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Nietzsche and the Politics of Immortality
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
July 4, 1997
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acceptance of the thesis,

NIETZSCHE AND THE POLITICS OF IMMORTALITY

submitted by

Richard Avramenko, B.A.

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for the degree of Master of Arts

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July 4, 1997

Abstract

This discussion begins with the premise that man is by nature a coward and that his greatest fear is the fear of death. Consequently, man perforce creates a culture that provides him with the notion of immortality so that he can live despite the frightening knowledge of his mortality. This paper establishes that in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche there is a hierarchy of the cultural manifestations of immortality. The hierarchy is based on the culture's resemblance to his doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, which is demonstrated to encompass his notions of the will to power and the Superman. The discussion begins with Nietzsche's praise of the pre-Socratic festival culture, continues with his disdain for Socratic culture, his contempt for Christian culture, and finally, with his nausea for the technological culture of the Last Man.

**With thanks to No One, whose fame has reached the
heavens and whose courage opens eyes.**

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I

THE TERRIBLE SPECTRE OF DEATH: NATURAL COWARDICE AND THE WILL TO IMMORTALITY

In his *Description of Greece*, Pausanias recounts a legendary boxing match between Creugas of Epidamnus and Damoxenus of Syracuse at the ancient Nemean games. Because night was drawing near and a victor had yet to be declared, the judges decided to produce a *klimax* by ordering the athletes to exchange undefended blows until one of them yielded. The boxers agreed and Creugas was first. He struck Damoxenus in the head; Damoxenus withstood the blow and then

bade Creugas lift up his arm. On his doing so, Damoxenus with straight fingers struck his opponent under the ribs; and with the sharpness of his nails and the violence of the blow his hand pierced his side, seized his bowels and dragged and tore them out. Creugas expired on the spot....¹

The match was decided definitively — Creugas, or at least the corpse of Creugas, was recognized as the victor. Damoxenus was expelled from the stadium because, in dealing his opponent many blows instead of one, he had violated his mutual agreement.

Beginning a discussion Friedrich Nietzsche's work with this archaic account of an even more archaic occurrence may appear somewhat strange. This example of human behaviour, however, is quite *apropos* because, like much of Nietzsche's work, it is at first glance an affront to our modern sensibilities. These are the sensibilities that tell us no athlete should die during an athletic competition; they tell us that no human being should die in such superfluous and non-serious circumstances and moreover, that Creugas' recognition as victor is the only humane act the judges could have taken. The decision to recognize Creugas as the victor, however, was influenced by neither the cruel circumstances of his death nor the death itself. The Greeks did not share these modern sensibilities; Creugas was recognized as the victor because he won — his death was only incidental and, as cruel as it may seem, the *humanity* of the judges can exist as but a part of

¹Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, VIII, XL, 2-6.

modern prejudices and imagination. Nietzsche understood that this cruelty of the Greeks, the people of Plato, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Aristophanes, is difficult to reconcile with the modern penchant for exulting the Greeks as the founders of aesthetics, philosophy, and justice. "The Greeks," Nietzsche writes, "the most humane men of ancient times, have in themselves a trait of cruelty, of tiger-like pleasure in destruction: a trait, ...which, however, in their whole history, as well as in their mythology, must terrify us who meet them with the emasculate idea of modern humanity."²

The problem is that when modern readers meet Creugas and Damoxenus, they almost invariably do so with the "emasculate idea of modern humanity," and, as Nietzsche suggests, they are terrified and are unable to conceive how such a highly cultivated people, how a people with such discriminating aesthetic tastes, could find pleasure in these types of barbaric spectacles. The indignation and terror stem not just from the violence of the competitions, but from the fact that boxing at Olympia, not to mention wrestling and the pankration, no longer resembled a mere sport but rather they took on the mien of a deadly serious business in which competitors were frequently killed in the stadium. Because Creugas was killed in a sporting competition, because the competitors were determined to win at any cost, and because the contests generated such enthusiasm and celebration, such contests are therefore often deemed to be inconceivable acts of human behaviour. For many modern observers, sporting activities ought not to be so serious as to endanger the lives of the competitors; the confusion of serious activities, which is to say life-threatening activities, with non-serious endeavours is considered barbaric. The death of Creugas, it seems, reveals a shocking lack of respect for human life on the part of the Greeks.

Clearly, the Greeks did not regard their ancient athletic competitions in this way. On the contrary, for the Homeric Greeks such endeavours were exemplars of noble human actions. For Nietzsche, this fundamental difference between Homeric culture and subsequent cultures lies at the core of his philosophical work. He recognizes that, contrary

²Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homers Contest" in *The Collected Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. II, Livy edition, p. 51.

to what modern cultures would find acceptable, the Greek sculptor had “to represent again and again war and fights in innumerable repetitions” and that “the whole Greek world exult[ed] in the fighting scenes of the ‘Iliad’.”³ Likewise, he recognized that the Greeks valorized the oft-violent victories of their athletes with little regard for the sort of human suffering that is so disturbing to modern observers. Nietzsche, however, does not regard the Greek penchant for cruelty and destruction in the same way as his contemporaries. Whereas modern observers find in this trait “something offensive, something which inspires horror,”⁴ Nietzsche has nothing but contempt for this offence and horror, which he repeatedly calls effeminate and emasculate historical eunuchism.

With the contrast of these views we might be tempted to conclude that there actually is a difference in the value of life for the Greeks (and Nietzsche) and the value others, including moderns, put on life. But is this truly so? Can we properly conclude that one culture values life more or less than another? This is often the explanation many modern Western observers are forced to make when they are confronted by cultures that do not appear to have, at bottom, an equally intense desire to avoid pain and death. This would indeed be a convenient conclusion – simply to state that Mongols, warring Greeks, Iranians, Iraqis, Yugoslavians, terrorists, or whosoever engages in seemingly superfluous conflicts and dangerous contests, are primitive and uncivilized people who do not esteem the value of human life. To make such a statement, however, would be to ignore some rather obvious facts: the Iraqi soldier and the Serbian nationalist weep as readily for a dead companion or family member as the most sensitive Western observer. Achilles, upon hearing of the death of his dear friend Patroklos, is engulfed in a “black cloud of sorrow” and “he himself, mightily in his might, in the dust lay at length, and took and tore at his hair with his hands,”⁵ and even that incorrigible warrior Odysseus had tears well up in his eyes “and was stirred with pity” by the sight of the corpse of his companion Elpenor.⁶ Hence, we are

³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

⁵*Iliad*, XVIII, 22-27.

⁶*The Odyssey*, XI, 55-56.

faced with an obvious contradiction. On the one hand we can state that the Greeks and the other so-called barbarians are affected by the death of kith and kin in the same way as modern observers, but on the other hand, they nevertheless constantly engage in martial endeavours and, in Nietzsche's words, often find in the "the cruelty of victory the summit of life's glories."⁷ It is because of this contradiction that we may be tempted to agree with modern sensibilities, but if we look at what lies *behind* the Homeric world, and for that matter, behind any world, it will soon become evident that "we do not understand them enough in 'Greek fashion'"⁸ because occurrences such as the ancient boxing match are as much of an expression of man's basic will to life as is the modern disdain for such life threatening endeavours.

If, however, we define the will to life as that which impels one to consider basic life, the condition of being alive rather than dead, as preferable to its opposite, the condition of being dead rather than alive, then we must reconcile what appears to be an apparent lack of the will to life with the modern revulsion for such barbaric spectacles. In other words, if we claim that the will to life is the driving force behind both the modern revulsion for certain aspects of Homeric culture and for Homeric culture itself, yet fail to account for what appears to be a lack of the will to life by Creugas and Damoxenus, Odysseus, suicide bombers, and so on, then we would be forced to follow the modern proclivity for dismissing certain cultures as barbaric. The task here, however, is not to repudiate the contention that these Olympic boxers were barbarians. This would be a fruitless endeavour because the will to life, as it is manifested by Creugas' and Damoxenus' needless risking of life and limb, will always, from the perspective of contemporary observers, be inconceivable barbarism. Instead, the task is to discover what is meant by the will to life and, in particular, what it means within the context of the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.

To do this we must first ask: What are the contemporary standards of the will to life? In other words, how do humans, and in particular, how does modern Western culture

⁷Nietzsche, "Homers Contest," p. 53.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.

stand in relation to death and does this standing have anything in common with the Greeks? The answer to these questions is threefold and is based on two modest and fundamental tenets that are the prefatory ground for this discussion of Nietzsche's work. These tenets are considered fundamental because they are not exclusive to contemporary man – in fact, they are contingent on no specific temporal and spatial circumstance – and they are modest because they are not based on an hubristic and procrustean attempt to universalize contemporary values and notions. In other words, because of their modest nature, they can serve as the elusive yet crucial common point of agreement that is necessary for any discussion and, in particular, they will serve as appropriate groundwork for our discussion of the will to life in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.

The first tenet arises from the philosophical tradition of characterizing man in the state of nature. Whereas others have begun with the notion that man is by nature good, or that man is by nature evil, this discussion begins with the fact that man is by nature a coward. Untutored by conventional conditioning, man is a trepid creature – he is *homo timidus*. As will soon be demonstrated, it cannot be correctly stated that man is cowardly throughout the entire course of his life, but we can be certain that a young child or an infant, and infantility is the only extant state of nature, is cowardly the moment he drops from the womb. As soon as the child experiences pain he will thereafter meet anything confronting his painlessness with fear. When a child falls, for example, he learns to fear stairs and heights in general; when he is scratched by a pet he thereafter quakes in the presence of a hissing cat and approaches all cats with a degree of trepidation. Fear in the state of nature is thus equated with nothing more than pain and pleasure. What is pleasurable is not feared and what is painful is feared. Courage does not exist naturally – in the state of nature we find either fear or ignorance and ignorance is quickly transformed into fear. Although the child who has been scratched by a cat will be ignorant about dogs, he will quickly recall the painful feline experience and, when confronted by a snarling dog, his ignorance will transform itself into fear. He will fear the dog not because it is a dog, but instead because

he has learned that hip-high, furry critters with claws and teeth are painful and to be taken seriously. Hence the natural cowardice of man precedes his nurtured cowardice, but the latter is begotten by the former and, as such, it is as natural and as certain as natural cowardice. In other words, man is born a coward and during the development of his consciousness, which is to say, as he emerges from the infantile state of nature, he becomes more cowardly. But more on this presently.

The second tenet is rather straightforward and requires little in the way of explanation: All sane and sentient adult human beings are perforce aware that they shall one day expire. That is, man recognizes and is aware of his mortality – a condition Nietzsche succinctly summarizes by saying that “the belly is the reason man does not so easily take himself for a god.”⁹ Man is reminded of his mortality thrice daily and occasionally, but with poignant efficacy, by the sight of an exposed belly like Creugas’. The second fundamental tenet therefore arises from the first. Man’s awareness of his mortality arises from his fear of things painful because when he learns that the pain of hunger, and pain in general, is a forewarning of death, he has first sighted the terminal nature of his existence – he has been made aware of his mortality. Thus the dissolution of the puerile state of nature, which is characterized by either fear or ignorance, begins when the child matures because as he develops his consciousness he becomes more and more able to make the connexion between hunger and death. When the child stands at the threshold of the state of nature, he gains the knowledge that hunger and pain mean mortality and mortality means death.

Death, however, is like an unfamiliar dog. It is an unknown. In fact, death is *the* unknown and since *homo timidus* fears things painful and things unknown, both of which are apparent characteristics of dying and death, he thus begins to fear death itself. The realization of mortality is begotten by fear but this realization also exacerbates the original proclivity to fear. In other words, whereas in the state of nature (infantility) the child’s fear is based on tactility, there is an intermediate state of nature in which the knowledge of death,

⁹Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #141, p.101.

or more precisely, the awareness of the unknown, becomes part of his consciousness. Fear is no longer contingent on merely the anticipation of immediate and superficial pain, but on the more gripping inevitability of the ultimate pain – on the anticipation of the pain of death. But just as the child recoils from the prospect of tactile pain, the conscious human being will also retreat from death. This retreat we have already called the will to life which means that the state of nature is abolished with the advent of the will to life. The state of nature no longer exists when man begins to address his fear of death: it ends when man transforms his natural fear into an unnatural courage. Hence, when we ask how man stands in relation to death, we are inquiring into the conventions he learns and creates in order to adequately cope with the paralyzing fear of death. Furthermore, when we ask if modern man's relation to death has anything in common with the Greeks, we can say that indeed it does – it arises from natural impulses that all men have in common.

Having stated these two fundamentals, we can now return to the threefold characterization of man's relation to death. The first characteristic stems directly from his natural cowardice and the awareness of his mortality. Since man is aware of his mortality, which means he knows that death is inevitable, and since man is uncertain of what follows immanent death, he fears the inevitable. And as we have already determined, that which is painful, or that which is potentially painful (*viz.*, unknown) is a serious matter. In short, death is unknown and frightening and, consequently, it is serious. Pain and uncertainty are serious, but death is the most serious – death is thus a terrible spectre that haunts man from the day he becomes aware of his mortality.

The second characteristic of man's relation to death follows this directly. Because the terrible spectre haunts man relentlessly, and because death is serious, it is therefore to be avoided. The fear of what happens after biological life causes man to eschew death for as long as possible. This, of course, is a restatement of the will to life – the preference of being alive rather than dead – but with the addition of *for as long as possible*. This modification of our first definition of the will to life seems to make the universal application

of these characteristics impossible because we can point to Greek athletics as an example of men not avoiding death for as long as possible. In fact, we can point to the entire history of the West, including our 'civilized' modern era, as being rife with gruesome stories of martial bravery and barbaric spectacles resulting in untimely deaths. The fear of death, it seems, does not have an equally paralyzing effect for all men. Apparently, the second characteristic does not apply to Olympic athletes, warriors, or others who do not make it their primary concern to avoid death for as long as possible.

If, however, we ask what it means to avoid death for as long as possible, we will realize that in its most imperative form it means to avoid death forever. In other words, if the will to life demands of the individual to avoid death for as long as possible, the strongest demand it can make is to avoid death forever and herein lies the third characteristic of man's relation to death: since death is frightening and serious and to be avoided for as long as possible, it becomes man's task eternal to overcome it – to find a cure for both death and the paralyzing fear it inspires. The will to life, therefore, amplified by culture, becomes the will to immortality; it becomes the effort to overcome the seriousness of death by projecting one's existence beyond the boundaries of normal biological life.

Like the first two characteristics, this characteristic of man's relation to death is not exclusive to any particular culture at any particular time. It is held by those with modern sensibilities just as it is held by ancient Hellenic athletes. In fact, the will to immortality is necessarily part of all cultures because without it, the terror invoked by the certainty of death would make living impossible. Immortality, or at least the notion of immortality, allows man to know the unknowable – it creates a world in which man can know death, so to speak, thereby making it less frightening and less serious. The belief in immortality and the concomitant will to immortality allows man to believe that immanent life is more than just a prelude to death. All men require this possibility because without it, existence would be unbearable and would amount to no more than an inescapable death sentence. The certainty of the finality of biological death must therefore be transformed into either uncertainty, or, to

use terms more befitting the modern belief in immortality, into the certainty of projecting one's existence beyond immanent boundaries. It is through this transformation that the athletes with which we began, warriors, Socrates, Christian martyrs, and human beings in general are able to muster the courage required to put themselves in perilously dangerous situations, to opt for death, or to carry on living despite the terrible spectre of death. Man's natural cowardice and the knowledge of the certainty of death that he learns in the state of nature are addressed with the notion of immortality. The seriousness of immanent death is therefore abated by the prospect of immortality in one form or another because if there is a possibility that death can be overcome, it is no longer as serious or frightening. Like the dog feared by the child, if it can be dealt with, understood, or in Nietzsche's reckoning, overpowered, then it is less threatening. If it is less threatening, then it is less serious. The will to immortality is thus satisfied by a culture that enables man to achieve what will hereinafter be referred to as ontological projection; culture is a genuine and concerted effort to overcome the fear inspired by the certainty of immanent death by projecting one's life beyond normal existential boundaries.

Culture, which includes political endeavours, philosophy, and religious movements, is therefore spawned from *homo timidus*' psychological need to create a world and a consciousness that can adequately address the terrible spectre of death. Although this contention is not stated in precisely these words in Nietzsche's philosophical *oeuvre*, it would not be imprudent to say that this formulation is the underlying leitmotiv in his thought. In one of his earliest works, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he states that as human beings "we are forced to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence – yet we are not to become rigid with fear."¹⁰ Later, in *The Twilight of the Idols*, he writes that the driving force creating culture, and especially the culture of nineteenth century Germany, is "conditioned and excited by the feeling of fear."¹¹ *Homo timidus*, as we have called man, fears death

¹⁰Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 17, p. 104.

¹¹Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 64.

because it is the great Unknown, and since "danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown," Nietzsche states that man's "first instinct is to *eliminate* these distressing states."¹² In order to overcome the anxiety caused by the Unknown, and to deal with the fear that accompanies the Unknown, man instinctively creates a culture in which he will be able "to trace something unknown back to something known [and this] is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and moreover gives a feeling of power."¹³

It is this "feeling of power" that marks Nietzsche's departure from the usual and, as has been said, *humane* understanding of the will to life and the will to immortality. Whereas the terrors of individual existence force *homo timidus* to create an explanation, Nietzsche finds that for most of mankind, "any explanation is better than none. Because it is at bottom only a question of wanting to get rid of oppressive ideas, one is not exactly particular about what means one uses to get rid of them."¹⁴ Nietzsche, however, is particular about the means. The indiscriminate creation of a form of ontological projection simply to get rid of oppressive ideas means that for most of mankind power remains merely a feeling; it is not true power. Consequently, the life lived by most of mankind becomes mere biological life because it neglects that which Nietzsche considers to be the essence of life – the will to power.

Hence, to Nietzsche's understanding, the will to life and the will to immortality, as it is understood with modern sensibilities, is reduced to merely a struggle for biological existence and this "struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power – in accordance with the will to power which is the will to life."¹⁵ Thus does the boxing match between Creugas and Damoxenus demonstrate the difference between the will to life as it is understood with the "emasculate idea of modernity" and as it is understood by Nietzsche. For the former, it violates the principles of the will to life

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #345, p. 292.

because it endangers the biological lives of the participants; for the latter and for the Homeric Greeks, it is a quintessential example of the will to life because it embodies the will to power and, as will soon be demonstrated, a higher form of ontological projection. Moreover, it demonstrates that risking one's biological life, or even losing one's biological life, does not necessarily negate the principles of what Nietzsche would consider to be a life-affirming form of ontological projection. The task of this discussion is therefore first to discover how Nietzsche differentiates between the various forms of ontological projection and second, to demonstrate that these very distinctions provide a basis for understanding not only Nietzsche's thought in general, but also a basis for understanding how our own relation to death shapes the way we regard ancient boxing matches.

II

HOMO TIMIDUS AND COSMOLOGICAL PROJECTION

§ 1. Apollinian Culture

What we have set out thus far is that the historical task of Western political endeavours, religious movements, and philosophy is to create a world and a consciousness that will adequately address the terrible spectre of death; that *homo timidus* necessarily creates a cultural milieu wherein his fear of death, which is the most terrible aspect of reality, will be abated by the prospect of ontological projection in one form or another. Now we will turn our attention to the following question: is one form of ontological projection superior to another? For Nietzsche, as has already been indicated, the answer to this question is a definite yes and much of his work focuses on this very theme. In fact, we can say that his body of work can be divided into two intricately interrelated parts: one which discusses a 'better way' and one which can be regarded as a polemic against the indiscriminate ways, which he calls the decadent ways, of overcoming the serious existential problems that are raised by the notion of death. Since, however, to be decadent means to be marked by decay and decline, there must necessarily be a healthy and lofty point of origin from which things can begin to decay and to decline. Thus we will begin our discussion of ontological projection here and because with this, we will be better equipped to understand what Nietzsche considers to be the decadent forms.

For Nietzsche, the lofty and healthy point of origin is best typified by the ancients. Specifically, it lies with the Homeric Greeks. With the Homeric Greeks he finds a plausible, perhaps even a noble manifestation of the will to immortality. However, before embarking, we must add two words of reservation. First, when Nietzsche discusses the Greeks, he is not referring to ancient Greeks in general. He is quite specifically referring to the race of men who emerged from the age that corresponds with Hesiod's fourth age – the age of a "just and good, a godlike race of heroes, who are called the demi-gods." He is

referring to the race of men who "sought the flocks of Oedipus, and died in Cadmus' land at seven-gated Thebes; and some who crossed the open sea in ships, for fair-haired Helen's sake" and most importantly, he is referring to "the race of heroes, [who] *well deserve their fame*."¹

In Nietzsche's estimation, the later Greeks, that is, the Greeks subsequent to and including Socrates and Plato, are decadent for reasons that will be discussed presently. It is in the world of the pre-Socratic Greeks that Nietzsche suggests there may be an example of a better way. This, however, brings us to the second word of reservation. Nietzsche does not endorse this world wholeheartedly. He says that it is a "world into which I have sought to find a way, into which I have perhaps found a new way," but he then immediately states that his "taste, which may be called the opposite of a tolerant taste, is even here far from uttering a wholesale Yes: in general it dislikes saying Yes, it would rather say No."²

For this reason it is not surprising that Nietzsche began his philosophical publications with *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this work we find a basic contradistinction of cultures in the Greek world: the Dionysian versus the Socratic. As Nietzsche himself says about this book:

I was the first to see the real opposition: the degenerating instinct that turns against life with subterranean vengefulness (Christianity, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in a certain sense already the philosophy of Plato, and all of idealism as typical forms) versus a formula for the highest affirmation, born of fullness, of overfullness, a Yes-saying without reservation, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything that is questionable and strange in existence.³

In other words, Nietzsche begins his philosophy by contrasting two ways of addressing the strange and questionable realities of existence; to use our terminology, he begins by opposing a higher and a decadent form of overcoming the fear of death – a higher (tragic) and a decadent (nihilistic) manifestation of the will to immortality. For now we will discuss the higher type – which is embodied in the antithesis of the Apollinian (the world of dreams

¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 158-175, emphasis added.

² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 116.

³ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 272.

and sculpture: the more serious) and the Dionysian (the world of intoxication and music: the less serious).

The usual course for a discussion of *The Birth of Tragedy* is to focus on the Dionysian because it is this half of the antithesis that recurs repeatedly through Nietzsche's work. However, since the Dionysian is only half of the antithesis, it does not stand alone and a study of the Apollinian is equally necessary to understand the work fully. Apollinian culture, as Nietzsche calls it, is the world begotten from dreams. Dreams, he says, are where the "glorious divine figures first appeared to the souls of men; in dreams the great shaper beheld the splendid bodies of superhuman beings."⁴ From these images, man – the great shaper – is able to create an interpretation of life and "by reflecting on these processes he trains himself for life."⁵ Dreams, however, do not always produce agreeable and friendly images. The harsher experiences of universal existence also pass into a dream world, which includes "the serious, the troubled, the sad, the gloomy, the sudden restraints, the tricks of accident, anxious expectations, in short, the whole divine comedy of life."⁶ For Nietzsche, these images serve as the common ground of human experience and are not unlike what we have already described as the moment man becomes aware of his mortality. In the Apollinian dream world man "lives and suffers... amid the dangers and terrors"⁷ and is thus made aware of the terminal nature of his existence. Hence Apollo, the god of dreams, the god of mere appearance, of illusion, of sculpture, of the nonimagistic, is also the god of the *principium individuationis* – the god of just boundaries.⁸ When man becomes aware of his mortality, he becomes aware of the limits that perforce accompany finite individual existence. As Nietzsche indicates, from the *wisdom* acquired of the Apollinian dream world, where every man is an artist, "the Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence."⁹

⁴Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 1, p. 33.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶*Ibid.*, section 3, pp. 42-43.

⁷*Ibid.*, section 1, p. 35.

⁸Cf. *ibid.*, section 9, p. 72.

⁹*Ibid.*, section 3, p. 42.

It seems odd that Nietzsche would refer to the recognition of the terminal nature of human existence as wisdom. A spectator with the aforementioned modern sensibilities, or “with another religion in his heart,” will be discouraged and disappointed and soon turn his back on this Apollinian culture because he finds in it no reason for “moral elevation, even for sanctity, for disincarnate spirituality, for charity and benevolence.”¹⁰ In short, he will turn his back on it because it does not assuage the discomfort that arises from the knowledge of his mortality; it does not help him overcome his fear of death. In fact, the folk wisdom to which Nietzsche refers does quite the opposite:

‘There is an ancient story that King Midas hunted in the forest a long time for the wise Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, without capturing him. When Silenus at last fell into his hands, the king asked what was the best and most desirable of all things for man. Fixed and immovable, the demigod said not a word, till at last, urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh and broke out into these words: ‘Oh, wretched and ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is – to die soon.’’¹¹

How, then, did such disheartening wisdom aid the Greek in overcoming the terrible spectre of death?

For Nietzsche, the answer to this question lies in what he calls the Olympian middle world of art. That the Greek might endure the terror of this wisdom, that he might deal with the titanic powers of nature, he could “interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians,”¹² for the wisdom of the sylvan god, Silenus, also included the mythical exemplars. Nietzsche points to the quotidian consumption of Prometheus’ liver, Oedipus’ terrible fate, and the family curse of the Atridae as examples of the Olympian world participating in a universal Moira. Thus “out of the original Titanic divine order of terror, the Olympian divine order of joy gradually evolved through the Apollinian impulse

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹*Ibid.* Cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*:

Though he has watched a decent age pass by
A man will sometimes still desire the world
I swear I see no wisdom in that man.
...Not to be born surpasses thought and speech.
The second best is to have seen the light
And then to go back quickly whence we came.

¹²Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 3, p. 42.

toward beauty, just as roses burst from thorny bushes. How else could this people, so sensitive, so vehement in its desires, so singularly capable of *suffering* have endured existence, if it had not been revealed to them in their gods, surrounded with a higher glory?"¹³

The wisdom of the sylvan god, which applied in the mortal and immortal worlds alike, allowed human existence to mirror Olympian theogony. Now, if we recall that Nietzsche refers to man as "the great shaper," it becomes evident that the wisdom of Silenus is actually human wisdom. Thus both the "glorious divine figures," the gods, and poetic inspiration, the wisdom of the gods, were created from a most profound need – the need to overcome the terrors of existence. Thus, in Nietzsche's words,

the same impulse which calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life, was also the cause of the Olympian world which the Hellenic "will" made use of as a transfiguring mirror. Thus do the gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it – the only satisfactory theodicy! Existence under the bright sunshine of such gods is regarded as desirable in itself, and the real pain of Homeric men is caused by parting from it, especially by early parting: so that now, reversing the wisdom of Silenus, we might say of the Greeks that "to die soon is worst of all for them, the next worst – to die at all." Once heard, it will ring out again; do not forget the lament of the short-lived Achilles, mourning the leaflike change and vicissitudes of the race of men and the decline of the heroic age. It is not unworthy of the greatest hero to long for a continuation of life, even though he live it as a day laborer. At the Apollinian stage of development, the "will" longs so vehemently for this existence, the Homeric man feels himself so completely at one with it, that lamentation itself becomes a song of praise.¹⁴

Hence, the *Apollinian* makes the Greek man both aware of his mortality and at the same time seduces him to continue living despite the terrors of existence. The Greeks create culture, specifically, they create *Apollinian culture*, to overcome the fear of death. Apollinian culture, however, does not satisfy their need for ontological projection – hence the other side of Nietzsche's duality: the Dionysian.

§ 2. Dionysian Culture

Whereas Nietzsche describes the Apollinian world to be the world of dreams and terror, for the Dionysian world he uses the analogy of intoxication. The Dionysian is the

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 43.

“blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature” and brings with it a “collapse of the *principium individuationis*.”¹⁵ Of course, the ecstasy of the Dionysian emotions is most readily achieved under the influence of “narcotic draught,” or, in more romantic terms, from the “potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy.” With either description, under the charm of the Dionysian, the emotions grow in intensity and “everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness.” The bond between man and man is renewed, and nature, “which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.”¹⁶

For Nietzsche, Homeric man is able to stand out of the knowledge of his mortal boundaries with the ecstasy of Dionysian intoxication. The hostile barriers of necessity are broken in the orgiastic singing and dancing of the Dionysian. Thus, in

song and dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing. ...supernatural sounds emanate from him, too: he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.¹⁷

In other words, Dionysian ecstasy stands in direct opposition to the Apollinian *principium individuationis*. Whereas Apollinian art creates boundaries, the rapture of the Dionysian art, while it lasts, creates boundlessness and excessiveness. It temporarily erases the limitations of human existence by transfiguring man into a participant in the world of the gods. “The worlds of everyday reality and of Dionysian reality,” Nietzsche writes, are therefore separated by a “chasm of oblivion.”¹⁸ In this state of oblivion, man is temporarily able to forget the horror or absurdity of existence of which the Apollinian dream world has made him aware. Of course, with enough narcotic draught or potent comings of spring, any human could temporarily forget his troubles, but with the advent of the Dionysian festival, the “destruction of the *principium individuationis* for the first time

¹⁵*Ibid.*, section 1, p. 36.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, section 7, p. 60.

became an artistic phenomenon”¹⁹ and overcoming the terrors of existence becomes an act of creative deification.

Hellenic man, however, could never completely abandon the Apollinian in favour of the Dionysian because both are “artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, *without the mediation of the human artist*.”²⁰ Just as man cannot control the convalescent dreams that spring from the natural world of sleep, neither can he reject the raw sensuality and cruelty of Dionysian revelry. The songs and pantomime, however, of the “dually-minded revelers was something new and unheard-of in the Homeric-Greek world; and the Dionysian *music* in particular excited awe and terror”²¹ because it defied the martial and measured nature of Apollinian art. This music, which Nietzsche refers to as the Dionysian dithyramb, embodies all the symbols of excessiveness and boundlessness – the opposite of the Apollinian. Hence, for the Apollinian man, the Dionysian dithyramb man would have seemed as “titanic” and “barbaric” as the “pre-Apollinian age – that of the Titans; and the extra-Apollinian world – that of the barbarians.”²² But in this, even the Apollinian Greek would re-cognize his inward relation to the overthrown Titans and heroes and be forced to recognize that “despite all its beauty and moderation, his entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and of knowledge, revealed to him by the Dionysian. And behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus! The ‘titanic’ and the ‘barbaric’ were in the last analysis as necessary as the Apollinian.”²³

The separate art worlds of the two deities are in constant opposition, but at the same time they mutually augment each another. The Apollinian Greek sees in his nature the titanic and barbaric and the Dionysian Greek is always drawn back from orgiastic revelry by the Apollinian. As we have already noted, the oblivion of Dionysian intoxication is only temporary because the terrors of everyday reality, the terrors of the wisdom of the sylvan

¹⁹*Ibid.*, section 2, p. 40.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 38.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 40.

²²*Ibid.*, section 4, p. 46.

²³*Ibid.*.

god, perforce re-enter man's consciousness. These art impulses are simultaneously present in the Greek man; these two separate inclinations run parallel to each other and are, for the most part, openly at odds in each man. As such, the two art impulses impel each other constantly to create new and more powerful artistic births, which in turn perpetuates the antagonism. This perpetual antagonism, however, "is only superficially reconciled by the common term 'art'; till eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic 'will,' they appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling ultimately generate an equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art – Attic tragedy."²⁴

Thus for Nietzsche, tragedy was the result of the welding together of the Apollinian and the Dionysian. This mysterious union, as Nietzsche calls it, had its origin in the dramatic dithyramb of the Dionysian musician, who, in his art form, created a "repetition and a recast of the world."²⁵ Such a musician was, "without any images, himself pure primordial pain and its primordial re-echoing."²⁶ Nietzsche claims that this music evolved itself into the Greek satyr chorus – the chorus of the primitive tragedy – which had as its domain a space high above that of ordinary mortals. In fact, for the actual presentation of these early tragedies, the Hellenes constructed a platform which represented "a fictitious *natural state*" whereupon resided "fictitious *natural* beings." The scaffolding, however, is "no arbitrary world placed by whim between heaven and earth; rather it is a world with the same reality and credibility that Olympus had with its inhabitants possessed for the believing Hellene."²⁷ Thus, having confronted the reality of the terrors of existence, the Greek man of culture sat himself before the middle world of the dithyrambic satyr chorus and felt himself to be "nullified," preserved, and lifted up. He experienced the metaphysical comfort

that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable – this comfort appears in incarnate clarity in the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural beings who live ineradicably, as it were, behind all civilization and remain

²⁴*Ibid.*, section 1, p. 33.

²⁵*Ibid.*, section 5, p. 49.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁷*Ibid.*, section 7, p. 58.

eternally the same, despite the changes of generations and of the history of nations. With this chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art – life.²⁸

Herein lies the crux of what Nietzsche considers to be the higher form of ontological projection. With tragic art the Greek is able to turn “the nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live.”²⁹ When struck by the frightening reality of the finite nature of his existence, he overcomes the paralysis by placing himself, at the same time, both before and within a transfiguring reconstruction of the eternally recurring cosmological order. Thus the Homeric Greek form of ontological projection, the form of ontological projection from which Nietzsche says there can only be decay and decline, will therefore be referred to as cosmological projection. For these Greeks, cosmological projection is embodied in the Dionysian mysteries and therein “the *fundamental fact* of the Hellenic instinct expresses itself – its ‘will to life’.”³⁰

As has been said, the will to immortality is the will to life in its most imperative form. Ontological projection is the culture created to realize the will to immortality and cosmological projection, manifested in Dionysian mysteries, is the Homeric Greek expression of the will to immortality. With this, Nietzsche would certainly agree, for when he asks, “What did the Hellene guarantee to himself with these mysteries?” his answer is quite pointed: Homeric man guaranteed to himself “eternal life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change.”³¹ For Nietzsche, this triumphant Yes to life beyond change and death contained in the Dionysian symbolism represents the profoundest instinct of life and the highest manifestation of ontological projection because, as an expression of the will to life, it is an even stronger expression of the will to power. Before the Dionysian satyr chorus,

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁰Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 120.

³¹*Ibid.*.

Nietzsche writes, Homeric man overcomes his great fear of death because he experiences an

affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the sacrifice of its highest types – *that* is what I called the Dionysian, *that* is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. Not so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge... but beyond pity and terror, to realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*.³²

In other words, the Homeric Greek expression of the will to immortality contained not only a joy in destruction, which means a joy in overcoming and overpowering, but also a joy in the eternally recurring destructive forces of the cosmos. He took joy and found an affirmation of life from the fact that he could willingly transfigure himself into an equal participant both before and within these eternally destructive powers. These powers, however, are not only destructive because they also embody creation. The affirmative Yes to the pain of death and change includes a Yes to beginnings as well. As a Yes to the eternal recurrence of life, it includes a Yes to the pains of life and birth. With the Dionysian, the pains of existence are mirrored by the pains of childbirth, and the Homeric Greek was able to understand that “all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, *postulates pain....*” He discovered that “for the eternal joy in creating to exist, for the will to life eternally to affirm itself, the ‘torment of childbirth’ must also exist eternally.”³³

§ 3. The Eternal Recurrence of the Same

For the reader familiar with Nietzsche's work, the parallel between cosmological projection and his doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same will now be evident. Cosmological projection is for Nietzsche the highest formulation for overcoming the horrors and absurdities of existence because, above all, it embodies both the eternally recurring destructiveness and the creativity of the will to power. Although the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same is not stated in precisely these words in *The Birth of*

³²*Ibid.*, p. 121.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

Tragedy, we have seen that the thought is present and that even Nietzsche later recognized this. Similarly, in Nietzsche's early work the notion of the will to power is present but the thought is not specifically articulated. Despite this, however, it is important to note that the ideas are present in the very beginning of his work and, moreover, that these two ideas, which Martin Heidegger refers to as two of Nietzsche's five major rubrics,³⁴ are interconnected with each other in such a way that it is impossible to understand one without the other.

The connection between the eternal recurrence, the pain of existence, the will to immortality, and the will to power becomes more evident when Nietzsche first directly articulates the thought. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes:

The Greatest Weight. – What, if some day of night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moon light between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!'

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?³⁵

The communication of the eternal recurrence is called the greatest weight because from it man is given the thought that he must live out the horrors and absurdities of existence, the thought that he must relive the fear-inspiring world that is revealed to him in the Apollinian dream world, for all eternity. Indeed, this is a great weight for man to bear.

However, it must be noted that the communication of the doctrine is at this point only in the interrogative. Nietzsche asks "what, if..." this thought were given to man. What would man's reaction be? Would man curse the demon who spoke thus or would he

³⁴In Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, pp. 3-12. According to Heidegger, the other three major rubrics are: nihilism, the revaluation of all values hitherto, and Overman.

³⁵Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #341, p. 274.

call him a god? The answer begins in the next passage entitled *Incipit tragoedia* – the tragedy begins – which is nearly identical to the first page of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. We have already seen that at the Greek tragedy festivals the participants, through their shared experience of the theogon, which is to say cosmological, trials and tribulations, felt themselves to be uplifted, nullified, and preserved. More importantly, they felt themselves to be, like the gods themselves, part of the eternally recurring cosmological order. Thus the first communication of the eternal recurrence in *The Gay Science* is not only a veiled proclamation, it is an introduction to the demon who will "speak thus". It is an introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche himself says that "the idea of the eternal recurrence" is "the fundamental conception of this work"³⁶ and that Zarathustra is the teacher. The greatest weight, or, the heaviest burden that is put on man with the first communication of the eternal recurrence, is lightened with the appearance of the teacher.

And what does Zarathustra teach that lightens the greatest weight? Zarathustra teaches another of Nietzsche's five major rubrics – he teaches the Superman. *Zarathustra* begins immediately after the first proclamation of the eternal recurrence but the first thing the teacher of eternal recurrence teaches is not the eternal recurrence of the same, but rather it is the Superman.³⁷ When Zarathustra, Nietzsche's literary incarnation of Dionysos, comes down from the mountain and enters the marketplace the first phrase he utters is: "*I teach you the Superman.*" Later in this sermon he says "The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!"³⁸ What this means is that the teacher of the eternal recurrence, when teaching this doctrine, is also teaching the willing of the Superman – the ultimate manifestation of the will to power. When the will to life, that is, the will to self-preservation, takes its most imperative form – the will to immortality – it is actually the will to power because "a living thing desires above

³⁶Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 295.

³⁷Nietzsche's term is "übermensch": literally, overman. Although this is translated as either Superman or Overman, for the sake of consistency, I will use Superman but the connotations of Overman should also be kept in mind.

³⁸Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 41.

all to *vent* its strength – life as such is the will to power – : self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences* of it.”³⁹ Hence on the one hand Nietzsche says that the Superman is the meaning of the earth, but on the other he says that the world is “a monster of energy, without beginning or end...” and that it is a “*Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying... *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!*”⁴⁰

The confusion created by the apparent synonymy of the two rubrics is abated when we realize that Nietzsche has this in mind: *Homo timidus* properly overcomes the horrors and absurdities of existence when he participates in and accepts the cosmos as an eternally recurring quantum of power. He does this because as a participant he actively wills the transfiguration of his humanness into the quintessential manifestation of the will to power – the Superman. Thus *incipit tragoedie*, which means the highest form of life affirmation (cosmological projection) begins when man wills himself into the eternally recurring cosmological order of the Gods, is therefore also *INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA* because Zarathustra is the teacher of both the Superman and the eternal recurrence of the same. Zarathustra teaches immortality in the most literal meaning of word. He teaches non-mortality; he teaches the god-like overpowering of power; he teaches the godification of man; in short, he teaches cosmological projection which is not immortality *per se*, but rather, immortalization in the sense of deification.

The most succinct summary of this teaching of Zarathustra is found in the section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled *The Convalescent*. In this passage Zarathustra’s animals recognize the dual lesson of their master and state:

Thine animals know it well, O Zarathustra, who thou art and must become: behold, *thou art the teacher of the eternal return*, – that is now *thy* fate!

That thou must be the first to teach this teaching – how could this great fate not be thy greatest danger and infirmity!

Behold, we know what thou teachest: that all things eternally return, and ourselves with them, and that we have already existed times without number, and all things with us.

³⁹Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, # 13, p. 44.

⁴⁰Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1067, p. 550.

Thou teachest that there is a great year of Becoming, a prodigy of a great year: it must, like a sand-glass, ever turn up anew, that it may anew run down and run out: –

So that all these years are like one another, in the greatest things and also in the smallest, so that we ourselves, in every year, are like ourselves in the greatest and also in the smallest.

And if thou wouldst now die, O Zarathustra, behold, we know also how thou wouldst then speak to thyself: – but thine animals beseech thee not to die yet!

Thou wouldst speak – and without trembling, buoyant rather with bliss, for a great weight and worry would be taken from thee, thou patientest one!

'Now do I die and disappear,' wouldst thou say, 'and in a moment I am nothing. Souls are as mortal as bodies.

But the plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined, – it will create me again! I myself pertain to the causes of the eternal return.

I come again with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent – *not* to a new life or a better life or a similar life:

I come again eternally to this identical and selfsame life, in its greatest and in its smallest, to teach again the eternal return of all things, –

– To speak again the word of the great noontide of earth and man, to announce again to man the Superman.⁴¹

Zarathustra's lesson, as it is revealed through his animals, begins with the eternal recurrence and concludes with the Superman. If, however, the relationship between the two and the relationship between these rubrics and overcoming the horrors and absurdities of existence is not yet clear, what follows will certainly lend to a more thorough understanding of this interpretation.

⁴¹Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, pp. 269-271. Livy edition.

III

COSMOLOGICAL PROJECTION AT OLYMPIA

§ 1. A History

With the Dionysian festival a cultural milieu was created wherein the spectators were able to overcome the fear of death by projecting their biological existence not merely forward, but also upward. The travails and uncertainties of human life and death were mirrored by Olympian theogony and the Hellene felt himself nullified as an equal participant in the eternally recurring cosmological order. The Dionysian festivals described by Nietzsche, however, were not the only festivals in the ancient world to re-echo the eternally recurring power of the cosmological order. Many of the life-affirming elements Nietzsche attributes to the Dionysian festivals are evident, perhaps even more poignantly, in the ancient Greek athletic competitions. More specifically, just as the Dionysian festivals were a cultural creation that allowed the Hellene to express his will to immortality as cosmological projection and immortalization, the competitions at Olympia also served in this same capacity. Moreover, the lofty and healthy type of ontological projection, as Nietzsche would call it, that was manifest at the ancient Olympic athletic festivals was more than just the creation of a culture that allowed both the competitors and the spectators alike to participate in the eternally recurring cosmological order. It contained many of the origins of the cosmological order into which the Hellene aspired to project his existence. Although Nietzsche does not specifically discuss the Olympic games,¹ it will soon be evident that the healthy and lofty form of the will to immortality – the love of and participation in the eternal

¹As will soon be demonstrated, Nietzsche does discuss the agonistic element of Greek culture and was likely familiar with the ideas of Jacob Burckhardt, an historian who was a senior colleague of Nietzsche's at Basel University. Burckhardt coined the term 'agonal' when describing the contest as one of the main characteristics of Greek culture. It is possible that Nietzsche did not devote much attention to the festival at Olympia because, other than ancient references, there were few extant sources available at his time. Interest in the festival does not seem to have waxed until well after the first excavation of the site, which was undertaken by Ernst Curtius in 1875 and finally yielded results in 1881. Excavation of the site continued well into the 1960's.

recurrence of the same – that he ascribes to the Dionysian festivals is equally applicable to the ancient athletic festivals.

The festival at Olympia, according to Ludwig Drees, had its earliest origins with the Pre-Homeric fertility cults of Ilithyia, who is mother nature herself, and her snake-son, Sosipolis.² Over time and with the spread of agriculture, these agrarian cults produced their own myths which incorporated the annual events of sowing, growth, and harvest. Sowing came to be regarded as the consummation of the marriage between mother earth and her divine son, the seed corn. “After the sacred marriage of the sowing,” Drees writes, “the seed grew to its full height and then died at harvest time, only to be reborn in the following year when the whole process was re-enacted.”³ In these cults, the eternally recurring cycle of birth, marriage, and death of their god was celebrated. Later, when the peninsula became more settled by the early Hellenes and the population grew as a result of increased agriculture, the male god of these cults became known as Zeus and the earth mother became known as Hera. Zeus was also known by the laudatory epithet of Pelops which was construed to mean ‘abundance producer’. Hera, which means ‘year of vegetation’, was forced to defeat Poseidon in battle for the religious rights in her own homeland, and was therefore also known by the epithet of Hippodamia – subduer of the horse – because Poseidon had been conceived as a horse. Together, the divine couple of Zeus-Pelops and Hera-Magna Mater-Hippodamia served as the patron god and goddess of the Mycenaean kingdom and the cult spread throughout the entire Peloponnese. The entire Peloponnese obviously includes the sanctuary at Olympia where, according to myth, the earth mother Hippodamia was a native goddess because she was the daughter of the king of Pisa,

²Ludwig Drees, *Olympia: Gods, Artists, and Athletes*, p. 13. Sosipolis: literally, “the saviour of the city.” Much of the following information is taken from Drees’ excellent book, but E. Norman Gardiner’s *Olympia: Its History and Remains* has also been very illuminating. I have opted to rely on Drees because his book is the most systematic and thorough book available. If the reader desires more information on Olympia and Greek athletics, Drees’ book is a fine starting point as it is very straightforward and is most excellently documented. For further information see Olga Alexander (ed.), *Mind and Body: Athletic Competition in Ancient Greece* (Athens 1989), Donald Kyle, *Athletics in Ancient Athens* (Leiden 1987), and Michael Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence, and Culture*, (New Haven 1987).

³Drees, p. 15.

Oenomaus. There, Pelops was regarded as an intruder and was forced to win the hand of Hera in a ritual chariot race against her father.

With this mythic chariot race the seeds of competition were planted at Olympia. There are, however, varying accounts of the race. In one formulation, Pelops wins through treachery – he replaces Oenomaus' brass axle pins with wax pins and, during the competition, the pins melt and Oenomaus is thrown from the chariot. Pelops then promptly kills him and takes his kingdom. In another account, Pelops wins through the assistance of a god – Poseidon gives him a golden chariot drawn by four winged horses and casts a spell on Oenomaus' chariot causing the wheels to come off and sending the rider flying to his death. In either version, the core of the myth is intact: Pelops wins his bride in competition.⁴ Competition and contest, which is to say, power and overpowering, thus lie at the mythopoetic root of the sanctuary at Olympia.

When the Mycenaean Kingdom collapsed around 1200 BC, the Dorians and Eleans brought their victorious Zeus (god) to the sanctuary. In the new formulation of the myth the Northern Zeus took possession of the religious offices of the resident gods by killing them with thunderbolts thrown from his throne on Mount Olympus. He took Hera, the former patron goddess of the Mycenae, as his wife, and Demeter, the goddess of the poor and the slaves, as his lover. Hera's marriage to the Zeus of Mount Olympus deprived her of her superordinate status of Magna Mater that she held with the ancient fertility cults and caused a separation of Hera and Hippodamia. Further, since the Zeus of Mount Olympia took sole possession of the title 'Zeus', Pelops was therefore deprived of his original status and reduced to the rank of a hero – a demi-god.

The reason that the gods of the old fertility cults had to be replaced was because, as Drees writes, "the new tribes did not understand the cults practiced by their vanquished opponents. To their way of thinking a god who was born and died each year was no god at all, for he was demonstrably mortal."⁵ The mortality of Zeus-Pelops, however, was

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

accepted by the old fertility cults as part of the eternally recurring cycle of the vegetation year and the games of the new gods probably arose from the celebratory funeral games of the old festivals. Under the old cults, games were held to mark the death of Pelops who, as ancient myth tells us, was killed as a small boy by his father, Tantalus, and served up as a meal on the table of the gods. The gods, however, recognized the crime (save Demeter), condemned Tantalus to eternal torment, restored the boy to life, and welcomed him into the pantheon. The killing of Pelops, who is symbolized by the seed corn, is thus a necessary part of the agrarian cycle. The sowing of seed is akin to the killing of the seed because it must die in the womb of the Magna Mater before it can be reborn. For this reason, according to Drees,

in the anthropomorphic view of the universe this phase of the vegetation year could only be expressed if Pelops was personified by a small boy who was then murdered in a ritual ceremony and devoured by the other members of the cult at a sacral meal. Subsequently, however, the murderers of the divine child [Tantalus/sowers] had to submit to trial by ordeal, opposing one another with naked swords in mortal combat. Plutarch, who was himself a sacrificial priest at Delphi, confirms that such duels were fought in Olympia. The blood sacrifice was supposed to appease the wrath of the god at his own violent death and so reconcile him to the living. It seems that the more arduous athletic events such as the wrestling, boxing and *pankration*... were derived from these duels.⁶

The original objective of the funeral games at Olympia was therefore to convince the dead god to return to life. In essence, they were a lamentation for the rent in the immortal nature of the gods in which man participated as a sower and reaper.⁷

When the new Zeus was brought to the sanctuary at Olympia the entire Hellenic pantheon accompanied him. The simple pre-Hellenic sanctuary at Olympia was thus transformed into an illustrious abode and a centre of pan-Hellenic significance. "When this god came to Olympia," Drees states, "he brought Hellas with him...[and] his shrine became a place of pilgrimage for the citizens of every Greek state."⁸ The age-old fertility games and funeral games were assimilated into the new Olympian cult and the actual Olympic games, as we know of them today, commenced in 776 B.C.. According to Pausanias, the funeral

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 19.

games of the fertility cult were re-established afresh by Iphitus, a contemporary of Lycurgus, the famous Spartan statesman:

At this time Greece was grievously worn by internal strife and plague, and it occurred to Iphitus to ask the god at Delphi for deliverance from these evils. The story goes that the Pythian priestess ordained that Iphitus himself and the Eleans must renew the Olympic games.⁹

Iphitus therefore heeded the oracle and resurrected the games in accordance with legend surrounding their mythical founder, Heracles.

Heracles' legendary founding of the Olympic games is bound up with the other Hellenic myths. While traveling in Greece, Pausanias heard the myth from "the most learned antiquaries of Elis" who claimed that "when Zeus was born, Rhea entrusted the guardianship of her son to the Dactyls of Ida, who are the same as those called Curetes. They came from Cretan Ida – Heracles, Paeonaeus, Epimedes, Iasius and Ida." Zeus was thus protected from Cronus (time) by the same Heracles who, at the Olympic sanctuary, "matched his brothers, as a game, in a running-race and crowned the winner with a branch of wild olive, of which they had such a copious supply that they slept on heaps of its leaves while still green. ...Heracles of Ida, therefore has the reputation of being the first to have held, on the occasion I mentioned, the games, and to have called them Olympic."¹⁰ As for the olive wreath, Heracles is also credited for bringing it to Olympia from the land of the Hyperboreans and, when the games were revived by Iphitus, this tradition was also renewed.

In one of his Olympic odes, Pindar also credits Heracles with founding the games and clearly links the new myths to the old myths of the fertility cults:

Now the ordinances of Zeus have roused me to sing of the peerless contest, of trials six in number;
Which Herakles established by the ancient tomb of Pelops...
And having pegged the Altis all about, he cleared it fair and free,
And consecrated all the level plain around to solace and festivity,
Having honoured the stream of Alpheus in company with the twelve sovereign deities.
And he called the hill by Kronos' name; for of aforetime while Oinomaos ruled, it was nameless, drenched with many a snow-shower...
And established the fifth-yearly festival with the first holding of

⁹Pausanias, V.iv.6.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, V.vii.6-8.

Olympian games and the winning of victories.¹¹

The importance of Heracles' accreditation as the founder of the Olympic game should not be overlooked. Heracles, we must keep in mind, is the only human being to have ever acquired the immortality of the gods and ascend into the pantheon on Mount Olympia. Hence, when the games began anew in 776 B.C., they were completely mimetic of the games put on by Heracles himself. In other words, the foot race between Heracles and his brothers was emulated in the foot-race for men and when the winner was crowned with the olive wreath, he was crowned with that which "was sacred to Cretan Heracles and was inhabited by him. Consequently, when the victor in the foot-race was crowned with a wreath of wild olive, he assumed the properties of the god."¹² In terms we have been using thus far, by winning the race just as Heracles had won the race, the victor projected himself into the Olympian cosmological order. The deeds of the athlete were reflective of the deeds of the deity thereby allowing the contestant to feel, symbolically at least, immortal.

The religious origin of the games at Olympia, however, is not universally accepted. E. Norman Gardiner claims that although the athletic competitions were closely related to religion, their origin is independent and secular. "They are the natural outcome," he writes, "of the universal love of play, love of fighting, love of competition, and their character is determined by the warlike character of the people."¹³ He continues this interpretation by demonstrating that athletic festivals could only be held at religious festivals because they alone could afford the necessary stability and security needed for such assemblies in the unsettled political environment of ancient Greece. While Gardiner's separation of the religious and secular aspects of the games is interesting, it is nonetheless more important to note that the Greeks' love of play, love of fighting, and love of competition – in short, the agonistic element of Greek life – had religious origins.

¹¹ Pindar, *Olympian X*.

¹² Drees, p. 27.

¹³ E. Norman Gardiner, *Olympia: Its History and Remains*, p. 67.

In "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche outlines the religious grounding of the Hellenic contest, which, in Greek, is *agon*. He begins his explanation by presenting a lengthy quotation from Hesiod's "Works and Days" and his translation is as follows:

Two Eris-goddesses are on earth. One would like to praise the one Eris, just as much as to blame the other, if one uses one's reason. For these two goddesses have quite different dispositions. For the one, the cruel one, furthers the evil war and feud! No mortal likes her, but under the yoke of need one pays honour to the burdensome Eris, according to the decree of the immortals. She, as the elder, gave birth to black night. Zeus the high-ruling one, however, placed the other Eris upon the roots of the earth and among men as a much better one. She urges even the unskilled man to work, and if one who lacks property beholds another who is rich, then he hastens to sow in similar fashion and to plant and to put his house in order; the neighbour vies with the neighbour who strives after fortune. Good is this Eris to men. The potter also has grudge against the potter, and the carpenter against the carpenter; the beggar envies the beggar, and the singer the singer.¹⁴

In other translations, 'Eris-goddess' is rendered as Strife or Discord and, as Nietzsche recognizes, it is difficult for our contemporaries to comprehend the inclusion of grudge and envy with a good god. Our modern sensibilities would rather that these be considered vices and be included with the evil Eris. For the whole of ancient Greece, however, this was not so. Instead, in the Greek world there would be wide spread agreement with Hesiod "who first designates as an evil one that Eris who leads men against one another to a hostile war of extermination, and secondly praises another Eris as the good one, who as jealousy, spite, envy, incites men to activity but not to the action of war to the knife but to the action of *contest*."¹⁵ Envy and spite are not considered blemishes by the Greeks, but instead as gifts of a beneficent deity that drive man to noble action – they are natural endowments that entice man to Olympia and to other contests of power.

The religious origin of competition in Greek culture is confirmed by Johan Huizinga in his very revealing book, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Huizinga writes that "during the whole span of their existence the Hellenic games remained closely allied with religion, even in later times when, on a superficial view, they might have the appearance of national sports pure and simple."¹⁶ As an explicit example, he points to

¹⁴As cited in Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest" in *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 54-55. The passage cited is from Hesiod, "Works and Days," 12-27.

¹⁵Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," p. 55.

¹⁶Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, p. 73.

the competitive zeal in the initiation rites of Spartan boys who, upon entering manhood, endured a cruel trial of pain before the altar. Furthermore, we can point to the ritual funeral games sponsored by Achilles in honor of his dead friend Patrokles.¹⁷ Such competitions as this are believed to have links to the aforementioned funeral games of the ancient fertility cults. In any case, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that the agonistic element in Greek culture is both begotten by and revolves around a common religious grounding. Even the Greek word for competition, *agon*, brings to mind *agora*, which is oft-rendered as marketplace, but can also connote 'gathering', not unlike a gathering for a religious festival.

There is also a connexion between *agon* and *agonia*, the latter word, which originally meant 'contest', later also came to mean 'death-struggle' and 'fear'.¹⁸ Hence, for the Greeks, competitions were akin to a religious congregation where men gathered, filled with the noble envy and spite of the beneficent Eris-Goddess, to participate in a fearful death-struggle, not unlike the fearful death struggle that is life, for a prize. But in stating this, we are then forced to ask: of what are the competitors jealous? Nietzsche refers to a list of contests compiled by Aristotle and states that the most striking example in this list is the envy-inspired contest between poets. He says that "the most striking instance [is] how a dead person can still incite a living one to consuming jealousy; thus for example Aristotle designates the relation between the Kolophonian Xenophanes and Homer. We do not understand this attack on the national hero of poetry in all its strength, if we do not imagine, as later on also with Plato, the root of this attack to be the ardent desire to step into the place of the overthrown poet and to inherit his fame."¹⁹ In Hesiod's words, even the artist strives with the artist for the prize. The artist, the athlete, the rhetorician, the warrior, or for that matter, every Hellene, is driven to contest because he is jealous of the fame of his adversaries. In sum, he is envious of the recognition given to his adversaries and recognition is the foundation of power.

¹⁷*Iliad*, Bk. 23, 257-897.

¹⁸Huizinga, p. 51.

¹⁹Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," p. 56.

§ 2. Fame and Immortality

In the agonistic culture of the Greeks, fame was the prize for the victor. Winning was all-important because, as Pindar writes, “he who has won luxuriant renown in games or war, once he has been well praised, receives the greatest of gains: regard in the speech of his fellow citizens, and on the lips of strangers.”²⁰ In the ancient world, regard in the speech of fellow citizens is in fact fame. It is fame based on recognition and, if the deeds are noteworthy enough, the regard will be on the lips of citizen and foreigner alike beyond the earthly existence of the competitor. In other words, winning in contest (or war) allows the competitor, thanks to his noble deeds or speech, to project his existence beyond the boundaries of normal biological life. He will be recognized not only in life, but also in death.

As Huizinga asserts, winning not only demonstrates one to be superior in the outcome of the game *per se*, this superiority also “tends to confer upon the winner a semblance of superiority in general. In this respect he wins something more than the game as such. He has won esteem, obtained honour.”²¹ At Olympia, we know that the victor was awarded the wreath of wild olive, but this reward was, at best, perfunctory. The real reward of the victory was that it elevated the athlete “out of the anonymity of the daily round ...[and] those who acquired personal fame received a further lease of life for they lived on in the memory of posterity.”²² In Lucian’s dialogue *Anacharsis*, Anacharsis, a Skythian, and Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, are discussing these very prizes. Anacharsis is having the purpose of the *gymnasion* explained to him and, being a barbarian, is understandably skeptical about the value of a simple olive wreath (or the crown of pine at Isthmia, the laurel-berries at Delphi, and the olive oil at the Panathenaia). Solon says to him:

But my good man, we do not look at the prizes which are handed out. They are tokens of victory and a way to recognize the victors. Together with them goes a reputation which is worth everything to the victors, and getting kicked is a small price to pay for those who

²⁰Pindar, Isthmian Odes I, 50-51.

²¹Huizinga, p. 50.

²²Drees, p. 101.

seek fame through pain. It cannot be acquired without pain, and the man who wants it must endure many hardships in the beginning before he can even start to see the profitable and sweet end of his efforts.²³

The wreath of wild olive is thus the crest or emblem that elicits recognition for the winner; it affords him esteem, honour, and power in both his time and after he has died.

Drees also recognizes that the only hope Hellenic man had for acquiring some form of immortality was to perform some deed that would be remembered by both the present and future generations. The deeds performed at Olympia, however, were not merely 'some deed', as Drees puts it. They were not arbitrary deeds that merely brought notoriety to the athlete. Instead, they were very specific deeds that created a very specific form of fame and recognition. Immortality was acquired at Olympia because when the wreath of wild olive was placed on the head of the victor, he was bestowed with the properties of the first Olympic victor – Heracles. By emulating the deeds of Heracles, the only human to ever become immortal, the Olympic athlete was not only defeating his opponents in the game, he was matching the deeds of the most enviable man. He was matching the deeds of a man who had gained a position over man – he was immortalized or, in Nietzsche's terminology, a Superman. And indeed, the winners at Olympia were often revered as gods upon returning to their native cities.

The immortality of the winner was further ensured, symbolically at least, because each Olympic victor was permitted to erect a votive statue at the sanctuary. On a most basic level, the physicality of these statues would speak to future generations of the accomplishment of the athlete thereby projecting him beyond the normal boundaries of his biological existence. There is, however, more to the statues. Drees tells us that the "victors were forbidden to erect statues which reproduced their own features." Instead, the "votive offerings had to be presented in an ideal form."²⁴ The athlete's natural bodily features were not recreated on the statue, but instead, the imperfections, which is to say, the humanness of

²³Lucian, *Anacharsis*, 10-11. As cited in Stephen G. Miller, *Arete: Greek Sports from the Sources*, p. 76.

²⁴Drees, p. 104.

his form, were replaced with the ideal body of the god. As has already been discussed, in winning at Olympia the athlete was emulating the deeds of a god, or more precisely, of a mortal who became immortal, and in the commemoration of the emulation, the statue also had to reflect the divine nature of such an act. In other words, the statue immortalizing the athlete had to represent the symbolic immortalization of the athlete. In winning, the athlete had demonstrated the spirit of the god, had the spirit of the god placed on his head, and was artistically transfigured into the ideal form of the immortal god.

Although there must have been hundreds of such statues erected at Olympia, only a few odd bases and other assorted fragments have been recovered.²⁵ One of these bases, however, speaks volumes on the point that is here being made. On a base of white marble dated 472 B.C., the following inscription has been deciphered: "Euthymos of Lokroi, son of Atykles, having won three times at Olympia, set up this figure to be admired by mortals. Euthymos of Lokroi Epizephyrioi dedicated it. Pythagoras of Samos made it."²⁶ The athlete, hewn in marble in the ideal form of a god, is to be admired by mortals. Clearly, victory at Olympia, or overpowering all other humans in contest, sets the winner apart from mortals, and, more importantly, sets him apart from death. He commands mortal humans to regard him as an immortal god.

There is another tale that illustrates this point even further. In the famous pankration match of the 54th Olympiad, Arrhichion of Phigalia, who had won at Olympia twice previously, won for a third time. The pankration, which Philostratus calls the noblest form of contest, was a combination of boxing and wrestling in which the competitors fought with their hands, feet, elbows, their knees, their necks and their heads. The only thing prohibited to the athletes was biting and putting fingers in orifices. As Franz Mezö puts it, "the pankratiasts were allowed to gouge one another's eyes out... they were allowed to trip their opponents, lay hold of their feet, nose and ears, dislocate their fingers and arms and apply strangle-holds. If one man succeeded in throwing the other he was entitled to sit on

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁶Stephen Miller, *Arete: Greek Sports from Ancient Sources*, p. 107.

him and beat him about the head, face and ears; he could also kick him and even trample on him.”²⁷ The victor was declared when one of the contestants was either incapacitated or yielded by raising two fingers. In any case, in the final pankration match in 564 B.C., Arrhichion was killed by his opponent. The victory was memorialized in a painting that still existed in the early second century A.D. in Naples and is described by Philostratus in his *Imagines*. In this work, Philostratus is apparently describing the painting to a group of ten year old boys:

Wherefore the opponent seizing Arrhichion around the waist thought to kill him and he had already thrust his arm around his throat to cut off his breath. Fitting his legs close around his groin and gripping the ends of his feet in the bend of his knees, he did get ahead of Arrhichion in the matter of choking, with the sleep of death stealing over his senses, but he did not get ahead of Arrhichion's reasoning powers for at the moment he happened to relax the pressure of his legs, Arrhichion kicked away the ball of his opponent's foot beneath which his own right side was imperiled, leaving the leg bent at the knee, dangling there. Then Arrhichion seized his opponent at the groin so that he could no longer resist and sank down on him toward the left. Gripping the end of the useless foot in the crook of his knee, he did not leave the ankle joint in place such was the force of his sharp wrench outwards. Arrhichion himself was becoming weak as consciousness was leaving him but his body could all the more forcibly fall against an object.²⁸

The pain in the ankle of Arrhichion's opponent was so great that he capitulated, but the combination of his leg-hold and strangle-hold was forceful enough that it killed Arrhichion at precisely the same time. As was the case for Creugas of Epidamnus, the dead man was given the victory, but in the painting described by Philostratus,

the man who did the strangling is painted in the picture to look like a corpse and is the one indicating defeat by his upraised hand; whereas Arrhichion is painted as victors always are, for his color is fresh, perspiration is still dripping, and he is smiling just as living men do when they become aware of victory.²⁹

Because he won, Arrhichion is depicted as living despite the fact that he was killed. The loser is shown as the dead man. Hence, not only is the dead man's life renewed and projected artistically, he is remembered and discussed seven centuries later in Italy and 26 centuries later in this work. The loser, however, acquired no fame and achieved no such immortality. In fact, in 174 A.D. when Pausanias was describing the same pankration match, he says that Arrhichion was “contending for the wild olive with the last remaining

²⁷As cited in Drees, p. 83.

²⁸Philostratus, *Imagines*, II.6.

²⁹*Ibid.*.

competitor, *whoever he was*,"³⁰ The man's name is not even known and we can be sure that there was no statue erected for him nor a royal welcome for him when he returned to his native city.

§ 3. Immortality and the Eternal Recurrence

To say that immortality was conferred upon athletic victors means that cosmological projection, as a manifestation of the will to immortality, was a possibility for merely a few thousand Hellenes, because, through the 1168 year history of the Olympic games, there were relatively few competitors and even fewer victors. For the Hellenes who were not victorious athletes, however, the festival at Olympia served a similar function as it did for the athlete. First, we know that the festival itself had its earliest roots in the agrarian cycle. In essence, the festival reflected, and more importantly, celebrated the eternally recurring cycle of birth, growth, and death. For the spectators, the games at Olympia were therefore akin to immanent participation in this cosmological cycle because not only were the games themselves reflective of the cycle, they were also an immanent manifestation of continuity. The games were, after all, held without interruption for nearly twelve centuries.

The age old tradition that the games represented, however, went beyond mere longevity. The penteteric cycle of the festival was an intricate part of the Hellenes' notion of time. According to Gardiner, the early Greeks reckoned time according to the lunar month and the lunar year and it was the moon that determined the propitiousness of a day. The use of the lunar calendar, however, created many problems for the Greeks because the lunar year does not accord with the solar year. Since the solar year is roughly $365\frac{1}{4}$ and the lunar year is only 354 days, there is a difference of $11\frac{1}{4}$ days. From time to time the early Greeks remedied this difference by arbitrarily inserting intercalary days or months. Unfortunately this method caused endless confusion and it was only with the discovery that eight solar years were roughly equal to ninety-nine lunar months that the Greeks were able

³⁰Pausanias, VIII, XL, 1. Emphasis added.

to reconcile their calendar. This "discovery was easy to make," Gardiner claims, "especially at a time when men regularly observed the heavenly bodies in order to regulate their lives and it was a discovery of extreme importance, for it provided every eight years a fresh starting-point for the calendar, a means of readjusting it and setting it right. The cycle of ninety-nine months then formed a Great Year which brought into agreement the lunar month and the solar year."³¹

At that time it was a widespread custom of the farmers to welcome the seasons and the lunar phases with certain rites. For example, the vernal equinox, as it marked the start of the farming season, was everywhere given special rites of lustration. Similarly, the days of the new moon and the full moon were observed universally. Hence "it was then only natural that the beginning of the Great Year should be similarly marked, and that in view of its importance as harmonizing the lunar and solar periods it should be associated with the worship of the most important deity of the community. Particularly was this the case when, as at Olympia, that deity was himself a sky-god. No theory of sun and moon, no sacred marriage between sun-god and moon-goddess, is necessary to explain the rise of such a festival. It was inevitable."³² The penteteric cycle of the games, which by modern accounting is every fourth year, thus grew out of the Great Year. However, since the interval of the Great Year was inconveniently long, that is, since holding the festival at the beginning of every Great Year would leave an eight year hiatus between competitions, it is believed that the practice arose of celebrating both the beginning and the middle of the period – every four years.³³ The occasion of the festival at Olympia was thus begotten from the eternal cycle that affected every Hellene and from the universal desire for renewal, both temporal and symbolic. It was, as we have learned from Zarathustra's teaching, "a great year of becoming, a colossus of a year." It was a year that must "like an hour-glass, turn itself over again and again, so that it may run down and run out anew: so that all these years

³¹Gardiner, p. 70.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 71.

³³*Ibid.*.

resemble one another, in the greatest things and in the smallest, so that we ourselves resemble ourselves in each great year, in the greatest things and in the smallest."³⁴

The non-competitors therefore had a stake in the mythological grounding of the festival but, despite its profundity, it is unlikely that this association is the sole explanation for widespread enthusiasm generated by the games. The second function that the festival at Olympia served for the Hellenes who were not victorious athletes is thus directly related to the immortality conferred on the victor. Huizinga tells us that winning at play, a category which includes the agonistic culture of ancient Greece, brings honour and esteem to the victor. From our discussion, we know that in Hellenic culture this is directly related to fame and immortality. The fame of the individual, victorious athlete, however, had a direct bearing on his fellow citizens because this same "honour and esteem at once accrue to the benefit of the group to which the victor belongs." The success of the victor, Huizinga says, "readily passes from the individual to the group."³⁵ The inhabitants of the victor's native city shared his fame and, in the same way as Nietzsche describes it for the participants at the Dionysian festival, felt themselves to be nullified, preserved, and lifted up. Producing such a son meant that the city itself had elevated itself in the eternally recurring order of the cosmos and further, had procured the favour of the gods. The immortality bestowed on the one son thus became a renewed possibility for the rest, albeit via other forms of agonistic competition.

As would be expected, the victor received considerable fame and accolades in his native land. For example, in Athens, the victorious athlete was given the honour and leisure of free meals in the *prytaneum*, and in Sparta "they enjoyed the highest privilege to which a 'peer' might aspire for they were allowed to fight beside the king in battle."³⁶ In many cities, when a victor returned from the sacred games, it was customary to make a breach in the city walls because the victor had "assumed the identity of the god and consequently

³⁴Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 237. See *Supra*, n. 41, Chapter 2.

³⁵Huizinga, p. 50.

³⁶Drees, p. 106.

would have been entitled to a private entrance. In later times it was doubtless reinterpreted and may well have been regarded as an indication that a city which produces such valiant sons had no need of city walls.”³⁷ City walls, we know, are erected as a defence against uncertainty; they are erected for protection against unknown threats to the biological existence of the inhabitants and the immanent existence of the city itself. In short, they are political manifestations of the will to life. They are inspired by fear and erected as a barricade against death. Breaching the walls of a city after a native son has been victorious at Olympia is thus very significant symbolically – it demonstrates that the city as a whole is also participating in the cosmological projection embodied in the both the festival and the victorious athlete. It demonstrates that death, or at least the fear of death has, to some extent, been overcome through the deified athlete and the eternally recurring athletic festival.

Huizinga considers competition, and specifically athletic competition, as part of play. He says that “to dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty, to endure tension — these are the essence of the play spirit.”³⁸ In the case of the festival at Olympia, this holds true for the athlete and the spectator alike. But such a description of a human activity need not be confined to athletic competitions because exactly the same thing can be said about politics. Like athletics, politics require courage. Politics are about risk, uncertainty, and daring. Hence it is not a great leap to draw similarities between the athletic competitions in ancient Greece and their political culture. In fact, if we agree with Huizinga that “archaic man *plays* the order of nature as imprinted on his consciousness,”³⁹ then it follows that this order of nature would also be reflected in the culture’s political constitution. In other words, if it is through “playing that society expresses its interpretation of life and the world”⁴⁰ then, consequently, their political organization will directly reflect their play.

Thus the agon, the competitions at Olympia, were a direct reflection of the theogonic cosmos. Participation in this struggle was a playful participation in the painful ‘death-

³⁷*Ibid.*. Cf. Suetonius, *Nero*, 25.

³⁸Huizinga, p. 51.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 46.

struggle' that is life. By playing with the most serious questions confronting existence, the Greeks were able to alleviate the seriousness of life. By participating in a playful recreation of the eternally recurring cosmological order, they were able, just as they were with the Dionysian festival, to turn "the nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live."⁴¹ They were able to turn the nauseous thoughts about life and its strangest and sternest problems into a higher form of ontological projection – cosmological projection. Solon sums it up rather succinctly:

I cannot, just by telling you about it, convince you of the pleasure of what happens at such a festival as well as you would learn for yourself, sitting in the middle of the crowd, watching the *arete* of men and physical beauty, amazing conditioning and great skill and irresistible force and daring and pride and unbeatable determination and indescribable passion for victory. I know that you would not stop praising and cheering and applauding.⁴²

And, as the order of nature was reflected in the athletic festival, the Hellene was able to praise and cheer the travails and uncertainties of human life and death; he was able to realize in himself the eternal joy of becoming – a joy which also encompasses joy in destruction.⁴³ As he watched the beauty of the agon, he also watched a re-creation of life: his praising and cheering of the athletes would therefore be a praising and cheering of the eternal recurrence of life and death, and with the conclusion of the joyous festival, he could say, in accordance with Zarathustra's lesson of the eternal recurrence and the Superman, "Was that — life? Very well! Once more!"⁴⁴

⁴¹Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 7, p. 60.

⁴²Lucian, *Anacharsis*, 14. As cited in Miller, *Arete*, p. 77.

⁴³See *Supra*, note 32, Chapter 2.

⁴⁴Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 325.

IV

SOCRATISM AND THEORETICAL PROJECTION: THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY AND SPORT

§ 1. Courage

With the Dionysian and agonistic festivals, Homeric man was able to overcome his fear of death by feeling himself to be a participant in the eternally recurring cosmos. He was able to throw his existence forward. But being cosmological, this form of immortality must include all, hence 'throwing forward' does not encompass that which is equally important for this form of ontological projection; it does not include the past. Thus the term projection, insofar as it etymologically means 'forward throwing', is insufficient. What is needed is a term that also includes 'up-throwing,' 'down-throwing' and, importantly, 'prejection' or 'backward throwing'. The eternal recurrence necessarily needs a link to the past which is a major reason it is the greatest weight for moderns who, when considering immortality and history, are inclined to think in terms of 'going forward' (progress).

We have seen how the ontological projection at Olympia includes the past as well as the future and present. The votive statues, for instance, imparted immortality on the victorious athlete by speaking to the present and unborn generations, but in their construction they were genealogically linked to a noble and divine past. If we consider an immortalizing action at Olympia to be event A, then we can say that event -A, which is the same victory won by prior athletes and first enacted by the gods, has occurred innumerable times in the past. Event A is thus inseparable from -A, just as the beginning of the Great Year is inseparable from the present. Moreover, the certainty that the festival will once again be held yields the inevitability that the victory (the emulation of the Gods) will be reproduced in the future. A future victory, event A+, is merely a replica of A and A- and consequently A- and A+ are, from the perspective of A, as inextricably connected with A as A is with the past and the future. A-, A, and A+ are recurrences of the same. As opposed

to other conceptions of repeating events, for the Greeks there was no notion of improvement – they kept no records of records, so to speak. There was no index of running times or jumping distances. A was not compared qualitatively with A- in this manner. What mattered was victory, which is to say, what mattered is the re-enactment and perpetuation of the noble deeds – the overpowering of the will to power – of the past. Victory, or perhaps more accurately, fine (kalon) victory, binds the past to the present, the present to the future and, importantly, the future to the past. Event A is a willed emulation of the original event A- precisely because this prior event is worthy of emulation. Immortality is desired not merely because man is afraid of death, but because he feels a profound affiliation with a noble and good past and, as the heir to this past and the father of the future, he is an important part of what Nietzsche's Zarathustra calls "the ring of existence"¹ and "the marriage-ring of rings – the ring of the return."² Thus we see that for Nietzsche, this manifestation of the eternal recurrence of the same is the high point of ontological projection because through it, the tragic/agonistic Hellene could find instinctive joy in the realities of life, which perforce includes the seriousness of pain and death, by instinctively immersing himself in an unbroken ring of noble and divine manifestations of the will to power.

In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche expresses this same formulation but with much more literary eloquence. In *Of the Vision and the Enigma*, Zarathustra relates his "abysmal thought," of the eternal recurrence to those "who take long journeys and do not want to live without danger." He says to these fearless venturers and adventurers that he had a vision in which the Spirit of Gravity appeared to him in the shape of a miscreant dwarf. The dwarf, riding on Zarathustra's shoulders, was burdening him with "leaden-thoughts" and doing his best to discourage his courage. Zarathustra, however, is discouraged for only a short time and finally says "Halt dwarf! either I – or thou!" The dwarf then jumps off Zarathustra's

¹Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 266. Livy edition.

²*Ibid.*, from *The Seven Seals*, pp. 280-284. Livy edition.

shoulder and squats on a stone where a gateway stood. Zarathustra points to the gateway and says:

"Look at this gateway! Dwarf!"... "it hath two faces. Two roads come together here: these hath no one yet gone to the end of.

This long lane backwards: it continueth for an eternity. And that long lane forward – that is another eternity.

They are antithetical to one another, these roads; they directly abut on one another: – and it is here, at this gateway, that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: 'This Moment.'

But should one follow them further – and ever further and further on, thinkest thou, dwarf, that these roads would be eternally antithetical?" –

"Everything straight lieth," murmured the dwarf, contemptuously. "All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle."

"Thou spirit of gravity!" said I wrathfully, "do not take it too lightly! Or I shall let thee squat where thou squatest, Haltfoot, – and I carried thee *high*!"

"Observe," continued I, "This Moment! From the gateway, This Moment, there runneth a long eternal lane *backwards*: behind us lieth an eternity.

Must not whatever *can* run its course of all things, have already run along that lane? Must not whatever *can* happen of all things have already happened, resulted, and gone by?

And if everything have already existed, what thinkest thou, dwarf, of This Moment? Must not this gateway also – have already existed?

And are not all things closely bound together in such [ways] that This Moment draweth all coming things after it? *Consequently* – – itself also?

For whatever *can* run its course of all things, also in this long lane *outward* – *must* it once more run! –

And this slow spider which creepeth in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and thou and I in this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must we not all have already existed?

– And must we not return and run in that other lane out before us, that long weird lane – must we not eternally return?" ³

The gateway, This Moment, is therefore not only the place where Zarathustra communicates his doctrine of the eternal return, it is also the place where he looks into life and sees reality as man standing at an abyss. He sees that "as deeply as man looketh into life, so deeply also doth he look into suffering." This Moment, however, is also the place, or perhaps more accurately, it is the time when he musters courage in the face of this reality; it is the time when he finds the courage to participate in the eternal recurrence. At the gateway, Zarathustra realizes that "courage is the best slayer: courage slayeth also fellow-suffering" and that "courage which attacketh: it slayeth even death itself."⁴ In the preceding formulation, event A is thus akin to This Moment. It is the time when, for example, the Olympic athlete, fully aware of his mortality, finds the courage to emulate the

³*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191. Livy edition.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 189. Livy edition.

noble actions of the long lane that continueth eternally backward. The festival is the gateway where and when event A- meets A+ and man, with the requisite courage, satisfies his will to immortality and his will to power by embarking on the "long lane *outward*."⁵

§ 2. Instinct and Reason

Now, having explicated this manifestation of the will to immortality, which Nietzsche refers to as the 'better way', we can turn our attention to what he considers to be the decadent ways. In other words, we can now turn our attention to the second part of the "two antitheses: the tragic disposition, [and] the Socratic disposition."⁶ It is important to note that changing our focus from the noble manifestation of the will to immortality, as Nietzsche would refer to it, to the more decadent, to the Socratic disposition, does not alter the ground of our discussion. Like all other humans, Socrates also faced death and was forced to consider how one should act, or what kind of culture one should create in order that we, *homo timidus*, may live with this fear of death. For Nietzsche, however, Socrates was a decadent because of the way he approached this fundamental ontological problem. In fact, we can even say that it is because Socrates approached the questions at all that he is considered a decadent. In other words, that Socrates was explicitly asking these questions demonstrates that he was consciously seeking answers – which is fundamentally the opposite of the Dionysian way. Hence, as Nietzsche writes, "there is eternal conflict between *the theoretic* and *the tragic world view*" because "ancient tragedy was diverted from its course by the dialectic desire for knowledge and the optimism of science."⁷ With the tragic disposition these issues were not addressed explicitly or consciously; instead they were dealt with instinctively and herein lies the key difference between the Dionysian and the Socratic: instinct as opposed to reason. In Socrates' words, it is akin to the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry"⁸ and cosmological projection, insofar as it is the

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 191. Livy edition.

⁶Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 432, p. 236.

⁷Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 17, p. 106.

⁸Plato, *The Republic*, 607b.

expression of an instinctive will to immortality, must therefore be replaced by a new form of ontological projection: theoretical projection.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche says that the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, between instinct and reason, began in earnest with the advent of the New Attic Comedy of Euripides. Euripides, in alliance with the “demonic power” of Socrates, scared Dionysus from the tragic stage because he adhered to “the character of *aesthetic Socratism*, whose supreme law reads roughly as follows, ‘To be beautiful everything must be intelligible,’ as the counterpart to the Socratic dictum, ‘Knowledge is virtue.’”⁹ With this principle in hand, Euripides altered the elements of the old tragedy – he changed the form of the characters, the language, the music, and the dramatic structure so that they might, in his estimation, correctly accord with the Socratic canon.

The Euripidean-Socratic opposition to the old form of tragedy was thus based on their supposition that the old poets, including the tragic poets, lacked ‘*nous*.’ They were opposed to it because even with the instinctive creations of the old poets, death was still the great unknown and the answer to the eternal ontological questions were, at best, foggy. Hence, in their artistic endeavours, the old poets appeared to be “drunken” and lost in “primeval chaos.” Euripides therefore considered himself to be “the first sober person amid a crowd of drunken ones,” and, as such, “he had to condemn the ‘drunken’ poets.”¹⁰ Whereas poets before him, such as Aeschylus, did what was right *despite* doing it unconsciously, Euripides said they did it wrong *because* they created unconsciously. Consciousness, or reason, became the requisite for both beauty and goodness and the creative (and destructive) actions of the old tragic poet, not to mention the actions of the Homeric warrior and the Olympic athlete, were condemned because they were based on instinct.

In this new perspective of good and beauty there was no place for instinct and thus, in general, there was no room for the poet. As Nietzsche points out, “the divine Plato, too,

⁹Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 12, pp. 83-84.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 85.

almost always speaks only ironically of the creative faculty of the poet, insofar as it is not conscious insight, and places it on a par with the gift of the soothsayer and dream-interpreter: the poet is incapable of composing until he becomes unconscious and bereft of understanding.”¹¹ Or, in terms we have been using, Euripides, Socrates, and Plato recognized that the poet can only be poetically creative when he is engulfed in the Dionysian intoxication of instinct. But Euripides had to reject this sort of aestheticism because, armed with his aesthetic principle that everything beautiful must be conscious (which is parallel to the Socratic dictum that everything good must be conscious) he did not comprehend the Old Tragedy and therefore did not esteem it.

We can be certain that Euripides would not agree with Nietzsche’s, and likely Aeschylus’, belief that “for any kind of art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: *intoxication*.”¹² Be it the intoxication of sexual excitement or any of the great desires, the intoxication of feasting, contest, brave deeds, victory, crowds, cruelty, destruction, narcotics, or the intoxication of the will, the “essence of intoxication is the feeling of plenitude and increased energy.” The man experiencing “this condition transforms things until they mirror his power – until they are reflections of his perfection.”¹³ In terms of the Old Tragedy, the reflection of the Hellene’s perfection is his transformation of the tragic stage into the theogonical world in which he symbolically participates. In terms of Greek athletics, which employed all of the aforementioned forms of intoxication, the transformation is embodied in the deification of the athlete and the concomitant elevation of the athlete’s kinsmen and townsfolk. In any case, intoxication, or as Nietzsche also calls it, the Dionysian disposition, permeated almost every aspect of the Greek world prior to the advent of New Attic Comedy and aesthetic Socratism.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 82. Cf. pp. 83-85.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 83.

Hence it is not surprising that when Socrates came on the scene he found everywhere the instinctive and intoxicated transfiguration of the older Hellenes that directly contradicted his prerequisite of consciousness for the existence of beauty and good. As Nietzsche says, in his critical peregrinations of Athens, "to [Socrates'] astonishment he perceived that all the celebrities were without a proper and sure insight, even with regard to their own professions, and they practiced them *only by instinct*."¹⁴ He found that the greatest statesmen, orators, poets, and artists were unable to account for their actions, morality, and creations because they were based on instinct and begotten in moments of intoxication. Further, he found that the driving force behind the agonistic culture of the Greeks was also spawned by instinctive emotions, namely that of grudge and envy, and for Socrates, the abiding ontological questions were far too serious to be addressed *only by instinct*. Cosmological projection was therefore unsatisfactory for Socrates because it relied on the old, Homeric instincts of the poet, the warrior and the athlete. Cosmological projection, as it was embodied in the athletic agon, was therefore to be rejected and replaced with the new form of ontological projection. The higher form of the will to immortality, as it was manifested and achieved with the Old Tragedy and the athletic festivals, was rejected by Socrates and Euripides precisely because it was founded on instinct. Hence the decadent Socratic influence, the culture of theoretical projection, was, at bottom, a debasement of the agonistic instinct and is referred to by Nietzsche as "instinct-disintegration."¹⁵

This instinct-disintegration of Socrates was a conscious effort. There was nothing instinctive about the war and battle he waged against the Homeric agonal instincts of the sophists, rhetoricians, statesmen, athletes, and warriors. Nietzsche goes so far as to put imaginary words on the lips of Socrates:

'Behold, I can also do what my great rivals can; yea I can do it even better than they. No Protagoras has composed such beautiful myths as I, no dramatist such a spirited and

¹⁴Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 12, p. 87.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 89.

fascinating whole as the Symposion, no orator penned such an oration as I put up in the Gorgias and now I reject all that together and condemn all imitative art!"¹⁶

The question, however, is why Socrates would reject all of the traditional instinctive culture of the Hellenes. Why was he compelled to condemn all existing art as well as all existing ethics because they were *only by instinct*? Why did the philosophers become "the *décadents* of Hellenism" and create a "counter-movement against the old, the noble taste (—against the agonal instinct, against the *polis*, against the value of the race, against the authority of tradition)?"¹⁷

The answer lies in the formulation with which we began. For Socrates, Euripides and Plato, participation in the eternally recurring cosmos was uncertain. In essence, there was no proof that cosmological projection, as we have described it, provided any real form of immortality. Therefore when Socrates consciously considered the questions of existence, he found that instinctive participation in the cosmos and the eternal recurrence were inadequate because there was still uncertainty. Because uncertainty means unknown, and because anything unknown causes *homo timidus* to be frightened, Socrates necessarily sought out a new way "to heal the eternal wound of existence"¹⁸ by knowing the unknown. He sought to create a culture that would trace the unknown back to something known which is "alleviating, soothing, gratifying and moreover gives a feeling of power."¹⁹

As the break from the old, agonistic culture, theoretical projection manifested itself not in the form of festivals, but instead in the form of dialectics. This new culture, however, could not be entirely severed from the old and this is why Nietzsche says that the philosophic tradition established by Socrates and solidified by Plato "should rather be defined as an erotic contest, as a further development and inward intensification of the old agonal gymnastics and their *presuppositions*.... What finally emerged from this philosophical

¹⁶Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," pp. 59-60.

¹⁷Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 119.

¹⁸Nietzsche *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 18, p. 109.

¹⁹Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 64.

eroticism of Plato? A new artistic form of the Greek agon, dialectics.”²⁰ The difference, however, between the old agonistic culture and the new dialectic culture is not to be underestimated. With the former, man was able to act because he was conditioned by instinct. He was able to act on the impulses of his will to power because prior to the advent of dialectics, “the great reasonableness underlying all moral education lay in the fact that it always attempted to attain to *the certainty of an instinct*: so that neither good intentions nor good means, as such, first required to enter consciousness.”²¹ Thus the conditioning acquired in the training of the athlete and the warrior was readily and instinctively transferred to life.

With the latter, that is, with dialectics, instinctive actions were mocked by Socrates because they were unable to justify themselves logically. The equation formulated by logic is incompatible with the aforementioned cyclical equation. Whereas with the old form of immortality, A was instinctively willed to be equal to A-, and A+ was expected to be equal to both A and A-, dialectics introduced causality. A- had to be explained and it had to justify A. But since A- was instinctive, it could not be justified and therefore it was to be rejected. As a result, A+, the noble future, was no longer linked to a noble past and as such, the cyclical nature of the eternal recurrence was broken. In order for A+ to be good, A had to be modified to prepare the ground for a better future.

The old agonistic instincts, however, were not completely rejected but instead their development was inward. In other words, the intense competitive spirit of the individual was redirected inward and the zeal for contest came to be directed against the individual himself. Hence, the only way instinct could manifest itself was in opposition to action. The dialectical man could not act because, thanks to his worship of logic, he acquired “that cheap wisdom of Jack the Dreamer who reflects too much and, as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action.”²² Of course, reflecting on manifold

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 92.

²¹Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #430, p. 350, Livy edition.

²²Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 8, p. 60.

possibilities means that one is consciously considering uncertain outcomes; and if outcomes are uncertain, any action necessarily entails risk. Thus participation in the risky businesses of war, competition, politics, or, for that matter, the risky business of life, is inhibited by the dialectic disposition. Dialectics is part of a culture that is created to address man's innate trepidity not by impelling him to action that allows him to overcome his fear of death, but rather by paralyzing him from any uncertain action at all. If one takes no risks, uncertainty is eliminated and fear is overcome. In this light, the glorified image of Socrates standing barefoot and stunned in the midst of battle takes on an entirely different hue; similarly, the same can be said of the voice that comes to Socrates from time to time, known as the daimonion of Socrates, that is always dissuasive and turns him away from any action of which he is uncertain. Dialectics lays the ground for pathos rather than action.

With dialectics, Nietzsche says, the world was presented with "the image of the *dying Socrates*, as the human being whom knowledge and reason have liberated from the fear of death, [which] is the emblem that, above the entrance gate of science, reminds all of its mission – namely, to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified."²³ We must keep in mind, however, that in Nietzsche's understanding, this image is an image of decadence. Whereas dialectics and theoretical projection serve the same cultural purpose as cosmological projection – namely, to help man muster the courage to overcome his horror and fear that is begotten by his realization of the finitude of existence – the fact remains that Nietzsche regards this new form of ontological projection, and Socrates himself, as a rapid downward plunge. This being so, then why was Socrates so readily able to break from the traditional culture of the Greeks, and in doing so, garner such a large following? And furthermore, why is it that Nietzsche finds this new culture, which serves the same purpose as the old culture, so repugnant and decadent?

²³*Ibid.*, section 15, p. 82.

§ 3. Cowardice

In Nietzsche's work, we find the answer to these questions in the nature of Socratic dialectics. First, we can agree with Nietzsche that Socrates exercised fascination amongst the Greeks because "he discovered a new kind of *agon*, ...[and] he was the first fencing-master in it for the aristocratic circles of Athens, is one reason. He fascinated because he touched on the agonal instinct of the Hellenes – he introduced a variation into the wrestling-matches among the youths and young men."²⁴ The new kind of *agon* is, of course, dialectics and because there is a link between this culture and the old festival culture, Socrates was able to draw into his world many Athenian citizens. Furthermore, whereas the old form of ontological projection demanded courage from the Hellenes, dialectics eliminated much of this onerous requirement. With dialectics the Hellene no longer had to face the rigours of reality head on. Instead, he could follow the "theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of panacea."²⁵ He neither needed to act on any creative impulse nor engage in any risky activity in order to find satisfaction with his life. He could simply follow Socrates and Plato and their "unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abyss of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even correcting it."²⁶ In short, Socrates and his theoretical projection were widely appealing because, on the one hand they mimicked the noble, agonistic element of the old culture, but on the other hand they were much less demanding of the individual. The road to happiness, which is to say, the means with which man overcomes the terrors of individual existence, became less burdensome and therefore more easily traveled.

Whereas the old culture, at the gateway called This Moment, demanded action, conditioning, and especially demanded courage in the face of reality, with Socratism and the Platonic dialogue the ancient could instead give himself to "the severe and sober sport

²⁴Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 42. See also *The Will to Power*, #432, p. 236.

²⁵Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 15, p. 97.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 95.

of ideas, generalizations, refutations.”²⁷ He no longer needed to suffer the pains of life in order to feel nullified and uplifted. The happiness that the dialectic man acquired through the Socratic equation, which Nietzsche formulates as reason = virtue = happiness, is, at bottom, the victory of a most un-Dionysian spirit. The un-Dionysian spirit (the Socratic) could replace the old form of Hellenic cheerfulness that springs from the dark abyss of the Apollinian culture because it too “manifests itself in the form of ‘Greek cheerfulness.’”²⁸ However, in Nietzsche’s words, it is “a senile, unproductive love of existence” because it is directly opposed to the “splendid naïveté” of the old culture, which, as we have already demonstrated, is the victory that the Hellenic will, “through its mirroring of beauty, obtains over suffering and the wisdom of suffering.”²⁹

Now, having discussed why Socrates was so readily able to break from the traditional culture of the Greeks and garner such a large following, we can turn to the second question – Why does Nietzsche find this new culture so distasteful? Why does he say that the appearance of the Greek philosophers from Socrates onwards is a symptom of decadence? Quite simply, he says that “with Socrates, Greek taste undergoes a change in favour of dialectics,” and when this happens

it is above all the defeat of a *nobler* taste; with dialectics the rabble gets on top. Before Socrates, the dialectical manner was repudiated in good society: it was regarded as a form of bad manners, one was compromised by it. Young people were warned against it. And all such presentation of one’s reasons was regarded with mistrust. Honest things, like honest men, do not carry their reasons exposed in this fashion. It is indecent to display all one’s goods. What has first to have itself proved is of little value. Wherever authority is still part of accepted usage and one does not ‘give reasons’ but commands, the dialectician is a kind of buffoon: he is laughed at, he is not taken seriously. —Socrates was the buffoon who *got himself taken seriously*.³⁰

But when Socrates got himself taken seriously, the value of honest things and honest men was called into question. When he demanded that all things and all men expose their reasons and, in particular, when he dragged the noble instinct for command and beauty into the harsh daylight of the marketplace, it perforce withered away from the ugly face of

²⁷Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, #544, p. 217.

²⁸Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 17, p. 109.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 41.

Socrates' dialectics. Cosmological projection, the higher form of ontological projection, which required noble and beautiful (*kalon*) characters and actions, was attacked and defeated by the ugly and developmentally thwarted Socrates.³¹ And with this defeat, the new form of ontological projection became a source of happiness accessible to the common everyman who could, with much more ease, impose the Socratic tyranny of reason on even the most demanding and difficult problems of reality.

Hence, for Nietzsche, "dialectics can be only a *last-ditch weapon* in the hands of those who have no other weapon left."³² Where the courage required to overcome the terrors of individual existence is lacking, dialectics can be substituted. It is the weapon for the non-warrior, the non-athlete, and the sober and timid philosopher. It is the tool with which the non-heroic, non-Homeric man can achieve happiness (or, as Nietzsche says, be 'cheerful') through the Socratic equation: reason = virtue = happiness. The Socratic virtues, however, were not responsible in themselves for the 'rabble getting on top,' but rather, the "virtues were preached *because* the Greeks had lost [the agonal instincts]: excitable, timid, fickle, comedians every one, they had more than enough reason to let morality be preached to them. Not that it would have done any good: but big words and fine attitudes are so suited to *décadents*...."³³ When the Greek had lost the intestinal fortitude to face the facts of reality directly, he could, without enduring any serious threat of pain or death, surreptitiously attack the problems from the rear armed with only the last-ditch weapons of Socratic virtues and morality.

Dialectics, however, was not only an efficacious weapon for the Greek who had *lost* the agonal instinct, it also became the weapon for those who had never participated in the festival cultural at all – the slave, which includes the slave in fact and the slavish in nature. Thus, both the morality preached by Socrates and the "irony of the dialectician [are] a form of mob revenge" on the Hellenic nobility and, thanks to both of these, "the

³¹See *Ibid.*, p. 40 for a discussion on the ugliness of Socrates.

³²Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 42.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 119.

ferocity of the oppressed finds an outlet in the cold knife-thrust of the syllogism –.”³⁴ With dialectics, the commanded, the mob, the rabble, the herd, the masses, the canaille, or whatever Nietzsche decides to call them, demand rationality and reasons from the commanders and reject the instincts of the tragic/agonal man as irrational and immoral. In doing so, the masses are able to feel themselves to be participants in Socrates’ new form of ontological projection and, as it were, ‘get themselves on top’ of the commanders. With dialectics, they establish for themselves a new morality that condemns and rejects the morality of the past and provides them with the uplifting notion of an ideal present.

According to Nietzsche, the new weapons of the rabble, Socratic morality and dialectics, mark the decadence and decline of Greek instinct because, prior to the rise of Greek philosophy (i.e., Platonism), the men of the nobler nature possessed “the unconditional will not to deceive themselves and not to see reason in *reality* – not in ‘reason’, still less in ‘morality.’”³⁵ With Plato and Platonism, however, man tries to see reason in reality and, when this is not be easily discerned, he forces reason into reality. Now, if we recall what Nietzsche means by ‘reality’ – that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end – then it becomes evident that dialectics and theoretical projection are a bid to impose reason into the unreasonableness of finite human existence. It is an attempt to know death, to know being, and in doing so, to overcome *homo timidus*’ natural fear of death. For Nietzsche, however, Socratism and Platonism, although they espouse to do none other than penetrate the abyss of being and in doing so correct it, are much farther from reality than, for instance, Thucydides. He says that “in Thucydides, *Sophist culture*, by which I mean *realist culture*, attains... its perfect expression” because with this realist culture we find an “invaluable movement in the midst of the morality-and-ideal swindle of the Socratic schools which was then breaking out everywhere.”³⁶ Thucydides faces reality with the intrepidity, fortitude and stern matter-of-factness that was instinctive in the older

³⁴Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #431, p.236.

³⁵Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 118.

³⁶*Ibid.*.

tragic/agnostic Hellenes. In sum, Nietzsche says “*courage* in face of reality ultimately distinguishes such natures as Thucydides and Plato: Plato is a coward in face of reality – consequently he flees into the ideal.”³⁷

By stating that “*courage in the face of reality*” distinguishes *such natures* as Thucydides and Plato, we know that Nietzsche has in mind two categories of man – the instinctive/agonistic man participating in Dionysian cosmological projection and the reasoning/philosophical man following the course of Socratic theoretical projection. With the former type of man, reality is not shunned because, as a part of his nature, he has developed the courage to overcome the realities of human existence. With the latter, however, reality is rejected in favour of morality, and in particular, a morality that espouses an ideal world. He possesses neither the noble instincts of heroism nor the instinct to will the Superman. Instead, he has what Nietzsche calls the ‘instincts of decadence’. The “*instincts of decadence*,” he writes, are those which, “through the moralists, want to become master over the instinctive morality of strong races and ages.”³⁸ The decadent, whom we have been referring to as the dialectician of the mob, desires to be recognized by his master as the new master. Like all men, he has the will to immortality and desires the power that naturally accompanies it. However, since the old form of immortality and elevation require, above all, courage, and since he is deficient in exactly this, he resorts to the weapons of the timid – morality and dialectics. This is precisely why Nietzsche characterizes the instincts of decadence as first, “the instincts of the weak and underprivileged,” and second, “the instincts of the exceptions, the solitaires, the abandoned, of the *abornus* in what is lofty and what is petty,” and third, “the instincts of those habituated to suffering, who need a noble interpretation of their condition.”³⁹ Theoretical projection is decadent because it is a cultural milieu of morality created by the

³⁷*Ibid.*.

³⁸Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #423, p. 228.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 228–229.

weak for the weak so that they may acquire recognition and immortality without the onerous prerequisite of mustering courage in the face of reality.

For Nietzsche, the rejection of cosmological projection, which is to say, the rejection of the eternal recurrence of the same, results in ersatz immortality. Thus it is not immortality that the 'rabble' acquires from their reason and dialectics. Instead it amounts to nothing more than an expression of 'Alexandrian cheerfulness'. Like opera, theoretical projection "is an expression of the taste of the laity in art, dictating their laws with the cheerful optimism of the theoretical man." The world of the ideal, into which Plato and other cowards can flee, amounts to "idyllic seductions and Alexandrian flatteries" that are "empty and merely distracting diversion[s]."⁴⁰ Or, to state it differently, theoretical projection does not confer a noble form of immortality on its participants, but instead, it offers an easy route for *homo timidus* to forget and overlook his weakness, his temerity, and his displeasure with life.

It is because of the ease of this new form of ontological projection that Plato, "the seducer of the nobility," was able "to negate all the presuppositions of the 'noble Greek' of the old stamp." With the modest demands of the new morality, Plato, who "was himself seduced by the *roturier* Socrates," was able to convince both the Greek commoner and the noble to sever "the instincts from the *polis*, from contest, from military efficiency, from art and beauty, from the mysteries, from belief in tradition and ancestors."⁴¹ His success in doing this not only gave the rabble the superordinate position in the new culture, it also eliminated the possibility of the higher form of ontological projection for those of the more noble stamp. Thus with the rise of Socratism, dialectics, theoretical projection, and New Attic comedy, the will to immortality that was expressed and realized at the tragic and Olympic festivals came to an end. The Hellene no longer felt nullified, preserved and uplifted by the noble speech and deeds of the athlete nor by the Homeric character. The tragic poets died and with their death

⁴⁰Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 19, p. 118.

⁴¹Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #435, p. 239.

the Hellene had given up his belief in immortality; not only his belief in an ideal past, but also in an ideal future. ...the fifth estate, that of slaves, now comes to power, at least in sentiment; and if we may still speak at all of 'Greek cheerfulness,' it is the cheerfulness of the slave who has nothing of consequence to be responsible for, nothing great to strive for, and who does not value anything in the past or future higher than the present.⁴²

He does not value the past because, upon looking into it, he sees nothing noble in his lineage. He has no kinship with a votive statue that will arouse his instinctive respect for the past and future; he has no link with the immortals and the powerful. Instead, when he looks into the past he is embarrassed and nothing would suit him better than to abolish any links it might have with This Moment and, in particular, any link his future will have with the past. His will to immortality is incompatible with the eternal paths of the eternal recurrence of the same, but with theoretical projection, which rejects the past for precisely this reason, he finds an acceptable form of mollification.

⁴²Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 11, p. 78.

V

CULTURE AS MORALITY

§ 1. Nietzsche's Anthropology

What we have set out thus far is two manifestations of culture. We have stated that all culture is a manifestation of *homo timidus*' effort to overcome his fear of death and that cosmological projection and theoretical projection are created for just this purpose. Although Nietzsche does not use this terminology, we have seen that he too dissects culture along similar lines. The contradistinction he makes between the Dionysian and Socratic dispositions, which he exemplifies with the figures of Thucydides and Plato, is a division of two general characteristics of human behaviour – the behaviour of the brave and commanding and the behaviour of the weak and cowardly. It has also been made quite evident in the previous chapter that the latter of these groups was able to become predominant with the rise of Socratism and New Attic comedy. In other words, man's relation to death changed with the rise to power of the theoretical man and, as a result, culture (religion, politics, philosophy, etc.) has subsequently been shaped by this type of man and, in Nietzsche's analysis, this rise to power of the fifth estate, of slaves, is a movement of decadence.

Although we have situated the origin of this movement in ancient Greece, in Nietzsche's thought the elevation of the Hellenic rabble is only the beginning of a moral movement that has continually reshaped itself and has been reinforced and re-augmented for two and a half millennia. The rise of Socratism and Platonism merely marks the origin of a long tradition in which the weak and cowardly have set the standards for human association. It is at this tradition that Nietzsche directs some of his most vitriolic attacks and, as readers familiar with his work are well aware, the division of human behaviour into two categories is at the core of not only his interpretation of the modern condition, it is also at the core of his thought in general. Thus, having situated our analysis of man's relation to death with

Nietzsche's account of the ancients, it is both useful and necessary to provide a few words on his division of human behaviour into that of the strong and commanding and that of the weak and cowardly.

To begin, Nietzsche uses the term 'morality' to encompass what we have been referring to as 'culture' and 'general categories of human behaviour.' By morality he has something quite specific in mind. In one of his early works, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, he says that "morality is nothing other (therefore *no more!*) than obedience to customs, of whatever kind they may be; customs, however, are the *traditional* way of behaving and evaluating."¹ Furthermore, tradition is "a higher authority which one obeys, not because it commands what is *useful* to us, but because it *commands*."² Hence we see that for Nietzsche morality has its historical origins rooted in 'commanding' and 'obeying'. Morality, that is, doing "good" and overcoming the fear of death, is thus thought to be the adherence to the predetermined constructs of tradition. It is the tradition of obeying commands.

Since morality consists of obeying traditional commands, then it follows that there must be both commanders and commanded. Furthermore, if there is a morality of obeisance, then it necessarily follows that there is a morality of command – that there two histories of morality: one of commanders and one of the commanded. Thus in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche says that there is a "twofold prehistory of good and evil," one of which originates "in the soul of the ruling tribes and castes" and the other "in the soul of the subjected, the powerless."³ In other words, a serious and circumspect account of the genealogical origins of morality will reveal a distinct morality for, as we have already referred to them, the commanding, and a distinct morality for the commanded. For Nietzsche, morality is, quite literally, dissected: in a study "of the many finer and coarser moralities which have ruled or still rule on earth," Nietzsche says, "two basic types [of

¹Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, #9, p. 10.

²*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, #45, pp. 36-37.

morality] were revealed and a basic distinction emerged. There is a *master morality* and *slave morality*.”⁴

In the first essay of *On The Genealogy of Morals* the nature of this dissection, of the slave morality and the master morality, becomes explicit. Nietzsche begins this ‘polemic’, as he calls it, against the usual moral historians by demonstrating that there are two origins of the concept ‘good’ – one begotten by masters and one begotten by slaves. Because of this, the opposite of ‘good’ itself becomes differentiated. Whereas we would normally consider the opposite of ‘good’ to be ‘evil’, Nietzsche demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case. ‘Evil’ is the opposite of ‘good’ only for slaves. For the commanders, the opposite of ‘good’ is ‘bad’. But we will return to this presently. For now, the task is to realize that Nietzsche begins with the origin of the morality, the ‘*prehistorical*’ origin he says, rather than the morality itself because “throughout the longest part of human history... the value or non-value of an action was derived from its consequences: the action itself came as little into consideration as did its origin.... Let us call this the *pre-moral* period of mankind.”⁵ Like other philosophers, Nietzsche endeavours to go back to the origins in order to determine the nature of man; but unlike others he refuses to tote the prejudicial baggage of the modern notions of good and evil with him. He does not begin with an idea of man as either intrinsically good or intrinsically evil – these are moral determinations that were developed later. It is only over “the past ten thousand years,” Nietzsche says, that “it is no longer the consequences but the origin of action which determines its value.”⁶ *Moral* history does not and cannot exist in *prehistory* and Nietzsche does not suppose that it does.

To say that something is prehistorical is, obviously, to say that it is before history. But how can something be ‘before history’? And if something is before history, does that not mean that history began at some point? For Nietzsche, history began at the same

⁴Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #260, p. 194.

⁵*Ibid.*, #32, pp. 62-63.

⁶*Ibid.*

moment that man first engaged in politics, hence before man became political, that is, before man entered a community, there was neither history nor politics. Now, if politics is part of culture, as we have defined it, then history begins when man creates culture – history begins when *homo timidus* begins to address his fear of death. In other words, where there is no politics there is no culture and where there is neither politics nor culture, there is no history. Thus with pre-political/pre-cultural man we will find the *pre-historical* origins of morality.

It is said that only beasts and gods have no use for politics, and the same seems to hold true with Nietzsche's anthropology. Before man "found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace," that is, when man was pre-political or pre-historical, he was a "semi-animal well adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure."⁷ He was an instinctual man-animal, or, depending on one's perspective, an instinctual man-god, whose main instinct was "the *instinct for freedom* (in [Nietzsche's] language: the will to power)."⁸ This instinct for freedom is characterized by "hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction."⁹ Man in his prepolitical state is a semi-animal, or, to use another of Nietzsche's terms, he is "the beast of prey, the splendid *blond beast* prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory."¹⁰ He has little, if any at all, fear of death. He is, in the language we used in the first chapter, in the state of nature because the state of nature exists as long as man remains unaware of, or unconcerned with, his mortality.

This image of pre-political man becomes even more acute with Nietzsche's description of the beginning of history. The beginning of history, we will recall, is that moment when man creates political culture; and man can only become political when he comes together with other men and first establishes, then exercises his power. If we consider such a meeting imaginatively, and, as Nietzsche has probably done, borrow the

⁷Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 16, p. 84.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 11, pp. 40-41.

imagery from Hegel, the result will be more clearly seen. We can then imagine two of these splendid, blond beasts colliding, each in search of spoil and victory, “each seeking the death of the other.” In the ensuing struggle, “the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle.”¹¹ With victory, one of the beasts of prey proves himself to be master and the other becomes his bondsman. One semi-animal becomes master over the other, the vanquished, whose “whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.”¹²

Whereas he was once free, the defeated semi-animal is instituted into a political relationship “by an act of violence” and is kept there “by nothing but acts of violence.”¹³ And it is through this violence that the state, that is, “the oldest ‘state’ thus appeared as a fearful tyranny, as an oppressive and remorseless machine, and went on working until this raw material of people and semi-animals was at last not only thoroughly kneaded and pliant but also *formed*.”¹⁴ In a sense, the defeated semi-animal is tamed by the stronger semi-animal, whose work as an organizer, as a state-creator, is wholly instinctive. As Nietzsche says, “they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are [and] wherever they appear something new soon arises, a ruling structure that *lives*.” The victor of the initial, violent battle – “the blond beast of prey” – becomes “the conqueror and the master race.”¹⁵ The loser, and it is important to note that, just as in the agonistic competitions, there actually is a *loser* in this exchange – the loser has his own *instinct for freedom* repressed. He is beaten and enslaved by his better. Politics and culture, or more accurately, the need for politics and culture is thus initiated by he “who can command, he who is by nature

¹¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 113-114.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 17, p. 86.

¹³ *Ibid.*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*.

‘master,’ he who is violent in act and bearing.”¹⁶ This, Nietzsche says, is the anthropological origin of morality and the concomitant cultural response to the recognition of one’s mortality.

§ 2. Slave Morality

Nietzsche’s theory that culture begins with the victory of the stronger semi-animal, and that morality, or more specifically, the two-fold differentiated morality (slave morality and master morality), originates with the advent of the state, is rooted in the tenet that before there was either of these, there were neither. Although this may at first seem confusing, the proposition is not so difficult.

We will restate the issue. First, for Nietzsche it is not possible to say that man is intrinsically good or evil. He leaves this to less circumspect thinkers. Man can be neither good nor evil until there exists the ideas of good and evil. Second, before there was culture, these ideas could not have existed, hence in his natural state man was *pre-moral* and *pre-historical*. Third, in this pre-historic and pre-moral condition, man was akin to a semi-animal driven by his most basic instinct – the *instinct for freedom*, which is the will to power.

In other words, a “living thing desires above all to *vent* its strength – life as such is will to power —.”¹⁷ But, what happens when one of these semi-animals is enslaved? Does his *instinct for freedom* disappear? Is it possible that this instinct ceases to be instinctual? On the contrary, it is merely “made latent” and “pushed back and repressed.”¹⁸ Once under the domination of the master (the victor), the slaves are forced

to walk on their feet and ‘bear themselves’ whereas hitherto they had been borne by the water: a dreadful heaviness lay upon them. They felt unable to cope with the simplest undertakings; in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their ‘consciousness,’ their weakest and most fallible organ! I believe there has never been

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #13, p. 44.

¹⁸Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 17, p. 87.

such a feeling of misery on earth, such a leaden discomfort – and at the same time the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands!¹⁹

The enslaved man retains his instinctive drives, those animal drives which are independent of judgment or will, but cannot vent them outwardly.

What remains for the slave is to curtail the normal expression of his instinct for freedom. The joy of the hunt, hostility, cruelty, the joy of persecution, prowling, adventure and warring are no longer his to execute freely, but the will to express these is not his to accept or reject. The will to power is still an instinctive part of the slave (as it is for all living things) but is merely repressed; it cannot be expressed both because the master is his superior and because the slave fears the possibility, nay, the certainty, of death or pain at the hand of the master. But “all instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward*” and according to Nietzsche this is called “the *internalization* of man: [and] thus it was that man first developed what was later called his ‘soul’”.²⁰

This, then, is the origin of slave morality. The once free-reining instincts of the semi-animal turn inward because, despite their repression by the master, the need to express them still persists. Since the slave is possessed by his fear of the master and by fear in general, he cannot act. He thus begins to hate the master and the use of the word ‘hate’ is quite deliberate here. Nietzsche explains what is meant by hate: “Hatred...places people on a par, vis-a-vis; ...in hatred there is *fear*, a good and ample element of fear.”²¹ Further, he says that “one does not hate so long as one continues to rate low, but only when one has come to rate equal or higher.”²² Clearly, hatred is reserved for the slavish “because they are the most impotent [and] it is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions, to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred.”²³ The slave is forced to look up at his better who has shown him the terror of death; and when he looks up at his dreaded better, he is consumed “by the

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 16, p. 84.

²⁰*Ibid.*.

²¹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #379, p. 342.

²²Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #173, p. 106.

²³Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 7, p. 33.

submerged hatred” and is in turn beset by the cornerstone of slave morality – *ressentiment* – which is none other than the “vengefulness of the impotent.”²⁴ Thus fear, which begets that terrible, inexorable hatred, is, as Nietzsche says, “the mother of all morality.”²⁵ Thus once again we see that man’s natural fear both begets and necessitates culture.

Ressentiment is therefore manifest vengefulness and fear. Although the instinct for freedom was once exercised as will to power, after it is turned back against the (defeated) slave there is still “the *need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself – this is of the essence of *ressentiment*.”²⁶ The weak and impotent, that is, the slave, then creates for himself an ‘enemy’ upon whom he can vent his revenge, but the revenge is bound to be imaginary because of the very nature of the slave – he cannot truly act because he is paralyzed by fear. The only action the slave is capable of is fundamentally reactive – he engages in the ersatz deed of moralizing by conceiving “‘the evil enemy,’ ‘the Evil One,’ and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a ‘good one’ — himself!”²⁷

The man of *ressentiment*, through his impotency and fear, begins to create the values of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as a reaction to the master’s action. Thus,

the slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge.²⁸

The revenge is the creation of the ideas of good and evil, which is essentially a negative creation. His action is a reaction to the master, to what is different, to what he no longer is, to his existence of suffering; his action is a reactive No, “and this No is its creative deed.”²⁹ He rejects the stronger man. That is to say, he rejects the master morality by condemning it as evil and its participants the ‘evil ones’. Moreover, he

²⁴*Ibid.*, 10, p. 37.

²⁵Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #201, p. 123.

²⁶Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 10, pp. 36-37.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁹*Ibid.*

is suspicious of the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and mistrustful, *keenly* mistrustful, of everything 'good' that is honoured among them – he would like to convince himself that happiness itself is not genuine among them. On the other hand, those qualities which serve to make easier the existence of the suffering will be brought into prominence and flooded with light: here it is that pity, the kind and helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, friendliness come into honour – for here these are the most useful qualities and virtually the only means of enduring the burden of existence. Slave morality is essentially the morality of utility. Here is the source of the famous antithesis 'good' and 'evil' – power and danger were felt to exist in evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety and strength which could not admit of contempt. Thus, according to slave morality the 'evil' inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely the 'good' who inspire fear and want to inspire it, while the 'bad' man is judged contemptible. ...within the slaves' way of thinking the good man has in any event to be a *harmless* man: he is good-natured, easy to deceive, perhaps a bit stupid, *un bonhomme*.³⁰

The slave, to put it in somewhat prosaic terms, is a 'nice guy'.³¹

Indeed, the power and danger the slave feels at the sight of the master is so unnerving that he is forced to create a morality that allows him to exist, that gives some sort of meaning to his existence, that compensates for the fearful existence, that allows him to be *happy*, and last, but certainly not least, allows him to live despite the aforementioned repression of his primal and instinctive desires.

Slave morality, Nietzsche says, is developed when "weakness is being lied into something *meritorious*... and impotence which does not requite into 'goodness of heart'; anxious lowliness into 'humility'; subjection to those one hates into 'obedience' (that is, to one of whom they say he commands this subjection – they call him God)."³² In other words, the human inadequacies (*viz.*, weakness and cowardice) that led to the original failure of the semi-animal in the first battle are mendaciously remade into virtues. The miserable existence of the slave is then justified, or perhaps even given meaning, through the negative creation of good and evil. Thus

the inoffensiveness of the weak man, even the cowardice of which he has so much, his lingering at the door, his being ineluctably compelled to wait, here acquire flattering names, such as 'patience,' and are even called virtue itself; his inability for revenge is called unwillingness to revenge, perhaps even forgiveness.³³

³⁰Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #261, p. 199.

³¹Particularly if we keep in mind the etymological origins of *nice*.

³²Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 14, p. 47.

³³*Ibid.*.

The weakness of the slave is deemed 'good' and the strength of the master is deemed 'evil'; the misery the slave is forced to endure becomes a "sign of being chosen by God."³⁴ Weakness and slavishness are then virtues of a religious nature, or more specifically, they first manifest themselves in Socratism and theoretical projection, and, as we shall soon see, they are later embodied in the virtues of Christian morality.

We therefore see that guilt and bad conscience, the hallmarks of modern morality, first arise as a consequence of the inability to do what all living things desire to do – vent their strength and, in doing so, take on the color of an immortal god. Later, after the enslaved have festered in hatred and have had some time to reflect on their situation, this weakness, this impotence, is then rationalized and justified, or, we might say, moralized, and re-articulated in the form of a new will to immortality. The slaves, or in Nietzsche's terms, "the oppressed, downtrodden, outraged" will then "exhort one another with the vengeful cunning of impotence: 'let us be different from the evil, namely good! And he is good who does not outrage, who harms nobody, who does not attack, who does not requite, who leaves revenge to God, who keeps himself hidden as we do, who avoids evil and desires little from life, like us, the patient, humble, and just.'"³⁵ Which is to say, he is good who removes himself from any immediate threat of pain and death.

§ 3. Master Morality

In contradistinction to slave morality, Nietzsche describes the other side of the twofold nature of morality. Master morality, which, as we have already seen, originates in the souls of the ruling tribes and castes, has its own value-distinctions. Whereas as 'good' and 'evil' are part of the language of the slave, for the master, or "the noble human being," *ressentiment* has not been forced on him. There has been no need to create the notion of an 'evil' enemy because this man of the higher culture has not been conquered. In fact, Nietzsche is quite candid as to the origin of the master race. "Let us admit to ourselves

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, 13, p. 46.

unflinchingly," he writes, "how every higher culture on earth has hitherto *begun!*" The aforementioned semi-animal, or, the

men of a still natural nature, barbarians in every fearful sense of the word, men of prey still in possession of an unbroken strength of will and lust for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more civilized, more peaceful, perhaps trading or cattle-raising races, or upon old mellow cultures, the last vital forces in which were even then flickering out in a glittering firework display of spirit and corruption. The noble caste was in the beginning always the barbarian caste: their superiority lay, not in their physical strength, but primarily in their psychical – they were *more complete* human beings (which, on every level, also means as 'more complete beasts' –).³⁶

In establishing himself through this initial act of violence, the master then creates what Nietzsche calls the *pathos of distance*. After the initial victory, the victor recognizes, or, *creates* "orders of rank and differences of worth between man and man...." The *pathos of distance* develops from "the incarnate differences of classes, from the ruling caste's constant looking out and looking down on subjects and instruments" and from the constant "exercise of obedience and command."³⁷ The noble type of man thus "separates from himself those natures in which the opposite of such exalted proud states find expression: he despises them. It should be noted at once that in this first type of morality the antithesis 'good' and 'bad' means the same thing as 'noble' and 'despicable' – the antithesis 'good' and 'evil' originates elsewhere."³⁸ It is 'good and bad', not 'good and evil' with which the master is concerned.

For the master, 'good' is first and foremost related to strength, and since the master is master by virtue of his strength, he naturally considers himself to be 'good'. Thus he who has "the power to requite, good with good, evil with evil, and also actually practices requital – is, that is to say, grateful and revengeful – is called good."³⁹ There is no need for the noble type of man to call the inability to requite 'unwillingness to requite' nor need he call impotence 'goodness of heart.' He has the power, the will and, importantly, the

³⁶Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #257, p. 192.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, #260, p. 195.

³⁹*Human, All Too Human*, #45, pp. 36-37.

courage to requite, and as such, he requites. This is what is considered good – the ability to vent one's instinctual strength.

Bad, on the other hand, is a quality of "he who is powerless and cannot requite." From the perspective of the noble man, good and bad "is for a long time the same thing as noble and base, master and slave."⁴⁰ The master requites and is thus good; the slave cannot requite and is thus bad. Thus

the judgment 'good' did *not* originate with those to whom 'goodness' was shown! Rather it was 'the good' themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebeian.⁴¹

It is the master who creates the value 'good' because he does not feel the need for approval. He alone is the one who accords honour to things as he was the first to seize the right to create values and to coin names for values.⁴² Thus the "pathos of nobility and distance, as aforesaid, the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to lower order, to a 'below' – *that* is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad'."⁴³

Nietzsche also provides ample etymological evidence of the relation between that which is noble or aristocratic, or, if you will, masterly, and the notion of 'good'. He says that in various (European) languages there is a strong correlation between "the basic concept 'good' in the sense of 'with aristocratic soul,' 'noble,' 'with a soul of a high order,' 'with a privileged soul' necessarily developed: a development which always runs parallel with that other in which 'common,' 'plebeian,' 'low' are finally transformed into the concept 'bad'."⁴⁴ In fact, he also draws a parallel between the words 'good', 'gut', Goth, and Gods which quickly brings to mind the victorious Superman or the athlete at

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 2, pp. 25-26.

⁴²The term 'right' here is synonymous with 'power' insofar as rights must be seized through agonistic competition. A right is a prize of victory – not a consolation of losing. The modern penchant for misusing the term to mean a self-evident power belonging to man simply because he is man is antithetical to Nietzsche's understanding of power.

⁴³Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 2, p. 26.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* 4, pp. 27-28. See also, Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, #231, p. 138.

Olympia who, with his emulation of divine beauty and prowess, was elevated to the status of a god. The low of course, are the plebeian many, the common, or, in Nietzsche's oft-used expression, they are 'the herd'. From the perspective of the master then, the bad are "a mass like grains of sand."⁴⁵ They are a lying, impure, cowardly, vengeful, hate-filled, and conniving herd of low-minded slaves who are so filled with *ressentiment* that when they look up at their betters, they are reduced to calling every noble quality they cannot possess 'evil'. Nietzsche summarizes the slavish propensity, which he also calls the 'herd-instinct', to call noble goodness 'evil' as

the contrary of what the noble man does, who conceives the basic concept "good" in advance and spontaneously out of himself and only then creates for himself an idea of "bad"! This "bad" of noble origin and that "evil" out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred – the former an after-production, a side issue, a contrasting shade, the latter on the contrary the original thing, the beginning, the distinctive *deed* in the conception of a slave morality – how different these words "bad" and "evil" are, although they are both apparently the opposite of the same concept "good." But it is *not* the same concept "good": one should ask rather precisely *who* is "evil" in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. The answer, in all strictness, is: *precisely* the "good man" of the other morality, precisely the noble, powerful man, the ruler, but dyed in another color, interpreted in another fashion, seen in another way by the venomous eye of *ressentiment*.⁴⁶

This venomous eye of *ressentiment*, which is begotten from hatred, is reserved for the slave. For the master, there is no need to create the idea of evil because this is only necessitated by the fear caused by impotence. The master does not fear the slave. In fact, in master morality all fear has been overcome. This is why Nietzsche calls himself, and all other noble types of man, "The Fearless Ones".⁴⁷ And whereas fear and *ressentiment* lead the man of the herd instinct to hate the master as an imagined 'evil' enemy, the master only looks down from a superior height at the vengeful slave and feels contempt. For reasons that have already been amply demonstrated, he does not regard the slave as evil, but instead he considers the slave "bad". The slave cannot requite good with good nor evil with evil and is therefore contemptible: and, it should be noted, that it is "he who is contemptible who counts as bad."⁴⁸ Hence hatred is part of slave morality and "refined contempt is our

⁴⁵Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, #45, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁶Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 11, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁷Cf. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, as the heading of the fifth chapter; and *ibid.*, # 379, p. 342.

⁴⁸Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, #45, p. 37.

[we fearless one's] taste and privilege, our art, our virtue perhaps, as we are the most moderns of moderns. We fearless ones...are virtuosos of contempt."⁴⁹

Not only does the master think of the impotent eunuchs of the herd instinct as merely contemptible and not worth taking seriously for very long, neither does he think of his true enemies as evil. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Since his enemy can only be an enemy insofar as he is capable of doing him harm, that is, requiting evil with evil, the master will then regard him as good. In other words, "one does not regard the enemy as evil [because] he can requite. In Homer the Trojan and the Greek are both good."⁵⁰ The enemy is honoured because, like the man of noble (good) culture, he too is "delighted with all who love, as we do, danger, war, and adventures, who refuse to compromise, to be captured, reconciled, and castrated."⁵¹ The man of low-culture, the antithesis of the knightly-aristocratic man, fears (and thus hates) danger, hates insecurity, and would rather be captured and emasculated than face the uncertainty of death.

§ 4. The Victory of Slave Morality

In setting these two distinct moralities apart in such a way, Nietzsche has put before us a genealogy of morals. He has traced morality from its primordial beginnings to the present. In doing so he has demonstrated that they have developed in opposition to each other and that history, that is, the cultural creations of human beings, is a history of competition between slave morality and master morality. As Nietzsche writes, "the two opposing values 'good and bad' (master morality) 'good and evil' (slave morality) have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years."⁵² And what has been the result? Who has won this historic struggle?

⁴⁹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #379, pp. 342-343.

⁵⁰Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, #45, p. 37.

⁵¹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #377, p. 338. In aphorism # 5 Nietzsche also writes about the etymological relationship between 'bad' and the Latin 'malus', meaning bad, and the Greek *melus*, meaning dark or black. Nietzsche is making the point that there may be some historical relationship between the dark-haired man and the notion of bad as opposed to the blond, Aryan Goth.

⁵²Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 16, p. 52.

The answer to this is rather obvious in Nietzsche's work: "the people have won – or 'the slaves' or 'the mob' or 'the herd' or whatever you like to call them... 'The masters' have been disposed of; the morality of the common man has won."⁵³ Slave morality, championed first by Socratism and later by Judeo-Christianity, has triumphed over the nobler ideals. This struggle, which is "inscribed in letters legible across all human history" came to be symbolized by the two cities of Revelations – it is "'Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome': there has hitherto been no greater event than *this* struggle, this question, *this* deadly contradiction."⁵⁴ Half the earth, Nietzsche says, now bows down to Rome, and the icons therein are of four Jews – Jesus of Nazareth, the fisherman Peter, the rug weaver Paul, and the mother of Jesus, named Mary. "Rome," he says, "has been defeated beyond all doubt."⁵⁵

Slave morality is the predominant morality and is the juggernaut that seeks to subordinate, to eliminate the other morality. It "is the conscience of the present-day" that seeks to "abolish all danger", which is "the cause of fear", and in doing so, fulfill the "imperative of herd timidity: 'we wish that there will one day *no longer be anything to fear!*'"⁵⁶ The way to this wish is through the culture of 'progress' and with the fulfillment of these goals, the fear-inspiring master will too be eliminated. Culture, or the "*meaning of all culture*" is then

the reduction of the beast of prey 'man' to a tame and civilized animal, a *domestic animal*, [and] one would undoubtedly have to regard all those instincts of reaction and *ressentiment* through whose aid the noble races and their ideals were finally confounded and overthrown as the actual *instruments of culture*.... These 'instruments of culture' are a disgrace to man and rather an accusation and counterargument against 'culture' in general!⁵⁷

The cultured man is the 'tame' man, the "hopelessly mediocre and insipid man," and the cultural world that emanates from this herd-man will be entirely emasculated, eternally feminine, and utterly unendurable. It is a world that Nietzsche says he "cannot cope with"

⁵³*Ibid.*, 9, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 16, p. 52.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*.

⁵⁶Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #201, p. 124.

⁵⁷Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 12, pp. 42-43.

and “makes [him] choke and faint.” It stinks of the “entrails of some ill-constituted soul.
...Bad air!” he wheezes, “Bad air!”⁵⁸

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

VI

CHRISTIANITY AND SOTERIOLOGICAL PROJECTION

§ 1. Recognition

Having explicated Nietzsche's theory of morality, we can now return to our account of the various forms of culture man has created in order to deal with the terrible spectre of death. What can now be more clearly seen is that the difference between cosmological projection and theoretical projection parallels the difference between master morality and slave morality. Although both races are perforce aware of the inevitability of death, "the higher man is distinguished from the lower by his fearlessness and his readiness to challenge misfortune."¹ He is distinguished from the lower man because he is willing to confront, and possibly to overcome, the misfortune of his mortality with courage. Thus when Nietzsche says that man is driven by his most basic instinct – the instinct for freedom – he has in mind what we have been calling the will to life and its imperative, the will to immortality. The will to immortality is nothing other than man's instinct for freedom – in particular, the will to immortality is the instinct for freedom from death and the uncertainty surrounding it. Since Nietzsche explicitly calls the instinct for freedom the will to power, it is evident that the will to immortality is akin to the will to power. Thus both forms of ontological projection are expressions of the will to power but from the perspective of a different category of human being – cosmological projection for the master and theoretical from the slavish.

With cosmological projection the successful participant either took on the mien of a god and was, symbolically and substantively, recognized as immortal – and there is nothing more powerful than an immortal – or felt himself to be an equal participant in the noble power of the eternally recurring cosmos. In either case, with cosmological projection the participant satisfied his will to immortality (will to power) and overcame the weight and

¹Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #222, p. 127.

burden of existence. Theoretical projection is also a form of the will to immortality because it too is an attempt by *homo timidus* to overcome his fear of death. The difference between the two, however, lies not so much in the efficacy of the approach, although we have seen that there is a marked difference in the immortality acquired from each manifestation, but rather in the type of creature that is being made immortal. Theoretical projection triumphed over cosmological projection because it posed less danger to its participants, because it was more tangible, and, as it severed the present and the future from the past, it was easier and open to more individuals than the older form of the will to immortality. In essence, it was a safer form of culture in which one could vent his strength and therefore more people were able to be liberated from the powerlessness and oppression they felt from their great fear of death.

To be liberated from powerlessness and oppression means one thing: it means that one has acquired power for himself. To have power, however, one must be recognized by others as powerful. The question is from whom is the recognition garnered? With cosmological projection, recognition is sought and realized from all. To be considered a hero, a demi-god, and especially as a god, one must elicit recognition from everyone, including other powerful men and, as was the case for Herakles, even from the mighty gods themselves. True immortality requires universal, or keeping our terminology consistent, cosmological recognition – a most difficult demand.

Theoretical projection also made demands on its participants. Like cosmological projection, it offered the prospect of immortality, that is, the prospect of overcoming finite biological existence, to “more nobly formed natures, who actually feel profoundly the weight and burden of existence, and must be deluded by exquisite stimulants into forgetfulness of their displeasure.”² In other words, the victory over death offered by theoretical projection appealed to the man who understood the older culture, but was of such a nature that he could not muster the requisite courage to participate in it. Such a route

²Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 18, p. 110.

to immortality and power demanded too much of him and, consequently, he formulated a new, less dangerous way to garner recognition. Although dialectics was certainly safer than the pankration or boxing and did not present the uncertainties common to prowling and warring along the Asiatic coast, it nevertheless required the dialectician to expose himself to the scrutiny and difficulty inherent to public discourse. It required preparation, thoughtfulness, and at least a modicum of courage because, as a public presentation, it too was a quest for recognition. The will to immortality, embodied in theoretical projection, needed recognition but the difference between it and cosmological projection is from whom the recognition is garnered. Whereas the latter required limitless, cosmological recognition, the former made no such demand. Herein lies the appeal and the relative ease of the new culture – cosmological recognition was no longer needed for immortality. With the new culture, the dialectician did not need to look so far abroad; instead he needed recognition only from his dialectical collaborators and from whomever else he could seduce. In essence, he established boundaries around the required field of recognition. Limitlessness, as it was described for the Dionysian world, was eschewed and a world, rationally bounded by reason, was consciously created. Immortality and power were thus made easier to acquire because recognition was sought from less, and lesser, men.

From the perspective of the masses however, theoretical projection is still problematic as a form of immortality. The most slavish man, as he has been described in the preceding chapter, is unable to participate fully, if at all, in the Socratic form of ontological projection because all danger has not been eliminated. Since the imperative of herd timidity, as Nietzsche calls it, demands the transformation of the world into a place where there is no longer anything to fear, and since the imperative of man's basic will to life demands that he project his existence beyond the normal boundaries of biological existence, yet another culture had to be created that could include the most timid of man. What was required to free this, the largest caste, from the fear of death was a form of ontological projection devoid of frightful uncertainties and completely lacking the need for

courage by its participants. In other words, like all men, the timid herd has the desire to be recognized as immortal, which is to say, they too feel the will to power, but want to take no risks satisfying it. The solution to this dilemma is to create a form of immortality and power that requires even less recognition than that of theoretical projection. Whereas cosmological projection appealed to a cosmological audience in each of the past, the present, and the future, and theoretical projection appealed to some (or a *theoretically 'good'* audience) in the present and the future, a new form of ontological projection was needed that could reduce the requirements of recognition even further; hence a form of ontological projection was created that looked to a single entity for recognition and eliminated the need for this recognition in not only the past, but also in the present.

§ 2. The Instinctive Hatred of Reality

With Christianity, the slavish man found exactly this. He created for himself a religious culture with a god who says, “If a man has faith in me, even though he die, he shall come to life; and no one who is alive and has faith shall ever die.”³ The only thing required for immortality is the belief that “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life.”⁴ The prospect of immortality thus comes to be based on recognition from just one rather than all or some – it was based on recognition from God alone and further, this recognition is completely removed from the present and the past. And when man’s quest for immortality, recognition, and power, all of which amount to the same thing, is removed from the present and past, it means that any need for immediate action is eliminated. All that is required of the Christian is the relatively easy practice of waiting – of doing nothing but waiting for immortality as it is promised in future salvation. Hence when “the Christian acts,” Nietzsche writes, “he is distinguished by a *different* mode of acting. Neither by

³John 11:25.

⁴John 3:16.

words nor in his heart does he resist the man who does him evil.”⁵ He does not require good with good nor bad with bad. Noble action, the basis of the higher culture, is no longer required for immortality; instead, the task of projecting one’s existence beyond the normal boundaries of biological life was removed from the individual and entrusted in the beneficence of an omnipotent and radical other. Thus ontological projection, as a human endeavour, came to be based on salvation; hence we will refer to it as soteriological projection.⁶

As a formulation for overcoming the fear of death and acquiring immortality, soteriological projection is rather effective. We know that in the two thousand year history of Christianity, the belief in salvation, which is a promise for the future only, immortality of this sort has served a great many people. As Nietzsche writes,

to ordinary men, finally, the great majority, who exist for service and general utility and who may exist only for that purpose, religion gives an invaluable contentment with their nature and station, manifold peace of heart, an ennobling of obedience, one piece of joy and sorrow more to share with their fellows, and some transfiguration of the whole everydayness, the whole lowliness, the whole half-bestial poverty of their souls. Religion and the religious significance of life sheds sunshine over these perpetual drudges and makes their own sight tolerable to them.... refining, as it were *making the most use* of suffering, ultimately even sanctifying and justifying. Perhaps nothing in Christianity and Buddhism is so venerable as their art of teaching even the lowliest to set themselves through piety in an apparently higher order of things and thus to preserve their contentment with the real order, within which they live hard enough lives – and necessarily have to!”⁷

Hence for Nietzsche, Christianity is the final stage of the triumph of slave morality. It is the quintessential culture of decadence that not only facilitates the ascension of all that is sick in humanity, it also justifies it. It is the most decadent form of ontological projection because, insofar as it severs recognition and action from the past and the present, it becomes the antithesis of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same.

To Nietzsche’s way of thinking, Christianity had its origins in ancient Greece because, with the rise of theoretical projection, the elemental fear found in every man was

⁵Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, #33, p. 157.

⁶In *The New Science of Politics*, Eric Voegelin uses the terms “cosmological truth”, “anthropological truth”, and “soteriological truth”. In part, I have based my three forms of ontological projection on Voegelin’s work. Although little resemblance remains of his ideas in mine, I acknowledge my indebtedness to the influence of the *New Science* and, in particular, the use and abuse of Voegelin’s terminology.

⁷Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #61, p. 87.

no longer overcome with culture, but instead, it was merely compensated into the culture. As he says, "when the rabble came to predominate in Greece, *fear* also overran religion; and Christianity was preparing itself."⁸ When fear is accommodated by culture rather than overcome by it, the floodgates are opened and the lower ranked, more cowardly man is able to find justification for his temerity. He is permitted to feel power without the effort that had theretofore been required. Whereas previously "all men incapable of wielding some kind of weapon or other – mouth and pen included as weapons – became servile," Christianity is very useful because "within Christianity servility assumes the appearance of a virtue and is quite astonishingly beautified."⁹ In itself, this does not constitute the decadence of Christianity against which Nietzsche so vehemently rails. Insofar as Christianity permits the ordinary man to live with himself and his servile existence, it is a useful tool. Further, so long as the philosopher, "the man of the most comprehensive responsibility who has the conscience for the collective evolution of mankind," continues to "make use of religions for his work of education and breeding, just as he will make use of existing political and economic conditions,"¹⁰ it is a useful tool. That is to say, religion is a necessary means for overcoming the resistance of the ruled, but at the same time, it also has as one of its functions the necessary task of giving "a section of the ruled guidance and opportunity for preparing itself for future rule and command."¹¹ The problem with Christianity, however, is that it was not used for this purpose. It was not used as religions are supposed to be used but rather, it came to be the predominant form of culture precisely because it excluded, or more precisely, because it "waged a *war to the death* against this *higher* type of man, it has excommunicated all the fundamental instincts of this type, ...[it] has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of opposition to the preservative instincts of strong life."¹²

⁸*Ibid.*, #49, p. 78.

⁹Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, #115, p. 66-67.

¹⁰Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #61, p. 86.

¹¹*Ibid.*.

¹²Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, p. 129.

For Nietzsche, the decline of the human race, the decadence of mankind, is rooted in exactly this because “it costs dear and terrible when religions hold sway, *not* as means of education and breeding in the hands of the philosopher, but in their own right and as *sovereign*, when they themselves want to be final ends and not means beside other means.”¹³ In other words, it costs mankind the prospect of producing the fearless genius who confronts reality head-on and who, in doing so, brings to mankind the notion of the godlike man – not God, but the godlike man – who can and does overcome the frightening reality of life and death through the will to power. It costs man the possibility of the Superman. But since it was this frightening reality that begot the need for alternative forms of ontological projection in the first place, it is hardly surprising that with Christianity, it is once again shunned. We have seen that for Nietzsche, Plato was a coward in the face of reality and consequently fled into the ideal, but with Christianity, this flight is taken even farther. In fact, Nietzsche even says that with Christianity there is actually no flight from reality at all because, as a morality and religion of the slavish, it never comes “into contact with reality at any point.”¹⁴ The entire culture is comprised of imaginary psychology, imaginary natural science, imaginary causes (God, soul, free-will, unfree-will), imaginary effects (sin, grace, forgiveness of sins), and an imaginary teleology (the kingdom of God, the Last Judgment, eternal life). Whereas the tragic/agonistic Hellenes, who originally became aware of the terrors of existence from the Apollinian dream world, confronted reality and in doing so found joy, the Christian creates a “purely fictitious world” which is

distinguished from the other world of dreams, very much to its disadvantage, by the fact that the latter *mirrors* actuality, while the former falsifies, disvalues and denies actuality. Once the concept ‘nature’ had been devised as the concept antithetical to ‘God’, ‘natural’ had to be the word for ‘reprehensible’ – this entire fictional world has its roots in *hated* of the natural (–actuality!–), it is the expression of a profound discontent with the actual.... *But that explains everything*. Who alone has reason to *lie himself out* actuality? He who *suffers* from it. But to suffer from actuality means to be an abortive actuality.... The preponderance of feelings of displeasure over feelings of pleasure is the *cause* of a fictitious morality and religion: such a preponderance, however, provides the *formula* for *decadence*....¹⁵

¹³Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 87.

¹⁴Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, #15, p. 137.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

The decadence of Christianity is therefore centered in what Nietzsche calls the “instinctive hatred of reality.”¹⁶ In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that to hate something means to fear it. Thus for those who subscribe to the Christian prescription for immortality, reality is, above all and understandably so, feared. Once again it becomes obvious that the fear man has of the pain of death is the impetus for culture, but in this case, the solution for overcoming death is, in Nietzsche’s estimation, even more decadent. It is decadent because the ‘instinctive hatred of *every* reality’ causes the cowardly man to retreat into the “‘ungraspable’, into the ‘inconceivable’” and excites “antipathy towards every form, every spacial and temporal concept, towards everything firm” which merely allows him to feel “at home in a world undisturbed by reality of any kind, a merely ‘inner’ world, a ‘real’ world, an eternal world.... ‘The kingdom of God is *within you*’”¹⁷

The instinctive hatred of reality thus arises in those who are accustomed to suffering but cannot resist. It is the consequence of a nature that “feels all resisting, all need for resistance, as an unbearable displeasure (that is also to say as *harmful*, as *deprecat*ed by the instinct of self-preservation) and knows blessedness (pleasure) only in no longer resisting anyone or anything, neither the evil nor the evil-doer – love as the sole, as the *last* possibility of life....”¹⁸ And it is with the religion of love that the slavish man is able to overcome the physiological realities of life. A culture in which the instinctive hatred of reality is the predominant psychological characterization, or for that matter, any culture created by men dominated by fear, which is to say “the fear of pain, even of the infinitely small in pain – *cannot* end otherwise than in a *religion of love*...”¹⁹ because with this sort of solution, immortality becomes ecumenical and all human shortcomings, especially fear, are elevated to the status of a virtue.

With Christianity the flight from reality is the fundamental requisite for immortality. If one recalls that an integral part of reality is mortality, one will also recall that it is this part

¹⁶*Ibid.*, #30, p. 153.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, #29, p. 153.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁹*Ibid.*.

of reality that all men have in common with all other men at all other times. In fact, mortality, because it is that which all men have in common, can be considered reality, actuality, or even truth. Man is born, he lives, and then he dies. Or, man was born, he is living, and he will die – past, present and future. With either formulation, the fact remains that death is part of a universal truth and is bound up with time. In the doctrine of Christ, however, immortality is achieved through a rejection of these because, as Nietzsche writes:

If I understand anything of this great symbolist it is that he took for realities, for 'truths', only inner realities – that he understood the rest, everything pertaining to nature, time, space, history, only as signs, as occasion for metaphor. The concept 'the son of man' is not a concrete person belonging to history, anything at all individual or unique, but an 'eternal' fact, a psychological symbol freed from the time concept.²⁰

Whereas with cosmological projection, immortality was achieved precisely by standing out as something or someone individual or unique within the confines of time, space, and history (reality), the Christian finds immortality in the exact opposite. He finds it in his passive emulation of a symbol removed from reality. He finds immortality not by projecting (and prejecting) his existence into time, but rather by removing himself and his death from the frightful reality of time.

By removing his death from the reality of time, the Christian is able to satisfy the demands of the will to power. Since immortality is essentially about power, removing the concept of death from reality allows him to feel powerful without the effort needed with the higher form of ontological projection. When death is beaten, at least in what Nietzsche calls the fictitious world of Christianity, it allows for the creation of a new sovereign dominion – the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven, however, is "a condition of the heart – not something that comes 'upon the earth' or 'after death'."²¹ In fact, the power bequeathed on the Christian can only be a condition of the heart because he has not overcome the death in any actual sense. Whereas the Olympic athlete and the Hellenic warrior faced danger and risked death in order to overcome the frightful realities of existence, the Christian needs not endure any such danger because he has already

²⁰*Ibid.*, #34, p. 158.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 159.

psychologically banished death from the immanent world. In Nietzsche's terms however, banishment would not be a strong enough term for the Christian's relation to death because the

entire concept of natural death is lacking in the Gospel: death is not a bridge, not a transition, it is lacking because it belongs to quite another world, a merely apparent world useful only for the purpose of symbolism. The 'hour of death' is not a Christian concept – the 'hour', time, physical life and its crises, simply do not exist for the teacher of 'glad tidings'.... The 'Kingdom of God' is not something one waits for; it has no yesterday or tomorrow, it does not come 'in a thousand years' – it is an experience within a heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere.²²

Similarly, the same can be said of recognition – it is everywhere and nowhere and at bottom merely an experience in the heart. As has already been discussed, immortality, which is to say, power, necessarily requires recognition. With soteriological projection, recognition is needed from only God and, since the Kingdom of God is everywhere and nowhere, the Christian form of immortality can therefore be ecumenical and appeal to the low, the downtrodden, and the wretched refuse in every corner of the earth.

§ 3. The Degodification of God

According to Nietzsche, prior to the advent of this form of immortality, the idea of God was formulated by a specific people in order that they might "venerate the conditions through which it has prospered, its virtues – it projects, its joy in itself, its feeling of power onto a being whom one can thank for them." Religion was created by a proud people as a form of gratitude and further, just as was described with the Hellenic Eris-goddesses, the god had to be "both useful and harmful, both friend and foe – he is admired in good and bad alike."²³ He was the god of a strong people, a god who shared in the rapturous *ardeurs* of victory and destruction, and a god who knew of cruelty, anger, envy, mockery, and acts of violence. In short, "he represented a people, the strength of a people, everything aggressive and thirsting for power in the soul of a people."²⁴ With

²²*Ibid.*.

²³*Ibid.*, #16, p. 138.

²⁴*Ibid.*.

soteriological projection, however, this sort of god is unsuitable because the people he represents are neither strong nor a people, as such. Instead, a god has to be created that can represent, or more accurately, recognize, a weak and scattered people. Whereas god was formerly created by a nation as an expression of gratitude for victory and all that is represented by victory, the Christian god is created for and by the losers of the existential struggles against reality.

This transformation of god is particularly important to our theme because as the dominant form of ontological projection comes to be based on the nature of the slave, the structures of human association change with it. Just as the Hellenic community was reflective of the festival culture of the agonistic/tragic Greek, when the religion of the Christian comes to hold sway, the concomitant apparatus of human organization will be restructured accordingly. In other words, since the symbols man creates because of how he stands in relation to death necessarily shape the organization of his community, the Christian transformation of God reveals much about two thousand years of human association. Nietzsche describes the Christian transformation in terms of submissiveness: "When a people is perishing," he writes, "when it feels its faith in the future, its hope of freedom vanish completely; when it becomes conscious that the most profitable thing of all is submissiveness and that the virtues of submissiveness are a condition of its survival,"²⁵ it will also have to alter its God in order to justify and compensate for such a miserable condition. In altering its god in such a way, it is then unavoidable that the organization of their communal association will be altered accordingly. Thus when the Christian transforms the notion of god, his God necessarily becomes

a dissembler, timid, modest, counsels 'peace of soul', no more hatred, forbearance, 'love' even towards friend and foe. He is continually moralizing, he creeps into the cave of every private virtue, becomes a God for everybody, becomes a private man, becomes a cosmopolitan....²⁶

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

The Christian god is transformed into a cosmopolitan god – a god for every city – which means, just as it is with the recognition and power found in soteriological projection, that the god is at the same time everywhere and nowhere. Similarly, the community of Christians and the immortality found therein mirrors the transfigured conception of god by becoming cosmopolitan in nature. They establish an ecumenical community that achieves immortality in this very ecumenism rather than a city with clearly delineated boundaries, clearly lineated links to a noble past, and with immortality based on power as it is represented by the city within which they dwell.

Whereas the tragic/agonistic Hellenes would occasionally breach the walls of their city to welcome a new god who symbolizes the power and victories of the city and its people, for the Christian god these same walls represent a barrier to the ascendancy of the weak. They represent a division between a strong and particular people on the inside and a weak and scattered people wandering about the periphery. In other words, city walls, in a very martial manner, represent and substantiate inequality amongst man. The Christian doctrine, however, was created to passively combat this very inequality. It was created to overcome these differences by establishing a “kingdom” of non-martial power – power without walls, power without a particular time or place, power without a particular people, and power without courage. With walls there can be neither a cosmopolitan god nor an ecumenical and equal distribution of power and immortality; thus for the Christian, they must necessarily be removed. It is for precisely this reason that Nietzsche says “primitive Christianity is the abolition of the state: [it] forbids oaths, war service, courts of justice, self-defense and the defense of any kind of community, the distinction between fellow countrymen and foreigners, and also the differentiation of classes.” Moreover, it “is also the abolition of society: it prefers all that society counts of little worth, it grows up among outcasts and the condemned, among lepers of all kinds, ‘sinners,’ publicans,’ prostitutes, the most stupid folk (the ‘fishers’); it disdains the rich, the learned, the noble, the virtuous,

the 'correct'."²⁷ And thus the transformation of god plays itself out in the structures of human association by removing the barriers of particularism and power in favour of cosmopolitanism and weakness.

In Nietzsche's understanding, this transformation of the notion 'god' and the corresponding transformation of human community by the Christians means that their god,

just like his people itself, has gone abroad, gone wandering about; since then he has sat still nowhere; until at last he is at home everywhere, the great cosmopolitan – until he has got 'the great majority' and half the earth on his side. But the God of the 'great majority', the democrat among Gods, has none the less not become a proud pagan God: he has remained a Jew, he has remained the God of the nook, the God of the dark corners and places, of all unhealthy quarters throughout the world!... His world-empire is as before an underworld-empire, a hospital, a *southern*-empire, a ghetto-empire.... And he himself so pale, so weak, so *décadent*....²⁸

Hence there is contradiction that sheds light on Nietzsche's antipathy toward Christianity. Whereas man has as his most basic instinct the will to power, which can be expressed in no greater terms than in that of the will to immortality within the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same and the Superman, the Christian expresses this will in a god who both represents and symbolizes weakness. Whereas with cosmological projection man endeavoured to emulate or transform himself into the beauty of god and in doing so become god-like himself, the Christian reduces the notion of god to such a sickly state that the difficult task of emulating one's god becomes neither preserving and uplifting nor desirable. In fact, emulating the god becomes the easiest of endeavours.

Thus when Nietzsche describes the Christian conception of God, he says that God is the "God of the sick," and that

God as spider, God as spirit – is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: perhaps it even represents the low-water mark in the descending development of the God type. God degenerated to the *contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes*! In God a declaration of hostility towards life, nature, the will to life! God the formula for every calumny of 'this world', for every lie about 'the next world'! In God nothingness deified, the will to nothingness sanctified!...²⁹

Clearly, the Christian god is not representative of the will to power because immortality ceases to be the highest expression of power as soon as it becomes ecumenical and

²⁷Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #207, p. 123.

²⁸Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, #17, pp. 139-140.

²⁹*Ibid.*, #18, p. 140.

removed from the will to power of the individual. Power can only be power as long as it is unequally distributed and therefore without inequality, or, as Nietzsche calls it, the “pathos of distance” and “rank order”, man cannot vent his strength – he cannot satisfy his will to power and will to immortality. Thus the will to immortality expressed in soteriological projection is the antithesis, or the *contradiction*, of the higher form of ontological projection. With the cosmopolitanism of Christianity, that is, with the everywhere and the nowhere of Christianity, the will to power of the individual ceases to be the focal point of ontological projection and is subsequently replaced with “the will to nothingness.”

The will to power becomes the will to nothingness for two reasons: first, the recognition required for power is situated in a timeless, everywhere and nowhere god; and second, the immortality to which one strives is centred in an existence that lies outside the realm of human being – the individual’s will to power no longer has any relationship to other historical human beings. The reliance on salvation for immortality therefore means, in Nietzsche’s words, that Christianity has “shifted the centre of gravity of that entire existence *beyond* this existence.”³⁰ The centre of gravity, which is the will to power as the focus of man’s relationship to other men and, perhaps more importantly, the focus of his relationship to life and death, is removed from the world in which he lives and dies. The problem with this is that if

one shifts the centre of gravity of life *out* of life into the ‘Beyond’ – into *nothingness* – one has deprived life as such of its centre of gravity. The great lie of personal immortality destroys all rationality, all naturalness of instinct – all that is salutary, all that is life-furthering, all that holds a guarantee of the future in the instincts henceforth excites mistrust. *So* to live that there is no longer any meaning in living; that now becomes the meaning of life.³¹

The pursuit of cosmopolitan immortality creates a situation in which there is a pursuit of no immortality at all. Instead, the pursuit is a pursuit of nothingness – a pursuit which denies man the possibility of confronting the terrors of existence and, from the victories found in this confrontation, feeling himself to be nullified, preserved and lifted up. In short,

³⁰*Ibid.*, #42, p. 167. Nietzsche points directly to Paul, the “hate-obsessed false coiner,” for initiating this shift.

³¹*Ibid.*, #43, p. 167.

shifting the centre of gravity into the 'beyond' eliminates the need and possibility of overcoming the finiteness of human existence because the greatness of man is no longer measured in relation to other men nor in his emulation of the power and beauty of the gods.

For Nietzsche, this means that Christian immortality is merely a crude transformation of the symbol of the eternal recurrence, of "the concept 'eternal life,' the antithesis to transient personal life" [into] personal immortality."³² In other words, the departure from the doctrine of the eternal recurrence that began with theoretical projection becomes complete with soteriological projection and Christianity because there is an inherent misunderstanding of the immortality of the person. Because the Christian presumes that there is another world, a *beyond*, and because this world has the absurd concept of punishment and sin as the heart of its interpretation of existence, immortality is no longer based on participation in the eternal recurrences in the eternally recurring cosmos. Man no longer strives to emulate and become like the immortal gods. The Superman is no longer willed. With soteriological projection and its Doctrine of Judgment, "instead of the deification of man," immortality is sought in "his un-deification, [in] the digging of the deepest chasm, which only a miracle, only prostration in deepest self-contempt can bridge."³³ For Nietzsche, Christian cosmopolitan immortality is, at bottom, an emulation of nothingness, a will to nothingness, and a debasement of man's centre of gravity – the will to power. And insofar as Christianity has come to hold sway with its doctrine of "equality before God" and democratic distribution of immortality, immortality itself has become meaningless. The ecumenical distribution of immortality, or as Nietzsche says, "'immortality' granted to every Peter and Paul," means that there is no immortality and this, he says, "has been the greatest and most malicious outrage on *noble* mankind ever committed."³⁴

³²Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #170, p. 102.

³³*Ibid.*, #196, p. 116.

³⁴Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, #43, p. 168.

VII

NIHILISM AND THE DEATH OF GOD

§ 1. The Greatest Recent Event

In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche asks: "What were the advantages of the Christian moral hypothesis?" His answer is quite pointed and corroborates what has been said in the previous chapter. He states that "it granted men an absolute value as opposed to his smallness and accidental occurrence in the flux of becoming and passing away."¹ In other words, Christian morality, which strongly resembles slave morality, gave man a feeling of permanence despite his knowledge that human life is transitory. It made man think that, through his belief in God and the *beyond*, he had innate value and could acquire personal immortality. In doing so, Christianity "prevented man from despising himself as man, from taking sides against life; from despairing of knowledge: it was a *means of preservation*."² Christianity was the culture of ease created by *homo timidus* to alleviate the fear and powerlessness he felt not just from the knowledge of his mortality, but also from his abiding fear that arises from his ignorance of what happens after death.

For Nietzsche, soteriological projection is the nadir of the various possibilities of ontological projection because it represents the greatest degree of deviation from the eternal recurrence of the same and the Superman. In fact, insofar as it rejects the link between the eternal path forward and the eternal path backward, which is to say, insofar as it necessarily needs to reject This Moment and the courage and the will to power that comes to light at This Moment, soteriological projection is the antithesis of cosmological projection. The decline and decay that began with theoretical projection and culminated in Christianity, however, does not cause Nietzsche to despair completely because he sees a characteristic in Christianity that gives some reason for optimism. His observation of

¹Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #4, p. 9.

²*Ibid.*, p. 10.

nineteenth century European culture leads him to believe that the fictitious world created by this morality cannot endure its own forces because

among the forces cultivated by [Christian] morality was *truthfulness*: this eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its partial perspective – and now the recognition of this inveterate mendaciousness that one despairs of shedding becomes a stimulant. Now we discover in ourselves needs implanted by centuries of moral interpretation – needs that now appear to us as needs for untruth; on the other hand, the value for which we endure life seems to hinge on these needs. This antagonism – not to esteem what we know, and not to be allowed any longer to esteem the lies we should like to tell ourselves – results in a process of dissolution.³

In Nietzsche's terminology, this dissolution is nihilism. The values, or more precisely, the social values, in Christianity – faith in morality and the hope for power and immortality based on recognition from God – devalue themselves because “the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and history.”⁴ Christianity necessarily results in nihilism first, as we have already discussed, because the culture is in itself a manifestation of the will to nothingness, and second, because, through its own cultivation of truthfulness, the shabby origin of man's highest values becomes clear. Christianity dies at the hand of its own morality because its truthfulness makes man realize that he lacks “the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be ‘divine’ or morality incarnate.”⁵

For Nietzsche, this dissolution of Christianity and soteriological projection is summarized in his well-known statement “God is dead.” This proclamation, which first appears in *The Gay Science* in an aphorism entitled *New Struggles*, compares the death of the Christian god to the death of Buddha:

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.⁶

This somewhat obscure passage reveals two things: first, the death of God, and second, that the death of God does not altogether alter the ways of human behaviour. Even after the

³*Ibid.*, #5, p. 10.

⁴*Ibid.*, #1, p. 7.

⁵*Ibid.*, #3, p. 9.

⁶Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #108, p. 167.

death of God, the shadow lingers on and man continues to live according to the constructs created by the centuries of belief in Christian morality. In the language used thus far, man continues to rely on Christian morality, which includes the Christian notion of linear immortality rather than the ring of existence, to overcome his great fear of death; he continues to pattern the basis of his feeling of power, albeit an ersatz power, on forms established by Christianity but without God *per se*. It is against this shadow of God that Nietzsche engages in a “new struggle” because, although the false Christian world of death and immortality has died, there yet remains to be a new thought, which is to say, the thought of the eternal recurrence of the same, to “make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them.”⁷

The passage comparing the death of Buddha to the death of the Christian God becomes less obscure when Nietzsche raises the topic a second time in *The Gay Science*. In the famous tale of the madman, the Madman lights a lantern in the bright morning hours, enters the marketplace and cries out that he is seeking God. The people in the market square, many of whom already did not believe in God, laugh at the Madman and shout jokes about God losing his way, hiding, or emigrating. The Madman, provoked by their mirth, leaps into the crowd and cries “‘Whither is God?’... ‘I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers.” He then asks how this happened and what it means: “Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?” and “Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?”⁸

The ‘how’ of these questions has already been answered. God was murdered by his own hand – through the truthfulness fostered by Christianity. What it means, or, “how shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers,” however, is another matter. The demise of the Christian God means that the values that had hitherto provided the main stimulus for life are no longer the most efficient. Whereas Christianity had for centuries

⁷*Ibid.*, #278, p. 225.

⁸*Ibid.*, #125, p. 181.

provided man with meaning, which is to say, an achievable goal such as a “moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal happiness,” with the death of God, “now one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*.” It brings about the realization that “man is no longer the collaborator, let alone the center, of becoming.”⁹

Not only does the death of God eradicate this idea of aim, it also means that the faith man once had in a totality, in a comprehensive unity in and underneath all events, in “some supreme form of domination and administration,” is no longer viable. This belief in some sort of unity or some form of monism was once sufficient “to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a mode of the deity.” The death of God, however, also spells the death of the notion of the universal, and since man had conceived of “such a whole in order to be able to believe in his own value,” he loses “the faith in his own value when no infinitely valuable whole works through him.”¹⁰

For Nietzsche, the truthfulness of Christianity, besides giving rise to the insights that there is no goal in becoming and that there is no great unity in which man can completely immerse himself as part of a supreme value, also forces man to discover that the *beyond*, which Nietzsche refers to as the *true* world, “is fabricated solely from psychological needs.” In other words, man discovers that the Christian afterworld, which includes the form of immortality it represents, is a false world. In fact, with the death of God, a form of nihilism comes into being that “includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a *true* world.” The *true* world, the cornerstone of soteriological projection, becomes untenable and therefore “one grants the reality of becoming as the *only* reality, forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities – but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it*.”¹¹

⁹Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #12, p. 12.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, #12A, p. 12.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 13.

Thus when Nietzsche's Madman suggests that we are plunging continually – backward, sideward, forward, in all directions – he has in mind the idea that the platform upon which man stood no longer functions as a substructure for meaning. Metaphorically speaking, the ground of man's relation to life and death has been wrested from beneath him and he is falling. Whereas man had come to rely on God and the true world for the requisite recognition for power and immortality, the death of God means that the foundation of this form of ontological projection is no longer valid – the entire horizon, or that which provided man with perspective for interpreting his world, has been wiped away. As a result,

a feeling of valuelessness was reached from the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' of the concept of 'truth.' Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not 'true,' is *false*. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a *true* world. Briefly: the categories of 'aim,' 'unity,' 'being' which we used to project some value into the world – we *pull out* again; so the world looks *valueless*.

The death of God and the demise of soteriological projection, it seems, should cause man much discomfort and pessimism.

To Nietzsche's understanding, however, this new valuelessness and meaninglessness of the world ought not to be a cause for despair. On the contrary, when the death of God is raised for the third time in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche refers to it as "the greatest recent event." "That God is dead," he writes, "that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable," is "the meaning of our cheerfulness."¹² Whereas one would expect that the initial consequences of such a death to be foreboding and dark, this is not so for Nietzsche. Instead, he says that quite the opposite from what one would expect is taking place. The initial consequences

are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn.

Indeed, we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel, when we hear the news that 'the old god is dead,' as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea.'¹³

¹²Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #343, p. 279.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 280.

In short, the death of God is reason for cheerfulness because when the three aforementioned categories of reason – aim, unity, and truth – no longer hold sway, the purely fictitious world of Christian valuation is ready for revaluation. Nihilism, as a consequence of the “greatest recent event,” is thus not a reason for gloom, but it is to be regarded as a freedom from the decadent and slavish values of Christianity and, more importantly, freedom for “a revaluation of all values hitherto.”¹⁴

§ 2. The Last Man

The problem with nihilism, however, is that it is ambiguous. It is for this reason that Nietzsche devises two categories of nihilism: active nihilism and passive nihilism. Active nihilism is defined as “a sign of increased power of the spirit.”¹⁵ It is a sign of strength wherein the “spirit may have grown so strong that previous goals (‘convictions,’ articles of faith) have become incommensurate.” Moreover, active nihilism “reaches its maximum of relative strength as a violent force of destruction.”¹⁶ It is, as Nietzsche suggests in his subtitle for *The Twilight of the Idols*, akin to philosophizing with a hammer. A hammer, it must be kept in mind, is not only a tool used for pounding or the part of a modern gun that strikes the firing pin, it is also a lever with a striking head for ringing a bell or striking a gong. The hammer is not only a coercive and martial instrument, it is also a creative instrument for making music. Active nihilism is thus both destructive and creative. It destroys the old, decrepit values while at the same time, like the Dionysian festival, it acts as a catalyst for the new, life-affirming values.

The new values Nietzsche has in mind are not unfamiliar. They are the Superman and the eternal recurrence. It is for exactly this reason that the Madman asks the mocking unbelievers in the marketplace, “What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not

¹⁴Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 31.

¹⁵Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #22, p. 17.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, #23, p. 18.

become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"¹⁷ The murder of God has at least made possible festivals of atonement and sacred games – the same *melieu* in which the ancients actively participated in the eternal recurrence of the same and willed their noblest and bravest men into god-like figures. The new values and the new goal becomes clear: "Not 'mankind' but overman is the goal!"¹⁸ The Madman, active nihilism incarnate, recognizes this and therefore tells the people in the market place that "there has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."¹⁹

The problem, however, is that the Madman's words fall on deaf ears, for the market place is full of passive nihilists. Nietzsche is quite clear in defining this other sort of nihilism: "nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit" is *passive* nihilism. In fact, he goes so far as to define "passive" as being "hindered from moving forward" and therefore it is "an act of resistance and reaction."²⁰ Whereas the active nihilist rejects or destroys the "values hitherto," while he exercises his will to power, the passive nihilist demonstrates signs of diminished strength and, because of this weakness, has the need to posit for himself "a goal, a why, a faith."²¹ Although the three aforementioned categories of reason are no longer believable nor universally believed by either the passive or active nihilist, the psychological condition that begot the slavish Christian notions of aim, unity, and truth in the first place still remains. That is to say, *homo timidus*' fear of death and his nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence maintain their underlying position as the essential motivating factor in human behaviour. The death of God does not change this fundamental characterization. *Homo timidus* requires the mollification of one sort of culture or another, and as has already been discussed, the less demanding and more efficient the culture is, the better it is. Thus for Nietzsche, nihilism is at the same time the

¹⁷Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #125, p. 181.

¹⁸Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1001, p. 519.

¹⁹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #125, p. 181.

²⁰Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #657, p. 346. In this same aphorism, Nietzsche asks, "What is active?" - reaching out for power."

²¹*Ibid.*, #23, pp. 17-18.

greatest recent event and a catastrophe. It is a great event so long as it is active nihilism but it is catastrophic as passive nihilism because, as such, it perpetuates the cowardly decadence that began with Socrates and was falsely valorized throughout the two-thousand year history of Christian morality. Passive nihilism, the antithesis of active nihilism, is therefore

weary nihilism that no longer attacks.... The strength of the spirit may be worn out, exhausted, so that previous goals and values have become incommensurate and no longer are believed; so that the synthesis of values and goals (on which every strong culture rests) dissolves and the individual values war against each other: disintegration – and whatever refreshes, heals, calms, numbs emerges into the foreground in various disguises, religious or moral, or political, or aesthetic, etc..²²

In other words, what emerges into the foreground after the death of God is His lingering shadow. It is aim, unity, and truth without God. It is the unbelievable values that have not been revaluated but merely transmogrified into equally mendacious and equally contemptible doctrines of slavish utility. It is the attempt by the passive nihilist "to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far," which, contrary to Nietzsche's goal of the eternal recurrence and the Superman, produces "the opposite, makes the problem more acute."²³

When the Madman of *The Gay Science* enters the market place in the bright morning sun, he lights a lantern for precisely this reason – to vanquish the shadow. After his proclamation, when the people in the marketplace can only stare in astonishment, the Madman throws his lantern on the ground and it breaks into pieces. "'I have come too early,' he says then; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men.'"²⁴ In a similar vein, when Nietzsche's Zarathustra comes down from his high place in the mountains to bring mankind a gift, he finds that "this old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that *God is dead!*"²⁵ Furthermore, like the Madman in *The Gay Science*, when Zarathustra enters the marketplace to present mankind with his gift – the Superman and the eternal recurrence – the people laugh at him. Thus Nietzsche writes that "when Zarathustra had spoken these words, he

²²*Ibid.*, p. 18.

²³*Ibid.*, #28, p. 19.

²⁴Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #125, p. 182.

²⁵Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, prologue #3, p. 6.

again looked at the people, and was silent. 'There they stand,' said he to his heart; 'there they laugh: they understand me not; I am not the mouth for these ears.'" Like the Madman's audience, the crowd in *Zarathustra* may have disposed of the old god and the basis for the old form of ontological projection but the shadow of the old form perseveres. They could not understand, or more likely, refused to understand the hard teaching of the Superman. In *Zarathustra*, however, the sermon in the marketplace does not conclude with the proclamation of the Superman. Zarathustra realizes that one must "first batter their ears, that they may learn to hear with their eyes."²⁶ Hence he continues his sermon by battering their ears with the most contemptible thing – the Last Man.

Zarathustra's sermon on the Last Man is of particular interest because he preaches it to a marketplace teeming with slavish passive nihilists. It seems, at this point at least, that he is unaware that the Last Man has already arrived; that the earth has already been made small and on it the Last Man, who makes everything small, already hops. Zarathustra fails to realize that his proclamation of the Superman is for naught because the gaggle of passive nihilists do not, or more correctly, cannot share his lofty vision. His warning of the forthcoming ineradicable species of flea-like man, the man who "liveth longest" and whose loftiest ambitions are to be entertained and merely diverted from the horrors and absurdities of existence, is directed at just this sort of man. There is no need for him to show the crowd in the market place the Last Man because he is describing what is before him:

'We have discovered happiness' – say the last men, and blink thereby.

They have left the regions where it is hard to live; for they need warmth. One still loveth one's neighbour and rubbeth against him; for one needeth warmth.²⁷

The nausea the passive nihilist feels from the horrors or absurdities of existence – at the rediscovered meaninglessness and valuelessness of becoming – is easily overcome with "a little poison now and then: that maketh pleasant dreams. And much poison at last for a pleasant death." Rather than confronting and overcoming the difficulties of existence with the will to power and courage, they are content so long as they are entertained:

²⁶*Ibid.*, prologue #5, p. 11.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

One still worketh, for work is a pastime. But one is careful lest the pastime should hurt one.

One no longer becometh poor or rich; both are too burdensome. Who still wanteth to rule? Who still wanteth to obey? Both are too burdensome.

No shepherd, and one herd! Every one wanteth the same; every one is equal: he who hath other sentiments goeth voluntarily into the madhouse.

'Formerly all the world was insane,' – say the subtlest of them, and blink thereby.²⁸

The crowd, with their pride and ignorance, do not realize that it is of them whom Zarathustra speaks. "Give us this last man, O Zarathustra,' – they called out – 'make us into these last men!'"²⁹ They, the passive nihilists, the shadow worshippers, the men who strive for the smallest victories, can only blink and laugh hatefully at the man giving them the Superman. They have killed God but still look to His shadow to overcome their great fear of death.

The significance of this passage is revealed later in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Zarathustra himself comes to realize that he had presented his gift to those least capable and least willing to accept it: "When I came unto men for the first time," he says, "then did I commit the anchorite folly, the great folly: I appeared in the market place. And when I spake unto all, I spake unto none."³⁰ He had discovered from the experience in the market square that the populace, the populace noise, and the long populace-ears were of no account. He had learned that "on the market-place no one believeth in higher men," never mind Supermen. Moreover, he found that even if one speaks well of the Superman, the mob will only blink and stammer about equality. "'Ye higher men,' – so blinketh the populace – 'there are no higher men, we are all equal; man is man, before God – we are all equal!'"³¹ The higher man or the Superman is as untenable for the Last Men as it was for the Christian. The aversion the mob has for inequality, which is to say, the "pathos of distance" and "rank order," is rooted in the same soil as it was for the first slavish movement; namely, it is founded on the basis that rank order presupposes higher and lower

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁰*Ibid.*, Book 4, p. 350.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 351.

men and from the perspective of the lower men, who have from the first violent confrontation been made all too aware that they are lower and weaker, this inequality, this brutal and frank demonstration of their mortality, has been the cause of unabating angst and fear. Christian immortality erased the fear begotten by the pathos of distance by making all men equal before God – an equalization and elevation that required no fearlessness and absolutely no risk of defeat on the part of the timid. For the Last Man, this equality remains as efficacious for acquiring the feeling of power as it was for the faithful Christian, but since God is dead a new foundation is thus required. In other words, a new form of culture is required for the slavish and cunning expression of the will to power. They require the efficiency and ease of linear immortality, but they make it even more efficient and easier by excluding God or any other sort of transcendence.

§ 3. Technological Culture

When Nietzsche describes the new form of culture, the culture emerging with the advent of the passively nihilistic Last Men and the actively nihilistic higher man, his description is largely prognostic. He admits this when he says that what he relates in *The Will to Power* is "the history of the next two centuries" but as he says this, he also says that what is coming "can no longer come differently." The future, he claims, speaks to him in a hundred signs and "this destiny announces itself everywhere."³² The dead God, it seems, casts a long shadow and the culture that Nietzsche observed being created by *homo timidus*, the shadow worshipper, was beginning to take shape. Since soteriological projection, particularly in the form of Christianity, was the culture that emerged from the victory of slave morality, it follows that the dissolution of this form of ontological projection does not alter the original cowardly nature of its creators. This nature, being the nature that always necessitates the creation of the least strenuous and least frightening form of culture for overcoming the fear of death and hatred of the feeling of powerlessness, remains the nature of the Last Men and the passive nihilists. Thus Nietzsche's prognostication of the coming

³²Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #2, p. 3.

two centuries is a continuation of what has already been described but with one major difference: secularization.

When the masses realize that everything by which they had formerly acquired their feeling of power is false through and through, Nietzsche claims that there will be a propensity to attempt "a kind of this-worldly solution, but in the same sense – that of the eventual triumph or truth, love, and justice (socialism: 'equality of the person')." ³³ In other words, they will endeavor to preserve the culture of utility that is created around Christian morality by transforming its foundational precepts into an immanent prescription for power and immortality. For Nietzsche, the "equality" espoused by socialism, and for that matter, by democratism, is essentially an interpretation – or an immanent re-interpretation – of the "same sort of old-fashioned metaphysical comfort" that was offered through Christianity. It is an effort "to hold on even to the 'beyond' – even if only as some antilogical 'x' " ³⁴ so that there might be some aim or some goal in the otherwise meaningless and purposeless world. The antilogical 'x' is, in the programs of almost all modern movements, a heaven on Earth; it is a utopic vision that is typically described with language espousing progress toward universal freedom for the individual.

Now, recalling Nietzsche's anthropology, it becomes clear that universal freedom for the individual means universal freedom from the threat of death. It means freedom from the enslavement that arises from the first violent confrontation between man and man; in short, it means an empowering of the original loser, which was the impetus for the genesis of linear immortality in the first place. The disempowered loser readily takes to the notion of linear immortality because with it he is able to forget and banish the terror and ignobility of his past by creating an idyllic future wherein the distribution of power amongst man will be level. Thus the culture that inevitably emerges from the nihilism begotten by soteriological projection is a continuation of what Nietzsche refers to as the 'leveling' of mankind and what is desired by the leveled, or as Nietzsche as calls them, the equal, the

³³*Ibid.*, #30, p. 20.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

Last men, and the mediocre, is an "ideal conceived as something in which nothing harmful, evil, dangerous, questionable, destructive would remain." In other words, it is a world in which death is not overcome, but rather, it is an ideal world in which death is eliminated. On the road that the Last Men are building toward this ideal, which Nietzsche says "can now be completely surveyed," arises "adaptation, leveling, higher Chinadom, modesty in the instincts, satisfaction in the dwarfing of mankind – a kind of stationary *level of mankind*."³⁵ Moreover, with this leveling of mankind the expression of the will to power is reduced to mean merely the feeling of power in the absence of human overpowering; or, as Zarathustra says, it is akin to "no herdsman and one herd" which can also be interpreted to mean a herd of herdless herdsmen. It is a herdless herd of herdsmen because, as herdsmen, the Last Men have the feeling of power, but since it is an equally distributed feeling and form of power they are nevertheless still part of a herd. One cannot set oneself apart from the herd without exercising power over the others in the herd. In a level herd of herdsmen, however, the obsession with the equal distribution of power forbids this form of overpowering and thus the weakened will to power of the herd, which encompasses the will to immortality, must necessarily be directed elsewhere.

The culture of the herd of herdless herdsmen that is expressed neither by commanding a herd nor by commanding other herdless herdsmen and is therefore redirected into that which can be most safely commanded: the earth. Nietzsche calls this economics and it is based on the principles of science. The will to immortality as it is expressed by the will to power, when directed against the earth, is called economics because the goal of this commanding is to furnish the masses with the commodities necessary for not just for biological life or long biological life, but more importantly, for unending biological life. This is exactly why Zarathustra predicts that the "Last man liveth longest." He lives longest because through his commanding of the earth's commodities, the necessities of biological life can be met both with increased expediency and increased safety.

³⁵*Ibid.*, #881, p. 470.

We can therefore say that the ontological projection of the Last Man is manifested in the culture of technology. Although a discussion of technology would at this point be useful, for the purpose of economy it will have to suffice to say that technology has at its core the efficient ordering of the means of efficiency.³⁶ In the context of this discussion technological culture will mean the efficient use of technology for the purpose of creating the most efficient form of immortality. As has been demonstrated with the previous forms of ontological projection, efficiency in immortality means ease, comfort, and safety. Technology provides the Last Man with the easiest notion of immortality – like soteriological projection, it is completely independent of history, noble or otherwise; the most comforting – the uncertainties presented by the finitude of biological life can be overcome in the most *real* way, through such prospects as birth control, genetic engineering, cloning, cybernetics, and death control; and the safest – no personal risk is required in the battle against mortality. In short, the technological culture that is created after the victory of slave morality and the demise of the Christian god presents the slave with the ideal form of ontological projection.

For Nietzsche, this means either of two things. First, it could mean that once "power has been attained over nature, one can employ this power in the further free development of oneself: will to power as self-elevation and strengthening."³⁷ In other words, like nihilism, while in itself it causes Nietzsche to gasp for fresh air, the ascendance of the decadent Last Man can also present the higher man with reason for optimism: if the power gained from mastering nature is used to elevate and strengthen man then "the transformation of nature into concepts for the purpose of mastering nature – belongs under the rubric 'means.'"³⁸ It belongs under the rubric of means and gives reason for optimism because it can be used for maintaining the Superman as the goal. Through this expansion of

³⁶For a more detailed discussion of technology and culture see for example Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Vintage Books, 1964); Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (Harper Torchbooks, 1977); or Barry Cooper, *Action into Nature* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

³⁷Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #403, p. 218.

³⁸*Ibid.*, #610, p. 328.

power man can be overcome and the Superman can be achieved. In Nietzsche's view, however, this is unlikely and thus his second perspective, to which we can now testify, becomes the more likely of the two.

Of this second possibility he writes: "once we possess that common economic management of the earth that will soon be inevitable, mankind will be able to find its best meaning as a machine in the service of this economy – subtly 'adapted' gears; as an ever-growing superfluity of all domination and commanding elements; as a whole of tremendous force, whose individual factors represent *minimal forces*, *minimal values*."³⁹ The mastery of nature will continue to make the earth small because the Last Man, who is not only the most slavish but also the laziest slave, will continue to make everything small. He will see his efficient management of the exigencies of biological life as having the same goal as soteriological projection – eternal life – but will disregard the smallness of his existence. In other words, the technological culture of the Last Men will have as its goal unending biological life regardless of the life that is being lived. The belief in unending biological life, which is quite different from immortalization, is the poison aforementioned by Zarathustra because it transforms life into a form of stasis wherein man is transfigured into a mere mechanism of perpetual motion. Such a machine, as it is for every technological instrument, performs in the most predictable of ways. Thus in a world populated by these machines there will be no uncertainty and no danger – which is perfectly acceptable for the Last Man.

For Nietzsche, however, a world of Last Men who, above all, endeavor to eliminate risk and uncertainty is the worst possible world, for "there is no sorer misfortune in all human destiny than when the mighty of the earth are not also the first men. Then everything becomes false and distorted and monstrous."⁴⁰ In particular, ontological projection in the form of the eternal recurrence of the same becomes completely distorted and that which is ultimately substituted by the Last Man, technological immortality, is monstrous because it

³⁹*Ibid.*, #866, p. 463.

⁴⁰Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 299. Livy edition.

forgets the goal of becoming by replacing the static and lazy slave-machine for the Superman. The world of the Last Man is a world where the populace-mishmash does not have as his greatest concern the Superman, but instead, he is concerned with "how to maintain himself best, longest, [and] most pleasantly." These new masters of the world, Nietzsche claims, just as it was with the Christians, are the preachers of "submission and humility and policy and diligence and consideration and the long *et cetera* of petty virtues" and as such, "*they* are the Superman's greatest danger!"⁴¹ Hence Nietzsche pleads with his listeners to overcome and surpass them.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 352.

VIII

LAST MAN OLYMPICS

When we began this discussion of *homo timidus*' effort to overcome his great fear of death, we stated that Nietzsche looks to Hesiod's fourth age of man as the lofty and noble example of men who "*well deserve their fame.*" What this means should by now be quite clear. The interrelation between well-deserved fame, the will to power, the eternal recurrence of the same, and the Superman is bound up in man's psychological need to establish an acceptable relationship to his inevitable death. Fame, which is to say, recognition, is the reward conferred on the human being who distinguishes himself by standing out of the crowd. For Nietzsche, "standing out" of the crowd satisfies a man's will to immortality and will to power when it is also a "standing over" the crowd. This outstandingness and "overstandingness" is acquired, not given, through acts of courage and in particular, through acts of courage when directly confronted with the frightening reality of human mortality. Whether these acts of courage are enacted with a sword on the Asiatic coast, with the fists in the Altis at Olympia, before the tragic stage, or with a pen, they all have in common the courageous effort to project one's existence into a cyclical and genealogical link with a noble and divine past, present, and future.

With this account of Nietzsche's vision of the high point of ontological projection and its subsequent denigration into the nadir of the Last Man, it is now possible to see that "the striving for distinction is no longer "the striving for domination over the next man."¹ Instead, the striving for distinction, as it is manifested by the technological culture of the Last Man, has been reduced to striving for distinction as merely an organic being amongst other equal and equally organic beings. The highest victory the Last Man seeks is no longer the overcoming of "mortalness" or overcoming his "human, all-too-humaness," but rather, it has been reduced to the overcoming of mortality. Victories for the Last Man are thus

¹Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, #113, p.68.

much easier because they are much smaller – the greatest victories are staying alive for another day and not becoming a victim to capricious powers.² In short, the modern form of ontological projection does not strive to overcome and rise above the fundamental nature of man; it does not have as its goal the overcoming of man's natural cowardice.

Thus in the last analysis we can return to whence we began. In a Nietzschean interpretation of the world, the victory won by Creugas of Epidamnus at the Nemean games is a victory that offends not just modern sensibilities, but offends against Last Man sensibilities. It defies the imperative of making the world safe from discomfort, uncertainty, danger, and untimely death. Moreover, it violates the principle of universal and equal distribution of victory, power, and immortality that had its inception with theoretical projection, was solidified with soteriological projection, and has culminated in the Last Man Olympics. Thus, whereas we began with the ancient athletic festival, we now conclude with the modern incarnations.

The modern Olympic festival, first held in Greece (1896) around the time of Nietzsche's death, was borne of ideas antithetical to the ancient incarnation. They were the brainchild of the French Baron, Pierre de Coubertin, who hoped that through such competitions reconciliation could be established among warring nations. They were conceived as a "merely competitive means to a cooperative end: the world at peace."³ In the Baron's own words, the games were inspired by "religious sentiment transformed and enlarged by the internationalism and democracy that distinguish the modern age." Or in the words of a disciple of the Baron, the modern Olympics are to be regarded as a twentieth century religion, "a religion with universal appeal which incorporates all the basic values of

²Although the terms "victory" and "victim" have separate etymological origins, their roots are nevertheless interesting in a discussion of Nietzsche's work. Victory, from the Latin *victus*, meant victorious of winning or conquest in a struggle against odds or difficulties and has kept this connotation. Victim, on the other hand, comes from the Sanskrit *vinakti* which means "he set apart" which is most closely related to the modern connotation of a living body sacrificed to a deity in the performance of a religious rite. Both words indicated a setting apart or an elevating distinction but in the modern sense, to be victimized means to be denied the small victory of being merely equal to other, small-victoried Last Men.

³Allen Guttmann, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*, p. 1.

other religions, a modern, exciting, virile, dynamic religion.”⁴ In sum, the modern games were instigated not as a medium for participating in the eternal recurrence of the same, but with the hope of making the world a safer place. Hence the Nietzschean appellation – Last Man Olympics.

In saying this, however, the intention is not to belittle the efforts of the modern athlete. Instead, it is to question the modern notion and understanding of athletics and competition. If, for example, we look at the 1996 gold medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling – a sport that has certainly retained some of the agonistic elements of the ancient agon – this will become more clear. Alexandr Karelin, the gigantic, six-time world champion Russian, won his third Olympic gold medal and extended his ten-year reign as the undefeated champion of Greco-Roman wrestling.⁵ The American runner-up, *whatever his name was*, was furious and regarded the silver medal as a humiliating token of defeat. The problem, at least in this example, is not this type of athlete. The questionability lies in the fact that the organizers, keeping consistent with the tenets of technological culture and the secular derivation of soteriological projection, heap praise and accolades on not only the first loser, but on the second and for that matter, they heap undeserved fame on all the losers. The distribution of silver and bronze medals is a system for equalizing the rewards of victory among the athletes and the athletes’ countrymen. It is a method of making esteem and recognition – the foundation of power – ecumenical. In doing this, Karelin’s victory becomes just some feat qualitatively better than the man who finished dead last. It is a conscious effort to make, at least to some degree, all the losers winners; in doing so, however, it also makes all the winners losers. It is thus an unconscious effort to keep the Olympic victor from rising above the crowd in the marketplace by denigrating and lowering his victory while at the same time summoning the throng of losers into the market. It is for precisely this reason that Nietzsche writes, “formerly, one wished to acquire fame and be

⁴As cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵Interestingly, Karelin, who is described as the toughest man in the world, works as a tax collector in Russia.

spoken of. Now that is no longer enough because the market has grown large; nothing less than *screaming* will do.”⁶

If this appraisal of the Last Man Olympics seems too harsh and offends against modern sensibilities, then perhaps another example is in order. The ancient agonistic festivals served as a medium for overcoming the terrible specter of death by placing the athlete before a risk, both symbolic and real, to his physical well-being. *Homo timidus* was overcome by having the athletes emulate the divine form and the heroic martial deeds of the gods, and in doing so, man was able to feel himself nullified as a participant in the eternally recurring cosmos. Thus there are few images more ludicrous that we can evoke than: Creugas (had he survived the match) having his crown of olive wreath placed over his protective head-gear after a three round boxing match with padded gloves; Herakles having his olive wreath, albeit a smaller olive wreath, placed on his head for finishing third in a bowling competition; Herakles, finishing dead last in golf, fat and weak, bloodied and bruised, smiling and saying that he is honoured just to have participated; or worse still, the other gods on Mount Olympus clapping and cheering Herakles on his return, also proud and honoured that he had just participated.

The modern Olympics are the product of a culture that has as its highest value biological life without death. They are from a culture in which the fear of death is overcome by simply eliminating, or making it the task eternal to eliminate, the most evident and tactile causes of fear and death. Likewise, the will to immortality and the will to power are satisfied by eliminating power and immortality under the pretense of their equal distribution. *Homo timidus* as the Last Man is not uplifted and elevated by overcoming his nature; he is uplifted by the confirmation that he has the same nature as all the other Last Men. Or, in harsher terms, he feels uplifted and powerful when he sees, as at the Special Olympics, that everybody is a winner, nobody loses, and that even the weakest of his fellow biological organisms can take their share of the equally distributed spoils from the small victories in the

⁶Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, #331, p. 260.

struggle against human nature. With this form of ontological projection, the elemental fear that makes man man is not overcome. Man no longer regards his cowardly nature as something in need of overcoming so long as he witnesses the same embarrassing trait in all; he takes solace in this mediocrity and his ability to make all mediocre. The farthest thing from him is Zarathustra's lesson for the higher men – the lesson that can guide *homo timidus* to well deserved fame: He possesses heart who knows fear but masters fear; who sees the abyss, but sees it with pride.

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