Nietzsche and the Pathologies of Meaning

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Abstract

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My dissertation details what Nietzsche sees as a normative and philosophical crisis that arises in modern society. This crisis involves a growing sense of malaise that leads to large-scale questions about whether life in the modern world can be seen as meaningful and good. I claim that confronting this problem is a central concern throughout Nietzsche's philosophical career, but that his understanding of this problem and its solution shifts throughout different phases of his thinking. Part of what is unique to Nietzsche's treatment of this problem is his understanding that attempts to imbue existence with meaning are self-undermining, becoming pathological and only further entrenching the problem. Nietzsche's solution to this problem ultimately resides in treating meaning as a spiritual need that can only be fulfilled through a creative interpretive process.

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"Everything that happens may be meaningless, fragmentary and sad, but it is always irradiated by hope or memory. And hope here is not an abstract artifact, isolated from life, spoilt and shopworn as the result of its defeat by life: it is a part of life; it tries to conquer life by embracing and adorning it, yet is repulsed by life again and again. And memory transforms the continual struggle into a process which is full of mystery and interest and yet is tied with indestructible threads to the present, the unexplained instant. Duration advances upon that instant and passes on, but the wealth of duration which the instant momentarily dams and holds still in a flash of conscious contemplation is such that it enriches even what is over and done with: it even puts the full value of lived experience on events which, at the time, passed by unnoticed. And so, by a strange and melancholy paradox, the moment of failure is the moment of value; the comprehending and experiencing of life's refusals is the source from which the fullness of life seems to flow"

~Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*

INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation develops an account of Nietzsche's diagnosis of and solution to what I call the problem of meaning—that is, the debilitating sense that human existence is meaningless. Nietzsche wants to know if human life is, in light of the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," worthwhile and affirmable. He hopes to show that it is—not by ignoring the objectionable aspects of existence, nor by positing a way to bypass them with some notion of an afterlife or other means of metaphysical escape from the ordinary, empirical world.[1] Nietzsche assumes the ambitious task of showing that what sometimes seems to make existence objectionable, like suffering, is part and parcel of what makes it affirmable. What is remarkable about Nietzsche's thinking on this subject is not just his realization that there's no metaphysical escape, but that he comes to take this insight as his starting point. From here, Nietzsche goes on to consider various related issues, such as the implications of "death of God" on our potential for seeing existence as meaningful, or why a world in which all of our aspirations are realized is not necessarily more meaningful than one in which they aren't. Later on in his career, Nietzsche questions what relation the structure of the world could have to questions about the meaningfulness of our existence within it.

In the following pages, I offer a sketch of the problem of meaning and its philosophical importance. I will provide a discussion of key terms and a roadmap of how the present dissertation will unfold according to the development of Nietzsche's understanding of meaninglessness and the solutions he envisages for it.

[1] The early Nietzsche is an exception to this statement. From *The Birth of Tragedy* through the *Untimely Meditations*, he promotes a view about the fundamental nature of reality that permits a metaphysical escape. He later repudiates any metaphysical account that posits a distinction between the "real" world and the "apparent" world, and that lays claim to the idea that the objectionable aspects existence in the apparent world can be accounted for, justified, assuaged, or redressed by the real (metaphysical) realm. See: A 14; TI "Problem of Socrates," "Four Great Errors" 8, "Ancients" 2-3; et al.

The Problem of Meaning

Nietzsche's philosophical focus is on meaninglessness, a state of affairs that he eventually comes to call nihilism. Nihilism isn't a term he uses in his published works until relatively late in his career.[2] Nevertheless, this dissertation aims to show that a deep concern about meaninglessness is at the center of Nietzsche's thought from the beginning. Even before he understands the problem of meaning in terms of "nihilism," there are similar—yet importantly different—conceptions of meaninglessness at work in his thinking.[3] For instance, the conception of pessimism that permeates *The Birth of Tragedy*, while not identical to the nihilism that would come to concern him, shares features with it. What meaninglessness amounts to shifts throughout the various stages of Nietzsche's thinking, and so too do Nietzsche's proposed solutions for overcoming it. This dissertation will outline these different conceptions of meaninglessness—and their opposite, conditions wherein we experience existence as meaningful—that Nietzsche addresses. What's at stake in the endeavor to diagnose states of pervasive meaninglessness is nothing less than the question of the possibility for human flourishing.

In terms of methodology, I will investigate these issues by dividing Nietzsche's philosophical career into three stages: early, middle, and late. The early phase contains unpublished works starting from about 1869, as well as published works from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) through the *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876). *Human, All Too Human* (1878) marks the first published work of the middle phase, which ends with the publication of the first four books of *The Gay Science* (1882). The first published work of the late or mature period is

[2] The first published instance occurs in section 10 of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), a work I attribute to Nietzsche's later period. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, the term "nihilism" appears only a few times, suggesting that Nietzsche is at this point working out the details of his conception of it. One year later, with the publication of Book V of *The Gay Science* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, the term is used with greater regularity (e.g., GS 346, which provides a helpful characterization of nihilism).

[3] I use "meaninglessness" to designate a general state of affairs that concerned Nietzsche throughout his career; the nature of this meaninglessness is what changes throughout his thinking. I use "nihilism" to refer to the particular conception of meaninglessness that concerns the later Nietzsche.

Part I of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and ends with Nietzsche's mental collapse in 1889.[4] In dividing Nietzsche's career into these three periods, I am not suggesting that each period presents a set of static, finalized views. Within each phase, his thinking undergoes important changes.[5] But each phase does present a set of cohesive views that are largely inconsistent with the positions that define his other phases.

The meaninglessness that interests Nietzsche is a large-scale cultural phenomenon. Culture for Nietzsche consists of such things as ethics, religion, philosophy, as well as certain habits, attitudes, customs, and ways of being in the world. These components reciprocally reinforce one another while expressing something distinctive about the identities of a culture's members. Meaninglessness as kind of cultural crisis occurs when culture fails to supply its members with the resources that could be used to interpret existence and thereby imbue it with meaning. Nietzsche's conception of the resources in question, along with the nature of culture's failure, depends in part on the period of his career we're considering. Below, I'll give a fuller account of how the problem of meaning plays out in each phase of Nietzsche's career. Here it's enough to say that for the early Nietzsche, the problem concerns our comportment towards some deep metaphysical truth about the world and our existence within it; in middle period, the problem turns into one not about metaphysics, but about how to balance the insights of science with the kinds of beliefs and attitudes that supply meaning; and finally, in the later period

[4] This dissertation draws heavily from Nietzsche's *Nachlass*, or his unpublished notebooks. This includes *The Will to Power*, a posthumously published work that was not assembled or authorized for publication by Nietzsche, but consists of selected notebook entries from his later period. With respect to reconstructing Nietzsche's views, I give priority to his published work. However, the notebook entries remain an invaluable interpretive resource. They not only give us a fuller sense of what Nietzsche was thinking—even if he rejects or tinkers with many of the notebook's ideas or arguments—they also fill in gaps and clarify uncertainties found throughout Nietzsche's published works.

[5] This is especially evident in the middle period. The 1878 *Human, All Too Human* articulates a more "positivist" or "naturalist" agenda that looks askance at art and its corrective potential. By the 1882 *Gay Science*, this naturalism is attenuated, and art and its potential is looked at far more favorably.

nihilism is understood in terms of a problematic relation that holds among our values, goals, and the world.

Though the focus of this dissertation will be on the differences in how Nietzsche conceives of meaninglessness throughout his career, there is an interesting line of thought that runs throughout his different conceptions of meaninglessness and that concerns the specific question of how the sense of meaninglessness can be bolstered and exacerbated. For Nietzsche, the pursuit of meaning can be self-undermining in a way that it contributes to the very problem that those pursuits aim to overcome. This is a distinctive and essential aspect of Nietzsche's thinking on meaninglessness, which I call the "pathology of meaning." A pathology of meaning describes the manner in which attempts to imbue existence with meaning are not only self-defeating, but self-defeating in a way that as the pathologized pursuit runs its course, the sense of meaninglessness is strengthened or reinforced. This dissertation will point out how the pathology of meaning unfolds in Nietzsche's thought.

The Need for Meaning

An underlying claim of this dissertation is that Nietzsche conceives of meaning as a human *need*. Meaninglessness is thus a condition that arises when attempts to meet the demands of this need are frustrated.[6] That Nietzsche conceives of meaningfulness as a need is perhaps best seen in the first section of *The Gay Science*:

> [H]uman nature on the whole has surely been altered by the recurring emergence of such teachers of the purpose of existence—*it has acquired one additional need* […]. Man has gradually become a fantastic animal that must fulfill one condition of existence more than any other animal: man *must* from time to time believe he knows *why* he exists; his race cannot thrive without a periodic trust in life [ein *periodisches Zutrauen zu dem Leben*]—without faith in the *reason in life* [*Glauben an die* Vernunft im Leben]!

[6] Below I'll say more the phrase, "meeting the demands of the need for meaning." I use this phrase when discussing the need for meaning because it can't be satisfied in the way ordinary needs are.

There's a great deal to be garnered from this passage.[7] Nietzsche claims that human beings have acquired a new need—indeed a new condition of existence—not shared with other animals. Meaning is a uniquely human need. Human beings must see their activity and their existence as meaningful because we are *reflective* creatures. We need to know *why* we exist and to see a *reason* for going on living, not just for the sake of self-preservation, but in order for us to thrive.[8] Non-human animals lack a need for meaning. In order for them to flourish, they don't need (and lack to the capacity) to reflect on their activity and see it as meaningful. Driven only by instinct, animals do not engage in the sort of reflexive activity wherein someone compares his actions and aspirations with what he values.

In this passage Nietzsche also claims that the need for meaning gradually developed, implying that human beings didn't always have this need. This will be an observation I develop in Chapter II, while Chapter III expands on it by linking it to the narrative Nietzsche offers in *The Genealogy*. In older societies, where human beings were characterized as brutish beasts of prey, meaningfulness wasn't a need. Human beings lacked the reflective capacity such that issues of meaning could not arise as a problem in the first place. In this sense, these early human beings were more like animals. We should take seriously Nietzsche's moniker for them as *beasts of prey*.

What is philosophically interesting about conceiving of meaning as a need in the way GS 1 presents it is the suggestion that human nature is malleable—that meaning was not always the object of a need and that human nature has been altered. More interestingly, this new spiritual

[7] I'm shelving for the moment that fact that in this passage Nietzsche talks about *purpose*, not about *meaning*. Below, I analyze the concept of meaning in terms of intelligibility, significance, purpose, and affirmability. Chapters II and III address further interpretive issues about GS 1.

[8] By his mature period, Nietzsche claims that a state in which a person is trying merely to subsist is a "condition of distress" (GS 349); if one's primary goal is to survive, then his activity is aimed at the minimum requirements to keep life going. This state is anything but one of flourishing. Flourishing involves, among other things, an excess of vitality so that one's activity can be directed to something other than mere subsistence.

need makes human existence more precarious, while also enriching it. If meaningfulness is a condition of existence [*Existenz-Bedingung*], or a condition of human thriving [*gedeihen*],[9] then human existence becomes more complicated and dangerous. Additional needs come with a risk: The more needs or conditions of existence an organism has, the greater the probability that it will be unable to satisfy all of them. Having gradually developed the new need for meaning—one that's quite difficult to meet the demands of—the possibility for human flourishing has been complicated and endangered. However, even though human existence became more dangerous with the acquisition of this new need, so too did it gain the possibility of enhancement and elevation.

A claim that will be developed in Chapter III is that Nietzsche conceives of human beings as inherently sickly for the very reason that we have developed a need for meaning:

> Where does it come from, this sickliness? For man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that—he is *the* sick animal: how has that come about? Certainly he has also dared more, done more new things, braved more and challenged fate more than all the other animals put together: he, the great experimenter with himself, discontented and insatiable, wrestling with animals, nature, and gods for ultimate dominion—he, still unvanquished, eternally directed toward the future, whose own restless energies never leave him in peace, so that his future digs like a spur into the flesh of every present—how should such a courageous and richly endowed animal not also be the most imperiled, the most chronically and profoundly sick of all sick animals? (GM III 13)

While a fuller explication of this passage is offered in the dissertation, some intriguing points are worth mentioning here. In identifying human beings as uncertain, changeable, and indeterminate, Nietzsche is referring to the malleability of human nature. What makes us positively *ill* is not that human beings haven't had their needs met, spiritual or otherwise. The human being *as such* is *the* sick animal. We are sick because we possess various spiritual needs, in particular the need

[9] Nietzsche (and in particular GS 1) is not consistent about whether meaning is a condition of existence or a condition of thriving. Even within a single period of his career, he sometimes suggests that in a state of meaninglessness, human beings will be driven to mass suicide; at other times his remarks suggests that lacking meaning precludes human flourishing but not necessarily existence as such (see for instance the figure of the "last man" discussed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a figure who ostensibly leads a meaningless life but who can nevertheless persist).

for meaning, that have greatly imperiled the possibility of flourishing while making human existence inherently more dangerous. Nietzsche thinks that human beings—at least modern human beings—have so far been anything but successful in pursuing meaning. Our pursuits have only exacerbated the sense of meaninglessness. But were we to be successful in meeting the demands of the need for meaning, we would nevertheless retain our status as the sick animal. We are sick, Nietzsche says, *because* we are uncertain, changeable, and indeterminate, with perpetually restless, future-directed energies. Achieving a sense of meaningfulness necessitates a kind of reflexive activity, and it is the implications of this reflexive activity that make us indeterminate and perpetually restless, wracked with worries about how to achieve what matters to us.

There is, however, a positive side to our sickliness: That which is responsible for our sickliness has at the same time enriched human existence. The need for meaning, as Nietzsche states in the GS 1, has made us a "fantastic animal [*phantastischen Thiere*]." Nietzsche connects our sickliness to humanity's greatest feats, to the fact that we've done truly astonishing things: We have dared and braved more than all other animals combined, we've wrestled with nature and the gods, and we are great experimenters with ourselves. Unlike other animals, human beings aren't content with mere survival. Even if other animals aren't content with this end, the feats and flourishing they can achieve pale in comparison to the feats and flourishing that are genuine possibilities for human beings. The need for meaning may have made human existence more dangerous and uncertain, but it has also made the human being a "courageous and richly endowed animal." Our sickliness has made human existence interesting [*interessant*], as the need for meaning has opened up new avenues for human expression and has increased the spiritual possibilities of what it means to be human.

Meaning as the Object of a Need

What does it mean to conceive of meaning as the object of a need? If meaning is the object of a need, then failure to attain this object results in some harm. Nietzsche claims that this need is a *condition of existence*, implying that ongoing failure to meet its demands might result in death. At the very least, failure to meet the demands of the need for meaning will eliminate the possibility of flourishing. The need for meaning thus resembles our natural needs—needs include things like sleep, water, certain foods and nutrients, and shelter. Though the means of *satisfying* these needs is subject to historical change, they persist throughout human history; all human beings share the same basic natural needs, since they're rooted in biological or natural facts.

The need for meaning, even though it resembles natural needs in some ways, is different in certain crucial respects. Given that Nietzsche thinks the need for meaning gradually developed over the course of human history, it's not a *natural* need. At some point in our history, human beings meaning was not a need. It arises only as the result of certain social and cultural developments. This point is related to the idea that human nature is malleable, that once a need like the need for meaning is in place, human nature is altered. Now that it is in place, failure to meet its demands jeopardizes attempts to live a flourishing life. One doesn't just fail to realize the potential of being human, one falls far short of it. So rather than being a natural need, the need for meaning is a *spiritual* need.[10]

[10] At no point in his career did Nietzsche self-consciously advance a thoroughgoing theory of needs, though there are interesting and subtle differences in how he speaks of the concept of need in different phases. For these reasons it's difficult to provide a detailed account that can be attributed to Nietzsche, in particular the specifics of distinctions he doesn't explicitly advance, like the classes of natural and non-natural needs. That said, natural needs are needs we have in virtue of being living things, and in particular human beings (i.e., in order to continue living, human beings have nutritional requirements that differ from other animals). There are arguably a host of various non-natural needs, like "social needs" that don't of necessity have to be satisfied in order for a particular human being to survive or persist. Spiritual needs are a special class of non-natural needs having to do with those conditions of flourishing or thriving, and that "answer" to something in us beyond our being purely natural, living entities. Satisfying spiritual needs will in some cases presuppose the satisfaction of certain natural needs (e.g., certain nutritional needs have to be satisfied in order to keep a person alive, and so be in a condition to pursue higher,

The need for meaning, as a spiritual need, can never be properly *satisfied*, in the sense that there exists a state of affairs in which the need is satiated and as a result dissipates. The need for meaning calls for a special kind of "satisfaction," and differs from our other, natural needs, which can be properly satisfied. Rather than saying the need for meaning finds satisfaction, I will talk about "meeting the demands" of the need for meaning.

Typically, the notion of satisfying a need implies a consummation of or stopping point to the activity required to bring about that satisfaction. The "satisfaction" involved in the need for meaning is more dynamic—there's no point at which the activity required to meet the demands of the need for meaning is terminated or finished. Compare the need for hydration to the need for meaning. Here it will be useful to draw a distinction between a need that *recurs* and a need that calls for some *ongoing* and *open-ended* activity. The need for hydration is a recurrent need, while the need for meaning requires ongoing, open-ended activity. While I can't satisfy the need for hydration *once and for all*, such that I'll never have to drink water again, I can still satisfy this need. If I need water, I can bring about a state of affairs (drinking water) in which the need is satiated, and for at least some time, the need as something occurrent, as something motivating me to pursue the procurement of water, disappears. Indeed, there's a point at which continuing to drink water can endanger my health. So in the case of hydration, there's an aim or object (water) that, once achieved, puts an end to pursuing the satisfaction of the need. The need for hydration is one that can be satisfied even if it's also one that recurs.

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more spiritual needs); and in some cases striving to obtain the objects of spiritual needs will conflict or be in tension with certain natural needs (e.g., striving to realize the ascetic ideal, and so meet the demands of the need for meaning—a particular spiritual need—involves the suppression of or striving to a degree against the satisfaction of natural needs like the need for food).

The need for meaning is different insofar as meeting its demands requires a special kind of ongoing and open-ended activity.[11] The need for meaning gives us some general kind of aim—meaning—but this isn't the sort of object that can be acquired such that we can stop pursuing it. Moreover, the need for meaning can be "satisfied" in a variety of different ways, unlike the need for hydration, which calls for a relatively simple object (water). It's not the case that the need for meaning is satisfied by attaining a goal that matters to me, and that after some time, the need for meaning will make itself felt again such that I need to attain another meaningful goal—in contrast to the way I satisfy my recurring need for hydration by drinking more water once I become thirsty again. While meaningfulness is bolstered by the accomplishment of valuable goals that matter to us, there's more to meaningfulness than just this kind of accomplishment. Meaningfulness for Nietzsche also involves a certain view, comportment, or attitude toward existence. This is why *The Genealogy* passage quoted above claims that the human being is "insatiable," a creature "whose own restless energies never leave him in peace." We're insatiable and restless for the reason that the need for meaning never finds satiation.

Central to Nietzsche's view is the idea that we meet the demands of the need for meaning through the activity of *interpretation*—specifically an interpretation of existence and the world.[12]

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[11] I've chosen the more awkward phrasing of "*meeting the demands of*" because it better suggests the open-ended nature of the pursuit that would "satisfy" the need for meaning. Satisfaction implies some kind of consummation. Meeting the demands of something implies that there may be more demands to meet, and the demands may always be present. Demands can be met, but that doesn't thereby imply some kind of final consummation. For instance, someone might be able to meet the demands that come along with being a good friend, but continuing to meet those demands is an ongoing process. He has to meet the demands of being a good friend by, say, getting together his close friends on their birthdays; but this gesture doesn't exhaust the demands, and he can meet other demands with varying degrees of success—perhaps he's not as cognizant of his friends' emotional states as he ought to be. Meeting the demands of something is therefore consistent with those demands remaining active and continuing to obligate or drive someone to some end.

[12] By the mature period, Nietzsche has developed a view of the will to power and interpretation such that even the satisfaction of our natural needs involves an interpretive process. I discuss this in Chapter III, but the interpretive process involved in satisfying our natural needs is different from the interpretive process that meets the demands of the need for meaning.

Meaningfulness isn't a property that we discover or that's out there in the world for us to find. Existence is rendered meaningful through a creative interpretive process that draws on axiological resources largely furnished by culture. We actively shape these interpretations, which consist of a variety of perspectives that *project* certain properties onto the world such that we ideally experience it and our existence as meaningful. One of the chief properties projected onto the world, at least according to the later Nietzsche, is *value*. Our interpretations help us to make sense of what ends or goals we take to be estimable or *worth* achieving.

While we can't reject or accept new wholesale interpretations of existence, we can develop them in a piecemeal fashion. The interpretation we deploy will to varying degrees imbue existence with meaning and help to generate a certain, ideally life-affirming comportment toward the world. But no interpretation is ever exhaustive or complete because it will inevitably encounter things it can't make sense of, things it can't incorporate. Moments like these spur us on to revise our interpretations.

As a result, there is no a once-and-for-all, complete interpretation of existence. Nietzsche takes existence and the world to be characterized by a rich but radical ambiguity [*Vieldeutigkeit*] (see GS 2). This ambiguity ensures that our interpretations will, in imbuing some aspects of existence with meaning, necessarily sacrifice the possibility of imbuing other aspects with meaning. Interpretations have to be constantly expanded upon, revised, and restructured; the perspectives that constitute them have to shift and be cultivated, with certain perspectives being deployed while others are retired or disengaged. This dissertation will elaborate this point by connecting the process of interpretation to the will to power as a force that strives for ever-greater amalgamations of power. For Nietzsche, interpretations are expressions of the will to power that grow by incorporating and ordering different aspects of existence. When these

interpretations fail to grow, they lose their vitality and become increasingly ineffectual at imbuing existence with meaning, and so fail to meet the demands of the need for meaning.

What is Meaningfulness?

So far I have tried to provide a sketch of how Nietzsche conceives of meaning as the object of a need. But it's necessary to consider what is meant by *giving meaning* to something, whether we're speaking of a particular life, human existence, or the world.[13] It is not my intention to provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for what meaningfulness consists in, nor do I hope to reduce the notion of meaningfulness to some concept or set of concepts. Rather, I'd like to characterize the notion of meaningfulness in terms of those aspects that are often intuitively associated with it and with accounts of meaningfulness in general (be they religious, philosophical, or otherwise). In this vein, the four notions I'd like to introduce to help get a grasp on what meaningfulness amounts to are *intelligibility*, *significance*, *purpose*, and *affirmability*. Affirmability in particular plays a crucial role in Nietzsche's understanding of meaning, but these other, related notions can help us better understand what's distinctive about

[13] By "human existence," I mean something similar to "human life." I generally opt for human existence because "human life" has a biological connotation. Nietzsche is no doubt interested in human *life*, but I prefer"human existence" because it better captures the larger sense of the human form of life, or the sort of existence we tend to think is distinctively human beyond what we associate with it biologically. "Human existence" captures better than "human life" features of being human, like contemplation, culture, senseless suffering, and reflexivity (even if these things are rooted in our biological nature). Nietzsche's interest in life as something biological is confined largely to his later period and part of the middle period (though here his conception of life is undeveloped); "human existence" therefore captures even what the early Nietzsche is interested in. Moreover, I frequently speak of interpreting and giving life to human existence *and* the world because these are two closely related entities; the difference is largely one of focus. Below we'll see how the notion of meaning can be understood in terms of notions like intelligibility and significance. Meaning with respect to significance frequently concerns the place of human existence *in* the world; it'd be strange to say, unless we're speaking of the human world or the social world, what it would mean for it to have significance, since the world is something that's just there and at some fundamental level "given." The significance of our existence arises as a question as a result of certain features of the world, such as certain structures of it that thwart meaning-imbuing aspirations. But when it comes to meaning intelligibility, the focal point switches to the world. Human existence, too, has to be rendered meaningful in terms of intelligibility, but so too does the world. The world has to be minimally intelligible—we have to be able to make sense of its structures and patterns—in order of us to structure our lives, projects, and activity for us to be able to navigate it, and for us to understand our significance within in it. If there's any shorthand for what it is that has to be given meaning, it'd be best to say "human existence in the world."

Nietzsche's account by holding it alongside other views about meaningfulness. These four notions can work to reinforce one another, and in some cases one will bleed into another, and in other cases an account of meaningfulness may lack some of these notions.

Intelligibility

Frequently, when we say that something is meaningful, we mean that it is intelligible and makes sense to us, and that we can understand or comprehend it. To say that existence or the world is intelligible is to say something along these lines. More specifically, the world is intelligible to me insofar as it's a place I can navigate—I have some mapping of its structure and features that provides me with a sense for what demands and expectations of mine are reasonable or appropriate and which aren't.[14] Similarly, to say that human existence is intelligible to me is to say something about how I can make sense of it, that I have some knowledge of the nature of human existence that gives me a basic understanding of what it means to be human and the limitations and possibilities that come with this. In terms of my own individual life, to say that it is intelligible is to say that my existence is something I can make sense of in terms of a life-narrative, that I have an understanding of what I want out of my life, and what goals matter to me and how I can achieve them.

To get a better sense of what I mean by intelligibility in this context, it might be helpful to think of something that we experience as lacking intelligibility. Consider traumatic events, such as the sudden and unexpected death of a loved one. These sorts of events are often

[14] *Part* of what Hegel means by his famous dictum, "The actual is rational and the rational is actual," concerns meaning in this sense of intelligibility. Hegel no doubt means far more than "intelligible" when he talks about rationality, but one aspect of what this dictum means is that reality, or the world, is rational in the sense that it's a place in which we can in principle realize our highest aspirations. Once the historical process has reached a certain point and Spirit has sufficiently developed, the structure of the world—what is actual—isn't hostile or even apathetic towards the realization of our large-scale goals. *The Philosophy of Right* claims that *it is the case* that the actual is rational and the rational is actual, but we, as atomized individuals, don't see the world this way; Hegel hopes to shift our comportment so as to consummate the claim by getting us to realize its truth.

experienced as inscrutable and hard to make sense of. It's hard for a person who has experienced a trauma to give reasons for why it happened, and for her to coherently fit it into her life-narrative or her conception of how the world or human existence typically is or ought to be. Traumas are experienced as defying intelligibility—in extreme cases, trauma sufferers feel that they no longer know how to navigate the world. They feel that something about existence just doesn't make sense. They don't really know which of their expectations, aspirations, and goals are realizable.

An important aspect of intelligibility thus concerns *order* and *coherence*. Something is experienced as intelligible when we can see some order in it. Were I to see the world as intelligible then I would be able to see how it's ordered and experience it as coherent, such that it isn't a place that's altogether intractably opposed to my projects, aspirations, and goals. Intelligibility is particularly important in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which discusses not only the positive role this notion plays in imbuing meaning, but also the sometimes pernicious and self-undermining aspects of it. The pathology of meaning in this text largely concerns how intelligibility can go awry in the pursuit of meaning.

Significance

Oftentimes, when we say something has meaning for us, we're saying something about its significance. We talk of meaningful events in our lives, or an object or place that has meaning for us. To speak of meaning in this way is to say these events, objects, or places *matter* to us, perhaps because they're emotionally laden or they carry some import for how our lives have turned out. By the same token, when people say things like human existence is meaningless, the reasons they give to substantiate this thought concern the fact that human existence isn't significant, or that we don't matter: We live on a tiny planet in an unremarkable solar system at

the edge of an unremarkable galaxy that is, in itself, only one among billions of others; we are the accidental result of evolution, and so have no special place in the grand scheme of things; and from the vantage point of geological or cosmic timescales, human history amounts to the blink of an eye. The idea behind these considerations is that we're insignificant because from some perspective we're "small" and don't matter, and we don't matter because we can't have a lasting impact on the universe.

Significance is closely tied to the idea of things mattering in a certain way. Things can matter for us, or be significant, in different ways. One way things matter to us is in terms of *values*. If you value the opera, and I don't, then opera matters for you and you care about it in a way that it doesn't matter for me. Significance, however, doesn't have to be positive. To return to the example of a trauma, such an event is surely significant to a person. A man, some years after the sudden and unexpected death of his wife, can sensibly and coherently say that this loss was a significant event in his life, and that it mattered a great deal to him. Here, it isn't the case that he values the loss of wife. The trauma has significance because it posed a radical rupture in his life and what was making it meaningful. Something can matter to us in that it has a kind of *negative* significance. And things can matter to us positively in a number of different ways. Something might matter to me *in itself*, or as a *means* to something else. The dedicated operagoer who hates her job might value her job as means to achieving the resources that allow her to go to the opera; her job matters to her only instrumentally.

Things can also matter to us in a way such that they have neither negative nor positive significance. It's a significant fact about human beings that our hands have ten digits, but it's strange to assess this fact as being positively or negatively significant. What if they had twelve digits, or eight digits? This would make an enormous difference—we very likely wouldn't count

in base ten, for instance—and so is a significant fact about human beings, but not one that is either negative or positive.

As we'll see, meaningfulness according to Nietzsche involves the notion of significance—part of what meaninglessness amounts to is a failure to see existence as significant, as well as a failure to see certain activities and achievements as genuinely mattering. That said, Nietzsche wants to steer a careful course when it comes to questions of human significance. He wants to retain some perspective or set of perspectives from which human existence is seen as lacking significance. We need to come to terms with the fact that on a cosmic scale we *are* insignificant. One of the aspects of Christianity Nietzsche finds distasteful is the idea that *everything* we do has some kind of cosmic significance, and that God is looking down us, interested in and assessing each and every action of ours (see GM III 22 and A 52). GM III 25 talks about the waning appeal of "a transcendental solution to the riddle of [man's] existence, now that his existence appears more arbitrary, beggarly, and dispensable in the *visible* order of things." Since Copernicus, Nietzsche goes on to note, it's as if we've been slipping down a ramp, coming to realize that from the perspective of the universe, we aren't at the center of things. Darwin only further problematized our self-image by showing us we are "an *animal*, literally and without reservation or qualification."

Nietzsche wants confront these facts, along with the insight that there's no transcendental solution or metaphysical escape. Our activity and existence at large can matter to us from a different, and equally valid vantage point, as long as we don't take that vantage point too seriously. Nietzsche's rhetoric of levity, humor, and self-mockery play into this (a point which I elaborate in greater detail in Chapter II). We need to be able to see ourselves as insignificant, and

to laugh at what matters to us, while also being able to carry on and to take our aspirations seriously.

Purpose

The notion of purpose is ordinarily associated with questions about the meaning of life, existence, and the world. Frequently, when people ask what their life means, they're asking if it has some purpose, aim, or goal—they could be asking either about their own individual lives ("my life lacks purpose") or they could be asking a broader question, "What does it all mean?" that oftentimes breaks down into a question of "What's the purpose of it all, what's the point of human existence?"[15] Believing that existence or one's life has a pre-given *telos* or aim can in turn help to make these things appear intelligible and significant. Take as an example the Christian who believes God has a purpose for humanity and for each individual. This allows him to make sense, at least in principle, of all the events that occur in his life, since everything is part of God's plan. Even if he suffers some trauma—even if as a mortal *he* can't quite make sense of it—he can comfort himself with his faith that there was a divine reason for why it happened. Indeed, after he's gained some distance from the trauma—let's say his life eventually starts to go extremely well—he might causally connect the trauma to the positive turnaround in his life, confirming to him that it was all part of God's plan. Similarly, the idea that God has a plan for him imbues his existence and activity with significance, since his life and his actions matter in God's eyes—and what could make one seem more significant than mattering to the creator and moral arbiter of the universe?

[15] In the second essay of *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche speaks of the *meaning* of a practice or custom like punishment, by which he primarily means its purpose. His point here is that the meaning or purpose of a practice isn't fixed, it is fluid and changes throughout history as it's reinterpreted and appropriated within different schemes of understanding the world. However he is not talking here about the purpose of human existence.

As far back as his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche rejects the idea that human existence has a purpose. In this work, human existence is seen as the offshoot or "dream image" of the underlying, senselessly striving Schopenhauerian Will, which exists outside of time and experience. The Will—this peculiar metaphysical reality or entity that underlies experience as we know it—has no object *toward* which it strives, and this implies that human beings have no purpose. Lacking a purpose, the Will is pure striving. If the Will has no purpose, and our status in the universe amounts to mere representations, ideas, or images of the Will, then surely our existence has no purpose in light of the Will's senseless striving. We're not part of some aim-directed, purposive force; we're instead riding on the back of a purposeless force responsible for all of our suffering.

By the mature period of Nietzsche's thought, he's long since jettisoned this ponderous metaphysical framework, but he maintains that human existence as a whole lacks a pre-given purpose or aim. Here, Nietzsche vehemently rejects the kinds of solutions that thinkers like Kant, Hegel, and Marx offer in their respective philosophical projects. History has no purpose, nor does human existence. History isn't unfolding according to some logic whereby human beings increasingly become more moral or better. As Nietzsche states, "People are *not* the products of some special design, will, or purpose, they do *not* represent an attempt to achieve an 'ideal of humanity,' 'ideal of happiness,' or 'ideal of morality,'—it is absurd to want to *devolve* human existence onto some purpose or another" (TI "Four Great Errors" 8). The history of human existence, Nietzsche insists, is not moving toward any aim or end, and so has no purpose.

As I'll discuss in the third chapter, a crucial aspect of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is its implication that human existence lacks a pre-given purpose. This doctrine claims that the history of the entire cosmos goes through identical iterations, has done so eternally, and

will continue to do so eternally. That everything repeats, without ever reaching or approaching an endpoint, implies that human existence has no purpose. If *The Birth of Tragedy* conveys our purposelessness through Schopenhauerian metaphysics, then the later Nietzsche relies on a cosmological doctrine to do the same.[16] Similar to his aim to have us face our cosmic insignificance without being crushed by it, so too does Nietzsche want us to face the fact that human existence does not come prepackaged with a purpose. He aims to show that human existence can be meaningful absent any guiding purpose built into it.

In denying that human existence has a purpose, Nietzsche is not committed to the idea that an individual's life lacks a purpose. Nietzsche *would* deny that a particular life comes prepackaged with a purpose, but that doesn't imply that a person can't structure her life around attempting to achieve a certain aim or end, which in turn gives her life a purpose. Nietzsche himself sometimes speaks this way. For instance, he states, "If you have your '*why*?' in life, you can get along with almost any '*how?*'" (TI "Arrows and Epigrams" 12). This idea is echoed some epigrams later: "Formula for my happiness: a yes, a no, a straight line, a *goal*" (ibid. 44).[17] While Nietzsche never mentions *purpose* here, it's implicit in what he says. Possessing a "*why* in life" is about having a *reason* to live. It might be recast as, "Why do you care about living?" which is answered in terms of certain aims and goals you have. Similarly, Nietzsche's formula for happiness involves having a goal.

[16] The doctrine of the eternal recurrence is in a sense as "metaphysical" as Schopenhauerian metaphysics, but not under Nietzsche's specific understanding of metaphysics as a philosophical account that posits or presupposes a division between a world of appearances and the world as it is in itself (Nietzsche of the middle and mature periods accuses Plato, various Christian philosophers, Kant, Schopenhauer, and countless others of advancing this kind of philosophical view). In principle one can offer a cosmological account of the world without advancing the kind of doctrine that Nietzsche considers metaphysical. Such a cosmological account would deal with questions like "how will the universe unfold?", "what is the origin of the universe?", or even "is there an origin of the universe?" Also worth noting is that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is more than just a cosmological theory. Nevertheless, it's as a cosmological theory that it has implications about how Nietzsche thinks we ought to understand the relation between human existence and the notion of purpose.

[17] One can see similar statements pertaining to the purpose of one's individual life in Nietzsche's correspondence, where he sometimes speaks as if he has endured life, and is motivated to go on, because he hasn't yet realized his life's purpose.

Even if one has a self-given purpose, this isn't something that's created *ex nihilo*. Whether he wants to devote his life to helping the needy, writing poetry, or taking care of his family, the purpose a person "selects" for himself must, if it is to imbue meaning, have some goal or end that intersubjectively *matters*. Taken at the level of culture—the sphere that enshrines certain activities as estimable and meaning-imbuing—the goal or end he selects must have some significance. Someone might find playing videogames extremely challenging and rewarding, and so see his life's purpose as completing as many videogames as he can. This is a purpose Nietzsche, at least, would balk at. The purpose which one gives oneself has to have a goal that's *worthy* of esteem. As Geuss notes, Nietzsche's "replacement for the traditional ethical perspectives and its questions […] is one not centered, as is usually thought, around the concept of 'will-to-power' but around that of admiration" (2003: 39).[18] The purpose one gives oneself has to have as its end some goal that is admired or deemed estimable—but the source of this esteem can't only be the single individual who admires or esteems it. This is where the realm of culture steps in. Culture doesn't make certain goals estimable or worthy of admiration, but it can sustain these goals by enshrining them; and culture can go awry here, by enshrining or casting certain goals as estimable or worthy of admiration when they in fact aren't.[19] Nietzsche's task is

[18] This dissertation further develops the connection between what Geuss calls "admiration" and the will to power. Geuss is mistaken to decouple admiration from the will to power. It is true that a goal's being esteemed is central to Nietzsche's account of meaningfulness: The meaning-imbuing goals we strive to accomplish have to be estimable or worthy of admiration, or else working towards their accomplishment would fail to imbue our existence with meaning. But the will to power itself, as will be discussed in Chapter III, can only be sufficiently engaged, and so find expression, in such goals.

[19] This statement seems to be attributing to Nietzsche a view about the *objectivity* of values, or of what's estimable and worthy of admiration; yet he frequently eschews this kind of objectivity. There are two potential routes out of this problem. One is to take the position of Andrew Huddleston (2014), which holds that the values Nietzsche promotes have genuine evaluative standing. The other is to soften the kind of objectivity we're talking about here, and to invoke Nietzsche's perspectivism and the kind of objectivity it allows for. GM III 12 states, "'objectivity'—[…] understood not as 'contemplation without interest' (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability *to control* one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge." Without delving into the complexities this passage introduces, the reconceived notion of objectivity presented here is understood in terms of employing a variety of perspectives

to show that the ostensibly estimable goals the achievement of which people have taken as their life's purpose are in fact *not* estimable at all, and the problem is that modern European culture is continuing to enshrine such goals and the activities that realize them. We're taking the wrong sorts of activities as helping to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Meaningless thus looms on the horizon.

Affirmability

Affirmability is perhaps what is most central to Nietzsche's thinking on meaning. As early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, he speaks positively of the "creative affirmative force and consciousness" (BT 13) and of Apollo as the god associated with "the affirmation of the individual personality" (BT 21). However, as it is typically associated with Nietzsche, the affirmation of life takes center place only in his later thinking. As a result, I'll start off discussing the notion of affirmability as it relates to not just Nietzsche's later period, but to accounts of meaning in general.

Affirmability involves the strength to "say yes" to the terms under which existence is "given to us." It involves consenting to or approving what human existence fundamentally is, as well as the kind of world in which that existence is situated. Even those aspects of life over which we have little or no control are affirmed; life is declared to be worth it in spite of (or even because of) those aspects of life. In a sense, the affirmation of human existence is to genuinely want its general form to not be any other way: One would prefer to be who one is rather than someone else, or *something* else, like a Greek god.[20]

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and affective interpretations. Thus, if a particular goal is deemed estimable *only* from what Nietzsche would call an excessively one-sided or overly partial perspective, then we may say that it is "in fact" not estimable.

[20] I say the affirmation of human existence is "*in a sense*" to genuinely want its general form to not be any other way. I include this "in a sense" because there is nothing inconsistent with affirming human existence as it is, while (let's

Affirmability includes more than just a belief or judgment about existence. It also involves the capacity to take a certain comportment or attitude toward it.[21] A person might genuinely believe or judge that existence is worthwhile, but if this belief or judgment doesn't influence the way he behaves or conducts himself, then it's hard to see how he has affirmed existence. This belief has to figure in with the way he conducts himself in the world and in the general way he sees and interprets things. An affirmative comportment to the world goes a long way to meeting the demands of the need for meaning. As far as Nietzsche is concerned, this comportment is something dynamic, something that has to be maintained; it's not a *state of being* so much as a dynamic way of interpreting the world.

How are intelligibility, significance, and purpose related to affirmability? Depending on the understanding of meaningfulness under consideration, these notions will relate to affirmability in different ways. Some accounts will hold that intelligibility, significance, and purpose (or some combination) are necessary and sufficient conditions for affirmability; others that these notions (or some combination) are merely necessary conditions for affirmability; and others yet that they are neither necessary nor sufficient, that all that's necessary to realize meaningfulness is affirmation. Indeed, one might hold that all there is to a meaningful existence is that one affirms or believes it to be so.[22] Nietzsche, I take it, holds that *some* degree of

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say) wanting to eradicate senseless starvation. One might think that senseless starvation is an unfortunate fact we have to deal with. However, one can affirm human existence without affirming senseless starvation. One is affirming facts about *what it is to be human*, and so one is affirming the fact that human beings *can* starve; but that doesn't imply that one is affirming the genuinely senseless starvation that many people in the world are *actually* suffering from.

[21] There might be belief systems, religions, or accounts of meaning where this isn't the case. Some might take affirmation to consist of a belief or set of beliefs about the world.

[22] This would be a hardline subjectivism that holds that a person can't be mistaken about the meaningfulness of her own life, even if she devotes it to morally horrendous ends, or to activities that are pointless. The demands of the need for meaning are met when she feels that they are. In this case, the demands of the need for meaning might be something that can be *satisfied* in the ordinary sense. In terms of the four notions related to meaningfulness I've presented, the only relevant one for her is affirmability, and even then, it's a watered down version since (at least according to a truly hardline subjectivism) all affirmability amounts to in this case is the *belief* that a person has affirmed her own existence.

intelligibility, significance, and even personal purpose are necessary but not sufficient conditions for affirmability. A person could in principle see the world and existence as intelligible and significant (in the way Nietzsche approves) and have a personal sense of purpose, but her life might nevertheless fail to be affirmable; the presence of these other notions doesn't guarantee that her life is affirmable, since she still has to be able to take up the right comportment to it. Let's imagine that she has failed to genuinely affirm existence, but she has devoted her life to realizing an estimable purpose and she experiences existence as intelligible and significant. She has gone some way to meeting the demands of the need for meaning, but what is perhaps the crucial ingredient is missing.

Let's move on to other aspects of Nietzsche's take on affirmability. What does affirmability amount to for Nietzsche (at least of the later period)? One common way to understand affirmability for Nietzsche involves the eternal recurrence as a kind of test. This reading starts with the question, "If I had to live my life exactly as I have lived it infinitely times more, would I?"[23] If I genuinely answer "yes" to this question, then I have affirmed my life.

While I think it's right to associate affirmability with the eternal recurrence, this particular interpretation gets a few things wrong. If this is all affirmability amounts to, someone could in principle affirm his life, but in a way Nietzsche would find objectionable. Under this reading, someone like the "last man" might be happy to live his painless, contented life over and over again an infinite number of times. The last man would thereby be passing the eternal recurrence test, but Nietzsche would deny that the last man even could ever genuinely affirm his life in the face of the eternal recurrence. This is because *genuine* affirmability is more than a test that examines a person's subjective take toward his life in the face of repeating it *ad infinitum*.

[23] Maudemarie Clark (1990) conceives of affirmation in this way. For her, the eternal recurrence serves as a kind of practical test; I ought to live my life in such a way that I would affirm its infinite repetition.

Affirmability and the eternal recurrence relate to one another in that the latter requires a shift in one's values that makes the former possible. As Reginster (2006) notes, "Nietzsche explicitly declares that living in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires a revaluation of values" (220). The eternal recurrence isn't a practical test for affirmation; it's a doctrine the acceptance of which requires embracing certain values that make affirmation possible.

What values are involved in the doctrine of eternal recurrence? The eternal recurrence invites us to embrace as values—or at least to revel in—what we typically find objectionable about existence. For instance, Nietzsche states, "Means of enduring it [the eternal recurrence]: the revaluation of all values. No longer joy in certainty but in uncertainty" (WP 1059). Nietzsche isn't speaking here of *all* the objectionable aspects of existence, but he is talking about a major one: Uncertainty. Uncertainty is connected to other aspects of existence that we tend to think are objectionable—like ambiguity and doubt—and are experienced in tandem with fear, anxiety, and dread.[24] The ability to embrace the eternal recurrence requires having joy in uncertainty, contingency, changeability, and becoming. Affirmation involves the ability to dwell and take joy in the fundamental ambiguity of existence. Nietzsche states, "[T]o stand in the midst of this *rerum concordia discors* [discordant harmony of things] and the whole marvelous uncertainty and ambiguity of existence *without questioning*, without trembling with the craving and rapture of questioning […]—that is what I feel to be *contemptible*" (GS 2). The affirmation of human existence involves a joyful acknowledgment and embrace of the discordant harmony of things—it involves the ability to joyously and enthusiastically take human existence as it really is.

[24] Uncertainty may seem to be a strange and only mildly objectionable aspect of human existence, but for Nietzsche it's related to notions of becoming versus being. It's the inability to cope with uncertainty that Nietzsche thinks drove philosophers like Plato and Kant to posit an eternally unchanging metaphysical realm that is more fundamental than the empirical world. Uncertainty is tied up with a picture of the empirical world as a place where things change, decay, and deteriorate. In challenging us to have joy in uncertainty, Nietzsche is challenging us to embrace contingency and all its implications (including the fact that we senselessly suffer).

One final aspect about taking a joyful comportment toward contingency and becoming is an important notion linked to Nietzsche's conception of affirmation: Interestingness. It might sound strange to say that such a notion is involved in affirmation, since calling something (like human existence) "interesting" doesn't seem related to any kind of joyful yes-saying. But GS 1 describes "that profound shock that many individuals feel at the thought: 'Yes, living is worth it! Yes, I am worthy of living!' Life and I and you and all of us became *interesting* to ourselves once again for a while" (cf. GM I 6). The profound shock isn't over the fact that one finds one's own life interesting, but that *human existence* is interesting. In calling existence "interesting," Nietzsche means that life has become fascinating, stimulating, and curious. He states that it was the teachers of the purpose of existence who were the first to succeed in producing and cultivating this profound shock, suggesting that meaning is tied up in what makes us interesting to ourselves. We take ourselves, and our uncertain existence, as something *significant*, which in turn drives us to *make sense of* human existence. Seeing human existence as something interesting drives the interpretive process that Nietzsche thinks is so central to meaning, since this interpretive process is aimed at making sense of the ambiguity of existence without denying it, or without the hope of once-and-for all making sense of it. Indeed, reveling in the ambiguity of existence rather than denying is a sign that one has affirmed existence, as is suggested by GS 2 above. Lacking any sense that human existence is meaningful goes hand-in-hand with us being uninteresting, dull creatures.

Dissertation Outline

So far, I've developed some of the terms and ideas that will figure in this dissertation, while offering in some cases a philosophical analysis of them. I would like to turn now to a very general outline of how this dissertation will proceed. The driving question in each chapter

concerns what I've called the pathology of meaning. The pathology of meaning refers to the way in which our attempts to imbue existence with meaning have been self-undermining. Meaning has been pathologized in the sense that the way we understand it, along with the resources we have at our disposal for interpreting the existence, have *seemed* to meet the demands of the need for meaning. In reality, however, all of these things have only further frustrated this need. Nietzsche thinks nineteenth century Europe is at a point in history where this frustration is most evident. The following outline sketches, through the three major phases of Nietzsche's career, his conception of meaninglessness, the pathology of meaning, and the solutions that are open to him.

Chapter I: The Birth of Tragedy *and the Problem of Meaning*

The puzzle that Chapter I is focused on resolving concerns a series of claims Nietzsche makes in the representative text of his early period, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). In the early period, Nietzsche thinks that cultures work to inculcate and sustain illusions. Underlying the empirical world is a deeper, metaphysical realm that Nietzsche characterizes as horrifying. To varying degrees and in different ways, illusions cloak this metaphysical realm. Were we to come face-to-face with the truth of things, it would destroy us. Such illusions (at least in ideal situations) spur us on to live in spite of the horrifying truth and are responsible for generating the sense that existence is meaningful—illusions are the resources we have at our disposal to meet the demands of the need for meaning. The problem with modern German (and European) culture is that the illusions it promulgates are unsustainable and pernicious, throwing off kilter what Nietzsche thinks is the proper metaphysical comportment to the world and our existence within it.

Chapter II: Meaning, Science, and the "Perceptions and Sensations of Non-Science"

The second chapter of this dissertation deals with a shift that occurs in Nietzsche's thought and the implications of this shift for how he conceives of the problem of meaning. *Human, All too Human* (1878) marks a sudden break with his earlier metaphysical views. This text rejects any conception of metaphysics (such as that found in *The Birth*) that maintains a divide between the empirical world and a deeper, more fundamental metaphysical one. Nietzsche's thinking becomes more "naturalized," and the entire question of meaning changes as a result.

What are the effects of this shift? Nietzsche comes to cast meaningfulness in terms of the scientific pursuit of knowledge, and the pursuit of truth in general gets tied to the ways in which we meet the demands of the need for meaning. One quotation lucidly articulates this shift in Nietzsche's thought: "And knowledge itself: […] to me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings also have their dance- and playgrounds. '*Life as means to knowledge*.'—with this principle in one's heart one can not only live bravely but also *live gaily and laugh gaily*!" (GS 324). The pursuit of knowledge is here seen as a world of dangers, victories, and heroic feelings, and Nietzsche casts life as a *means* to knowledge. Meaningfulness is achieved through the pursuit of truth precisely because its pursuit is *significant*—it gives us a realm full of danger, victory, and heroism.

This chapter argues that the demands of the need for meaning are met through a productive tension between the domains of science and non-science. What Nietzsche calls the perceptions or sensations (the word he uses is *Empfindungen*) of science are pit against the perceptions or sensations of non-science ("sensations" that come to us from the domains of art,

religion, and metaphysics).[25] The perceptions and sensations of non-science are a power-source, giving us life-enhancing illusions, one-sidedness (against science's many-sided objectivity), and passions that drive us to achieve our aspirations. However, these perceptions and sensations can lead to pernicious and hazardous consequences that Nietzsche speaks of as a kind of overheating; with the help of science and the pursuit of truth, the pernicious consequences of this overheating can be obviated.

A crucial part of Nietzsche's project in the middle period is to use the perceptions of science to uproot and dispel what he calls the "need for metaphysics" (also called "the metaphysical need"). The need for meaning has become pathologized because it has been identified with the need for metaphysics. Meaning and some deeper metaphysical realm have been tied together such that we can make sense of the world—and our existence acquires significance—only if we see it through the lens of this metaphysical world. In this period Nietzsche hopes to show not only that we can have meaning without metaphysics, but that metaphysics is a pathology of meaning, that it is actively *hindering* attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Chapter III: Overcoming Nihilism and the Pathology of Meaning

By this point in Nietzsche's career, his published works explicitly use the term, "nihilism." Unlike in the previous stages of his career, Nietzsche understands this form of meaninglessness primarily in terms of *values*. Nihilism amounts to a crisis in our values wherein they're unable to help make the world intelligible or to see our activity and existence as significant. Ultimately, nihilism has the effect of problematizing the project of affirmation.

[25] See HH 251 for Nietzsche's remarks about "the perceptions of science and non-science" and their relation to one another.

The aim of this chapter is to detail Nietzsche's complicated position on the ascetic ideal, discussed at length in the third essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*. Contrary to many interpretations, the ascetic ideal is not unqualifiedly pernicious. Nevertheless, the ascetic ideal is the force responsible for pathologizing the pursuit for meaning. It has indeed made us more interesting (cf. GM III 20), but it is now self-destructing. For Nietzsche, the problem isn't so much the ascetic ideal's self-destruction or self-overcoming. It's that, once the ascetic ideal has run its course, we risk a kind of nihilistic collapse. With no ideal to fill its place, we'll be left in a state of meaninglessness—without any values, without any goals that we deem *estimable*, and so, without a way to effectively engage the will to power.

This chapter will discuss how the ascetic ideal is a special kind of ideal—what I call an absolute ideal—of which it is the first kind in human history. Nietzsche's ambition is not, once this ideal has overcome itself, to let modern culture operate without an absolute ideal. Instead, Nietzsche hopes to replace it with a *new* absolute ideal. This chapter argues that this new ideal is the eternal recurrence, and discusses what it would mean for the eternal recurrence to serve as an absolute ideal. More specifically, this chapter discusses how, as an ideal, the eternal recurrence would generate the sorts of values we could use to stave off nihilism and to work towards meeting the demands of the need for meaning.

CHAPTER I: *THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY* AND THE PROBLEM OF MEANING

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
~T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Let us stifle under the mud at the pond's edge
and affirm that it is fitting
and delicious to lose everything.
~Donald Hall, "Affirmation"

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), has as its central concern a worry about meaningfulness in modern culture: Modern German culture lacks the resources necessary to meet the demands of the need for meaning. *The Birth* is a notoriously difficult text given that it's intended to contribute to a myriad of intellectual pursuits: aesthetics, classical philology, philosophy, and cultural criticism, all while advancing a Wagnerian agenda. The Foreword to Richard Wagner states that "the matter with which we are concerned is a grave problem for Germany, a problem which we now place, as a vortex and turning-point, into the very midst of German hopes." Nietzsche describes the grave problem in terms of modern German culture being "tired," suffering from a sense of "growing sterility and exhaustion" (BT 20). He warns that a "catastrophe [is] slumbering in the womb of theoretical [i.e., modern German] culture" (BT 18). Raymond Geuss articulates the nature of Nietzsche's worry nicely: For Nietzsche, "[L]ife in the modern world lacks a kind of unity, coherence, and meaningfulness that life in previous societies possessed. Modern

individuals […] cannot see the lives they lead as meaningful" (1999: xii). Nietzsche's solution to this state of affairs involves establishing "a new form of existence, the content of which can only be guessed at from Hellenic analogies" (BT 19); a new form of existence that will allow its adherents to live meaningfully in a culture which finds its inspiration and consummation in the Wagnerian music drama and has as its precursor Ancient Greek tragic culture.

As Geuss points out, a worry about meaningfulness stands at the center of the work's critique. However, if a concern about meaningfulness is at the center of *The Birth*'s cultural diagnosis, then how are we to understand the significant role played by "the Dionysian"—which is one of the two constitutive drives of the "tragic culture" Nietzsche hopes modern Germany will emulate? The Dionysian is a force that seems entirely resistant to attempts to interpret existence in a way that renders it meaningful—it is the drive for destruction, chaos, and the transgression of boundaries. As such, it is a force that *resists* interpretation and understanding, making it difficult to see how cultivating this drive might help us meet the demands of the need for meaning. As much as we can formulate the Dionysian in ordinary language, it is with Silenus's wisdom, that "the very best thing [for you human beings] is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However the second best for you is: to die soon" (BT 3). If meaningfulness is a central concern in *The Birth*, then Nietzsche should seemingly want to eliminate the Dionysian from German culture. Instead, what he calls for as a solution is "*the gradual awakening of the Dionysiac spirit*" (BT 19).

Nietzsche's ideal cultural form should seemingly rely far more heavily on the powers of the Apollonian drive. The Apollonian drive exists in "opposition, both in origin and goals" (BT 1) to the Dionysian. It is the drive for an aesthetically pleasing order, intelligibility, and coherence. Nietzsche states that the Apollonian drive produces "images [*Bilder*]," and "using these images

to interpret [*deutet*] life and practicing for life" human beings can get a "feeling of complete intelligibility [*Allverständigkeit*]" (ibid.). The Apollonian thus seems far better equipped to give us a sense that existence is meaningful, since it provides the resources (namely, "images") that can render existence intelligible through interpretation.

Perhaps the most puzzling consequence of claiming that meaningfulness is the central issue in *The Birth* is that it ostensibly fails to make sense of Nietzsche's critique of "Socratism"—a cultural phenomenon defined by the rise of a new drive, the "Socratic drive." Though Nietzsche doesn't see the Socratic as a wholly pernicious force, much of *The Birth* is devoted to condemning it. Nietzsche states that the Socratic drive confines "the individual within the smallest circle of solvable tasks, in the midst of which [the theoretical, i.e., Socratic man] cheerfully says to life: 'I will you: you are worth understanding'" (BT 17). What's not obvious without knowing the larger context of this passage is that this statement is intended as a *criticism* of Socratism, yet this passage suggests that Socratism is particularly well-fitted to give us an interpretation of human existence that we can understand, cheerfully affirm, and find meaningful. How, then, could meaningfulness possibly be so central a concern of *The Birth*?

The specific question this chapter will answer is why, if the primary source of Germany's exhaustion and malaise is a sense of meaninglessness, Nietzsche calls for a revitalization of the Dionysian. What's at stake here is an understanding of how the early Nietzsche conceives of the need for meaning and the resources available to meet the demands of this need. I'll start by sketching *The Birth*'s metaphysical backdrop and theory of cultural types. I'll then turn to elaborating how each cultural type, which is defined in terms of the dominance of the Apollonian, Dionysian, or Socratic, generates resources for interpreting existence in a way that meets the demands of the need for meaning. We'll see how the need for meaning—or rather, our attempts

to meet its demands—can become pathologized and why the Dionysian drive can serve as a corrective for this state of affairs.

Part I: Background

Sketching the Schopenhauerian Metaphysics of *The Birth*

One of the central claims of *The Birth* is that Greek tragedy finds its origin in the brief union of two fundamental "*artistic drives of nature*" (BT 2), the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Before moving on to discuss the claims that Nietzsche makes in *The Birth*, it's worth having a firm grasp of what these drives of nature are and their metaphysical backdrop—a deceptively difficult task since Nietzsche associates each drive with a cluster of different and sometimes seemingly tenuously connected ideas. To start, in calling the Dionysian and Apollonian artistic drives of nature, Nietzsche means that they belong to nature independently of human beings. They are "artistic powers which erupt from nature itself, *without the mediation of any human artist*" (ibid.). Human beings, in particular artists, can nevertheless serve as the "medium, the channel through which" nature expresses itself (BT 5).

Nature as Nietzsche discusses it here isn't restricted to the world conceived of as the organic and inorganic world, the empirical world as it is replete with animals, plants, and various geological, chemical, and physical entities. Nature encompasses, in addition to all this, a metaphysical entity that *underlies* and *generates* the empirical world. This account of nature is deeply wedded to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, which conceives of the empirical world as a "representation" or "idea" of the metaphysically more fundamental and underlying world called the Will. Nietzsche refers to this underlying world under a variety of names: "the Will," "the primal being," "the primordial unity," "the one, truly existing subject" (BT 5), "the *one* world-

being itself" (BT 9), among others. The Apollonian and the Dionysian stem from this mysterious metaphysical entity, which Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche following him, understand as the Kantian thing-in-itself[26]—as an object that stands outside the world as we experience it and which *generates* such a world, the "world of phenomena" or the "world of appearances." This primal metaphysical entity is "the ground of things" (BT 5, 7), and "[i]n relation to that primal being every phenomenon [*Erscheinung*] is merely a likeness" (BT 6). This primal Schopenhauerian world of the Will is the *true* world, the *real* world, of which the world as representation is merely a reflection.

This elaborate metaphysical picture is indebted to Schopenhauer in a number of ways. Schopenhauer understands the Will as a singular, senselessly striving metaphysical entity. It is a kind of force, drive, or impulse that can't be satiated and has no *telos*. Because the Will is the thing-in-itself, we can only have the most limited knowledge of it; but Schopenhauer believes that in the Will's senseless striving it generates a representation [*Vorstellung*] that *is* the empirical world we inhabit. The World as Representation, differing radically from the world understood as Will, operates according to the *principium individuationis*—the principle of individuation—which is the principle that the world we inhabit consists of various distinct entities, like me, you, tables, chairs, computers, and so forth. Schopenhauer links the *principium individuationis* to space and time (which make the existence of such distinct entities possible) and to the (necessary) laws of the empirical world, since it's through such laws that individuated entities in the World as Representation interact with one another.

However, the World as Will—the world of Nietzsche's primal being—in standing outside the empirical world, isn't subject to the *principium individuationis*. The Will, instead, is *a single*,

[26] Schopenhauer interprets Kant's "thing-in-itself" in a highly idiosyncratic way that is inconsistent with much of what Kant has to say about it. The crucial difference between Schopenhauer and Kant is that Schopenhauer thinks that through a kind of self-reflection, we have limited access to the thing-in-itself.

non-spatiotemporal, *self-standing entity*, and as such, it is "the one, truly existing subject" (it is presumably called a *subject* since it *creates* the World as Representation; the World as Representation is a representation *of* the Will).[27] Because the World as Will generates the World as Representation, both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche think that we can have only limited access to the former—the Will "*appears*" or manifests itself (albeit in a highly obscured manner) in the World as Representation, which is why Nietzsche states that in relation to the primal being, the phenomenal world is a "likeness" (*Gleichniss*). This implies that the World as Representation has its ground in the truly horrifying reality of the Will. The relation that holds between the world as Will and the world as representation isn't something that Nietzsche makes clear; but like Schopenhauer he believes that the Will's senseless striving gives rise, in the world as representation, to flux, change, destruction, and becoming—it constantly creates and destroys individuated appearances and representations. The fact that the Will ceaselessly generates and destroys appearances means that we, who live in the world of appearances, are faced with an ever-changing, hostile (or at best indifferent and intransigent) reality that is overwhelmingly at odds with attempts to experience existence as meaningful.

There is a crucial link between this Schopenhauerian metaphysics and what Nietzsche takes to be the two fundamental drives of nature—a connection that I think many commentators have overlooked and that is important to understanding the role meaningfulness plays in *The Birth*. I claim that, as drives of nature, we can understand the Apollonian and the Dionysian as *two tendencies of the Will*.

[27] Schopenhauer's account gives rise to countless questions : how is it possible for the Will to be non-spatiotemporal yet something that *strives*? How can we know the nature of the Will and what sort of knowledge is that? How does it give rise to the World as Representation? These questions lie outside the scope of this chapter.

The Metaphysics of the Apollonian and the Dionysian

The Apollonian and the Dionysian are not parts or features of the Will as it is in itself. The Will is an undifferentiated unity and so can't be composed of two separate components. The Apollonian and the Dionysian *only* manifest themselves in the world of appearances, but each drive discloses a *tendency* of the Will as it is in itself. These tendencies of the Will, when taken together, are "contradictory," opposed to one another "in origin and goals" (BT 1), which explains in part why the World as Representation is at odds with our attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning.[28]

The Dionysian is a force that should be identified with the basic condition of the Will as a senselessly striving entity. Nietzsche often links the Dionysian with a "quite different reality" (BT 1) from the one we inhabit: the World as Will. And the Dionysian, as a drive that transgresses boundaries, is associated with the Will's being a single, self-standing, undivided entity. When the Dionysian manifests itself in the world of appearances, it runs counter to the *principium individuationis*, seeking to destroy the boundaries between individuated entities and so return them to the Will's state of undifferentiated, primordial unity. But if we identify the Dionysian with the Will's senseless striving, how does this senseless striving relate to the destruction of individuated entities and a return to a state of primordial unity? To strive is, for Nietzsche, to attempt to overcome or surpass a boundary or limit. Just as the Will's striving lacks a *telos*, the Dionysian drive isn't aimed at any specific end. It's aimed only at the inexact and vague end of transgressing of boundaries, whatever they may be—social, political, and personal boundaries alike are all sought to be overcome. Consequently, the Dionysian is associated with

[28] Because Nietzsche says the *origins* of the Dionysian and the Apollonian are opposed, we should identify them with two, contradictory tendencies of the Will. Nietzsche describes the Will itself as a "primal contradiction." When we take a broader perspective on the origins of these drives, they *both* originate in the Will and its activity as a senselessly striving entity, but they manifest themselves only in the World as Representation.

destruction and chaos in the World as Representation, since its striving to overcome boundaries is unlimited and uncontained.

For Nietzsche, the Dionysian drive most clearly manifests itself aesthetically in *music*.[29] Music, unlike the paradigmatic Apollonian arts of painting and sculpture, isn't clearly *individuated* and is, in a purely *physical* sense, formless.[30] Music has the power to generate Apollonian images—"melody, as it gives birth again and again, emanates sparks of imagery" (BT 6). Dionysian music isn't bound by, modeled after, or created to copy any given image or representation of phenomenal reality. The Dionysian, associated as it is with intoxication (*Rausch*) and the transgression of boundaries gives rise to aesthetic experiences characterized by a sense of "losing oneself." As Richard Schacht aptly notes: "As one in a state of intoxication may be said (quite appropriately, even if only psychologically) not to 'be oneself,' one immersed in the surge and flow of an instance of this type of [Dionysian] aesthetic experience 'loses oneself' in it. One's consciousness is caught up in it" (2001 [1977]: 199). Dionysian aesthetic experiences culminate in a feeling of losing oneself, in the destruction of the boundary that separates one individual from another and from the rest of reality. Crucial here is Nietzsche's association of the Dionysian with the suffering of the Will's senseless striving. Dionysian wisdom is a "wisdom of suffering" (BT 3), wisdom about the "hidden ground of suffering" (BT 4); and the "Dionysiac artist has become entirely at one with the primordial unity, with its pain and contradiction" (BT 5). Dionysian music provides us with an example of a manifestation of the Will's tendency for senseless striving and its attendant suffering.

[29] Not all music is purely Dionysian, however (nothing, in fact, can be purely Dionysian). Nietzsche is careful to indicate that some music is Apollonian. Music that is meant to represent aspects of phenomenal reality, like a thunderstorm, marching soldiers, or the sounds of a meadow is Apollonian (for reasons discussed below).
[30] Nietzsche doesn't deny that music possesses metaphorical or nonphysical form, as demonstrated by his discussion of Ancient Greek "modes" (forms) of music.

But the Will also has a second tendency that, when it manifests itself in the World as Representation, is associated with the Apollonian: namely, the tendency of the Will to depict and glorify itself in representations. The Will's striving gives rise to the World as Representation. Nietzsche states, "How does the world of Olympian gods relate to this piece of popular wisdom [i.e., Silenus's wisdom]? The relationship is that of the rapturous vision [*entzückungsreiche Vision*] of a tortured martyr to his torments" (BT 3).[31, 32] Key to understanding the relevance of this passage is Nietzsche's claim that the world of Olympian gods is an *Apollonian* creation—the "very same drive which assumed sensuous form in Apollo gave birth to that entire Olympian world" (ibid.). The world of Olympian gods is a beautiful illusion or representation that is generated out of Silenus's horrifying wisdom in exactly the same way that the saint's rapturous vision is born out of suffering. The Will, in its suffering, gives rise to the World as Representation in a way that parallels the tortured martyr's rapturous vision arising out of his suffering. Nietzsche substantiates this reading in a notebook entry from 1870, claiming that "the world can only be a representation" and this "representation is an ecstatic [*verzückte*] world projected by a suffering being" (KGW 7[204]). The Apollonian thus arises out of the Will's tendency to form beautifying representations *of itself*. Why does the Will, or the tortured martyr for that matter, generate any such a vision or representation? Because in this rapturous representation, they find a kind of deliverance from their suffering: "I feel myself driven," Nietzsche states, "to the metaphysical assumption that that which truly exists, the eternally suffering and contradictory, primordial unity, simultaneously needs, for its constant redemption

[31] Translation modified.
[32] See also (from Nietzsche's unpublished 1870 notebook entries) KGW 7[116] and [201] for more remarks on the figure of the visionary "tortured saint."

[*Erlösung*], the charming vision [*entzückende Vision*], intensely pleasurable semblance [*Schein*]" (BT 4).[33]

Because the Apollonian corresponds to the tendency of the Will to transfigure itself through beautiful or charming representations, it is able to conceal the terrifying nature of the Will: "Thanks to the delight in semblance and redemption through semblance which [the Apollonian] imparts, it casts a spell over even the most terrifying things before our very eyes" (BT 12).[34] Apollo is the "god of all image-making energies," and is associated with transfiguring visions and dreams—the paradigmatic Apollonian arts are visual (sculpture and painting). Indeed, phenomenal reality is related with Apollo: "One might even describe Apollo as the magnificent divine image of the *principium individuationis*, whose gestures and gaze speak to us of all the intense pleasure, wisdom and beauty of 'semblance' [*des 'Scheines'*]" (BT 1). The world we inhabit is much like an Apollonian dream of the primal being—"we are" reads a notebook entry from 1870, "the characters in the dream of the god who guess how he is dreaming" (7[116]). Or, as he says in *The Birth*, "[W]e may very well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art [i.e., the Will]" (BT 5).

As Julian Young notes, "Nietzsche uses 'Apollonian' in two senses. In the first it just means the everyday world, […] the world of the '*principium individuationis*'. Apollo, that is to say, he regards as the god of boundary drawing, justice, individuality, and plurality (BT 1, 2, 9). So the everyday world is 'Apollonian' because it is a world of individual *things*" (2006: 17)—and things, as discrete entities, have boundaries that separate them from other discrete things. "In the second sense," Young continues, "'Apollonian' refers to this same world raised to a state of glory […]. It is its 'perfection,' 'apotheosis,' 'transfiguration' (BT 1, 4, 16)" (ibid.). Though

[33] Translation modified.
[34] Translation modified.

Young is right to claim that Nietzsche uses "Apollonian" in these two senses—to refer to the ordinary, everyday world of appearances as well as the perfection of this world—*both* senses in fact pick out the same *tendency* of the Will to transfigure itself. The everyday phenomenal world is already a representation or *copy* of the Will. The Apollonian artist, through sculpture, painting, epic poetry, or any of the other associated art forms, creates a representation or copy of the phenomenal world, which is thus a representation *twice* removed from the Will, a copy of a copy of the Will. And because the artist himself is "a medium, the channel through which the one truly existing subject celebrates its redemption in semblance [*Scheine*]" (BT 5), the Apollonian work of art's true creator is the Will. The Will thus finds increasing degrees of redemption from its suffering through ever greater degrees of semblance. This is why Nietzsche claims that his "philosophy is an *inverted Platonism*: the further something is from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better it is. Living in illusion [*Schein*] as the goal" (KGW 7[156]).

Nietzsche's History and Theory of Cultural Types

The Birth provides a theory and history of cultural types, of which there are three: "a culture is predominately *Socratic* or *artistic* or *tragic*" (BT 18). Each cultural type is defined in terms of the dominance a particular drive, and each employs a distinctive kind of "*illusion*" [*Illusion*][35] to keep its members from confronting the horrifying nature of the Will. In Socratic cultures the Socratic drive is dominant, in artistic cultures the Apollonian drive predominates, and in tragic cultures the Dionysian holds sway. The illusions these cultures foster serve as "stimulants" that motivate the members of a culture "to carry on living," and the character of these stimulating illusions is generated by the mixture of drives by which a culture is defined.

[35] Nietzsche uses *Illusion* here and not *Schein*. Nietzsche uses *Illusion* as a more general term and intends *Schein* to be the specific kind of illusion associated with the Apollonian.

Socratic cultures promote illusions based on "the pleasure in understanding." The member of an artistic culture "is ensnared by art's seductive veil of beauty fluttering before his eyes." And the members of tragic culture are held fast "by the metaphysical solace that eternal life flows on indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances." Crucial to note is that it's these illusions that meet the demands of the need for meaning. An understanding of this theory of cultural types and the history of their progression is necessary for seeing why Nietzsche turns to Attic tragic culture, defined by the dominance of the Dionysian, as the most adept at meeting the demands of the need for meaning.

The story that Nietzsche tells of the rise and fall of Attic tragedy starts with the "Iron Age," or "the Age of the Titans." This is an era in Greek history that precedes the creation of the Olympian pantheon and is thoroughly Dionysian. Those living in this era were deeply familiar with Silenus's wisdom and so were aware, more than the members of other cultural types, that the world is chaotic and disordered and that human existence is pointless and full of suffering. Nietzsche says little about this era of Greek history. Presumably Iron Age Greeks lived a quietist existence of resignation—Nietzsche often associates the Dionysian with Buddhistic resignation, claiming that after a Dionysian ecstatic state, "daily reality re-enters consciousness, [and] it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion." Those who, through the Dionysian, "have gazed into the true essence of things […] find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint" (BT 7). Iron Age Greeks live a life that swings between states of Dionysian ecstasy and complete resignation. Whatever illusions Iron Age cultures produced—promulgated, Nietzsche suggests, by folk music—they veiled the Dionysian truth only just enough to keep its members "seduced" into existence. Given its Dionysian nature,

the Iron Age is a thoroughly tragic culture but *not* the tragic culture that *The Birth* venerates. The Dionysian drive in Iron Age culture manifested itself in an unsettlingly unsophisticated and unsublimated form.

This era of Greek history was followed by the Homeric Age, characterized by the ascendancy of the Apollonian. The beginning of the Homeric Age is the effect of a gradual process: As the Dionysian became more demanding and the true nature of existence increasingly dawned on the Iron Age Greeks, their suffering intensified. Finally they were compelled "under the influence of the Apolline instinct for beauty" to create the Olympic pantheon, thereby finding a degree of deliverance from their suffering just as the tortured saint does with his vision. This process changed Iron Age Greeks, culminating in the artistic culture of the Homeric Age.[36]

Once the Homeric Age had firmly established itself, the Apollonian drive became increasingly powerful—so much so that the Greeks of this era came to see Dionysian practices as foreign and unfamiliar, the memory of their own Dionysian Iron Age having faded. When the Homeric Greeks came into contact, through Barbarians, with these seemingly foreign Dionysian practices, the Apollonian drive reacted with greater force, eventually ushering in the *Doric* Age of Greek history. The Doric Age is an era belonging to the Homeric Age—it is a specific sub-era—that is characterized as "a permanent military encampment of the Apolline" (BT 4). The Doric view of the world, as evidenced by its art and practices, is defined by rigidity and strict discipline: "Only in a state of unremitting resistance to the Titanic-barbaric nature of the Dionysiac could such a cruel and ruthless polity, such a war-like and austere form of education, such a defiantly aloof art, surrounded by battlements, exist for long" (ibid.). Below we'll see how

[36] I'll return later to how this artistic culture generates illusions that, veiling the truth of the Will, allow its members to see existence as meaningful and intelligible.

the Doric Age is instructive for demonstrating how Apollonian illusions, otherwise capable of meeting the demands of the need for meaning, can backfire.

In much the same way that in the Iron Age the increasingly unrestrained influence of the Dionysian invited an Apollonian reaction, so too did the increasingly unrestrained influence of the Apollonian in the Homeric Age invite a Dionysian response. Nietzsche states, "The Dionysiac and Apolline dominated the Hellenic world by a succession of ever-new births and by a process of reciprocal intensification" (BT 4). Even in the face of the staunch opposition posed by Doric culture, some Dionysian practices took root in Doric Greece itself, though in a heavily altered form. Nietzsche mentions lyric poetry in this vein, an art form that combines music, singing, and poetry. As poetry, it employs words and images, manifesting its Apollonian component, which is presumably what allowed it to find acceptance in a culture as staunchly Apollonian as Doric Greece.[37] Nevertheless, Nietzsche insists, lyric poetry is a *Dionysian* art form because it privileges music over its Apollonian qualities. Its "music refers symbolically to the original contradiction and original pain at the heart of the primordial unity, and thus symbolizes a sphere which is beyond all appearance" (BT 6). Crucial to note is that lyric poetry, though Dionysian, bears little resemblance to the Dionysian practices of the Barbarians, and was for this reason able to establish itself in Doric Greek culture.

What's important about lyric poetry is that it gave rise to the dithyramb (another Dionysian art form), which in turn created the conditions for Attic tragedy (the ancient art form Nietzsche finds most estimable). As the Dionysian once again found expression in Greek life and practices, the Apollonian and the Dionysian were eventually forced to become reconciled under a

[37] Nietzsche never explicitly states that lyric poetry arose in Doric culture in particular, so it's possible that the origin of this art form predates Doric culture. Either way, the Apollonian aspect of lyric poetry would have permitted its persistence throughout the Doric age. That Nietzsche believes an Apollonian aspect is present in lyric poetry is clear from remarks like the following: "This is the phenomenon of the lyric poet: as an Apolline genius he interprets music through the image of the Will" (BT 6).

"peace-treaty" (BT 2). Under the conditions of this truce Attic tragedy came into being. With the advent of this art form, Nietzsche thinks that Greek culture became truly tragic. *This* is the tragic culture that Nietzsche ardently esteems because the Dionysian finds a more sophisticated and sublimated expression with Attic tragedy than in the practices of either the Dionysian Barbarians or the Iron Age Greeks. A "vast gulf […] separated the *Dionysiac Greeks* from the Dionysian Barbarians." In the latter "the very wildest of nature's beasts were unleashed, up to and including that repulsive mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always struck me as the true 'witches brew'" (BT 2). In the practices of both the Barbarians and the Iron Age Greeks, the Dionysian expressed itself in a crude and unrefined manner, in the most "grotesque manifestation[s]," such as "extreme sexual indiscipline" (ibid.). In the age of Attic tragedy, however, the Dionysian is *sublimated*.[38] It isn't expressed *directly* through acts that express the transgression of boundaries, but through the more roundabout manner of *tragedy*. The sublimation of the Dionysian leads to its expression in a variety of "festivals of universal redemption and days of transfiguration" (BT 2). Note that the Age of Attic Tragedy isn't *purely* Dionysian; it also has a heavily Apollonian

[38] Sublimation is a productive process wherein a drive or force finds expression in a circuitous manner. The term is associated with psychoanalysis, though Nietzsche speaks of the same process. For Freud, sublimation is a defense mechanism wherein the psyche unconsciously attempts to maintain the ego's self-image in the face of the hardships of reality. So, for instance, I might have a drive the direct satisfaction of which is socially unacceptable, like a drive for violence. Satisfying this drive in a direct fashion—acting out violently—might seriously injure my self-image and my social standing. As a defense mechanism that ensures I don't suffer such an injury, sublimation is my psyche's way of satisfying the drive *indirectly*. Rather than satisfy my aggressive drive directly, I satisfy it by painting, writing a novel, or deriving mathematical theorems. These activities not only prevent the injurious effects of satisfying my desire directly, they can also hide these drives from my consciousness. In painting, writing, or mathematizing, I do not realize that my baser drives are finding satisfaction. Sublimation thus permits for the mutual satisfaction of competing psychological forces—on the one hand, my socially unacceptable drive finds (indirect) expression, while the psychological forces that try to maintain my self-image are satisfied because I didn't do anything socially unacceptable. Something similar happens with Attic tragedy—it permits *both* the Apollonian and the Dionysian to find satisfaction, *even though both drives exist in "an enormous opposition"* (BT 1), and tragedy permits this by *sublimating* the Dionysian.

character, since these two artistic forces have been reconciled (even if only under a tense truce). Nietzsche nevertheless characterizes Attic Greece as a tragic, *Dionysian* culture.[39]

At this point in Nietzsche's historical account, things take an unexpected and rapid turn for the worse. Attic tragic culture hits full stride with Aeschylus and Sophocles but almost immediately declines with Euripides, whose tragedies express an "aesthetic Socratism" (BT 12)—an aesthetic that puts a premium on a kind of *realism* about the empirical world. Euripides's tragedies are a symptom of a much larger cultural shift marked by the rise of the Socratic drive. What's distinctive about this drive is that it ignores and suppresses the Dionysian; it aims to render existence *conceptually* intelligible by categorizing and classifying the empirical world. I'll have more to say below about why Socratism is largely pernicious according to Nietzsche. Here, it's enough to say Nietzsche's objection to Socratism resides less in its conceptual apparatus as such and more in the fact that the theoretical man—the man who embodies the Socratic drive—acknowledges *only* the empirical world (the World as Representation), believing that in classifying and categorizing it through concepts, he's arriving at fundamental truths about existence.

Nietzsche's theory of cultural types ends with Socratism; since its rise, it has been the dominant cultural form in the Western world, and the ills that afflict modern German culture stem from the overweening dominance of the Socratic drive. Meaningfulness in such a Socratic culture is defined by the search for knowledge, by science and its advancements that allow people to live a more comfortable existence. The issue Nietzsche has with Socratism is that it obscures the "metaphysical meaning" of existence. And though Socratism has successfully held

[39] Nietzsche characterizes it as Dionysian because the Dionysian drive is dominant. No cultural form is ever purely Dionysian or purely Apollonian (or purely Socratic). This is why Nietzsche says in BT 18 that "depending on the proportions of the mixture, we have a culture that is *predominantly* [vorzugsweise] *Socratic* or *artistic* or *tragic*."

sway since its rise more than two-thousand years prior, Nietzsche believes that in 19th century Europe it is in danger of a catastrophic collapse.

Part II: Meaningfulness in Artistic Cultures

Apollonian Images and Meaningfulness

A distinctive characteristic of the Apollonian drive is its capacity to generate *images* that we can use both to veil the horrifying truth of the Will and as resources for interpreting existence. Images are the illusions that are generated by and that define artistic cultures like Homeric Greece. These images make existence intelligible and meaningful. Even if the everyday, Apollonian world of the *principium individuationis* is a "partially intelligible reality" (BT 1), the Apollonian drive is the very same force that, through beautiful semblance (*Schein*), can bring this partially intelligible world to an apparent completion, to "the perfection of dream states" (ibid).[40] It is in such perfection that "all forms speak to us; nothing is indifferent or unnecessary" (ibid.). The perfected world created by the Apollonian is one wherein things make sense to us—"all forms speak to us"—and where the world appears *meaningful* because nothing in it is *indifferent* to us. It generates a sense of being at home in the world. Instead of appearing hostile or apathetic, the world is experienced as amenable to our highest aspirations and goals, thereby contributing to meeting the demands of the need for meaning. "The true artistic aim of Apollo," Nietzsche states in the concluding section of *The Birth*, "in whose name we gather together all those countless illusions of beautiful semblance [*Schein*] which, at every moment, make existence at all worth living at every moment and thereby urge us on to experience the next" (BT 25).

[40] "The relation of art to nature," Nietzsche states in an early notebook entry, "resembles the relation of a mathematical circle to a natural circle" (KGW 19[252]).

How, though, does the Apollonian drive generate illusions capable of meeting the demands of the need for meaning? The images generated by the Apollonian are used "to interpret life" (BT 1). "Image" is a term of art in *The Birth*, and an Apollonian image might best be understood as an assemblage of properties; these images condense a variety of relatively distinct properties into a coherent and crystallized assemblage. An Apollonian image need not be a *physical* image, like a painting—this is evident from the fact that Nietzsche classifies various literary art forms, like epic poetry, as Apollonian because they produce a series of steady images within us, through the imagination. An internal representation produced by a narrative can therefore count as an Apollonian image or series of images. In *The Birth* and throughout Nietzsche's early writings, "image" occurs alongside a cluster of seemingly similar terms, including "concepts" and "symbols"—both of which are, in fact, significantly different from images and which I'll return to later.

What we focus on in an Apollonian image is its "surface content" or its form (see KGW 29[17]). As Schacht observes, "The idealized images of Apollonian art are not to be thought of as having the function either of faithfully representing or even of symbolically expressing anything at all. They are rather to be thought of as beautiful illusions, to be contemplated simply for what they are in themselves, and to be enjoyed solely on account of their intrinsic beauty" (196). For instance, Clint Eastwood's Blondie from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* can serve as an image of ruggedness, courage, masculinity, wit, cunning, and self-reliance. *The Birth* abounds with images, such as the satyr who serves as an image of animality, mischievousness, hybridity, tragedy, and the Dionysian. Apollo is presented as a special kind of divine image (a *Götterbild*—see BT 1). He is Greek god who is associated with an amalgam of different qualities and characteristics, including order, prudence, dreams, prophesying, visual art, and the Olympian

pantheon in general. In these examples various properties are associated with one another, revolving around a central figure—Blondie, the satyr, or Apollo. The content of these images are beautiful, delightful, pleasing, enchanting, or charming, and it's these aspects we dwell on when contemplating them. Moreover, images *transfigure* their content. Whatever basis they have in the world of appearances is transformed and rendered beautiful. The life of a real cowboy during the Civil War altogether lacks the charm and luster of Blondie's fictional experience of it. In beautifying or transfiguring the ordinary world as we experience it, images have the capacity to produce "Apolline contemplation" (BT 6). This is a sort of *aesthetic* contemplation that remains fixed on outward appearances, on the connections among the properties condensed within and evinced by the image. Apollonian contemplation is to be contrasted with its scientific and philosophical counterparts, which are defined in terms of penetrating scrutiny or exacting analysis.

Images are capable of meeting the demands of the need for meaning through their connotative flexibility, through the fact that they operate according to a loose logic of *similarity*. Experiences of all varieties—mundane, exceptional, pleasant, painful, and terrible—can be connected to Apollonian images on the basis of similar content between the experience and the image. Through this connection, particular experiences can be ordered, rendered intelligible, and imbued with significance. The Greeks, who Nietzsche thinks had many Apollonian images in their mythology, were thus "compelled to connect everything they experienced, immediately and involuntarily, to their myths, indeed, they could only understand their experiences through this connection" (BT 23).[41]

[41] Note that these connections are made immediately [*sofort*] and involuntarily [*unwillkürlich*], implying that linking experiences to images or myths doesn't have to be conscious.

Part of what makes Apollonian images powerful tools to interpret existence is that their surface content doesn't need to be cheerful or optimistic. Nietzsche states, "Not that it is only the agreeable and friendly images which give [someone] this feeling of complete intelligibility; he also sees passing before him things which are grave, gloomy, sad, dark, sudden blocks, teasings of chance, anxious expectations […]—for he, too, lives in these scenes and shares their suffering" (BT 1).[42] This observation demonstrates the potential of Apollonian images to transfigure experiences of suffering. Suffering, in particular suffering that is experienced as meaningless, frustrates attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Meaningless suffering is suffering twice over: one suffers some first-order pain, sorrow, or grievance, in addition to a second-order suffering that stems from the knowledge that this first-order suffering has no meaning. Apollonian images don't *eliminate* suffering, but they allow people to interpret it, rendering it intelligible and significant. They have the capacity to mitigate or dispel the second-order suffering by transfiguring first-order suffering, by connecting it (for example) to images that portray the suffering of estimable figures. In being connected to the content of Apollonian images, people can take a different attitude towards their first-order suffering, since it is given a transfigured luster.

It's worth drawing out the *kind* of meaning Apollonian images produce and how they do so, especially in cases of suffering. The second-order suffering isn't mitigated by giving the first-order suffering a *purpose*. Giving suffering a purpose is a common way to alleviate and make sense of it. If I can see that the hardship I'm enduring has a purpose—at least a substantive purpose I endorse or come to endorse—then the suffering will seem to have some degree of meaning. For instance, if I go on a hunger strike to protest some policy, then the suffering I endure from hunger serves the larger purpose of conveying my opposition and so has a meaning

[42] Translation modified.

through the larger purpose it serves. Imbuing suffering with a purpose is a common way of making sense of suffering—one's suffering is part of God's plan, it's part of some cosmic design, or it serves as a lesson to teach us something, etc. This is *not* how Apollonian images operate. If I'm suffering some hardship in life, I connect this experience to an Apollonian image on the basis of some perceived similarity between my circumstances and those portrayed in an Apollonian image, but I'm not imbuing the suffering with meaning by giving it a purpose. Apollonian images imbue my suffering with a sense of *significance*, as well as a transfigured appearance, both of which allow me to change my attitude towards the suffering. Perceiving a similarity between my suffering and the plight of Odysseus gives my suffering a kind of significance since Odysseus is a hero, and his travails and successes epic: "Odysseus, too, suffered such things, and he was a hero," I might think; and being oriented towards my suffering in this manner gives me inspiration ("If I can overcome this obstacle that bears so much resemblance to Odysseus's, then I, too, have something of the heroic within me").[43]

Artistic cultures therefore provide illusions that adeptly meet the demands of the need for meaning. These illusions conceal the meaningless reality of the senselessly striving will, keeping Dionysian truth at bay. And more specifically, Apollonian images generate a sense of meaningfulness in a variety of ways. We project these images, which come to us through culture, onto the world, giving it an intelligible appearance, thereby allowing us to experience the world

[43] Nietzsche develops this idea in *The Gay Science* (1882): "Only artists, and especially those of the theater, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each himself is, himself experiences, himself wants; only they have taught us to value the hero that is hidden in each of these everyday characters and taught the art of regarding oneself as a hero, from a distance and as it were simplified and transfigured" (GS 78). Though this passage occurs in a work published ten years after *The Birth*—after Nietzsche's thinking underwent important shifts—it's a concise articulation of how Apollonian images operate. They help us to make sense of existence, of what each of us "is," "experiences," and "wants," and they do so by transfiguring the content, simplifying it and making it beautiful.

as a place that is amenable to our striving, aspirations, and existence.[44] Apollonian images also give the sense that one's existence and travails are significant. If I can link my efforts to those portrayed in images, I can experience my efforts as significant. Lastly, these images can serve as a source of inspiration. In linking my experience to the content of Apollonian images, I can be spurred on to overcome a hardship. The power of Apollonian images, however, works to only further entrench this chapter's central puzzle: Given their power, what role could the Dionysian possibly play in meeting the demands of the need for meaning?

Doric Culture and the Pathology of the Apollonian

In Nietzsche's history of Greek cultural types, the thriving culture of Homeric Greece ended with the Doric Age, which is described as "a permanent military encampment of the Apolline" (BT 4). The Doric Age is instructive because it shows what can go wrong with the Apollonian drive and provides a glimpse into why Nietzsche thinks we can't exclusively rely on it to satisfy the need for meaning. In the Doric Age, the Apollonian drive "was expressed in more rigid and menacing forms than ever" (ibid.). The Apollonian, as the drive for order, became overbearing, squelching images' application conditions. Crucial to note here is that Doric culture's Apollonian images (and *any* culture's Apollonian images) are closely tied up with Greek religion and mythology—a culture's mythology is a reservoir of Apollonian images. But the Doric Age becomes characterized by "the severe […] gaze of orthodox dogmatism" (BT 10). Doric Greeks "were already well down the road towards transforming their […] mythical presuppositions [… into] systematized […] historical events" (ibid.). This dogmatization of

[44] It's important that these images are upheld by culture, coming to us from esteemed works of art, religion, and a culture's mythology. This cultural dimension explains why, even if as an individual I use images to make sense of *my* existence, meeting the demands of the need for meaning is not a purely individualistic affair—the collective realm of culture sustains the images that the members of a culture have at their disposal.

Greek myths—and with it, Apollonian images—is something that Socratism brings to completion, but it was already underway in the Doric Age's rigid worldview, before the rise of Socratic drive. Doric Greece *pathologizes* the capacity for Apollonian images to give existence a transfiguring sheen by rigidifying the application conditions of these images.

The problem of this process of ossification resides not in any change in the *content* of an Apollonian image but in the fact that in being dogmatized and rigidified, the conditions of its application become constricted. Images lose their connotative flexibility and generality. Imagine, for instance, a Greek officer whose troops are suffering from low morale; he might see his situation as similar to that of Odysseus and his fearful crew and use this image to make sense of his situation and give his troops an inspiring speech much like Odysseus did for his crew. However, if this Apollonian image supplied by *The Odyssey* becomes dogmatized, the commander may not even link his state of affairs with Odysseus's—after all, Odysseus was the captain of *ship* giving a speech to his *crew at sea*, not to mention the fact that Odysseus is a Greek hero, whereas the commander isn't on a ship at sea, his subordinates aren't his *crew*, and the commander isn't of the heroic caliber of Odysseus. The differences between the mythological image and the commander's circumstances might seem to overshadow their similarities, so the connection might not even occur to him; and if it does, he may simply be unmotivated by it since the differences are what appear as salient to him. Under the conditions of Doric culture, drawing parallels between one's experiences and Apollonian images becomes increasingly difficult because the images become fixed to more specific situations; the content of the image becomes more strictly denotative, meaning that it comes to refer to a specific state of affairs. The images thus come to operate more strictly according to their *particular* content.

Nietzsche also mentions in BT 10 that Apollonian images in the Doric age were on their way to being transformed into historical happenings (again a process that is completed and intensified with Socratism). Such historicization is as deleterious as dogmatization. In being historicized, Apollonian images not only lose flexibility, they also lose their distinctively Apollonian sheen of transfiguring beauty. They're naturalized and transformed into mere empirical events, "which fully understood, would only demonstrate that the dice-game of chance and the future could never again produce anything exactly similar to what it produced in the past" (UM II 2).[45] In being seen as mere historical happenings, the content of Apollonian images is experienced as contingent, the result of historical happenstance, making it difficult to draw correlations between the content of these images and one's life-circumstances. In Doric culture, the Apollonian drive for order, limitation, and boundary setting becomes tyrannical, and its meaning-imbuing potential is rendered pathological and self-undermining. Images become lifeless and ossified and not only fail to contribute to meeting the demands of the need for meaning but are also able to work actively *against* such attempts. Instead of spurring us on and imbuing our travails with significance, images only accentuate the feeling that one is *not* like the heroes of mythology, that one's life-circumstances have little or no connection to anything that possesses the appealing, aestheticized luster of the epic events of mythology. Having become

[45] This quotation is from "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), the second essay in Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (also from his early period). Nietzsche is speaking here of "monumental history," a mode of historical analysis where the focus is on the greatness of a person or event. According to this approach, events or persons are imbued with an almost mythic quality. Monumental history operates in manner very similar to Apollonian images and myth: "[M]onumental history will have no use for […] absolute veracity: it will always have to deal in approximations and generalities, in making what is dissimilar look similar. […] Monumental history deceives by analogies." (UM II 2). Like Apollonian images, monumental history operates according to a logic of similarity and analogy, and it becomes defunct if its flexibility is constrained. Figures or events that have been monumentalized can show us that such mythic greatness is possible, acting in a way very similar to Apollonian images: monumentalized figures can serve as a source of inspiration, they can be used to make what is present intelligible by being linked to historically understood events, and they can render present circumstances significant by being linked with something monumental.

imperious, the Apollonian keeps people mired in the minutiae of their life-circumstance, resulting in feelings of disjointedness and disorientation.

We therefore have good reason to see why, if *The Birth* is so concerned with the problem of meaningfulness in modern German culture, Nietzsche wouldn't look solely to the Apollonian drive as a panacea. What keeps Apollonian images in a condition of fecund fluidity is the Dionysian. Nietzsche states, "But lest this Apolline tendency should cause form to freeze into Egyptian stiffness and coldness, […] the flood-tide of the Dionysiac would destroy periodically all the small circles in which the one-sidedly Apolline will attempted to confine Hellenic life" (BT 9). The confinement of Hellenic life to "small circles" at the hands of the one-sidedly Apollonian is the pathological condition that characterized Doric Greece, and the solution to avoiding this predicament lies in the Dionysian.

The Dionysian Drive in Artistic Culture

Artistic cultures remain healthy only if they permit the Dionysian adequate expression. In a healthy artistic culture, the Apollonian is able to press the Dionysian into its service without squelching it. Since even healthy artistic cultures must make room for the Dionysian, we ought to have an account of how the Dionysian operates in these healthy cultural forms so that we can understand how tragic cultures differ from *healthy* artistic cultures.

If in Doric culture, the Apollonian images of Greek mythology were in danger of losing their fluidity, then "under the overwhelming influence of tragic poetry, the Homeric myths are re-born to new life" (BT 10). Tragic poetry is Dionysian;[46] and the reinvigoration of Homeric myths is what marks the transition from the artistic culture of Homeric Greece to the tragic

[46] This particular passage (BT 10) is, in fact, the only one in *The Birth* where Nietzsche mentions "tragic poetry" as such. I take it that what he means by tragic poetry is broad category of musically inspired poetry that contains lyric poetry, the dithyramb, and perhaps other poetic forms not discussed in *The Birth*.

culture of Attic Greece. In understanding the Dionysian effects of this reinvigoration, we can retrospectively see how the Dionysian was operating in the healthy, pre-Doric artistic culture of the Homeric era.

How does the Dionysian reinvigorate Apollonian images and the mythology from which they derive? Part of the answer concerns the static quality of Apollonian images, as opposed to the Dionysian as something inherently *dynamic*. As Schacht claims, the Apollonian issues "in the creation of *enduring*, idealized images—'beautiful illusions' as [Nietzsche] terms them" (195; my emphasis). Dionysian art, on the other hand, deals with "the experience of the inexhaustible, *dynamic* 'primal unity'" (196; my emphasis). As a dynamic force, the Dionysian is able to imbue the enduring images of the Apollonian with new energy. What it means for Apollonian images to infused with new energy is that they remain hermeneutically open, capable of being reinterpreted and recontextualized so as to keep their application conditions sufficiently flexible.[47] Nietzsche's account of music most clearly demonstrates the capacity of the Dionysian to revitalize images.

Music is for Nietzsche a unique art form. All Apollonian art represents or portrays things in and from the World as Representation. This isn't so with music, which has the Will as its object. Music "is not, as all [other arts] are, a copy of appearances, but a direct copy of the Will itself, so that it represents *the metaphysical in relation to all that is physical in the world*, the thing-in-itself in relation to all appearances" (BT 16). In copying the Will, music is therefore at the same remove to the Will as the everyday world of appearances is, since the world of appearances is itself a copy of the Will. Music therefore doesn't just disclose the nature of the

[47] What I mean by images being infused with energy in a way that keeps them hermeneutically open can be demonstrated by several examples. Think of the how Shakespeare's plays are constantly being recontextualized and reinterpreted. Ralph Fiennes' 2011 film *Coriolanus* is a rendition of Shakespeare's play, but one that highlights issues pertinent to a 21st century audience—it's set in the Balkans (not in Rome), and is arguably intended (despite its placement in the Balkans) to reflect something about the US involvement in the Middle East, in particular, the effects of war on the soldiers fighting it. A perhaps more familiar example of hermeneutic fecundity is supplied by superheroes like Batman and Spiderman. Initially comics, there are now not only many movies, but movies that restart their "timeline," retelling their stories in different ways.

Will,[48] it discloses the *relation* that our everyday world of appearances has to the Will. In copying the Will, music discloses its striving nature—music, "although invisible, is so full of movement and life" (BT 16), much as the Will is full of the movement of striving. Music discloses the relation the World as Will and the World as Representation by generating a *torrent* of images; much as the Will is characterized as being "eternally creative beneath the surface of incessantly changing appearances," (ibid.), so does music incessantly generate a plethora of images that rapidly change and displace one another. Music "emanates sparks of imagery which in their variety, their sudden changes, their mad, head-over-heels, forward rush, reveal an energy utterly alien to the placid flow of epic semblance [*epischen Scheine*]" (BT 6).

The imagery emanated by music is radically different from the images of Apollonian art. The Apollonian produces *stable* images, which is why epic poetry, as an Apollonian art form, is characterized as a placid flow. It provides series of images that proceeds calmly such that we can link each image with the next, presenting us with a coherent narrative that unfolds over time. Music, on the other hand, produces a torrent of images that suddenly change and are often contradictory: "a combination of the various image-worlds generated by a piece of music produces a fantastically variegated, indeed contradictory result" (BT 6). The raw images or image-worlds produced by music thus can't, by themselves, be used to meet the demands of the need for meaning, since, in their contradictory and incoherent nature, they fail to create the Apollonian sense of "complete intelligibility." Moreover, the flood of images produced by music proceeds so rapidly that any particular image is unstable, soon to be displaced by another.

The Dionysian thus possesses an enormous force and energy—in music, "Dionysus […] speaks in the form of energies" (BT 8). Music, especially purely instrumental music (music

[48] Music, of course, doesn't disclose the Will in an unmediated form. Nietzsche insists that music "by its essence, cannot possibly *be* Will, […] but it *appears* [erscheint] as Will" (BT 6).

unaccompanied by words) is inexhaustible by the Apollonian image-making powers, but for this very reason, the Apollonian can "harvest" the energy of the Dionysian. "[I]mage and concept," Nietzsche states, "acquire a heightened significance" with music. He continues by making an even stronger claim that music causes the "image to emerge with the *highest degree of significance*" (BT 16). The Dionysian, in imbuing images with greater significance, preserves and resuscitates their meaning-imbuing potential. The more significance an image has, the better it is able to be used as a means to meet the demands of the need for meaning—it has more salience, making its application conditions easier to realize than when such images are "dogmatized" and fixed to particular circumstances. The Dionysian imbues images with higher significance through its tendency to loosen boundaries, to generalize and universalize. Nietzsche discusses "the universal validity" (BT 21) of Dionysian music in opposition to the *particularity* of the Apollonian. The Dionysian ensures that Apollonian images retain a sense of generality, pushing against the Apollonian tendency to confine Hellenic life to small circles. The generality and universality of the Dionysian safeguards Apollonian images with a kind of fluidity so that their application conditions aren't too stringent.

The Dionysian also plays a vital role in generating the myths from which the Apollonian drive takes its images. This might seem surprising, given that the shift between the Iron Age and the Homeric Age happens in step with the *Apollonian* creation of the Olympian pantheon—suggesting that Homeric mythology in general is Apollonian. However, mythology is not a purely Apollonian creation. Nietzsche is insistent that the Dionysian, and music in particular, is *the* "myth-creating energy" (BT 17). Though the Olympian pantheon and its associated mythology might be characterized as Apollonian, the Dionysian nature of the Iron Age supplied the energy to fuel its creation. "*Myth*" Nietzsche states, is "the contracted image of the world, […]

an abbreviation of appearances." Without myths, Nietzsche concludes that "all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement. […] The images of myth must be unnoticed but omnipresent, daemonic guardians […] by whose signs the grown man interprets his life and his struggle" (BT 23). This description implies that the generation of myth requires both the Apollonian and the Dionysian: the Dionysian's effusion of images is harvested and stabilized by the Apollonian. These images are thereby rendered serviceable as a special kind of coherent narrative: the myth.

Understanding myths as a contracted image of the world allows us to fully grasp the import of the Dionysian as a "myth-creating energy" (BT 17). Nietzsche elaborates:

> Myth needs to be felt keenly as a unique example of something universal and true which gazes out into infinity. In true Dionysiac music we find such a general mirror of the world-Will; a vivid event refracted in this mirror expands immediately, we feel, into a copy of an eternal truth. […] Dionysiac music enriches and expands the individual appearance, making it into an image of the world [*Weltbilde*]. (BT 17)[49]

There's a lot to be gathered from this passage. The Dionysian's universalizing tendency is at play here insofar as an appearance, or "vivid event" is imbued with Dionysian energy through music. This event is "refracted" in music (the "mirror of the Will"), and through this process "expands." In expanding a particular appearance with this Dionysian energy, it is turned into an image of the world. In disclosing the relation of the Will to the world of appearances, the Dionysian holds up the expanded, universalized appearance to the whole world of appearances and in this manner generates the special, "contracted image of the world." It is contracted or abbreviated because it is a single appearance or vivid event, but is also an *image of the world* through its Dionysian expansion and universalization.[50]

Myths, as contracted images are necessary for the healthy functioning of artistic cultures. They serve as the storehouses of robust Apollonian images that can be accessed by an entire

[49] Translation modified.
[50] The Apollonian is presumably minimally involved in this process, in so far as it can hold a particular appearance or event fixed so that it can be expanded to form this contracted image.

culture. While an individual may draw on certain images to make his existence and his travails appear meaningful, these images are sustained by and accessible to an entire culture. Moreover, in calling myths "contracted images of the world," Nietzsche means that they are entire worldviews, or world-pictures. They are coherent interpretations of human existence that render it intelligible and significant, since they're lenses through which existence as a whole is interpreted.

We now have a full account of healthy artistic cultures. The question now is why Nietzsche thinks tragic cultures are superior, especially when the Apollonian drive can predominate without squelching the Dionysian.

Part III: Meaningfulness in Tragic Cultures

Tragic Culture and Symbolic Interpretation

One of the decisive differences between artistic and tragic cultures concerns the role of symbols. As Schacht notes, the term symbol is closely associated with the Dionysian—"it is […] symbolic forms in which Dionysian art consists" (196). If the mode of interpretation paradigmatic of artistic cultures is imagistic, then the corresponding mode for tragic cultures is *symbolic*.[51] The Dionysian drive, through its expression as music, not only generates a torrent of images, but "also knows how to find symbolic expression [*symbolischen Ausdruck*] for its true, Dionysiac wisdom" (BT 16). Symbols, like images, present us with a kind of representation, but unlike images, the *surface content* is not what is important. With symbols, we try to look behind

[51] Imagistic interpretation is *not* absent in tragic cultures, however. Images are perhaps used even more since the Dionysian drive gives them a "heightened significance." Symbols are also not lacking in other cultural types, it's just that the *definitive* mode of interpretation in artistic cultures is imagistic, and the definitive mode of interpretation in tragic cultures is symbolic.

the surface content to see *what* is being represented or referred to. They present us with a surface content that *embodies* something deeper, that stands in for something else.

What Dionysian symbols represent is the Will. "Music," Nietzsche states, "refers symbolically to the original contradiction and original pain at the heart of the primordial unity, and thus symbolizes a sphere which lies above and beyond all appearance" (BT 6). Dionysian symbols thus don't resemble ordinary symbols like letters, words, and signs. The combination of words, "Obama's dog" can be seen as a symbol (or collection of symbols) that clearly refers to a particular entity; similarly, a company's logo, like Nike's "swoosh" is a symbol representing the company. Dionysian symbols can't represent the Will in such a manner. I again follow Schacht's lead, who carefully observes that Dionysian art doesn't supply us with "unvarnished representations of the world, as it is in itself" (193). The Will simply cannot be disclosed in an unmediated manner, and can only reveal itself in *enigmatic* symbols. Through the Dionysian drive, the Will finds expression through some symbolic medium, like music or dance (see BT 2), but the Will is never purely or completely represented. The symbols generated by the Dionysian contain an essentially *unfathomable* component. Such symbols gesture towards the Will, signifying it only in a highly obscured manner, rather than transparently referring to it. The content of Dionysian symbols is inherently inscrutable, and the best they can do is to provide us with a glimpse of Dionysian truth.[52]

In disclosing the Will only through enigmatic symbols, the Dionysian can produce a distinctive kind of knowledge called "Dionysian wisdom." Geuss describes Dionysian wisdom as "a kind of non-theoretical, non-discursive knowledge, […] a knowing embodied perhaps tacitly

[52] This is why Nietzsche states in an unpublished notebook entry from 1871 that the "thoughts and reflections of the [tragic] hero are not an Apollonian *insight* into his real nature, but an illusionary stammer [*illusionäres Stammeln]*" (KGW 9[28]). The tragic hero, and his thoughts and motivations, embody Dionysian wisdom but aren't lucidly portrayed with Apllonian clarity. We come to apprehend Dionysian wisdom through the *stammering* of the hero because the content is unclear, incomplete, and partially unintelligible.

in one's attitudes or behavior even if one never forumulate[s] it clearly" (xvii-xviii). Symbols, as Dionysian disclosures of the Will, give us *glimpses* into the nature of the Will, and provide us with a kind of mystical *insight*, but this insight isn't something that can be linguistically or conceptually conveyed. It can only be symbolically represented, and it can only be apprehended (as much as it permits apprehension) through direct exposure to these symbolic representations.

The symbolic nature of Dionysian representation is directly related to the central problem under consideration in this chapter. Dionysian symbols, unlike Apollonian images, don't lend themselves to generating the feeling of intelligibility, nor do they seem to possess and sort of inspiring potential of images. They always leave an incomprehensible remainder and are at best only partially intelligible, making it difficult to see how the Dionysian could play a role in meeting the demands of the need for meaning.[53]

In describing the effect of Attic tragedy on the spectator, Nietzsche articulates an important aspect of unintelligibility in Dionysian art. He claims that the spectator "sees the transfigured world of the stage, yet he negates it. He sees before him the tragic hero with all the clarity and beauty of the epic and yet takes delight in his destruction. He comprehends events on the stage to their innermost core, and yet he gladly flees into the incomprehensible" (BT 22). The spectator opts for the unintelligibility of the Dionysian symbol over the intelligibility of Apollonian images. In order to see how this fleeing into incomprehensibility relates to meeting

[53] We might see Dionysian symbols as operating in such a way that *what* they refer to is a lack, a kind of utter meaninglessness. As an analogy, think of a woman who undergoes a traumatic experience like the unexpected death of her brother. In the aftermath of the death, she will see "symbols" all around her that represent loss, lack, and meaninglessness: When she hears a song that her brother loved, or walks by his favorite café, or smells his favorite food, memories of brother are conjured up, but *also* the trauma of losing him. The song, the café, and the food are symbols for her, but in her grieving they don't simply refer to her brother; they also refer to his *absence* . These symbols, in her traumatized state, refer to something that she experiences as unintelligible and meaningless. Dionysian symbols operate in a similar manner: in referring to the meaninglessness of the Will and its striving, they refer to something intangible and inscrutable, to something we can't make sense of.

the demands of the need for meaning, we have to turn to the details of Nietzsche's account of Attic tragedy and the metaphysical solace it generates through symbolically representing the Will.

Attic Tragedy and Metaphysical Solace

What makes Attic tragedy so estimable for Nietzsche is that through it, tragic culture of Attic Greece finds a way to avoid the fate that befell other tragic cultures, namely, world-weariness and resignation. Attic tragedy serves instead as a stimulus, driving people to a special kind of affirmation. "We must remember," Nietzsche states, "the enormous power of *tragedy* to stimulate, purify, and to discharge the entire life of a people" (BT 21). How tragedy operates in this manner is articulated most clearly in the following entry from Nietzsche's notebooks dating from the end of 1870 to April of 1871:

> What we call 'tragic' is precisely the Apollonian clarification of the Dionysian: if the tangle of emotions created simultaneously by the Dionysian intoxication is broken down into a series of images, that series of images expresses the 'tragic,' as is to be explained immediately. The most common form of *tragic* destiny is the victorious defeat or the victory achieved in defeat. Each time the individual is defeated: and yet we perceive his destruction as a victory. For the tragic hero it is necessary to be destroyed by that which is intended to make him victorious. In this disturbing contrast we surmise something of the highest esteem for individuation. (KGW 7[128])

I take this passage to be of such import because it shows us how Attic culture is able to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Nietzsche states here that tragedies give us the highest esteem for individuation as a result of the disturbing contrast it presents us with. They allow us to celebrate the fact of individuation not *in spite of* the suffering we endure as a result of our individuated status but *because* of it. As Silk and Stern state, "By this [tragic] fate [the tragic hero] illuminates the meaning of suffering as well as the meaning of individuality" (272). How, more specifically though, does tragedy illuminate the meaning of individuality and our suffering? In tragedy the Dionysian stimulates "the Apolline impulses to their highest pitch" and "is […] able to force the exuberance of Apolline energy into its service" (BT 22). The Dionysian has the

upper hand here because it uses the Apollonian to *clarify* its own truth. This truth is broken down into a series of images, which become the action of the drama (the events unfolding on the stage). However, tragedies also produce a special type of image, the "allegorical dream-image [*gleichnissartigen Traumbilde*]" (BT 2, 5).[54] What makes this image unique is that it expresses Dionysian wisdom in imagistic form; it works both symbolically and imagistically. Through the allegorical dream image, tragedy produces within us a "wondrous self-division" (BT 22) wherein we oscillate between seeing the events on stage as beautiful, Apollonian transfigurations, but also as Dionysian *symbols* or *allegories* expressing something deeper but impenetrable. The "disturbing contrast" Nietzsche discusses in the notebook entry quoted above—the contrast between seeing the estimable tragic hero, illuminated by the Apollonian, undergo a self-destruction that reveals something about the Dionysian nature of things—aids in generating such self-division. According to Nietzsche, this self-division is why we see the Apollonian clarity of the tragic hero but negate it and flee into the incomprehensible. It is with his account of tragedy, Nietzsche claims, that we can "understand the meaning of our desire to look, and yet to go beyond looking when we are watching a tragedy" (BT 24); the desire to look is the effect of the Apollonian, the desire to go beyond looking the effect of the Dionysian.

What makes the whole dramatic performance properly *tragic* is explained by the content of the images we see before us on the stage, which symbolically express fragments of Dionysian wisdom: We watch the annihilation of the tragic hero. Crucially, this does not bring about the resignation that other tragic cultures succumbed to but leads us instead to hold individuation itself in the highest esteem. We praise individuation because the destruction of the tragic hero,

[54] Translation modified. Spier's translation incorrectly reads: "*symbolic (gleichnishaft) dream-image*" (BT 2). The word "gleichnishaft," however, is, in the original German, "*gleichnissartig*." "Symbolic" is not an infelicitous translation of "*gleichnissartig*," but I've decided to follow Douglas Smith's translation of the word as "allegorical" because Nietzsche usually uses "*symbolisch*" for "symbolic." Other translations render "*gleichnissartig*" as "metaphorical," "symbolical," and "similitude."

his failure and going under, is victorious and beautiful. Tragedies operate as stimulants that inspire us to continue our striving, despite the fact that we know the truth about things—that our aspirations are almost certainly bound to be thwarted and that ultimately our death and destruction is ensured. Tragedy has this effect because we see the laudable tragic hero not just *fail*, but fail for particular reasons: his own striving for greatness destroys him. His failure is brought about by the very aspirations that propel him and by the very qualities that make him estimable.[55]

The Apollonian drive transfigures the hero's failure such that we see it as something *beautiful*. We've already seen that the Apollonian has the capacity to transfigure our suffering; what makes tragedy such a powerful stimulant is that it doesn't just transfigure suffering, it transfigures failure itself—and not just *any* failure, but the *ineluctable failure* that is built into the metaphysical nature of reality itself, failure that's rooted in the nature of the Will. In seeing as beautiful the failure that is brought about by our status as individuated, striving, and aspiring beings, we aren't driven to resignation, to giving up our aspirations, nor to seeing our status as individuated beings as regrettable. We are instead driven to affirm the fact of individuation, and with it, our striving and aspiring.

This special attitude of affirmation that tragedy generates is what Nietzsche characterizes as the metaphysical solace that "we derive from every true tragedy" (BT 7). It's a consolation with the fact that we are the kind of individuated beings we are and that undergirding our individuation is the terrible truth of the Will; it is a unique kind of consolation with the fact that "the struggle, the agony, the destruction" generated by the Will is "necessary" (BT 17). Yet the characterization of metaphysical solace that Nietzsche provides in *The Birth* seems different

[55] Nietzsche states, "Prometheus had to be torn apart by vultures on account of his Titanic love for mankind; Oedipus had to be plunged into a confusing maelstrom of atrocities because his unmeasured wisdom solved the riddle of the Sphinx" (BT 4).

from the interpretation I've proposed, since *The Birth* couches this solace in terms of the *illusionary* identification with the Will. Metaphysical solace is described as "the solace that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable" (BT 7). Elsewhere, speaking of Attic tragedy, Nietzsche states:

> "[T]he Dionysian chorus […] discharges itself over and over again in an Apolline world of images. […] This primal ground of tragedy radiates, in a succession of discharges, that vision of drama which is entirely a dream-appearance, and thus epic in nature; on the other hand, as the objectification of a Dionysiac state, the vision represents not an Apolline redemption in semblance, but rather the breaking-asunder of the individual and its becoming one with the primal being itself." (BT 8)[56]

The illusion created by Attic tragedy and promulgated, through the symbols it generates, by tragic cultures in general is the *feeling* of having overcome individuation, being at one with and identical to the Will.[57] If metaphysical solace involves the feeling of having overcome individuation, then it seems to run counter to my characterization of metaphysical solace as an attitude or feeling of esteem towards the world of individuation. Nietzsche, after all, states that metaphysical solace involves the "the breaking-asunder of the individual."

However, these two seemingly different views of metaphysical solace amount to the same thing. Here we can turn to *The Birth*'s claim that "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*" (BT 5). Our existence as individuated beings, and the world which we inhabit, is an artistic creation of the Will. Nietzsche attempts to justify the world and our existence (replete as it is with disappointment, suffering, and failure) in aesthetic terms. "The non-individuated reality behind all appearances," Geuss states, "[…] is itself a kind of artist.

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[56] Translation modified.

[57] I am indebted to Schacht's and Geuss's insight that despite Nietzsche's association of the Dionysian with the true nature of things, Dionysian art creates its own kind of illusion. This illusion consists of identification with the Will—the feeling that we actually *are* one with the Will. As Schacht states, "to the extent that such [Dionysian] experience leads one to identify oneself so completely with this reality [of the primal being] that one feels oneself to enjoy even those of its features that actually characterize it only as a whole, with which one is not truly identical, this transformation may also be said to have the significance of the fostering of another, different illusion" (199-200). The Dionysian illusion resides in our supposed transformation, since this transformation "leaves our actual status in the world unchanged and the basic conditions of our human existence unaltered" (200). Geuss also makes this point: "Successful (great) tragedy may allow us that momentary identification [with the Will] and vision, but that identification is nonetheless in one important sense an illusion" (xxv).

[…] The world and life may come to seem 'justified' for us to the extent to which we, through various aesthetic experiences, can come close to identifying ourselves in the primordial child [the Will] and seeing the beauty of the play" (xv). The aesthetic justification Nietzsche calls for, as Geuss notes, results from identifying with the Will. When this identification is brought about, we take its cosmic perspective, seeing the World as Representation *as* an artistic creation of the Will; and though the identification with the Will is illusory, we come to see the World as Representation as *our own* creation. But what matters here is that we (illusively) "see" the World as Representation from the perspective of the Will, implying that we see the World as Representation *as a work of art* that gives us (the Will) some deliverance from suffering. The World as Representation is thereby justified as an aesthetic phenomenon.

What matters here is that justifying the World as Representation, even if this justification is carried out through an illusory identification with the Will, *just is* to justify the fact of individuation and the suffering that comes with it. This is why Nietzsche says in the notebook entry quoted above that tragedy leads us to "surmise something of the highest esteem for individuation." Metaphysical solace thus involves two aspects: identifying with the Will and an aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of the Will's artistic creations, namely, us. This amounts to holding the world of individuation in the highest esteem and explains why Nietzsche states that metaphysical solace is consolation with the *necessity* of "the struggle, the agony, the destruction."

Meaningfulness in Artistic and Tragic Cultures

What makes the illusions of tragic cultures, and the apparent justification they offer, better than the Apollonian illusions of artistic cultures? Despite his high regard for Homeric culture, why does Nietzsche privilege Attic tragic culture? There are two reasons.

First, the particular art form of tragedy is well equipped to transfigure not *just* our suffering and failure; it transfigures *ineluctable* failure itself into something beautiful. The Apollonian images of artistic cultures are powerful tools capable of transfiguring suffering and failure, but tragedy, in pressing the Apollonian into the service of the Dionysian, can go one step further. It transfigures not just *particular* instances of failure and suffering but transfigures the metaphysical *facts* of failure and suffering. Compared to artistic cultures, this makes a tragic culture like Attic Greece's better able to confront the objectionable aspects of existence, and so better able to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Through images, artistic culture can transfigure the objectionable aspects of existence that problematize our attempts to see the world as meaningful; but these images are applied in a piecemeal fashion, on a case-by-case basis. In a particular *instance* of my own suffering or failure, I can make use of Apollonian images to transfigure the experience. Tragic cultures offer a wholesale justification of existence. Tragic cultures are thus particularly well equipped to meet the demands of the need for meaning, allowing us to *affirm* the fact of our individuation.

The second reason Nietzsche seems to think that tragic cultures offer more powerful illusions than artistic cultures goes back to the metaphysical backdrop of *The Birth*. As we saw, the Apollonian corresponds to a tendency of the Will to transfigure itself, and the Dionysian corresponds to the tendency of the Will to senselessly strive (which gives rise to the suffering that needs to be transfigured). If the metaphysical solace that results from tragedy is an

affirmative attitude that holds the world of individuation in the highest esteem, then tragedy works to justify *the Apollonian tendency itself*. In justifying the World as Representation and in aesthetically esteeming it, the Apollonian tendency to transfigure is itself justified. The Apollonian drive therefore finds a kind of "independent justification" since it's justified in terms of the Dionysian.

However, the images of artistic cultures are potent means for meeting the demands of the need for meaning: they have the capacity to generate a sense of intelligibility, that one's existence is significant, and they have the ability to motivate and inspire. With respect to these aspects of meaningfulness, how do tragic cultures fare? Worth noting here is that tragic cultures use images too, so the sense of meaning they confer is present in tragic cultures. Nevertheless, tragic cultures put a premium on *unintelligibility* in a way that artistic cultures don't. The members of artistic cultures interpret the world and existence through images, engendering the "feeling of complete intelligibility [*Allverständigkeit*]." Tragic cultures, on the other hand, do more to accommodate Dionysian truth and wisdom. In interpreting the world through symbols, the tragic worldview permits and even invites a sense of inscrutability. In carefully integrating Dionysian wisdom, tragic cultures keep alive a sense of mystery, wonder, and the mystical.[58] This isn't to say that artistic cultures are unconcerned with cultivating a sense of wonder, but tragic cultures put a premium on it.

With respect to instilling a sense of significance, tragic cultures operate differently. After claiming that it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are justified, he adds, "although, of course, our awareness of our significance […] hardly differs from the awareness which painted soldiers have of the battle depicted on the same canvas" (BT 5). Tragic cultures, it seems, are either incapable of or indifferent to instilling a sense of significance.

[58] "[*M*]*yth*," Nietzsche states, "cannot dispense with the miracle [*das Wunder*]" (BT 23).

However, the notebook entry quoted above states that in watching the "disturbing contrast" of the tragic hero's destruction "by that which is intended to make him victorious […] we surmise [*ahnen wir*] something of the highest esteem for individuation." Tragedies, and the illusionary perspective of the Will they provide, don't give us *awareness* [Bewusstsein] of our significance as individuated beings, but they do allow us to *surmise* something about our significance as individuated beings.[59] A full-fledged awareness of our significance is neither possible nor desirable—this is the kind of conceptual knowledge Nietzsche associates with Socratism (more on which below). Nietzsche makes this point emphatically in a notebook entry from 1872: "It is not possible to *prove* [erweisen] either the metaphysical or the ethical or the aesthetic significance of existence" (KGW 19[123]). Our significance can't be *proven*, but it can be felt. Dionysian wisdom, recall, is non-discursive and non-conceptual. We can't *know* our existence is significant, but we can *surmise* it. The German "ahnen etwas" (to surmise, to guess something) is appropriate because it has the kind of mystical connotation we'd associate with the Dionysian—unlike the English "surmise," "ahnen" can also mean "to divine," "to presage," "to foreshadow," "to sense," or "to have a premonition of."

Our existence gains a new significance in tragic cultures . Because such cultures court Dionysian wisdom, there's a greater awareness of the truth that everything really *is* meaningless. Paradoxically, our striving can gain meaning and significance because it occurs against the backdrop of the meaninglessness of the Will. Our striving thus isn't just aimed at overcoming particular obstacles; it's a defiant striving against meaninglessness itself, against the metaphysical fact of the Will. As tragedies demonstrate, when we strive to realize our aspirations in the face of meaninglessness and ineluctable destruction and failure, our striving gains a kind

[59] This is not true of all tragic cultures, since the Dionysian, when unfettered, can lead to resignation, which is the effect of feeling that nothing matters.

of tragic beauty.[60] Our striving might be Sisyphean—we may repeatedly fail only to start all over again—but it is not for that reason less significant.[61]

Equipped with an understanding for why Nietzsche thinks so highly of tragic cultures, as well as two broad conceptions of meaning and interpretation, one artistic, the other tragic, we can now turn to what Nietzsche thinks is so pernicious about Socratic culture.

Part IV: Meaningfulness in Socratic Cultures

Socratic Concepts

If artistic cultures are defined by the use of Apollonian images to render existence intelligible and significant, and tragic cultures are defined by the use of Dionysian symbols to generate the feeling of metaphysical solace, then Socratic cultures are defined by the use of *concepts*. Nietzsche's objection to Socratism is focused on its misuse of conceptual thinking. He frequently characterizes concepts as *rigid*—but since images can also become ridified, as Doric culture demonstrates, this doesn't help to differentiate the two terms. Part of the difference has to do with what concepts are used for: they classify things, operate by strict denotation, and are entirely abstract. A concept may have an associated image, but what matters here is the object that's being *referred* to. With concepts we never dwell on the content that's being outwardly presented to us, but instead latch on to what the concept is pointing to. In this sense, they operate somewhat like symbols in that they refer to things; the difference is that concepts have a direct referential capacity. Unlike Dionysian symbols, concepts are not enigmatic, nor do they give us

[60] As an analogy, consider the Battle of Thermopylae, in which a small contingent of Greek soldiers went into battle knowing that their enemies vastly outnumbered them. What makes the story of this battle legendary and inspiring is that the Greeks heroically fought *knowing* that their defeat was imminent and guaranteed. By the same token, there's an esteem for our existence and striving when we *continue* to strive with the Dionysian insight that, in the grand scheme of things, this striving will amount to nothing.

[61] James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is arguably an example of the idea of "Sisyphean striving." A trope throughout the novel is Stephen Dedalus's ascending and falling. Stephen, after having fallen, never gives up, but continues, like Icarus, to "fly too high," but unlike Icarus, knows that he will inevitably fall once again.

only brief, non-discursive, non-theoretical insight into their content; conceptual content isn't hard to access, and rather than generating insight into the nature of the Will, concepts generate an understanding of the empirical world.

The "theoretical man"—the man who embodies the Socratic drive—interprets existence with concepts, thinking we can understand and interpret the entire world through conceptually categorizing and classifying things. For him, conceptual knowledge is exhaustive—it's the only kind of knowledge, and we could in principle come to a full understanding of the world through conceptual categorization. But the world that's conceptualized and categorized is the world of the appearances. Concepts are generated by abstracting from objects we encounter in the empirical world, are applicable only to the empirical world, and are thereby powerless as tools to show us anything about the underlying, metaphysical nature of the world. Nietzsche's objection to Socratism isn't the nature of conceptual repertoire *per se* but rather the way in which it is used. The theoretical man believes that in conceptually categorizing and classifying things in the world of appearances, he's arrived at a comprehensive understanding of the world and existence. The worldview of Socratism assumes that concepts are the *only* adequate resources for interpreting existence, thereby precluding any interpretation of existence that acknowledges its metaphysical foundations.

Compared to the Socratic man's hubristic use of concepts, Nietzsche believes that Apollonian images exhibit a degree of modesty. The Apollonian, as the drive for limit- and boundary-drawing, limits the representational capacity of its images. The Apollonian is, to speak metaphorically, "aware" that the images it produces are *not* images of things-in-themselves but illusory transfigurations. The man of artistic culture is always at least mildly aware that "hidden beneath the reality in which we live and have our being there also lies a second, quite different

reality" (BT 1), namely the reality of the Will. "The image of Apollo [*Bilde des Apollo*]," Nietzsche states, "must also contain that delicate line which the dream-image may not overstep if its effect is not to become pathological, so that, in the worst case, the semblance would deceive us as if it were crude reality; his image must include that measured limitation, that freedom from wilder impulses, that wise calm of the image-making god" (ibid.). That is, even Apollonian images don't claim to represent reality as it really is; they wear their transfiguring, perfecting, and distorting nature on their sleeve. They don't purport to disclose more than what's within their bounds as creations of the Apollonian drive—they don't purport to capture or represent all of reality, or reality as it is in itself.

This "self-consciously" limiting aspect of Apollonian images is what differentiates concepts from the rigidified images found in Doric culture. The problem with rigidified images is that their application conditions become constrained; the appropriateness of applying such images becomes increasingly difficult. Yet these images, rigidified or not, still don't profess to represent any underlying reality. The theoretical man's concepts, on the other hand, do claim to represent reality *as it actually is*; the theoretical man claims that there's no reality to represent other than the reality of appearances. The theoretical man's concepts lack any sense of "measured limitation," and he professes that his concepts represent the *true* nature of the world and capture its essence. In actuality, concepts only skim the surface, and unlike Apollonian images, they don't beautifully transfigure their content. They simply present us with some abstract content that Nietzsche thinks has been drained of its vivacity so that it can be conceptually manipulated.

The Dangers of Socratic Optimism

Worse than Socratism's hubristic claim to comprehensively categorize the world is its optimism. The Socratic drive employs its conceptual apparatus to empirically understand existence in order to *correct* it—it is characterized by an "optimism which imagines itself to be limitless" (BT 18), an optimism which "believes in correcting the world through knowledge [*Wissen*], in life led by science" (BT 17). Nietzsche takes issue with this optimism for a number of reasons. First, it completely *represses* the Dionysian. In thinking that the only reality is that which can be conceptually categorized and articulated (the World as Representation) it refuses to acknowledge the Dionysian ground of things. In this failure it generates the illusion that existence can be rectified and the world improved *through* knowledge. It thereby turns a blind eye to the pessimistic fact that undergirding the world of appearances is the Will, with its eternal striving and suffering. That such senseless striving stands at the very foundations of existence means, to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer alike, that man's basic lot *can't* be rectified.[62] Socratic illusions (unlike Apollonian ones) *completely* veil this harsh truth—the Socratic drive is characterized by the "arrogant delusion" (BT 18) that it can "heal the wound of existence" (ibid.).

However, since *all* cultures operate according to illusion and delusion, what makes the optimistic illusions of Socratic culture any worse? Tragic cultures risk the threat of Buddhistic resignation and artistic cultures risk the threat of stagnated Apollonian images.[63] What makes the risks courted by Socratic culture worse is that the Socratic drive is particularly prone to rapidly realize its pernicious potential. Once the Socratic drive enters the scene, it almost immediately

[62] This is another reason why Attic tragic culture is so estimable for Nietzsche. It doesn't try to give its members a sense of optimism but the opposite. In tragic cultures like Attic Greece, striving is not seen in optimistic terms, nor is there any belief the world can be changed for the better. Tragic cultures have, as much as possible, come to terms with world being fundamentally out of joint. We strive precisely in the face of knowing that everything is at base uncorrectable, and this imbues our existence with the sense of tragic beauty discussed above.

[63] "Every excessive force," Nietzsche says in an early notebook entry, "as a rigid regime, has barbarizing, immoral [*unsittliche*] and stultifying effects" (KGW 23[14]).

takes the upper hand and squelches the expression of *both* the Dionysian and the Apollonian ("And behold!" Nietzsche exclaims, "Apollo could not live without Dionysus" (BT 4)). Attic culture comes into dominance with the tragedies of Aeschylus, and though Sophocles' tragedies reveal the first "important sign that the Dionysiac ground of tragedy is already beginning to give way,"[64] the tendencies of tragic culture that Nietzsche admires stay strong even through the latter's works. But once the Socratic drive gains the upper hand with Euripidean drama, Nietzsche suggests that its rise to dominance is swift; tragic culture declines with corresponding rapidity. The resulting state of affairs bears some resemblance to the conditions of Doric culture, but the situation is, by Nietzsche's lights, worse. Recall how, in Doric culture, "the one-sidedly Apolline will attempted to confine Hellenic life" into "small circles" (BT 9). The Socratic drive, operating with its rigidifying conceptual apparatus, has a similar effect: Socratism "fights against Dionysian wisdom and art; it strives to dissolve myth; […] it believes […] it is truly capable of confining the individual within the smallest circle of solvable tasks, in the midst of which he says to life: 'I will you: you are worth being understood [*erkannt*]" (BT 17).[65]

In dissolving myth and in abandoning Dionysian wisdom and art—which implies abandoning the Apollonian—Socratism destroys the most powerful resources Nietzsche thinks we have to meet the demands of meaning. The Socratic drive causes people to become more egoistic and less concerned with existence in general. A notebook entry reads, "From Socrates onward: all of a sudden the individual became too self-important" (KGW 6[13]). In confining the individual to ever-smaller circles, the Socratic drive fosters a sense of self-importance. The

[64] Nietzsche thinks these signs are evident in Sophoclean tragedy because Sophocles relies less on the chorus, failing to give music its proper. This development ends in the "*annihilation* of the chorus which occurs in a frighteningly rapid sequence of phases in Euripides, Agathon, and the New Comedy" (BT 15). With the annihilation of the chorus the driving Dionysian force of tragedy is eliminated.
[65] Translation modified.

members of Socratic culture focus less on "the metaphysical meaning of existence" and aim instead to achieve an insouciant happiness and comfortable repose (see KGW 32[72]).

In ignoring the metaphysical meaning of existence, people eventually come to see their lives as listless and lacking meaning. "How strange!" Nietzsche exclaims. "The way [most people] now live shows that they think nothing of themselves; they betray themselves and throw themselves away on shabby pursuits (whether these are petty passions or the trivialities of an occupation)" (KGW 3[64]). Focusing simply on their own personal happiness and comfort, people no longer care about the deep, Dionysian meaning of existence. By ignoring the metaphysical meaning of existence, Nietzsche thinks that people become complacent, no longer concerned with the striving it takes to achieve great things. He claims that "a people—or, for that matter, a human being—only has value to the extent that it is able to put the stamp of the eternal on its experiences; for in so doing it sheds, one might say, its worldliness and reveals its unconscious, inner conviction that time is relative and that the true meaning of life is metaphysical" (BT 23).

Because the Socratic drive is optimistic, it aims primarily at improving conditions in the empirical world, without concerning itself with the true nature of reality. In "demolish[ing] the metaphysical buttresses surrounding it," Socratism has "been accompanied by a decided growth in worldliness" (BT 23). People no longer care about striving to put "the stamp of the eternal" on their experiences, creating great, lasting works or achievements that encapsulate the worldview of a culture and can serve as the tools a people uses to interpret existence. In the modern world, the Socratic drive has instead culminated in a frenzied search for knowledge in an attempt to supply meaning:

> [W]e find the same excessive lust for knowledge, the same unsatisfied delight in discovery, the same enormous growth in worldliness, and alongside these things a homeless roaming-about, a greedy scramble to grab a place at the tables of others, frivolous deification of the present, or a dull, numbed turning away

> from it, all of this *sub specie saeculi*—of the "here and now"; these same symptoms suggest that at the heart of this culture there is the same lack: the destruction of myth. (BT 23)

Nietzsche claims that the frenzied search for knowledge[66] and the desire to deify the present is an attempt to find a substitute for myth. Myths are fecund reservoirs of meaningfulness that Socratism has undermined. The need for meaning is thoroughly pathologized under these conditions. The more Socratism runs its course, the more it dissolves and diminishes the resources that could be used to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Unable to meet the demands of this need, people rush headlong into the pursuit of knowledge, unwittingly making the problem worse. Socratic culture asserts that the pursuit of knowledge is the activity that best meets the demands of the need for meaning, when in fact this pursuit, at least when it occurs without any acknowledgment of the deeper meaning of things, is self-undermining. Indeed, its frenzied pursuit to categorize the world leads Socratism to actively "strive to dissolve myth" (BT 17), thereby destroying the greatest resource Nietzsche thinks a culture has for interpreting existence and meeting the demands of the need for meaning.

Alongside these worries, Nietzsche thinks that Socratism is approaching a catastrophic collapse. Geuss claims that "Socratic illusions and the form of life associated with them are not finally stable" (xxii). This isn't entirely right: The Socratic drive has been dominant since Socrates lived. This makes Socratic culture, of all the cultural phases Nietzsche discusses, one of the most stable and resilient, especially when compared to the extremely brief lifespan of Attic tragic culture. The issue Nietzsche has isn't with the *instability* of Socratism, since *no* cultural form, given the destructive nature of the underlying Will and the eternally fluctuating world of appearances is destined to last forever. Impermanence just is a part of the world of appearances.

[66] "Just consider," Nietzsche states, "how a scholarly man whiles his life away: what does the study of Greek particles have to do with the meaning of life [*Sinne des Lebens*]? […] the *greatest part* of that antlike labor is simply *meaningless* [*Unsinn*] and superfluous" (KGW 3[63], translation modified).

What Geuss does get right, however, is that Socratism is, by the time Nietzsche is writing *The Birth*, on extremely shaky foundations. Its worldview is finally showing fissures—it has *now* become unstable. That people are coming to see their lives as listless and aimless and are beginning to question the value of knowledge, are for Nietzsche signs that Socratic illusions are losing their hold. "The catastrophe slumbering in the womb of theoretical culture is gradually beginning to frighten modern man; in other words, he is beginning to suspect the consequences of his own existence" (BT 19). Although Socratism has been a stable cultural form for millennia, it is now coming face to face with its consequences and with the Dionysian truth it can no longer suppress.

The collapse of Socratism is a good thing for Nietzsche, but his worry is that if we go along without acknowledging the Dionysian foundations of existence, without slowly exposing ourselves to Dionysian truth, then the Socratic worldview might abruptly shatter, leading to a catastrophic culture-wide trauma.[67] In the past—as, for instance, when Apollonian Homeric culture displaced the Iron Age—a degree of Dionysian truth was maintained as one cultural form gave way to another. Since one of the defining characteristics of Apollonian illusions is that they present themselves as illusions, even the artistic culture of Homeric Greece didn't deny that there is a more fundamental reality. Socratism, however, has attempted to conceal the Dionysian in a more perilous manner, such that the latter threatens to burst forth with a torrential force. Nietzsche suggests that the effect such a calamity might have is at its worst a "practical pessimism which could generate a horrifying ethic of genocide out of pity" (BT 15); a less

[67] We can formulate this point in Freudian terms. The Apollonian cultures of the past were much better equipped to deal with the onset of the Dionysian because these cultures still retained a sense of the Dionysian truth of things; Socratic cultures, on the other hand, operate with an interpretation of existence that completely pushes the Dionysian out of view. In this sense, Apollonian cultures are akin to the anxious person who is better equipped to suffer a blunt force shock (or what Freud calls "fright"), because the anxious person is at least loosely aware of the threat; his anxiety helps to psychologically prepare him for instances of fright, and so he is less apt to respond to the fright with lasting traumatic symptoms. Socratic cultures are like the person who lacks anxiety but has an experience of fright. Such a person is more likely to suffer from lasting traumatic symptoms since he wasn't psychologically prepared.

serious though nonetheless catastrophic effect would be the "Buddhistic" resignation that Nietzsche thinks characterizes other Dionysian cultures. Either way, what's at stake is the need for meaning itself.

Conclusion: The Solution to Socratism

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the crucial role meaningfulness plays in *The Birth*. I have attempted to provide a comprehensive account of how each of the three cultural types generates illusions that attempt to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Each cultural type generates its own distinctive illusion, which gives its members the resources to interpret existence and thereby experience it as meaningful. The Socratism Nietzsche thinks pervades modern Germany pathologizes the need for meaning by ignoring its metaphysical dimensions.

This is the diagnosis of German culture *The Birth* provides. But what is the solution? *The Birth* gives little in terms of a proposal for curing modern Socratic culture. Nietzsche states that modern Germany is at a turning point in history—but his solution is not pinned on a hope for some naïve return to Attic tragic culture. Such a return is impossible and not even desirable. Nor is the solution to uproot and abolish the Socratic drive. The solution is to give culture a *new* foundation. The Socratic drive just is part of our form of life now, and there's no use in trying to abandon the mode of conceptual thinking it introduced. At this turning point in history, Nietzsche thinks that German philosophy has made progress in addressing the ills of Socratism. Kant, and in particular Schopenhauer, have worked to "to destroy scientific Socratism's contented pleasure in existence by demonstrating its limits" and have "ushered in an incomparably deeper and more serious consideration of ethical questions and art, one which can

be defined as the conceptual formulation of *Dionysiac wisdom*" (BT 19). Noteworthy is the notion of a *conceptual* formulation of Dionysian wisdom.

Such a formulation is truly novel: Nietzsche hopes to unite the Socratic and the Dionysian. This hope is also found in *The Birth*'s discussion of the enigmatic figure of the "*music-making Socrates*" (BT 15) or the "artistic Socrates" (BT 14).[68] Nietzsche never clarifies what he means by this figure, but it presumably involves some combination of the Socratic drive with the Dionysian and the Apollonian and is involved in the task of providing a "conceptual formulation of Dionysian wisdom." Instead of using the Apollonian to express Dionysian truths, it might be possible to use the Socratic drive to this end.

Nietzsche's early notebook entries help to flesh out the kind of solution he has in mind. "It is not a question of destroying science," he states, "but of *controlling* it" (KGW 19[24]). What will control science—something essentially Socratic—is philosophy. The role of philosophy is to moderate culture by, on the one hand, putting a restraint on the mythical drive ("strengthening the sense of truth as opposed to free poetic creation") while, on the other hand, restraining the drive for knowledge (through the "strengthening of the mythical and mystical, the artistic"). Philosophy's prime aim is the "*[d]emolition of the rigidly dogmatic*" (KGW 23[14]). Philosophy has the purpose of making sure that no drive becomes tyrannical. "In relation to a culture," Nietzsche goes on to say, philosophy "can never have a fundamental significance but only a secondary one. […] Culture can issue only from the centralizing significance of an art or a work of art. Philosophy will involuntarily prepare the worldview of that work of art" (ibid.). A flourishing culture can't be built on philosophy, only on art. Socratic culture is problematic for

[68] It's unclear whether the figure of the music-making Socrates is the same as the artistic Socrates. One possibility, given Nietzsche's description of artistic culture in terms of the Apollonian, is that the artistic Socrates embodies a union primarily between the Apollonian and the Socratic, whereas the music-making Socrates embodies a union primarily between the Dionysian and the Socratic.

Nietzsche because it is founded on knowledge. While it may seem Nietzsche is denigrating philosophy by denying it fundamental significance in relation to culture, it has the substantial task of moderating a culture such that the "centralizing significance of an art or a work of art" can be realized.[69]

The best example we have of an attempt at a conceptual formulation of Dionysian wisdom, or of the music-making, artistic Socrates, is in Nietzsche. *The Birth* is best understood as a philosophical work that attempts to prepare the way for a new kind of art, namely Wagner's music drama. It carries out this purpose by critiquing modern German culture through an attack on the tyrannically dominant Socratic drive. In restraining the drive for knowledge and advancing a tragic worldview that gives the Dionysian adequate expression, *The Birth* clears the ground for this new form art that will convey a tragic worldview.

[69] A line from his early notebooks demonstrates that Nietzsche does not look down on philosophy: "Philosophers are the most distinguished class of those who are spiritually great. They have no public, they need *fame*. In order to communicate their supreme joys, they need *proof* [Beweis]: this makes them unhappier than artists" (KGW 19[170]).

CHAPTER II: MEANING, SCIENCE, AND THE "PERCEPTIONS AND SENSATIONS OF NON-SCIENCE"

> To view life as part of this universal mystery of greatest depth, is to sense an experience which is very rare, and very exciting. It usually ends in laughter and a delight in the futility of trying to understand what this atom in the universe is, this thing—atoms with curiosity—that looks at itself and wonders why it wonders. Well, these scientific views end in awe and mystery, lost at the edge in uncertainty, but they appear to be so deep and so impressive that the theory that it is all arranged as a stage for God to watch man's struggle for good and evil seems inadequate.
> ~Richard Feynman, *The Meaning of it All*

Nietzsche's middle period works—*Human, All Too Human* (1878, 1879, and 1880), *Daybreak* (1881), and the first four books of *The Gay Science* (1882)[70]—stage an acute shift in his philosophical views. As we saw in the first chapter, prior to his middle period Nietzsche was wedded to an elaborate metaphysical program with Schopenhauer's philosophy of the Will at its center. *Human, All Too Human* marks Nietzsche's rejection of Schopenhauer's metaphysics and a shift toward a kind of positivist neo-Kantianism. This neo-Kantian positivism involves a newfound appreciation for the Socratic conception of the will to truth that was so heavily scrutinized in *The Birth*.[71]

[70] Nietzsche published *Human, All Too Human* in 1878, followed by "Assorted Opinions and Maxims" in 1879 and "The Wanderer and His Shadow" in 1880. The 1878 *Human* was later repackaged with these two other works, creating the two-volume *Human* we have today. The 1878 *Human* became volume one, with the other texts comprising volume two. I follow standard convention by citing section numbers. Sections from the first volume of *Human* are cited with the abbreviation "HH," sections from "Assorted Opinions and Maxims" with "AOM," and sections from "The Wanderer and His Shadow" with "WS." *Daybreak* is cited as "D" and *The Gay Science* as "GS." Please see the "Works Cited" for a full list abbreviations.

[71] I say "Socratic conception of the will to truth" because it's a mistake to read *The Birth* as advancing a wholly critical attitude toward the will to truth. Nietzsche holds the Dionysian in such high esteem because it succeeds at getting at truths—metaphysical truths—that the Socratic drive can't. A Socratic conception of the will to truth is a will to *empirical* truth rather than *metaphysical* truth. Nietzsche's esteem for this brand of truth is an important part of his newfound positivism—he renounces of the value of truth about a metaphysical realm, and looks instead to find truth in the (empirical) world as we experience it. Many commentators have for these reasons labeled the Nietzsche of this period a positivist—see Hussain (2004) and Clark and Dudrick (2004).

Richard Schacht has aptly observed that Nietzsche's anti-Enlightenment thinking in *The Birth*, which found inspiration in certain strands of Romantic thought, comes by the time of *Human* to take the Enlightenment as its primary guide. Nietzsche had "become convinced that only something like a continuation and radicalization of Enlightenment thinking, getting to the bottom of things and ruthlessly exposing all false hopes and dangerous palliatives, can afford us at least the possibility of a future worth having and a life worth living" (1986: xiv). In the same vein Brian Leiter notes, "In the mid-1870's, Nietzsche did, in fact, go through a phase of 'science worship' and hardcore 'positivism,' viewing natural science as the paradigm of all genuine knowledge, the culmination of which was *Human, All Too Human*" (2002: 21). Nietzsche's neo-Kantian positivism denies the truth of a dual conception of reality with the world of appearances on the one hand and the noumenal world on the other. This dual conception of reality is what Nietzsche understands by *metaphysics*, which not only posits two worlds but also roots the world of appearances in the noumenal.

This chapter will flesh out Nietzsche's Enlightenment-inspired conception of what Schacht calls "a future worth having and a life worth living." Nietzsche's newfound philosophical approach has deep implications for how he thinks about questions of meaning. The "true meaning of life is metaphysical" Nietzsche formerly told us in BT 23; now he has turned his back on metaphysics. The question is how Nietzsche's new philosophical commitments bear upon his understanding of the need for meaning and, just as important, the problem of meaning itself. In the middle period the central problem concerns reconciling the pursuit of meaning with the scientific pursuit of knowledge. As in *The Birth*, Nietzsche continues to believe that illusions, or at least some species of untruth and error, are necessary and closely tied to meaning—though these illusions aren't now concealing any facts about an underlying metaphysical world.

Even if illusions are necessary for achieving meaning, Nietzsche in this period sees meaning as the object of a *natural* need, not as something metaphysical. Metaphysics is now an obstacle to sustaining the possibility of a future worth having and a life worth living. Yet meaning has been so closely tied to metaphysics—in part due to the history of metaphysics and its connection with questions of meaning—that the need for meaning and what Nietzsche calls "the need for metaphysics" are pathologically identified with one another. Meaningfulness is experienced as possible *only* by rooting those interpretive resources that meet the demands of the need for meaning in another, metaphysical realm. This chapter will show why Nietzsche thinks this is pernicious and what solutions there are to this state of affairs.

In this vein, one of the central tasks of the middle period is to integrate the interpretive resources that meet the demands of the need for meaning with what Nietzsche calls his "historical philosophy"—that is, his new, anti-metaphysical methodology "which can no longer be separated from natural science" (HH 1). This chapter presents Nietzsche's naturalized account of meaning and the changes it undergoes throughout the middle period. However, before delving into the complexities of this account, it's necessary to have a grasp on the problem Nietzsche was addressing and the interpretive puzzles that arise from his attempt to naturalize the notion of meaning and interpretation.

Sketching the Problem of Meaning in Nietzsche's Middle Period

As in *The Birth*, Nietzsche's middle period articulates a concern about the sense of fragmentation and incoherence that characterizes modern life, and Nietzsche remains worried about the growing sense that a meaningful life is defined solely by the individualistic pursuit of the satisfaction of one's own idiosyncratic tastes and desires. Despite his hostility toward

metaphysical philosophy, Nietzsche concedes that an "essential disadvantage which the cessation of the metaphysical outlook brings with it lies in the fact that the attention of the individual is too firmly fixed on his own brief span of life and receives no stronger impulse to work at the construction of enduring institutions [… and] to embark on 'everlasting' works" (HH 22). Metaphysical outlooks, like those of Christianity for instance, posit an eternal realm where truth and meaningfulness are grounded. This outlook, based on the ideas of the eternal and immutable, cultivates within individuals a sense for long spans of time and future generations, which in turn can fuel the creation of great and meaningful works or institutions that outlast the individual's lifetime, or that take more than an individual's lifetime to actualize (e.g., cathedrals). When this kind of outlook is undercut by scientific insight—when people invest less credence in ideas of the eternal and immutable—transience and ephemerality are accepted. People, wanting to get the most of their brief lifespans, become (according to Nietzsche) less interested in creating great works and institutions. The individual "wants to pluck the fruit himself from the tree he plants and is therefore no longer interested in planting those trees which demand constant tending […] and are intended to provide shade for successions of generations" (ibid.). In the modern world the idea of a meaningful existence is increasingly understood in terms of satisfying one's own ends.

So some of the cultural concerns voiced in *The Birth* are present in Nietzsche's middle period. The most salient divergence from his earlier views concerns the denial that science is a predominately pernicious force. What results is a tension between the value of truth and the value of error. The resources for interpreting existence and the world in a meaningful way rely heavily on illusion, error, and untruth: making the world intelligible, seeing our lives, actions, and suffering as significant or purposeful, and in short, creating a picture of the world and our

lives that we can affirm all require untruth and error. Yet at the same time, Nietzsche's historical philosophy aims at securing truths that often demolish the grounds for believing those errors and untruths. "So far," Nietzsche says in GS 12, science "may still be better known for its power of depriving man of his joys and making him colder, more like a statue, more stoic." The demands of the need for meaning can't be met by the insights of science. For Nietzsche, science is involved in a *descriptive* enterprise, not a meaning-imbuing one, and attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning are frustrated by scientific insights. Discovering, for instance, that our actions don't have cosmic significance, that we're not at the center of a divine plan, or that the human species is the accidental result of evolution, are insights that frustrate attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning by chipping away at our sense of significance. The picture of the world science gives us makes us colder, more statue-like, and stoic because it paints the world as a place that's indifferent to our interests and needs.

The problem of meaning in this period of Nietzsche's career thus concerns a difficulty between balancing the insights of science with certain needs and interests of ours. To experience existence as meaningful requires that we fashion a picture of it that doesn't correspond to the way it truly is. In this sense, meaningfulness is in tension with science. However, the tension between science and our needs can be a productive one:

> [I]f science provides us with less and less pleasure, and deprives us of more and more pleasure through casting suspicion on the consolations of metaphysics [*durch Verdächtigung der tröstlichen Metaphysik*], religion and art, then that mightiest source of joy to which mankind owes almost all its humanity will become impoverished. For this reason a higher culture must give to man a double-brain, as it were two brain-ventricles, one for the perceptions of science, the other for those of non-science: lying beside one another, not confused together, separable, capable of being shut off; this is a demand of health. In one domain lies the power-source [*Kraftquelle*], in the other the regulator: it must be heated with illusions, one-sidedness, passions, the evil and perilous consequences of overheating must be obviated with the aid of the knowledge furnished by science. (HH 251; cf. HH 20)[72]

[72] The line that starts with, "For this reason […]" reads in the original, "Desshalb muss eine höhere Cultur dem Menschen ein Doppelgehirn, gleichsam zwei Hirnkammern geben, einmal um Wissenschaft, sodann um Nicht-Wissenschaft zu empfinden." The key word here is the verb "empfinden," which Hollingdale translates into the noun "perception." Zimmern's translation keeps "empfinden" in the infinitive as "to experience" ("a higher culture must give man a double brain, two brain chambers, as it were, one to experience science, and one to experience

According to this passage, it is a sign of high culture to develop within the individual two opposing tendencies, a "double-brain." On the one hand, we have to rely on what Nietzsche calls the perceptions or sensations of non-science. This includes the error and untruth that have been both "the mightiest source of joy to which mankind owes almost all its humanity" and the power-source of human flourishing, striving, and achievement. Historically, metaphysics, religion, and art have supplied these sorts of untruth. On the other hand, we have to employ science to temper the illusions that our joy in and spur to life depend on, since "the ruination of science" will culminate in "a sinking back into barbarism" (ibid.). Without the moderating and tempering effects of the perceptions of science, untruth will run rampant and turn into a pernicious species of delusion. Nietzsche's examples of such pernicious delusions include the "superstitious and religious concepts and fears" such as "original sin" or "the salvation of souls" (HH 20).

Brian Leiter claims that in *Human* science, not art, is the "the mark of high culture" (2002: 33). This claim needs to be refined. Science alone isn't the mark of high culture. Rather, it's the delicate interplay and fine balance between truth and untruth, between science and illusion. Leiter understates Nietzsche's estimation of the perceptions of non-science and neglects the importance of its productive tension with the perceptions of science. There's a similarity here to *The Birth*, which also conceives of cultural health in terms of the reconciliation of two opposing tendencies. Franco notes this, saying of *Human*, "In his new version of the Apollonian-Dionysian dialectic, Nietzsche claims that the brain 'must be heated with illusions, one-sidedness, [and]

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nonscience"). Crucial to note is that the noun form of "empfinden," "Empfindung," is used extensively throughout Nietzsche's middle period to refer to sensations. "Empfindung" is generally translated as "sensation," "feeling," "sense," "sentiment," or "perception" depending on context. It is a term that plays an important role in Kant's account of cognition. Sensations are like intuitions [*Anschauungen*]. Intuitions, however, can be pure, e.g., space and time, whereas sensations, e.g., pain, cannot since they are always located in space and time. HH 251 therefore urges interpretive caution. "Perceptions of science and non-science" are not *full-blooded* perceptions, in the sense of the German "Wahrnehmungen." That Nietzsche uses "empfinden" suggests that they're lower on the totem pole of objects in our cognitive repertoire. In using "empfinden" in HH 251, Nietzsche presumably means to allude to his other discussions of sensations or Emfindungen.

passions,' and then the 'perilous consequences of overheating must be obviated with the aid of the knowledge furnished by science'" (2011: 48). On the science side of *Human*'s tension are insights that secure the conditions of meaningfulness by ensuring that the errors and untruths of non-science don't get out of control. The need for metaphysics is a pathologized form of the need for meaning, and if carried out properly the scientific pursuit of truth can undo and prevent this malformation. So while Leiter is right to see in *Human* Nietzsche's new and positive stance on science, he misses the extent to which Nietzsche thinks culture—the domain that generates the resources capable of meeting the demands of the need for meaning—is driven by a productive tension between the perceptions of science *and* non-science.

The problem of meaning as it is understood by the Nietzsche of the middle period concerns the ability to maintain this productive tension. What, though, is Nietzsche's background explanation for how this tension arises in the first place? How do we go about sustaining it in a way that secures the conditions for meaning? Why can't the insights of science themselves generate meaning, and if they can't, how do they work to restrain our tendencies toward untruth and error? And how more specifically can this tension go awry?

These questions will be answered over three parts. The first part addresses the relation between error and truth, and how the perceptions and sensations [*Empfindungen*] from the domains of non-science generate the resources for meaning-imbuing interpretation. The second part of the chapter focuses on the role that the perceptions and sensations of science play in curbing the tendencies cultivated by the domains of non-science. The concluding part of the chapter will address issues that arise in the first two-parts and deal with important changes in how Nietzsche's conception of this tension changed at the end of his middle period with the publication of *The Gay Science*.

Part I: Meaning, Error, and the Domains of Non-Science

What is the role that the domains of non-science—things like religion, metaphysics, aesthetics, and morality—play in the generation of meaning? How are error, illusion, and untruth involved here? Answering these questions will help us to understand how Nietzsche in his middle period conceives of meaning as a need and the way we can go about meeting its demands.

Error and Untruth in Nietzsche's Positivism

The tension that generates meaning seems to boil down to a tension between the value of truth and the value of untruth. On Nietzsche's view, art, religion, metaphysics, and morality rely on error and untruth, and it's their role in imbuing meaning that gives value to error and untruth. Science and the will to truth have value at least insofar as they keep error and untruth in check, preventing their barbarizing effects.

This description matches Nietzsche's metaphor of the double-brain, but it becomes complicated when we see that for Nietzsche the so-called "perceptions of science" aren't strictly speaking error-free. The tension that generates meaning therefore doesn't strictly speaking boil down to a tension between the value of science and truth on the one hand and the value of untruth and error on the other. However, the error and untruth involved in science and cognition is of a different kind—and has a different source—than the kind of error and untruth involved in the sensations and perceptions of non-science. Understanding this difference is necessary for grasping the details of meaning-imbuing interpretation.

For Nietzsche, the picture of the world generated by science isn't purely factual if by "factual" we understand something that is error-free. Knowledge as such includes error:

> To the extent that man has for long ages believed in concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to

> believe that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things; language is, in fact, the first stage of the occupation with science. Here, too, it is the *belief that the truth has been found* out of which the mightiest sources of energy have flowed [*aus dem die mächtigsten Kraftquellen geflossen sind*]. A great deal later—only now—it dawns on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a tremendous error. Happily, it is too late for the evolution of reason, which depends on this belief, to be again put back. (HH 11; cf. "On Truth and Lying"; GS 57, 107, 110, 111, 121)

Science depends on language and concepts, that is, on identifying objects and phenomena with conceptual designations. It presupposes that these designations are simply *describing* the world without error. Though Nietzsche thinks this faith in language is baseless, it is thankfully too late for us to change anything about it. Through the evolution of reason, we've inherited the errors of logic and mathematics on which science is founded. Underlying logic is the error "that there are identical things, that the same thing is identical at different points of time"; but these are merely "presuppositions with which nothing in the real world corresponds" (ibid).

At this point in his career Nietzsche believed that reality in itself is radically dynamic and in constant flux.[73] This position demonstrates the influence of Heraclitus and, more contemporary with Nietzsche, thinkers like Afrikan Spir and F.A. Lange. Franco notes that "in the years leading up to the publication of *Human, All Too Human,*" Nietzsche studied closely Spir's "1873 book *Denken und Wirklichkeit* (*Thought and Reality*) […]. In that book Spir argues that our concepts obtain truth only in a world of self-identical being, a kind of Parmenidean One; they cannot be applied to the empirical world of becoming without falsifying that world" (20). According to neo-Kantians like Spir and Lange, our impression that there are stable things in the world is the effect of our own cognitive contributions. Independent of our cognitive faculties, reality is in a state of constant becoming, so the static categories and concepts we use to latch

[73] He first encountered this idea in the fragments of Heraclitus and was smitten with it throughout his career in one way or another. In his middle period, Nietzsche read neo-Kantians like Spir and Lange, who naturalized the two-world account, placing the flux not in the noumenal realm—as Nietzsche had done in *The Birth* by making the Will, as thing-in-itself, a senselessly striving entity—but within the empirical world itself.

onto dynamic reality necessarily falsify it because they present the world to us as something that has static or (at least over some duration) unchanging entities.[74]

Nietzsche's account gives rise to two pressing questions. First, *what* is being falsified? And second, *how* is it being falsified, i.e., how is *error* involved in the process of cognition? Here we find something dubious in the views of Nietzsche's middle period. We might think that the application of concepts and categories to the world involves simplification, but this doesn't imply that it falsifies them. A subway map of New York City, for instance, simplifies what it portrays by omitting the streets, terrain, and buildings of Manhattan; yet there's no reason to believe that the map falsifies anything in virtue of this omission. By the same token, if I say, "There is a cup of tea in front of me" (when in the ordinary sense there is), it's unclear how I'm falsifying anything. It might be true that the cup and the tea are in reality always in a state of flux; but how is my application of these concepts, "cup," "tea," or "being in front of me" getting anything wrong? One might say that what's *really* before me is actually just a collection of subatomic particles and forces in such-and-such a configuration and that this microscopic reality is what is being falsified when I call it a cup of tea. Whether I call what's in front of me a cup of tea or a collection of these molecules, composed of these atoms, composed of these subatomic particles and forces—and I concede that all these microscopic entities are jostling around, that I can't know the position and momentum of any of the electrons, etc.—it's still unclear how I'm in error.[75] Saying "a cup of tea" as opposed to offering a complete account of the cup of tea in terms of its subatomic particles and forces (impractical as that may be) seem like two descriptions of the same thing, and while certain descriptions may be more appropriate in

[74] An enormous amount of secondary literature has been devoted to Nietzsche's account of falsification. See (among others): Nehamas 1985 (43-73); Clark 1990 (95-158); Anderson 1996 (307-41) and 2002 (95-117); Hussain 2004 (326-68); and Ricardi 2013 (219-257).

[75] I'm using the subatomic particle point merely as an example; Nietzsche would deny that even this description corresponds to reality, since I'm using stabilizing concepts like "electron."

different circumstances, there's no reason to believe that all things considered either description is *false*, or even that one description is all things considered truer than another.[76]

Ultimately, I don't think Nietzsche's account of falsification can be salvaged. Be that as it may, he thinks that reality is falsified in our apprehension of it, and this account of falsification stems from his neo-Kantian commitments. Thankfully, Nietzsche thinks, the basic categories we've used to carve up reality are evolutionary inheritances, so we can't arbitrarily choose to rid ourselves of them. "Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished," Nietzsche states in GS 111. Yet "for all that, theirs might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is 'equal' as regards both nourishment and hostile animals—those, in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously—were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal." In the course of evolution, there may have been human beings, or pre-human species, whose categories and conceptual designations were more accurate in that they better captured the flux of reality. We, however, treat as equal (or identical) the very things that these beings may have seen as quite different. We do so through applying the same concept to things that in actuality are quite different. Where we have one concept, they may have employed many such that their designations better corresponded to the flux of things, and they may in various other ways have been more sensitive to the ever-changing nature of reality. But in terms of their survival this accuracy counted against them. We've benefited from our sloppy and coarse conceptual carvings.

[76] Nehamas believes that falsification enters the picture not because concepts simplify things, but because we falsify the fact *that* we're simplifying things (i.e., we don't take our simplifications to be simplifications, and it's in this gesture that we falsify things (57). Alternatively, Anderson (2002) holds that "[c]oncepts like <substance> and <causality> are supposed to falsify our experience precisely because they are not based on the evidence of the senses" (101-2). I leave aside these interpretive issues since my focus is on the question of meaning.

What all of this shows is that science doesn't differ from the spheres of non-science simply on the basis of error: *Both* contain errors, and both falsify the world in one way or another. However, the errors contained in cognition and scientific inquiry differ significantly from the errors contained in the spheres of non-science. When Nietzsche says we need to cultivate a double-brain, we might see each part as generating its own of distinctive kind error. The errors and untruth that come to us through science have through evolution become part of our cognitive apparatus—they're generated by what I'll call *cognitive falsification*. The other sort of error and untruth that characterizes our experience is generated by what I'll call *affective falsification*. Nietzsche himself never draws such a distinction, but it captures the double-brain's different kinds of error. The error and untruth generated by cognitive falsification are simply an effect of human cognition. Such errors are built into the very fabric of our experience and make experience possible in the first place. Nietzsche states, "Delusion and error [… are] a condition of cognitive and sensate existence" (GS 107). Categories like "cause," "effect," "motion," "rest," "form," and "content" are identified by Nietzsche as falsifying reality as it is independent of our cognitive contributions. "[R]eason," as Lanier Anderson nicely puts it, "'falsifies' because it imposes a stable order onto the flux of sensory experience" (1996: 317). Yet it is according to what Anderson calls "reason," or the basic conceptual categories that constitute it, that experience as such is rendered possible. There's no way to sidestep or otherwise rectify this falsification, nor would we want to since experience would be reduced to the raw data of our senses, random, un-ordered, and nonsensical.

Affective falsification doesn't have its origin in our cognitive apparatus. It stems instead from our emotional needs and interests—it stems from how we *want* the world to be. Nevertheless, this falsification still manifests itself cognitively. Take as an example a devout

Evangelical Christian. Formerly a criminal addicted to drugs, he found inspiration in Christianity to turn his life around. Given his emotional investment in Christianity, he can't entertain the idea that his religious beliefs might be wrong, especially because they seem responsible for changing the course of his life. As a result, whatever evidence might seem to count against his religious beliefs simply isn't processed as evidence, or is otherwise ignored. Conceding that he might be wrong about evolution could have deep ramifications on other aspects of his religious beliefs; so evidence for evolution—evidence that runs contrary to the way he wants the world to be—is falsified.

So affective falsification can play itself out cognitively. The devout evangelical falsifies evidence that runs contrary to his beliefs, and this is doubtlessly a cognitive phenomenon. What makes it different from cognitive falsification is what's driving it: Cognitive falsification and affective falsification differ in their origins. Affective falsification is driven by a person's emotional and affective make-up. Cognitive falsification is driven by the machinery that makes ordered experience possible. Human beings, having inherited the same cognitive faculties through evolution, all cognitively falsify reality in (more or less) the same way. The same can't be said of affective falsification, which will differ from person to person on the basis of affective strength, emotional needs, personal histories, cultural backgrounds, and so forth.

Cognitive falsification and affective falsification also differ in terms of the *object* of falsification. Cognitive falsification falsifies reality as it is independent of human cognizers, i.e., reality as radical flux. Affective falsification falsifies the picture of reality we get as a *product* of cognitive falsification and so is a kind of second-order falsification. What's falsified here is precisely the picture of the world that comes to us through science or cognition—the world of organized, stabilized, and categorized sense data. Worth stressing here is that cognitive

falsification yields a picture of the world we all share (and it's this picture that is the object of affective falsification). Since we've all inherited the same cognitive apparatus, we all use the same fundamental categories to carve up the world. As a result, Nietzsche can still work with some notion of truth. There's truth as correspondence to the world as it is *independently* of us, which is the truth that is falsified by our cognitive apparatus. Then there's truth as correspondence to the world as it is processed by our cognitive apparatus. Even this truth is "universal" insofar as it applies to all beings with human cognitive faculties. And this truth, as the product of cognitive falsification, is the object of affective falsification.

The distinction between cognitive and affective falsification sheds light on the kind of error and untruth involved in the generation of meaning. Cognitive falsification arranges a world for us that is minimally intelligible. This is extremely important, since cognitive falsification is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience, and so, a condition of affective falsification and meaning. But the resources that meet the demands of the need for meaning involve something more, and these resources come from the domains of non-science. For Nietzsche, science is in the business of description—"description," he states, "is what distinguishes us from older stages of knowledge and science. We are better at describing" (GS 112). Were we to remove the error and untruth that comes to us through affective falsification, we'd be left with a description of the world powerless to meet the demands of the need for meaning. As Nietzsche intimates in HH 251, the perceptions and sensations of non-science do more to allow us to construct meaning, yet they involve a distinctive kind of error that can be corrected through the perceptions and sensations of science *even if* the latter involves its own kind of error.[77]

[77] The distinction between affective and cognitive falsification applies best to *Human*. In Nietzsche's later period this distinction falls out of the picture. Nietzsche comes to see inquiry itself as driven by our affects, which problematizes *Human*'s double-brain image since the domains of non-science come to be seen as central to inquiry.

Affective Falsification and Meaning

When it comes to generating resources that can meet the demands of the need for meaning, affective falsification contributes far more than cognitive falsification. Existence and the world are given meaning by being interpreted, but this interpretive process primarily involves affective falsification. What's falsified here is the picture of the world supplied by science—the world as organized, stabilized, and categorized sense data. This picture often runs counter to how we want the world to be, or at any rate the world as a place in which we at least think we can thrive. The scientific picture of the world often shows us how insignificant our existence is and that the world is indifferent to our interests and needs. With "the scientific spirit [*wissenschaftlichen Geistes*]," an 1881 notebook entry states, "the world has become ever more indifferent to us" (11[110]).[78] Religion, as a domain of non-science, provides an excellent example of something that has affectively falsified the world through an interpretation that generates a sense of meaning. "[E]very religion," Nietzsche states, "was born out of fear and need, it has crept into existence along paths of aberrations of reason" (HH 110).[79] The origin of religion lies in its ability to provide comfort in the face of a fearful or indifferent reality, thereby responding to certain emotional needs—it gives us a picture of the world wherein our activity and existence are interpreted as meaningful. If it seems that we live in a world where we're prone at any moment to suffer terrible fates incongruous with our efforts and deeds, religion can step in and help us make sense of it. For instance, Christianity cultivates the belief that whatever terrible

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The distinction between affective and cognitive falsification starts to become blurred with *The Gay Science*, a point discussed in Part III.

[78] Translation modified from Ansell Pearson (2006).

[79] *The Gay Science* modifies this account of the origin of religion and is discussed in Part II of this chapter.

and unjust things befall us in this life, all will be set aright in the afterlife (thereby ostensibly making life in this world more bearable).

How do the spheres of non-science falsify the world given to us through cognitive falsification? Here we can turn to what Nietzsche says about *concepts and sensations*. These are the building blocks we use to fashion interpretations of the world—they replace the notions of "image" and "symbol" that were central to the account of meaning-imbuing interpretation offered in *The Birth*. In HH 1, Nietzsche articulates one of the defining tasks of his historical philosophy in terms of a "*chemistry of concepts and sensations* [Begriffe und Empfindungen]. […] All we require, and what can be given us only now the individual sciences have attained their present level, is a *chemistry* of the moral, religious and aesthetic conceptions and sensations [*Vorstellungen und Empfindungen*]." What Nietzsche means by "sensation" here is something very basic: It is a primitive kind of perception associated with things like feelings and sense-impressions. Some of the most fundamental sensations for Nietzsche are things like pleasure and pain (see HH 18), though presumably the term covers a much larger array of things that includes color perceptions, tactile sensations, and so forth. Sensations tend to be phenomenologically simple, in the sense that when we have sensations of pain, pleasure, sadness, redness, roughness, sourness, etc., they seem immediate to us. We simply happen to feel or be aware of them, even if only loosely—that is to say, we *passively* receive or experience sensations.[80] If I have a sensation of redness, I might be mistaken that the thing that I judge to be red actually *is* red, but the sensation of redness presents itself as primitive and immediate, as something to which I am passively receptive. As we'll see, sensations can be mixed with and mediated by concepts, thereby becoming more complex.

[80] Like Kant's notion of intuition, Nietzsche understands sensations as the element in perception that we passively receive. The term intuition, as Kant employed it, seldom arises in Nietzsche's middle period.

Concepts are abstract categories that we use to organize the world. We subsume sense data and sense impressions under certain concepts. If sensations are things we passively receive, then concepts are the tools in our cognitive repertoire that we actively (even if unconsciously) apply in organizing these sensations. Concepts play a crucial role in cognitive falsification by organizing and holding fast the flux of raw sense data that comes to us from the empirical world. The concepts involved in this basic cognitive process are only the most fundamental ones. Whatever picture we get through the process of cognition can be further carved up according to more and more conceptual categories. "Line," "plane," "body," "substance," "cause," and "effect" are Nietzsche's examples of fundamental conceptual categories that are used to generate experience. But concepts like "chair," "president," "human," "society," "culture" aren't nearly so fundamental. I'll call those concepts that aren't fundamental in this way "higher-order concepts." They further subsume whatever objects and representations we get as an effect of basic cognition and cognitive falsification. To avoid any potential confusion, affective falsification should not be understood as necessarily resulting from the application of higher-order concepts to the organized representations we get through cognitive falsification—it results only when the higher-order concepts falsify the picture of the world as it comes to us through cognitive falsification (more on which below).

Different from concepts, though closely related, are *Vorstellungen*—representations or conceptions. In HH 1, Nietzsche mentions sensations in tandem with *concepts* (Begriffe) and *representations* (Vorstellungen).[81] Representations or conceptions involve more than simply concepts. In the Kantian tradition, representations refer to sensations, intuitions, and concepts. In HH 1, Nietzsche isn't using *Vorstellung* in this Kantian sense, since the passage reads "moral, religious and aesthetic conceptions and sensations." Were conceptions a broader class as they are

[81] Hollingdale's translation renders "Vorstellung" as "conception" and Zimmern's as "idea."

for Kant, Nietzsche presumably would have said only "conceptions," since that would already include sensations. By "moral, religious, and aesthetic conceptions," I take Nietzsche to mean a constellation of concepts and ideas that hang together to form a general representation of the world. Sin is a *concept* that fits into a larger religious *conception* of the world that includes other concepts, like fallenness, redemption, as well as related sensations. As constellations of concepts, *Vorstellungen* are socially inculcated, which once habituated are schemas used to organize new sensations and concepts that one encounters.

Nietzsche refers to a *chemistry* of concepts and sensations because he thinks that the results of combining certain sets of sensations with certain concepts—or embedding sensations within certain conceptual frameworks—are like the results of chemical processes: We can get a compound that differs significantly from any of its more elementary starting ingredients. "According to this explanation," Nietzsche states, "there exists, strictly speaking, neither an unegoistic action nor completely disinterested contemplation; both are only sublimations [*Sublimirungen*], in which the basic element seems almost to have dispersed and reveals itself only under the most painstaking observation" (HH 1). Combining concepts and sensations in certain ways yields a product that differs from its initial form, so much so that it can be difficult to identify the starting concepts and sensations. Morality, religion, and aesthetics all work according to this kind of "sublimation."[82] These domains each generate unique kinds of sensations: moral sensations like disgust, guilt, altruism, goodness; religious sensations like sinfulness and holiness; and aesthetic sensations like beauty and disinterestedness. Nietzsche's

[82] In chemistry, sublimation is defined as a chemical process of phase change whereby a solid directly becomes a gas or vapor without passing through the intermediate liquid phase. By altering conditions of temperature or pressure, a substance like H_2O can go from being ice directly to being vapor, without being liquid water. Sublimation is a phase change, meaning that there's no change in the chemical substance: Before and after the sublimation of ice, we have H_2O molecules; they're just arranged differently, either rigidly as a solid or more randomly as a gas. Nietzsche's metaphor is apt: Gases are very different from solids, yet the base "element"—H_2O—remains the same throughout this phase change. The task of Nietzsche's historical philosophy is, using this metaphor, to identify the H_2O, the thing that remains unchanged in the sublimation.

own examples of unegoistic action and disinterested contemplation are meant to illustrate that these kinds of sensations or states are composed of more elementary sensations and concepts. The resultant sensations and concepts are so transformed that it can be hard to identify the presence of the more elementary sensations and concepts they're composed of. Unegoistic actions, despite the sensations of moral worth and esteem they're associated with, boil down to much more modest sensations and concepts rooted in egoism and self-interest; and disinterested contemplation is rooted in partialities of all kinds.

There are two outcomes to Nietzsche's account of interpretation in terms of this chemistry of concepts and sensations. First, religious, moral, and aesthetic interpretations function through this chemistry. Religion, for instance, takes ordinary sensations and subjects them to an interpretive and conceptual process that generates new concepts and sensations, like sinfulness out of feelings of inadequacy or shame.[83] This interpretive process consists in placing the elementary concepts and sensations within a new conceptual framework that allows the initial concepts and sensations to be interpreted in particular ways, thereby transforming them. I might interpret a sensation of pain as punishment by God; feelings I have about my inadequacy may result in a sense of sinfulness. "But such feelings," Nietzsche says, "are profound only insofar as when they occur certain complex groups of thoughts which we call profound are, scarcely perceptibly, regularly aroused with them; a feeling is profound because we regard the thoughts that accompany it as profound" (HH 15). That is, feelings are experienced as profound when they're associated with a certain complex group of "thoughts"—of concepts and conceptions—that we regard as profound. The sensations that result from this interpretive process are experienced *as if* immediate, like the elementary counterparts from which they're constructed; in fact, however, they are the product of a complicated interpretive process. Thus,

[83] Feelings of inadequacy or shame may still not be as elementary and basic as, say, sensations of pain or redness.

elementary sensations, like pain or redness, are ones that I do passively receive; complex sensations like the feeling of sinfulness are experienced *as if* passively received, but given that they're the products of a conceptual process, we're actually (though unconsciously) active in producing them. I might feel distinctively *sinful*, but this feeling ultimately boils down to more mundane sensations that have been interpretively reworked according to particular concepts and conceptions.

This brings us to the second important upshot. This chemistry of concepts and sensations gives us insight into how domains like morality, religion, and aesthetics carry out affective falsification. What's really fuelling the affective falsification are certain needs and fundamental interests of ours—we want the world to be a place that exhibits properties like beauty, moral goodness, and so forth, since this is a world we think we can flourish in, that is, a world that responds to our affective needs and interests. Because the base sensations and concepts, when combined, can make products that seem so different and distinct from—even opposed to—these base elements, it's easy to see how this chemistry can play into affective falsification. The chemistry can be so transformative that it generates powerful sensations and emotions, like moral disgust, the feeling of sinfulness, or the aesthetic sense of the sublime, that can strike us with the same sense of immediacy and potency that raw sensations can—when, really, they're heavily mediated by a complex host of concepts and conceptions. Thus, the products of this chemistry can be composites of sensations and concepts, such as sinfulness or guilt—both of which are concepts but can also be experienced as sensations. These products conceal their base origins, and it's the purpose of Nietzsche's historical philosophy to uncover such origins.

The perceptions and sensations of non-science that Nietzsche discusses in HH 251 play a role in imbuing the world with meaning by affectively falsifying it: the interpretive frameworks

from the domains of non-science, as complex conceptual networks, falsify the world as it comes to us through cognitive falsification. There is no such thing as sin, disinterested contemplation, or moral goodness according to the picture of the world we get through science—these non-existent entities are projected into the world, but given the complex interactions of our sensations and concepts seem to exist independently of this projection.

Sensations like guilt and sinfulness aren't *false* or *erroneous* in the sense that nobody experiences them, since many people surely do. Error and falsity enter the picture when we make a judgment that these sensations and concepts refer to things that actually exist. "It is probable," Nietzsche states, "that the objects [*Objecte*] of the religious, moral, and aesthetic sensations belong only to the surface of things, while man likes to believe that here he is in touch with the world's heart; the reason he deludes himself is that these things produce in him such profound happiness and unhappiness, and thus he exhibits the same pride here as in the case of astrology" (HH 4). Religious, moral, and aesthetic sensations have *objects* that are superficial in that they aren't actually part of reality—they only seem to be. What Nietzsche means by an "object of sensation" is the thing that we experience as, or judge to be, responsible for producing the associated sensation. When looking down at the ground in my backyard, I have a certain sensation of greenness and come to believe "there is grass in front of me"; the object of sensation here is the grass since I take it to be producing the sensation of greenness that I experience. The objects of religious, aesthetic, and moral sensation, however, don't really exist—the objects that purportedly produce the sensations aren't actually there, which is why Nietzsche compares these domains to astrology.[84] To feel sinful is one thing; but to believe that this feeling is generated by

[84] The fundamental categories of cognition *also* posit entities that aren't there. But things like sinfulness "aren't there" in a much more robust sense—sinfulness is a concept that gains no traction with the scientific view of the world. When the objects of affective falsification "aren't there," they're absent from our truest, most accurate descriptions of reality, from the picture of reality we get through science.

some real entity or state of affairs to which we are passively responsive is to make a false judgment on par with the judgments of astrology.

Human beings want to believe that the objects of these sensations actually exist because they produce "such profound happiness and unhappiness." This remark suggests that the purported objects of such sensations are the result of affective falsification: We *want* such things to exist in the world, but if we take an honest, scientific look at it, they aren't there. We project them into "the world's heart" because these objects respond to affective needs and interests of ours. They imbue meaning because they introduce into the world things we value and care about. This is why Nietzsche says these objects don't just produce profound happiness, but also profound *unhappiness*. For instance, feelings of sinfulness produce unhappiness, but this feeling can play an important role in giving a sense of meaning due to the network of beliefs in which it is situated. If I believe that there's a God overseeing my actions, and that I've done something sinful, my actions retain cosmic significance. Sinfulness is a notion that, though it involves unhappiness, helps to make the world more intelligible and my existence more significant by projecting notions of divine goodness and evil into the world.

We now have a complete picture of Nietzsche's chemistry of concepts and sensations, which shows us how affective falsification projects entities into the world that don't exist—they're illusory—but which have the capacity to help meet the demands of the need for meaning. Full-fledged interpretations of existence and the world—interpretations that imbue meaning—are generated through a complicated interplay of fundamental concepts, higher-order concepts, elementary sensations, and complex sensations.[85] What remains to be seen is how this complicated interplay works.

[85] What makes a concept higher-order is different from what makes a sensation complex. Complex sensations are amalgams of elementary sensations and feelings that have been conceptually and interpretively transformed. A

Incorporation, Needs, and Affective Falsification

Incorporation is the process of assimilating and appropriating an idea or notion into our ways of seeing, experiencing, and being in the world. It involves taking something that is at first foreign and unfamiliar—for Nietzsche this can be either a truth or an error—and making it a part of our habits and interpretation of the world. It's a process of unification and amalgamation that works to minimize and dissolve any dissonances in our way of interpreting the world. John Richardson (1996) offers a helpful picture of what incorporation amounts to: "Our classifications aren't just means to better dealing with things; they're intrinsically a mastering of those things, an assimilating of them to our past experience, hence to ourselves" (230).

In terms of concepts and sensations, this process assimilates new higher-order concepts and conceptual schemes, which in turn process our elementary sensations to produce new complex ones. Incorporation is a vital part of how meaning-imbuing interpretations develop over time. These interpretations aren't static frameworks of higher-order concepts that are brought to bear on sensations; the interpretations change over time as they encounter *new* concepts and conceptions that have to be assimilated. New concepts and ideas come out of the various domains of life and are incorporated into our ways of understanding the world. Imagine, for instance, when Christian interpretations of existence were faced with the theory of evolution; science had discovered an insight that jarred with the Christian worldview that saw human beings as divinely created in God's image. Over time, some versions of Christianity worked to

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higher-order concept is one that is applied to the picture of the world produced by cognitive falsification. Science often relies on higher-order concepts: Scientific concepts like "electron," "atom," and "galaxy" don't affectively falsify the world, they're only further, more refined conceptual subsumptions of the objects presented to us through cognitive falsification. The only error and falsity involved with these higher-order scientific concepts is the error and falsity of cognitive falsification, unless the higher-order concept refers to something that doesn't exist even under the scientific view of the world, e.g., the concepts of phlogiston or the ether.

incorporate evolution into their interpretive frameworks, some more successfully than others: Catholicism, for instance, assimilated the theory of evolution into its interpretation of existence by seeing it as a process guided by God, whereas Evangelical Christianity either failed at incorporating the theory, or incompletely incorporated it with creationism or intelligent design.[86]

Once something is incorporated into our way of interpreting the world, the interpretation itself changes. The concepts and conceptions that structure the interpretation are recalibrated as new concepts are assimilated—they exist in an ongoing reciprocal arrangement. "In matters of law, morality, and religion," Nietzsche states, "the most external aspect, that which can be seen, has, as usage, deportment, ceremony, the most *durability* […]. The cult is, like a fixed word text, always being subjected to new interpretations; concepts and sensations are the liquid element, customs the solid" (WS 77).[87] What has the most durability, temporally speaking, are the outward expressions and manifestations of law, morality, and religion. Things like rituals, ceremonies, and institutions remain relatively unchanged—or change very slowly, at any rate—but the concepts and sensations involved in and associated with these things develop, which amounts to the transformation of the interpretations of law, morality, and religion. That is, as interpretations come across new concepts that are incorporated, the interpretation itself changes, and this happens with greater rapidity than a change in customs.[88]

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[86] Affective falsification is still present in the Catholicism case. While Catholic doctrine may have been reconciled with evolution, it still sees evolution as guided by the hand of God—a claim that goes well beyond the evidence we have at hand. A deity is thus being projected into the world that Nietzsche would say we scientifically have no right to. This would therefore still count as a case of affective falsification.

[87] This insight becomes especially important in *The Genealogy*. See GM II 12-3.

[88] The celebration of Christmas is a prime example of this phenomenon. Originally it was a pagan holiday that was appropriated by Christianity, and through this appropriation, new concepts and sensations were associated with it. In the modern world, Christmas has become increasingly secular—people of non-Christian faiths, even atheists, celebrate it, implying that the concepts and sensations associated with this ceremony have changed, while the ceremony itself has remained durable (even if certain ritualistic aspects of it—e.g., going to Christmas Mass—have fallen out of favor).

Nietzsche's most common term for incorporation is *Einverleibung*, which literally means "to take into the body."[89] It is a particularly apposite term for Nietzsche to use given his frequent metaphors based on the body and digestion, as well as his broader concern for the human being as a natural entity (rather than a metaphysical or supernatural one). This process is a vital part of how he understands the activity of interpretation.

Incorporation plays a central role in the diagnostic project of Nietzsche's middle period. Nietzsche thinks that both truth (understood as correspondence to the world as it is processed by our cognitive apparatus) and error are capable of being incorporated. As a matter of historical fact he thinks we have incorporated far more errors than truths, and this has enormous implications for the prospects of maintaining the meaning-generating tension between the sensations of science and non-science. The interpretive frameworks of our particular historical moment are so heavily saturated with error that we're running the risk of a "return to barbarism." Nietzsche states, "Through immense periods of time, the intellect produced nothing but errors […]: all its higher functions, the perceptions of sense [*Wahrnehmungen der Sinne*] and generally every kind of sensation [*Empfindung*], worked with those basic errors that had been incorporated from time immemorial" (GS 110). At a glance, it's unclear whether the errors mentioned here relate to cognitive or affective falsification, but it seems that Nietzsche must mean both: that *every kind of sensation* and the *perceptions of sense* have worked with *basic errors* that have been incorporated from time immemorial suggests that he's speaking of both cognitive and affective falsification.

[89] The term *Einverleibung* only becomes prominent with *The Gay Science* (1882) and in the unpublished notebooks in 1881; previous to this, Nietzsche generally uses terms like "assimilation" (*Assimilation*) and "appropriation" (*Aneignung*) that I take to point to the same phenomenon. As Keith Ansell Pearson (2006) notes, the "notion of incorporation . . . figures in Nietzsche from his earliest published writings." (235).

What matters here are the errors resulting from affective falsification, since it's these that we can fruitfully expunge.[90] Nietzsche's discussion in GS 110 culminates in a challenge: "The ultimate question about the condition of life is posed here, and the first attempt is made here to answer the question through experiment. To what extent can truth stand to be incorporated?—that is the question; that is the experiment" (GS 110). That is, to what extent can we incorporate the kind of truth that potentially disturbs our affective interests? How far can we go in doing away with affective falsification? This is a question about the *condition* of life, Nietzsche says, because our very survival, not to mention the possibility of flourishing, hangs on realizing at least some of our fundamental affective interests.

Nietzsche's task in this period is to take our interpretations of the world and to break them down into the incorporated errors and truths that comprise them. This involves working against or reverse engineering incorporation in such a way that the pernicious errors that have been incorporated are un-incorporated, disjoined, or otherwise incapacitated. Nietzsche turns to science as a means to dissociate these errors, opening them up for critical reflection; they're removed from our pre- or unreflective ways of being in the world by through a process of *defamiliarization*. Going hand-in-hand with this process is the positive task of incorporating truth. We've failed, by Nietzsche's lights, to incorporate truths like the death of God, since "we must still defeat his shadow" (GS 108; cf. GS 125). Continuing to go on without realizing the implications of this truth poses a threat to the tension that, when properly balanced, is capable of producing the interpretive resources that meet the demands of the need for meaning. Our errors

[90] The errors of affective falsification are the only ones we can effectively extinguish. It would be enormously difficult, if not impossible, to rid ourselves of cognitive falsification, since such errors are evolutionary inheritances. More importantly, there's no foreseeable benefit to ridding ourselves of such errors. The categories that generate this type of error *construct* experience, so expunging would have seriously negative consequences.

threaten to get the best of us. Nietzsche wants to give humanity some power over the process of incorporation and the fashioning of meaning-imbuing interpretations:

> [M]en are [now] capable of *consciously* resolving to evolve themselves to a new culture, whereas formerly they did so unconsciously and fortuitously: they can now create better conditions for the propagation of men and for their nutrition, education and instruction, manage the earth as a whole economically, balance and employ the powers of men in general. This new, conscious culture destroys the old, which viewed as a whole has led an unconscious animal- and plant-life. (HH 24)

Modern Europe is at an historical crossroads where human beings are capable of constructing culture and consciously directing themselves and the conditions of their existence. This means gaining agency over the process of incorporation, thereby gaining control over the meaning-imbuing tension that Nietzsche thinks characterizes culture.

The truth that Nietzsche thinks we should incorporate—the truth that would remove the pernicious errors and illusions generated by affective falsification—is not truth as correspondence to the world independent of our cognitive machinery; it's truth as correspondence to the world as constructed by that machinery.[91] Yet it's also not Nietzsche's ambition to remove all the errors of affective falsification, since doing so would dissolve the tension between the domains of science and non-science that he thinks is so productive. This raises the question of what kind of affective falsification Nietzsche values and what kind he thinks is pernicious—and how he makes this distinction.

We now have in firm view the mechanics of how meaning-imbuing interpretation works in Nietzsche's middle period. The products of affective falsification generate meaning by projecting into the world entities that don't really exist, but which serve as loci of value. These entities respond to our affective interests by providing objects in the world that, in one way or another, allow us to see our efforts as significant, or by making the world seem less indifferent to

[91] Though Nietzsche doesn't want to "correct" the errors of cognitive falsification, he does think that it's important to be aware of the fact *that* we engage in this falsification. This truth is important for Nietzsche because he sees it as playing an essential role in dispelling the pernicious errors and illusions that come to us from metaphysics.

our wellbeing. The notion of incorporation gives us a better understanding of Nietzsche's critical project: We've incorporated a number of pernicious errors, and the task facing modern humanity is one of exscinding them while incorporating truth.

The next part of this chapter will turn to the critical aspect of Nietzsche's account, and to the way that science undergirds it. Why does Nietzsche think it is necessary to look to science to generate truths that, when incorporated, curb the dangerous tendencies of the domains of non-science? This part will provide a better sense of the tension that Nietzsche thinks generates meaning, thereby permitting us to see the standards Nietzsche uses in separating pernicious affective falsification from its innocuous or even healthy forms.

Part II: Science and the Critique of Concepts

In an 1885 notebook entry reflecting on his middle period, Nietzsche states, "Even now, most philosophers have no inkling of the real critique of concepts or (as I once called it) a real 'history of the genesis of thought'" (KGW 40[27]).[92] The history of the genesis of thought is a reference to HH 16 (quoted in this chapter's introduction) where Nietzsche states that it's the aim of *Human* to provide such a history. This history is the backbone of historical philosophy, which (recall) he claims "can no longer be separated from natural science." That a history of the genesis of thought operates as a *critique of concepts* follows from Nietzsche's understanding of how large-scale interpretations arise from the interplay between concepts and sensations. Concepts transform sensations into something complex and posit the existence of objects corresponding to these complexes. A critique of concepts can therefore bring to light the conceptual schemes we use to interpret our sensations. It's the concepts involved in affective falsification—concepts like sinfulness, holiness, etc.—that refer to and posit entities that don't actually exist. In this sense,

[92] Translation modified.

Nietzsche's critique plays a central role in reforming the ways that we interpret our sensations by tracing the origins and developmental trajectories of our conceptual schemes. The task of determining which concepts refer to entities that don't exist and which do (in terms of picture of the world we get through cognitive falsification) requires the insights of science.

How does science carry out this task? Even though the concepts of science, as a result of cognitive falsification, strictly speaking don't refer to entities that exist, Nietzsche still claims, "It will do to consider science as an attempt to humanize things as faithfully as possible" (GS 112). The picture of the world science supplies is made up of higher-order concepts that build off of and have their foundations in the basic concepts that fuel cognition. Higher-order concepts play a crucial role in scientific inquiry—science has to posit the existence of entities and phenomena using concepts that are more intricate than those that fuel basic cognition. The concept of an electron, for instance, is not one of the fundamental conceptual categories that generates experience, but it is vital to sciences like chemistry and physics. The concept of an electron is a higher-order concept—it offers a more refined and specific classification than what we get through the concepts of basic cognition. This concept still builds off of the fundamental conceptual categories that drive cognition, and since these fundamental categories belong to us *as* human beings, science is the attempt to "humanize things as faithfully as possible." The fundamental categories don't pick out objects in the world that exist there independently of us (since the world is in radical flux), but they do pick out objects that we all experience as human cognizers. The world is being cognitively falsified "for us." Affective falsification doesn't posit the existence of objects that exist for us as human beings—it posits the existence of objects on the basis of a person's affective strength. The task of science is therefore to ensure that its concepts, including its higher-order concepts, are ultimately rooted in the fundamental categories

we have as human cognizers. So the concept of an electron, if it is derivative of and ultimately underwritten only by the categories that make cognition possible, is a useful concept involving only cognitive falsification (assuming electrons exist for us as human cognizers).

Science works by constructing a conceptual edifice that as much as possible excludes any kind of non-cognitive error and falsification. Science's representation of reality casts it is as barren as possible, since it is ideally underwritten by nothing more than the basic categories of cognition.[93] As Franco (2011) nicely puts it, scientific thinking never escapes error, but "it does struggle against the grosser simplifications and falsifications that human beings have perpetrated on reality" (131). The critique of concepts that Nietzsche's historical philosophy carries out is a critique of those concepts that make reality more *affectively* bearable and manageable—it's a critique of *non-cognitive* (i.e., affectively generated) concepts. Science is thus implicated in the task of conceptual critique in two ways. First, it provides us with a barren and "faithful" representation of reality that we can use to compare to the representation of reality generated by the domains of non-science.[94] Science's representation will allow us to see how and where our other representations go wrong, i.e., what they erroneously project into the world. And secondly, it provides the methodology by which the critique is carried out—the scientific method helps us to historically trace the concepts that come to us through the domains of non-science (which is why HH 1 claims that his historical philosophy can no longer be separated from natural science).

There are three motivations Nietzsche has to use science as tool for conceptual critique. First, he simply takes truth to have intrinsic value. Science is by extension valuable since it is driven by the will to truth and serves as its most manifest expression. Nietzsche doesn't, as

[93] In AOM 31, titled "In the Desert of Science," Nietzsche likens scientific inquiry to a laborious journey through the desert where the "man of science" is prone to embrace illusion. Because he's stuck in a barren landscape that isn't liable to respond to his non-cognitive needs, he's all too easily enticed by mirages that, if he embraces them, make him "dead to science."

[94] As Nietzsche states, "[G]enuine science [is…] *the imitation of nature in concepts*" (HH 38).

we've seen, hope to rid us of affectively generated error and untruth *in toto*; but truth (as correspondence to the picture of the world generated by cognitive faculties) is still something valuable for Nietzsche, even if it isn't the be all and end all. Truth is valuable in part because we want our interpretations of the world and existence to correspond to reality as much as possible. If the task of interpretation is to imbue existence and the world with meaning such that we can affirm these things, then the picture of the world and our existence within it has to exhibit some degree of accuracy. Otherwise, what we're affirming isn't really the world or our existence at all. As Lanier Anderson (2005) puts it, "Without any constraint of truthfulness, I might 'tell my life to myself' (EH F) as a pretty story indeed. But if the life-story I affirm is mere fiction, I will not have approved *my* life at all" (203). Though Anderson is here speaking of a person's life-narrative, the same can be said of our general interpretations of existence and the world.

There's another reason that Nietzsche looks to science as a corrective. He thinks many of the errors we've incorporated that are responsible for generating meaning are now, with the advent of modernity, on shaky foundations. The tendencies toward error threaten to get out of control and undercut our ability to fashion meaning-imbuing interpretations. The meaning-imbuing potential of these errors is becoming increasingly impotent and obsolete, largely as a result of scientific inquiry itself. This mode of inquiry undercuts our ability to endorse such errors and illusions, thereby casting suspicion on them and preparing them for replacement.

Last of all, Nietzsche turns to science because the interpretations we've inherited are deeply flawed. At one time, religious interpretations may have had greater potential in meeting the demands of the need for meaning. But in Nietzsche's view they have always been defective. At least in the Western world, these interpretations always *devalued* the world as we experience it by positing a higher realm where meaning is rooted. Interpretations motivated by such a

distinction are inherently objectionable for Nietzsche on the grounds that they inhibit our ability to truly flourish. In positing this distinction, these interpretations are limited because they hinder our capacity to affirm human existence as it actually is.

In what follows, I'll look to the critical hopes Nietzsche has in store for science by turning to his critique of metaphysics, which serves as a case study for how the tendencies that generate meaning have become pathological. This critique is a clear example of the three reasons sketched above for why Nietzsche looks to science. This critique also serves as a particularly powerful illustration of how science can regulate the "evil and perilous consequences" (HH 251) of non-science. Critiquing the *need* for metaphysics—which is different from the critique of metaphysics—is one of the cornerstones of the critical project that defines Nietzsche's middle period. These critiques therefore are paradigmatic instances of his conception of science as conceptual critique

Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and the Need for Metaphysics

Given the centrality of Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysics, it's necessary to start off by saying a few things about how he conceives of metaphysics and what is meant by a "need for metaphysics" (or as it is sometimes called, a "metaphysical need"). Nietzsche's basic understanding of "metaphysics" is taken almost completely from Schopenhauer. "By *metaphysics*," Schopenhauer states, "I understand all so-called knowledge that goes beyond the possibility of experience, and so beyond nature or the given phenomenal appearance of things, in order to give information about that by which, in some sense or other, this experience or nature is conditioned, or in popular language, about that which is hidden behind nature, and renders nature possible" (WWR II 164). Schopenhauer's understanding of metaphysics centrally involves his

idiosyncratic reading of Kant's "two-world" distinction between appearances and the thing-in-itself. Built into Schopenhauer's understanding isn't just a carving up of the world in terms of phenomena and noumena; metaphysics is, specifically, inquiry into how a more fundamental metaphysical world *generates* the world as we experience it—or, as Schopenhauer states, metaphysics "strives to pass beyond the phenomenal appearance to that which appears," or *manifests itself* in the world of appearance (WWR II 177).

In this vein Schopenhauer is insistent that the proper subject matter of metaphysics isn't exclusively the noumenal realm or the thing-in-itself: "Metaphysics […] remains immanent, and does not become transcendent; for it never tears itself entirely from experience, but remains the mere interpretation and explanation thereof, as it never speaks of the thing-in-itself otherwise than in its relation to the phenomenon" (WWR II 183). According to Schopenhauer, metaphysical inquiry goes "beyond the phenomenon, i.e., nature, to what is concealed in or behind it, yet always regarding it only as that which appears in the phenomenon, not independently of all phenomenon" (ibid.). Schopenhauer conceives of metaphysics as a form of inquiry that brings to light truths about the noumenal realm and its *relation* to the phenomenal realm. It never deals purely with the noumenal but always remains tethered to the world as we experience it because the noumenal matters to us only in its *relation* to the phenomenal.[95]

But what exactly does Schopenhauer mean by a *need* for metaphysics? How does it arise and how is it bound up with his relational understanding of metaphysics? These are important questions since it's conceivable that, even if as Nietzsche claims we have no access to a

[95] *The Birth* also advances this relational conception of metaphysics. Nietzsche says of music that it "is not, as all others [i.e., other arts] are, a copy of appearances, […] it represents *the metaphysical in relation to all that is physical in the world*, the thing-in-itself in relation to all appearances" (BT 16, Nietzsche's emphasis). Music doesn't represent the Will—the thing-in-itself—but the Will in relation to the world as representation.

fundamental metaphysical realm, we might still have an affective *need* to assume the existence of such a realm.

The need for metaphysics is not a need for abstract philosophical theorizing about the relation between the metaphysical and the physical. According to Schopenhauer, the need for metaphysics arises from the fact that the human being "marvels at its [the human being's] own work, and asks itself what it itself is. And its wonder is the more serious, as here for the first time it stands consciously face to face with *death*, and besides, the finiteness of all existence, the vanity and fruitlessness of all effort force themselves on it" (WWR II 160). The need for metaphysics arises from the fact that human beings are reflective creatures who realize the inevitability of death and come to see that in the course of their lives all their efforts and strivings will, in the grand scheme of things, amount to nothing.

But how does this condition of ours as human beings—along with our awareness of it—generate a *need* for Schopenhauer's relational view of metaphysics? "[U]ndoubtedly," Schopenhauer continues, "it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that gives the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations [*Auslegungen*] of the world. If our life were without end and free from pain, it would possibly not occur to anyone to ask why the world exists, and why it does so precisely in this way, but everything would be taken as a matter of course" (WWR II 161).[96] Schopenhauer here refines his conception of the origin of the need for metaphysics: When we realize that the world is constituted as it is, we naturally come to ask why it constituted in that way rather than another. We recognize that the world is structured so that our pain and suffering are inevitable, and that in our finitude we can't have any lasting impact. Pain and suffering are

[96] Note Schopenhauer's use of the term *Auslegung*, which usually is better translated as "interpretation," but sometimes Schopenhauer seems to have something more like "explanation" in mind. The verb *auslegen* means "to lay out," "to set up." I've decided in this instance to remain with the translator's decision of "explanation."

why we need metaphysics in the first place—if we didn't experience pain or suffering, we wouldn't (according to Schopenhauer) even think to ask why the world is as it is. Pain, suffering, and death force us to question whether it's worth going on with a form of existence in which such objectionable things are so commonplace.[97] In questioning the way the world is, we can at least see whether we're doomed to live such an existence, or whether there is a way to mitigate its problematic aspects. Once all this dawns on us, Schopenhauer believes that we engage in philosophical reflection in order arrive at a metaphysical explanation of the world. The need for metaphysics is therefore a kind of affective need—metaphysical accounts respond to concerns we have about the character of our existence and the nature of the world.

Crucial to Schopenhauer's argument is his claim—which he spends most of "On Man's Need for Metaphysics" trying to substantiate—that purely naturalistic or physical explanations (i.e., scientific explanations) will not satisfy our philosophical reflection. He insists that we need metaphysical explanations that show how the physical world we experience is grounded in a more fundamental noumenal one. Schopenhauer looks askance at purely physical explanations because he thinks they always leave a crucial "why" question unanswered. He concedes that the phenomenal world can in principle be completely explained according to physical laws. But such explanations never fully answer questions about *why* the world is the way it is. Causal explanations of events have no stopping point—there is no physical first cause (Schopenhauer

[97] Schopenhauer offers different explanations or interpretations for why we need metaphysics that differ in their focus (as the quotations above demonstrate).Sometimes he emphasizes the role that death plays, at other times he focuses on our vanity and impotence in trying to change the world, and sometimes he emphasizes suffering and pain. The central theme uniting all of these formulations—or at least the theme that Nietzsche picks up on—concerns the objectionable aspects of existence where suffering plays the essential role. For Schopenhauer, suffering is why we want a metaphysical explanation and interpretation of existence. Young (2006) misses this point, and sees the need for metaphysics as a "human universal. The history of every culture exhibits structures designed to assure one of the non-finality of death" (86). Though Schopenhauer does mention the need for metaphysics as stemming from "knowledge of death," he immediately adds "and therewith [*und neben*] the consideration of the suffering and misery of life." Our awareness of death is a species of suffering—it is problematic insofar as death and our awareness of it causes us to suffer. So Young is mistaken to see the need for metaphysics as responding to worries about death in particular rather than suffering in general.

assumes that space and time are infinite—see WWR II 173). And physical explanations about why or how we experience certain qualities, like redness, always leave a different sort of "why" question unanswered. For instance, you can tell me that my experience of redness is produced when light of a certain wavelength is reflected off an object and reaches my eye, but you can't tell me *why* I experience *that* wavelength as red. There's still some "why" question about the nature of experience *as such* that physical explanations aren't able to answer. Physical explanations can't, in other words, offer an account of *why things appear to us as they do*. In failing to answer these sorts of "why" questions, we can't according to Schopenhauer make any real headway into the question of why the world has the fundamental structure it does, and so why we suffer, feel pain, and die.

The need for metaphysics plays an important role in questions of meaning. Metaphysical explanations as Schopenhauer construes them answer our need to understand how our lives can be *worthwhile*, and this (at least as far as Nietzsche is concerned) lands us squarely on the topic of meaningfulness. The need to understand how our lives can be worthwhile stems from our affective—not our cognitive—relation to the world. That we are finite and that we suffer are facts that call for some kind of justification or explanation. In light of the unpleasant aspects of existence, we want to know if there's some silver lining, or if at least there's any reason to carry on in light of the objectionable aspects of existence. Metaphysical explanations or interpretations (*Auslegungen*) of existence provide some sense of meaning in at least two ways: They *make sense* of our suffering (they render our suffering at least minimally intelligible) by giving it an explanation, and ideally such explanations allow us to see our existence as significant and worthwhile. The details of such explanations allow us to determine the extent to which we can

mitigate the objectionable aspects of existence, how much they're truly part of the nature of things, and so forth.[98]

Another important aspect of the need for metaphysics—one that clarifies its connections to questions of meaningfulness and our affective interests—is its religious dimension. Schopenhauer thinks that this need can be satisfied in one of two ways: one can look to religion, which Schopenhauer sees as a "popular metaphysics" that satisfies the need for metaphysics among the masses and less sophisticated; or one can look to philosophical reflection, which is "accessible only to an extremely small number of persons" (WWR II 164).[99] That Schopenhauer offers religion as an example of how the need for metaphysics can be satisfied reveals its connection to questions of meaningfulness: religions provide their believers with a sense of purpose or meaning in the order of things. As Schopenhauer states, "Religions fill very well the place of metaphysics in general, the need of which man feels to be imperative" because they supply "indispensable consolation in the deep sorrows of life" (WWR II 167). Religions give solace and comfort for the suffering we experience as human beings by providing an explanation or justification of the problematic aspects of existence, thereby satisfying the need for metaphysics and giving the sense that the demands of the need for meaning are being met. Julian Young (2006) notes that according to Schopenhauer, one "major function of any properly developed religion" is the idea that "[o]ver and above the 'physical' […] we need to believe in a 'metaphysical' domain, the character of which will reconcile us to at least the *grand* narrative of

[98] Schopenhauer's final judgment on the necessity and role of suffering is, of course, pessimistic—suffering is no mere illusion but has its origin in the insatiably striving Will. There's no way to rectify the fact of suffering. Yet it's still the case that Schopenhauer provides an explanation of suffering, and though this explanation is pessimistic, it provides suffering with at least some meaning since it gives us reasons for why we suffer.

[99] Schopenhauer distinguishes religion from philosophy in terms of how each arrives at metaphysical truths. Religion is essentially allegorical—the truths it yields aren't "true *sensu stricto et proprio* [true in the strict and proper sense]" (WWR II 166). Philosophy articulates truth literally, whereas religion gets at the same truth indirectly through allegories and metaphors. Schopenhauer thinks philosophy is superior to religion because something inevitably gets lost in religion's indirect and metaphorical articulation of metaphysical truth.

our existence" (11-2). What Young means by a "grand narrative of our existence" is an account of human existence that would imbue it with meaning. Religions excel at providing accounts that profess to supply large-scale interpretations of existence that imbue it with significance, intelligibility, and (oftentimes) purpose.

Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer that there's a connection between the need for metaphysics and religion, but Nietzsche is much more cynical about it. He sees philosophical metaphysics as a botched attempt to secularize religious metaphysics. "Schopenhauer's metaphysics," he states, "demonstrates that even now the scientific spirit is not yet sufficiently strong: so that, although all the dogmas of Christianity have long since been demolished, the whole medieval Christian conception of the world and of the nature of man could in Schopenhauer's teaching celebrate a resurrection" (HH 26).[100] Schopenhauer's metaphysical system—along with his account of the need for metaphysics—is really just a cloaked version of Christianity that works to reinstate a conception of the world and human existence that is essentially Christian. The fact that Schopenhauer's metaphysics is meant to offer a more sophisticated, non-religious satisfaction of the need metaphysics only obfuscates the need's actual religious origins and nature. We'll see why this obfuscation isn't, by Nietzsche's lights, innocuous.

Nietzsche's Critique of Metaphysics

Though Nietzsche's argument for dispelling the need for metaphysics presupposes his attack on metaphysics and religion in general, it is important to distinguish between his attack on metaphysics *as such* and his attack on the *need* for metaphysics. This is because it's necessary to distinguish the existence of a need from the existence of what can *satisfy* it or meet its demands.

[100] Young (2006) correctly observes that for Nietzsche the "metaphysical need is a Christian creation" (85).

I'll deal with each of these critiques in turn, looking first to the critique of metaphysics as such and then to its associated need.

As far as metaphysics is concerned, Nietzsche's misgivings concern, on the one hand, skepticism about the existence of a metaphysical realm and, on the other, an outright denial of any epistemological access to such a realm. In *Human* Nietzsche doesn't *deny* the existence of a metaphysical or noumenal world—as far as its existence is concerned, he's agnostic. As Clark (1991) notes, *Human*'s "position on the metaphysical world is equivalent to TL's ["On Truth and Lying"] agnosticism regarding truth. We cannot rule out the possibility" (99). Yet, drawing from the methodological presuppositions of his historical philosophy, Nietzsche denies that we can make any *claims* about such a realm. Philosophers like Schopenhauer conceive of this realm as lying beyond the world as we experience it; Nietzsche thinks we can't have epistemological access to it *because* it lies beyond experience. Even if, as Schopenhauer claims, the aim of metaphysical inquiry is truth about the relation between the noumenal and phenomenal, Nietzsche thinks we can't arrive at even this kind of truth.[101] How could we say anything substantive about the relation between the noumenal and phenomenal if we can't say anything whatsoever about the noumenal?

If we carry out a critique of metaphysical concepts, Nietzsche thinks we'll find that the presuppositions of these concepts preclude access to the realm they ostensibly refer to. The only access we have to reality is through our senses, and the generation of (cognitive) representations of reality requires the application of concepts to sensations. According to Nietzsche, we don't

[101] Even though Nietzsche targets Schopenhauer, his criticisms apply more broadly than to just the German tradition of philosophical metaphysics. For instance, Platonic idealism doesn't advance a Kantian distinction between noumenal world and phenomenal world, but for Nietzsche it still advances a two-world distinction insofar as it posits a realm of forms against empirical reality. For explicit criticisms of this aspect of Platonic metaphysics in Nietzsche's middle period, see D 3, 448, 469 (where he links Christianity with Platonism) and 474 (where Nietzsche links Schopenhauer to Plato). Schopenhauer serves as a central figure for Nietzsche because he is the most recent manifestation of what is wrong with metaphysical philosophy.

have access to a realm lying beyond the empirical one, and his reasons for thinking this are straightforward: we can't even have a *sensation* of the noumenal world because, by definition, it lies beyond the empirical one, and sensations, coming to us from our sense organs, apply only to the empirical world. The noumenal realm can't serve as the object of sensation, and it therefore lies beyond representation. "[M]ore rigorous logicians," Nietzsche states (approvingly referring to Afrikan Spir), "having clearly identified the concept of the metaphysical as that of the unconditioned, consequently also unconditioning, have disputed any connection between the unconditioned (the metaphysical world) and the world we know" (HH 16). Here we see Nietzsche's conceptual critique at work. The concept of the metaphysical boils down to the concept of the unconditioned. Recall Schopenhauer's remark from WWR II 164 that metaphysics seeks "to give information about that by which, in some sense or other, this experience or nature is conditioned." The unconditioned is the world independent of the most basic categories we use to make sense of it—so, for instance, according to Kant the unconditioned is outside space and time. For Nietzsche, something unconditioned in this manner must also be *unconditioning*—it can't *condition* experience as we know it if it's so radically different from it. Or, at least we couldn't know anything about *how* it conditioned experience.

By tracing the concept of the metaphysical in this way, Nietzsche arrives at the conclusion that we can't establish any coherent relationship between the noumenal and the phenomenal. The most we can say about the noumenal realm is simply how it's *not* like the world as we experience it. And such negative claims rule out the possibility of arriving at any explanation for how the world as we experience it is generated by or has its source in the noumenal realm.[102]

[102] "[O]ne could assert nothing at all," he states, "of the metaphysical world except that it was a being-other, an inaccessible, incomprehensible being other; it would be a thing of negative qualities" (HH 9). Because we can't say

Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhaur's conception of metaphysics is motivated in part by his falsificationist account of truth and knowledge. If we already falsify the empirical world—and are thereby blocked from having knowledge of empirical reality as it is in itself—then we certainly can't know anything about a realm *beyond* the empirical world. As it happens though, Nietzsche's understanding of cognitive falsification spells serious trouble for his critique of metaphysics. If truth is defined in terms of the correspondence between our representations and reality, and the only access we have to reality is through representations that have been conceptually rendered, then how could we ever come to know anything about reality independently of our conceptual apparatus? Nietzsche criticizes Schopenhauer for thinking that we have access to a noumenal realm beyond experience; yet those same criticisms apply equally to Nietzsche's claims about empirical reality as it is independent of our cognitive contributions. How could we know that the true nature of reality is one that, in its constant flux, always evades our conceptual categories (since our representations of reality require these very conceptual categories)? Indeed, how could we even know that empirical reality independent from our cognition of it is in a state of constant flux? Knowledge of this sort seems to amount to the same kind of knowledge that Nietzsche thinks Schopenhauer's conception of metaphysics problematically presupposes. His faslficationist claims commit more or less the same misstep as Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Nietzsche's falsificationist position can't, in my view, be made more palatable; the problem identified here goes to the root of these views. However misguided, Nietzsche thought he could advance his falsificationist account given certain scientific insights about how our senses distort reality. His source on these findings was largely F.A. Lange.

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anything positive about the metaphysical world—because we can't arrive at truths about it other than how it's not like the world we experience—we can't have any satisfying sense of how the noumenal relates to the phenomenal.

The unpalatable facets of Nietzsche's account aside, for him we simply *can't* have access to reality as it is independently of our cognitive contributions, so we're forbidden from deriving the relational truths aimed at by metaphysical inquiry. "[W]hat appears in appearance," Nietzsche states in HH 16, "is precisely *not* the thing in itself, and no conclusion can be drawn from the former as to the nature of the latter." The thing-in-itself can't appear in appearances, so Schopenhauer's hope "to pass beyond the phenomenal appearance to that which appears" (WWR II 177) is ill founded. That the thing-in-itself doesn't appear in appearances is clear from the fact that *even if* we construe this term as something wholly empirical, it *still* wouldn't appear in appearances. If we understand the "thing-in-itself" to refer to the empirical world as it is independent of our cognition of it, rather than referring to some positively existing metaphysical realm that lies beyond experience, then according to Nietzsche it would refer to empirical reality as in radical flux.[103] Not only does our conceptual apparatus fail to represent the world as in constant flux, it generates experience as we know it by actively *falsifying* this reality. We only arrive at cognitive representations of the world through this process of falsification, which is why what appears in appearance is precisely not the thing-in-itself; cognition works to distort the real, ever-changing nature of empirical reality, it works to *exclude* the thing-in-itself through its stabilizing and organizing categories. As Nadeem Hussain (2004) concludes, even if Nietzsche forfeits the idea of a metaphysical thing-in-itself, falsification would still be pervasive in our

[103] Nietzsche's use of the term "thing in itself" is fraught with equivocation. Sometimes he means "thing-in-itself" as Schopenhauer conceives of it, as a positive entity existing outside experience but which generates experience. At other times he means "thing-in-itself" to refer to the empirical world as it is independent of our cognition of it. Under this non-metaphysical understanding of the term, the thing-in-itself doesn't generate the empirical world—it just *is* the empirical world stripped of our cognitive contributions. Clark (1991) makes note of this point by drawing a useful distinction between the "metaphysical world" and the "thing in itself": "Belief in a metaphysical world therefore presupposes belief in the existence or conceivability of the thing-in-itself but is not identical to it. There is a metaphysical world only if truth differs radically from what human beings can know (empirically), whereas the world is a thing-in-itself if (as far as we can tell from our concept of truth) its true nature might differ radically from the best human theory of it" (99). With respect to the HH 16 (quoted above), it doesn't matter which reading of thing-in-itself we take. Even if we take it to refer to the empirical world as it is independent of our cognition, the thing-in-itself would still fail to appear in appearances.

cognitive hold of reality: Nietzsche advances "a conception of our thoughts, and of our language, as referring to clusters of sensations using concepts given which all such claims, literally construed, are false. What is important to see is that according to such a view our claims about middle-sized objects would be false even if there were no [metaphysical] thing-in-itself" (342).[104]

One of the truths Nietzsche thinks we have to incorporate is the fact that our basic cognitive faculties falsify reality as it is in itself—we have to incorporate "the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science—the insight into delusion and error as a condition of cognitive and sensate existence" (GS 107). Incorporation of this truth will ensure that we don't fall prey to the enticements of metaphysics. If we incorporate the truth that cognition necessarily falsifies, then we will have come to accept that we lack access to reality beyond conceptual representation, thereby relieving ourselves of any reason or impetus to posit such a realm (as far as our interest in truth and knowledge is concerned). Incorporating the fact of cognitive falsification would be to fully realize its implications, which in turn would mean that we'd realize that our cognitive interests don't hang on having to discover truths about a thing-in-itself (construed metaphysically or otherwise).

Successful incorporation of this truth relieves us of any reason *as far as our interest in truth and knowledge is concerned*—but there's still the question of our *affective* interests and needs. A condition of our flourishing may require us to posit a metaphysical realm. After all, Schopenhauer's reasons for postulating the need for metaphysics were less cognitive than affective: Presupposing a metaphysical realm answers to an affective need to see our existence as worthwhile in the face of all that is objectionable in it. None of Nietzsche's arguments against

[104] Hussain is speaking here of Spir's conception of thoughts and sensations, not Nietzsche's. But this is a conception that Nietzsche was committed to during the middle period. My reading of Nietzsche's views about concepts and sensations is indebted to Hussain's article, titled "Nietzsche's Positivism."

metaphysical philosophy implies that we don't have a need for metaphysics—a metaphysical realm may or may not exist, and whether or not we have access to it implies nothing about the nature of our needs and non-cognitive interests. It won't do to suppose that we can't satisfy this need due to the fact that we don't have access to metaphysical truth; all this fact shows us is that satisfying the need for metaphysics would require illusions generated by affective falsification. If compelling, these illusions would give us the *sense* that we have access to a metaphysical realm and would thereby provide the need for metaphysics with a substitute satisfaction. Nietzsche isn't opposed, in principle, to error and illusion. So his reason for wanting to dispel the need for metaphysics can't stem purely from the truth that we lack access to a metaphysical realm. It's necessary to distinguish here between the existence of a need and what can *satisfy* that need or meet its demands.

Nietzsche's Critique of the Need for Metaphysics

Regardless of his criticism of metaphysics as such, what by Nietzsche's lights is wrong with the *need* for metaphysics? The simple answer is that, according to Nietzsche, the need for metaphysics is not a *genuine* need. In order to understand why he thinks this, we have to turn to his general understanding of human needs. In HH 476, Nietzsche speaks of how the Church in the Middle Ages "was designed to meet needs based on fictions [*auf Fictionen beruhenden Bedürfnissen*] which, where they did not yet exist, it was obliged to invent (the need for redemption)."[105] The need for metaphysics, while not explicitly identified as one such need, is implicitly incriminated here. Much as a drug addict may think that he needs another fix, so do we falsely perceive the need for metaphysics as genuine. As Julian Young (2006) aptly characterizes it, "The underlying idea, here, is […] that like advertisers who *create* needs where none existed

[105] Translation modified.

previously in order to generate a market for their products, so the 'metaphysical need' is a Christian *creation*, and hence, as one might seek to 'de-programme' someone brainwashed by Scientology, something that should and can be eliminated" (85-86).

What Nietzsche finds objectionable about the need for metaphysics isn't that we might have to employ illusions and error to satisfy it. It's objectionable because the need is specious. Nietzsche employs a distinction between genuine and specious needs throughout his middle period works.[106] The distinction is based on what happens when the perceived need goes unsatisfied. When genuine needs go unsatisfied, some serious harm results to our self-preservation or our ability to flourish; when a specious need goes unsatisfied, no serious harm results, and in some cases we actually *benefit* (at least in the long run) from refusing its satisfaction.[107] Nietzsche thinks that failing to satisfy the need for metaphysics—though we may have some "withdrawal symptoms"—will ultimately be to our benefit because this ostensible need is specious and pernicious.

What I mean when I say that the need for metaphysics is specious is something like the following. Imagine that I have a cold and believe that drinking hard liquor is the way to cure it: I come to believe, "I need hard liquor (to cure my cold)." But this claim is altogether false. Hard liquor will do nothing to cure my cold, so my perceived need is specious. In drinking the liquor I might fool myself into believing that my cold is actually getting cured, when really I'm just

[106] The distinction predates Nietzsche's middle period. In "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" (1876) he distinguishes three categories of needs: needs can be "genuine" or "true" [*wahrhaft*] (see RWB 252); they can be "illusory" [*Scheinbedürfnissen*] (RWB 229); or they can be "wholly spurious" [*ein ganz erlogenes… Bedürfniss*] (UM IV 218). In the HH 476 passage quoted above, Nietzsche contrasts those "needs based on fictions" with "true needs" [*wahren Bedürfnissen*]. In *Daybreak* he mentions "actual need and distress" [*eigentliche nothleidende Bedürfniss*] (D 125), suggesting that there's a non-actual (i.e., illusory or specious) counterpart.

[107] One of the developments Nietzsche makes in his middle period concerns this question of what results when a genuine need goes unsatisfied. In *Human*, Nietzsche understands genuine needs in terms of the harm to our self-preservation when they go unsatisfied. By the time of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche thinks less of self-preservation and more of human flourishing and life-affirmation (which sometimes conflict with the needs of self-preservation).

getting inebriated; all the while, the liquor is actually making my cold worse. It'd be much better if I refrained from alcohol altogether.

This example is an apposite one, since Nietzsche sometimes discusses the need for metaphysics in tandem with narcotization. It's a need that we simply don't have to satisfy in order to ensure our preservation or flourishing. Worse yet, satisfying this specious need actually works to harm us, even if (or because) it narcotizes us. Whatever impulsion we feel toward metaphysical explanations is a dangerous one that threatens our capacity to flourish. The following passage demonstrates how pernicious the need for metaphysics is as a narcotic:

> *The twofold struggle against an ill*. When we are assailed by an ill we can dispose of it either by getting rid of its cause or by changing the effect it produces on our sensibilities [*Empfindung*]: that is to say by reinterpreting the ill into a good whose good effects will perhaps be perceptible only later. Religion and art (and metaphysical philosophy too) endeavor to bring about a change of sensibility [*Empfindung*], partly through changing our judgment as to the nature of our experiences (for example with the aid of the proposition: "whom God loveth he chastiseth"), partly through awakening the ability to take pleasure in pain, in emotion in general (from which the art of tragedy takes its starting-point). The more a man inclines towards reinterpretation, the less attention he will give to the cause of the ill and to doing away with it; the momentary amelioration and narcoticizing such as is normally employed for example in a case of toothache, suffices him in the case of more serious sufferings too. The more the domination of the religions and all the arts of narcosis declines, the stricter attention men pay to the actual abolition of the ill: which is, to be sure, a bad outlook for […] the priests: for these have hitherto lived on the narcoticizing of human ills. (HH 108)

The need for metaphysics arose through this art of reinterpretation, where a certain sensation or sensibility is conceptually reworked. We feel that we need a metaphysical interpretation of existence—especially in its religious forms—because we've become hooked on the kind of satisfaction it provides: It allows us to see our existence as divinely significant, it gives us a sense of purpose, it allows us to make sense of the world in all its complexity, and it gives us the sense that we're meeting the demands of the need for meaning. Yet the meaning that these religious and metaphysical systems imbue is really just numbing us to the actual affliction.

What is this affliction? It's precisely the sense of meaninglessness Nietzsche combats. Nietzsche thinks that metaphysics was, at least at one point in history, better equipped to supply us with resources to meet the demands of the need for meaning. But now—with the onset of

modernity—metaphysics fails to provide us with reliable resources for meeting this need's demands. Instead of actually generating the positive sense that we can affirm existence, we have desperately clung to metaphysical explanations as a way to simply avoid acknowledging the bankruptcy of such metaphysical resources. We have avoided acknowledging that we're on the brink of utter meaninglessness. Our reliance on metaphysics, in other words, doesn't generate any sense of flourishing or affirmation; it just gives us a false sense of significance, purpose, and intelligibility such that we don't think to question the real state of affairs we're facing.

The need for metaphysics has effectively hijacked and pathologized the genuine need for meaning. A sense of meaningfulness is a condition of our flourishing, and possibly even of our preservation. "Gradually," Nietzsche claims, "man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfill one more condition of existence than any other animal: man *has to* believe, to know, from time to time *why* he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life—without faith in *reason in life*" (GS 1). We have to have some sense about *why* we exist—we need to have faith that existence is worthwhile, not just to flourish, but possibly merely to go on existing. It is this affective need or fundamental interest of ours that has made us fantastic animals—the need for meaning is, at least in part, what separates us from other animals.

Traditionally—or at least for the last large portion of human history—religious metaphysics has effectively met the demands of the need for meaning. In relying on metaphysics to continue to meet its demands, we have incorporated its errors and illusions. Before science undercut our faith in having access to metaphysical truth, metaphysics was less problematic. But now things are different. "Under the rule of religious ideas," Nietzsche states, "one has got used to the idea of 'another world (behind, below, above)' and feels an unpleasant emptiness and deprivation at the annihilation of religious delusions" (GS 151). The process of incorporation—

of having gotten used to the idea of 'another world'—explains why the need for metaphysics has become so entrenched that the toppling of religious ideas brings with it a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. We've relied on the errors of metaphysics for so long to satisfy our affective interests that we now feel that we *need* metaphysics and that it's only through metaphysics that we can meet the demands of the need for meaning. As our religious errors and illusions are undermined by science, we find ourselves confronting conditions of emptiness, deprivation, and meaninglessness. We're now using metaphysics as a quick fix, to dull ourselves temporarily to the fact that we lack the resources to meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Nietzsche thinks we strongly feel we need metaphysical explanations: "How strong the metaphysical need is and how hard nature makes it to bid it a final farewell, can be seen from the fact that even when the free spirit has divested himself of everything metaphysical the highest effects of art can easily set the metaphysical strings, which have long been silent or indeed snapped apart, vibrating in sympathy" (HH 153; cf. HH 22). The "free spirit," as the embodiment of Nietzsche's middle-period philosophy,[108] has not just come to the realization that metaphysical philosophy is bankrupt; he has worked at incorporating this realization and so is able to live in accordance with it more so than others. Yet even he still feels the tug of the need for metaphysics. That nature itself makes it difficult to overcome the need for metaphysics shows how powerfully this need is felt and how thoroughly the metaphysical errors that fuel it have been incorporated—and therefore how difficult a task it will be to abolish the allure of metaphysics.

[108] The subtitle of *Human, All Too Human* is *A Book for Free Spirits*. As Amy Mulin (2000) notes, "On the back cover of the original 1882 edition of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells us that this book represents "the conclusion of a series of writings by Friedrich Nietzsche whose common goal is to erect a new image and ideal of the free spirit" (383). Nietzsche tells us that to this series belong: *Human, all too Human* (1878), *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880), *Daybreak* (1881), and *The Gay Science* (1882, Books 1-4)" (383). Nietzsche thus defines his middle period in terms of the figure of the free spirit. In addition to Mulin (2000), see Franco (2011).

Not only is the need for metaphysics specious, but its continued satisfaction poses an ever-increasing risk to our wellbeing. Though Nietzsche thinks that our proclivity for metaphysical systems like Schopenhauer's "demonstrates that even now the scientific spirit is not yet sufficiently strong," it's still the case that the scientific enterprise is now fully underway. It's no longer a live option to try to curb the scientific spirit—an option that wouldn't appeal to Nietzsche anyway. "The influence of science has already acquired such depth and breadth that the artists of our century have, without intending to do so, already become glorifiers of the 'delights' of science!" (D 433). Nietzsche here looks to art (a realm of non-science) as evidence of the pervasive influence of science. Nineteenth century realism in art is for Nietzsche confirmation of science's impact on other domains. His point is that "the march of science" (D 547) is now so firmly underway that even the domains of non-science are affected. Though the scientific spirit isn't sufficiently strong, Nietzsche nevertheless thinks that we have incorporated knowledge to the point that it has become a need—"eventually knowledge and the striving for the true found their place as a need among other needs" (GS 110). That said, it's presumably a relatively weak need that can be easily trumped by our other, affective needs.

This state of affairs leads us to a double bind. The need for metaphysics has pathologized the need for meaning—metaphysics is experienced as a need, even if it's a specious one. Yet the march of science threatens to only further undermine the presuppositions of metaphysics. The errors and illusions that satisfy this specious need are coming to stand on increasingly frail foundations. Science is problematizing even the substitute satisfactions we could turn to as ways to satisfy the need for metaphysics. If we don't start working to incorporate the truths of science and exterminate the need for metaphysics, we may find ourselves in a truly perilous situation of utter meaninglessness. Relying on metaphysics would be to paint ourselves into a corner.

However, even if it has pathologized the need for meaning, metaphysics still supplies us more than any other domain with the resources that we *feel* can meet its demands. As the presuppositions of metaphysical philosophy become less tenable as a result of scientific discovery, we find ourselves increasingly unable to realize and meet those affective interests and needs that center on meaning. Nietzsche's task is to wean us off the need for metaphysics while giving us meaning-imbuing resources from the domains of science and non-science.

Trying to get ourselves out of this situation itself courts certain dangers. The errors and illusions generated by the domains of non-science run the risk of getting out of control and returning us to a state of "barbarism." One way in which this barbarism manifests itself is with *fanaticism*. When the illusions and errors of non-science grow out of control, they become *convictions*. "Conviction," Nietzsche states, "is the belief that on some particular point of knowledge one is in possession of the unqualified truth" (HH 630). Science combats convictions by "prevent[ing] a restoration of superstition and folly" and working against men of conviction for whom "[t]o possess an opinion is to them the same thing as to become a fanatical adherent of it and henceforth to lay it to their heart as conviction" (HH 635). Science cultivates the capacity to doubt, which challenges and overturns our convictions—hence Nietzsche's esteem for science as a tool to constrain the error-generating domains of non-science.

As much as science can curb fanaticism, if its truths aren't incorporated, it can also work to drive such convictions deeper. This is the danger of passively letting the march of science go on without working to incorporate its truths. We might at some abstract, intellectual level acknowledge the truths of science, but this isn't enough. We have to incorporate them so that our affects, feelings, and sensations also align with them. Scientific concepts have to figure into our interpretive frameworks such that we come to interpret our sensations and feelings differently.

The more that metaphysically inclined people feel that science is chipping away at the foundations of their convictions, the more they'll be driven to fanaticism by doubling down on their convictions. This can lead to two brands of fanaticism, one in which the fanatic hangs onto his convictions *because* they conflict with science; and another in which the fanatic feigns a broadmindedness toward scientific insights but secretly harbors a deep disdain toward science. Regarding the first case, Nietzsche claims, "The presupposition of every believer of every kind was that he *could* not be refuted; if the counter-arguments proved very strong it was always left to him to defame reason itself and perhaps even to set up the '*credo quia absurdum est*' ['I believe it because it is absurd'] as the banner of the extremest fanaticism" (HH 630). The fanatic in this situation offers a reactionary response to the insights of science by slandering reason itself. He disarms the insights of science by denying that they really arrive at truth and defends his convictions on the grounds that they conflict with science. That his convictions are absurd is supposed to count as a reason in favor of them, given what he takes to be the flawed nature of scientific reason.

Nietzsche discusses the second brand of fanaticism as follows:

> *Apparent toleration*.—You speak fair words about science, but!—I see *behind* your toleration of science! In a corner of your heart you believe, all this notwithstanding, that *you do not need it*, that you are being magnanimous in according it recognition, in being indeed its advocate, especially since science does not exhibit the same magnanimity in regard to your views on life. […] You, precisely you would glare in bitter and fanatical hostility if science should ever look you straight in the face with *its* eyes!—What do we care, then, if you practice toleration. (D 270)

This kind of fanatic response to the truths of science involves a self-congratulatory and affected tolerance toward it. In seeming to be tolerant, this fanatic disarms scientific truth by seeing himself as above it—*he* doesn't need it, because he has his convictions, but he can still let science be. Science, he thinks, is either needed by those who haven't ascended to the level of "understanding" he's achieved, or he uses it in a slapdash manner to buttress his convictions.

Either way, his acceptance of science is vainglorious and phony since, as Nietzsche notes, were he to look at scientific truth without his affectations, he'd show his true colors: fanatical hostility.

Both these fanatic responses are motivated by the fact that metaphysics and its associated need have pathologized the resources for generating meaning. In feeling that science is eroding the grounds for their metaphysical beliefs, and because (as a result of a history of incorporation) these beliefs respond to certain affective needs and interests, fanatics clench onto these beliefs even more tightly. For this reason, the truths of science have to be incorporated, thereby curbing the tendencies of affective falsification that keep belief in metaphysical errors alive. Scientific truth has to be made a part of our practices and how we interpret the world. The incorporation of science's truths would remove or greatly diminish whatever temptation there might be toward metaphysics while opening new paths to meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Exterminating the Need for Metaphysics and the Incorporation of Truth

We have "to understand," Nietzsche proclaims, "that the needs which religion has satisfied and philosophy is now supposed to satisfy are not immutable; they can be *weakened* and *exterminated*. […] A philosophy [like Schopenhauer's] can be employed to *satisfy* such needs or to *set them aside* [*oder dass sie dieselben* beseitigt]; for they are acquired, time-bound needs resting on presuppositions that contradict those of science" (HH 27). What should be clear by now is *why* Nietzsche thinks that the need for metaphysics ought to be exterminated. What remains to be seen are the details of how to implement this task without also exterminating the need for meaning.

The process of exterminating the need for metaphysics and the process of incorporating scientific truth are two sides of the same coin. The more scientific truth is successfully

incorporated, the less the need for metaphysics will appear genuine to us and the less we'll feel its force. Nietzsche's notion of incorporation presupposes the idea that human nature is malleable. The history of incorporation is the history of how human nature has changed. Contra Schopenhauer, Nietzsche doesn't think that the need for metaphysics originates in human nature as such. "[T]he *need for metaphysics*," Schopenhauer states, "is peculiar to man alone; accordingly he is an *animal metaphysicum*" (WWR II 160). Nietzsche thinks this kind of claim presupposes a misguided view of human nature and its historical development. "Lack of historical sense," Nietzsche states, "is the family failing of philosophers; many, without being aware, even take the most recent manifestations of man, such as has arisen under the impress of certain religions […] as the fixed form from which one has to start out. They will not learn that man has become" (HH 2). Man has become because human nature as such has developed over time. What explains the malleability of human nature is the fact that human beings in different historical eras have incorporated different errors, truths, ideas, habits, and practices.

That human nature changes in step with the process of incorporation implies that human beings have had different needs—our needs are "time-bound." There are some needs that all human beings have shared throughout history—like the need for food—but these needs aren't distinctively human since non-human animals have them too. But the needs that make us "fantastic animals [*phantastischen Thieren*]" (GS 1)—the needs we have that make us distinctively human—have changed over time. The process of incorporation demonstrates how human needs have changed over time on the basis of those things we've assimilated. Philosophy now has the power either to risk keeping these needs satisfied (at least for a time) or to gradually wean us off them. With respect to the need for metaphysics, Nietzsche opts for the latter.

But what does it mean to incorporate truth and knowledge? What truths call for incorporation? How is this process to be carried out such that it gradually exterminates the need for metaphysics? And what resources from the domains of non-science are we left with to generate meaning once the need for metaphysics has been dispelled—and what makes these remaining errors less pernicious than the errors and illusions of metaphysics? Though we have a preliminary sense for the response to these questions, a more in-depth account would be helpful.

There are two kinds of scientific truth that call for incorporation: the small and seemingly mundane truths of science as well as the (often) large-scale implications of these truths. Concerning the former, Nietzsche claims: "It is the mark of higher culture to value the little unpretentious truths which have been discovered by means of rigorous method more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical and artistic ages and men, which blind us and make us happy" (HH 3). *Human* hopes to change our "estimation of unpretentious truths" (ibid). We have to start holding those "little but immeasurably frequent and thus very influential things" in higher regard rather than those "great, rare things" (HH 49). "[N]ot that which glitters, shines, excites, but often insignificant seeming truth is the fruit [the man of science] wishes to shake down from the tree of knowledge" (HH 264). The truths of science tend to be mundane in the sense that they concern everyday, quotidian objects. Science reveals the chemical composition of water, it shows why things fall to the ground, and so forth. Religion and metaphysics deal with grander notions like the salvation of the soul, redemption, and the grounds of the phenomenal world. Because science focuses on the mundane, it can offer an analysis capable of uprooting the errors and illusions that are so deeply incorporated that they belong to our unreflective ways of being in the world. "Science," Nietzsche states, "compels us to abandon belief in simple causalities precisely where everything seems so easy to comprehend and we are the fools of appearance.

The ‘simplest’ things are *very complicated*—a fact at which one can never cease to marvel!” (D 6; cf. GS 2). Science reveals how truly complicated even the most seemingly simple phenomenon is, whereas metaphysical philosophy tends to overlook and ignore such phenomena by fixating on the ostensibly grander aspects of life. Science works to defamiliarize the most basic aspects of our daily lives, and this is why it can serve as an effective instrument for exterminating the need for metaphysics.

Though science may work to uncover “unpretentious truths” (HH 3), when taken together these truths can have profound implications. The death of God, which Nietzsche first announces in section 108 of *The Gay Science*, is a case in point. “God is dead,” Nietzsche declares, “but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow.—And we—we must still defeat his shadow as well!” What it means for God to be dead is that the grounds for theocentric interpretations of the world have been undermined. The faith in God that undergirded the medieval worldview is no longer available to us. God thus can’t serve as the linchpin in meaning-imbuing interpretations of existence.[109] Science, and the implications of all the unpretentious truths it has dredged up, has demolished the grounds for such faith.[110] Be that as it may, we haven’t actually *incorporated* these truths. Even those of us who have shed belief in God continue to unwittingly endorse religious and metaphysical conceptions, particularly in our ways of thinking about morality and ethics. The need for metaphysics is the prime example of something we’re stuck with as a result failing to incorporate the fact of God’s death. To quote GS 151 at greater length:

[109] It’s not an objection to the death of God thesis that there are still large numbers of people who believe in God. What’s at stake in this claim isn’t whether or not people believe in God but what role this belief plays in our cultural, social, and everyday lives. To say God is dead is to say that theocentric interpretations of existence don’t play a central role in cultural or social spheres. Theocentric interpretive resources have been disempowered.

[110] Science doesn’t undermine belief in God through discovering that He doesn’t exist. Science is just better able to explain phenomena that at one time were seen as mysterious and so were attributed to the workings of God. When enough of these phenomena are scrutinized by science, and as science time and again offers the best methodology for providing explanations, then the ability to place faith in God (or so Nietzsche thinks) becomes weakened.

> The metaphysical need is not the origin of religion, as Schopenhauer has it, but only a *late offshoot of it*. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has got used to the idea of "another world (behind, below, above)" and feels an unpleasant emptiness and deprivation at the annihilation of religious delusions—and from this feeling grows now 'another world,' but this time only a metaphysical and not a religious one. But what led to belief in 'another world' in primordial times was *not* a drive or need, but an *error* in the interpretation of certain natural events, an embarrassing lapse of the intellect. (GS 151)[111]

The need for metaphysics is really just a religious development stemming from errors and conceptions that we became accustomed to and assimilated. Philosophers like Schopenhauer who use a secularized metaphysics to satisfy this need are only worsening the situation by keeping obsolete religious resources on life support, rather than confronting the dire facts of the situation.

However, if the task of incorporation involves mundane and unpretentious truth, how can we develop a taste for it? By offering grandiose explanations, religion and metaphysics would seem to have a more obvious appeal. To get a clearer sense of the issue here, let's return to HH 251. Before telling us about the double-brain we have to cultivate, Nietzsche articulates a worry concerning the "*future of science*.—Science bestows upon him who labors and experiments in it much satisfaction, upon him who *learns* its results very little. As all the important truths of science must gradually become common and everyday, however, even this little satisfaction will cease: just as we have long since ceased to take pleasure in learning the admirable two-times-

[111] Nietzsche's account of the origin of religion changes from *Human* to *The Gay Science*. In *Human* he claims that religion originated as a response to certain affective needs. "For every religion," he states, "was born out of fear and need, it has crept into existence along paths of aberrations of reason" (HH 110). Early in human history, religion developed as a way for people to cope with the miseries of existence. People projected deities into the world that could be turned to in times of need. *Human*'s account for the origin of religion is similar to Schopenhauer's account of the need for metaphysics. But in GS 151, Nietzsche claims a different origin—not in our affective needs but as a way to *explain* natural events like lightening, rainfall, and so forth. According to GS 151 these explanations might best be understood as early humanity's first attempts at *scientific* explanation. Given that the methodologies of scientific inquiry weren't developed, they turned to deities to explain things. So whereas HH 110 gives religion an origin in our affective needs, GS 151 gives it a cognitive origin insofar as religion was an attempt to explain the workings of nature. In Part I of this chapter, I cited HH 110 as evidence that religion responds to affective needs in a way that science doesn't. Though Nietzsche's position changed between then and GS 151, this doesn't affect the interpretive point of Part I—religion, for Nietzsche, has historically done a better job of responding to our affective interests and needs, regardless of whether it originated to serve this purpose. GS 151 implies that though religion was initially developed as a way to explain nature, it eventually came to satisfy affective needs—it helped people rid themselves of unpleasant feelings of emptiness and deprivation. As the errors of early religions were incorporated, affective needs were either created as a result, or these affective needs originated in some other way and it just so happened that religion excelled at satisfying them.

table." The satisfaction that science affords doesn't lie in the truths it yields. These truths tend to be mundane and eventually lose what "little satisfaction" they initially offer (see HH 256 and 635). The satisfaction we gain from science is found in laboring and experimenting, in the *spirit* of scientific inquiry and in the *process* of discovery—not in the actual discoveries.

Nietzsche continues, "science provides us with less and less pleasure, and deprives us of more and more pleasure through casting suspicion on the consolations of metaphysics, religion, and art." It provides us with less and less pleasure not only because the discoveries of science lose their luster but also because as the scientific enterprise presses on, its specific domains of inquiry become increasingly rarefied and specialized. The pursuit of scientific truth loses the ability to supply satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment when its domains become so narrow that its researchers are fixated on objects and problems whose connections to daily life—and whose connections to the other domains of science—become tenuous. This insight spells trouble for any large-scale effort at incorporation: Science is *already* in the business of casting suspicion on the non-scientific domains of life that imbue meaning and make us happy. If the pursuit of knowledge becomes less and less capable of yielding any sense of satisfaction, then it's a serious worry how we'll have the endurance to carry out Nietzsche's project, or even how we'll get it off the ground in the first place. In light of these worries, why should we bother with the task of incorporating truth at all? The scientific enterprise is well under way, and this is reason enough for Nietzsche to think that we can't naively fall back on the comforts of metaphysics while ignoring the advances of science. But if the whole scientific enterprise is about to exhaust itself, then going on endorsing all the old ways of interpreting the world seems like a live option, perhaps even the more prudent one.

Nietzsche's middle period works offer three responses to these worries. These responses become increasingly refined and more adept at dealing with these worries, and the final consideration in particular causes Nietzsche to overhaul his understanding of the tension between science and non-science in very interesting ways. The first response concerns Nietzsche's view that, though science will progressively yield less and less satisfaction and happiness, it is still in its "youthful" stages: "The search for truth still possesses the charm of standing everywhere in stark contrast to grey and tedious error; but this charm is in continual decline. Now, to be sure, we are still living in truth's youthful era" (HH 257). There's still time to work to incorporate scientific truth before we succumb to the pernicious effects of metaphysics and religion. According to Nietzsche, once we self-consciously initiate the process of incorporation, we'll become increasingly resilient and capable of incorporating more truth. There "will eventuate," he claims, "an increase in energy, reasoning capacity, in toughness and endurance" (HH 256). Even if science will provide us with less and less satisfaction, at the moment the situation isn't drastic: There's still time to incorporate scientific truth before it's too late, and successful incorporation of its truths will have "*inoculated* [us] with something new" (HH 224)—an inoculation that will make us more capable of assimilating new scientific truths, while also serving as an immunization against the dangers of metaphysical and religious mystifications. Whether or not we can sustain the scientific pursuit of truth in the long run once its charm has faded is an open question. But at the very least we will have dispelled the need for metaphysics and its accompanying religious dangers.

Another important aspect of Nietzsche's program to incorporate the truths of science involves what he thinks will be a newfound appreciation for the quotidian and everyday We'll find a new sort of happiness and sense of meaning that's connected to the everyday. Nietzsche's

revaluation of unpretentious truths shows that he thinks we need, as Richardson (2008) puts it, "the long-term habit of diagnosing our everyday thoughts and habits, [and] seeing why they express the values they do. We need, that is, to *embody honesty* in the details of our lives" (102). What Nietzsche thinks we'll find when we properly appreciate the intricacies of everyday life is a new kind of happiness and meaning, even if these intricacies fail to offer the consolations of metaphysics and religion. Of course, Nietzsche's reasons for wanting to incorporate truth don't revolve around whether or not truth makes us happy. "Why do we fear and hate a possible reversion to barbarism?" he asks. "Because it would make people unhappier than they are? Oh no! The barbarians of every age were *happier*: let us not deceive ourselves!" (D 429). Nietzsche doesn't fear the return to barbarism because it would make us unhappier. His fear stems from his worries about our ability to meet the demands of the need for meaning, which might very well force us to be less happy than we would be were we to revert to barbarism.

Though science doesn't give us the sense of fulfillment in the way that the errors of metaphysics and religion do, it does afford us a different, new and by Nietzsche's lights superior kind of fulfillment rooted in the everyday. Once we come to appreciate science's capacity to produce such fulfillment, we will be further driven to incorporate its truths: "One can […] discover much more happiness in the world than clouded eyes can see: one can do so if one calculates correctly and does not overlook all those moments of pleasure in which every day of even the most afflicted human life is rich" (HH 49; cf. GS 12). Nietzsche's examples of such moments include things like "those social expressions of a friendly disposition, those smiles of the eyes, those handclasps"; and "especially within the narrowest circle, within the family, is life made to flourish only through benevolence. Good-naturedness, friendliness, politeness of the heart are never-failing emanations of the unegoistic drive and have played a far greater role in

the construction of culture than those much more celebrated [metaphysical and religious] expressions of it called pity, compassion, and self-sacrifice" (HH 49; cf. D 450). Pity, compassion, and self-sacrifice are the kinds of grandiose notions touted by religions and metaphysical systems. Yet they've had a much smaller role in the construction of culture, Nietzsche claims, than do these everyday things that religion and metaphysics overlook—good-naturedness, friendliness, and so forth. The tendency that science cultivates within us to turn away from the grandiose and extravagant therefore allows us to find meaning, fulfillment, and happiness in the more mundane aspects of life.

The last consideration Nietzsche advances for responding to the worry of how we can initiate the task of incorporating truth is the most interesting, and it forces him to change several important ideas about the meaning-sustaining tension between science and non-science. This last consideration involves the project of developing a *gay* science. The title of *The Gay Science* is meant to call to mind a number of ideas—playfulness, courtship, medieval troubadours, song, and poetry—but one central idea is a new conception of the search for truth that isn't colored by the prejudice that "where laughter and gaiety are found, thinking is good for nothing" (GS 327). In the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*—published in 1887, five years after the publication of the first edition—Nietzsche looks back on the sentiment that fueled this work: "the attraction of everything problematic, the delight [*Freude*] in an X, is so great in highly spiritual, spiritualized people […] that this delight flares up like bright embers again and again over all the distress of what is problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty […]. We know a new happiness [*Glück*]" (GS P 3). *The Gay Science* is an attempt to articulate this new conception of happiness and delight that stems from "the attraction of everything problematic."[112]

[112] There's an interesting question here about how Nietzsche conceives of the relation between happiness and meaningfulness. The latter should not be conflated with the former, as passages like D 429 demonstrate. A sense of

The Gay Science looks more favorably at the power of illusion and error (especially as generated by the domain of art) than does *Human*. *The Gay Science* claims that the pursuit of truth itself is *fueled* by the errors and untruth from the domains of non-science. Nietzsche's gay science is characterized as a "*passion for knowledge* [Leidenschaft der Erkenntniss]" (GS 3; my emphasis). In HH 251, Nietzsche pits science *against* passion—"In one domain lies the power-source, in the other the regulator: it must be heated with illusions, one-sidedness, passions [*Leidenschaften*], the evil and perilous consequences of overheating must be obviated with the aid of the knowledge furnished by science." *The Gay Science* reconceives the nature of scientific inquiry *as* a passion. No longer is science opposed to the passions, it is now seen as driven by the passion for knowledge. Nietzsche continues, "Even *without* this new passion—I mean the passion for knowledge—science would be promoted: up to now science has grown and matured without it. […] It is something new in history that knowledge wants to be more than a means" (GS 123). Historically, the search for knowledge wasn't driven by a passion. Nietzsche here understands knowledge as being the object of a passion to imply that it is pursued for its own sake rather than as a means to something else—and that only recently (historically speaking) has science become the object of a passion in this way. In the Ancient world it was seen as "the best

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meaning doesn't amount to a feeling of happiness. But there's an important interpretive issue here about how to conceive of happiness. Throughout his career, Nietzsche never esteemed happiness as contentment (though *Human* does offer some qualified positive remarks about happiness as contentment—e.g., WS 192). But if we understand happiness in different terms, like those of *The Gay Science*—if we link it to the process of striving that Nietzsche esteems and to a sense of fulfillment one feels in the process of confronting "the problematic" and "the danger of uncertainty"—then the notion takes up a different relation to meaningfulness. Nietzsche devotes a number of important passages in his middle-period works to the notion of happiness understood in a variety of ways, sometimes in relation to meaning. For this reason, we ought to resist the common view (here articulated by Geuss) that "what is commonly taken to the be the centre-piece of ancient ethics—the doctrine of 'happiness'—is remarkable for its virtually complete absence as a serious structural feature of German philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries. […] Nietzsche notoriously thought that humans didn't seek happiness" (2003: 44). Nietzsche, within and beyond his middle period, speaks a great deal about happiness and joy in tandem with meaning (cf. HH 251), so happiness of some kind is not altogether disconnected from questions of meaning.

means to virtue" (ibid.) and in the medieval world it was valued because "it was through science that one hoped best to understand God's goodness and wisdom" (GS 37).[113]

In a notebook entry from 1881—when Nietzsche was generating ideas that, one year later, would be published in *The Gay Science*—he sheds light on what it means for science to be driven by the passion for knowledge, relating this passion explicitly to the notion of incorporation: "to *wait and see* how far knowledge and truth can be ***incorporated***—and to what extent a transformation of man occurs when he finally lives only *to know*.—This is the consequence of the passion for knowledge: there is *no way of ensuring its existence* except by preserving as well the sources and powers of knowledge, the errors and passions; from the *conflict* between them it draws its sustaining strength" (KGW 11[141]). Nietzsche significantly modifies the tension discussed in HH 251. The central tension now isn't between the domains of science and non-science—it's a tension among *all* of our passions and errors. The pursuit of knowledge itself is driven by the tension among errors and passions. The errors that come to us from affective falsification and the domains of non-science play a role in the pursuit of knowledge—not just the errors involved in cognitive falsification. When Nietzsche says that there's no way of sustaining the passion for knowledge without preserving "the sources and powers of knowledge, the errors and passions," he doesn't simply mean that we have to preserve the errors involved in cognitive falsification. These errors aren't at risk of being corrected or otherwise removed because they make experience itself possible; they're so deeply entrenched

[113] Strictly speaking, it's not the case that truth and knowledge are the objects of a passion. What's valuable for Nietzsche is the *activity* of pursuing knowledge and the truth—the passion for knowledge is really a passion for the activity of searching for knowledge, it is "an appetite for and enjoyment of the chase and intrigues of knowledge" (D 327). Those passionately engaged in this activity have to feel to a degree that truth and knowledge are valuable, since acquiring these things is what motivates them. But what those engaged in this activity find "delightful" is the "attraction of everything problematic," the "distress of what is problematic" and "the danger of uncertainty."

that they're impervious to being seriously altered in any way. Now, the domains of science are themselves underwritten by the domains of non-science.

The domains of non-science now supply the resources that fuel the project of incorporation. This might sound strange—if the project of incorporation is intended to diminish the amount of error and untruth that come to us from the domains of non-science, it seems odd that Nietzsche would employ resources from these same domains to effect this end. But Nietzsche isn't trying to entirely extirpate the domains of non-science. He's interested in combatting only those affectively fueled untruths and errors that stem from metaphysics and religion. These are the particular domains that, with the onset of modernity, have pathologized attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning.[114] This leaves other classes of affectively fueled untruth and error at his disposal, such as art and morality. Nietzsche favors the former. His hope is to use art to fuel the passion for knowledge, and to use the passion for knowledge to incorporate those truths that erode the need for metaphysics. In this way we can remove the pathological forces that have contaminated the need for meaning. By relying on the domains of non-science to spur the passion for knowledge, the tension central to meeting the demands of the need for meaning can be maintained. Let's turn now to the modified version of this tension as it's found in *The Gay Science*.

Conclusion: Art, Aesthetics, Incorporation, and Meaning

[114] Julian Young (2006) contests this claim: "Nietzsche in fact *never* abandoned his religious communitarianism. To the end […] Nietzsche's fundamental concern, his highest value, lies with the flourishing of the community, and to the end he believes that this can happen only through the flourishing of communal religion" (2). Rather than exterminate the domain of religion, Young thinks that Nietzsche wants to repair it. Young's argument is interesting, but there's far too much textual evidence that runs counter to his claim (much of which has been cited in this chapter). Part of the issue is what Young himself means by "religion"—he agrees that Nietzsche wants nothing to do with religions like Christianity. While Nietzsche is interested in maintaining some notion of the "spiritual," there is no reason to yoke this notion to religion as Young does. If Nietzsche champions anything like religion, then it's such a modified version of it that there's no use in calling it *religion* anymore. Reducing spirituality to religion, or thinking that spirituality has to be understood in religious terms is the sort of reduction Nietzsche tries to combat.

We now know what domains of non-science are left for meeting the demands of the need for meaning: art and aesthetics.[115] This leaves us with the following questions: How can art and aesthetics help to fuel the project of incorporation that's supposed to exterminate the need for metaphysics? Incorporation aside, what interpretive resources do art and aesthetics supply that meet the demands of the need for meaning? Last, how do the errors and illusions of art differ from the pernicious errors and illusions of metaphysics?

The Gay Science and the Tension between Comedy and Tragedy

The Gay Science recasts the central, meaning-generating tension as occurring not between the domains of science and non-science as such but between *comedy* and *tragedy*. "[A]t present," Nietzsche states, "the comedy of existence has not yet 'become conscious of itself'; at present, we still live in the age of tragedy, in the age of moralities and religions" (GS 1). The tension introduced in HH 251 is *aestheticized*. What Nietzsche means by comedy and tragedy is hard to pin down in its details. Each term is located at the center of a cluster of connotative associations, but their meanings are closely related to his metaphors of laughter and seriousness. Comedy and tragedy embody two different ways of comporting oneself toward existence and the world—they're two different ways of interpreting and aesthetically responding to the world and our existence in it. A tragic stance is one in which life is taken "seriously." It's associated with religions and morality because it's from the perspective of these domains that we see our existence as meaningful, significant, and worth caring about. Moreover, tragic domains supply

[115] Nietzsche also seems to have the resources of morality at his disposal. However, he thinks that morality in its current form is so suffused with the pernicious errors of metaphysics and religion that relying on it would run counter to incorporating the truth that God is dead. Morality is a domain rife with presuppositions that have failed to account for the death of God. Nevertheless, Nietzsche isn't opposed to morality *in toto*. Leiter (1995) notes, "Nietzsche could not be a critic of *all* morality since he explicitly wants to retain the idea of a 'higher morality'" (113). So whatever is involved in the notion of a higher morality, Nietzsche could look to it as a domain of non-science capable of supplying the interpretive resources for generating meaning.

values. Historically, we've taken existence seriously insofar as we've seen human actions as capable of angering or pleasing God (or other deities). Acting wrongly—acting against moral and religious values—affects one's eternal wellbeing and salvation.

Nietzsche asks, "What is the meaning of the ever-new appearance of these founders of moralities and religions, of these instigators of fights about moral valuations […]? What is the meaning of these heroes on this stage? For these have been the heroes thus far" (GS 1). The founders of moralities and religions are the tragedians of existence because they have always given us something at which we're "forbidden to laugh." "Every time 'the hero' appeared on stage," Nietzsche continues, "something new was attained: the gruesome counterpart to laughter, that profound shock that many individuals feel at the thought: 'Yes, living is worth it! Yes, I am worthy of living!' Life and I and you and all of us became *interesting* to ourselves once again for a while." The forces of tragedy have done a great deal to imbue existence with meaning by getting us to see it as *heroic, interesting, significant*, and *worthwhile*—as something to take seriously rather than to laugh off as absurd.[116] "It is obvious," Nietzsche concludes, "that these tragedies, too, work in the interest of the *species*, even if they should believe that they are working in the interest of God, as God's emissaries. They, too, promote the life of the species by *promoting the faith in life*."

The forces of comedy are opposed to those of tragedy. They embody a lighthearted approach to human existence. When we come to see that human existence isn't like the tragedians have understood it—that our actions don't have the significance that a tragic

[116] The seriousness that tragic tendencies impart shouldn't be understood as causing us to cling to life at all costs. Moralities and religions give us principles that cause us to take life seriously but which in extreme circumstances also motivate people to sacrifice their lives to uphold such principles. Martyrs don't engage in self-sacrifice because they don't take life seriously. The martyr is willing to give her life for something she takes so seriously that it trumps her desires for self-preservation. This manifests a *tragic* view of life. It's hard to imagine a martyr dying for her principles if she assumes an exclusively comedic stance on life. With this attitude she wouldn't take her principles seriously enough to be willing to die for them, nor would she have structured her life around them.

comportment assumes—then a properly comedic response can ensue. We laugh at ourselves, at our absurdity, and how seriously we've taken existence. The comedic stance buoyantly acknowledges our insignificance in the grand scheme of things. It operates like (but is different from) the domains of science. These domains paint the world and our existence in it as meaningless. Ultimately, all tragedians of existence—all those who have advanced moral, religious, or metaphysical systems, all the "teachers of the purpose of existence"—succumb to a comedic view of existence. Nietzsche states, "There is no denying that in *the long run* each of these great teachers of a purpose was vanquished by laughter, reason, and nature: the brief tragedy always changed and returned into the eternal comedy of existence, and the 'waves of uncountable laughter'—to cite Aeschylus—must in the end also come crashing down on the greatest of these tragedians." In Nietzsche's view, all tragedians succumb to the forces of comedy because religious, moral, and metaphysical systems are historically located and eventually become obsolete. When faith in such systems wanes, it can for a time give way not only to a view that human existence isn't as important as it had been taken to be, but also to a lighthearted acceptance of this fact.

With Nietzsche's revised opposition between comedy and tragedy, art (as a domain of non-science) is no longer pitted against science. The tension between science and non-science remains important, but it's no longer at the center of Nietzsche's thinking: The terms of the opposition have changed, where both art and science can play into *either* the comic or the tragic views of existence. Within a tragic interpretive framework, science has the ability to *disturb* us when we still cling with seriousness to the sorts of metaphysical, religious, or moral views (underwritten by error) that science debunks. This is the effect Nietzsche thinks science is having on his contemporaries. Science also has the capacity to make us more lighthearted about serious

matters. Nietzsche's gay or joyful science is intended to have this effect. It's a science that uncovers truth about the world and our existence within it, but which also instills a certain attitude toward the truths and insights that science yields: instead of seeing these truths as disturbing and troubling, within a comic framework we accept them with buoyancy.

Art also has the capacity to play into either the tragic or comedic views of existence. This point is suggested by the very fact that these views are given the explicitly artistic categorizations of the comic and the tragic. Art plays a pivotal role in Nietzsche's gay science because it cultivates a more lighthearted approach to existence. As early as *Human*, Nietzsche touts art's ability to get us to react with greater insouciance toward the disturbing and potentially life-denying truths of science. "This teaching," Nietzsche states, "imparted by art to take pleasure in existence [*Lust am Dasein*] and to regard the human life as a piece of nature, as the object of regular evolution, without being too violently involved in it—this teaching has been absorbed into us, and it now reemerges as an almighty requirement of knowledge" (HH 222). This passage claims that the process of incorporating scientific truth can require the aid of art. Art helps us to refrain from getting "too violently involved" in life, that is, from taking it too seriously so that the demystifying insights of science don't strike us too hard.[117]

[117] In a tragic stance, art transfigures the stuff of life so that we can take it seriously. Art also has a transfiguring role to play in comedy. This marks an important difference between the comedy/tragedy distinction and the science/non-science distinction. A comedic view of existence isn't the same as a realistic view of existence, nor is it purely a scientific one. It involves an attitudinal and normative component that's absent in science. We don't just see our existence as insignificant or absurd; the comedic attitude contains within it a lighthearted rather than serious response to this fact. In the comedic stance, art transfigures the unembellished and more purely scientific view of reality such that a lighthearted response is possible. Nietzsche makes a seemingly offhand remark in *The Birth* about the difference between tragedy and comedy that is relevant here: "Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live; these representations are the sublime, whereby the terrible is tamed by artistic means, *and the comical, whereby disgust at absurdity is discharged by artistic means*" (BT 7, my emphasis). The comic view of existence involves this kind of artistic transfiguration or discharge that allows us to look at the absurdity of existence with buoyancy rather than disgust. An important difference between comedy and the domains of science emerges here: The latter contains within it no attitudinal or normative component. The domains of science don't in themselves involve a comedic, lighthearted, or in any way transfigured take on the truths or insights that it dredges up. The perspectives of science give us a representation of reality that is as faithful and un-transfigured as possible, unlike the perspectives of comedy.

Art also plays a crucial role in propping up tragic views of existence. It can help us to take existence seriously by imbuing it with significance, thereby providing resources to interpret existence so as to make it meaningful and affirmable. The comedic role of art doesn't do as much as the tragic to transfigure existence so as to give it the appearance of being significant, interesting, and meaningful. The comedic stance works to curb or constrain meaning-imbuing forces so they don't become pathological. The tension between tragedy and comedy therefore bears an important resemblance to that between the domains of science and non-science. Comedic interpretations, like the picture of the world we get through science, tend to support or contain a more realistic representation of human existence in the universe (insofar as it concedes and "laughs at" the fact of our insignificance). Tragic interpretations rely far more than comedic ones on the forces of affective falsification and the domains of non-science since, in order to get us to take life seriously, they have to disguise the fact of our insignificance through things like religion, morality, and metaphysics.[118]

The crucial point about the tension between comedy and tragedy is more or less the same point Nietzsche makes in *Human* about the opposition between the domains of science and non-science. The two sides of these oppositions can (and when the right conditions have been secured, do) exist in a *productive* tension. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche identifies himself with the forces of comedy when, after speaking about the comedians of existence, he states, "We, too,

[118] In *Human*, Nietzsche relates the experience of an idle walk through the streets of Genoa, when he hears the stentorian and seemingly ceaseless ringing of a bell that drowns out the noise from the streets. Out of the blue he recalls a quotation from Plato's *Republic*: "I recalled the words of Plato and suddenly they spoke to my heart: *Nothing human is worthy of being taken very seriously; nonetheless*— —" (HH 628). It's difficult to know how to read this enigmatic passage. Even though *Human* doesn't develop Nietzsche's conception of tragic and comic worldviews, this passage articulates (and performs) the tension between them. The ringing of the bell puts the daily activity of those on the street in a different light. In drowning out the street noise, the ringing gives the sense that human existence isn't worth taking seriously. This aspect of the passage's meaning, and the element of Nietzsche's experience it speaks to, amount to a *comedic* take on human existence. But the quotation ends with the cryptic "*nonetheless*." This "nonetheless" doesn't connote the *tragic* as such, but it does create a tension with the remark expressed in the previous part of the Plato quotation. This is the sort of tension that describes the relation between the comedic and tragic views. At some level, our existence isn't worth taking seriously—*nonetheless*, we do and should take it seriously, even if from some perspective it's really quite absurd.

have our time" (GS 1). This identification with the forces of comedy is similar to his identification with the forces of science in *Human*. But *The Gay Science* characterizes the comedic laughter we need as a "corrective laughter" (GS 1)—it's intended to get us to laugh at, and thereby overturn, the metaphysical and religious excesses that have "made the world ugly and bad" (GS 130).

The Gay Science's identification with the forces of comedy is a reaction against the fact that the current tragic forms of existence (in the form of religion, metaphysics, religion, and morality) are overweening. Tragedy and comedy follow a "law of ebb and flood" (GS 1). As moral, metaphysical, and religious systems become obsolete, their ability to get us to take existence seriously wanes, and a comedic phase of history ensues. Relevant here is the concluding passage (GS 342) of the 1882 *Gay Science*, entitled "*Incipit tragoedia*"—"the tragedy begins." It describes the "going under" of Zarathustra. If GS 1 evinces a comic attitude toward existence, then by the end of the first edition of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche thinks the corrective task of laughter has been fulfilled and it's time to initiate another tragic attitude toward existence. *The Gay Science*'s comic viewpoint is a way to loosen the hold that religion, metaphysics, and morality have had so that *new* resources for generating meaning can be secured, and a new tragic phase can be ushered in. Nietzsche therefore doesn't support the squelching of tragic takes on existence *in toto*. Both comedy and tragedy are necessary for securing and maintaining fecund resources that meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Art, Tragedy, and the Generation of Meaning

How does art play into a tragic view of existence so that we experience existence as significant? Let's take a closer look at GS 1 and its characterization of the age of tragedy in

which we live. When asking about the "the meaning of the ever-new appearance of these founders of moralities and religions," Nietzsche remarks, "What is the meaning of these heroes on this stage? *For these have been the heroes thus far*" (my emphasis). Morality, religion, and metaphysics have historically succeeded in giving us a sense that our existence can be heroic and therefore significant, interesting, and worthwhile. Later in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells us that art can also give us this same sense of heroic significance:

> Only artists, and especially those of the theater, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each himself is, himself experiences, himself wants; only they have taught us to value the hero that is hidden in each of these everyday characters and taught the art of regarding oneself as a hero, from a distance and as it were simplified and transfigured—the art of 'putting oneself on stage' before oneself. […] Maybe there is a similar sort of merit in that religion which bade one to see the sinfulness of every individual through a magnifying glass and turned the sinner into a great, immortal criminal: by describing eternal perspectives around him, it taught man to view himself from a distance and as something past and whole. (GS 78)

Art can carry out the same task as religion: It allows us to see ourselves as heroes and our strivings as heroic. But art differs from religion and metaphysics. It, and only it, has trained us "*to value the hero that is hidden in each of these everyday characters*." Art has the capacity to imbue our existence with significance in a way that is consistent and continuous with science's propensity to focus on the everyday. Unlike religion, art doesn't need an elaborate and grandiose metaphysical backdrop to imbue existence with a sense of significance. Art can accomplish this end by getting us to see ourselves heroically *as* "everyday characters."

Art's power to transfigure (daily) existence relies on its capacity to allow a person to put himself on stage before himself through distanciation, simplification, and falsification. Art can help to imbue existence with meaning in a way similar to the domains of non-science discussed in *Human*. GS 78 suggests that I can see my efforts and travails as meaningful by comparing them to the heroic feats we see carried out on the stage—in particular, the tragic stage. In terms of concepts and sensations, the domains of art and aesthetics supply us with the conceptual frameworks necessary to interpret sensations so that we can see our existence as significant,

worthwhile, and affirmable. Recall Nietzsche's remark that "a feeling is profound because we regard the thoughts that accompany it as profound" (HH 15). Art allows us to experience aspects of our lives as heroic by associating them with the heroic feats we see play out in works of art. This interpretive process hinges on the power of affective falsification. We falsify things in order to arrive at a heroic conception of ourselves, and we do this by positing entities that don't really exist—such as values (more on which below)—that respond to our affective needs and interests.

The process through which art imbues meaning is similar to how the images discussed in *The Birth* imbue meaning: we draw comparisons between ourselves, or the situations we are facing, and those that are portrayed in works of art. If I am working to finish my dissertation, I might "put myself on stage before myself" by linking my activity to, say, John Nash as portrayed in *A Beautiful Mind*.[119] I use this artwork (or this protagonist) as a way to not only make sense of my travails but also to give me a sense of significance. John Nash was a brilliant mathematician who struggled to write his dissertation, and in connecting my struggles to his, I can see my life and struggles as more significant and bearable since I "witness" someone of Nash's intellectual caliber struggle to accomplish a similar task. Falsification (as Nietzsche understands it) is at work here in a variety of ways: I have to conceal certain relevant differences between myself or my situation and the artistic one I'm using to interpret my struggles (e.g., Nash wrote a discipline-changing dissertation in math while suffering from schizophrenia). In the grand scheme of things, from a perspective outside my own, my dissertation amounts to at best very little, and my writing it lacks the cosmic significance that religions are adept at supplying. But art

[119] *A Beautiful Mind* is a movie about the actual life of the mathematician, John Nash. The events it portrays are loosely real—the movie is based on John Nash's life as a mathematician, his struggles with schizophrenia, and its impact on his personal and professional life. Yet the movie stages a kind of aestheticization of Nash's actual life that transfigures it. The movie omits many important aspects of Nash's actual life in order to provide it with an aesthetic appeal. For instance, the actual Nash divorced his wife—the love interest in the movie—and later remarried her. These details, though surely of importance for the actual Nash, are omitted in the movie so that the sub-plot love story is less complicated and is unified with the more salient aspects of Nash's life and career. Films such as this show us how aestheticizing our lives in a way that falsifies them permits us to see them as heroic and significant.

can nevertheless help me to take my struggles seriously.[120] Art doesn't need to give me the sense that my activity has cosmic import; it can help me to see my activity as something more significant than merely my own idiosyncratic pastime. Art can (among other things) help cultivate a perspective from which my existence appears valuable and help to give that perspective a certain superiority or primacy over other perspectives.

The capacity of art to generate resources that allow us to interpret our struggles as significant and heroic comes to fuel Nietzsche's project of incorporation. This capacity cultivates an attitude wherein the search for knowledge is experienced as heroic:

> And knowledge itself: let it be something else to others, like a bed to rest on or the way to one, or a diversion or a form of idleness; to me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings also have their dance-and playgrounds. '*Life as means to knowledge*.'—with this principle in one's heart one can not only live bravely but also *live gaily and laugh gaily*! And who would know how to laugh and live well who did not first have a good understanding of war and victory? (GS 324)

The search for knowledge and the project of incorporation are given an interesting gloss in terms of both comedy and tragedy. The search for knowledge is portrayed as *heroic*, and for that reason it is given a tragic meaning: it is something that we can *live for*, it is the kind of activity that can make life interesting and meaningful. And the way that the search for knowledge is given this kind of meaning-imbuing potential—the way in which we can experience knowledge as something to live and even sacrifice ourselves for[121]—is by being infused with value by art. Art

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[120] Art not only gives us works that inspire us or help us to interpret our travails; Nietzsche insists that art also gives us the methods we can use to carry out falsification. What we can learn from artists are the skills "to distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add *in order to see them at all*, or to see things around a corner and as if they were cut out and extracted from their context, or to place them so that each partially distorts the view one has of the others and allows only perspectival glimpses, or to look at them through coloured glass or in the light of the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent: all this we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins; *we*, however, want to be poets of our lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details." What it would mean to extend these skills beyond the creation of works to the fashioning of one's life, or to one's comportment toward existence isn't clear.

[121] Nietzsche frequently speaks of sacrificing oneself in the name of the pursuit of knowledge, which is the rhetoric associated with tragic outlooks. See D 45 and 327. In GS 1, Nietzsche speaks of the teachers of the purpose of existence as "instigators of fights about moral valuations […] and religious wars," whereas in GS 283 he speaks of those who will "carry heroism into the search for knowledge and *wage wars* for the sake of thoughts and their consequences." The wars Nietzsche mentions in GS 1 are plausibly *actual* religious wars, whereas those mentioned

is what can make the search for knowledge appear valuable and heroic. Nietzsche thinks that art has already started to serve the search for knowledge in this way—recall HH 222's remark that art "now reemerges as an almighty requirement of knowledge." One of the driving aims of *The Gay Science* is to imbue the search for knowledge with value by aesthetically transfiguring it. *The Gay Science* paves the way for an era that Nietzsche welcomes, "that age that will carry heroism into the search for knowledge" (GS 283).

Such a conception of the search for knowledge allows us, Nietzsche claims, "not only to live bravely but also *live gaily and laugh gaily*." Knowledge can thus fuel a comedic approach to existence. We've already seen how knowledge can buttress a comedic view of existence insofar as its insights work to diminish our sense of significance and make existence seem absurd. But Nietzsche is suggesting something specific here: art can imbue the *search* for knowledge with a tragic meaning, while the particular *insights* that it dredges up—its discoveries and their implications for our view of human existence—can be given a comic meaning. The search for and incorporation of truth is thereby given an extremely sturdy foundation that reciprocally strengthens our resources for meaning-imbuing interpretation. The search for knowledge can imbue meaning; yet the potentially disturbing insights it comes across—which could diminish our sense of significance—are disarmed. They're taken with lightheartedness by being comically transfigured. In other words: the dynamic activity of pursuing knowledge, by being tragically transfigured, is cast as a (indeed, *the*) meaningful activity. It is transfigured into an activity that is heroic, which makes it affirmable and affirming, thereby contributing to meeting the demands of the need for meaning. At the same time, the static truths yielded by this search, which have the potential to frustrate attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning, are given a comic

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in GS 283 are *figurative* wars (i.e., struggles). Nevertheless, Nietzsche wants people to sacrifice themselves to the pursuit of knowledge in way similar to the people who sacrificed themselves for religions and moral systems.

meaning.[122] The search for knowledge thus embodies the ideal of Nietzsche's middle-period thinking: this activity maintains within itself the tension between tragedy and comedy.[123]

Only through being transfigured into something "tragic" (something to take seriously) can the search for knowledge contribute to meeting the demands of the need for meaning.[124] An example will help to demonstrate this point. One of the specific scientific discoveries Nietzsche thinks needs to be aesthetically embellished is the truth that our cognition falsifies. Without such embellishment, this truth would undermine the pursuit of knowledge as the central meaning-imbuing activity. This activity has to see truth and knowledge as valuable, whereas the truth of cognitive falsification threatens to devalue the knowledge and its pursuit. GS 107 notes, "Had we not approved of the arts and invented this type of cult of the untrue, the insight into general

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[122] Being given a comic meaning shouldn't be taken to imply that these truths are disempowered. If that were the case, there wouldn't be any tension between the forces of comedy and tragedy in the first place. The question of how incorporation plays itself out in terms of the comedy/tragedy distinction is difficult to answer. How a truth gets incorporated will differ on a case-by-case basis. Truths—at least disturbing truths—are incorporated by being given a comic gloss. Nietzsche compares the artist's ability to beautify to the physicians ability to make medicine more palatable: "Here we have something to learn from physicians, when for example they dilute something bitter or add wine and sugar to the mixing bowl" (GS 299). The tools of the artist, and by extension the process of comic transfiguration, falsify; but such falsification, even in its affective forms, doesn't have to (and in the forms that Nietzsche endorses, mustn't) amount to full-blown *denial* of truth. Just as the physician, in altering the mixture, doesn't vitiate the medicinal properties of the solution, neither does the artist deny or contradict the truth in dressing it up. Hence Nietzsche insistence on using "art as the *good* will to appearance" (GS 107; cf. GS P 4). In dressing up the truth, artists make it more palatable so that it can be incorporated, just as physicians make medicine more palatable so it can be imbibed.

[123] That Nietzsche hopes to give the search for truth a tragic valence and the discoveries this search yields a comic one is most manifest in *The Gay Science*. Though *Human* doesn't advance a distinction between the comic and tragic views of existence, HH 251 does leave open the possibility that Nietzsche hoped to pit the domains of science against the domains of non-science in a similar way. He states, "In one domain lies the power-source, in the other the regulator: it must be heated with illusions, one-sidedness, passions, the evil and perilous consequences of overheating must be obviated with the aid of the knowledge furnished by science." The overheating isn't obviated by science as the search for knowledge; it's obviated by *knowledge* itself. It's possible that *Human* configured science and non-science in a way similar to the tragic and comic views of existence: the domains of non-science (art in particular) *fuel* science (as the search for knowledge), while the discoveries it makes are used to ensure that the domains of non-science in general—art, in addition to morality, metaphysics, and religion—don't get out of control. While it's plausible that *Human* advances a view like this, it was likely at best only lurking in the background of Nietzsche's thinking. *Human*, unlike *The Gay Science*, doesn't see art as a saving grace. Though *Human* ranks art as a healthier domain of non-science (unlike metaphysics and religion), this work still gives a much lower estimation of art's potential than *The Gay Science*.

[124] GS 107 states, "At times we need to have a rest from ourselves by looking at and down at ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *at* ourselves or crying *at* ourselves; we have to discover the *hero* no less than the *fool* in our passion for knowledge; we must now and then be pleased about our folly in order to able to stay pleased about our wisdom!" The passion for knowledge involves a comic component, insofar as it allows us to laugh at ourselves as fools; but it also contains a tragic component, insofar as it allows us to cry at ourselves as heroes.

untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science—the insight into delusion and error as a condition of cognitive and sensate existence—would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now our honesty has a counterforce that helps us to avoid such consequences: art, as the *good* will to appearance." Commentators typically read this passage as articulating Nietzsche's endorsement of art's capacity to hide unpalatable truths from our view. While this reading isn't wrong, it's necessary to emphasize that Nietzsche is calling on art to hide a *specific* truth from our view, namely, the truth that delusion and error are conditions of "cognitive and sensate existence." This just is the claim of cognitive falsification—science has discovered the truth of cognitive falsification. In order to prevent this truth from diminishing our sense of significance *as* pursuers of knowledge, it has to be countered by art's falsifying and transfiguring tendencies. We need art to affectively falsify the truth of cognitive falsification so that the pursuit of truth and knowledge can be continue to be seen as valuable.

Sustaining the Meaning-Imbuing Tension through Values

This chapter has argued that Nietzsche thinks there is a tension that must be sustained in order for our meaning-imbuing resources to remain fecund. This tension exists between the tendencies for and against affective falsification: If the tendencies that promote affective falsification get out of hand, they'll undermine themselves and we risk a return to barbarism. This is a risk that Nietzsche thinks nineteenth century Europe is facing in the aftermath of Christianity's religious and metaphysical excesses. The forces of science and comedy can productively constrain the tendencies of affective falsification. Yet a purely scientific interpretation of existence, wherein all traces of affective falsification have been extinguished, or

all the tragic tendencies have been incapacitated, would conflict with attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Nietzsche's sees scientific truth as capable of eroding the grounds of our meaning-imbuing resources; it threatens to land us in a state of meaninglessness. To solve this predicament Nietzsche looks to science and the pursuit of knowledge as the activity that can meet the demands of the need for meaning. What contributes to meeting these demands aren't the insights and discoveries yielded by scientific inquiry, but the activity of pursuing truth. In order to ensure that the scientific enterprise can serve as a locus of meaning, Nietzsche lays art and aesthetics at its foundation. Art and aesthetics cast the scientific enterprise as something heroic and meaning-imbuing. Science and the search for knowledge is thereby undergirded by a domain of non-science.

In placing art at the foundation of this tension, Nietzsche avoids the pernicious illusions and errors cultivated by metaphysics and religion. What makes art different from metaphysics and religion is that its illusions are, as Nadeem Hussain (2007) notes, *honest*: "What is special, for Nietzsche, about art is that it is honest about its use of illusion. Art is in the business of generating honest illusions" (168). Honest illusions are illusions that at some level we *know* are illusions but which still have the power to motivate us. When I look at a straight stick placed in a jar of water, I *know* that the stick is actually straight, but it can't appear as anything but bent. "The connection between art and valuing," Hussain elaborates, "is that art allows us to see how we can regard something as valuable even when it is in fact not valuable, and we know that it is not valuable. […] From art we could learn how to *regard* something *as* valuable in itself even when we know that it is not valuable in itself" (170). The illusions and errors of art are superior to those of religion and metaphysics for two reasons: first, they are more consistent with the

tendency of science to focus on the everyday, since artistic illusions and errors don't require any conception of a higher, eternal, or otherwise superior metaphysical realm; and second, art can be honest with respect to the status of its illusions and errors. Unlike religion and metaphysics, artistic illusions wear on their sleeve their status as illusions.

Hussain's reflections also help us to see what specific kinds of entities are artistically projected into the world, namely *values*. Values are projected into reality by the domains of non-science and get us to take life and existence seriously. They compose the backbone of tragic views of existence. We falsify reality by taking certain things to have value in themselves, when really we are projecting value into them—including the activity of searching for knowledge that Nietzsche gives a central place to in our new meaning-imbuing interpretations. Art, by linking this activity to the notion of the heroic, instills it with value.[125]

What makes the notion of value important for our purposes is that it shows how Nietzsche's account of meaning-generation avoids the individualism that he's opposed to (and is expressed in HH 22, et al). Values structure tragic views of existence by getting us to take things seriously. I can only see my efforts at writing a dissertation as something significant and worthwhile when I'm able to assess this activity in terms of values. But according to Nietzsche, the values I use to assess this activity come to me from culture. If writing dissertations isn't an activity deemed valuable in a culture (or community of some kind), then it would be difficult to imbue this activity with any significance. What it means for something to be significant is, at least in part, that it is or has the potential to be recognized as such by others.

Nietzsche says of morality (*Sittlichkeit*) that it is "nothing other […] than obedience to customs [*Sitte*], of whatever kind they may be; customs, however, are the *traditional* way of

[125] By the time of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche still holds the Neo-Kantian account of concepts and sensations prevalent in *Human*. That said, starting with *Daybreak*, the notion of value comes to take on more importance in Nietzsche's thinking. He starts to work with three, rather than two, key terms: concepts, sensations, and values.

behaving and evaluating. In things in which no tradition commands there is no morality" (D 9). Nietzsche is speaking here of moral values. Moral practices and values are rooted in communities—they're based on a community's ways of seeing and being in the world. They aren't rooted in the fabric of reality, nor are they simply generated arbitrarily by individuals. In order to have any traction, values can't be the sorts of things that individuals create *ex nihilo*. As much as Nietzsche would later speak about the creation of new tables of values, we shouldn't envision some individual who arbitrarily chooses what's valuable and what's not. For Nietzsche, valuing as such is grounded intersubjectively. What confers value has to come from some cultural domain—such as the domain of art—and it's only in virtue of having some intersubjective basis that we could use values to imbue our activity with significance.[126]

Art and aesthetics sustain the meaning-imbuing tension and keep evaluative practices healthy. Values are employed to keep the pursuit of truth on firm footing. In order for the pursuit of truth or the search for knowledge to serve as the central meaningful activity, truth and knowledge have to be seen as valuable. The activity of searching for the truth thereby comes to satisfy our affective interests. Engaging in this activity allows us to see ourselves as significant. The distinction *The Gay Science* makes between comic and tragic views of existence pits these attitudes against each other in such a way that their productive tension can be maintained. The activity of searching for the truth is tragically transfigured, while the truths it discovers are comically transfigured. One particularly important truth that undergoes comic transfiguration is the truth of cognitive falsification. The will to truth, in dredging up the falsified nature of its own

[126] This is why GS 1 speaks of the "teachers of the purpose of existence." It's relevant that these figures are *teachers*, even if their teachings run counter to the accepted customs of a community or culture. Even if these teachers are those who make "strong communities" sick by disrupting their "habitual and undiscussable principles," as HH 224 puts it, they need someone to whom they can teach their new principles. The notion of a teacher presupposes those who would learn from him. The trope of the teacher appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—Zarathustra is compelled to descend from the solitude of his mountain home in order to find those with whom he can share his wisdom.

insights, turned on itself. For Nietzsche this is an important truth to incorporate. Realizing the anthropomorphized nature of truth is one more bulwark against our ostensible need to posit a metaphysical beyond. At the same time, however, we can't let the truth of cognitive falsification undermine the pursuit of knowledge by shaking our commitment to the truth.

CHAPTER III: OVERCOMING NIHILISM AND THE PATHOLOGY OF MEANING

"Vision is meaning. Meaning is historical."
~Rust Cohle, *True Detective*

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
~Tennyson, "Ulysses"

The mature period of Nietzsche's career contains his most elaborate and powerful thoughts on meaningfulness. It's within this phase that Nietzsche develops the notions of the will to power and the eternal recurrence and he refines his conception of meaninglessness in terms of nihilism. This chapter investigates the intersections among these notions by looking to several works from this period. The focus will be on the Third Essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* because it's in this work that considerations about meaning and the manner in which the need and quest for it can become pathologized are most manifest.

Nietzsche's answer to the central question of Third Essay of *The Genealogy*, "What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals [*was bedeuten asketische Ideale*]?" is surprising in its ambivalence.[127] He clearly thinks there's something problematic about the ascetic ideal. In the essay's concluding section he states, "We can no longer conceal from ourselves *what* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the human, and even more of

[127] Throughout the third essay of *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche switches between speaking of ascetic ideals (in the plural) and *the* ascetic ideal (in the singular). I'll have more to say about this below.

the animal, and more still hatred of the material of the senses […]—let us dare to grasp it—a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life" (GM III 28). Passages like this demonstrate that Nietzsche sees the ascetic ideal as misanthropic and that the willing it fuels is hostile to life. It comes as no surprise that one of the essay's main claims is that we need an alternative and countermeasure to the ascetic ideal and the pernicious willing it sustains: "I ask […]: 'where is the opposing will expressing the opposing ideal?'" (GM III 25; cf. 23).

What is less obvious are the ways in which Nietzsche thinks the ascetic ideal has in very qualified ways been life-affirming. Speaking of the ascetic priest (the embodiment of the ascetic ideal), Nietzsche states, "[T]his apparent enemy of life, this denier—precisely he is among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life." As life-denying as the ascetic priest might seem, Nietzsche claims the opposite here. In GM III 28—the same section in which Nietzsche claims that the ascetic ideal expresses a will to nothingness and an aversion to life—he elaborates the affirmative potential of the ascetic ideal:

> The ascetic ideal offered man meaning! It was the only meaning offered so far; any meaning is better than none at all […]. In it, suffering was interpreted; the tremendous void seemed to have been filled; the door was closed to any kind of suicidal nihilism. […] Man was saved thereby, he possessed a meaning, he was henceforth no longer like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense—the 'sense-less'—he could now will something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: the will itself was saved. (GM III 28)

The ascetic ideal gave human beings meaning. By filling a void at the core of human willing, it held back the sense that human existence is unintelligible, senseless, and insignificant—the sense that it is like a leaf in the wind and a plaything of nonsense [*ein Speilball des Unsinns*]. The threat of nihilism was staved off.

Nietzsche's mixed thoughts on the ascetic ideal stem from the following observation: The very thing that has rescued us from nihilism is also responsible for keeping the threat of nihilism on the horizon. As much as the ascetic ideal has provided a sense of meaning, so too has it

sustained the threat of nihilism that could undermine this same sense of meaning. The ascetic ideal has thus *pathologized* the need for meaning in the sense that the more we strive to realize this ideal, the more we achieve a sense of meaningfulness, yet these same strivings in a roundabout way keep nihilism at the fore. Our attempts to meet the demands of this need are self-sabotaging in that they work to ultimately undercut themselves. The ascetic ideal has held the threat of nihilism at bay by providing resources that can be used to meet the demands of the need for meaning; but it has also inhibited human flourishing through what Nietzsche calls a "deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more *life-destructive* suffering" (GM III 28). The ascetic ideal has colonized the need for meaning such that attempts to meet its demands are counter-productive, culminating in this pernicious form of suffering.

This chapter will spell out the ascetic ideal's pathological ways of meeting the demands of the need for meaning and the implications of this process. Crucial here are Nietzsche's thoughts on the link between guilt and the ascetic ideal. He is generally interpreted (rightly) as aiming to revalue suffering by showing that it is not in itself objectionable. However, he also thinks there are forms of suffering that shouldn't be revalued (or which can't be revalued), such as the life-destructive suffering generated by the ascetic ideal and more specifically by guilt. This more nuanced approach to suffering that sees certain forms of it as life-enhancing and others as life-destructive has largely gone unnoticed by Nietzsche scholars. Necessary for understanding the distinction between life-destructive forms of suffering and their more life-enhancing counterparts is the historical narrative that buttresses the philosophical account in *The Genealogy*. While Nietzsche doesn't think the ascetic ideal was ever innocuous, part of what is problematic about it is that at this historical juncture it is on the verge of self-destruction. While this destructive process isn't itself worrisome, without constructing an alternative ideal we risk our

own wellbeing and the possibility of developing resources to meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Part I of this chapter analyzes the diagnostic aspect Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal. It starts by considering what sets his later period apart, and then moves on to detailing what he means by the term "ideal," what in particular the *ascetic* ideal is, and the problems it gives rise to (with a focus on how it courts nihilism). Part II turns to Nietzsche's solution to the problem diagnosed in Part I. Part II considers how Nietzsche aims to replace the ascetic ideal with what I claim is another ideal, where "ideal" is understood in a specific, technical sense (discussed in Part I). The strongest candidate for this alternative ideal is the eternal recurrence: In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche claims that the ascetic ideal "was the only ideal so far, because it had no rival. 'For man would rather will nothingness than *not* will'—Above all, a *counterideal* was lacking—*until Zarathustra*" (EH "Genealogy"). This passage asks for a counterideal to the ascetic ideal, claiming that it can be found in the figure of Zarathustra. As we'll see, Zarathustra's ideal is the eternal recurrence. Moreover, as an ideal in a specific and technical sense, the eternal recurrence ideal will share some *structural* similarities with the ascetic ideal. That is, though these ideals differ in content they do share some formal similarities. The ascetic ideal was the first and only such ideal that has ever existed, as the passage above claims, and Nietzsche doesn't aim to simply topple the ascetic ideal but to provide a new one in its place.

Part I: Diagnosing the Problem of Nihilism

Before turning to the ascetic ideal, it may be helpful to consider some of the key ideas that are distinctive of Nietzsche's mature thinking. Having a grasp of these ideas demonstrates some of the developments in his thinking and situates the need for meaning within the context of

the later period. We'll then proceed to an important shift that occurs between the middle and later periods that involves Nietzsche's abandonment of what he called the free spirit ideal that defined his middle period. This will provide the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of his thinking on ideals, what is objectionable about the ascetic ideal in particular, and what nihilism is and its role in his mature thought.

The Will to Power and the Need for Meaning

The will to power is one of the defining concepts of Nietzsche's thought, and is crucial to understanding how the need for meaning is reconceived during his mature phase. The will to power is a desire to "discharge [one's] strength" (BGE 13) in the overcoming of resistance—it is a "desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs" (GM I 13). Power is the ability to overcome resistance, and the will to power is engaged through the exercising of our capacities in the *activity* of overcoming resistance. The following analysis of the will to power is indebted to the account developed by Bernard Reginster in chapter 3 of (2006) and (2007: 37-8). He concisely characterizes the will to power as follows: "It is a [second-order] desire whose object includes another (first-order) desire. It is, specifically, a desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire" (2006: 132). The will to power doesn't have as its end a static state of affairs; it isn't "a will to the *state in which resistance has been overcome* (a state in which desires have been satisfied)." It is "a will to the very *activity of overcoming resistance*" (2006: 126-7).[128]

[128] This is why I say that that the will to power is "*engaged*" rather than "satisfied," "gratified," or "fulfilled." Most other drives or "wills" are satisfied through the attainment of certain objects or states of affairs. The drive for food (hunger) is satisfied through food (something static). The will to power is satisfied only through being properly engaged in a kind of activity, i.e., the activity or striving aimed at overcoming resistance. Note the similarity between the will to power and the need for meaning. The demands of the need for meaning are met through an ongoing and open-ended activity. Meaning isn't a static object, just as the will to power isn't a drive for a static state of affairs. Throughout Nietzsche's thinking the demands of the need for meaning are met through an ongoing and

Determinate first-order desires are things like, “I would like a PhD,” “I hope one day to be a professor,” or “I want hamburger.” Each of these desires aims at securing a particular object or state of affairs—like having a PhD, being a professor, or a hamburger. The will to power differs from these determinate first-order desires because it doesn’t involve merely desiring (for instance) a PhD, nor is it just the desire for obstacles or other forms of resistance that pose themselves in the pursuit of a PhD; it is the drive that is expressed in the overcoming of these obstacles.

The role resistance plays in the will to power is worth considering in greater detail. Activities that don’t pose any resistance fail to engage the will to power. We can and often do achieve the object of a first-order desire without any resistance—imagine I wanted a slice of chocolate cake and happened to have some in the fridge. I didn’t have to overcome any resistance, and so didn’t undergo any suffering. But my will to power isn’t engaged. Similarly, I don’t feel powerful or accomplished by climbing atop a mound of dirt, defeating a four-year-old at a game of chess, or in heating up a TV dinner in the microwave; but I do feel a sense of power or accomplishment—the feeling that I’ve overcome resistance—when I scale a mountain, defeat a chess champion, or prepare a gourmet meal from scratch. The latter activities provide resistance in that they’re difficult, and the accomplishment of such tasks involves obstacles that have to be overcome. Suffering (conceived broadly by Nietzsche) is the experience of encountering and striving to overcome such an obstacle.

Though resistance is necessary for engaging the will to power, not just any resistance will do. Sisyphus’s boulder-pushing poses immense resistance, but it doesn’t give him the relevant sense of power, and not just because the boulder always rolls back down the hill. If he finally got the boulder to stay atop the hill, he may have achieved a difficult feat, but pushing boulders up

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open-ended activity, and when this need is linked to the will to power in Nietzsche’s mature thought, the dynamic nature of “achieving” meaning (of meeting the demands of the need for meaning) is more palpable.

hills isn't in itself a valuable, meaningful, or worthwhile activity. It could only be worthwhile if, for instance, the boulder was going to be used to build a monument that Sisyphus approved of.[129] Pushing boulders to the tops of hills is like other difficult but meaningless activities such as counting the grains of sand on a beach or forcing oneself to eat an entire chocolate cake for desert.[130] Why don't such achievements engage the will to power? As difficult as it is to accomplish such feats, the goals these activities posit aren't *meaningful*—that is, they aren't significant or valuable. To say that these goals aren't meaningful is to say that accomplishing them doesn't contribute (or contributes only negligibly) to meeting the demands of the need for meaning—the goals, and so the activity of pursuing and realizing them, aren't meaning-imbuing. Furthermore, the suffering endured to bring about such goals is meaningless (like the suffering Sisyphus endures in his rock pushing).

This discussion demonstrates that we don't strive to overcome just any sufficiently difficult obstacle or resistance, nor do we want to realize just any goal. Striving also has to be aimed towards an end or goal that we are justified in caring about.[131] Nietzsche claims that "[e]very animal […] instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve the maximal feeling of power" (GM III 7). This claim has two important implications. First, every animal (and therefore every human being) is driven by the will to power, by the "instinct" to discharge its strength. Following from this is the idea that every animal seeks the *optimal conditions* that allow for this discharge. This instinct isn't one that all animals just so happen to share. For Nietzsche it's fundamental to life itself. He states elsewhere that the will to power is "the will of life [*Wille des Lebens*]" and that life seeks power

[129] Cf. Wolf (2010), Seachris (2013), and Metz (2014) for a more detailed discussion of Sisyphus and meaning.
[130] What these tasks share is a sense of being pointless. They aren't in themselves experienced as intrinsically rewarding, nor do they instrumentally contribute to an end or goal that is intrinsically rewarding.
[131] Below is a discussion of the difference between "meaningful" and "valuable."

"above all [*vor allem*]" (BGE 13).[132] The second and more important implication of GM III 7 concerns *meaning*. Meaning is for human beings one of the optimal conditions that allow for the discharge of strength; it's a condition of the kind of striving that will engage the will to power (in human beings) that the goal of this striving appear valuable and meaning-imbuing. Human beings strive to achieve meaningful goals or ideals, and the meaningfulness of these ends renders the resistance involved in achieving them meaningful. Meaning is thus a condition of engaging the will to power. Since the will to power is the will of life, failure to engage it is a hindrance to the optimal conditions of discharging strength and precludes the possibility of human flourishing.

An important component to the way Nietzsche conceives of the overcoming of resistance involves the notion of suffering (construed broadly). Willing power involves willing resistance to be overcome, and overcoming resistance involves suffering. As Reginster (2006) notes, "Since suffering is defined in terms of resistance, then the will to power indeed 'desires displeasure'" (113).[133] Running up against a resistance is experienced as a sort of suffering or displeasure; more precisely, it is experienced as an unpleasant or distressing disequilibrium that one is driven to stabilize. For instance, imagine two chess masters in fierce competition with one another. Both are driven to overcome the other by winning. We might not say that they are suffering in the ordinary sense, but the desire each has to win is experienced as an itch, irritation, or discomfort,

[132] It's crucial not to confuse the "will *of* life" with the "will *to* life." Both are terms we find in Nietzsche's corpus. In saying that the will to power is the will of life, Nietzsche means that the will to power "guides" life, is expressed through life, and is definitive of life itself (it's part of what makes a living being living). The will *to* life (a notion that Nietzsche inherits from Schopenhauer) is the will to live and is often used interchangeably with the will to self-preservation. The distinction between the will to life and the will of life will become clearer when we see that the will to power (the will of life) can motivate people to achieve ends that run counter to self-preservation.

[133] The understanding of suffering linked to the overcoming of resistance is broad. It goes beyond physical or mental pain and shouldn't be taken to refer solely (as it is sometimes is in ordinary English) to intense pain or agony. Reginster (2006) notes that Nietzsche often "uses 'displeasure [*Unlust*]' and 'suffering [*Leiden*] interchangeably" (285). Nietzsche doesn't use the term "suffering" in a way that clearly distinguishes it from "displeasure" and "pain," but the suffering (or displeasure, etc.) that is involved with the will to power is in one way or another a kind of disequilibrium that oftentimes serves as a *stimulus* (see two notebook entries from 1887-8, KGW 11[76], [77]) to stabilize this disequilibrium. Given that Nietzsche typically uses the term suffering, I will follow suit despite the differences between it and other forms of displeasure.

but one that is enjoyed (in as much as they like chess). Their suffering is occasioned not merely by resistance, but by the desire each has to overcome it. If in the middle of the match one of the players becomes apathetic about chess and loses his passion for it, then the resistance provided by the other player would remain. But the uninterested chess player ceases suffering because he no longer cares about winning; if he suffers, it's from having to play a game he no longer has any interest in. He doesn't suffer from the mental stress of having to devise the best play, nor from the will that formerly drove him to defeat his opponent. By the same token however, even if the dispirited player happens to win, he wouldn't experience his feat as meaning-imbuing since he now no longer cares about chess. What this implies is that willing (or desiring) is accompanied by displeasure because it necessarily involves a kind of disequilibrium. Willing is wanting something one doesn't have. Achieving meaningful goals—overcoming resistance in the pursuit of what is valuable—therefore necessarily involves the suffering. If a goal is properly meaning-imbuing, then the suffering endured in achieving it is meaningful.

The Need for Meaning in the Mature Period

The preceding discussion introduced several different terms related to the need for meaning, such as striving, overcoming, resistance, suffering and goals. But what does it mean for these sorts of things to have meaning? And if these objects are imbued with meaning, is that all there is to meeting the demands of the need for meaning? Turning to these questions will serve to provide a better understanding of how Nietzsche conceives of nihilism as the condition under which the interpretive resources that could meet the demands of the need for meaning are wanting.

Some Nietzsche scholars claim that Nietzsche's interest in meaning is restricted to

suffering. On his Nietzsche Weblog, Brian Leiter (2010) states, "We might well stand in need of *meaning*, but the need for meaning *simpliciter* plays no role in the argument of GM III. What is at issue […] is the need for *suffering to be meaningful*." According to Leiter, for Nietzsche suffering is what has to be imbued with meaning; the need for meaning is really the need for suffering to have meaning. Leiter's interpretation is ostensibly substantiated in the Third Essay, where considerations about meaning often occur alongside those of suffering. For instance, GM III 28 states, "Man, the bravest animal and most prone to suffer, does *not* deny suffering as such: he *wills* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind" (cf. GM II 7, et al).

Leiter offers this interpretation in response to Sebastian Gardner's understanding of the need for meaning. Gardner—whose general position I share—thinks the scope of the need for meaning goes beyond suffering. What needs meaning is the world and human existence within it. Concerning the concluding passage of *The Genealogy* Gardner states:

> [T]he need for *Sinn* [German for "meaning"] presupposes, in *some* sense, the fact of suffering. Nietzsche's view of their relation is not straightforward, and consideration of the topic is complicated by the fact that meaninglessness is itself an object or form of suffering (man '*suffered* from the problem of what he meant', GM III 28, p. 127/KGW VI–2.429). My suggestion would be that Nietzsche regards suffering in its primary, hedonic sense as *occasioning* the formation of the need for *Sinn*, indeed as *necessary* for its crystallization, but that he regards the need for *Sinn* as then assuming a life of its own, such that, if *per impossibile* we ceased to suffer in the hedonic-Schopenhauerian sense, we would continue to stand in need of *Sinn*. Suffering thus figures twice in Nietzsche's genealogy, and in two different forms: primordially it is a matter of life's minus score on the hedonic, Schopenhauerian balance sheet; later it assumes the additional and independent form of a consequence of our finding life *sinnlos*. (2009: 27)

Contra Leiter, Gardner claims that meeting the demands of the need for meaning goes beyond giving suffering meaning.

Gardner rightly sees the meaninglessness of suffering as only a component (though a very important one) of nihilism. As he claims, suffering "in the hedonic-Schopenhauerian sense"

may occasion the formation of the need for meaning, but the need comes to have a "life of its own," that is, it comes to assume a role that goes beyond giving suffering meaning. What he means when he speaks of suffering "in the hedonic-Schopenhauerian sense" is suffering or discomfort in opposition to pleasure or satisfaction. What makes it hedonic is that pleasure—or at least the absence of suffering—is deemed intrinsically valuable. Suffering is counted as "a matter of life's minus score on the hedonic, Schopenhauerian balance sheet." The extent to which existence is worthwhile is determined by the extent to which suffering, which counts negatively, is minimized. We might imagine a sheet in which we count pleasures, depending on their kind, intensity, and length in time, as positives to varying degrees, and displeasures, based the same criteria as negatives. What makes it Schopenhauerian is that the *fact* of suffering renders existence objectionable, regardless of how the balance sheet turns out. For Schopenhauer the mere fact that we suffer is itself enough to make existence objectionable.[134] This form of suffering occasions the formation of the need for meaning because it's a precondition for its "crystallization." It's because we suffer that we take pause and wonder why bother with existence at all when it's suffused with something as objectionable as suffering. Schopenhauer (see the previous chapter on Schopenhauer's views in "On Man's Need for Metaphysics) saw suffering as a necessary condition for arriving at questions about meaning and the worthwhileness of existence; Nietzsche (at least of the later period) never explicitly articulates this belief, but were we to imagine existence without suffering, the need for meaning would nevertheless remain, though suffering helps to make questions of meaning more poignant and ubiquitous.

According to Gardner, meeting the demands of the need for meaning goes beyond imbuing suffering with meaning. Suffering causes human beings to wonder whether existence is

[134] C.f. Schopenhauer's WWR II 161.

worthwhile, but meeting the demands of the need for meaning involves more than just giving suffering meaning. The need for meaning comes to have a life of its own in that the objects to be imbued with meaning are the world and human existence—"*man* suffers from the problem of what *he* meant" (my emphasis), not just his "hedonic" suffering. Nihilism thus isn't just a claim about the meaninglessness of suffering, it's a claim about the meaninglessness of existence.

Gardner's interpretation has several exegetical points in its favor. Nietzsche frequently speaks of nihilism as a condition pertaining to our attitude toward existence and the world, not just our suffering. Even in the GM III, where the focus is on the meaninglessness of human suffering, Nietzsche states of the ascetic ideal: "It stubbornly interprets epochs, peoples, humans in relation to this one goal, it permits no other interpretation, no other goal" (GM III 23; cf. 28). The ascetic ideal doesn't just interpret suffering, it interprets entire historical epochs and human existence—it is a thoroughgoing interpretation the object of which is the world and our existence within it. This includes suffering but also goes beyond it. If we're unable to experience existence and the world we inhabit as meaningful, then it follows that we won't see our travails and the suffering that accompanies them as meaningful either. Nihilism is therefore a state in which what lacks meaning isn't only suffering, it's humanity itself since the ascetic ideal effectively saved human beings by giving existence a meaning.

Statements that substantiate Gardner's position are also found in Nietzsche's notebook entries. They demonstrate that Nietzsche understands nihilism in terms of how we interpret the world and existence rather than just suffering. An entry from 1885-6 states that nihilism is the view that "'Everything lacks meaning' (the untenability [*Undurchführbarkeit*] of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that *all* interpretations of the world are false)" (WP 1, KGW 2[127]).

Nihilism is a phenomenon that pertains to everything, not just an interpretation of human suffering. It involves a large-scale interpretation of the world that, viewed askance, awakens the suspicion that there are no meaning-imbuing interpretations whatsoever; since one meaning-imbuing interpretation has become untenable—e.g., the Christian interpretation—we become disenchanted with the possibility of devising alternatives. In another entry from 1887, Nietzsche states, "*Radical nihilism* is the conviction of the absolute untenability [*Unhaltbarkeit*] of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes" (WP 3, KGW 10[192]). As in the previous passage, this entry claims that nihilism amounts to a conviction about untenability—in this case, the untenability of our existence within the world vis-à-vis our "highest values."

We'll turn to the details and ostensible inconsistencies of these passages below—in WP 1, nihilism involves the untenability of an interpretation of the world, whereas WP 3 claims it's the untenability of human existence vis-à-vis the highest values that are recognized. Nevertheless, these passages demonstrate that Nietzsche understands nihilism as a condition that goes beyond the large-scale sense that suffering is meaningless. The meaninglessness of suffering is a crucial component to the account of nihilism, but nihilism ultimately amounts to a condition wherein existence and the world are experienced as meaningless. When existence and the world are experienced as meaningless, suffering is as well since it results from facts about human existence and the structure of the external world. Consequently, the solution to nihilism—what is required to meet the demands of the need for meaning—goes beyond Leiter's suggestions of an interpretation of suffering. Something more is needed, as Gardner indicates, especially since "man suffers from the problem of his meaning." Suffering may therefore be necessary for the "crystallization" of the need for meaning, because through suffering we come face to face with what is the most evidently problematic part of human existence. But the imbuing suffering with

meaning isn't enough to meet the demands of the need for meaning, since Nietzsche "regards the need for *Sinn* as […] assuming a life of its own, such that, if *per impossibile* we ceased to suffer in the hedonic-Schopenhauerian sense, we would continue to stand in need of *Sinn*."

Nihilism, Values, and the Need for Meaning

Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism was never fully articulated or worked out. The notebook entries quoted above seem to offer different understandings of nihilism, giving rise to the question of how Nietzsche conceived of it beyond the claim that the world and human existence lack meaning. The two key points of his understanding of nihilism involve on the one hand a claim about the untenability of meaning-imbuing resources, and on the other a claim about how something goes wrong between values and goals.

The first key point is complicated by the two WP passages quoted above that seem to inconsistently situate untenability. WP 1 offers a view of nihilism in terms of the untenability of our interpretations of the world and existence, whereas WP 3 understands nihilism in terms of the untenability of existence in light of what we recognize as our highest values. However, this inconsistency is only apparent because Nietzsche understands values as special kinds of interpretations. Below we'll return to the crucial role the notion interpretation in general plays in the mature period; here the focus is on what it means for values to be interpretations and how this view reconciles the claims of WP 1 and WP 3. A notebook entry from 1885-6 states, "[M]oral evaluation is an *exegesis* [Auslegung], a way of interpreting [*eine Art zu interpretiren*]" (WP 254, KGW 2 [190]). Another entry from the same time period states, "*My chief proposition: there are no moral phenomena, there is only a moral interpretation of phenomena* (WP 258, KGW 2 [165],

Nietzsche's emphasis).[135] Values are interpretations for Nietzsche in that they posit hierarchies and orders of rank that shape our basic comportment to the world—they *rank* things in the world, like objects, states of affairs, and activities. As interpretations, they aid in generating the appearance that the world is coherent and intelligible by ordering otherwise disparate aspects of it. For instance, valuing empathy makes the pain of others strike me differently than if I hold egotism in higher esteem; the effect of seeing others suffer differs in each case. Once this value has been inculcated, I involuntarily and unreflectively react to the suffering of others in certain ways: Seeing photographs of people in pain generates negative affects, when a friend trips I immediately go to his aid, I feel bad (the sting of conscience) if I fail to aid an ailing person when it was within my power to do so, etc. Values influence the ways in which we respond to the world by giving it and certain events a normative hue.

Part of what Nietzsche means to point out in calling values interpretations is that they don't exist independently of human beings. There are only moral interpretations of phenomena rather than actual moral phenomena because values provide axiological perspectives and windows out onto the world (cf. WP 12); our interpretations project into the world axiological properties of all kinds (moral value, aesthetic value, etc.). For Nietzsche there are no moral phenomena because phenomena in themselves lack moral or evaluative properties prior to the process of projection. It's through our interpretations and perspectives that phenomena take on meanings in terms of the values we hold. Valuing involves a projection into the world that shapes our experience of it. Valuing the religious truth of Catholicism, for instance, involves the projection of evaluative tinged notions like sin and redemption; the world appears to the Catholic through the perspective of these value-laden notions. The values that do the most to affect our comportment to the world are what Nietzsche calls our *highest values* (more on which below).

[135] C.f. BGE 108 for an almost identical statement.

What we take to be the highest values serve as the supreme expression of what we care most about, which is why Nietzsche sees it as imperative to interrogate the ascetic ideal. It is the mainstay of our evaluative framework, the foundation out of which our highest values grow, and so the lens through which we interpret the world.

Because values are interpretations, the claims of WP 1 and WP 3 aren't at odds with one another. The claim that nihilism is a state wherein existence is untenable in light of our highest values (WP 3) is not only consistent with understanding nihilism in terms of the untenability our overall interpretations of existence (WP 1), both claims are just different articulations of the same position: Both amount to the claim that our interpretations of existence are untenable in one way or another. The untenability of our highest values implies the untenability of our interpretations of existence. But what does Nietzsche mean by a highest value?

This brings us to the second key point about Nietzsche's understanding nihilism in terms of a gap between values and goals. The untenability involved in nihilism results in part from a gap between goals and our highest values. WP 2 provides another important perspective from which to understand nihilism. Written in 1887, it states, "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devaluate themselves* [die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen]. The aim [*Ziel*] is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (KGW 9 [35]). This passage presents nihilism in terms of our highest values, linking these special axiological entities to goals. Highest values are special sorts of values. While they don't structure an evaluative framework, they do play a vital role in it. Values exist in a ranking. We may not be able to provide a hard and fast ranking of the values we hold, but a loose ranking is possible. Highest values are those that, in the pursuit of realizing them, we express something fundamental about our spirit or identity. For instance, someone might value money because it allows her to buy food, and value food because it keeps her alive,

yet she doesn't take money or food to be highest values. Neither making money nor eating the food it buys expresses something fundamental about who she takes herself to be. Instead, activities like singing and playing the guitar express her identity, making the performance of music a highest value for her. She wants money and food because they secure the basic conditions that allow her to live according to her highest values. Money and food might still say something important about her. The amount of money she has will determine whether she is rich or poor, and so express something about her socio-economic standing, just as the food she eats says something about her—for instance, whether she eats fast food, prepares her own food, is a vegetarian, vegan, etc., all say something about her. But that doesn't mean that money and food express something fundamental about her identity in terms of who she takes herself to be. Highest values, however, have this expressive spiritual capacity.

Culture plays a crucial role in sustaining highest values. It doesn't generate these values but it enshrines them, making them available and appealing to a culture's members. In enshrining certain values, culture gives them an illustrious sheen that makes them alluring to the members of a culture, thereby motivating them to live according to these values. Cultures put a premium on certain kinds of activities, character traits, virtues, and states of affairs—for example, a particular culture might enshrine activities and virtues like humility, painting, and certain religious beliefs and philosophical views. These are examples of what a culture might take to be its highest values, and activities that manifest or express them serve as outward manifestations about the distinctive and idiosyncratic identity of that culture and its members. For Nietzsche, values in general give us goals, and highest values supply especially important goals. Working toward accomplishing these goals isn't just a way of demonstrating what we take to be valuable, values cause us to have affective reactions to certain states of affairs and that motivate us to carry

out certain activities and strive to realize certain ends. Values cause us to *will* certain activities and states of affairs. To value empathy means both that I am struck by certain features of the world—like the pain of others—and that I am driven to behave and comport myself so as to be empathetic. Failing to be empathetic in relevant circumstances is (among those who value it) experienced as a moral shortcoming; such a failure invites the proverbial sting of conscience or even guilt.[136] I feel bad or experience myself as deficient if I value empathy but fail to act empathetically when it's called for; if I don't value empathy, but the other members of my culture do, then they will see me as bad or deficient if I fail to act empathetically when it's called for.

The role that culture plays in enshrining values is an essential component of Nietzsche's understanding of value and normativity. Activities that work toward realizing goals express the values that generate them; they express something about what Nietzsche calls a "type of life [*Art von Leben*]" (cf. BGE 3, TI "Morality as Anti-Nature" 5, et al.). What determines the type or form of life a person belongs to are considerations like a person's tendencies, dispositions, strengths, weaknesses, and various other considerations pertaining to her psychological makeup, physical constitution, the culture she grows up in, socio-economic standing and other facts about her history. No single consideration will determine the type of person someone is, but each tends to have at least a minor influence on determining who one is and so the type of life they belong to. Culture here is, however, typically very important given the role it plays in consecrating values. Different cultures instill different values and esteem different traits and virtues. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* articulates an account of the intersections among the notions of culture, value, meaning, goals, and the will to power:

[136] Below we'll return to Nietzsche's views on bad conscience, guilt, and the distinction between them.

> A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensible and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need [*Noth*], the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy. Whatever makes them rule and triumph and shine, to the awe and envy of their neighbors, that is to them the high, the first, the measure, the meaning of all things [*Sinn aller Dinge*]. Verily, my brothers, once you have recognized the need and land and sky and neighbor of a people, you may also guess the law of their overcomings, and why they climb to their hope on this latter. (Z "On the Thousand and One Goals"; cf. BGE 143, 194)

The highest values are manifestations of what a culture cares about most, and culture maintains these highest values by consecrating them and holding them up as a "tablet of the good"—as kinds of "codes" that guide its members in engaging in meaning-imbuing activities. The striving and willing of the members of a culture are given a direction. The particular values that are enshrined as highest values determine the activities that are most estimable; they provide goals toward which people strive. Zarathustra provides several examples of the values enshrined by different cultures: "'To speak the truth and to handle bow and arrow well'—that seemed both dear and difficult to the people who gave me my name [the Persians]" (ibid.). The highest values of Persian culture included truthfulness and being skilled in archery; these values provide goals or activities that Persians held to be dear and so worth practicing: speaking the truth even when difficult to do so and excelling at archery. Such activities express something about what it means to be a member of Persian culture. The values enshrined by culture are a tablet of their overcomings and the voice of their will to power because the goals supplied by these values are pursued through activities that pose resistance; overcoming this resistance is how one pursues these goals, and their pursuit is how a culture's highest values are expressed.[137] Nietzsche states

[137] It's important to note that the goals a culture enshrines, or even the goals an individual lives by regardless of their cultural status, need not be *achieved* in order to express the value that generates them; one need only work toward the pursuit of that goal's achievement with instances of success (and the possibility of occasional failure) throughout their pursuit. There are going to be evaluatively generated goals that, strictly speaking, can't be achieved. If I value modesty, I may find myself in situations wherein I want to be boastful but have to hold back; this marks an expression or manifestation of modesty (even if only to myself) but there is no single goal modesty gives me that I once and for all achieve that makes me modest. The goals values give us are ones we have to repeatedly pursue and work toward, and it's through this activity that we express the values. By the same token, occasional failure is acceptable as well; if on a particular occasion I am boastful, that doesn't mean I'm not modest, I just failed to act

that these values are what make the members of a culture "triumph and shine to the awe and envy of their neighbors" because it's only by advancing different highest values that a culture gains a distinct identity. "No people could live without first esteeming," Zarathustra continues. "[I]f they want to preserve themselves, then they must not esteem as the neighbor esteems" (ibid.). If a culture esteems what their neighbor esteems, then there's nothing to differentiate them. Two cultures can't advance the same set of highest values, since in doing so, they'd effectively be the same culture.

Meeting the demands of the need for meaning is in part a collective, cultural enterprise. One meets the demands as an individual, but the values at one's disposal are sustained and kept vital through culture. That said, something isn't valuable in virtue of the fact that a culture enshrines it; cultures can enshrine values that fail to provide estimable goals, and therefore fail to imbue meaning. Nietzsche's criticism of the ascetic ideal, heralded as it is by European culture, demonstrates that a culture can err in what it enshrines and deems valuable. Below we'll return to the details of Nietzsche's critique. What's noteworthy about the role of culture in sustaining our values is what it says about nihilism: nihilism isn't merely a personal experience, it's a state of affairs that has its roots in culture. When culture advances pernicious, destructive, pathological values, or values the estimation of which has these consequences, then nihilism ensues.

What are Values and What is Nihilism?

That cultures can go wrong in their values raises the question of what values are on Nietzsche's view. This is a particularly thorny issue this chapter doesn't aim to positively settle.

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according to a value. *Repeated* failure is a more difficult question; I may feel the motivational pull to be modest, but constantly fail to act modestly. This may be a case of akrasia, it may be evidence that I don't actually value modesty, or something else. But these sorts of considerations go beyond the moral psychology that is the focus of this chapter.

He is generally taken to be a skeptic concerning the existence of values, in that he denies that there are axiological facts. He claims that "a 'morality-in-itself,' a 'good-in-itself' do not exist, […] it is a swindle to talk of 'truth' in this field" (WP 428). If there are no axiological truths, then how can a culture enshrine the wrong sorts of values?

There are two general interpretive strategies available to make sense of Nietzsche's views. One is to suppose that contrary to most recent commentary on the matter, Nietzsche is not as doubtful toward the idea that one can be correct or mistaken about what is valuable.[138] On this view, he's just not the meta-axiological skeptic he's often taken to be such that a culture can err in enshrining certain things as values that aren't values, and individuals can be correct or not in what they take to be valuable. Another possibility is that he is indeed a skeptic, but the values that are heralded by culture can be perniciously self-undermining, which gives us a good reason to forsake them and to engage in Nietzsche's project of revaluation. In this second case, a culture's highest values are self-sabotaging, as Nietzsche thinks of the ascetic ideal. On this view it doesn't matter whether or not one can be correct or mistaken about what is valuable, or whether or not there are axiological facts. What matters is that holding certain things to be valuable can have pernicious consequences and that values can be self-defeating, that some certain value (given perhaps facts about its nature, the valuer, and the world) has certain consequences when one attempts to realize it in the world, and these consequences aren't just antithetical to the realization of that value, but attempts to realize the value in the world backfire such that its opposite is realized; such values fail as values, or fail at what they "ought" to do as values. It's hard to think of how values can backfire in this way, but Nietzsche sometimes hints

[138] See Huddleston (2014), which argues that "Nietzsche's texts do not necessitate the skeptical meta-axiological positions that have been attributed to him in the recent secondary literature" (322). According to Huddleston, Nietzsche lacks a systematic understanding of what values are, but he nevertheless takes the values that he champions as being the correct values.

at this view when he points out the hypocrisy not of certain Christian valuers, but certain Christian values that given their nature and facts about the world, are bound to backfire (he sometimes speaks of humility and pity in this way).[139]

Either way, different cultures enshrine different values, and part of what gives a culture its distinctive identity are the things it takes as its highest values. If Nietzsche does believe there are axiological facts, he might be a pluralist. Pluralism in this context is an axiological position that holds the following: As a matter of fact there are different kinds of value, but all such values taken together are incommensurable and give rise to intractable conflicts. We can't realize all values at the same time because (for instance) realizing the genuine value X necessarily (either logically or as a matter of practical fact) problematizes the possibility of realizing the genuine value Y—or worse, the more one realizes genuine value X, the more one fails to realize the genuine value Y, such that the realization of X and Y stand in an inverse relation.

Setting aside the details of value pluralism, what matters for Nietzsche is that no culture can enshrine everything that (assuming it exists) has genuine evaluative standing. If Nietzsche is the kind of value pluralist who holds that two things may be valuable but attempts at realizing them come into conflict with one another (such that pursuing the realization of one value runs counter to pursuing the realization of the other) then a culture cannot in principle enshrine all that

[139] Though this doesn't speak to a fact about values *per se*, Nehamas (1985) offers a related and interesting account of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* as a philosophical autobiography that reveals that false humility or at least something self-serving at the heart of all autobiographies. For someone to write an autobiography they have to take themselves to be great, exemplary, or offering something that readers could learn from. But most autobiographers don't present themselves this way, they are instead humble throughout the autobiography, not explicitly stating the reader has something to learn from the writer's self-narrative. According to Nehamas, *Ecce Homo* lampoons this by showing the false humility for what it is. Instead of failing to address why one ought to read one's own particular life-story, or instead of giving a feigned, disingenuous, and self-congratulatory narrative about how one became so great (though the autobiographer would never self-describe in such a manner), Nietzsche does explicitly what the average autobiographer does duplicitously: He tells the reader why he's so great and why the books he's written are earthshattering. See Nehamas (1985: 170-199). This example of autobiography isn't without its problems, but it's worth noting that the problem isn't that one who holds humility as a value then goes on to write an autobiography; it's that oftentimes the content of the autobiography (even if unbeknownst to the writer) is an attempt to be humble, yet the autobiography itself expresses the opposite.

is valuable. On this view, that there is a vast array of genuine axiological entities means one can still be in error about what has value. Value pluralism doesn't commit one to the view that *everything* is valuable, just that there's an abundance of values, and that these values taken *en masse* will necessarily involve irresolvable conflicts if we try to realize them all or put them all in practice. Such value pluralism holds that in principle not all the values can be realized together.[140]

Even if Nietzsche doesn't believe there are axiological matters of fact, and even if he isn't a pluralist in the sense sketched above, the *Zarathustra* passage above nevertheless suggests that different cultures enshrine different sorts of activities, and even if there's a conflict among attempts to pursue activities enshrined by different cultures, that doesn't mean that one culture is right and the other wrong. Rather than call Nietzche a value pluralist, I prefer the term "quasi-pluralist," which doesn't commit him to the view that values have genuine standing, or that values are what they are independent of interpretation. As seen above, values are entities that are projected into the world through a complicated interpretive process.

Like the pluralist, Nietzsche as a quasi-pluralist would concede that *across* cultures it's possible for there to be inconsistent or incommensurable values; yet this inconsistency doesn't result from one culture being right and the other wrong about what has value. On the quasi-pluralist reading Nietzsche doesn't take any values to have genuine axiological standing (which is why it is *quasi*-pluralism); strictly speaking one isn't correct or in error about what is valuable since there's nothing outside human perspectives and interpretive vantage points to confer value.

[140] Even if Nietzsche weren't a value pluralist, and even if he were a more run of the mill moral philosopher, he'd still hold that no single culture could enshrine all genuine values if only because a culture lacks the resources to do so. There are simply too many values, and even if they don't conflict, a culture nevertheless has to "choose" which to consecrate, or which to hold higher than others. To be clear, I don't take Nietzsche to be this kind of "run of the mill" moral philosopher, just that even a moral philosopher with views more in line with accepted versions of realism and/or monism could concede that a culture can't enshrine all that is valuable.

But even if as a matter of fact we can't be in error about what is valuable, evaluative schemes can still in principle be ranked. If a system of values is within itself hypocritical, self-destructive, or otherwise damaging for its adherents—if it is sufficiently "life-denying," whatever Nietzsche might mean by that—that may give its adherents a reason to abandon or overhaul their axiological resources.

However, Nietzsche's understanding of inconsistent or conflicting values is considerably more complicated than this. The account I've provided suggests he advances complete consistency and harmony among one's axiological resources as something to be aimed for. This isn't the case. Nietzsche doesn't advocate that a single culture or a single individual hold a set of values that are entirely consistent or harmonious. Such consistency and harmony fails to generate productive conflict and for Nietzsche marks a kind of weakness. He instead advocates that cultures and individuals have values, drives, wills and affects that conflict with one another. Speaking of master and slave moralities, he states that "in all higher and more mixed cultures, attempts to negotiate between these moralities also appear, although more frequently the two are confused and there are mutual misunderstandings. In fact, you sometimes find them sharply juxtaposed—inside the same person even, within a single soul" (BGE 260). Though in many cases conflicting values lead to confusion and misunderstanding, all higher cultures (and so higher individuals) always attempt to *negotiating* among different value-systems. Nietzsche's quasi-pluralism therefore doesn't aim at consistency or harmony among one's axiological resources. Nietzsche's account of interpretation (which we'll return to below) holds in high esteem this process of negotiation since it can produce more powerful and comprehensive interpretations and outlooks on the world. A problem occurs when there are "mutual misunderstandings" among one's values such that the values undercut themselves or lead to a

sort of debilitating dissonance. If not properly incorporated, two opposing forces, whether they be values, drives, wills, or even beliefs, can result in a process of degeneration and weakening—much as someone who wanting two opposing things becomes enervated from the conflict and inability to make up his mind.

Setting aside the details of Nietzsche's axiological views on the plurality of values, cultures can enshrine only a certain set of values—not because certain values conflict, but because a culture has only so many resources at hand to enshrine certain values. No culture has the capacity or the resources to enshrine all values. Values, to be values, have to find expression through institutions, practicies, customs, rituals, and the like. There simply isn't enough time or other resources available to people to express values in all these different sorts of ways.

The values that a culture projects and enshrines have the capacity to culminate in nihilism. Nihilism is a state wherein, for complicated historical and cultural reasons, our values lack motivational force, or if they do motivate us we're simply unable to realize them. But more than being a condition that pertains to our values, nihilism is a state wherein something goes awry between our values and goals. Nihilism results when this relation goes wrong in one of three different ways.

The first way in which this relation can go awry is when a culture's defining goals and the activity of pursuing them are perceived as lacking value. In this case we become apathetic toward this pursuit. The activity required to realize such goals isn't worthwhile, and realizing the goals fails to result in the expression of our values. The Sisyphean effort to push a boulder atop a hill meets this description, since this goal fails to express any value. A state of affairs in which boulders are atop hills isn't, in itself, valued. The result is a sense of meaninglessness.

Second, nihilism is a state in which we experience the structure of the world as

relentlessly inhospitable to the realization of valuable, meaning-imbuing goals. In this case, the problem isn't that realizing goals fails to express meaning, it's that we're unable (or feel that we're unable) to realize the relevant sorts of goals. If we can't realize goals that express and are supplied by our highest values, then engaging in meaning-imbuing activity aimed at achieving them becomes discouraging. Like the first manifestation of nihilism, this fact can come to have an effect on our capacity to care about pursuing these goals. If we continually experience the world as inhospitable to the expression of our highest values, then one possible outcome is to stop trying.

Last, nihilism is a state in which values and goals become decoupled such that, even if we're motivated to realize certain goals and even if the world isn't obdurately opposed to their realization, their actual achievement nevertheless fails to express the values we thought it would. There's a mismatch between the goals that, when realized, we thought would express our values and what actually expresses these values (if anything all). This form of nihilism leaves us bewildered and at a loss for how to proceed—again, possibly adversely affecting out ability to care about expressing our highest values, and so, realizing meaning-imbuing goals.

This section has provided a detailed account of how Nietzsche understands the notions of value, interpretation, goals, and the need for meaning. Values serve as essential resources in meeting the demands of the need for meaning. They give us goals to pursue, the accomplishment of which, or even the pursuit of which, imbues existence with meaning. Moreover, the interpretations of the world and existence they help to buttress have an influence on how we relate to these things. The interpretations they supply change our comportment to the world. They make certain features of it more or less salient. More importantly, they help to make things *matter* to us, they make us care about certain things. In this way, values play a vital role in

making the world and existence appear meaningful. A person who values nothing whatsoever won't find anything interesting, estimable, or worth caring about. Nothing in existence strikes him as significant or interesting. Similarly, his perspective on the world will lack kind of intelligibility. He may find the world intelligible in the sense that he can navigate it and get around; he needn't be confused or mistaken about how his environment is organized or about how people act. But his view of the world will be bland insofar as nothing really matters to him; nothing strikes him as truly interesting.

These insights in turn provide a better sense of how Nietzsche understands nihilism. More than just being a condition wherein everything appears meaningless, nihilism is more specifically a condition wherein something goes wrong with our values and goals. The goals and ambitions that values supply are found lacking, for any of the reasons specified above. Depending on the specific nature of how these values are rendered impotent, we may despair or otherwise feel disoriented.[141] We affectively respond to this state of affairs through apathy, depression, and in some cases fury.[142] This condition results in a state of affairs wherein the world and existence fail to strike us as worthwhile, significant, and interesting. With this understanding of nihilism in hand, along with what it says about how Nietzsche thinks of values and goals in relation to the need for meaning, we can turn to his thoughts on ideals in general and the ascetic ideal in particular, which will allow us a fuller view of what is objectionable about the ascetic ideal and how Nietzsche hopes to move beyond it.

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[141] Reginster (2006) discusses at length nihilism as despair and nihilism as disorientation.

[142] In his unpublished notebook entries, Nietzsche discusses passive and active forms of nihilism. Passive nihilism is one of resignation, apathy, and depression. An 1887 entry reads, "Nihilism as decline and recession of power: as passive nihilism" (WP 22). Active nihilism "reaches its maximum of relative strength as a violent force of destruction" (ibid.). Active nihilism can be a positive force insofar as it razes a status quo that is inimical to the flourishing of life. Nietzsche's attack of the ascetic ideal is a form of active nihilism, but this form of nihilism isn't the endpoint; it's part of a process where obsolete values and axiological resources are overthrown and overcome so as to prepare the ground for new evaluative approaches to and perspective on existence.

The Free Spirit Ideal and the Transition from the Middle to the Mature Period

One of the defining differences between Nietzsche's middle and mature periods is the abandonment of what he called the free spirit ideal. Published on the back cover of the first edition of *The Gay Science* is the following remark: "This book marks the conclusion of a series of writings by FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE whose common goal it is to erect a new image and ideal of the free spirit. To this series belong: *Human, All Too Human*. With Appendix: *Mixed Opinions and Aphorisms*. *The Wanderer and his Shadow*. *Dawn: Thoughts About the Prejudices of Morality*. *The Gay Science*." This statement groups together all of the middle period works, claiming that they were engaged in the task establishing the free spirit ideal. This task was completed with the first edition of *The Gay Science*, which contains books I through IV published in 1882; book V was added in 1887 during the mature period.

Nietzsche's 1882 correspondence demonstrates the central role of the free spirit in the thought of his middle period, as well as his eventual dissatisfaction with the free spirit as an ideal. Paul Franco (2011) provides a nice sampling of these letters. In June of 1882, Nietzsche writes to Lou Salomé, "With this book [*The Gay Science*] that series of writings that began with *Human, All too Human*, comes to a conclusion: in all of them taken together, 'a new image and ideal of the free spirit' has been erected. That this is not the 'free man in fact' you will have long guessed" (161, qtd. in Franco 2011). Nietzsche announces that a phase of his writing has found closure, suggesting that he's starting on a different path. This remark also evinces a degree of discontent with the figure of the free spirit who is not the "free man in fact." After the first addition of *The Gay Science* was published Nietzsche writes again to Salomé, urging her to "[l]ook through this phase in which I have lived for several years—look beyond it! Do not deceive yourself about me—surely you do not think that the 'free spirit' is my ideal!" (ibid.).

Nietzsche expresses that the free spirit ideal he formerly identified with is one he no longer embraces. To Carl von Gersdorff, he writes that "[t]he past six years have been in *this* respect the years of my greatest self-overcoming…. Enough—I have risen also *above* this stage of my life—and what remains… must now give complete and full expression to that for which I have endured life at all" (ibid.). This letter gives the sense that Nietzsche has not just finished with one stage of his thinking, but that he has risen above it. These letters demonstrate Nietzsche's dissatisfaction with the free spirit as an ideal. Its abandonment is one of the key indicators of a transition in his thinking.

The figure of the free spirit continues to appear in Nietzsche's later works and about whom he continues to say positive things.[143] But after *The Gay Science* Nietzsche no longer casts the free spirit as an ideal. Below, we'll consider in detail how Nietzsche understands the word "ideal," but here it's enough say that the term comes to have a meaning that involves more than our ordinary understanding of it as a sort of norm, standard, or value which we strive to realize. "Ideal" refers to something that plays an essential role in structuring large-scale axiological schemes and normative systems. Ideals in this technical sense are special objects within such systems. Nietzsche realizes that in this special sense of "ideal," the free spirit central to his middle-period thought was lacking. Note that ideals in this technical sense differ from highest values. Highest values stand at the top of an ordering of values, but they don't play a *structural* role in an evaluative system; below we'll see that ideals do structure such systems.

In order to grasp why Nietzsche rejected the free spirit ideal, we need to consider two questions: What is a free spirit? And what does the rejection of the free spirit as an ideal say about the shift in Nietzsche's thinking? In other words, how did Nietzsche's project change such that the free spirit ideal became inadequate?

[143] For instance, "Part II" of *Beyond Good and Evil* is titled "The Free Spirit."

Concerning the first question, the free spirit is a one of Nietzsche's "types." Bernard Reginster provides a helpful account. The free spirit is defined in opposition to a type or form of life broached in the previous chapter: the fanatic, also referred to as "the fettered spirit," the "man of faith," the "man of conviction," and "the dogmatist" (Reginster 2003: 52). The fanatic holds certain beliefs—convictions—that he is uninterested in subjecting to scrutiny. He believes that he is already "in possession of unqualified truth" (qtd. ibid.: 56). As such, the fanatic is "impervious to epistemic reform" (61). The free spirit has the opposite relation to inquiry and the pursuit of truth. He actively seeks the truth and is therefore willing to revise his beliefs and divest himself of any convictions he may hold. Nietzsche states, "What characterizes the free spirit is not that his opinions [*Ansichten*] are more correct but that he has liberated himself from tradition, whether the outcome has been successful or a failure. Usually, though, he will nonetheless have truth on his side, or at least the spirit of inquiry after truth: he demands reasons, the rest demand faith" (HH 225). It's not the possession of truth that defines the free spirit of the middle period, but the "spirit of inquiry after truth"—what Nietzsche would later dub "the will to truth." Recalling from the previous chapter the importance that the notion of incorporation played in Nietzsche's middle period, the free spirit doesn't just search for truth, but seeks to incorporate it.

I am deeply indebted to Reginster's (2003) account of the free spirit. Yet this interpretation considers the free spirit as a static entity throughout Nietzsche's career when in the later period the conception of the free spirit is modified. During the middle period the free spirit is associated with the will to truth; only later in Nietzsche's thinking is the association with the will to truth reformulated. Reginster concludes, "[T]he 'spirit of inquiry after truth' is a characteristic the free spirit possesses only 'usually,' not necessarily" (63). The conclusion that the free spirit is usually but not necessarily defined by the will to truth fits only the conception of

the free spirit in Nietzsche's *later* period. The free spirit of the middle period essentially possesses not just a will to truth, but an unconditional and uncompromising will to truth. Reginster's interpretation of HH 225 is based on Nietzsche's phrasing that "usually [*gewöhnlich*]" the free spirit "will have truth on his side, or at least the spirit of inquiry after truth." The "usually" here to refers only to the possession of truth: *Usually* the free spirit (at least when compared to others) will know the truth of things. Nietzsche follows this claim with the statement the free spirit will have on his side "at least [*mindestens*]" the spirit of inquiry after truth. This "at least" suggests that it's a condition of being a free spirit that one possess the spirit of inquiry after truth; that is the minimal criterion for determining whether or not someone is a free spirit. Nietzsche continues: "[The free spirit] demands reasons, the rest demand faith." This remark isn't qualified in the way Reginster suggests. It's not that the free spirit usually demands reasons; the demanding of reasons is what he does *qua* free spirit. This demand stems from his commitment to the pursuit of truth.

This is no small point because Nietzsche's rejection of the free spirit as an ideal derives from this figure's unconditional and uncompromising will to truth. Franco astutely notes that the problem with the free spirit of the middle period is that it presupposes the ascetic ideal. In response to the question of what is lacking in the free spirit of the middle period, Franco states, "In a note written in the winter of 1882–83, Nietzsche already intimates the answer to this question, an answer that he will amplify in his later writings, most notably in the famous aphorism entitled "How We, Too, Are Still Pious" from the fifth book of *The Gay Science*: *the free spirit is still in the grips of* […] *the ascetic ideal*" (105; emphasis mine). Franco's claim makes sense in the context of Nietzsche's emphatic demand from *The Genealogy*: "No! Don't come to me with science when I ask for the natural antagonist of the ascetic ideal, when I

demand: 'where is the opposing will expressing the *opposing ideal?*' Science is not nearly self-reliant enough for that; it first requires in every respect a value-creating power in the *service* of which it could *believe* in itself—it never creates values" (GM III 25). Though this claim is about science rather than the free spirit *per se*, it applies equally well to the free spirit's unconditional will to truth. The scientific enterprise rests on the value of (knowing the) truth. The issue here isn't that the free spirit values the will to truth, but that he is the embodiment of the will to truth and his essential task is defined in terms of science and the pursuit of truth. The free spirit of Nietzsche's middle period rests on the conviction that truth is unconditionally valuable, and this is the conviction Nietzsche interrogates in the later period: "*What* in us really wills the truth? […] We paused for a long time before the question of the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete standstill in front of an even more fundamental question. We asked about the *value* of this will" (BGE 1; cf. GM III 24).[144]

The problem with the free spirit ideal is that as the embodiment of the unconditional will to truth, it is not a value-creating power. Like science, "it never creates values." Yet ideals as Nietzsche conceives of them are wellsprings of value. This point has implications for issues of meaningfulness. Without the ability to create values, the free spirit ideal is unable to provide resources for meeting the demands of the need for meaning. It unwittingly draws on the resources supplied by the ascetic ideal, making it subservient to the ascetic ideal. In fact, it has helped sustain the ascetic ideal. When advanced as an ideal, the free spirit of the middle period is an expression of the ascetic ideal.

A series of important questions arises in light of these considerations: How (more specifically) is the free spirit ideal an expression of the ascetic ideal? Why doesn't Nietzsche

[144] It is wrong to take Nietzsche's queries about the value of truth as an implicit rejection of truth's value. He still holds truth in high esteem, but he realizes that in light of his project of revaluation even the value of truth requires scrutiny. The will to truth calls upon itself to question its own value, but this doesn't imply that truth is valueless.

modify his conception of the free spirit such that it can properly challenge the ascetic ideal? Nietzsche does revise his conception of the free spirit later in his career. The free spirit of the mature period is still associated with the will to truth but is no longer the embodiment of the unconditional will to truth. In the later period, the free spirit takes on the task of interrogating the value of truth. This figure is faced with a "new demand: we need a critique of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called in question*" (GM P 6). Nietzsche's inquiry into the value of truth goes hand-in-hand with a refashioning of what the free spirit is and stands for. So why doesn't he advance this modified understanding of the free spirit as an ideal? The answer to this question will have to wait until the end of this chapter after we get clear on what an ideal is in Nietzsche's technical usage of the term. This will demonstrate why Nietzsche thinks the eternal recurrence is the antagonist of the ascetic ideal and not a reworked understanding of the free spirit.

What is the Ascetic Ideal?

Defining the term "ascetic ideal" may at first seem an easy task. It is presumably an ideal or standard that places a premium on ascetic practices of self-denial and self-deprivation. Under this reading, it is an "ideal" in the sense that it is a principle, standard, or norm that we strive to realize and that we use to assess the value (usually the moral value) of an action or person. Actions aimed at maximizing my own pleasure, like treating myself to a luxurious dinner of truffles, caviar, and filet mignon, are denounced by the ascetic ideal. Insofar as I consistently perform them, I am a bad person.

This intuitive rendering of the ascetic ideal overlooks some important nuances of how Nietzsche uses the term "ideal." For instance, he claims that the ascetic ideal has been the *only*

ideal so far—"the ascetic ideal was the only ideal so far, […] it had no rival. […] Above all, a *counterideal* was lacking—until Zarathustra" (EH "Genealogy"). Nietzsche is not claiming that throughout human history, asceticism has been the only principle or norm according to which people have lived (until Zarathustra). Long before the ascendency of the ascetic ideal—when (for example) the "master moralities" discussed in the first essay of *The Genealogy* reigned—people lived according to norms and standards. Nietzsche mentions such ideals, claiming that "Israel […] has hitherto triumphed again and again over all other ideals, over all *nobler* ideals" (GM I 8; cf. GM I 17, I 24; EH P 2). Israel, a nation which Nietzsche sees as representative of the ascetic ideal, succeeded in supplanting other, nobler ideals that preceded the ascetic ideal. Given the claim that the ascetic ideal has been the only ideal, when he refers to nobler ideals he's using the term "ideal" in the ordinary sense, to refer to a norm, standard, or principle; but when speaking of the ascetic ideal, he isn't using "ideal" in this conventional sense.

There's an important distinction to be drawn between an ideal in the conventional sense, and what I'll call an absolute ideal. By conventional ideal, I do not mean an ideal that is considered such merely by convention or common agreement; I mean an ideal in the sense that we ordinarily and conventionally use the term. An absolute ideal differs from a conventional ideal in the role it plays within a normative and axiological system, such as a moral code. Within any given normative system, there is a plurality of conventional ideals, such as honesty, self-sufficiency, and courage. These are conventional ideals because they conform to the way we conventionally use the term ideal (*not* because they are ideals *by* convention or agreement). But none of these ideals is responsible for the value of the others. Their status as ideals isn't determined by or derivative of any of the other (conventional) ideals.

Particular conventional ideals can be shared across different normative or axiological systems. Courage, for instance, can be an ideal held by both a Christian martyr and an Ancient Greek soldier. It can serve as a conventional ideal in completely different evaluative systems, fitting within a constellation of different conventional ideals. Yet there's a key difference between courage in these two cases: For the Christian martyr, courage derives its value from the ascetic ideal; in the case of the Ancient Greek soldier, courage is a conventional ideal the value of which isn't rooted in any absolute ideal. An absolute ideal is the foundation and linchpin such that *all* other values, norms, standards of evaluation, and conventional ideals within an evaluative framework derive their motivational or evaluative force from it. Courage, for the Christian martyr, means something different than it does for the Ancient Greek soldier. In being yoked to the ascetic ideal, courage is rooted in the ascetic outlook of (as Nietzsche states in GM I) wanting to seem "'too good' for this world."[145]

This is not so with an absolute ideal. All other values, norms, standards of evaluation, and conventional ideals within an evaluative system structured by an absolute ideal derive their motivational and evaluative force from it. No two distinctly different large-scale normative systems can therefore share the same absolute ideal, since in doing so they would in effect be the same normative system (qua *large-scale* normative system). There might be local differences within large-scale normative systems structured by the same absolute ideal: Nietzsche thinks that we moderns still live under the ascetic ideal, but there are important differences between the norms we live by and the norms of medieval England (which was also under the sway of the ascetic ideal). For us, the ascetic ideal takes the guise of an unconditional will to truth, whereas medieval Europe was governed by a more explicitly religious form of the ascetic ideal. Similarly,

[145] For the martyr courage might mean something like the following: "Death doesn't matter; existence in this earthly realm isn't worthwhile anyway." This is not what courage means for the Ancient Greek soldier. Though his courage may cause him to take death less seriously than a coward, his ideal of courage doesn't slander earthly existence.

two geographically distinct areas can at the same point in history exhibit local differences in their guiding large-scale normative frameworks—such as Catholic France and Protestant England in 1600. That both cultures were normatively directed by the ascetic ideal doesn't imply that there weren't important differences at the level of cultural, theological, and religious values and doctrines; they may have shared an absolute ideal yet still had different local sets of conventional ideals.

This geographic and historical point about large-scale normative systems structured by an absolute ideal points to an interesting shift that occurs between the second and third essays of *The Genealogy*. In the second essay, Nietzsche claims that moral practices like punishment can remain nearly unchanged *as* procedures, but throughout history they can acquire completely different meanings. "[O]ne must distinguish two aspects," Nietzsche says of a moral practice like punishment. "[O]n the one hand, that in which it is relatively *enduring*, the custom, the act, the 'drama,' a certain strict sequence of procedures; on the other hand, that in it which is *fluid*, the meaning, the purpose, the expectation associated with the performance of such procedures" (GM II 13). While the external features of a moral procedure may remain nearly unchanged, its meaning, purpose, and significance are "*projected* and interpreted *into* the procedure" (ibid.).[146] What makes a practice intelligible to a society, and how it coherently fits within a society's beliefs and values changes. This is an account of the nature of historical change in our moral practices: their form endures, but their meanings are fluid and subject to vicissitudes of history, and so constantly subject to interpretation and reinterpretation.

[146] Some external features of a moral practice or procedure can change. The external aspects of procedures like punishment have changed throughout history. Brutal forms of punishment like quartering are now no longer practiced, many nations have abolished the death penalty, etc. So the form isn't completely static. Nietzsche's point is that a practice or procedure like punishment is one that we can identify throughout history. Quartering, firing squads, hanging, lethal injection, fines, and imprisonment are different forms of punishment that have been common at different points in history. But we can recognize them all as punishment, even if they're different from one another. The basic procedure remains unchanged. Nietzsche thinks that changes at the level of form or procedure are far less radical than the ways in which the meanings of the practice of punishment have shifted.

Interesting to note here is that in a certain sense the opposite is the case with the ascetic ideal: The outward form this ideal takes—its guise in various cultures and historical moments—changes. As noted, the ascetic ideal manifested itself in medieval Europe in an explicitly religious way while today it manifests itself in terms of the unconditional value of truth (though not all of its religious vestiges have disappeared). Contrary to shifts in its outward form, the meaning of the ascetic ideal has remained relatively constant. The ascetic ideal is an attempt to contend with the world and our existence within it by paradoxically projecting an idealized otherworld. "The ascetic priest," Nietzsche states, "is the incarnate desire to be different, to be in a different place […]; but precisely this power of his desire is the chain that binds him here [*die Fessel, die ihn hier anbindet*]" (GM III 13).[147] The ascetic ideal expresses and originates in a desire to escape the essential aspects of earthly existence, which Nietzsche takes to involve change, transience, becoming, and suffering (cf. GM III 11). One of the features of the ascetic ideal that fascinates Nietzsche is that even though it's the incarnate desire to be elsewhere than on earth, it manages to burst "forth with such violence that it at once becomes a new fetter" (GM III 13) to the earth itself. This ideal keeps ascetic priests and anyone else guided by it chained to the earthly existence they hope to flee.[148] Moreover, the central question of the Third essay concerns the *meaning* of the ascetic ideal; Nietzsche couldn't ask this question if its meaning radically shifted throughout history. He can look to the meaning of the ascetic ideal in different historical eras because its meaning has changed very little. Had the meaning changed drastically, the more appropriate question would be what are the meanings of the ascetic ideal, but he simply

[147] Translation modified.
[148] Nietzsche is fascinated by this capacity of the ascetic ideal to "chain" human beings to their earthly existence. We'll return to this point below, but this capacity is one of the positive sides of the ascetic ideal. But note the bizarre way it functions: It keeps human beings chained to their earthly existence by slandering it, by interpreting it as something *worth* fleeing in the hopes of arriving at an otherworld radically different from the earthly one.

asks for its meaning, suggesting that though the meaning may have changed throughout history, it hasn't done so radically.

Nietzsche never explicitly draws the distinction between "conventional" and "absolute" ideals. However, it is at work in the way he vacillates between speaking of ascetic *ideals* [*asketische Ideale*] in the plural, and the singular ascetic *ideal* [*das asketische Ideal*]. Ascetic ideals (in the plural) are conventional ideals that manifest the absolute ascetic ideal. Brian Leiter's characterization of ascetic ideals (in the plural) is relevant here. He defines "ascetic ideals [… as] those norms that valorize […] *all* those states of self-denial in which we forgo satisfaction of desires, not only the rapacious and sensual desires […] but also ordinary desires" (2002: 246). This definition conveys the conventional sense of the term "ideal" discussed above. When Nietzsche discusses ascetic ideals in the plural, he tends to invoke this conventional understanding. "Poverty, humility, and chastity" (GM III 8) are examples of three ascetic ideals Nietzsche mentions, each of which is an ideal in the conventional sense. For instance, humility is the same kind of ideal as those nobler ideals that Nietzsche says "Israel" triumphed over. As ascetic ideals, poverty, humility, and chastity are conventional in the sense that none of them is more normatively foundational.[149] When we ordinarily speak of ideals, like poverty, humility, chastity, modesty, or courage, we're speaking of ideals in the conventional, ordinary sense of the term.

But when Nietzsche talks about *the* ascetic ideal he is talking about an absolute ideal. Conventional ideals like poverty, humility, and chastity derive their value and status as ideals from the absolute ideal of asceticism. An absolute ideal is therefore *grounding*—it serves as the

[149] What I mean by normatively foundational is not that conventional ideals can't be ranked or put into some kind of hierarchy. There may be a moral framework according to which humility is more important than chastity—a failure to be humble (being prideful or arrogant) might be considered more morally blameworthy or censurable than a failure to be chaste. What I mean by "normatively foundational" is that none of the conventional ideals of being chaste, humble, or frugal derives its value from any of the others.

ground for evaluative systems and conventional ideals. The absolute ideal of asceticism grounds conventional ideals like poverty, humility, and chastity because each is an expression of ascetic practices. These conventional ideals are necessary because the ascetic ideal on its own can't be realized without providing subsidiary goals and values. In itself, the ascetic ideal is too nebulous and abstract. One needs more specific goals to strive for, and so it supplies more concrete ascetic ideals like poverty, humility, and chastity. It's difficult to know what to do if we're told, "be ascetic," or at the very least it's difficult to assess how successful we are in realizing this idea without a set of more concrete goals which we can meet with more or less success. More specific instruction is necessary in the form of goals we can strive to realize. Poverty, humility and chastity are examples of more concrete goals that we can succeed at achieving to varying levels of success. Living indigently, acting humbly, and being chaste are concrete ideals we can strive to realize and so use as frames of reference to determine the extent to which we're living up to the absolute ascetic ideal. The more successfully we live in accordance with these conventional ideals the more confident we can be that we're living up to the ascetic ideal as something absolute.

Leiter's definition of ascetic ideals quoted above helps demonstrate what Nietzsche means by ascetic ideals as conventional ideals. David Owen offers a helpful definition of *the* ascetic ideal useful for understanding what it means for it to be an absolute ideal. He claims that the ascetic ideal "denotes the idealization of asceticism *as a way of life that is committed to treating living, existence itself, as an ascetic procedure*" (113-4, my emphasis). This description of the ascetic ideal further illustrates what is distinctive about it as an absolute ideal. Unlike conventional ideals, it is a comprehensive and privileged norm that permeates all aspects of

one's existence. It doesn't advance as ideals particular actions or attitudes, but an entire way of life; it offers a thoroughgoing interpretation of existence. Nietzsche states,

> The ascetic ideal has a *goal*—a goal so universal that all other interests of human existence, measured by it, appear petty and narrow. It stubbornly interprets epochs, peoples, humans in relation to this one goal, it permits no other interpretation, no other goal; it casts aside, denies, affirms, sanctions only in accordance with *its* interpretation (and has there ever been a system of interpretation more thoroughly thought through?); it submits to no power, it believes in its own predominance over every other power, in its absolute *superiority of rank* over every other power—it believes that no power exists on earth that does not first have to receive a meaning [*Sinn*], a right to exist, a value, as a tool of the ascetic ideal as a way and means to *its* goal, to *one* goal. (GM III 23)

There's a great deal to discuss in this passage. It employs a constellation of concepts, like "goal," "interpretation," and the power to instill meaning, all of which are central to understanding nihilism and the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal advances certain goals as valuable and worth pursuing. Its ends are seen as the only intrinsically valuable ends; the end of any other acceptable value or norm is at best only *instrumental*—"a tool"—to the ascetic ideal's ends.[150] The ascetic ideal determines what things *matter* to human beings, since any goal that's not sanctioned by the ascetic ideal appears as petty and narrow. It determines what is valuable—nothing has value that doesn't derive from the ascetic ideal.

Part of what makes an ideal absolute is that it is comprehensive: It structures an entire type of life, giving its members an overarching goal to pursue, and this goal is universal. It alone provides the resources for interpreting the world and existence, and the interpretation it grounds is the wellspring from which value flows. As an absolute ideal, it is responsible for rendering our existence and the world meaningful. It is only through the perspectives offered by the ascetic ideal that the members of culture under its sway can make sense of the world and our existence

[150] At this point it isn't clear what the ascetic ideal's ends are, or more precisely what its *one* goal is. Nietzsche concludes the third essay by telling us that its goal is nothingness. This claim is opaque and we'll return to it below. For now note that the ascetic ideal's goal is to employ "the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming" (GM III 16) so that one can see oneself as "'too good' for this world" (GM III 1); it gives one the sense of having overcome the conditions of earthly existence.

within it. “Apart from the ascetic ideal,” Nietzsche states, “man, the human *animal*, had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal; ‘why man at all’—was a question without an answer; the *will* for man and earth was lacking; behind every great human destiny there sounded as a refrain a yet greater ‘in vain!’” (GM III 28). As an absolute ideal, the ascetic ideal has provided the *only* “system of interpretation” so “thoroughly thought through” (GM III 23) that earthly existence was given meaning. It is the only meaning-imbuing power on earth. What constitutes a meaningful life is determined *in toto* by the ascetic ideal. With these kinds of remarks, Nietzsche identifies many of the problematic aspects of the ascetic ideal. For instance, GM III 23’s remark that it relentlessly or *stubbornly* [*unerbittlich*] interprets entire epochs, people, and humans, doesn’t cast the ascetic ideal in a positive light. However, Nietzsche also identifies features of the ascetic ideal that express his qualified respect and fascination with it. He is nothing less than intrigued by an interpretive power so mighty that it has succeeded in so much. The ascetic ideal slanders human existence, but it also gives human existence a goal and has imbued it with meaning.

For the last large portion of human history, the demands of the need for meaning are capable of being met only by adherence to the ascetic ideal, thus making it the linchpin in what Julian Young (2004) calls a “grand-narrative” account of meaning. Grand-narrative accounts of meaning—or comprehensive meaning-imbuing interpretations, as I’ll call them—are “global rather than individual, since they narrate not just your life or mine, but rather all lives at all times and places” (1).[151] The two distinctive features of such an account are “universality and

[151] While sympathetic to the power that narrative holds in human life and in the generation of meaning, the notion of narration isn’t the most apt vis-à-vis Nietzschean accounts of meaning. Narration is a process of generating meaning through the disclosure of experiences and events, but the notion of interpretation is more apposite. Narratives can of course be interpretations. Nietzsche himself sometimes speaks in terms of narrative. “Meanwhile,” Zarathustra says, while sitting in solitude, “I talk to myself as one who has time. Nobody tells me anything new: so I tell myself—myself” (Z III “On Old and New Tablets”). A similar statement is in *Ecce Homo*. After recounting the state of solitude he’s lived in (EH P 3), Nietzsche states in the Foreword (which follows the preface), “*How could I fail to be*

givenness" (85), and the absolute status of the ascetic ideal implies that it generates a comprehensive meaning-imbuing interpretation.[152] Below we'll return to a particular understanding or kind of meaning that is generated by a comprehensive interpretation but isn't necessarily universal or given in the sense that Young claims. Contra Young (2004) and Christopher Janaway (2007), who offers an interpretation in line with Young's, we will see that in advancing the eternal recurrence as a counterideal, Nietzsche is in a qualified sense advancing a comprehensive (but not universal) account of meaning.

By understanding the ascetic ideal as an absolute ideal, we can see why it has been "the only ideal so far." More accurately, it has been the only *absolute* ideal so far. As an absolute ideal, the ascetic ideal is an innovation of slave morality. The first essay of *The Genealogy* explains how noble values based on self-expression and outward displays of instinctual energy (see GM I 11) were overthrown by slave values, based on modesty, meekness, and restraint. These values are ultimately rooted in the ascetic ideal because they express self-denial and self-deprivation. Nietzsche calls the historical event wherein noble values were overthrown by slave values the "slave revolt in morality." Prior to this slave revolt, noble cultures existed and thrived without a guiding absolute ideal. Such cultures nevertheless had *conventional* ideals, and were therefore structured by norms and values. These norms and values may have been arranged

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grateful to my whole life?—and so I tell my life to myself." Such statements lend support to narration as a Nietzschean method of imbuing meaning to one's existence. But these two instances of self-narration in Nietzsche's works are dwarfed by the more common notion of interpretation. The language of interpretation is appropriate given Nietzsche's background as a philologist. His frequent remarks about interpretation are a result of that background. He also frequently speaks of translation. A philological understanding of interpretation, which looks at a pre-existing text and makes meaning out of it through the act of interpretation, is a better paradigm to employ than self-narrative. Below we'll return Nietzsche's views on interpretation and it's relation to meaning, values, and perspectives.

[152] The ascetic ideal is "universal" in the sense that it applies to all human beings. The only way for any person to live a meaningful life, regardless of historical, geographical, or social considerations, is by realizing the ascetic ideal and the values and norms that derive from it. It is "given" because the conception of what constitutes a meaningful life is preordained and already in place. When the ascetic ideal is in place, the demands of the need for meaning are met only by following its principles. Failing to do so is a grave shortcoming with moral and ethical implications that render a person's life meaningless.

according to a hierarchy but there was no absolute norm like the ascetic ideal in virtue of which conventional ideals were imbued with value.

Nietzsche's characterization of pre-slave revolt cultures substantiates the idea that they lacked an absolute ideal. He conceives of pre-slave revolt societies as consisting of two classes, a noble (or master) class and a slave class. The norms that governed each of these classes were radically different: The norms and values appropriate for the nobles, based as they were on assertiveness, would have been inappropriate for the slaves, who were expected and forced to be submissive. Until the slave revolt, the noble class itself is divided between a "warrior caste" and a "priestly caste" (GM I 7).[153] Warrior norms centered on martial values and virtues, and priestly norms centered on purity and cleanliness (see GM I 6). Such ancient cultures therefore lack an absolute ideal since different classes and subclasses abided by different values and norms, and these two sets of norms weren't subsumed under an all-encompassing ideal. The ascetic ideal as an absolute ideal arrives on the scene with the triumph of slave morality, which supplants noble modes of morality and posits the ascetic ideal as a comprehensive ideal to which all are bound. Since the slave revolt in morality, no other absolute ideal has emerged.

The distinction between absolute ideals and ideals in the conventional sense demonstrates what Nietzsche is looking for as a replacement for the ascetic ideal. This hope is indicated by his claim that the ascetic ideal has been the only ideal so far because "a *counterideal* was lacking—until Zarathustra" (EH "Genealogy). This claim demonstrates that he is looking for *another*

[153] Though the details of the slave revolt narrative are opaque and the subject of debate among Nietzsche scholars, the slave revolt succeeds in part as a result of the priests joining it. As I interpret it, the priests rather than the slaves initiate the slave revolt: The priests' social standing and political clout started to wane as the warrior caste hedged in on it. Lacking the physical prowess of their warrior counterparts, the priests couldn't physically take back power, but they could enact "*spiritual revenge*" (GM I 7) through a "radical revaluation" of the warriors' values. Such a revaluation might or might not have restored the priests to *political* power, but they became more powerful than the warriors by gaining sole authority over questions of value. The role the slave class plays in this account is important, but they are not as active as the priests in the staging of the revaluation. The priests' revaluation, which flies in the face of the warriors' active and assertive values, puts a premium on the activities and traits that slaves already exhibited. The slave class was particularly well suited to serve the priests' ends.

absolute ideal to replace the ascetic ideal, implying that the solution to the problems generated by the ascetic ideal doesn't reside in returning modern European culture to the conditions that obtained prior to the slave revolt when there was only a host of conventional ideals and no absolute ideal. This implication conflicts in interesting ways with Young's and Janaway's interpretations of Nietzsche's views on meaning.

Young and Janaway claim that Nietzsche advances a conception of meaningfulness centered on a specific understanding of the individual's role in generating meaning. Young states that for Nietzsche "there is no such thing as the—universal—meaning of life, […] no meaning is written into the metaphysical structure of reality. That doesn't mean that my life can't have meaning. It doesn't mean that I can't create meaning in my life, my own individual meaning" (2003: 85). Young is right in claiming that Nietzsche denies both that meaning is universal and that it is written into the metaphysical structure of reality. Janaway advances a similar reading, stating that "Nietzsche's ideal differs [from the ascetic ideal] in that for him" meaning is "*creatively achieved* than given, and *personal* rather than universal" (2007: 242-3)—implying that meaning and value don't solely come from the external world itself, as many of those under the sway of the ascetic ideal believe. Like Young, Janaway focuses on the individual's role in generating meaning. Both are right to see the individual as in some sense creating meaning, and both are right to reject some conception of universality. But their interpretations suggest that the individual creates meaning *ex nihilo*. It's unclear what a "personal meaning" amounts to, as well as Young's idea that a person can create her own "individual meaning," but both suggest that meaning is subjective. Someone creates a personal or individual meaning for herself such that as long as she feels that the demands of the need for meaning have been met, they are.

We'll return below to the non-subjective aspects of Nietzsche's conception of meaning, but there are several problems with Young and Janaway's subjectivist approach. Values and ideals help us to meet the demands of the need for meaning. But if Nietzsche seeks to replace the ascetic ideal with a different absolute ideal (the doctrine of the eternal recurrence), then meeting the demands of the need for meaning isn't as subjective, personal, or individualistic as Young and Janaway assert. The universality of the ascetic ideal isn't something that will be retained in Nietzsche's counterideal, but it also won't be purely subjective, personal, or individualistic. I will call Young's and Janaway's readings the subjectivist interpretation, which holds that it is sufficient that one takes one life to be meaningful for in order for it be so; all that's involved in meeting the demands of the need for meaning is that one subjectively feels or believes that to be the case. What the subjectivist interpretation fails to account for is that the resources we use to meet the demands of the need for meaning come from culture, which is a collective, intersubjective domain. Individuals don't create their own individual or personal meanings *ex nihilo*. Meaning-imbuing resources are intersubjectively grounded insofar as culture enshrines the values that individuals have at their disposal, and these values work both to cultivate a certain comportment to the world (whereby certain features are made salient and others pushed into the background) and to provide a gloss to certain goals and activities to make them estimable and worth pursuing.

The Ascetic Ideal: Completing Nietzsche's Diagnosis and the Pathology of Meaning

We can now turn to questions that put Nietzsche's ambivalence toward ascetic ideal in the finest relief, thereby providing a fleshed out picture of how the ascetic ideal is truly self-undermining. By undermining here, I don't mean that its values devaluate themselves in the way

WP 2 suggests. What I mean is that the ascetic ideal throws us headlong into a destructive cycle that, over time, culminates in potentially irresolvable and irreversible nihilism.

Nietzsche articulates his appreciation and fascination toward the ascetic ideal when he says that "man was *saved*" by the ascetic ideal because with it, "he possessed a meaning, […] he could now *will* something; no matter to what end, why, with what he willed: *the will itself was saved*." Human beings were effectively saved because the will to power in human beings was given (ascetic) goals that were seen as estimable and worth pursuing. As a thoroughgoing meaning-imbuing and value-conferring absolute ideal, it met the demands of the need for meaning; it provided conditions capable of engaging the will to power and gave human beings everything they required to see their struggles and their lives as significant and worthwhile.

But how could the ascetic ideal engage the will to power in the first place? Being poor, humble, and chaste—and in general depriving oneself of earthly pleasures—seems like an odd way to engage the will to power. How could pursuing the realization of these ends count as an achievement, as something that makes one feel accomplished and powerful? In striving to realize these conventional ideals, we're forced to overcome the resistance posed by our own natural drives, desires, instincts, inclinations, and impulses. If poverty and chastity are ideals of mine, then I have to resist the urge for material goods and sexual gratification. I have to squelch my desire for tasty food, fine clothes, and sex. In achieving these goals, I sacrifice the gratification these earthly things provide, but I feel a different kind of gratification: I feel accomplished insofar as I've exhibited self-discipline, and I feel a certain sense of power over my natural drives and inclinations. I experience the gratification of self-control, and self-control is power over my natural, embodied self. And what's better: because the drives I'm overcoming are natural, successfully exhibiting self-discipline and self-control is an ongoing activity, since these

natural drives resurface from time to time, forcing me to overcome them time and again. When these drives resurface, it gives my will to power more resistance to overcome. Over time we may to a degree be able to subdue these drives, but some natural drives will invariably reemerge, guaranteeing that I'll sooner or later come up against a resistance to overcome and thereby exercise the will to power.

What Nietzsche finds objectionable about the ascetic ideal is not that it forces us to take control over our bodily drives and instincts and so exhibit self-mastery. The sovereign individual, whose description invites Nietzsche's unequivocal praise and awe, demonstrates his esteem for such self-mastery.[154] He finds problematic what the ascetic priest—as the representative of the ascetic ideal—and those under his sway stand for and express. They aren't driven merely by the feeling of power that accompanies self-discipline. They're driven by the hubristic and self-aggrandizing sense of power that they achieve in their "attempt to see themselves as 'too good' for this world" (GM III 1). Because the ascetic ideal is wed to a robust metaphysical system that maintains a hard and fast divide between *this* world (the empirical natural world we inhabit) and a privileged *otherworld* (which is metaphysically and morally superior, such as heaven), it gives the ascetic priest and the members of his flock the sense that they're overcoming not some obstacles and resistances that are a part of the world and human existence, but over the world and

[154] The status of the sovereign individual and Nietzsche's feelings toward him is a source of scholarly debate. He describes this figure as one who has the right to make promises and who is able to live up to his commitments. Leiter (2011) argues against my position. He offers a deflationary reading of the sovereign individual: We're not to take Nietzsche at his word here. Instead, the sovereign individual is a guileful criticism of agency and free will (and perhaps even a criticism of the Kantian notion of autonomy). What Nietzsche is advancing is a view of hard determinism. Leiter, and others who share this interpretive stance, advance interesting reasons for this reading, but Nietzsche's language runs counter to such a reading. The glowing terms in which he describes the sovereign individual are used elsewhere by Nietzsche to describe individuals and types he clearly lauds. Commentators who share my interpretive stance include Gemes (2009), Ridley (2009), and Owen (2009), who see the sovereign individual as the highest expression of genuine agency. Leiter's reading has some powerful points in its favor, but there are two main problems with his view: First, the one already mentioned, that the very same language Nietzsche uses to describe this figure is found throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre to describe figures for whom he clearly has respect; and second, Nietzsche's views on freedom, free will, autonomy, and determinism are notoriously vexed, and his final views on these issues is and remains unclear, and the textual evidence supports reading the sovereign individual as a figure of esteem, if not an ideal to strive for.

human existence as such. They immodestly see themselves as too good for this earthly world, as capable of standing above it, outside it, and capable of, deserving of, and rightfully judging it. Striving to achieve the ascetic ideal ultimately amounts to a striving to overcome the conditions of earthly existence, giving the ascetic priest and his flock the sense that they're better than all that is earthly and natural—they stand above it and so can stand in judgment of it.

There are many problems with any attempt to overcome the conditions of earthly existence. Particularly noteworthy about the ascetic ideal is that it pits us against our needs and ultimately puts the will to power in a self-destructive cycle. The ascetic priest presses the will to power into his service using the metaphysical divide between worlds. Our natural drives and inclinations and needs are transformed into the obstacles we strive to overcome in order to feel power. The ascetic ideal reinterprets our natural conditions in terms of a value scheme that renders them base, evil, and corrupt. It cultivates in man "an 'evil eye' for his natural inclinations, so that they […] become inseparable from his 'bad conscience'" (GM II 24). What it means for his natural inclinations to become inseparable from his bad conscience is that failing to overcome one's natural drives, impulses, and inclinations invites the sting of conscience and ultimately has the capacity to instill a sense of self-flagellating, self-belittling guilt.

Under the sway of the ascetic ideal, we come to feel guilt and shame towards everything that is natural about us as human beings—including the will to power. This reinterpretation puts the highest value on the ascetic stifling and overcoming of these "base" conditions of our earthly existence, and consequently, the ascetic ideal hijacks the need for meaning. Under the ascetic ideal, the demands of the need for meaning are met through the denial and suppression of our natural needs, drives, and the will to power itself. This has a deeply pernicious implication. The will to power is part of our natural constitution not just as human beings but as living ones and

isn't something that can be excised or exterminated. Striving against the will to power in this way undercuts the "optimum of favorable conditions under which [the human being] can expend all its strength and achieve the maximal feeling of power" (GM III 7). As Nietzsche elsewhere states, "[*W*]*hat* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal [… is] a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life" (GM III 28). Under such a configuration, the will to power becomes fettered to the ascetic ideal. In order to meet the demands of the need for meaning, we're forced to strive to overcome our natural conditions such that we jeopardize the functioning of the will to power—we end up striving against the will to power itself, and so against the will of life. We actively work against securing the optimum of favorable conditions under which we can expend our strength and exercise the will to power. With the ascetic ideal, "an attempt is made to employ force to block up the wells of force" (GM III 11).[155]

The picture that comes out of this account is not attractive. Observed from a distant planet, Nietzsche tells us that the earth would appear to be "the distinctively *ascetic planet*, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at themselves, at the earth, at all life, who inflict as much pain on themselves as they possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain" (GM III 11). Yet in spite of this the ascetic ideal has accomplished something great: It has saved humanity from a nihilistic catastrophe. As difficult as it may be, why can't we simply accept that human beings are peculiar animals who can only get on with themselves and the world by embracing self-disgust and a hatred of their earthly existence?

There are many reasons why Nietzsche thinks that we shouldn't be content with the

[155] The story is not as straightforward as this. The ascetic ideal has a way of surreptitiously keeping stores of pent of energy that, in various ways, are given certain outlets.

situation the ascetic ideal has created. Inferring from the first two essays of *The Genealogy*, we know that (at least the masters) in pre-slave revolt societies flourished without the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche is not looking for a nostalgic return to these ancient cultures, as evidenced by the fact that he wants to replace the ascetic ideal with another absolute ideal, and such an ideal was altogether lacking in pre-slave revolt societies; but this historical consideration suggests that things could be different and that we could shed our allegiance to the ascetic ideal since there's no necessary connection between it and culture or human nature. We can also look to the concluding lines of *The Genealogy* for a reason to move beyond the ascetic ideal: "We can no longer conceal from ourselves *what* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: […] *a will to nothingness*, […] man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will" (GM III 28). The goal that the ascetic ideal gives all willing—the ultimate goal under which it interprets all other ends, values, and conventional ideals—is nothingness. If the chief motivation of Nietzsche's philosophical project is the overcoming of nihilism, then embracing the ascetic ideal and the concomitant will to nothingness carries the risk of preserving nihilism. Embracing a will to nothingness is not a promising way to oppose nihilism. The ascetic ideal may have been successful in keeping nihilism at bay so far, but in the wake of God's death its viability is all the more compromised.

We've seen how the ascetic ideal staves off nihilism by imbuing with value those goals that involve the overcoming of our natural needs and drives. Now I want to focus on how, for these reasons, the ascetic ideal at the same keeps the threat of nihilism alive. Under the ascetic ideal, the demands of the need for meaning are met through the suppression of our other needs in a way that gives rise to a conflict among our needs. *The Genealogy* identifies two distinct but intricately related problems about the conflict of needs generated by the ascetic ideal: first, that

there's something *pathological* about this conflict; and second, it produces a "more poisonous, life-destructive suffering [*giftigeres, am Leben nagenderes*]" (GM III 28).

I'll start with the pathological configuration of needs brought about by the ascetic ideal. There's something disquieting about meeting the demands of the need for meaning by suppressing our other, natural needs. There is nothing inherently distressing about restraining our needs or foregoing their satisfaction. This is necessary for achieving various ends we endorse and coping with the world more generally since sometimes what we need isn't ready at hand. For example, in the middle of a job interview I might become hungry, but for reasons of tact it'd be prudent for me to constrain this felt need for food until the interview is over. What makes the ascetic ideal pathological on this count is that the configuration of needs it produces pits the will to power against itself. The will to power itself is employed to overcome all that is natural in us, and the will to power is part of our nature. In doing so it ultimately works to frustrate and undercut attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning. The process according to which this unfolds is complicated and far from straightforward. The ascetic ideal places the will to power in an intricate self-destructive cycle; the more this cycle runs its course, the worse it gets. The ascetic ideal has so far been able to maintain this self-destructive cycle by continually jumpstarting it when it approaches collapse—a point we'll see in detail below. Though the ascetic ideal has been able to maintain this cycle, the problem facing us now is that its capacity to keep the cycle running is weakening, making it less and less able to meet the demands of the need for meaning. This is why nihilism is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. Nietzsche states, "Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?" (WP 1). The "Christian-moral interpretation [in which] nihilism is rooted" (ibid) is increasingly unable to sustain itself.

Useful for seeing the pathological dimensions of the ascetic ideal is how it constricts the will to power such that mere self-preservation rather than flourishing is its highest expression. In a section from the Fifth Book of the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells us that the "wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress [*Nothlage*], of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life [*Leben-Grundtriebes*] which aims at *the expansion of power* and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation" (GS 349). Nietzsche makes two important points here: First, the will to power is more fundamental than the basic will to life, i.e., the will to self-preservation; second, any state of affairs in which one is driven by "the wish to preserve oneself" is a truly dire one. Supposing I were in such a dire situation, my main concern would be to satisfy the basic needs and conditions of self-preservation rather than focusing on how to flourish or thrive. All of my efforts and energy—my "will"—are aimed at securing the conditions of my survival. If I were lost in the woods, for instance, my foremost concerns would be food, water, shelter, and all those other things I need in order to simply go on living. Part of what makes this situation so dire is how dangerously close it puts me to death.

But for Nietzsche there's another consideration that makes this state of affairs so dismaying: it inhibits the will to power. "Every living thing," he states, "does everything it can not to preserve itself but to become *more*—" (WP 688). Just eking by while lost in the woods prevents me from "becoming more." I'm not "discharging my strength" or "expanding my power." I remain stuck in a static process of survival. At best, my needs of self-preservation are met, but not the needs of power, such as meaning. My will to power is not adequately engaged, and my striving, though aimed at my self-preservation, isn't meaningful. The demands of the need for meaning aren't met because my striving isn't aimed at anything more than securing the baseline conditions and needs that make that striving possible. If every animal instinctively

strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve the maximal feeling of power, then baseline survival is at odds with my ability to engage the will to power. Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power suggests that as human beings we have needs beyond the needs of self-preservation, and meaning is one such need. The need for meaning is fundamental since meeting its demands is a condition of engaging the will to power, and the will to power is (according to Nietzsche) more fundamental that the will to life. If the demands of the need for meaning go unmet, then the will to power in human beings isn't capable of functioning at its highest potential.

Returning to the ascetic ideal, we can begin to see how it pathologically meets the demands of the need for meaning by turning the will to power against itself. The need for meaning is a fundamental need beyond the needs of self-preservation, but in order for its demands to be met the needs of self-preservation must be met first. Such needs I'll call *anterior needs* while the need for meaning belongs to a category I'll call *posterior* needs. An astronomer who finds the challenges posed by scientific inquiry meaningful satisfies the posterior need for meaning by striving to make new discoveries about the universe. But if she doesn't have her anterior needs met, then she'll be unable to engage in astronomical inquiry. The ascetic ideal turns the will to power against itself by pitting it against the needs of self-preservation—against "the most fundamental presuppositions of life"—along with anything else that belongs to us as natural beings. Under the ascetic ideal, it is only through the stifling of our anterior needs that the need for meaning (as a posterior need) can be satisfied. The ascetic ideal dangerously opposes the will to power itself, and in so doing ultimately works to undercuts attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Under the ascetic ideal, the more we strive to meet the demands of the need for meaning, the more we suppress our natural anterior needs, which in a

roundabout way culminates in the frustration of meeting the demands of the need for meaning. As a posterior need, it requires that anterior needs already be satisfied; in other words, the ascetic ideal undermines the foundational conditions that have to be in place in order to engage in meaningful striving, just as the astronomer can't engage in her meaning-imbuing activity if she lacks food and water.

Those under the sway of the ascetic ideal are driven by "an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, *over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions*" (GM III 11, my emphasis). One masters natural and anterior needs by depriving them (as much as possible) of satisfaction, which demonstrates that one isn't reliant on them; in this way a person shows she doesn't have to abide by them, that she isn't controlled by them. She can get along just fine without paying any heed to such needs so as to demonstrate to herself that she is above them, and so above her earthly constitution. The ascetic ideal puts a premium on such conduct, but in doing so initiates a self-sabotaging and self-undermining cycle wherein we struggle against ourselves and our earthly existence in a bizarre attempt to give our lives and the world around us some significance and intelligibility—all in the hope that we can appear to ourselves and others to be too good for this world. In the midst of this situation, the ascetic priest acts as a "physician" because he can to an extent provide resources that meet the demands of the need for meaning—"but before he can act as a physician he first has to wound; when he then stills the pain of the wound *he at the same time infects the wound*" (GM III 15).[156]

This self-undermining cycle keeps us in a perpetual "condition of distress" associated with self-preservation. Nietzsche states:

[156] The details of how the ascetic priest carries out this feat will be discussed below. Striving against one's earthly lot can over time generate a sense of malaise and meaninglessness, but before this sense takes hold, the priest is able to provide fresh resources that keep the ascetic cycle of self-deprivation going.

> *The ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts* [Shutz- und Heil-Instinkte] *of a degenerating life* which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence; it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with new expedients and devices. The ascetic ideal is such an expedient; […] The ascetic ideal is an artifice for the *preservation* of life. (GM III 13)[157]

As a fundamental presupposition of life, the will to power becomes directed against itself through the ascetic ideal. Striving to overcome everything that is natural within us includes striving to overcome the will to power itself. This preserves life, but at the cost of preventing us from achieving or becoming more—it preserves life at the cost of flourishing. As Leiter notes, the ascetic ideal ensures that "the maximum 'feeling of power' consists in survival itself" (2002: 254). In an attempt to meet the demands of the need for meaning, the ascetic ideal projects as a valuable and meaning-imbuing goal the overcoming of the will to power; what makes this bizarre and self-undermining is that the will to power is what helps to generate meaning, and yet this is the object that the ascetic ideal aims to overcome. In keeping us in this survivalist condition of distress, the ascetic ideal pathologizes our attempts to find meaning and forecloses the possibility of human flourishing. The more we engage the will to power to overcome itself, the more we unwittingly endanger the need for meaning and jeopardize the possibility of human flourishing.

Those under the sway of the ascetic ideal don't see themselves as engaging the will to power to strive against the will to power; they do so unawares. Ascetic priests would deny in the first place that there exists anything like the will to power. Willing power goes against their values of meekness, modesty, humility, poverty, and the like. Moreover, the will to power belongs to us as earthly creatures, and our earthly status is what the ascetic ideal hopes to overcome. On pain of contradiction, the ascetic priests and those under their sway can't endorse their values while knowing that they culminate in the kind of power they eschew. The ascetic

[157] Translation modified. Kaufmann translates "*Schutz- und Heil-Instinkte*" as simply "protective instinct."

priest has to carry this process out in a roundabout manner such that neither he nor his flock has a grasp of the reality of the situation.

Suffering and the Pathology of Meaning

Now that we have a general sense for how the ascetic ideal pathologizes the need for meaning by pitting the will to power against itself, let's turn to the "more poisonous, life-destructive suffering" this ideal generates—a form of suffering Nietzsche thinks is deeply objectionable and which is generated by and helps to further intensify the pathology of meaning.

Nietzsche doesn't object to the ascetic ideal because it causes suffering. Central to his philosophical project is an attempt to revalue suffering so as to show that it isn't inherently bad, objectionable, or regrettable. "Man," he states, "does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires it* he even seeks it out" (cf. GM II 7; GS 56). That something causes suffering does not in itself make it objectionable. There must be something peculiar about the suffering generated by the ascetic ideal that makes it life-destructive.

Part of the staying power of the ascetic ideal—one of the reasons it has retained its authority for so long—has to do with how it interprets *all* suffering, even the very life-destructive suffering it generates. It subsumes all suffering under a comprehensive interpretation of all human suffering. This marks another paradoxical and self-undermining feature of the ascetic ideal: It generates a destructive form of suffering, while at the same time providing an interpretive account that ostensibly makes sense of it and renders it meaningful while also keeping this pernicious suffering active. It's constantly able to step in and alleviate or eliminate second-order suffering. Though he never provides a systematic classification of types of suffering, here I offer a loose typology that is relevant for understanding Nietzsche's views on suffering and how they relate to meaning and the will to power. To be clear, the kinds of

suffering discussed here are fluid; one kind of suffering can give way to or become another.

The first kind of suffering is essential to the proper functioning of the will to power. Recall Reginster's remark that was analyzed above. He says, "The will to power, insofar as it is a desire for the overcoming of resistance, must necessarily also include a desire for the resistance to overcome. Since suffering is the experience of such resistance, then he who desires suffering *ipso facto* 'desires displeasure'" (2007: 37). This kind of suffering is suffering for the sake of power. I'll label it "power suffering." It's an essential and ineliminable feature of the pursuit of power, having to do with the function resistance plays in the will to power. Nietzsche has power suffering in mind when he states, "Man, the bravest of animals […] does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it, he even seeks it out" (GM III 28). Human beings seek out suffering rather than repudiate it because it's a necessary part of what we do when we set out on endeavors that are meaning-imbuing and intrinsically valuable to us (such as getting a PhD, becoming a chess champion, or climbing a mountain). Power suffering is experienced in the process of striving and is a consequence of expressing the will to power. It is the suffering that a mountaineer experiences while scaling a peak, a wrestler experiences in the ring, or a philosopher feels when solving an intractable problem.

There is another kind of suffering related to the will to power that one experiences when expression of the will to power is inhibited. After telling us that every animal "instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power," Nietzsche crucially adds: "every animal abhors, just as instinctively and with a subtly of discernment that is 'higher than all reason,' every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to the optimum (I am *not* speaking of happiness, but its path to power, action, to the most powerful activity and in most

cases actually its path to unhappiness)" (GM III 7). Though Nietzsche doesn't mention suffering here, it's at work in the idea of an intrusion or hindrance that frustrates the capacity to engage the will to power. I'll call this kind of suffering *inhibitive suffering* since it stems from inhibition to the will to power's functioning. What's inhibited here isn't the will to power, it's the ability to engage the will to power. Striving to overcome resistance always involves an inhibiting force. The mountaineer has to face the inhibiting forces posed by the mountain, her tired body, and the sinking desire that she should give up; the chess player faces the inhibiting forces of his skilled opponent; etc. This is not the inhibition involved in inhibitive suffering. These kinds of inhibitive forces are what constitute the resistance that's to be overcome, and which generate power suffering. Inhibitive suffering pertains to the ability to engage the will to power in the first place; when the mere engagement or exercise of the will to power is inhibited, then what I'm calling inhibitive suffering is at play.

So inhibitive suffering is not the kind of suffering one experiences in the activity of overcoming resistance—it is not the direct result of this resistance, which would be power suffering. Inhibitive suffering results either from the lack of such resistance, or when such resistance is so overwhelming one simply gives up. The will to power of a beginning chess player will be inhibited—it won't be engaged—if he's paired with chess master who he knows will swiftly defeat him; the first-year college physics student enjoys the challenge of her problem sets, but if given one of the Millennium Prize Problems—a set of six (originally seven) extraordinarily difficult problems the solution to which has a $1 million prize, as yet unsolved by the world's greatest mathematicians and physicists—then she won't even know where to begin (barring the assumption that she is a genius). The degree of resistance posed by such problems is

so crushing her will to power would fail to gain traction with any of the problems—they would appear like a foreign language to her.

What's being inhibited in such cases isn't the activity of exercising one's skills or a form activity in the attempt to overcome resistance; it's the very ability to engage the will to power itself that's being inhibited. This is the kind of suffering a person experiences when she's unable to engage or discharge her will to power, and is often experienced as a kind of boredom, languishing, listlessness, or feeling of "rotting away."

Important to note is that there's nothing about the nature of a kind of suffering as such that makes it power suffering or inhibitive suffering; whether it's one or the other is determined by an agent's attitude toward a particular activity and the resistance it poses.[158] Some may find proving mathematical theorems interesting and engaging, others boring and tedious. In the case of the former, such activity engages the will to power and the resistance it poses generates power suffering; in the case of the latter, such activity fails to engage the will to power and the task generates inhibitive suffering.

To further demonstrate the difference between power and inhibitive suffering, consider a different example. Imagine a mountain-climber who has scaled all the world's highest mountains but Everest. Every mountain she has climbed in the past has posed several obstacles for her: She's had to save the money needed to get her to each mountain, she's had to diet and train to

[158] Though power suffering and inhibitive suffering are distinct, there's no hard and fast divide between them. Imagine a passionate engineering student who's assigned an extremely challenging problem set. Though she normally finds the assigned problem sets difficult, they're nonetheless rewarding, a means for her to engage her will to power, and a source of power suffering. However, she finds this particular problem set so difficult that it demoralizes her and causes her to question her decision to become an engineer; she eventually finds herself unable to even attempt solving it. She now experiences inhibitive suffering since the goal of accomplishing the problem set fails to engage her will to power and leaves her despondent. However, after seeking help from her friends and the professor, she gains an understanding of how to proceed. Though she still finds it challenging, she now has a sense for how to proceed, and her will to power is once again engaged. The inhibitive suffering has given way to power suffering. Cases such as this are common in life. In activities we find meaning-imbuing, we occasionally feel discouraged and that, in Nietzsche's language, the will to power is left unengaged. When we later return to the activity we may again find it interesting and worthwhile such that it engages the will to power.

keep her body in shape, and so on. These obstacles generated power suffering because in overcoming them, she gets closer and closer to her goal. And of course, each individual mountain has provided her with an obstacle, the overcoming of which involved suffering. The activity of scaling each mountain involved resistance, and in overcoming this resistance she experienced power suffering—and in so doing, engaged her will to power and experienced a feeling of power and achievement. Now, all she has left is Mount Everest. But on the way to the airport where she will catch a plane to fly her to Nepal, her taxicab gets into a car accident that results in a broken leg. In the aftermath of the accident, while in the hospital, she yearns to climb Everest and suffers at the thought that the taxicab accident has inhibited (at least temporarily) her ability to engage the will to power by climbing Everest. This kind of suffering—the suffering she experiences as a result of the accident—is inhibitive suffering because it results from the inability to engage the will to power. She suffers from lacking the resistance that only mountain-climbing can provide, instead lying awake with the sense that her capacities are dwindling.

Another important mode of suffering is the suffering that occurs when one fails to achieve valuable goals. I'll call this form of suffering failure suffering. In certain circumstances, this kind of suffering can (but doesn't necessarily) lead to inhibitive suffering. Someone enthusiastic about learning to dance ballet may come to realize that for whatever reason he isn't cut out for it; he may have clumsy coordination and his feet may not have the high arch and instep advantageous to ballet dancing. Despite a great deal of practice, if he repeatedly fails to meet his goals, he experiences failure suffering and gives up ballet dancing altogether; insofar as he still finds ballet engaging, it is now the source of inhibitive suffering since it's no longer able to engage his will to power. The severity of suffering depends in part on the degree to which he staked his hopes on this goal.

Failure suffering doesn't necessarily lead to inhibitive suffering, however. An ardent engineering student who studiously prepared for a midterm exam may be distressed in failing it, but this failure doesn't necessarily inhibit the ability to engage her will to power in engineering-related activities. She can move on and still succeed. A particular failure needn't altogether discourage someone from meaning-imbuing activities. In certain cases, failure might motivate one all the more to succeed in the future. The engineering student may become more ardently driven to succeed after her failure so she can prove to herself that she has what it takes to be an engineer—and perhaps to give her a sense of redemption from her previous failing.[159]

In other circumstances, failure suffering can be transformed into power suffering. Imagine the mountaineer who tries to climb Everest but fails time and again. However, after more training and practice, she eventually succeeds. Her previous failures can be reinterpreted in terms of power suffering. What was initially experienced as failure suffering is transformed into power suffering—as an expression of her will to power through the overcoming of resistance—once she scaled the mountain. She may reinterpret her previous failures as instances of power suffering given her eventual success. Failure is an important component of Nietzsche's views on suffering since we all at some point fail in our strivings. And when we consider things like the

[159] Zarathustra's discussion of redemption—of turning an "it was" (a presumable failure) into a "thus I willed it"—is a form of transforming failure suffering to power suffering (See Z "On Redemption"). Failure itself can serve as to spur one on. Similarly, Zarathustra's exhortations to higher men who have failed can be read not just as a speech to inspire them to continue striving to achieve greatness, but to inspire them to overcome their failures: "Shy, ashamed, awkward, like a tiger whose leap has failed: thus I have often seen you slink aside, you higher men. A throw had failed you. But you dice-throwers, what does it matter? You have not learned to gamble and jest as one must gamble and jest. Do we not always sit at a big jesting-and-gambling table? And if something great has failed you, does it follow that you yourselves are failures? […] The higher its type, the more rarely a thing suceeds. You higher men, hav eyou not all failed? Be of good cheer, what does it matter? How much is still possible! Learn to laugh at yourselves as one must laugh! […] All good things approach their goal crookedly" (Z "Higher Men" 14-7). Last, Nietzsche himself treats his own failures as objects of resistance to be overcome. In an 1882 letter to Overbeck, he writes, "This last *morsel of life* was the hardest I have yet had to chew, and it is still possible that I shall *choke* on it. I have suffered from the humiliating and tormenting memories of this summer as from a bout of madness […]. I am exerting every ounce of my self-mastery […]. Unless I discover the alchemical trick of turning this—muck into gold, I am lost. Here I have the most splendid chance to prove that for me 'all experiences are useful, all days holy and all people divine'!!! All people divine…" (qtd Middleton 1969: 197-8).

fact of aging, whether our goals are physical or mental, our skills will eventually plateau or decline.

The reinterpretability of suffering demonstrated in the example above doesn't eliminate the suffering, but it can relieve or diminish it. That the mountaineer eventually succeeded doesn't undo the suffering she experienced after her failures, but it does transform that suffering. The reinterpretability of suffering is worth noting here because as we'll see below, the ascetic ideal excels at this task.

The process of reinterpretation we've seen at work so far involved the transformation of failure suffering to power suffering. However, there are other important ways in which suffering can be given new meanings. Imagine again the case of the Everest climber who, on her way to Nepal, gets into a car accident, and let's suppose that her leg is permanently injured such that she will never be able to climb mountains again. While in the hospital she for the first time devotes herself to reading poetry, seeing something in it that she never had before. She comes to have a passion for poetry and devotes her life to reading and writing it. Her newfound love of poetry doesn't undo the inhibitive suffering involved in being unable to live out her dream of scaling mountains, but it might give her suffering new meaning. Had she never injured herself, she would never have recognized the value of poetry. Her inhibitive suffering is diminished now that she has a new meaning-imbuing task to engage her will to power—the appreciation and creation of poetry. She may have failed to scale Everest, but only through this failure did she discover a new source of meaning. The meaning of our suffering is fluid. Fresh interpretations of it can for better or worse give it new, ideally more affirmable tinges.

This interpretability gets us to the heart of the question of suffering for Nietzsche. An important insight from *Genealogy* is that human beings don't just suffer from physical or mental

phenomena, they suffer from meaninglessness itself. Nietzsche states, "man was surrounded by a fearful *void*—he did not know how to justify [*zu rechtfertigen*], to account for [*zu erklären*], to affirm [*zu bejahen*] himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning" (GM III 28). This brings us to another kind of suffering, which I will call "existential suffering." Human beings suffer when they don't see their struggles or their existence as meaningful. Existential suffering is caused by the thought that the world, existence, or one's particular life is meaningless. It is the suffering one experiences when in a large-scale manner the demands of the need for meaning haven't been met. This form of suffering is pernicious because, as we've seen, meaning is part of the "optimum of favorable conditions under which" human beings can thrive and express their will to power. Without a sense of meaning, the will to power is severely inhibited.

Existential suffering is therefore an extreme form of inhibitive suffering. Inhibitive suffering results when one is unable to engage the will to power, but such suffering can be localized in that it can apply to particular activities or to short spans of time. If the mountaineer or the engineering student catches the common cold, the optimal conditions for the discharge of strength won't be in place; the mountaineer may fail to scale a peak as a result, and have to return home, or the engineering student may fail a test given the sub-optimal conditions under which she took it. The ability to engage the will to power is frustrated, but only temporarily so. With existential suffering, existence itself is experienced as insignificant and unintelligible; we suffer from this sense of meaninglessness. Existential suffering involves second-order suffering, since it is in part suffering that has as its object suffering itself. No suffering is experienced as power suffering. What results is an overwhelming sense of languishing and malaise.

We've so far considered three fluid types of suffering: power suffering, inhibitive suffering, and existential suffering. Though each mode can be transformed into others, part of

what differentiates them is how desire, striving, and attempts to overcome resistance figure in each. In power suffering, the motivation and desire to overcome resistance is present, and one is actively engaged in striving to overcome that resistance (which is the source of the suffering). In inhibitive suffering, one might have the desire to overcome an obstacle of some kind, but the will to power gains no traction, so striving to overcome the obstacle or resistance isn't present. The first year physicist may want at some abstract level to solve one of the Millennium Prize Puzzles, but her striving isn't engaged because the task is overwhelming; her concrete desire or motivation is disempowered given how daunting the task is. With existential suffering, the issue is that there is little desire or motivation to overcome resistance in the first place. There's no striving to overcome resistance because the person afflicted with existential suffering is apathetic and experiences a kind of depression or disempowering malaise.

We saw above that failure suffering can motivate one to continue striving, turning a particular failure or set of failures into the object against which one strives (in an attempt to prove to oneself that one can overcome such failures). Despite the debilitating nature of existential suffering, Nietzsche sometimes suggests that meaninglessness itself can be the source of resistance against which one strives. Nietzsche states that man "suffered from the problem of his meaning" (GM III 28). While difficult, meaninglessness itself can in principle serve as the resistance against which one strives. The figure of the tragic hero venerated by the early Nietzsche seems to do just this. However, one can't simply strive against meaningless by striving directly for meaning; meaning isn't the object of a determinate first-order desire. To strive against meaninglessness requires that one has other activities driven by determinate first-order desires that have as their as their objects something valuable, but also something other than meaning. Meaning is too nebulous to serve as the object of a determinate first order desire, but

achieving other determinate first-order desires for valuable objects or states of affairs can imbue one's own existence with meaning. This situation is analogous to the so-called "paradox of happiness." One can't secure happiness by having happiness and happiness alone as the object of a desire. In such a case, there's nothing concrete to strive for. The same is the case with meaning; it's not a determinate object such that one can strive to attain it by directing one's activity toward it. One has to be engaged in other sorts of valuable activities that in turn imbue meaning—this is why one has to strive to achieve valuable goals. The goal of meaning in itself is too indeterminate. So like failure suffering, existential suffering can in principle provide an object of resistance to be overcome, though in a peculiar manner.

The Ascetic ideal and Guilt Suffering

The ascetic ideal introduces a poisonous and destructive suffering in the form of guilt that is able to capitalize on existential suffering. Guilt suffering, as I'll call it, is a unique kind of suffering generated by the ascetic ideal and sustained by the priest. This mode of suffering, despite its destructive tendencies, is one of the reasons why the ascetic ideal has remained intact for so long. The ascetic ideal functions by giving human beings a sense of meaning, thereby ostensibly assuaging existential suffering. It comprehensively interprets all suffering in terms of guilt, making any variety of suffering intelligible and significant. Nietzsche claims that "every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly an agent; still more specifically, a *guilty* agent" (GM III 15). But the ascetic priest informs the sufferer that he himself is the guilty agent and so to blame for his suffering. The priest tells him he must seek the cause of his suffering "in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his

suffering as a *punishment*" (GM III 20). The ascetic priest renders the sufferer's plight intelligible by giving him a reason for it, and this reason lies with the guilty sufferer himself.

It's necessary to stress that the sense of guilt Nietzsche is discussing is pervasive within an individual's self-image. It comes to permeate one's entire self-image. The problem with guilt is in part its pervasive capacity, but it also makes its sufferers feel guilty for things they have they have no reason to. The ascetic ideal cultivates guilt over the fact that one is what one is—that one is a natural being with natural needs. Human existence as such is seen through a lens that makes it appear tarnished, flawed, and disgusting. In this sense, guilt suffering generates a kind of existential suffering, insofar as human existence is seen as rotten and flawed; but unlike standard varieties of existential suffering, guilt suffering doesn't impair motivation, it rather drives one all the more to overcome one's status as an earthly being, and so to overcome among other things the will to power itself.

Why would anyone embrace an ideal that forces him to see himself as guilty? Because, Nietzsche tells us, "reasons relieve" (ibid). If what arouses indignation against suffering isn't suffering as such, but the fact that it is meaningless, then the ascetic ideal relieves this indignation. It assuages second order suffering by ostensibly giving the existential suffering and inhibitive suffering meaning. However, as we'll see, the ascetic ideal doesn't eliminate these forms of suffering but instead keeps them active in a concealed form such that, from time to time, they reveal themselves for what they are.

If I suffer from a toothache, then I am to blame because my suffering is a consequence of my being a natural being, or having sinned in the past, or that I am tainted by original sin. It's important to stress the power of the ascetic ideal's interpretive capacity: No matter what kind of suffering I experience or that I see others experience, whether it be power suffering, inhibitive

suffering, failure suffering, or existential suffering, then I can render it intelligible and significant through interpreting it in terms of guilt. It's intelligible because it has a source (even if that source is as loose as "I'm a sinful creature") and an explanation. I suffer because I am a rotten creature, because I have failed to live up to God's principles; and the ascetic ideal renders all suffering supremely significant since, in its religious guise at least, the ascetic ideal assumes the existence of an omnipotent being who cares about all of my actions. So powerful is the ascetic ideal that even if I doubt its metaphysical underpinnings by questioning God's existence, it still gives me a reason for the suffering this doubt produces. My doubt and the feelings of uneasiness that come with it are consequences of my being inherently flawed and living with insufficient faith. Even though the ascetic ideal compels those under its sway to blame themselves for their miseries, its persistence can be explained at least in part by its capacity to relieve the sufferer's existential anguish by giving it a meaning.

The interpretive capacity of the ascetic ideal not only explains its staying power, but why it was embraced in the first place. In the first essay of *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche gives us a sketch of pre-slave revolt cultures, divided as they were into a master class and a slave class. The repressive political constellation in which the slaves lived induced enormous amounts of inhibitive and existential suffering. As slaves, they were no more than mere tools for their masters, and they wouldn't have been able to express their will to power. Venting their will to power against the masters would have incurred a reaction that ensured their demise. The inhibitive and existential suffering they were forced to endure engendered the reactive affects of ressentiment. Their suffering wasn't experienced as meaningful because it was generated by the arbitrary desires and whims of their masters—the slaves, as slaves, lacked agency. Meanwhile,

the priestly aristocrats, who were originally part of the master class alongside the knightly aristocrats, entered a power struggle with their knightly counterparts.[160]

Like the slaves, the priests lacked the means to physically overpower the knightly aristocrats. With no other recourse, priestly ressentiment "becomes creative" (GM I 10), giving birth to an evaluative system that inverts master morality. Goodness is no longer defined in terms of physical virtues or traits, like strength, valor, etc., but in terms of ascetic virtues and traits. Note that originally priestly values centered on considerations of purity and cleanliness. These values differed from the aggressive and martial values of the knights, but their value systems didn't conflict because their values weren't opposed to one another; they differed, but could nevertheless coexist. Only when priestly ressentiment became creative was there an inversion of knightly values such that what the knights considered good the priests dubbed evil, and what the knights considered bad the priests dubbed good. This inverted morality allowed the priests to co-opt the enormous slave class. Enduring inhibitive and existential suffering, the slaves were in a prime state to embrace the priest's ascetic ideal. The ascetic priest went "before them as their shepherd" (GM III 13). The ascetic ideal allowed the slaves to reinterpret their suffering and give it a meaning, and it did so without the slaves having to adopt a new type of life and without having to change anything about their lifestyle—"When [the ascetic priest] was dealing with sufferers of the lower classes, with work-slaves [...] he required hardly more than a little ingenuity in name-changing and rebaptizing to make them see benefits and a relative happiness in things they formerly hated: the slave's discontent with his lot was at any rate not invented by

[160] Nietzsche doesn't go into any detail regarding this conflict or what started it. Below we'll see reasons for why the priests were initially masters, but one explanation for the origins of this conflict is that the priests for whatever reason put restraints on the activity of the knights. As an example, think of how the priests in Ancient Greece interpreted various phenomena as omens and made decrees based on these interpretations about whether it was or was not acceptable to engage in warfare. Though speculative, it's possible that the knights came to feel hampered by these religious rites and so challenged the authority of the priests. Other possibilities for the conflict concern potential political considerations; perhaps both classes came to vie for political power, which culminated in strife.

the priest" (GM III 18).[161] Given how much the priest's revaluation must have appealed to the slaves, it's no wonder that they embraced it.

There's an additional question here about how the masters got yoked into eventually embracing the ascetic ideal. It's possible that since the majority of the population accepted it, after enough time the slave values seeped into the fabric of culture, and slowly displaced the knight's master values. This possibility is suggested by Nietzsche's observation that the priests are ubiquitous: "For consider how regularly and universally the ascetic priest appears in almost every age; he belongs to no one class; he prospers everywhere; he emerges from every class of society." Nietzsche also states that the knightly masters would have been deeply impressed by the priests' and slaves' displays of self-deprivation and extreme self-control—the latter of which the knightly masters must to an extent have valued since self-control is necessary on the battlefield. The ascetic priest is able "to evolve a virtually new type of preying animal out of himself, or at least he will need to *represent* it—a new kind of animal ferocity in which the polar bear, the supple, cold, and patient tiger, and not least the fox seem to be joined in a unity at once enticing and terrifying. If need compels him he will walk among the other beasts of prey with bearlike seriousness and feigned superiority, venerable, prudent, and cold, as the herald and mouthpiece of more mysterious powers" (GM III 15; cf. GM III 10-12, 14). The ascetic priest takes on the form of a beast of prey, and can't help but appear to the knightly masters as venerable and prudent; the knights fail to understand the priests' power of self-discipline.

[161] Here we see a vestige of the priests' former noble states. Nietzsche states that the nobles had the power to confer names, and more specifically to "create values and give these values names […] The seigneurial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers: they say 'this *is* so and so.' They set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it, as it were" (GM I 2). The priests' rebaptism betrays their noble heritage, which they here take advantage of against the knightly aristocrats.

The ascetic ideal's interpretation of suffering under the guise of guilt generates a special kind of suffering. In giving us the goal to overcome earthly existence itself, virtually every aspect of our natural being becomes an obstacle or piece of resistance to be overcome. The suffering we experience in trying to overcome these obstacles is rendered meaningful—intelligible and significant—as guilt suffering. But guilt suffering is in actuality an odd amalgam of power suffering, inhibitive suffering, and existential suffering. It is a mode of suffering that unites and grows out of these other forms of suffering. To those under the sway of the ascetic ideal, all suffering seems to be power suffering, since suffering itself is generated by the worldly realm that is to be overcome. The very phenomenon of suffering is interpreted as belonging to this worldly realm, and so is itself something that is to be overcome. Part of what we overcome in our status as natural beings is the fact that we suffer, which is why heaven is envisioned as a realm with no suffering.

Yet guilt suffering is not power suffering, or at least can't sustain it. In striving to overcome the basic conditions of existence, the guilt suffering we experience has elements of the other varieties of suffering. We're ostensibly overcoming the conditions of our natural existence, giving the striving against our earthly lot the appearance of power suffering. But underneath all this, we're actually fuelling and sustaining inhibitive suffering. The ingenuity of the ascetic priest is to give all of our suffering the appearance of power suffering. In reality, the more we strive to overcome the conditions of earthly existence the more we inhibit the functioning of the will to power, since the will to power is an essential (indeed, for Nietzsche, the *defining*) part of our earthly existence. The ascetic ideal employs the will to power to struggle against and overcome the will to power—recall Nietzsche's remark that with the ascetic ideal "an attempt is made to employ force to block up the wells of force" (GM III 11). Guilt suffering is therefore the

kind of suffering we experience as a result of pathologizing attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning: We feel that we're meeting these demands by overcoming our earthly lot, when really we're thwarting the will to power and the resources capable of meeting these demands.

Striving to suppress our needs appears as power suffering, but the more we succeed, the more inhibitive it becomes—yet the ascetic ideal always comes back into the picture to interpret our suffering under the monolithic category of guilt suffering. The ascetic priest is "only too certain of his art, to dominate *suffering* at all times" (GM III 15). We now know in detail why Nietzsche states that the ascetic priest "brings salves and balm with him, no doubt; but before he can act as a physician he first has to wound; when he then stills the pain of the wound, *he at the same time infects the wound*" (GM III 15). The ascetic priest at first stills the pain of his sufferer by giving it meaning; but he at the same time infects the wound so that the ascetic priest will soon enough have to be called upon to still *that* pain. Employing the ascetic ideal, the priest initiates a cycle through an interpretive apparatus that makes suffering feel like power suffering; but in engaging the will to power by striving against the will to power, this suffering inevitably starts to take on its real appearance as inhibitive and existential suffering. The ascetic priest then steps back in and jumpstarts the cycle all over again, removing the suffering's inhibitive and existential appearance.

All this gives the sense that the ascetic priest is really in the business of inhibitive existential suffering; his aim is to keep his flock in check, and he does so by keeping alive the appearance of power suffering; as this appearance deteriorates, the priest can reinterpret it all over again. Before the sufferer's symptoms become dangerously close to collapsing into full-blown inhibitive existential suffering, the priest applies his hermeneutic balm. The ascetic priest

"combats only the suffering itself, the discomfiture of the sufferer, *not* its cause, *not* the real sickness: this must be our most fundamental objection to priestly medication" (GM III 17). The sufferer's discomfiture is eased in the way a medicinal painkiller is administered to someone with chronic back pain—it alleviates the suffering but does nothing to address its cause. Just as the analgesic wears off, so too does the priest's interpretive balm. The ostensible power suffering involved in overcoming earthly existence gives way to inhibitive existential suffering. The real sickness here is the sufferer's sense of meaninglessness, and the priest addresses it by supplying it with meaning through the interpretive and psychological mechanism of guilt. Just as in the case of the painkiller, this interpretation is effective for only so long, which is why the priest has to reapply the hermeneutic balm that reinterprets his flock's suffering.

The ascetic priest has to be cautious in the process of striving against earthly existence and the will to power. Recall Nietzsche's observation that the ascetic ideal employs "force to block up the wells of force" (GM III 11). To the extent that guilt suffering exhibits a degree of inhibitive suffering, it creates stores of pent up energy. Some of this energy is released through the mechanism of guilt, which redirects it back on to the self-perceived guilty agent herself. Part of the existential suffering involved in guilt suffering is that it casts human existence as deficient. The sufferer experiences human existence and his life in particular as defective and sinful, but through guilt he's able to vent his affects against himself. The ressentiment his inhibitive suffering generates is in part transformed into power suffering through psychological self-laceration. We can see why this initiates an ongoing cycle. This act of self-laceration, along with the attempts to overcome the conditions of earthly existence, induce suffering that's experienced as power suffering, but his bout of self-laceration leaves him feeling repugnant. Only some of the accumulated energy is released through this self-harm, so these stores of energy continue to grow

since the ascetic ideal reinitiates cycles of self-overcoming through self-laceration with ever-greater force.[162] The ascetic priest therefore has to be careful in how he treats these stores of energy, since Nietzsche thinks they're apt to explode in one way or another if not handled carefully. As Nietzsche states, the ascetic priest "fights with cunning and severity and in secret against anarchy and ever-threatening disintegration within the herd, in which is the most dangerous of all explosives, *ressentiment*, is constantly accumulating" (GM III 15). If *ressentiment* continues to accumulate without any outlet, it will explode among the priest's flock and his dominance will be undermined.

Nietzsche states that the "actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness, and the like" is to be found in the fact that "every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; […] some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief, *anesthesia*" (GM III 15). The kind of suffering Nietzsche is talking about here must be inhibitive (and in some cases existential) suffering. Power suffering doesn't generate *ressentiment*—or, if it does, it is immediately dissipated—because striving to overcome the resistance that causes power suffering just *is* to vent one's will to power. Power suffering doesn't accumulate like inhibitive suffering, since power suffering is experienced alongside expressions of the will to power. What this all means is that the ascetic priest needs in addition to the mechanism of guilt other methods that ensure that the explosive force of *ressentiment* remains latent. These additional methods involve an *anesthetization* of the feeling of inhibitive and

[162] A mainstay of Nietzsche's philosophy is the notion of self-overcoming. The ascetic ideal advances a particular form of self-overcoming that involves overcoming all that is earthly and natural within oneself. This takes on a nefarious veneer when the self-overcoming involves a self-directed hatred and contempt. Guilt as Nietzsche conceives of it isn't the feeling that one has failed, done wrong, or should have done otherwise; it's the feeling that one failed, did wrong, or could have done otherwise but didn't *because* one is at base a contemptible creature.

existential suffering so that the sufferer no longer experiences or feels it for what it is; his attention is diverted from questions of meaning.

The ascetic priest has two general methods of anesthetization: "innocent" ones and "guilty" ones. The innocent methods aim at "the general muting of the feeling of life," and include things like "mechanical activity, the petty pleasure, above all 'love of one's neighbor,' herd organization, the awakening of the communal feeling of power through which the individual's discontent with himself is drowned in his pleasure in the prosperity of the community" (GM III 19).[163] What these activities have in common is that they divert the sufferer's attention away from his suffering through an ascetic procedure, like focusing on rote work, or providing small pleasures to others. Through these procedures, the sufferer is occupied with something other than his own miserable situation. Insofar as he isn't dwelling on his suffering then it is muted and numbed, and the stores of pent up energy remain latent or are slowly dissipated in a safe manner.

The other general method of anesthetization—the one Nietzsche calls "guilty"—involves the release of a torrent of emotion, "some kind of an *orgy of feeling*—employed as the most effective means of deadening dull, paralyzing, protracted pain" (ibid). What makes these means "guilty" is that they duplicitously employ what the ascetic ideal is aimed at stifling: the ascetic ideal, aimed at the denial of sensuality, now makes use of it. Religious procedures like fiery sermons, confessions, church singing, choirs, and so on, detonate some of the explosive force of the sufferer's pent up energy, and release it in a tremendous emotional outburst of religious

[163] There's another form of suffering that the ascetic ideal exploits. I'll call it "other-directed suffering" or "empathic suffering." This is suffering that we experience as a result of someone we care about suffering. The death of a loved one or undeserved misfortune of a friend causes *them* to suffer, but can also cause us to suffer. Nietzsche is typically seen as hostile to empathic suffering given his frequent disparaging remarks about pity. A discussion of empathic suffering lies outside the scope of this chapter, but it's worth mentioning that while Nietzsche is often critical of pity (*Mitleid*), he isn't opposed to all forms of other-directed suffering. Part of his objection against pity is that it's ripe for exploitation by the ascetic ideal. The priest can use the suffering of others as grist for his mill—it's even more evidence that earthly existence isn't worthwhile.

ecstasy, righteous indignation, grief, or any other fervent outburst of feeling. The sudden emotional release not only helps to liberate some of the sufferer's pent up energy, but ultimately serves the purpose of anaesthetization—in much the same way that, after a fit and frenzy of anger or sadness, one typically feels numb.

The effect of the innocent and guilty means of anesthetization is that it deadens those under the ascetic ideal to the real situation they're in. The demands of the need for meaning are met *just enough* to keep the ideal's adherents. The ascetic ideal prevents human flourishing, and when its adherents begin to feel malaise and listlessness, the priest employs his methods to keep the self-destructive cycle running while numbing people to feelings of inhibitive existential suffering

Part II: Nietzsche's Solution to the Problem of Nihilism

We now have firmly in view Nietzsche's reasons for regarding the ascetic ideal as something pernicious and the suffering it generates as life-destructive. What remains to be seen is how his solution to the problem of nihilism consists in replacing the ascetic ideal a new absolute ideal. I follow Leiter (2002) in interpreting the eternal recurrence as the substitutive ideal. Recall the remark in *Ecce Homo* that the ascetic ideal was "the only ideal so far" and that "a *counterideal* was lacking—*until Zarathustra*" (EH "Genealogy"; cf. BGE 56). Leiter provides an argument that what Nietzsche means in saying Zarathustra will serve as a counterideal is that the eternal recurrence will serve as a counterideal: "In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says that, 'the fundamental conception of [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*] is "eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable" (EH III: Z-1). To be able to affirm the eternal repetition of one's life would, of course, mean that one was no longer at the risk of 'suicidal nihilism'" (287).

So the eternal recurrence is the prime candidate for what Nietzsche has in mind when he says that a counterideal was lacking until Zarathustra.

However, Leiter and other commentators are unaware of the implications this interpretive move has on the views of meaning that have been attributed to Nietzsche, in particular the "individualistic" or "personal" accounts of meaning advanced by Janaway and Young (even Leiter in the above quotation speaks of an *individual* being able to affirm the eternal repetition of her *own* life). The claim in the "Genealogy" section of *Ecce Homo* that a counterideal to the ascetic ideal was lacking until Zarathustra demonstrates that the counterideal Nietzsche seeks is an absolute ideal. He wants to put in place a comprehensive and value-generating ideal that will serve as the linchpin and blue print for a new axiological framework; he's not looking to simply reinstate a new assortment of conventional ideals. This framework will provide resources that can meet the demands of the need for meaning, and because the ideal that will underlie this framework is absolute (and so comprehensive), Nietzsche isn't advancing the kind of individualistic or personal account of meaning that Young, Janaway, and Leiter think will solve the problem of nihilism. These are points that will be elaborated below.

Before delving into this set of issues, it's worth addressing a number of important questions that cropped up from our previous discussion. Why, for instance, is a free-spirited science not a sufficient answer to the ascetic ideal? And if it isn't, why can't a modified conception of the free spirit work in its place? Moreover, what would a meaning-imbuing interpretation look like that solves the problem of nihilism, and what role would the eternal recurrence have to play in it? Most important, what does it mean to see the eternal recurrence as an *ideal*, in particular an *absolute* ideal capable of countering the ascetic ideal? These and related questions are the focus of this part of the chapter.

Science and the Ascetic Ideal in the Wake of God's Death

Our discussion has so far centered on questions about the religious guise of the ascetic ideal. Recall that for Nietzsche, it's not just that "science today has absolutely *no* belief in itself, let alone an ideal above it"—it's that "where [science] still inspires passion, love, ardor, and *suffering* at all, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather *the latest and noblest form of it*" (GM III 23). Why does Nietzsche think this ideal has persisted under the guise of science even after the death of God (that is, after the religious interpretations that dominated all ways of living and types of life waned)? Nietzsche was writing at a time when the ascetic ideal was shedding its religious shell. Its religious foundations were crumbling under the insights of scientific truth. What's left of the ascetic ideal when these religious underpinnings have been knocked out from underneath it? Presumably, the ascetic ideal should wither away under such conditions, yet Nietzsche asserts that on the contrary the ascetic ideal exists today in "its strictest, most spiritual formulation" (GM III 27).

There are a few points to consider here. The will to truth contains an ascetic element insofar as it seeks truths—even disturbing truths—over potentially pleasing falsehoods. Throughout his career, Nietzsche denied that in all circumstances knowing the truth is superior to ignorance. Human flourishing on occasion requires that we embrace untruth or at least veil or otherwise dilute the truth. Knowing the truth is nevertheless a matter of strength, courage, and cleanliness for Nietzsche (see EH P 3, et al.); but one has to have the strength to endure the knowledge of difficult truths. One can presumably train oneself to accept such truths through practice, habituation, and a process of "experimentation" (cf. GS 110). But if the pursuit of truth is leading one toward knowledge that causes irreparable harm (such as longstanding and

debilitating inhibitive suffering) then it might be best to terminate the pursuit, or to do what one can to veil the truth.[164]

Science in particular has a self-deprecating element in that it has belittled humanity's self-image. Nietzsche states that science has been driven by the "*will* to self-belittlement" (GM III 25). What he has in mind here are the scientific discoveries that were at one time experienced as traumas: the heliocentric theories of Kepler and Copernicus (see GM III 25), which removed humanity from the center of the universe, and Darwin's theory of evolution, which implies that "man has become an *animal*, literally and without reservation or qualification, he who was, according to his old faith, almost God ('child of God,' 'God-man')" (ibid). In diminishing humanity's self-image, science displays an ascetic facet. But the problem isn't so much that science diminishes humanity's self-image. To a large degree this is a tendency Nietzsche appreciates because it has helped in the struggle against the ascetic ideal's religious self-aggrandizing of humanity and its elevation of every action as inviting divine appraisal. He aims instead to "translate man back into nature; to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over the eternal basic text of *homo natura*" (BGE 230). So the ostensible belittlement of humanity isn't what is objectionable about the ascetic ideal in its scientific guise, though this is nevertheless an ascetic manifestation of the scientific enterprise.

[164] I leave aside here the details of Nietzsche's views on the circumstances in which not knowing the truth is better than knowing it. He never fully developed his views on these matters, nor is he always consistent. I take it that for him there are cases in which knowing the truth, even if it's debilitating, is better than remaining in ignorance. Living miserably with knowledge of the truth is in some cases superior to living a complete lie. Take the standard example of a person whose life is imbued with meaning through his romantic relationship with his wife. If he finds out that his wife has and continues to be unfaithful, and is in other ways not the person he thought she was, then Nietzsche would think it better that he know the truth. Nietzsche may think that untruth is in some circumstances superior to knowing the truth, but he generally speaks of veiling, disguising, masking or diluting the truth, not altogether concealing it from view. The language he uses suggests that some element of the truth still shines through, it's just "refracted" or seen from a particular vantage point that doesn't give one an unvarnished or completely unobstructed view.

However, science's will to self-belittlement can in principle serve as an expression of the same misanthropy that drives the ascetic priest who sees human beings as inherently despicable. If one engages in this self-belittlement out of a pleasure in spitefully abasing humanity's self-image, then scientist or not they resemble the priest's animus toward the human lot. Nietzsche "rebels at the idea" that there are psychologists, "investigators and microscopists of the soul" who are driven by "a secret, malicious, vulgar, perhaps self-deceiving instinct for belittling man (GM I 1), but he does entertain that possibility.

> The main problem Nietzsche has with modern science and the will to truth is that they operate according to an unwavering faith in the absolute value of truth—they're driven by convictions. "That which *constrains* these men," Nietzsche says, speaking of free spirits and "men of knowledge," is "this unconditional will to truth, is *faith in the ascetic ideal itself*, even if as an unconscious imperative—don't be deceived about that—it is the faith in the *metaphysical* value, the absolute value of *truth*, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone" (GM III 24). Modern science evinces the purest expression of the ascetic ideal because it is driven unquestioningly by the absolute value of truth. Yet Nietzsche is insistent that the "will to truth requires a critique—let us thus define our own task—the value of truth must for once be experimentally *called into question*" (ibid.). Worse than failing to question the value of truth, these men of knowledge assume it has absolute value, a value that trumps all other considerations. When truth has such absolute value, then the will to truth is unconditional. Consequently, under the ascetic ideal "truth is more important than any other thing"; this brand of free spirit is driven by "the principle, the faith, the conviction [that] finds expression" in the claim, "*Nothing* is needed *more* than truth, and in relation to it everything else only has second-rate value" (GS 344).

There's much that's objectionable about this attitude toward the value of truth and the will to truth. Knowledge of the truth trumps all other human interests; *nothing* is as valuable as the truth. Nietzsche's criticism of this attitude doesn't imply that he takes truth to have little or no value; the opposite is the case. Truth can remain valuable (and even have intrinsic value) and the pursuit of truth can even be a highest value, but an unconditional will to truth projects the value of truth into a metaphysical beyond.

What is problematic about science and the unconditional will to truth—when they serve as expressions of the ascetic ideal—is that they frustrate attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning. If truth is taken to have absolute value, then what matters isn't the activity of pursuing the truth; what matters is possession of the truth. Having the truth is to be in possession of something imbued (only seemingly) with metaphysical value, with value that ostensibly surpasses any earthly good or activity. Despite the differences between the priest and the scientist, when the pursuit of truth is subservient to the ascetic ideal, this difference disappears. Both seek something the value of which originates in an otherworld, whether that be heaven or some (perhaps) Platonic realm of unchanging eternal truth. Truth is fanatically pursued at all costs, and not because the pursuit is a valuable and meaning-imbuing activity, but because simply possessing the truth is unequivocally good. The scientist driven by the ascetic ideal not only denies that there are cases in which untruth, falsification, or ignorance is better than truth and knowledge; they seek something static that ostensibly resides in an otherworldly realm.

This situation is objectionable because for Nietzsche what matters is the activity of pursuing the truth, whereas the unconditional will to truth craves only the possession of truth. The truth-seeker under the ascetic ideal is like a miser; he wants to collect as much truth as he can simply for the sake of having the truth. The pursuit of truth in its innocuous and healthy

forms still aims at truth; the truth-seeker is motivated to acquire the truth. But in lacking absolute value, possessing the truth matters less than pursuing it. The truth-seeker will presumably have to achieve (some of) the truths he seeks, lest he becomes discouraged and experience inhibitive suffering. But acquiring the truth is the kind of goal that engages the will to power through its pursuit. In this manner, the pursuit of truth is an activity that meets or contributes to meeting the demands of the need for meaning.

This isn't the case with seekers after truth who operate under the ascetic ideal. Their pursuit of truth is characterized by escapism. They throw themselves into a scientific endeavor as a means of numbing themselves to suffering. Questions about meaning cease to matter to them, so they turn to "*ways of self-narcotization*—deep down, not knowing whither. *Emptiness*. Attempt to get over it by intoxication; […] intoxication as blind enthusiasm for single human beings or ages […].—Attempt to work blindly as an instrument of science […]. Some kind of continual work, or of some small stupid little fanaticism" (WP 29, dated 1883-8). This passage is reminiscent of the "innocent" means employed by the ascetic priests. Science is used as a way to cut oneself off from the world and engage in a form of self-induced narcosis. When the demands of the need for meaning aren't being met, one way to cope with the existential suffering that results is to numb oneself to it. Zealously throwing oneself into the pursuit of truth becomes an activity to keep oneself occupied. Science and the pursuit of truth become a means of *distraction* rather than an activity that supplies meaning-imbuing goals.

Nietzsche's perspectivism, which we'll return to below, provides another vantage point from which to understand what is troubling about seeing truth as having absolute value and the will to truth as being unconditional. The seeker after knowledge who operates under the ascetic ideal rests easy once she is in possession of the truth. But Nietzsche's perspectivism

demonstrates that truth can take on new meanings, significance, connotations, and interpretations. Nietzsche states: "There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be" (GM III 12). This passage denies neither truth nor objectivity. The notion of a perspective implies the existence of an invariant or something that perspectives are perspectives *of*. The passage claims that when we look at something—a truth, a piece of knowledge, a belief, etc.—from different perspectives and through different interpretive frameworks, we come to "see" new things about it. For instance, we might know various facts about planet earth, but the connections of those facts to other facts, beliefs, truths, connotations, and associations will differ depending on the perspective or interpretive lens we use; the geologist, the painter, the physicist, the school teacher, the accountant will all draw different connections from these truths to other truths, facts, experiences, and memories.[165] In believing she's in possession of the truth, and in believing that that's all that matters, the ascetic ideal's seeker after knowledge doesn't think to consider the truths she has from different perspectives. She doesn't think to link the truths she's discovered to these different sorts of things—she's just happy to be in possession of the truth. And because she operates under the conviction that she is driven by the unconditional will to truth, and that the truths she's discovered have absolute value, she's less likely to question whether she has, in fact,

[165] This does not imply that the truths about the earth that each person considers are "subjective" because they view them from a different perspective. The truths and the facts remain more or less the same, but their meanings, connections, and connotations will be different. I say "more or less the same" because even in the mature period, Nietzsche endorsed the falsification thesis, discussed at length in the previous chapter (though the falsification thesis he embraces in his later period is different in important respects). Each person might engage in different types of falsification, but that doesn't mean that the truth for each is different. Regardless of the perspective they're taking, it is a truth that the earth's gravitational pull is 9.81 meters per second per second. The geologist may think about this in truth terms of the structural integrity of different rocks when they strike the earth's surface when dropped from a certain height; the physicist may think of this in terms of the earth's gravitational effect on the moon; the school teacher may think about how to devise ways to convey this truth to her students. Also worth noting is that Nietzsche's notion of a "type of life" is relevant here. Part of what individuates one type of life from another is the perspective it provides.

discovered the truth. Once she's added what she takes to be a truth to her inventory, she's on her way to add more truths to it. Acknowledging she made an error would mean losing a truth, in much the same way the miser would reluctantly forfeit money he found out was counterfeit.

For these reasons, Nietzsche refuses to cast science as the proper antagonist to the ascetic ideal. As pernicious as the ascetic ideal was in its manifestly religious form, at least then it created the *illusion* of meaning. No doubt, in its religious form it was pernicious. But when the will to truth follows the lead of the ascetic ideal, some of the illusions that may have sustained resources capable of meeting the demands of the need for meaning are now challenged. Think of the illusions Nietzsche mentions above that were shattered by heliocentrism and Darwin's theory of natural selection. In a crucial sense we're better off without these illusions, but without other meaning-imbuing resources, we're nonetheless in a precarious situation. In the current state of things, the ascetic ideal under in this scientific form is more dangerous. As Nietzsche states, the will to truth, "this *remnant* of an ideal, is, if you will believe me, this ideal itself in its strictest, most spiritual formulation, esoteric through and through, with all its external additions abolished, and thus not so much its remnant as its *kernel*" (GM III 27).

Nietzsche's account of asceticism and the absolute value of truth gives rise to a series of thorny philosophical questions. For instance, how can we know the value of a particular truth until that truth has been discovered and is therefore known? One answer is that if we start to get a sense that the will to truth is leading us down a dangerous path, we stop, and embrace ignorance (Nietzsche frequently speaks of a "will to ignorance" that opposes the will to truth, e.g., BGE 24, 230, GS 344 for only a few examples). But what are we to do in the case when a pernicious truth has been discovered? Nietzsche recommends a certain qualified form of self-deception. "*Art*," he claims, "to say it in advance, for I shall some day return to this subject at

greater length—art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science" (GM III 25). The suggestion here is vague but we have seen something like it at work throughout his career. He goes on to say, "Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism—there the sincerest advocate of the 'beyond,' the great slanderer of life; here the instinctive deifier, the *golden* nature" (ibid). It's unclear what Nietzsche has in mind here when he describes Homer as a deifier, and the details of Nietzsche's views won't be clear until we sort out the details of the eternal recurrence as an absolute ideal. But to provide a sketch, the answer has to do with the sort of interpretive activity we saw at work above in Nietzsche's perspectivism. We can situate and recontextualize truths and untruths within an interpretive framework such that particularly disturbing truths, within the interpretive context they're placed, lose their destructive force. We can shift the purpose for which a truth is used or the connotative connections it has.

There are other important questions worth considering here. For instance, Nietzsche frequently claims that we ought to embrace destructive truths. This raises the question of when a destructive truth is good (or ought to be incorporated into our interpretive frameworks) and when a destructive truth is bad (and ought to be either ousted from our interpretive frameworks or heavily shrouded to obscure its destructive aspects). For the time being, I will shelve these questions and look at what Nietzsche has to say about interpretation. At the end of the chapter we'll return to how the will to truth and the will to deception might be reconciled through Nietzsche's understanding of perspectivism and interpretation.

Interpretation, Meaning, and the Will to Power

The will to power is an inherently interpreting force. "The will to power interprets," a notebook entry states from 1885-6—"it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. […] Interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something" (WP 643). Interpretation involves putting things together, providing a coherent assemblage, ordering what resists being ordered, and giving meaning to something that otherwise lacks it. Nietzsche conceives of interpretation as "forcing, adjusting, abbreviating, omitting, padding, inventing, falsifying" (GM III 24)—these are all effects of forcing things into a coherent and intelligible order. In the second essay, *The Genealogy* makes the following crucial supplement:

> The cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous "meaning" and "purpose" are necessarily obscured or even obliterated. (GM II 12)

Note the scope of this claim—all events in the organic world involve mastering, and mastering involves fresh interpretations and adaptations that instill new meaning by displacing the old. We've seen already how Nietzsche understands the relation between the form of something (e.g., a practice like punishment) and its meaning. Something's form can remain relatively stable throughout history, yet its meaning is fluid—it can be inscribed and re-inscribed with new meanings throughout history (e.g., the purpose of punishment, which Nietzsche thinks has been fluid throughout history). Previously, we saw how the ascetic ideal actually marks an interesting exception to this: The meaning of the ideal has in its basic contours remained the same, but its form has changed drastically throughout history (e.g., its various religious guises, its scientific form, etc.). But disregarding the ascetic ideal for now, the above quotation elaborates how interpretation and meaning operate within *The Genealogy*: Here we get a fuller picture of what the fluidity of meaning amounts to and how it's related to the will to power.

Part of what Nietzsche is trying to contest in this passage is the idea that we can explain the origin of something in terms of its utility, or in terms of some aim or purpose that was initially assigned to it (assuming an aim or purpose was initially assigned to it in the first place). When it was first performed, a practice like punishment was thought to have its origins in its purpose, namely, to allow an injured party revenge of some sort; and the origin of law is thought of in terms of its utility, in the codifying of practices of punishment for useful ends like compensation to a wronged party. Already, Nietzsche thinks this origins story is wrongheaded, but even more misguided is when we assume that this same purpose in terms of utility is at work in practices of punishment today. Nietzsche from the start razes this explanation of origin, utility, and purpose. He not only contests it at the level of practices like punishment and law, his account advances an altogether different and far-reaching conception of how origin, utility, and purpose relate to one another. In short, there's no inherent connection between these notions. The account he gives claims that purposes and utilities we assign things occur only as an afterthought, as kind of rationalization in the moment of why we do what we do; the purposes and utilities of a practice today aren't directly tied to their origins.

In reality "purposes and utilities are only *signs* that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function; and the entire history of a 'thing,' an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another, but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion" (ibid). Things historically change—organic and inorganic, concrete and abstract—because there are always power struggles to reinterpret them and assign to them new meanings and purposes. Some thing—let's say a custom—exists and operates according to a particular

interpretation that assigns that custom a purpose and significance. The significance of the custom will depend on various contextual and circumstantial considerations, such as the cultural milieu within which it is placed and the values that govern that culture; and purpose will differ depending upon these values and various other practical considerations that guide a culture and the types of life it harbors. But the interpretation of a custom, which assigns it a particular significance and purpose doesn't remain static. Let's say some superior power comes along, struggles with its reigning interpretation (and whoever or whatever advances that interpretation), and in overpowering it, absorbs and incorporates that custom in such a way as to give it a fresh interpretation. A new meaning—a new purpose and significance—is assigned to the custom because it's become absorbed into a new amalgam, a fresh context—a new organism, to speak loosely. The custom is placed within a new nexus of beliefs, values, customs, and connotations—the custom becomes part of a different constellation.

Becoming master, as Nietzsche says, always involves a fresh interpretation because what it means to master something is to absorb it into a particular order or set of orderings; and in incorporating it, it gains a different purpose, meaning, and significance, and is thereby reinterpreted. To interpret something just is to give it a meaning or a purpose. Indeed, Nietzsche even claims in a notebook entry from around 1886, "All meaning is will to power" (KGW 2[77]), because all meaning arises from forcing something that resists interpretation into an interpretive framework. This is why purposes and utilities are only *signs* that a will to power has become master of something less powerful, and any custom, organ, or thing (Nietzsche's scope is wide here) is historically speaking a long sign-chain of all the meanings and purposes it has and formerly had.

There are a several important philosophical implications and questions this account gives rise to. Let's start with two insights from passages quoted above that are essential to understanding Nietzsche's method of genealogical inquiry and its relation to the need for meaning and the will to power. He states that "becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured or even obliterated"; and he states that "the entire history of a 'thing,' an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another, but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion." Where the traces of an object's history (again, where the object in question can be a practice, custom, axiological system, or anything subject to interpretation) haven't been obliterated, then the genealogical method is able to trace the continuous sign-chains that are vestiges of previous interpretations and the past powers that maintained and advanced them. To speak metaphorically, one can approach an existing interpretation and treat it as an archeological object, unearthing the remnants of the previous interpretations out of which it developed and the diversity of sign-chains according to which it unfolded.

But the genealogical method doesn't trace a single developmental trajectory. It is "the exact reverse of what we might call 'tracing a pedigree,'" (1) as Geuss (1999) notes. According to Geuss, an object with a pedigree has a single origin, is an item of valor, is the source of value, is part of "an unbroken line of succession" from the point of its origin to the present, and through the passage of time at least doesn't lose value and oftentimes gains value (3). In "certain cases the longer the pedigree—the further back it can be traced—the better, the greater the resultant valorization" (ibid.). Therefore "what is older is better, i.e., a more genuine or more intense

source of value, so that getting into contact with it is inherently desirable." (ibid.). Genealogies oppose pedigreed historiographical methodologies. They don't seek to legitimize (nor necessarily delegitimize) a practice or institution, and they don't aim to "have the effect of enhancing the standing of any contemporary item" (ibid.). More importantly, the genealogical method eschews the idea that an item—a practice, custom, etc.—has a single origin. Such things are the result of "a conjunction of a number of *diverse* lines of development" (4). The "further back the genealogy reaches the less likely it is to locate anything that has unequivocal, inherent 'positive' value which it could transmit 'down' the genealogical line to the present" (ibid.).

These observations disclose additional implications about the genealogical method. The objects of genealogical investigation come to have the significance and purposes they do contingently. Nietzsche asserts that the ever-new interpretations of an object that vie against and displace one another don't "even have to be related to one another, but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion." The power struggles that result in reinterpretations don't follow principles or rules that determine an outcome in advance. If the struggle occurs between two disproportionately matched powers, then one can probabilistically predict which will win out, but in most cases such struggles don't occur under such clear-cut circumstances. Moreover, there's nothing external to the features and properties of the combatting powers and the contexts in which they struggle that determine which will triumph. There's no external entity, such as a Hegelian Spirit, a teleological end, or laws of history guiding the succession of interpretations; nor is there anything built into object at its origin that ensures it will follow (as Geuss remarks above) a single line of transmission. Interpretive powers struggle against one another in a purely chance fashion, according to diverse lines of development. Crucial to note is that the superior power that triumphs is itself constituted by an

interpretive framework or hermeneutic structure; in its triumph, it resituates the object within this framework.

But what happens to the superior power, the power that succeeds in reinterpretation? It too changes, though not as drastically as the object it has incorporated. In reinterpreting a custom, the custom's former interpretation is obscured or obliterated, and the custom itself is resituated within the superior power's interpretive framework; but the superior power itself, and larger hermeneutic framework within which it situates the appropriated interpretation, itself undergoes a change. The newly incorporated custom exerts a counterforce that induces a small change within superior power's overall interpretive framework. In fitting the custom into a preexisting constellation, the constellation undergoes a slight shift. Two examples from astronomy serve as helpful analogies.

First, consider a stellar constellation, which is analogous to the successfully reinterpreting power. In absorbing the new object, it's as if the constellation gains a new star—imagine a new star was born within a preexisting constellation. The addition of the single star doesn't change the overall constellation. Leo is a constellation that looks like a lion and the addition of a single start wouldn't change that appearance. But it does change it slightly insofar as there is now one more star within the constellation. The meaning of the incorporated object changes now that it has been fit within a new constellation. Now that it belongs to Leo, the star exists within certain relationships to other stars in the constellation; perhaps the new star's position makes it appear as if Leo has an eye.

Another helpful analogy from astronomy concerns gravitational interaction. Imagine a massive celestial body, like earth. A smaller celestial object, like a large asteroid, happens to get caught in the earth's gravitational pull such that it falls into a steady orbit. While it's right to say

that this new object orbits the earth (rather than that the earth orbits it), this is because the earth is considerably more massive. Yet this new object shifts the center of mass between it and the earth. These two objects are in a sense orbiting around each other. More accurately, they're orbiting around a single point (known as the barycenter) that's determined by the mass of each object. "A barycenter in astronomy is the point between two objects where they balance each other. It is the center of gravity where two or more celestial bodies orbit each other" (Ungar 2010: 8). That is, the earth and the new object orbit a center of mass that's somewhere between the center of the earth and the center of the new orbiting object. Assuming the distance of the celestial object remains the same, the barycenter will be closer to the center of the earth the less massive this new object is, and farther away from the center of the earth the more massive the object is (and if the object is more massive than the earth, the barycenter will be closer to it than the earth). Either way, the earth's center of mass shifts, meaning that the *earth system* as a whole has changed even if only slightly.[166] If you could look at their interaction from a bird's-eye view, you'd see that the earth doesn't remain stationary as the object orbits it, but the earth too wobbles around the center of mass.

This analogy illuminates what happens when a superior power interpretively incorporates or absorbs an object already imbued with an interpretation. Just as the earth system as a whole changes slightly with the addition of a newly orbiting asteroid, so too does a superior power's overall interpretive scheme alter as a result of reinterpreting and incorporating some object. The prevailing power doesn't remain static and unchanged in having reinterpreted the object; by

[166] With respect to most planets and their moons, the center of gravity is located close to the center of the host planet; the barycenter is typically below the planet's surface rather than lying outside it. According to Dr. Sten Odenwald's astronomycafe.net, in the earth-moon system the center of mass between these objects is about 1,707 km below the surface of the earth and 4671 km from the earth's center (1997; last accessed 8/10/15; http://www.astronomycafe.net/qadir/q665.html). Pluto, and its most massive moon Charon, are peculiar in that the center of mass around which they orbit lies far outside the surface of Pluto. Though dense, Pluto is a small dwarf planet, and relative to Pluto Charon is massive, positioning their barycenter 960 km above the surface of Pluto.

fitting it within a new conceptual, connotative and axiological constellation, it's as if the superior power (like the earth in the analogy above) gains a new center of mass. The interpreting power changes in having reinterpreted the object for its purposes, only the interpreting power changes far less than does the reinterpreted object, just as the earth system changes very little in comparison to the celestial object it now has within its orbit (the trajectory of which, in being caught in a steady orbit around the earth, has changed drastically). The prevailing power thereby grows and changes, but it's also influenced by and takes on traces and properties of the reinterpreted, incorporated object. The change in the prevailing power isn't just that it now has another object within its interpretive repertoire. In having been assimilated, the object slightly changes the overall perspective or interpretive framework (at least in human beings, whose interpretive capacities are more robust than those of other animals); it slightly changes one's interpretive comportment to the world and to existence. This slight change may seem negligible, but the more the superior power overcomes interpretive obstacles and recontextualizes them into its own hermeneutic nexus, the more the interpreting power changes. As it successfully reinterprets more and more objects, a superior interpreting power will gradually undergo marked changes and developments.

This point has important philosophical implications since the sorts of interpretive power struggles Nietzsche considers are commonplace, meaning that over time the interpreting power, even it is continually successful in overcoming hermeneutic obstacles through reinterpreting them, necessarily changes over time *as a result* of this process of interpretive absorption. The overall meaning and connotative connections of a superior interpreting power will change even if it successfully overcomes and reinterprets all the objects it encounters; it'd be like adding more and more stars to the Leo constellation to the point that it eventually no longer resembles a lion,

or adding more and more celestial objects to earth's orbit such that the earth system as a whole changes as its center of mass greatly shifts.

We've so far considered how the interpretive process works for Nietzsche. But what exactly are the powers that engage in this interpretive struggle, and what kinds of interpretations does he have in mind in thinking of the will to power as an inherently interpreting force? Recall that the will to power is the will of life, so all living things engage in this interpretive activity.[167] For an unusual example that nevertheless demonstrates the breadth of Nietzsche's views on matter, imagine a mouse. It has eyes it uses to see, legs it uses to run, a mouth and teeth to eat; then an owl swoops in and devours it. The mouse has now been absorbed into a greater whole—namely the owl—and assigned a new purpose and significance. Whatever the mouse was doing before, it's now being transformed into protein and other nutrients for the owl. Its purpose now lies in helping the owl flap its wings, clutch with its claws, turn its head, and hoot. This is an admittedly strange example of how something like a mouse and its organs are reinterpreted, but it follows from the connection Nietzsche sees between living beings and the will to power. "The organic process constantly presupposes interpretation," (WP 643, 1885-6; cf. WP 651), he states.

What it means to live implies being an organism that interprets; it's to be a thing that by nature organizes and assigns meanings to itself, the environment, and things in the environment. Growth and increased power consist of ever-greater accumulations of meanings and broader, more encompassing interpretations and orderings. Nietzsche states, "The spirit's power to appropriate the foreign stands revealed in its inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the manifold, […] it involuntarily emphasizes certain features and lines in what is foreign […] retouching and falsifying the whole to suit itself. Its intent in all this is to incorporate

[167] Nietzsche sometimes speaks of the inorganic world operating in this way too, but due to the complexity such a notion introduces, I focus on the will to power as it operates within the organic world

new ‘experiences,’ to file new things in old files—growth, in a word—or more precisely, the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power” (BGE 230). The interpretive process of appropriation, assimilation, and incorporation is an expression of the will to power. Above we saw that this process doesn’t simply assimilate an object and leave the interpreting force unchanged, but alters the interpreting force itself; though the incorporation of new experiences involves filing new things in old files—of fitting things into preexisting patterns and adapting the unfamiliar to the familiar—it’s possible to acquire new “files” and patterns, and to alter the old “files” or patterns through added content. The interpreting force gains new concepts and expands the concepts it has through classifying more objects and phenomena. The more concepts one has in one’s repertoire the more expansive one’s interpretation will be[168]; and the more these concepts are expanded, the more they’ll take on new connotative and conceptual links, which further expands one’s interpretive assemblage. We thus have a better even if imprecise sense of how the interpreting power is changed: it grows through the expansion of its hermeneutic and meaning-imbuing apparatus.

Another example involving the reinterpretation of a custom rather than the assimilation of one organism into another might help to better illustrate how Nietzsche conceives of the relation between interpretation and the will to power. Take Christmas as an example of a custom that has involved a series of incorporations and reincorporations. Originally a pagan winter solstice yuletide holiday involving religious rituals like animal sacrifice, feasting, dancing, and drinking, the celebratory custom was appropriated by Christianity and imbued with a different purpose and significance cast in terms of the birth of Christ. By the end of the nineteenth century Christmas

[168] Though having more concepts in one’s possession does make for a more expansive interpretation, the nature of these concepts is important. The ascetic ideal furnishes one with concepts like sinfulness, but this concept is pernicious since, from a variety of perspectival vantage points, it fails to refer to anything that is part of the external world. The problem with it is therefore two-fold, but what makes it particularly problematic is that the ostensible phenomenon it refers to is life-destructive rather than that it refers to something non-existent.

started to take on the meanings and rituals we associate with it today, such as gift-giving and the erecting of a Christmas tree—the latter of which is a remnant and "sign" of its pagan origins, as original winter solstice festival involved bringing indoors pieces of arboreal foliage. Thus, Christianity initially viewed this holiday as not only foreign and unfamiliar, but antithetical to its core beliefs. Yet Christianity was able to reinterpret it and situate the originally pagan holiday within its own nexus of meanings, transforming it from a festival expressive of pagan values to a holiday expressive of Christian ones.

In the twenty-first century, with the influence of increasing secularization, the holiday has continued to undergo reinterpretation as it slowly loses its religious meanings and is progressively becoming a day to spend time with one's family, eat lovingly prepared food, exchange gifts, and celebrate generosity and goodwill. Many families in certain areas of the world celebrate it not as a religious holiday but a cultural one, altogether foregoing church attendance and Christmas mass. Even in its secular form though the holiday retains signs of its Christian interpretations: The holiday is still called *Christ*mas and even irreligious people continue to sing and listen to Christmas carols, the lyrical content of which in some cases contains explicit references to Christianity (e.g., "The Little Drummer Boy," "Away in a Manger," among countless others). Christmas serves as an exemplary illustration of a custom that has undergone a series of reinterpretations and that is saturated with a history of different meanings, many of which remain but in obscured form.[169]

[169] There are many other examples of practices that have been reinterpreted or that demonstrate an interpretive power struggle over meaning. "Goodbye" has completely lost its original religious meaning of "God be with ye." As a social courtesy in the English language, people of all kinds of religious (or irreligious) beliefs say "bless you" after a person sneezes even though the practice of blessing someone after sneezing is thought to initially have been a way to appeal to God's benevolence to ensure the health of the sneezer (the explanation that one was to be blessed because in sneezing his soul might escape his body and be seized by the devil has no substantiation whatsoever). Columbus Day is currently the site of an interpretive struggle as some see it as a holiday to mark Columbus's arrival to the Americas, while others see it as expressing an insensitive disregard for Columbus's reprehensible actions toward the Taino people of the West Indies where he landed, which included killing, torture, and enslavement (not

Interpretation and the Need for Meaning

If Nietzsche thinks that living beings by nature have a drive to imbue things with meaning, then how does this relate to any conception of the need for meaning? There's an ostensible problem here: How could meaning not be achieved if we, by nature, are interpreting beings? Why is nihilism a problem at all—how *could* it be if meaning is achieved in this way? The worry here is simply that if: first, the will of life is the will to power; second, "the will to power *interprets* [interpretirt], […] *interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something*" (KGW 2[48]); and third, interpretation is the act of giving something meaning; *then* how could we fail to meet the demands of the need for meaning, especially in as resplendent a manner as Nietzsche paints it? If you're a living being, it seems like through this chain of reasoning, you get for free what's required to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Furthermore, how could meaning be a need or condition of engaging the will to power if the will

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to mention the inadvertent yet catastrophic spread of diseases that the native populations of the Americas had little or no resistance to, and which decimated these populations). This particular interpretive struggle has gained enough traction that there are protests on Columbus Day, many business establishments no longer give their workers the day off, and educational institutions have stopped using the holiday to give students a long weekend. Last, consider the current interpretive struggle centered on the variety of flags (often battle flags) originally flown by the Confederacy during the American Civil War, and controversially still flown outside of government buildings in a handful of states. The flag was initially a symbol for the slave-holding states that tried to secede from the United States. In the one hundred and fifty years since the American Civil War, the flag has been interpreted, reinterpreted, and imbued with a variety of meanings both at different times and by different groups of people. Today, there are countless arguments in favor of and against flying the flag in public spaces (or at least outside government buildings). The following is a sampling of the varying interpretive positions (many of which are neither inconsistent nor mutually exclusive): some argue the flags' historical meaning is sufficient reason to keep the flag flying; some that it represents something distinctive and charming about the politesse and hospitality of the American South; others argue that the flags commemorate fallen Confederate soldiers; some say the flags symbolize the untamable and defiant American spirit; and (among many other interpretations) there are those held largely by minorities and black Americans who see the flags as degrading, insulting, and oblivious to the cruelty, inhumanity, and historical reality of slavery. All of these examples provide instances of power struggles where what's at stake is the meaning of an object, custom, or practice. Note that the process of interpretation and reinterpretation is carried out consciously, intentionally, and reflectively to widely varying degrees. The transition and upheaval of meanings occurs consciously in the cases of Columbus Day and the flying of Confederate flags. In other cases, the transition happens with a lesser degree of or entirely without conscious agencies directing the interpretive forces. This is in part the case with the secularization of Christmas, which occurs instep with a far more extensive shift in the interpretive-cultural landscape, and even more the case with shifts in linguist practices like saying "goodbye" or "bless you."

to power in effect *creates* meaning (if, as Nietzsche says, "All meaning is will to power")? There seems to be a problem of circularity here.

It's worth noting at the outset that even if organisms aim to discharge their strength and to express their will to power, it doesn't follow that they do so successfully, or in as flourishing a manner as they could. Success and failure, or degrees of success and failure are still possible. A carnivore that eats meat by nature may nevertheless fail in its endeavors to acquire it and starve to death; or it might live in an area where there's only just enough meat for it to survive without it living a flourishing existence. Since the ascetic ideal has pathologized our attempts to meet the demands of the need for meaning by pitting the will to power against itself, we face a situation in which the pursuit of meaning misfires.

There are even larger issues at stake here. The will to power is the will of life, which implies that life aims at expressions of power. This makes it seem as if life has a set purpose and is therefore guided by a principled teleological process. If life by nature strives for power, then life seems to have a *telos*, but Nietzsche vehemently opposed teleological accounts. Life seems to have an easily identifiable fundamental tendency to seek power, which in light of Nietzsche's critique of teleology ostensibly indicates an inconsistency at the heart of his views. If life has a *telos* then it would in a relatively straightforward way proceed by stages to gain evermore power or assemblages of power—that's just what growth is. Nietzsche says that the essence of life is the "expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions" (GM II 13).

While pressing, these worries have a response. What counts as power for Nietzsche is extremely nebulous. The essence of life may involve form-giving, but he also says it's "spontaneous" (ibid.). This spontaneity makes it difficult to see that life has power as a kind of determinate *telos* or as an end that in advance guides the way in which life proceeds, changes, or

develops. Nadeem Hussain (2011) in particular responds to this worry by pointing to a passage in which Nietzsche explicitly contrasts his conception of the will to power with teleology. Nietzsche states "[L]ife itself is *will to power*; self preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results. In short, here as everywhere else, let us beware of superfluous teleological principles" (BGE 13).

Hussain offers two ways of interpreting this remark: "One is to interpret him as thinking of the claim that life is the will to power as teleological but not as a *superfluous* teleological claim. The second option, the one I prefer, is to ascribe to him the view that a general tendency to growth, domination, expansion, increase of strength, and so on, is simply too diffuse to count as having a *telos* in the relevant sense" (158). I agree with Hussain's reading of the passage, as well as the interpretive stance he takes: For Nietzsche power is too diffuse a concept for it to serve as a teleological end. What counts as power in one instance might not in another, what counts as "growing more" in one case can count as "degenerating" in another. Part of the issue here is Nietzsche's notion of a type (or form) of life. Members of one type of life (say, classicists) are going to count as power what another form of life does not (say, mountaineers). The devoted and dyed-in-the-wool mountaineer will experience inhibitive suffering if forced to stay in a library and read Homer, while the devoted and dyed-in-the-wool classicist will equally despise having to scale mountainsides.

More to the point, Nietzsche's discussion of the way life grows doesn't lend itself to a teleological understanding. It's not a simple, straight-forward process whereby ever-greater amalgams are formed. Life is not driven by the sorts of internal laws that characterize teleological accounts, such as the idea that an acorn realizes its *telos* by unfolding according to preset internal principles. Nietzsche states: "Like trees we grow—this is hard to understand, as is

all of life—not in one place only but everywhere, not in one direction but equally upward and outward and inward and downward; our energy at work simultaneously in the trunk, branches, and roots; we are no longer free to do only one particular thing, to *be* only one particular thing" (GS 371). Nietzsche's image of the tree growing in all directions drives home how goalless life as a general concept is. As a tree's branches grow upwards toward the sky, so too do its roots grow deeper into the soil. Life in general grows in such a way that, as growth happens in one way, at the same time a kind of opposing growth can be underway. Life's growth is described as happening in different ways and in different places at the same time. There's no determinate endpoint that life grows toward, it's just growing, and in more than one way. Its development and growth is aimed only at continual development and growth.[170] A notebook entry from 1888 states: "Life itself is not a means to something; it is merely a growth-form of power" (KGW 16[12]).

Yet all this leaves unanswered the question of how the need for meaning fits in here. Even if Nietzsche's account isn't teleological, it remains to be seen how the need for meaning is relevant to this account of power and interpretation, and in particular why the need for meaning isn't superfluous or immediately satisfied given the understanding of will to power as a meaning-creating force. There are several crucial clarifications to offer regarding this point.

First, the interpretation that's a basic activity of life as a result of the will to power doesn't produce the sort of meaning that could meet the demands of the need for meaning. It creates only a basic kind of meaning and sense of intelligibility that is a precondition for meeting the demands of the need for meaning. Recall the example of the owl eating the mouse. The mouse is reinterpreted and given a new meaning by being absorbed by the owl. If meaning can

[170] Though pure speculation, it's possible that Nietzsche is playing with the common acorn/oak tree teleology example in this passage precisely by talking about how trees in general don't grow towards something.

be generated through such simple organic processes of consumption, then we should be wary of assuming that the basic activity of life can produce the sort of meaning—a much thicker, substantive conception of meaning—that'll stave off nihilism.

There are two broad levels of interpretation at play in Nietzsche's thinking. There are what I will call "lower order interpretations" on the one hand, and "higher order interpretations" on the other. Their difference is not marked by a hard-and-fast distinction; instead, there is a gradual transition from lower order interpretations to higher order ones; and higher order interpretations presuppose, or are in some sense built upon lower order interpretations. Recall from the last chapter the distinction between cognitive falsification and affective falsification. Cognitive falsification is more fundamental insofar as it has to do with falsifying the world in accordance with fundamental categories we use to carve up and navigate the world. It doesn't generate and sort of robust sense of meaning, which instead comes from affective falsification.

Something similar is operating here in terms of how Nietzsche understands interpretation. Lower order interpretations are expressions of the will to power, but not in any robust form. Animals, as evidenced in the owl example, are capable only of such lower-order interpretations. And just as cognitive falsification permits us to have a basic mapping of the world, so too do our lower order interpretations. Such interpretations are a prerequisite for higher order interpretations.

At this point in his career, Nietzsche continued to hold on to the belief that reality is in a state of constant, radical flux. Lower order interpretations take the unprocessed manifold that bombards our cognitive apparatus and applies fundamental categories to make sense of it all. "Not 'to know'," Nietzsche states, "but to schematize—to impose upon chaos as much regularity and form as our practical needs require" (WP 515). These lower order interpretations serve to provide this kind of schematization and engage in cognitive falsification insofar as they fail to

represent reality as in radical flux. They assemble a schematization and mapping of reality in accordance with our practical needs. As he states elsewhere, "The material of the senses adapted by the understanding, reduced to rough outlines, made similar, subsumed under related matters. Thus, the fuzziness and chaos of sense impressions are, as it were, logicized" (WP 569; cf. TI III 2 & 5).

There are important differences between the later Nietzsche's understanding of falsifying lower order interpretations and the middle-period Nietzsche's views of cognitive falsification. The cognitive falsification of the middle-period concerns the domains of science and cognition. It provides us with the rough outlines needed to navigate the world in accordance with our practical needs; a substantive sense of meaning presupposes cognitive falsification, but it doesn't generate it. It's affective falsification that supplies the resources for interpreting existence and generating meaning by projecting into the world entities that aren't there. In the later Nietzsche, things are different. There's no hard and fast divide between cognitive and affective falsification in the later Nietzsche, for whom scientific inquiry is underwritten by both cognitive and affective falsification. The line between these modes of falsification is blurred such that the distinction starts to fall apart. Much of what fuels the scientific enterprise is a kind of affective falsification. In *The Genealogy*, he states that we ought to think differently about what methods we use to arrive at the objective world, saying: "objectivity […] understood not as 'contemplation without interest' (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability *to control* one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge" (GM III 12). The search for knowledge shouldn't exclude the affects, but is in fact partially driven by them. This complicates the picture of cognitive and affective falsification that came out of Nietzsche's middle-period thinking, since

here we see that affects are playing a positive role in supplying us with different perspectives on the world such that we can get a fuller picture of objectivity and a greater understanding of the world.

Another important difference between cognitive falsification and lower order interpretations is that the latter involve more than just cognitively organizing the world. The owl example demonstrates that the process of ingestion is an interpretive one for Nietzsche. The process whereby our bodies take in forms of sustenance and break them down into various nutrients that fuel our bodies is a form of reinterpretation. A raspberry bush contains a certain "meaning," but that meaning changes when the raspberries are plucked and served as food. When ingested, the plants' berries—the meaning of which was to spread raspberry seeds so as to grow more plants—are reinterpreted. The raspberries themselves are broken down through the digestive process and given a new meaning in terms of the nutrients they provide.

Shelving for now the notions of cognitive and affective falsification as they figured in the last chapter, the important point is that the will to power as an interpreting force can operate at such a low-level manner that the interpretations it generates are simply the kinds of interpretations that allow us to navigate the world. In taking the flux of unprocessed data, the will to power is still overcoming a sort of resistance. It's forcing into a kind of order something that is unordered and chaotic. But the sense of meaning we get out of this is thin, and it fails to provide us with a sense that the world or our existence is significant. We just get the sense that things are loosely intelligible. The intelligibility produced isn't robust, and the meaning generated by lower order interpretations is insufficient for meeting the demands of the need for meaning.

What's crucial for meeting the demands of the need for meaning are higher-order interpretations of existence. These don't just present us with a sort of schematic mapping of the

world, they present us with a picture of the world in which our existence is significant and our existence makes sense to us. Lower order interpretations are outwardly focused, in that they have as their object the external world and their aim is to organize the flux of sense data that comes to us from it. Higher order interpretations are reflexive because they concern not just the world but our existence within it; both the world and our existence within it are imbued with meaning through higher order interpretations. Higher order interpretations that respond to the need for meaning still presuppose the lower-order interpretations, since we wouldn't be able to see our lives as significant if we weren't able to overcome the chaos of sense-data; but higher order interpretations do the heavy lifting when it comes to meeting the demands of the need for meaning. They offer a more robust picture of reality and our existence, in the sense that they create amalgams of power that go beyond those that make sense of the flux of unprocessed sense-data.

But how do we arrive at such higher-order, full-blooded interpretations of the world? Nietzsche states, "the feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept 'aim,' the concept 'unity,' or the concept 'truth.' Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking. […] Briefly: the categories 'aim,' 'unity,' 'being,' which we used to project some value into the world—we *pull out* again; so the world looks valueless" (WP 12). Not only does this passage shed light on why the world looks valueless to us, it shows that it has that appearance because we've been projecting the wrong sorts of concepts into the world.

Values are an essential ingredient of higher-order interpretations, in part because Nietzsche sees values themselves *as* interpretations of the world. They figure into these higher order interpretations, and more than just making sense of the raw stuff of sense-data, they help to

make salient certain features of the world that *we care about*. Higher order interpretations of the world are structured by values—values offer us the tools we can use to interpret the world in a way that's more sophisticated than what our lower-order interpretations allow for. Values, Nietzsche states, are things we have "falsely projected into the essence of things" (WP 12). By claiming that we have *falsely* projected values into reality, Nietzsche means that values are not externally existent entities (they do not exist in the world before we "place" them there). Higher-order interpretations help to imbue the world with meaning *through* values; we project them into the world, and this in turn gives us objects, goals, and states of affairs that matter to us and give us things to esteem. And when we have such objects and goals, our will to power can be effectively engaged.

The problem with the ascetic ideal is that it has given us values that when projected into the world lack normative force. We no longer feel the pull of the ascetic ideal's values. "Now we discover needs implanted by centuries of moral interpretation—needs that now appear to us as needs for untruth; on the other hand, the value for which we endure life seems to hinge on these needs. This antagonism—*not* to esteem what we know, and not to be *allowed* any longer to esteem the lies we should like to tell ourselves—results in a process of dissolution" (WP 5). So the will to power operates by forming interpretations of the world, and imbuing the world with meaning. The problem is that having been under the sway of the ascetic ideal for so long, its interpretation has implanted needs within us. These needs mislead us—they cause us to project values into the world that fail to imbue the right sorts of goals with meaning, thereby leaving the will to power unengaged. Nietzsche states in a notebook entry from 1887, "I understand by 'morality' a system of evaluations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life" (WP 256). The values that are projected into reality are expressions of those conditions under

which one can best express their will to power—they're the conditions that allow for a creature's flourishing. The problem is that the values we've inherited and that have been habituated within us over the centuries no longer coincide with those conditions that permit the maximal discharge of strength.

The ascetic ideal has colonized the will to power by hijacking its capacity to generate higher-order interpretations of the world. It uses the will to power to organize the world through its particular values, to make it appear meaningful to us. But these values simply fail to imbue the ideal's goals with value, which has the effect of failing to engage the will to power. The result is nihilism. It's for this reason—that we lack the right sort of evaluative resources—that our higher-order interpretations of the world still fail to satisfy the need for meaning. So the fact that the will to power still interprets the world through the projection of values does not imply that the demands of the need for meaning will be met.

A Genealogy of the Need for Meaning

It's worth asking why human beings are the sorts of creatures who have a need for meaning and how it came about that they required higher-order interpretations to meet the demands of this need. Having an account of the need's development will better our understanding of it and how Nietzsche thinks we can rectify its pathologization.

We require higher-order interpretations in part because we're self-conscious creatures. We have an ability that animals lack. Human beings can engage in introspection and ask about the worthwhileness of their activities. Moreover, when we suffer we reflect and raise the question of *why* we suffer; we raise this question with respect to particular occasions of suffering and why as well as why we suffer at all. Less complex forms of life aren't capable of this

introspection, and so have no need for higher-order interpretations to explain suffering; and suffering aside, they don't need higher-order interpretations to engage the will to power, and so, don't require them to flourish. They don't need to see their existence or their travails as significant and intelligible, if only because (most animals at least) lack the cognitive capacity to raise such questions. All these animals require are the kinds of lower-order interpretations that allow them perceive the world so that their natural needs may be met. As far more complex creatures capable of self-reflection, human beings require more if they want to lead flourishing lives. And one of the additional requirements involves meeting the demands of the need for meaning.

Yet the need for meaning has not remained static throughout human history. The kinds of higher-order interpretations capable of meeting its demands have not only developed throughout history, but have become more complex. The need for meaning itself is something that human beings seem to have become conscious of, at least on a large-scale, as an effect of the process of *socialization*. The story Nietzsche tells in *The Genealogy* suggests that human beings started off as brutish creatures who either lacked a need for meaning, or satisfied it in the most doltish of ways—in activities like warfare, or in exercising cruelty for the sake of exercising cruelty. But something dramatic happened when human beings started to form stable communities. When entering into a community, these early humans reaped all the benefits that communal life supplies, like strength in numbers (against, say, aggressive neighboring communities). Once the division of labor was under way, it allowed them to procure goods that they themselves didn't make. But such beings had to comply with the rules of the community. And this forced them to take control of their more animalistic drives. Failure to do so would result in swift and agonizing forms of suffering. "Man, suffering from himself in some way or other," Nietzsche says, was

"like an animal shut up in a cage, uncertain why, or wherefore, thirsting for reasons" (GM III 20). Within the confines of society, human beings had to *repress* many of the drives that, prior to communal existence, they could give free reign to.

For Nietzsche, processes of socialization explain the origin of "bad conscience"—the feeling a person has when he feels he's done something *wrong* (the phenomenon of the bite of conscience). This feeling isn't generated externally, by someone or something harming you; it's generated internally through a split that occurs in a person's psychology, brought about through socialization. Because aggressive and otherwise socially unacceptable desires had be curbed once human beings entered into societies, they had to engage in a form of self-policing, self-monitoring, and self-discipline. Bad conscience was generated when the aggressive and cruel instincts, which one could express outside the walls of society, were *turned inward*. Instead of venting aggression on someone else—which within a stable community, would incur punishment—they turned their drives for cruelty and aggression against themselves. Human beings found themselves "plunge[d] into new surroundings and conditions of existence" (GM II 16). When someone committed a wrong on the basis of their aggressive or anti-social instincts, these drives found expression within and against the agent himself. Aggression and cruelty were expressed when one part of the agent's mind reprimanded itself for some wrong-doing. A split occurred within agency itself, and this split permitted a larger degree of self-reflection.

For this reason, the bad conscience can serve a positive and constructive role because it is activated in cases beyond just the failure to act in accord with social mores. The bad conscience is active when I fail to live up to my own goals and self-given obligations. So long as it doesn't become debilitating, it has the potential to aid human beings in achieving their goals. This same split is also what allows for one to take a step back from oneself—from one's desires,

inclinations, and the like—and assess them on the basis of the effects that will be incurred if one acts in one way rather than another. The phenomenon of guilt and guilt suffering is when the bad conscience becomes perniciously cruel and vicious toward the subject, going overboard in venting aggression. It engages in an extreme form of self-deprecation and laceration that forces the agent to see himself as utterly rotten.

So the need for meaning became pertinent once processes of socialization were sufficiently underway. In early societies, the warrior nobles could still rely on the pre-social methods for satisfying the need for meaning. They could leave the confines of society to engage the will to power in the most animalistic ways: "once they go outside, where the strange, the stranger is found, they are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey. There they savor a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society, they go back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey" (GM I 11). While within the confines of society, the warrior caste had to comport themselves accordingly. They were "held in check *inter pares* by custom, respect, usage, [and] gratitude," and their relations with others exhibited "consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship" (ibid.). But the ability to leave the confines of society and exercise the will to power through acts of aggression was available only to the warriors, and even then only after enduring periods of peace. During long periods of peace, the knightly nobles would have experienced inhibitive suffering in having to curb their aggressive drives—the predominate way they had to engage their will to power—and so, feel the need for some sense of meaning that they couldn't satisfy through activities like warfare.

Recall that in such ancient communities, the noble class consisted of two types or forms of life: the warrior type and the priestly type. Initially, there was no conflict between these types of life; both belong to the nobility. But the priestly type was particularly adept at generating new means of meeting the demands of the need for meaning, and in creating the sorts of higher-order interpretations that would meet these demands. Furthermore, they did so while also legitimizing and supporting the knightly class's lifestyle. Crucial to note here is the role that the priestly class in such ancient communities played. In tribal communities, Nietzsche tells us "the living generation always recognized a juridical duty toward earlier generations, and especially toward the earliest, which founded the tribe" (GM II 19). Living generations within a tribal community felt that they owed a debt to the tribe's previous generations. The priests developed as a class in part as a result of fear, experienced even by the knightly nobles, toward the powerful ancestors to whom a debt was owed. One pays off this debt with things like sacrifices, religious rituals, and perhaps even certain acts of war. But as the tribe grows and becomes more successful, there is also an increase in the sense of debt owed to the tribe's earlier generations. Any victories or positive developments in the tribe are interpreted as having been achieved with the help or intervention of their ancestors; at the very least, such positive developments are experienced as possible only given the fecund conditions these ancestors created.

Yet at a certain point in the history of a tribe, the ancestors cease being mere ancestors: They become deified, and are seen as gods who look down on the tribe, and actively interfere with the tribe's success or failure. This brings with it an increased sense of debt. The genius of Christianity, according to Nietzsche, is that it takes this logic, but turns it on its head: Formerly, the members of a community paid back their gods, and showed them gratitude through sacrifices. Christianity, on the other hand, ensures that human beings will feel a crushing sense of guilt not

just because their God is all-powerful and all knowing, but because he's so benevolent that He sacrificed his Son *for us*. This elevates bad-conscience—based as it initially was on the concept of debt—to the level of full-blown guilt, since God's action incurs a debt that we can never pay back or effectively live up to. This is why Nietzsche's understanding of guilt isn't just the feeling that one has erred, or acted in a way contrary to their (or others') values; it's a relentless and insatiable self-directed cruelty that goes beyond the bite of conscience to extreme self-laceration and self-deprecation in that one sees oneself as impure and sinful to the core.

Even prior to the advent of Christianity, we can see why the priests would have been in an exalted social position. The warrior caste is occupied with defending the community and attacking others (perhaps to glorify and win the favor of their ancestor-gods) and expanding the territory of the tribe. They might have acted on martial norms not shared by the priest, but the priests' religious norms helped the warriors achieve their ends. The success of the warriors is dependent, in part, on whether one's ancestors, or ancestor-gods, are looking down upon them favorably. And it was the *priests'* duty to commune with these god-like figures, and do what they could to keep these divinities helping the community thrive. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that according to *The Genealogy*, the priests in such ancient cultures had high social standing and belonged to the nobility.

The priestly class also shows us another means for meeting the demands of the need for meaning, means that don't rely on martial norms. The priests introduced other ways to meet the demands of the need for meaning, such as maintaining higher-order interpretations that centered on their ancestor-gods. The priests were responsible for a host of religious rites and rituals (ascetic or not) that supplied goals that could effectively engage the will to power. This is why Nietzsche tells us that when *new* types or forms of life arise, they often have to do so under the

guise of already established types, lest they appear as a threat to the community. Recall that the priest, in order to instill fear in others (in particular in the knightly nobles), had "to evolve a virtually new type of preying animal out of himself, or at least he will need to *represent* it—a new kind of animal ferocity in which the polar bear, the supple, cold, and patient tiger, and not least the fox seem to be joined in a unity at once enticing and terrifying. If need compels him he will walk among the other beasts of prey with bearlike seriousness and feigned superiority, venerable, prudent, and cold, as the herald and mouthpiece of more mysterious powers" (GM III 15; cf. GM III 10-12, 14). The priest presented himself as a terrifying and enticing figure, as one who held mysterious powers stemming from his capacity to commune with the ancestor gods (who, in turn, the knightly nobles feared and respected).

It was with processes of early socialization that the need for meaning became felt on a large scale for the first time. Moreover, these processes of socialization introduced within early human beings a split in their agency. The advent of the bad conscience increased their self-reflective capacities. This in turn could only have worked to make the need for meaning felt more acutely, generating a greater need for higher-order interpretations. These interpretations became increasingly complex. They involved larger amalgams of power as society developed. Even after the priestly class lost its noble status, this did all the more to fuel the higher-order interpretations. In fact, this greatly expanded their complexity, since the fall of the priestly class as a noble class went hand-in-hand with the slave-revolt in morality. Now the priests could develop interpretations that appealed to the disenfranchised slaves. Being treated as mere tools of the nobles, the slaves would have yearned for a sense of meaning, and so were ready to accept the priests' interpretations. This whole process culminated not just in a very sophisticated

interpretive apparatus that eventually generated the ascetic ideal; it marked the first grand-scale revaluation of values.

Now, two-thousand years later, Nietzsche thinks another revaluation of values is needed. The values we have don't supply us with goals that we think are achievable or that are worthwhile; and worse yet, since these goals derive their ostensible value from the ascetic ideal, the more we strive to realize them, the more we're effectively realizing nothingness. If the ascetic ideal staved off nihilism in the past, now it seems to be throwing us headlong into nihilism. And part of Nietzsche's project of revaluation is to develop a new, and in some sense more comprehensive, higher-order interpretation of existence. And we shouldn't be discouraged merely because meaninglessness seems to be the order of the day: "The 'meaninglessness of what happens': belief in this results from an insight into the falseness of previous interpretations, a generalization of weakness and despondency—it is not a *necessary* belief. Man's lack of modesty—when he doesn't see meaning, he *denies* it exists" (KGW 2[109]). It's only from a lack of *modesty*, Nietzsche claims, that we're bound to accept meaninglessness as the order of the day. Previous interpretations have been untenable, but from that it doesn't follow that *all* interpretations are bound to be untenable.

Nietzsche makes an important statement concerning one of his fundamental philosophical aims in an 1885-6 notebook entry:

> That the *world's value* lies in our interpretation (—that somewhere else other interpretations than merely human ones may be possible—); that previous interpretations have been perspectival appraisals by means of which we preserve ourselves in life, that is, in the will to power and the growth of power; that every *heightening of man* brings with it an overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every increase in strength and expansion of power opens up new perspectives and demands a belief in new horizons—this runs through my writings. (KGW 2[108])

The value of the world—the meaning we give it—comes from how we interpret it. The interpretations we've given the world have worked not only to *preserve* ourselves in life, but

they've created precisely those conditions necessary for engaging the will to power, and in allowing for the *growth* of power. The interpretation Nietzsche now hopes to offer won't only better secure the conditions under which we can flourish through expressing the will to power, this new interpretation will mark an overcoming of *narrower* interpretations. The interpretation Nietzsche hopes to use to supplant the ascetic ideal will be one that is more comprehensive—or comprehensive in a different way—insofar as it will open up new perspectives and horizons that formerly couldn't have been imagined. And all this, Nietzsche states, is a core idea running throughout his writings.

The Eternal Recurrence: Background

I've suggested that Nietzsche hopes to supplant the ascetic ideal with a new ideal—and not just any ideal, but an ideal that has the same general structure as an absolute ideal. This new ideal is the eternal recurrence. In a notebook entry from the autumn of 1887, Nietzsche states, "'How much "truth" can a spirit endure and dare?'—a question of its strength […] a Dionysian *saying Yes* to the world as it is, to the point of wishing for its absolute recurrence and eternity: which would mean a new ideal of philosophy and sensibility" (10[3]). But how is it that the eternal recurrence could serve the role of an absolute ideal, and what would it mean for the doctrine of the eternal recurrence to be an *absolute* ideal in the first place?

Before turning to these questions, it's necessary to get a firmer sense of what the eternal recurrence is. Nietzsche took the eternal recurrence to be a cosmological doctrine about how the universe unfolds. He thought that there were three plausible cosmological doctrines: "One is that change goes on forever without repeating itself. Another is that a state is reached after which no change occurs. The third possibility is that the universe traverses a cycle which is repeated

infinitely many times" (Small, 2006: 196). Nietzsche's theory of the eternal recurrence is this third possibility.

His reasons for rejecting the first two cosmological theories are woefully disappointing, as is his argument for the eternal recurrence. The first doctrine states that the universe exists eternally, but undergoes no repetition—instead, it's simply "an endless sequence of new states of affairs" (ibid.). Nietzsche rejects this on the grounds that he thinks the matter and energy in the universe are finite, and that such a conception of cosmology would assume an infinite amount of energy and matter. If energy and matter were finite, repetition would necessarily follow, according to Nietzsche (note that this assumption is false); this particular cosmological account is false because it denies the finitude of matter and energy.

The second cosmological theory is more in line with those that are popular today: That there is an end-state to the universe. Again, Nietzsche offers a puzzlingly lackluster counter-argument, claiming that if we assume that the universe has an end-state, it must already have been reached. As he states, "If the world had a goal, it must have been reached: if there were some (unintended) end state for it, this must also have been reached. If it were in anyway capable of pausing and becoming fixed, if there were in its course just one moment of 'being' in the strict sense, there could be no more becoming, and therefore no more thinking of or observing a becoming, either" (qtd. Small: 2006 196). So, the argument goes, if the universe had a final state, it would have been reached, foreclosing the possibility of becoming; but the fact that there are observers like us who witness change and becoming implies that this cosmological theory must be false. Nietzsche's counter-argument is flawed in a number of ways, but the most obvious flaw is that we have no reason to assume that if the universe had an endpoint we'd already have reached it.

This leaves the third possibility. Nietzsche believes that if there is a finite amount of energy and matter, but an infinite amount of time, then there can only be a certain finite number of combinations of such energy and matter, implying that repetition will necessarily occur. The repetition in question here is not repetition of *similar* state of affairs, but repetitions of *identical cycles*. So imagine the following scenario: Let's say that up until this *very* moment, the cycles have been completely identical; only now, under one cycle, I put on blue shoes, and in another cycle, I put on black shoes. This seemingly insignificant act implies that these repetitions are not identical and so not a recurrence of the same cycle. Repetitions need to be identical down to the most minute details. Note that we *have no memories* of previous cycles. Each cycle is in this sense hermetically sealed from the rest. Having memories would suggest at the least the possibility of changing the course of a particular cycle, which would thereby render it a different cycle. So let's imagine that I remember that on the previous cycle, I chose to eat a sandwich not knowing it would give me food poisoning. Remembering this in another cycle, I opt for soup instead. This altered decision would undo the identity of the cycles. Furthermore, if I had memories of previous cycles, I could have memories of future events since I've already lived through them; but Nietzsche never says anything to this effect. One might think that we still retain memories of old cycles, but that these memories don't change the outcomes of our actions, but it's hard to imagine *how* we could have memories of previous cycles. Moreover, merely having memories in one cycle that I lacked in a previous one would make the present cycle different since I'd have a different mental or brain state. So my life in the cycle I'm currently living through contains memories only from this cycle.

Nietzsche's reasoning in favor of the eternal recurrence is flawed, and it's not my aim to defend it as a cosmological doctrine because his conclusion (the universe will go through

identical cycles that eternally recur) doesn't follow from the premises: First, that there is an infinite amount of time; and second, that there is a finite amount of matter and energy. Georg Simmel provided what is perhaps the most famous counter-argument. Imagine that there are three stationary cylinders of the same radius on a single spoke. There is a mark at the bottom-most point of each cylinder such that at this moment in time the three marks are all aligned with one another. All at the same time, they start to rotate at the following rates: the first cylinder rotates at some rate X; the second cylinder rotates at some rate 2X; the third cylinder rotates at a rate of X/π. Given these conditions, the marks drawn on the bottoms of the three cylinders will *never* align again, even given an infinite amount of time.

There's another puzzling feature to Nietzsche's thoughts on these cosmological accounts. He seemed to think that of these three cosmological doctrines, the eternal recurrence is the hardest to affirm. It's understandable why he wants to affirm the doctrine that's most difficult to accept, since if that account can be affirmed, it implies that the other two are affirmable. It's hard to know what standards we could use in terms of these three cosmologies to determine the difficulty of affirmability, but below we will consider Nietzsche's thoughts on this. The difficulty here is that that it's not obvious why the eternal recurrence is harder to affirm than the cosmological theory that holds that there will be an end to the universe (the second of the cosmological theories introduced above). This theory is more or less the one accepted today, according to which the objects of the universe will slowly tear themselves asunder and dissipate into a soup of subatomic particles. Under this view, one day there will be no human life, nor even the possibility of sentient existence, for the remainder of time. Why should we think this account is easier to affirm than the eternal recurrence? Under the eternal recurrence, at least things like human culture and sentient life are granted existence again and again; but under

science's currently reigning cosmological theory, not only will all human culture and human life one day be erased for good, but so too will the *very possibility* of any life for the remainder of all time. Nietzsche gives no convincing argument for why the currently favored cosmological theory is easier to affirm than is the eternal recurrence.

There are some reasons he may have thought the eternal recurrence was the most difficult to affirm. If the universe does end, then there will be an end to suffering. The eternal recurrence holds that suffering will never end since every instance of it will recur again and again. And unlike the cosmological theory that holds that the universe will, rather than ending, go on forever with constant change and becoming, the eternal recurrence denies there's any hope for increasing progress. In a universe that goes on forever, it's at least in principle possible (even if practically unlikely) that intelligent life progress and asymptotically reach some maximal state (whatever that would consist of). The eternal recurrence also denies this since whatever progress is attained at the end of a cycle, it will be obliterated and everything will start anew. Involved in the eternal recurrence cosmology is a sense of futility. Regardless of the great and grand things that are accomplished and the suffering human beings have endured, all will be wiped out. What's worse, everything will start anew and all over again, which only ostensibly adds to the sense of futility. Think of engaging on a time-consuming project, but immediately before you complete it, it gets destroyed and you have to start all over again. You never get the satisfaction of having completed it. The eternal recurrence involves this kind of futility. But the upshot of this isn't that we should accept such futility and resign ourselves. Nietzsche's point is that it doesn't matter that one day everything we care about and everything that mattes to us will be destroyed as the cosmological cycle starts over again. Meaning is achievable regardless of these cycles; meeting the demands of the need for meaning doesn't require that we envision a state of final completion

or an endpoint that is asymptotically approached even if never reached. Endless repetition of the same isn't inconsistent with meaning or affirmation.[171]

One way to understand the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is to set aside its cosmological understanding altogether, which avoids the falsity of Nietzsche's argument for it as a claim about how the universe unfolds. An alternative reading, offered by commentators like Maudemarie Clark, is to see the doctrine of the eternal recurrence as a test for the affirmability of one's existence. The test poses the following question: "Would you live your life over again an infinite number of times, exactly as you lived it down to the smallest detail?" If you answer yes, the idea is that you have affirmed your existence, whereas answering no implies you have not. There are issues in how to understand this test. It can't operate in terms of tallying up all the pain and suffering I've endured alongside all the pleasure and joy I've experienced, assigning negative values to the former and positive values to the latter; if the sum is positive, then (so it might go) I've lived what in principle is an affirmable life, whether I choose to affirm it or not. Nietzsche's thoughts on affirmation, however, can't amount to the good in life outweighing the bad. This makes the account utilitarian in a way Nietzsche would resist. More must be at stake in the theory than a reckoning of good and bad experiences. For Nietzsche life might be affirmable even if after the tallying up process the pain and suffering outweighs the pleasure and joy. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence amounts to far more than being a practical test to determine

[171] The futility implied by the eternal recurrence, along with the idea that suffering will never cease given the eternally repeating cycles of the cosmos, might be why Nietzsche thinks that of the three cosmological doctrines he considers, the eternal recurrence is the most difficult to affirm. But it's not as if, when the cycle restarts, I'll *know* that I'm starting all over again, since I have no memory of the previous cycle. This means I won't experience the futility of starting all over again, unlike in the case of a life-long time consuming project that, right before completion, gets destroyed. In this latter case, I feel dread at the wasted time and insofar as I don't feel defeated, I will feel discouraged and frustrated about having to start all over again. Sisyphus suffers because he pushes the bolder up the hill, and *right* before he's about to finally place it, it rolls back down; and he repeats this for eternity. But he experiences the setback and disappointment for eternity with the memory of his failures. We don't since we have no recollection of previous cycles, so it remains difficult to understand what makes this cosmological doctrine the most difficult to affirm, not to mention (as already noted,) the question of determining what criteria to use to assess difficulty in terms of affirmability, at least given the three cosmological doctrines Nietzsche considers.

whether one's life is affirmable. It's difficult to understand why Nietzsche would develop so complicated and unintuitive a doctrine if that was its upshot.

What the practical test reading of the eternal recurrence misses is the important role it plays on the project of revaluation. Erecting the eternal recurrence as an absolute ideal would amount to a revaluation in a variety of ways, but the most obvious of which is, as an absolute ideal, it would displace the ascetic ideal. Like the latter, the eternal recurrence ideal would be a value-creating force, and values it generates would provide a comprehensive interpretation of existence allowing us to meet the demands of the need for meaning. Unlike the ascetic ideal, its comprehensive interpretation wouldn't force us to see all other interpretations, values and worthwhile activities as serving or expressing a *single* goal. The eternal recurrence ideal can be expressed by a variety of different, sometimes even conflicting types of life, meaning that under this ideal different types of life can flourish. This isn't the case with the ascetic ideal wherein only the ascetic type is capable of living a meaningful and thriving existence.

One feature of the ascetic ideal that the eternal recurrence retains, however, is that meaning is not a purely subjective affair. In displacing the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche is not advancing the view that all it takes for existence to be meaningful is that one subjectively believes or feels it to be so. There are constraints on what can count as a meaningful and affirmable life based on the value-creating possibilities of the eternal recurrence as an absolute ideal.

Suffering and the Eternal Recurrence as an Absolute Ideal: Meaning Without Purpose

A crucial difference between the ascetic ideal and what I'm going to call the eternal recurrence ideal is that the latter rejects the notion of a transcendent realm. The ascetic ideal

presupposes a transcendent realm, like heaven: We strive to overcome the presuppositions of earthly existence in an attempt to appear divine and in the hopes that we one day arrive in heaven, where our existence will be characterized by painlessness and eternal bliss. Even under the guise of science, which doesn't concern itself with a heavenly realm, those under the ascetic ideal still aim to appear too good for this world in that they unconditionally seek truth, the only object of absolute value. The value of truth isn't rooted in the earthly realm we inhabit and the search for truth is tenuously connected to questions of meaning.

An interesting implication of the ascetic ideal is that it not only has its adherents struggle against the basic presuppositions of life; it actually has them strive against the *fact* of suffering itself. Suffering is seen as something that's an essential part of the very worldly realm that is to be overcome, part and parcel of our earthly lot. We suffer in part because this realm is characterized by changeability and becoming, rather than being. Adherents to the ascetic ideal struggle to overcome suffering because they're striving to overcome the will to power, and suffering is a necessary ingredient of the will to power; striving to overcome the will to power implies striving to overcome suffering. So the very phenomenon of suffering is interpreted as belonging to this worldly realm that is to be overcome.

The eternal recurrence ideal forces us to accept the fact of becoming and the necessity of suffering. Since it doesn't posit a transcendent realm, all we're left with is the world we inhabit—it's just that this world repeats itself eternally, emphasizing the worldly in its endless recurrence. The eternal recurrence ideal forces us to come to terms with the fact of our suffering, rather than engaging in the narcotizing methods employed by the ascetic priests. For the ascetic priests, heaven is posited as a *telos*, as a final, painless, static state of affairs characterized by being rather than becoming. The eternal recurrence offers a wholesale rejection of teleology on

this grand, cosmological scale. The universe isn't progressing toward an end state since everything happens over and over again without end. If we could one day arrive at something that looked like a human or cosmological *telos,* it will one day be destroyed as a new cycle of the eternal recurrence begins things anew.

The eternality involved in the eternal recurrence is of a particular kind. The ascetic ideal valorizes eternality in terms of that which is forever unchanging and static, such as heavenly bliss. The eternal recurrence valorizes eternal change and becoming. While it might be the case that I'll experience a particularly exultant moment of life eternally over and over again, I'll also experience the closure of this moment eternally over and over again. What's valorized is not a state of affairs, but the endless process whereby states of affairs go on giving way to others. Given that the earthly realm is characterized by change and transience, the eternal recurrence valorizes this real state of affairs rather than the (fictional) perfect and blissful stability glorified by the ascetic ideal. In its valorization of becoming, the eternal recurrence eschews the notion of a teleological end state.

The anti-teleological aspect of the eternal recurrence implies that our suffering has no grand or over-arching *purpose*. The ascetic ideal gave all suffering a purpose. To requote GM III 13: "The ascetic ideal has a *goal*—a goal so universal that all other interests of human existence, measured by it, appear petty and narrow. It stubbornly interprets epochs, peoples, humans in relation to this one goal" (GM III 13). Nietzsche doesn't mention suffering here, but given that suffering is part of human existence and the ascetic ideal intransigently interprets all aspects of human existence, suffering is included in its interpretive scope. The ascetic ideal interprets all suffering in terms of guilt suffering, and this guilt suffering is yoked to the ascetic ideal's goal of

overcoming the fundamental presuppositions of life. So all suffering is given a *purpose* in terms of the ascetic ideal's overarching goal.

But the eternal recurrence doesn't supply human existence with a purpose. This doesn't mean that all suffering is utterly purposeless—the mountaineer's suffering while scaling cliff-sides serves the purpose of achieving her goal of ascending the mountain. But her suffering isn't given a purpose in terms of the ascetic ideal's grand goal. However, this might be seen as a weakness of the eternal recurrence ideal. It seems we've lost something in giving up the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal could at least give all inhibitive suffering meaning. When the mountaineer gets into a car crash and can't climb the mountain—thereby preventing her from engaging in the activity that allows her to engage her will to power—she experiences inhibitive suffering. And if the accident is bad enough such that she'll never be to climb mountains again, she'll likely come to experience existential suffering. These are all modes of suffering the ascetic ideal could interpret and alleviate, yet the eternal recurrence leaves them untouched. This seems like a serious of the eternal recurrence ideal since it seems to leave some forms of suffering (in particular existential suffering) utterly meaningless and therefore potentially life-destructive. If the ascetic ideal resulted in life-destructive suffering by ensuring that all suffering eventually became inhibitive suffering, the eternal recurrence ideal doesn't seem any better off since it offers no alternative

The Eternal Recurrence and the Interpretation of Suffering

Part of the appeal of the eternal recurrence ideal for Nietzsche is that it acknowledges we undergo senseless, purposeless suffering. Nietzsche doesn't seek an account that imbues all suffering with a purpose since it's just a fact about our existence and the world that our suffering

doesn't come pre-packaged with a purpose. Suffering is imbued with a purpose through actively advancing an interpretation. The ascetic ideal constrains our ability to creatively or self-consciously give suffering a purpose since the interpretation is already in place; we simply passively receive an interpretation that's already there for the taking. Under the ascetic ideal, everything (including our suffering) is already interpreted according to the same scheme. The resources it gave us made it quite easy to simply pass off things like inhibitive suffering as ultimately purposive, but this just denies an ugly aspect of existence that Nietzsche thinks we need to come to grips with. So though it might seem that we're at a serious loss in relinquishing the ascetic ideal's all-compassing interpretive power, Nietzsche takes this as an advantage. We can still imbue existence and the world with significance and intelligibility, and our lives and sufferings with purpose; but we sometimes have to face the difficult fact that not all of our suffering is purposeful and that things happen that are unintelligible or negatively significant. This is one of the aspects that makes existence hard to affirm, and one of the reasons why existence under the eternal recurrence ideal is hard to affirm.

In an entry from an 1886-7 notebook entry, Nietzsche discusses the progression he expects will result from the death of God and the gradual collapse of the "Christian moral hypothesis." After the death of God, he tells us that we are now able to "concede much nonsense and contingency" (KGW 5[71] 3), but that we still have a long way to go toward accepting this in a way that doesn't lead to nihilistic resignation. As the implications of God's death play out, he asks: "In this process, who will prove to be the *strongest*? The most moderate, those who have no *need* of extreme articles of faith, who not only concede but even love a good deal of contingency and nonsense" (ibid. 15). Presently, we can concede a degree of contingency and that things are purposeless, but in the future the people who will fare best, and the type Nietzsche

wants to cultivate are those who can "love a good deal of contingency and nonsense." While Nietzsche doesn't mention purposelessness here, it's part of what's involved in not just conceding, but loving contingency and nonsense—that the world doesn't unfold according to some purpose, and that *not* all of our suffering is purposive. Some of our suffering is accidental and nonsensical. Embracing the eternal recurrence ideal helps to further that end since it takes away any resources for imbuing all suffering with an overarching purpose.

More than just helping us to acknowledge the unpleasant aspects of existence, the eternal recurrence ideal provides interpretive resources available for those who have undergone purposeless suffering. These resources involve modulating or adapting the significance of our suffering. Nehamas offers an interpretation of the eternal recurrence that focuses on its implications on personal identity rather than a view about human existence or the cosmos at large. According to Nehamas, while we can't retroactively change any event that has happened to me, we *can* change its significance and the role it plays in our lives.[172]

Let's imagine the mountaineer again. Having suffered a debilitating leg-injury, her prospects as a mountaineer are now foreclosed for the remainder of her life. But she may use this as an opportunity to explore other avenues of here interests—other things that she takes to be valuable—and try to use this to find another life-defining activity that permits her to exercise the will to power. Returning to the example of her discovery of poetry, she ends up devoting her time to writing and reading poetry, and attending poetry workshops and readings. She has reinterpreted the significance of her unfortunate accident. It has a different meaning for her—initially, it was so negatively significant that she thought it effectively deprived her life of meaning and pursuing valuable activities. Reinterpreting the event's significance isn't to say that it became *insignificant* to her, but while formerly it appeared to her that her life was doomed to

[172] See Nehamas (1985: 141-60)

meaninglessness she's now found a new outlet for the will to power. Furthermore, despite the love of poetry she's cultivated, she needn't say that the car-accident had some purpose. She could retain the belief that it was a regrettable and traumatic accident, and she can do so without believing that there was some force guiding her life that caused these events so that she could discover poetry. It's just that it is now no longer the life-denying event that it formerly was; she's found a new way to imbue her existence with significance. In this way, eternal recurrence can helps us to look at the purposelessness of the cosmos without depriving us of the resources we can employ to sustain value and meet the demands of the need for meaning.

Purging the Need for Meaning

There is an interpretive possibility that hasn't been considered. In trying to overthrow the ascetic ideal, why not assume that Nietzsche's looking to purge or curb the need for meaning? Because this need was lacking in the early stages of humanity (or was at least extremely underdeveloped) it seems possible to rid ourselves of this need or at least curb the motivation to meet its demands. Given the complications this need introduces into human existence, it might be preferable to check the force of this need as much as possible. Two notable interpreters have taken this to be Nietzsche's solution: Arthur Danto and Brian Leiter.

Danto (1994) claims that the upshot of *The Genealogy* is that we ought to stop trying to imbue suffering with meaning. What we're left with at the conclusion of *The Genealogy* is that "[s]uffering really is meaningless, there is no point to it, and the amount of suffering caused by giving it a meaning chills the blood to contemplate" (45). Danto's interpretation criticizes second-order suffering, and suggests that the way to rid ourselves of it is to cease attempting to give our first-order suffering meaning. Danto claims we ought to "stultify the instinct for

significance" through a "reeducation and redirection" (48) of the will. The need for meaning is something we'd be better off without and we ought to do what we can to extinguish it. Note that Danto understands meaning here in terms of *significance* and not purpose, though I take it he'd be equally critical of trying to give a purpose to our suffering.

Leiter (2002) offers a similar conclusion, which he claims stems from taking the eternal recurrence as an absolute ideal. Embracing the eternal recurrence as an ideal is for us to accept that existence is meaningless:

> The eternal return does not so much provide a "meaning" for suffering – to affirm the doctrine of eternal return is to recognize that there is no such meaning – as it provides an aim for the will other than the ascetic ideal: namely, to will the repetition of everything through eternity. To admit that there is no meaning or justification for suffering is, indeed, an "abysmal thought" (e.g., Z III: 13), which is why Nietzsche says, "If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you" (GS: 341). This is the attitude of existential commitment, through brute force of will, to carry on in the absence of such a meaning or vindication, to give up, in effect, asking "Suffering for what?" (288)

Unlike Danto, when Leiter talks about recognizing there's no such thing as our suffering having meaning, he seems to have *purpose* rather significance in mind—this is suggested when he says we ought to give up asking "suffering for what?" The upshot of embracing the eternal recurrence ideal is to realize that this question is ill-formulated or simply has no answer. Either way suffering has no purpose. On this general point, I agree—the eternal recurrence does attempt to show that we can't rely on some absolute ideal to imbue all of our suffering with meaning. That said, Leiter also seems to have more in mind than purpose when he goes on to talk about "the attitude of existential commitment, through brute force of will, to carry on in the absence of such meaning or vindication." It seems that he, like Danto, is conceiving of the meaning of our suffering in terms of significance. The issue here is that Danto and Leiter interpret Nietzsche as advancing a wholesale rejection of the need for meaning.

This interpretive strategy is problematic textually and philosophically. Philosophically, it seems enormously unlikely and troubling to think that we could live our lives while embracing

this sort of meaninglessness. Part of what Nietzsche's nihilism is about concerns a problem with things *mattering* to us; it's a problem that involves the inability or complication of esteeming things. Think of the bovine-like last man. He may have some conception of thin meaning, but if so it centers less on things genuinely mattering and being interesting, and more on petty pleasures. Furthermore, against Danto and Leiter, suffering doesn't seem like the sort of thing that shouldn't matter to us, or that we shouldn't take as significant, whether we are talking about our own suffering or the suffering others (regardless of Nietzsche's oftentimes callous stance toward the latter). A world that is meaningless in this sense may give us an opportunity to exhibit the kind of existential defiance and brute will-power Leiter seems to champion, but at the same time it all seems rather grey and uninteresting.

The Danto-Leiter reading also fails on textual grounds. The meaningless condition that this reading sees Nietzsche as endorsing is the nihilism that he so often speaks of overcoming. A notebook entry from 1887 states, "Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage (what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all)" (WP 13). There are two important points to gather from this passage. Nihilism is regarded as a transitional stage; it's the stage between the crumbling of the ascetic ideal and construction of the eternal recurrence ideal. *The Genealogy* makes it manifestly clear that the ascetic ideal is still the reigning ideal, so it hasn't yet self-destructed or otherwise been abolished. And the worry is that if we don't cultivate a new ideal in the meantime and continue to proceed unawares, it will eventually be too late and we'll face nihilism as something unbearable, resulting in the foreclosure of human flourishing—turning us into the dreaded figure of the last man, or what's worse, resulting in suicide (recall Nietzsche's remark that the ascetic ideal closed the door to suicidal nihilism). Moreover, Nietzsche *The Genealogy* announces that he will probe questions

about nihilism and the ascetic ideal more thoroughly in a future work, "under the title 'On the History of European Nihilism'; it will be contained in a work in progress: *The Will to Power: An Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*" (GM III 27). Nietzsche's reference to this work in progress suggests he'll provide a fuller account of nihilism and how to overcome it.[173] Also notable is that Nietzsche calls nihilism a state of affairs that's *pathological*, and what makes it pathological is that there's something enormously arrogant about deriving a generalization from the way things are now to the way things have to be, and to infer that because we're suffering from a state of meaninglessness now, we always will because that's the natural or inevitable state. Think of Nietzsche's claim about "Man's lack of modesty—when he doesn't see meaning, he *denies* it exists" (KGW 2[109]).

Nietzsche therefore isn't looking to squelch the need for meaning, but to provide new resources to meet its demands. We're presently in a transitional stage in which we have the opportunity to set up the eternal recurrence as an antagonist to the ascetic ideal. This will serve as a new absolute ideal that will be value-creating. It will be capable of imbuing human existence with meaning, albeit in a manner completely different and at odds with the ascetic ideal it's supplanting.

The Eternal Recurrence as a Comprehensive Value-Creating Force

One of the defining characteristics of an absolute ideal is that it is, in some sense, value-creating. Reginster (2006) notes that Nietzsche's task of the revaluation of all values goes hand-in-hand with the eternal recurrence. Reginster states, "Nietzsche explicitly declares that living in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires a revaluation of values: 'Means of enduring it

[173] This work was never finished. The text we have today that's titled *The Will to Power* is a collection of notebook entries, published and arranged posthumously.

[the eternal recurrence]: the revaluation of all values. No longer joy in certainty but in uncertainty; no longer "cause and effect" but the continually creative; no longer will to preservation but to power' (WP 1059)" (220). The revaluation that needs to be carried out so as to displace the ascetic ideal and make room for the eternal recurrence ideal, is a subject we've broached. We need to cultivate values that allow us to live with uncertainty, that deny teleology, and that don't presuppose or involve any conception of a metaphysically divided world. Reginster (2006) notes that living in accordance with the eternal recurrence requires we welcome human finitude—"willing the eternal recurrence of our earthly life is to welcome its finitude, since it acknowledges, and affirms, the ineluctability of death" (223). This might sound strange since the eternal recurrence posits that we'll live our lives over and over an infinite number of times, which suggests that I needn't fear death since I'll live all over again. But keep in mind, cycles of the eternal recurrence are separate. The "Jeremy" of this cycle will be identical to the "Jeremy" of the next cycle, but the latter "Jeremy" will have no memories of or psychological continuity with the former. So while I will come into existence again in the future, my consciousness won't be continuous with my former self's. As much as I might come into existence infinitely many times in the future, I'll also have to face the daunting fact of death an infinite number of times as well. As a result the eternal recurrence is consistent with valuing human finitude, since as many times I'll live, I'll also have to die, and future "reincarnations" are in no way connected with past "reincarnations." I live one and only one *finite* life—it's just that it recurs infinitely.

Reginster also observes that the eternal recurrence forces us to revalue becoming, transience, change, and impermanence. Valuing becoming involves more than embracing finitude. It forces us to actively accept the fact that things in the world and our existence change.

Moreover, as Reginster (2006) points out, "becoming is an essential feature of the will to power, a paradigmatic manifestation of which is creative activity" (226). The ascetic ideal, on the other hand, sees becoming as an evil; it's in part because things change that we suffer. The ascetic ideal values permanence and being rather impermanence and becoming. Nietzsche states:

> Contempt, hatred for all that perishes, changes varies—whence comes this valuation of that which remains constant? Obviously, the will to truth is here merely the desire for a world of the constant. […] Happiness can be guaranteed only by being; change and happiness exclude one another. The highest desire therefore contemplates unity with what has being. This is the formula for: the road to the highest happiness. *In summa*: the world as it ought to be exists; this world, in which we live, is an error—this world of ours ought not to exist. […] the real *primum mobile* is disbelief in becoming, mistrust of becoming, the low valuation of all that becomes—What kind of man reflects in this way? An unproductive, suffering kind, a kind weary with life. (WP 585)

The eternal recurrence ideal forces us to embrace becoming and the world as it is. The person Nietzsche describes in the passage above is the type who lives in accordance with the ascetic ideal.

The eternal recurrence ideal also forces us to revalue suffering. Under this ideal, suffering can still be seen as bad—for instance, the mountaineer's inhibitive suffering. But suffering isn't seen as an unmitigated defect or flaw. Given the role suffering plays in the will to power, it can actually be a good thing. In short, the eternal recurrence encourages us to value those things that are necessary for life and its operation in terms of the will to power. The ascetic ideal, recall, was characterized as "an insatiable instinct and will to power that wants to become master not over something within life, but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful, and basic conditions" (GM III 10). The eternal recurrence ideal resists this attempt to master all the basic conditions of life. It doesn't try to master life, nor does it see itself as standing outside of life, judging it from this illusory external perspective.

So far, we've seen the general sorts of values the eternal recurrence as an ideal sustains and generates. And these values supply certain goals with value, which in turn gives us aims to

achieve, thereby engaging the will to power. As an absolute ideal, the eternal recurrence thereby permits for a comprehensive evaluative scheme. The task of imbuing meaning is therefore not a purely individualistic affair. One can believe or feel that they're living a meaningful life and yet be failing to do so. Recall Janaway's (2007) claim that Nietzsche's ideal would have us creatively achieve personal meaning (we'll return below to Young's reading). Janaway is correct insofar as imbuing suffering with meaning is done at the level of the individual. Values aren't part of the fabric of reality or the structure of the world, nor do they gain their status as values merely because a sufficiently large number of people recognize them as values. And Janaway is right to claim that the sense we make of our suffering is creatively achieved insofar as it's the result of the will to power's active interpretive process.

But Janaway's reading makes Nietzsche's account seem *too* personal. As an absolute ideal, the eternal recurrence grounds values such that one can have the wrong values. The person who thinks there's value to eating a whole chocolate cake for dessert because it's a difficult exercise is, by Nietzsche's lights, just wrong. The suffering this person endured is, from their perspective, meaningful, because they took the goal to be meaningful; but in reality, they're just mistaken. The early Nietzsche says the same thing about the "scholarly man who whiles his life away: what does the study of Greek particles have to do with the meaning of life? […] The greatest part of that antlike labor is simply *meaningless*" (KGW 3[63], translation modified). These people—the competititve cake eater and the Greek scholar—might think the suffering they're enduring in eating unhealthy amounts of cake or in struggling to learn Greek, translate Greek texts, and interpret ancient and abstruse physical theories is meaningful. But Nietzsche thinks these activities are too disconnected from questions of meaning.

Recall the poor mountaineer whose leg was permanently injured in a car accident, and turned to poetry. Let's say she believes in a sort of New Age spirituality, believing, "Everything happens for a reason; the car accident was part of the universe's purpose for me, and without it, I never would have discovered poetry." From her perspective, her suffering has been imbued with meaning because it was effectively given a purpose. Nietzsche would think that she's mistaken about something. The universe has no higher plan for her, nor is there any kind of mystical higherpower overlooking her actions to ensure that "everything happens for a reason." Janaway's interpretation legitimizes these self-given interpretations of suffering, since meaningfulness is a personal affair. By Nietzsche's lights, however, there are legitimate values grounded in the eternal recurrence ideal, and these values make some goals worthwhile and others not. And it's in light of this that some activities (and some suffering) are meaningful, and others aren't.

Young (2003), too, advances an interpretation similar to Janaway's, but has as its focus something broader than the meaningfulness of suffering. Young claims that for Nietzsche there is no universal meaning of life, since meaning doesn't have its source in "the metaphysical structure of reality," but that fact doesn't imply that I can't create my own individual meaning (see page 85). There are two problems with such a reading. First, it suggests that the only criterion for a life to count as meaningful is that the individual takes it to be so, but we've already seen that Nietzsche thinks people can be fallible on this point. What it takes for someone's existence to be meaningful isn't just that they find it meaningful and affirmable. The second issue with Young's reading is that it fails to take into account the resources individuals employ to imbue their existences with meaning. Young and Janaway are right to think that meaning in life is something that is created insofar as it's the product of an interpretive process. One doesn't live a meaningful life through abiding by something like a code of laws, or checking

off a list of dos and don’ts. The interpretive process carried out by individuals employs resources that are sustained and enshrined at the level of culture. The need for meaning is met by employing resources that are grounded in a shared, comprehensive, cultural ideal, such as the ascetic ideal or the eternal recurrence—and even then, culture can go awry in sustaining the wrong sorts of values (hence Nietzsche’s critique of the ascetic ideal).

Nietzsche is in this sense what I’ve called a “quasi-pluralist” (and possibly a pluralist). I take him to be a quasi-pluralist rather than a run-of-the-mill pluralist because he doesn’t seem to have the resources that would ground values so as to give them genuine standing. The pluralist component to Nietzsche’s thought is seen in the fact that he holds not just various different values, but values that conflict with one another to have something *like* genuine standing. Huddleston (2014) advances the view that Nietzsche isn’t a flat-out, global skeptic, in that he does take certain values to have genuine standing; it’s just that he never advances an account of how values have such standing. I agree with Huddleston’s basic position, and add to it the possibility that Nietzsche may have been some variety of a pluralist.

The eternal recurrence ideal allows for a plurality of values to coexist and even compete with one another. Zarathustra speech on “The Thousand and One Goals” asserts that there have been a variety of cultures that have advanced different values, and different cultures herald values that are inconsistent with what other cultures herald as values. Nietzsche never suggests that one culture is in the right ant the other in the wrong. Instead the suggestion seems to be that certain values are enshrined and maintained through an intersubjective process. What matters here is that these values posit goals that allow the members of a culture to flourish and to distinctively identify themselves in terms of certain overcomings. It allows the members of a culture to see themselves and to have others see them *as interesting*. “Whatever makes them rule

and triumph and shine, to the awe and envy of their neighbors, that is to them the high, the first, the measure, the meaning of all things" (Z "Thousand and One Goals" 58). Not just anything can therefore count as valuable. Zarathustra makes two crucial suggestions here: What's taken as valuable or estimable is what makes the members of a culture rule and triumph and shine, meaning that they excel at it. In valuing a particular activity, the members of one culture will practice at excelling at it and so successfully outdo the members of another culture. But Zarathustra adds a second crucial point. They must make their neighbors stand in awe and *envy*. This isn't because the neighbors hold the same values. As discussed above, if two groups of people hold the same highest values, they're effectively part of the same culture. Other cultures look on in awe and envy because they see this other culture as interesting,

What role does the eternal recurrence ideal have here? Why not replace the ascetic ideal with the "ideal of life"? What matters to Nietzsche is that the values one endorses serve life and the ability to let its adherents grow, flourish, and exercise power. There are a few problems with setting up life as an ideal in this way. Flourishing isn't a static, straightforward notion for Nietzsche. What let's some flourish will cause others to languish, so a single tablet can't be raised for everyone to follow—power in one case won't count as power in another. Another related issue is one we've already come across. Power as specific end to strive for is just to diffuse and nebulous. The eternal recurrence ideal is intended to serve life's aims in way that the absolute ideal has failed. One of the objections with the ascetic ideal is that it gives a single end—asceticism, of one kind or another—as the single value we ought to strive to achieve. Asceticism is broad, but not as broad as life. Setting up life as an absolute ideal also fails to speak to us as beings who inhabit human forms of life. The eternal recurrence does speak to us in this way since nonhuman animals lack the capacity to consider eternal repetitions. The eternal

recurrence asks us if we're able to affirm an existence filled with contingency, purposeless, and suffused with suffering. As self-conscious creatures, this gives us a more concrete (even if still imprecise) idea of what we're affirming, rather than something as vague as "life." Even if the eternal recurrence ideal gives us a plethora of sometimes conflicting values, it still serves as an ideal that gives us values to embrace, and these values as we've seen enshrine the facts of becoming and intransience that just are part of the world we inhabit. The eternal recurrence is meant to be a comprehensive ideal that not only urges us to affirm the fundamental tendencies of life, but also the way the world is.

The Eternal Recurrence Ideal and Types of Life

We've seen that the eternal recurrence generates an array of values that can conflict with one another. A more precise way to put this point is that it generates highest values that can structure types of life, where the types of life can be at odds with one another. Nietzsche sees it as a positive feature of the eternal recurrence ideal that it can generate highest values belonging to differing types of life. Contest, strife, and struggle among types of life can in the right circumstances be productive. The eternal recurrence as an absolute ideal doesn't subjugate *all* values and interpretations to a *single* goal. Recall the following remark from *The Genealogy*: it "has a *goal*—a goal so universal that all other interests of human existence, measured by it, appear petty and narrow. It stubbornly interprets epochs, peoples, humans in relation to this one goal, it permits no other interpretation, no other goal; it casts aside, denies, affirms, sanctions only in accordance with *its* interpretation" (GM III 23). It's in terms of this goal that it interprets *all* of human existence, and so allows for only one type of life, the ascetic or priestly type—at the very least, it holds the priestly type as the exemplary type for emulation, even if one isn't a priest *per se*.

The eternal recurrence lacks any such a goal and doesn't advance a single type of life as deserving universal admiration and emulation. If there's any goal to the eternal recurrence, it's the affirmation of life. The eternal recurrence ideal allows for a plurality of types or forms of life that can be seen as worthwhile, meaningful, and affirmable. If the ascetic ideal "believes that no power exists on earth that does not first have to receive a meaning, a right to exist, a value, as a tool of the ascetic ideal as a way and means to *its* goal, to *one* goal" (GM III 23.), then the eternal recurrence ideal permits for a variety of goals and highest goals of equal standing. Values are only tools to achieving the ascetic ideal's singular goal; this one goal imbues all human activity with a purpose. The eternal recurrence ideal eschews any such singular goal, allowing for there to be a variety of goals (though not just *any* goal) that allow one to express a type of life and find affirmation

Leiter offers an interpretation of Nietzsche's typology I'd like to consider. Leiter claims that there are different types of *human* life. In (2002) he discusses Nietzsche's "Doctrine of Types," which claims that "each person has a fixed psycho-physical constitution, which defines him as a particular *type* of person. Call the relevant psycho-physical facts here 'type-facts.' Type-facts, for Nietzsche, are either *physiological* facts about the person, or facts about the person's unconscious drives or affects" (91). Schacht (2005) attributes a similar view to Nietzsche, only uses the term "form" rather than "type": "For we now know (or should) that there are only particular *forms* of life […] with differing particular constitutions and conditions of preservation, flourishing and growth, which are attuned to their environing world" (200). They're different from other forms of life in part because they're self-reflexive, conscious creatures. But even within the broad category of "human life," given the complexity of human life itself, one can still find differing, more specific forms of life. The conditions that sustain

these forms of life and that allow them to flourish and discharge their strength can differ from one form of life to another. But what constitutes a "form" or "type" of life?

Let's return to Nietzsche's discussion of the transition of human beings into communal forms of existence, as well as his discussion about the origin of philosophers. Both transitions involve the notion of a type or form of human life. He states that socialization involved a "forcible sundering [of man] from his animal past, as it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence" (GM II 16). Pre-social human beings could without any bad conscience do what they wanted without inviting either the sting of bad conscience or ritualized forms of punishment. The socialization of human beings forced them into new conditions of existence. In order to flourish under these new social conditions, human beings had to embrace a new form of life that involved the emergence of the bad conscience, without which communal organization would be impossible.

Human history has time and again witnessed the creation of new human types. "The philosophic spirit," as Nietzsche says, "always had to use as a mask and cocoon the *previously established* types of contemplative men—priest, sorcerer, soothsayer, and in any case a religious type—in order to be able to exist at all" (GM III 10). The philosophical form of life—because it was initially considered a dangerous and foreign form of life—had to disguise itself. Wearing the mask of the religious type, it disguised itself under an already established form of life. Nietzsche mentions the "types of contemplative men," each of which embodies a distinct form of life: the priest, the sorcerer, the soothsayer, all of which are examples of a religious type of life. Indeed, the priestly caste and the warrior caste that belong to master morality are two different types of life, as is the type of the slave.

The notion of a form of life is broad, and has within itself further subdivisions and overlaps: One can be a religious type, living in the more specific form of life known as a "soothsayer" or a "sorcerer." The scholar, the artist, and the scientist are more examples of types of life. The scientific form of life was an offshoot of the philosophical type since science was largely an offshoot of natural philosophy. People can be predisposed to certain types of life: the person who, for genetic reasons, has short stubby legs may not be suited to the athletic-runner type of life; those who don't have patience for, or for whatever reason struggle with algebra likely aren't suited to the mathematician's form of life. We're not in complete control of the types of available to us. Leiter (2002) takes this notion even further, claiming that Nietzsche's doctrine of types to imply that the type of life we come in inhabit is deterministic, based on "type-facts":

> The claim, then, is that each person has certain largely immutable physiological and psychic traits, that constitute the "type" of person he or she is. Type-facts, for Nietzsche, are *causally primary* with respect to the course of a person's life […] Type-facts are also *explanatorily primary*, in the sense that all other facts about a person (e.g., his beliefs, his actions, his life-trajectory) are explicable by type-facts about the person (perhaps in conjunction with other natural facts about the circumstances or environment). (91)

Certain immutable physiological and psychic traits do predispose someone to certain types of life. However, Leiter's account is excessively deterministic; Nietzsche's account isn't as deterministic as Leitier would have us believe. We do have some agency and control over the types of life we belong to, even if there are genetic, environmental, psychological, and other factors that serve as restrictions. Think again of the mountaineer—she set off on one life course, but after her debilitating injury struck out on an entirely different one through long practice and effort at writing and studying poetry.

Beyond Good and Evil makes clear that we are predisposed to living certain sorts of lives and that our possible life-trajectories are constrained. But Nietzsche also notes that agency has a role to play. He states: "Learning changes us: it does what all nourishment does which also does

not merely ‘preserve’—as physiologists know. But at the bottom of us, really ‘deep down,’ there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions” (231). We are subject to a degree of spiritual fatedness. What we are and what we are capable of becoming is determined by forces outside of our control, forces that are to a degree predetermined (e.g., genetics). What people find interesting and the sorts of questions that drive them will determine the kinds of activities people find worth pursuing, but these considerations aren’t entirely within our control—we can’t capriciously decide to find something interesting and worth pursuing.

But note that Nietzsche claims learning can change us. Through the process of education (construed broadly) we can find new interests, learn new skills, and expand our interpretations of the world. If what we learn changes us—if it causes us to find something interesting and worth pursuing—then it can open up entirely new horizons, giving us new types of strivings to engage in, new goals, and the possibility of expanding our interpretations of the world. Learning or education helps us to grow in new ways and in new directions, allowing us to exercise the will to power in different and novel ways.

Leiter’s deterministic account fails to recognize the importance of the notion that the will to power changes an agent and her environment. While there may be certain types of life one is more or less suited to inhabit, people are also capable of transforming their natures through processes of “learning”—taking in or incorporating—other objects, through exercising their will to power in new and different directions. Schacht (2005) acknowledges this point: He claims that certain “limited horizons” are

> needed in human and other forms of life to facilitate their functioning, in various sorts of practical contexts and situations characteristic of them, and in which they arise and go on. What Nietzsche is talking about is the gearing of particular forms of life to their circumstances in ways that attune them to features of their environments that will make a difference to them, given specific configurations of needs and abilities. And this is offered as a piece of *naturalistic insight into the way forms of life work*. (201)

The broader point Schacht makes concerns the fact that people function according to different perspectives, but such perspectives (or parts of them) can shift, grow or decay, on the basis how well one satisfies the conditions of, and flourishes within, a particular type of life. Each type of has its own distinctive perspective or set of perspectives, seeing certain things as salient, estimable, worthwhile, or interesting. Different types of life have different "conditions of preservation and growth." Inhabiting a specific type life brings with it certain needs and values. As Nietzsche states in a notebook entry from the fall of 1887, "in *valuations, conditions of preservation* and *growth* express themselves" (KGW 9[38]; cf. 11[73], from as late as March 1888).

Those inhabiting different types of life will have different sets of values, as well as different conditions of growth and expansion. For instance, the artist will consider certain sorts of things valuable (beauty, various forms of artistic expression, and certain artistic techniques) and other things as simply lacking high value (perhaps the truths of quantum mechanics). These values give the artist *goals* to overcome; they imbue certain tasks, which pose resistance, with an estimable quality that drives one to overcome resistance in realizing such goals. The quantum physicist, at least with respect to the activity that makes him flourish, will disagree, believing that discovering truths about quantum mechanics is more interesting than the artist's endeavors. The scientist may also appreciate the value of art and the artist the truths of quantum mechanics—just as the mountaineer, formerly engaged in physical form of life, came to inhabit a new form of life centered on art. But *qua* scientist, the type of life he inhabits gives him a perspective of what sorts of undertakings are worthwhile. But there are going to be times when certain forms of life come at loggerheads with one another. Someone of a particular religious form of life might object on the basis of his religious values to a painter's irreligious work of art.

Even within a single form of life, values can come into conflict: Imagine an artist who values classicism and eschews all post-modern art (here two forms of art come into conflict with one another).

The importance of types of life vis-à-vis the eternal recurrence ideal includes the insight that this ideal can make room for a more diverse cluster of forms of life than can the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal, interpreting everything according to its one goal, sees as valuable only one type of life: the ascetic type. There are various subdivisions within the ascetic form of life (ascetic priests, ascetic laypersons, ascetic philosophers, etc.), so there is a degree of leniency in how this ideal can be realized. But the eternal recurrence doesn't privilege one form of life over all others. Because it valorizes the conditions of earthly existence (including and in particular the will to power), vastly different forms of life are capable of realizing this ideal: philosophers, artists, scientists, scholars, wrestlers, boxers, soldiers, political leaders, and so forth. These types might have been able to realize the ascetic ideal, but they would had to have *adapted* their forms of life to fit within its confines. The artist, under the ascetic ideal, wasn't living a meaningful life *as* an artist but instead as an *ascetic* artist. Under the eternal recurrence ideal, not all the values that belong to their type of life are *tools* to achieving the ascetic ideal's ends. The values themselves can stand on their own, as belonging to the type of life that they do.

The eternal recurrence ideal requires a revaluation. Why isn't it the case that now all types of life are just given a different goal? Why posit the eternal recurrence as an ideal, when it seems like each type of life could operate in a manner resembling pre-slave revolt cultures characterized not by an overarching absolute ideal, but by a plethora of ideals? Though each type of life may thrive under different sets of values, the eternal recurrence ideal ensures that notions of eternal being fail to gain traction. As an absolute ideal, it precludes the potential of

something like the ascetic ideal once again gaining sway. Because the eternal recurrence ideal valorizes becoming and transience in all its forms, it is able to enshrine various kinds of values according to which different types will thrive without allowing the highest values of a particular type gaining the upper hand such that they generate an absolute ideal.

We can now return to a longstanding question posed at the beginning of this chapter: What's wrong with a modified free spirit ideal? Recall that Nietzsche of the middle period gave up the free spirit as an ideal, and his reasons for doing so were that this ideal expressed the ascetic ideal. But Nietzsche refined his conception of the free spirit as a figure who, rather than accepting truth as possessing absolute or unconditional value, came to embody the questioning of truth's value. What's wrong with advancing this modified free spirit as an ideal? The problem is that this is one particular type of life that advances, enshrines and thrives by certain values that aren't suited to other types of life—namely, those types of life that have little interest in the pursuit of truth or in questioning the value of truth. The eternal recurrence ideal, on the other hand, allows for these different types of life to flourish.

To be clear, Nietzsche is no egalitarian. The eternal recurrence ideal does not stem from a desire to treat all types of life as equal, but instead encourages a rank and ordering of types of life. Some types might be more meaningful and affirmable than others, though Nietzsche leaves unclear the criteria that could be used to determine this (not to mention the worry about the implausibility of such criteria). When sketching a possible route out of nihilism in his 1886-7 notebooks, Nietzsche states: "The ***value*** *of such a crisis* [i.e., nihilism] is that it *cleanses*, that it crowds together related elements and has them bring about each other's destruction, that it assigns them common tasks to men with opposite ways of thinking—[…] thus initiating *an order of rank among forces*, from the point of view of health" (KGW 5[71] 14). As catastrophic as

nihilism is, Nietzsche thinks it destroys certain pernicious types of life and allows for a rank and ordering of the others. Even better is that this crisis allows for opposite ways of thinking to thrive, unlike under the ascetic ideal. Their conflict and struggle with one another keeps alive the possibility of fresh perspectives, new horizons, and ever-growing interpretive frameworks. The more we allow for different types of life and the interpretations according to which they thrive, the more we'll be able to expand our interpretations as different types of life come into conflict with others.

Each form of life has its own unique set of resources for interpretation and provides a standpoint from which existence. Under Nietzsche's conception of a type of life, it's possible for an individual to take up the perspectives of more than one form of life. Nietzsche himself writes as a philosopher, poet, and philologist, thereby illustrating that he can deploy the perspectives and interpretive resources of different forms of life in an effort to understand and interpret the world around him. Recall Nietzsche's remark from his 1885-6 notebook entries, that what "runs through his writings" is the idea that "the *world's value* lies in our interpretation […]; previous interpretations have been perspectival appraisals by means of which we preserve ourselves in life, that is, in the will to power and growth of power; that every *heightening of man* brings with it an overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every increase in strength and expansion of power opens up new perspectives" (KGW 2[108]). The sentiment expressed in this notebook entry is echoed in the view articulated in *The Genealogy* that deploying different interpretive frameworks and assuming different perspectival vantage points is required for gaining a better and more complete conception of something (of its objectivity). Encouraging a plurality of types of life ensures the continuation of different interpretive resources, which in turn bolsters the capacity to overcome narrower interpretations.

Art, Science, and the Eternal Recurrence Ideal

We saw above that Nietzsche thought science could not serve as an appropriate adversary for the ascetic ideal. Art fares better for this purpose: "*Art*, to say it in advance, for I shall some day return to this subject at greater length—art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science" (GM III 25). We'll return to why art is a better stepping stone to the eternal recurrence ideal than is science, but it's important to note that Nietzsche doesn't hope to abolish scientific inquiry with the eternal recurrence ideal. Throughout his career, the will to truth remained something of enormous value. The question here isn't just why art is better suited to challenging the ascetic ideal, but what scientific inquiry will look like when it is no longer the most "spiritual" manifestation of the ascetic ideal. In what way will the will to truth and art be reconciled under the eternal recurrence?

It's difficult to say what science and art would look like under the eternal recurrence ideal. Nietzsche offers an odd intimation when he describes two different sorts of drives, one of which he equates with the will to truth, the other of which he equates with its opposite. Describing the first such drive or will, he states:

> That commanding something which the people call 'the spirit' wants to be master in and around its own house and wants to feel that it is master; it has the will from multiplicity to simplicity, a will that ties up, tames, and is domineering and truly masterful. Its needs and capacities are so far the same as those which physiologists posit for everything that lives, grows, multiplies. The spirit's power to appropriate the new to the old, to simplify the manifold, and to overlook or repulse whatever is totally contradictory—just as it involuntarily emphasizes certain features and lines in what is foreign, in every piece of the 'external world,' retouching, falsifying the whole to suit itself. Its intent in all this is to incorporate new 'experiences,' to file new things in old files—growth, in a word—or more precisely, the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power. (BGE 230)

This passages describes the basic act of interpretation carried out by the will to power whereby the unfamiliar is made familiar by emphasizing certain features of the world, overlooking others,

and falsifying the flux of reality. Its aim is incorporation and the feeling of growth and increased power.

Particularly illuminating are the remarks that immediately follow, which develop Nietzsche's views on appropriating, falsifying, and familiarizing drives:

> An apparently opposite drive serves this same will: a suddenly erupting decision in favor of ignorance, of deliberate exclusion, a shutting of one's windows, an internal No to this or that thing, a refusal to let things approach, a kind of state of defense against much that is knowable, a satisfaction with the dark, with the limiting horizon, a Yea and Amen to ignorance—all of which is necessary in proportion to a spirit's power to appropriate, its 'digestive capacity,' to speak metaphorically—and actually 'the spirit' is relatively most similar to a stomach. Here belongs also the occasional will of the spirit to let itself be deceived, perhaps with a capricious intimation of the fact that such and such is *not* the case, that one merely accepts such and such a delight in all uncertainty and ambiguity, a jubilant self-enjoyment in the arbitrary narrowness and secrecy of some nook, in the all too near, in the foreground, in what is enlarged, diminished, displaced, beautified, a self-enjoyment in the caprice of all these expressions of power. (ibid)

This passage describes a drive that opposes the first drive discussed in BGE 230. These two passages imply that the drive to truth belongs to drive to "simplify the manifold," to render the unfamiliar familiar, and to reduce multiplicity to simplicity. The drive to truth is an expression of (while also making use of) the will that ties up and tames, reducing multiplicity to simplicity. What is the drive to truth tying up, taming, and simplifying? The flux of reality, what one fails to understand, inconsistencies that threaten to undermine one's beliefs or confidence, and the like. The drive to truth is a drive to appropriate and grow. The drive to ignorance and deception—Nietzsche describes art in GM III 25 as the will to deception with a good conscience—opposes the will to truth but can still serve as an expression of the drive for growth and power (what BGE 229 and 230 call the "fundamental will of the spirit," the will to power).

Noteworthy is that the acquisition of truth and knowledge is equated with an appropriating drive, while and the drive to deception and ignorance resists this kind of appropriation lest the truth or knowledge incorporated exceed one's "digestive capacity." If a particular truth or bit of knowledge is sufficiently disquieting or disruptive, then its concealment,

rejection, or being ignored is experienced as enjoyment. The will to ignorance and self-deception can count as expressions of power. The will to deception and ignorance stop the process of "spiritual ingestion" through preventing the appropriation of truth or knowledge, it ensures the overall stability of the interpreting agent (and her interpretive framework). But this will that opposes truth doesn't necessarily express a weakness. If the will to truth appropriates by reducing the unfamiliar to the familiar, then the opposite drive can express the strength to withstand the unfamiliar with all its ambiguity and uncertainty.

BGE 230 also touches upon the drives characteristic of the scientist and inquirer on the one hand, and the drives characteristic of the artist on the other. What it would mean for the will to truth and the will to deception to be unified within a single "spirit"—what it would mean to reconcile these tendencies within an individual—is hinted at here. But first, how could both the drive for appropriating of truth and its opposite count as expressions of power? It seems that only the first passage describes an increase in power, since it results in appropriation, and so seemingly growth and an increase in power; in making familiar something that was unfamiliar, I've cognitively appropriated it. How does deception, ignorance, or falsification express power or strength? When one falsifies the truth, or let's oneself be deceived, it can be the case that one is taking "delight in all uncertainty and ambiguity." Delight in uncertainty and ambiguity requires power, which is expressed through overcoming a particular kind of resistance; ambiguity and uncertainty are states associated with cognitive disequilibrium, irritation, anxiety, and doubt. Power is expressed in dwelling in this uncertainty because instead of "ingesting" a troublesome truth, reality has been dressed up such that one *beautifies it* and is thereby able to take delight in its ambiguity and uncertainty. One doesn't ingest the truth, but gains the sense that they can withstand the ambiguity and uncertainty of existence. In the 1886 preface (the

second preface) to *Gay Science*, Nietzsche applauds the Greeks for "know[ing] how to live. What is required for that is to stop *courageously* at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance" (GS P 4; my italics). The reason why stopping at the surface can be done *courageously* is that instead of accepting a pernicious truth, one basks in the ambiguity and uncertainty of existence—and in *accepting* that this is the nature of existence, one is effectively overcoming resistance and exercising the will to power. Under the eternal recurrence ideal, these two opposing tendencies of the will to power would be properly united in sufficiently strong types.

Does this mean that we should simply try to live in such a way such that we never have to confront unpleasant truths? First of all, the will to deception under the ascetic ideal was working towards pernicious ends, as was the will to truth. Part of the asceticism involved in an unconditional will to truth is precisely that one chokes down whatever unpleasant truths one confronts, while also being led by the misleading sense that the world is in *essence* fundamentally knowable by us; the unconditional will to truth fails to acknowledge that reality is at base uncertain and ambiguous. "The greater the resistances a force seeks out in order to master them, the greater is the magnitude of the failure and misfortune thus provoked: and as every force can only expend itself on what resists, every action necessarily contains an *ingredient of unpleasure*" (11[77], from 1887-8). Here we find a typical statement about the will to power, resistance, and "unpleasure." But here Nietzsche talks about *failure* suffering—the suffering we endure when we've *engaged* the will to power, but failed to achieve the determinate first-order object it was striving for. If failure suffering is too great, it can become inhibitive suffering. When, in the search for truth, the risk of inhibitive suffering becomes too great, Nietzsche thinks employing drives to ignorance, self-deception, and untruth is called for. The will to power can

thus deploy the drive for truth or the drive to deception based upon the magnitude of the failure one will confront, and what foreseeable effects such failure will have.

Let me note one last interesting aspect of this unity of the drives for truth and untruth. If the artistic drives for untruth and deception are associated with remaining in ambiguity and uncertainty, and the drive for truth is associated with growth and psychical ingestion, then they may be deployed *precisely for the purposes of making one uncomfortable*. Used together, they can dredge up some of the unpleasant truths we sometimes have to confront. *The Genealogy* itself is an example of this, as are many of Nietzsche's other works (such as Book V of *The Gay Science*, the final section of which starts with the words, "But as I finally, slowly, slowly paint this *gloomy* question mark"—suggesting that the whole book has been leading up this gloomy epilogue). *The Genealogy* is an attempt to get us to question values, which prior to genealogical scrutiny may have seemed ordinary and familiar. But this scrutiny is supposed to show us that these values are strange and unfamiliar, with unexpected and counterintuitive origins and developmental trajectories. The works goal is to render unfamiliar what we experience as so familiar that we oftentimes don't think to question it, and the genealogical method aims to achieve this goal through its jolting style. In this way, the work interpretively recasts something that is familiar and deeply entrenched within our type of life; it carries out one of the "reversals of perspective" mentioned in GM III 12.

Conclusion: The Eternal Recurrence Ideal and the Need for Meaning

This chapter has offered a comprehensive account that establishes some simple claims. Nietzsche saw the ascetic ideal as problematic because it gnawed away at the will to power itself, and since the will to power is the will of life—life's essence—it has worked to keep the threat of

nihilism at bay while nevertheless keeping it on the horizon. As pernicious as the ascetic ideal was, Nietzsche claims that with it, "Life became *very* interesting" (GM III 20); this doesn't sound like much, but it's high praise from Nietzsche. He wants to keep human beings *interesting* animals, animals that require additional conditions of existence—like the need for meaning—despite or even because the danger that such an additional existential condition introduce. His solution to the problem generated by the ascetic ideal involves more than just demolishing it. Before this ideal crumbles and we're left either in a state of suicidal nihilism or Zarathustra's dreaded last men, we need to start constructing a new ideal—the eternal recurrence.

Founding human culture on the eternal recurrence means replacing one absolute ideal with another. This replacement will better supply human beings with the interpretive resources they need to see existence and the world as meaningful and interesting. The eternal recurrence is better suited to this end because it glorifies what's essential about existence in this world—transience, contingency, the lack of a *telos*, finitude, and the will to power. In this respect, the eternal recurrence doesn't stand outside life, nor does it posit a goal outside of life in the manner of the ascetic ideal. It instead takes human existence and the world within which it operates and exalts it for what it is. The denial of an overarching purpose to human existence doesn't mean that human existence and the world can't be seen as significant and intelligible to us. It means that we have to recalibrate our conceptions of what's involved in existence. Moreover, the eternal recurrence will allow for a greater array of forms of life to coexist, fruitfully striving against one another, thereby allowing for ever-broadening interpretations of existence and the world. All this serves to *de*-pathologize the need for meaning, ensuring that we can meet its demands and at least secure the possibility for human flourishing.

Let me conclude with a final remark about *affirmation*. What exactly does an affirmation of existence amount to? Does the lack of such affirmation imply that one has lead a meaningless life? Is it an attitude, and how does it relate to the need for meaning?

In order for an individual to lead a meaningful existence, she need not actually affirm her life, though her life would be more meaningful if she did. It's possible that one's life is affirmable, but for various reasons (let's say psychological ones) she's unable to affirm it. Vincent van Gogh, Yutaka Taniyama, Ludwig Boltzmann, Edwin Armstrong, Alan Turing—to name only a small handful—led affirmable lives, but all committed suicide for various reasons. Many, if not all of them, thought their lives were simply unaffirmable, and likely meaningless.

Susan Wolf (2010) provides the nice example of Tolstoy, who "went through a period when he could not see the value of his literary accomplishments as such, magnificent as they were. The realization that he had done much that had made his life meaningful was unavailable to him" (44). Assuming Tolstoy died with this opinion of life and his accomplishments, does that make his life meaningless? Tolstoy didn't consciously affirm his existence, since he thought it wasn't affirmable. The best way to understand this case and those provided in the examples above is that they lacked affirmation while being affirmable. They were affirmable and meaningful, and they are affirmable *because* they were meaningful. For a person's life to be affirmable it has to have (to a sufficient degree) met the demands of the need for meaning.

So Tolstoy's life was meaningful and affirmable, but not affirmed. That said, Tolstoy's life would have been more meaningful if he had consciously affirmed it. Such affirmation would itself be an expression of strength. For whatever reason, despite his literary accomplishments, Tolstoy became "exhausted" with life (to use Nietzsche's term) and so, suffered from inhibitive suffering. That Tolstoy's life didn't end having been affirmed (by Tolstoy) doesn't make it

unaffirmable. Complicated circumstances and facts regarding Tolstoy's life led him to see his life in the way he did—yet paradoxically these same circumstances and facts may have contributed positively to his literary accomplishments. But that Tolstoy took his life to be meaningless doesn't make it so.

Consider the contrary case, in which someone sees his life as valuable and affirmable, when it in fact isn't. The life-long pot-smoker who spends his life in a narcotized state of detachment and disengagement with the world is not someone Nietzsche would think is living a meaningful life. If at the end of his life, this person regards it as meaningful, nodding to it saying he'd do it all over again for eternity, Nietzsche would claim that he is mistaken about the meaning he takes his life to have.

When it comes to the individual, genuine affirmation amounts to a variety of things. It's a self-conscious activity, an upholding of the fact that one's life has been worthwhile, that the need for meaning has indeed had its demands sufficiently met. It's also a sort of attitude that one then takes towards their lives, after such a self-conscious affirmation. Lastly, affirmation involves something about the notion of interestingness. The notion of a thing being interesting and affirmable are distinct, but an affirmed life is one wherein a comportment is taken to existence wherein it is seen as interesting. The depressed person whose life is affirmable is unable to take this stance; life appears to him as dreary and uninteresting.

But what about the trickier case of the affirmation of existence and the world? It is possible to separate the affirmation of one's individual life from that of human existence and the world at large. Genuine individual affirmation requires that a person look back on his life, and interpret it, his accomplishment, and his suffering in a certain sort of way, such that the demands of the need for meaning have been met. What I'm going to call full-scale affirmation—genuine

affirmation of the world and existence—requires more. It requires an exceptionally powerful interpretive and perspectival apparatus, consisting of a variety of interpretations and perspectives. When looking at the world and existence from these perspectives, then existence and the world can *in toto* be affirmable. The mix of drives and wills that fuel these interpretations involve a careful amalgam of the familiarizing drives to truth and knowledge, as well as the drives to deception, art, ignorance, and untruth that keep the world a place of ambiguity and mystery. Deception and ignorance are necessary in a deeper sense, as well. The world and human existence will always contain elements on which we can't dwell too long. We need only think of what Hegel called the "butcher block of history," replete as it is with senseless human violence, atrocities and misery. To focus on these harsh truths would foreclose affirmation. As Nietzsche says, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you" (BGE 146). These lines suggest that engaging one's will to power in the pursuit of truth can lead to a form of failure suffering. Eventually one will come across an agonizing truth will fail to be incorporated—and perhaps remain so. In which case one has, as it were, experienced a sort of failure suffering that eventually gives way to existential and inhibitive suffering. "For one thing is needful," Nietzsche tells us. "That a human being should attain satisfaction with himself—be it through poetry or art [driven by the will to deception and ignorance]; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. […] For the sight of something ugly makes one bad and gloomy" (GS 290).

Only the greatest of individuals can succeed in the feat of affirming the world and existence. Such individuals will have cultivated the will to truth and knowledge more than is generally capable. They will have strengthened it *not* to the extent that it can overcome and affirm *all* the atrocities of history, nor even the misery that human beings experience in the

present. Such a person would come across more as a monster than as someone who has affirmed existence. Striving to come to terms with the atrocities of history and human existence is (in at least some cases) a manifestation of the ascetic ideal by giving truth absolute value.

Affirmation is possible due to the nature of interpretation. Interpretation changes the object that's interpreted and the interpreter himself. The ugly objects that are interpreted into an perspectival framework can through this process be given a different sheen. They need not be ignored, but they can placed within an interpretive nexus so as to affect without completely coloring one's perspectival take on the world. Affirmation results when one's interpretive take on existence incorporates as much as possible, broadens one's perspectival horizons in such a way that no truth is too debilitating, nor does any falsehood or truth cut off the possibility of other interpretations that can fruitfully widen one's view of the world—such that we can carry out "that every *heightening of man* brings with it an overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every increase in strength and expansion of power opens up new perspectives and demands a belief in new horizons." Affirmation is possible when the possibility of a certain kind of life-affirming and strengthening remains possible, when one can continue to expand one's power and bask in the ambiguity of existence without either denying it or being being crushed by it. "No limit to the ways in which the world can be interpreted; every interpretation a symptom of growth or of decline," Nietzsche writes in a notebook entry. "Plurality of interpretations a sign of strength. Not to desire to deprive the world of its disturbing and enigmatic character!" Affirmation, possible only with such a plurality of interpretation, doesn't result from depriving the world of its ambiguity. Affirmation is the result of a plurality of interpretations, an admixture of art and the will to truth, of wanting to know and not wanting to know—tendencies that don't work against one another, that don't deprive the world of its ambiguity and all that is disturbing

in it. To affirm this enigmatic world isn't merely to appreciate it for its ambiguity, but to thrive, flourish, and expand in it—to say "yes" to it.

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List of Abbreviations
BT: *The Birth of Tragedy*
UM: *Untimely Meditations*
HH: *Human, All too Human*
WS: *The Wanderer and His Shadow*
D: *Daybreak*
GS: *Gay Science*
Z: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*
GM: *On the Genealogy of Morals*
TI: *Twilight of the Idols*
A: *The Antichrist*
WP: *The Will to Power*
EH: *Ecce Homo*
KGW: *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*
(The *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* is public domain and available online at nietzschesource.org)

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