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HISTORY, NIHILISM AND THE ETERNAL RETURN:
NIETZSCHE'S ARMING OF HISTORICISM

by

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A thesis submitted to Carleton University in
fulfillment of the requirements of the course
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ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Return as an effort to provide a consistent immanentist ontology adequate for the derivation of morality or as a source of value. Such an effort is necessitated by the transformation of reason that leads to positivism and historicism, both of which remain disarmed against charges of nihilism in the light of the fact that while they eradicate all transcendent sources of value, they are unable to provide any consistent grounds for value themselves.

This discussion is prefigured by a discussion of the debate between Ancients and Moderns vis a vis the crisis of modernity. The failure of technology as a modern attempt to overcome nihilism is examined with reference to the work of Jacques Ellul, followed by a critical evaluation of the solutions forwarded by two proponents of antiquity — Stanley Rosen and Eric Voegelin. The essay concludes with a focus on Nietzsche's perception of history and his proposed solution to nihilism.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1945 a new sun momentarily paled the skies over Hiroshima, and all around the world people bowed before its iridescence. It shone brightly and delimited a final horizon for man. It blinded, and the final mystery became immanent; no longer was there anything beyond this horizon. If reason had revealed to man a transcendent world beyond the confines of the cave, a world that could be apprehended in thought, then technique had captured it and made it a concrete reality. There was no longer any room for shadows in the cave. This was a cremating sun far removed from the life-creating one observed by Plato, which, in its daily benevolent sojourn over the polis revealed the right order of the cosmos. It was not the repository of that wisdom above the earth for whose love Socrates was brought to trial before the community, nor was it one that remained forever immutable unto itself yielding only its fundamental rhythm to permit the implacable measure of cosmic time and duration. This new cosmic interloper was not that beacon which illuminated man's position in the cosmos, leading to the unshakable belief that "the highest in dignity are the stars".¹ Indeed, it can be summarily stated that the mushrooming fireball of the nuclear explosion is as characteristic of key aspects of modernity as was the sun of Athens for antiquity.

The difference between these two suns also serves to emphasize the revival of a debate that raged insistently over two centuries ago, a quaint but vital quarrel between the ancients and emerging moderns. This debate has in recent years enjoyed a renewed vogue due to an insistence by various scholars who maintain that in its resolution lies an answer to that peculiar malaise, the "crisis of modernity". The demand for quick resolution to this debate was given impetus because modern technology's awesome power was seen to have put mankind's very fate in the balance. The last two centuries' scholarly

output is littered with attempts either to reconcile the quarrel or to resolve it in favour of one or the other. The fact that the debate still rages shows no such reconciliation or resolution has occurred; yet in this august noontime of the west, the triumph of the modern appears radiantly unmistakable. The quarrel, at first perceived as centering on the relative merits of classical and modern art, grew to the epic proportions of an authentic crisis that was only overcome through a far-reaching and ostensibly irreconcilable break in the traditions of philosophy and science, thus ushering in the age in which we live. Central to the contemporary debate is the theme that this break, spawned in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is as decisive as it is revolutionary. Primary importance is attached today to the birth of modern conceptions of science which come to dominate not only our understanding of the external world but also our interaction with it. In other words, history comes to be viewed as discontinuous, and while the location of the decisive break with the past is often a matter of some contention, its presence is universally accepted. A further theme underlying this present debate stems from arguments of the beleaguered proponents of antiquity. This is the belief that the motifs underlying antiquity are normatively superior. Hence we see the glinting intensification of a debate insistently reignited in order to propound the moral superiority of the ancients.

This challenge, accepted by apologists of the modern outlook, underscores the fact that the evidence for a discontinuity between antiquity and modernity is decisive. Indeed, what could be more awesomely alien to an Athenian son than the dazzling flash of a nuclear explosion? Nevertheless, the modern revolution does not constitute a complete rejection of the past for the very conception of a renaissance betokens the revival of antiquity.² It is obvious that modern science and the corollary belief in the efficacy of a universal

method based upon mathematical reasoning are engendered by Platonic philosophy and the ancient Greek conception of man as a logical animal. Differences are accentuated at the expense of similarities because any radical insistence on historical continuity would obscure the very real uniqueness of modernity as a palpable historical phenomenon. These differences, moreover, are hardly constituted by the span of centuries, i.e., by time alone, but by specific theoretical and experientially determined decisions taken and lived throughout that time.

It was Hegel who made the first significant insistence upon a radical continuity between ancients and moderns, but this reconciliation was paradoxical. The historical solitude between ancients and moderns became the necessary contradiction whose resolution, while preserving aspects of antiquity and modernity, cancelled both in the culmination of history perceived as the Absolute Spirit manifested through man. Since Hegel's time, however, modern science has been further revolutionized into a technology which, for the first time, creates one world out of our planet. World history is thus no longer a glimmering construct in the minds of philosophers but a concrete reality, one that speaks less of promise today than of catastrophe. The march of history seems to have become a retreat from freedom and from that heightened self-consciousness that Hegel had pronounced. Neither of these is to be found in the pacified consensus of television-irradiated brains, and the "revolt of the masses" is a revolt for the institutions of the commonplace. Mass conduct reveals a public that is far from ready to translate the principal of freedom into reality.³

The hegemony of technique today demands and receives acquiescence and consensus. Its imperatives no longer allow for such optimistic couplets as this: "Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night/God said let Newton be, and

there was light".⁴ The positive freedom that technology had promised vanished when man decided to objectify reason itself and subordinate himself before this embodiment of his own essence. Technology's monolithic umbrella also makes pressing the need for a return to serious discussion of negative freedom. No longer does a "freedom to do" surge forward, since the necessity imposed by technology obliterates it.

Nonetheless, it is not my contention that the hegemony of technique alone distinguishes modernity, nor indeed that it constitutes the crisis of modernity in its totality. In the final analysis, technique is revelatory of the latest universal attempt to found a morality based on an immanentist ontology. That this attempt is a failure, indeed, one in a series of failures, needs to be demonstrated. And it is this series of failures that constitute the crisis of modernity.

With this assertion we reach the junction that connects the whole itinerary of this essay. I attempt to demonstrate initially how modernity can be defined by an unique transformation of reason and the attendant changes wrought by this transformation in the way we live. The transformation of reason entails two immediate consequences: a) It leads to the conversion of nature into history, or, which is the same thing, into a human construction and b) It converts or replaces eternity with temporality, or, which is the same thing, becoming subsumes Being, thus heralding the death of God.

Both these facets are revealed in positivism and historicism which constitute the dominant modes of contemporary discourse. The crisis of modernity can be alternatively viewed as the fact that both, positivism and historicism, remain disarmed against charges of nihilism in the light (or, more appropriately, dark) of their failure to provide an immanentist ontology adequate for the derivation of morality or as a source of value.

The conversion of nature into history culminates in the realm of technique. It is for this reason that the first chapter of this essay makes a pilgrimage to the altar of technology. But this pilgrimage is not to worship or pay homage but to question, and through this questioning perhaps to help desacralize what appears to be a new god. But we must break this journey to clarify and assess the contours of modernity and the uniqueness of the contemporary technological phenomenon, while contrasting modernity with antiquity in order to flesh out the continuities and disarticulations between the two. We must thus address ourselves to questions of why, for some scholars, the "crisis of modernity is the crisis of reason"⁵ and why technology is "knowledge that does not know itself"⁶ in an age when the reasonable way of doing things has become hegemonic. We need to make sense of the accusation that technology is the essence of a nihilistic civilization when, for the first time in history, all is not permitted within the technological horizon but technology alone defines and directs all progressive human action.

In the second chapter, I examine the obverse side of the coin. Here the legacy of historicism is examined and attention is focused on various attempts to overcome its nihilistic implications. The reignition of the debate between ancients and moderns through the attempted revival of the Socratic notion of philosophy in the works of Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and Stanley Rosen provides an adequate foundation upon which to evaluate the results of this debate. I attempt to demonstrate here that while the proponents of antiquity deliver critical barbs with unnerving accuracy at various contributory aspects toward the crisis of modernity, their own assertions are far from providing a philosophical or practical solution to the dilemmas at hand. Indeed, these scholars may well constitute the "last men" of philosophy, masking the wasteland in their hearts with insistent appeals to the "other world". After all, it was

Nietzsche who had proclaimed the nihilism of our age to be the indisputable heir of the Socratic notion of philosophy brought to its logical conclusion today with its still enduring yet hollow belief in the transcendent.

The third chapter examines Nietzsche's concept of Eternal Recurrence. After noting various interpretations of this doctrine I conclude the essay with an examination of how it constitutes the core of Nietzsche's attempt to found a consistently non-nihilist immanent ontology.

Notes to the Introduction

¹Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy", in Reason in the Age of Science (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 15.

²Stanley Rosen, G.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 7. For Rosen the term Renaissance means the revival of antiquity in both its Greek and Christian forms. A similar view is expressed by Marshall Clagett in his excellent Greek Science in Antiquity (New York: Collier Books, 1973), see esp. pp. 13-15. Thus Clagett observes that while "modern science grew out of Greek science and philosophy... the acceptance of this essential continuity in the development of Western thought does not obviate the novelty of the scientific activity of the seventeenth century." Ibid.

³Gadamer, easily uncomfortable with Hegel's pronouncement of the end of history, articulates the statement "What is rational is real, and what is real is rational" to denote a historical task for man rather than being "a legitimation for the inactivity of us all". Thus if Hegel has demonstrated the principle of freedom irrevocably, the march of world history is nonetheless unending, for man has to still translate this freedom into reality. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hegel's Philosophy and its Aftereffects" in op. cit., pp. 36-37:

⁴Alexander Pope quoted in Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 44.

⁵This is one of the ways Stanley Rosen characterizes nihilism today. See his Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. xv.

⁶David Lovekin, "Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology" in Man and World (10: 1977), p. 267. See also Maurice Planchot, "The Limits of Experience: Nihilism" in The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation, ed. David Allison (New York: Delta Books, 1977), pp. 122-123.

CHAPTER 1

The Transformation of Reason

The activity of Socrates marks the decisive beginning of what has come to be accepted as the tradition of western philosophy. The writings of Plato that acquaint us to the work of Socrates reveal that, initially, philosophy is linked to the practical and political question of the right way to live. Plato conceives philosophy as a dialectical ascent toward the achievement of a harmony between thought and speech on the one hand and practical existence on the other (i.e., between logos and ergon). This ascent is made possible by the "discovery" of reason, and Socrates insists that rational thought, armed with the gleaming scalpel of logic, can permeate the very depths of being. This penetration into the mysteries of being is necessitated by the powerful and unrestricted human desire to know, to acquire knowledge. The ancient Greeks construed this knowledge as having a much greater human value than the hitherto prevailing mythic and poetic outlooks precisely because it was gleaned through exercising the uniquely human faculty of reason. Herein lay the birth of traditional metaphysics, dubbed as the "first science", and through the labours of people like Aristotle it came to achieve an absolute primacy over all the other branches of knowledge that were in the process of being formalized.

Subsumed under the overarching umbrella of the "prima philosophia", this Greek "science" is characterized by an unbridled rationalism. Indeed, its own luminous magnificence can be said to lie in the fact that it sought reason in the cosmos; "it sought the nous which is at work ordering and distinguishing in all the formations of nature",¹ and man, because he was himself endowed with reason, could feel its pull toward knowledge. The logic of this science, then, served to maintain a bond between man and the cosmos, between man and nature, and gradually to delineate the links of this bond into the "great chain of

being". This is how knowledge for its own sake became an entirely worthwhile venture, even if it did not yield any practical benefits. Indeed, science served its own ends in giving meaning to human existence by locating it within the rationally determined order of being. The immanent logos of the cosmos began to shine through the transparency of becoming in the world, and man could see the immutability of being in the "forms" of things around him. The highest activity, contemplation, revealed an eternal domain that participated in the temporal present. For this reason, we find the Greek scientists insistent on maintaining, as far as possible, a congruence between the objects of nature and our perception of them. This science corresponded to wisdom; and this wisdom corresponded, in turn, to a view of life as "balance, harmony and moderation".² This original conception of science as coterminous with philosophy continued to unfold until it was replaced by those theoretical events that mark the end of the Middle Ages.

It is apparent that modern conceptions of science are remote from the approach the ancients took, but the ancient Greeks did have some concepts that parallel modern notions of science. Indeed, they did distinguish areas of knowledge through which manufacture and production was possible, and to these branches of knowledge they gave the terms poiesis and techne. But these were considered to be inferior forms of knowledge in terms of their contributions to human existence. The Greeks recognized the enormous potential of technique toward disharmony and unrestrained force, understood its capability to reduce a life of contemplation to one of manipulation and power, and thus saw that it posed an ultimate threat to their civilization. In the same manner, politics too was perceived in the narrow sense of the Greek word praxis, whereby it proceeded as a learning exercise concerned with prudential wisdom whose ultimate aims were the development of character, well-deliberated assessment of the contingent circumstances of life in the polis, and finally

action. Because of this contingency, politics could never aspire to the level of a true science. Questions of the Good and the Just were here always subordinated to the concrete life of the polis in which man had to participate in order that his human nature could be fulfilled. Yet the life of the polis was, by its very nature, devoid of both ontological constancy and logical necessity, and so politics fell under the ambience of practical philosophy. Man could bring about its realisation not through the episteme that applied to rigorous science, but through phronesis or prudence that fell in the orbit of practical philosophy.³ It was not until the efforts of such people as Bacon and Hobbes that phronesis is replaced by episteme and praxis by techné.

But the yearnings of Bacon and Hobbes had to wait a few centuries before coming to fruition. Social and political life remained aloof from the clockwork regularity that had been postulated for them. Human action refused to become a balance wheel because it still remained contingent and, therefore, unpredictable. It is not until the enslavement of science by technique that a new role develops for man. This is a role in which man's essence and existence are united, yielding the ontological constancy and necessity (hence predictability) so necessary for a "true science" that maintains its own practical autonomy through the rigorous application of all knowledge. This is nonetheless an odd predictability, as we shall soon see, because that which is predicted is already an end in the process through which one predicts. Science and technique become one and this is a far cry from practice in ancient Greece where scientific thought first emerged and yet remained divorced from technique. Thus Ellul has observed that the Greeks did not reject technique because they were unable to apply science; but instead this should be viewed as "a deliberate, positive activity involving self-mastery, recognition of destiny and the application of a given conception of life". He adds that "only the most modest

techniques were permitted-~~by~~ those which would respond directly to material needs in such a way that these needs did not get the upper hand".⁴

It is commonly assumed that the seeds of modernity lie in the waning of faith in the Middle Ages.⁵ This assessment is incorrect since during that period the Socratic conception of reason was maintained and even enlarged by Christianity. Ernst Cassirer's summation of medieval Christian thinking admirably illustrates its similarity with Socratic thought:

The task of medieval thought had consisted largely in tracing the architectonics of being and in delineating its main design. In the religious system of the Middle Ages as it is crystallized in scholasticism every phase of reality is assigned its unique place; and with its place goes a complete determination of its value, which is based on the greater or lesser distance which separates it from the First Cause.⁶

Other views point to the growth of empiricism toward the end of the Middle Ages wherein the concrete facts of human experience come to new theoretical life, and while this view is somewhat less parochial, it still does not fully explain the rise of modernity.⁷

To understand the birth of modernity one has to understand the sweeping power that was unleashed when reason itself underwent a transformation and engendered a new science. This transformation of reason came to mediate all subsequent human history and all facets of human experience to such an extent that one can only define modernity in terms of the emergence of this new notion of science and method.

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, this is only one side, albeit an important one, of the coin. It can be viewed as the conversion of nature into a human construction wherein man's relatedness to the world around him finds articulation only insofar as it is a world of his own creation. The other side of the coin is equally important, and has to do with the corollary transformation of eternity into temporality. It is here that we confront attempts to

overcome philosophical dualism and hence, some scholars assert, to overcome philosophy itself.⁸ It is at this juncture that the primary difficulty obstructing any immanentist ontology--the reconciliation of being and becoming--needs to be overcome. This is the task set aside in the following chapter. For the moment let us assess the contours of one side of the coin.

As William Barrett has pointed out, Gallilean mechanics can hardly be viewed as an empirically based model. In other words, it is not a theoretical construction derived from human experience.⁹ Galileo did not establish the laws of mechanics on the basis of his own immediate experience, but instead he developed an intellectual model that was initially contrary to the facts as normally revealed in experience. The scientific revolution is distinguished by the creation of just such abstract and apparently non-factual intellectual models based upon a refusal to accept the world as empirically given. Once conceptualized, the models' structures are subsequently verified with the aid of new methodologies of empirical measurement. Thus, not only does this new science set itself the task of understanding the structures of the universe that underlie the immediate facts of experience, but it also actually sets about producing these structures. Cassirer can rightfully echo Descartes in observing that modern thought begins with its own clear and distinct ideas and "finds in them the model for all reality."¹⁰

Once nature becomes open to mathematical construction, the famous Kantian dictum of reason being the legislature of experience comes to fruition. Mathematical analysis relegates the world of visible appearances to the backwaters, thus breaking the congruence between man and nature that the hitherto prevailing "science" had tried so hard to maintain. The new science, then, sheds the manacles of the first philosophy, the doctrine of substance as the true being, and militantly refuses to view nature passively. It resounds with Bacon's insistence that nature be "put to the rack to compel her to answer our

questions". For the first time in history it becomes possible to use science to transform nature, and this conversion is nothing more than a technological transformation. The modern coupling of science with technology is particularly appropriate since modern science is essentially technological. Technology in this instance begins as nothing more than the material embodiment of a science that theoretically dictates conditions for measuring nature, but it is a technology that soon becomes heterodyne and imposes a direction upon science itself: "The principles established by Descartes were applied and resulted not only in a philosophy but in an intellectual technique."¹¹

The reverberations of this new role of thinking soon set up sympathetic vibrations in all fields of human endeavour. In all spheres of activity it soon came to be apparent that Reason and the Good, which had hitherto been tied together, were being wrenched apart. The blame for this has been brought to the door of this new mode of thinking which dictated, as one contemporary writer asserts, that the Good lay "beyond the rational investigation of this world", with the Cartesian ego cogitans becoming "the symbol of the process by which man sought to master the world by relying on himself and mathematics alone".¹² In the sphere of politics, the moral conditions of a "good and exemplary life" came to be subordinated to physical needs, to the actual conditions of survival: "If the theoretically based point of departure of the ancients was how human beings could comply practically with the natural order, then the practically assigned point of departure of the moderns is how human beings could technically master the threatening evils of nature".¹³ The identification of reason with scientific rationality, and knowledge with mathematical knowledge reaches its apogee in later years with the fuller development of liberal-rationalism with its extollation of the virtues of rationality, utility and progress. This view is evident in Bentham's

utilitarianism and his ambition to crown himself as the Newton of the "social sciences". His wish to establish morality ultimately on a purely scientific basis and his belief that all social phenomena could be reduced to laws¹⁴ find a poignant rejoinder in Mill's autobiography wherein he narrates how the "rationalistic utilitarianism of his upbringing contributed to his breakdown.

Soon technology and power come jointly to play a key role in the establishment of modernity. Bacon's proclamation that "knowledge is power" is not an instigation to understand nature through empathy; it is an urgent request to subject nature to man's control. Thus nature's importance derives not from its essence but from the uses to which it can be put. A similar advocacy pervades the work of Hobbes, as Michael Oakeshott recounts: "Hobbes' philosophy is in all its parts preeminently a philosophy of power precisely because philosophy is reasoning, reasoning the elucidation of mechanism and mechanism essentially the combination, transfer and resolution of forces. The end of philosophy itself is power--scientia propter potentiam".¹⁵

The transformation of the science of man to the science of technical manipulation can be traced back at least to Hobbes' physicalistic and mechanistic view of human nature.¹⁶ This is evident in Hannah Arendt's indictment that Hobbes' pronouncements are an attempt to find a theory "by which one can produce, with scientific precision, political institutions which will regulate the motions of time or creation understood in terms of a clock that regulates the processes of nature".¹⁷

While the crisis of modernity has been characterized in many different ways, a common factor has always been the fact that modern thought and action are overwhelmingly dominated by technology. But since technology itself is the essence of a science dictated by a reason that is divorced from any notions of the Good, nihilism becomes its common foundation. With the transformation

of reason firmly entrenched in technology, the stage is set for the entry of this strange guest--nihilism--that Nietzsche had foreseen knocking at our doors. Indeed, in later modernity the illusions of reflective self-consciousness are dealt a severe blow by Nietzsche (along with Marx and Freud) and this is marked by the realization that the guest intends to become a permanent resident. Now for a moment we must turn to an analysis of technology's direct contribution to the crisis.

Jacques Ellul on Technology

The birth of modernity with the transformation of reason and the subsequent redefinition of knowledge as power comes to be crystallized in modern technology which reflects and reinforces the factors that contribute to the crisis of modernity. Jacques Ellul has presented us with the most perceptive portrait of the role and nature of technology in contemporary society. This portrait reveals how technology has tantalizingly drawn all the strings that encompass human thought and action upon itself, only to mirror them back so that all transcendence beyond itself is effectively foreclosed. In this manner, man's essence is sublimated and lost in technology, and in those rare moments when he questions and searches, he finds only an objectified echo informing him that technology has already encapsulated his nature.

In his mammoth work, The Technological Society, we find his most sustained analysis of technique. In using this term Ellul undertakes an analysis of something more than technology. While the term technology implies a specific set of means external to man, though still rooted in a cultural context, Ellul's term technique refers to any and all means used for the achievement of all ends in society. Such a conception has important repercussions on the way "technology" is commonly discussed, and allows for a fuller understanding of the technological phenomenon itself. More importantly, its strength lies

in its ability to surpass weaknesses in analysis resulting from too narrow a conception of technology. This will be discussed in the closing section of this chapter.

Ellul presents us with two definitions of technique, one general and one particular. In the former, technique refers merely to any means utilized for the achievement of a particular end.¹⁸ Here technique is a pervasive force through all of history, subsuming all civilizations and all cultures. Indeed, it makes a civilization or a culture possible and uniquely defines man's relationship to the world in contradistinction to other things. Thus magic, too, can be seen as an early expression of technique.¹⁹ All the means by which man creates a civilization, through protection and defence from his environment, to its eventual assimilation can be viewed as technique in this general sense. Even science is preceded by technique in that the most primitive man was acquainted with certain effective means for achieving desired ends. The distinguishing feature of this technique, viewed as a means, lies in the fact that these means do not necessarily determine or define the end, which is preconceived from notions that may derive their rationale elsewhere. In this respect a variety of techniques could be utilized to ensure the desired end. Technique as it exists in modernity had to wait for the arrival of the new reason and the new science.

Ellul's concern and focus devolve on the second, narrower definition of technique. It is ubiquitous in contemporary culture, a culture that is unique in being constituted within a technological civilization. In this sense Ellul means that "our civilization is constructed by technique (makes a part of civilization only what belongs to technique), for technique (in that everything in this civilization must serve a technical end) and is exclusively technique (in that it excludes whatever is not technique or reduces it to technical

form)".²⁰ In this culture, this Technological Society, technique comes to be defined as a method through which rational and efficient ordering can take place. This conception of technique constitutes a radical change from effectiveness to efficiency. It can be claimed that "Without exception in the course of history, technique belonged to a civilization and was merely a single element among a host of nontechnical activities. Today technique has taken over the whole of civilization".²¹

The reason utilized in this radical reordering is precisely that new, transformed reason we have already seen, and it surges forward in search of newer, different, even more efficient means. Indeed, it demonstrates the possibility of a hierarchy of different means. While reason initially displaces traditional operational methods with a multiplicity of new ones exhibiting a high degree of diversity, ultimately reason comes to work in the opposite direction of destroying diversity. This is because it must account for itself before the tribunal of the "fixed end of technique--efficiency". Eventually any technique reaches its standard form, which means that the "multiplicity of means is reduced to one: the most efficient".²² And this efficiency is thoroughly demonstrable. Technical virtuosity and its accomplishments reveal themselves to the perceiving consciousness as concrete and objective facts. Modern science with its attitude that only those things are knowable that can be expressed numerically is thus particularly amenable to this process: "To get away from the so-called 'arbitrary and subjective', to escape ethical and literary judgements...the scientist must get back to numbers".²³ Technical demonstration and modern science, such are the arid fields wherein the seeds of the technical consciousness germinate, flowering into the present situation where:

It is no longer the best relative means which counts, as compared to other means also in use. The choice is

less and less a subjective one among several means which are potentially applicable. It is really a question of finding the best means in the absolute sense, on the basis of numerical calculation.²⁴

The technical phenomena of today that Ellul has analysed are subsumed under two major characteristics: rationality and artificiality. These in turn subordinate or supplement five further characteristics that he terms automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universalism and autonomy. To these I have added the new characteristic of cybernetics in order to flesh out certain themes that remain implicit in Ellul. To a certain extent the term cybernetics already embraces the concept of autonomy, yet they are not wholly synonymous. By autonomy Ellul denotes a teleological independence from genuine human purpose that is inherent in technology. This independence is, moreover, immanent in and determined by technology itself. But technology does not function of its own accord. If it separates itself from genuine human purpose it does so by legitimating and redefining these purposes through the rule of efficiency. In light of these new purposes human action is hued by new overtones that contribute to the maintenance and synchronicity of the technological system. I suggest that this mode of human action can be understood through the concept of cybernetics which conceives of the technological system as an essentially self-regulating system that incorporates human purpose and action. At the ~~other end~~ of the spectrum I have added the concept of entropy to the concepts of reason and artificiality. This term is already present in some of Ellul's other works but he does not pursue it in any systematic way. After exploring Ellul's own pronouncements concerning entropy, I explore the ways in which it can be used to understand systemic change at various levels. In other words, entropy and cybernetics relate to each other in that while the former serves to explain systemic change, the latter serves to explain its stasis. The tenability of

these assertions can only be examined, however, after a closer examination of the characteristics already described by Ellul.

The first aspect of technique can be best defined as a rational process that infiltrates and replaces all that is spontaneous. For Ellul this rationality is "best exemplified in systematization, division of labor, creation of standards, productions". It arises in two phases:

First, the use of 'discourse' in every operation; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means and instruments to the schema of logic.²⁵

In other words, technique entertains only those methods that can be reduced to an abstract and logical schema.

The artificiality of technique comes to lie in its opposition to nature:

It destroys, eliminates, or subordinates the natural world, and does not allow this world to restore itself or even to enter into a symbiotic relation with it. The two worlds obey different imperatives, different directives, and different laws which have nothing in common. Just as hydroelectric installations take waterfalls and lead them into conduits, so the technical milieu absorbs the natural.²⁶

The natural world thus comes to be rapidly replaced by an artificial world, a world created through technique and hence amenable only to technical problem solving. The environment comes to include fewer and fewer natural objects. By this Ellul means not only the concrete objects of our environment--roads, buildings and the like--but also social relations as well. Even social relations come to be perceived by the technical mind not as given to us, nor as inherent in the nature of things, but as objects created by technical activity. Thus in the technological society Hobbes' dictum comes true far beyond his expectations.

The motto that declares "the one best way" for everything leads to the process Ellul terms automatism, and it is the premier process that ensures the

self-directing quality of technique. Ellul illustrates this characteristic through an example:

A surgical operation which was formerly not feasible but can now be performed is not an object of choice. It simply is. Here we see the prime aspect of technical automatism. Technique itself, ipso facto and without indulgence or possible discussion, selects among the means to be employed. The human being is no longer in any sense the agent of choice.²⁷

Technique in this manner tends to become a closed circle, automatically carrying out the choice between alternate methods or mechanisms, denying human choice and leaving man in the role of a performer only. But automatism implies more than merely the appropriation of choice and direction; it also implies the further capacity of conquering all the hitherto spontaneous and non-ordered human activities. The conquest is almost complete. We must now consider that "the various technical systems have invaded all spheres to the point that they are everywhere in collision with modes of life which were heretofore non-technical".²⁸ And in this conflict there can be only one winner:

We are at the stage of historical evolution in which everything that is not technique is being eliminated. The challenge to a country, an individual, or a system is solely a technical challenge. Only a technical force can be opposed to a technical force. All else is swept away.²⁹

With the characteristic of automatism then, all choices are reduced to technical choices, and these are themselves quite distant from the moral arena. The only moral value in technique, if it can be deemed as such, is the "value" of technical "use". Good is linked together with efficient use, which is, in turn, capable of technical, mathematical enumeration. Efficient use determines its own value. Insofar as it is conducted with maximum efficiency, a practice can no longer be deemed good or bad. Ellul deliberates on the logical corollaries of this characteristic in an analysis of "monism", and in this deliberation an initial attribute becomes apparent. It is this. Technique can no

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longer allow choice if the goal of this choice is not already inherent in technique. Any motif that transcends this parameter is immediately voided; religion, philosophy and art must henceforth become techniques.

Self-augmentation is a characteristic of the technical phenomenon, of the "ensemble of techniques". It proceeds in and through the combinations of techniques. Ellul formulates self-augmentation to be governed by two laws: 1) that technical progress is irreversible; and 2) that this progression is geometric rather than arithmetic. The irreversibility of technique is engendered by the adage that techniques always disproportionately exhaust the natural resources necessary for their existence, thus necessitating more rapid technical progress in order to fill this gap. In other words "only inventions perpetually more numerous and automatically increasing can make good the unheard-of expenditures and irremediable consumption of raw materials..."³⁰ The second law seeks its rationale in the fact that techniques within the technical circle are inter-dependent. Thus any technical innovation has repercussions across the whole of the circumscribed area, making further combinations and innovations possible. Ellul exemplifies both these laws of self-augmentation in terms of concrete town planning problems:

A large city supposes a concentration of the means of transport air control, traffic organization, and so on. Each of these permits the city to grow even larger and promotes new technical advances. For example, to make housework easier, garbage-disposal units have been put into use which allow the garbage to run off through the kitchen sinks. The result is enormous pollution of the rivers. It is then necessary to find some new means of purifying the rivers so that water can be used for drinking. A great quantity of oxygen is required for bacteria to destroy these organic materials. And how shall we oxygenate rivers?³¹

Both these laws come to illustrate the virtual redundancy of man as an individual. Thus George Grant's disgruntled observation that technological advance seems to be taking place for its own sake³² is certainly applicable here, but it cannot

be countered with any plea that technology be applied to strictly human goals. Such an assertion would clearly be based on a misunderstanding of the essence of technique. Not only does technique become hegemonic, defining its own goals and setting its own imperatives, but it further incapacitates man's capability for autonomy. Technique leaves "freedom" for man in only those areas that are already deferential to technical "necessity". This necessity guarantees that man has freedom to act "only in virtue of their commonest and lowest nature, and not in virtue of what they possess of superiority and individuality".³³ Technical elements evolve through an ever-encompassing spontaneity of combination and recombination, and man plays an increasingly feeble role in this process.

Through the processes of automatism and self-augmentation, then, technique comes to be uniquely defined and identified by itself alone. Its becoming is prefigured in its being, which means that it requires no contradiction, no otherness, no negation, no dialectic to fulfill itself. Existence and essence are one:

It resembles nothing other than itself. Whatever the domain to which it is applied, man or God, technique simply is; it undergoes no modification...a precise and well defined boundary surrounds it; there is that which is technique, and there is everything else, which is not.³⁴

Following this, its own internal logic, technique becomes a closed world wherein all the separate techniques link together as the technical phenomenon, into a whole displaying a single essence. This is the characteristic of monism and it invalidates the commonly asserted distinction between various techniques or between the techniques themselves and the uses to which they are put. In this whole all the elements display an ontological harmony, "use is inseparable from being".³⁵ Applications are the structural prefigurations of conceptions, and conceptions arise only insofar as they are amenable to applications. We can no longer distinguish between good and bad uses of technology because

technology becomes use itself. A mistaken but long-repeated distinction between the two hinders our grasp of the technical phenomenon; it arises because of an identification of technique with machines. Thus Ellul observes that "A man can use his automobile to take a trip or to kill his neighbors. But the second use is not a use; it is a crime...(A) number of uses can always be made of the machine, but only one of them is the technical use".³⁶ In other words, we cannot assert that technique progresses to any human goals, whether moral or immoral; we cannot even say that it progresses to its own goals, because these are already united and defined in use. To impose goals on technique arbitrarily or to implicate it in moral imperatives already means to deny technique its essence. But such a decision would be, of course, highly irrational. One does not slide to home-base on a landmine nor bat a grenade out of the park for a home-run, even if used tank shells are popular as flowerpots in Bohemia, where they serve as a statement of aesthetic technique.

If the monism of technique reveals that it is a whole unto itself, the universalism of technique serves to illustrate its geographical and qualitative hegemony. Its artificiality serves to help reveal the human essence because in human terms technique comes naturally to be adopted globally in all spheres of life. Thus all the elements of civilization become subservient to it. This is the defining characteristic of a technical civilization. As technical civilization advances, its internal logic ensures that man must bow and retreat from his hitherto privileged place and become an object for that which has usurped him from the center of society. Monism and universalism together eradicate essential differences across civilizations, all of which now come to share monistic technique as a common essence. This is not to deny that techniques, the "best ways", will not vary geographically; it is only to assert that the variances will be nonessential, that it will always be the "best way" which will prevail.

Ellul explores the irresistible independence of technique in a discussion of its final characteristic--autonomy. This characteristic is expressed by the self-referential elements present in technique as well as by the progress it makes independently of the social situation. Politics and economics are both increasingly subservient to technique's evolution and are less and less guided by external necessities. Technical imperatives hitherto developed in the realms of politics and economics now become heterodyne; these imperatives close in upon these very realms, imposing their own reality, their own internal laws and necessities upon them:

Suppose that the state intervenes in a technical domain. Either it intervenes for sentimental, theoretical or intellectual reasons, and the effect of its intervention will be negative or nil; or it intervenes for reasons of political technique, and we have the combined effect of two techniques. There is no other possibility.³⁷

Similarly it is no longer economic necessity that gives impetus to technique, for economic needs are themselves products developing out of concepts that technical relations make concrete. Thus technique comes to "sit in judgement on itself", heralding itself as a force "beyond good and evil".³⁸ Technique manoeuvres itself to face technical problems and can hence bow only to technical criteria; with reference to moral problems it can maintain only silence. In becoming its own arbiter, it can no longer accept external limitations or directions; all that is transcendent is gradually made concrete in its structures. In this manner technique desacralizes all that it touches and in this appropriating stance it becomes sacred itself. It denies "mystery" and reduces all the beacons that had hitherto transcended day-to-day activities to the septic and mundane reality of a flashlight. What science enumerates theoretically technique demonstrates through the practical compulsion of design, what science evidences through reason technique soon objectifies into use. In denying the sacred, it becomes god. Beyond it lies nothing, for technique

"denies mystery a priori. The mysterious is merely that which has not yet been technicized".³⁹

Technique's autonomy is exhibited not only with reference to man's cultural institutions, but between technique and man as well. Thus "man is reduced to the level of a catalyst...(H)e resembles a slug inserted into a slot machine: he starts the operation without participating in it".⁴⁰ Even this slim role becomes anathema in the perfected technological system because man becomes the sole source of error in such a system: "To the degree that technique must attain its result with mathematical precision, it has for its object the elimination of all human variability and elasticity".⁴¹ Ellul, warm on this theme, waxes sarcastically in exclaiming "ten percent of all telephone calls are wrong numbers, due to human error. An excellent use by man of so perfect a machine!"⁴² What then can be the solution to human contamination of more critical technical processes? Man must capitulate to technique in order that error may be eliminated. He must sacrifice his freedom, he must sacrifice himself because ultimately technique is not possible within a realm of human freedom or autonomy. Man and technique are intertwined, but while technique obeys and proceeds by necessary laws that give it an absolute predictability, man's behaviour remains contingent, and with this contingency comes unpredictability. In this conflict, it becomes necessary that "technique prevail over the human being. For technique, this is a matter of life and death. Technique must reduce man to a technical animal, the king of the slaves of techniques".⁴³ In other words, the contingency of human action must be replaced by necessity or else neither man nor the system can continue to survive. This is precisely why the autonomy of technique leads inexorably to cybernetics.

Man's personal attributes have to be erased so that the "perfect design of the organization"⁴⁴ may unfold unblemished. Man's self-motivated action in the

system can only serve to degrade order and the underlying meaning that sustains this order. The absolute predictability inherent in the technical phenomenon, its subservience to its own autonomous and self-referential laws, cannot tolerate chance. The technological system tolerates no irrational component within it. There is no room for mere probability. And, insofar as such a term is even allowable in this context, randomness becomes coterminous with evil.⁴⁵ As long as all these factors persist in the system and as long as man is the cause of them, he becomes the insidious reason for entropy in the system. The hard-won order from an inherently disorderly universe must be preserved at all costs; man's actions cannot be allowed to disturb this order. The cost of error in a world of universal and interlocking techniques can be extremely high. This is why cybernetics is inexorably becoming a governing reality.

Cybernetics, Entropy and Technique

Ellul has observed that the final end (and very nearly a conscious goal) of modern civilization appears to be entropy. This belief stems from the achievement of two key results through the hegemony of the technical phenomenon. The first of these is the annulment of all contradiction in society. The tension arising from contradiction in society is, for Ellul, a necessary condition for change and indeed life itself. Such tension exists in two areas. The first of these becomes a necessary condition for knowledge and is marked by a bifurcation between thought and action, mind and body, perception and object, man and man, the known and the unknown.⁴⁶ All these tensions are, as we have seen, obliterated by technique. As for the second, Ellul explains: "Tension between groups composing the entire society is a condition for life itself, or life susceptible to creation and adaptation in that society. It is the point of departure for all culture".⁴⁷ The overriding nature of technique makes these contradictions tend to disappear as well. No longer does it allow

an interplay between different points of view, since technique becomes the universal telescope for man. Ellul says: "Man's dream--including the socialist dream--is to suppress these contradictions, i.e., to arrive at entropy, at the equilibrium of death".⁴⁸

The second result is a product of the successful achievement of the first. The annulment of all tensions and contradictions from the life of man reduces him to a "mass man". It is only through this mass characteristic that he can now be said to have any essence at all. In other words, the imperatives of technology demand a cultural homogeneity and an equilibrium, a consensus and steady predictability in human affairs so that human life can be completely synchronized within the system. Thus Ellul observes:

In a group in the state of human equilibrium, of human homogeneity, there is entropy. But entropy is exactly the equilibrium of death. We must be cautious when accepting the generalizations made by others and understand that complete adjustment by all to all in a group in reality means that the group is no longer alive; it has been mechanized. Unity attained in political movement means that life in a given system has disappeared.⁴⁹

Such pronouncements on the part of Ellul initially appear to be misguided.

After all entropy denotes disorder, chaos and randomness. It is, essentially, a measure of disorganization while cybernetics speaks of organization.⁵⁰

Technological civilization is, if nothing else, orderly to a fault. It seeks to eliminate randomness, unpredictability and chaos. How, then, are we to interpret Ellul's analysis? Is Ellul misguided in his assertions? I think that, on the whole, there are convincing reasons for Ellul's conclusions.

We can start by assenting to a physicalistic description of civilization as an "island of order" existing despite the overall tendency of the universe toward entropy.⁵¹ Civilization in this view is the end product of man's attempt to combat entropy through the use of technique to create and maintain order. The point that Ellul is making is that the establishment of order is not

something that has hitherto proceeded negatively. It has not been defined in terms of the absence of entropy, and the utilization of technique has hence sought its teleological *raison d'être* in realms that transcend physicalistic notions. Order at this level is derived through a conception of absolute order itself, not through a concept of entropy.⁵² Insofar as this has been the case, technique has remained a means in the hands of man, and the system circumscribed by these means has maintained itself through combatting the overall tendency toward entropy. This combat has resulted in the evolution of a culture devoted to "human things". The case today is entirely different. The following quotation from Ellul summarizes what we have already presented more discursively:

The first great fact which emerges from our civilization is that today everything has become means. There is no longer an end; we do not know whither we are going. We have forgotten our collective ends, and we possess great means: we set huge machines in motion in order to arrive nowhere. The end (by this I mean the collective end of civilization, for individuals still have their own needs ends, for instance, to succeed in a competition, or to get a higher salary, and the like) has been effaced by the means. Thus man, who used to be the end of the whole humanist system of means, man, who is still proclaimed an end in political speeches, has in reality himself become the means of the very means which ought to serve him.⁵³

We have already witnessed how the five characteristics of technique create a new subjectivity for man, displacing traditional objects for technical manipulation by embodied conceptions that are now indistinguishable from natural objects. In effectively closing all transcendence beyond itself, technique does not permit us to conceptualize the "absolute order". In reducing all choice to technical choice, it comes to define its own direction and maintain its own mechanistic progress in which life comes to be viewed in its purely physical aspects. In other words, the new system defines order negatively, as purely the absence of entropy. This is why the system aims at cybernetic organization, the most effective means of maintaining mechanistic order, utilizing man as

another loop in its feedback mechanisms.⁵⁴ In such a state of affairs there is no room for new ideas or spiritual motifs; man can no longer choose idiosyncratically on the basis of cultural preferences, religious persuasions, philosophical insights or an aesthetic penchant unless they too become techniques and bow to efficiency; in other words, disappear.

This is the sense in which we must understand Ellul's assertion that life itself disappears; human life gives way to the existence of organic automaton. Thus all human characteristics are rendered either uniform or equivalent, and therefore no more exchange or significant interaction is possible. Man as man enters a state of final entropy. Ironically he becomes an island of disorder in an ocean of order.

Other Views on Technology

In concluding, we must shed some critical light on the above formulations by considering two related contemporary viewpoints regarding technology. In the first of these, technology is seen to be inherently neutral, its moral dimension being revealed by the uses to which it is put. Such a view characteristically puts the reins of technological practice unilaterally into human hands. If technological applications bring about unwarranted circumstances, the fault is purely human. This perspective echoes the positivist tradition of "amoral problem solving", conceiving technology as nothing more than a scientific capability crystallized into a tool waiting to be put to use. Typical examples point to the fact that discoveries in nuclear physics can yield a panacea of unlimited energy as well as nuclear bombs. The decision for either is in human hands because there is a hiatus between technology, which is confined to the realm of the "hard" natural sciences, and social and political phenomena. For Ellul, as we have seen, such an argument is anathema because one can hardly speak of "good" or "bad" uses of a phenomenon that is use itself. A correlative

view emanating from this conception of technology points to the fact that through modern technology man's choices and hence his freedom have been enlarged. This too Ellul dismisses. He accepts the existence of such choice and such freedom; but for him the key issue resides in the fact that both choice and freedom are technologically defined and determined.⁵⁵

This leads us to the second related view which is marked by the lament that the crisis of modernity lies in the uneven development of the sciences of nature vis a vis the sciences of man. The claim here is the explicit one that the methods of social control lag far behind the methods whereby we can manipulate the natural environment. Both these views are adumbrated by Robert Heilbroner, for instance, who maintains that:

The external challenge of the human prospect, with its threat of runaway populations, oblitative wars, and potential environmental collapse can be seen as an extended and growing crisis induced by the advent of a command over natural processes that far exceeds the reach of our present mechanisms of social control. It goes without saying that this unequal balance between power and control enters into, or provides the underlying basis for that 'civilizational malaise'.⁵⁶

In fact Heilbroner is firm in the view that the problems created by technology have reached such overwhelming proportions that they can only be solved by technological means. But these means must now be urgently focussed upon the management of human affairs. It is for this reason that he foresees the grim prospect of a rigid authoritarian antiutopia in which the few manage the affairs of men with the same implacable equanimity that characterizes the control of nature around us.⁵⁷

What, for Heilbroner, remains a grim prospect is viewed by such people as B. F. Skinner as a positive state of affairs to be striven for urgently. This is because in the Skinnerian world individual autonomy is but a myth. The growth of the "scientific analysis of behaviour" has dispossessed autonomous man, turning over to the environment the control that man himself was once said

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to have exerted. Thus Skinner can proclaim that autonomous man "has reached a dead end".⁵⁸ But for Skinner this is an entirely satisfactory state of affairs, because a new world beyond freedom and dignity awaits us: through his work, man can come to control his own destiny.⁵⁹ This belief stems from the fact that even if man is controlled by his environment, the environment, in modernity at least, is almost totally man-made. Biological and physical techniques have advanced so quickly that both biological and cultural evolution "may now accelerate because they are both subject to intentional design".⁶⁰ Skinner gives supreme importance to this intentionality, repeatedly stressing the need for a self-conscious science of human behaviour control through which the "desired" human state of affairs can be achieved by means of a selective and technologically controlled environment. It is toward this scientific manipulation and control of man that the closing sentence of Beyond Freedom and Dignity-- "we have yet to see what man can make of man"--is geared to excite and encourage us. But nowhere does Skinner provide us with the critical tools for such a self-consciousness, and the guideposts of intention themselves float, and then sink, in the cultural artifacts of a constantly changing social environment.

Even if we were to accept the desirability of Skinnerian liberation wherein self-conscious and intentional control is substituted for haphazard and unself-conscious control, the reflexivity of such a selfconsciousness and intention is still to be doubted. Indeed, for Skinner to even speak of these things is a poignant signal. He has given up the search for the real human, because survival in a technological society makes such a search worthless. Nonetheless, he must perforce use categories revelatory of concrete, individual thinking human beings. But insofar as these individuals are beyond the grasp of such an understanding, and insofar as their totality is encompassed, surpassed and

subsequently determined through measurable, observable and controllable behaviour alone, Skinner himself remains a willing tool of technology.

If we are to take Ellul seriously then Skinner's evocation becomes nothing more than an invitation to unveil the spectre of a grim reality. Ellul's work in this context becomes an attempt to convince us that Heilbroner's fears have long been realized and that Skinner's urgings have been far surpassed. This yields a state of affairs that can only be equated with the situation of a terminally ill patient, waiting only to be unhooked from the life-support system. In such a situation, one in which man and technology are so inextricably linked, it becomes impossible to distinguish the means from the ends. To speak of self-conscious intention when both self-consciousness and intention are siphoned through the filter of technique is farcical. The crisis, Ellul insists, is already upon us. It is ludicrous for us to be still debating about how to avoid it. These debates are but theoretical railway tracks with no destination.

In the last analysis Ellul's work informs us of the existence of one value, of one moral worth existing in society today. This is the value of technique itself. To be good in such a society would mean a complete acquiescence to it, to be good and critical would mean opposing technique with technique, which paradoxically recalls Hitler's observation that "unless the enemy learns to combat poison gas with poison gas, this tactic, which is based on an accurate evaluation of human weaknesses, must lead almost mathematically to success."⁶⁹

Notes to Chapter One

¹Hans-Georg Cadamer, "Hegel's Philosophy and its Aftereffects" in op. cit., p. 35.

²Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 29.

³Leo Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 24-25. For another excellent discussion see Jürgen Habermas, Theory and Practice (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 41-81.

⁴Ellul, The Technological Society, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵William Barrett, The Illusion of Technique (New York: Anchor Books, 1979), p. 200. Barrett is critical of this view.

⁶Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, op. cit., p. 39.

⁷Such a view is propounded by A. N. Whitehead. See Barrett, op. cit., p. 200.

⁸This is the view of propounded by Stanley Rosen, for instance. See chapter two of this essay. Leo Strauss propounds a similar thesis vis a vis natural Right in his Natural Right and History.

⁹Barrett, The Illusion of Technique, op. cit., pp. 200-201.

¹⁰Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, op. cit., p. 39.

¹¹Ellul, The Technological Society, op. cit., p. 43.

¹²Rosen, Nihilism, op. cit., p. XV. See also, Ernst Cassirer The Myth of the State (New Haven: Yale University, 1975) p. 164. Cassirer directs attention to the fact that after Galileo and Descartes, knowledge is identified with mathematical knowledge.

¹³Habermas, Theory and Practice, op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁴Elie Halevy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (London: Faber, 1934) p. 433.

¹⁵Michael Oakeshott, "Introduction" to Hobbes' Leviathan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. xxi.

¹⁶Habermas, Theory and Practice, op. cit., pp. 62-67.

¹⁷Hannah Arendt quoted in ibid., p. 61.

¹⁸Ellul, The Technological Society, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰Ibid., p. 128.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 21.

²³Ibid., p. 18.

²⁴Ibid., p. 21.

²⁵Ibid., p. 79.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 80.

²⁸Ibid., p. 83.

²⁹Ibid., p. 84.

³⁰Ibid., p. 90.

³¹Ibid., p. 92.

³²George Grant, Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), p. 101.

³³Ellul, The Technological Society, op. cit., p. 93.

³⁴Ibid., p. 94.

³⁵Ibid., p. 95.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 96-97.

³⁷Ibid., p. 134.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 134.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 135.

⁴²Ibid., p. 137.

⁴³Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵This stems from the belief that randomness and unpredictability both serve to destroy 'meaning'. Norbert Wiener has given us the classic statements on this. See, The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society (New York: Avon Books, 1967), Preface: "The Idea of a Contingent Universe", pp. 13-21.

⁴⁶This is explored fully in David Lovekin's "Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology", op. cit., pp. 264-265.

⁴⁷Jacques Ellul, The Political Illusion (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 216.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 209.

⁵⁰Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings, op. cit., p. 31.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 39.

⁵²Similar views are expressed by Leo Strauss who speaks of the progressive lowering of horizons by people such as Machiavelli, Rousseau and Nietzsche. See, for instance, "The Three Waves of Modernity" in Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss ed. H. Giddens (New York: Pegasus, 1975). Eric Voegelin's famous phrase, "immanentization of the eschaton" bespeaks a similar attitude.

⁵³Jacques Ellul, The Presence of the Kingdom quoted in "Marx in the Social Thought of Jacques Ellul" by D. Menninger in Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays ed. R. G. Christians and J. M. Van Hook (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 21.

⁵⁴Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings, op. cit., p. 38.

⁵⁵This is already evident from our prior discussion. For a further analysis see David Lovekin's defence of Ellul in "Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology", op. cit., pp. 251-253.

⁵⁶Robert L. Heilbroner, An Inquiry into the Human Prospect (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), pp. 75-58.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁸B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 196.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 198.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ellul, The Technological Society, op. cit., p. 84.

CHAPTER TWO

The Historical Sickness

"There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense, which injures every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people or a culture."¹ This is one of Nietzsche's earliest statements warning of the dangers of historicism. In this same early work, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, he sketched out the basic problems that would exercise him for the rest of his life. It is here that he likened the historical sense to a disease and referred to it as the "historical malady",² which, if allowed to rule without restraint "uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs existing things of their atmosphere in which alone they can live."³ But why this denigration of the historical sense? Nietzsche's answer was unequivocal:

And this is a general law: every living thing can become healthy, strong and fruitful only within a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself or, on the other hand, too selfish to restrict its vision to the limits of a horizon drawn by another, it will wither away feebly or overhastily to its early demise.⁴

With the advent of the historical sense and the realization of the historicity of each "present moment" in our existence, the comforting and all-enveloping cloak of horizons suddenly becomes foetid. Nietzsche acknowledges that "only so far as man, by thinking, reflecting, comparing, dividing and joining, limits that unhistorical element...does man become man."⁵ For indeed, if man was to draw a horizon around him almost to a point, if he was totally unhistorical, he would be capable of escaping from "boredom and dissimulation", but this escape would also involve his total reanimalization.⁶ To be truly human, then, involves the capacity to maintain resoluteness, strength and meaning through horizons in the face of one's historicity. In other words, meaningful action necessitates that we "forget" our participation in the

ineluctable flow of becoming, of transience and, for a moment, take counsel from some eternal verity.

The sustaining power of horizons had hitherto devolved on the fact that they divided the world into an eternal beyond and a transient present. In other words, they functioned as the crystallization of truths and values that aspired to permanence by virtue of their being grounded in the eternal and unchanging. This bifurcation of the world ends when the historical sickness forces upon us the realization that all horizons are man-made or transient and subjective. It is this event that leads to the devaluation of the highest values, culminating in world-weary relativism, and it is this that Nietzsche has in mind when he proclaims the death of God. The cataclysmic nature of this event is outlined by Nietzsche through the incessant cries of the madman in The Gay Science:

Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?
What were we doing when we unchained this earth from
its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we
moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging con-
tinually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions?
Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as
through an infinite nothing?⁷

Thus the terror of history assails us as a series of blind, rootless occurrences, leaving us with the question, "How shall we comfort ourselves?"⁸

Indeed, how do we comfort ourselves? What horizon creating masks does one wear to tolerate the abyss of nothingness? Nietzsche gives us the clue in his very first proclamation of the death of God: "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown."⁹ In other words, even when the sustaining power of horizons vanishes, the horizons nonetheless remain, now finding their support in ersatz, immanent and secular faiths. The course of technology has become such a horizon as was demonstrated in chapter one, and in its stifling of all creativity and

its extollation of the commonplace, it reveals the transformed nature of such horizons.

Nietzsche ruthlessly unmask such horizons as the false yet necessary prophylactic against the transparency of becoming in the world.¹⁰ Other comforts proceed from the narcotic belief in science and infinite progress, combined with the dangerous beatific vision of an already perfected human nature. All these elements come to be raised to the status of new gods, in themselves impersonal and devoid of value but radiant for having donned the mantle of the dead God.

Nietzsche's recognition of this fact and his iconoclastic urgings can be situated within a wider frame of discourse that ranges from Ellul to Marx and Leo Strauss. Thus Nietzsche's analysis of horizons and the "unhistorical" moment of historical action can be usefully compared to Marx's critique of ideology as a mask for the historical. Nonetheless, history still has a meaning for Marx, and thanks to the privileged ontological status of the proletariat we can look forward to the coming golden age at the end of history, when, with the disappearance of historical action the terror of history will vanish as well. This typically historicistic solution wherein the "meaning" of history is preserved through the identification of what happens with necessity, is given justification through the transhistorical "life at the end of history."¹¹

Leo Strauss' definition of morality as "secularized biblical faith" or the attempt to "establish heaven on earth by purely human means"¹² seems to echo Nietzsche's own formulations. But while we can sustain ourselves with Strauss' assertion that life in a transcendent heaven is still possible, we find no such consolation in Nietzsche's work.

The brief sketch offered above of Nietzsche's prognosis of the historical sickness thus invites comparison with other ostensibly similar views regarding historicism and nihilism. Such a comparison, apart from being mutually illustrative

would also point to the essential uniqueness of Nietzsche's formulations. In keeping with the original thrust of this essay, I devote the rest of this chapter to such a comparison within the framework of the debate between the ancients and moderns. It is important that we demonstrate at the very outset that the similarity between Nietzsche and the two proponents of antiquity selected for this debate--Stanley Rosen and Eric Voegelin--is circumscribed strictly within the descriptive bounds of the existential crisis brought about by historicism. Nietzsche's analysis of the origins, etiology and prescriptive antidote to the historical malady is at considerable variance with the ones offered by these other scholars. For, as we shall see, there is more at stake here than the fact, obvious by now, that while for Nietzsche all horizons are false and illusory, for these other scholars only some are.

Stanley Rosen: Introduction to the Dogma of Wisdom

With the publication of Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay in 1969, Stanley Rosen appeared in the limelight with the avowed purpose of rescuing philosophy from nihilism. This is because modern philosophy, Rosen tells us, insofar as it starts with Descartes and comes to be characterized by Nietzsche, Marx, Wittgenstein and Heidegger and revealed in positivism, ordinary language analysis and existentialism can be deemed as nihilistic. This accusation stems from the fact that all modern philosophy can be reduced to historicism. Rosen's solution is unequivocal, as he pleads for an urgent return to Plato so that we may once again "take our bearings in time by a vision that remains free of the transience of temporality."¹³

Rosen starts with the acknowledgement that the "permanent human possibility" of nihilism seems to have come to fruition today as a "pervasive presence" and that this event is due to a "series of specific philosophical

decisions in the past."¹⁴ The end product of these decisions has been to sunder "reason" from the "good." Rosen summarizes the consequences of this by proclaiming that:

By detaching "reasonable" from "good", the friends of reason made it impossible to assert the goodness of reason. Indeed, they made it all the more easy for the enemies of reason to assert the evil of reason. If reason is conceived exclusively on the model of mathematics, and if mathematics is itself understood in terms of Newtonian rather than Pythagorean science, then the impossibility of asserting the goodness of reason is the extreme instance of the manifest evil of reason. Reason (we are told) objectifies, reifies, alienates; it debases or destroys the genuinely human. It obscures the significance of human existence by superimposing the rigid, inhuman, and, in the last analysis, man-made categories of a mathematized ontology.¹⁵

The last sentence of the above passage alerts us to a further caveat regarding the genesis of nihilism, for it originates not merely in a divorce of reason and the good but also from the fact that such categories that impart meaning to contemporary existence are themselves human creations. Thus Rosen smells nihilism whenever a divorce between reason and the good is suspected or wherever man is seen as the sole creator of meaning. This latter point of course, involves the very transformation of reason discussed in chapter one. In Rosen's terms the obverse way of stating this would be to assert that nihilism is the result of our abandoning Platonic realism.

This point is made explicit in Rosen's criticism of Wittgenstein and ordinary language analysis. Here he asserts that if meaning is a human construction then "there is no basis, external to human agreement, by which to distinguish between sense and nonsense."¹⁶ A little later he clinches the argument by reiterating: "If reasons have no external 'objective' reference but are altogether self-certifying, then they are arbitrary utterances, lacking in rational justification or human value."¹⁷ The upshot of all this is that it

becomes impossible to assert the intelligibility of "the whole" because any speech that purports to do this cannot move toward validation without reference to criteria that are not themselves human constructs. Needless to say, this poses a grave problem for Rosen who wants to preserve the ideal to offer complete rational speech about "the whole" since this achievement of wisdom can be alone claimed to constitute "the end and standard of philosophy."¹⁸

Rosen's analysis thus boils down to a polemical defense of Platonic reasoning involving the following related theses: a) The whole is intelligible, b) a complete rational speech about the whole is impossible, i.e. the intelligibility of the whole cannot be revealed in a single speech, and lastly, c) no speech can be considered philosophical if it denies the intelligibility of the whole since despite the inability to articulate the whole, this articulation nonetheless remains the valid end of philosophy.¹⁹

These formulations immediately give rise to several anomalies in Rosen's analysis of nihilism, and, as a corollary, in his prescriptions regarding the overcoming of nihilism.

Now if the goal of philosophy is wisdom, then it is necessary for its achievement that we be able to offer a complete and rational speech about the whole. Since this cannot be achieved according to Rosen, then the drive toward wisdom is attempting the impossible and the claim to wisdom is claiming to have achieved the impossible. Under these circumstances anyone who claims wisdom (such as Hegel) makes a false claim. If this is the case then Rosen is trapped into trying to explain how an impossible claim is nonetheless a valid standard for philosophy. To overcome this inconsistency, Rosen would have to claim that the whole is unintelligible and that reality does not exist beyond the temporal except as a human construction which the experience of history reveals to be contradictory. This is essentially the position taken by

radical historicism, wherein all transhistorical facts are denied and philosophy is relegated to Plato's cave.²⁰ Of course, Rosen's entire effort has been to repudiate such a claim.

Alternatively Rosen can claim that a rational account of the whole can be given. Such a claim involves, ultimately, the identification of eternity with time as history and the relegation of the whole into a human construction fully accounted for at the end of history. Thus while a transhistorical justification (the end of history) may be said to exist as a validating plus to bolster this view, the loss of the immutability of the whole leads to nihilism as well.

In the final analysis, then, the Socratic horizon of Ideas crumbles necessarily into speculative or radical historicism, an assertion often reiterated by Nietzsche. Wisdom and eternity conceived in the Platonic way are always at cross purposes in this regard. The attempt to reconcile them gives direction to the subsequent course of western philosophy. If the whole is knowable, then it is, by the same token, predictable and controllable. This is not to deny that this latter turn had to await the arbitrary Cartesian identification of what is "clear and distinct" to the human mind with the substance of things. Indeed, this identification is already present in the formulations of Plato and Aristotle; the Cartesian formulation, however, with its inherent dualism makes the whole into an "object" awaiting the arrival of the "subject" to master it. In this manner the contemplative origins of philosophy are metaphysically in keeping with the technological hubris of modern philosophy.

Eric Voegelin: Pneumopathology and Gnosticism

The fundamental problem that exercises Voegelin revolves around incorporating metaphysics into science. Science, as it is understood today, cannot deduce

the Ought from the Is, yet it is somehow bound by a duty to improve life. Insofar as it cannot conceptualize the good life internally, using its own criteria, it has to resort to "non-scientific" presuppositions or opinions to define this duty. In the realm of scientific methodology, the noblest of human ideals are beyond investigation, and hence cannot be shown to be superior to baser views regarding humanity. This impasse arises out of the simple fact that modern science cannot move beyond how the world is, and in this it fails to answer the most basic of human questions, for man, when he experiences himself as existent "discovers his specific humanity as that of the questioner for the where-from and the where-to, for the ground and the sense of his existence".²¹ Indeed, it was this fact, rooted in anxiety burdened existence, that gave birth to science, and Voegelin wants to guide it back to its original purpose. The procedure that he chooses purports to be objective and rooted in fact, encompassing an analysis of man's place in the world as well as a record of his way through history. On the basis of this analysis, developed in his mammoth work Order and History, Voegelin attempts to criticize the present practice of political science and lay the groundwork for a new science of politics.

Voegelin starts by locating man as one of the four factors that constitute a first fact--the "primordial community of being". World and society are two other factors, and God (or the ground of being) is the fourth. Man acquires knowledge of this community of being only by "virtue of his participation in the mystery of being...There is no vantage point outside existence from which its meaning can be viewed and a course of action charted according to plan, nor is there a blessed island to which man can withdraw in order to recapture his self".²²

Insofar as world and society are concerned, man can acquire knowledge about how they function with a great deal of certainty. The clouds of uncertainty

appear in the form of the fourth factor, the ground of being which appears to be inscrutable:

At the center of his being man is unknown to himself and must remain so, for the part of being that calls itself man could be known fully only if the community of being and its drama in time were known as a whole.²³

This is the reason that the reality experienced by man as specifically human is that of unrest. He is not self-created or autonomous, and the meaning of his existence is not pre-coded in his life. Yet this ultimate ignorance of man must not be construed as a hermeneutic circle, nor is it complete ignorance, for "Man can achieve considerable knowledge about the order of being, and not the least part of that knowledge is the distinction between the knowable and the unknowable."²⁴

To show the existence of this "order of being" and the possibility of man's acquiring scientific knowledge of it, Voegelin turns to history and his own theory of symbolization. To allay the state of unrest that pervades his existence, man needs knowledge of the unknown ground of being. History is man's ongoing search for an understanding of this ground. This ongoing investigation however, is articulated through symbols which try to explain the relations and tensions between man and the ground of his being, and between man, society and the world. Every society has to create an order endowing its existence with meaning in terms of human and divine ends. This order is expressed through symbols which can take two forms. They can either express man's fundamental awareness of his participation in being, or they can express man's refusal to seek an understanding of this order of being. In the latter case, divine being as the ground of being is eliminated from man's consciousness and symbols of human dominance replace symbols of the order of being. This is expressed either in "scientism" where the search for the how ignores the why, or in historicism where a knowledge of the whole is made possible through "magic" or "sorcery"

which attempts to make the ground of being immanent in the world.²⁵ Insofar as neither of these enterprises effect the ground of being itself, they serve merely to inhibit any glimpse of it, thus increasing the disorder in our own soul and in society. The fact that knowledge of this ground of being is possible is revealed by its manifestation in history, and this manifestation has been symbolized at various points in time. It is these manifestations, or rather their symbolizations that are the epochal events in history and which Voegelin classifies as "leaps in being".

The discovery of Reason or *Nous* by the Greeks is one such event; in fact, an event of such importance that Voegelin considers it as dividing history into a before and an after. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all resisted the disorder of their age, and in doing so they experienced a force, which they called *Nous*, that structured man's psyche and enabled it to resist disorder. Reason, along with the constituents of its structure was the first "adequate articulation of the questioning consciousness as the constituent of humanity."²⁶

This characterization of man as a rational animal was an expression of an actual fact, summarizing the reality of order in man's psyche. But the Greeks did not omit any segment of reality in their conceptualizations. They well realized that the psyche was entombed in a body through which man participated in organic reality and the realm of matter, and if the psyche felt the ordering pull of reason it also felt the counterpull of the passions. Moreover, man was not just concerned with personal order, but in being social and historical as well, he was concerned with order in these three dimensions. Thus reason functions within the comprehensive field of human reality—personal, social and historical, as well as in an hierarchy of being from Divine *Nous* down to matter. Lastly, since the unrest felt by man is directed by the divine ground of being itself, the unfolding of the noetic consciousness is experienced as a process of immortalizing:

With their discovery of man as the zoon noun echon, the classic philosophers have discovered man to be more than a thanatos, a mortal: he is an unfinished being, moving from the imperfection of death in this life to the perfection of life in death.²⁷

The well-ordered soul is thus open toward that which is higher, and it means living not only in tension toward the ground of being, but in moving toward it. It was in this attunement of the soul toward divine being that the Greeks saw the highest attainment of man, a goal towards which the soul had to be educated. This explains the Classic definition of Philosophy as "love of wisdom":

philosophy in the classic sense is not a body of "ideas" or "opinions" about the divine ground dispensed by a person who calls himself a "philosopher", but a man's responsive pursuit of his questioning unrest to the divine source that has aroused it.²⁸

It was when the soul closed itself to what is higher that it opened itself to disorder or sickness. Voegelin borrows the term 'pneumopathology' from Schelling to refer to this. When the soul fails to grasp the truth of order, it becomes disoriented and new symbolizations of order are created which are totally inadequate because they rest on an incomplete or imagined reality. Since this imagined reality does not change reality as it is, a conflict is inevitable between the two. This is where Voegelin takes his boldest step in proclaiming that all modern resolutions to disorders are fundamentally gnostic, for, like the Gnosticism of old, they elevate an imaginary reality and postulate man's redemption from disorder through knowledge. Symptomatic of this is Hegel's pronouncement:

To help to bring philosophy nearer to the form of science-- that goal where it can lay aside the name of love of knowledge and be actual knowledge--that is what I have set before me.²⁹

It is in this confrontation of philosophy with gnosticism that Voegelin unfolds his critique of modern political science, where the all important

category of reason, he says, has been perverted to a life of insanity, indeed where "the insane have locked the sane in an asylum". This manifestation of gnostic insanity has been well described by Voegelin in The New Science of Politics and Science, Gnosticism and Politics, and need not be expounded here.

Eric Voegelin: Theology as Philosophy

Despite Voegelin's unique terminology and rich imagery, the themes he deals with are neither unique or new, and his analysis is open to the same strictures, if not more, that apply to Stanley Rosen.

We find no objections to Voegelin's initial characterization of the human condition which leads man to create an order through symbolization (or "horizons"). Nor do we disagree with the assertion that man has no vantage point outside of existence (or "history") to grasp the mystery of being. We agree even that the divine ground of being is symbolized (or acts as a horizon) throughout history in an effort to create meaning. The problem devolves ultimately on Voegelin's insistence that this divine ground exists as a separate reality, in and by itself. Voegelin cannot prove adequately that the eternal is not itself a human construction whereby one can escape history, and thus remains, as a symbolization, necessarily incomplete. Voegelin thus creates a tension between the demands of divine being on man and man's demands on divine being which serves as a classic statement calling for another Feurbachian critique. The only answer Voegelin can provide that cannot be refuted vis a vis divine being rests on revelations which constitute his "leaps in being," because it is this alone that can guarantee reason as an essentially non-human construct.

Let us reconsider the argument from another angle. What vantage point can Voegelin offer whereby we can judge which order of symbols is open to the "divine

ground of being" and which is not? Apart from answers that are rhetorical and only beg the question such as "an order that is attuned to that which is higher", Voegelin can forward two concrete answers which ultimately reduce to one: a) an order that is open to the divine ground acknowledges its ignorance while one that is not claims knowledge or wisdom. This is a similar formulation to that of Rosen's and basically the same objections apply to it. Thus to quote Voegelin again:

At the centre of his being man is unknown to himself and must remain so, for the part of being that calls itself man could be known fully only if the community of being and its drama in time were known as a whole.

Voegelin can thus relax in the certitude of his own incomplete speech about the whole denigrating the claims of historicism at complete wisdom or at no wisdom at all: Voegelin's point is here similar to Rosen's and it appears to be that immanent horizons (symbols) are self referential whereas symbols of the transcendent are not, but the latter can be ascertained only after we have moved from "the imperfection of death in this life to the perfection of life in death."

b) an order that is open to the divine ground of being is an order symbolized through a manifestation of the divine ground of being itself. As we have observed before, Voegelin considers these manifestations and their symbolization to be the epochal events in history. But how are we to understand these manifestations? How are we to understand the "discovery" of nous as a manifestation of the "Divine Nous"? It would appear that manifestation is merely revelation in disguise, but it is a revelation that maintains the possibility of being able to account for itself. Now if such a characterization of manifestation as revelation is true, then it would appear that the perennial struggle between theology and philosophy has been decided in favour of the former, with divine revelation overcoming the unaided efforts of men toward knowledge with which they can order their lives. But, as one scholar has aptly observed:

Philosophy and revelation each regard themselves as the "one thing needful"; no harmony or synthesis is possible. The question of what each can say on its own behalf appears to involve what each can say to exclude the other. But revelation is unable but also not obligated to refute the possibility of philosophy, whereas philosophy, to show its own reasonableness, is obligated but unable to refute the possibility of revelation.³⁰

In the light of all this it would appear that Voegelin is purely a theologian--an assumption that is not entirely unwarranted given the religious ardour and evangelical zeal of his followers. Nonetheless we are discussing Voegelin as a philosopher, and as such we must account for the central place accorded to revelation and whether this can be reconciled with philosophy.

The reconciliation of revelation and philosophy, of the oracle and Socrates, is indeed what Voegelin attempts by making reason itself a revelation. Thus we cannot immediately refute Voegelin's second line of defense by dismissing it as a theological issue. Clearly Voegelin with his metaphysical fervour is unhappy with reason's inability to account for itself if it is considered as a category or a construct of the human mind. It is a recognition of this fact that leads to "scientism", he would assert, and would be further dismayed by the attendant limitations on metaphysics itself. Recalling Voegelin's remonstrations against Hegel we are further assured that historicistic solutions wherein the reflexivity of reason is guaranteed by history would hardly be considered satisfactory by him.

Voegelin is thus led back to a re-statement of the search for a first cause as the underlying principle of reason, for if the autonomy of reason is granted as a human construct, then man himself becomes the cause rather than the caused. However, if reason is not autonomous, then there is the possibility that it can account for itself by reflecting on itself as other than itself. The idea of reason as the Divine Nous becomes the standard of reason. This standard, however, is unrealizable and incomprehensible, as we have seen, and

dictates only that which cannot be known. We re-enter the meaningless circle where knowledge equals the knowable which cannot be known. This was Rosen's "valid" but unrealizable standard and end of philosophy and has been voiced by Leo Strauss as well: "Philosophy is knowledge that one does not know, that is, it is knowledge of what one does not know."³¹ Strauss himself tries to escape this dilemma by making philosophy contingent on the transhistorical nature of the "fundamental problems"³² raised by not knowing the unknowable, a doubtful victory at worst and a Pyrrhic one at best.

These problems combine to give credence to the Nietzschean view that Platonic thought necessarily leads to the crisis of modernity. If the self-proclaimed task of philosophy is to articulate the "whole" and the concomitant task of political philosophy is to articulate the "good" both of which are transhistorical, then indeed both can only proceed negatively, through an articulation of "fundamental problems". The whole cannot be knowledge unless an irrevocable transhistorical viewpoint is established, which means precisely the knowledge of all historical as well as natural configurations yet to be (unless of course these configurations have already occurred.)

The possibility of reason being able to account for itself which was the original intention of this exercise, is abdicated, and reason becomes the ability to account for phenomena on the basis of things other than itself that exhibit laws analogous to, and causing human reason, but not otherwise reciprocally determined.

With this failure the logical Kantian step is to be expected, with the subjective necessity and freedom of reason. Reason becomes its own arbiter, inasmuch as it comes to be the arbiter of such laws as it dictates to phenomena. The disjuncture between the inner freedom of reason and the contingency of external historical (political) existence comes to count as

one of the modern progenitors of nihilism, and it remained for Hegel to attempt a reconciliation between them.

Voegelin's fears toward any symbolization that reflects human dominance drive him to use revelation as a guarantee for reason itself. Even the conception of reason as generated out of the immanent laws of the cosmos would be odious to Voegelin, but to his credit it is perhaps because he sees the nihilistic consequences of such a conception.

This brief account of the major bases of Stanley Rosen and Eric Voegelin's formulations provides an adequate contrasting viewpoint to that of Nietzsche, for he too struggles with similar issues.

Nietzsche: History as the Cure for History

The point of departure for Nietzsche's efforts is also an initial acceptance of his philosophical inheritance. Thus in On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, the initial premises of Nietzsche's efforts are already the problems undermining any philosophical efforts generated by the loss of nature at the expense of history, and the conception of order as a creation of human reason. The conversion of nature into history already undermines the efforts to ground morality and order in anything other than faith or revelation as we have already seen. Similarly our analysis of technology as a result of autonomous, self-referential "creative" reason has also demonstrated the problems that accumulate when efforts are made to extract moral principles while still maintaining the autonomy of reason.

Nietzsche accepts both these problems and his efforts at combatting them constitute his entire philosophical corpus. In this section however I will limit my discussion to such themes that constitute the core of On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, since it is here that Nietzsche develops,

more or less discursively (as opposed to aphoristically) the major difficulties in man's confrontation with history.

Nietzsche's acceptance of the fact that man is uniquely defined by history as opposed to nature is demarcated within the first few pages of his essay wherein he differentiates man from the animals purely on the basis of the fact that man is endowed with memory.³³ Here Nietzsche begins with history in its most elemental form -- as personal memory. The orbit of this awareness connects the present with not only a memory but also a future. It is thus that the past is refashioned so that "man becomes man."³⁴ But what differentiates man easily becomes heterodyne as a greater evaluation of the past reveals a present which will soon have as much value as the past did. With this realization also comes despair, for any action into the future is tinged by the expectation of disappointment. Man soon gives up the search for the "superhistorical", for the vantage point that is not circumscribed by the temporal, and which can thus give a meaning to man's despair or a value to guide action by.

It is in light of the overwhelming ambivalence brought about by an "excess of history" that Nietzsche proclaims the necessity of both, the "historical" and "unhistorical" modes of thought. When Nietzsche refers to the "historical" mode of thinking as constituted by "reflecting, comparing, dividing and joining" he is at once also speaking of the faculties of reason. An excess of history becomes reason reflecting back upon itself and its active modes, but in its inability to account for itself it discovers only its own impotency with regard to valid rules for life. The present orientation toward the future then dissolves into inaction and it is only with the entry of the unhistorical moment with "forgetfulness" and the "passion" associated with this moment does man have the capability of "not only an unjust, but

rather of every just deed."³⁵ The unhistorical here is clearly not the same as the "ahistorical" one would use with reference to animals, for to be unhistorical means to be able to forget, and this implies a building up of memories. The important point that needs to be underscored here is the fact that if the "historical" attitude is constituted by "comparing, dividing and joining" then it is nothing more than a reflection on the "unhistorical", which indeed constitutes history proper through action. And it is precisely these actions informed by the "unhistorical" that constitute the standards and valid ends of "historical" thinking. The contingency of "historical" knowledge on "unhistorical" action poses a problem for Nietzsche because action, if it is "unhistorical", it is also without reason, inasmuch as it implies a process without rational calculation or standards, yet it comes to constitute itself as a standard in the process of "historical" reflection.

Thus Nietzsche proclaims:

A historical phenomenon clearly and completely understood and reduced to an intellectual phenomenon, is for him who has understood it dead: for in it he has understood the mania, the injustice, the blind passion, and in general the whole earthly darkened horizon of that phenomenon, and just in this he has understood its historical power.³⁶

While the crisis brought about by the dependency of the "historical" on the "unhistorical" might be solved by a reliance on the "superhistorical", Nietzsche rejects such a solution because it devalues action and history. This is evident in his claim that one who has adopted a "superhistorical" standpoint "could no longer be tempted at all to continue to live and cooperate in making history, since he would have understood that blindness and injustice in the soul of each agent as the condition of all activity."³⁷

Nietzsche goes on to "relate" three kinds of history with human "conditions". Thus he tells us that "History belongs to the living man in three respects:

it belongs to him so far as he is active and striving, so far as he preserves and admires, and so far as he suffers and is in need of liberation."³⁸ To the first of these belongs monumental history wherein man searches the past for models of greatness and the good life with the intention of seeking comfort in these past acts and the belief that greatness will be at hand again.³⁹ "That the great moments in the struggle of individuals form a chain, that in them the high points of humanity are linked throughout millenia, that what is highest in such a moment of the distant past be for me still alive, bright and great -- this is the fundamental thought of the faith in humanity which is expressed in the demand for a monumental history."⁴⁰ But it is precisely in this fact that monumental history encounters problems and becomes dangerous, for in consecrating the acts of greatness only, it raises the ire of the common man. Moreover, in abstracting from the "forgetfulness" and "destructive" elements of the acts that constitute monumental history, only the "effects" are preserved. Without a study of the causes then, man does not realize the sheer improbability of the conjuncture that informed the original action from arising again.⁴¹ Insofar as monumental history devotes itself to the striving and the causes in the life of the historical actor there is a lesson to be learned, even if it be a negative one in revealing the error and illusion at the base of each action. When it abstracts and records effects and concentrates on the objects of striving, it becomes a consecration of the illusory. To preserve the valuable aspects of monumental history, one needs self-conscious historical criticism, which may in turn lead to self-conscious action.

Whereas monumental history serves those who aspire to great acts, antiquarian history aims at preservation of the "common wisdom" of the past. It makes the city endure in time by attempting to give "opinion" a grounding

in history. But insofar as it serves a preservative function only, it too is detrimental because it changes that which it hopes to preserve. In attempting to preserve the "effects" of ~~past~~ acts it changes them, for their cause lay not in the desire for preservation but in the desire for change and creation.

Ultimately then, both monumental and antiquarian history develop into errors and necessitate a history that can unearth "causes" rather than mere effects. This is the task of critical history, and this task too is not free from dangers for it borders on that very historical malady that forms the initial exploratory intent of Nietzsche's essay. Critical history, in probing beyond effects to causes exposes the "unhistorical" at the base of the "historical", it shows the meaningless forces of passion and unreason that lie at the root of the objects that form the subject matter of monumental and antiquarian history. In thus devaluing the past critical history serves a destructive function, and this function appears to become all the more deleterious as critical history realizes the contingency of its own formulations. In revealing the illusions of the past, it gnaws at its own roots and its own development. But while critical history may deteriorate into the very historical sickness that Nietzsche sees around him, it can also become the necessary condition for a liberation from the clutches of the past in the present. But this can only be accomplished by a further step that those who suffer from the historical sickness do not take. In addition to liberating the present from the past with the consequence of dread and rootlessness, it must also turn reflexive and analyze itself by its own standards: "history must itself dissolve the problem of history, knowledge must turn its sting against itself"⁴² In other words, Nietzsche is here aware of the self-contradictory aspects of what Strauss would later call "naïve historicism"⁴³ which attempts to demonstrate

the relativity of all past knowledge by the transhistorical assumption that this insight in itself transcends the limits imposed by historical relativity.

The problems generated out of this are still matters of debate in the continuing discussion of the "sociology of knowledge", the "sociology of sociology" and the "Marxism of Marxism."⁴⁴

With this "inward turn" then, critical history can effect a liberation from the past with the reinterpretation of history as the human creation of necessary illusions. With this insight, Nietzsche tells us, we can create the past anew and turn the "effects" of the past to new purposes. This becomes "an attempt, as it were, a posteriori to give oneself a past from which one would like to be descended in opposition to the past from which one is descended."⁴⁵ In other words, critical history somehow allows us to choose our past. The various stations that counterpoint the manner of this choosing would ultimately lead to Nietzsche's concept of the Eternal Return, but I will reserve a discussion of this for the next chapter. For the moment I address myself to fleshing out further details from the work under discussion.

It is clear that Nietzsche considers critical history to be dangerous insofar as it serves to destroy the past. His own task as a critical historian is to destroy our understanding of the past. This is simultaneously a genealogical as well as a hermeneutical endeavour. It is genealogical in that it seeks to reduce the "objects" of historical understanding to the elementary seeds of historical action from which they have sprung; Nietzsche was to call these the "moral seeds" in his later work On the Genealogy of Morals. But the identification of the seeds is not enough for it yields only the knowledge of ancestry. The kernel of the seed understood as the state of being of the historical actor must be judged as well. This hermeneutic task is hence also constituted by a process of self-understanding

in the present for "It is only from the standpoint of the highest strength of the present may you interpret the past: only in the highest exertion of your noblest qualities will you discern what is worthy of being known and preserved, what is great in the past." 46

In other words for a genuine critical history, historical understanding is at the same time an understanding of oneself, and, as such, it can never truly be objective or dispassionate; to understand the passion that motors history, one has to be passionate oneself; to understand the creative and destructive impulses behind past actions we must destroy and create ourselves for as Nietzsche tells us, "only as master builders of the future who know the present will you understand (the past)." 47 Any other alternative leads to the weary conclusion that we are but epigoni or late arrivals on the plane of history. 48 It is precisely this latter belief that is "paralyzing and upsetting" 49 and in a final endeavour to escape its terrible destructiveness it transforms itself and "defies this late arrival as the true meaning and purpose of all that has happened earlier". It is this "bold inversion" of belief that leads to concepts of "world-process" and the establishment of "history in place of the other spiritual powers." 50

Nietzsche's argument against objective historical knowledge can be best understood in the light of the transformation of reason we have already discussed. Nietzsche accepts this transformed reason and acknowledges that order in nature is an imposition of principles that have their origin in human thought and thus any exposition of the bases of order must first and foremost be an examination of its source in man. Since nature itself is fragmentary and unknowable, any knowledge ultimately becomes knowledge of man and his "ordering" capacities. This thesis is discussed further in the following chapter with reference to categories developed by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy.

For the moment let us consider the conclusions Nietzsche reaches in The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life.

In the final analysis, Nietzsche points to the fact that if an excess of history has led to a malady, then further excesses are needed as recuperative measures. Nietzsche's uniqueness lies in his radical 'use' of history to escape from history. But this is not an escape "from" history into the clutches of myth, ideology or religion, all of which give history a transhistorical significance and thus abstract from it only errors or superimpose on it illusory categories; it is a radical turning to history as it is, and through this evolving an understanding of the autonomy of human action. That this is indeed the case is revealed in Nietzsche's criticism of the two other alternatives to the historical malady.

The first of these results from "dispassionate" critical history and comes to be indistinguishable from the historical sickness itself. This leads to moral relativity, selfish viewpoints and an abdication from the responsibility to search for that which constitutes the genuinely human. Such a history, lost in its continuous search for objectivity ends in despair and moral obtuseness, for engendered as it is from too much historical knowledge, it ends in the realization that there is too little historical knowledge in that the ultimate wellsprings of history remain unknown. This result ensues from the fact that critical history does not go far enough; it undermines the pylons of our horizons and in fear it stops short precisely when it should shake loose these horizons altogether and rejoice in freedom and in the face of the challenge of creating new horizons. It should create anew and rework the purposes of the past into purposes for the future in the knowledge of what constitutes genuine human greatness. When criticism does not criticize itself however, it remains detached from that knowledge which can alone be

the basis of morality. There is no truth or greatness in naive relativity. A crucial step has to be taken beyond the recognition of the relativity of horizons and their consequent deterioration. In its absence man comes to be stuck in limbo, as it were, because nihilism assails us in two ways. It comes to be defined as the continuing belief in the "old" horizons even after their bases have been demolished and their social validity lost. Such horizons now sustain what Nietzsche was to call the "last men". Nihilism takes a more explicit formulation as the erosion of the horizons entirely with nothing to replace them except ersatz and transient whims and fashions. This becomes the credo of the explicit nihilist. But Nietzsche himself is neither a last man or a nihilist, though he often assumes the role of the latter, but only to urge us to a final truth that does not depend for its veracity on the unknowable.

Without the critical step toward an analysis of the basis of human creativity we become epigoni, who wrap small circles around ourselves and mask our despair with a shallow cheerfulness, resigned to transience, and the spirit of revenge that cannot come to terms with the meaningless past. It is at this stage that technology acquires supreme importance, for if the lessons of history show nothing but meaningless human creation, then the answer to the crisis is seen to lie in more creations which are unselfconscious. Technology fails and becomes dangerous in its power precisely because its source lies in unselfconscious creativity, with no definition of purpose or end; a creativity that does not know itself because the character of the creator is never questioned. Thus nihilism becomes the proper end of such a critical history, for it refuses to heal itself by making a turn and proclaiming, as Nietzsche did later:

At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture but to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again.

And still later, Nietzsche would reiterate his point by making Zarathustra shout the following to the people in the market place as a warning:

The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is still rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirl!⁵²

Thus history can be both, the cause and the cure for nihilism; it can overwhelm us, or, in dissolving the past allow us room for new creation. When man's critical powers serve only to reveal limitations, his condition becomes one of despair, hate and revenge. Despair at the irrevocability of the past, hate toward that which limits him, whether it be God or nature, and revenge toward that from his past that has filtered into his present. Thus it moves further and murders God and relieves nature of any normative status, destroying any telos in history. It becomes more dangerous as it elevates the present human as the only source of value, but man, as he is now, remains a poor standard.

If the first alternative fails because it ultimately rests on too little knowledge, then the second alternative fails because it converts this little knowledge into ultimate knowledge by proclaiming the "end of history". This is merely the logical conclusion to the first alternative and is an acknowledgement that in the light of history there is nothing fundamentally new that can be done, for the horizons that acted as the necessary condition for action are no longer available. Nietzsche voices surprise at the fact that

instead of this being a cause of sorrow, it has instead led to narrow self-satisfaction. With the eradication of horizons and the end of history "the earth becomes small, and on it hops the last man", who proclaims "We have invented happiness" and then blinks, for now "one is clever and knows everything that has ever happened."⁵³ For Nietzsche such a state of affairs does not betoken the end of history, but merely the end of all human effort and endeavour. Nietzsche militantly points to the identity of man's highest achievements with absurdity that such a view brings about. For indeed, if man proclaims wisdom in the knowledge of history as a whole and claims to have reconciled all contradictions, then one should expect more than the mediocrity of modern existence. That the "grand reason" of the "world-process" with its freedom should culminate in an existence which reveals neither reason nor freedom, drives Nietzsche to polemical fury:

This history, understood in a Hegelian way, has contemptuously been called the sojourn of God on earth, which God, however, is himself first produced by history. But this God became transparent and intelligible to himself inside the Hegelian craniums and has already ascended all possible dialectical steps of his becoming up to that self-revelation: so that for Hegel the apex and terminus of world history coincided in his own Berlin existence. He should even have said that all things after him are properly judged to be only a musical coda of the world historical rondo; more properly yet, to be redundant. He did not say that: and so he implanted in the generation thoroughly leavened by him that admiration for the "power of history" which practically at every moment turns into naked admiration⁵⁴ for success and leads to the idolatry of the factual.

But there is a sense in which Nietzsche takes the "end of history" theme seriously and this arises from the fact that if men do believe that there is nothing new that can be done, then indeed they will cease in their efforts, thus ironically bringing history to an end.

Hegel's pronouncement that the present is dictated by historical

necessity ~~and~~ is therefore the way it is because it must be the way it is leads to a justification of "all the cruelties, aberrations, and tragedies of history" in the light of the "historical moment", and we, like Hegel can read "the morning papers as a sort of realistic benediction of the morning". This point, elaborated by Mircea Eliade is similar to Nietzsche's, and he observes that

it is not inadmissible to think of an epoch, and an epoch not too far distant, when humanity, to ensure its survival, will find itself reduced from any further "making" of history. . . and will strive to forget, as meaningless and dangerous, any spontaneous gesture which might entail "historical" consequences. 55

The Advantage and Disadvantage of History of Life ultimately points the way to all of Nietzsche's other works. Thus if man is his own standard, and the study of history is a process of self-realization then the overman is indeed necessary; and if critical history must turn against itself then what truth can it uncover that is "free" from history except its eternal return? These are the final themes of this essay that we turn to in the next chapter.

Notes to Chapter Two

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History of Life. Translated by Peter Preuss (Cambridge: Hackett, 1980), p. 10.

²Ibid. p. 62.

³Ibid., p. 38.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁵Ibid., p. 11.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Nietzsche, The Gay Science. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage, 1974) p. 181.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁰For an excellent analysis of such Nietzschean masks, see Robert E. McGinn "Culture as Prophylactic: Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy as Culture Criticism." in Nietzsche Studien. 4, 1975. pp. 75-138.

¹¹Mircea Eliade has given a superb analysis of such solutions as ways of escaping history, a viewpoint that is similar to Nietzsche's. Nonetheless, while Eliade seeks a solution in the Judaeo-Christian category of faith, Nietzsche refuses to reintroduce any transcendence in his own formulations. See Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History. (Princeton University, 1974). pp. 147-162.

¹²Leo Strauss, Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss, Ed. Hilail Gilden. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975). p. 82.

¹³Stanley Rosen, Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay. (Yale University: 1978). p. 141.

¹⁴Ibid. p. XIV

¹⁵Ibid. p. XV

¹⁶Ibid. p. 11

¹⁷Ibid. p. 42

¹⁸Ibid. p. 5

¹⁹A similar summary of Rosen's postulations is offered by Bernd Magnus. My conclusions, however, differ from Magnus' whose interest is to establish "the deeper wisdom in the Socrates who loved wisdom but knew only his ignorance" against what he considers to be Rosen's "Platonic Socrates who could order the polis if he could but rule it." "Nihilism, Reason and 'The Good'" in The Review of Metaphysics 25-2, 1971. pp. 292-310. See esp. pp. 305-306.

²⁰This is Leo Strauss' characterization of historicism. See Natural Right and History. (University of Chicago, 1980) p. 12.

²¹Eric Voegelin. "Reason: The Classic Experience" in Southern Review. 10-2, 1974, p. 241.

²²Voegelin, Order and History, Vol. I, Israel and Revelation (Louisiana State University, 1956) p. 1.

²³Ibid. p. 2.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵For an analysis of the former, see Voegelin's "The Origins of Scientism" in Social Research. 15-4, 1948 pp. 462-494. For the latter see, "On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery" Studium Generale. 24, 1971. pp. 335-368.

²⁶Voegelin. "Reason: The Classic Experience". op. cit. p. 241.

²⁷Ibid. p. 252.

²⁸Ibid. p. 244.

²⁹G. W. F. Hegel. The Phenomenology of Mind. Translated by J. Baillie p. 70.

³⁰Richard Kennington. "Strauss's Natural Right and History". The Review of Metaphysics. 35-1, 1981. p. 69.

³¹Strauss, Natural Right and History. op. cit. p. 32.

³²Ibid. p. 35.

³³Nietzsche. The Advantage and Disadvantage of History. op. cit. p. 9.

³⁴Ibid. p. 11.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid. p. 14.

³⁷Ibid. p. 12.

³⁸Ibid. p. 14.

³⁹Ibid. pp. 14-19.

⁴⁰Ibid. p. 15.

⁴¹Ibid. p. 17.

⁴²Ibid. p. 45.

⁴³Strauss. Natural Right and History. op. cit. p. 25.

⁴⁴For the first, see Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia. For the second, see Alvin Gouldner, The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology, and for the last see Goran Therborn, Science Class and Society.

⁴⁴Nietzsche. The Advantage and Disadvantage of History. op. cit. p. 37.

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 38.

⁴⁶Ibid. p. 46.

⁴⁷Ibid. p. 47.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Nietzsche. The Gay Science. op. cit. p. 280.

⁵⁰Nietzsche. Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche.
Translated by Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking, 1976) p. 129.

⁵¹Ibid. p. 131.

⁵²Nietzsche. The Advantage and Disadvantage of History. op. cit. p. 47.

⁵³Eliade. The Myth of the Eternal Return. op. cit. pp. 148-154.

CHAPTER THREE

Illusion and Reality in The Birth of Tragedy

Before we can proceed to an expansion of the themes expressed in The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, it is necessary to take a step backward, to Nietzsche's first published work The Birth of Tragedy for an understanding of Nietzsche's view of the world. Though ostensibly an analysis of art as expressed in Greek tragedy, The Birth of Tragedy is also the key to Nietzsche's perception of the world as it is, and presents us with the "first facts" to which any philosophical endeavor can take us. And these first facts go beneath individual self-certainty or the Socratic extollations of reason. True to himself, Nietzsche ~~turns reason~~ turns against itself to uncover what later would acquire the name "will to power", but more importantly, this is the site where he initially uncovers the most basic of human propensities that underlie the various manifestations of the will to power.

While Socratic philosophy denigrates the mytho-poetic world view because of its inability to account for itself according to the rules of reason, Nietzsche turns to this world view to reveal how it is the most appropriate expression of the world, an expression however, to which we cannot go back. This is because the subsequent development of reason, science and logic foster methods of escape from the true world that dominates all of history. In the comparison between art and science, the former invariably occupies a superior position in all of Nietzsche's works.

Nietzsche's initial consideration is the fact that the world, as it reveals itself to us in open experience, in primordial experience as it were, without the crutches of concept or logic, reveals itself as Becoming.

Events come to be, and just as inexorably pass away. Existence is characterized by a constant flux and a stream of events and entities that brooks every dam and overflows all dykes. This is essential nature for Nietzsche, and man's differentiation from it lies in his ability to formulate the unchangeable behind the changeable and thus acquire knowledge in the face of the chaos of constant change. The world in itself does not reveal anything permanent; permanence is a human imposition that makes life as a human possible. In the realm of science this propensity yields the imposition of laws that lead to predictability and in the realm of philosophy and religion, the transcendent or God is created as "meaning" beyond flux. The principle of truth itself becomes that which is permanent. All conceptions thus become illusions and dreams, and the "true world" becomes a "fable". As Nietzsche was to observe later: "To impose upon becoming the character of being -- that is the supreme will to power".

It is for this reason that the nature of the world comes to be best revealed by art, which is created imagery, and classical Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche, was the most self-conscious of such art because it explicitly pointed to the meaning of Becoming. This was revealed in the fate of the dramatic hero, wherein life and meaning both dissolved in the ultimate flow of change. Thus while dramatic form may be said to have frozen the eternal flux, it self-consciously reduces itself to formlessness by pointing to the true meaning of the world in its content.

It was in Greek tragedy then, that Nietzsche saw the optimum reconciliation between the forces of Apollo and Dionysus.² Nietzsche uses the characteristics of those Greek gods to explain the basic dualism between Being and Becoming, transience and stability, form and formlessness, appearance and truth, and, later, the historical and the unhistorical. Dionysus, for Nietzsche, is

representative of Becoming, of disorder and the primordial flow of destruction and rejuvenation, of all that can be identified with the non-conceptual and the formless. In other words the Dionysian principle represents all that cannot be formulated or conceptualized but can be a lived experience.³

Apollo, on the other hand represents order and form. It was Apollo, after all, who was the source of law through the Oracle at Delphi. Thus the Apollonian principle reflects reason, logic, measure and individuation.⁴ In other words Apollo represents the principle which counteracts the annihilating flow represented by Dionysus. The Apollonian principle constitutes genuine human creation whereby man attempts to give meaning to his existence through abiding concepts. But while the Apollonian represents the human propensity toward stability and the unchanging, it does so through appearance and illusion; the genuine reality of Dionysian primordial flux remains unchanged. It is for this reason that life, if it intends to remain linked to truth needs both, the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles. A Dionysian existence on its own is impossible because it is anterior to individuation and thus needs the Apollonian for its very articulation and self-consciousness.

A thoroughly Apollonian existence, however, becomes a life that is entirely illusory which forgets its origins in self-creation, and comes to perceive the "objects" of its creation as autonomously existing entities or concepts, thus losing touch with the truth of existence. The deception that is man's meaning comes to be perceived as the truth and the reality of becoming is forever masked. The solution, then, lies in some form of reconciliation between the forces of Apollo and Dionysus. It is obvious that while Apollonian masks are essential to human existence,

Nietzsche would not find all such masks acceptable. In other words, those masks that deny the Dionysian or refuse to acknowledge the truth of Becoming, deny the truth of existence itself, and thus lead to a one-sided existence.

Nietzsche felt that he had discovered the perfect reconciliation of Apollo and Dionysus in Pre-Socratic art, specifically tragedy. This is because tragedy, as a mask, affirmed the truth of Dionysus rather than denying it by revealing the ultimate futility of life through the necessary doom of the tragic hero. But precisely in expressing this annihilating flow of Dionysus, in converting it into art, the Greeks were able to preserve life.⁵ Tragedy could thus express the relationship between illusion (itself as an art form) and reality (the fate of the hero). Pre-Socratic man, it can be said then, saved himself from both, - the terrifying glimpse into the truth of Dionysus and the stultifying regularity and sterility of Apollo by reconciling both in art.

With the rise of reason in Socratic thought, however, Apollo and Dionysus become dissociated, leading to the devaluation of art wherein the two had been combined. Thus whereas the Pre-Socratics had aimed at justifying life "as an aesthetic phenomenon",⁶ Socratic culture "proposed to induce men to view human existence as justified (therefore bearable) because comprehensible intellectually. That is, man, through the use of reason could acquire knowledge of the human condition which made it seem intelligible."⁷ This is the turn that marks the subsequent development of western philosophy and culminates in the modern crisis. For Nietzsche, modernity, in a sense, begins with Socrates. Robert McGinn adheres to a similar interpretation in his excellent analysis of

The Birth of Tragedy:

For Nietzsche, whereas tragic culture stressed courageous acceptance and joyous affirmation of the rigors of the human condition, Socratic culture emphasized aggressive penetration of and ultimate victory over its refractory aspects. From the perspective of the mature Nietzsche these strategies might be termed the power of "surrender" versus the power of "control".⁸

McGinn correctly concludes that the materialism of contemporary western culture can be more fundamentally explained "as the primary contemporary manifestation of Socratic optimism and its basic cultural strategy" rather than on the basis of "capitalist greed and its associated ideological support system". Similarly, he asserts, technology too can be seen as "modern man's means for escaping the terror and horror of existence by attempting to 'become God'".⁹

From this brief overview of some of the ideas expressed in The Birth of Tragedy, we can extract the following conclusions.

- a) Meaning is a human creation; it is an imposition of Apollonian masks on the inherent disorder, and amidst the perpetual Dionysian flux, of the universe.
- b) Insofar as these masks serve to affirm the Dionysian element, the truth of meaning is preserved, i.e. meaning is seen for what it is - a human creation that is nonetheless destined to dissolution. This leads to a life that is ~~exuberant~~ and courageous and was the condition of pre-Socratic man wherein art functioned as such as mask.
- c) The advent of reason disintegrates the unity of Apollo and Dionysus. Reason, being the pure crystallization of Apollo, seeks and imposes the characteristics of law, stability and ultimately Being (immutability) on the universe. Everything is reversed and the reality of the human

condition of perpetual change, decay and regeneration is consigned to that which is "lower" since it becomes inaccessible to reason (which is contemplative) while the Dionysian can only be lived experience. The Apollonian, now identified with that which is "higher", ensures that the illusory rules. That which was distant from the truth retreats still farther by endowing a realm beyond reality (the transcendent) with its own characteristics.

Our analysis of The Advantage and Disadvantage of History has already shown us how the transformation of an immanent truth to a transcendent illusion leads to an inability on the part of reason to account for itself. Such an account cannot be forthcoming if reason attempts to seek its basis in anything other than itself. Insofar as it refuses to do so, all that results is an erosion of all the ersatz truths that were the products of reason itself; this is the lesson of Nietzsche's critical history. The end product is nihilism; a nausea in the face of truth¹⁰ or an "excess of history" which permits a glimpse of the truth of existence with no satisfactory escapes to mitigate the horror of this perception.

Nietzsche's initial conclusions thus reveal a sorry state of affairs, devoid of the solace and comfort afforded by myth and religion and equally lacking in any justifications that emanate from reason itself. The task that confronts Nietzsche is the development of a new mask through which we can once again sustain ourselves. But such a mask has to be such that it can affirm the truth of existence and, at the same time, self-consciously see itself as a human creation. It cannot seek its "ground" in anything that transcends the human act of creation itself. Initially then, such a task appears to be doomed to failure, for is not the very

historical sickness due to our realization that all masks are human creations and thus not grounded in anything permanent? It is in circumventing this problem that Nietzsche does not allow for any escape that transcends history. His escape from history becomes a radical turning to history itself and its ineluctable return.

The Eternal Return

Joan Stambough once remarked ironically of "Nietzsche's absolutely central doctrine of eternal recurrence" that:

Anyone who has tried long enough to grope his way around that philosophical terrain often returns from it as something far worse than the proverbial "burnt child"... and begins to fear that the element of recurrence is taking place precisely in his own desperate attempts to make sense of that doctrine.¹¹

One can hardly disagree with this assertion, since even a small survey of the various interpretations of this doctrine reveals the mark of several singed fingers. At the very least we must take the statement as a warning and proceed with caution in this regard.

The doctrine of the Eternal Return has been variously interpreted as a cosmological doctrine, as a hypothetical ethical imperative or in terms of its psychological impact on the person who believed in it.

Of these three interpretations, the cosmological hypothesis has been the most discussed in the belief that the psychological and ethical versions of the doctrine depend upon proof of the former for their coherency.¹² On the other hand the psychological and ethical interpretations of the doctrine sometimes dispense with the cosmological interpretation entirely or reduce it to a weaker view which presupposes that we accept it "as if" it were true.¹³

The cosmological interpretation, in its general outline, states that everything that has happened in the universe will reoccur again in exactly the same configuration, inasmuch as that which is to happen in the future has already occurred in the past in exactly the same way. There are many passages in Nietzsche's works that appear to give credence to the cosmological doctrine. Most of these are present in posthumously published works wherein it appears that Nietzsche attempted to give a "scientific" proof of the doctrine.¹⁴ Thus, for instance in The Will to Power, Nietzsche asserts:

Let us think this thought in its most terrible form; existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: "the eternal recurrence"...It is, the most scientific of all possible hypotheses. We deny end goals: if existence had one it would have been reached.¹⁵

If Nietzsche's usage of the word "scientific" is taken to mean "objective", then certainly this passage may be construed as supportive of the cosmological doctrine. However, Nietzsche is adamant that "objective" truths are ultimately granted their status through a function of reason itself, as was made evident in our analysis of The Advantage and Disadvantage of History and The Birth of Tragedy. Moreover, Nietzsche went through great pains to apprise us of his suspicions regarding science. This is evidenced in proclamations such as the following: "It is perhaps dawning on five or six minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and not a world explanation."¹⁶ However else we may interpret Nietzsche's use of the word "scientific" then, it is obvious that it cannot be taken to denote objectivity. In keeping with Nietzsche's assertion that all understanding is fundamentally constituted by self-understanding because the "objects" of understanding ultimately reduce to human creations, we must turn to the language of infinitives when interpreting this passage. Viewed in this light the passage in question can be taken to constitute two commands:

one of which urges us to "think this thought in its most terrible form" while the other claims that "we deny end goals". In other words the first of these is a plea to turn thinking against itself rather than on the "objects" of the initial thought, whereas the second issues forth as an explicit command; in this case a denial - - a human conceptualization that denies "ends". At the very least we can assert that the doctrine cannot be amenable to proof as a cosmological assertion because it is impossible to prove empirically, allowing for no standpoint from which such a verification could be forthcoming.

The key to understanding the Eternal Return lies then in Nietzsche's prior conceptions of the "ordering" capacities of man himself. Whereas Kant had already established the nature of reason as the legislator of experience, Nietzsche steps further, and proclaims that to be legislator ultimately also means to give commands, and if reason gives laws, then it can also be asserted that laws can be changed. It was this insight that is revealed in The Advantage and Disadvantage of History and The Birth of Tragedy, and it is reiterated by Nietzsche in almost all his works. Thus, in The Will to Power, in a passage entitled "The Highest Man as Legislator of the Future" that chronologically precedes the passage on the Eternal Return we have examined, the following statement can be found:

After having tried in vain for a long time to attach a definite concept to the word "philosopher"...I recognized at last that there are two distinct kinds of philosopher: 1. those who want to ascertain a complex fact of evaluations (logical or moral); 2. those who are legislators of such evaluations. The former try to master the world of the present or the past by concentrating and abridging the multiplicity of events through signs: their aim is to make previous events surveyable, comprehensible, graspable, and usable — they assist the task of man to employ all past things for the benefit of the future.

The latter, however, are commanders; they say: "Thus it shall be!" They alone determine the "whither" and the "wherefore", what is useful and what constitutes utility for men; they dispose of the preparatory work of scientific men, and all knowledge is for them only a means for creation.

Nietzsche's concern thus devolves on not only man's capacity to create meaning and order, but also on his subsequent adherence to this very same meaning and order. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche was to make this point more explicit still by having Zarathustra exclaim:

But wherever I found the living, there I heard also the speech on obedience. Whatever lives, obeys.

And this is the second point: he who cannot obey himself is commanded. That is the nature of the living.

This, however, is the third point that I heard: that commanding is harder than obeying; and not only because he who commands must carry the burden of all who obey, and because this burden may easily crush him. An experiment and hazard appeared to me to be in all commanding; and whenever the living commands, it hazards itself. Indeed, even when it commands itself, it must still pay for its commanding. It must become the judge, the avenger, and the victim of its own law.¹⁸

It becomes clear, then, that any endeavour seeking a proof of the doctrine of the Eternal Return as a statement that corresponds to the objective nature of the cosmos is contrary to Nietzsche's intent. The Eternal Return, it is my contention, is only comprehensible if it is understood as a human creation, a command that wills the nature of the cosmos to be understood in a particular way. Any other interpretation leads to inconsistencies. Thus the cosmological version of the interpretation crumbles as soon as it attempts to delve into the truth value of the doctrine. If however the truth of the doctrine was perceived as a creation, a creation made possible by the destruction of prior "truths" then an entirely new and consistent interpretation becomes possible. Such an interpretation seeks to affirm the ultimate meaninglessness of a world that is, "a monster of energy, without beginning, without end"¹⁹, and through

this affirmation to confer a meaning that seeks no justification beyond the fact that its origin lies in the human will to command and create.

The interpretations of the doctrine as an ethical imperative or in terms of its psychological import are intimately related, for its normative dictates depend on the putative psychological consequences it would have on our actions if we believed it to be true. Such arguments typically assert that Nietzsche's intent was to induce us to a mode of action "as if" the doctrine were true. This interpretation obviously has Kantian overtones and originates in Hans Vaihinger's short treatment of Nietzsche in the last chapter of his enduring work The Philosophy of 'As If'. The primary passage from Nietzsche that appears to validate this interpretation is gleaned from The Gay Science:

The greatest weight.—What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and every thought and every sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? 20

This passage, couched in hypothetical action, does not offer the thesis that everything in the universe recurs, but proceeds more along the lines of a "thought-experiment". The language of the passage thus easily lends itself

to the normative interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine. Further exegeses of this passage have focussed on Nietzsche's consideration of only two psychological reactions to the demon's question: total exhilaration or total despair. Various scholars have expressed dissatisfaction at this formulation, and have pointed out that the question "what if everything reccurs" may be a source of indifference as well. The first source of indifference may be a result of a dismissal of the fact of recurrence because it may not really have any consequential effect on one's life. Thus Danto observes:

It does not matter that we pass away and return and pass away again. What counts is what we eternally do, the joy of overcoming, whatever our task may be, and the meaning we give to our lives. And all of this for the sake of the thing itself, not for any consequences: for it leads to what it has led to and always will.²¹

Another, less Sisyphean interpretation has been forwarded by Ivan Soll who maintains that even the possibility of recurrence should be a source of psychological indifference. Soll has argued that since we have no memory of the experiences of our past occurrences, nor indeed can we anticipate our future occurrences, the possibility of my life occuring again should be a matter of complete indifference.²²

On the basis of the above criticisms we might be led to assume that Nietzsche was completely mistaken about the psychological import of his doctrine. It is certainly clear that, as a cosmological assertion, the doctrine does lead to indifference on the one hand or a rigid determinism on the other. For, indeed, if everything I do I have already done before, then it makes no sense for me to worry about norms or values, since my actions are no longer guided by them but by the recurring structure of the universe itself. Exercized by this inconsistency, Alexander Nehamas has recently attempted to justify Nietzsche's delineation of only two psychological reactions to the doctrine.

Nehamas argues that for Nietzsche "there is no subject, no thing, left over beyond the sum-total of its characteristics and effects, its experiences and actions." From this, Nehamas concludes, that "if any of these were different, their subject, being their sum-total, would also have to be different."²³

Nehamas bolsters this claim of radical contingency by quoting Nietzsche's admonitions against the "thing-in-itself". For instance:

The "thing-in-itself" is non-sensical. If I remove all the relationships, all the "properties", all the "activities" of a thing, the thing does not remain over.²⁴

There is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed — the deed is everything...our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, "the subject".²⁵

To these citations Nehamas adds the famous passage from Thus Spoke Zarathustra:

Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you have said Yes too to all woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, "You please me happiness! Abide, moment!" then you wanted all back. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored.²⁶

Nehamas thus concludes that Nietzsche's presentation of two reactions to the doctrine is warranted because ultimately the doctrine asserts that "If we accept any part of our self, then we accept our entire self, and all the world as well; and if we reject any part of it, then we reject our entire self, and all the world with it."²⁷ In other words Nehamas asserts that if our life were to recur again, it would have to be the very life we have lived, thus involving an acceptance on our part of each and every moment of our lives, no matter how detestable. But what more does this doctrine imply above and beyond a simple acceptance of one's fate? Nehamas answers with a formulation similar to one originally propounded by Karl Lowith,²⁸ and this involves the capability of the doctrine to allow one to "change" one's past. This is not a literal change,

Nehamas is quick to add, but is based on Nietzsche's "thinking of his view that every one of my past actions is a necessary condition for my being what I am. If, therefore, I am even for a moment such as I would want to be again, my past actions can be seen in retrospect to have been essential to, and therefore constitutive of, the self which I would want to repeat. What is thus changed is not the past, but its significance. This is accomplished by creating, on the basis of the past, a future which is at some point acceptable, and which therefore justifies what made it possible."²⁹

In this manner the doctrine allows one to overcome oneself, and become the overman by, as Lowith has observed, "accepting voluntarily what cannot be otherwise, thus transforming an alien fate into a proper destiny."³⁰ In other words, the doctrine allows one to choose one's past or at least choose the significance the past will have for us, by willing backward and reworking this past into new purposes for the future.

The analyses offered by Nehamas and Lowith are extremely insightful, and they definitively link the Eternal Return to Nietzsche's primary concerns as outlined in The Advantage and Disadvantage of History.⁶ The Eternal Return can cure the historical sickness if the past is given meaning by an act of the will. But this "willing of the past" is still contingent on one's acceptance of what now reveals itself as a metaphysical assertion rather than a cosmological assertion. The overman is thus constituted not only by his coming to terms with the Eternal Return but also with its metaphysical underpinnings, necessitating a proof of the truth value of their assertions. Thus, as an example, one is led down the labyrinthian path of trying to show the absolute importance of even the most trivial of actions and inconsequential moments of existence. Would my whole life really be different if I slept on my left side last

night instead of the right? In another sense this interpretation also involves the act of creation in the light of a past given to us and our acceptance of a metaphysical doctrine. The cure thus only proceeds half-way and succeeds in inculcating in one a mere determination not to be vengeful toward the past. This is akin to Freudian therapy which aims at converting neuroses to common unhappiness.

For the Eternal Return to be entirely successful as an antidote, then, involves a further step, and this is an insight into the fact that any attempts to give it a foundation, whether cosmological or metaphysical, are themselves interpretations -- the results of man's ordering capacities. If this point remains unacknowledged, then the Eternal Return remains irreconcilable with Nietzsche's philosophical intent and his analysis of "history". For Nietzsche, as we have seen, is consistently aware of the fact that any analysis of the past, of history or the world must also at the same time be a process of self-inquiry and self-understanding. The truth of the Eternal Return then, can only be guaranteed if it is asserted as a commandment, as a law created by man who nonetheless acknowledges his subservience to this law. It is only in the acknowledgement of this self-governed creativity that the Eternal Return can be a source of freedom and joy, of an exuberant journey into the future, while yet proclaiming the Dionysian flux of an ever changing yet eternally recurring world. The Eternal Return, thus conceived, provides an ever present and consistently immanent horizon. But this is a horizon that does not restrict, allowing instead for constant self-overcoming.

Issued as a command, the Eternal Return leaves man as his own judge, deciding whether or not a life is worthy of repetition. In this respect it does not dictate what constitutes "worth" which itself is a self-defined category, because it too stems from man. There can be no external standpoint from which man can judge the worth of his actions, of his past and of history.

Whereas Kant had subsumed the individual's actions under an overarching moral law that did not allow for any private language, Nietzsche goes to the other extreme demanding that we evaluate each action on the basis of our having created the horizon that informed this action in the first place. The individual is thus not confronted with abstract rational law but with overwhelming responsibility. In reducing all meaning to the individual Nietzsche tends to become a truly dangerous writer, and he was himself aware of this fact:

The political madness, about which I smile just as my contemporaries smiled at the religious madness of earlier times, is above all secularization, faith in the world and a putting the "beyond" and the "backworld" out of one's mind. The goal of this political madness is the well-being of the fleeting individual. Thus, socialism is its fruit, i.e. those fleeting individuals want to win their happiness. Through socialization they have no reason to wait as the men with eternal souls and eternal becoming and future improvement do. My doctrine says: live in such a way that you must live to live again, that is the task...whoever gets the highest feeling from striving, let him strive; whoever gets the highest feeling from peace, let him rest; whoever gets the highest feeling from adaptation, following, obedience, let him obey. Only let him become aware of what gives him the highest meaning and not shun any means; Eternity is at stake!³⁰

Nietzsche demonstrates here that just as the horizons supported by the transcendent constituted a religious madness, their secularization has led to a political madness. A belief in this world is equally absurd and reveals as little meaning as a belief in the "backworld" did. But if Nietzsche rejects both worlds what else is left? Nietzsche advocates that we live in such a way that we might wish to live again, but this wishing is prefigured by an intense request for self-inquiry, an appeal that one become aware of what constitutes a life that may be worthy of repetition. Without this step we are left with the danger of the present political madness only. That is why we must "not shun any means".

Notes to Chapter Three

¹Nietzsche, The Will to Power. translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 509.

²Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche. translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Modern Library, 1968), pp. 20-22.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid. pp. 48-52.

⁶Ibid. p. 52.

⁷Robert E. McGinn, Culture as Prophylactic. op cit. p. 103.

⁸Ibid. p. 104.

⁹Ibid. p. 135.

¹⁰Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy. op cit. p. 60.

¹¹Joan Stambough, "Thoughts on a Nachlass Fragment From Nietzsche" in Nietzsche Studien (6: 1977). p. 197.

¹²See, for instance, Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist. (New York: Vintage, 1968). Chapter 11., A.C. Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher (New York: MacMillan, 1965). Chapter 7., Bernd Magnus, "Eternal Recurrence" in Nietzsche Studien (8: 1979). pp. 362-377.

¹³See, for instance, Ivan Soll, "Reflections on Recurrence" in Robert Solomon (ed.) Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays. (New York: Anchor, 1979). Arnold Zuboff, "Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence" in Solomon, op cit.

¹⁴Danto utilizes two such passages in his "cosmological interpretation". See Nietzsche as Philosopher. op cit. Chapter 7.

¹⁵Nietzsche, The Will to Power. op cit. pp. 35-36.

¹⁶Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche. op cit. p. 211.

¹⁷Nietzsche, The Will to Power. op cit. pp. 509-510

¹⁸Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche. op cit. p. 226.

¹⁹Nietzsche, The Will to Power; op cit. p. 550.

²⁰Nietzsche, The Gay Science. op cit. p. 341.

- ²¹Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher. op cit. p. 212.
- ²²Soll, "Reflections on Recurrence" in Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays. op cit. p. 339.
- ²³Alexander Nehamas, "The Eternal Recurrence" in The Philosophical Review (89:3, 1980). p. 343.
- ²⁴Nietzsche, quoted in ibid. p. 343.
- ²⁵Nietzsche, quoted in ibid. p. 343.
- ²⁶Nietzsche, quoted in ibid. p. 344.
- ²⁷Nehamas, ibid. p. 345.
- ²⁸Karl Lowith, Meaning in History. (University of Chicago, 1970) pp. 214-224.
- ²⁹Nehamas, op cit. p. 349.
- ³⁰Lowith, op cit. p. 218.
- ³¹Nietzsche, quoted in Joan Stambough "Thoughts on a Nachlass Fragment From Nietzsche" op cit. pp. 195-196.

Conclusion

Nietzsche's writings are a self-conscious attempt to seek the well-springs of western philosophical thought, to disinter its strengths and weaknesses, and, finally, to relate this heritage to the human condition. His itinerary thus confronts all the major philosophical edifices of the past and he sees them linked together by a logical necessity that culminates in the nihilism of his own age. Whereas Hegel had attempted to demonstrate this logical necessity as the course of Reason, thus reconciling the changing philosophical horizons of the past with the human condition, Nietzsche sees the logical necessity arising from the fact that all the hitherto prevailing philosophical horizons are merely the outcome of an original error, which gradually deteriorates over the course of history. Nietzsche has given us a precis account of this tradition:

How the "True World" Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error.

1. The true world — attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he is it. (The oldest form of the idea, relatively clever, simple, and convincing. A paraphrase of the sentence, "I, Plato, am the truth.")
2. The true world — unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents"). (Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible — it becomes female, it becomes Christian.)
3. The true world — unattainable, undemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it — a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (At bottom, the old sun, but seen through fog and skepticism. The idea has become sublime, pale, Nordic, Konigsbergian.)
4. The true world — unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also unknown. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how can something unknown obligate us? (Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cockcrow of positivism.)
5. The "true" world — an idea which has become useless and superfluous — consequently — a refuted idea: let us abolish it! (Bright day; breakfast; return of bon sens and cheerfulness; Plato's embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)
6. The true world — we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one. (Noon; moment the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)¹

But this high point of humanity still awaits the arrival of Zarathustra, until then all that enters is that strange quest that Nietzsche had found knocking upon our doors -- Nihilism. The longest error extracts its toll leaving man without God and without Nature. All that remains is a paralyzing historical awareness that flickers close to extinction, fanned, as it is, by the transience of the world. Nietzsche perceives the ancients and moderns alike, linked together by this error that necessarily transforms itself from a religious madness to a political one. The error culminates in positivism and historicism. I have attempted to demonstrate how both of these can be considered nihilistic. But the seeds of this nihilism lie in the very tradition to which the proponents of antiquity would want to return. This too has been a topic of exploration in this essay. What other route is left open to us? Is nihilism to be the necessary condition of man? To answer these questions, the realm of technology was discussed and found to be a failure in its ability to provide a standard for human endeavour and action.

In its unreflective dedication to efficiency, technology presumes to change human nature or define arbitrarily the structure of existence that man must now do. In the absence of any knowledge of what constitutes man to begin with, technology tends to reduce existence to a lowest common denominator.

Historicism, in the meantime, eradicates any further attempts to give meaning to human existence, repeatedly stressing the transience and relativity of all truths. In the face of the "historical sickness" all sustaining horizons crumble and the "error" finally comes home to roost. It cannot be elevated to the status of a transhistorical truth anymore, no matter how strenuous the efforts of the proponents of antiquity.

Nietzsche's uniqueness lies in his use of historicism to further the

destruction that it wreaks. Such a nihilistic enterprize is necessitated in his view because only thus can the horizon be wiped clean of the taint of the longest error. The dissolution of past horizons leaves room for the creation of new ones.

Utilizing the insights first developed in The Advantage and Disadvantage of History and The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche is able to forward the doctrine of the Eternal Return as the weapon with which the truths of historicism can be preserved and its deleterious effects mitigated and turned toward a new creativity.

This is possible because the doctrine of the Eternal Return seeks the cure of the historical sickness in history itself. The eternal recurrence of Becoming displaces Being from the ancient centre of the universe, but it does so in the light of a self-consciousness that constantly reveals it as a human creation. The question it thus addresses itself to initially devolves on the explication of an existence that is worthy of repetition. But, if man is at once the law giver and the obeyer, the conceiver of the Eternal Return and one who must also live in its shadow, then the original question reduces itself further, and becomes a radical plea for self-inquiry. The worth of an existence is thus not constituted by a mere willingness to have it return, but by an inquiry into the nature of what it means to be in such a way that man's ordering capacities, his bestowing of worth and meaning can be revealed. and such a revelation can only be a self-revelation, bound eternally within the horizon supported by the immanent pylons of human creation and self-creation.

Notes to the Conclusion:

¹Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche. op cit. p. 485.

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