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NIETZSCHE AND METAPHYSICAL LANGUAGE

For about a decade now there has been a growing uneasiness with regard to Nietzsche: might he not be more inaccessible, more unapproachable, and more inevitably "betrayed" than any philosopher before or since? Might he not be more veiled and also more thoughtlessly read, and therefore more richly endowed with a future, than any other philosopher?

How did all this come about? No doubt, first of all, the apparent ease with which he can be read—an ease due to his seductive "style" (polemic, poetic, aphoristic) as well as to what can pass superficially for a lack of "technical" vocabulary—gave rise to the illusion that this philosopher lay within easy reach of everybody. Thence, inversely and at the start, came disdain on the part of the "specialists" for a philosophy that is so little concerned with being "coherent" and so manifestly anti-philosophical that it could easily be dismissed as belonging more in the ranks of "literature." The warning indicated by the subtitle of Thus Spoke Zarathustra had not been understood: a "book for all" and "for none." Then, too, a number of extraneous factors moved in to obliterate Nietzsche's thought: prejudices (e.g., the one propagated by Gide about Nietzsche's supposed "aestheticism"), myths (e.g., the one consisting of the belief that his insanity sold out his work, whereas it merely interrupted it), falsifications and misconceptions (the most odious and most often repeated one being that about his supposed anti-Semitism). But the obstacles do not stop here. Of Nietzsche's unfinished works, more than half are posthumously published fragments, and the editions available to us in translation up to the present time have represented the texts in a partial and mutilated fashion, without due respect for either the manuscripts or the chronology. Finally, if we line up the "literary" versions of Nietzsche (in Thomas Mann, Musil, Jünger, Borges) as well as the strictly philosophical commentaries (by Heidegger, Jaspers, Fink, Klossowski), we are faced with a disconcerting diversity of interpretations testifying all the more to how difficult it is to encompass the vast field opened up by Nietzsche's thought.

However, Nietzsche's inaccessibility might well derive from something more fundamental—namely, his strange and ambiguous language vis-à-vis the traditional language of philosophy. Indeed, Nietzsche develops, in direct opposition to the tradition and its language, a language of his own, a form
particularly insinuating, insidious, complex—and designed for the purpose of *subversion*. On the one hand, when making use of current metaphysical oppositions (which, for him, all come down to the Platonic opposition between the "true world" and the "apparent world"), he does so with a view to eradicating and abolishing these very distinctions; there is thus inevitably an ambiguity weighing upon his use of terms having a precise meaning within the tradition, terms such as "true" and "false," "good" and "evil." On the other hand, the key words of his own vocabulary (Will to Power, Nihilism, Overman, Eternal Return) elude conceptual logic. Whereas a concept, in the classical sense, comprises and contains, in an identical and total manner, the content that it assumes, most of Nietzsche's key words bring forth, as we shall see, a plurality of meanings undermining any logic based on the principle of identity. Insofar as they include significations that are incompatible with one another, these words could be understood as bursting at the seams: a word such as Nihilism designates at once the most despicable and the most "divine" mode of thought. But they function above all to burst open some traditionally accepted identity (e.g., Will, Ego, Man). The recourse to polysemy and the attempt to destroy the great identities of the tradition base themselves on a theory of language that takes language as a machine fabricating false identities. And for Nietzsche, every identity is "false," in particular any identity born of conceptualization. As he says, "Every concept arises from identifying what is not identical." Every concept results from a series of metaphorical transpositions (so primeval that they are always forgotten), the "truest" concept being simply the one that corresponds to the identification—i.e., image—that is most familiar and most common (most effaced in its character as a mere image). Far from attaining to the "truth," a concept, like language in general, functions as an instrument of "gregarization": viz., it is an identification for the greatest number.

While the dominant words of Nietzsche's discourse (especially Will to Power and Eternal Return) are meant to subvert, fracture, and dismiss concepts, his overall effort is one aiming to set the entire logical, semantic, and grammatical apparatus (in which the philosophical tradition had naively taken up its abode) to moving in a direction contrary to its constant tendency: namely, toward the assignment of proper nouns, the reduction to identity, and the passage to the universal. In other words, the specific nature of Nietzsche's discourse might well be defined in the first instance as an attempt to encourage disbelief in the laws of logic and the rules of grammar (the final refuge of a defunct theology): it is necessary, he says, to "know how to dance with words," "dance with the pen." This dancing penmanship wills to rock, to topple, to dissociate, to disperse all conformity. With its various games of irony, parody, interrogation, innuendo—but especially with its ruptures, shifts, displacements and the like (which it would be necessary to delineate in detail)—Nietzsche's style aims finally at destroy-
ing, or at least checkmating, all logical and, especially, dialectical "seriousness," the goal of which is always to establish identities or to reveal the one absolute identity.

Finally, the method of genealogy, that critical method discovered by Nietzsche himself and presenting itself as an art of deciphering symptoms ad infinitum, raises a particular difficulty that affects the manner in which we are to render an exposition of Nietzsche's thought. Contrary to Plato's method (consisting in gathering sensuous diversity into a unity of essence), Nietzsche's method aims at unmasking, unearthing, but in an indefinite way—i.e., without ever pretending to lift the last veil to reveal any ori­ginal identity, any primary foundation. Thus, the method itself manifests a deeply rooted repugnance toward any and all systematization. Hostile to the idea of an ultimate revelation of truth, and rejecting all unique and privileged interpretation ("There is no solely beatifying interpretation"), the method of genealogy is necessarily hostile to all codification of its own results. Moreover, the fragmented, aphoristic, and bursting character of the text corresponds to Nietzsche's own grasp of the world: a world scattered in pieces, covered with explosions; a world freed from the ties of gravity (i.e., from relationship with a foundation); a world made of moving and light surfaces where the incessant shifting of masks is named laughter, dance, game.

Thus, Nietzsche's language and Nietzsche's method both possess an explosive energy: what is volatilized in each case is always identity, on which every system rests.

However, in each instance the destruction is possible only on the basis of a new and more radical affirmation. Thus there arises a most penetrating question: might we not have, in the figure of Nietzsche, a subtle restoration of metaphysics and ethics (to the extent, for example, to which it is difficult not to conceive of the Overman in turn as an ideal)? Here we have the supreme perplexity that can remain at the horizon of our own interrogation: in what sense does Nietzsche "overcome" the metaphysics that he combats?

No doubt the strictly Platonic structure of metaphysics (based on the separation of true being and lesser being) is abolished and not just turned around. Every "ulterior world," every foundation, is dissolved, and the final symbol of Dionysus—another word for the Will to Power—summons all the attributes of beings, the "true" as well as the "false," the "real" as well as the "fictitious." These terms become indeed interchangeable insofar as the "true" of which Plato speaks proves to be fictitious and therefore false, and insofar as the real is true if it is taken as false in Plato's sense but as containing also within it the fictitious.

If, however, according to another (more Heideggarian) definition, the metaphysical approach consists in "identifying" beings in their totality—i.e., in designating with one name the character of beings as such and in their entirety—is not Nietzsche then still a metaphysician? For if metaphysical
thinking is that kind of thought aiming to discover the unique and ultimate word that allots to each present thing the character of presence, then it might well be that Nietzsche, by uttering the term "Will to Power," *did* re-enact the traditional move of metaphysics.

But to what extent is the term Will to Power still an identity? Does it not, like all great themes in Nietzsche, refer back to identities that are broken, disfigured, forever dispersed and unrecoverable? Here is the question that will serve as a constant background for the present inquiry into the Will to Power, Nihilism, Genealogy, the Overman, and the Eternal Return. If this style of approach leaves aside the question of Nietzsche's progressive elaboration of these ultimate themes (and therewith also the problem of distinguishing between the various phases of his work), it is for two reasons: first, such problems pass beyond the limits of the present exposition; second, the exposition is based on the view (not to be established here) that the substance of Nietzsche's effort is already to be found, although in an enveloped, unthought, and veiled way, in *The Birth of Tragedy*—his first work, and one that he never ceased to rethink and to defend, the one that he was finally to complete.

**THE WILL TO POWER**

Nietzsche explicitly underlines and affirms in various ways that everything that exists is at bottom and in its totality Will to Power: "The essence of the *world* is Will to Power;" "The essence of *life* is Will to Power;" "The most intimate essence of *being* is Will to Power." World, Life, Being—these are not ultimate things, but only formations of the Will to Power: herein we find the "ultimate fact."

We must accordingly discard from the very start, as a gross misconception, any interpretation of the Will to Power that is *solely* psychological or anthropological. So construed, it would simply be synonymous with hunger for power, and it would be a mere matter of each individual desiring to dominate others and to subjugate things. It can easily be shown that such a will would in reality be impotent, constantly suffering from an inadequacy and undergoing a perpetual nostalgia. Alternatively, it might be taken as synonymous with a "superiority complex" (after the fashion of Adler), always wanting to extend itself without seeing any limit to its imperialism. Whatever the psychologizing interpretation might be, power gets understood as a concrete and empirical goal, something exterior to the will (riches, political power, glory), a goal pursued or manipulated with presumption. In any case, there would be a distinction between the power and the will, one being the object desired or possessed by the other.

The Will to Power is something much different from the psychological relationship between a subject *qua* will and an object *qua* power. Will to
Power is indeed "the word of being," but this word is a locution, the two terms being inseparable, and each term losing its habitual meaning. Although it is here a question of an affirmation about the totality of beings (in this sense a "metaphysical" affirmation), the locution is designed first of all to destroy and eliminate the traditional metaphysical concept of the will. As for the term "power," it receives its own meaning only in the course of the attempt to overcome that concept: it comes to designate the very essence of this newly thought will. Thus the Will to Power, a term bursting at the seams, a term that cannot be reduced to an identity, comes to express anything but a variety of volition.

The classical view of the will in effect turns it either into a metaphysical substance or, more commonly, into a faculty of the subject. Moreover, this view sees in the will the cause and source of our actions. Finally, it conceives of the will as a unity, an identity.

In opposition to this classical conception, Nietzsche posits as the guiding theme of his own analyses of the will the astonishing affirmation that "there is no such thing as a will." Why does he do this? First of all because the will as a conscious faculty is neither a unity nor a primary term. It is plurality and complexity itself, and it is derived. What we call will is only the symptom and not the cause. On the one hand, "will" in the psychological sense constitutes in everyday language the simplification of a complex interplay of causes and effects. On the other hand, the will, by being posited as a center or as a foundation, is taken falsely by metaphysics to establish a unique origin within reality as well as within the individual, for there is no center, and there is no foundation. There is no will: this means, as against Schopenhauer, that there exists no unique and universal will constituting what things are in themselves, that behind the phenomena there is no substantiality of the will. No will: the individual does not possess an identical and permanent will from which all his actions could flow. What the individual calls his "will" is a plurality of instincts and impulses in constant battle with one another to gain the upper hand. An analysis of the individual's "I will" shows that what we call will is the result of a reduction; according to the dictates of a practical necessity as well as to those of linguistic structure, and that it represents merely an imaginary entity, a pure fiction. Volition is composed of distinct emotions and polarities: there is that which wills and that which is willed, and then also, at the very core of the "individual," that which commands and that which obeys, the pleasure of triumphing over a resistance and the different pleasure of perceiving an instrument doing its job. What language designates with the name of will is in reality only a complex and belated sentiment: one accompanying the victory of one impulse over others, or the translation into conscious terms of a temporary state of equilibrium intervening in the interplay of impulses.

The will, like consciousness itself, is indeed for Nietzsche not a beginning but an end, not the first term but the "last link in a chain." The will (like
consciousness and thought in general) is the distant echo of a battle that has already been fought out, the aftermath coming to the surface, or the “code language” of a subterranean struggle of impulses. To will is to feel the triumph of a force that has cleared a way for itself quite apart from our knowing anything about it, and the supreme illusion consists in taking this feeling, this sentiment, for a free causality. There is no will: that means there is no fixed and defined center (the center is always shifting and it cannot be grasped), but rather a plurality of elementary “wills”—which is to say unconscious impulses, forever in conflict, alternately imposing themselves and subordinating themselves. “There is no will; there are rather fulgurations of the will which are constantly increasing and diminishing their power.” Seen with regard to these impulses, the whole of our conscious motivation comes down to a fiction—or rather a symptom. In psychology we never cease to confound effects and causes. Generally speaking, the realm of the intellect and the sphere of consciousness are but symbols to be decoded, symptoms of impulsive movements—i.e., symptoms of bodily movements. That is why it will always be necessary to philosophize—i.e., to interpret the phenomena—by taking the body as the “abiding clue.”

Is the Will to Power, then, merely a name designating the realm of the unconscious, the realm of the body? Quite the contrary. On the one hand, the locution applies to every possible kind of force: it does not at all refer uniquely to the forces that underlie psychic phenomena—i.e., the impulses of the body—but rather refers to all the phenomena of the world. On the other hand, the locution applies more precisely to the inner dynamism of these forces, to the orientation that qualifies them. In fact, rather than naming these forces taken in themselves as new metaphysical substances of the sort that Nietzsche rejects as fictitious, the Will to Power names the polarity that orients them, structures them, and defines their meaning: not an absolute meaning, nor a univocal direction, nor any finality whatsoever, but a multifaceted meaning that takes its shape from the moving diversity of perspectives. In its widest signification, the Will to Power designates a deployment of forces that is non-finalized but always oriented. Every force, every energy, whatever it may be, is Will to Power—in the organic world (impulses, instincts, needs), in the psychological and moral worlds (desires, motivations, ideas), and in the inorganic world itself—inasmuch as “life is just a special case of the Will to Power.” Every force participates in this same essence: “It is one and the same force that one expends in artistic creation and in the sex act; there is but one kind of force.” However, the concept of a single force diversifying itself does not suffice to account for the Will to Power: “To the concept of force must be attributed an inner will, what I refer to as ‘Will to Power,’ i.e., as an insatiable demand for the demonstration of power.”

It is this “insatiable demand for the demonstration of power” that expresses the meaning of the complementary phrase “to Power,” conveying
the sense of the "movement toward" contained in the German Wille "zur" Macht. What, then, is this Power? It is precisely the intimate law of the will and of all force, the law that to will is to will its own growth. The will that is Will to Power responds at its origins to its own internal imperative: to be more. This imperative brings it before the alternatives: either it is to augment itself, to surpass itself, or it is to decline, to degenerate. According to the direction that the force takes (progression or regression), and according to the response (yes or no) one makes to the conditions imposed upon life or imposed on life by life itself (as Zarathustra says: "I am the one who is ever forced to overcome himself"), there appear right at the origin, at the very heart of the Will to Power, two types of force, two types of life: the active force and the reactive force, the ascending life and the decadent life. If all volition is a volition to be stronger, if all power is overpower, our volition can also try to escape from itself and from its own demand for growth. There is here a paradox: for, strictly speaking, it is impossible to cease to will, since that would mean to cease to be. However, the decadent will that refuses to "admit the fundamental conditions of life" remains nonetheless a will: "Man would rather will nothingness than not to will at all." Only in this case, the direction of the will is reversed: growth becomes advance in decadence. The "intensification" essential to the Will to Power works itself out backwards. For Nietzsche, in the special case of moral decadence, its most extreme creation is the ascetic ideal.

The Will to Power therefore always has to do with itself. It possesses a fundamental reflexivity—i.e., it is always overcoming itself, be it through action or through reaction. At its origin it presents itself to and for itself as a chaotic and contradictory diversity of elementary impulses; it is primordial affectivity. What Nietzsche calls "chaos" is this primordial indetermination of the Will to Power. Undetermined as it is, it can assume all forms, for it is just so many masks: it is Proteus. Without form because of its excess of possibilities, Chaos signifies, on the one hand, not at all disorder, but rather the multiplicity of impulses, the entire horizon of forces, within which knowledge and art are to delineate their perspectives. On the other hand, Chaos is to represent equally the moment when, all values collapsed, the Will to Power effects a return to itself, a sort of return to point zero.

When thought of in conjunction with Chaos, the Will to Power appears at once as the principle defining a hierarchy for the forces contesting for the upper hand and as the tendency to appropriate an ever larger field of action. That will is strong which can harmonize its own forces, forces in themselves divergent, and can dominate their constant development. That man is powerful "who fongs to see chaos"—i.e., who agrees to face all impulses (or at least the greatest number possible), and who can master them. This mastery is conveyed in and by such expressions as "grand style," "grand politics," "grand reasoning," "grand educator," "grand hope," in which the adjective "grand" designates a Will to Power attaining, in each case, its
fullest affirmation. In contrast, that will is weak which cannot bear this task and seeks out a solution in the elimination or repression of this or that force. When affirmative and strong, the Will to Power takes upon itself variety, difference, and plurality. When negative and weak, it shrinks into reflexes of flight and defense, willing but its own diminution in the shadow of a bloodless ideal, in complete opposition to the grand simplification that perfect mastery can produce.

This initial bipolarity of the Will to Power forms the basis from which the whole enterprise of genealogy receives its definition: the "genealogical" critique of values consists in relating any given value to the originary direction (affirmative or negative) of volition, in unveiling the long lineage issuing from this primordial orientation, and in unraveling the remote thread of encounters that have since frozen into "values."

But what are values? As instruments that the Will to Power grants itself in order to confirm itself in its initial direction, values constitute the conditions of its existence; they are the "points of view" that permit it to maintain itself and to develop itself. Nietzsche defines values as follows: they are "conditions of conservation and increase, namely in regard to complex creatures having a relative duration of life within the realm of becoming." The production as well as the hierarchy of values—i.e., how they are situated with regard to one another (their situation always changing according to their very nature—for example, the rank enjoyed by art relative to knowledge at any given time)—makes sense only in relation to the originary direction of the Will to Power; the "place" of values favors, sustains, and propels movement in this direction.

As the origin of values, and the origin also of every hierarchy of values, the Will to Power fixes the value of all values. But this origin cannot be reduced to a primordial unity, to any kind of identity, because it is nothing but a direction forever to be determined. On the other hand, this origin has and gives meaning only in retrospect—namely in and through the genealogical development that issues from it, and by which it is recognized.

NIHILISM

But what does the genealogical view discover when it turns toward the prevailing—the supposedly "highest"—values? It finds them in the throes of that crisis called Nihilism.

In this word, too, we can read a duality (if not a plurality) of meaning. On the one hand it designates the contemporary situation (probably destined to last for a long time yet) where the "highest"—i.e., the absolute—values are rendered null and void. On the other hand, the word applies to the unfolding as well as to the internal "logic" of all so-called "European" history since Plato. In this second sense, Nihilism has more historical continuity than the
“decadence” marking the moments of “weakening” of Will to Power (the Alexandrian civilization as against ancient Greece; Christianity as against imperial Rome; the Reformation as against the Renaissance). Inasmuch as Nihilism presided over the original institution of those values currently tottering, and inasmuch as it directs their evolution and every possible transmutation, Nihilism is in some fashion always present, always at work—before, during, and after the moment of its violent explosion. Concurring with the very humanity of man, it can rightly be called man’s “normal condition” (whereupon the question might be asked whether a race of men who no longer knew nihilism would still be men). But insofar as it is the peculiar disease of contemporary man (one requiring a homeopathic remedy), Nihilism is also a “passing pathological condition.”

Indeed, being much more than a critical thought that man and his culture might turn against beliefs, values, and ideals, Nihilism assails man and his culture as the experience and sentiment of a critical condition that has become brutally actual—for, before crashing down with all its weight, Nihilism approaches as “the most alarming of all guests” and installs itself insidiously as a sentiment that is first of all one of gloom, and then one of terror, at the debacle of all meaning. It is the progressive consumption of everything having signification, the growing predominance of empty significations, sapped to the last drop. It is the moment when we feel ourselves—as in the onrush of a nightmare or as in a complete disorientation in space and time—flowing or drifting toward ill-defined borderlands where every previous meaning, every previous sense, still subsists, but has been converted into non-sense. “The desert is growing,” as Zarathustra says. All the old meanings (whether moral, religious, or metaphysical) slip away, steal away, refuse their services: “The goals are missing.” All sense totters, vacillates, sputtering like the few last rays of light of a dying sun. Nihilism, the experience of the exhaustion of meaning, amounts to a grand weariness, a “grand disgust,” on the part of man, directed toward himself as well. Nothing is worth much anymore, everything comes down to the same thing, everything is equalized. Everything is the same and equivalent: the true and the false, the good and the bad. Everything is outdated, used up, old, dilapidated, dying: an undefined agony of meaning, an unending twilight: not a definite annihilation of significations, but their indefinite collapse.

Precisely because it is complete disorientation, this kind of nihilism can abruptly alter its Stimmung (its mood, its tone), ceasing to be an anxious inquietude and becoming a complacent quietude. Here we have the experience of a will satisfied with meaninglessness, with non-sense, a will happy that there is no longer any sense or any meaning to look for, a will having found a certain comfort in the total absence of meaning and a certain happiness in the certainty that there is no answer to the question “why?” (or even “what?”). Nietzsche describes this stage as that of the “last man.”
A remark made by Zarathustra and taken up again in *The Gay Science* (§125)—namely, that “God is dead”—summarizes the collapse of all values. For disaffection in regard to religious faith is only one sign among many indicating the bankruptcy of every ideal: not only of every ideal, but of every intelligibility, every idea. With God there disappears the guarantee for an intelligible world, and therewith the guarantee for all stable identities, including that of the ego. Everything returns to chaos. Nietzsche compares this event to a natural catastrophe: to a deluge, to an earthquake, but most often to an eclipse of the sun. The Sun of intelligibility has grown dark and the Earth has lost its orbit, becoming a roving star that suffers the eclipse by growing dark itself. Here we have “complete nihilism,” although it is neither its first nor its last form.

At first, Nihilism is the expression of a decadent will, of impotent Will to Power recoiling from an affirmation of “life” and changing into negation. (That which is negated in and by Nihilism is what Nietzsche calls “life”—i.e., the world as plurality, as becoming, as contradiction, as suffering, as illusion, as evil.) This negation of “life” and of the world proclaims that “this world is worth nothing and nothing in it is worth anything.” Taking this proclamation as its point of departure, Nihilism invents a “true world”—i.e., a world that possesses all the attributes that “life” does not have: unity, stability, identity, happiness, truth, goodness. Thus the division of the two worlds, the feat undertaken by Plato, constitutes the nihilistic act par excellence. All metaphysical values and all categories of intelligibility contain implicitly a will to negate—i.e., to depreciate and to slander—life. But in its first form (the Socratic and Platonic one), Nihilism remains latent. Negation does not show itself. Only affirmations are in evidence: the affirmation of grand, supersensible values (the True, the Beautiful, the Good), and later on the affirmation of grand principles of logic (identity, causality, sufficient reason, etc.).

Between the larval nihilism of triumphant metaphysics and the “complete” nihilism declaring that none of the earlier constructions, nor any value, has any meaning, we find situated various forms of “incomplete nihilism.” In these forms the will for negation comes more and more out into the open. Incomplete nihilism is but the decomposition of the “true world,” the recurrent attempt to find replacement values to substitute for the Platonic and Christian ideals (Christianity having only “popularized” the concept of a “true world” with its idea of a “world beyond”). One noteworthy substitute, among others, is the Kantian ethic, which can no longer do more than postulate the other world: “At bottom the same old sun, but now obscured by fog and skepticism; the Idea become sublime, pale, northern, Koenigsbergish.”17 And then there are the “secular” ideals: the faith in progress, the religion of happiness-for-everybody (socialism appearing as the successor of Christianity insofar as it promises happiness on earth), the mystique of Culture or of Man. However, after having killed God—i.e.,
after having recognized the nothingness of the "true world"—and after having placed himself where God once was, Man continues to be haunted by his iconoclastic act; he cannot venerate himself, and soon ends up by turning his impious against himself and smashing this new idol. Among the forms of incomplete nihilism are to be found the characters that Zarathustra calls the "superior men," the "vestiges of God on earth," those who desperately uphold an ideal the fragility of which they know all too well. They are like that "conscientious soul" who, latching onto the ideal of a perfect science, no matter how limited and ridiculous, studies but one thing, albeit very thoroughly: the brain of the fœch! For this study he gives his blood and his life, and he grinds himself into the dust.

Although not yet "consummated," Nihilism is "complete" now that the will to nothingness has become manifest and patent. Up to that point this nothingness—i.e., the condemnation of "life" as non-being—was hidden behind various representations of the ideal and various fictions of the supersensible. It is on these representations and fictions that Nihilism, their proper counterpart, now expatiates. The distrust that had given rise to the "true world" turns against its own creations. The sensible having been depreciated and the supersensible ceasing to be of value, the essential metaphysical difference (Platonic, Christian, and also Kantian) between being-in-itself and appearance, between truth and illusion, ends up rejected. What gets abolished is not only the "true world," whereupon we would have to re-evaluate the "appearance" that would be left over, but also the very distinction between the "simple" appearance and the idea: "With the true world we have also done away with the apparent world."18

"Appearances," according to Nietzsche's conception of them, become the "only reality," the All: that is why the whole range of predicates associated with what used to be called appearance, "including contrary predicates," are suited to this reality. This "new" sense of appearance contains both truth and lie, both reality and fiction. It signifies at once "appearance" in the sense of paralogism (a sin against logic) and in the sense of veracious vision of being as Chaos. Gathering within itself all contraries, it deliberately explodes the logic of identity. Appearance, thought of in this new way and transfigured by the abolition of all oppositions, never comes to the point of referring itself back to any ultimate foundation, nor to any central focus of interpretation, nor to anything "in itself": rather, it always refers to a further appearance. Everything is a mask. Any mask once uncovered uncovers another mask. "Becoming" is simply the indefinite play of interpretations, an indefinite shifting of masks.

Thus Nihilism is not overcome simply because the essential metaphysical distinction ceases to be of value. In order to transform "complete" nihilism into "consummated" nihilism (or "ecstatic" nihilism, that which precisely allows us to take leave of—ek-stasis, the difference), it is necessary that we pass from a recognition of the dissolution to an active, an affirmative
dissolution. The new affirmation includes an act of destruction whereby all
the relations issuing from the difference are destroyed. This unity of creation
and destruction at the core of a force supremely affirmative (active nihilism)
comprises a perspective that Nietzsche also calls "Dionysian": the perspec-
tive of the joyous, pure affirmation of the unity of contraries.

It is in this latter sense—namely as an invalidation of all metaphysical
differences and as a radical abolition of the "true world," as a negation
of the singular God (Christian representative of the world)—that "nihilism
might indeed be a divine manner of thinking": delivered from the
paralysis effected by the Singular, the creative instinct of Multiple gods
would be re-animated. This "divine" form of Nihilism prefigures an essen-
tial transition.

GENEALOGY AND THE FORMER TABLETS

As a kind of symptomology or semiology, the genealogical
 critique
interprets values as so many signs (values being but a "cipher-language" to
be decoded), signs of subterranean impulses or, more precisely, signs of the
originary direction, whether ascendent or decadent, of these impulses.
Genealogy shows at once a birth and an affiliation: it allows us to see how the
initial direction prevailing in such-and-such evaluation persists through each
and every derivation and transformation, no matter how distant from the
origin. Like all values, the True and the Good serve as instruments, as
conditions for the possibility of a Will to Power maintaining and developing
itself thanks to them. Just where and how the line is to be drawn between the
true and the false, the good and the bad, depends upon the kind of life that
these values uphold. They have no intrinsic value at all; their entire "truth"
lies in their adequation to a particular Will to Power. "You will always have
only that ethic which is becoming to your own force,"—i.e., which will
harmonize with the orientation of this force. Values that advise being
prudent—or taking risks—are dictated by a particular type of force. In
exactly the same way, the supposedly immutable principles of logic, as well
as the discoveries of science, serve as a support, as a base of operations for a
determinate type of humanity. "The force of the various modes of knowl-
edge does not lie in their degrees of truth, but... in their character as
conditions of life."

Thus Nietzsche strives to demonstrate, by the genealogical method, that
science (and knowledge in general), contrary to its own pretentions, is not at
all disinterested, but rather is supremely "interested."

There is no "immaculate knowledge," says a chapter of Thus Spoke
Zarathustra (II, "On Immaculate Perception"). And Nietzsche attacks the
myth of a "pure" objective knowledge that could cruise over reality without
being implicated in it, that could, without prejudice or point of view, be the
faithful mirror of reality. The illusion peculiar to knowledge—namely, the illusion of objectivity—consists in imagining that it is possible to penetrate, right down to its innermost recesses, the essence of things, while at the same time simply reflecting it. However, knowledge is essentially active even when it believes itself to be passive, essentially solar even though it takes itself to be lunar (i.e., revolving around reality and borrowing from it what little cold light it possesses for itself). All knowledge thus comes down to belief and conquest.

It is belief inasmuch as truths (including the principles and categories of logic) do not correspond to any "in themselves" of things, are not adequations to "objects" but rather to the Will to Power. We are forced to believe in a logic in order to bring things under our control. To "deduce" logic from the Will to Power means to relate it to needs and desires: the desire for stability introducing simplicity, order, identity; the need for prediction inventing the categories of causality and finality, which in turn make possible various systems of repetition and the consequent foreseeability of phenomena. Logic rests upon a useful and necessary falsification, being born of the vital need to lean upon identities despite the fact that nothing real is reducible either to unity or to identity. Therefore, "truth is that kind of error without which a certain kind of living being cannot live." But truth is, in addition, falsification of the False, for the "in itself," namely "pure becoming," presents itself to us as Chaos—i.e., as non-(logical)-truth, eternal and infinite.

Then, too, knowledge is conquest inasmuch as it is by nature imperative, inasmuch as it imposes laws upon Chaos, inasmuch as it is an assimilating activity. Knowledge behaves despotically because it never ceases to suppress, to simplify, to equalize. Like ethics, logic springs from a will to reduce all phenomena to "identical cases." While feigning objectivity, the enterprise of knowing schematizes and creates fictitious coherences, meanwhile appropriating with an inexhaustible voracity everything strange to or other than it, with the sole view of mastering it. But that is not all: the schematizing and assimilating activity of knowledge is not even the work of consciousness. This activity emerges already at the level of the body, and from there enters onto the conscious level. Knowing and judging are simply matters of recognizing a particular schema of assimilation that happens to be available because it is already traced out by the body—i.e., by the Will to Power.

The destruction of logic by means of its genealogy brings with it as well the ruin of the psychological categories founded upon this logic. All psychological categories (the ego, the individual, the person) derive from the illusion of substantial identity. But this illusion goes back basically to a superstition that deceives not only common sense but also philosophers—namely, the belief in language and, more precisely, in the truth of grammatical categories. It was grammar (the structure of subject and predicate) that
inspired Descartes' certainty that "I" is the subject of "think," whereas it is rather the thoughts that come to "me": at bottom, faith in grammar simply conveys the will to be the "cause" of one's thoughts. The subject, the self, the individual are just so many false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality. Moreover, the "self," once brought into relation with the Will to Power, proves to be a simple illusion of perspective insofar as it is posited as an underlying unity, permanent center, source of decision. Rather, the "self" and the individual are fictions concealing a complexity, a plurality of forces in conflict. Conscious and personal identity, aside from being but a "grammatical habit," hides the original and fundamental plurality constituting the Will to Power in bodily form. "We are a plurality that has imagined itself a unity": a multiplicity of impulses that have provided themselves with an arbitrarily coherent and substantial center. The actual "functioning" of the Will to Power comes into clearest view with regard to the body understood as a multiplicity originally unintegrated but ascribing to itself a unity. To philosophize by taking the body as the "abiding clue" amounts to revealing the "self" as an instrument, an expression, an interpreter of the body. It also amounts to revealing the body (in opposition to our petty faculty of reasoning, where only surface "causes" make their appearance) as the "grand reason"—i.e., as the totality of deeply buried causes in their mobile and contradictory diversity. Philosophy has never ceased to show disdain for the body; it has not wished to recognize that it is the body that whispers thoughts to the "soul," and that consciousness is only a superficial and terminal phenomenon. Psychology has always idolized superficial unities for fear of facing the unsettling multiplicity at the depths of being.

Our logical and psychological categories derive their falsehood precisely from this "will to find out the truth"—i.e., from that which is fixed, stable, identical, and noncontradictory. But by devaluing contradiction, we bring into evidence a moral prejudice at the very basis of knowledge. This prejudice can be summed up as follows: that which is always stable, always identical, is not only True, but also Good, and in a twofold way: knowledge claims to bring salvation and is itself haunted by an ideal of ethical honesty. It is as shameful to deceive as it is to be deceived, and the true has more ethical value than the false. If the will to know the true is the will to be good and to be saved, this will is, then, for Nietzsche, a way of negating "life."

Indeed, if the logically true takes shape in the course of searching out identity at all costs and rejecting the contradictory character of life, the will to truth is associated with a nihilistic Will to Power—or, more bluntly, with a covert will to die, a covert death-wish. All knowledge is motivated by this ascetic will, this will to self-destruction that turns out to be the supreme form of ethics. There is in all knowledge an aspiration to situate oneself definitively beyond all contradiction, and this, for Nietzsche, lies in situating oneself within nothingness.
Thus, any genealogy, whether it be of logic, science, psychology, or anything else, comes down to a genealogy of morals, since the ethical ideal is the archetype and source of every ideal, and especially of truth. Things are true or false only inasmuch as they are good or evil. The ideal of knowledge turns out to be but a special and derived case of the general ideal: "The need to know what should be gave rise to the need to know what is." The genealogy of morals, being more radical, poses the question about the meaning of the Ideal—i.e., about the originary direction of that Will to Power to which such an invention corresponds and renders service. While at the same time detailing and unveiling the process by which the Ideal is fabricated, a genealogy reveals moral consciousness as a formation issuing from a long development and assuming varying degrees.

From a genealogical point of view, it appears that ethical systems can only be defined univocally, in purely negative and pejorative terms: moral consciousness, as well as its ideal, are analyzed and unmasked as inventions of "resentment." But what does resentment mean if not a hatred, a condemnation, a depreciation of "life"? In other words, ethical systems derive from a weak and impotent Will to Power reacting against the most affirmative impulses and favoring negation and destruction. Resentment is, as Nietzsche most generally defines it, the negating instinct of life, "the instinct of decadence." Since every value expresses the point of view necessary for the maintenance and growth of certain beings and for a certain period of time, and since every value also serves as a condition of existence, an ethical system, itself a sign of sickness, constitutes at the same time a remedy, or rather an attempted recovery. It serves the purpose of a defensive wall, of a systematic protection against the unrelenting impulses of sex, egoism (every ethic being a disdain for the self, an ousting of the self, an Entselbstung), aggression, cruelty, etc. Since these impulses cannot be taken up and expressed as such, they are kept at a distance—or, if at all possible, extirpated (morality playing, for Nietzsche, the role of an instrument of castration) by assigning to them their specific nature: the embodiment of Evil and of immorality. Their "immoral" nature amounts to a projection of the fear they arouse.

But why can't these impulses be expressed? Two obstacles, one internal and the other external, stand in the way. On the one hand, these impulses are already weakened, degenerate, and sickly, in such a way that they could not in any case find a satisfactory outlet (witness the case of Socrates, who distrusts instincts simply because his own are decadent). Furthermore, of the two this internal obstacle is by far the more complex, for it arises from an ambivalence: although the decadent type is characterized by an unprecedented decay as far as his instincts go (Socrates: the "amystical" creature par excellence, monstrously insensitive to art and to music) and by a hypertrophy of his reasoning and conscious faculties, he is also one who feels that he is "capable of every evil"—i.e., one who is incessantly at the
brink of brutally expressing his desires and erupting into all sorts of bestial-
ity. The decadent man feels within himself the terrifying proximity of
animality, and animality that is poorly constrained by a frail film of civiliza-
tion, of civility and good manners, and which is on the verge of breaking out.
"Instincts want to play the tyrant: it is necessary to invent a counter-tyrant
that is stronger yet." The Socratic ethic (virtue is knowledge, the only sin
is ignorance, a virtuous man is a happy man) represents this counter-tyranny;
it is the ultimate and obligatory recourse in the face of instincts that are at
once weakened and yet also threatening at any moment to boil over into
anarchy. On the other hand, the external obstacle consists of the repressive
external organization (society, in essence) that forbids these impulses to
express themselves.

The development of man's "interiorization" and the birth of his ethical
consciousness takes its foothold and beginning from the impotence of the
instincts, their powerlessness to find a way of expressing themselves out-
wardly, and the resultant turn inward. However, precisely in the figure of his
adversary Plato—Plato the man rather than Plato the philosopher—
Nietzsche envisages still a third possibility to account for the origin of the
reactive (ascetic) ethic: there are indeed people in whom the overabundance
of life and sensuality is such that asceticism, for them, redoubles their
strength by giving them a victory in the face of an obstacle that they set to
themselves solely for the pleasure they take in proving themselves trium-
phant over it. In this sense we might say that Plato was an extremely
sensuous man who happened to be "enamoured with his own contrary." But
this explanation holds neither for Platonism nor for Christianity.

Whatever the case may be, the illusion peculiar to any ethic lies in its
erecting into a universal rule, into an imperative, that which is only a
constraint—i.e., a need, a domineering condition of existence.

Meanwhile, and at the same time, the genealogical method reveals the
ambivalence and the duplicity of the concept of "morality." For even if it is
ordinarily a function of a weak and reactive Will to Power, it can also arise
from the values willed by a strong and active will. Still, though, the highest
point of view of the affirmative Will to Power necessarily situates itself
beyond good and evil, since even the distinction is the work of weakness. To
the affirmative Will to Power, the strong and the weak appear equally moral
and equally immoral. Immorality finds itself assessed from two different
angles. Unilateral morality is thereby dissolved. As Nietzsche says in The
Genealogy of Morals, the concept "good" has no one meaning. There are
neither "virtues" nor "vices" that could not be taken in at least two
diametrically opposed ways. Just as there is a lowly and vile prudence of the
weak, so is there a noble and proud prudence of the strong; a cowardly and
weak cruelty as well as courageous and strong cruelty; a pessimism that is a
symptom of exhaustion and decomposition as well as a pessimism that
manifests a superabundance of energy, that constitutes a kind of luxury of
strength. The need for destruction and change can be the expression just as much of an exuberant and overflowing strength as of a hatred and malcontent in the face of what is. In the same way, the need for stabilizing, fixing, and "externalizing" can come as much from generosity and happiness as from rancor and a morbid desire to perpetuate suffering and unhappiness. In the same culture, the "good" man can mean "he who is courteous and nice," but also "he who longs for battle and victory." Thus, the genealogical point of view brings to light a typology of antithetical morals: the initial fundamental opposition between "strong" and "weak" crops up again in the gregarious type (passive, defensive, vulgar) and the solitary type (active, aggressive, noble). The profound insight of Nietzsche is that this antagonism is necessary and not to be overcome: "The moral instinct consists in constructing types; for that it needs antinomical values."

Of course, Nietzsche's analysis does not preclude a multiplicity of degrees and intermediary stages, even mixed types. However, the antagonism of the two types must be thought of not as a conflict that brings them into mutual relations and attaches them to each other, but as a mutual separation that detaches and distinguishes them from each other. A caesura, a fault, keeps the two apart. The Hegelian opposition of master and slave is a dialectic, a reciprocity of relations. Nietzsche's opposition is based upon a rupture, a cleavage within humanity. Nietzsche does not want the moat between them to be filled in. He rather wants to underscore what he calls the "pathos of distance." The antagonism must be further aggravated, pushed as far as possible, to bring out the two irreversible propensities leading, on the one hand, toward gregarization, leveling, uniformity, and, on the other hand, toward the formation of higher men, exceptional men, "great solitary figures."

At first, the antithesis was present not only in the opposition between the "noble" as self-affirmation and the "vile" as self-negation, but also in the opposition between Dionysian tragedy (affirmation, even one of suffering) and Christian theory (negation, even one of happiness). It then repeated itself in the modern opposition between the classical type (capable of mastering all contradictions) and the romantic type (expressing the weakness of instinct). Finally, it is bound to recoil in the future to the other extreme—i.e., for Nietzsche, it is bound to result in the ultimate opposition between the "last man," the complete nihilist, and the Overman.

But, to come right to the point, why and how did the weak man, the man of resentment, come to be exclusively identified with the moral man? From whence derives this prolonged immobilization of the Good exclusively on one side—this "hemiplegia of virtue," as Nietzsche calls it?

By inventing moral inwardness, from which stem the ideas of doing wrong and being justified, of being in debt and having responsibilities, the weak man has "triumphed" over the strong, happy man who affirms himself in his individuality apart from obligations and without having need
of ratification. Once moral inwardness was discovered, the strong man was driven to doubting the legitimacy of his actions. Ever since Socrates, the Good has not taken care of itself; instinctive action has become suspect; only that action is good which can answer up before the inner court. The logical and disinterested appearance of Socratic dialectic is now unmasked: it is the "weapon"of the weak man who seeks to unsettle whatever is affirmative without daring or being able to engage in mortal combat with it—for the man of resentment, the "slave," never enters into a truly reciprocal relationship with the man of strength, the "master": the weak man rather receives his only definition as the one who rejects the ethic of the "master." It is clear enough that, for Nietzsche, the "master" (and such will be the Overmen, the future "Masters of the Earth") is not the master of the slave, but the master of himself, his acts, and, above all, his "inward chaos." The master is the individual who gives himself his own law, and whose ethic is built on pure self-affirmation. The master is the one who is different: "My ethic would be to deprive man more and more of his universal character and to specialize him, to make him to a certain extent unintelligible to others." 26

Here we have the ethical principle of the master: "That which is good for me is good in itself." In contrast, the man of resentment rejects every form of affirmation, of joy, of happiness. He bears a grudge against life. Nothing is good enough for him. He posits as evil that which is Other, different or affirmative. He suffers incessantly. He is incapable of either forgetting or assimilating events. He is also plagued by memories, by the past. "He cannot shake anything off, he cannot get rid of it. Everything is an injury. Man and things clutter in about him with no discretion. Every event leaves its mark. Memory is a purulent wound." 27

Furthermore, the underlying meaning of resentment, what Nietzsche also calls the "spirit of revenge," becomes in the course of time a certain version of the Will to Power: it is a rebel will taking revenge on a temporality dominated by the dimension of the past and understood Platonically as disappearance and non-being. Meanwhile, this "insane" will does not see that it is its own prisoner.

The impotence of the weak man is so great that he cannot bring his resentment to an external expression. He can only turn it against himself, in this way suppressing it. This repressed hatred and cruelty, this grudge and accusation (not only against the strong and against affirmation, but also against time itself and the entire world), by turning into self-accusation produces that mutation of resentment called bad conscience. Whereas at first it is everything external that was accused and found guilty, it is now the ego, the self. Just as the master was the master of himself, so the slave is enslaved to himself. The inwardness, the "interiorization" of man, thereby results in a "regression" of strength as it takes a retrograde effect upon itself: aggressiveness and cruelty, whose own impotence as well as the repressive social structure forbid them to manifest themselves in any exter-
nal fashion, direct themselves inwardly, and find on the inside a vast field of "new and subterranean satisfactions." Suffering thereby assumes, for the first time, an internal signification ("it's my fault") that the Christian religion, the religion of the weak, is well able to nourish, refine, and exploit: "You suffer, therefore you have sinned: suffering is punishment for having done wrong," says the priest, securing for himself infinite powers over those who accept this article of faith. However, we should bear in mind that, if there is a religion of the weak, there is also a religion of the strong, or rather two such religions: the primitive Greek religion of Dionysus, and the future religion of the Eternal Return.

But resentment necessarily evolves into its third stage, where the ultimate realization of its peculiar goal is embodied (a goal already present from the beginning): the suppression of the self. One's conscience, being its own executioner, ends up not being able to stand itself. It wills its own death—i.e., it becomes necessary to live and experience one's own death. The ascetic ideal, with its fiction of an afterlife, of a "true world" possessing all the characteristics contrary to the world of "life," represents the means of achieving this death at the heart of life. The will can live out its own impossible self-destruction, continuing to exercise itself as a will, just by willing nothingness (the nothingness of itself and of the world). Self-accusation changes into self-destruction. At first, man immolates himself to the "beyond" prescribed by religion, undergoing the privations of an ascetic existence. When the religious ideal has gone bankrupt and finds itself replaced by the scientific ideal, the sacrifice is still determined by the ascetic ideal. Whether life is sacrificed to God or to truth makes no difference with regard to the principle of the ideal. Finally, then, even the suppression of the ideal—not just the ideal of God, but of each and every ideal—appears as the simple prolongation and work of the very principle of negation already present in the ascetic ideal. Atheism and nihilism result from the application, from the unconditional practice, of the ideal "truth at all costs!"—the ideal born of the ascetic ethic. Indeed, as Nietzsche shows, atheism has as its source none other than the ideal of scrupulous sincerity, the ideal of rigorous intellectual honesty as it developed under the influence of that notion created by Christianity itself: the refinement of conscience. Thus atheism is, in the genealogical sense, "the awe-inspiring catastrophe of a two-thousand-year training in truth, a training which in the end forbids itself that lie which is faith in God." 28 Atheists, and above all the scientists, are the most pious of men. Religion and morality thus die from their own exigencies: they commit suicide. "God has killed God." Everything great can only perish by "an act of self-suppression": thus wills the Will to Power.

Nihilism proves that until now only pain, sacrifice, destruction of the self have given meaning to life, that there has never been any other ideal. But this Ideal is no longer: "The goals are missing." The Will to Power demands of
humanity that it surpass itself. But how are we to define this new goal, the More-than-human, with regard to all those who are of the strictly human type?

THE OVERMAN AND THE TRANSMUTATION

As the ultimate "goal," the Overman obviously cannot be identified with any type or level of humanity actually existing. In this sense, the philosophy of the Overman unfolds as a philosophy of the Future while yet presenting something quite different from a philosophy of Progress.

Insofar as the strong type of man has disappeared at the present time of nihilism (complete or incomplete, but not yet ecstatic), and insofar as there are no longer any "masters," it might seem that the Overman could incontestably be taken to mean some strong type of the future—i.e., the man who has vanquished nihilism. But this is not at all the case.

To be sure, we do have already under our eyes the absolute "opposite" of the Overman—namely, the "last man," the extreme representative of weakness, a man frozen at the level of passive nihilism, totally reduced to a "herd animal," rendered uniform, equal, and level—the man who has found happiness. But, as an ultimate horizon, isn't the Overman radically different from any human type we might be able to describe? One thing is sure: he is not incarnated by the "higher man" (der höhere Mensch), who is still the prisoner of an ideal (e.g., the scientific ideal held up by the scrupulous specialist on the leech) and thereby of Nihilism. Even Zarathustra himself is not the Overman, but rather his "messenger," his prophet. Might not the Overman, then, be the "total" man become once again affirmative, the "highest man" (der höchste Mensch) undertaking and completing the task of transmuting all values? This, again, does not seem to be the case, since it is the More-than-human, the Overhuman, that stands already as the goal toward which the "strong men of the future" surge; these men have to prepare the way for, have to make possible, the appearance of the Overman. What Zarathustra does is to announce the coming of a new type of man: he calls himself "the herald who summons numerous legislators." But it is in the midst of these highest men, beyond and above them, that there will flash, in sparse solitude, the "lightning" of the More-than-human.

The image of lightning underscores the absoluteness of the emergence. The idea of the Overman seems to correspond to the possibility of an ecstatic break away from humanity. Isn't the appearance of the More-than-human foreseen precisely as a break with humanity, as a series of explosive faults destroying the very concept of humanity considered as an identity, a unity, a totality universally embracing all thinking beings? The Overman will thus
bring it about that the identity of humanity will, by itself, "burst at the seams" insofar as it is the highest form of life and a universal.

One question is of utmost importance: are we to interpret the Overman to be some sort of highest type of man, the perfect embodiment of the essence of man (who actualizes what was, in the past, only a potentiality)—or are we to interpret the Overman in a much different way—as a species higher than man (perhaps a god) and, in any case, as some living being other than man? The question is of decisive importance because the point is not simply to quarrel over a difference of degree or of nature. The point is to determine whether Nihilism is so coextensive with the essence of man that it will prove possible to overcome it only by overcoming humanity itself. Meanwhile, though, Nietzsche's answer to the question is clear enough. To the humanism of progress (implying an accumulation of gains for the entire species—i.e., the distribution to each and every man of the "attributes" they have picked up together) Nietzsche opposes a non-egalitarian and anti-universalist vision of the future where hierarchy and selection will come more and more into power and evidence. On the one hand, to be sure, there will be "gregarized" humanity subsisting and prospering precisely by stabilizing itself at the nihilistic level of the search for happiness; in this quarter the nihilism of the last man will install itself and spread itself out. On the other hand, though, the new "masters," turning toward the ultimate goal, will create the primer for the counter-movement that will make it possible for the More-than-human to thunder forth at some undetermined time in the future: this they will achieve by destroying the old values with a "blow of the hammer"—a blow that must both smash and liberate—and by instituting new tablets. It is this operation in which certain men are separated off and isolated from the others that will constitute the condition for the possibility of the production of beings surpassing man. The total man, the synthetic man, therefore represents only a stage of transition (a type no doubt allowing of various degrees) on the way toward the Overman. The "highest" man, the "legislator of the future" (i.e., the man who lays down the law, submitting himself to it as well), amounts to only an effort on the part of the Will to Power to attain the Overman—a bold and dangerous experiment.

In any event, the Overman is "an attempt at something which is no longer man." Once again the logic of identity breaks down, not because the Overman contains an ambiguity (he is not, after all, at the same time both the fulfillment of man and the surpassing of man), but because he stands in opposition to the identification of man with himself as the highest living being. Man can no longer idolize himself. The "will for justice" ("justice" meaning, for Nietzsche, at once a respect for distance and separation as well as an adequation to the Will to Power) commands Zarathustra to "smash, according to the image of the Overman, all your images of man." Having irrevocably sold itself into slavery, humanity ceases to be the goal: "The
Overman is now the goal.” The Overman stands out as that type of living being who finally cuts himself loose from all the ties that even an affirmative humanity keeps on having with Nihilism. For Nietzsche, this “detachment” constitutes the future of the future, its promise. It presupposes as already accomplished the immense task of the transmutation, a task itself belonging to the future.

The Overman, as different from man as man is from the animals, is not a myth, but rather an “economical” exigence of the Will to Power. In fact, he represents the necessary compensation for the degradation, the loss of energy, evidenced by the present species that has been leveled down. The Will to Power must be able to retrieve itself wholly in the figure of the Overman, since it has degenerated wholly in the figure of man. Thus, the Overman does not fulfill humanity but rather that which, in humanity, is more originary than humanity—namely, the Will to Power: the Overman is the fulfillment not of the essence of man, but of the essence of life.

It might seem utopian that two such different species of thinking beings, which Nietzsche envisages “separated as much as could possibly be,” could ever subsist “side by side” far in the future. But that is only because we find it so difficult to think of the opposition master/slave in terms other than those of domination or dialectical reciprocity. Meanwhile, though, the opposition Overman/man first of all simply continues to push to the very limit the fundamental antinomy governing any type of moral construction: the opposition between gregarious/passive/vulgar and solitary/affirmative/noble. These two fundamental determinations of the Will to Power end up by existing in absolute separation. Secondly, though, for Nietzsche it is possible to conceive of a reign that is not at all a domination: “Beyond those who dominate, freed from all ties, is where the highest men live: and these make use of the dominators as of instruments.”

The future “Masters of the Earth” will possess neither political power, nor wealth, nor any effective governing force. Those who actually govern and dominate will themselves be of the slave class. The Overman will not govern or dominate leveled-down humanity. Nietzsche describes him as soft, austere, isolated, sober, powerful, resembling a “god of Epicurus,” not concerning himself with men. His reign will therefore be a secret reign. But how will he reign if he places himself beyond all political action and finds himself the butt of disdain for the slaves? He will reign in the sense that he will exercise over humanity an indirect influence, what Nietzsche calls by the name of “grand politics”: having been the only one to preserve the power of creating, he will steer the world toward a goal that necessarily remains unknown to men. He will reign inasmuch as he will incarnate precisely the possibility of a future. The Caesarism of the Overman—nonviolent Caesarism (“Caesar with the soul of Christ”)—must be understood as a tyranny of an artist. The “Masters of the Earth” will, as artists do, mold and fashion the masses of humanity to the extent to which, unknown to these masses, they can serve
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the "masters" as an instrument. Indeed, only these latter will be conscious of any higher goal. Moreover, this "artistic" side of the Overman does not only signify that he shall gather into himself all the characteristics of various creators of the past (scholars, heroes, poets); it really points to something quite different from artistic talents or gifts, even prodigious ones. It points out that art is henceforth to be acknowledged as the highest value, that the principle of evaluation has been fundamentally turned about.

The Overman is only possible once the transmutation of values is accomplished. By its very nature, this transmutation presupposes a radical transformation at the core of the Will to Power, a transformation in which weakness and negation are once and for all eliminated. Everything will be transfigured, because all creation will find itself liberated at long last from every fetter. In its final form, the transmutation will no longer retain anything but affirmation: it will place at the summit of the hierarchy the value of pure affirmation—that value which, throughout all its infinite differences, will procure the highest differentiation of the Will to Power—namely, Art. Thus the Platonic domination of science over art gets abolished or, rather, turned about. It is no longer the artist, but rather the scholar, who will be placed at several removes from the truth (thought of here in terms of adequation to the Will to Power). Why, though, does art have "more value" than truth? In Nietzsche there is not to be found any sort of aestheticism. Art is not a refuge, although there are certain statements that might suggest a withdrawal in the face of truth (considered, however, as knowledge): "We have art so that we will not perish from truth." 32 But the (future) primacy of art rests on a twofold necessity governing the very relation between art and knowledge, once these are envisaged in genealogical fashion. First, knowledge is always derived: it comes from a primordial and forgotten artistic creation that is none other than the very creation of language as "an artistic formation of metaphors" (these being later mummified into concepts). Science retrieves, in the form of icy, bloodless, and discolored concepts, the images and the schemas that language had primordially superimposed on the world. But it is art that first of all made the Chaos over into anthropomorphic form. The man of knowledge, the conquering and faithful one, is an artist who does not know himself. To know means simply to rediscover schemas that the artistic instinct has already cast over things. Second, if art has to become the highest value, it is because art corresponds best to, is most adequate to, the essence of the Will to Power as permanent growth of the self, as unfathomable depth of beneficent and exalting illusion, and as reinforced affirmation. If ever since The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche has called art "the highest task and the authentically metaphysical activity" (see the end of the preface of that work), it is because art is the "great stimulus of life": art drives the creator on to overcome himself, art enlarges the world by returning it to its originally explosive and chaotic character. Art is drunkenness, celebration, orgy, break with identity—whereas science contents itself
with ordering that which is basically already acquired. If art intensifies the feeling of power, it is because art reaffirms all reality in and through its power of establishing as real any "appearance" simply by confirming it as an appearance. The appearance is selected, corrected, and magnified; but this procedure entails an adherence to what has always been regarded merely as illusory: it entails a glorification of illusion as illusion.

Finally, the transmutation gives birth to the ideal of a species of knowledge that need no longer be the enemy of art but that, in submitting itself to art, would be submitting itself directly to the Will to Power. Such is the ideal of the "Gay Science," a science that is also tragic (for what is in Nietzsche's sense "tragic" is not at all sad or pessimistic: it is the state in which, thanks to an affirmation of the highest degree, we are able to include within ourselves, and to vindicate, even the deepest suffering). In The Birth of Tragedy Dionysian tragedy found its most original representation in the phenomenon of musical dissonance—i.e., in the pleasure felt in pain itself. Suffering thereby ceases to be an argument against life. Now, the enterprise of knowing has always up to the present time been seriousness, pain, and labor (all previous judgments of value have been dominated by the idea of work). Knowing has been funereal, deathly, a desire to finish up with life, a will to die, individual and moralizing asceticism. In contrast, an artistic manner of knowing tends toward breaking down the narrow limits of individual identity, something that the Dionysian wisdom of the first Greeks, the Greeks before Plato, had been able to do. What The Gay Science teaches is the loftiest teaching of Nietzsche (we can just as well say "of Dionysus," since this teaching ultimately destroys even the identity of the proper name of him who proffers it), "innocence of becoming," which is the same as the "Eternal Return of the Same."

THE ETERNAL RETURN

The doctrine of the Eternal Return makes itself felt first and foremost as an experience: a multifaceted experience, since it presents itself to us at the same time as a pure effort of thought, as a test, as a particular moment of lived experience, and, finally, as an attempt at having an ethical character.

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in the chapter "On Redemption," the doctrine is introduced in the form of a question: how can the Will to Power liberate itself from resentment, specifically that resentment which is turned into hatred of time? How can it apprehend time differently than as a passage, a disappearance, a non-being, wherein it recognizes its own passage, its own disappearance, its own nothingness? How can it liberate itself from the entire weight of the negative, from that which at the bottom of its heart is but its own will to disappear, its will to nothingness?
How can the condemnation, the "vengeance" that is brought to bear upon Becoming, be erased? How are we to escape the idea that everything that passes deserves to pass, is therefore without value and is therefore, by disappearing, simply undergoing its just punishment for the sin of having ever existed? Nietzsche sees this idea as very old: he finds it even at the origin of Greek philosophy—namely in the thought of Anaximander, according to which Becoming is guilty, the death of beings representing castigation for their mistake of having been born. In the face of this long tradition, how are we to recover "the innocence of Becoming"?

For the Will, "redemption" must be something quite different from "reconciliation," for thus would still remain, by its dialectical operation, the negative at the core of the positive. The redeemed Will must cut itself off, absolutely and radically, from the Will's saying "No!" in order to refashion itself into the pure Will saying "Yes!" But what is it that this "Yes!" affirms? It affirms that against which the malignant will revolted, namely, time itself: time as the past that has already passed by, as the action of passing away, as the passage itself. The Will to Power must learn to "will backwards" (zurückwollen)—i.e., so deeply to will the past and the passage itself that the passage vanishes of its own accord as mere passage, changing itself thereby into incessant passage, into a passage that is always present, into Eternal Return. In this way, not only will human time be "saved" from death, but the Becoming of the entire world will find its redemption. However, this enigmatic metamorphosis of Becoming into Re-coming, into coming back, is only announced as a possibility: it depends on the will's being able to "will backwards"—i.e., being able, on the one hand, to affirm in all truth both the past and the passage itself, and, on the other hand, to turn back into itself in order to affirm itself as willing the passage. What we have here, then, is the possibility of a conversion of the will. In the chapter entitled "On the Vision and the Riddle," this possibility, still purely hypothetical, reappears, this time no longer as one of a new relationship of volition with the past, but as a possibility of a new relation between the present taken in itself and the past taken in itself. Nietzsche does not at all set out to prove that the Return is actually inscribed in the course of things; he rather introduces a simple fiction or a hypothesis, like a free play of the imagination, that comes out in the form of a question: "And if everything that is has already been?" Now, this fiction assumes an intrinsic value to the extent that it immediately proves itself capable of conferring a value by making one thing appear as a double necessity correlative to, or following upon, the fiction: if the present is a repetition of the past, then every instant must find itself multiplied to infinity, both forward and backward, and be swollen by its own repetition until it is equal to eternity. Then, too, every future must already be past and what is possible must be defined in terms of what is already accomplished. Finally, if everything comes back, no cause
exterior to Becoming is thinkable, and Becoming determines itself simply because it is already determined the moment it is past. Everything is equally necessary.

The idea of this consequence appears first off as rather sinister and dismal. But then the idea of the Eternal Return is itself a test: it represents "the heaviest burden" weighing down on us. In fact, it comes uncomfortably close to complete nihilism. If everything has already been, if everything is bound to come back, not just in a similar but in identical fashion, isn't everything indifferent? What goal could such a repetition have? Thus it is the ghastly gnome (in the chapter "On the Vision and the Riddle," §2), that "spirit of heaviness," who enunciates for the first time an affirmation fit to inspire disgust at one's own existence as well as to drive one into despair, namely: "Time itself is a circle." In his mouth the formula "everything returns" resonates as an eternal "in vain!" If everything comes back, everything is eternal: but if one thing is worth as much as the next, everything is equally useful and useless, and the best and the worst are worth the same. Thus, although it is the very reverse, the idea of the Eternal Return resembles at first, and in caricature, the most extreme form of Nihilism: as Nietzsche says, "Let us think this thought in its most terrifying form: present existence, just as it is, without either meaning or goal, but unavoidably returning, without even a finale in nothingness: 'the Eternal Return.' " He places quotation marks around the expression because this thought is a test—i.e., an instrument of discrimination: who would want to start his life all over again under absolutely identical conditions? Only those who are strong, only those who consider their existence as worth being infinitely repeated, will be able to bear such a thought. If this doctrine ever takes hold, it will accentuate the cleavage between the strong and the weak, it will reinforce the strong by driving them to affirm themselves even more, while in contrast it will crush the weak by driving them to want to negate themselves even more still. It will thereby contribute to the great task of selection. But how will this doctrine come to take hold? In the same way a religion does, the elect here being those who have faith in their own lives as lives worthy of being repeated innumerable times. A religion diametrically opposed to all religions that only promise a better life, happiness in a world beyond, this doctrine offers happiness on earth to all those who are capable of this faith. It is a religion that, Nietzsche says, will be "easy" on unbelievers, for although it has a paradise, it has no hell: "He who does not believe will be conscious of life as fugitive." It is a religion without sin and without error, for everything that repeats itself infinitely is neither good nor bad, it is innocent; it simply is. As the only religion devoid of nostalgia, eliminating all desire to flee the world and every devaluation of the "here and now" for the sake of some transcendence or other, this doctrine establishes, as any religion does, a tie with the divine understood as a totality and a unity of self and world. But, as we shall see, Nietzsche's sense of
“divinity” is not synonymous with that of perfection; it is rather synonymous with absolute affirmation embracing imperfection itself. Finally, the Eternal Return must be understood as a religion of pure possibility: just as the simple thought of eternal damnation was able to modify the actions of men, so the faith in each instant of life as being worthy of returning should raise humanity far beyond itself. Just as the religion of the Return represents a test as the level of the individual, the Return of everything constitutes a test for the Will to Power in general, inasmuch as it implies the return of all forms of Nihilism, the return of weakness and the return of decadence. For the Return signifies that even if the Will to Power liberates itself and attains to the Overman, the nihilistic and reactionary man will nonetheless eternally return. Here lies the greatest obstacle that the Will to Power will have to face. It can only triumph over this obstacle by adhering to a new kind of “necessity,” one that also includes, but does not itself resuscitate, the negative.

As an experience, in the sense of a possibility and a test, the Return also appears as an apparently very simple experience of a privileged moment: that of having said “yes” to the instant. An affirmation that is truly full and complete is also contagious: it bursts into a chain of affirmations that knows no limits. “If we say yes to a single instant we say yes to all existence.” However, this instant is a privileged one: only an instant of joy can be affirmed in this way. Only joy possesses the power to will itself and thereby to will the totality of things, including pain: “Have you ever said yes to a joy? Oh, my friends, then you have also said yes to all pain. All things are enchainèd with one another, wrapped up in one another, bound together by love.” In a single instant felt as necessary—necessary right through to its most extreme contingency—a necessity reveals itself to us that ties this instant to all others. Such an instant cannot exist without implying all the others. Once its own contingency is eliminated, all contingencies are eliminated. Any experience of joy that is supremely affirmative is also, by being an experience that proliferates and multiplies the instant, the experience of the necessity of eternal and universal ties: “If you have ever, just once, willed that one time come a second time, . . . then you have willed the return of everything!” This experience represents the exact reverse of the fundamental experience of Nihilism that had conferred value and meaning on everything from the standpoint of pain, from the standpoint of the experience of a will that could not will itself, that willed only to be rid of itself. The experience of joy is so strong that it can will, as being part of the eternal ties, pain itself, death and the “grave.” “All joy wills the eternity of all things.” The idea of the Return is begotten and sustained by joy.

Finally, considered as applicable to action, the doctrine of the Return constitutes an ethical claim. We are to act at every instant as though each of our acts were destined to be repeated an infinite number of times in exactly the same way: in my own life I am to try to modify my relationship with the
instant, to will each act just as intensely as though it were not destined to pass, but rather to remain eternally. I should will the idea that what I now do involves my eternal being. However, this ethic opposes in reality every categorical imperative ("I should") and proposes in contrast an imperative of necessity ("I am constrained to"). As Nietzsche says: "My doctrine teaches to live in such a way that you are forced to wish to relive everything all over again." The law of the Eternal Return cannot be formulated in the indicative mood, but its imperative is at the same time a necessity. "Let us impress upon our life the image of eternity." This life is your eternal life: Non alia, sed haec vita sempiterna. I am to act in such a way as to be forced to will the repetition of my acts, and, inversely, I am to will whatever it is I am constrained to do. This ethic—namely, being forced to will a necessity that is the necessity of volition itself—is circular. The significance of this circle is: the Will which wills the Eternal Return is that will which wills itself, which finds in itself the necessity to will itself.

But just what is the "necessity" of which we speak here? Nietzsche declares that he has set himself the task of "liquidating the concept of necessity," and as a matter of fact the formula that sums up the wisdom of the Eternal Return, Amor fati, is meant to shatter the traditional concept of necessity. For fate, in Nietzsche's sense of fatum, revolves around a necessity that is neither the causal necessity of the laws of nature (mechanism), nor that of a blind fatalism "in the Turkish sense" (as Nietzsche says), nor that of a liberty determining itself. In his sense of the term, "necessity" is no longer a category; rather, it encompasses those logical contraries that are Chaos and Form, chance and law. "I want to learn more and more to see what is necessary in things and what is beautiful in them: in this way I will be one of those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: may that be my love from now on!" Inasmuch as everything is necessary, Amor fati is, for conceptual logic, a contradiction. But what has been eliminated is precisely the opposition between love as an activity of the will, and destiny as a purely passive determination of that which is already settled. Volition that has been transfigured by the Return is no longer qualified by desire, aspiration, or want: it is no longer a will in search of what is not yet. Rather, what here presents itself is the fullness and perfection of a will that bears down on what is. This volition is love, where to love is to will that what is (as such and not otherwise) be what it is an infinite number of times over. In the Volition that loves necessity, the apparent difference is narrowed down between the Will to Power as "being more" and the Eternal Return as "being settled." Here, "necessity" embraces all at once the fatum, the will, and the tie uniting the two—a tie that is also the "ring" uniting all things. For a volition that loves necessity to the point of being its own necessity (ego fatum), there is no longer any contradiction between determinism, freedom, and contingency. That is why "the most extreme fatalism is identical with chance and creativity." There is no longer really any
chance for a Will that affirms itself indissolubly as its own destiny and that of the world. This will is absolute freedom within absolute necessity, since it wills so strongly, and affirms so invariably, whatever happens to itself or to the world, no matter whether it has chosen it or not. "Every 'it was' is a fragment, an enigma, terrifying chance until such time as the creative will says in addition: but that is just what I wanted!" 42 Meanwhile, though, does not the ego, by unifying itself in this way with the fatalism of the Return, lose its own unity and identity?

Indeed, the idea of the Return, once it is experienced in all its varying forms, leads to time-honored distinctions being shattered—distinctions that, according to the principles of identity and contradiction, traditionally defined the modalities of existence. Just as individuality cannot be the same as totality of the world, in the same way things cannot belong at the same to the categories of possibility, contingency, and necessity, any more than they can refer back at the same moment to time and to eternity. Traditional logic prohibits us from confounding the order of freedom, the order of chance, the order of destiny. Even the speculative logic of Hegel places these conflicting categories as "moments" within the reconciled totality of Absolute Knowledge. But Nietzsche attacks the very idea of metaphysical contradiction and antimony. If the thought of the Eternal Return is the "most easy-going" thought, it is so because it melts the glaze of metaphysical antitheses and volatizes logical contraries. Indeed, the Eternal Return is neither real nor ideal, but something like a fatal possibility. As a way in which a Will to Power can be supremely affirmative, it gives birth to a new tie, to a new necessity, out of the dissolution of the old oppositions. This new "necessity" harmonizes itself with its old "contrary," namely chance, disorder, and dispersion—just as did the word "appearance" (which, in the end, contained as well the sense of the "true world"). In other words, the complete circle of the Return (the coherence of everything) includes Chaos (the incoherence of everything). The divine ring of eternity is a broken ring. However, the theory of the Eternal Return, just like the theory of the "vicious circle," consists precisely in according the most positive value, in attributing perfection, to the break in the circle. The break signifies here that the circle is a form without goal, a form that contains in itself chaos. "Universal chaos of the sort excluding all activity having a final purpose does not contradict the idea of circular movement: it's just that this movement is an arational necessity. . . ." Thus the inclusion of Chaos in the necessity of the circle does not constitute a synthesis or a reconciliation in the manner of Hegel: chance and disorder are not "surpassed" by, but rather gathered up into, the perfect circle, such a circle being in its very essence defective. The totality of the Return is bursted totality, a shattered totality. As a symbol, its necessity is expressed in the coherence that unites the scattered starts of a single constellation: "Supreme constellation of being! . . . Emblem of necessity." Produced by a pure affirmation "which no
wish attains, which no negation sullies” (being emancipated from all desire and want), this necessity within and of disorder surpasses every antithesis thinkable: it is “the celestial necessity that forces even chance events to dance in stellar formation.”

It is clear why Nietzsche was never able to offer a scientific demonstration of his doctrine as a theory of nature, or arrive at the point of defending the Eternal Return in realistic terms: he would have had to submit his argumentation to the logical principles that science obeys but that his own doctrine repudiates.

Thus though all the while annuling the major metaphysical opposition, namely being/becoming, the thought of the Eternal Return still preserves the one as well as the other of these two terms as possible “points of view.” That which is still permanent within Becoming is the circle itself. Being the law of Becoming, the circle is not itself something that has become. Even though Becoming is in itself what is unstable, namely Chaos, the circle is the highest stabilization possible for this instability. As a consequence, the Eternal Return appears to be just one more interpretation, an interpretation of Becoming according to the perspective of Being; but it is at the same time the highest to which the Will to Power can raise itself, for this interpretation secures for the Will to Power the greatest of triumphs, the eternal triumph. By willing the circle, the Will secures itself for itself and secures for itself constant mastery over Chaos—i.e., the certainty of always being able to overcome even the Return of the negative. Here we have what Nietzsche calls the “summit of contemplation” as well as a “recapitulation,” the summation of his abyssal thought: “To impress upon Becoming the character of Being—this is the highest form of the Will to Power . . . That everything returns—here a world of Becoming comes closest to the world of Being.”

Thus the Eternal Return appears as that perspective of the Will to Power that confers upon a world fundamentally interpreted as a world of Becoming the highest value it can have. This perspective eternalizes the world of Becoming from the very same point of view that, throughout all of history, has devalued it—namely, the fictitious point of view of a world of Being. Thus values are reversed in a twofold way.

In the end, by effacing all the differences on which language and history are built (especially the opposition between remembering and forgetting), the thought of the Return leaves us face to face with a most exacting aporia. Paradoxically, the affirmation of the Return of the Identical and the Same destroys all partial identities, especially the firm identity of the self as opposed to the identity of the world, since the “total” identity of self and world does away with the particular identity of the individual self. What is, then, the “new history” that Nietzsche proclaims shall now begin once the idea of the Return has taken hold? The “logic” that eliminates personal identity from the ego fatum makes Nietzsche say: “At bottom I am all the
names of history.'” Every identity, including that of the self and that of
proper names, comes down to an interchangeable mask bound up with the
universal Game, which is itself only an indefinite shifting of masks. What is
the significance of this loss of “proper” names? Is this ultimate explosion
merely the leap into madness of Nietzsche the man, the lived moment when
the abolition of the antitheses nourishing metaphysical language reduces the
philosopher to science? The language that the self uses to provide itself with
a fictitious center, the language of fixed and arbitrary identities, appears to
be so much bound up with this system of contradistinctions that denying this
system casts one back into the dissociated and inexpressible clutches of
Chaos. From the moment when the self of Nietzsche coincides with the
totality of history, he deprives himself of both speech and writing. Like
Dionysus, his last “identity,” Nietzsche’s self is torn to pieces and scattered
about, all in accordance with the perspective of the dispersed totality that he
will henceforth incarnate. The final silence of madness shall be, as he put it
shortly before ceasing to write, “the mask that hides a knowledge which is
fatal and too sure.” But what kind of knowledge is this? Perhaps it is
knowledge that language cannot smash the principle of identity without
smashing itself, and yet cannot submit itself to this principle without re-nouncing
the effort to bring the depth of Being to words. Thus the destruc-
tion of metaphysical language can, in the case of Nietzsche, be looked at as
an experiment pushed so far as to destroy the destroyer qua speaker. This
attempt at subversion—one that both succeeded and misfired, since it forced
to the forefront the essential impasse of Western metaphysical discourse—
makes Nietzsche the greatest “tempter” for we who have no other language.

If, as Nietzsche says, “every word is a prejudice,”” and if grammar will
always be re-establishing an indefinite multitude of substitutes for the God
who is dead, what more precious does he bequeath to us than that which,
throughout the derailed syntax of these destroyed words and the astonish-
ing distribution of the terms (i.e., the limits) of this discredited language, will
never cease to awaken in us the infinite carefulness of a “great distrust” that
can return language to its proper course?

NOTES

3. “Letter to Fuchs, 26 August 1888.”
4. Beyond Good and Evil, §186.
5. The Genealogy of Morals; II, §12.
6. The Will to Power, §693.
7. The Innocence of Becoming; II, §874.
8. WP, §46 et al.
13. *GM*, very last sentence.
15. *WP*, §1.
17. *TI*, “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable.”
20. *IB*; II, §496.
29. *IB*; II, §1270.
31. *WP*, §998.
32. *WP*, §822.
33. *GS*, §341.
34. *WP*, §55.
35. *IB*; II, §1347.
40. *GS*, §276.
41. *IB*; II, §1369.
42. *Zarathustra*; “On Redemption.”
43. *Zarathustra*; “The Seven Seals.”
44. *WP*, §617.
45. “Letter to Burckhardt, 6 January 1889.”
46. *Human, All Too Human*; II, §355.
We would like to ask of Nietzsche: what is meant by the will to power? What is meant by saying that life is will to power? What are the powers of life? What does it mean to say that the will to power is the basis of all that is?

Thus we would put to Nietzsche the familiar form of the philosophical question. It asks after the essence of the Will to Power. The philosophical question "‘what is ...?’" is answered by supplying the quiddity, the essence. Philosophical thought is a questioning of appearances, an investigation of their essence, their organizing structure, their telos, their meaning.

This questioning assumes that the sequences of appearances mean something, indicate, refer to an underlying something, a hypokeimenon. It is metaphysical; it takes the appearances to be signs. Philosophical interrogation of the world is a reading of the world, an assumption of the succession of sensorial images as signs of intelligible essences.

Nietzsche refuses this reading of the world; he declares that the essences that the philosophical intelligence arrives at are in fact only the senses of the things—their meanings. The metaphysical reading of the world is a world-hermeneutics—an interpretation, an estimation, a valuation. "Insofar as the word ‘knowledge’ has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. ‘Perspectivism.’ "

It is possible to interpret this as Nietzsche’s virulent and extremist statement of the central thesis of modern idealism: the essences found through philosophical interrogation do not reveal the things themselves productive of their appearances, issuing signs of themselves, but reveal the acts and laws of the subject that interprets. In this sense Heidegger has called Nietzsche the most coherent subjectivist and the last Cartesian.

But there are Nietzschean reasons behind his statement, not Kantian ones. First, if the philosophical reading finds behind the flow of appearances an order of essences that accounts for them, Nietzsche finds behind those very essences, those senses, those interpretations, the Will to Power that accounts for them. But the Will to Power is not an essence, a quiddity behind the essences. It is, Nietzsche says, just ‘the last instance which we could go