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Auf die Schiffe!

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Navigating Nietzsche's Metaphors of Fluidity

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By

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For my parents

Acknowledgments

To Ruth for your masterful guidance and teaching that has always inspired me to embark on yet another horizon.

To Mom and Dad for unconditional support, love, and trust as I walk a sometimes unconventional path through the mountains.

To Shanga, who taught me the value of dance even before Nietzsche.

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I would not build a house for myself, and I count it as part of my good fortune that I do not own a house. But if I had to, then I should build it as some of the Romans did—right into the sea. I should not mind sharing a few secrets with this beautiful monster.

–Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Introduction

Nietzsche's work has drawn innumerable readers for his experimental and refreshing approach to topics that have occupied philosophers since time immemorial. Yet the question of how to read Nietzsche remains openly debated. He writes in an aphoristic, fragmented form. His language is cryptic, poetic, and metaphorical. His work is full of seemingly intentional contradictions, and it is frequently unclear whether his tone is sarcastic or serious, humorous or tragic. Finally, he rarely attempts to delineate his arguments. On the contrary, he often seems to intentionally sow confusion. One could even go so far as to question if the title “philosopher” is a useful frame for understanding Nietzsche. How would we read him differently, for example, if we thought of him not as a philosopher but instead as a poet?

This approach seems promising because poetic language, and metaphor in particular, play such a prominent role in Nietzsche's work. Metaphor for Nietzsche, I argue, is not merely a stylistic device to adorn otherwise logical arguments, nor an aesthetic distraction to be peeled away, revealing what is “underneath.” Rather, it is the primary language he uses to articulate his ideas. Consider that his magnum opus, *Zarathustra*, is composed entirely of metaphor. And in his other works, many of his greatest ideas are articulated principally through metaphor. For example, in *The Gay Science,* he explores affirmation through the metaphor of eternal return, and even within aphorism 248 of the eternal return, where every word matters, what are we to make of the spiders and moonlight that glitter throughout?

In our quest to understand Nietzsche’s message, the cryptic language and seeming lack of a consistent system can be disorienting. It is of particular interest then that certain metaphors,

namely those of water and land, and more broadly fluidity and solidity, appear like motifs over and over again throughout his work and especially at the heart of his most important ideas. Indeed, it is clear that Nietzsche was playing with the concept of fluidity his entire writing life. Therefore, in this essay, I will depart from the premise that this recurring theme warrants especially close investigation. Be it the sea, rivers, lakes, lava, fluid spider silk, or seafaring, the metaphors can be found again and again living vibrantly throughout the texts.

Through a close reading of the metaphors of fluidity, I will argue that we gain a deeper understanding of Nietzsche's thought. For example, I will suggest that the metaphor of the seafarer is the key to understanding the experimental approach to philosophy proposed in T*he Gay Science*. Furthermore, at the same time that we explore the metaphors of fluidity, we will think about the ways in which the metaphors are themselves fluid (i.e., their referents are constantly changing) and provide grounds for seemingly infinite interpretations. Like Heraclitus' river, we can never step into the same Nietzschean metaphor twice. Recognizing this characteristic is distinct from interpreting specific cases. While an analysis of individual metaphors illuminates the content, this second perspective begins to unpack Nietzsche's technique and addresses questions of form. In regards to the content, many important ideas such as a healthy response to the death of God and a philosophy of the future are, at their core, characterized by embracing fluidity. Equal are the dangers of not embracing it. From morality to our very experience of the world as it is mediated through concepts and narratives, Nietzsche wrote about the cost incurred by solidifying that which is fluid into stagnant ideologies. With respect to the form, just as Zarathustra tells us his teachings have become a river, Nietzsche's work itself uses metaphor, aphorism, and poetic language to embody the qualities of dancing

water. Consequently, his corpus defies rigid interpretations that would presume to systematize it and avoids falling prey to its own critique of calcification and ideology.

By the same token that Nietzsche worked to subvert the yoke of logic, rationality, and systems, we as readers should not foist these demands upon him when it comes to questions of interpretation. The integrity of Nietzche's work is therefore only preserved by affirming its fluid nature. Reading him is most authentically and best approached as one would engage with any other river, by swimming or navigating a craft down it and subsequently being carried towards the sea; a method carried out through poetic engagement with the metaphors that abound in the texts. In contrast, a flawed approach is to corral the river such that the water becomes still, or to freeze it into ice. These methods (which seek to arrive at a stable, permanent understanding) render analysis possible via the rational mind but transform the work into a pale simulacrum of itself. What solidification purchases is graspability via the rational intellect, but the cost is the concealment of the playful vitality that still vibrates underneath.

To read Nietzsche is very different from reading, for example, Descartes. It is relevant to find a logical error, contradiction, or reason for doubt in Descartes' argument. Descartes himself urges us to cast out anything that can be doubted. Nietzsche, however, does not adhere to those strictures and instead encourages us to entertain the illogical. In his project of subverting the philosophical tradition, he challenges what philosophy is and how it is done: his work refuses to privilege the definitive, the logical, or the solid. With this new way of doing philosophy, comes the demand for a new way of reading. And this I attempt to offer here.

In my first chapter, I analyze Nietzsche's early essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense." Here, Nietzsche argues that certain kinds of conceptual truths are born from a metaphorization of an unknowable source, yet are mistakenly taken for the thing in themselves.

I show how the core of the essay is about fluidity and solidity, in that concepts consist in a hardening of unmediated sensory experience, which is inherently fluid, undifferentiated, and amorphous. Additionally, I show how the artistic mode, which Nietzsche urges us to reclaim, is found in how one recognizes and embraces the fluidity of sensory experience. I offer a close reading of the metaphors that Nietzsche uses to make this argument: petrifaction, the edifice of concepts, and lastly, the figures of the intuitive and rational men.

In Chapter 2, I turn to *The Gay Science*, where I frame the text as a response to the death of God, the idea that truth institutions have crumbled. I argue that the gay scientist as a figure in the text represents a healthy response to this event. To understand who he is and how he lives, I follow the metaphors that surround him, which are metaphors of oceans, seas, sailing, navigating, and seafaring. As the land crumbles, I embark with the seafarers out onto a landless sea and contemplate what it means to navigate without land to orient around. I also consider figures in the text that relate to the ocean and land differently, such as Epicurus, and argue that they serve as foils to the gay scientist.

In Chapter 3, I immerse myself in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* considered by many (Nietzsche among them) to be his greatest work. Here I submerge myself in the sea, am carried by a river's current, and wade through swamps choked with mud and vegetation. I follow these metaphors to better understand the figure of the Übermensch, who Nietzsche tells us *is* the sea. I write about how *Zarathustra,* more than any other text, exemplifies the quality of dancing water and transcends rationality both in content and form.

Through my engagement with the metaphors in these texts, I hope to not only shed light on many of Nietzsche's important ideas but also on how poetic language contributes to his success in creating such timeless and flexible works. Works that both critique rigid ideology and

avoid falling into the trap of becoming it themselves, works that propose radical new ways of living without dogmatism, and works that invite the reader to embark on expansive seas and explore unknown horizons.

Chapter 1 - The Graveyard of Perceptions

Nietzsche's essay “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873) warns about the dangers of conceptualization, the process by which we mediate the fluid experience of being through concepts, and suggests how the artistic mode, which is lost as a result of that process, can be reclaimed. The questions that arise are: What is the danger in conceptualization? Where is this danger present in our lives? And, what are the possibilities available to avoid or negate the danger? In order to answer these questions fully, I argue that we must look at certain key metaphors in the text that are thematically related to fluidity and solidity. Specifically, they are the metaphors of petrification, the edifice, and the artist. These metaphors are the route to understanding Nietzsche’s critique because the critique is itself metaphorical, at its core, and no formal argument is otherwise presented.

The first metaphor to explore is petrification, which notably implies a past state of liquidity. Here, Nietzsche describes the human experience of being as having a fundamentally fluid and formless quality. Through a precisely elucidated process, he shows how experience is translated first from nerve stimuli, then to language, then to knowledge, and finally, crystallized into concept. Because experience is more boundless and amorphous the less it is mediated by the organism and its narratives, the process of conceptualization entails a synthetic equalization of multiplicity to fit that which is different into concepts, which are boxes of the same. The next symbol is the edifice, which is Nietzsche’s metaphor for the accumulated efforts of science and philosophy, and is framed as the composite of concepts. The edifice gets to the core of Nietzsche's argument about what science is actually doing, and what it is not. Finally, the artist is Nietzsche’s answer to the intuitive way of being that is lost when the conceptual mode is

dominant. Instead of filling the rooms of the edifice with neat rows of items (what the figure of the rational man is occupied with), the intuitive tears it apart and puts it back together in novel and unorthodox ways which leads to new transferences across boundaries.

These metaphors are essential because Nietzsche's critique of conceptualization is that it entails synthetic hardening of that which is actually fluid and alive. Furthermore, the artistic being that Nietzsche sketches is best understood through the metaphors of fluidity and solidity because it is their relationship to these qualities that makes them who they are as figures. Following all of these metaphors gives insight into core themes for Nietzsche such as language, science, and art. Because he uses various incarnations of the same theme of liquidity and solidity, exploring these connected metaphors will also show how these important Nietzschean topics relate to one another in profound ways. The seemingly disparate themes of language, science, and art that abound in “Truth and Lie” (and Nietzsche’s work more generally) are connected by a shared relationship to fluidity and solidity.

Petrification

The first metaphor essential to understanding Nietzsche's critique of conceptualization is the idea of petrification. It presupposes that being is fluid and formless and, through a process, artifacts (concepts and truth) crystallize out of the primordial waters. He argues that what philosophers have thought of as objective truths are instead perspectives and interpretations. To demonstrate this, he traces back the process by which we come to invent words, which construct all of our truth claims and subsequently become those which comprise what we call knowledge. Once he has undermined faith in the objectivity of truth, he takes aim with his main critique: that

in the hardening of metaphor by which concepts are formed, something is lost of the aliveness and “sensuous power” that was there originally, in being, and ultimately still is.

Before he gets into describing this process, Nietzsche makes a series of moves that destabilize his readers' unexamined intuitions about truth. Part of the character of truth, he will argue later, is that it seems so solid. Yet the “ground” is an infinite expanse of water. Because the philosopher lives in an edifice, they look around their dwelling and see only solidity. What he wants is to bring the philosopher to a window, or better yet toss them headlong into the sea so that they might experience the fluidity of being for themselves. In short, he needs his reader to entertain the idea that maybe there is no ground. To pry the door open a sliver, he begins with the following quote:

> In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of "world history"—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.
>
> One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened. (TL 1)

Here Nietzsche is highlighting that human pursuits matter very much to humans, but not at all to the dizzying indifference of the universe. The galactic imagery and scale remind us of the true vastness of the cosmos in which we abide. Our knowledge, which he argues is inherently anthropocentric, tends to make us feel grandiose. “That haughtiness which goes with knowledge,

which shrouds the eyes and senses of man in a blinding fog" (TL 1), this Nietzsche wants to deflate before he launches into his critique of truth.

Truth, he argues, is something invented. It entails a metaphorization of stimuli which are then congealed into concepts. Precisely what is lost in this process of hardening is the original fluidity and aliveness that still affords the opportunity for play and creativity. According to the process he describes, we receive a nervous response from some stimulus which is then translated into an image. This we describe with a sound, i.e., a word. And eventually, the source is forgotten and the word is taken for the thing in itself at which point it has been congealed into truth.

> The "thing in itself" (for that is what pure truth, without consequences, would be) is quite incomprehensible to the creators of language and not at all worth aiming for. One designates only the relations of things to man, and to express them one calls on the boldest metaphors. A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one. (TL 2)

A description of this process makes it clear that these types of truths lack a basis of solidity. Because the process entails so many layers of metaphor and abstraction, it becomes further and further from the thing in itself. In the same way, "One can imagine a man who is totally deaf and has never had a sensation of sound and music. Perhaps such a person will gaze with astonishment at Chladni's sound figures[1]; perhaps he will discover their causes in the vibrations of the string and will now swear that he must know what men mean by 'sound'" (TL 3). This comparison is effective because the sound figures described in no way resemble the catalyst; the

[1] Geometric figures that appear when a plate dusted with sand is vibrated with a string or bow.

geometric pattern is completely unlike the sound. Nietzsche draws this kind of comparison between the thing in itself and the nerve stimulus, then again for the image that is formed, and so on for each stage of translation. The process of conceptualization is completed when we categorize those images and sounds translated from a nerve stimulus into like categories. He uses the example of a leaf. No two leaves are actually equal in nature, not even two leaves of the same species. "Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal. No leaf ever wholly equals another, and the concept 'leaf' is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from these individual differences, through forgetting the distinctions." Conceptualization, therefore, takes the fluid multitude of sensory experiences and transforms them into manageable, fixed tools. It is the fluid made synthetically firm for our use as referent objects.

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (TL 3)

The quality of seeming firm is the core of his critique. It is because of this seeming that we forget we could keep metaphorizing our experience in new ways. The concept seems firm and we mistake it for the thing in itself. Yet being is always still a fluid and available medium from which new metaphors and relations between things can be crafted.

It is important to note that it is not the process of metaphorization, but the forgetting itself, that Nietzsche critiques. His critique is not that we make concepts, but that we forget that

their origin is metaphor. That we believe ourselves to be doing something more objective, and develop an arrogance from the delusion that our knowledge is so firm. Indeed, he even writes that “The drive towards metaphors is the fundamental human drive” (TL 6). The crafting of metaphor out of fluidity is actually what Nietzsche wants us to reclaim, but it necessitates sacrificing the illusion of solidity.

> Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security, and consistency: only by means of the petrification and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed from the primal faculty of human imagination like a fiery liquid, only in the invincible faith that this sun, this window, this table is a truth in itself, in short, only by forgetting that he himself is an artistically creating subject, does man live with any repose, security, and consistency. If but for an instant he could escape from the prison walls of this faith, his "self consciousness" would be immediately destroyed. It is even a difficult thing for him to admit to himself that the insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that man does… (TL 5)

The terms petrification, coagulation, and fiery liquid evoke the thematic imagery of a fluid that becomes solid and hardened. They describe again how sensory experience is translated first into language and then, through forgetting, concept, at which point it is no longer alive. This quote is additionally helpful, however, because it acknowledges the sacrifice involved in giving up a blind faith in concepts. Yet as Nietzsche will tell us, it is worth the cost for the artistry that is reclaimed. Having described petrification, and its process which thereby demonstrates the ultimate fluidity of being underneath, Nietzsche is now set up to talk more about the dangers therein with his next metaphor: the edifice.

The Edifice

The edifice is a complex beast of metaphor. It is a hulking piece of architecture that is simultaneously made of spider webs and solid material. Instead of a foundation, it rests on flowing water, and figures called the men of rationality are always busy at work maintaining and improving the structure. I argue that an examination of the edifice can help us answer the question: what is the danger that Nietzsche is pointing to in "Truth and Lie?" In answering this question, we will also see that the metaphor builds on petrification by moving beyond a description of purely the process of conceptualization. He shows how the accumulation of philosophical and scientific concepts becomes a structure that individuals and cultures build around themselves. Additionally, because it is built in layers of increasing abstraction, there are concepts in the edifice made not only from direct experience but also from other concepts. While enclosed in the solid-seeming structure, it is easy to forget the fundamental aliveness of experience that underlies it. The danger is located, then, in an unawareness of the structure itself.

Whereas the metaphor of petrification is about the creation of individual concepts from direct experience and stimuli, the metaphor of the edifice is about a web being built from the aggregate of them. The fact that Nietzsche uses the same metaphorical theme of fluidity for his discussion of both conceptualization and the scientific edifice highlights that they are not distinct ideas, but rather intimately connected. It is the project of science and philosophy to pick up each brick made by the process of conceptualization and integrate them into a framework. It sheds light on precisely what Nietzsche's critique of science is by drawing a thread from it back to the initial metaphorization of stimuli and showing that its foundation is metaphor and not objective truth:

> We have seen how it is originally language which works on the construction of concepts, a labor taken over in later ages by science. Just as the bee simultaneously constructs cells and fills them with honey, so science works unceasingly on this great columbarium of concepts, the graveyard of perceptions. It is always building new, higher stories and shoring up, cleaning, and renovating the old cells; above all, it takes pains to fill up this monstrously towering framework and to arrange therein the entire empirical world, which is to say, the anthropomorphic world. (TL 6)

We can understand the scientific edifice then as yet another layer of abstraction away from direct experience because it picks up those concepts forged by language and forgetting, makes concepts about those concepts, and builds the tower of metaphors with them, which is a creation more complex and abstracted than the individual bricks that compose it. It is also subsequently more removed from the playful creation that Nietzsche wants to recover because it is even easier to forget the fluid nature of experience unfiltered by concepts while in the edifice. Describing it as the graveyard of perceptions speaks to the edifice as the final resting place in their life cycle, which begins with the formless experience of being and concludes with installation in the edifice where they truly solidify and lose all "sensuous power." Like with that of petrification, fluidity is again at the center of the edifice metaphor, because it is built on running water, but the metaphor is developed beyond that of petrification in yet another way because it includes an implied fragility that hints at the possibility of reclaiming artistic subjectivity. It also conveys the idea that although there is much that is impressive about science, its foundation is inherently unstable.

The second part of Nietzsche's critique, aside from the loss of artistic subjectivity, has to do with the inherent instability that is the foundation of science, and more specifically that its inhabitants may deny the fundamental uncertainty rather than embrace it.

> Here one may certainly admire man as a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water. Of course, in order to be supported by such a foundation, his construction must be like one constructed of spiders' webs: delicate enough to be carried along by the waves, strong enough not to be blown apart by every wind. (TL 4)

The spider web is actually an even better metaphor than it seems at first. Because a spider's silk begins as a liquid that quickly solidifies into a solid material, it thus mirrors the process of conceptualization that starts with fluid perception and is hardened into concepts. The edifice image also makes it clear that when its walls become too hardened, the structure becomes like a prison that separates its inhabitants from the spontaneity of the river over which it is constructed. Nietzsche critiques this separation both because it leads to an arrogance that is inherent in the anthropocentric worldview it facilitates, and also because the playful capacity for artistic creation is forgotten.

When the inhabitants of the edifice forget that the bricks that seem so solid have their origin in an artistic act of metaphorization it begins to feel like the worldview, and by extension, the world itself is fixed and unchangeable. The edifice as a metaphor is an evolution beyond the previous one of petrification alone because even when the walls do feel solid Nietzsche reminds us that the river is still there the whole time. With the metaphor of petrification, it can seem like the "fiery liquid" is transformed into the concept leaving no trace of its originally liquid form. Really, however, petrification is more of a translation than a transformation that leaves the original source material untouched. The edifice metaphor, with the river flowing all the time beneath it, removes this possible misinterpretation and shows that even when a tower of hardened concepts has been constructed, the ultimate liquid nature of the experience is

unchanged and therefore still accessible. The fact that there is always access is what Nietzsche wants us to realize, he is not critical of the edifice or science in and of themselves, but rather the propensity of them to conceal the fluidity beneath. In a way, Nietzsche is even appreciative of the architectural feat of building so high on water:

> In this he is greatly to be admired, but not on account of his drive for truth or for pure knowledge of things. When someone hides something behind a bush and looks for it again in the same place and finds it there as well, there is not much to praise in such seeking and finding. Yet this is how matters stand regarding seeking and finding "truth" within the realm of reason. If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal" I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man. (TL 4)

It is clear here that the use of the edifice metaphor gestures at a danger that arises when science becomes the predominant epistemology in a culture. The danger of science is as both an incomplete method for finding truth and as an entity that separates us from the mode of artistic creation. Despite his appreciation of the architecture, he is consistent in his warning about what is lost if truth becomes our prison, which occurs when we take the walls of the edifice for something solid and forget that it rests on a foundation of metaphors. The fact that the edifice is a lived-in space means that Nietzsche can discuss different orientations and ways of relating to its seeming solidity and inherent fluidity, as different occupants of a building might interact with their dwelling. In this aspect of the metaphor, he explores the question of: given this edifice and the nature of conceptualization, how do we live? He introduces the ideas of the rational man and

the intuitive man to explore this question and show how one has options when it comes to engaging with the edifice.

The Intuitive Man

So far, the theme of fluidity and solidification has shown us much about the process by which experience is translated into concepts, and how concepts become the bricks that compose the vast structure of science. The theme has also shown us that we can forget about the metaphors and the process of metaphorization and begin to take them for the things in themselves, a dangerous mistake that makes the nature of experience seem rigid and fixed—obscuring that it is something inherently malleable that we can engage creatively. To escape this danger, and to reclaim artistry, Nietzsche introduces the figure of the intuitive man. A close reading of this figure also gives insight into Nietzsche's understanding of art as an antidote to the oppressive weight of long-dead metaphors and the conceptual prison.

The essence of the intuitive man is his relationship to the dynamic of fluidity and rigidity as it pertains to concepts and experience. He steps outside of the rigid constraints of concepts which allows him to engage playfully and creatively and also to craft novel metaphors from experience. The intuitive man is set up in contrast with the rational man who is so firmly a prisoner in the edifice of concepts that he is unaware of the fact thereof, and therefore unaware that crafting novel metaphors is an option. To him, concepts are like a master that rules his thoughts and organizes the interpretation of experience in a rote manner. He cannot see the world in any way save through the lens of the long-dead, forgotten metaphors that comprise the edifice. Because of this strict hierarchy between concepts and the intellect which they chain and restrict, I

argue that Nietzsche's mention of the Roman festival Saturnalia is key to understanding the role reversal that takes place when artistic subjectivity is reclaimed and the intellect is set free.

> …the intellect is free; it is released from its former slavery and celebrates its Saturnalia. It is never more luxuriant, richer, prouder, more clever and more daring. With creative pleasure it throws metaphors into confusion and displaces the boundary stones of abstractions, so that, for example, it designates the stream as "the moving path which carries man where he would otherwise walk." The intellect has now thrown the token of bondage from itself. At other times it endeavors, with gloomy officiousness, to show the way and to demonstrate the tools to a poor individual who covets existence; it is like a servant who goes in search of booty and prey for his master. But now it has become the master and it dares to wipe from its face the expression of indigence. (TL 7)

When someone reclaims their artistic ability, it is akin to Saturnalia: the Roman festival to Saturnus, the counterpart deity to the Greek titan Kronos. The festival was characterized by the dissolution and inversion of social boundaries and hierarchies, in other words, an increase in fluidity within the usually rigid Roman society. During Saturnalia, slaves would dine at the banquet table and be served by their masters. They were allowed to say whatever they wanted, even offensive things. The giving of gag gifts was common and there was, appointed by lot, a *Saturnalicius princeps,* or King of Saturnalia, who had to be obeyed and was tasked with giving chaos-inducing and ridiculous instructions such as “sing naked,” and “throw him in cold water” (Miller, 172). If we take this as the primary metaphor for the inversion of the conceptual and artistic faculties, we can see that the artistic is akin to the *Saturnalicius princeps,* a playful spirit that becomes manifest when the shackles of rigidity are thrown off. When this spirit is manifest, it engages with the edifice in a profoundly different way.

> That immense framework and planking of concepts to which the needy man clings his whole life long in order to preserve himself is nothing but a scaffolding and toy for the most audacious feats of the liberated intellect. And when it smashes this framework to pieces, throws it into confusion, and puts it back together in an ironic fashion, pairing the most alien things and separating the closest, it is demonstrating that it has no need of these makeshifts of indigence and that it will now be guided by intuitions rather than by concepts. (TL 7)

We can see how this description of the intuitive man that Nietzsche provides illustrates the spirit of the *Saturnalicius princeps*. Key phrases like "smashes the framework to pieces," and "throws it into confusion, and puts it back together in an ironic fashion," speak to the power of the artistic faculty to profoundly disrupt rigid structures.

The origin of the artistic faculty is a drive toward the formation of metaphors that Nietzsche claims is the fundamental human drive. Even when there exists the structure of concepts that rules experience, this drive is at work disrupting the order. What is important for Nietzsche is that the drive is present even in those for whom it is most repressed, i.e., the rational man, who utilizes metaphors, albeit of the stale and long-dead variety, in every moment—but is unwilling and unable to acknowledge that it is what he is doing.

> This drive is not truly vanquished and scarcely subdued by the fact that a regular and rigid new world is constructed as its prison from its own ephemeral products, the concepts. It seeks a new realm and another channel for its activity, and it finds this in myth and in art generally. This drive continually confuses the conceptual categories and cells by bringing forward new transferences, metaphors, and metonymies. It continually manifests an ardent desire to refashion the world which presents itself to waking man, so

> that it will be as colorful, irregular, lacking in results and coherence, charming, and eternally new as the world of dreams. (TL 6)

This passage is useful because it sheds yet more light on what is going on when the artistic mode is reclaimed. Like the moving water that is always already under the edifice of concepts, the drive to metaphorization is always present even in someone clinging to rationality. Even in the rigid conceptual structure of the edifice, I would argue, the drive's work is seen in the restlessness of science. The way science has not yet ceased to reframe the same phenomenon since the presocratics speaks to the drive's influence on the rational man, who is of course unaware that metaphor is what is being constructed. The practice of giving gag gifts during Saturnalia can be seen as a metaphor for these "new transferences" that arise from the productive confusion that the artistic sows. Incidentally, Saturnus was the god of sowing, among other things, and we can see how the drive toward metaphor is closely tied to generativity.

Standing in contrast to the fluidity, subversion, and chaos of the artistic is the rational man. Also referred to in the text as the scientific man, an exploration of him can illuminate the intuitive man *via negativa*.

> …the scientific investigator builds his hut right next to the tower of science so that he will be able to work on it and to find shelter for himself beneath those bulwarks which presently exist. And he requires shelter, for there are frightful powers which continuously break in upon him, powers which oppose scientific truth with completely different kinds of "truths" which bear on their shields the most varied sorts of emblems. (TL 6)

The frightful powers mentioned here gesture at the drive towards metaphor, and its pattern-interrupting effect. It also brings to mind the chaotic fluidity of raw experience, symbolized by the river. Curiously, Nietzsche makes no mention of where the intuitive man

builds his hut or even if he has a hut at all. This, I argue, is intentional and serves to communicate the unshelteredness of the intuitive man. Because he does not have a hut, he is directly exposed to the forces of nature, or in other words, experiences it unmediated by the rational mind. These forces are what the rational man fears and tries to avoid, thus he lives as close to the edifice as possible, clinging to it like a raft amidst the sea. For him, direct contact with the chaos of being is nauseating, like a kind of seasickness, and so he builds walls around himself to protect and filter it. The walls mediate experience by turning every sensation into a concept that can be grasped by the rational mind, instead of the raw force of experience which can be engaged only by the intuitive faculty.

The two figures vividly show the consequences of one's relationship to experience. Whether like the rational man we construct layers and layers of narrative between ourselves and experience, or, like the intuitive man, live open to it, has a profound impact on what it feels like to be alive.

> There are ages in which the rational man and the intuitive man stand side by side, the one in fear of intuition, the other with scorn for abstraction. The latter is just as irrational as the former is inartistic. They both desire to rule over life: the former, by knowing how to meet his principle needs by means of foresight, prudence, and regularity; the latter, by disregarding these needs and, as an "overjoyed hero," counting as real only that life which has been disguised as illusion and beauty. (TL 7)

For the rational man, the main goal is the minimization of pain. To this end, he employs concepts effectively to organize and categorize the world, which helps him avoid the sting of dangerous things. Because in uncertainty there might lurk danger, the rational man seeks to remove uncertainty and ambiguity with webs of concepts that explain the world. It is necessary for him

to deny that they are metaphors lest he has to face the fundamental uncertainty underneath his construction. Nietzsche argues that he succeeds in avoiding misfortune but at the cost of never experiencing any real happiness. The intuitive man, however, while he still desires freedom from pain lives with far less between himself and direct experience. Because of this, he feels the full range of human feeling, something not available to the rational man who "...wears no quivering and changeable human face, but, as it were, a mask with dignified, symmetrical features. He does not cry; he does not even alter his voice. When a real storm cloud thunders above him, he wraps himself in his cloak, and with slow steps he walks from beneath it" (TL 8). The mask being a metaphor for the self-deception he enacts through a denial of his metaphors, also points to the fixedness and rigidness of the rational man both in what he desires of the world and what he becomes.

* * *

What do we get out of a reading of all these metaphors: fluidity, solidity, the edifice, the intuitive man, the rational man? We gain insight into the way rigid concepts can obscure the fundamental nature of being, and the generativity that comes from reembracing it. We also see how we work to separate ourselves from fluidity and ambiguity. On all levels, from individuals to institutions to societies, there are ways that we construct the edifice around ourselves, composed of rigid values and concepts, ways of seeing the world that can't be questioned, and rote conversations that keep happening again and again. We do this to protect ourselves from uncertainty and harm, but Nietzsche reminds us that in the same move, we also cut ourselves off from the full richness and playfulness available to us. To be sure, it is the more uncomfortable

path, but as Nietzsche will tell us in *The Gay Science*, suffering is a part of experience that can be embraced as well.

Chapter 2 - The Horizon of the Infinite

The Gay Science (1882) is an aphoristic text in which Nietzsche contends with the death of God and the question of how one ought to philosophize in a godless world. What is this new way of philosophizing? What does the gay scientist do that sets him apart from philosophers of the past? How is Nietzsche, through the figure of the gay scientist, telling us not only to philosophize but also to live? The gay scientist is presented by Nietzsche through a number of different masks—he is the artist, the philosopher of the future, free spirit, dragon slayer, dynamite exploder, and skilled sailor, seafarer, and navigator. It is on this final figure that I would like to focus. Through the navigator's relationship to the ocean and land, I will argue, we can understand the new philosophy that Nietzsche espouses as a philosophy that sets itself apart because it does not rely on or attempt to create a solid system. Likewise, I will argue that we can come to understand what *The Gay Science* is *not* through a reading of Nietzsche's presentation of the figures of Epicurus and the madman that embody unhealthy responses to the realization that solidity does not exist.

Before examining the aphorisms and metaphors that articulate his philosophy, it is important to understand the starting place and context for *The Gay Science* as a response to the death of God. Nietzsche is famous for the statement "God is dead." What he meant by this is that the institutions of truth to which people had subscribed for so long were becoming unbelievable, an event metaphorized as dry land crumbling into the sea. Primarily the Christian church and religion are implicated in the maxim, but Nietzsche also foresaw the crumbling faith in science, philosophy, democracy, and other institutions of thought that we see playing out today. Nietzsche wants to know what it would mean to do philosophy, to live, on a sea where the "land" is absent.

How does one respond to crumbling land? Around what do we orient, as navigators, without land? *The Gay Science* is an exploration of these haunting questions. The gay scientist, who is an evolution of the figure of the artist that we saw in the previous chapter, not only forgoes the solidity of the edifice, but embarks out to sea leaving the crumbled land behind. By following the metaphors of the ocean, and the actions of navigating and seagoing that weave abundantly throughout *The Gay Science*, I hope to shed light on this figure and philosophy in the most illuminating way possible.

On Firm Ground

The first aphorism we will consider examines Nietzsche's interpretation of Epicurus, the Hellenistic philosopher who argued that the goal of life was to maximize genuine happiness, which he saw as the absence of pain. I argue that Epicurus' relationship to land and water serves as a counterpoint to that of the gay scientist. Instead of telling us directly how the gay scientist is, Nietzsche begins by telling us how he is not. In the aphorism, Nietzsche paints a picture of Epicurus gazing out at a calm and bright sea, one that he has made calm and bright through the lens of his philosophy. The sea throughout *The Gay Science* is a metaphor for philosophy, so it is evident that Nietzsche is depicting Epicurus' philosophy as having a calming and brightening effect on the lives of those who live it. However, for Nietzsche, this epicurean picture fails to acknowledge the reality of crumbling land. Furthermore, the sea itself is too calm and bright, too apollonian. It does not represent the real sea which has the wild and dark qualities associated with Dionysus. For Nietzsche, these aspects must be affirmed, which is why I argue the epicurean stance is positioned here as a mistake by virtue of its denial.

> Yes, I am proud of the fact that I experience the character of Epicurus quite differently from perhaps everybody else. Whenever I hear or read of him, I enjoy the happiness of the afternoon of antiquity. I see his eyes gaze upon a wide, white sea, across rocks at the shore that are bathed in sunlight, while large and small animals are playing in this light, as secure and calm as the light and his eyes. Such happiness could be invented only by a man who was suffering continually. It is the happiness of eyes that have seen the sea of existence become calm, and now they can never weary of the surface and of the many hues of this tender, shuddering skin of the sea. Never before has voluptuousness been so modest. (TGS 45)

Notice how safe and free of pain Epicurus' world is. There is land, first and foremost. In later depictions of the sea, the land will have crumbled. Epicurus looks out at the sea but does not embark, he remains safe and dry on firm land. It is light and calm and the animals that frolic seem harmless enough. Despite not being what will eventually become the gay scientist, Epicurus is, however, certainly more in touch with reality than the man of rationality (from "Truth and Lie"). This is because of the simple yet profound act of acknowledging the sea. It pairs well with the next aphorism, 46, that describes a shipwreck, implying an individual that has gone past the stage of gazing at the sea and taken the step of embarking upon it.

Aphorism 46 begins a movement out into the sea that will continue for the rest of the book, it is this movement that is characteristic of the new philosophy Nietzsche is exploring. The aphorism moves beyond the epicurean security of being on dry land and deals with the scene of a shipwreck, but one where it is still possible to swim back to land. Nietzsche is moving us slowly toward his vision of the philosophers of the future who navigate a landless sea. In 46, the figure has transcended the past stage by embarking, but land still exists. The idea of seasickness on land

also flips the normal state of things in which stability is normal and instability is strange. This flipping is designed to make us begin to question our assumptions about why we prefer stability and why we expect it to be the normal mode. Notice how in the following quotation, Nietzsche writes first from the perspective of the rational man, cloistered in the tower and enamored with stability:

> It is a profound and fundamental good fortune that scientific discoveries stand up under examination and furnish the basis, again and again, for further discoveries. After all, this could be otherwise. Indeed, we are so convinced of the uncertainty and fantasies of our judgments and of the eternal change of all human laws and concepts that we are really amazed how *well* the results of science stand up. Formerly, nothing was known of this fickleness of everything human; the *mores* of morality sustained the faith that all of man's inner life was attached to iron necessity with eternal clamps. Perhaps people then experienced a similarly voluptuous amazement when they listened to fairy tales. The miraculous gave a great deal of pleasure to those who at times grew tired of the rule and of eternity. To lose firm ground for once! To float! To err! To be mad! That was part of the paradise and the debauchery of bygone ages, while our bliss is like that of a man who has suffered shipwreck, climbed ashore, and now stands with both feet on the firm old earth—amazed that it does not waver. (TGS 46)

At first in 46, Nietzsche is wearing one of his many masks. Coming from “Truth and Lie,” it is difficult to read them as anything but sarcasm. It shifts back to his genuine voice at “formally” when he describes how the mores have repressed the fluidity and wildness that is a dimension of the human experience. The mores he is referring to are clarified by reading aphorism 42 which concerns how the Romans forbade women from drinking wine. Nietzsche argues that this was in

order for them not to have access to the Dionysian: the thing that the Romans feared above all else as it represented a kind of Greek invasion and destabilization of rigid social structures. In his story about the shipwrecked person, Nietzsche is describing the solidity that was lost when God died and how grateful people were to find a new solidity in science, post-enlightenment. However, the Nietzschean concept of the death of God reflects the eroding faith in all systems of truth, science included, so the aphorism is a stepping stone on the way to later ones in *The Gay Science* that will explore a complete absence of land altogether.

Homesick for the Land

I argue that the next two aphorisms deal with a world where God has already died. The metaphors of the ocean and the people embarked upon it demonstrate the experience of crumbled land and explore ways of responding. The earlier aphorisms we considered dealt with ocean metaphors where land was present; here, the scenes depict a landless sea. There is a constant movement in *The Gay Science* from land to sea, and these middle aphorisms deal with the phase where mankind suffers a thrownness into the ocean where they are still disoriented. They have not yet learned how to navigate this new world but they have certainly set sail.

> We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel

> homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom* —and there is no longer any "land." (TGS 124)

In the above aphorism, 124, the predicament is laid out fully for the first time. The land, or in other words, solidly believed systems or institutions of truth, are gone. This is commentary on the enlightenment and dwindling religious faith, but also the nihilism that emerged and continues to emerge as a response to the decay of religious faith: the doubtfulness of truth systems in general and the confusion of values that resulted. In undermining our truth systems, we have burned our bridges and destroyed the land leaving ourselves adrift in the void. This is the predicament, and *The Gay Science* is a new way of orienting in a world without land to orient around.

Aphorism 125 deals with this same theme, but I argue its central purpose is to demonstrate how the news that God is dead can be dangerous. It imparts important lessons about unhealthy ways of responding. It revolves around the figure of the “madman” who receives the news and spirals into an unbalanced state.

> Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace. and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? —Thus they yelled and laughed. (TGS 125)

For Nietzsche, the news that God is dead is not news at all. It is a premise and the starting place for much of his philosophical work. The fact that the madman is so shocked about God being dead is our first clue that he is meant to portray a misreading of Nietzsche. For this reason, we

must be careful not to confuse the madman with the gay scientist or the philosophers of the future that Nietzsche puts forward as solutions to the predicament. Furthermore, the madman gets wrong what it means that God is dead. For Nietzche, it means that finally the horizon is open and the seas free for exploration to occur. The madman, however, wrongly thinks that the death of God signals an entrapment and disorientation. This sentiment is reflected in the previous aphorism in the metaphor of a bird in its cage. The madman is like the bird that felt more free in confinement. To be sure, freedom comes with disorientation, but the madman fails to embrace the freedom, which is what leads to his troubled state.

> Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? …Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? (TGS 125)

What the madman demonstrates is that it is unhealthy to linger in the skeleton of the old world, clinging to how it used to be. The act of staying put is what causes the unbalanced state of the madman, and is what Nietzsche wants to help us avoid. Notice how the madman does not embark on the sea but tries to stay on land. At the end of the aphorism 125, we are told that the madman lingers especially in churches, affirming even more that he has not moved on. 125 is a cautionary tale that portrays the dangers of insight without proper integration and application. It highlights the danger of receiving an insight but struggling against it and not embracing it, of wishing it were otherwise and being in denial. It shows the mistake of thinking that the land provided more freedom, and additionally, it leads to later aphorisms that express healthy responses to the death of God.

The Seafarers

The metaphors in aphorism 283 convey the purest expressions of Nietzsche's imperative that we find. They contrast very well with the madman as they possess an entirely different attitude that is characterized by boldness and leaning into life, rather than fearful cowering. “For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to *live dangerously*! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas” (TGS 283). If we were to imagine the figures that accept Nietzsche's imperatives, they would not linger on the land like the madman, and they certainly do not linger in churches. The key is that they embark on their ships. When the land crumbles, they fully accept that fact and embrace the infinite and open horizon. Epicurus and the madman, as counterexamples, both cling to the land in some way and do not dare to venture out.

If aphorisms 283 contained the kernel of Nietzsche's central imperative: “Send your ships into uncharted seas,” then 343 conveys the healthiest emotional response and framing to have in response to the news that God is dead.

> The greatest recent event—that “God is dead,”" that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. We philosophers and "free spirits” feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea!'— (TGS 342).

This passage, too, is in clear contrast with the madman aphorism, lending more support to my argument that the madman represents an interpretation gone awry. The madman seems disturbed and stricken that God is dead, the “free spirits,” on the other hand welcome the news. Lastly, it engages in conversation with the aphorism about Epicurus by acknowledging that there will be darkness.

It is clear from the attitude of the free spirits that Nietzsche presents a philosophy of affirmation. He directly faces the problem of crumbling land and instead of denying it, seeks to find a new way to live in full acknowledgement of it. This way of life entails a departure from the usual seeking of solidity and embraces the ambiguous way of things. The implications are just as profound for us today as they were in a world with more religious participation, when God's death was still fresh. Today, the faltering trust in experts and institutions represents the death of the newer gods, yet just as they falter new lands rise out of the sea in the form of cultural and political ideologies. What Nietzsche has to teach us is relevant to any clung-to narrative and any crumbling faith. Whenever and wherever they appear we can ask: What does it mean to live dangerously? Nietzsche's figures teach us that it means to engage with the world in a manner free from ideology, which entails letting go of whatever lands and gods we cling to and embarking into the unknown without the security of our rigid narratives.

Chapter 3 - He is the Sea

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883) is a bewildering text that follows the wanderings of the character Zarathustra as he attempts to teach mankind the way of the Übermensch. It presents immense interpretive challenges due to the sheer density of metaphor and aphoristic language, but also due to an absence of guidance about *how* to read the book. Robert Pippin writes in the introduction of the Cambridge edition that "*Zarathustra* is unlike any of Nietzsche's other works which themselves are unlike virtually anything else in the history of philosophy." In regards to its origin, Nietzsche wrote that the core idea of the figure of Zarathustra came to him by a certain pyramidal rock on the shore of Lake Silvaplana in the Swiss Alps, and in *Ecce Homo* he writes of the process that it was "scarcely one year for the entire work" (EH 70), and ten days each part. The fourth part however was written later and Nietzsche was vehement that it was not to be read by the public, so it is considered of dubious relevance.

While making sense of the book as a whole is a dizzying and maybe impossible prospect, some patterns and themes are clear. For example, it is here that Nietzsche introduces what has become perhaps his most famous idea: the Übermensch. The Prologue begins with Zarathustra leaving his cave hermitage of ten years and descending from the mountains to teach it to the people. Immediately the question arises: who is this figure? Zarathustra tells us: "Behold I teach you the overman: he is the sea" (TSZ 6). Not only is a metaphor of water used to illuminate this most important figure, but it is through water that Nietzsche also expounds on important factors around it, such as the philosophy of fluidity that leads to becoming it and the dangers of stagnation that even a philosophy of fluidity are vulnerable to. Corresponding to each of these three points, water is found in three main forms: sea, river, and swamp. Together, these

metaphors interact with each other throughout the text forming a watershed in which rivers cascade down mountains into expansive oceans and pool in stagnant swamps. In order to understand what it means that the Übermensch is the sea, I argue that an exploration of this water system as a whole is warranted. Through consideration of these three forms, the Übermensch comes into focus as a being that affirms fluidity to such an extent that he himself becomes a fluid, dynamic being, like the sea.

The Sea

The Übermensch is a figure much like the intuitive man and the gay scientist, a figure that is a paragon of a certain way of living that Nietzsche espouses. However, the metaphor of the sea at hand challenges the past figures and suggests that the Übermensch is a step beyond the others. The intuitive man from "Truth and Lie," one of Nietzsche's earlier texts, sees the moving water beneath the edifice of science which prompts the insight that the structure's seeming solidity is an illusion. Subsequently, he is able to play with it, and on it, in unconventional ways that defy the dogma of its concrete nature. The gay scientist not only sees the water, but boldly embarks upon it as a seafarer, leaving the solidity of land and structure behind altogether. In *Zarathustra*, we meet the Übermensch, who goes beyond a relationship to fluidity (which implies distinct entities that relate) and *becomes* the sea. To return to the quote from the introduction:

> Truly, mankind is a polluted stream. One has to be a sea to take in a polluted stream without becoming unclean.
>
> Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea, in him your great contempt can go under. (TSZ 6)

What does it mean that the Übermensch is the sea, and how is it distinct from the gay scientist who embarks upon the sea as a navigator? The main difference is that the metaphor of the navigator still implies a sense of separation between the figure and the sea. Many of the figures that Nietzsche introduces can be read in the degree of separation they have to the water. In "Truth and Lie," the rational man (who is the foil to the intuitive man), does not even acknowledge the existence of the sea and chooses instead to hide in the edifice of science, which serves as a shield of insulation. Someone like Epicurus, that Nietzsche writes about in the *Gay Science*, gazes out at the sea from the land, but does not set sail. The gay scientist embarks, leaving the crumbling land behind, out onto a landless sea. Finally, we arrive at the Übermensch. He cannot quite be said to engage with the sea like the others. Engaging, like relating, presupposes separate entities that interact and connect. He becomes the sea, thus erasing the division between himself and his environment. Union with the sea symbolizes a full, dissolving embrace into the non-ideological way that is characterized by a complete departure from the "land" or rigid truths and narratives. It complicates and challenges the previous figures' ways of being and in some ways seems to supplant them. The Übermensch seems clearly in the same lineage of previous figures, but is also in a category of his own. While certainly representing an evolution in the lesson of fluidity, to say he is the final form, or apex of the figures would be to force a hierarchy and linearity onto Nietzsche's philosophy which works so hard to avoid exactly those frames.

Another property of the sea that reveals something about the figure is that because of its vastness, it is resistant to pollution. Pollution is runoff from the land: solid matter (i.e., "land" or rigid narrative) mixing in with the water. Mankind is very prone to pollution via ideology, if history is any indication. Even if one were to become the Übermensch, ideologies would be

constantly inflowing, but in the vastness of the Übermensch, the rigid truth is simply dissolved in solution. The contempt referenced, that "goes under" references the Nietzchean theme of negation which is about saying no to the vitality that is available in life. Negation's opposite, affirmation is deeply connected to the theme of water because to negate something requires a continuous rigid narrative to be upheld in denouncement of it. Both "being the water" and "going under" are new relationships to water we had not seen yet adopted by Nietzschean figures. It is in this way that the Übermensch challenges all the past figures, who throughout Nietzsche's work have grown closer and closer to water. At the point of actually becoming the water and submerging down into it, there is no closer state that can be achieved.

What does it mean to "become the sea?" To allow "pollution" to be dissolved in us? How does Zarathustra serve as a kind of model of this evolution of thinking? Upon leaving his cave in the mountains, the first person Zarathustra encounters is an old man who says, "You lived in your solitude as if in the sea, and the sea carried you. Alas, you want to climb ashore? Alas you want to drag your own body again." Zarathustra answered: "I love mankind" (TSZ 4). The old man is like a person who has read *The Gay Science* but is not yet up to date on Nietzsche's latest thinking. Because of this, he sees Zarathustra leaving the sea and wonders why. He challenges the platonic return to the people that the first part of Zarathustra's journey mirrors, whose departure from the "sea of solitude" and return to shore is like the philosopher king returning to the cave of illusions to liberate those within. In *The Gay Science*, the imperative is to embark, nothing more. While on the high sea, we can imagine that Zarathustra realized that the further stage, namely immersion in fluidity, was possible and subsequently returned to teach. In other ways, however, the cave metaphor in *Zarathustra* complicates Plato's allegory and represents a rereading. For Nietzsche the cave is physically higher, being on a mountain top, and also is the

place associated with the sea, whereas for Plato the cave is the physically lower and undesirable house of illusions. Here, Nietzche deliberately resists the privileging of reality over appearance invented by Plato, and echoes his argument from "Truth and Lie," that the thing in itself is not worth aiming for. We might imagine that, for Nietzsche, the shadows flickering on the wall of the cave represent not illusions to be vanquished, but rather artistic interpretation and the act of creating metaphor is the principal drive of humankind.

The River

Rivers, and other forms of flowing water like streams and brooks, appear in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a metaphor for the way Nietzsche does philosophy. At the beginning of the second part, called "The Child with the Mirror," Zarathustra takes a moment of self-reflection. He realizes he has undergone a shift. His teaching style has become flowing water. This insight was precipitated by a vision he had dreamt the previous night in which his reflection in a mirror showed a ghastly mask. "Indeed, all too well I understand the dream's sign and warning: my teaching is in danger" (TSZ 63). There is a palpable anxiety throughout Nietzche's work that he will be misinterpreted.[2] What terrified Nietzsche most was that his work would be interpreted into a fixed ideology, or a system that was cast in concrete. He expressed throughout his life the anxiety of being "understood," a word that hints at finality and arrival at a stable resting place of interpretation, rather than an ongoing fluid engagement.

In *Beyond Good and Evil,* he writes that "Every deep thinker is more afraid of being understood than of being misunderstood" (BGE 290), and in *The Gay Science* "One not only wants to be understood when one writes, but also quite as certainly not to be understood" (TGS

[2] There is a bitter irony then, in that following his descent into madness, his sister seized his literary estate and made copious edits and omissions so that his work could be read to support Nazi agenda.

381). He writes in Ecce Homo, “I have a terrible fear of being declared holy one day: you can guess why I am publishing this book beforehand—it should prevent any mischief-making with me... I don’t want to be a saint, and would rather be a buffoon” (EH 88). This concern with being understood is illuminated somewhat when we consider that both the German *verstanden* that is being translated here and the English “understood” employ an embodied metaphor of *standing* apart in some way from the object at hand. *Standen* comes from the verb to stand, and *ver* is a prefix that intensifies the meaning, as in the case of *sprechen,* which means “to speak” and becomes “to promise” with the addition of *ver* as *versprechen.* Etymologically, to understand is to gaze from a place of detachment while standing firmly still. This, I argue, is not the type of engagement Nietzche would want his readers to have. He writes in *The Gay Science*: “Our first questions about the value of a book, of a human being, or a musical composition are: Can they walk? Even more, can they dance” (TGS 366)? Implicit in the word understood and *Verstanden* is fixedness and even stagnation. If a book walks or even dances, is it not right to walk and dance along with it? Nietzsche clearly did not want his ideas about fluidity to be articulated nor interpreted in an un-fluid way. This is reflected in the change that takes hold of Zarathustra; he is “transformed” into moving water. His teachings become a river cascading down from the mountains, roaring into the valleys where mankind dwells, and finally out to the expansive sea, the place his teachings lead. To express all this Zarathustra says:

> I have become mouth through and through, and a brook’s bounding from high boulders: I want to plunge my speech down into the valleys. And may my torrent of love plunge into impasses! How could a torrent not finally make its way to the sea! Truly, there is a lake in me, a hermit-like and self-sufficient lake; but my torrent of love tears it along – down to the sea! (TSZ 64)

A brook bounding down a mountain is the epitome of dancing water, and is surely the quality Nietzsche sought for his writing and teaching. Just as Heraclitus said that one cannot step in the same river twice, one never reads the same Nietzsche twice. His aphoristic, poetic style holds depths that never seem to be fully plumbed. Interestingly, the book that is the most ripe for endless interpretation is *Zarathustra* itself. The character Zarathustra's self-reflection that his teachings are in danger, and his transformation into a river as a pedagogical technique reflect Nietzsche's own project with the content and form of *Zarathustra* as a whole.

What are the consequences of a philosophy that is a river? It means that our normal interpretive methods won't suffice. With a few exceptions, the type of understanding that philosophy has sought, since Plato, is to arrive at a bedrock foundation of certainty, but with a philosophy that claims there is no bedrock, this approach would not only be impossible, but miss the point. However, one might imagine philosophers building bridges and viewing platforms over the river so as to have a stable, fixed location from which to analyze it, in an effort to treat rivers like other objects of the philosophical gaze.

> If timbers span the water, if footbridges and railings leap over the river, then surely the one who says "Everything is in flux" has no credibility…Over the river everything is firm, all the values of things, the bridges, concepts, all 'good' and 'evil' – all of this is firm!" – But when the hard winter comes, the beast tamer of rivers, then even the wittiest learn to mistrust, and, sure enough, then not only the dummies say: "Should everything not – stand still?"...But against this preaches the thaw wind! The thaw wind, a bull that is no plowing bull – a raging bull, a destroyer that breaks ice with its wrathful horns! But ice – breaks footbridges! Yes my brothers, is everything not now in flux? Have all

> railings and footbridges not fallen into the water? Who could still hang on to "good" and "evil?" "Woe to us! Hail to us! The thaw wind is blowing!" (TSZ 161)

The idea of a structure built over water is familiar to us from "Truth and Lie" which featured the edifice of science. However, the metaphor here challenges the picture from "Truth and Lie" by hinting that the river itself will destroy the man-made structures. In a sense, the river here represents both "everything" as well as the type of philosophy that Nietzsche is experimenting with in *Zarathustra*.

In the sense that the river is everything, it reflects the way all is fundamentally in flux. The metaphor of ice gestures at the way that even the flux is in flux, and has moments of seeming more solid. Sometimes it is solid enough to fool "even the wittiest" into thinking that all is solid. But winter is only a moment, and to think that the winter state is universal is to make the same mistake as confusing a certain perspective for a universal truth. The ice metaphor contains within it the characteristic that fluidity hardens and subsequently melts back into liquid in a cyclical way. In the sense that the river is a metaphor for the style of philosophy, the bridge and winter take on a new implication. They are both things that allow one to "stand over" in relation to a philosophy—something that is normally impossible with a river. With a bridge, one can stop mid-crossing and watch from a fixed vantage point, and the ice turns everything solid so that it can be inspected like a fly in amber. The point is that while these vantage points are possible for a moment, in the end, the river is a river and it will destroy these fragile interpretations that fail to relate to it as a wild, fluid, dancing thing. In this way, the river is again a self-reflection on Nietzsche's own philosophical insights, his aim is that while scholars may offer a systematization of his work that misses the point, the inherent depth and fluidity of the philosophical insights will win out, and engulf the concrete interpretations time and time again.

The Swamp

Evoking all that is fetid and stagnant, the swamp is Nietzsche's metaphor for what can go wrong with philosophy and, by extension, any system that purports to know the truth. Not only does the swamp represent stuck, failed systems, but it also signals how *not* to read Nietzsche's work. By this token, the swamp is a cautionary tale about the dangers of interpretation: that interpretation can result in a stuck conceptualization that fails to retain the original fluidity of the source material. There is a risk that, as rivers cascade down from high mountain tops to the sea, they ooze to a standstill in the lowlands choked with vegetation and mud. Earlier in *Zarathustra*, it was noted that in the sea the pollution of mankind can dissolve, yet in the swamp the mud and rotting matter overwhelm the water and it never makes it to the sea. The swamp is a place of stagnation and death above all. As an oxygen-starved place where little grows, it is the graveyard of things that once lived—a familiar metaphor from the edifice of concepts in "Truth and Lie" which, too, was a graveyard of concepts: the place where ideas lose their vitality. The swamp motif, which appears 17 times throughout the text, signals everything that Nietzche opposes in his philosophical project of igniting playfulness through the embrace of fluidity.

Scholars who have lived too long in the swamp milieu create philosophies that reflect its qualities. That their works are "swamp-like" is useful for understanding Nietzsche's critique, because it becomes clear how his contempt is related to their relationship to fluidity. "When they pose as wise, I am chilled by their little proverbs and truths; often there is an odor to their wisdom, as if it came from the swamp, and truly, I have already heard the frog croaking out of it" (TSZ 98)! Nietzsche's critique, that their wisdom has the odor of the swamp, takes aim at the lack of playfulness and dissimilarity with flowing water in the history of Western philosophy. to

reference Nietzsche's litmus test for a book's quality, wisdom from the swamp is that which is stuck and cannot walk nor dance.

Swamps are a mixture of water and land, and for Nietzsche, they also represent the lostness that comes in the wake of God's death if there is not a clear path to the sea. If the land crumbles into the water, but the river cannot flow to the sea, the result is stagnation. In the prologue, Zarathustra claims that mankind is a polluted river, but in the sea, he can dissolve. The swamp then is what occurs if the water remains stuck, and a significant part of Nietzsche's project is to be the river that washes the swamp into the sea. In chapter two, Zarathustra encounters a soothsayer that foresees a world in this stagnant state:

> I saw a great sadness descend over humanity. The best became weary of their works. A doctrine circulated, a belief accompanied it: 'Everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was!...' All our wells dried up, even the sea retreated. All firm ground wants to crack, but the depths do not want to devour! 'Oh where is there still a sea in which one could drown?' – thus rings our lament – out across the shallow swamps. (TSZ 106)

This prophecy points to a philosophical danger: If those things that provided structure and solidity crumble (become weary) and mix into the underlying water without a path, the result is a devaluation of all values, or nihilism. This is reflected in the lament "Everything is empty, everything is the same," and also the flatness of the landscape that echoes a moral leveling of all things, where nothing is believed in. The swamp metaphor is new and distinct from past metaphors of solidity and fluidity, because it is not a representation of one or the other; rather, it explores the mixture that comes from the past idols being torn down into the water, but without any clear next step. A concrete example of this is the figure of the madman that we encountered in *The Gay Science*. The madman receives the news that god is dead, that the land has crumbled,

yet he is stuck clinging to the land in an awkward in-between stage. Unlike the seafarers, he does not embark out to sea, a movement that embraces landless philosophy; rather he is mired in the swamplands fixated on the way things used to be.

In addition to swamps representing the mixture of land and water, or the crumbling of truth systems into that which already was and is fluid, they represent another bad combination: interacting with a fluid text in a non-fluid way. In a way, we can read the swamps in *Zarathustra* as a word of caution from Nietzsche about how our interpretation of the text could be led astray. *Zarathustra* is a dancing river, and if you trap it in one fixed perspective, it ceases to be the same thing and loses its essence. If held in one place for too long the water goes bad, becoming a harmful dogma. The frequent mentions of stagnant water remind us to treat Nietzsche, and perhaps especially *Zarathustra*, as a river. In doing so, we free the river from single-perspective constraints. It flows on in all its force, and the student is free to swim in its current, out to sea.

Conclusion

Our voyage has taken us through three of Nietzsche's major works and past numerous metaphors. We began by glimpsing in the distance the first hints of what would emerge as the theme of fluidity and solidity, the idea of petrification in "Truth and Lie." We saw these petrified objects, concepts, stacked like bricks to build the next metaphor: the edifice, and we sailed away from "Truth and Lie" with an appreciative wave to the figures of the rational and intuitive men. In *The Gay Science* we steered past crumbling land and contemplated Epicurus and the madman resolutely standing their ground. As Mount Vesuvius erupted, Nietzsche's free spirits embarked in their ships and for a moment we sailed the same seas. We gazed up at the cave and watched as Zarathustra became a "brook's bounding from high boulders" as he made his way down to the sea. And as for the swamplands, I hope my navigation has avoided running us aground there.

In that regard, my intention with this piece has been to engage with Nietzche in a non-systematizing way that embraces the poetic and non-rational. To do otherwise, I argue, is to run afoul of the swamp. It would be to force Nietzsche into the very confines that he both critiqued and actively tried to avoid. There would be an irony, then, in concluding this essay with the usual air of finality that surveys the evidence provided and announces that the findings are firm and secure. While I maintain that the theme of fluidity is salient throughout these texts, I would be wary to cast Nietzsche, or even just the metaphors we explored, solely in its light. The metaphors have taught us much, but there are also many metaphors and aspects of metaphors in these texts that do not relate to fluidity. To truly embrace the lesson of fluidity, one must turn away from it and read Nietzsche's aphorisms from entirely different vantage points. Where

would we have ended up, for example, if we had followed instead Nietzsche's metaphors of the body, digestion, and health?

What is clear is that the metaphors I have discussed form a tapestry in which countless vivid images abound: lava, towers, spiderwebs, ships, the sea, and swamps. Looking back, they live at the heart of the central ideas of their respective texts, be it language, responding to the death of God, or the next evolution of the human being. The same theme, invoked most often with water, starts off as a descriptor of the exterior world in "Truth and Lie," becomes a way of life in *The Gay Science,* and in *Zarathustra* it is not exterior at all but something we can become. The metaphors themselves draw closer and closer to water until the individual is subsumed within them, just as Nietzsche's writing began fairly concrete in "Truth and Lie" as he wrote about fluidity, it later became fluid itself as he wrote *Zarathustra.* This movement, towards the embrace of water, is of course also mirrored by an observation noted earlier that the figures start off as spectators of the water, learn to emulate it, and then become it. Often, existential philosophy is framed as a human spectator gazing into the abyss of the sublime, a relationship captured by Casper David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* which is often used to represent the same vein of thought. The painting depicts a wanderer gazing from a clifftop out into an expanse of swirling mist. Yet what this misses is the possibility signaled to in *Zarathustra,* of going beyond relationship through total submersion. Perhaps a better depiction of Nietzsche's thought would be a wanderer in the midst of fog, or further, a sea of fog into which the wanderer has dissolved, having become the fog himself.

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