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On Boredom

by

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**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Department of Political Science

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
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**The undersigned hereby recommend to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis,**

ON BOREDOM

submitted by

John Colman, B.A. Hons.

**in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts**

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April 18, 2000**

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ON BOREDOM

ABSTRACT

Contrary to everyday understanding boredom is not resultant of a lack of external stimuli. The following in tracing the history of boredom through the three metaphysics of the Platonic theory of Ideas, God, and technology, will reveal it to be the pain resultant of an inquiry into the questions concerning Being. Boredom presents itself within each metaphysic as a choice between pleasure and pain, the former is an abandonment of the metaphysical into nothingness, the latter as its embrace and essential meaning of Being. With the death of metaphysics following Nietzsche's statement that God is dead how are we to understand and profit from boredom, and how is it to remain ontologically essential?

Nietzsche's ideas of the will to power and the eternal recurrence, offer the means by which we may embrace boredom without recourse to the metaphysical which would otherwise result in the fall into a hermeneutic of relativism, whose ultimate conclusion can only be nihilism. Boredom understood both existentially and ontologically reveals its paradoxical character as both the creator and destroyer of the metaphysical, and both the greatest threat and ultimate savior of philosophy itself.

ON BOREDOM

INTRODUCTION

All moods are identifiable and understandable only through the realization that they exist as part of a dichotomy. It is only because of sadness that we can know when we are happy, and vice versa. Without sadness there would be no medium through which to interpret the sensations that arise from happiness, it would cease to be a condition of elation and would simply exist as a state of indifference. This dichotomy can be seen in relation to all moods, rage and tranquility, envy and satisfaction, the passions that arise from the aesthetic and unsightly, and so on and so forth. However, when we use this practice in relation to boredom we seem to fall into an enigmatic void. It would be easy to say that boredom's dichotomous partner is busyness or being entertained, yet it is possible to feel bored reading a classic novel or at a party, situations in which busy-ness and entertainment ought to exclude any feeling of boredom.

Boredom brings with it a burden and a resounding poignancy of emptiness. The question here is what is the nature and character of this emptiness. We know that when we are bored we feel as though we should be doing something, and that the something which we are doing is unsatisfactory. The problem is that as mentioned, boredom seems to come in situations in which one would not expect it to. Moreover, while I may feel bored at a party, another may be having the time of their life at the very same party. It would therefore appear that boredom is not a condition that is brought on by external stimuli or the lack thereof, but is in fact something internal and ontological.

Often when we are bored we search for avenues to alleviate our boredom, we may consider getting together with friends, reading a book, listening to music and a whole

host of other activities. When considering these options we often find ourselves saying that we are not “in the mood”. Being “not in the mood” seems to suggest that boredom is a suspension of mood itself, but this cannot be so for we are always in a mood. We may then perhaps say that boredom’s dichotomous partner is the thing that is in suspended animation.

Along with this feeling of “not being in the mood”, boredom often arrives with a feeling of guilt, we feel as though we ought to be doing something. Again recalling that boredom is not derived from a lack of external stimuli but is in fact internal, the nature of this ought must be ontological. The purpose in the following is to come to a better understanding of this ontological “ought”.

It now may be possible to postulate that the nature of boredom lies within the unity of the three characteristics so far mentioned. A preliminary hypothesis would therefore have it that boredom is the ontological suspension of the “ought” of our being. This in turn must direct the inquiry onto the path of the metaphysical. All metaphysics posit an object to which the “ought” of our being must strive, boredom is then a failure to progress or a suspension in the teleological path to that object. The proper confrontation and resolution to boredom can therefore only be understood in relation to a particular metaphysic. The object of the metaphysic will determine the both the nature of the burden brought on by boredom and what action is most appropriate in sublimating boredom, it will in essence reveal the dichotomous partner to boredom.

The three metaphysics under scrutiny here, the Platonic theory of Forms, God, and technology, posit an essential meaning to existence, and at root demarcate their own unique belief in the essence of Being. Moreover, they outline a way of being in the world

and the proper moral and ethical conduct so as to move closer to the ideal which they represent. Each requires a separate way of thinking and meditating upon one's relationship to it so as to facilitate the "good life" and come into closer contact with it. The space for the contemplation of this relationship and the "ought" of the metaphysic can be found in boredom. Boredom can however when not confronted in a means indicative and harmonious with the metaphysic in question, lead one astray and block the path to questions pertaining to the essence of Being and the meaning of existence.

The "ought" of the metaphysical stands in close relation with the role of reason, more importantly the tension between reason and passion. The "ought" of the metaphysical must ultimately be identified as the sublimation of passion by reason. Our introduction into each metaphysic will be through its portrayal of sexuality, in treading this path we are contrasting the instinctual, passionate, genesis of man with the striving for the ethereal and immortality. Each metaphysic posits a doctrine of man in nature, and the path to the perfection of man, either within or without. The idea of nature resultant of the tension between reason and passion plays itself out on a whole host of levels, from morality, virtue, rights and duties, and our conception of time.

In light of this duality, our relationship with boredom can be a deciding factor in whether we have an authentic or inauthentic relationship with the world. As such boredom and the means through which we sublimate and overcome boredom can be seen as a microcosm of what we aspire to, how we make decisions regarding such goals, and ultimately the worthiness of the goals themselves. In better understanding boredom, and its existential and ontological roots, we can come to a deepened understanding of the modern nature of art, truth, and politics.

CHAPTER I

BOREDOM AND THE PLATONIC FORMS

"Good evening, gentlemen. I'm plastered..."
Alcibiades

It shouldn't be all that striking to introduce this chapter with a statement of inebriation, for boredom will drive men to many an unhealthy acquaintance. It is of common knowledge that those who drink do so for a plethora of reasons, two however stand out; they may simply desire to have a boisterous evening, or they may be attempting to divert their minds from internal chaos and disorder. It is a desire for escape, to dull pain through pleasure. The concern here is not the social drinker but the drunk. Alcibiades' besotted arrival at Agathon's near the end of Plato's *Symposium*, may at first glance appear to be the entrance of one who simply wishes to revel in the evening. Closer inspection of his ontological predicament in the larger picture of the *Symposium*, however, reveals a man who, may not be a drunk, but is in pursuit of diversion.

The notion of diversion is of central importance to the wider theme of boredom, and as will be made explicit in the course herein, the ideas of diversion and boredom are inextricably bound. There is an inherent, and rather devious, polarity that surrounds the idea of boredom, a polarity for which diversion and contemplation are its polar opposites. The relation that any given individual maintains with this dichotomy has a direct bearing on their being and more importantly, their becoming. Socrates and Alcibiades each embody within the *Symposium* one of the two sides of the dichotomous character of boredom; boredom may be either a sign of health or disease within the soul. Socrates is

often the lone the pillar of psychic health but Alcibiades is but one player among several in the Platonic dialogues who has made an unhealthy acquaintance with boredom.

The task for the chapter at hand is to expose a philosophical premise that may act as a gage by which to determine one's relation to the boredom paradox. It also serves the function of fulfilling a basic human need, that of exterior guidance. The aforementioned 'boredom paradox' is perhaps most easily defined by the statement that the problem with boredom is not boredom per se, but our inability or unwillingness to sit through boredom. One confronted with boredom is motivated through the anxiety it effects, to seek diversion in the form of the pleasures of the flesh. This however, only stands to aggravate the predicament, in that it introduces the individual to a perpetual cycle of apathy and captivation, which drives one towards insatiable trivialized pleasure and further away from contemplation. Boredom can only be incorporated into being and becoming by way of direct confrontation and self-referential thought. Boredom is therefore not something to be shunned but overcome, likewise, it is not superfluous, but indispensable, to being.

The Platonic forms, and the larger framework of ascent passage, within the *Symposium*, will be scrutinized here as one of the earliest manifestations of a philosophical attempt to overcome boredom and render life meaningful. It accordingly has particular importance in the genealogy of boredom, regardless of the fact that the term, or any etymological equivalent, is absent from the dialogues studied. In the rather limited scope of the philosophical rumination on boredom it is therefore unsurprising that the *Symposium*, not to mention other Platonic denunciations of sophistry, and their place within the genealogy, has largely been ignored. There seems to be a commonly held belief that boredom is largely a product of the modern period, although there are some

who have undertaken, in rather frivolous fashion, to draw parallels with medieval theology.¹ As stated the design here is to provide boredom a direct link from the classical world to the postmodern.

The forms are a compelling representation of the belief in man's perfectibility on earth. A belief that brought it into direct confrontation with Christianity, a dispute whose victor is rather obvious, this however is a theme to be taken up in the next chapter. It should nevertheless be born in mind that for the present study of the antiquity of boredom, the forms are perhaps the incipient struggle for meaning in the face of boredom.

Man's confrontation with boredom has always been the confrontation with the question of meaning. The aforementioned anxiety is the troubling side to the question, in other words the possibility that life holds no meaning. The forms are the inaugural answer to that question in the positive, the problem posed is that the consternation which comes from the simple asking of the question impels one to believe that they never need ask it in the first place. This however is unadulterated absurdity, in that we are constantly challenged by it, for it presents itself to us every day. The bored are those who have trivialized their existence in a vain attempt to divert their minds into believing that the question is posed by man alone, in other words, one may grapple with it in the time they see fit. These individuals are Socrates' antagonists in the Platonic dialogues; they are Alcibiades, Callicles, Euthyphro, and Gorgias, to name but a few.

¹ See Siegfried Wezel, *The Sin of Sloth Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). Wenzel excellent exegesis of acedia and its relation to Christian mysticism will be taken up in chapter II, there is however no attempt even in passing to bridge the gap between the core of his subject matter and modern day boredom. He fails likewise in making notice of acedia's ancient ancestry.

The *Symposium* will be interpreted as the middle ground between the perilous extremes of sophistry and absolute theism. The attraction of the sophist lies in the ability to offer the individual a heightened sense of agency, while the enticement of theism is the benefaction of guidance and purpose. Each however are but the beginnings of a passage whose extremity is the deterioration of authentic contemplation, the sophists terminal being the objectification of the 'other', theism's closure being the objectification of the 'self'. Plato's denouement of this dichotomous enigma is to combine the agency of sophistry with the teleology of theism.

Let us then pursue Plato's middle ground, but before doing so one final note is in order. The *Symposium* is an address to Eros, or more generally passion; it is appropriate to say that boredom is a state of mind in which one feels a corrosion of passion. It is further the unwillingness to sublimate the passions in an act of denudation of one's old values for the new. It is cowardice in the face of the pain associated with letting go; as will be seen, it is the pain of Alcibiades.

As Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff explain in the introduction to their translation of Plato's *Symposium*, a symposium is a banquet where heavy drinking, decadent feasting, and capricious cavorting take place within an atmosphere of musical interlude, oratorical verve, and sexual excess.² We are however told later that many of the guests are still recovering from the night before and they have decided to go easy on the drinking. They have also resigned to send the flute girl away so as to concentrate on conversation.³ This being the case it is however interesting that Plato should have nevertheless titled his work *Symposium*. It is contended here that this may give credence

² Plato., *Symposium* trans. Nehamas & Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett PublishingCo. 1989) pp.xiii

³ Ibid., pp. 7, 176E-177A

to the claim that the decadence and corruption of many of the guests may not be isolated to pleasures of the flesh like drinking and fornication, but that they are suffering from a vice of the soul.

Far from the placid, stoic, and academic connotations a symposium conjures up in the contemporary mind, we join Socrates, Agathon, Aristophanes, Eryximachus, Pausanias, and Phaedrus, at a gathering where passion is on center stage. The guest in attendance at Agathon's are there to celebrate his victory at a dramatic contest, upon Eryximachus' suggestion, they decide to engage in speech making so as to uncover the nature of the long neglected god of love, or Eros. For the purposes here, it is sufficient to join Agathon and guests, at the beginning of Socrates' accounting of his tutelage under the priestess Diotima, for the nature of all other speeches, will be revealed in the course therein.

Diotima begins with a biographical sketch of Eros, his parentage serving the immediate purpose here for the initial confrontation of passion and object, where passion may relate to the teleological nature of the aforementioned theism, and object to the agency previously associated with sophistry and rhetoric. The conception myth of Eros' at the celebration of Aphrodite's birth will allow for an exposition of Eros in which the objects and the passions are instrumental in the fulfillment of the craving itself. It shall serve as the vehicle by which Eros arrives at a meaningful end, and in the larger picture, a means towards a fruitful engagement with boredom.

According to Diotima's instruction, Eros is born of Penia by Poros. Penia, a beggar, lay beside Poros in the garden of Zeus in the hopes of bearing his child for the purpose of relieving herself from poverty. Penia literally translated means poverty, while

Poros means resource or way.⁴ Again there is embodied in Eros the ideas of teleology, through Penia and agency, via Poros. Eros is thus imbued with the characteristics of both his parents,

“He is always poor, and he’s far from being delicate and beautiful; instead, he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless, always lying on the dirt without a bed, sleeping at peoples doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mothers nature always living in need. But on his father’s side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom through all his life, a genius with enchantments, potions and clever pleadings.”⁵

From this, Diotima persuades Socrates that Eros is being a lover not being loved as he once thought. There is a certain quality of constant moving and desire in being a lover, whereas from being loved, one can infer a state of being that is rather stationary and static. At essence, we desire not what we are, but what we wish to be. In the previous speeches of the evening Eros was associated with the domain of being loved, and was therefore believed to be a God. Earlier, when Socrates recounted his initial tutelage under Diotima, she had persuaded him that Eros could not be beautiful or good, and therefore not a god but a spirit.⁶ After having been made aware of Eros’ parentage, it is possible to elucidate the fact that should Eros be both beautiful and good, there would be by necessity no internal motivation for him to possess the good and the beautiful. In other words, the ontological account of Eros being assembled would be ruined if this were not so, in that his existence would again be quiescent and static. When passion is arrested, as

⁴ Ibid., pp.48, 204C.

⁵ Ibid., 203D

⁶ Ibid., pp. 45, 201E

would happen if Eros was both beautiful and good, it may well become a redundancy, which is but a different guise for boredom.

The dialogue between Socrates and Diotima now focuses on why exactly men desire the things they do, to which Socrates responds, “That they become his own”.⁷ Diotima further questions Socrates to uncover why men want such things and Socrates’ answer quite simply is for happiness. It is possession of the objects of our passions that is the end to the passion itself. It is becoming increasingly obvious as to why the objects of our passions are central to the passions themselves. Passion without object is an existence of utter confusion, it is most devastatingly an existence whereby passion is divorced from virtue. Socrates comes to see Eros, through Diotima’s pedagogy, as a teleological progression.

The importance of the conception myth of Penia and Poros for the present study of the passions can now be interpreted. Eros’ parentage is the embodiment of this teleological process. From Penia, the passions find their constant desire, their need, and their poverty, which motivates their satiation. Through Poros, passion is guided towards and acquires the skill to secure the objects through resource and cunning. A biblical analogy may help to clarify, if Eros, or passion, was an Immaculate Conception of Penia alone, there would simply be desire, it would be devoid of the hunt that comes from Poros, and thus would have nowhere to find direction nor proficiency in acquisition. Passion needs both parents if it is to be realized and fulfilled, the bastard child of passion, or passion without object would be a futile and redundant sentence. Likewise with boredom one loses the capacity to be discerning with respect to the pleasures one seeks

⁷ Ibid., pp. 50, 204D

and the values one adopts. The objects of the passions are trivialized by the overwhelming need to be entertained.

However, it is not simply happiness that motivates one towards love of the good and the beautiful, “It is giving birth in beauty, whether in body or in soul.”⁸ Man wants the good and the beautiful to be his forever, furthermore, man wants to be eternally happy, he wants what at essence he cannot have; immortality. This desire for immortality can be further understood as the desire to escape the confines of time, the understanding of this desire will demonstrate the essential quality of what it means to be human. This understanding however does not come via some coruscation of self-awareness, but by teleological passage that begins with the love of a single body. The fatally bored approach time in similar fashion, in that it is deemed to be a burden. The proper meditation on boredom will however reveal the fact that it is only through time, and within time, that one can reappraise the role of boredom in being and becoming. The ascent passage is likewise offering itself to us as a means within time to actualize this desire for immortality.

The ascent passage offers more than a description of the path towards the highest point of Eros, it can also be seen as a defense of Socratic logos against the attacks leveled upon it by its detractors. As will be discussed later, in other dialogues, most notably the *Gorgias*, Socrates criticized the sophists, rhetoricians, and relativists of not being concerned with the good, but only self-aggrandizement, they likewise accuse him of advancing an analogous and no more transcendental form of the good. The ascent passage makes available to logos the ability to accede the fact that logos is a desire, but

⁸ Ibid., pp. 53, 206B

that if there is a hierarchy to desire than logos and Socrates' teaching can remain the highest good.

As mentioned, the first stage in the ascent is love of the body, or love of a particular body. At this stage, Diotima's account is an adaptation of what Phaedrus previously said in the first speech of the evening. The ascent begins with an erotic longing for another. It is passion felt within a body for a body. It is the root of our sexuality whether it is romantic love or heated lust. It is an important statement on the unity of body and soul, in that it is a testament to the fact that our bodies are capable of serving us as mediums towards enlightenment and wisdom. It is further a statement that sexual passion has within it the loam from which wisdom will have been germinated.

It is this teleological birthplace within the body and erotic longing that we must recall when in the following chapter Christian metaphysics is discussed. It is these very basic natural longings of sexuality and passionate love that provide us with a capacity for further spiritual and intellectual growth. The denial of this generative element within our bodies is both the foundation of Christian metaphysics and the source of some highly problematic philosophy that wishes to build impossible bridges between platonism and Christian theology.

The ancient valuation of sexuality and passionate love is what at root separates the ideas of earthly transcendence from salvation in the beyond. For the present study of boredom it is the difference between the contemplation of man as resolution and the prayer to God as solution. The doctrine of sexuality is the tap root of salvation for both the ancient and the Christian, one who sees it as the beginning of an ascent of the soul, the other as the beginning of a descent, one who sees in it the need for constant

passionate metamorphosis, the other a constant repudiation, one is a sign of growth, the other vice.

This love of beauty in the particular, naturally leads to a more universalized love of the body, and the second stage in the ascent, in that one who speaks of love is speaking of beauty in form and therefore, will consequently see it in all bodies. While it is obvious to all that some bodies are more attractive than others, the love felt for a particular individual remains at root the love of the human form. As Diotima recounts, "First if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there, then he should realize that beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he'd be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same, when he grasps this he must become a lover of all bodies..."⁹

Moving on, the third stage is the realization that love of the soul must be superior to love of the body. Pausanias in his speech distinguished between noble and vulgar love, the distinction being based upon the behaviour it gives rise to, whether it be vile or honourable. "Now you may want to know who counts as vile in this context. I'll tell you; it is the common, vulgar lover, who loves the body rather than the soul, the man whose love is inconstant, since what he loves is mutable and unstable."¹⁰ Having universalized his love, with the love of all bodies the individual is forced to redirect his love towards the soul, which is the seat of universality. For genuine love is expressed through speech and therefore, the lover can be attracted to an ugly body but a beautiful soul, an obvious defense of Socrates in the face of Agathon's later collating of Eros with the young and the beautiful.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 57, 210B-C

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 17, 183E

Unsatisfied, love of the soul gives birth to love of beautiful activities, such as laws and in larger form the polis. This is the realm of civic virtue, where love is the means to moderation and the ability to live in a city where the wildness of our souls is abandoned for the security that the polis offers. In the speech of Agathon, Eros is responsible in part for moderation that drives men to accept the fact that agreement between them is what is to be deemed as just, "And the effects he has on others are not forced, for every service we give to love we give willingly. And whatever one person agrees on with another, when both are willing, that is right and just; so say 'the laws that are the kings of society.'"¹¹

The individual who fails to reach this level, stagnates here, or allows his love of the polis to be corrupted, not only fails in his attempt at self-mastery but fails to be a good citizen. An individual or a society that flees from the pains associated with boredom and tries to find a regiment of pleasure and entertainment to ward off the questions posed by boredom will find that their concept of the political and their attitudes towards politics will be sullied. Politics itself will soon be entertainment, will not draw on the best that society has to offer, and the politicians themselves will be branded as anything but virtuous. At essence we fail completely to recognize that the fount of politics is civic virtue and that it is a means towards the betterment of men both physically and intellectually.

A society that fails to reconcile the art of politics with civic virtue must be prepared to allow for the fact that they can no longer expect their politicians to be virtuous. Politics will be nothing but entertainment where scandal and the façade of what constitutes debate will be *de rigueur*, and spectacle will replace the nobility of the

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 34, 196C

amelioration of the citizenry through consensus and the clash of ideas. Through our own collective neglect we will have demanded that politics mirror the pleasantries and the vacuous production of theatre and pulp fiction.

Politics is meant to be the realm in which the questions that are posed by boredom are to be centered in the public sphere. The same path that an individual is to take in self-perfection, a society and its government should mirror. If the individuals that comprise that government cease to take interest in those questions or flee from them into pleasantries and distraction it is more than likely that their government will follow suit.

Returning to the ascent passage, love of the polis as embodied in the fourth stage eventually reaches its height and the individual is again ready to transform and redirect his Eros towards love of the sciences, a love that Eryximachus earlier professed was the greatest form of Eros. For it is in medicine that Eryximachus believes lies the ability to discriminate between base and virtuous love. "Medicine is simply the science of the effects of love on repletion and depletion of the body, and the hallmark of the accomplished physician is his ability to distinguish the love that is noble from the love that is ugly and disgraceful."¹² The physician can further both create good and destroy bad love within the patient, the physician is "...guided everywhere by the god of love."¹³

Yet the love of the sciences is not complete, for the sciences are too particular in scope and do not offer a comprehensive view on the world. However, these are the beginnings of love of knowledge, and the love of ideas, it is the specific, to wisdom's universal. As Diotima says, "The result is that he will see the beauty of knowledge and be looking not at beauty in a single example...but the lover is turned to the great sea of

¹² Ibid., pp. 21, 186D

¹³ Ibid., 187A

beauty, and, gazing upon this, he gives birth to many glorious beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom.”¹⁴ Its is love of wisdom, philosophia, that is the apex of the ascent.

The pattern within the ascent is now somewhat obvious, the individual begins with a particular, which is subsequently exchanged for the universal, which is again commuted for a particular and then again for a universal. To elaborate, the body (particular) is reciprocated for all bodies (universal), the soul (particular) for the polis (universal), finally science (particular) for philosophy (universal). The ascent ends with philosophy and the Forms, for there can be no transposition from this universal to another particular. The Forms may stand as the supra-sensible arbiter that motivates the dialectic between the passions and the objects. The beauty of the Forms may stand in large part in that they enable both the theist and, perhaps more importantly, the atheist, to acknowledge a higher order for which to endeavor, and an exquisite object to referee the passions.

It is only in the completion of the ascent that the individual comes face to face with true virtue and thus can come to an understanding of his desire for immortality. As previously mentioned, Diotima makes little effort to account for those who have seemingly allowed themselves the respite, however dangerous, of remaining at any given stage without moving onwards and upwards. It is this arrest that is of importance here, for it is they who surrender to the acquisitions of any given stage that are here labeled the bored.

It is possible to draw our own conclusions as to the perilous consequences such an abdication might have. The eventual entrance of Alcibiades towards the end of the

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 58, 210D

Symposium points to an individual who, regardless of the honour and prestige he has acquired from his love of the polis, realizes rather painfully how he has yet to reach the heights to which Socrates has ascended. The obvious torment and inadequacy he feels from his relation to Socrates is the result of his slackness.

“Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame – ah, you didn’t think I had it in me? Yes, he makes me feel ashamed: I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave into my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become one constant effort to escape him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I’m doing nothing about my way of life, although I have already agreed with him that I should. Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I’ll be even more miserable. I can’t live with him and I can’t live without him!”¹⁵

What Alcibiades wishes to escape is not Socrates the person, but the idea of Socrates. In other words, the guilt and futility he feels within himself for his cowardice in not abandoning the material and psychological pleasure he receives from his position of eminence in Athenian society, in exchange for what he knows is of greater value, that being the virtue that comes with the culmination of the ascent. It is what Socrates embodies as a form of being and becoming that Alcibiades fears and culminates in him as shame. It is his boredom with the pleasures that derive from his stature that he wishes to escape, it is similarly not Socrates he wishes dead but the decadent and corrosive soul that he knows is keeping him from true virtue.

Alcibiades is engaged in a struggle with boredom when in Socrates’ company. This is not to say that he finds Socrates boring but that Socrates embodies for Alcibiades the right choice between what is good and what is pleasant, a choice he is unwilling to

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.67, 216B-C

make. The perks of his office and eminence in Athenian society are pleasant in relation to the good of self-perfection and growth of soul that demands his movement from politics to philosophia.

To return to what was said earlier, this is the pain of Alcibiades, the pain associated with an unhealthy acquaintance with boredom. He is not willing to search for the meaning of his displeasure with Socrates, for he tells us that when Socrates is not around he no longer considers his ontological predicament. It can further be deduced that what his confrontations with Socrates are, are the engagements with authentic contemplation. It is indisputably his apprehension of peering into the meaning of existence and finding nothing there. It may likewise be his self-defeating belief, that even if he were to engage himself with Diotima's ascent, he may not discover the strength to arrive at its end. This is a distinct possibility of which Diotima forewarns Socrates, the fact is that he may be embarking on a passage he may very well be incapable of fully understanding, "Even you Socrates, could probably come to be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly – that is the final and highest mystery, and I don't know if you are capable of it."¹⁶ It is not so much what one may find, or not find in the end, but the courage and fortitude that is required to begin and continue along the ascent that is the ultimate test. It is the constant questioning and revaluation that is as much a savior as the final arrival at philosophia. As with boredom, it is not boredom per se but our inability to sit through boredom. Finally, the fact that Alcibiades has arrived after all the speeches have been given and that he had not heard a single one, gives greater salience to the pedagogy of Diotima. Even though he has not

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.57, 209E-210A

heard first hand the progression of the ascent, he is nevertheless aware of it instinctively, not to mention his deficiency with respect to fulfilling its commands.

Many similar remarks can be noted with regard to the other players within the *Symposium*. As mentioned each speech corresponds, either in direct or loose fashion, with a stage of the ascent. Each in their professed belief in the highest stage of Eros has failed, like Alcibiades, to question their own motivations. Each recitation can therefore be scrutinized for the virulence for which it may give rise. Phaedrus in his equation of Eros with the body may be in jeopardy of a possible transgression into vanity and hedonism. Pausanias' belief in Eros as perfected in the love of the soul, while of a higher order than Phaedrus, may eventually fall victim to an unhealthy egoism that shall find him lacking in true companionship. Eryximachus in his professed love of the sciences and more specifically medicine, has allowed reason to completely dominate where art and irrationality may have otherwise existed alongside. Aristophanes' myth of the split of the sexes,¹⁷ which may be interpreted to imply a love of the polis, could seduce one to the depravation of tyranny. Finally Agathon, whose speech is a devotion to moderation, and "the laws that are the kings of society",¹⁸ is very much akin to the vice that Aristophanes may give rise to, that of authoritarianism. The idea being conveyed is not that Aristophanes or Agathon are tyrants, or that Phaedrus is a hedonist, but that they in their collective failure to question and sublimate their passions fail to reconcile the good with the bad.

All goods when no longer questioned as to their nature, which is the virtues for which they give rise and their existence as stepping stones towards other goods in the

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.25, 189E-190A

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.34, 196C a quote that if further attributed to Aristotle and Alcidama (*Rhetoric* 1406A17-23)

ascent of the soul, may devolve into vice. Diotima tries to show that all objects of love prior to philosophia are valued in part as a source of virtue in that they are steps towards a higher more sublime love. The object of any particular love is the eventual birth of a new love. The body gives rise to the soul but such love that does not give rise to its morphology into the soul is likely to degenerate into vanity. Likewise love of the polis and its child of civic virtue gives birth to great acts of kindness for ones fellow citizen but could quite possibly lose the citizen as object and simply become love of power.

In the passage from one love to another, man secures that the virtues that are embodied in each stage remain pure. One love is not lost for another but each is collected in its purest form and the act of sublimation secures that the virtue will not be defiled. The individual that reaches the stage of love of wisdom will have a virtuous relationship with the body, the soul, politics, reason and these combined will be and simultaneously not be philosophia.

The ascent passage demands of the individual the willingness to situate all values in a place where they are openly available to refutation. The individual who is compliant in this challenge is compelled to similarly have his own existence scrutinized, where in every action and thought must be rendered accountable within the larger picture of self-mastery as embodied in the ascent passage. This is in unmediated confrontation with the atomism and self-sanctity of values that is the hallmark of sophistry and relativism. A proposition that is totally unsustainable, and which is illuminated as such in the polemic between Socrates and Polus, Calicles, and with whom the work derives its title *Gorgias*.

The *Gorgias* is a dialogue whose focal point is oratory and rhetoric, but the subtext of happiness and the good life make it analogous to the *Symposium*. My intention

here is to examine in more detail the copula between sophistry and boredom in the classical sense and also to expose the foundations upon which the modern conception of boredom is largely built. The determination here is that the incongruity within oratory is analogous to the boredom paradox, which is revealed through a survey of the *Gorgias* where the question as to the relation between pleasure and the good is raised. The rhetoricians Polus, Gorgias, and Callicles it is maintained have not engaged themselves with the ascent and therefore cannot claim to know themselves, and their place. Without recourse to this level of introspection their claims to be acting out of self-interest, and holding self-interest up as the highest good, are not only without support but unsustainable.

The dialogue between Socrates and Callicles is perhaps one of the most hostile and nasty confrontations in all of Plato's work, culminating in the life of the stone versus the life of the catamite. Before this fantastic verbal pugilism can be examined the stage should be set. The dialogue begins with Socrates questioning Gorgias as to the nature of oratory, Socrates asks Chaerephon to query Gorgias as to, "What he is"¹⁹. Does he claim to be the practitioner of a craft or techné, and if so, won't he by necessity be able to teach others this craft?²⁰ To relate this back to the previous exposition of the ascent passage, if Gorgias had engaged himself with the ascent he would know the answer to this question almost instinctively. The ascent passage confronts the individual with the task of finding his place and the essence of his being, however as we will be seen, Gorgias is exposed to the fact that he really doesn't have a firm understanding of his being, nor his "craft".

¹⁹ Plato., *Gorgias* translated by Donald, J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987) pp.2, 448A

²⁰ Ibid., pp.4, 449B

Gorgias claims that his craft is speech making, but Socrates counters Gorgias by demonstrating that many crafts are likewise involved in speech making. Arithmetic, medicine, and finance are all based in large part on their ability to elucidate the good of their craft by use of speeches. Gorgias has therefore failed to properly demonstrate the nature of his “craft” through simply stating that it is interested in speech making. Speech making is but a means towards a final end, it is this final end that Socrates wishes Gorgias to enlighten him upon.²¹ He is therefore forced to refine his earlier response by asserting that the end to which his speeches are aimed, is “The thing that is in actual fact the greatest good, Socrates. It is the source of freedom for mankind itself and at the same time it is for each person the source of rule over others in one’s city”.²² This power at essence for Gorgias is the power to persuade. This for Socrates is still insufficient, just as arithmetic, medicine, and finance are concerned with speech making, they are likewise concerned with persuasion. Gorgias finally concedes that the persuasion as defined by his craft is that applied in law courts and in the assembly; that of justice.

Now that Gorgias has roughly defined and differentiated the end of persuasion that is applicable to oratory from that of the other crafts partially occupied with speeches, and just as there is a difference between knowledge and conviction, Socrates comes to see a duality within the realm of persuasion itself. There are those crafts said to be centered upon teaching, like mathematics, and are consequently labeled teaching conviction. Oratory on the other hand is best defined by the act of convincing, and is henceforth labeled conviction persuasion.²³ Gorgias’ acceptance of this duality is to be his downfall, for the dichotomy is premised upon the degree of knowledge manifest in

²¹ Ibid., pp.5-9, 449A-452E

²² Ibid., pp.9, 452D

each of its teachers. Socrates comes to the fatal conclusion that, "Oratory doesn't need to have any knowledge of the state of their subject matters; it only needs to have discovered a persuasive device in order to make itself appear to those who don't have knowledge that it knows more than those who actually do have it."²⁴

Gorgias' earlier statement that the orator could use his power of persuasion in an unjust manner, combined with the fact that it is a "craft" which is not rooted in knowledge renders any claim to be concerned with justice a moot point. If oratory has self-professedly no basis in knowledge then it fails by its own hand to sustain the claim that it can speak for justice and also that it is a craft. Socrates concludes that what oratory at the heart of the matter constitutes is nothing more than a "knack", one that is best suited to speak of what's pleasurable not what's good, one that can only be likened to pastry baking.²⁵ Where as pastry baking has the ability through pleasant taste to dupe the body into a false sense of health, oratory in like manner fools the soul, "...what pastry baking is to medicine, oratory is to justice."²⁶

A rough sketch of the parallels between the orator and the bored are beginning to emerge. Both constitute an uncertainty between what is best and what is pleasant. The orator having never been taught about justice cannot by right, possess the knowledge to discriminate on the elusiveness between the pleasant and the good. Likewise the bored having never allowed themselves the proper exposure to boredom cannot see the paradox between boredom as emancipator and boredom as oppressive. The substance of this ignorance transposes itself onto the issue of self-interest.

²³ Ibid., pp.13, 455A

²⁴ Ibid., pp.18, 459B-C

²⁵ Ibid., pp.22, 462D

²⁶ Ibid., pp.26, 465C

Gorgias having been shamed by Socrates concedes defeat through his silence. Polus enters into the dialogue to defend the life of the orator, and in doing so, oratory's true character is further laid bare. Polus believes that regardless of its degree of knowledge, oratory empowers the individual, and is thus in and of itself a benefit. He sees in the orator the same capacity for power as in the tyrant, "Don't they like tyrants, put to death anyone they want, and confiscate the property and banish from their cities anyone they see fit?"²⁷ Polus believes that this endowment alone ought to be regarded as good, further illuminating the clandestine self-interest that is truly the realm of oratory.

Polus has created two false dichotomies for which he is unaware. He has fabricated a prevarication between justice and discipline, and secondly, he has contrived a related opposition separating pleasure and pain. As will be seen, these are two equivocations that boredom correspondingly embodies when misrepresented. It is the exposure of these two falsehoods that will finally manifest itself in the confrontation between Socrates and Calicles and the health of the soul.

Socrates begins by questioning Polus as to why we do the things we do, and the fact of the matter is that we do things for the sake of the effect they will cause. Socrates illustrates by maintaining that people take medicine, which is generally discomforting, for the health it will bring,²⁸ to which Polus agrees. Our actions are therefore directed to a future good. Without the knowledge that the medicine will bring health, the afflicted would avoid it, acting as they see fit, even though the medicine is in fact good for their health. So, it is possible to act as one sees fit but not to one's benefit. The tyrant may too act as he sees fit, by property confiscation and exiling whom ever he pleases, but this

²⁷ Ibid., pp.27, 466C

²⁸ Ibid., pp.29, 467C

does not necessitate the fact that he is acting to his own advantage, if he like the sick knows not what his self-interest constitutes.

This argument is then transferred into the realm of justice and punishment. Socrates asks Polus whether it is better to act unjustly or to suffer an injustice, to which he replies that it is better to act unjustly. Socrates then sets out to show Polus that corruption of ones soul is most shameful, to which he agrees. The reason being, "...is that it surpasses the others [corruptions] by some monstrously great harm and astounding evil, since it doesn't surpass them in pain..."²⁹ Socrates returns to the medical analogy and asks Polus again, "Now, is getting medical treatment something pleasant? Do people who get it enjoy getting it?" to which Polus replies, "No, I don't think so." He then further accepts that it is to their benefit. It is subsequently shown that an even greater benefit is to never have contracted the illness to begin with, again Polus agrees. Justice is then a form of medicine for corruption of the soul, and the happiest man is he who never allow corruption to enter his soul to begin with, so it is therefore better to suffer an injustice, for it brings no corruption, rather than to act unjustly which is a source of corruption.

The man who acts unjustly, and does not pay his due, is like the man who fears medicine. "They focus on its painfulness, but are blind to its benefit and are ignorant of how much more miserable it is to live with an unhealthy soul than with an unhealthy body, a soul that's rotten with injustice and impiety. This is also the reason they go to any length to avoid paying what is due and getting rid of the greatest evil."³⁰ It can be further extrapolated that the just life is therefore the disciplined life, and should one fall into

²⁹ Ibid., pp.45, 477D-E

³⁰ Ibid., pp.48, 479B-C

waywardness, they should not flee that pain of their retribution but acknowledge the pleasure that may arise from it.

The aforementioned false dichotomies between justice and punishment, and pleasure and pain have therefore been exposed for the duplicities they are. Again the parallels to boredom ought to be noted, as seen earlier, the failure to realize the unity of pleasure and pain leads one into a life of immoderation and away from contemplation, much like Polus' deficiency in reckoning the unity between justice and punishment, and pleasure and pain. Polus failed to see that the unjust man in undertaking to escape his due, is led to a false sense of health within his soul. This unjust man is the brother to the man who in his flight from boredom defrauds himself of the opportunity to profit from his pain. They both lack the knowledge and the self-awareness to properly act in accordance with their self-interest, which is a life of moderation. A life that Callicles believes is the life of a stone.

“How delightful you are! By the self-controlled you mean the stupid ones!”³¹ So Callicles ridicules Socrates after he was so “bold” as to claim that the individual who attains self-mastery is truly his own ruler. Callicles furthers his argument by stating that the man who lives in reflection to the powers that he possesses, is, “...the man who'll live correctly”, and, “ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them.”³² This according to Callicles is within the natural order of things; some have by right a greater share of power and would be acting unnaturally if they controlled the use thereof, even if it is self-control. Such great individuals need not enslave themselves to anything, nor anyone, least of all themselves, “As for all those who were

³¹ Ibid., pp.64, 491E

³² Ibid., pp.64, 491E-492A

either sons of kings to begin with or else naturally competent to secure some position of rule for themselves as tyrants or potentates, what in truth could be more shameful and worse than self-control and justice for these people who, although they are free to enjoy good things without and interference, should bring as master upon themselves the law of many, their talk and their criticism?"³³

To Socrates this is not an enslaved life but an orderly one. He tells a story of a Sicilian who believed that the part of the soul where the appetites resided was like a jar, the wise are those who have sealed their jar so as not to spill it, while the soul of the fool is likened to a sieve, "...for their untrustworthiness and forgetfulness makes them unable to retain anything."³⁴ Socrates adapts the jar metaphor to his own purposes and instead uses an analogy of two men to demonstrate that if anyone is iterating the life of enslavement it is Callicles.

Each man has several jars that hold within them milk, honey, and other necessities that are difficult to procure. "Now the one man, having filled up his jars, doesn't pour anything more into them and gives them no further thought. He can relax over them. As for the other one, he too has resources that can be procured, though with difficulty, but his containers are leaky and rotten. He's forced to keep on filling them, day and night, or else he suffers extreme pain."³⁵ One for Socrates is obviously a highly disciplined life the other rather disorderly. The jars here may be interpreted as ones constitution, one man never being satisfied, while the other is at peace and rest, having ample amount of time for less material considerations. The man that can not maintain a harmony between his

³³ Ibid., pp.65, 492B

³⁴ Ibid., pp.66, 493A-D

³⁵ Ibid., pp.67, 493A

needs and his appetites, the man with the rotten jars, will have an unhappy existence in constantly trying to satiate his unquenchable desires.

Callicles sees the predicament of the man with the leaky jars in complete contrast to Socrates. He believes that the man who has filled his jars, and need not worry, has lost with those worries, the ability to feel joy and pain, and as a result reduced his existence to one analogous with, "...living like a stone."³⁶ The man with the leaky jars by contrast is the happy one, in that, "...living pleasantly consists in this: having as much as possible flow in."³⁷ Like the bored, Callicles has opened his life to an existence in which it is not he that commands his passions but his passions that command him, a life which Socrates scorns for being of no higher order than that of a catamite.³⁸ Callicles in correlating the life of order to that of the stone, has dismissed the possibility that the pleasant life and the good life are not the same, and in doing so, has associated himself with the bored.

It is this failure of Callicles' that the dialogue now turns. The central questions being, is it possible to at once be in pain and doing well, and is pain by necessity an indicator of a suffering soul? As Socrates shows, and Callicles agrees, the man who is thirsty and drinking, and the man who is hungry and eats, is both suffering and feeling pleasure simultaneously. In other words, the pain associated with thirst and hunger are still prevalent when the pleasurable act of drinking and eating are undertaken. The conclusion drawn is, "So, feeling enjoyment isn't the same as doing well, and being in pain isn't the same as doing badly, and the result is that what's pleasant turns out to be different from what's good."³⁹

³⁶ Ibid., 494A

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., pp.68, 494E

³⁹ Ibid., pp.71, 497A

Callicles it is obvious agrees with Socrates but refuses to acknowledge his defeat. Callicles' indignation and refusal to answer Socrates' questions with an open mind continues for much of the remainder of the dialogue. Socrates in the end never truly convinces Callicles of the errors of his ways, or at least Callicles never concedes defeat, even in tacit form like the silences of Gorgias and Polus. The closing dialogue is an attempt to further substantiate on the part of Socrates his admonition that oratory is not a craft but a knack. While in no way trying to trivialize it, for it is a remarkable piece of Socratic logos at work, its relevance here is unessential. Socrates for these purposes has shown, regardless of Callicles dissention, that the good and the pleasant, and that painful and the regretful are not substitutive.

Callicles, Gorgias, and Polus, have in their ruinous miscarriage of securing any definitive knowledge as to the essence of what they claim to speak to, have misled themselves into a false sense of security that comes from the ignorance that separates the good from the pleasant. It is the benightedness that comes to those that fail to engage themselves with Diotima's ascent. Their collective failure to distinguish between the good and the pleasant reduces their existence and their "craft" to one that parallels the first stage in the ascent. Oratory is the last frontier of the pleasures of the flesh and the love of the particular body. It is the witlessness of the bored, those who through fear and loathing can not transcend the life of the body for that of the soul. Socrates engages Callicles, Gorgias and Polus with the energy that he does because he sees in the passion of oratory the possibility for transcendence. Such passion it is obvious to Socrates when properly channeled could drive these sophists to the heights of the ascent, and even if they were unable to complete the journey they would at least have profited from the

realization of their place in the polis. However, whether it be through the silence of Polus and Gorgias or the indignation of Calicles it appears that they would rather take comfort within the darkness of those who would rather stay in the Platonic cave than risk their sight in the blinding light of day.

The metaphor of the cave in *The Republic* is another ascent, which has acutely similar parallels to the *Symposium*, as such it shall serve as the final illustration of the need for transcendence in order to render life meaningful in the classical world. It also assists in understanding that the introduction of moral questions to the uninitiated can be perilous and what is in fact needed is a methodical progression, one in which Diotima's ascent is a magnificent archetype.

Socrates asks the interlocutors to imagine a dark cave and the inhabitants of the cave have been there since birth. The prisoners are chained by their feet and neck so that all they can see is what is immediately in front of them. Behind them is a light source, which illuminates a screen directly in front of them behind which objects pass and create shadows. The prisoner can not see themselves or their fellow inmates and thus only know the shadows that pass in front of them. "In every way, then, such prisoners would recognize as reality nothing but the shadows of those artificial objects."⁴⁰

Plato then asks us to suppose that one of the prisoners was freed and forced to walk towards the light. He would then subsequently be shown the objects that had previously been passed behind the screen. The experience of such a man would be to believe that what he was now seeing is less real than the shadows which he had grown accustomed to. Coming into direct sunlight his eyes would burn and he would feel

⁴⁰ Plato., *The Republic* translated by Francis MacDonald Cornford (London: Oxford University Press, 1945) pp. 229, 515C

motivated to return to the cave where he is certain of his sight. If he was further forced to stand in the light, Plato asks, "...would he not suffer pain and vexation at such treatment, and, when he had come out into the light, find his eyes so full of its radiance that he could not see a single one of the things that he was now told were real?"⁴¹ The man would need to become habituated to the new reality, his ascent would require time and patience if it were not to be an overwhelmingly painful and frightening experience.

"He would need then to grow accustomed before he could see things in that upper world. At first it would be easiest to make out shadows, and then images of men and things reflected in water, and later one the things themselves. After that, it would be easier to watch the heavenly bodies and the sky itself by night, looking at the light of the moon and stars rather than the Sun and the Sun's light in the day time."⁴² The prisoner would eventually come to the belief that the Sun controls everything. He would feel sorry for those who live in the cave, for what they believe to be real is but a shadow, and that they live in ignorance of the truth.

Now if the prisoner was led back into the darkness of the cave and back into his shackles, his eyes would again feel pain, this time from the darkness that engulfs them. His fellow prisoners seeing his pain would mock him, "They would laugh at him and say that he had gone up only to come back with his sight ruined; it was worth no one's while even to attempt the ascent. If they could lay hands on the man who was trying to set them free and lead them up, they would kill him."⁴³ This last line is a definitive reference to the death of Socrates.

⁴¹ Ibid., 516A

⁴² Ibid., pp.229-230, 516A-B

⁴³ Ibid., pp.231, 517A

Do the fellow prisoners mock the man returned because they genuinely believe his ascent was futile, or are they simply attempting through ridicule, to save the reality that they know, which has been brought into question from one of their own and thus laugh the laugh of those in fear? Is the raillery of Callicles and Polus a similar attempt to make light of the obviousness of their futile and unenlightened beliefs? Perhaps Socrates demands too much of such unlearned souls and that to expect them to immediately move from love of the body to love of wisdom is impossible. Callicles, Gorgias and Polus are the brethren of the man who has first emerged from the cave and must be initiated to the light in rather small doses. To discharge the sting of enlightenment they need, like the bored to first attempt a reconciliation with the questions that on the surface seem painful, slowly peeling away the layers of their beliefs that have protected them from the prospects of meaninglessness. The cave is that world of insignificance, where mere shadows are the surrogate of clarity, and where the pleasant is the shadow of the good.

The unity of the good and the pleasant, while being a malignancy in and of itself points to a more general and nefarious union. It is in fact merely a component of a comprehensive unity of values. Callicles and Polus in setting forth a belief in the rule of self-interest have in far more general terms advocated a leveling of all values. For there is no gulf that separates the promotion of self-interest as the highest good and the belief that all values are of equal merit.

As Socrates establishes the synthesis of the good and the pleasant leads to a life wherein the individual is in fact blind to his own self-interest. Even if hypothetically the unity of the good and the pleasant could not be logically dismantled and that self-interest was the highest good, there is no position from which to positively argue its support. If

one set of values is of no higher order than any other, how is one to maintain in the face of contention that the values being contested are in fact legitimate. It is not only then impossible to talk of values with others, as Callicles, Gorgias and Polus make evident, but it becomes impracticable to introspectively consider ones values critically. Furthermore, if none are of any greater significance than any others, where would the motivation to re-evaluate them come from internally? It is this failure that prevents the rhetoricians in the *Gorgias* to move beyond their collective stagnation of the love of the body.

This form of relativism is destructive to the extreme. If one's own values are neither open to self examination or external questioning a whole host of civilized edifices come down. The idea of education becomes an irrelevancy if one person has nothing to offer the other except for an equally redundant set of values. The desire to live in community and political union is shattered by the fact that one must remain his own ruler because no other shares or can defend one's values as well as oneself, no other will have experienced or experiences life in similar terms or holds the same things dear except by coincidence.

It is this loss of value, for if all values are equal they are necessarily equal to zero, that confronts the bored. When the act of contemplation is put on par with the frivolities of entertainment, why endure the potential pain instead losing oneself in the pleasures of escape? The answer is not a life of stoicism. Culture, art, and irrationality are all essential components of a meaningful existence, they are in their most sublime and profound forms resultant from the question of meaning, not the pleasantries resultant from a diversion from it. It is when entertainment is seen as the prime motivator of all activity that it

becomes a danger, it is this quest for perpetual distraction that manifests itself in the appetite to separate the inseparable. To believe that we may have justice without punishment, pleasure without pain, joy without sorrow, and health without disease, is to believe that one may formulate one's own values in total isolation. It is one thing to attempt to convince others of the sanctity of one's personal ethical and value matrix, but once the individual attempts to convince himself that no one has the right to question their values, then they are forced to reconcile to the fact that they may be their own but really are an irrelevancy. It is this departure that allows for the substitution of the good for the pleasant, the belief that a healthy diet for the body and the soul must not ever compromise the taste buds.

Boredom is the painful side of the asking of the question of meaning and the fear of an answer in the negative. These questions are posed at every stage of Diotima's ascent; the rejection of the pain is the rejection of the meaning. Those who shun boredom, believe, like Polus, that it is not the injustice done that corrupts the soul, but the punishment. The pain involved in the act of questioning becomes the medium to reject all unpleasantness and the question itself. The rejection of the question is the rejection of the possibility that the good and the pleasant are not the same. It is through the possibility of seeing, hearing, and smelling all that is obnoxious and unpalatable that we realize what is good. It is sickness that gives meaning to health, darkness that gives salience to light and deafening noise that makes silence bearable and necessary. If one closes his eyes the horrors will not disappear, if one holds his breath the stench will not dissipate, if one simply sleeps all will not be better in the morning, and if one never leaves the cave their eyes will never burn.

The ascent passage is a medium through which the distressing re-evaluation of all values presents itself as a necessity. The bored are those who have falsely led themselves to believe that this is not necessary, they are those who have abandoned the ascent. Those who are patient with boredom and do not shun the pain are now offered a window of introspection that is the impetus for further ascent and self-development. Diotima does not make it plain but it can be inferred that to release oneself from the values embodied in any particular stage for that of another would be an isolating experience, it involves a total reformulation of being. The avoidance of that pain may bring with it temporary benefits as we can see through the eminence of Alcibiades, but can only in the end serve to aggravate a improper yearning which hungers for a union of what is necessary and what is desirable. It is this hunger that we feel when we are bored. There appears to us through boredom to be a nauseous void, one feels the stagnation of being, where what is valued is suddenly brought into question. The immediate impulse is to find some diversion to challenge that void, be it through listening to music, watching spectacles or anything that can serve as distraction. There are those who in the confrontation of meaninglessness and anxiety, feel a drowsiness and compulsion to sleep, as if turning oneself off will pacify the emptiness.

What initially presents itself as the desire for psychic sleep when properly courted becomes a medium through which to experience psychic awakening. As we are told at the end of the *Symposium*, once all the guests at Agathon's have either left or gone to sleep, Socrates goes to the Lyceum, where he spends the remainder of the day just as he always did, only the following evening does he return home and takes rest.⁴⁴ The sleep of the others must be read as more than simply the exhaustion from a lively evening, but as

the psychic and ontological exhaustion they feel from their incapacity to climb any higher on Diotima's ladder. It is this notion of sleep that will serve as a link to the fourth century, and to a sect of Egyptian Christian ascetics residing outside Alexandria for whom sleep is a sign of boredom, a meta-sin that comes at noon to rob man of God and transcendence.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Symposium* pp.77, 223D

CHAPTER II

BOREDOM AND THEOLOGY

"My soul slumbers on account of acedia"
Septuagint,
Psalm 118:28

The man who fears his own erection is the man who fears God. We have been ejected from paradise for the sin of eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge, and as a permanent reminder of our original transgression, we are forever punished for this sin in the shame we feel for our bodies and the lust that drives our genitalia. For falling from the state of grace we have been castigated with the loss of control over our genitals. This is but a simple and crude exegesis of the Christian sexual doctrine of St. Augustine of Hippo, as taken from *The City of God*. St. Augustine's sexology, and the fall of the libidinous man, shall serve as the primary vehicle for the movement from the metaphysic of the forms to the metaphysic of God. It is the potentialities of eroticism and the erotic passions that separate the ancients from the Christians. More precisely, it is these differences in sensuality, and in the capacity of lust, that destroys the Platonic ascent for the Christian dogmatist.

The teleological confrontation with boredom that began in erotic longing and had the potential for climax in wisdom, is replaced with a meeting that is best contested with chastity and obedience to scripture. The Platonic ascent as told by Diotima in the *Symposium* is cut off at its root when the impassioned, venereal, concupiscent appetites no longer constitute the beginning of the path to quintessence, but merely, the mortification resultant from the abuse of that quintessence. That shame will serve as the

remembrance of a lack of obedience that found us here on earth, separated from God, and only in recapturing that obedience will we return to God's good grace.

Only through a close study of St. Augustine's sexology can we appreciate the movement from ancient to theological metaphysics and fully comprehend the changing nature of boredom. What was obviously a highly active, and passionate confrontation with boredom, becomes a more passive, phlegmatic, meditative, engagement. It is similarly a movement from command over the passions to the obliteration of them, whereby the starvation of bodily pleasure is the food of the soul.

One of the most probing and detailed analyses of sexuality in early Christian writing is St. Augustine's *City of God* and more specifically book XIV therein. The book makes account of three phases of sexuality in no particular order beginning with the relations of Adam and Eve, their transformation following original sin, and finally, our fallen sexuality. It is an exceptional history of lust, an exposé of its effects, and a survey of its place within the genus of sin. For the study at hand it serves as an excellent beginning for looking at the theological treatment of passion and its relation to boredom.

Prior to Adam and Eve's consumption of the fruit from the tree of knowledge, they existed in a state free of sin. They experienced no lust but only love in the company of God. The command to multiply was undertaken in an act of will, control over their respective sexual organs was pure and fornication was methodical and free of shame. Augustine in chapter 24 of book XIV remarks that Adam's control over his penis was to such an extent that he could become erect, not from a lustful gaze upon Eve, but through a conscious act of will. "The man, then, would have sown the seed, and the woman received it, as need required, the generative organs being moved by the will, not excited

by lust.”⁴⁵ Augustine likens this control to men who can move their scalp, bring up swallowed food, cry or sweat at will, and even those who “...have such command of their bowels, that they can break wind continuously at pleasure, so as to produce the effect of singing.”⁴⁶ These rather odd analogies are made in order to show that however difficult it may be for us to imagine the extent of Adam’s genital control enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, there are among us those who have control over bodily parts and functions that are equally puzzling.

Blessed with such control, all births would have been immaculate conceptions, “Since no wild heat of passion would arouse those parts of the body, but a spontaneous power, according to need, would be present, thus must we believe that the male semen could have been introduced into the womb of the wife with the integrity of the female genital organ being preserved, just as now, with that same integrity being safe, the menstrual flow of blood can be emitted from the womb of a virgin.”⁴⁷ Augustine would have us believe that what on the surface appears to be a rather mechanistic stoic sexuality is in fact the perfect unity of erogenous ecstasy and supraliminal holiness. The non-existence of lust assured that the act of sexual intercourse was done with the will of God in mind and not for self-gratification. The total control over the erection in more general terms is but another manifestation of the vigilance of the soul over the body, the soul being the seat of God in man and the body being the realm of passion. It is a condition of absolute purity and devotion to God, such that in every action and thought man is engaged in worship.

⁴⁵ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950) pp.472

⁴⁶ Ibid., Book XIV, chp.24, pp.473

⁴⁷ Ibid., Book XIV, chp.26, pp.475

The state of bliss wherein paradisaal sexual relations are the fulfillment of God's command is shattered with the consumption of the forbidden fruit. It would appear that the direct result of this disobedience was the "swelling" of the sexual organs. The erection experienced by Adam ceased to be an act of will; "They experienced a new motion of their flesh, which had become disobedient to them, in strict retribution of their own disobedience to God."⁴⁸ Adam and Eve for the first time became aware of their nakedness, felt shame, and as told in the book of Genesis, took the leaves from a fig tree and covered themselves, "But when they were stripped of this grace, that their disobedience might be punished by fit retribution, there began in the movement of their bodily members a shameless novelty which made nakedness indecent: it at once made them observant and made them ashamed."⁴⁹

Adam has disobeyed God's command and in doing so, has allowed his flesh to rule over his soul. Adam and Eve for the first time have forgotten God and perhaps in larger measure have 'willed' themselves to be gods. For their indecent act of self-gratification, God punishes Adam with the unwilling erection. It is to be a permanent reminder that he must not equate what is good with what is pleasant. The somewhat arbitrary and spontaneous erection coupled with lustful heated coitus are now no more than mere signs that Adam has been ungrateful, it is above all symbolic that without God man is purely flesh and no more, nor no better, than an animal or a slave. It is likewise a sign that both our bodies and minds are chaotic without God, "But sometimes lust

⁴⁸ Ibid., Book XIII, chp.13, pp.422

⁴⁹ Ibid., Book XIV, chp.17, pp.465

importunes them in spite of themselves, and sometimes fails them when they desire to feel it.”⁵⁰

Lust removes our reproductive organs from the rule of the soul and is forever banished to the shadows of darkness. Augustine in chapter 18 of book XIV argues that the fact that we insist in copulating in the privacy of our homes is not an act of decency or humility but in fact proof of the shame we still feel for having disobeyed God.

“Lust requires for its consummation darkness and secrecy; and this not only when unlawful intercourse is desired, but even such fornication as the earthly city has legalized. Where there is no fear of punishment these permitted pleasures still shrink from the public eye. Even where provision is made for this lust, secrecy also is provided; and while lust found it easy to remove the prohibitions of law, shamelessness found it impossible to lay aside the veil of retirement. For even shameless men call this shameful; and though they love the pleasure, dare not display it. What! does not even conjugal intercourse, sanctioned as it is by law for the propagation of children, legitimate and honourable though it be, does it not seek retirement from every eye? Before the bridegroom fondles his bride, does he not exclude the attendants, and even the paranymphs, and such friends as the closest ties have admitted to the bridal chamber?”⁵¹

In chapters 15 and 19 of the same book, Augustine continues on the shamefulness of fallen sexuality and our desire to hide it from public view. Augustine argues that because our fallen sexuality takes such complete control over our flesh our will is disabled to such an extent that to appear so slavishly is humiliating, “So possessing indeed is this pleasure, that at the moment of time in which it is consummated, all mental activity is suspended.”⁵²

The necessity of darkness and the suspension of all mental activity ought to be interpreted in existential and ontological terms. The libidinous man is not only distracted from God, and is in flight from God but from himself as well. The suspension of thoughts

⁵⁰ Ibid., Book XIV, chp.16, pp.465

⁵¹ Ibid., Book XIV, chp.18, pp.466

⁵² Ibid., Book XIV, chp.16, pp.464

directed towards God is also a suspension of the capacity to realize oneself as a child of God, created in His own image. This being so, the life of the flesh is one wherein man cannot truly come to know himself, and is in darkness to his own being. To draw parallels with the ascent and the nature of boredom in the first chapter, those who fail to pursue the ascent to its highest, or those who stagnate at any given level, are in fact hindered in their ability to genuinely come to a full understanding of their being and their place within the polis. So too with the man who allows his passions to blind the light of God has no prospect of realizing himself.

Augustine drives himself into a rather troubling paradox, while he must acknowledge that our bodies are God's creation, his distaste with the erection is a direct criticism of that godly creation. His attempt to overcome this is to not criticize the penis per se but to claim that its contamination is the fault of the first couples sin. This in turn creates yet another paradox that he doesn't address, in Paradisal coitus without lust, one may extrapolate that being totally an act of will any woman would have sufficed. This rather random, seemingly accidental love is not virtuous and furthermore would create problems in solidifying any bonds of marriage. The fact of the matter for Augustine is that sexual intercourse is reduced to a necessary evil following original sin, because the command to multiply still stands. It is appropriate to say that this paradox is but another reminder of our 'parents' original transgression.

This is in stark contrast from what we can discern from the first stage in Diotima's ascent, and from the wider theme of love for the particular body, in the *Symposium*. The love of a particular body is sullied if one does not choose the right individual as the speech of Aristophanes demonstrates. Aristophanes' myth is that of the

round beings with four arms, four legs, two sets of sex organs and two faces, who are subsequently split in two by Zeus and are made to spend the rest of their lives looking for their other half. While being rather odd, if not comical, it is nevertheless important to the larger work of the *Symposium*, in that it demonstrates that love must be well directed in order to be virtuous.

“And so, when a person meets the other half that is his very own, whatever his orientation, whether it’s to young men or not, then something wonderful happens: The two are struck from their senses by love, by a sense of belonging to one another, and by desire, and they don’t want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment.”⁵³

For Plato it is this virtuous well-directed eroticism that first moves us towards love of another, and is the beginning of life, where without such longing wisdom could never be achieved.

Diotima’s ascent is a channeling of the passions where one gives birth to another in a constant movement and metamorphosis. The sexology of Augustine is an important guide to how passions are to be dealt with in Christian theology; they are not instruments that enable the growth and rejuvenation of the individual, but lead downward in a continuing spiral of debasement. The passions if anything are a marker to discern the degree of one’s impurity and slovenliness of soul. Augustine’s history of lust is exemplary of this imperious attitude towards passion that is *sine qua non* to any hopes of a return to Eden.

Although in marriage the disease of lust may be turned towards good if the act of copulation is directed towards the propagation of man as ordained by God, the sin itself remains. As newborns we are the products of a sinful meeting of passions, as Adam’s

⁵³ Plato, *Symposium*, pp.28

inheritors, our fathers are incapable of recreating the willful impregnation of our mothers with the same purity and preservation of their virginity that once saved Eve. Our bodies are sullied from the first breath, we shall never regain the state of bliss that we forfeited for the fruit of the tree knowledge, we can however, attempt to access this heavenly state in a constant conquering of our passions.

What Adam and Eve experienced in taking the fruit of knowledge is a momentary lapse in their ability to discern the good from the pleasant. They not only deviated from heeding God's warning, but they forgot God altogether. It is this collapse of the ability to discern the good from the pleasant that is the hallmark of boredom. God's punishment of the involuntary erection for the good Catholic is to serve as a reminder that the failure to keep the soul as sovereign over flesh is equal to obliviousness towards God. This alternative reading of original sin and the fall as disobedience motivated by boredom does have precedence, as will be seen, in the writings of the desert fathers of Egypt.

The quest for transcendence that for Plato in the *Symposium* is a pedagogical movement that requires the city or the polis, is now a exercise in obedience and is best practiced outside of the city in a hermitic atmosphere of seclusion and austerity. The first true attempt at a proximal return was undertaken by the aforementioned Egyptian fathers living outside of Alexandria in the fourth century, where strict obedience to ones soul, and in turn to God, drove them from the city to the ascetic life of the desert. The absolute detestation and unsavory characterization of the pleasures of the flesh that we see in Augustine's sexology, is taken to new heights in an effort to cleanse one's soul so as to make it fit for God's residence.

The Egyptian Desert Fathers believed that all men are embroiled in dialectic known to them as *hesychia*. It is a battle between one's ego and the image of God which exists in all men. Every emotion, hatred, aggressiveness, meekness, jealousy, is in fact the manifestation of this on going battle of *hesychia*. Eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge as said was a gross act on the part of Adam and Eve, in pursuit of overcoming God and transforming themselves into gods, which fits quite neatly within the dialectic. The emotions are the ego's attempt to fulfill this wish to be gods and escape from the tedium of religious practice. The synthesis of the dialectic is the removal of all these emotions that bar the way from seeing this image of God in one's soul, the encounter with this image is the aim of all human existence. The monk must first begin to truly know himself as the child of God, as a man who was created by Him in his own image. It culminates whereby the image of God within man is revealed to himself and God, which is made possible due to the sacrifice of Christ, in a certain sense, "...God encounters God by the spirit of the risen Christ, and then there is peace: that calm, that security, that repose, that Sabbath, that leisure, that reality so rich that it can not be circumscribed by any words."⁵⁴

The superlative setting in which to have the dialectic played out was one of both geographical and intellectual solitude. The desert was the choicest battle-ground for two reasons, first it was traditionally held to be the dwelling place of evil spirits and therefore ground-zero for a full scale war against passion. As the desert historian Palladius recounts,

"The demon 'goeth round about in places wherein there is no water, that he may seek for rest, and he findeth not'; which saying maketh us to understand

⁵⁴ Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and the Chapters on Prayer*, trans. J.E. Bamberger (Spenser Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1972) pp.xii-xiii

that when the unclean devil of fornication wageth war against the monk, if the monk afflicteth himself by eating food sparingly, and especially drinking water sparingly, Satan will never be able to injure him by means of passion.”⁵⁵

Where there is least moisture, there are the purest spirits, and those whom the devil most despises. Secondly, the desert was chosen for its obvious geographical isolation, far away from the superfluous desires, pleasures and distractions of the city⁵⁶. “Thus it is with the man who dwelleth with men, for by reason of the disturbance caused by this affair of the world he cannot see his sins; but if he live in the peace and quietness of the desert he is able to see God clearly.”⁵⁷

One of the leading figures in the desert monastic community, Evagrius Ponticus, characterized the life as follows;

“Asceticism consists in that you do not, in any way, take your fill of bread, water, and sleep; that you promptly resist any disturbing thought, whatever it be, with firmness and wisdom, asking God for it; that you devote yourself diligently to reading, prayer, the office, conversation with God and remembrance of Him; that you do not lend your mind to vagrant thoughts. This is the highest degree of perfection: that your thought be never detached from God; each time it separates itself from Him, bring it back!”⁵⁸

A monk who is able to engage in uninterrupted contemplation of God would be granted through a long and arduous battling with the ego a glimpse at the image residing in him. Every emotion would arise and test the monk, he who prevailed would not only see the image but would be purified, come to know God in himself and be united with him.⁵⁹

Evagrius’ biography is rather short and scattered, he was born in 345 in the town of Ichora in Pontus, present day Iverönü in Turkey. Monasticism was a vibrant movement

⁵⁵ Budge, E.A.W., *The Paradise of the Fathers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1904), pp.316-317

⁵⁶ Wenzel, Siegfried. *The Sin of Sloth* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960) pp.13

⁵⁷ Budge, (1904), Vol. 2, pp.3

⁵⁸ Wenzel, (1960), pp.13

⁵⁹ Evagrius Ponticus, (1972), pp.xviii

in Pontus thanks to the spiritual leadership of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzen. Evagrius was a deeply religious youth he was however not drawn to the monastic life, but instead, preferred the intellectual life of Constantinople.⁶⁰ There is a substantive gap in the historical record and we don't know exactly what Evagrius was doing with his time in the capital. We may however speculate that he was involved in some capacity of theological study based on the historian Palladius' claim that he was appointed "reader" by Basil, however uncertain what the title connotes.⁶¹ Circa 379, after the death of Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen ordained Evagrius deacon, in an effort to restore the Nicene doctrine in the capital, he was later to be further promoted to archdeacon. His personality and brilliance endeared him to many and he developed strong friendships with Gregory of Nyssa, brother of St. Basil, and Nectarius bishop of Constantinople. Evagrius fashioned a remarkable name for himself as a man of profound spirituality and meditation, known to many as the "destroyer of the twaddle of the heretics".⁶²

Due to fame and reputation Evagrius was held in great esteem by some of the wealthiest elements of capital society, which gradually created a crisis of identity. He became endeared to the pomp and refinement of wealth and became consumed with the care of his body and the attention of his slaves, he fell in love with the wife of a wealth gentleman and struggled desperately with his passions⁶³. It is said that during this tumultuous time Evagrius had a vivid Kafkaesque⁶⁴ dream where he was accused of some

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.xxxvii

⁶¹ Budge, (1904), Vol.I, pp.223

⁶² Ibid., pp.xxxviii

⁶³ Ibid., pp.xxxix

⁶⁴ This is in reference to Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, the story of Joseph K. who awakes one morning to find that he has been charged with a crime for which he is subsequently arrested. He is never informed of the nature of the crime and never meets his judge nor penetrates the courthouse, he is finally executed still totally unware of his wrongdoing.

nebulous crime for which he was certain of his innocence⁶⁵. In the dream he swore to leave Constantinople and watch out for his soul. When he awoke he recalled the dreamed oath and carried it out anyway, setting sail for Jerusalem.

Evagrius believed that dreams could be a medium through which God communicates with man and that they offer the individual a means of introspection often not found in conscious meditation. His doctrine of dream-psychology is rather remarkable, but a short aphorism will have to suffice here.

“Natural processes which occur in sleep without accompanying images of a stimulating nature are, to a certain measure, indications of a healthy soul. But images that are distinctly formed are a clear indication of sickness. You may be certain that the faces one sees in dreams are, when they occur as ill-defined images, symbols of former affective images. Those which are seen clearly, on the other hand, indicate wounds that are still fresh.”⁶⁶

A Roman aristocratic widow named Melania received Evagrius in Jerusalem. Melania was a woman who was well connected with the leading figures of desert monasticism. Upon her husband death, and having come into a great fortune she “...clave to them and ministered unto them of her own possessions”.⁶⁷ Evagrius lived with Melania in great comfort, soon forgot his dream oath, and continued in his worldly ways as in Constantinople.

Falling ill with fever, and after relating his dream to Melania, she believed that his broken promise was the cause of his ill health and offered the opinion that he should enter into the monastic life. He apparently took her advice, for the next we hear of him, he is living in Nitria, outside of Alexandria, circa 383, in a desert cell whose monks were the disciples of Pambo. Pambo as related by Palladius, was an icon of the ascetic life and a

⁶⁵ Budge., (1904)., vol.2, pp.223

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.31

master of many who would later go on to fame in the desert tradition, “Now this man Pambo possessed the power to utter words of prophecy, and splendid triumphs, yet with all these he despised gold and silver, even as the Word demandeth.”⁶⁸ Upon Pambo’s death the monastic community was led by Ammonius Parotes, and within a two years it was to be known as the “Congregation of Evagrius”⁶⁹.

During his two years in Nitria, Evagrius traveled widely visiting the other desert monastic communities. In Cells there was a hermitage under the leadership of Macarius the Alexandrian with whom Evagrius developed a close friendship. Cells was said to embody a more austere and severe asceticism, which Evagrius took a great liking to and he eventually moved from Nitria to Cells where he would spend the rest of his life, dying at the age of fifty-five, in 399. During his time in Cells Evagrius became quite a prolific and gifted writer, developing his own cosmology and Christology, to which we shall now turn.

According to Evagrian cosmology, in the beginning all was united in a whole that was pure intelligence, in Evagrius’ terms a Henad, created by the Primitive Henad, or God. As the Henad multiplied and due to obscene negligence in contemplation of the creator it was prostrated from its original state of total equality and unity. Through moral fault known as “the movement”, God enacts “the judgement”, and in so doing occasions the second creation. The second creation is the cosmos, our present bodies, and all visible creation, ruled over by the providence of God. Depending on their respective degrees of guilt the individuals, “Pass into bodies that are more or less material, more or less dark,

⁶⁷ Budge., (1904)., vol.1, pp.156

⁶⁸ Ibid., vol.1, pp.103

⁶⁹ Evagrius Ponticus, (1972)., pp.xlii

more or less thick.”⁷⁰ The three manifestations of spirit correspondent to the second creation, being; angels, humans, and demons, each with their respective levels of temptation by passion.

Each being has a soul that is composed of two parts; intelligence and psyche, the three created beings of the second creation are ontological positions, which are first and foremost characterized by their level of ignorance towards God.⁷¹ Psyche is the realm of the passions and serves as a foil to ones attempts at pure intelligence as embodied in the Henad and ergo unity with God. Those totally devoid and purified of passions, the angels, are most blessed with a proximal unity with God, while humans and demons must try to extricate passion from their bodies to find their image of God. This extrication is won by contemplation.

The threefold division of spirit is matched with a corresponding three tiered system of contemplation, angels are capable of *natural contemplation*, followed by those who practice asceticism and prayer who possess *second natural contemplation*. Finally those who have managed to return to the state of being of pure intelligence prior to “the judgement” have what is known as *essential contemplation*, which is reunification with God.⁷² The duty of all is to make the ascent through these ontological states of contemplation, or at least attempt to do so, with the assistance of angels.

Christ was an angel that gave up his angelic state in order to assist those on earth to move upwards. He is also the ruler of the second creation and the arbiter who decides whether one has made themselves worthy of advancing onto the angelic state. Once all creatures have given themselves over to Christ, then a new eschatological period will

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.lxxvi

⁷¹ Ibid., pp.lxxvii

come known as the *seventh day* where the reign of Christ on earth will begin. Once all creatures have attained the state of *natural contemplation* and equality with Christ the *seventh day* will give over to the *eighth day*. This last eschatological period will mark the end of the rule of Christ over the earth, the triumph of *essential contemplation*, and the reunification of all creatures with God. At such time all matter will cease to exist and the original Henad will be reconstituted.⁷³

Evagrius' cosmology and Christology lends itself quite rightly and for obvious reasons, to the conclusion that he is a major figure in the Hellenization of Christianity. The ascent from one form of contemplation to another has many similarities with that of Diotima's from the previous chapter. It is however a much more negative journey, where the passions for Plato are very much positive stimuli assisting on the path towards wisdom, Evagrius establishes the passions as demons or *logismoi*. The *logismoi* is the Evagrian classification of the eight passionate thoughts and their association with a particular demon. The ascetic life was a life that was directed towards confrontation with these demons, their contemplation and engagement was paramount to the contemplation of God, and the fight for his love, for God is watching the battle and realizes that he is the prize.

Evagrius wrote his *Praktikos* as a formulation of the above demonology and as a guide for the proper monastic engagement with them. The monk must first learn to identify the *logismoi*, for in doing so does he not only comes to learn of the appropriate means of confrontation, but he also learns of himself. For this reason, the *logismoi* is

⁷² Ibid., pp.lxxviii

⁷³ Ibid., pp.lxxix

more a tripartite unity of passion, thought, and demon. Section 43 of the *Praktikos* details this process of first understanding;

“We must take care to recognize the different types of demons and take note of the circumstances of their coming. We shall know these from our thoughts (which we shall know from the objects) we ought to consider which of the demons are less frequent in their assaults, which are the more vexatious, which are the ones which yield the field more readily and which the more resistant. Finally we should note which are the ones which make sudden raids and snatch off the spirit to blasphemy. Now it is essential to understand these matters so that when these various evil thoughts set their own proper forces to work we are in a position to address effective words against them, that is to say, those words which correctly characterize the one present. And we must do this before they drive us out of our own state of mind. In this manner we shall make ready progress, by the grace of God. We shall pack them off chafing with chagrin and marveling at our perspicacity.”⁷⁴

The monk who masters this art of demonic encounter is one who is on the path towards *apatheia*, or health of the soul. *Apatheia* is what is actively pursued in contemplation and in prayer, its pinnacle is a remembrance of the Henad, of being pure thought, so Evagrius says, “The spirit that possess health is the one which has no images of the things of this world at the time of prayer.”⁷⁵ It is in the deepest state of reverence and supplication where the image of God within the monk, that is an inheritance from the Henad, may be glimpsed, “The Kingdom of Heaven is *apatheia* of the soul along with true knowledge of existing things”⁷⁶. The ‘knowledge of existing things’ pertains to man’s appreciation of God circuitously through his creation, which includes the monk himself.

Again we may draw parallels between the Evagrian ascent and that of Diotima. While they both aspire to wisdom, regardless of their divergent views on what it constitutes, they both in existential terms are paths that with every step entail a deepening

⁷⁴ Ibid., sect. 43, pp.28

⁷⁵ Ibid., sect. 64, pp.34

of self-awareness. Within the Platonic ascent we may say that the first step of love for a particular is the realization that we are beings motivated by love, within the Evagrian ascent this love is the realization that we are God's children.

The eight members of the demonology or the *logismoi*, are the barrier between the monk and the ascent to *second natural* and then *natural contemplation*. Under the subheading 'The Eight Kinds of Evil Thoughts' Evagrius enumerates the eight demons, "There are eight general and basic categories of thought in which are included every thought. First is that of gluttony, then impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, *acedia*, vainglory, and last of all, pride."⁷⁷

Acedia remains in its original Greek due to the fact that much of its complexity is lost in translation. Its literal meaning is lack of care, with connotations of modern depression and can be traced back to the Greek physician Hippocrates.⁷⁸ Other Hellenistic writers have used it in rather vague and ambivalent fashion, as both noun and verb and with both positive and negative implication, as both freedom from sorrow and apathy.⁷⁹

The first Greek text to maintain some consistency of use and meaning of *acedia* is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Mostly contained within the book of Psalms it is the foundation upon which Evagrius built both his demonology and formalization of *acedia*. Two passages are particularly useful for these purposes, Psalm 118:28 and Psalm 90:6. The latter reads;

⁷⁶ Ibid., sect. 2, pp.15

⁷⁷ Ibid., sect. 6, pp.17

⁷⁸ Kuhn, Reinhard. *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) pp. 68

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 69

“He that dwells in the help of the Highest, shall sojourn under the shelter of God of heaven. He shall say to the Lord, Thou art my helper and my refuge: my God; I will hope in him. For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunters, from every troublesome matter. He shall overshadow thee with his shoulders, and thou shalt trust under his wings: his truth shall cover thee with a shield. Thou shalt not be afraid of terror by night; nor of the arrow flying by day; nor of the evil thing that walks in darkness; nor of calamity, and the evil spirit of noon-day.”⁸⁰

The noonday demon is *acedia*, and is used in the original Greek text but lost in its translation into english. This demon was believed to pose the gravest danger to a monk, it “...attacks the monk about the fourth hour and besieges his soul until the eighth hour. First he makes the sun appear sluggish and immobile, as if the day had fifty hours.”⁸¹ This sin was reckoned to be a meta-sin through which a whole host of others originated. For the monk whose entire existence is premised upon uninterrupted contemplation any distraction is but a set back in his attempts to find reunion with God. The typical day was to be spent in isolation in one’s cell, engaged in hours of indefatigable prayer, and should the day seem to grow longer, tedium and monotony may ensue. *Acedia* thus afflicts the monk, “...when the mind is broken by love of pleasure, when the heart grows slack and is weighed down by fleshly love, when it grows weary on account of the works of piety and grows old on account of its pains with regard to the pursuit of virtue.”⁸²

The monk is then faced with the desire to flee his cell or more detrimentally to sleep. As Psalm 118:28 states, “My soul has cleaved to the ground; quicken thou me according to thy word. I declare my ways, and thou didst hear me: teach me thine ordinances. Instruct me in thy ordinances; and I will meditate on thy wondrous works.

⁸⁰ *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* (London: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) pp.753-754

⁸¹ Wenzel, (1960)., pp.5

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp.7

My soul has slumbered on account of *acedia*".⁸³ To recall the closing of the last chapter and the final scene in the *Symposium* the idea of sleep ought to be associated with the abandonment of the ascent to the Platonic forms. All the guests at the end of the *Symposium* sleep, sleep being a metaphor for the fact that they have all grown tired of the arduous task of the ascent. Likewise for the monk, sleep is "...the neglect on the part of the rational soul of the virtues and of the knowledge of God."⁸⁴

Sleep is an ontological state wherein the individual loses his understanding of himself, and his place within the world, just as we witness the pain of Alcibiades who is torn between the suffering of the ascent and the pleasures that derive from his position in society. He is however, fully aware that he is not fulfilled, and that if he remains inactive and stagnant in his position on Diotima's ladder he is cheating himself of fully becoming the person who he has the potential to be. He further deceives himself by channeling this tormenting paradox into a thinly veiled hatred for Socrates. The monk is similarly torn through *acedia*. The pain is so frightening that he fails to see what lay beyond the anguish, what first promotes itself as a vehicle for flight from the cell is in fact a medium towards a closer relationship with God. Boredom with the cell presents itself to the monk with ample excuse to leave the sanctity of intellectual isolation, and even the monastic life altogether. Yet he who endures and remains to fight *acedia*, eventually recognizes it to be a sign that the time has come for deeper contemplation and an opportunity for a heightened and renewed relationship with God.

Sleep here can be treated in both its physical and psychic manifestations, in either case the Desert Father believed that the day was destroyed once the monk allowed *acedia*

⁸³ *The Septuagint*, (1975)., pp.771

⁸⁴ Wenzel, (1960)., pp.11

into his mind. *Acedia*'s nature as a meta-sin is made plain in the following, "But no other evil thought follows upon the thought of *acedia* on that same day: first, because it lasts a long time; second, because it contains wellnigh all evil thoughts in itself."⁸⁵ When reading the above characterization of *acedia* one is excused from thinking of the rather sorry diarist from Dostoyevsky's *Notes From Underground* when he pitifully tries to absolve his often violent actions and imagination by stating, "But then one might do anything out of boredom."⁸⁶

Another important indication of the severity for which Evagrius treated *acedia* can be found towards the end of his *Chapters on Prayer*. Aphorism 75 states, "The statement in the Apocalypse that speaks of the angel who takes care of putting incense in the bowl that contains the prayer of the saints refers, in my opinion, to precisely this grace wrought by the angel. He infuses knowledge of true prayer so that for the future the spirit may stand firm, free of all *acedia* and all negligence."⁸⁷ Recall that the origin of the first fall in Evagrius' cosmology, "the movement", was caused by negligence, now, to place the demon of *acedia* next to it, may quite rightly lead one to an argument that not only is *acedia* the root of a plethora of other sins, but it is also part of original sin. Furthermore, *acedia* is a sin that is the greatest threat to our ability to return to essential knowledge that characterized us prior to the fall.

Evagrius' coupling of negligence and *acedia* in relation to the fall from Eden is comparable to what was said earlier of Augustine's sexology. Boredom is again a motivating factor for the negligence (disobedience in Augustinian terms) that led to original sin. *Acedia* is the nefarious unity of the good and the pleasant, which is in no

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.8

⁸⁶ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes From Underground* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961) pp.109

uncertain terms a parallel to Augustine's argument that eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge was an act of disobedience. Adam and Eve drove themselves out of paradise and away from God through the consumption of the forbidden fruit which was a gross act of self-deification.

The outward effects of *acedia* are comparable in that they drive the monk away from God and the contemplative life itself. The monk begins with a listlessness of soul whereby anything would appear more satisfying than prayer. The monk confronted with *acedia* is led to believe that the most fortuitous path towards self-realization is not that which is directed towards God. He believes that if anything God is but a hindrance to such realization. It is within the bounds of proper interpretation to say that like the self-deification of Adam and Eve, the monk too in his flight from the monastic life wants to become his own ruler and God.

The surroundings of the cell seem to close in on the monk and his first instinct is to flee. As Evagrius warns the brethren, "The time of temptation is not the time to leave one's cell, devising plausible pretexts. Rather, stand there firmly and be patient. Bravely take all the demon brings upon you, but above all face up to the demon of *acedia* who is the most grievous of all and who on this account will effect the greatest purification of soul. Indeed to flee and to shun conflicts schools the spirit in awkwardness, cowardice and fear."⁸⁷ While *acedia* poses the gravest danger, it also has the greatest power of deliverance.

The ascetic life is a difficult life, fasting, denying oneself sleep, living in self-inflicted poverty are all great trials that on the surface no individual would bring upon

⁸⁷ Evagrius, (1972)., pp.68

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.24

himself. These are all however physical pains for which the spoils go to the soul. Never having to feel the pangs of hunger, the dehydration of thirst, or the exhausting of sleeplessness are all pleasantries that seem fitting to a comfortable life. Evagrius taught and lived that if the demon of gluttony should arise then one should fast, should one feel the throb of the demon fornication one should stand naked in the cold of night until ones body became dried up and shriveled like a beast of the desert.⁸⁹ If one should be attacked by *acedia* great patience and diligence and fervency of prayer is required.

Acedia brings this paradigm of comfort to the monk, along with the memories of his former life, who may accept this life of relaxation in exchange for the knowledge of what separates the good from the pleasant. This is but self-deception, as Evagrius counsels the monk, "The drugs that purge the body do not remain within the body of the patient. The virtues, however, cleanse the soul but yet remain in the man who has been purified."⁹⁰

This ascetic boredom with ones surroundings resembles the conflict that the sophists from Plato's *Gorgias* faced, that being, a collapse of the dividing line between what is good and what is pleasant. What is pleasant to the flesh deceptively becomes the arbiter of what is good, the demon of *acedia* is such a sycophant to these paltry pleasures, "When the spirit prays purely without being led astray then the demons no longer come upon it from the left side but from the right. That is to say, they suggest the semblance of God to it in the form of some image that is flattering to the senses, in the hope of leading it to think it has attained the aim of its prayer."⁹¹ The monks affected with *acedia*, like Callicles in the *Gorgias*, in their failure to differentiate the good from the pleasant may

⁸⁹ Budge, (1904)., vol.1, pp.225

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.37

unwittingly find themselves living the life of the catamite. This inability to discriminate as shown in the preceding chapter, impedes the individual's ability to rise through the ascent and blinds them to the forms, likewise the life of the ascetic is thwarted in an effort to achieve *natural contemplation* and the image of God within him is clouded.

While much credit must be given to Evagrius for the first true, sustained, coherent, and organized dissertation on *acedia*, the term did undergo some changes that helped to transport the Egyptian desert fathers' teachings further afield and take the demon of *acedia* outside the cloistered community of monasticism. John Cassian, a monk born in Bethlehem and acquainted with the desert fathers is one such figure.

Cassian traveled extensively through the hermit colonies of Egypt and eventually settled in France where he founded his own monastic communities. Taking much that he learned about the ascetic life he wrote two treatises for his young students, *De Institutis Coenobiorum* and *Collationes Patrum*. Each of these works contains several passages dealing with *acedia* in very classic Evagrian terms, yet with an enhanced measure of precision. This in and of itself is not terribly remarkable, Cassian did however make a notable contribution in his systematization and classification of the eight chief vices of Evagrius' demonology.

Cassian as part of this classification catalogued the affects of each vice and the virtue that should replace it if the monk confronted and defeated the demon in a proper fashion.⁹² As in the Evagrian representation, *acedia* is followed by sleep or retreat from one's cell, the virtue that replaces it is *fortudio*, strength and courage.⁹³ Within this system Cassian establishes a progeny for each vice, "from *acedia* are born idleness,

⁹¹ Evagrius, (1972)., pp.67

⁹² Wenzel, (1975)., pp.20

somnolence, rudeness, restlessness, wandering about, instability of mind and body, chattering, and inquisitiveness.”⁹⁴

Another of Cassian’s contributions was to divide the list of vices into categories derived from, or experienced through, either a fleshly or spiritual medium. *Acedia* takes a special place within this system, as being a vice that needs no external stimuli. Cassian in giving *acedia* such a place of eminence in his demonology, and attributing it with no necessary extraneous factors has allowed for its confrontation to be met in the everyday lives of all men. In doing so he broadened the debate surrounding the sin, and encouraged all men of faith to study and develop their own categorizations for *acedia*, once again removing it from its strictly ascetic home.

In the Carolingian period of circa 668-968, through to the 12th century there is a marked increase in the use of *acedia* by a broad range of theological scholars, with often very interesting results. *Acedia* becomes a vice with highly existentialist overtones, where every man must guard against it. The process begun by Cassian of introducing *acedia* to the layman can be seen in the few short examples below.

Isaac of L’Étoile gave a sermon that related the story from the book of Matthew verse 8 and transformed it into a warning for the whole congregation to take heed. The story is of Christ’s journey in the boat of his apostles, Christ falls asleep, “And as he fell asleep a great storm arose”. Isaac maintains that this is a metaphor for those who have allowed Christ to “fall asleep” in their hearts. “But with the storm Christ shakes them out of their *acedia*, which leads to the flow of evil thoughts, like an inner and unbearable

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.21

tempest. Woe to you if Christ sleep in you...Therefore let us be vigilant, brethren, let us be vigilant above all else against the plague of *acedia*.”⁹⁵

What is also interesting in Isaac of L'Étoile's sermon is its parallels with the story of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. In both myths sleep spells disaster. There are two such episodes where Odysseus' sleep dashes his hopes of returning to Ithaca. The first is when he and his crew arrive at the floating island of Aeolia, home of Aeolus son of Hippotas. As a gift and an aide for Odysseus' voyage Aeolus gives him a bag that contains all the powers of the wind which Zeus had bestowed upon him. However, while Odysseus sleeps his crew grows suspicious that he is hoarding some gifts that ought to be shared amongst them. They then open the bag, which releases the winds and throws them into a terrible tempest.⁹⁶

The second instance is their arrival on the island of the Sun god Hyperion. Odysseus had been forewarned not to eat the cattle or sheep of the island, for doing so would spell great misfortune. He relays this information to his crew who heeds this warning. However, after many days on the island the crew grows hungry and while Odysseus sleeps they are swayed by Eurylochus, a fellow crewman, and feast on Hyperion's finest cows. When they disembark from the island Zeus punishes Odysseus and his crew,

“Zeus brought a somber cloud to rest above the hollow ship so that the sea was darkened by its shadow. Before she had run very far, a howling wind suddenly sprang up from the West and hit us with hurricane force. The squall snapped both forestays simultaneously. As the mast toppled, all the rigging tumbled into the hold, and the mast itself, reaching the stern, struck the helmsman on the head and smashed in all the bones of his skull. He plunged like a diver from the deck, and his brave soul left his body. Then at one and the same moment Zeus thundered and struck the vessel with lightning. The whole ship reeled from

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp.33

⁹⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) pp.144

the blow of his bolt and was filled with the smell of sulphur. My men were flung overboard and round the black hull they floated like sea-gulls on the waves. There was no homecoming for them: the god saw to that.”⁹⁷

Hugh of St. Victor in his *Summa de Sacramentis* likewise seems to tear a page from the Greeks in his metaphor of the soul as a vessel, “The rational soul in its health is a strong and sound vessel without any corruption. When the vices enter into it, they spoil and corrupt it in this way: through pride it becomes blown up, through envy it dries out, through wrath it cracks, through *acedia* it breaks.”⁹⁸ Hugh’s metaphor is highly reminiscent of the jars analogy discussed in the first chapter of this paper. Hugh of St. Victor is in no uncertain terms in his “vessel” analogy relating the demon of *acedia* to the souls of all men, further moving the vice into the public domain.

Hrabanus Maurus, similarly expands the realm of *acedia* further into the general public. In a rather lengthy passage Maurus identifies the vice, gives its symptoms, its possible rewards and argues for every man to be watchful,

“The eighth and last poison of the eight principle vices is *acedia*....It is defeated by the soldier of Christ through reading, constancy in good deeds, the desire for the prize of future beatitude, confessing the temptation which is in the mind...For the devil has great difficulty in finding a spot for temptation in the man whom he finds employed in some good work, than in whom he encounters idle and practicing no good...Such then is the Christian who when he arises in the morning from his bed of drunkenness, does not engage in any useful work, does not go to church to pray, does not hasten to hear the word of God, does not make an effort to give alms or to visit the sick or to help those who suffer injustice: but rather goes hunting abroad, or stirs quarrels and fights at home, or devotes himself to the dice or to useless stories and jokes while his food is being prepared by hardworking servants.”⁹⁹

Hugh Ripelin of Strassburg is yet another figure who instigated a remarkable turning point in *acedia*’s evolution, primarily for his departure of analysis from a highly

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.190-191

⁹⁸ Wenzel, (1975)., pp.41

psychological point of view of intent and will, while still maintaining the Evagrian concept of flight. "Vice is first of all a disorientation of will. This can be twofold: either a desire for things we ought not to desire, or an aversion against things we should not flee from."¹⁰⁰ *Acedia* within this twofold system occupies the inappropriate desire for evasion. Ripelin's failing comes in his creation of the false dichotomy of good and evil objects of will.¹⁰¹ In doing so Ripelin inadvertently misses the subtlety that good and evil are inextricably bound and his double movement need not be responsible for different vices but in fact may apply to all vices.¹⁰²

Saint Thomas Aquinas kept Ripelin's accent on will but rectified the problem of the duality. Thomas' system is one that attempts to summarize all of man's moral life, *acedia* is a ubiquitous slackening in man's moral fiber, and with Thomas *acedia* finally moves into the realm of prosaic life no longer affixed to the monastery, asceticism or social standing.

Thomas deals with *acedia* in both his *Summa Theologicae* and *Questiones Disputatae de Malo* (or *Questions on Evil*). Thomas borrows and relies heavily on Aristotelian psychology taken from *The Nicomachean Ethics*. As will be seen in so doing he takes *acedia* to its highest (or lowest) level by giving it its own object, the *bonum divinum* or God himself. Thomas in a very systematic formulation addresses *acedia* through four questions. First he asks whether *acedia* is a sin, then if so is it a special sin, followed quite logically by is it a mortal sin, and finally, is it a capital vice. One answer

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.37

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.44

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp.45

in the positive leads to the next question, which in turn develops the basis for the next, until *acedia* occupies a place perhaps unparalleled with any other transgression.

Question XI in *On Evil* is titled “On *Acedia*”, the first article is subtitled “Whether *acedia* is a sin?” Thomas begins by listing ten reasons why *acedia* has in previous theology not been enumerated as a sin. The majority of the reasons listed hinge in large part on the erroneous claim that *acedia* is but another form of sadness or tedium. The rationale rests largely on the premise that sadness is not a sin because it does not originate in man but from external stimuli of which man has no control. Thomas quotes the Glossa of Peter Lomb in reason III, “If you act with sadness, the act is done by you but you do not act.”¹⁰³ In similar vein John Damascene said that, “*acedia* is an oppressive sadness. But oppression seems to be a punishment rather than a fault. Therefore *acedia* is not a sin but a punishment.”¹⁰⁴

Thomas’ reply to this belief that *acedia* is an internal stirring of sadness that finds its motivation externally outside of man’s command is as previously mentioned contingent upon Aristotle. In book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states that actions which are motivated by fear or sadness are a compound of both the voluntary and the involuntary. Thomas therefore states that while the motivation may be involuntary, the act of being sad nevertheless originates in us, and therefore *acedia* remains a sin.¹⁰⁵ In reply to John Damascene Thomas says, “Sadness is said to be oppressive inasmuch as it suppresses passion so that it does not rise to act, and according to this the oppressive sadness concerning good works has the nature of fault rather than punishment because it

¹⁰³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. by Jean Oesterle, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) pp.359

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.360

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.361

originates in us.”¹⁰⁶ To relate this back to the system as set up by Hugh of Ripelin, Thomas has now accounted for sin that is indirect in that it comes initially from outside of ourselves, whereas Hugh of Ripelin could only account for direct sin, originating from inside us.

Question XXXV of the *Summa Theologicae* is devoted to the study of *acedia* and is divided along four questions as in *On Evil*. The first article again being devoted to the question if *acedia* is a sin. Thomas maintains that it is a sin, “...both in itself and in point of its effect.”¹⁰⁷ It is sinful in itself because it is a general aversion to the good and its effect Thomas says is flight. The idea of flight still retaining its Evagrian fundamentals, Thomas however distinguishes between flight that is good from that which is bad,

“Sin is ever to be shunned, but assaults of sin should be overcome, sometimes by flight, sometimes by resistance; by flight when continued thought increases the incentive to sin, as in lust; for which reason it is written: Fly fornication; by resistance, when perseverance in thought diminishes the incentive to sin, which incentive arises from some trivial consideration. This is the case with *acedia*, because the more we think about spiritual goods, the more pleasing they become to us, and forthwith *acedia* dies away.”¹⁰⁸

As with the Aristotelian voluntary/involuntary synthesis, Thomas here by offering the two sides of flight overcomes the false duality of Hugh of Ripelin.

Having established *acedia* as a sin, Thomas probes its nature more deeply in the second article to see if *acedia* is a special sin. Thomas has already distinguished in very elementary terms that *acedia* is an aversion to a spiritual good, now he needs to determine the exact nature of this spiritual good in order to single out *acedia* as a special sin. The attributes necessary for particularizing *acedia* as a special sin Thomas says,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.363

¹⁰⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963) Part II-II Qu.35, art.1, pp.1345

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.1346

“If *acedia* were simply sadness concerning any spiritual good, for any reason whatsoever, it will follow necessarily that *acedia* would not be a special sin but a kind of consequence of every sin; therefore in order to affirm that *acedia* is a special sin we have to establish that it is sadness concerning a spiritual good for some special reason.”¹⁰⁹

One previous reason enumerated for not considering *acedia* a special sin was that, “That which follows on every sin is not a special sin. But sadness concerning spiritual good follows on every sin, for that is saddening to anyone which is contrary to him; and indeed some spiritual good of virtue is contrary to every sin. Therefore *acedia* is not a special sin.”¹¹⁰

This objection rests largely on the premise that the object of *acedia* is simply any spiritual good, however, *acedia* is aversion to divine good. It is a repugnance of God himself. As Thomas replies, “Any sinner is sad about spiritual good according to the special nature of that virtue to which his sin is opposed; but according to the nature of divine spiritual good, which is the special object of charity, his enmity about it proceeds from *acedia*.”¹¹¹

Having attributed the *bonum divinum* as the object of *acedia* its place as a special sin is secured, as Thomas iterates in a lengthy passage that is worth quoting in its entirety. Thomas in the following takes up the traditional Evagrian claim that it is aversion to spiritual works, the Augustinian burden of the flesh, and most importantly its relation to our distaste for God himself. In doing so Thomas is forging a place for *acedia* that is in between body and spirit.

“The work of any special virtue, then let us say, of chastity, can be loveable and delectable in two ways. First, according as it is a work of that virtue, and this way is proper to chastity. Second, according as it is related to the divine

¹⁰⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, pp.364

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.363

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.365

good, and in this way it is proper to charity. We must say, then, that the sorrow about this special good which is the internal and divine good makes *acedia* a special sin; just as the love of this good makes charity a special virtue. This divine good, however, can induce sorrow in man because of the opposition between spirit and flesh – as the Apostle says in Galatians 5:17 – ‘the flesh lusteth against the spirit’; and thus, when carnal desire rules man, it is disgusted with spiritual good as by something contrary to itself, just as a man who has a corrupted sense of taste loathes wholesome food and feels sorrowful about it when he ought to take such food. Such sorrow and loathing or disgust of the spiritual and divine good is *acedia*, which is a special sin.”¹¹²

Thomas is now once again to probe deeper to see if this special sin is a mortal sin.

In the second article of book XI of *On Evil* Thomas states that *acedia* is the flight from divine spiritual good due to the pain it may bring and the subsequent search for pleasures of the flesh as a ointment to this transgression. For Thomas it is the victory of passion over reason, “But when carnal affection so prevails over reason that man is deliberately sorrowful about a spiritual divine good, obviously such a movement of the will is a mortal sin.”¹¹³ This ‘movement’ of unity between what is pleasant to the flesh and what is good for the soul is further attacked in the *Summa Theologicae* with respect to *acedia* as a mortal sin, “The movement of *acedia* is sometimes in the sensuality alone, by reason of the opposition of the flesh to the spirit, and then it is a venial sin; whereas sometimes it reaches to the reason, which consents in the dislike, horror and detestation of the Divine good, on account of the flesh utterly prevailing over the spirit. In this case it is evident that *acedia* is a mortal sin.”¹¹⁴

Thomas has now reached the end where that all is left, is to determine whether *acedia* is a capital vice, a capital vice being, “...vices that move a person to other sinful

¹¹² Ibid., pp.364-365

¹¹³ Ibid., pp.367

¹¹⁴ *Summa Theologicae*, pt.II-II, Q.35, art.3, pp.1347

acts” and “...a vice is capital that has daughters assigned to it.”¹¹⁵ It has already been demonstrated that *acedia* was considered to be a meta-sin by the desert fathers, however, having the vice rigidly confined to the monastic experience, its existence as a capital vice was rather limited. What Thomas has done, is render *acedia* part and parcel of man’s morality, encompassed in every day life. It is in no uncertain terms an aversion to what man should love most, that being God. The abandonment of God for Thomas is an abandonment of the ties that bind us to a moral life, *acedia* is therefore deeply connected to man’s affective life.

Thomas returns to Aristotelian psychology again to make the case for *acedia* as a capital vice. Thomas quotes two passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, both of which deal either surreptitious or overtly with the life devoted to pleasure. In book VIII chapter V Aristotle in his treatise on friendship states that, “Older people and sour people do not appear to be prone to friendship. For there is little pleasure to be found in them, and no one can spend his days with what is painful or not pleasant, since nature appears to avoid above all what is painful and to aim at what is pleasant.”¹¹⁶ Thomas translates this passage as saying, “And indeed since no one can long endure sadness without joy, as the Philosopher says, therefore two effects follow from sadness, one of which is that a person withdraws from the saddening things; the other is that he turns to other things in which he finds pleasure.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *On Evil*, pp.386

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985) 1157b15-17, pp.216

¹¹⁷ *On Evil*, pp.369

This turning to the pleasant, is preceded by a sentiment of anger and hatred for what is the object of the sadness, which as previously demonstrated is God.¹¹⁸ Thomas then quotes from book X chapter VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle, in an attack on those who believe that amusement is equitable to happiness, states that, "...these people have had no taste of pure and civilized pleasure, and so they resort to bodily pleasures."¹¹⁹ For Thomas these "pure and civilized pleasures" are spiritual goods and the tuning away from them is an act of self-deception, for what man is in fact doing is unwittingly leading himself into spiritual despair.

The progeny of *acedia* is best enumerated in the *Summa Theologicae* and in order to do Thomas' words justice we will allow him to speak for himself.

"Now in the avoidance of sorrow the order observed is that man at first flies from unpleasant objects, and secondly he even struggles against such things as cause sorrow. Now spiritual goods which are the object of the sorrow of *acedia*, are both ends and means. Avoidance of the end is the result of *despair*, while avoidance of those goods which are the means to the end, in matters of difficulty which come under the counsels, is the effect of *faint-heartedness*, and in matters of common righteousness, is the effect of *sluggishness about the commandments*. The struggle against spiritual goods that cause sorrow is sometimes with men who lead others to spiritual goods, and this is called *spite*; and sometimes it extends to the spiritual goods themselves, when a man goes so far as to detest them, and this is properly called *malice*. In so far as a man has recourse to external objects of pleasure, the daughters of *acedia* is called *wandering after unlawful things*."¹²⁰

From the above we can further say that for Thomas, *acedia* is the negation or rejection of *caritas*, or joy in divine good, whereas for the Egyptian desert fathers *acedia* was more generally a lack of patience with spiritual good. While this distinction appears to be somewhat trivial or superficial, it is a profound refinement on man's relationship with God.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Aristotle, (1985). 1176b19-21, pp.282

This is best demonstrated with a survey of where and how Thomas places *acedia* with respect to the Ten Commandments. As mentioned *acedia* is opposed to the greatest of Christian virtues, that of *caritas*. For this reason, *acedia* for Thomas, is a renunciation of the Third Commandment; remember to keep the holy Sabbath day. In the third article of the question on *acedia* taken from the *Summa Theologicae* Thomas incorporates the commandments by stating, “*Acedia* is opposed to the precept about hallowing the Sabbath-day. For this precept, in so far as it is a moral precept, implicitly commands the minds rest in God; and sorrow of the mind about the Divine good is contrary thereto.”¹²¹ The equation of *acedia* and the third commandment is the final act in delivering to all men a warning against the vice. It furthermore establishes what the Egyptian fathers could not due, that *acedia* and in more general terms man’s relationship with God exists everywhere and at all times.

A final note on the exalted position of *acedia* comes from Thomas’ style and organization of the *Summa Theologicae*. The second part, the *secunda secundae*, is a treatise on moral acts, and is arranged in the order of the seven chief virtues, from faith to moderation.¹²² *Acedia* is the first of the capital vices to be discussed, as it opposes the greatest virtue, that of *caritas*. Thomas in placing *acedia* at the forefront of his work is demonstrating that *acedia* is the greatest threat to man’s relationship with God and with respect to his eventual deliverance back to His good graces.

In the evolution of *acedia* there are obvious parallels with the interpretation of the Platonic ascent. Boredom for the Christian is similar to boredom for the ancients in that it confronts the individual with a choice. For the ancients the proper choice is to look

¹²⁰ *Summa Theologicae*, pt.II-II, Q.35, art.4, pp.1348

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pt. II-II, Q.35, art.3, pp.1347

deeper within oneself for the impetus to move higher on the ascent of the soul. For the Christian this choice is best resolved likewise with introspection but not to find oneself but to find God. The outcome is also similar in that the improper choice is the collapse of the dividing line between the good and the pleasant. For the ancient such error results in the failure to realize oneself, while for the Christian the error results in the failure to realize oneself as the child of God. Both likewise offer as the solution, contemplation and affirmation of a metaphysic. While for the Greeks this affirmation manifests itself with the realization of the individuals place in the polis, the here and now, and a “divine” sense of home. For the Christian the affirmation of the metaphysic of God manifests itself in a deep sense of one’s birth in God and a profound realization of being away from home. Boredom is a reminder of Adam and Eve’s original transgression and the realization that due to that transgression we are separated from God. The Christians studied here believed that boredom confronted as such can be a tremendously profitable experience in that it can serve to bring one closer to God.

Christian theology from Evagrius to Thomas pronounces that man’s affinity with God is maintained through conscious acts of pious contemplation and prayer. Only in constant attentiveness can man secure the right to the gifts of the hereafter and govern himself in the here and now in accordance with scripture. *Acedia* presents itself as the aversion to the tedium and struggle that such an undertaking must entail. *Acedia* serves as an escape route from the possibility that the fundamental question of man’s existence will be unanswerable or answered in the negative. For the Christian the answers to such questions reside in God, therefore, the flight from or aversion to that question is by necessity a flight from and an aversion to God. Boredom with acts of piety is a deviation

¹²² Wenzel, (1975). pp.57

from the realization of oneself as a child of God and the demands that such a life must occasion.

The monk or the pious and virtuous man will however endure *acedia* and emerge from it with new vigor and a heightened awareness of God and himself. Such a man will come closer to and see more clearly the image of God residing in himself, and in doing so affirm his own being. Boredom when properly confronted will then be but a possibility to renew ones faith and to see oneself in a more crystalline manner as a child of God.

CHAPTER III

BOREDOM, MODERNITY AND TECHNOLOGY

"So what happened, were you bored in Manchester?"

"Was I bored?"

"No I wasn't fucking bored. I'm never bored. That's the problem with everybody you're all so bored. You have nature explained to you and you're bored with it. You have the living body explained to you and you're bored with it. You've had the universe explained to you and you're bored with it. So now you want cheap thrills and like plenty of them. It doesn't matter how tawdry or vacuous they are as long as it's new, as long as it's new. As long as it flashes and fucking bleeps in forty fucking different colours. Whatever else you can say about me, I'm never fucking bored."

Johnny,

from the Mike Leigh film *Naked*

Johnny's angst is both directed at, and the product of, a torn society. It is a society which has been born of an existence racked and defined by fear. It is manifest of cowardice in those who believe their fear can be cast aside and kept at bay by simply willing not to question no understand it. The objects of Johnny's misanthropy live in twentieth century London, but their intellectual, spiritual, and psychological heritage date back to the seventeenth century of Thomas Hobbes. Johnny's misanthropy, and the misanthropy of many an elevated spirit, this chapter will assert is the product of the Hobbesian man. The Hobbesian man is one who believes that his fear is nothing but another commodity to be traded for something far more profitable, the bargain price of divorcing his passions from their objects.

Johnny's present is the future as predicted by Fyodor Dostoyevsky's underground man. The diarist from *Notes from Underground* is a man profoundly bored. His diary is not written so that he may to look back upon it with sentimentality for days gone by, but

is composed for us, his unknown reader, in augury. He warns,

Now suppose one day they really did find a formula at the root of all our wishes and whims that will tell us what they depend on, what laws they are subject to, how they develop, what they are aiming at in such and such a case, and so on and so forth – that is, a real mathematical equation? Well, chances are that man will then cease to feel desire. Almost most surely.¹²³

He prognosticates upon the dissemination of instrumental reason into the folds of life, wherein such reason trespasses upon, and steals into, our attempts at self-awareness. The task in this chapter will be to expose the philosophical premise that opens the door to the demise of passion, wherein this trespasser first finds an aperture for intrusion. Such an opening can be found in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and more precisely the *Epistle Dedicatory*.

Mike Leigh's Johnny and Dostoyevsky's underground man are distant brothers, the bastard children of Thomas Hobbes. They are the tortured souls of the Hobbesian divorce of passion and object. It is this separation that is the constitutive factor in an entirely new confrontation with boredom. It is the manifestation of a shortsighted desire to rid man of guilt and duty, in an exchange for happiness and rights. Boredom must henceforth be thrown into the world and the darkness where any illumination upon a teleological ascent or descent of the soul is without merit and an utter redundancy. As will be seen, the introspective qualities of boredom, drawn in chapters I and II, are not only futile but impossible due to the demise of the infinite.

The ultimate end of the chapter at hand is to demonstrate that the doctrine of

¹²³ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961) pp.111

“Read thy self” taken from the *Epistle Dedicatory* is the ground upon which the metaphysic of technology has germinated. The metaphysic of technology, as with the metaphysic of the Forms in chapter I, and the metaphysic of God in chapter II, will be the medium through which man, modern man in this context, confronts and attempts to overcome boredom. In keeping with the general theme outlined in chapters I and II, the treatment of the idea of passion is central.

The metaphysic of technology is a dramatic shift within the genealogy of boredom. The ontological limbo that is boredom, has up until now been resolved through a metaphysic, whose only possibility for resolution is the teleology that is encompassed within that metaphysic. As will be seen, what Hobbes has done is give rise to a metaphysic without teleology. The exclusion and refutation of any sort of teleology is manifest in the divorce of passion and object. The ultimate question then becomes, what is the potential for the fulfillment of man’s becoming, and the “ought” of that becoming, once teleology is lost? We are a long way from the resolution of this question, a question that cannot be properly addressed until we first begin an exegetical survey of the idea of passion in the *Epistle Dedicatory*.

The Hobbesian ontology is largely captured in the admonition to “Read thy self”, a declaration that is,

“...to teach us , that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, fear, &c*, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon like occasions.”¹²⁴

In the Hobbesian “similitude of the passions” the ontological foundation appears to be laid wherein man can genuinely come to know others through introspection into the

nature of his passions. This in itself would seem to suggest an equality among men, in that what one finds in himself is by definition what he will find in others, which in turn has the capacity for creating a remarkably ethical and egalitarian society. If we can accept that our motivation for action, and reaction, are first formulated through what we "...think, opine, reason, hope, feare &c..." and that these according to Hobbes, are identical to the motivations of all other men, then by necessity a certain equality has been posited and assumed.

This seemingly inherent equality is further complemented by Hobbes in the *Epistle Dedicatory*, when he states that the objects of these passions are of little circumstance, but more detrimentally, can only serve to distance ourselves from the understanding of a genuine ontology. This second "ontological layer" reads,

"I say the similitude of *Passions*, which are the same in all men, *desire, feare, hope, &c*; not the similitude of *the objects* of the Passions, which are the things *desired, feared, hoped, &c*: for these the constitution individuall, and particular education do so vary, and they are easie to be kept from our knowledge, that the characters of mans heart, blotted and confounded as they are, with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting, and erroneous doctrines, are legible only to him that searcheth hearts."¹²⁵

The twofold ontological argument, of the similitude of the passions and the prerequisite divorce of the objects from those passions on the surface appears to assert a fundamental equality which drives the larger work of the *Leviathan* on to the contract out of the state of nature. The removal of the objects of our passions from consideration strengthens this apparent equality in that any individual cannot assert their superiority through more refined taste or adherence to a superior and stricter moral or ethical creed. There is no possibility of comparison between men on the foundations of high versus low art, taste in

¹²⁴ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1985) pp.82

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.82-83

dress, preference in music or on any cultural level. One must begin to wonder whether Hobbes in excluding the objects of the passions can give an account of culture or history at all. This question is however premature and we must for the time being leave it aside.

The charge to “Read Thy Self” for Hobbes must necessarily lead all men to realize their fundamental equality and that their shared violent compulsion for survival offers but one solution, that being a social contract. The competition between men driven by the same passions will always be a zero sum game, no one will ever have any respite from the fear of the other unless some degree of cooperation is introduced and some general law maintained. “Read Thy Self” will be the basis upon which men will find the need for law and the foundation for trust.

However, a deeper dissection of the dictum to “Read Thy Self” presents the Hobbesian man with a conundrum. On the one hand, “Read Thy Self” is undertaken to expose the fundamental equality of all men, which, in turn, one could imagine has the potential for creating a remarkable ethical and egalitarian society. However, on the other hand, the Hobbesian man is simultaneously brought to the realization that given the similitude of the passions, one’s actions in fulfilling those passions will be understood as justified by all others. The leveling of all passion and action down to the prioritization of survival, is a right that no other could oppose. The Hobbesian man is therefore simultaneously brought to the realization of his axiomatic equality with the other, and almost schizophrenically the compulsion to totally disregard the other.

The question before us now is how is this schizophrenia internalized and eventually manifest in the metaphysic of technology? Furthermore, what does this tell us of boredom and its relation to the metaphysic of technology? The answer to the latter is to

be found in Hobbes, and for the answer to of the former we must wait for Heidegger.

In the Chapter titled *Of Consequence or Trayne of Imagination* and its subheading *Conjecture of the time past* Hobbes states, "Whatsoever we imagine is *Finite*. Therefore there is no Idea, or conception of anything we call *Infinite*."¹²⁶ This is an obvious denunciation of Plato, and the theory of Ideas, but for our present inquiry it is in no uncertain terms a rejection of teleology. It is the offspring of the divorce between passion and object. Once Hobbes removes the object of passion from consideration he must remove all notions of hierarchy and with that the soul. The loss of the soul is akin to the loss of the object and a supra-sensible arbiter to direct ones action. The removal of the objects of the passions is dissociative in that all objects become mere commodity. They lose their inherent quality of binding men together in community. All love, hate, fear, and anxiety become groundless. All music, painting, sculpture, poetry, and literature become meaningless scribblings. Genuine passion and art for all intents and purposes cease to exist. Eros is an impossibility, God is an impossibility, only fear is left to inform the individual of his own existence. That fear will both force men into community, and keep man from himself. His being will be decided by those he fears, all passion will be reduced to an ontological birth in fear. It is this fear that is the bridge to Martin Heidegger and the metaphysic of technology.

The unfathomable nature of the infinite can only be conceived by first positing that the objects of our passions can teach us nothing of ourselves, and hence ontologically irrelevant. What we must now come to understand, is that once the object, the infinite, and teleology are removed from consideration, are not the prospects for human becoming a moot question. Hobbes' rejection of both teleology and the potentiality of becoming are

alluded to once again in the idea of “*Read Thy Self*” taken from the *Epistle Dedicatory*. There is an inherently a-historical rejection of teleology in the conception of *reading* oneself. Hobbes is arguing that man’s basic mental and psychic construction is like a text, enclosed within rigid binding, orderly indexed, and fully comprehensible in the moment, where language and truth are inextricably bound. Furthermore, this text is biographical rather than autobiographical. What is meant here by biographical is that man is a product of his environment and his contact with others, what he can best aspire to is a situation in which these others don’t adversely affect his life. These others are the authors of his existence and predicament. Man’s project is not to come towards his nature, but to conquer and master nature, to ultimately fight against and harness it, finally to distance himself from his own nature.

The Hobbesian man unites his aforementioned fear and incapacity to conceive of the infinite in the conquering of nature and in the embrace of the other of his fear. The conquest of nature is manifest in a drive to see in all things natural a commodity to be harnessed and spent. The embrace of the one who is feared is the commodification of oneself in the dictatorship of public opinion. These two outcomes of “*Read Thy Self*” are the drive of technology that Martin Heidegger calls “standing reserve” and the “they-self”.

The Hobbesian man eases his fear in nature through the comfort of “the they”, which as will be seen assuages and mollifies his fear by constantly providing false, ever changing objects for his passion. The passions that were previously all grounded in fear are cosmetically covered over and soothed by a constant movement through vacuous cosmopolitanism. Even the simple animal pleasures that were previously closed off by

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.99

the domination of fear, are fleetingly and surreptitiously experienced through passion reborn without object, wherein vacant cosmopolitanism takes the place of teleology and becoming. Culture, art, and politics, which were previously unfathomable, arise through the false ground of entertainment. Fear of violent death, and the incapacity to conceive of the infinite is what oppresses the Hobbesian man. He can only find solace from both of these oppressors in building a metaphysic, yet still properly unable to conceive of the infinite, it must be a metaphysic without teleology. This project is realized through the combination of the commodification of nature and vacant cosmopolitanism resulting in the idea of progress. These are the hallmarks of man and his environment in the metaphysic of technology.

We have however, gone far ahead of ourselves, and must return to the bridge between Heidegger and Hobbes, that being the Heideggerian notion of fear. It is the Heideggerian notion of fear that will be used as the interpretive device through which the Hobbesian man from the outset distances himself from himself. It is this distancing that forms the ground out of which the modern confrontation of boredom comes to fruition.

The Hobbesian state of nature is primarily characterized by man in a constant state of fear and in perilous danger of violent death.¹²⁷ Hobbes himself felt no need to delve into the nature of that fear and expose it existentially, but if we turn to Heidegger's *Being and Time* the existential and ontological character of fear is systematically set out. For Heidegger the mood of fear is fundamental in distinguishing between an authentic and inauthentic mode of being. For this reason the present analysis believes that the Hobbesian fear is the foundation upon which the ontological predicament of modern man is built.

Heidegger begins by stating that, "That before which we are afraid, the 'fearsome', is always something encountered within the world, either with the kind of being of something at hand or something objectively present or *Mitda-Sein*."¹²⁸ *Mitda-Sein* is others, while something at hand or something objectively present encompasses all things in the world except ones own being. Those things which are the objects of fear and create in ourselves the feeling of fear are always things external to our own being, being can not be afraid of being, in other words I can not be afraid of myself.

This is still not an ontological portrait of fear but is rather what Heidegger would call an ontic account. It does not disclose to us what is the possibility of being as revealed through fear, but simply gives an account of fear through a labeling of particular characteristics. So what does fear disclose about being in an ontological sense? In being afraid the Hobbesian man is forced to turn away from himself, in being afraid he is essentially closed off to himself. If fear is the product of either things in the world or others, there are no moments within fear that can claim to speak directly to or about man. Being in all intents and purposes essentially loses itself in the things and others feared.

Existentially those in the grip of fear are no longer in a position in which they can contemplate anything but self-preservation. Hobbes himself in his portrait of the state of nature argues that due to the overwhelming fear and threat of violent death, there can be no industry, culture, knowledge, or arts.¹²⁹ Heidegger elaborates upon this existential predicament of self-forgetting, "When one forgets and backs away from a factual, resolute potentiality-of-being, one keeps to those possibilities of self-preservation and evasion... Taking care of things which fears for itself leaps from one thing to the other,

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.186

¹²⁸ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, Trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996) pp.131-132

because it forgets itself and thus cannot grasp any definite possibility.”¹³⁰ Facticity and resoluteness mentioned above are complex terms, but what is essential to them, without going into detail, is a situation where being is open to the possibilities of being. Being in being resolute and realizing its facticity, ceases to allow being to be dictated by the things and others in the world. Fear as an existential is the antithesis of resoluteness, it is a losing oneself to the things and others that surround it. In the present context the Hobbesian fear is the third and final “ontological layer”.

This existential losing of oneself Heidegger calls “falling prey”. This is the ontological predicament resultant of fear. Falling prey is constitutive of three essential elements; idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. The Hobbesian man dominated and oppressed by fear, and without any clear sight upon the possibility of being seeks to cover over and hide from himself this fear. The Hobbesian man ultimately needs to feel a sense of “foundness” and this is falsely and ingenuously realized in idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity and their ontological-existential consequence of tranquility.

Because in the Hobbesian state of nature no art, culture, or letters, can ever be realized and the Hobbesian man, still dominated by fear, never is truly capable of ontologically escaping from that state, the tripartite ontological suppression of “falling prey”, provides the Hobbesian man with the spurious and feigned belief that it understands everything and that nothing is closed off from its being. Genuine understanding, questioning, and discourse, are henceforth commuted for idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity.

Heidegger’s discussion of idle talk in *Being and Time* is in part a parody on the

¹²⁹ Hobbes, Thomas. pp.186

¹³⁰ Heidegger, Martin. (1996) pp.314

Platonic approach to philosophy, which for Heidegger places too much trust in public opinion. As interesting as that may be, what concerns us here is how idle talk is the mode of discourse for the Hobbesian man. Idle talk is primarily constitutive of gossiping and passing the word along. In idle talk there is a shattering of what is commonly understood as conversation, the interplay between speaking and listening breaks down. That relationship is superseded by the primacy of simply speaking. There is a certain sense that what one is doing in idle talk is not so much engaging in a conversation directed to and grounded in the listener, but merely talking to anyone about anyone.

“What is important is that one speaks. The being-said, the *dictum*, the pronouncement provide a guarantee for the genuineness and appropriateness of the discourse and the understanding belonging to it. And since this discoursing has lost the primary relation of being to the being talked about, or else never achieved it, it does not communicate in the mode of primordial appropriation of this being, but communicates by *gossiping* and *passing the word along*.”¹³¹

From the above we can begin to see that idle talk is not only a form of discourse, albeit a rather shallow one, but a way of being, an existential. Being in idle talk removes itself from the ground of its being and that of those with which it converses. Gossiping is talking upon hearsay, the groundlessness of gossip speaks with a certain “matter-of-factness” whereby being is deceived into believing that it may speak upon any subject. What is in fact an existential closing off from being presents itself quite ironically as an incredible liberation of understanding, “Idle talk which everyone can snatch up, not only divests us of the task of genuine understanding, but develops an indifferent intelligibility for which nothing is closed off any longer.”¹³²

What is perhaps most insidious in idle talk and the closing off that it brings is how it stands with future understanding. Idle talk through its deception of rendering

¹³¹ Ibid., pp.158

everything understood, closes off the possibility of further questioning. Because all is erroneously thought as understood there is no need to delve deeper into the question of being or any question for that matter, it "...holds any new questioning and discussion at a distance because it presumes it has understood and in a peculiar way it suppresses them and holds them back."¹³³

Idle talk as a corrosive hybrid of genuine discourse and its relation to understanding, further distances man from himself in that he is forced into yet another trade off, that between genuine understanding and curiosity. The ontological and existential mode of being with which the Hobbesian man engages in idle talk determines the way in which he sees things in the world. He has already through his vacuous speech deceived himself into believing he has understood everything, he therefore comes to his everyday experience with the same blinders on. He looks at the objects and others in the world simply to see them not to understand them.

Curiosity not concerned with understanding the things and others in the world simply seeks experience. It likewise does not seek involvement with these things and others, but, as Heidegger states, seeks distraction. Ultimately it does not seek to find a place for itself amongst these things and others but to lose itself in and through them. As Heidegger maintains, "The care of seeing is not concerned with comprehending and knowing being in the truth, but with the possibilities of abandoning itself to the world. Thus curiosity is characterized by a specific *not-staying* with what is nearest."¹³⁴

In this "not-staying" we first glimpse our modern conception of boredom and the means by which we try to remedy it. This inability to stay and contemplate drives us on a

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

never-ending quest for entertainment. Boredom appears to the individual who is not entertained. Therefore the remedy to such a situation is entertainment and as Johnny from the introduction of this chapter stated a steady progression of increasingly “tawdry and vacuous” sense experience, “...as long as it’s new, also long as it’s new”. Curiosity furnishes this need for the piling up of experience, “Consequently, it also does not seek the leisure of reflective staying, but rather restlessness and excitement from continual novelty and changing encounters. In not staying, curiosity makes sure of the constant possibility of distraction.”¹³⁵

It is here that we may momentarily return to the Hobbesian separation of passion and object. Curiosity is the existential product of that divorce of passion and object. With no proper object to ground the passions the Hobbesian man can aspire to nothing more than the distraction and “not-staying” embodied within curiosity. The groundlessness of his being pushes him onwards through a collecting and gathering of experience. Any truth in being is essentially lost and this fact is cosmetically covered over with the gloss of culture found in vacant cosmopolitanism. The passions with neither direction, nor arbiter to guide their fulfillment essentially run amok never having time, nor reason, to stop, absorb, and contemplate. Boredom comes to the Hobbesian man and compels him to move on. This requirement of constant movement is the consequence of distraction and “not-staying”, Heidegger calls this “never dwelling anywhere”.¹³⁶

This notion of boredom as a lack of entertainment can not be the proper ground in that it does not there have the capacity of telling anything about being and the one who is bored. Boredom as such can only inform man of his environment and even then the

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp.161

¹³⁵ Ibid.

insights it can conjure are elusive. It is elusive in that reading a book, going to the market, meeting friends for drinks, watching a movie and so on, may one day provide man with the distraction he desires but at other times the exact same activities may appear to be boring. The realization of this quandary would force the Hobbesian man to reunify passion and object. At that moment he would have to stop and look more deeply at the objects with which he soothes his boredom, he could then begin a search for the proper object, begin to be discriminating and ultimately retransform his curiosity into understanding. This realization of the same things being and not being boring at different times is however closed off from man through the third element of falling prey, that being ambiguity. So there has to be a deeper ground for modern boredom. However, we are not as of yet prepared to address the question.

Ambiguity as said closes off the opportunity of the Hobbesian man's resting and contemplating his twofold trade off between discourse and idle talk, and understanding and curiosity. It achieves this as Heidegger states in that, "Ambiguity is always tossing to curiosity what it seeks, and it gives to idle talk the illusion of having everything decided in it."¹³⁷ It is also through ambiguity that we may see who the Hobbesian man is in Heideggerian terms.

Ambiguity arises from the strain between our own intuition and the "truths" that are revealed through idle talk and curiosity. The purveyors of these "truths" are what Heidegger calls "the they", "The who is not this one and not that one, not oneself and not some and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, *the they*."¹³⁸ Heidegger characterizes the mode of being in and with "the they" by distantiality, averageness, and

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp.163

levelling down. All three terms refer to an existential surrender of ones own opinions, tastes, and judgement to another. Simply stated, “We enjoy ourselves the way they enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way they see and judge.”¹³⁹ We become distanced from others in the perpetual cycle of trying to keep up, we accept, even aspire to “averageness” in that we seek the things all others seek, and finally through “distantiality” and “averageness” the possibilities of being are “leveled down”. Ambiguity as the conduit between idle talk and curiosity sustains the presence in “the they”, in that it assures that no definite response can be generated to the things “they” say.

The question then becomes why does the Hobbesian man surrender so much to “the they”? What does the Hobbesian man stand to gain in such a sacrifice?

We have seen that the Hobbesian man is largely defined ontologically by his fear of violent death. Crippled by his overwhelming fear of death he seeks a means or a vehicle through which this fear can be alleviated. He achieves this through the covenant out of the state of nature. He assuages his fear, and in so doing places himself in the hands of others in the hope that they will follow the laws as dictated by that covenant. Heidegger calls this the *disburdening* of being. The disburdening of being and ultimately of the Hobbesian fear by “the they” is the reward. “The they” arrests his fear of death through “the they’s” transformation of it into an object. Death takes on the character of an event that is never present, but is something that happens to “them” and not to it, at least not now.

“The publicness of everyday being-with-one-another ‘knows’ death as a constantly occurring event, as a ‘case of death’. Someone or another dies, be it a

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp.118-119

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.119

neighbour or a stranger. People unknown to us 'die' daily and hourly. 'Death' is encountered as a familiar event occurring within the world. As such, it remains in the incopiousness characteristic of everyday encounters. The they has also already secured an interpretation of this event. The fleeting talk about this which is either expressed or else mostly kept back says: One also dies at the end, but for now one is not involved."¹⁴⁰

The Hobbesian man having surrendered himself over to "the they" and having overcome his fear of death is rewarded through idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity with tranquilization.¹⁴¹ This tranquilization reminds one of the character of Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*, who can only make sense of all the injustice in the world, and the trials and tribulations he is so undeservedly made to bear, by reckoning that, "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."¹⁴²

We still have yet to arrive at the ground of how boredom is to be properly understood in relation to the metaphysic of technology. However, with the realization that the Hobbesian man is in fact "the they self" of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, we have moved a step closer. The answer appears closer still with the understanding that the Hobbesian man in giving himself over to "the they", objectifies his fear of death. Death no longer stands above him, and he is given a fictitious semblance of control over it, by distancing himself from it. Now if we regard the modern project, of which Hobbes' *Leviathan* is an integral text, as being in large part driven by the desire to assert control over nature then a new direction is found. "The they self" and the Hobbesian man have essentially approached the fear they have with their own death in a fashion similar to the way in which they approach nature, as object. Fear of death, now like nature, seems to have been transformed so that it does not threaten man but is an object for his

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.234

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.166

manipulation. The idea of holding death outside of oneself and believing in one's capacity to control it may seem rather ludicrous. However, through an exegesis of how the Hobbesian man sees nature through the lens of technology, and incorporates his passions in that line of sight, we may come to see how fear of death itself is fully overcome.

The idea that the potentiality for being is best realized in man's movement away from nature is epitomized within Hobbes' idea of the state of nature. Nature is inherently dissociative, in that it makes men quarrelsome. This constant state of war dominates man in nature due to his three main drives, competition, diffidence, and glory.¹⁴³ As Hobbes so famously stated, man's life in nature is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short."¹⁴⁴ When such a view upon nature is married with the Heideggerian "they-self" and its existential modes of being of distantiality, averageness, levelling down, tranquility, and disburdening, together with the Hobbesian man's falling prey to the world as epitomized by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, then a specific insight into, and relationship with, nature becomes apparent. All of the above Heideggerian terminology point to a particular way of being and seeing, they are existentially linked by the common thread of what Heidegger terms "enframing", the technological mode of being in the world.

In this idea of enframing we will move closer yet again to the proper confrontation with boredom. The essence of technology as partially described by enframing comes to us from Heidegger's essay, *The Question Concerning Technology*. While a very convincing argument is made by Heidegger that in order to understand technology as a way of revealing and understanding the world we must look back to the

¹⁴² Voltaire, *Candide* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985)

¹⁴³ Hobbes, Thomas. pp.184

Greeks, its importance and suitability here are questionable. The intellectual heritage of technology and its relation to being have already been brought to light through the previous discussion of falling prey and “the they self”. It will therefore suffice to begin Heidegger’s argument with the idea of challenging.

The way in which the world is revealed to the Hobbesian man in falling prey and “the they self” brings him to confront nature with what Heidegger calls challenging, “...which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”¹⁴⁵ Heidegger uses the example of the Rhine, and states that the challenging embodies in technology does not see the river as a river but instead sees it a source of power.¹⁴⁶ The landscape around the river is essentially shattered and no longer open to consideration, the river becomes a *curiosity* and not an integral part of the countryside that surrounds it. It is still seen but, “In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry.”¹⁴⁷

The river stands alone as a source of power distanced from its surroundings, the river ceases to be a river but something to be ordered and controlled, ultimately it is almost suspended in time awaiting to be spent. Man challenges the river into ordering to be used up in the future as energy. This ordering is much more than a simple stock piling,

“Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve. The word expresses here something more, and something more essential, than mere stock. The name standing-reserve assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the challenging revealing. Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stand over against us as object.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.186

¹⁴⁵ Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) pp. 14

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.16

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.16

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.17

In the existence of nature as standing-reserve and the understanding of its true essence as standing-reserve a new mode of understanding comes about, that which Heidegger calls enframing, "It is the way in which the real reveals itself as standing-reserve."¹⁴⁹ This for Heidegger is the essence of modern technology, it is however as he says nothing technological itself. The German word for enframing is *Ge-stell*, etymologically its root is *Stellen* which means to set upon, but it also has another meaning which speaks of a bringing forth. From both these terms we see that the essence of modern technology is a setting upon that reveals. This definition of technology can be rather misleading in that it seems to posit enframing entirely within the realm of human agency.¹⁵⁰

Enframing is rather a destining, it "starts man upon a way"¹⁵¹. Technology as a challenging, a revealing, as standing-reserve, and irreducibly as destiny is a mode of being that we are in but not necessarily entirely in control of, we are in enframing. The "truth" of the things encountered and revealed by enframing, which is nature, things in the world, and man, would appear to suggest that this destiny is a fate that for man is inescapable and frightening. Heidegger's response to this is, "Quite to the contrary, when we once open ourselves expressly to the essence of technology, we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing calm."¹⁵² In this calm man is given the capacity to monitor the progress of technology and assert his will upon it. Most importantly he saves himself from becoming standing-reserve.

This "freeing calm" is realized in an inauthentic form in the Hobbesian man as the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.23

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.24

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

aforementioned tranquility, however the positive gains that Heidegger claims such an awareness to technology bring, may be an impossibility for the Hobbesian man. If we return to Hobbes' divorce of passion and object and the Hobbesian man's existence as "the they self", subsequently run this through the idea of technology above, we shall then arrive at different conclusions.

In distancing himself from his fear of death and relegating it to experience that happens to others but not himself for now, the Hobbesian man approaches the one sure thing in his existence as he does technology with respect to the river in the example above. His own being itself is transformed into standing-reserve. In further Heideggerian terms, the Hobbesian man has enframed his "utmost possibility", in doing so his life itself is shattered and exists as a discontinuous series of experiences. This confrontation or challenging of life is further aggravated by the Hobbesian man in that his passions are not grounded. Without an object to serve as arbiter between true fulfillment and vacant appeasement the passions themselves become objects. Passions exist simply to be experienced, "the they self" in its idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity confine passion to object whereby it is stored and held on stand by to be experienced at will. Like the river it is on call for inspection, which is demonstrated in the false idea of boredom portrayed earlier. By appeasing boredom through entertainment and busyness it is assumed that the passions are within our control and can be conjured up at will.

As was seen through the Platonic and theological account of passion there exists throughout a desire to assert control and sublimate them for what is purest within them. The Hobbesian man through technology can only fulfill this desire for control through the objectification of the passions. The passions cannot be seen as in the Platonic or

¹⁵² Ibid., pp.26

theological account as either the path that leads to an ascent or descent of the soul, because the Hobbesian man cannot conceive of the infinite, there can be no teleological progression or human becoming. The only way in which the passions can either be at the service of man or a means towards introspective realization is through their quality as object in the service of entertainment.

In the analysis of the Hobbesian man as the Heideggerian “they-self” it was argued that the existential and ontological fear embodied in the Hobbesian man is tranquilized through the three elements of idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. The individual realized in the “They self” such characterized at essence does exactly what Hobbes admonishes us to do in the *Epistle Dedicatory*, that being to no longer consider our passions in terms of their objects, at root divorce our passions from their objects. The result is that fear of violent death is covered over by tranquility now that the passions are up rooted through the meaningless chatter of vacant cosmopolitanism.

The question upon us now is how is the “freeing calm” brought about through the proper understanding of technology existentially and ontologically different from tranquility realized in “the they, and can the Hobbesian man move from that tranquility to the “freeing calm” thus rescuing himself from transforming his being into standing-reserve. Secondly, if he cannot how is he to both realize technology as a destiny and a mode of being in and understanding the world while engaging it on a more profound level. Ultimately, can the Hobbesian “they-self” come to terms with boredom in a manner other than ignorantly interpreting it as a vacancy of entertainment and a lack of external stimuli?

The answers to these questions come from the idea of temporality in both Hobbes

and Heidegger. As was stated earlier, part of the ontological makeup of the Hobbesian man is his incapacity to conceive of the infinite. It was subsequently asserted that this incapacity kept the Hobbesian man in a state of perpetual fear, which could only be soothed by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity of the “they-self”. The “They” tranquilizes that fear by relegating death to something that “happens to others but not to itself, at least not now.” This in turn can only be realized by a separation of passion and object, for if the passions have proper objects then by necessity those objects must have an essentially infinite and stable essence. If the Hobbesian man could conceive of the infinite then like his passions his own being would have to have as essentially infinite and stable essence, even if that essence is the fact that it is finite. However, considering that Hobbes states that man cannot conceive of the infinite, he must give himself over to the “they-self” to sooth his primordial fear.

The argument above is made to demonstrate that the Hobbesian man is caught in a circular ontology. Through the unity of fear, the passion/object dichotomy, and the incapacity to conceive of the infinite, he can neither give meaning to his passions nor his being itself. Boredom conceived in terms of as a lack of external stimuli is the catalyst in that circle which keeps the Hobbesian man going. It keeps the passions groundless and gives being itself over to the false ground of entertainment. In order for boredom to cease to be the catalyst in such a circle it would have to throw the Hobbesian man temporarily from the circle so that he could sit in boredom and see the possibility of the infinite and thus give meaning to his passions and existence. Like the both the classical and theological accounts of boredom in chapters I and II, the Hobbesian man must have opportunity to sit through boredom.

If the Hobbesian man was provided with such an opportunity the tranquility emboldened by the “they-self” could give way to the freeing calm of technology, which would allow him to see technology as a destiny and thus give meaning to both passion and being. The existential difference between Heidegger’s conception of tranquility and the freeing calm is captured in the temporal difference between “awaiting” and “anticipating”. The “they-self” is characterized by awaiting, and an authentic relationship with technology, is temporally defined by anticipation. Furthermore, with technology defined as destiny, the ideas of awaiting and anticipating must at root determine, and posit, how man both conceives of himself and the relationship he has with his own self-actualization.

If we hold together the ideas of awaiting and entertainment, as we must, we arrive at a situation in which the Hobbesian man has given his entire being over to another. To want to be entertained is to want to be entertained by another, it is not an active pursuit but a passive one. This is the ultimate extension of the Hobbesian “they-self”. Boredom can only here to fore reveal itself to the bored as an emptiness to be filled with the life of another. Boredom to the Hobbesian man is seen as nothing but a form of social dysfunction, he feels cut off from “the they” and desires only to keep up with the latest trends, and awaits what is new and novel. We can see from the outside that boredom understood as such a feeling of a distancing from “the they” or emptiness, demonstrates that the “they-self” is lacking and cannot truly satisfy the needs of being, it has no teleology, no goal, no purpose, it is completely alienated from any notion of becoming. Boredom shows us that the Hobbesian “they-self” cannot be satisfied existentially by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity, if it could boredom would be a non-entity. This realization

is necessarily kept from the Hobbesian man through awaiting, which in turn is only made possible by awaiting. Again we see an ontological circularity of being.

It is this circularity that blocks the Hobbesian man from the realization that technology is a destiny, and keeps him away from transforming his temporal being into a state of anticipation. Technology as a destiny, and the realization of it as a mode of being in the world, strips it of its metaphysical quality and renders it malleable and subject to human manipulation. Its ultimate existential manifestation is the demise of the “they-self”. At such a juncture, the passive relation to being and being in the world undergoes a metamorphosis into an active anticipation of becoming and human possibility.

The existential difference between awaiting and anticipation, and being and becoming is one of present and future. In the Hobbesian ontology this temporal unity is broken as was made apparent through fear and the incapacity to conceive of the infinite. The temporal trinity of past, present, and future is more than broken it is rendered incomprehensible. The Hobbesian man without sight for the future as infinite is stuck in the present, as any notion of teleology and becoming are at essence rooted in the future. This still is not a proper understanding of the notion of temporality in the Hobbesian ontology, the incapacity to conceive of the infinite is the destruction of time itself. All understanding and knowledge exists in a dichotomy, between a positive and a negative, time and more importantly history is only understandable in the dichotomization of the finite and the infinite. Without the infinite the Hobbesian man cannot lay claim to an understanding of the finite either, he must exist in a discontinuous, fragmented series of “nows”.¹⁵³

These “nows” are moments without ground in time, they are in no uncertain terms

the temporal partner to passion without object. The fulfillment of, and giving meaning to, these moments is made possible through and only through entertainment and busyness. All understanding and being must be encapsulated in a moment, awaiting offers no space for meditation, and no space to engage boredom on an existential level. The temporality of awaiting is the corollary to the self-forgetting that is the Hobbesian man's sacrifice for shedding his fear in return for the tranquility of the "they-self", "When one has forgotten oneself and makes present a jumble of unattached possibilities, one thus makes possible the confusion that constituted the nature of the mood of fear. The forgottenness of confusion also modifies awaiting, and characterizes it as depressed or confused awaiting that is distinguished from pure expectation."¹⁵⁴

This "forgottenness" of the self keeps fear in the realm of the superfluous, something that is not an extension of one's ontological make-up but simply an unfortunate predicament. All passion is similarly held external to being, which only meditation can remedy. Meditation is however bound to a temporal unity that Heidegger defines as anticipation. It is in anticipation that the essence of Being is found, that essence being finitude. Such awareness of our essential finitude is the vestibule from where we can enter into the house where all affects and passions reside to inform us of our Being as finite. For Heidegger this is not only the house of Being but the morgue of metaphysics.

The magnetism of metaphysics is immortality, for the metaphysic of technology the agent of such immortality is the "they-self". "The they" provides man with this desire for immortality. In the Hobbesian and technological drive to assert itself over nature it is

¹⁵³ Heidegger, Martin. (1996), pp.376-377

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.314

also asserting its superiority over God. To posit that the creation of man is superior to God's creation is to kill God. The death of God will be dealt with in greater detail in the following chapter, for now we must at least understand that with the death of God the desire for immortality is not likewise exterminated. "The they" for the Hobbesian man is God's replacement. "The they" knows all, sees all, hears all, is immutable, unquestionable, everlasting, and the only arbiter of value. Boredom conceived of as a lack of external stimuli engages the Hobbesian man to further falling prey to "the they". The capricious dilettante of cosmopolitanism who can be all things, at all times, to all people, who can participate in politics through an carnivorous appetite for sound bites, and who can be an aesthete as long as he refrains from distinguishing between a child's finger painting and a renaissance masterpiece, will forever drift between boredom and entertainment. Passion and object will be irrecoverably divorced, continuously objectifying Being, privileging what is seen over what is felt, until value and opinion are themselves commodities so devoid of content that they too are but vessels to be filled with fads and trivia. Boredom drives on the impulse to objectify, expands the warehouse where experiences are collected, boredom empties those vessels so as to make room for their replenishment with only those things that are measurable and calculable.

Ultimately, "only that which becomes object in this way *is*- is considered to be in being."¹⁵⁵ - a not so distant echo that resounds in the existential ontological chasm eroded by the Hobbesian admonition to "read thy self".

¹⁵⁵ Heidegger, Martin. "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977) pp. 127

CHAPTER IV

BOREDOM WITHOUT METAPHYSICS

But there are, if only rarely, men who would rather perish than work without any pleasure in their work... Artists and contemplative men of all kinds belong to this rare breed... They do not fear boredom as much as work without pleasure; they actually require a lot of boredom if their work is to succeed. For thinkers and all sensitive spirits, boredom is that disagreeable "windless calm" of the soul that precedes a happy voyage and cheerful winds. They have to bear it and wait for its effects on them. To ward off boredom at any cost is vulgar, no less than work without pleasure.

Friedrich Nietzsche
The Gay Science (42)

Franz Kafka in a letter to his friend Oskar Pollak once wrote of the books that he most enjoyed reading, more importantly those that he believed ought to be read. He was not recommending any book in particular, he did not make reference to any one novel, nor for that matter any one author. It was more their content, the passions they stirred, that formed his opinion. In the letter, Kafka apologizes for having not written Pollak a timely reply to his last correspondence, in the apology one senses a deep sorrow, an acute isolation, and profound loneliness. He says that he had been occupied with reading and in an effort to relate his loneliness he tells of his last months by using a metaphor of a caveman, who "...out of boredom", seals the entrance to his cave with a large boulder, "... but then, when the block makes the cave dark and shuts off the air, feels dully alarmed and with remarkable energy tries to push the rock away. But by then it has become ten times heavier and the man has to wrestle with it with all his might before light and air return."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Kafka, Franz. *The Basic Kafka*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1979) pp. 289

Surprisingly Kafka is thankful for this “wounding of his conscience” as he calls it, it is the effect of great books, “I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound us and stab us”, he continues, “...we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be an axe for the frozen sea inside us.”¹⁵⁷ In the letter, and its metaphor of the caveman, it can be inferred that it is out of boredom that Kafka begins reading and it is boredom that is the axe that shatters the proverbial “frozen sea inside”. Without boredom, it can further be stipulated, one may never find the strength to seek, nor the means to endure, the isolation that Kafka as the caveman finds.

Kafka is a recalcitrant modern, seeking pain as opposed to pleasure, war as opposed to peace. In the present day cult of self-help books, simmering soulful “chicken-soup” for all that ails, treading twelve-step programs that offer a short walk out of the darkest of ontological forests, and a lady named Martha demonstrates through proper table settings, pine cone wreaths, and cranberry “compote”, the path to inner peace, where does one find, or why does one even consider, a Kafkaesque “wounding of conscience”? Can we not come to a wholesale understanding of both others, and ourselves through a cosmopolitan diet of culturally sensitive “fusion cuisine”, enlisting in the Oprah book club, and going to the latest performance of “Up with People”?

The answer to these questions, as the last chapter demonstrated, is a resounding no. The Hobbesian man, to continue with Kafka’s metaphor, is simply skating on the ice of the frozen sea inside, as ontologically defined by the Heideggerian notions of idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. The confrontation with boredom within the metaphysic of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

technology assured that the metaphorical ice never so much as cracked. Beneath that ice lie the questions concerning the essence of Being and truth. At risk of mixing metaphors, such questions can never be properly addressed, and the ice never shattered, when our lives are always “compote” and “Up With People” and never simply jam and “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf”.

Kafka wrote with an axe, beneath his internal ice we find not only his, but our, fears, trepidations, anxieties, and vulnerabilities, as told in the trial of Joseph K, and the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa. Kafka’s axe is in many ways the prodigy of Friedrich Nietzsche’s hammer, the advocate of war, the destroyer of God and gods, and by his own admonition a man born posthumously. The hammer is not simply the sledge of destruction but also the tool of the sculptor, the drive of the chisel that gives birth to softness and beauty out the grit and obduracy of granite.

Nietzsche wrote the books Kafka wanted. In reading *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Twilight of the Idols*, or any of his other works one feels far from soothed. Yet for those to which these books speak, and for those who can relish in the verbal attack, there is a feeling of liberation. There is a sense of release, like having said what one has bottled up for far too long, a heavy weight has been lifted and one is free to think again, finally having that torturous thought out in the open.

We have been discussing boredom with regards to metaphysics, under the metaphysic of the Forms and God, boredom seems to have been resolved by these metaphysics. But when we arrived at the metaphysic of technology it could do little but temporarily and cosmetically hide, if not aggravate boredom. What if the same were true for boredom with regards to Plato’s theory of the Forms and God? What if they too are

not truly capable of revealing all that boredom, understood ontologically, has to say? What if the “good life” and the “pious life” are but a thin veneer that hides something more essential, something that boredom helps conceal? We now must look back with suspicion. What if all three are bound together, and are but historical manifestations of the same impulse? What if technology is simply the ultimate conclusion of that impulse?

The purpose in the pages that follow will be twofold. First off, it is necessary to come to a better understanding of the metaphysic of technology and the reasons why boredom for the modern cannot shed light on the essence of authentic Being. The nature of boredom presented in the previous chapter has left some open questions. It was mentioned in chapter III that the Hobbesian/Heideggerian ontology of boredom would demonstrate how in the modern world man comes to an understanding of the “ought” of his Being. While the conclusions reached stipulated that a certain hedonism and lust for entertainment was the typical confrontation of boredom, it did not root out the essential meaning or cause of that hedonism. The answer to this question will be found in the unification and lineage of the three metaphysics of the Platonic Forms, God, and Technology, as the culmination of decadence and Nietzsche’s conception of nihilism as “event”.

Secondly, with nihilisms destruction of metaphysics as both a legitimate philosophical endeavor, and as a suitable instrument by which to understand the world and ourselves, the question becomes how to make sense of boredom in an ontologically significant way. Again as with the preceding chapters the role of passion will be central, and when we speak of passion we must broaden that perspective to include nature in general, more pointedly Nietzsche’s idea of will to power. Finally, the Nietzschean

theory on truth will serve as the portico to the house of the triumph over nihilism, and the necessity of boredom in the eternal recurrence of the same.

Throughout the preceding chapters boredom has been used as a foil to the idea of nothingness that stands in contradistinction to the essential meaning and significance of Being as epitomized by the metaphysic of the Forms, God, and Technology. Boredom serves, when properly confronted as an existential, to reaffirm in the face of that nothingness the meaningfulness and truth of Being that each metaphysic gives to its adherents. Boredom gives to Being the opportunity to reassert its essential stability and longevity in the face of chaos and constant flux. Nietzsche asks what is this inescapable drive that forces us to seek, and ultimately to impose a semblance of order upon this chaos? Is it not possible to lead fruitful lives in the embrace of chaos?

To properly understand technology we must view it not as an isolated historical happening or insular metaphysical worldview, but as the culmination of a thought process and pattern of reasoning that begins with Socratic philosophy. For Nietzsche the underlying motivation, or prejudice, is the privileging of “reality” over appearance. Socrates through the Platonic dialogues stresses that what our sensory experience, the realm of appearance, shows us of the world is often illusory. Pre-Socratic philosophy in contradistinction characterized the world as a permanent state of flux, of constant becoming. This tension between appearance and reality has been in many ways the driving force of philosophy as a whole. It was Nietzsche’s quest not only to reassert the realm of appearance, but to try to come to an understanding of why we have felt the need to privilege this so called “reality”.

There is a note in *The Will to Power* that we should bear in mind as we move through this chapter. It is important on many levels. Firstly, it is key to understanding what Nietzsche believed to be the root of the prejudice of reality over appearance. Secondly, it marks the subtlety of Nietzsche's critique, and forces us to constantly be aware that his distaste for Platonism, Christianity, and modernity are coloured by the caveat that they do constitute a deepening of human consciousness. It also a good place to begin considering the importance of biology and physiology in Nietzsche's philosophy. Not to mention it as a prelude to his critique of metaphysics. For these reasons although it is rather lengthy it will be quoted nearly in its entirety.

"There is no question of subject and object, but of a particular species of animal that can prosper only through a certain relative rightness; above all, regularity of its perceptions (so that it can accumulate experience)- Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power – The meaning of 'knowledge': here, as in the case of 'good' or 'beautiful' the concept is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behaviour on it. The utility of preservation – not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived – stands as the motive behind the development of organs of knowledge – they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words: the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which the will to power grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service."¹⁵⁸

The aphorism may be interpreted to say that while the end metaphysics seeks to achieve is honourable, perhaps even biological, namely self-preservation, the means and methods used to achieve that end, are not only unsuitable to that end, but dangerous. As will be made apparent, the danger lies in that the urge towards the ordering of the world when taken to its extreme end, as in technology, results in a profound resentment and a

catastrophic devaluing of the world, wherein man moves from a hatred of the world to an indifference to it. Nietzsche would argue, contrary to our contemporary ethos, that indifference is far more damaging than hatred, we on the other hand through our spiritualization of tolerance and relativism have taken indifference to the level of the sublime.

To understand and map this movement towards the spiritualization of indifference we shall follow the path used in all previous chapters to introduce metaphysics. We shall begin again with passion and sexuality. Nietzsche has much to say towards a critique of Platonic thought, Christianity, and modernity, and there are many avenues by which such a critique can be approached. However, by coming towards this critique through sexuality, we can then move beyond the initial critique and understand his positive philosophy, his great “yes-saying” towards life.

The tension between passion and reason occupies the background of the preceding chapters. The resolution to the question as to whether it is passion that controls and informs reason or vice versa is one that forms the subtext of Diotima’s ladder from chapter I, St. Augustine’s account of man’s fall from grace, and Hobbes’ dictum to “read thy self”. It is also a question that any student of Nietzsche is forced to struggle with, the understanding of which is of absolute necessity if one desires to read Nietzsche properly and not prostitute his philosophy like so many in feminist and communitarian circles of the Left have done, not to mention his historical misinterpretation by the far Right.¹⁵⁹ The question is faced head on in the questioning of sexuality. Most importantly, as Professor Allan Bloom states in *The Closing of the American Mind*, the question between passion

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) aphorism 480

and reason we today see as rather absurd¹⁶⁰. Our incapacity to see it as a legitimate philosophical question, due to the false belief that it has already been resolved, effects with great detriment the larger sphere of the cultivation of intellect. For Nietzsche its historic resolution in favor of reason over passion is important in understanding nihilism and overcoming that philosophical tradition is paramount in overcoming nihilism.

We are not however prepared as of yet to address this properly and must now begin with sexuality. Nietzsche states in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reach up into the pinnacle of his spirit."¹⁶¹ On the surface this seems to mirror the ascent of the soul as told by Diotima in the *Symposium*. Love of the body as the first stage in an ascent to the Forms and philosophy would appear to have it that the root of philosophy is erotics, Socrates himself states in the Platonic dialogues that all he really knows is erotics. Both Plato and Nietzsche appear to be positing that erotic longing properly channeled is the ground out of which philosophy is germinated. Where they differ and the root of the Nietzschean critique of classical philosophy is the aforementioned tension between reason versus passion, and which ought to be the ruler and which the ruled.

In the Socratic account of the ascent of the soul it is reason that sublimates the passions. The ephemeral realm of the passions and their objects are slowly realized to be but images and shadows of the reality that is embodied by the Forms. Eroticism does not so much inform man as man but reveals the impermanence, ignorance, instability, and perils that such naked passion possesses. The erotic and the sexual are furthest removed from the Forms and are more likely to distance man from reality than to inform him of his

¹⁵⁹ See Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987)

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.251-256

being. What is most instinctive to the senses are but myths and visions, ultimately mere appearances.

This Platonic account of “reality” and appearance is for Nietzsche a monumental event. The association of the sensory and the sexual with appearance and the reversal embodied in the correlation of reality with the stable, everlasting, and ethereal has had immense ramifications. It is here that we must return to the caveat offered earlier that Nietzsche’s at times polemical attack must be seen in the light of his great admiration for the ancients as they do embody something that is magnificent, that being the boldness for value creation. For this reason it is possible to say that the reversal enacted by Socrates is both a profound deepening of human consciousness and an utter disaster.

The sublimation of passions enacted at every stage of the ascent of the soul differs from the Nietzschean perspective on sublimation in that as Nietzsche sees it the Socratic account must ultimately resolve itself in the reification of an eternal and otherworldly soul. The slavish passions must succumb to reason. Socratic reason culminates in a denial of this life, wherein sexuality as the birthplace of that reason must be viewed rather contemptuously as either vice or disease. Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* advances that Socrates lays bare his suffering of this life, which is the result of reason’s tyranny over passion, in the closing scene of the *Phaedo*. In the dialogue Socrates’ dying words to Crito are “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering and do not

¹⁶¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) aphorism 75, pp. 81

forget.”¹⁶² Asclepius was the god of medicine, and Nietzsche translates these dying words as, “O Crito life is a disease.”¹⁶³, death and the immortal soul must therefore be its cure.

Prior to Socrates, sexuality inspired veneration and awe, the pagan cult is in many ways given form and life through sexuality.

“Is the pagan cult not a form of thanksgiving and affirmation of life? Must its highest representative not be an apology for and deification of life? The type of a well-constituted and ecstatically over-flowing spirit! The type of a spirit that takes into itself and redeems the contradictions and questionable aspects of existence! It is here that I set the Dionysus of the Greeks: the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied in part; typical – that the sexual act arouses profundity, mystery, reverence.”¹⁶⁴

Socrates’ conviction of heresy was therefore not unjust and is not an instance of the wrongly accused. The triumph of reason over passion, and the demoralizing of the senses and sensuality is an attack on the gods at a very profound level. It is Socratic reason that brings Socrates’ lips to the hemlock and leads Socrates to ultimately offer a cock to Asclepius. That offering must therefore be scrutinized as an empty, ironic, and secret attack on Hellenic spirituality. The overturning of Hellenic spirituality at the hands of Socrates’ dialectical reasoning results in a resounding “No” to life, in contrast to the, “triumphant ‘Yes’ to life beyond death and change; true life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality. It was for this reason that the sexual symbol was to the Greeks the symbol venerable as such, the intrinsic profound meaning of all antique piety.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Plato *Phaedo*, in “The Trial and Death of Socrates, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1975) 118A, pp.58

¹⁶³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) aphorism 340, pp.272

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, aphorism 1052, pp.542

¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1968) “What I Owe to the Ancients”, aphorism 4, pp.108

For Nietzsche the reversal of sexuality from life enhancement and the apex of Hellenic paganism to a mere inroad to dialectical reasoning is a movement away from natural man. "Sexuality, the lust to rule, pleasure in appearance and deception, great and joyful gratitude for life and its typical states – these are of the essence of the pagan cults and have a good conscience on their side. Unnaturalness (already in Greek antiquity) fights against the pagan, as morality, as dialectic."¹⁶⁶ Moreover dialectics and morality in their ultimate culmination of the Platonic Forms introduce for the first time the idea of "ought", as Nietzsche scoffs, "A man as he *ought* to be: that sounds to us as insipid as 'a tree as it ought to be'".¹⁶⁷

This perversity of "a man as he ought to be" is the result of the de-naturalization of man that is inevitable in he who suffers life. In an aphorism titled the *Psychology of Metaphysics* taken from *The Will to Power* Nietzsche gives a rough account of the unity of this de-naturalization and suffering which culminates in metaphysics. The sufferer is in Nietzschean terms a decadent who at root cannot come to terms with the unity of pleasure and pain and will perform all the intellectual gymnastics necessary to create a place where the two are irreconcilably divorced. The sufferer begins with blind trust in reason and comes to the false conclusions that, "This world is apparent: consequently there is a true world;- the world is conditional: consequently there is an unconditioned world;- this world is full of contradiction: consequently there is a world that is free of contradiction;- this world is a world of becoming: consequently there is a world of being."¹⁶⁸

There is within these conclusions a mistrust and fatalism that is imposed upon the senses. When what is most intuitive and instinctual is regarded as mere shadows on the

¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 1047, pp.538

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, aphorism 332, pp.181

wall of the cave one's energy must by the dictates of reason look elsewhere and above for any comfort. As Nietzsche continues in the aphorism, "It is suffering that inspires these conclusions: fundamentally they are desires that such a world exists; in the same way, to imagine another world is an expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer: the *ressentiment* of metaphysicians against actuality is creative."¹⁶⁹

The question that must next strike the sufferer is, "why?" If our senses betray us and render us fundamentally ignorant of the world, then what by logical conclusion must be the source of our suffering? The answer for Nietzsche is error; "Second series of questions: *for what* is there suffering? – and from this a conclusion is derived concerning the relation of the true world to our apparent, changing, suffering contradictory world: (1) Suffering as a consequence of error: how is error possible?"¹⁷⁰ Suffering is the result of allowing our nature and our senses to come before reason, in reversing this relationship, in placing reason before passion suffering may be overcome. Reason's prescription to suffering is metaphysics, the positing of an eternal and immortal soul.

The theory of the Forms stabilizes the chaos that the senses relay to our faculties, positing an ideal for all things. The attainment, education, and action, required to move towards, and be initiated into, these ideals, for Nietzsche must eventually devolved into some sort of automaton of unconscious action so as not to fall prey to the senses again. Passions finally disintegrate and man is "denaturalized under the pretense of sublimation".¹⁷¹ What once informed man on the good and just life, that being instinct, is no longer merely sublimated but amputated.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., aphorism 579, pp.310-311

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., aphorism 430, pp. 234

“The great concepts ‘good’ and ‘just’ are severed from the presuppositions to which they belong and, as liberated ‘ideas’ become objects of dialectic. One looks for truth in them, one takes them for entities or signs of entities: one invents a world where they are at home, where they originate. *In summa*: the mischief has already reached its climax in Plato – And then one had need to invent the abstract perfect man as well: - good, just, wise, a dialectician – in short, the scarecrow of the ancient philosopher: a plant removed from all soil; a humanity without any particular regulating instincts; a virtue that ‘proves’ itself with reasons. The perfect absurd individuum in itself! Unnaturalness of the first water.”¹⁷²

The reading of this aphorism should bring forth a recollection of a biblical creed, “If thine eye offend the pluck it out.” This is precisely the remembrance that Nietzsche would have us recall. Nietzsche extends the soil metaphor in another aphorism wherein the desiccated soil tilled by Plato is the ground out of which Christianity is germinated, “Christianity has grown out of psychological decay, could only take root in decayed soil.”¹⁷³ And again the attack on the senses is both the ruin, and fertilization of that soil, “Platonic slander of the senses, preparation of the soil of Christianity.”¹⁷⁴

Returning to the idea of suffering and its provocation of the question concerning error, the ties that bind Platonism and Christianity are strengthened. The question concerning suffering and its resolution in errant reason is insufficient. It fails to address, and therefore resolve, the more pressing and fundamental question as to why do the senses betray us. It is Christianity that takes up this question and as was seen in chapter II finds the answer in guilt. The fall from grace traced by St. Augustine and the betrayal of the sexual organs is a direct result of this guilt. To continue with the aphorism quoted above, Nietzsche sees the questions concerning error and guilt as inextricably bound, wherein the asking of one necessarily leads to the inquiry of the other, “(2) suffering as a consequence of guilt: how is guilt possible? If, however, the conditioned world is

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., aphorism 438, pp.242

causally conditioned by the unconditioned world, then freedom to err and incur guilt must also be conditioned by it: and again one asks, *what for?* - The world of appearance, becoming, contradiction, suffering, is therefore *willed: what for?*"¹⁷⁵ These two questions, of guilt and error, coalesce and conspire to unite what would appear to be polar opposites, revelation and reason. Moreover, these two errors according to Nietzsche are a remarkable intellectual trickery, in that it leads to the false belief that, "...because one of them corresponds to reality, the other 'must' also correspond to reality. Whence should one derive the opposite concept if this were not so? - Reason is thus a source of revelation concerning being-in-itself."¹⁷⁶

The tension between reason and passion takes on a more fervent and violent manifestation once reason is the source of revelation. Reason's fulfillment with regard to passion is not simply their sublimation but their extinction. Chapter II opened with the line that the man who fears his genitals is the man who fears God, this is not sufficient. Reason as the source of revelation would have it in accordance with the dictum "If thine eye offend thee pluck it out", that "...only the castrated man is good man."¹⁷⁷

Diotima's account of Eros given in the *Symposium* puts forward a symbiotic relationship between passion and reason, with reason controlling what can either be a source of virtue or a source of depravity. It is reason that forces the realization that erotic longing in the particular can, and must be, sublimated for a more universal love of the soul. With the Christian "intellectual trickery" and reason's transfiguration into the source of revelation, the passions and sexuality, are deemed to be in no way connected to or

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., aphorism 427, pp.232

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., aphorism 579, pp.311

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., aphorism 383, pp.207

informative upon virtue in the positive. Reason and revelation converge in the genesis argument of guilt. Erotic longing as witnessed in chapter II is the constant reminder of our guilt for the disobedience that saw us banished from the Garden of Eden. As Nietzsche makes plain in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Christianity gave Eros poison to drink; he did not die of it but degenerated – into a vice.”¹⁷⁸

The Christian is at once told to multiply while simultaneously constantly reminded of his guilt through the unruliness of his genitals. The resolution to this conundrum is the “existential castration” that is realized in life after death and one’s return to God. Sexuality therefore becomes one of the chief devices through which good and evil, and pleasure and pain, are permanently divorced, the former being ethereal, the latter being of this world. The impiety and guilt that is associated with sensuality is part of the larger whole that Nietzsche refers to as “moral castrationism”.¹⁷⁹ Because in this life physical castration for all would be in contravention to the demands of procreation, Christianity turns on all that would give pleasure. If all that there is for us in this world is the endurance of suffering, and if only such suffering and asceticism can return us to God, then those who are most pious are the weak.

The weak, the suffering, the impotent, the pithless, and the pitiful become the creative, the good and the just, the morality of the slaves replaces the morality of the masters. The slave in his physical and ontological predicament must somehow justify his own baseness and castigate the superiority of his lord in order to feel that he is alive and worthy of being alive. He can only succeed therein by convincing himself and the master,

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 168, pp. 92

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 204, pp.121-122

that the master is not genuinely happy, and that the attributes that comprise a good slave are in fact the same attributes that make a man just.

The slave's eye is not favourable to the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and suspicious, *subtly* suspicious, of all the "good" that is honoured there- he would like to persuade himself that even their happiness is not genuine. Conversely, those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honoured – for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence.¹⁸⁰

For Nietzsche the above is a central component of the movement initiated by the ancients in the evolution of judging ones actions first from their consequences, then by their intention. The morality of consequence is in fact a pre-moral period, a period in which, "The imperative 'know thyself!' was yet unknown".¹⁸¹ The movement to the morality of intention is in many ways an attempt to accept a greater burden of responsibility and guilt upon oneself. It is the first moral stage and the beginning of an attempt at self-knowledge, it is a revaluation of monolithic proportions.

What was once revered as noble, the ability to instill fear, severity, hardness, pride, and power, are now objects of contempt, therein results a strict dichotomization between good and evil,

Here is the place for the origin of that famous opposition of 'good' and 'evil': into evil one's feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terribleness, subtlety, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According to slave morality, those who are 'evil' thus inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely those who are 'good' that inspire, and wish to inspire fear, while the 'bad' are felt to be contemptible.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 260, pp.207

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, aphorism 32, pp.44

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, aphorism 260, pp.207

Slave morality on the surface may appear as a desire to lift the slave up to the level of the master, but in truth, wished to bring the master down to the level of the slave. It did not wish to free the slave but to enslave the master. The desire that there be no slaves but only masters is completely vacuous and totally absurd, for there can no masters without slaves. What in fact transpires, is the creation of a whole society of slaves, we are no longer slaves to another but slaves to ourselves and slaves to God. What shall distinguish this manifestation of the life of the slave from his previous existence, is that it shall be slavery without suffering.

Christian pity is a means towards which the destruction of all suffering can be realized. The act of pity is an attempt to comfort those who suffer, so as to end that suffering. To get down on your knees and console another, is for the Christian, an act of charity by which you wish for that other person only happiness, comfort, and joy, whereby we ask; what good can come from suffering? Did not Jesus suffer enough for all of us? Was that not to be the last act of suffering? If we still suffer today, was not Christ's life in vain?

Pity, the destruction of suffering, and comfort, comprise a whole, "If you experience suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, worthy of annihilation, and as a defect of existence, then it is clear that besides your religion of pity you also harbour another religion in your heart that is perhaps the mother of the religion of pity: the *religion of comfortableness*."¹⁸³ The religion of comfort wishes to separate pleasure from pain, suffering from joy, body from spirit, and good from evil.

"The opposition reaches its climax when, as a logical consequence of slave morality, a touch of disdain is associated also with the 'good' of this morality – this may be slight and benevolent – because the good human being has

¹⁸³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 338, pp. 270

to be *undangerous* in the slaves' way of thinking: he is good natured, easy to deceive, a little stupid perhaps, *un bonhomme*. Wherever slave morality become preponderant, language tends to bring the words 'good' and 'stupid' closer together."¹⁸⁴

What is 'stupid' is the total lack of introspection and denial of life that comes from the belief that what slave morality and the religion of pity have achieved is the purging of cruelty and suffering from life. It is at base, a vulgar self-deception and befouling of one's own life motivating force. The Christian in trying to remedy cruelty with pity, has only served to camouflage his show of strength, and in doing so, is corrupting both himself and the object of his pity, to paraphrase Nietzsche, pity is refined malice.¹⁸⁵ The giver of pity is the stronger of two weak wills that sees in the pitied an easy prey for the execution of his strength, but in doing so he climbs down to his prey and does not truly raise himself up. To soften to a neighbour's call, and respond to his cries for pity is "to lose one's way" towards self-perfection. As for the neighbor himself, his calls will do him no good, as "our personal and profoundest suffering is incomprehensible and inaccessible to almost everyone... It is the very essence of the emotion of pity that it strips away from the suffering of others whatever is distinctively personal."¹⁸⁶ In this way the giver of pity becomes annoyed with the pitied, and the pitied are given affirmation in their desire to center the locus of their suffering outside of themselves.

Instead of profiting from cruelty and suffering, the religion of pity then gives to itself reasons and motivation for hatred, *ressentiment*, and decadence. The act of pitying is the making of necessity out of slave morality, which is *ressentiment*, and the act of taking such pity is the sign of a decadent, one who wishes to remain infected and unwell.

¹⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 260, pp. 207

¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All-Too-Human*, in Walter Kaufmann "Basic Writings of Nietzsche" (New York: The Modern Library, 1992) aphorism 45, pp.147

The individual giving pity is an accomplice to the pitied in fortifying his need for scapegoats and vengeance, while the pitied themselves are unwilling to accept their suffering as either a product of their own actions, nor something from which to profit. The religion of pity takes the cause of suffering away from the sufferer, “the priest alters the direction of *ressentiment*.”¹⁸⁷ Slave morality and the religion of pity, in the revaluation initiated by them and its subsequent birth of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, reaches a “divination” of lowliness in that it necessitates a hatred of this life. The sufferer in the act of pity is affirming that part of the dichotomy of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is the belief that because he suffers in the here-and-now there must exist a world where this is not so. This for Nietzsche is the *ressentiment* of metaphysicians.¹⁸⁸

The slave completes the revaluation in convincing the master to pity him, and in doing so, the master must abdicate his position and all the fortunes of that position. Slave morality thus becomes necessity in that all values other than those of the slave are deemed to be crude hedonism and shallow egoism. Aphorism 14 in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals* makes the connection between slavish pity and the resultant self-doubt of the master;

“They are all men of *ressentiment*, physiologically unfortunate and worm-eaten, a whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge, inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate and happy and in masquerades of revenge and pretexts for revenge: when would they achieve the ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph of revenge? Undoubtedly if they succeeded in poisoning consciences of the fortunate with their own misery, with all misery, so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune and perhaps said to one another: “it is disgraceful to be fortunate: *there is too much misery!*”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 338, pp.269

¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* in Kaufmann 1992, aphorism 15, pp. 563

¹⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, aphorism 579, pp. 311

¹⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, aphorism 14, pp.560

The decadent as said, wishes to remain ill, more directly they have forsaken the gifts that suffering may bring in exchange for happiness in the next life, they have reversed cause and effect and by doing so cannot understand their own suffering except in looking for a cause outside themselves. They have confused the fact that is the misguided objects they hold to be virtuous or their own lack of personal virtue that makes them suffer, with the myth that they suffer and therefore fail to attain virtue, in the process sullyng their bodies. This reversal leads both the pitied and the pitying into agreement that the solution to suffering lies in the next life, and this for Nietzsche, is a form of decadence. Perhaps more pointedly, it is the unwillingness to fight against decadence, for Nietzsche conceived of himself, Socrates, and Caesar as defined in part by their battle with, and overcoming of decadence.¹⁹⁰ The decadent furthermore, is one who believes that all decay and vice have no value and are inconsequential to life and that they therefore must be abolished. The religion of pity and those involved in acts of pity are positing just that, that suffering like vice, is superfluous to the advancement of man.¹⁹¹

There would appear to be a fundamental contradiction in the Christian conception of suffering. The good Christian must embrace suffering as the punishment handed down by God for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge, and also as the means by which to maintain an earthly acquaintance with God in the hopes of a reunion in the hereafter. Yet the religion of pity and comfort acts to banish suffering from the face of the earth, as it is superfluous to being. This tension can be primarily defined as one between utility and faith, as Nietzsche remarks in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Slave morality is essentially a

¹⁹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Case of Wagner* in Kaufmann (1992) preface pp. 611

¹⁹¹ Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, aphorism 41, pp. 25-26

morality of utility”¹⁹². The tension is a consequence of the initial “intellectual trickery” of the false union between reason and revelation. The nature of reason is such that it cannot exist in cohabitation with anything, it sees the world purely through the lens of utility, anything that is useless is slandered and slated for extinction.

The tyranny of utility is in no uncertain terms the progenitor of the technological drive of enframing uncovered by Heidegger in chapter III. While the morality espoused by the slave is useful in levelling the playing field, once it has realized its goal of such uniformity, utility turns inwards. The foundations of slave morality, God and faith, are no longer required in that the herd serves the purpose of controlling any errant individual desires for a display of power or superiority in any manifestation. In a note from *The Will to Power* Nietzsche asks, “In what action does man affirm himself most strongly?” His response, “Around these (sexuality, avarice, lust to rule, cruelty, etc.) prohibition, hatred, and contempt are heaped: one believed there were unselfish drives, one condemned all the selfish ones, one demanded the unselfish.”¹⁹³

The Nietzschean herd of slave morality in many ways controls and imposes its worldview like the Heideggerian “They-self”. Freedom for the slave begins with the submission of the master to slave morality, but must ultimately conclude with the liberation from all constraints, where true freedom is only realized with the death of God. What results is that the metaphysical is still deemed necessary in providing meaning to existence, while the “ought” and teleology that sustained all prior metaphysics is relinquished, the metaphysic of technology as told in chapter III is the realization of this divorce between metaphysics and teleology.

¹⁹² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 260, pp.207

¹⁹³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 786, pp.414

While Nietzsche does not talk about technology as such, his critique of modernity and insight into modern man epitomized as a “herd animal” is as cutting as Heidegger’s. It is the opinion here that without Nietzsche’s appraisal of slave morality and exposition of the “last man”, Heidegger’s thought would have been a near impossibility, regardless of Heidegger’s sustained critique and incredible insight into Nietzsche sustained over four volumes. This may be explained in part by a fundamental split in their respective views of prior philosophy. Where Nietzsche sees a unity and a certain degree of necessity, where all prior philosophizing informs the next, and regardless of his vitriol directed against it, it does in many ways amount to a deepening of human consciousness, Heidegger regards much of it with contempt and as entirely misguided.

The rise to supremacy of slave morality based upon strict utilitarianism no longer requires a transcendental God, in that the morality of utility occupies the space once reserved for that God. In many ways the fear of eternal damnation is replaced by the fear of difference, of being a Shepard not a sheep. In the words of Zarathustra, “No Shepard, and one herd! Every one wanteth the same; every one is equal: he who hath other sentiments goeth voluntarily into the madhouse.”¹⁹⁴ The fact that such individuals go “voluntarily into the madhouse” is telling of the herd on several levels. To go *voluntarily* speaks volumes to the degree and nature of freedom associated with the herd. Freedom of choice is but a thin veneer concealing what is ultimately freedom of conformity. To go voluntarily into a *madhouse*, demonstrates that the freedom of conformity is substantiated and given meaning by reason. We too have our “voluntary madhouses”, they are not sterile white washed institutions but can be found at any popular bookstore, and are

¹⁹⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1997) Prologue, 5, pp.11

prominently displayed under the heading “Self-help”, with resident psychiatrists “Chicken Soup for the Soul” and “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff”.

The madness of non-conformity reaches the very depths of the idea of a self. In two sequential aphorisms from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche forges the unity of modern morality as it exists without transcendental foundation, and the “madness” of the demise of the ego. Such morality he says, “trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function.”¹⁹⁵ Existing solely as a functionary of the perpetuation of this herd morality, the individual no longer comes to recognize himself, nor foster the growth of any value or measure of himself that would differentiate himself from the herd. Freedom of thought is itself a condition of madness.¹⁹⁶ Herd morality exists primarily as a product of its theological roots, and the drive to separate man from nature and distinguish man from animal, but once it sheds its transcendental heritage the individual member of the herd can no longer see that he has abandoned the drive to overcome himself. Existing solely as a function and a tool, the “herd man” believes to have reached an end point of perfection. There dies all teleology, which in and of itself for Nietzsche isn’t tragic, but if the death of teleology is not accompanied by the extinction of herd morality all values must begin to be devoured by utility.

The passions and sexuality are now seen as utilities. Once reduced to utility sexuality becomes superfluous. Evidence of this is easily found throughout modern society, language in particular is especially telling of the empty status of sexuality. The language that surrounds passion and sexuality has taken on a disturbingly Orwellian character. However, unlike the process undertaken in *1984* where words are simply

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 116, pp.174-175

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, aphorism 117, pp.175

discarded, we use words like love, passion, sex appeal, and the like, attached to anything and everything. The results are almost the same, and beg the question; is there any substantial difference between using a words in a vacuous and inappropriate manner and destroying that word altogether? The modern lexicon is demonstrative of passion without object. Sexuality becomes so far removed from procreation, nature, and the evolution of the species, when its power is watered down and sullied by association with commerce, and the masturbatory frenzy of entertainment, and from this bastardization it cannot be deemed to have any significance. “Free love”, “Make love not war” and “Honk if you’re horny” are mere symptoms of the tyranny of utility and the death of the instinctual.

True passion and genuine sensuality become overtime moods that cannot be genuinely experienced. The theological condemnation of sexuality as vice is ultimately fulfilled not by an active extirpation of the passions but more subtly through a passive stripping away of meaning. What initially presents itself as a new found plethora of choice is in fact the reduction of choice, sexuality need not be feared if it cannot be genuinely experienced. This is the culmination of the movement initiated by the ancients, nihilism, the state of affairs where, “the highest values devalue themselves.”¹⁹⁷

The movement towards the incapacity to experience the sexual drive in a genuine fashion is the same movement that boredom has taken. The metaphysic of technology cannot come to a genuine understanding of boredom and cannot profit from it because it does not have the capacity to experience it. The herd, the Hobbesian man, and the they-self, are all brothers in the family of castrated passion. The hedonism and constant quest for entertainment that concluded chapter III is all that is left for the they-self, without teleology, and positing itself as having reached an end, the they-self, like the herd,

“...unlearns modesty, blows up its needs into cosmic and metaphysical values. In this way the whole of existence is vulgarized: in so far as the mass is dominant it bullies the exceptions, so they lose their faith in themselves and become nihilists.”¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, as stipulated in chapter III boredom in the metaphysic of technology does notacerbate the problem but aggravates it, which is entirely keeping with the nature of nihilism and the fact that while the herd has shed itself of a transcendental God, it retains the moral valuations that are attached to it; hence, “Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute.”¹⁹⁹

The subordination of passion by reason, its evolution into vice, and finally the total degeneration and assault on meaning leaves passion and sexuality empty and unable to inform man on any significant ontological level. Boredom having traveled the same path and having arrived at the same vacuity can only be revitalized and reinvested with meaning through the overcoming of nihilism. As this chapter’s opening quote taken from *The Gay Science* and the correspondence of Franz Kafka make clear, great individuals require boredom. Nietzsche says that artists and contemplative men must make demands of and require the same of sexuality, “Artists if they are any good, are strong, full of surplus energy, powerful animals, sensual; without a certain overheating of the sexual system a Raphael is unthinkable – Making music is like making children; chastity is merely the economy of an artist.”²⁰⁰

Through the three metaphysics investigated here boredom never appears as genuinely necessary. The Socratic “good life” and “just man” may travel the ascent of the

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 2, pp.9

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., aphorism 27, pp.19

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., aphorism 28, pp.19

²⁰⁰ Ibid., aphorism 800, pp.421

soul and not stagnate at any given level and therefore have no need for boredom's ontologically informative quality. It is only the truant, like Alcibiades, who stands to profit from what boredom can reveal. In the case of the ascetic and the truly pious, the sin of acedia does not have to come at noon to try to rob him of his relationship with God. It is entirely within reason that the desert monk, and any devout theist, could sustain their piety and never fall pray to boredom. It is only the sinner who confronted with the noon time demon that may find salvation in a proper confrontation with boredom, but at root, "The distinctive invention of the founders of religions is first: to posit a particular kind of life and everyday customs that have the effect of *disciplina voluntatis* and at the same time abolish boredom."²⁰¹ Finally, because the they-self of the metaphysic of technology comes to the world believing that it already knows everything, and modern science has lost its genuine curiosity wherein it always begins it's "experiments" with predetermined parameters and reified "natural laws", boredom has become superfluous to its project.

The task for Nietzsche is to invest boredom with necessity, which is part of the project of reaffirming the necessity of all life through the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same. We are now more than ever able and prepared to undertake this reaffirmation of life. The death of God as the catalyzing event towards nihilism can either be the most barren, desiccated philosophical ground or the most fertile and life giving. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* the coming of nihilism and its dichotomous nature is articulated in the language of the ascetic life. In "The Bedwarfing Virtue" Zarathustra delivers a speech where he introduces himself as "Zarathustra the god-less" and proceeds to tell the people how all their virtues are small and petty now that God is dead. If they could see this they would, "...renounce all half-willing, and would decide for idleness as ye decide

²⁰¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 353, pp.296

for action.”²⁰² At that time they will rejoice and exclaim, “It cometh, it is nigh, the *great noontide*.”²⁰³ Later in chapters titled “Noontide” and “The Three Evil Things”, nihilism is again referred to as this “great noontide” and with it, as in the concept of *acedia*, come the perils of sleep. It is more than likely that Nietzsche was familiar with the notion of *acedia* and its relationship with sleep, in the preface to *Human, All Too Human* he states that the original dedication of the book, “A book for free spirits”, came to him from *acedia*.²⁰⁴ While he doubts the existence of such free spirits he hopes that someday such philosophers in the truest sense will find the environment in which they could thrive. In this hope Nietzsche is using the notion of *acedia* as it was used by the desert fathers, as the unhappy midway between despair and hope.

What is important is that nihilism occupies the threshold between meaning and meaninglessness that boredom occupies in the three metaphysical systems of the Forms, God and technology. The relationship to suffering that defines all metaphysics, the life weariness and decadence, that now reveals itself in nihilism, the feeling that we have been the victims of a lie thousands of years old can either crush man under its burden or be redeemed and justified. Man can exact revenge against the world as he has done through metaphysics, but this time without metaphysics in abandoning all meaning in both the earthly and otherworldly. He can continue to defame his nature, not in the Christian sense of the dictum, “If thine eye offend thee pluck it out”, but in believing that all is permitted becoming hedonistic, gluttonous, and boorish, or embrace the chaos as willed.

²⁰² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, part III, chapter 5, pp.167

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, preface aphorism 2, pp.6

Zarathustra encounters these types who are unable to redeem the past, in their stupidity they have simply reversed the Christian amputation of the passions, “I see and have seen worse things, and divers things so hideous that I should neither like to speak of all matters, nor even keep silent about some of them: namely, men who lack everything, except they have too much of one thing – men who are nothing more than a big eye, or a big mouth, or a big belly, or something else big – reverse cripples, I call such men.”²⁰⁵ Unlike a typical cripple who may suffer the past with the cry of “why hath God forsaken me”, the reverse cripple is to be confined to a never ending present cut off from the past and unable to conceive of and create a future, never having enough to satiate their enormous ear, eye or mouth. They believe the lie of freedom that speaks strictly of choice and rights, the lie that all is permitted, the lie that simply willing is creative and redeeming. They are however still suffering life in that they have yet to embrace the accidental and unalterable nature of man, they must will the past, “To redeem what is past, and to transform every ‘It was’ into ‘Thus would I have it!’”²⁰⁶

The event of nihilism could be empowering and ennobling it could point to the culmination of great bravery, of a great sacrifice, this would involve an entirely new re-valuation of values and for Nietzsche truth as well. This re-valuation is made possible by Nietzsche’s teaching on the nature of truth, which informs the doctrine of the will to power. More specifically Nietzsche believes that nihilism is the logical conclusion of a noble pursuit that began with a fundamental error, that being the mistaken identity of the will to power as the will to truth. “Will to truth do ye call it, ye wisest ones, that which impelleth you and make you ardent? Will for the thinkableness of all being: thus do I call

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, part II, chapter 20, pp.132

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.138

your will!”²⁰⁷ The will to truth the beginning of the movement initiated by Socratic reason, that wishes to come see an essential truth about being and in the words of Zarathustra, “Ye would still create a world before which ye can bow the knee: such is your ultimate hope and ecstasy.”²⁰⁸

The problem with trying to create a world to which we can “bow the knee” has already been seen in its culmination of the metaphysic of technology and nihilism. Thousands of years of striving for that essential truth leaves us feeling as the victims of a lie, yet it is not truth itself that has brought us to this threshold but our misconception as to our need for truth. We have been striving for truth in order to find the essence of being and for an essential and stable ego, “If on the other hand the ego proves to be something in a state of becoming then –”²⁰⁹ Nietzsche does not finish the thought but it must be inferred that if the ego exists in such a state of becoming the notion of truth must fall with the notion of a stable ego, and follow becoming into a state of flux.

The age of nihilism is an age of great doubt; that the three metaphysics crumble due to the fact that they are no longer believable for Nietzsche points to the essential truth about truth, “Trust in reason and its categories, in dialectic, therefore the valuation of logic, proves only their usefulness for life, proved by experience – not that something is true. That a great deal of belief must be present; that judgments may be ventured; that doubt concerning all essential values is lacking – that is the precondition of every living thing and its life. Therefore, what is needed is that something must be held to be true – not that something is true.”²¹⁰ The nature of truth corresponds directly to the way in

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Part II, chapter 12, pp.113

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.111

²⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 518, pp.281

²¹⁰ Ibid., aphorism 507, pp.276

which we perceive being and becoming, the belief in the stability of truth leads directly to an erroneous account of the stability of being, while the acceptance of the fluidity of truth we must direct our attention to the flux, chaos, unalterability of being.

It is only in such a conception of truth that the past can be redeemed and the “it was” transformed into an “As I would have it”. The will to truth that attempts to posit man as capable of an objective, disenfranchised, view upon the world where he occupies some Archimedean point free of passion and prejudice can only serve to eventually breed contempt and suffering of this life. Nietzsche’s conception of truth that mirrors the flux of human becoming lays bare the will to truth as the will to power.

However, the danger may arise wherein this ontological flux is misinterpreted and petrified as a new metaphysic. This is precisely where Heidegger’s thesis on Nietzsche fails. As Nietzsche makes plain in a note from *The Will to Power*, the culmination of western philosophy in nihilism and the discovery of the will to power destroys metaphysics; “If we eliminated these additions, no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta in their effect upon the same. The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* – most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge.”²¹¹ The will to power as a pathos rules out any attachment to teleology, and the metaphysical. Heidegger’s failure comes with his inability to see the absolute unity of the will to power and the eternal recurrence.

The concepts of force and power are complex and Nietzsche does not use them in their traditional mechanistic fashion. The mechanistic relation of force and power with cause and effect are mere interpretations of the world whereby we, without justification,

impose an order on things so as to justify our own lives, and reduce man to an essential drive towards self-preservation. A false relation between cause and effect divorced from intent, serves the dual purpose of giving us a false ground from which we can imbue our lives with meaning and also hide our true intent of the an increase in power under the guise of selflessness, as witnessed in Nietzsche's conception of pity. We use the causality of the metaphysical to provide stable truths and purpose to existence, "In short: the psychological necessity for a belief in causality lies in the inconceivability of an event divorced from intent; by which naturally nothing is said concerning truth or untruth (the justification of such a belief)! The belief in *causae* falls with the belief in *tele*."²¹²

This false theory of cause and effect informed by metaphysics plays itself out in the artificial dichotomy of passion and reason, and the association of nature with either a Hobbesian malignancy or Platonic benignancy. The two coalesce in an attempt to impart human qualities upon nature through mastery over it, for Nietzsche both the classical and modern interpretations, while being at opposite ends of the value spectrum are nevertheless the imposition of human valuations. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche attacks the humanization of nature and the will to see in nature the plebian democratic "neither god nor master" as a "perversion of meaning".²¹³ He follows this condemnation by hypothesizing that someone may come along,

"...who would picture the unexceptional and unconditional aspects of all 'will to power' so vividly that almost every word, even the word tyranny itself, would eventually seem unsuitable, or a weakening and attenuating metaphor – being too human – but he might, nevertheless, end by asserting the same about this world as you do, namely, that it has a necessary and calculable course, not

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, aphorism 635, pp.339

²¹² *Ibid.*, aphorism 627, pp.335

²¹³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 22, pp.30

because laws obtain in it, but because they are absolutely lacking, and every power draws its ultimate consequence at every moment.”²¹⁴

Nietzsche here is displaying a sort of inverse Darwinism. The fact that everything draws the “ultimate consequence” of its power “at every moment” is a statement that is in stark opposition to the evolution of the species defined by Darwin. Nietzsche has in effect removed the teleological principle within evolution, which explains how he can say that, “The world is will to power and nothing besides!”²¹⁵, while still highly critical of all prior morality.

The moral, religious, and scientific, views upon the world (which correspond directly with the three metaphysics discussed here) all embody the will to power. The tension between poetry and philosophy of the Platonic dialogues is will to power, the tension between master and slave is will to power, the tension between nature and artifice is will to power, even the internal tension between passion and reason is will to power. However, given the anti-evolutionary nature of man, the will to power is no guarantee that over time the species or its culture will continuously become more fruitful and refined. The will to power almost guarantees the opposite, “That will to power in which I recognize the ultimate ground and character of all change provides us with the reason why selection is not in favour of the exceptions and lucky strokes: the strongest and most fortunate are weak when opposed by organized herd instincts...”²¹⁶ He concludes, “In summa: growth in the power of a species is perhaps guaranteed less by a preponderance of its children of fortune, of strong members, than by a preponderance of average and

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 1067, pp.550

²¹⁶ Ibid., aphorism 685, pp.364

lower types – The latter possess great fruitfulness and duration; with the former comes an increase in danger, rapid wastage, speedy reduction in numbers.”²¹⁷

The problem arises chiefly because these competing forces all seek power and are willing to sacrifice anything, and open themselves up to any number of myths and lies in the attainment of that power. In this process of herd formation truth, or the nature of truth, must be sacrificed. As Nietzsche states, the strength of a society is not how much truth it can reveal but how much it can endure, “The criterion of truth resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power.”²¹⁸ Nature and man are likewise sacrificed. The drive to make nature logical is the drive that seeks to make nature comfortable, and bolster the position of the herd in opposition to the higher types, and the exceptions. The will to power as will to truth focused upon self-preservation becomes revengeful with regard to the past, and fearful of the future, the past faces our retribution through the humanization of nature, and the fear of the future is assuaged by the immortal soul and the de-naturalization of man. This design upon nature and man ultimately collapses in upon itself, where the present without future defined by technology cannibalizes the past of the eternal soul, having unwittingly devoured its own legs.

There develops a riddle within the will to power. This riddle and its solution occupies the second half of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The riddle is how can the will to power, which cannot will backwards free itself from the revenge it has exacted on man, nature, and truth without falling prey to the exact same “stupidities” of metaphysics that have brought us to nihilism in the first place. If it cannot redeem the past without ultimately sacrificing the future are we not destined to be victims for the rest of eternity?

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp.365

²¹⁸ Ibid., aphorism 334, pp.290

The will to power on its own can neither keep the fluidity of truth and becoming from degenerating into the metaphysical and misleading men like Heidegger, nor overcome nihilism. The flux of being and truth would like their theoretically stable counterparts have open recourse to revenge against man and nature left to their own devices.

Zarathustra speaks of this riddle in “On Redemption”,

“Willing liberates: but what is it that fastens in fetters even the liberator? ‘It was’: that is what the will’s teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator of all things past. The will cannot will backwards; that it cannot break time and time’s desire – that is the will’s most lonely affliction. Willing liberates: what does willing itself devise to free itself from its affliction and to mock its dungeon? Alas, every prisoner becomes a fool! The imprisoned will, too, releases itself in a foolish way. It is sullenly wrathful that time does not run back; ‘That which was’ – that is what the stone which it cannot roll away is called. And so, out of wrath and ill-temper, the will rolls stones about and takes revenge upon him who does not, like it, feel wrath and ill-temper. Thus the will, the liberator, becomes a malefactor: and upon all that can suffer it takes revenge for its inability to go backwards.”²¹⁹

This passage is quoted at length because it is the pivotal moment in *Zarathustra*, it is the moment when he realizes the impotence of the independent will, it is the moment when he is confronted with the oppression of nihilism and finally it is the moment when the need of the eternal return first dawns. It is also the point where we come to understand where boredom finds its place within Nietzsche, it occupies that space of stillness and quiet much like it had with regards to metaphysics, between the nihilistic impotence of an independent will and the all affirming eternal return.

It is the final chapter of part II “The stillest hour” where boredom provides the link between the will to power and the eternal return of the same. Zarathustra concedes however reluctantly, that he must return to isolation and abandon his disciples both physically and mentally. The language, tone, and imagery of *Zarathustra* is often biblical,

and one is led to associate Zarathustra the prophet with Jesus. Zarathustra has up until now surrounded himself with disciples, and it is in “The stillest hour” that the realization comes that if he should not abandon them him he will yet become but another teacher and mentor of the herd. For Nietzsche, Zarathustra must not allow his teachings to fall victim to, and be perverted by the herd, much as he believed Jesus’ had been.

In the solitude of the stillest hour, the existential notion of sleep and the ontological abyss that was the terror of the desert fathers visits Zarathustra. He asks his disciples, “Do you know the terror which assails him who is falling asleep? He is terrified down to his toes, because the ground seems to give way, and the dream begins.”²²⁰ The dream is that of the independent will to power, which dreams that the pain and suffering that it sees in this life can be overcome by the surrender of meaning in the here and now for the hereafter, realized in the herd. Just as the desert ascetic wished at noontide to abandon his solitude and escape to the city when acedia seemed to have suspended time, Zarathustra recounts, “The hand moved, the clock of my life held its breath – I had never heard such stillness about me: so that my heart was terrified.”²²¹

Zarathustra must return to his mountain home, return to his animals, and return to the stillness of a child. Zarathustra both laughs hysterically and weeps uncontrollably at the thought of his return to solitude. He has slept too long, for he has yet to come to terms with what this sleep has meant and what a true awakening must entail. On the voyage home he recounts the story of a Shepard who while asleep had a black snake crawl into his mouth and attach itself to his tongue, no amount of pulling could tear the snake from the Shepard’s mouth. A voice arose and told the Shepard to bite the head off the snake

²¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part II, chapter 20, pp.161-162

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, Part II, chapter 22, pp.167

and spit it out. The Shepard at that moment sprang up and laughed, it was a laugh that Zarathustra claims to have never heard before, the laugh of a man transformed. “No longer Shepard no longer man – a transformed being, surrounded by light, laughing! Not yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed.”²²²

Zarathustra is consumed with the need to find in himself that laugh, and he knows that in finding that laughter, life will once again have significance, “O my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter – and now a thirst consumes me, a longing that is never stilled. My longing for this laughter consumes me: oh how do I endure still to live! And how could I endure to die now!”²²³ To be neither able to live without hearing that laughter again, nor die without having heard it once more Zarathustra is conscious of his will’s paralysis at the hands of nihilism. Only in solving the riddle of the black snake will he be both ready to live and to die, preparation for life and death must ultimately be resolved by the redemption of the past that gives meaning to the future.

The solution to the riddle comes with his arrival back to solitude and his mountain home. It is his animals, the eagle and the serpent, who help him unlock the mystery. Zarathustra retells the riddle to his animals, and his absolute displeasure with what he had experienced while away, “My sighs sat upon all the graves of man and could no longer rise: my sighs and questions croaked and choked and gnawed and wailed by day and night: ‘Alas, man recurs eternally! The little man recurs eternally!’ ‘ I have seen them both naked, the greatest man and the smallest man: all too similar to one another, even the

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., Part III, chapter 2, pp. 179-180

²²³ Ibid.

greatest all too human! The greatest all too small! – That was my disgust at man! And eternal recurrence even for the smallest! That was my disgust at existence!”²²⁴

His animals do not want him to speak any further but to go sit in the garden and be still. Unlike Zarathustra’s disciples, his animals are not greedy and hence know the value of repose and stillness. The constant outpouring, and giving without taking that characterizes Zarathustra’s relationship with his disciples is not the path towards overcoming nihilism but one which culminates in new religions, “There is a lake that one day ceased to permit itself to flow off; it former a dam where it has hitherto flown off; and ever since this lake is rising higher and higher. Perhaps this very renunciation will also lend us the strength needed to bear this renunciation; perhaps man will ever rise higher as soon as he ceases to flow out into a god.”²²⁵ In the stillness of the garden Zarathustra realizes that it is precisely in the eternal recurrence of all things that nihilism is overcome. It is not only to learn to laugh again like the Shepard but to want to choke on the black snake of knowledge and suffer as a means to that laughter that is all important. Further still, that laughter is only made possible by and through the preliminary stage of suffering.

The eternal recurrence is embodied in his animals, the high flying eagle and the low lying snake, united in the circling of the eagle with the serpent coiled around his neck, the hunter and the hunted, the predator and the prey. The eternal recurrence of the same is the reunification of man and nature, pain and pleasure, passion and reason, and past and future.

²²⁴ Ibid., Part III, chapter 13, pp.236

²²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 285, pp.230

These four dichotomies are profoundly interrelated and form the unity and circle of the eternal return. The return of man to nature, realized in Zarathustra's homecoming, and the demand of his animals to be still leads to the reunification of pain and pleasure as told in the act of the Shepard's choking and laughing and the lineal relationship they have. The Shepard chokes as he pulls on the snake but once he bites its head off laughter ensues, the ineffectual pulling from the outside is reason, while the action of biting is instinct. There is posited here a unity, where the higher man reacts reasonably out of instinct. In the re-naturalization of man passion and instinct are synonymous with each other. The Socratic, "misunderstanding of passion and reason..." is rectified in the realization that, "...as if the latter were an independent entity and not rather a system of relations between various passions and desires; and as if every passion did not possess its quantum of reason."²²⁶ Finally, the reunification of passion and reason gives legitimacy to the "errors" of all metaphysicians, in that it was only in their historical and metaphysical dichotomization that the human species could have endured life.

The slave revolt in morality, the spiritualization of Platonism in the Saint, and the technological will to mastery over nature and the abyss of the death of God it created were all necessary and all must be accounted as a deepening of the will to power. The eternal return of the same is only discovered after we enter the abyss of nihilism, which was only possible because we have endured life through the metaphysical. All of which are born and die out of the stillness of the ascetic or philosophical life.

That stillness is boredom, the stillness of the eternal return of the same, a stillness that creates and constantly recreates itself, and gives meaning to itself, just as only man can give meaning to himself. It is only in the stillest hour that values can be both

²²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 387, pp.208

destroyed and created, it is only in boredom that it is possible to philosophize with a hammer. Boredom requires great courage, the courage of unmitigated skepticism and sacrifice where the world is no longer a comfort, "*Courage to be boring*. – Whoever lacks the courage to allow himself and his work to be found boring is certainly not a spirit of the first rank, whether in the arts or the sciences. – A scoffer who was also, exceptionally, a thinker, might take a glance at the world and its history and add: 'God lacked this courage; he wanted to make all things interesting, and he did so.'"²²⁷ To allow oneself to be deemed boring is courageous in that one exposes oneself to being irrelevant, superfluous, and meaningless. For Nietzsche this vulnerability is the only means through which any meaning stands to be found, just as it is only in nihilism that the eternal recurrence can be discovered.

To constantly busy oneself with play and work is barbaric and philistine. The maxim that idle hands are the playthings of the devil has placed such an imperative upon work that we no longer know how to be idle and bored. We invent play specifically not to fashion an existence aside from work but to keep us engaged in work, "To elude boredom man either works harder than is required to satisfy his other needs or he invents play, that is to say work designed to assuage no other need than the need for work as such."²²⁸ The men of the herd and the unrefined remain satisfied, but the artistic and contemplative find in boredom the need not for more work but for more boredom, a higher form of boredom, "He who has become tired of play, and who has no fresh needs that require him to work, is sometimes overtaken by a longing for a third condition which stands in the same

²²⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) Volume II, "Assorted Opinions and Maxims, Aphorism 25, pp.219

²²⁸ Ibid., Volume I, aphorism 611, pp.193-194

relation to play as floating does to dancing and dancing to walking – for a state of serene agitation: it is the artist's and philosopher's vision of happiness.”²²⁹

Boredom is therein revealed to be both the studio of the artist and the birthplace of philosophy. In revealing boredom to be the seat of philosophy, any philosophical system that does not make silence, stillness, and boredom either implicitly or tacitly necessary, posits the end of philosophy altogether. The eternal return makes the end of philosophy an impossibility and fights against the end of history arguments that are sheathed in the postmodern hermeneutics of relativism. Nietzsche thus may be said to anticipate the attack on philosophy that is the product of his own critique of modernity.

Zarathustra in the stillest hour and the quiet of his garden undergoes a metamorphosis from prophet and Shepard of the herd, conditioned, as is any good Shepard, to the maintenance of the herd into a philosopher and culler of the herd. He has transformed every “It was” into an “As I would have willed it”, and in so doing, takes the eternal return back from the brink of a postmodern abyss of relativism. He has and will forever more bear the greatest weight. The weight of not simply enduring all that has come before again but craving it,

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same sequence...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?”²³⁰

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 341, pp.273-274

CONCLUSION

BOREDOM AND THE CULTIVATION OF INTELLECT

Nietzsche states in *The Gay Science* “Alas my friends we must overcome even the Greeks!”²³¹ Some who wander the corridors of academia have perverted Nietzsche’s meaning here, those whose throats burn with the bile of revenge. In their ignorance and incapacity to read as Nietzsche ought to be read, in other words slowly, they have replaced “overcome” with abandon. These cultural lemmings, who in their collective suffering set off at breakneck speed towards the cliff of history. They do not perish but land safely, ironically having had the Greeks, the founders of the university itself, break their fall, thereby destroying the philosophical tradition. Having abandoned the Greeks they set upon rewriting history to ascribe disease and corruption where was once written virtue and justice. Little are they aware that the cliff from which they jumped was in fact the edge of a chasm, the chasm of relativism.

In their suffering of history they have unwittingly destroyed the future and committed the heinous crime of stifling the engagement of philosophy and made true scholarship a near impossibility. They have set traps in every discipline of the humanities and social sciences, whereby any social or cultural criticism that goes against their hallowed equality, and any elucidation of rank is labeled racist, sexist, anthropocentric, euro-centric, or illiberal. Once such accusations are leveled, all the “offenders” energy must move away from the content of the argument and be redirected towards defending themselves personally. So cannibalistic is their relativism that they fail to realize that the entire notion of education and scholarship is predicated upon some level of rank. Pedagogy, the student-teacher relationship, and the university itself, dies unless we can

accept that learning cannot exist simply on the foundations of unassailable opinion. Without the fostering and nurturing of the pedagogical relationship wherein the professor is afforded the respect of a lifetime of the cultivation of intellect and the student remains, however critical, as a somewhat empty vessel, the *raison d'être* of the university becomes moot. Relativism in its most nefarious manifestation, the implicit "all is known", where no one can impart any knowledge upon another is the swan song of higher learning. To say we must abandon the Greeks is to abandon the university.

Nietzsche was in no way advocating an abandonment of the Greeks, overcoming the Greeks is insurmountable without initially embracing them. Those who claim that we must do so are nihilists. Unlike Zarathustra's relationship with nihilism and the anguish in which it first presents itself, the above noted lemmings have not allowed nihilism to assault them but have been immediately liberated by it. Zarathustra too eventually finds in nihilism the freedom resultant from the eternal recurrence of the same, but only after the initial despair. As noted in the final chapter Zarathustra's metamorphosis from Shepard to philosopher comes only after the despair of nihilism, it is a direct result of an embrace of the past, and the metaphysical as initiated by the Greeks.

Nihilism brings about an existential schizophrenia wherein it both beckons the age where all is permitted and then defeats that absolute freedom with the feeling that such freedom truly matters little seeing all is for nothing. It is only the coming to terms with this schizophrenia that the past is redeemed and we are freed from revenge against it. The relativism of the sort encountered above only sees the freedom and not the chains of nihilism, and this is the most heinous insidious form of nihilism. It seeks only more freedom and more rights, and fails to see that when all choices, and all opinion, is

²³¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorism 340, pp.272

meritorious then no opinion and no choice has any hold on truth. At this point reality and fantasy are undistinguishable from each other, history becomes but the realm of the novelist.

It is this breed of “historian” that kills the philosopher. When nothing is open to external criticism then nothing is required with regard to self-imposed rigorous critical contemplation. Scholarship deteriorates into an endless stream of consciousness, untouchable and safeguarded by political correctness. Unable to see the forest for the trees, they impose contemporary morality as the litmus test that all prior philosophy must pass in order to be deemed useful for their shoddy scholarship.

Their “scholarship” cut loose from the past, while going nowhere moves at incredible speed. While there is much good work done in journals and the academic press with regard to secondary sources, it is of complete and utter worthlessness if it is not deemed essential to return to the primary sources. Nietzsche believed that there were philosophers and philosophical labourers. The philosophical labourer was one who was merely an interpreter, a philologist. These were vital however in the task of philosophy, one must begin by being such a labourer, to read slowly, to bear the burden of all prior philosophy. These relativist does not wish to labour and to sweat, in the quest for utopias of past and future they never transform the “it was”, into an “as I would have willed it”. Unlike either the philosopher proper or the philosophical labourer they see no use in quiet, silent contemplation, and this is symptomatic of the fervent pace of scholarship cut off from the primary sources, “One remains a philosopher only by – keeping silent.”²³²

The philosophical labourers are those who have overcome the past, and in so doing, pave the way for the genuine philosophers who, “With a creative hand they hand

reach for the future, and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their 'knowing' is creating, their creating is legislation, their will to truth is will to power".²³³ The scholar who believes that philosophy is possible without the initial labouring mistakenly associates scholarship with work, education with activity, and boredom with the cessation of the academic life. This is the new barbarism, a barbarism that feels in activity the distancing from vice, yet, "If idleness is really the beginning of all vice, then it is at any rate in the closest proximity to all virtue; the idle man is always a better man than the active."²³⁴

Boredom hence encapsulates the duality of the Nietzschean hammer. It is through boredom that the metaphysical myths of the past are destroyed and paradoxically preserved in their destruction. It is also the drive of the chisel that sculpts "legislation" of the new virtues and morality, the tool through which the philosopher manipulates the future. It is both the heart that keeps this academic life going and the womb that gives birth to future generations of thought.

In probing and reopening questions pertaining to Being, passion, and mood, those that are addressed in questioning boredom, we can forge anew the privileged role the university once played. We can reinstate the shattered criteria of what constitutes a learned person, exposing the barbarians for what they truly are. We can then wage war upon those who caught the university unawares and with its pants down, where the removal of power from politics was the unbuckling of the belt of the proverbial pants. We will use their hypocrisy, sentimentality, and romantic utopias to deliver a sound intellectual thrashing, bloodying their all too sensitive noses. We will chew them up and

²³² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, aphorism 8, pp.10

²³³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 211, pp.136

excrete them through the back passage of academia, the same back passage through which they initially crawled. They will then go voluntarily into the madhouse, hopefully never to be seen or heard from again. The university will emerge stronger than ever, and we will hold in our breast the hope that someday they will return again and we will have yet another opportunity to meet in the halls and lecture rooms for the separation of the wheat from the chaff in the next harvest of the cultivation of intellect.

²³⁴ Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, aphorism 284, pp.132

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