For extensive discussion, see Hampton (2019).

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An old man, Schelling turns to the metaphysical comfort that one might find in Christianity. The deep abyss stared back and Schelling looked away.

But is this fair to Schelling? Is there perhaps a way to return to Christianity that is not cowardice? In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche grants this as a possibility. Most Christians are Christian out of custom, not because they would have good reasons or evidence for their conviction. Therefore, any reason for believing cannot be given sufficient weight until the believer has tasted the polar opposite of Christianity. Not in the sense of the prodigal son, returning to his father once his inheritance has been spent, but as an apostate atheist. In one paragraph, Nietzsche writes:

> No, your evidence will be of no weight until you have lived for years on end without Christianity, with an honest, fervent zeal to endure life in the antithesis of Christianity: until you have wandered far, far away from it. Only if you are driven back, not by homesickness but by *judgment* on the basis of a rigorous *comparison*, will your homecoming possess any significance! (M 61; cf. MAM 226)

Nietzsche allows any believer a meaningful homecoming if they have passed through the cleansing fires of anti-Christianity. Perhaps Schelling's philosophy of revelation ought to be read in terms of such a homecoming, as he is one who has tried to endure the life outside of orthodox Christianity but found himself, in his later years, to be in need of a return. Rather than calling Schelling a homesick Christian, one should call him an apostate atheist. Nietzsche turns to religion as well, in the last instance, but not Christian religion. On this point, as I will argue, I find Nietzsche to be a more pious Schellingian than Schelling. Nietzsche does not allow the system of reality to finalize itself in any revelation. Any final revelation will let things go stale. The agonism of opposition must persist. In this, the Crucified is as much a challenge to Dionysus – the turn to self-denial is a challenge to self-assertion – as Dionysus remains a challenge to the Crucified. It is in the clash between these two points of view that a new highest personality can come to be: a Caesar with the soul of Christ.

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Chapter 9
Nietzsche's Religion of a Brave New Future

The endpoint of Schelling's philosophy is a philosophical religion that merges religion with philosophical thought, a position not entirely unbiased towards Christianity. To Schelling, a philosophical religion is the highpoint of the expression of freedom wherein the agent freely submits himself to what is in excess of reason: being, history and Christian revelation. In this final chapter, we detail how Nietzsche sought to accomplish something similar in his dealings with religion broadly-construed. Nietzsche recognizes the pedagogical potential of religion to inspire a more life-affirmative composure by inculcating bravery, and by providing the festivals that provide comic release where and when bravery is not an option. For Nietzsche, religion guides the downward movement of humanity which, in turn, dialectically strengthens its general upwards trajectory: the athlete braces himself for the race to come. As with Schelling, Nietzsche's positive usage of religion involves providing a locale for philosophical and creative aspiration to find rest and self-release. But unlike Schelling, Nietzsche does not allow Christianity an overriding privilege in accommodating such a release of self.

A New Religion – A New Hope?

In the winter of 1880–1881, Nietzsche penned a cluster of fragments in which one recurring trait is the exploration of the pedagogical potential of religion. This set of fragments opens with a provocative declaration:

Religion of Bravery:
1. The passion of honesty [*Redlichkeit*]
2. The biggest question
3. Bravery and nothing else (NL 9 1880 8[1]).

In the fragments that follow, Nietzsche experiments with a non-traditional view of the purpose of religion. For Nietzsche, much of religion – thinking particularly of Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism – has been geared towards promoting life denial, egalitarianism and compassion as virtues *in themselves*. Nietzsche's religion of bravery, however, aims for enlisting such ascetic drives within a more openly life-affirmative project. When speaking about Greek mythology in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche acknowledges that religion can indeed serve a purpose different than the one it has generally served: "Nothing [in Greek religion] reminds us of

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-010

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asceticism (*Askese*), of spirituality and duty; everything here speaks only of over-brimming, indeed triumphant existence, where everything that exists has been de-ified, regardless of whether it is good or evil" (GT 3).

Few scholars of Nietzsche's thought from 1945 until relatively recently have recognized that Nietzsche engages with religion in a positive light.[138] Yet, Nietzsche interacts with many topics of a religious nature, such as redemption and fatalism. Some recent commentators have looked beyond Nietzsche's more widely-recognized debunking of religion. Steven Aschheim rightly points out that the earliest reception of Nietzsche was aware of his dealings with religion, and saw in his thought reformation rather than de(con)struction: "The escapades of Nietzschean religion in Germany began not as a revolt against the Church but as a force *within* it, as a means for the revitalization not the destruction of Christianity" (Aschheim 1988, pp. 219–220). Reforming Christianity was not untimely, but a general pre-occupation in post-Hegelian Germany. Werner Stegmaier calls our attention to Nietzsche's Feuerbachian interests in turning the critique of (traditional) religion into a new religion. For Feuerbach – who aimed to, at least according to Marx, be a better Schellingian than Schelling – this meant a religion dedicated to the veneration of humanity. For Nietzsche, such a religion of humanity would dwell dangerously close to the last human [*Letzter Mensch*] (Stegmaier 1994, p. 164). Others have taken Nietzsche's mystical earthiness as a form of Emersonian religion. For instance, Adrian del Caro points out how "Nietzsche remained open to alternatives for the channelling of religious energy" and that it

> cannot escape notice that the philosophical alternative to religion in general and to Christianity in particular is itself highly religious, namely the Dionysiac, based as it is on Nietzsche's reworking of the artistic deity of the ancient Greeks into a 'philosopher god'. On this reasoning, when Nietzsche looks for a medium or vehicle for his new doctrines of earth affirmation, he unabashedly revisits the sphere of religion, as if to say that the type of earth affirmation he calls for is only possible if the religious impulse is tapped.
>
> (del Caro 2004, pp. 158–159)

Bruce Benson takes all of this one step further (and perhaps it is a step too far) and argues that Nietzsche remains unconsciously Christian in his attempts to rethink religion. In his view, Nietzsche "moves – or attempts to move – from one faith to *another*" (Benson 2008, p. 15). Finally, Julian Young carefully shows how Nietzsche retains an appreciation for the benefit of *Volk*, mythology and festival (Young 2006).

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138 Tim Murphy provides a fine systematic account of the dangers of unhealth in religion in Nietzsche (Murphy, 2001, pp. 79–94). John Smith barely touches upon a reconstructive moment in Nietzsche's philosophy of religion (Smith 2011, pp. 152–174). Many more examples could be given.

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Given these recent, more affirmative, appraisals of Nietzsche's appreciation of religion, I want to explore Nietzsche's positive philosophy of religion as a means towards cultivating sovereignty and style. In the above-mentioned fragments of 1880–1881, Nietzsche is investigating whether religion must necessarily induce life denial. Peter Woodford makes a suggestion of interest here, connecting Nietzsche's religious concerns to Darwinism:

> Understanding human moral life in terms of flourishing as a natural creature, a product of a natural history of evolution, could allow Nietzsche to develop what I call a 'realistic idealism'. That is, it could help inform the religious quest for a way of life that would lead to ultimate fulfillment by telling us something about the nature of the world in which this fulfillment was sought. (Woodford 2018, p. 28)

Woodford suggests that a Nietzschean religion is predominantly a means to tell us something about the nature of the universe. I do not follow this tack. Instead, I find that Nietzsche is not interested in conceiving of a new religion in terms of a doctrinal system of truth about the nature of the world. In fact, Nietzsche takes some very decisive steps away from religion as essentially a propositional account of human reality. Religion is not fundamentally concerned with truth, but with matters of a more existential nature (which, a little under hundred years later, would be confirmed by the Second Vatican Council). This is clear from the traits that Nietzsche assigns to his religion of bravery, which come under the heading of *religion nouvelle*. The 'new religion' is reserved for rare moments; it worships the drive to self-sacrifice; it has no god, afterlife, reward or punishment; it deals out no accusations and allows only for intellectual (not conscientious) remorse; it reconstitutes (rather than negates) the 'I'; it finds beauty in sacrifice; it preaches no love for humanity generally, but supports the general rule of the drives; it takes the highest wisdom as the norm; it admires the imprudence of magnanimity and takes compassion as a weakness; it honors the fullness of the passions (see: NL 9 1880 8[94]). Nietzsche's plan for a new religion is to countenance the dominance of ascetic, self-denying religions.[139]

I want to focus my attention on what exactly Nietzsche found appealing about a new religion and how this connects to his views of self-styling, sovereignty and overcoming. In short, Nietzsche recognized the pedagogical potential

139 For instance, Nietzsche connects the emergence of Christian faith to a forced self-sacrifice of more noble values: "They love as they hate, without nuance, into the depths, to the point of pain and sickness – their copious, *hidden* suffering makes them furious at the noble taste that seems to *deny* suffering [. . .] From the beginning, Christian faith has been sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, of all pride, of all self-confidence of the spirit; it is simultaneously enslavement and self-derision, self-mutilation" (JGB 46).

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in religion, which could be deployed to provide an outlet for three pairs of traits of humanity: bravery and truthfulness, festival and submersion, laughter and release. If, in Nietzsche's thought, over-humanity is geared towards guiding an upward trajectory, then festival and cult are more concerned (though not uniquely) with its downward correlate. Together, these would be a brave new religion of the earth, which encapsulates upwards and downwards movements as essential correlates of human existence: it "is the dream of the mountaineer who, though his *goal* may be above him, goes wearily to sleep on his way and dreams of the *happiness of the opposite course* – of effortless falling" (M 271). This topic revisits what we found to be so central to Nietzsche's rethinking of freedom; namely, that it should navigate the overcoming and submissive aspects of human libidinal life. Nietzsche's criticism of most historical religions is that religion has missed its mark: instead of appropriately channeling the downward movement of human psychology in dialectical tension with its opposing, upward motion, most historical religions have claimed or attempted to claim a sovereignty for the downward motion. In Schelling's terms, historical religions disconnected the principle of darkness from the principle of light.

Beyond Good and Evil 61 and 62 are very illustrative here. For strong individuals, "religion is an additional means of overcoming resistances, of being able to rule". For a select group of those who are governed by the strong, "religion gives [. . .] the instruction and opportunity they need to prepare for eventual rule and command" and allows these individuals "to take the path to higher spirituality and try out feelings of great self-overcoming, of silence, and of solitude". Finally, for the common people, religion gives

> an invaluable sense of contentment with their situation and type; it puts their hearts greatly at ease, it glorifies their obedience, it gives them (and those like them) one more happiness and one more sorrow, it transfigures and improves them, it provides something of a justification for everything commonplace, for all the lowliness, for the whole half-bestial poverty of their souls. (JGB 61)[140]

In all of these cases, religion is a dialectical means for furthering and facilitating creativity, strength and life affirmation. In other words, religion is a means to an end, and can dialectically augment self-overcoming and creativity.

140 Nietzsche had made a similar point in *The Gay Science* 128. There, he argues that prayer was invented for the rabble: "In order that they at least do not disturb, the wisdom of all founders of religions, small as well as great, has prescribed to them the formulas of prayer as a long mechanical work of the lips, combined with exertion of the memory and a same fixed posture of hands and feet and eyes!" (FW 128). In fact, religious practices justify the existence of the rabble: "The main point is that this work keeps them still for a time and makes them a tolerable sight" (FW 128).

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When religions instead claim a sovereignty, then there is a problem: there is "a high and horrible price to pay when religions do *not* serve as means for breeding and education in the hands of a philosopher, but instead serve themselves and become *sovereign*, when they want to be the ultimate goal instead of a means alongside other means" (JGB 62). Religion, then, serves to keep alive what should die: it justifies for itself what can only be justified as a means towards a higher end. For this reason, Nietzsche is warped by religion: "The religions that have existed so far (which have all been *sovereign*) have played a principal role in keeping the type 'man' on a lower level. They have preserved too much of *what should be destroyed*" (JGB 62). Religion ideally serves a pedagogical purpose – in different ways to different ranks of individuals – where it creates the opportunity for creativity and life affirmation.

Let us first focus on how such a pedagogical purpose operates. Nietzsche's pedagogical concerns only seldom address the lot of the singular individual, but most often regard the elevation of the species. This becomes very apparent in *The Antichrist*, where Nietzsche opens with: "The problem I am posing is not what should replace humanity in the order of being (- the human is an *endpoint*-): but instead what type of human should be *bred*, should be *willed* as having greater value, as being more deserving of life, as being more certain of a future" (A 3). Nietzsche is concerned with attuning cultural conditions so that they naturally lead to a higher type of human being. For this goal, Nietzsche does not mince words. He believes that Christianity has led humanity astray: "You should not beautify Christianity or try to dress it up: it has waged a *war to the death* against this *higher* type of person, it has banned all the basic instincts of this type" (A 5). Christianity has done so by taking "the side of everything weak, base, failed, it has made an ideal out of whatever *contradicts* the preservation instincts of a strong life" (A 5). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche expresses his hope for the emergence of "preparatory human beings", who "look, in all things, for what must be *overcome*", who have "cheerfulness, patience, modesty, and contempt for great vanities", who have a good sense "for the share of chance in every victory and glory", who have their "own festivals, their own workings days, their own periods of mourning, accustomed to command with assurance and equally prepared, when called for, to obey" – in short, human beings who are willing "*to live dangerously*" (FW 283). It is exactly these sort of beings who can be the bridge towards a higher, better and more life-affirmative future.

For Nietzsche, education should do more than provide theoretical knowledge and practical attitudes. Instead, it is equally supposed to foster an attitude of creative self-growth and self-styling in the human being, something which

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should be a lifelong project.[141] This was already a worry for Schopenhauer for whom education should foster an attitude of inquisitiveness that gives rise to ideas, not encourage mere reproduction:

> We should see to it that [the students] are guided to a pure apprehension of reality and bring them to the point where they draw their concepts always directly from the real world and form them according to reality; but they should not draw them from other sources, from books, fairy tales or the speeches of others, and then later apply such concepts ready-made to reality. (Schopenhauer 2015, p. 564 [667])

Schopenhauer was particularly worried that errors and false beliefs that are allowed to settle in at a young age become particularly difficult to uproot. As a result, he advised in favor of teaching only those courses to young children in which error is either impossible (mathematics) or of little risk (natural science) and leave matters of judgment for a later age (philosophy, religion, ethics). Like his philosophical mentor, Nietzsche was convinced that education should foster certain dispositional attitudes towards the self and the world, but school education would be simply insufficient towards this end. Schools always reflect the culture of the time, so we require a cultural shift before we can hope to reform our educational institutions. For Nietzsche, our culture has to be well-educated before it can, in turn, educate. Such a shift would require a serious and uncompromising commitment to new ideals and a new attitude towards the future. To put it bluntly, we need something akin to a new dominant religion that re-orients human beings in life. This is what Nietzsche intended with *Thus spoke Zarathustra*.

Reading Zarathustra Religiously

To think of *Zarathustra* as pre-occupied with religion might sound paradoxical given Nietzsche's repeated and vociferous objection towards followers, a paradox

141 Daniel Blue's biography of Nietzsche's early life gives us a good idea of the dominant pedagogical views of that time. Already in the 18th century, Rousseau had put forward the idea that instruction alone does not suffice to allow human beings to mature (the idea of *Erziehung*), but more comprehensive education (*Bildung*) requires "participation on the child's part and occurred as self-development" (Blue 2016, p. 102). Rather than passive recipients of education, individuals were called to rear themselves and monitor their own self-development. In the 19th century, Wilhem von Humboldt brought this ideas into systematic wholeness by emphasizing how each individual is, in the words of Daniel Blue, "a unique organism, and one's lifelong task (which would extend far beyond the years of formal education) was to discover an enact one's particular blend of abilities and at the same time to discipline them into a unity" (Blue 2016, p. 102).

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which is particularly evident from Zarathustra's declaration: "I need companions, and living ones – not dead companions and corpses that I carry with me wherever I want. I need living companions who follow me because they want to follow themselves – where I want" (Z, 'Prologue', 9). These and other paradoxes have made commentators struggle with the inescapable difficulty of the (meta-) interpretation of Nietzsche's self-proclaimed *opus magnum*, his dithyrambic, prophetic, halcyonic, provocative and mesmerizing *Zarathustra*. Is this book philosophy? Literature? Prophecy? Satire? The lack of consensus on how to read *Zarathustra* has inclined some commentators to suggest that this work simply cannot accept any overarching or comprehensive structure, and has relatively little bearing on Nietzsche's other philosophy.[142] As Nietzsche writes in the later *Ecce Homo*, *Zarathustra* stands on its own, it "has a special place for [him] in [his] writings" (EH, 'Preface', 4). This strategy was motivated in part by a tendency, predominant especially in the early reception of *Zarathustra*, for readers to ignore the distinctiveness between *Zarathustra* and Nietzsche's other works, especially the early, mythological readings of *Zarathustra* by Gustav Naumann, Alfred Fouillée, August Messer and Hans Weichelt. Commentators – then, and to some extent even now – tend to cherry-pick quotes from this work, regardless of context, in support of a holistic reading of Nietzsche's philosophy (see: Baeumler 1931; Löwith 1983; Heidegger 1986). Many lecturers will recognize this as still the default option for young students that try to make sense of Nietzsche's philosophy for the first time.

More recent scholarship tries to take a middle road between isolating from, and reducing *Zarathustra* to, the rest of Nietzsche's philosophy. Many read *Zarathustra* as a dramatic narrative that would test the philosophy Nietzsche developed more abstractly in his previous works (Seung 2005; Berkowitz 1995; Lampert 1986). *Zarathustra* is then Nietzsche's philosophy in practice. This strategy makes sense since Nietzsche suggested in *Schopenhauer as an Educator* that "the only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves something [is] to see whether one can live in accordance with it" (UB, 'Schopenhauer', 8). Relatedly, some scholars read *Zarathustra* as an attempt, not to test Nietzsche's comprehensive philosophy, but to develop or criticize a specific set of his ideas, such as modernism, nihilism or eternal recurrence (resp. Gooding-Williams 2001; Rosen 2004; Loeb 2010). But a pervasive difficulty with both readings is that the teachings of Zarathustra are highly paradoxical and at times even contradictory.

142 See particularly the work of Alexander Nehamas (2000, pp. 165–190) and Robert Pippin (1988, pp. 45–74). Michael Tanner has argued similarly that *Zarathustra* can at best be "savoured in a picaresque way" (Tanner 1995, p. 47).

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This makes it hard, perhaps even impossible, to distil a uniform doctrine or a stable set of propositions from *Zarathustra*. All readers agree *that* Zarathustra teaches something, but most are at odds about *what* it is exactly that Zarathustra teaches.

The ambiguity of Zarathustra's teachings can be understood best by taking into consideration Nietzsche's pedagogical-religious concerns.[143] The value of *Zarathustra* is not in the texts (in its words, rituals or beliefs) but in effect the text has on its reader. This explains why Nietzsche describes *Zarathustra* as a profound gospel, which should replace all other gospels (Nietzsche 1982, 70–72 [614]). Nietzsche sought to found a life-affirming religion in *Zarathustra* that would provide human kind with pedagogical tools to combat nihilism and the last human. Nietzsche is often believed to have forsaken this cultural ideal of the elevation of the species through religion and art when he broke with Wagner, simply because this was clearly Wagner's intention for German culture. Julian Young convincingly argues, however, that "though Nietzsche rejects Wagner the all-too-human *man and artist*, the Wagnerian *ideal* is something which, in 1883, he *still* adheres to" (Young 2010, pp. 259–360 and 2006). Nietzsche's difficulties with Wagner relate to the man Wagner, not the Wagnerian ideal.

Any univocally religious reading of *Zarathustra* would still have to answer the matter of Nietzsche's anti-prophetism. Looking back upon *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*, he writes:

> And yet I am not remotely the religion-founding type – religions are the business of the rabble, I need to wash my hands after coming into contact with religious people . . . I do not *want* any 'true believers', I think I am too malicious to believe in myself, I never speak to the masses . . . I have a real fear that someday people will consider me *holy*: you will guess why I am publishing this book *beforehand*; it is supposed to stop any nonsense as far as I am concerned . . . I do not want to be a saint, I would rather be a buffoon . . . Perhaps I am a buffoon. (EH, 'Why I am a Fate, 1)

It is clear from the text from *Ecce Homo* that Nietzsche does not want to have anything to do with religion and certainly does not want to found a religion! But how is one to reconcile this with the obvious religious preoccupations of

143 The quasi-religious preoccupations of Nietzsche, especially in *Zarathustra*, have not gone unnoticed. For instance, a very early reader of Nietzsche, Alfred Fouillée, was oblivious to its narrative, satirical and ironic elements and read the entirety of *Zarathustra* as one big religion with dogmas and divinity. His discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy was printed in *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1901, pp. 563–594). A more promising reading is given by Julian Young, who suggests that Nietzsche seeks to establish a "non-metaphysical, naturalistic Dionysianism" in *Zarathustra*. This is accomplished, on the one hand, by building on the Romantic idea of a *Volk* (people) that is united through religious festival and, on the other hand, by establishing new models for festivity (Young 2006, pp. 105–120).

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Zarathustra? Are these lines in *Ecce Homo* only Nietzsche's satirical buffoonery? Or is *Zarathustra* but a parody of all prophets and ideals?

I respond that Nietzsche's objection to having followers stems from his dislike of, what he came to call in *Zarathustra* and beyond, the figure of the actor (*Schauspieler*). This is an individual that is exalted over the masses, but not sufficiently free from the mindset of the common people. His prime example is Wagner, the man. An actor entertains a *Volkish* way of thinking; that is, a prudential, calculative rationality that craves recognition and easily becomes resentful when that recognition does not befall him. The actor depends upon and develops from the masses (see, e.g., FW 361 and 368), while the truly free spirit or true artist has experienced a liberation from the people.[144] Nietzsche had initially introduced the persona of the actor in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, where he builds on the opposition between solitude and the market place: "Where solitude ends, there begins the market place; and where the market place begins, there begins too the noise of the great actors and the buzzing of poisonous flies" (Z, 'On the Flies of the Market Place'). By exalting the actor, the people exalt one of their own. Whereas the actor himself requires the validation of the people and so makes a lot of noise, the creator is distanced from the people: "The people little understand what is great, that is: the creator. But they have a sense for all performers and actors of great things. The world revolves around the inventors of new values: – it revolves invisibly. But the people and fame revolve around actors: thus is the course of the world". (Z, 'On the Flies of the Market Place').

The actor is someone who pretends to be a creator. Often skilled at their craft, they deceive people about their uprightness. But the actor's hallmark feature is a lack of spirit and conscientiousness: "Tomorrow he will have a new belief and the day after tomorrow an even newer one. He has hasty senses, like the people, and a fickle ability to scent" (Z, 'On the Flies of the Market Place'). In contrast, a creator to the contrary is 'firm' and not easily shaken, and so does not consider the people when he bestows his creation: "When your heart flows broad and full like a river, a blessing and a danger to adjacent dwellers: there is the origin of your virtue" (Z, 'On the Bestowing Virtue'). Nietzsche has this lack of conscientiousness admitted by the "magician" (*Zauberer*), supposed to represent Wagner: "I wanted to represent a great human being and I persuaded many; but

144 In *Daybreak* 167, Nietzsche voices his discontent for the most read German philosopher, the most heard German composer and the most respected German statesman, which are respectively Schopenhauer, Wagner and Bismarck. While he does not use the same vocabulary in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche regrets the popularity of these individuals because they fundamentally seek the approval of the masses. They are actors.

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this lie was beyond my powers" (Z, 'The Magician'). The actor is an insincere individual because, rather than *being* a certain type, he *pretends to be* a certain type.

In Book Five of *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche explains how actors emerge by contrasting a *Volk* to a democratic society. In clearly-circumscribed social structures, a *Volk*, the people hold their role in society to be a destiny. When democracy emerges, however, "people unlearn this faith and a certain audacious faith and opposite viewpoint moves steadily into the foreground [. . .] where the individual is convinced he can do just about anything *and is up to playing any role*" (FW 356). Nietzsche abhors the malleability of societal roles. If one realizes one can be more than one fixed role, then one takes on any role without taking it up conclusively: "Every time man starts to discover the extent to which he is playing a role and the extent to which he *can* be an actor, he *becomes* an actor" (FW 356). Malleability makes individuals dishonest; it is a mask, a lack of integrity. Democracies make everyone *play* a role; in a *Volk* and culture, everyone *is* a role. Because of the inconstancy of the actor, a quick succession of different systems of belief can follow. This disadvantages the really great architects who want to erect systems of belief that persevere for thousands of years: "Another human type becomes ever more disadvantaged and is finally made impossible; above all, the great 'architects': the strength to build is now paralyzed; the courage to make far-reaching plans is discouraged; the organizational geniuses become scarce – who still dares to undertake works that would *require* millennia to complete?" (FW 356). The actor is too soft, too inconstant to serve as a foundation. To build, one "must be *firm* above all, a 'stone' . . . above all not an actor!" (FW 356).

If Nietzsche would admit to that he aspired towards a following, he would admit to needing the approval of the masses. This would make him an actor and render his art disingenuous. If Zarathustra acquires a following, this is not because Zarathustra has done everything in his power to convince the masses to follow him. Instead, Zarathustra's following will consist of those who recognize the greatness of Zarathustra even if Zarathustra consistently chides the masses. This is not unlike Nietzsche's early objections to the religion-founding ways of David Strauss, where Strauss' inorganic, contorted and self-serving attempts to erect a new religion are considered doomed to failure (see UB, 'Strauss', 3–4). For Nietzsche, there is still a yearning for a religion, but this cannot be based on theistic dogma or inorganic institutions: "These are the causes I have found for the decline of European theism. It seems to me that the religious instinct is indeed growing vigorously – but that it rejects any specifically theistic gratification with profound distrust" (JGB 53).

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Truthfulness and Bravery

Now that we have cleared away for a religious reading of *Zarathustra*, we can start to uncover the abovementioned pairs of element that belong to a Nietzschean religion. The first element of Nietzsche's religion of bravery (*Tapferkeit*) is truthfulness (*Wahrhaftigkeit,* sometimes *Redlichkeit*). Zarathustra is the moral exemplar of truthfulness, he is "more truthful than any other thinker" (EH, 'Why I am a Destiny', 3). Furthermore, Zarathustra's teaching is the "only one that considers truthfulness to be the highest virtue – that means the opposite of the *cowardice* of 'idealists', who take flight in the face of reality; Zarathustra has more courage [*Tapferkeit*] in his body than all thinkers put together" (EH, 'Why I am a Destiny', 3). For Nietzsche, while most religions provide a comprehensive ideology that interprets, explains and justifies human existence by means of certain transcendent truths, a religion of bravery does not provide a transcendent justification for life.

The upwards motion of over-humanity is a shattering of all tables of good and evil which, in its most extreme form, can affirm the nihilistic emptiness of meaning. However, this does not seem to be a state of being that could work for most human beings, most of whom need a dose of beliefs and convictions to stay the course of affirming life. For Nietzsche, the solution is to recognize the limited capacities of humanity, and yet attempt to inculcate the bravery to deal with such beliefs in a non-dogmatic and experimental fashion. Nietzsche is quite famous for opposing a notion of absolute, metaphysical or dogmatic truth, but his more positive engagement with truth is highly ambiguous. In many places, Nietzsche attacks the very notion of truth (e.g. MAM 19; FW 110; JGB 24) and advocates in favour of perspectivism, which holds that there are no facts, only perspectives. In this way, Nietzsche would replace the metaphysical approach to truth with a perspectival approach, wherein there is no absolute truth, only certain perspectives.

Maudemarie Clark calls Nietzsche's view of truth the "falsification thesis", which is "a denial that any human belief is, or could be, true" (Clark 1991, p. 1). In Clark's view, Nietzsche held this theory at least until 1882's *The Gay Science* and only fully gave it up in 1887's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. But it is a problematic imposition to understand Nietzsche's view of perspectivism in contemporary terms: a position that affirms the equal truth or untruth of any given perspective. There are many other ways to read perspectivism. For Alexander Nehamas, Nietzsche abandoned the "falsification thesis" decisively in *The Gay Science*, and he reads Nietzsche's opposition to dogmatism in this work as the view that "one's beliefs are not, and need not be, true for everyone" (Nehamas 1985, p. 33). But Nehamas notes that he takes Nietzsche's view to be inconsistent: one cannot avoid suggesting the universal truth of a belief when one

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asserts that belief. In a later work, Clark offers a reading (with David Dudrick) of *Beyond Good and Evil* that ties Nietzsche's concerns with truth to Kant's concern with dogmatism in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787); namely, that Nietzsche primarily questions the means by which dogmatists have attempted to attain the truth (Clark and Dudrick 2012, pp. 13–29; see also Emden 2019, pp. 273–301).[145]

There is some development on Nietzsche's understanding of truth. Instead of tracing that evolution, let us attempt to outline the general characteristics of Nietzsche's mature approach to truth and truthfulness (from *The Gay Science* onwards) with a focus on its relevance for understanding religion; specifically, his remarks in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here, Nietzsche makes his famous claim that if we suppose that truth is a woman, we must also assume that philosophers have been remarkably inapt at wooing the truth (and women, but that is a different story):

> Suppose truth is a woman – and why not? Aren't there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women? That the grotesque seriousness of their approach towards the truth and the clumsy advances they have made so far are unsuitable ways of pressing their suit with a woman?. (JGB 'Preface')

These lines could be interpreted in a variety of ways. The most obvious interpretation, one tentatively supported by the remainder of the preface, is that the Western philosophical tradition tended to think of truth in a way that is simply wrong and inappropriate. That way of thinking about truth, which Nietzsche associates with Plato's dogmatic errors and Christianity, held that there are things that are true, good and beautiful *in themselves*. Instead, Nietzsche advocates the view that the truthfulness, goodness and beauty of objects and ideas are relative to the person making such claims. Using perspectivism to oppose the former frame of thought might allow Western society to transcend their mistaken beliefs:

> But the struggle against Plato, or, to use a clear and 'popular' idiom, the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia – since Christianity is Platonism for 'the people' – has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals. (JGB 'Preface')

145 In later work, Nehamas has expanded on his position in discussion with the work of Clark (Nehamas 2017, pp. 319–346).

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This interpretation would read Nietzsche as an advocate of a new theory of truth, one wherein individualized perspectives dethrone the Platonic understanding of truth as an absolute perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*.

There is an obvious paradox to this reading that could not possibly have escaped Nietzsche's consideration: what is the epistemological status of the theory of perspectivism with regard to the denial of absolute truth? Does this not have the appearance of an absolute truth itself if Nietzsche holds truly that perspectivism is a better view of truth? Is he then not undermining his whole attempt to undercut the very notion of absolute truth? Instead of indicting Nietzsche with performative fallacy, this difficulty should give way to a different understanding of Nietzsche's perspectivism with regard to truth and truthfulness.

A more promising reading is that Nietzsche thinks of truth in terms of the victorious perspective in the struggle of ideas and ideals. One does not come to truth by "the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic", but human beings "take a conjecture, a whim, an inspiration or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract – and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact" (JGB 5). One arrives at a perspective by a distinctly libidinal process. By recognizing such a thing, one realizes that one's truthfulness (*Wahrhaftigkeit*, sometimes *Redlichkeit*) consists in one's capacity not only to express a victorious truth. It depends not upon its potentially absolute merits, but on its performative capacity to outweigh other perspectives through cunning and force. Truth is a species of courage. If we continue Nietzsche's metaphor of philosophers wooing the truth, then truthfulness is alike to flirtation: whether one has been absolutely 'truthful' does not matter, but whether one is capable of successfully playing the game of seduction. Truth should be a matter of winning the heart of oneself or another, not a cold imposition upon the other.

Whatever beliefs one holds to be truthful are the product of a complex libidinal process through which these beliefs are granted force as truthful. Any judgment of value is therefore a symptom of one's inner condition. As Nietzsche puts succinctly in *Twilight of the Idols:* "Judgments, value judgments on life, for or against, can ultimately never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they can be taken seriously only as symptoms" (GD, 'The Problem of Socrates', 2). In response, a philosopher's profession of an absolute, universal truth is expressive of a sick or ascetic will to absolute certainty. A healthy will can, however, be expressive of a myriad of sentiments and ideals – while styling these into a wholeness – that can deal with uncertainty.

Nietzsche's critique of truth thus aims not at dismantling all axiological hierarchy with regard to different perspectives, because some perspectives have, in a certain context, more claim to truthfulness. Instead, Nietzsche opposes the

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idea that there is a perspective that is absolutely true, and which therefore ought not to test itself repeatedly and against other perspectives. That is what Nietzsche means with "a tension in our bow [with which] we can now shoot at the furthest goals" (JGB, 'Preface'). Our dealings with truthfulness should not relax the tension improperly; a tension which builds up through such things as contest, competition, convincing, and seducing. Nietzsche notes previous historical attempts to relax this tension, "attempts, in a grand fashion, to unbend the bow"; namely, through "Jesuitism" and "the democratic Enlightenment" (JGB, 'Preface'). These two introduced casuistic, prudential and egalitarian approaches to truth and truthfulness (the multitude or the rational is right). But for Nietzsche, this is too easy: truth should be war, and war means taking and losing ground. Nietzsche's interest in developing a philosophy of truth is primarily aimed at creating the space for the organic development and transitioning between perspectives, thereby barring the possibility for any one philosophy to attain absolute dominance. Absolute dominance through absolute truth divests humanity of its creative potential. Perspectives are more truthful when they allow, support and augment the self-development of life.

Against previous casuistic and egalitarian approaches to truth, Nietzsche not only posits that truth is the product of agonizing struggles between perspective, but that the distinction between truth and untruth is quantitative, not qualitative. With regard to the latter, Nietzsche advances the view in *Beyond Good and Evil* that truth and untruth can no longer oppose each other in a binary fashion, which happened to be the fundamental belief of metaphysics: "The fundamental belief of metaphysicians is the *belief in oppositions of value*" (JGB 2). In opposing this view, one asks two distinct questions: on the one hand, whether such binary oppositions are real and, on the other hand, whether this opposition has been valued appropriately.

Nietzsche settles the first question with his perspectivism. He claims that "whatever value might be attributed to truth, truthfulness, and selflessness, it could be possible that appearance, the will to deception, and craven self-interest should be accorded a higher and more fundamental value for all life" (JGB 2). No particular truth or any view of truth *per se* can therefore be settled *a priori* as correct. For Nietzsche, this is a moral issue: many moralizing philosophers have held that certain values are absolutely beneficial at any given time. For instance, Schopenhauer says that compassion is at all times more truthful and more moral than selfishness, but Nietzsche believes that, in certain situations, self-interest might in fact be more appropriate than selflessness. Nietzsche does not that selfishness is good at all times; this would actually mean slipping back into an absolute conception of absolute truth and binary values that simply holds egoism as an absolute good.

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A second question is whether a binary opposition between truth and falsehood, because it is false, is useless or even dangerous. One could ponder, rightly, whether a binary distinction between truth and untruth might not be conducive to good things. Indeed, Nietzsche agrees that an opposition between truth and untruth, much like many other hierarchies, is necessary for the cultural health of a people. While it thus might be strictly speaking a falsity, societies can be served by a their binary distinctions (and so, also by a binary distinction between truth and falsehood). Without their tables of values, societies cannot flourish. Things become problematic, however, when these table of values become dogmatic and universal, which we have discussed in much more detail in the third chapter. Binary oppositions *per se* are not problematic, only when these become rigid.

Nietzsche's theory of truth thus becomes very complex, very quickly. Many contemporaries of Nietzsche held that natural science has a view of truth similar to the one Nietzsche hopes to develop. Natural science starts from a research hypothesis, which remains dominant until it is falsified, after which it is removed by a new perspective.

> Where is the *counterpart* to this closed system of will, goal and interpretation? Why is the counterpart *lacking?* . . . Where is the *other* 'one goal'? . . . But I am told it is *not* lacking, not only has it fought a long successful fight with that ideal, but it has already mastered that ideal in all essentials: all our modern *science* is witness to that, – modern science which, as a genuine philosophy of reality, obviously believes only in itself, obviously possesses the courage to be itself, the will to be itself, and has hitherto got by well enough without God, the beyond and the virtues of denial. (GM, 'Third Essay', 23)

Nietzsche is clear, however, that science fares no better than traditional philosophy as a practice in truthfulness. From *The Gay Science* onwards, Nietzsche argues that modern science aspires to full certainty and absolute truth. Science has masqueraded as the opposite of self-conceited dogmatism, but Nietzsche wonders whether science is really wholly without passion or "where it is still passion, love, fire, *suffering*, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather the latter's own *most recent and noble manifestation*" (GM, 'Third Essay', 23).[146]

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146 What passed for free spirits during Nietzsche's life similarly attracted his wrath: "All these pale atheists, Antichrists, immoralists, nihilists, these sceptics, ephectics, *hectics* of the mind [. . .] these last idealists of knowledge in whom, alone, intellectual conscience dwells and is embodied these days", even these are still under the ascetic ideal because "*they still believe in truth*"; "The *compulsion* towards it, that unconditional will to truth, is *faith in the ascetic ideal itself*, even if, as an unconscious imperative, make no mistake about it, – it is the faith in a *metaphysical* value, a *value as such of truth* as vouched for and confirmed by that ideal alone" (GM, 'Third Essay', 24).

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The reason for this is that science fails to pose the most basic questions with regard to truthfulness; namely what the value of truth is, and whether truth is always preferable over untruth.

For Nietzsche, the truthfulness of a perspective is established by its performative strength and capacity to express productive values. In order to assess whether a judgment or thought is valuable, we must establish a criterion that does not depend upon something that is absolutely, unconditionally true or valuable. Whether this is possible at all is debatable. Nietzsche believes that the promotion, development and preservation of life is something that can be recognized as valuable without thereby holding absolute value: "We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign. The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life" (JGB 4). In the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche calls this the "*plastic power*" of a "man, a people, a culture"; that is, "the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken molds". (UB, 'History', 1). Promoting life cannot be conceptualized in absolute terms because one cannot establish *a priori* what promotes life: it depends on situation, culture, accident and much more. One cannot simply imitate a certain set of societal ideals and virtues from a society that has prospered once before, because such imitation might be ineffective in a different culture. This is a lesson that Nietzsche learned the hard way when he attempted to resurrect a more Hellenic culture – for instance in *The Birth of Tragedy* – for which contemporary Germany and Europe simply were not receptive. The solution to societal problems must grow organically from within that society; they cannot be superimposed.

When there are truths that are particularly profound, truths that well up from deep within our being, there might arise a need for a deflector of sorts. Nietzsche would write that "everything profound loves masks: the most profound things go so far as to hate images and likenesses" and that "malicious cunning is not the only thing behind a mask – there is so much goodness in cunning" (JGB 40). One's exposure to life-affirming truths may not exceed one's strength to endure. For most, something must emerge that makes the truth bearable, something which must necessarily be a good, well-meant lie:

> Our educated people today, our 'good' men, do not lie – that is true, but it does them *no* credit! The actual lie, the genuine, resolute 'honest' lie (listen to Plato about its value) would be something far too tough and strong for them; it would demand something of them that one *must not* demand, that they open their eyes to themselves, that they come to know how to distinguish between 'true' and 'false' with regard to themselves.
>
> (GM, 'Third Essay', 19)

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Science is no comfort; neither is most philosophy. To be able to cope with the emptiness of the heavens, something like an art or religion must emerge that sanctifies deceit:

> *Art*, let me say it at the outset, since I shall deal with this at length some day, – art, in which *lying* sanctifies itself and the *will to deception* has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science is: this was sensed instinctively by Plato, the greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced. Plato *versus* Homer: that is complete, genuine antagonism – on the one hand, the sincerest 'advocate of the beyond', the great slanderer of life, on the other hand, its involuntary idolater, the *golden* nature. (GM, 'Third Essay', 25)

There is a dwelling with uncertainty, a quest for over-humanity, which might come at the expense of life affirmation, cheerfulness and lightness.

Paolo Stellino points out that the dangers of dwelling in nihilism is narrated suggestively in the image of Zarathustra's shadow, where

> Nietzsche is [. . .] portraying the risk run by the seeker of knowledge who has been able to call into question the existence of truth, but is unable to face the consequences of his act. In other words, for this seeker of knowledge, the danger lies either in returning to the starting point (turning, for instance, the denial of truth into a new and fanatical belief: 'nothing is true, everything is permitted') or in succumbing to the temptation of embracing a nihilist attitude, according to which life has no meaning and everything is in vain. (Stellino 2015, p. 172)

Indeed, Zarathustra's shadow is a "wanderer, who has already walked much at [his] heels" (Z, 'The Shadow'). The shadow is a seeker of knowledge, someone who refuses to stop at dogmatic faith, but thus has "unlearned [his] faith in words and values and great names" (Z, 'The Shadow'). Zarathustra's shadow is empty, deprived of energy, and cannot bring himself to joyous creation.

This is a legitimate fear in any quest for truth, bravery and over-humanity. As I see it, Nietzsche only has two recourses here. Either one can breed strength into the human animal, make him more capable of enduring the truth; or one provides the necessary lies, masks and illusions that foster an attitude of affirmation. Both of these objectives are a form of education (*Bildung*). If over-humanity aims at cultivating strength in humanity, then festival and laughter, which we will discuss in turn, are the nobles lies and occasions for an affirmative attitude in spite of the truth.

Festival and the Cult of the Surface

Early in *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche finds himself confronting his "devil"; that is, "the spirit of gravity [*Geist der Schwere*]" and after this confrontation, he concludes that

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"not by wrath does one kill, but by laughing" (Z, 'On Reading and Writing'). The spirit of gravity personifies all things that impede the upwards, ascending ideology of Zarathustra. In other words, gravity impedes and cancels out cheerfulness and life-affirmation, bravery and truthfulness. For Nietzsche, the heaviest thoughts are the death of God and eternal recurrence; namely, the realization that there are no ultimate values, and that human beings have to navigate their own way through life. The ultimate test of a human life is thus whether it is worth repeating eternally (see FW 341). This thought can be a terrible burden, and Nietzsche experimented with certain ideas to release the tension when gravity was at risk of overpowering cheerful life affirmation. One of these ideas is religious festivals.

In the third book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche announces and diagnoses the conditions and effects of the death of God. For Nietzsche, the death of God leaves a gaping emptiness or abyss. At one point, Nietzsche suggested two things that could fill in the emptiness left, namely tragedy and comedy: "I myself have now in the fourth act slain all gods, out of morality! What is now to become of the fifth act? From where shall I take the tragic solution? Should I start considering a comic solution?" (FW 153). One of Nietzsche's most illustrative texts on the effects of comedy is the fourth part of *Zarathustra* (originally published separately and disseminated privately as 'Noon and Eternity').[147] Where scholars have tried to decipher what type of work *Thus spoke Zarathustra* is, it hinges on the largely satirical fourth part of *Zarathustra*: does it mock any and all attempts at a positive morality, which was found to be impossible towards the end of Book Three?[148] Or is Book Four merely a self-satire, an unfortunate afterthought, because it mocks the seriousness of the rest of the work, which then does not necessarily belong to *Zarathustra*?[149] Alternatively, the fourth part illustrates an important component of Zarathustra's philosophy; namely, the need for human beings to immerse themselves in festival and comedy so as to remain cheerful in their pursuit of overhumanity. In other words, the comedy at the end of *Zarathustra* is the dialectical Other of the bravery throughout parts One through Three.

The narrative of *Zarathustra* IV begins after Zarathustra's moment of great affirmation at the end of Book Three. Richard Schacht describes this as Zarathustra's returning back to earth after his moment of ecstasy: now he is to deal again with the more mundane – to weather the hangover after the party (Schacht 1995, pp. 222–249).

147 Another important text in this respect is *Ecce Homo*. I do not attend to this text in detail here because I believe this has been done flawlessly by Nicholas D. More (2014).
148 For this point of view, see Conway (1989, pp. 211–224), Shapiro (1989), Pippin (1988, pp. 45–75), Berkowitz 1995, pp. 211–228) and Higgins (1987).
149 For this point of view, see Lampert (1986, pp. 7, 157–158, 224, 288–291), Hollingdale (1965, p. 190) and Fink (1973, pp. 114–118).

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While Zarathustra is seemingly content with his fate, he worries about the "higher man" and feels a welling of compassion for this type of human being. Zarathustra hears a distressed cry from a cave, from that higher man: a type of individual that has lost his standing in the world because of egalitarianism, nihilism and democracy. These higher men include rulers ("two kings"), a scientist ("the conscientious of spirit"), a Romantic artist ("the magician", Nietzsche's term for Wagner), a priest ("the last pope"), the ugliest human being ("modern man"), an ascetic ("the voluntary beggar") and Zarathustra's shadow ("nihilism as truth"). All of these higher men have come to seek out Zarathustra, for they take him to be their guide, even their Messiah, who might give direction and purpose to their lives. One of the kings, speaking for all the higher men, showers Zarathustra with respect: "Nothing more delightful grows on earth, oh Zarathustra, than a tall, strong will: that is the earth's most beautiful plant. An entire landscape is invigorated by one such tree". And again: "Even the gloomy, the failures are invigorated by your tree, oh Zarathustra, even the hearts of the unsteady are made sure and are healed at the sight of you" (Z, 'The Welcome'). Zarathustra is not moved by these accolades: "'You may indeed be higher men, collectively,' Zarathustra continued. 'But for me – you are not high and strong enough'" (Z, 'Welcome'). The reason for this is that "there is hidden rabble in [them] as well" (Z, 'Welcome'). Even though they claim to be higher men, they have still insufficiently developed towards over-humanity.

Zarathustra points out that the higher men are failures when it comes to living up to Zarathustra's message. They have not become sufficiently independent and affirmative of life. Such an indictment, especially from Zarathustra, could be expected to return the higher men to despair, but their response is quite different. Zarathustra leaves them briefly and, moments later, finds them breaking out in laughter. This pleases him: "They convalesce in their way, they laugh in their way: my ears have endured worse already without becoming testy. This day is a triumph; he is already retreating, he's fleeing, *the spirit of gravity,* my old archenemy" (Z, 'The Awakening', 1). Zarathustra has *truthfully* pointed out how the higher men are still far removed from life affirmation, but they did take up one of Zarathustra's most important lessons; that is, to learn to laugh about themselves and their own shortcomings. This capacity alone elevates them above mere humanity; in G. K. Chesterton's famous phrase: "Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly".[150] The higher men's laughter is a sign that they have incorporated Zarathustra's teachings of gratitude towards the earth, even gratitude towards and affirmation of their own shortcomings ("the returning of the small men"). In their gratitude, Zarathustra predicts that the higher men will

150 Full text available here: http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/130/pg130-images.html.

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learn to celebrate this joy: "It won't be long now and they will invent festivals and erect monuments to their old joys" (Z, 'The Awakening', 1).

When the cave grows silent, Zarathustra returns and staggers to find the higher men performing some sort of religious ritual around the donkey of the two kings. Zarathustra cries: "They've all gone *pious* again, they're *praying*, they're mad!" and describes how "they all kneeled there like children and devout little old women, and they worshipped the ass" (Z, 'The Awakening', 2). Struck by disbelief, Zarathustra wastes no time in questioning the higher men about their newly acquired piety, but all of them answer Zarathustra's reproaches with impish, roguish self-mockery. Although the text is equivocal, Zarathustra does seem to appreciate the combination of their religious festival and self-mockery:

> You strange, you higher men, how well I like you now – since you've become gay again! All of you have truly blossomed; it seems to me that flowers such as you require *new festivals*, – a small brave nonsense, some kind of divine worship and ass festival, some kind of old gay Zarathustra fool, a sweeping wind that blows your souls bright.
>
> (Z, 'The Ass-Festival', 3)

Zarathustra even continues that he greatly appreciates their ass festival: "And if you celebrate it again, this ass festival, do it for your own sake, do it also for my sake! And in remembrance of *me*!" (Z, 'The Ass-Festival', 3). Zarathustra is appreciative of the fact that the higher men have developed ironic festivals, even of the religious sort, that allow for a relaxation of tension when the spirit of gravity threatens to cool their affirmation of life.

This section is prone to misunderstanding, however. Most standard interpretations have taken Zarathustra's praise to be ironical or even cynical. According to these readers, Zarathustra's final words of parting also mark his acquiescence that he will never have true followers (Salaquarda 1973, pp. 181–213; Nehamas 2000, pp. 165–189; Johnson 2019, p. 189). I would argue that Zarathustra's praise is genuine as the higher men have devised a festival to release the tension raised through their attempts to overcome themselves. In fact, Julian Young helpfully points out that this ass festival is a reference to a Medieval Dionysus-cult or 'Feast of Fools' in which one could, for one day, overturn the usual rules of propriety. Clergymen would drag an ass into church and engage in a mock-worshipping of it by dancing around it, naked and drunk. In fact, *Beyond Good and Evil* 8 rehearses a verse from a song at such an Ass Festival at Beauvais on the 14th of January (Julian Calendar New Year): *Adventavit asinus pulcher et fortissimos* (Young 2006, pp. 114–117).

The scene is also a good illustration of Nietzsche's views on the "cult of the surface". Zarathustra is honestly excited that the higher men have recognized their need for a dose of superficiality when the weight of sovereignty threatens

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their cheerful life affirmation. This thought is not unique to *Thus spoke Zarathustra*: Nietzsche often invokes those cultural practices that put something in between human beings and those ideas that might weigh down upon them (see especially JGB 59). To understand the point properly, we have to look at Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*.

In that book, Nietzsche argues that the Greeks put Apolline semblance (*Schein*) between themselves and their most abysmal Dionysiac insights.[151] In Nietzsche's firstborn, Dionysus has all the appearances of a problem to be overcome, which makes many commentators detect a significant shift on the topic of Dionysus from the early to the later works (e.g. Benson 2008, pp. 97–117). Later, Nietzsche gives the book a damning self-review, which makes scholars hesitate on whether he retained his allegiance to the idea of a cult of the surface. Consider for instance:

> Indeed the whole book acknowledges only an artist's meaning (and hidden meaning) behind all that happens – a 'god', if you will, but certainly only an utterly unscrupulous and amoral artist-god who frees himself from the dire pressure of fullness and *overfullness*, from *suffering* the oppositions packed within him, and who wishes to become conscious of his autarchic power and constant delight and desire, whether he is building or destroying, whether acting benignly or malevolently. The world as the release and redemption of god, *achieved* at each and every moment, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the most suffering being of all, the being most full of oppositions and contradictions, able to redeem and release itself only in *semblance*.
>
> (GT, Attempt at self-criticism', 5)

Nietzsche does not abandon the ideas in this book wholesale. While Nietzsche would later object to the metaphysical undercurrent of *The Birth of Tragedy*, he retains his allegiance to the need of a cult of the surface.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the need for superficiality manifests most prominently in response to a Schopenhauerian view of aesthetics. According to Schopenhauer, human beings suffer profoundly from their individuality because the pursuit of their particular desires is a painful process, and moreover, its satisfaction can only breed more desire or boredom. Schopenhauer is keen on finding ways by which circle of suffering, satisfaction, boredom can be broken, even if only momentarily. As subjects of will, human beings are "on the revolving wheel of Ixion, [keep] drawing water from the sieve of the Danaids, [are] the eternally yearning Tantalus" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 220 [231]). In Schopenhauer's view, good art is capable of halting this circuity briefly by

151 Similarly, after Blaise Pascal had a near death experience in 1654, he would be convinced that an abyss was prone to form on his left hand side. He would put a chair to that side, between himself and the abyss, and the abyss would no longer frighten him.

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raising human beings "out of the endless stream of willing" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 220 [231]) which then frees them "from the terrible pressure of the will, [and celebrate] the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing, the wheel of Ixion stands still" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 220 [231]). Schopenhauer explains this remarkable feat by calling attention to the aesthetic intuition of a genius artist, who is capable of undoing worldly objects of their particular features and representing the timeless, eternal archetype of this object. This is what Schopenhauer calls the Platonic Idea, exposure to which dislocates individual beings from their own particular identity and momentarily submerges them in the timeless order. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, this process is known as the transformation of a particular individual into a "pure subject," which lifts the individual from the stream of longing and pain and transforms them into a pure, unmoved and untouched spectator: "To become a pure subject of cognition means to be rid of oneself" (Schopenhauer, 2015, p. 375 [443]).

While Schopenhauer did not make an explicit distinction between the Apolline and Dionysiac in art, his view of aesthetics does house such a distinction. According to him, most forms of art depend upon representations (*Vorstellungen*), which Schopenhauer ranks in ascending order: architecture, landscape gardening, historical painting and sculpture, nudes and rhetorical art, allegorical art, poetry and tragedy. These forms of art require a material foundation, even something as simple as images, likenesses or sounds. Despite being represented by material foundations, this type of art aims to represent not particular things, but the universal essence of particular things; namely, the Platonic Idea. Schopenhauer adds that music has no "suitable place" in this theory of art since it is not the "imitation or repetition of some Idea" but rather, music is "an unmediated objectification and copy of the entire will" (Schopenhauer 2010, resp. p. 283 [302] and 285 [304]). The Platonic Ideas are the well-measured, timeless archetypes of reality; the will is the voracious and ever-changing center of reality. As such, musical art is a dramatically different form of art. One problem that Schopenhauer fails to address in sufficient detail, and which will be taken up by Nietzsche, is how the experience of, or even complete immersion within, the voracious, all-devouring impersonal will can be a pleasurable experience. The enjoyment of music must be of a totally different kind than all other artistic enjoyment, which take pleasure in experiencing timeless beauty.[152] Nietzsche's bifurcation of artistic drives into the Apolline and the Dionysiac has therefore something of a Schopenhauerian pedigree.

152 This problem is addressed in more detail by Guyer (2008, pp. 173–174), Vandenabeele (2003, pp. 90–106) and Shapshay (2012, pp. 17–32).

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In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche comes to a staggering conclusion when he investigates further the soteriological potential of art: art is in the same business as religion.[153] Nietzsche's discussion of Greek tragedy is thus not merely an investigation into the artistic drives that govern aesthetic creation, but he considers Greek tragedy as one of the earliest representatives of religion. Indeed, as it does not revile life, Greek tragedy is more religious than Christianity. In his view, "from the very outset Christianity was essentially and pervasively the feeling of disgust and weariness which life felt for life, a feeling which merely disguised, hid and decked itself out in its belief in 'another' or 'better' life" (GT, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism', 5). Whereas, in the Greek pantheon, Nietzsche finds that "nothing here reminds us of asceticism, of spirituality and duty; everything here speaks only of over-brimming, indeed triumphant existence, where everything that exists has been deified, regardless of whether it is good or evil" (GT 3). Nietzsche's discussion of tragedy and mythology is ultimately interested in finding the enabling conditions of the life-affirming mythology of the Greeks, which is a topic undoubtedly very far removed from Schopenhauer, who thought of Greek Paganism as naïve, optimistic and delusional.

Let us focus on the two general principles that govern artistic creation: the Apolline and the Dionysiac. Schelling had suggested that human beings have fallen away from primal unity with God by becoming free individuals with the capacity for good and evil. At the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche overtly followed Schopenhauer, believing that all of representational reality is an expression of a primal, unitary (*Ur-eine*) will, and human beings are individualized according to the principle of individuation (*principium individuationis*). Because of that individuality, human beings are caught between their individualized existences – where they remain disconnected from their primal origin – and de-individualized re-emergence into primal unity. For Schelling, this is the choice to remain on the periphery of being by opposing one's own light to nature, or to reconnect one's individualized existence to the center of being through the revelation of Christ. Schelling's two options are aestheticized and de-moralized by Nietzsche: life is a choice between the Apolline and the Dionysiac. When siding

153 This point is actually not at all different from Schopenhauer's philosophy. Schopenhauer believed that intuitive knowledge of the nullity of existence could release human beings from their penal servitude to the will. This metaphysical knowledge could be provided by philosophy, but equally by religions by means of imagery and allegory. At best, religions are "mythological cloaks for truths that are inaccessible to the untutored human senses" (Schopenhauer 2010, p. 382 [420]). This means that religions could equally serve to offer a profound release from suffering. For further discussion of Schopenhauer's philosophy of religion in this respect, see Vanden Auweele (2017a, pp. 156–174 and 2015, pp. 53–71).

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with the Apolline, human beings set out to beautify their existence, to rejoice in their individuality, augment this individuality and creatively rework the world into a piece of art. When siding with the Dionysiac, human beings lose themselves in nature, restore their bond with nature, and enjoy the joyful ecstasy of being one with the world. An opposition between the exalted beauty of the Greek Pantheon and the sublime intoxication (*Rausch*) offered by Dionysus.

For the entirety of his mentally-sane existence, Nietzsche will waver between these two options. Greek society – especially in its Doric art throughout its so-called Archaic Period (8th century BCE to 480 BCE) – had initially a strong connection to the Apolline, where they would rejoice in the clear and beautiful ordering of their own lives, the *polis* and reality as a whole:

> Indeed one could say that Apollo is the most sublime expression of imperturbable trust in this principle [of sufficient reason] and of the calm sitting-there of the person trapped within it; one might even describe Apollo as the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis,* whose gestures and gaze speak to us of all the intense pleasure, wisdom and beauty of 'semblance'. (GT 1)

This orderly view of reality was suddenly challenged by its opposite, the Dionysiac, which shatters measure and harmony. Although the Greeks were predisposed towards an orderly relationship to reality, they were equally prone to feel a "blissful ecstasy" whenever there is the "breakdown of the *principium individuationis*", which is where we "catch a glimpse of the essence of the *Dionysiac*" (GT 1). But for Nietzsche, within the competition between the Dionysiac and the Apolline, the predominance of the one does not make the other one unpleasant. Indeed, there is a great sense of joy to be found in the Apolline even for the Greeks completely submerged in Dionysiac intoxication: "Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind" (GT 1).

Greek mythology – with its highpoint in Eleusinian Mysteries and Attic tragedy – is a careful balancing of the Dionysiac and the Apolline. According to Nietzsche, the Greeks had an excess of sensitivity to suffering which made them aware, through Dionysiac revelry, of the melancholy of individualized existence. To live as an individual is to live disconnected from the energy of life itself. This translated into an enigmatic insight that living itself is a fall from a higher good, and to part from life as soon as possible would be advisable. This view has become famous in terms of the wisdom of Silenus:

> An ancient legend recounts how King Midas hunted long in the forest for the wise *Silenus*, companion of Dionysus, but failed to catch him. When Silenus has finally fallen

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> into his hands, the King asks what the best and most excellent thing is for human beings. [Silenus answered]: The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon. (GT 3)

And yet, for Nietzsche, the Greeks were also those who – knowing all too well that individualized existence is pain-stricken, and blissful drunkenness is a definite improvement – were brimming with life, cheerful in the face of opposition and resolute in their desire for more and higher existence. Because of their sensitivity to suffering, the Greeks put something between themselves and this abyssal insight. The Greeks put a deflector between themselves and Dionysiac suffering, which was the Greek Pantheon: "The Greeks knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence; in order to live at all they had to place in front of these things the resplendent, dream-born figures of the Olympians" (GT 3). It is by no means a coincidence that even in Greek mythology the Pantheon emerged from the "Titanic divine order of terror" (GT 3). Before the Apolline could become victorious, this instinct first had "to overthrow the realm of Titans and slay monsters" (GT 3).

The Greek world of individualized beauty found justification anew in the resplendent world of gods. As Nietzsche would put it in an unpublished fragment:

> The will comes to its redemption in great geniuses and saints. Greece is the image of a people that has reached their highest intentions of will and always walk the next road to that end. The happy relationship of the Greek development to their will gives Greek art its smile, which we call Greek cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*]. (NL 7 1870 7[162])

For Nietzsche, the Greek world had found redemption for the schism between individualized will and primal unity through its heroes and gods. But how exactly is human existence justified by means of the Greek pantheon? In Christianity, the existence of God *per se* does not justify human existence, because there is an impressive and perhaps even unbridgeable gap between human beings and God. This is not the case for the Greek Pantheon, who "justify the life of men by living it themselves – the only satisfactory theodicy" (GT 3). The Greek gods are not infinitely removed from human existence but serve as a glorification of individual existence through being entangled, albeit in a more exalted sense, in the typical twists and turns of human existence.[154] The Greek gods are no strangers to jealousy, joy, ignorance, anger or even death. The Greek gods were a means to beautify earthly existence in such a way that the Greeks remain quite capable –

154 In *Human all too Human*, Nietzsche writes similarly: "The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods as set above them as masters, or themselves beneath the gods as servants, as the Jews did. They saw as it were only the reflection of the most successful exemplars of their own caste, that is to say an ideal, not an antithesis of their own nature" (MAM, 'The religious life', 114).

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despite being aware of the dissatisfaction inherent in individualized existence – to persevere in their Apolline quest of beautifying reality.

This means that the Dionysiac knowledge of the horrors of individualized existence is in excess of human fortitude. Dionysiac man knows too much:

> In this sense Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion. (GT 7)

There is indeed a bliss in ignorance, but what to do when ignorance *per se* is no longer an option? When the Greeks were confronted with Dionysiac insight, they could no longer simply rejoice in the beauty of existence. Those who know the horrors underneath cannot simply affirm the beauty of appearance. Only an idiot, such as Prince Myshkin's in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, could say that "beauty will save the world" (Dostoevsky 2004, p. 446). 'Idiot', here, means no insult; instead, an idiot is someone who is too close to things, too intimate, private and particular – one who is without distance. Beauty only redeems those who stay on the surface. Schopenhauer points out something similar about his pessimism, that beauty cannot redeem existence if one realizes that existence is horrible:

> An optimist tells me to open my eyes and, looking into the world, see how beautiful it is: in the sunshine, with its mountains, valleys, streams, plants, animals, etc. – But is the world then a peep show [*Guckkast*]? These things are of course beautiful to *look* at, but to *be* them is something entirely different. (Schopenhauer 2018, p. 596 [667])

Because of this, the Greeks had the inventiveness to put something between themselves and the Dionysiac abyss, namely art. Because they knew what dwelt underneath, they chose a second *naivité*, a superficiality. Such art can have two powerful, cathartic effects: sublime exaltation or comic discharge. Nietzsche writes:

> Here, at this moment of the supreme danger for the will, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress with the power to heal. Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live; these representations are the *sublime*, whereby the terrible is tamed by artistic means, and the *comical*, whereby disgust at absurdity is discharged by artistic means. (GT 7)

For Nietzsche, the tragic epos is able to represent the horror of individualized existence in such an aestheticized way that one is invigorated by it, while the comic satyr play provides comic relief that distances the spectator from that same horror.

These thoughts of covering up the abysmal core of human existence reappear in Nietzsche's later writings. For instance, In *Beyond Good and Evil* 59, Nietzsche discusses religion and the cult of the surface in a similar vein. In his

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view, anyone who "*needs* the cult of the surface this badly has at some point reached *beneath* the surface with disastrous results" (JGB 59). Nietzsche remains adamant that bravery and over-humanity would be able to cope with what lies underneath the surface. Religions emerge initially in response to pessimism, one which does not admit to the capacity of individuals to handle the truth: "Entire millennia sink their teeth into a religious interpretation of existence, drive by a deep, suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism" (JGB 59). Despite Nietzsche's own preference for bold and daring souls, he does recognize that religion, and especially religious piety, has been a beneficial tool to transform those who cannot handle the truth into something bearable to look at: "Perhaps piety has been the most potent method yet for the beautification of humanity: it can turn people into art, surface, plays of colors, benevolence, and to such an extent that we can finally look at them without suffering" (JGB 59). In other words, religions have offered, and should still be able to offer, a cult of the surface to those who otherwise would be reduced to world-weariness.

A long detour, but now we return to the higher men's Ass-festival. The higher men have become knowers in their interaction with Zarathustra, they can no longer simply continue with their previous tables of values. They have sunk themselves into nihilism. At the same time, and at incredible speed, they have recognized how the quicksand of nihilism rises higher the more one struggles against it. So they are not looking to deny nihilism, but for a momentary surface, an ephemeral place of stability. This is the surface and joy they have found in mock worshipping the donkey. A joy in falsehood. Their worship of the ass is their gleeful self-mockery of themselves and Zarathustra. Zarathustra says 'Yes' (in German: *ja*) to life; the ass brays 'hee-haw' (in German: *i-a*). The ass is the cheer, Zarathustra the truth; the ass is Apollo, Zarathustra is Dionysus. The higher men need both.

Laughter and Redemption

There is one final element of Nietzschean self-release, which we have read in terms of his philosophical utilization of religion (chapter six), which ought to be discussed; namely, his view on the redemptive potential of laughter. Laughter is not a uniform concept in Nietzsche: there are many different forms of laughter, the most famous being the Dionysiac laughter of affirmation. We will focus on a different form of laughter, not the laughter of the victor who has

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defeated his arch nemesis, but how laughter is a means by which one fortifies one's project of self-creation.[155]

Nietzsche's most explored sense of laughter, the tragic and Dionysiac laughter, is a type of laughter that erupts when someone plunges into the abyss of being and finds their suffering transformed by their over-human vitality. Katrin Froese summarizes this sort of laughter well: "Nietzsche's laughter is always tinged with sadness, but it is this sadness that gives the laughter depth. We must plumb the depths of despair in order to be able to laugh with our whole being" (Froese 2017, p. 74). But there are other forms of laughter in Nietzsche's philosophy, some more attuned to our discussion so far. Nietzsche often speaks of the dual need of seriousness and laughter when describing his ideal type of human being. Two impish remarks in *Beyond Good and Evil* are illustrative here; that is, paragraphs 28 and 223. In both of these paragraphs, Nietzsche uses the Latin phrase *in moribus et artibus*, which means "in customs and arts". The origin of this phrase is unclear. There is a Latin proverb *qui proficit in litteris et deficit in moribus, plus deficit quam proficit*, which means "he who is proficient in learning but deficient in morals is more deficient than proficient". Nietzsche connects *artibus* to *litteris* in a number of places (NL 11 1884 26[404]; NL 11 1885 38[5]; FW 366; GM, 'Third Essay', 22). *Beyond Good and Evil* 28 and 223 superficially deal with very different topics, but yet illustrate of two important aspects of laughter.

In paragraph 28, Nietzsche discusses how one culture's art and morality (*moribus et artibus*) are incredibly difficult to translate into a different language because of the tempo or style of the language. Different languages have a different tempo, so a verbatim translation misses an important element of the original message. Suggesting, then, that it would be near impossible to translate the work of Aristophanes, for "whose sake we can *forgive* the whole Greek world for existing," Nietzsche adds an off-topic little fact (whether it is really factual is doubtful):

> Nothing I know has given me a better vision of *Plato's* secrecy and Sphinx nature than that happily preserved *petit fait:* under the pillow of his deathbed they did not find a 'Bible' or anything Egyptian, Pythagorean, or Platonic – but instead, Aristophanes. How would even Plato have endured life – a Greek life that he said No to – without an Aristophanes!. (JGB 28)

155 John Lippitt has helpfully pointed out that – next to Dionysian laughter – Nietzsche entertains at least two other forms of laughter. First, there is the laughter of "unconcerned dismissiveness" that serves to "fortify us in our attempt to continue with a project that is *our* project". Second, there is laughter as a means beyond internal and external obstacles, specifically in how Nietzsche celebrates "the importance laughter can have in freeing us from both external and internal prohibitions" (Lippitt 1999, resp. pp. 114 and 116).

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Aristophanes is known as the father of comedy, his works are the only remaining in the ‘Old Comedy’ style, and Plato believed that *The Clouds* portrayed such a lamentable caricature of Socrates that it contributed to Socrates’ death sentence. For Nietzsche, comedy killed philosophical seriousness, the same seriousness that was cured of the sickness of life when Socrates drank the cup of hemlock (see FW 340).

The Greeks had a profound sense for the difficulty of life and required comedy to endure despite this difficulty. The more profoundly one suffers, the more deeply one requires laughter as a redemption. This becomes in a way enabled by that human beings lack a more fixed identity (see the discussion of democracy above). Nietzsche asserts that modern man is incapable of finding a mask or costume that fits: European man lacks an identity. In a desperate search for an identity, modern man has developed the historical spirit which studies all sorts of costumes, by which Nietzsche means “morals, articles of faith, artistic tastes, and religions” (JGB 223). Old styles become fashionable again, only to be quickly replaced by new fads. There might be a redemption in this, however, as the quick succession of ill-fitting costumes prepares Europe for “a carnival in the grand style, for the most spiritually carnivalesque laughter and high spirits [*zum geistigsten Fasching-Gelächter und Übermuth*], for the transcendental heights of the highest inanity and Aristophanean world mockery” (JGB 223). The ridiculousness of modern man has prepared Europe like nothing else for self-mockery. The seriousness of the search for identity and meaning flips over and becomes self-ironizing. With a touch of cynicism, Nietzsche then proclaims:

> Perhaps it’s that we still discover a realm of our *invention* here, a realm where we can still be original too, as parodists of world history or buffoons of God, or something like that, – perhaps it’s that, when nothing else from today has a future, our *laughter* is the one things that does!. (JGB 223)

Their very specific content notwithstanding, both *Beyond Good and Evil* 28 and 223 show that Nietzsche thinks of laughter and seriousness in a dialectical relationship, where laughter assuages the potentially tragic aspiration for meaning and purpose. Of course, there are many ways of laughing, not all quite as conducive towards life-affirmative ends, such as the laughter of the herd of humanity in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (Z, ‘Prologue’, 3). But in its form discussed here, laughter is a cathartic response that cushions the potential despair that might follow from difficulty and failure.

Festival and laughter have a soteriological function for Nietzsche. But this does not mean, I would say, that laughter originates from our recognition of its soteriological function. One cannot force a laugh, we cannot tickle ourselves. Laughter originates in ambiguity and indecision, a time and place where the

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straight road is lost. Laughter then does not build or rebuild, but unweaves; laughter reveals, even celebrates, the irreducible complexity and ambiguity of reality. Milan Kundera was thinking Nietzschean thoughts when he spoke of the novel as born "of the spirit of humor", which "does not by nature serve ideological certitudes, it contradicts them. Like Penelope, it undoes each night the tapestry that the theologians, philosophers, and learned men have woven the day before" (Kundera 1988, p. 166; see Wirth 2016, pp. 48–72).

Our final step now is to show how this sense of laughter fits with a religion of bravery. As discussed above, a religion of bravery aims to cultivate a disposition to be truthful; that is, to recognize the absence of meaning and create one's own purpose in life. The seriousness of such an endeavor can bring a certain heaviness upon human beings, which has then to be assuaged by laughter and festival. For Nietzsche, redemption is a preoccupation of religion, which ideally functions not in a sovereign fashion (for itself) but dialectically interacts with the very specific needs of different individuals. For this reason, Nietzsche expresses appreciation for polytheism over monotheism because polytheism allows for a variety of different uses of religion, while monotheism tends to level distinctions between such uses. He puts this most emphatically in *The Gay Science* 143, where he argues that older civilizations could escape the charge of impiety and individualism by invoking a god that steers their behavior: "Not I! Not I! But a *god* through me!" (FW 143). Polytheism was the first instance in which individualism and non-herdlike existence could be celebrated:

> The invention of gods, heroes, and overmen of all kinds, as well as deviant or inferior forms of humanoid life, dwarfs, fairies, centaurs, satyrs, demons, and devils, was the invaluable preliminary exercise for the justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual: the freedom that one conceded to a god in his relation to other gods one finally gave to oneself in relation to laws, customs, and neighbors. (FW 143)

When monotheism (re-)emerged, there arose again the idea of a singular type of human being, one great egalitarian herd. For Nietzsche, monotheism is the "rigid consequence of the teachings of a normal human type [and] perhaps the greatest danger to humanity so far" (FW 143).

Even in its more decadent form, Nietzsche recognizes that historical religions are a tool to combat weariness and depression. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche puts this bluntly, the priest offers release and redemption to human beings:

> We have every right to call Christianity in particular a large treasure-trove of the most ingenious means of consolation, so much to refresh, soothe and narcotize is piled up inside it, so many of the most dangerous and most daring risks are taken for the purpose, it has been so especially subtle, so refined, so southerly refined in guessing which emotions

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> to stimulate in order to conquer the deep depression, the leaden fatigue and the black melancholy of the psychologically obstructed, at least temporarily. (GM, 'Third Essay', 17)

The purpose of any religion is to "fight against a certain weariness and heaviness that has become epidemic" (GM, 'Third Essay', 17), but such a fight can be waged in a healthy or sick fashion. Christianity has sought to offer a release of tension, a devaluation of self-creation, which has soothed the nervous tension of human beings who could not amass the strength for self-creation. Christianity might have been a proper narcotic for the masses. Christ came for the sick, not the healthy (see: GM, 'Third Essay', 15). The problem is that Christianity became sovereign, and imposed its frame of thought even upon healthy creators and free spirits. In order to avoid the re-emergence of such a life-denying religion, the Nietzschean ideal of over-humanity has to be accompanied by a life-affirmative religion, replete with sermons to bravery and festivals of laughter.

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Conclusion

In one version of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827), Hegel discusses the transitional period between Christ's death and his spiritual permanence (Biblically between Easter and Pentecost), and he does so in words that foreshadow Schelling and Nietzsche:

> *God has died*, *God is dead* – this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that everything eternal and true *is not*, that negation itself is found in God. The deepest anguish, the feeling of complete irretrievability, the annulling of everything that is elevated, are bound up with this thought. (Hegel 2006, p. 465n)

This is akin to the starting point common to Nietzsche's and Schelling's philosophy; namely, that the tradition has run dry. The excessive rationalism of the tradition that reduced everything into shallow intelligibility has offered up an untenable view of reality. The problem here was not so much that the tradition had failed to make good on its claims; to the contrary, the tradition has been too successful in reducing reality to something that could be understood by means of simple reason. The very premise here is problematic, namely that the world can be understood by means of reason alone.

If the tradition is dead, what comes after the tradition? Hegel continues that "the process does not come to a halt at this point; rather, a reversal takes place: God, that is to say, maintains himself in this process, and the latter is only the death of death. God rises again to life, and thus things are reversed" (Hegel 2006, p. 465n). After the death of God, there is new life; God is dead, long live God. But the God that returns cannot be identical to the God that has died. For Hegel, God in his final revelation becomes the spirit that self-manifests through history and comes to recognize himself in that process. History is the life of the divine. Reality, the whole and even God have to be rethought if we want to re-infuse them with new life. This new philosophy cannot be hegemonic, it cannot force abstract concepts upon a world unhospitable to them. Instead, if we make use of concepts and ideas, these must emerge from the mess that is reality.

Schelling's argument in and after 1809, and Nietzsche's mature thought, roughly agree on this subject. One god has died, the one of the philosophical tradition, the foundation of philosophical thought, and now perhaps a new god comes to the fore, be this pantheist nature or the *Übermensch*. We cannot be entirely without gods. The hypothesis of the study was that Schelling and Nietzsche begin their philosophy with similar concerns, namely that European philosophy and culture had developed in such a way – because of some troublesome premises – that it became spiritually exhausted. There is then the autopsy of the philosophical tradition, dissecting the corpse so as to find the rampant disease, and the new life,

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110618112-011

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a new birth, of a fresh and livelier way of thinking. Central to this rejuvenation is a restoration, a rekindling but also revamping (not mere nostalgia) of a more original and more organic way of thinking that was disrupted by overly rationalist thought. But then, Schelling and Nietzsche part ways: one goes towards revelation and philosophical religion and the other towards bravery, laughter and overhumanity.

In his self-critical reception of his firstborn, Nietzsche laments that Romanticism tends to become nostalgia for traditional religion: Romantics as homesick Christians. This was the reception of the culmination point of Schelling's philosophy. The man who had returned humanity and nature to divine rights, who had exalted the Greek pantheon, who had vigorously defended pantheism and organic philosophy, that man had become an apostate to his own teachings when he turned to Christianity in his old age. Throughout this study, I have attempted a charitable reading of the trajectory of Schelling's thought where the oddities of his position are read as necessary components of a philosophical development. Thus Schelling's diagnosis of the incompleteness of a purely rationalist and idealist philosophy moves him towards a metaphysical empiricism, where being, freedom and God are revelations rather than logical conclusions. These epiphanies spur thought into motion, food for thought, and move idealist reflection beyond the confines of the merely logical through an openness to historical happening.

Schelling is not a revelatory fideist. In his dealings with nature, history and Christianity, he remains a philosopher, one open to the factual import of revelation. His project is then as demanding as it is daunting: to find a togetherness of philosophy and revelation that is a community rather than dialectical unity. Schelling would rebuke Hegel for the inability to take revelation seriously beyond a mere confirmation of reason; for Schelling, in order for revelation to command our interest at all, it must contain something in excess of reason. Hegelian dialectics is negative philosophy beyond its proper boundaries. But has Schelling not developed in his *Berlin Lectures on Revelation* a positive philosophy that is out of bounds? Schelling jumped on Christianity with too much enthusiasm. This is not to the demerit of Schelling's important innovations in thinking about the relationship of philosophy and revelation, and the unique way in which he configures the mutual and symbiotic relationship of faith and reason.

There is certainly something appealing about figuring faith and reason in a dialectical, non-dualist and non-reductive fashion. Critical thought and faith as two necessary, unique and interrelation aspects of a full philosophy: a doubleness rather than dualism. Human beings need both their highest heavens and deepest pits. I have made a case to read Nietzsche's philosophy of freedom and religion in this vein; that is, an attempt to combine the creative and affirmative

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aspects of human freedom. This took on a decisive vertical imagery: to rise higher and to tumble down. Like Schelling, Nietzsche knew that the absolute sovereignty of either of these directions is to the demerit of life. One cannot indefinitely chase the heights without occasionally indulging in a moment of rest and respite. It is that point of coming to rest that Nietzsche aimed to channel in his views of a new religion of festival and laughter.

There is an interesting finesse in thinking with Schelling and Nietzsche about freedom and religion. They avoid two infelicities at the extreme: too much control and too much restraint. If reason would come to subdue God and religion, then religion would turn stale and die; if reason would leave God and religion to its devices, then the sovereignty of religion becomes a trauma to reason that paralyzes constructive and organic development. We are looking for something between grabbing fast and letting go. Philosophy should be *a caressing of God and religion*, the intimacy of a touch whose commanding grasp is broken by the awesomeness of its object. Caressing God is not trout-tickling – we do not lull God into sleep so as to succeed in new philosophical control. We are being caressed just as much as we caress. Whether either Nietzsche or Schelling have succeeded in a fidelity to the gentleness of the caress remains doubtful. Their attempts have inspired impressive debate and deepened the issues as stake. That alone, I believe, justifies extensive engagement with their thought.

In the introduction, I discussed the problematic binary between faith and reason. In modern thought, as is widely recognized, there is such an emphasis on reason that faith and revelation lose their standing. Postmodern thought, in turn, is at risk of trying to recover revelation so radically that it finds reason paralyzed. A proper system of thought ought to accommodate the claims of reason and revelation both – not just in their singular unicity, but also in their absolved relativity. The bulk of this study intended to mine two 19th-century thinkers for their insights in how to accommodate such a view of the relationship between philosophy and religion. While their projects were similar from the outset, their conclusions were at some distance from each other.

Schelling's conclusion was that we need a mutual interpenetration of philosophy and revelation in a philosophical religion, which works towards something of a post-Apocalyptic Johannine church that re-unites humankind, this time wilfully, in a pantheistic God-consciousness. While I have expressed hesitations with regard to the strong Christian character of Schelling's conclusion, the general point seems highly recommendable: to recognize that the words we use to denote our gods are but masks for a deeper, spiritualized connection we all share.

Nietzsche could be read, as I have done, as fleshing out the limits of our capacity to be without gods. Most of us cannot. And so, Nietzsche attempts to offer tools of a religious nature, where our weakness in some sense or form can

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be celebrated and thus in effect be life-affirmative. This can happen through a process of styling and culturing, where infelicities are incorporated within a grand style. But also, this can happen in a brave religion, which has its comic festivals that assuage the tragedy of our existence. For Nietzsche, there does not seem to be a point of final completion, but only a principle of tension – Dionysus against the Crucified – that stirs humanity forward to new heights. There are always higher mountains to scale.

I want to conclude by saying that there is something highly attractive to a sort of Schellingian-Nietzschean religion. One part celebrates the connection of humanity to nature, the other offers succour when our human-all-too-human frailties might turn that celebration into a depression. This evades the trap of a view of religion that ought to defend itself against the acetous claims of positivistic science by marking out a specific region of human existence for the religious. It evades also the trap of a religion that becomes immune to criticism, of a revelation that ought to be accepted as Gospel. It is not ultimately the words that matter, or the rituals, or the clothes or jewellery, or even anyone's station in any grand hierarchy of election. What matters is the celebration of us connecting mystically ourselves with God and nature, our communities of celebration and mourning, and our quest to actualize ourselves to our highest potential.

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Endorsements

The late ‘positive philosophy’ of Schelling, with his turn to a Johannine Christianity to come, and Nietzsche, the unapologetic Anti-Christ, may seem to be heading in increasingly opposite and irreconcilable directions. In his highly original and provocative ‘dialectical’ dialogue, poised at the edge of reason without altogether eclipsing reason, Dennis Vanden Auweele transcends this facile opposition and discerns the horizon of a new and revelatory sense of religiosity and metaphysics. This important work takes the historically underdeveloped relationship between Schelling and Nietzsche to a new level.

Jason M. Wirth, Seattle University, author of *Schelling's Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination* (2015)

With this excellent book, Dennis Vanden Auweele joins the timely rebellion against the ban on metaphysics in contemporary philosophical thought. By sketching his prolegomena to every future metaphysics which could pass the demanding test of postmodern skepsis, he searches for a ‘non-dogmatic, organic metaphysics, which is a self-refreshing and self-renewing system of thought’ – and finds its roots in late Schelling and Nietzsche. This new robust metaphysics wants to be true to what Heidegger called ‘the poetry of transcendence,’ but it does not want to surrender to the clichéd opposition between faith and reason. It rather seeks transcendence in the manifestation of excess which exceeds reason with its all-too-systematic ambitions to discipline everything under immanentist auspices. Following Schelling, who saw the sign of being in its excess that cannot be deduced from thought, Dennis Vanden Auweele lays ground for a new metaphysical enquiry which opens to the unexpected: “This metaphysics has a knowledge of the absolute that is not absolute knowing.” This is a must-read for all those thinkers who are ready to embrace new bold metaphysical visions: here they will find not only encouragment but also a convincing argument against the ban on metaphysics which, as the author argues, always returns anyway, but in the form of an “abyss with a vengeance.”

Agata Bielik-Robson, author of *Another Finitude: Messianic Vitalism and Philosophy* (2019)

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