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Songs of the Last Philosopher: Early Nietzsche and the Spirit of Hölderlin

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*Songs of the Last Philosopher:
Early Nietzsche and the Spirit of Hölderlin*

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Sylvia Mae Gorelick

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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For Thomas Bartscherer, who agreed at a late moment to join in the struggle of this infinite project and who assisted me greatly, at times bringing me back to earth when I flew into the meteoric heights of Nietzsche and Hölderlin's songs and at times allowing me to soar there.

For Daniel Berthold, who has guided me along the philosophic path with rigor, diligence and kindness for four years, and whose help and support in this project have been profound and constant.

For Ann Lauterbach, my longtime mentor in the space between theory and literature, who taught me to remain with grace in the changeable disquiet of that gap. It was she who advised me to use this title, originally destined for a chapter, for the project as a whole.

For Robert Kelly, whose poetical encouragement unceasingly reminded me to thrust myself again in the volcano of Nietzsche's thought not only as philosopher but always, too, as poet—

take the air inside you
as a set of axioms
grinding on each other,

the dead thinking in us
is what we call thinking.

[...]

Now help him think,
the dead are hard of hearing

hence *music*, that special
art of being dead
for the benefit of the living.

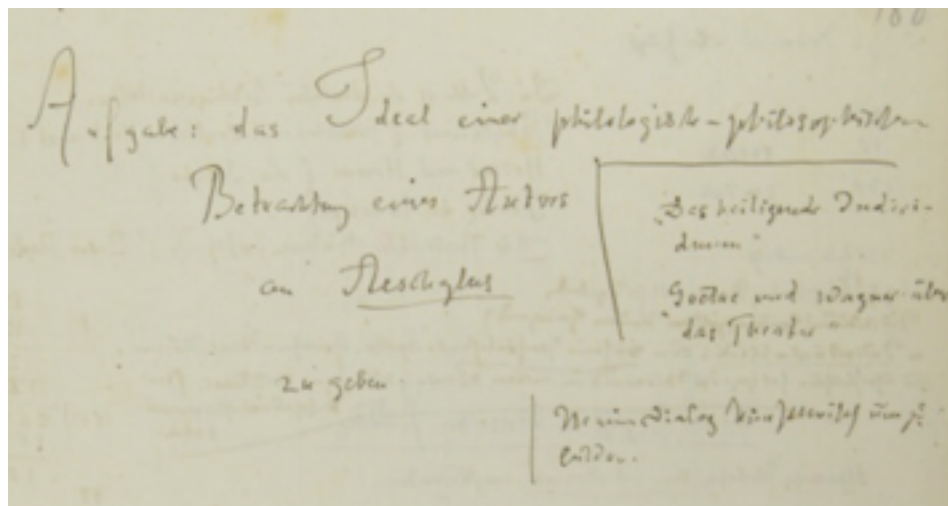
—Robert Kelly, Untitled (“Help Nietzsche thinking”)

Would I like to be a comet? I think so.
They are swift as birds, they flower
With fire, childlike in purity. To desire
More than this is beyond human measure.

—Friedrich Hölderlin, Untitled (“In Lovely Blue”)

Do I still hear you, my voice? You whisper when you curse? And yet your curse should cause the bowels of this world to burst! But it continues to live and merely stares at me all the more brilliantly and coldly with its pitiless stars; it continues to live, dumb and blind as ever, and the only thing that dies is—the human being. —And yet!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, “Oedipus: Soliloquies of the Last Philosopher”



Friedrich Nietzsche: Notebook U-I-5 Spring 1873

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Preface

Soliloquies and Songs: The Philosopher's Birth

Young Friedrich Nietzsche stands continually over an abyss: an abyss between poetry and philosophy, between art and science, between myth and knowledge, between a world in dissolution and the promise of a rising culture. It is a yawning chasm between finite past and infinite future, between the life of the ancients and the life of the moderns—between the mode of the soliloquy and that of the song. Hence the title, *Songs of the Last Philosopher*, in part borrowed from a fragment of Nietzsche's (called: "Soliloquies of the Last Philosopher") and in part renewed by my own perspective and the impulse that Nietzsche's task as a boundary figure—perhaps as a tragic hero, a *last philosopher*—was in great part to weave music and poetry, these rich artistic sources that open and expose the emptiness of the ground of so-called philosophical reason, into the discourse of that very reason: to push philosophy outside itself. Such songs lead to a madness—the madness of the unexpected—from which arises, as a *need*, the embrace of cosmic chance and eternal transformation across the tragedy of time. This is also the madness of *action*, posed in opposition to the sphere of *thought*. In order for philosophy to enter the world, to *change* it, it must freely exercise the mobile plasticity of the *art instincts of nature*, as Nietzsche calls them. Heraclitus' enigmas, too, are songs.

*

Nietzsche's early philosophy shall form the object of this work. It is a philosophy rife with contradictions. Most stunning, arresting, thoroughgoing of these contradictions is that between the drives within the young philosopher towards metaphysics and towards science. I have endeavored to show this contradiction, as well as the innumerable others, of which this

constitutes, in a sense, the root, neither as a dialectical opposition nor as an irreconcilable schizophrenia, but, in keeping with the philosopher's early thought, as a dissonant harmony—an *ἁγών* in the pervasive sense this had for the ancients.

Nietzsche's early philological study of the Greeks before Plato was not merely an academic endeavor; rather, it was necessitated by a crisis in culture, indeed by what the blossoming philosopher perceived to be a *lack* of culture in his contemporary Germany. He saw his time as an age of degeneracy, where the rise of philistinism and the radical separation of science, art, philosophy and philology threatened to so homogenize his people that the very possibility of unity and vitality in the nation was eradicated from the national horizon. Not only Germany, but indeed, modern Europe as a whole, for Nietzsche, *did not exist*, but merely subsisted in a blind and painful disunity, and herein lay, for him, the tragic nature of his time. Nietzsche perceived the imminent *death of metaphysics*, or rather, the radical impossibility of metaphysics in his era, in his contemporary Germany. We mustn't forget that this work was contemporary with the Franco-Prussian War, in which Nietzsche served as a medical orderly and, after perceiving this war's fascistic effects, turned against it. At the opening of the war, in July 1870, Nietzsche wrote to his friend, Erwin Rohde: "Our entire threadbare culture is plunging at the breast of the horrible demon." (*B* 3, 130) This demon he called "military genius" (1, 775; TGS).¹ He consequently believed, initially, that this explosion of Dionysian strife, the force of this military genius, would be capable of reviving culture. Yet, after experiencing the horrors of war and contracting dysentery and diphtheria, he began to view this war, rather, as a subordination of culture to the state. He wrote to Carl von Gersdorff in November, 1870: "I now

¹ Cited in Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York-London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), 67.

consider Prussia a power that is extremely dangerous for culture” (*B* 3, 155).² Nietzsche’s philological work coincides with the unification of Germany; the question of the possibility of a culture proper to Germany is, indeed, highly contemporary. His response to this question, however, was to be an *untimely* one, primarily involving a return to the rich source of ancient Greek culture.

Nietzsche’s main concern, therefore, in his writing of the early 1870s, as a professor of philology at the University of Basel, was to open wide the possibility of creating culture. This entailed, in his view, a radical transformation of philology, then circumscribed by esoteric academicism, so that it could finally unite with philosophy, with art and with science, to reestablish the systemic unity internal to culture. He therefore contrives a series of figures and formulas destined to bring about this end—this restored harmony of national life. These figures emerge, moreover, from his study of the “pre-Platonic” Greek philosophers. Traveling with a great mobility of spirit between the cosmic visions of these early philosophers, of which Heraclitus, Empedocles, Democritus are the most important to him, Nietzsche developed, from the ground of their tragic and secret fecundities, a series of theories on the role of the philosopher in the creation of culture. This hypothetical *philosopher* is conceived in a sense that owes much both to the *genius* of Schopenhauer, and to the Greek *tragic hero*.

Nietzsche and Jacob Burckhardt both conceived the *ἀγών*—the contest or competition—as the central aspect of ancient Greek culture. Burckhardt, one of the leading historians of the 19th century, who, like Nietzsche, advocated a rigorous historical relativism, had held a position at Basel since 1844, the year of Nietzsche’s birth, and the two enjoyed a mutual respect and

² Cited in Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 70.

friendship upon the young philologist's arrival at the university. Yet these two thinkers came to the realization of the ἀγών separately—Nietzsche had already formulated the theory prior to his arrival at Basel and it was perhaps in great part this illumination that bound these thinkers to one another.³ Burckhardt's book, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization (Griechische Kulturgeschichte)*, contains a chapter called "The Agonal Age," in which he advances this theory of the ἀγών as the dominant principle of Greek life. In 1872, Nietzsche wrote an essay called "Homer's contest" (*Homer's Wettkampf*) in which he also made this claim.

Though the ἀγών is, for both Burckhardt and Nietzsche, thought as a paradigm that informs every sphere of ancient Greek life, from the state to the arena to the oracle to the theater, there are two essential components of the agonal theory shared by these two moderns. The first is the importance of the opposition between a *good* and a *bad* goddess Eris (strife), of which Hesiod speaks in his *Works and Days*, and the second is the prohibition of any absolute victory between the contestants. With respect to the first of these points, Burckhardt claims that the *good* Eris was both most central to the Greeks and prior to the bad Eris: "The good *Eris* was the first to be born (while the bad was only a variant fostering war and conflict) and Hesiod seems to find her not only in human life but also in elemental Nature, for Cronos had placed her among the very roots of the earth [Gaia]. It is the good *Eris* who awakens even the indolent and unskilled to industry; seeing others rich, they too bestir themselves to plough and plat and order their houses, so that neighbor vies with neighbor in striving for wealth."⁴ Thus did this Eris work to incite men to competitive *production*. The Eris of destruction and *war*, on the other hand, could always be

³ Cf. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, ed. Oswyn Murray, trans. Sheila Stern (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999), xxxii.

⁴ Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, 165.

traced back to this originary Eris. Nietzsche's emphasis falls, rather, on the importance of the competitive *jealousy* awakened by the good Eris: "The Greek is *envious* and does not experience this characteristic as a blemish, but as the effect of a *benevolent* deity: what a gulf of ethical judgement between us and him!"⁵ These two goddesses of strife can thus be accessed *through* one another—the regime of bad Eris can always be reversed into a regime of the good Eris. Nietzsche also insists upon the political significance of the *ἀγών*, emphasizing "the feeling that the contest is vital, if the well-being of the state is to continue." It was for this reason that the contest could never allow an absolute victory. Taking an inspiration from Heraclitus, Nietzsche formulates this law of the Greek contest. Upon the banishing of Hermodor, the Ephesian sage said: "Amongst us, nobody should be the best; but if somebody is, let him be somewhere else, with other people."⁶ From this vantage point, Nietzsche writes: "For why should nobody be the best? Because with that, the contest would dry up and the permanent basis of life in the Hellenic state would be endangered."⁷ The *ἀγών* that Nietzsche and Burckhardt theorize thus defines itself *against the dialectic*, conceived in the speculative sense, and this in two ways. Firstly, through this reversibility between a nihilistic (*bad*) strife and a life-affirming (*good*) strife, and secondly through the necessity that this *ἀγών* continue eternally, without any conqueror ever prevailing. It is because of this exclusion of victory that the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the process by which the dialectic passes over to a higher stratum through the mastering of one side by the other, is impossible in the process of the *ἀγών*.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, "*On the Genealogy of Morality*" and *Other Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), "Homer's Contest," 174-181, 177.

⁶ Heraclitus, frag. 121. Cited in Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," 178.

⁷ Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," 178.

Rather, between the contestants of the Greek *ἀγών*, there is a relation of duplicity which Nietzsche had employed in his theorization of the two art instincts of nature, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, in *The Birth of Tragedy*. These two instincts are defined by the impossibility of their existence *without one another*—they are complementary forces which, in their primordial struggle, eternally exist—their competition constitutes the very genesis of tragic art. Hence, they express themselves through one another, just as man expresses himself through nature and nature manifests itself in the form of man. The *ἀγών* thus carries the aspect of a circular economy between life and art. At times, the two sides of the contest blend and lose themselves in one another, becoming indistinguishable. These are moments of reconciliation. Yet following such harmonic moments, they must again separate and return to their relation of strife. Extending this agonal paradigm far beyond Burckhardt's use, Nietzsche employs it to define the very attitude toward antiquity that the modern philologist must cultivate. The *ἀγών*, an antagonistic and primordial phenomenon is, in a certain perspective, the key to the Nietzsche's early thought.

The return to the Greeks for the creation of novelty was by no means a project foreign to German philosophy. It was, indeed, this very return that had characterized the German Romantic movement. Specifically, the high valuation of ancient *tragedy* as the source of cultural transformation and transition, indeed as the paradigm of the dialectic, was at the very heart of the birth of speculative philosophy as well as of German Romantic literature. Some fifty years after the death of that philosophical movement, Nietzsche finds himself, in the early 1870s, in close conversation and harmony with these predecessors. It is as if he found Schiller, Goethe, Hölderlin to be his *true* contemporaries, and it is to their constellation of problems and dangers that he responds.

The second fragment toward Nietzsche's unwritten *Untimely Meditation*, "We Philologists" (*Wir Philologen*) reads:

Passage on Faust
Hölderlin
Finish Empedocles⁸

The importance of Hölderlin, as at once the modern tragedian and a *figure* of the modern tragic hero is, I shall be arguing, central to Nietzsche's philological project. Nietzsche inherits the very archetype of the tragic hero as a herald of the culture to come from Hölderlin—this theory finds its ground in the case of Empedocles, the poet-philosopher who endeavored to save his people by thrusting himself into the flames of Mount Etna. Hölderlin's unfinished *Trauerspiel*, *The Death of Empedocles* had made an impression on Nietzsche at a young age, evinced by a letter he wrote at sixteen, addressed to a hypothetical attacker of Hölderlin, his "favorite poet." Taking Hölderlin's subversion of his contemporary speculative philosophy as a point of departure, I shall exhibit how the spirit of Hölderlin, whose tragic death in madness took place only a year before Nietzsche's birth, inspired the blossoming philosopher in his scientific-artistic-philosophical project. From Hölderlin, too, Nietzsche inherits the instinct toward *tragic time*—both for the ancients, in the rhythm of their tragedies, and for the moderns in their discontinuous dream of continuity. In the onrush of this time, the figure of the philosopher as tragic hero forms the radical cut, the *caesura* between a world of dissolution and a new culture. And it is precisely through his *failure* as a cultural reformer that he comes to constitute this chasm. The uncanny consonance between the tragic fates of Hölderlin and Nietzsche in long-endured madness—their respective descents into shadow-life, the first audible, productive and the second silent, evidently

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, ed. and trans. William Arrowsmith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 321.

haunts this discussion. Although the question of this consonance is of profound concern to me, it is not within the scope of the present project to formulate a response to it.

While there is an extreme, agonal tension between the metaphysical and the scientific views of life in Nietzsche's early work, his instinct toward a rejection of metaphysics entirely is central to his thought—this is particularly evident in his notebooks. I will therefore draw in great part from posthumously published fragments as well as from works published contemporaneously to their composition, or written with the intention of publication, and notes for courses given at Basel. There are thus various levels of textual direction, the intricacies of which I do not address. At a basic hermeneutic level, one might say that the addressee of these writings changes from form to form. The fragments would be addressed, then, to Nietzsche himself, as he takes on other voices to converse with himself, to experiment with his own thinking and to push at the limits of the spheres he moves within in the mode of an often-tragic solitude. The published works would be addressed to an audience to come—a community or a “we” that their very writing seeks to bring about, and to the few contemporary souls strong enough to receive the boldness of their claims; Richard and Cosima Wagner, Erwin Rohde and Carl von Gersdorff would number among these rare readers. The lecture notes, for their part, would constitute an address to Nietzsche's small circle of students—indeed, many of his lectures of the early 1870s were delivered to no more than ten students. This was largely because, following the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872, condemned by Wilamowitz, Ritschl and others as “fantasy philology” and “witty carousing,” Nietzsche's student following at Basel was greatly diminished.⁹ To postulate the degree of truth or faithfulness of the philosopher to

⁹ Cf. Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 83-84.

himself in these different forms of writing is nearly impossible. Rather, I might suggest that the posthumous fragments carry most profoundly the trace of Nietzsche's own becoming—the constant fluctuations of his self, of his multiple selves, and of their propositions, often contradictory, balanced on the limit between madness and reason.

The rejection of metaphysics, then, begins as a quiet, clandestine thought in the intimacy between Nietzsche and himself—the most dangerous thought, the most tragic thought, and, in a manner that he would later elucidate in its fullness, the most *necessary* thought to his time. The possessor of this poisonous, secret knowledge is the *tragic philosopher*. He attains this knowledge of the impossibility of metaphysics by an excess of consciousness—both of his time and of himself—which leads him to the foundational act capable of creating community: that of self-sacrifice. It is through the tragic thinking and the tragic songs of Hölderlin that Nietzsche comes to this sacrifice.

The present essay begins by tracing the configuration of Nietzsche's early work, in which science and metaphysics struggle against each other in the ideal organization of a culture. It then moves through Hölderlin, to grasp the significance of the tragedy's temporality and of the tragic hero's role in the creation of culture, and ends by following Nietzsche's theories of time and rhythm to the significance of the tragic hero *for him*, as the sacrificer of the metaphysical, and thereby, too, as the prophet of new community.

*

In 1887, Nietzsche would write, in a fragment:

To explore the whole sphere of the modern soul, to have sat in its every nook—
my ambition, my torture, and my happiness.

Really to overcome pessimism—a Goethean eye full of love and good will as the
result.

KSA 12: 9 [117]¹⁰

We may perhaps justly say that this instinct runs through the philosopher's work, ignited early in
the figure—among many others—of the *comet*.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. R.J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 532.

Philosopher as Comet

The young Nietzsche envisioned the philosopher as a wandering soul, a solitary spark in the night of an impoverished world, an open, limitless song that captures eternities in his incessant movement to fill living with power—this philosopher, above all, is the supreme untimely creature. In his *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873), written in the wake of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche speaks of the modern philosopher as a *comet*, the sole soaring entity in a dissolving, barbaric sky whose stars have been reduced to uniformity and identity, all possibility of unity, community between them obscured. While these faded stars belong to a world in which all that is alive has become measurable, calculable, commensurable, condemned to a self-inflicted destiny divested of singularity, the philosopher springs forth inhumanly, as that necessary hero who infinitely escapes all form of measure and who travels across solar systems at unthinkable, incalculable speeds. If the fertile culture of the Greeks engendered philosophers who harmonized with their entire cosmos in a necessary way, what can the modern philosopher's task, in a world divested of such unified harmony, possibly amount to?

Only a culture [*Kultur*] such as the Greeks possessed can answer our questions as to the task of the philosopher, and only it, I repeat, can justify philosophy at all, because it alone knows and can demonstrate why and how the philosopher is *not* a chance random wanderer, exiled to this place or that. There is a steely necessity which binds the philosopher to a genuine culture. But what if such a culture does not exist? Then the philosopher is a comet [*Komet*], incalculable and therefore terror-inspiring. When all is well, he shines like a stellar object of the first magnitude in the solar system of culture [*Sonnensysteme der Kultur*]. That is why the Greeks justify philosophers. Only among them, they are not comets.¹¹

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Lanham: Regener Publishing, 1962) § 1, 33-34.

Culture, for Nietzsche, is characterized by “vital unity.”¹² In the absence of this unity, the philosopher, a monstrous heavenly body, must strive toward the creation of a new, unheard-of culture, an undiscovered species of necessity whose face lies veiled beneath the soil of the modern age. In his project to expose it, the philosopher strives against the current of his time, as a crepuscular prophet. And might the comet’s tail, that unknown flame, brush against the surface of the earth in an infinitesimal instant of irreversible catastrophe whose result can only be radical transformation, a resurgence of the long-buried force of life? Here is the question this Nietzsche dares to pose to us.

This indeterminate determination of the philosopher as comet comes to light, we must remember, in the field of philology, at a moment in the flowering of this science when it is virtually indistinguishable from Hellenism. Nietzsche had been appointed a chair in philology at Basel University in 1869, at the age of 24. For him, therefore, this proposition is at once philosophical, anthropological, artistic and prophetic. In his notes for a course on philology in 1871, Nietzsche wrote: “*Comprehension of Antiquity*, full penetration of love.”¹³ This penetration demands first of all that we “experience our difference with it”¹⁴—the unsurpassable abyss between the Modern and the Ancient worlds must be not only understood but *undergone* in order for philology, and philosophy, to be possible. This experience, vastly changeable, must thus also be constantly *redefined, reevaluated, reestablished*. The invisible historical fabric that binds us to and separates us from the Greeks is rewoven and rediscovered with every change in the flux of

¹² Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 105.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Introduction aux leçons sur l'Édipe-Roi de Sophocle et introduction aux études de philologie classique*, trans. Françoise Dastur and Michel Haar (Paris: Encre marine, 1994), 93.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *L'Édipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 98.

life. Giorgio Colli writes with passion of the young Nietzsche: “Whoever has drawn such a wealth from these far-off spheres becomes an explosive force for the present [...].”¹⁵

Nietzsche’s book on the philosophers of the Greek tragic age followed a course given at Basel in 1872-1873 on the “Pre-Platonic Philosophers,” a term coined by Nietzsche. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* run along two opposing tracks: while the former maintains a metaphysical and artistic investment through a fidelity to Schopenhauer and to Wagner, treating Heraclitus and his aesthetic cosmology as the acme of ancient Greek philosophy, in keeping with the tone of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the latter tends decidedly away from metaphysics, toward a scientific goal, and takes Democritus and his atomism as the acme of this history. Both art and science, however, as we will discover, are necessary to Nietzsche’s philological project—primarily a *cultural project*.

In his inaugural address at Basel University, delivered on May 28, 1869, and titled *Homer and Classical Philology*, Nietzsche claims: “Homer, as composer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is an *aesthetic judgement*.”¹⁶ That is to say, Homer is a *modern creation*, projected onto an unknowable Greek world, outside the reach of our experience. For Nietzsche, Homer is a *great poet*, but he cannot be the *man* whom we call Homer; rather, he is a myth created by the soul of the Greek people. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the result of a great musical and poetic instinct that surpasses the bounds of the *principium individuationis* imposed by a state. The person, the very subjecthood of Homer is an invention, as Orpheus is an invention, a name destined to designate an eternal, musical instinct. In this address, Nietzsche puts forth a program for the

¹⁵ Giorgio Colli, *Écrits sur Nietzsche*, trans. Patricia Farazzi (Paris: Éditions de l’éclat, 1996), 15.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Homer and Classical Philology*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 3, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. J.M. Kennedy (London: J. N. Foulis, 1910). <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18188/18188-h/18188-h.htm>.

advancement of the “science” (*Wissenschaft*: literally, *making of knowledge*) of philology, which requires its unification both with *science* and with *art*. He writes: “Science has this in common with art, that the most ordinary, everyday thing appears to it as something entirely new and attractive, as if metamorphosed by witchcraft and now seen for the first time. Life is worth living, says art, the beautiful temptress; life is worth knowing, says science.”¹⁷ Antiquity, to be constantly revitalized and recreated, must be studied from both a scientific and an artistic perspective, and the one must never obscure the other. At the juncture between living and knowing stands philology, which, for its part, must unite with philosophy in order to treat the Greeks properly. “We grant that philology is not the creator of this world, not the composer of that immortal music; but is it not a merit, and a great merit, to be a mere virtuoso, and let the world for the first time hear that music which lay so long in obscurity, despised and undecipherable?”¹⁸ The philologist’s task is to cultivate the modern ear, that it might learn to hear the ancient music of life; it must facilitate the reception of the enigmatic Greek life-rhythm *for the first time*. To unveil that ancient force, to draw its infinitude into a twilit present, this is the philologist’s task—and it is for this very reason that the ancients cannot appear in their purity, but only through the mediation of the untimely thinker.

Nietzsche reverses a formula of Seneca’s to say: “Philosophia facta est quæ philologia fuit.” (What was philology has now been made into philosophy.) His ambition is to overthrow the barbarity of modernity and resuscitate the Greek instinct for life among the Germans with this, “our” new philosophical philology. He explains his “philological creed” as follows: “By this I wish to signify that all philological activities should be enclosed and surrounded by a

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Homer and Classical Philology*.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Homer and Classical Philology*.

philosophical view of things [... .]”¹⁹ Against the highly academic philology of his day, exemplified by Ulrich von Wilamowitz, whose central ambition was to make philology into a pure positive *science* (*Wissenschaft*), divested of philosophical or artistic influences, Nietzsche already, at the dawn of his ten-year career as a professor of philology, insists on the necessity to reassess and revalue the study of the ancients through a philosophical perspective. The transformation (which is to say, *creation*) of the world depends upon the exigency that philology be philosophical, that philosophy be philological, and that this transfigured discipline ally itself with art and with “the artistic friends of antiquity,”²⁰ with science and with the great scientists. By this means alone will philology succeed in breeding the geniuses of the future, a modern race of demigods.

“There is an invisible bridge from genius to genius,” writes Nietzsche in a notebook of 1872, “—that is the truly real ‘history’ of a people” (KSA 7: 19 [1]).²¹ It is this bridge that must continually be destroyed and rebuilt by the philosopher-philologist, each time anew, toward a future and the genius it unwittingly conceals. Or rather, the whole semicircular series of bridges must be demolished and re-erected once again each day, exposing ever greater dangers, discontinuities and possible harmonies. This history is never mastered by one logic but exposes the incommensurable difference between all self-necessitating logics, doctrines, philosophies, cosmogonies. Thus, with the gap of difference and community that separates and connects geniuses across a history comes also an immeasurable incomprehensibility. That wide chasm of

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Homer and Classical Philology*.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Homer and Classical Philology*.

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Untimely Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3. The seventh volume of the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) contains Nietzsche’s posthumous fragments from 1869 to 1874.

sameness and difference separates Heraclitus from Socrates, Schopenhauer from Nietzsche, Nietzsche from us.

In the second of his *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen—Untimely Meditations*, entitled “The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1873), Nietzsche writes: “Only insofar as history serves life do we wish to serve history.”²² The *life* of which Nietzsche here speaks is threefold, and requires a complex *ἀγών* between memory and forgetting: “*the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary to the good health of a man [ein Mensch], a people [ein Volk], and a culture [eine Kultur]*.”²³ It is thus that the creator of histories, and particularly of *philosophical* histories, must at once be able to “diagnose” his time from the perspective of the past *and* to diagnose the past from the perspective of the present, in order to engender the philosophical explosion proper to his time, the one that might push it beyond itself, onto unforeseeable, fertile ground. The degrees of memory and forgetfulness, of the historical and unhistorical forces necessary to a man, a people, a culture, is determined by the measure of capacity for plasticity, which Nietzsche views as an essential life-force, because, precisely, it determines the capacity for *transformation*.

To determine this degree and thereby the boundary beyond which the past must be forgotten if it is not to bury the present, we would have to know precisely how great is the *plastic force*²⁴ [*plastische Kraft*] of a man, a people, or a culture. I mean the strength to develop uniquely from within, to transform and assimilate the past and the alien, to recover completely from wounds, to redeem losses, and to refashion broken forms. There are men who possess so little of this strength that a single experience, a single pain, or, often and especially, a single subtle wrong, the tiniest scratch, makes them bleed helplessly to death.²⁵

²² Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 87.

²³ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 90.

²⁴ I have provided this literal translation. Arrowsmith translates *plastische Kraft* as “*shaping power*.”

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 90.

This *force* [*Kraft*] carries a primordial aspect—it is the *Urkraft* that makes possible the reestablishment of health for the future. Hence, an emphasis is placed both on the depths of a man, a people, a culture's strength, its power to bring itself into existence, and on the surface-phenomenon of life that is the result of the exercise of this power. Here it becomes evident that *life* has for Nietzsche both a scientific and a metaphysical signification. It is at once biological and primordial—and these two aspects are inseparable, enchained together in a circular relation at the heart of the world. And this is because the economy of the human creature is circular; when appearance, the exterior manifestation of life in cultural creations, transforms itself, therefore, the primordial and the underlying biological aspect of life must also be transformed. It is the breaking-out of a vicious circle, where the disconnect between internal force and external creation is so great that it merely subsists in a repetitive state of degeneracy, that enables a transformation of life and of culture. What shall enable this cutting of the vicious circle for Nietzsche shall be, precisely, the *sacrifice*—the abandonment of the metaphysical. With this sacrifice comes, too, the sacrifice of the capacity for *measuring* the degree of plastic force inherent in a man, a people, a culture. The question of the source from which such a capacity might come to be is left open and unanswered by Nietzsche—it is perhaps only from within the rhythm of one's time that such a measure might become possible. Measure itself, therefore, is ever *relative*—no universal law can be employed to undertake such a task. Indeed, there is a paradox in the concept of measure—for the tragic itself is defined by the impossibility of universal measure. It is only by approximation that the quantity of plastic force can be grasped. The *genius*, or the *tragic hero* who is capable of this measure is therefore characterized by an internal admixture of metaphysical and scientific life-forces that allow him at once to embody

the tragedy of his time, which reaches its apex in his excessive self-consciousness, and to sacrifice the metaphysical portion of this tragedy. It is through this sacrifice that a culture divested of metaphysics can arise.

The famous axiom of *The Birth of Tragedy* is that “it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that life is eternally *justified*”²⁶—this proposition formed the basis of Nietzsche’s metaphysics of art. Insofar as life is an artistic, aesthetic phenomenon, it surpasses and even *transfigures* the biological, scientific force it manifests. Life as biological life, that is, as a surface-phenomenon, on the other hand, leads necessarily to the deeper reality of life as the ground of all possibility, as a metaphysical force. Philosophy reveals itself to be in a privileged position to serve and cultivate life, precisely because it speaks the language of science but is primarily, primordially *artistic*. In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche writes:

Great quandary: whether philosophy is an art [*Kunst*] or a science [*Wissenschaft*].

In its aims and in its results it is an art. But its means, conceptual representation, it shares with science. It is a form of poetic artistry.—It cannot be categorized: consequently we must invent and characterize a species for it.

The physiography of the philosopher. He arrives at knowledge by poeticizing and poeticizes by arriving at knowledge. [...] Heraclitus can never be obsolete. [Philosophy] is poetry beyond the limits of experience, continuation of the *mythic impulse*; also essentially in images.

(KSA 7: 19 [62])²⁷

It is in this respect that philosophy is capable of bringing about culture—as a *poetic force*, in the sense of the Greek ποίησις, meaning *creation*. Philosophy’s power, which exceeds the measure of human experience, creating into outer solar systems, lies in reviving the “*free poetic manner* in

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Toronto: Random House, 1967), *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 5, 52.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 23-24.

which the Greeks dealt with their gods!” (KSA 7: 19 [40]).²⁸ Here, science is conceived as the *means* to philosophy as art, insofar as philosophy, in its scientific capacity, entails the creation of ordering concepts. Philosophy is a kind of monster, a hybrid creature, perhaps a species of *centaur* which, exceeding all categorization, requires the creation of a new physiography to contain it, to think it. The proper measure of the artistic, *mythic impulse* and the scientific impulse is achievable thus only philosophically. And the individual, the philosopher who emerges from the dynamic between these impulses, is himself the harbinger of the culture to come. Nietzsche wrote to his friend and fellow-philologist, Erwin Rohde, in February, 1870, while he was writing *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Scholarship, art, and philosophy are now growing together in me so fully that some day I am sure to give birth to a centaur” (B 3, 95).²⁹ This *centaur*—the mythical, monstrous half-beast, half-man is the very emblem, the prophecy of the new *Kultur* on the rise.

Of the philosopher’s relation to art, Nietzsche also writes: “How does the philosophical genius relate to art? [...] What *remains* when his system, as science, has been destroyed? But it is precisely this remaining element that *controls* the drive for knowledge, that is hence the artistic element. [...] In this control [of knowledge], the value of philosophy does not lie in the sphere of knowledge, but in the sphere of life: the *will to existence uses philosophy* for the purpose of a higher form of existence” (KSA 7: 19 [45]).³⁰ All of philosophy’s *force (Kraft)* thus originates from its primordial artistic strength. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe defines this *plastische Kraft* as the capacity to grow out of oneself, as the faculty to “croître par soi-même” and to “s’accomplir par

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 16.

²⁹ Cited in Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 65.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 18.

soi-même”—in the manner of nature. The self-creation of life as a work of art, this “auto-organic” capacity is the inner process that must be measured and cultivated by the philosopher.³¹ In an outline for the book, “*Philosophers of the Tragic Age*, in memory of Schopenhauer” (KSA 7: 23 [25]),³² Nietzsche writes: “Philosophy, marvelous double nature” (KSA 7: 23 [28]).³³ It is *double*, precisely, in its capacity as both an *artistic* and *scientific* force.

Untimeliness is the way of life necessitated by Nietzsche’s grand ambition to give rise to a new culture: “for I don’t know what sense classical philology could have today, if not that of exercising an untimely influence, that is, of acting against the time, thus upon the time, and, let us hope, to the aid of a time to come.”³⁴ It is for this reason that the second *Untimely Meditation* begins with this forceful quotation from Goethe: “I hate everything that merely instructs me without increasing or directly conferring life on my activity.”³⁵ History is fatal if it does not lead to the construction of another *invisible bridge* whose destination promises a resurgence of genius from its neglected tomb. As advice to the young philologist Nietzsche proclaims: “He must have the courage to seek his path alone.”³⁶ In other words: to leap into the doubly-unknown chasm of future and antiquity across an unbuilt footbridge, penetrating through the present with equal quantities of love and hatred. Likewise, Nietzsche says of “philosophers”: “following the road in

³¹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *L’imitation des Modernes (Typographies 2)* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986), “Histoire et mimésis,” 87-111, 98.

³² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 123.

³³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 125.

³⁴ Cited in Colli, *Écrits sur Nietzsche*, 15.

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 87. From Goethe’s letter to Schiller, Dec. 19, 1798.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *L’Œdipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 104.

solitude is part of their character.”³⁷ The modern wayward genius, isolated by virtue of his internal flame, must be both philologist and philosopher; in other words, the future of philosophy, as united with science and art beyond metaphysics, depends upon its intimate study of Greek antiquity. There alone will it find the source of a renewal of life for the future.

Untimeliness, the art of transforming antiquity (*Alterthum*) into novelty (*Neuthum*), is therefore the task of the philosophical genius. Paolo D’Iorio explains that while the first of these words is “of common usage,” the latter is highly “rare in the German language”—it appears in Nietzsche’s writing only twice: first, in the second *Untimely Meditation*, and second in the *Miscellaneous Maxims and Opinions*, appended to *Human, All too Human* in 1879.³⁸ In the second *Untimely*, these terms are used in a reproach of the “antiquarian” historian, who, endlessly accumulating the memories of history, finds that it is impossible “to set aside such a past [*Alterthum*] for a new present [*Neuthum*].”³⁹ The second occurrence is a reference to the appearance of the dead in dreams—when the dead reappear in this manner, “the distant past [*Alterthum*] becomes a new present [*Neuthum*].” These appearances are therefore “*Signs of great changes* [*W a n d l u n g e n*].”⁴⁰ In both cases, therefore, it is a matter of receiving ancient life into the heart of modern life by a process of anamnesis rendered possible through *forgetting*, which thereby creates this ancient life anew, in a manner unheard-of and unknown. This then is why plastic force is needed—to call back the past, differently, and, scientifically, to create the transformed present as a *work of art*. The collaboration of the scientific and the artistic and,

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, ed. Raymond Geuss, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 249.

³⁸ Paolo D’Iorio, *Le Voyage de Nietzsche à Sorrente* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2012), 85.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 102.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Miscellaneous Maxims and Opinions*, aphorism 360. Cited in D’Iorio, *Nietzsche à Sorrente*, 84.

indeed, their necessary, ceaseless struggle with one another, is at the heart of philosophy and essential to the poetic work.

What separates our time from that of the pre-Platonic Greeks, what separates ancient Greece from modern Germany, for Nietzsche, is predominantly the *existence of culture*. While the sphere of common life for the Greeks was constituted by an indestructible unity of art, ethics, philosophy and the state, such a cultural organism is no longer possible for the moderns. In 1872, Nietzsche writes: “At the proper height everything comes together and harmonizes—the philosopher’s thoughts, the artist’s works, and good deeds” (KSA 7: 19 [1]).⁴¹ The *modern* philosopher must therefore lay the ground for a renewal of the culture of this Greek species, yet in a manner that utterly transforms it. But what does “culture” mean? The word comes from the Latin root *colere*, meaning “tend, guard, cultivate, till”—culture is a spontaneous outgrowing, an organic upsurge from the depths of the earth, that must be defined and perfected by a people. It is the abundant out-spring of that which is most natural, into the self-organizing forms of collective life and government. In German, *Kultur* is used in the sense of “civilization” as opposed to *Bildung*, which is closer to culture in the sense in which one speaks of *high culture* or being *cultured*. Nietzsche uses the word *Kultur* to designate the externalization of the natural instinct of a man, a people, a culture to create itself as a universal harmony by the harnessing of *plastische Kraft*. It is, indeed, this life-force rendered absolute in the circumscribed historical context of a nation. Nietzsche proclaims: “My task: *to comprehend the inner coherence and the necessity of every culture [K u l t u r]*” (KSA 7: 19 [33]).⁴² These vital organizations correspond to one another by an internal *necessity* that binds them into systemic harmony. For the Greeks, this is

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 3.

⁴² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 11.

none other than the *cosmic harmony* that unites human and divine life in a perfect, dynamic whole. In Attic tragedy, according to Nietzsche, this whole manifests as an artistic reflection of the primordial, Dionysian One.

Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of Music

Schopenhauer revives this concept of universal harmony in his metaphysics of music, wherein music appears as the absolute presentation of nature. He writes: “The four voices or parts of all harmony, that is, bass, tenor, alto, and soprano, or fundamental note, third, fifth, and octave, correspond to the four grades of the series of existences, hence to the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, and to man.”⁴³ The vital harmony of nature, therefore, corresponds precisely to musical harmony; the latter is, it seems, an idealized copy of the former. Music, for Schopenhauer, is the purest manifestation of “the *will*” as life-force, in all its various forms. It is entirely “independent of the phenomenal world” and could to some degree exist in total absence of the world itself, as sheer will. Therein, no alien mediation—no Idea or representation (*Vorstellung*)—interferes with the will’s exhibition; music surpasses “the *principium individuationis* (the form of the knowledge possible for the individual as such)” and, in excess of the knowable, universally exposes the soul of the world.

Music is as direct an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself, nay, even as the Ideas (*Vorstellungen*), whose multiplied manifestation constitutes the world of individual things. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself. Since, however, it is the same will which objectifies itself both in the Ideas and in music, though in quite different ways, there must

⁴³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1958), 2: 448.

be, not indeed a direct likeness, but yet a parallel, an analogy, between music and the Ideas whose manifestation in multiplicity and incompleteness is the visible world.⁴⁴

Objective representations thus seek to exemplify music by *metaphor*; all the other shadow-arts, subordinated to the representative structure, strive toward music as their ideality, and collapse the difference between *Wille* and *Vorstellung* by attempting an impossible equation of the two in signs. This however, merely results in the endless and circular loss of the will itself, thus of *music* itself.

To create music purely, for Schopenhauer, is therefore the highest possible human achievement: “The composition of melody, the disclosure in it of all the deepest secrets of human willing and feeling, is the work of genius [... .] The composer reveals the inner nature of the world, and expresses the deepest wisdom in a language which his reason does not understand; as a person under the influence of mesmerism tells things of which he has no conception when he awakes.”⁴⁵ The composer-genius attains a lucidity of which men confined by reason alone are incapable; his power is universal, for he opens to man his essence as will—this capacity is called by Schopenhauer “inspiration.”⁴⁶

Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, writes, in his notebook of Winter 1869-Spring 1870: “Music is a language which is capable of infinite explanation” (KSA 7: 2 [10]).⁴⁷ The poverty of words, which are “the most deficient signs” (KSA 7: 2 [11]),⁴⁸ arises from their foundation by

⁴⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & co., 1909), 1: § 52, 333.

⁴⁵ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, 336.

⁴⁶ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, 336.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 14.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 15.

thought as “concepts” out of an origin in “shared sensation” (KSA 7: 2 [10]).⁴⁹ A “word” is an entirely physiological phenomenon—it is nothing but the “portrayal of a nerve stimulus in sounds.”⁵⁰ In another note, he writes: “Truth and lie physiological” (KSA 7: 19 [102]).⁵¹ Thus, as language is strictly circumscribed by a set of possible sensations and ways of capturing them and draining them of life, “[t]he largest amount of feeling does not express itself through words. And the word itself barely hints: it is the surface of the choppy sea, while the storm rages in the depths [*in der Tiefe*]” (KSA 7: 2 [10]).⁵² These *depths* however, do not house the Schopenhauerean will; they are, rather, the epicenter of emotion, the impulsive and powerful drive to *life*, conceived both biologically and metaphysically. The experience of this drive, undergone in the music of the Dionysian dithyramb, does not, like the will of Schopenhauer, recede infinitely into some noumenal nethersphere, but *requires symbolic expression*, and for this purpose, a *Dionysian language* must be born, a language that speaks life anew from its profoundest depths. Indeed, it is the simultaneous “coexistence” of “presence of mind and intoxication” entailed by “Dionysian artistry” that “characterizes the high point of Hellenism [...].” This artistry is born, like tragedy itself, the absolute Hellenic art, from the unification of Dionysus and Apollo, in a relation at once *agonal* and *amorous*, upon Dionysus’ arrival on Greek soil from the East: “originally only Apollo was the Hellenic god of art and it was as a result of his power, which so effectively restrained Dionysus as he advanced like a storm from Asia, that

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 14.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 255.

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 36.

⁵² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 15.

the most beautiful bond of brotherhood was able to arise.”⁵³ This bond was forged, in fact, at the Delphic oracle: “Because the Delphic priesthood saw through the new cult and took notice of its deep effect upon the social processes of regeneration and furthered it according to their political-religious aim to a certain extent, because the Apollinian artist learned with careful moderation from the revolutionary art of the Bacchus service, because finally, the dominion of the year in the Delphic cult order was divided between Apollo and Dionysus, both gods emerged as victors out of their contest: a reconciliation on the battleground.”⁵⁴ The ἀγών between the two gods, the ceaseless relation of strife and reconciliation, thus took place originally in the sphere of divination. The Delphic cult thus incorporated Dionysus as a necessary counterpart to Apollinian prophecy, which preached measure and self-knowledge—only through an ecstatic, Dionysian experience of becoming divested of the self and plunging into oblivion was the individuation required by the Greek state possible. Dionysian purification brought Apollinian illumination to its highest power and, locked in their struggle, the struggle between two impulses to symbolization, one *destroying* individuality and the other striving to reestablish it, not only tragedy but first *tragic prophecy* was born.

Erwin Rohde, in his monumental philological work, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (1894), would make this assertion even more explicitly. He writes that Apollo, after a “prolonged resistance” following Dionysus’ arrival in Greece from Thracia, did indeed “enter into the closest alliance with this remarkable divine brother of his, the Hellenized Dionysus. The covenant must have been made at Delphi. [...] The festal year of

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Worldview*, trans. Claudia Crawford, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, No. 13, Nietzsche and German Literature (Spring 1997), 82.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Worldview*, 83.

Delphi was divided, though unequally it is true, between Apollo and Dionysus. To such an extent had Dionysus taken root at Delphi, so closely were the two gods related, that while the front pediment of the temple showed the form of Apollo, the back pediment represented Dionysus—and the Dionysus of the nocturnal ecstatic revels. [...] The two divinities have many of their titles and attributes in common; in the end, the distinction between them seems to disappear entirely.”⁵⁵ This insight into the origin of the tragic ἀγών between Apollo and Dionysus reveals *prophecy* as the nexus of this event—for Nietzsche, therefore, the philological resuscitation and the philological reappropriation of the struggle between these two divine forces, alternating in dissonance and consonance, allows for science and art to unite as a method of divination—thus, of the prophetic unveiling of a future *Kultur*, arising as a *necessity*—as the destiny of cultural dissolution.

The cathartic experience of Dionysian tragic music is at once the primordial desire for a new system of representation (μίμησις): “In the Dionysian dithyramb the Dionysian reveler is incited to the greatest exaltation of all his symbolic possibilities: something never before experienced struggles for utterance, the annihilation of the individual, the oneness as the soul of the race and of nature itself. The essence of nature shall now express itself: a new world of symbols is needed, the accompanying representations are symbolized in images of a heightened humanness [...]”⁵⁶ The Dionysian impulse to symbolization lies beneath the Apollinian one; from its great depths, it must *disrupt* and *destroy* this surface-regime of signs and create a new one, which shall expose nature and the essence of humanity as a *unity*. This essence, however, is

⁵⁵ Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1925) 1: 287-288.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Worldview*, 95.

precisely that which is *least human*—the monstrous face of man that springs from music. Thus, Nietzsche’s view of the self-representation of the Dionysian in music differs from Schopenhauer’s view in that this instinct is nothing but the drive to symbolization. The Dionysian hence achieves its goal precisely insofar as it is actualized as art: rather than being a *copy* of that natural instinct, music is its very genesis. For the Dionysian is nothing but this *impulse to symbolization*, which the dithyrambs ceaselessly awaken.

For Nietzsche, there is one form of life that overrides all others in the constellation of culture. In a fragment, he writes: “Culture—the rule of *art* over *life* [*Kultur—Herrschaft der Kunst über das Leben*]. The degrees of goodness of a culture depend firstly on the *degree of this rule* and secondly on the *value* of art itself” (KSA 7: 19 [310]).⁵⁷ The creation of culture is the task of the artist, who creates in natural purity, and whose pulsing music communicates through the adequate externalization the essence of life—the *esse, breath*. For the ancients, Nietzsche insists, there is no possible determination of a “concept of being” but rather “*esse* [*to be*] basically means ‘to breathe.’”⁵⁸ In the spirit of the ancients, and through this philological gesture, Nietzsche rejects ontology as a central object of philosophy, just as he shall reject all idealist separations of a thing-in-itself from experience, and insists, rather, on a metaphysics of the βίος, natural life. He continues: “And if man uses it of all things other than himself as well, he projects his conviction that he himself breathes and lives by means of metaphor [...] upon all things. He comprehends their existence as a ‘breathing’ by analogy with his own.” Therefore, though the “original meaning of the word was soon blurred” we have the remnants of a proof that man understands the existence of other creatures “anthropomorphically”—by an extension and

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 162.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 11, 84.

projection of his breath onto them.⁵⁹ Again, Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1872: “Concepts arise only from intuition. ‘Being’ is the transference of breath and life to all things: addition of the human awareness of life” (KSA 7: 23 [13]).⁶⁰ Philosophy weaves its “webs of language”⁶¹ by the self-projection of human life onto that which is without it, and the appropriation of these things as *concepts*, through a metaphoric transmutation. All inanimate things become signs of which the true meaning is simply man himself. *Being*, therefore, is ultimately illusory, nonexistent for it presupposes the stagnancy, the eternity of all living things while Nietzsche, following Heraclitus, asserts that such an eternity is impossible, as life itself is nothing but *becoming*—we are transformed with every breath, and the only possible eternity therein is that of the endlessness of becoming itself. It is for this reason that Nietzsche will reject Parmenides. In a fragment, Nietzsche noted: “systems as anthropomorphisms” (KSA 7: 19 [245]).⁶² From this results the following “[c]urious problem: the self-consumption of philosophical systems! Unheard of both in science [*die Wissenschaft*] and art [*die Kunst*]! The situation is *similar* in the case of religions: that is remarkable and significant” (KSA 7: 19 [63]).⁶³ Philosophical systems are created in the same manner, and by the same anthropomorphic procedure, as religious systems—by a projection of the human organism onto the cosmos. It is the task of *philosophy* to determine the proper measure and proportion of science and art for the good of culture; this requires that *belief* be transferred from the realm of “religion”—or philosophy *as* religion (as in

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 11, 84.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 166.

⁶¹ “The philosopher caught in the webs of *language*” (KSA 7: 19 [35]). (Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 45.)

⁶² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 159.

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 24.

the case of Kant, who valued *belief* above *knowledge*)—to that of a dissonant harmonic unity between the arts and sciences.

Therefore, *art* is precisely that which for Nietzsche *makes life possible*, giving birth to it continually as a primal and originary force—for the fundamental human instinct is that toward symbolization and the creation of illusion, and such illusions, in turn, engender life: “We *live* only by means of [...] artistic illusions [*Illusionen der Kunst*].” The task of “higher culture” is the “[c]ontrol of knowledge as the drive of art.” Through the illumination of the fact that the same “world” is “reveal[ed]” by the “philosophical systems of the early Greeks” and by their “tragedy,” we are able to “grasp the unity of philosophy and art for the purpose of culture” (KSA 7: 19 [51]).⁶⁴ This then is the vital coupling from which alone a culture is created.⁶⁵ Nietzsche also writes, as a central principle of the Greeks: “Identity between life and philosophy” (KSA 7: 16 [17]).⁶⁶ It is this fluidity, this incessant interpenetration and thus transfiguration of life and philosophy that Nietzsche wishes to bring about once more among the Germans. Only a philosophy of life, established by a return to the ancient Greeks, can save modernity from barbaric devolution. Every philosophical doctrine, like every artwork, is a manifestation of “[t]he beautiful lie”—and this is how “the Greeks philosophized” (KSA 7: 19 [221]).⁶⁷ As art is the medium of the *beautiful lie*, it has, in view of the failure of knowledge, also become the only

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 20.

⁶⁵ And again:

“Illusion necessary for sentient beings to be able to live.

Illusion necessary for progress in culture,

What is the purpose of the insatiable drive for knowledge?

—It is, at any rate, hostile to culture.

Philosophy seeks to control it; it is an instrument of culture.

The earlier {Greek} philosophers” (KSA 7: 19 [64]) (Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 24).

⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, trans. and ed. Greg Whitlock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), “Translator’s Introduction,” xxv.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 152.

means to the *creation of truth*: “The *truthfulness* of art: now it alone is honest. / Thus, by an enormous detour, we return to *natural* behavior (among the Greeks). It has proved impossible to build a culture on knowledge” (KSA 7: 19 [105]).⁶⁸ Nietzsche speaks both of the life-serving power of art and of the “barbarizing influence of knowledge” (KSA 7: 19 [51])⁶⁹ whenever faith is put into it alone. The very indistinguishability of truth and lie, and the loss of measure for both, is what constitutes, for the moderns, the tragic experience—*our tragedy* is precisely the loss of any possibility of a life-giving metaphysics. In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche writes: “impossibility of metaphysics” (KSA 7: 23 [7]).⁷⁰ Yet for the Greeks there was the supreme possibility of illusion, that is, art, as a force that *created nature* and transformed life, although its superficial nature was recognized.

It is only with Plato that the sovereignty of the beautiful lie is dismantled: “Plato wants a new state in which *dialectics* rule; he denies the *culture* of the beautiful lie” (KSA 7: 19 [221]).⁷¹ It is at this Platonic moment that philosophy and art are severed from one another—the one subsumed under the category of *knowledge* and the other, that of *illusion*. Before this moment, they combine and collaborate in a necessary manner: “Viewed from the standpoint of the present, that entire period of Greek philosophy also belongs within the domain of their art” (KSA 7: 19 [36]).⁷² Nietzsche writes, in his notebook of 1870-1871: “My philosophy is an *inverted* [*umgedreht*] *Platonism*: the further something is from true being, the purer, the more beautiful,

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 124.

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 20.

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 163.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 152.

⁷² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 13.

the better it is. Living in illusion as the goal [*Das Leben im Schein als Ziel*]” (KSA 7: 7 [156]).⁷³ This life of illusion, therefore, defines itself against metaphysics and against the dialectic in all its myriad forms, including any dialectic of history; to live in illusion requires that all philosophical concepts be recognized as the manifestation of primal human drives—thus, no Idea or ideal shall be posited as the ground of reality—merely the constantly-transforming life-breath of becoming lies at the heart of nature as illusion. Such an *inversion* of the Platonic, hierarchical regime of Ideas and their copies requires a resuscitation of those *true* Greeks, the philosophers of life who lived in the tragic age, lives of the beautiful lie.

Nietzsche, in his course at Basel on the ancient Greek philosophers (1872), rejected the term “pre-Socratic” to describe these philosophers whose thought brought about the very dawn of philosophy, and replaced it with the term “pre-Platonic.” He justified this designation in the following manner:

Plato is the first grand *mixed character* both in philosophy and in his philosophical typology. Socratic, Pythagorean, and Heraclitean elements unite in his theory of the Ideas: it should not, without further qualification, be called an original conception. Also, as a human being he possesses the traits of a regally proud Heraclitus; of the melancholy, secretive, and legislative Pythagoras; and of the reflective dialectician Socrates. All subsequent philosophers are of this sort of mixed philosophical type. In contrast, this series of pre-Platonics presents the pure and unmixed types, in terms of philosopheme as well as of character. Socrates is the last in this series. [...] [These pre-Platonics] are genuine ‘discoverers.’ [...] They had to find the path from myth to laws of nature, from image to concept, from religion to science.⁷⁴

The purity of the ancients was therefore destroyed at Plato’s hands—their singularity as types was demolished, such that they became, rather, ingredients to be used and abused against their own ends. The genealogy of the pre-Platonic philosophers tells of the liberation of σοφία

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 52.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 5.

from μύθος; their history is that of a striving toward the foundation of science, away from the life of myth. At the end of this history, however, and before the goal of the pre-Platonics had been achieved, Socrates rejected both art and myth in favor of *rational morality*. In a fragment of 1875, Nietzsche writes: “With Empedocles and Democritus, the Greeks were well on their way to *correctly assessing* human existence, its irrationality, its suffering; *but they never reached this*, thanks to Socrates.” It was by introducing “terrible abstractions, ‘the good, the just,’” which diverted men from seeking the path of life and art, from understanding the cosmic workings (KSA 7: 6 [25]).⁷⁵ In the notes for his final lecture on the pre-Platonics, Nietzsche writes: “[Socrates] was always hostile to the entire culture and the arts, along with the natural sciences. [...] He dispenses entirely with physics [...] Likewise, he thinks nothing of art; he grasped only its practical and agreeable aspects, and he belongs among the despisers of tragedy. [...] Thus Socratic philosophy is absolutely *practical*: it is hostile to all knowledge unconnected to ethical implications.”⁷⁶ In a reversal of his characterization in *The Birth of Tragedy* of Socrates as the champion of science who puts tragedy to death by means of making Euripides his mask and having him employ the *deus ex machina*, Socrates is here envisioned as the murderer of both science and art, paving the way for Plato’s metaphysics morality by turning against culture. Socrates puts an end to the aesthetic world-view of Heraclitus, in whose mouth Nietzsche puts the following phrase with reference to fire as the eternal cosmic Justice and of all else as Injustice: “It is a game. Don’t take it so pathetically and—above all—don’t make a morality of it!”⁷⁷ For, before Socrates, morality is highly malleable, serving only the greatness of life and the

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 214.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 143, 144, 145.

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 64.

health of art. For the future, Nietzsche calls for both, with Schiller, a recreation and reinforcement of morals and, with Wagner, a subordination of morality to art. While, in “Athens,” life was “constantly suffused in responsibility, commitments, initiative, and effort” such that the people, for “cheer” knew how to “honor and crave art, the festival, and cultivation in general,” the “Germans’ moral weakness is the primary cause for their lack of culture” (KSA 7: 31 [2]).⁷⁸ For without a moral structure to a culture, no art can be properly created for its people. In accordance with his view of the pre-Platonic philosophers as *pure*, Nietzsche calls these philosophers from Thales to Socrates “*archetypal philosophers*” and declares: “Each is the first-born son of philosophy.”⁷⁹

After Plato, thus, *original* philosophy is no longer possible; how the purity achieved by the pre-Platonic philosophers had ever come about became a mystery—these early philosophers were dismembered, obscured in their luminous wholeness and transformed into enigmatic, near-sacred figures. In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche writes: “Later, people took from these venerable-incomprehensible ones whatever they needed, they looted them; and hence we find, sometimes here, sometimes there, in Plato’s academy as well as among the Stoics and in the gardens of the Epicureans, one of Parmenides’ arms, a piece of Heraclitus’ shoulder, one of Empedocles’ feet” (KSA 7: 23 [1]).⁸⁰ It became necessary, thereafter, that each philosophical system possess its pieces of the creators of pure ancient wisdom, as every church requires its saintly relic. Indeed, Nietzsche makes this very analogy in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the*

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 307.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 4.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 113.

Greeks: “Other peoples have saints; the Greeks have sages.”⁸¹ Of the pre-Platonics in their over-analyzed, disfigured state, Nietzsche writes:

In order to understand them as wholes, one must recognize in them the first outline and germ of the Greek *reformer*; their purpose was to pave the way for him, they were supposed to precede him as the dawn precedes the rising sun. But the sun did not rise, the reformer failed: hence the dawn remained nothing but a ghostly apparition. However, the simultaneous emergence of tragedy demonstrates that something new was in the air; but the philosopher and legislator who would have comprehended tragedy never appeared, and hence his art died and the reformation became forever impossible. It is not possible to think of Empedocles without a sense of profound sadness; he came the closest to filling the role of the reformer. That he also failed and soon disappeared—following who knows what horrible experiences and what hopelessness—was a pan-Hellenic catastrophe.

KSA 7: 23 [1]⁸²

The tragic failure of the philosopher as cultural reformer, the failure to unite tragedy with philosophy and hence the tragic fate of the Hellenic world itself, results instead in the dissolution of philosophy into science and morality which, alone, and separated by a chasm, cannot suffice to found a culture. This fate requires, indeed, a genealogical approach—one that apprehends the abyss of difference between the ancients and us and that travels the hidden passages of history to discover what it was that made their lives *tragic*. The figure of the philosopher as failed reformer, although he seems to represent the tragic downfall of tragic culture and thus must be restored in modernity as a *successful* reformer is in fact, as I shall later explicate, himself a *necessary* step in the creation of culture in one of Nietzsche’s many perspectives.

In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche proposes the following: “*The philosopher as the physician of culture (Kultur)*” (KSA 7: 23 [15]).⁸³ On March 2, 1873, Nietzsche wrote to his friend Carl von Gersdorff: “My book is growing and taking the form of a pendant to ‘Tragedy.’ I

⁸¹ *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 1, 32.

⁸² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 113.

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 167.

will call it, perhaps, ‘the philosopher as the physician of culture.’ I want, in fact, to make it a surprise to Wagner for his next birthday.”⁸⁴ This role for the philosopher—as *physician*—is justified on the following grounds:

Philosophy can create no culture,
but it can prepare it;
or preserve it;
or moderate it.

Such a proposition, insofar as it is true for the Greeks, extends into the present as an exigency to the nation that has no philosophy, and because of this, no culture. “*For us*: For these reasons, the philosopher is the supreme tribunal of the schools. Preparation of the genius: since we have no culture” (KSA 7: 23 [14]).⁸⁵ The pre-Platonic philosophers, as pure types, must thus be used by the modern philosopher in his practice as the physician of culture; this philosopher has the moral responsibility of diagnosing the complex constellation of the individual, the people and the civilization (*Kultur*) and treating them with the proper doses of each of these pure philosophies to serve their maximal health. This requires the determination of the proper combination and dynamic—the proper harmony, for a given time, between *myth*, *art* and *science*, these components of culture. Knowledge and art are regarded by Nietzsche, respectively, as the *destructive* and *creative* forces between which the conflict much ultimately result in the formation of a culture. “Art is more powerful than knowledge, because *it* wants life, while knowledge achieves as its ultimate goal nothing but—destruction.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Cf. D’Iorio, *La naissance de la philosophie*, 25-26. In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Les philosophes préplatoniens*, ed. Paolo D’Iorio, trans. Nathalie Ferrand (Paris: Éditions de l’éclat, 1994), 11.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the early 1870’s*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Humanity Books, 1990), 75.

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 252.

Hence, Nietzsche follows in the footsteps of Goethe, who, caught in the struggle between science and art, had written in his *Theory of Colors*:

Neither in knowledge nor in reflection can anything whole be put together, since in the former the internal is missing and in the latter the external; and so we must necessarily think of science as art if we expect to derive any kind of wholeness from it. Nor should we look for this in the general, the excessive, but, since art is always wholly represented in every individual work of art, so science ought to reveal itself completely in every individual object treated.⁸⁷

The possibility of a *whole* vision of the world to emerge hinges on this capacity to consider science as art: herein lies the goal of Goethe's poetic scientism. *The Birth of Tragedy* itself begins with a declaration of Nietzsche's ambition to create a new "science of aesthetics [*ästhetische Wissenschaft*] [...]"⁸⁸ In a certain perspective, his is the continuation of Goethe's project to combine art with science, or rather, to subsume science under the title of art—to transform science itself into an art which, as we know, also requires a transformation of the meaning of *art*. That science, like art, requires representation, which is to say, the presentification of nature, is the radical claim Nietzsche, with Goethe, is making. If philosophy stands at the midpoint between art and science, this is because, for Nietzsche, it must work in the service of life, springing from the changeable vital force in becoming, whose appearance men are.

Imitation and the Approach to History

The Dionysian art instinct is the embodiment of Nietzsche's epistemology, which views the fundamental human drive as that toward artistic, instinctual creation. The medium of this

⁸⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre*. Cited in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama [Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels]*, trans. John Osborn (London: NLB, 1977), 27.

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 1, 33.

creation, as I have said, is that of *music*. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche speaks of the Schiller's "poetic process," wherein he began "the act of creation" faced not with any series of images in a causal arrangement, but, rather, overcome with a *musical mood*. He quotes Schiller: "With me the perception has at first no clear or definite object; that is formed later. A certain musical mood comes first, and the poetical idea only follows later."⁸⁹ This primordial music, for Nietzsche, the Dionysian, is thus the source of *lyric* poetry, while the Apollinian appearance is that of *epic* poetry, though neither of these sources can create without the *strife* and struggle of the natural-artistic forces: "Taking part in both worlds [the Dionysian and Apollinian], poetry, too, reaches new spheres: simultaneously sensuality of image, as in epic, and the intoxication of feeling of the tone, in lyric."⁹⁰ Poetry is defined by Schiller as "*giving mankind its most complete possible expression* [...]"⁹¹ And it is in the later surfacing of the poetic idea, which corresponds as language to the Apollinian, that *illusion* manifests itself at once as the revitalized *beautiful lie* and as the new establishment of *truth*. The *art* of which Nietzsche speaks is this double-weaving of truth and lie that founds a culture, the collective life of a people. For art to *rule* life, it is thus necessary that, out of an original, musical and willful instinct, something altogether *monstrous*, absolutely different from its nature be created by human life, to re-appropriate this life as at once infinitely other and infinitely similar to it, and so to preside over it in a world to come. Art must simultaneously announce and bring about this world's arrival. Nietzsche declares: "Our salvation

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 5, 49.

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Worldview*, 95.

⁹¹ Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," 85. Cited in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 239.

does not lie in *knowing*, but in *creating*!” (KSA 7: 19 [125]).⁹² The first order of creation is, indeed, *cosmogony*: world-creation.

It is the task of culture itself to engender instinct as the source of *culture*, which, for Nietzsche, is also a *second nature*. In a fragment of 1873, he writes:

Imitation [Das Nachahmen] is the medium of all culture [Kultur]; it gradually produces instinct. All comparison (primal thinking [Urdenken]) is an imitation. Species develop as a result of the first specimens' preference for imitating only similar specimens, i.e. copying the largest and strongest specimen. The installation of a second nature by way of imitation. In procreation the most remarkable thing is the unconscious imitation and at the same time the education of a second nature.

KSA 7: 19 [226]⁹³

Instinct, the original, spontaneous movement of life and its unmediated self-manifestation, lies not, for Nietzsche, at a prehistoric original point, but must, on the contrary, be *created* through *imitation* as the movement by which a culture, and thus a *new nature*, comes to be. This imitation, however, is not a mere copy of an original. It is, rather, a self-originating, creative process whereby the sphere of the *primordial* itself is brought about.

Conversely, in his notes toward his second *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche warns against imitation as mere *copying* (*Nachmachen*) for the health of a culture. He presents the portraits of two sorts of historians, the monumental and the antiquarian. “*Imitation (Nachmachen)*—do not imitate—result: *assimilation*. Point of view represented by the monumental.” As for the antiquarian philosopher, he is characterized by “*Veneration, gratitude*: result: *loyalty*”—that is, the desire to represent history exactly as “it once was,” as a “consolation.” Later in the same fragment, on the subject of the “*Deception of objectivity*,” Nietzsche writes with foreboding: “Now *pure comprehension*, without reference to life—takes over the degenerate form of the

⁹² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 42.

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 153.

antiquarian (what is dead without veneration) and of the monumental (what is living without imitation [*Nachahmung*])” (KSA 7: 29 [102]).⁹⁴ The monumental, or exemplary (*monumentalitsche*) view of history thus calls for continual spurts of *originality*. It is its perspective that “the great moments in history form a chain; that in them a great mountain ridge of mankind takes shape through the millennia; that the peaks of such long-lost moments might still be alive, still luminous, still great, for *me* [... .] But this very demand—that greatness should be immortal—kindles the most frightful battle.”⁹⁵ For the need for the immortality of greatness suffocates the great themselves. The antiquarian historian, on the other hand, is devoured by infectious nostalgia, “a blind mania for collecting things, an incessant, restless accumulation of everything that has ever existed” and his “craving for the new” is nothing but a craving “for the old, for everything old.”⁹⁶ He is incapable of *forgetting* and therefore antiquarian history “understands merely how to *preserve* life, not how to create life [... .]”⁹⁷ Life is therefore stifled in the cobwebs of memory, and forgetfulness, which is absolutely necessary to the maximal health of a man, a people, a culture, is ruthlessly eliminated from possibility.

There exists, for Nietzsche, a third type of history: *critical* history. Its principle is the following: “In order to live, man must possess the strength, and occasionally employ it, to shatter and disintegrate a past. He does this by haling the past before a tribunal, interrogating it carefully, and in the end condemning it. But every past deserves to be condemned [... .]”⁹⁸ To the critical historical type belongs the impulse to destroy the past from which we issued, to “attack

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 243.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 95.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 101, 102.

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 102.

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 102.

its roots with a knife” and “plant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature withers.”⁹⁹ Such an endeavor is “always dangerous, and dangerous even to life itself,” since one’s history is inescapable, and “risky [...] because second natures are generally weaker than first natures.” Yet “for those who use critical history in the service of life, there is significant consolation in knowing that every first nature was once a second nature, and that every victorious second nature will become a first.”¹⁰⁰ All three of these historical archetypes are necessary; it is the task of the philosopher as comet and as cultural physician to determine which dosage of each is appropriate: “Every man, every nation, requires, according to its goals, strengths, and necessities, a certain knowledge of the past, a knowledge now in the form of exemplary history, now of antiquarian history, and now of critical history.”¹⁰¹ Each of these historical methods, accordingly, reflects an aspect of Nietzsche’s own approach to history, and particularly to Greek antiquity, with respect to his modern Germany. While in his ambition to create a second nature after the Greeks, to destroy their established, antiquarian history and to erect a new, philological-philosophical one, his approach is primarily critical, yet it unites most strongly with monumental, or exemplary history, in his treatment of the pre-Platonics as pure *types*, as geniuses connected by an invisible series of bridges, which, nonetheless, are not identical to a *chain of dialectical necessity*. A different species of necessity takes hold in Nietzsche’s viewpoint; while he is strictly opposed to any kind of Hegelian διαδοχαί (succession) of philosophers, he does believe in the need for *genius* and absolute novelty to form culture, by a

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 103.

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 103.

kind of spiritual correspondence between the geniuses of all times. For this purpose, the old form of imitation, inspired by Aristotle, as *copying nature*, must be demolished and a new one created.

Nietzsche thus avidly rejects all attempts to *copy* Greek antiquity in a barbaric manner—he sees in *opera* a “warning example of the damage the direct aping of antiquity can do.” Here, there is no “unconscious art growing out of the life of the people”—the “roots” of this art, rather, are thereby “badly mutilated” (KSA 7: 1 [1]).¹⁰² In the notes for the unwritten *Untimely Meditation, Wir Philologen*—“We philologists”—Nietzsche declares that “antiquity” is “not to be imitated directly, but learned, in what way art achieved its highest perfection to date.” The “few” who are destined to be philologists must equally be “critics of the present,” must “measure our own times against antiquity” and therefore also “measure antiquity in terms of their own ideals”—in this respect alone can they be “critics of antiquity.”¹⁰³ The capacity to *learn* is precisely what we lack, and what the Greeks were abundantly capable of: “The Greeks as discoverers and voyagers and colonizers. They know how to *learn*: enormous power of appropriation. Our age should not believe that it stands so much higher with regard to its drive for knowledge: except that for the Greeks everything became *life*! For us it merely remains knowledge!” (KSA 7: 19 [42]).¹⁰⁴ The vital, artistic appropriation that Nietzsche calls for must not be one that remains an “aping” in the perilous realm of “knowledge” but, rather, must fill everything it imitates with *life* by *creating it* anew in the sphere of *art*.

The word *Nachahmung* in the German lies much closer to the Greek μίμησις than to the English *imitation* or the German *Imitation*. μίμησις means artistic representation. Yet this

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 9.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, “We Classicists” [74], 343.

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 17.

definition is misleading; for art—τέχνη—does not *represent* nature but is its very manifestation. For the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*, imitation for the Greeks is the act of the Dionysian and Apollinian “art impulses of nature”¹⁰⁵—the height of symbolic self-expression. Tragedy is the “equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art” created by the “coupling” of these two vital impulses.¹⁰⁶ Vitality, here, is itself, however, thought not as an original and extratemporal point to which it would be necessary to return, but must be considered in concordance with the inseparability of τέχνη and φύσις for the Greeks, in Nietzsche’s perspective. By the German Idealists, tragedy had been conceived as “the absolute *organon*, or, to take up the expression that Nietzsche applied to *Tristan* (a work in which Nietzsche found approximately the same thing), ‘of all art, the *opus metaphysicum*.’”¹⁰⁷ The Organon is “the self-engendering, as Subject, of the Work”¹⁰⁸—the paradox here, is that the *genius*, or tragic hero, does not spring out of some oblivion; he is *created* by necessity. The very composition of tragedy, for Nietzsche, involves tragic experience, which Schelling regarded as the conflict between necessity, another name for destiny, and freedom, or our willful blindness in realizing our destinies. But the tragedy for the moderns is precisely the *lack* of our divinities—our condemnation to the knowledge that *we create our own truth*. Hence the *organon* is transfigured—it must be the work of mortals alone, in the tumult of their own becoming.

The Aristotelian “imitation of nature,” for Nietzsche, does not mean a copying of reality but, by an artistic creation of the Dionysian as the realm of the noumenal for the Greeks, a

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 1, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 224-225.

¹⁰⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 214.

birthing of nature itself, of a first nature and then a second nature, of a *new world* where souls exceed themselves and intermingle in the dawn of a collective lucidity. For Dionysian possession in tragedy, though it shatters individuality, does not, however, cloud consciousness. On the contrary, it clarifies it; for “[t]ragedy” requires “reflection.” Krell writes that for Nietzsche: “The chorus in tragedy *motiviert die Besonnenheit*, ‘motivates lucidity.’” And this word, *lucidity*, this *Besonnenheit*, is equally used by Nietzsche in his description of “the Dionysian dream of the Maenad troupes as described by the messenger in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*. At the heart of Dionysus, the epitome of Apollo.”¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche’s very creation of these two art instincts of nature is exemplary of the *creative imitation*—μίμησις—of antiquity he calls for. In the ecstatic (ἐκστατικός) experience of the Dionysian music of Greek tragedy, the dream-fabric of the Apollinian image is torn away, the “veil of *maya*” abolished, and man “feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity [*Ur-Einen*].”¹¹⁰ The “Dionysian world-artist”¹¹¹ must expose the soul of the universe by its *creation*—man becomes *monstrous*; in the experience of the Dionysian dithyramb, he is transformed into the very divine Apollinian image he constructed in his dream. All that he had brought to presence as *appearance* becomes for him reality—the measure of the real. Only by self-dispossession through that fundamental human nature he has created can he cease to be the artistic *creator of the world* and embody that harmonious cosmos. The self-engendering world of

¹⁰⁹ David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 411.

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 1, 37.

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 1, 37.

the Greeks is not some long-lost origin, but is still to be created. Lacoue-Labarthe affirms that for Nietzsche, “life is indeed thought on the model of art, and not the reverse.”¹¹² Nietzsche himself writes, in a fragment of 1874: “Isn’t it nature that imitates art?” (KSA 7: 35 [12]).¹¹³ And this is the function of tragedy, and, indeed, of *art* in the highest sense: to deliver us from the dream-life of *representation* to a transfigured realm of *experience*. And this experience, as an artistic creation by man of his own nature, his own *φύσις*, is also a birth of man himself, and hence a *primordial experience*; or: the experience of the primordial, ever re-created by the agonal play between artistic impulses.

Nietzsche writes in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*: “Everywhere, the way to the beginnings leads to barbarism [*Der Weg zu den Anfängen führt überall zu der Barbarei*]. Whoever concerns himself with the Greeks should be ever mindful that an unrestrained thirst for knowledge for its own sake barbarizes men just as much as a hatred for knowledge. [...] Whatever [the Greeks] learned, they wanted to live through, immediately.”¹¹⁴ The origins are shrouded in barbarity, and to seek them simply with *knowledge* is barbarizing; rather, this creation of this natural well-spring of all true experience is the task of science and art in their necessary coupling, and thus the task of philosophy which unifies them. Nietzsche’s philological project, which would develop into his genealogical project, thus works against the grain of history and philosophy conceived in a metaphysical framework. The project of reuniting knowledge with life, conceived on a biological ground, was thus for Nietzsche an overturning of the metaphysical organization that posits an intelligible and unattainable substratum of the in-

¹¹² Lacoue-Labarthe, *L’imitation des Modernes*, 98.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 366-367.

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 1, 30-31.

itself, the absolute or, indeed, the *will* behind the illusory phenomenal world, and projects a necessity or, in the case of Hegel, a dialectic, onto the unfolding of history. Michel Foucault writes: “Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for ‘origins.’”¹¹⁵ The origin, rather, lies in the future of a transfigured physis.

Nietzsche ends the second *Untimely Meditation* in the critical perspective, by appealing to the need for a revitalization of “the Greek concept of culture”—that is, “the concept of culture as a new and improved physis.”¹¹⁶ The *creation of culture* is inseparably one with the *recreation of nature*; the creation of nature *as* culture. Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Nietzsche’s definition of culture as a *living unity* as follows: “A people, like a man or a culture, a civilization (*Kultur*), only exists, only has its proper unity insofar as it is thinkable as a work of art.”¹¹⁷ The essential task of the philosopher as comet is to recreate the Greeks as a model for the culture to come of which, in his untimeliness, he is the only member, the sign and lone announcer. Such a task must be completed *anthropomorphically*, in accordance with the man of his time. Just as the Greeks, in Nietzsche’s creative view, formed their cosmogonies and philosophical systems by means of a projection of themselves onto nature, so that an “imitation” (*Nachahmung*) of nature that was its very genesis, modern man must create the nature he strives towards—that of antiquity—in order to engender the monstrous novelty of genius in the form of a *Kultur*. Goethe had said: “I call the

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 76-100, 77.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 145. See also the fragment of 1873 in which Nietzsche declares the need for an “improved physis (culture)” (KSA 7: 30 [15]). (Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 188.)

¹¹⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe, *L’imitation des Modernes*, 97.

classic *healthy*, the romantic *sickly*.”¹¹⁸ It is indeed this *health* that Nietzsche seeks to bring about in the mimetic creation of culture.

Knowledge, Wisdom, Belief

Nietzsche holds Kant responsible for a resurgence of anthropomorphism in the domain of knowledge. In the place the Kantian idealist epistemology, Nietzsche will create a new epistemology based upon sensation, strictly speaking, a physiological-materialistic ground. Yet we shall see that this ground is also *metaphysical*. He writes in a fragment of 1872:

Human beings even immediately exploited Kantian epistemology for a glorification of the human being: the world only has reality in them. [...] Intellect's *forms* emerge very gradually out of matter. It is plausible in itself that they are strictly adequate to truth. Where could such an apparatus that invents something new possibly have come from!

The primary faculty seems to me to be the perception of *structure*, that is, based upon the mirror. Space and time are merely *measured* things, measured according to a rhythm.

KSA 7: 19 [153]¹¹⁹

This rhythm is for the human that of *breath*. In every living thing, the measure upon which all knowledge is based is relative to its powers of perception. Man sees himself reflected in the world—he grasps external *forms* as relative to his own human form. “All knowledge is a process of measuring according to a standard” (KSA 7: 19 [155]).¹²⁰ Concepts, for Nietzsche, are formed out of images, which are the synthetic results of sensations; truth and lie, which are interpretations of these images, are separated only by degree. It is, indeed, a *moral* question as to where the limit between the two must be drawn. Yet the morality to which Nietzsche appeals

¹¹⁸ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, ed. J.K. Moorhead, trans. John Oxenford. (Cambridge: Da Capo, 1998), 305. (April 2, 1829.)

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 49.

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 49.

distinguishes itself from traditional morality in that it entails a tear in the veil of faith. His criticism of Kant is precisely that the latter creates an opposition between *faith* and *knowledge* and employs the former to destroy the latter:

Kant says (in the second preface to the *Critique*): “*I must, therefore, abolish knowledge to make room for faith*”; and the dogmatism of metaphysics, that is, the presumption that it is possible to advance in metaphysics without a critique of pure reason, is the true source of all that unbelief—which is always very dogmatic—that opposes morality.” Very important! he was driven by a cultural need.

Curious opposition, “*knowledge and faith*”! What would the Greeks have thought of this? Kant *knew of no other opposition! But we do!*

KSA 7: 19 [34]¹²¹

Nietzsche will replace this destruction of knowledge by faith with a tempering of the drive to knowledge by the artistic impulse. Both of these drives are present not only in the philosopher but in every human being: “it is only a matter of *degrees* and *quantities*: all human beings are artistic, philosophical, scientific, etc. [...] However, humanity only grows only through the veneration of what is *rare and great*” (KSA 7: 19 [80]).¹²² The epistemological structure of the mind is such that it is primordially artistic—which is to say that it deals in illusions—and secondarily scientific. It thus produces metaphors that are held to be absolute truths. This power of illusion, for Nietzsche, rather than a moral exigency, is the force of philosophy, its definitional, pulsionary and instinctual drive. The supremacy of philosophy over science and over art is precisely due to the fact that it “deals with *great* things and concerns” (KSA 7: 19 [83]).¹²³ It is for this reason that it is the philosopher must be central to the creation of culture: only he can determine the dosage, i.e., the necessary combination of quantities of these

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 12.

¹²² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 30.

¹²³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 31.

fundamental impulses to contribute to a genesis of culture through *greatness*, by means of its “legislation.”

Nietzsche writes: “It is not a matter of destroying science, but rather of *controlling* it. In all its aims and methods it is wholly reliant on philosophical views, *though it easily forgets this. But the philosophy that is in control of science [...] must determine its value!*” (KSA 7: 19 [24]).¹²⁴ The valuation of existence and its various constituent components—in the case of culture, science, art and philosophy—is, in Nietzsche’s view, the philosopher’s grand task. He is not meant to render social life possible—his purpose is not *moral*, but rather, by the co-ventriloquism of philosophy and philology, the *values* of science, of knowledge, of faith, of morals must be disclosed. The “origins,” however, of these things, are mired in the confusion of history, confusion of memory, such that they lose their character as absolute beginnings and do not constitute a whole.

The limitation, thus, of Kantian morality, is that it remains in the realm of *faith*. Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1872: “*Practical* morality will suffer greatly from the collapse of religion. [...] If we can only create *mores*, powerful *mores*! Then we would also have morality. / But *mores* are formed following the *example set by powerful individual personalities*” (KSA 7: 19 [39]).¹²⁵ The philosopher, to incarnate this individual power by bringing to the surface the spherical tragedy of modern existence—that is, to become the tragic hero of his people. It is in this same fragment that Nietzsche proposes the replacement of religion, hence of its metaphysics and its morality, by *art*: “I can imagine a wholly new sort of *philosopher-artist* [*neue Art des Philosophen - Künstler*] who fills the void with a *work of art* [*ein Kunstwerk*], with

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 9.

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 16.

one that has aesthetic value” (KSA 7: 19 [39]).¹²⁶ It is by a re-descent to the depths of knowledge—to the primordial process by which this knowledge is formed—where the human mind is revealed as the primary generator of illusions, that Nietzsche as philosopher-philologist, as a sounder of the traces of knowledge’s origins in artistic, plastic force, reveals *faith* as a lie and delivers us to the aesthetic as the ground of life. In place of religion, the primordial space of the *instinct* to faith must be accessed; and this instinct finds itself, once again, embedded in the fundamentally artistic life-force, as one of its originary perversions. For faith serves to veil, to cover over and mystify, in short to *stifle* the “drive for truth (*der Trieb zur Wahrheit*)”¹²⁷ such that its origins go everywhere invisible, eradicated by an all-encompassing illusion—by a faith that renders knowledge impossible, and thus eternally hides the rude and painful truth at which the pursuit of knowledge must eventually arrive—a truth that shatters the reality of this drive.

If man were nothing but a “knowing animal,” says Nietzsche: “He would be driven to despair and destruction by the truth, the truth that he is eternally condemned to untruth.”¹²⁸ It is for this reason that man, as the sheltering vessel of knowledge and the instinct toward truth, must create ever new illusions in which to place his faith: “for man the only fitting belief is the belief in the unattainable truth, in the illusion that approaches him trustfully.”¹²⁹ The ultimate incarnation of this truth, then, is the Kantian thing-in-itself, the unknowable that lurks beyond the surfaces of things, that is a receptacle for belief. And this belief renders all thought, all knowledge possible. Such an illusion differs from the *artistic* illusion which Nietzsche endorses

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 16.

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 254.

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, “On the Pathos of Truth (1872),” *Early Notebooks*, 248-252, 252.

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 252.

precisely because it is by definition ungraspable, invisible, and because its very existence is unprovable. Yet Nietzsche calls to another concealing power; that of consciousness itself, the work of a cruel, abyssal Nature, which hides from man what is most intimate to him:

Does nature not conceal most things from [man], e.g. his own body, of which he has only a deceptive “consciousness?” He is locked up in this consciousness, and nature has thrown away the key. Oh, the disastrous curiosity of the philosopher who desires for once to peer out and down through a crack in the chamber of consciousness: he might then suspect that man, in the indifference of his ignorance, rests on the greedy, the insatiable, the disgusting, the merciless, the murderous, as if he were hanging in his dreams from the back of a tiger.

“Let him hang,” cries *art*. “Wake him,” cries the philosopher, in the pathos of truth.¹³⁰

Yet to *awake* him would revive man from a world of imagination, where he comes to life as something *other* than himself, outside himself, into a world of beautiful lies, a life of shadows in which faith plays the central role of supplying an invisible inner truth to a truthless reality. The philosophy of which Nietzsche dreams—the culture-engendering philosophy, comes out of a unification of the philosophical drive to truth with the underlying artistic drive, which lives on images, on the dream-surface of the mind, lights flickering from the outside, lifting the mind into lucidity through illusion. Nietzsche writes: “It is [the human being’s] *nature* to be so immersed in illusion (dream) and dependent upon surface (eye)” (KSA 7: 19 [183]).¹³¹ And again: “Due to the superficiality of our intellect, we do indeed live in one ongoing illusion: that means that in every moment we need art in order to live” (KSA 7: 19 [49]).¹³² Only by means of a *control* and

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 252.

¹³¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 58.

¹³² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 19.

limitation, indeed, a *legislation* of the drive to knowledge by the philosopher can culture come about.¹³³ This need defines the philosopher's task:

The supreme dignity of the philosopher is revealed when he gives focus to the limitless drive for knowledge, controls it by giving it unity.

This is how the earlier Greek philosophers are to be understood, they control the drive for knowledge.

KSA 7: 19 [29]¹³⁴

Nietzsche proffers a doctrine of art and world as illusion: "When closed, my eyes see within themselves countless changing images—imagination produces them, and I know that they do not correspond to reality. Thus, I believe in them only as images, not as realities. / Surfaces, forms. / Art includes the joy of awakening belief by means of surfaces: but one isn't really being deceived? For if so, it would cease to be art! [...] Art thus treats *semblance as semblance*, precisely does *not* want to deceive, *is true*. [...] *The world as semblance*" (KSA 7: 29 [17]).¹³⁵ The philosopher speaks a double-tongue, both artistic and scientific, and wherein the artistic drive [*Trieb*] always exceeds the scientific one, wherein Nature's mad, organic movement toward self-creation, its power to shroud the world in illusions, is ever stronger than the drive for knowledge. He is, precisely for this reason, the truest creator of gods, the truest creator of worlds in the absence of gods, the *most capable* of transfiguration.

A contradiction must be marked between the force of a Nature that precedes man, creates him, precedes *culture*, and a cultural human force whose task is to create that Nature, again, and again, newly at each turn. I would like to suggest a circularity between these two contradictory strains of proposition. Yet this contradiction, like all contradictions in Nietzsche's writing, is not

¹³³ In a fragment of 1873, we read: "Control and limitation of knowledge for the benefit of life, of culture" (KSA 7: 29 [21]). (Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 199.)

¹³⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 10.

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 198-199.

dialectical; rather, it is born of an immense mobility between perspectives. Moreover, the structure of the Nietzschean contradiction reveals it, in this movement between visions, to be non-contradictory; the terms, that is, immediately lose the appearance of *opposition*, as soon as the “opposite” exposes itself. In fact, these contraries move in a circular manner, yet this is not the circle of Kant’s antinomies, nor is it the circle of Hegel’s dialectic. This circle is a *physiological, epistemological, philological* proposition, which is to be broken through *sacrifice*.

Nietzsche makes a distinction between *wisdom* and *knowledge* (which he equates with *science*), under the heading: “Wisdom and Science. / *On Philosophers*. / Dedicated to the immortal Arthur Schopenhauer” (KSA 7: 19 [85]), which he had considered as a possible title for his book on the Pre-Platonics.¹³⁶ He draws the following line of distinction: “σοφία and ἐπιστήμη. Inherent in σοφία is discrimination, the possession of good taste: whereas science, lacking such a refined sense of taste, gobbles up anything that is worth knowing” (KSA 7: 19 [86]).¹³⁷ Philosophy, whose task is to *control the drive to knowledge* (KSA 7: 19 [83]: “Philosophical thought is a *controlling* of the drive for knowledge”)¹³⁸ must have exquisite *taste* in order to choose that which is worth knowing—and this, of course, with respect to the constellation of culture. Nietzsche traces σοφία to *sapio*, “to taste”, *sapiens*, “one who tastes”, and σαφής, “tastable.”¹³⁹ Thus *taste* rather than *skill* is attributed to the sages: “According to etymology, then, the word lacks the eccentric meaning: it contains nothing of quietude and asceticism, only a sharp taste, a sharp knowledge, without any connotation of a ‘faculty.’”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 32.

¹³⁷ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 32.

¹³⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 31.

¹³⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 8.

Σοφία as *taste* is here defined as “active” and allied with those who are “of sharp taste,” as the reduplication of the first syllable exhibits in Σίσυφος (Sisyphus), for in the Eolian dialect, σοφία is σύφος. By an analogy to the transformation of the Greek λύχης (wolf) into the Latin *lupus* (where the χ becomes a *p*), Nietzsche traces the Latin *sucus* (taste, savor) to the Greek σοφός, the φ having been transformed into a *c*. The Latin *sapio* (to taste) and *sapiens* (he who tastes) would thus come from σοφής and σοφός, supposing the same equivalence of meaning as that between *lupus* and λύχης. Nietzsche opposes taste to τέχνη “(from τεκ, to generate), which always denotes a ‘bringing forth’.”¹⁴¹ It is essential to mark this difference. For just as the philosopher cannot *produce* a culture, nor can he *create* knowledge; his task, rather, is to control it. He is, further, capable of performing such a task precisely because he embodies aspects of the artist, of the religious leader, and of the scientist. In fact, σαφής comes from “σα” and “σάος”—“light.” Originally, then σοφία and σαφής mean clarity, evidence, luminosity. Sharpness, thus, of *decision*.¹⁴²

The two *cultural life-forces*, art and philosophy, are called to bring about the coming birth of culture, which the young Nietzsche felt to be imminent. In this sentiment, he felt himself to be the herald of the coming culture. He believed Wagner to be the beginning of a great cultural resurgence in Germany: “The problem: *finding the culture to go with our music!*” (KSA 7: 19 [30]).¹⁴³ Nietzsche and Wagner, in their own eyes, came to personify the two poles of the culture-creating life-force of which Nietzsche speaks—that is, of art and philosophy (or, philology). Wagner wrote to Nietzsche: “You could take over quite a lot for me, perhaps one entire half of

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 8.

¹⁴² Cf. D’Iorio’s note at Nietzsche, *Les philosophes préplatoniciens*, 281, n. 5.

¹⁴³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 101.

my calling!” Musician and philosopher-philologist were thus to mutually guide and inspire one another. Wagner wrote to Nietzsche on February 12, 1870: “Now you must demonstrate the purpose of philology and help me usher in the ‘Renaissance’ in which Plato embraces Homer, and Homer, filled with Plato’s ideas, really does become the greatest possible Homer” (*N/W* 1, 58).¹⁴⁴ The two men were thus to push one another, by a sort of dialectical opposition, to *become* more fully what each of them was. They exchanged lives and wills under the Pindaric imperative:

Like precious goods from Tyre, my melody
comes to you over the gray sea.
Hear it gladly,
the Kastor-song on Aiolian strings, gladly
for the seven-toned lyre’s sake.
Listen, and become
what you are.

Pythian 2, lines 65-71¹⁴⁵

On November 18, 1871, Nietzsche wrote to Carl von Gersdorff: “only as fighters have we in our time a right to exist, as vanguard fighters for a coming *saeculum*, whose formation we can roughly presage from our own selves—that is, from our best moments; for these best moments do obviously estrange us from our *own* time, but they must have a home somewhere; therefore I believe that we have in these moments a sort of obscure presentiment of what is to come.”¹⁴⁶ In this communication, at once major and minor, hyperbolic and obscure, Nietzsche expresses this *dispossession* from his time precisely as the *promise* of greater time to come. He places himself at the crux of this transition from one generation to another.

¹⁴⁴ Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 58.

¹⁴⁵ *Pindar’s Victory Odes*, trans. Frank J. Nisetich (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 165.

¹⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), letter 32, 82.

To Erwin Rohde, on December 21, 1871, Nietzsche wrote the following, in reference to his week in Mannheim with Wagner: “I felt like a man whose presentiments have at last come true. For that precisely is music, and nothing else is. But I consider that if only a few hundred people of the next generation will have from music what I have from it, I anticipate an entirely new culture!”¹⁴⁷ In the same letter, he declares: “I have had a number of fundamental insights about Plato, and I think that we two might one day well and truly warm up and illuminate from inside the hitherto so shabby and mummified history of Greek philosophers.”¹⁴⁸ The coming German culture and the revitalization of the history of Greek philosophy *from within*, as a philological pursuit, are the two tasks of the young Nietzsche, and they are intimately connected.

Truth and Lie: The Need for Myth

The questions of foundational myths and the necessity of metaphysics in the service of life occupy Nietzsche interminably. He writes, in a fragment of 1873, the enigmatic phrase: “New mythology” (KSA 7: 29 [102]).¹⁴⁹ We must regard this as both an exigency toward the creation of a unifying mythology and the warning against a danger on this event’s horizon.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche insists on the “metaphysical comfort” we experience in tragedy—a comfort inherited from the Greeks. Metaphysics here serves *myth* as an integral cultural force. In his discussion of the Dionysian satyric chorus, in the presence of which the “Greek man of culture felt himself nullified” and overcome by a “feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature,” Nietzsche writes of the essential effect of the chorus as follows:

¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, letter 33, 84-85.

¹⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 85.

¹⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 243.

The metaphysical comfort—with which, I am suggesting even now, every true tragedy leaves us—that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable—this comfort appears in incarnated clarity in the chorus of the satyrs, a chorus of natural beings who live ineradicably, as it were, behind all civilization and remain eternally the same, despite all the changes of generations and of the history of nations.

With this chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhist negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art—life.¹⁵⁰

Tragedy provides the feeling of an ineffable, eternal, natural realm of primordial joy and suffering—the *Ureine*—by which the fleeting world of appearances is constantly destroyed, and of which this world is an inadequate manifestation. The pessimism of the Greeks was thus at once their tremendous power of *life-affirmation*. Nietzsche's intention, however, in this passage, is not to create a new culture but to expose, in the manner necessary to the creation of a coming culture, a *metaphysics of Greek civilization*.

Nietzsche thus considers myth, in this work, to be absolutely necessary to the health of a culture: “without myth every culture loses the healthy power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement. Myth alone saves all the powers of the imagination and of the Apollinian dream from their aimless wanderings.”¹⁵¹ He defines myth as “a concentrated image of the world that, as a condensation of phenomena, cannot dispense with miracles.”¹⁵² It is for this reason that he calls for “*the rebirth of German*

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 7, 59.

¹⁵¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 23, 135.

¹⁵² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 23, 135.

myth” out of “German music”—in this pursuit, he “we must hold fast to our luminous guides, the Greeks.”¹⁵³

As a criticism of Schiller’s opposition of the naïve and sentimental, Nietzsche writes: “the present day has that frostily clear and sober atmosphere in which myth does not thrive, the air of the historical—whereas the Greeks lived in the twilight air of the mythical and hence could make clear contrasts and draw clean lines in their literature: whereas we seek twilight in art because life is too bright. It is coherent with this that Goethe understood the position of the human being in nature, and that of surrounding nature itself, to be more mysterious, enigmatic, and demonic than his contemporaries; but for that sought all the more repose in the brightness and sharp definition of the work of art” (KSA 7: 29 [116]).¹⁵⁴ A darkened world like that of the Greeks requires blinding luminosity in its art, purest clarity in its philosophy. While the modern world, drenched in light, where knowledge has fatally mastered illusion and radical individuation rules day and night, the only way back to a sentiment of originality is by a tenebrous simulation of that Greek brightness in the absence of the myth that rendered this brightness possible. Goethe, the greatest and most Grecian German poet in the eyes of Schiller and Nietzsche, moves within this contradiction by drawing its tension out to plenitude: the dusky enigma must be sung in the clearest tones possible.

Nietzsche wrote in 1872: “Philosophers appear during those times of great danger—when the wheel keeps turning faster—they and art take the place of disappearing myth. But they are thrown far ahead of their time, because they only gain the attention of their contemporaries very

¹⁵³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 23, 137.

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 247.

slowly. / A people that becomes conscious of its dangers produces genius” (KSA 7: 19 [17]).¹⁵⁵ For the Greeks, the long process of absolution from myth was necessary to give birth to their culture. Yet in Nietzsche’s modern Germany, the triumph of absolute knowledge over illusion demands a resuscitation of myth and of illusion in art: “Illusion necessary for progress in culture” (KSA 7: 19 [64]).¹⁵⁶ Both art and knowledge, however, repose upon an economy of meaning that pretends to universality. Both metaphor, the principle of illusion, and knowledge, constitute themselves by an equalization of unequal things. Of metaphor, Nietzsche writes: “*Metaphor* means treating as *equal* something that one has recognized to be *similar* in one point” (KSA 7: 19 [249]).¹⁵⁷ And of knowledge: “Knowledge, quite strictly speaking, has merely the form of tautology and is *empty*. Any knowledge that advances us is an *identification of the non-identical*, the similar, i.e. it is essentially illogical” (KSA 7: 19 [236]).¹⁵⁸ Knowledge *reduces* and *sets an equal value to radically different things*—thereby, it destroys. It is, however, a natural occurrence. “The similar recalls the similar and compares itself with everything: that is knowledge, the quick grouping of everything that is identical. Only the similar perceives the similar: a physiological process.” (KSA 7: 19 [179]).¹⁵⁹ The theory of *like* drawing to *like* is Empedoclean and Democritean; it is the axiom of the physical theory of effluences. Here, Nietzsche transforms it into a means for the critique of knowledge as reductive and destructive; without the opposing force of *art*, which explodes the scientific metaphors with its own illusions,

¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 7.

¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 24.

¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 160.

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 156.

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 56-57.

knowledge renders life impossible. Only in the time of the pre-Platonics were art and science capable of harmonious and dissonant coexistence.

If a resurgence of myth is to serve as the soil of culture, it must be a profoundly untruthful ground of truth: indeed, this myth, in an era of extreme self-consciousness, worlds away from the naïveté of the Greeks, must be a myth that affirms itself as myth, and which, therefore, in no way inspires universal *belief*. For the nature of the beautiful lie is such that every cosmogony, every mythical foundation, reveals itself as anthropomorphic illusion: an economy of truths, therefore, which unveil themselves in the moment of their utterance as *lies* must be established. “The foundation of everything great and vital rests upon illusion. The pathos of truth leads to decline. [...] Above all to the decline of *culture*” (KSA 7: 19 [180]).¹⁶⁰ It is for this reason that the *art impulses* must triumph over the pathos of truth in philosophy: for it is by means of illusion alone that life comes about. Genius, the ultimate goal of culture, and that around which it thrives, requires a renaissance of the *beautiful lie* for its superhuman spark to be ignited. For the word *genius* means *generative power* for the root *gen*, produce, create. In the 1640s, it takes on the meaning it is destined to have for Nietzsche: a natural brilliance of man that surges up and surpasses his finitude.

In his *World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer defines genius by a *monstrosity of thought*. “[W]here the brain’s power of forming representations has such a surplus that a pure, distinct, objective picture of the external world exhibits itself *without a purpose* as something useless for the intentions of the will, which is even disturbing in high degrees, and can even become injurious to them—then there already exists at least the natural disposition to

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 57.

abnormality. This is denoted by the name of *genius*, which indicates that something foreign to the will, i.e. to the I or ego proper, a *genius* added from the outside so to speak, seems to become active here.” The “surplus of brain activity” at work in the genius is called by Schopenhauer *monstra per excessum*.¹⁶¹ The difference, for him, between the genius and the normal man, separated by a “gulf,”¹⁶² is that of the capacity for objectivity and the confinement to subjectivity. The “genius has a double intellect, one for himself and the service of his will; the other for the world, of which he becomes the mirror, in virtue of his purely objective attitude toward it.”¹⁶³ Thus is the genius, godlike, capable of representing not only his own will but also the universal will of all men, so great is his mental strength. Consequently, the work of a genius is the “quintessence” and manifestation of this fundamental “contemplative attitude[... .]” The “normal man,” by contrast, “has only a single intellect,” which is “subjective” rather than objective. The difference between a single and a double intellect is as unbridgeable as that between “the open chest notes of the human voice” and “the falsetto notes”: high as the chest voice may strain, it is “essentially different” from falsetto.¹⁶⁴ Schopenhauer qualifies, however, his definition of genius to say that it is contingent upon circumstance, and requires the proper situation to be engendered: “By itself, genius can produce original thoughts just as little as a woman by herself can bear children. Outward circumstances must fructify genius, and be, as it were, a father of its progeny.”¹⁶⁵ Genius thus requires a *culture* in order to be born. Nietzsche

¹⁶¹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2: 377.

¹⁶² Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders (New York: A.L. Burnt Company), “On Genius,” 362.

¹⁶³ Schopenhauer, *Essays*, 363.

¹⁶⁴ Schopenhauer, *Essays*, 363.

¹⁶⁵ Schopenhauer, *Essays*, 366.

writes: “The Greeks as the only people of *genius* in world history. Even as learners they have genius.”¹⁶⁶ The powers of appropriation and creation among the Greeks are especially potent and important; these, too, however, relied upon the culture in which the Greek soul was born.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes of Homer as the archetypal naïve genius, which requires “the complete victory of the Apollinian illusion” used by “nature” to “achieve her own ends.” He explains: “In the Greeks the ‘will’ wished to contemplate itself in the transfiguration of genius and the world of art; in order to glorify themselves, its creatures had to feel themselves worthy of glory; they had to behold themselves again in a higher sphere, without this perfect world of contemplation acting as a command or a reproach. This is the sphere of beauty in which they saw their mirror images, the Olympians.”¹⁶⁷ The Greeks created their gods, their forces of nature, in order both to reflect their *will* and to rule over them; the heroic genius could thus rise upward, toward his towering mirror image and, becoming godlike, serve as a natural force for the people himself. “It was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a most profound need. [... O]ut of the original Titanic divine order of terror, the Olympian divine order of joy gradually evolved through the Apollinian impulse toward beauty, just as roses burst from a thorny bush. How else could this people, so sensitive, so vehement in its desires, so singularly capable of *suffering*, have endured existence, if it had not been revealed to them in their gods, surrounded with a higher glory?”¹⁶⁸ To live under “the bright sunshine of [the] gods is regarded as desirability in itself, and the real pain of Homeric men is caused by parting from it

¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, “We Classicists,” § 65, 360.

¹⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 3, 44.

¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 3, 42-43.

[...].”¹⁶⁹ Thus did every god render *joy* as well as suffering, *light* as well as obscurity absolutely necessary to life. The task of the genius was to announce in immortal song “this oneness of man and nature” called “naïve” by Schiller.¹⁷⁰

Of the birth of modern genius, Nietzsche writes, in *Wir Philologen*: “In *transitional* world history the judgement will be most accurate, since it’s in such periods that the greatest *genius* exists. / *Production of the genius* as the only one who can really *value* and *deny* life.”¹⁷¹ The task of philology united with philosophy, therefore, is to *produce* the monstrous genius that his time calls for, the only being capable of evaluating life for a culture.

In *Wir Philologen*, Nietzsche wrote: “*Leopardi* is the modern ideal of a classicist. The German classicists can’t *create* anything.”¹⁷² At the heart of the task of philology thus lies artistic creation. In his *Pensieri*, Giacomo Leopardi wrote: “the greatness connected with genius cannot be achieved in our day without the soul wearing out the body, like the sword wears out its sheath. It was different in antiquity where genius and greatness were much more natural and spontaneous and could develop without so many obstacles to overcome; where the destructive cognition of truth (which today goes hand in hand with great talent) was not as powerful” (*Pensieri I*, 8/10/1820).¹⁷³ On the Greek earth, body and spirit grew together naturally, spontaneously—they engendered themselves in harmonious unity and took the form of the genius. For Nietzsche as for Leopardi, with the separation of these elements comes the tyranny

¹⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 3, 43.

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 3, 43.

¹⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, “We Classicists,” § 180, 384.

¹⁷² Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, “We Classicists,” § 22, 331.

¹⁷³ Giacomo Leopardi, *Selected Poems*, trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Anne Paolucci, ed. Anne Paolucci (Smyrna, Delaware: Griffon, 2003), 47.

of knowledge over life, its constant effort to analyze and thus destroy it. According to Nietzsche, the “[... dichotomy between] spirit (the faculty of abstraction) and bodies (lower sensory apparatus),” which he also calls the “unnatural tearing apart of the intellect” is the “original source first of dialectic [...] and later of logic [...]”¹⁷⁴ His return to the Greeks is not a return to *origins* but a return to the time before the empire of knowledge rendered the life of a *Kultur* impossible. Such a time, because it never took place in a way our language could grasp, must be created anthropomorphically.

In his essay *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873), Nietzsche exposes the shattering truth of “truth,” which for him constitutes the very tissue of tragic experience:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, decorated and which, after lengthy use, seem firm, canonical and binding to a people: truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions, metaphors that have become worn and stripped of their sensuous force, coins that have lost their design and are now considered only as metal and no longer as coins.¹⁷⁵

To build a culture on illusion in a world where knowledge reigns supreme, this requires first of all the philological, genealogical destabilization of dogma—the truths in which knowledge deals must be exposed in their infinite falsity, precisely to make room for an instinct toward illusion *qua* art. On the heels of Nietzsche’s announcement of this fact follows a metaphor; that of currency whose value has been lost, and which exists simply as worn metal, material exchanged without a thought to its original meaning. This uncovering of value by metaphor constitutes a *first truth* for the coming world. Its purpose is strictly pedagogical; it is a model for the myths on which a culture must be built—metaphors which, in the same instant as they are pronounced,

¹⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 86.

¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873), 257.

reveal their illusory nature, and the illusory nature of truth in general, so that truth is seen to rest, by necessity, on the surface of life yet as the only means by which life comes to exist. A new constellation of truths without blind *belief* is what Nietzsche is proposing. This requires that men cease to *copy* language, i.e. merely to reproduce a set of lies in which they place their faith, and *transform* the system of signs instead, through a mimetic process. For we sleep most the time: “Men are deeply immersed in illusions and dreams; their eye glides along the surface of things and sees ‘forms’; their feeling nowhere leads to the truth, but is content to receive stimuli and, as it were, play blind games on the back of things.”¹⁷⁶ Men cling to the metaphysical meaning of the words they speak without ever plunging into the depths of that meaning—they glide safely along the surface, in their eternal dream, never becoming conscious of their somnambulistic sub-existence. It requires the rigor of philology, enforced by its intimate relation to philosophy, to shatter this universal reverie.

The insight into the illusory, untruthful nature of truth and the consequent need for a destabilizing unveiling of the old truths and a foundation of new ones are, for Nietzsche, at once Heraclitean and Schopenhauerean. For Heraclitus says: “wisdom alone wants and does not want to be called by the name of Zeus” (14 [A 84]).¹⁷⁷ Giorgio Colli explains this fragment as follows: “the name Zeus is acceptable as a symbol, as a human designation of the supreme god, but it is not acceptable as an adequate designation, precisely because the supreme god is something hidden, inaccessible.”¹⁷⁸ This is why every utterance of the sage must be an enigma, a riddle:

¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 254.

¹⁷⁷ Giorgio Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, trans. Patricia Farazzi (Combas, Éditions de l'éclat, 1992). Vol. 3: *Héraclite*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ Giorgio Colli, *La Naissance de la philosophie*, trans. Patricia Farazzi (Paris-Tel-Aviv: Éditions de l'éclat, 2004), 65.

“the enigma (*l’enigma*, also *the riddle*), extended to a cosmic concept, is the expression of the hidden, of the god. All the multiplicity of the world, its illusion-generating corporeality, is an interlacing of enigmas, an appearance of the god, in the same way as the words of the sage are an interlacing of enigmas, sensible manifestations which are the imprint of the hidden.”¹⁷⁹ Colli proposes this formula for the Hellenic wisdom uttered by Heraclitus: “There is a hidden world of which our world is the appearance, this is the Greek intuition: there, the gods live.”¹⁸⁰ Heraclitus says, in continuity with the Delphic phrase, “Know thyself”: ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωυτόν; “I have searched myself out” (14 [A 37]).¹⁸¹ For the inner wisdom of man, all is unity, but in perception and language it appears as separation and contradiction. Man must have the courage to search for his inner λόγος, the eternal cosmic flame. Yet “nature loves to hide:” “φύσις [nature, birth] κρύπτεσθαι φιλέει” (14 [A 92]).¹⁸² Therefore, this process of self-searching is itself the the pursuit of the unknowable, that is, of our own birth and our own nature that recedes into oblivion even as we approach it, and remains, indeed, to be created at every moment. “Aeon considers the human being in itself as contrary to the Logos (ἄλόγος): only by his relationship to fire does he participate in the common intelligence (ζυνὸν λόγος).”¹⁸³ The wisdom of man is measured by his proximity to fire. For the “con-tuitive god [... ,] all contradictions run into harmony, invisible to the common human eye, yet understandable to one who, like Heraclitus, is related to the contemplative god.”¹⁸⁴ The realm of harmonious unity, which for men appears as warlike

¹⁷⁹ Giorgio Colli, *La Naissance de la philosophie*, 67.

¹⁸⁰ Giorgio Colli, *Après Nietzsche*, trans. Pascal Gabellone (Paris: Éditions de l’éclat, 1987), 33.

¹⁸¹ Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 51.

¹⁸² Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 91.

¹⁸³ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 73.

¹⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 61-62.

dissonance, is attainable only to the self-seeking sage, capable of transcending speech and becoming *godlike*, in other words, for Nietzsche, a *genius*. Indeed, Nietzsche made this extension himself, in a fragment of 1873: “Echoing Heraclitus: To the genius (god), even the most intelligent philistine (human being) is an ape” (KSA 7: 27 [67]).¹⁸⁵ This formula, then, offers us another image, akin to metaphor of the philosopher as comet; the god of Heraclitus, which is nothing but an anthropomorphic projection onto nature, must be profoundly reevaluated and recreated as a genius, to surpass the commonality of the knowledge of humans themselves—redefined as modern philistines—in his gesture of vital wisdom, achievable only through art.

Schopenhauer, for his part, considers all material reality to be the *representation* of that which is eternally unknowable and unrepresentable: the universal *will to life*. Yet language is the path of sufficient reason, the only means to civilization: “It is by the help of language alone that reason accomplishes its most important achievements,—the united action of several individuals, the planned co-operation of many thousands, civilization, the state; also science, the storing up of experience, the uniting of common properties in one concept, the communication of truth, the spread of error, thoughts and poems, dogmas and superstitions.”¹⁸⁶

Nietzsche’s goal is thus to cultivate new truths upon which a culture can *function* without *believing in them*—to replace the *god* behind language and the *will* behind representation with *experience*, life itself, and to place the essence of this new ground of life, no longer equatable to such a name because it is the stuff of infinitely changeable life itself, in the material of illusion itself—of future illusions. Both art and nature deal in illusions, anthropomorphisms, metaphors, metonymies, but while those of science, metaphysics, knowledge and religion symptomatically

¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 176.

¹⁸⁶ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, vol. 1, § 8, 48.

mask their metaphorical origin and birth dogmas, those of art reveal themselves in the same instant as they present themselves as *groundless*, as *illusory*.

Yet belief is also, to a certain extent, necessary to life, and in this degree Nietzsche agrees with Schopenhauer: “What the truth means to men! / The highest and purest life is possible in the belief that one has the truth. The *belief in truth* is necessary for man. / Truth appears as a social need: through a metastasis it is then applied to everything that does not need it. [...] The founding of states awakens truthfulness” (KSA 7: 19 [175]).¹⁸⁷ It is precisely for this reason that a culture cannot found itself on art alone, but requires at once the rigidity of organizational laws, in the form of science and the state. Yet just as the long-suppressed Dionysian, “like a knight sunk in slumber” must be reawakened “from this abyss” so that the birth of German culture out of music and myth, the unseen “German knight,”¹⁸⁸ may become possible, so art, led by philological philosophy, must triumph over science and destroy its leaden truths before any harmony between the two can be born. These laws, therefore, must be founded anew, and the old ones destroyed; a new, Dionysian language must be born, a language which speaks the unutterable; the depths. In a fragment of 1872, we read:

When it is a question, on the one hand, of the *value* of knowledge, whereas, on the other hand, a beautiful illusion, as long as one believes in it, has the same value as an item of knowledge, then one realizes that life requires illusions, that is, untruths that are held to be truths. [...] In the *struggle between ‘truth’ and ‘truth’* both seek an alliance with reflection. *All true striving for truth came into the world through the struggle for a sacred conviction*, through the πάθος of struggle: otherwise human beings have no interest in its logical origin [*Ursprung*].

KSA 7: 19 [43]¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 142.

¹⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 24, 142.

¹⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 17-18.

There is, then, a necessary reversibility between the lie that is held to be a truth and the truth that reveals itself as lie—the philosopher as *comet*, who re-evaluates at every step the *value* of knowledge and that of art, must, through the cultivation of illusions, reveal the chasmic depth between these two functions of illusion. Only thereby can old illusions, old myths, be unveiled as groundless lies even as new illusions are put in place on the very ground of that groundlessness; in the ruins of the failure of religion. It is through this power that he shall put in place *mores* by acting as an example for his people. The new nature that *culture* shall be thus necessitates, too, a new species of belief, or Apollinian dream. In this fragment, it is the need for “sacred conviction”—for religious belief—that gives birth, by means of the agonal instinct to which this need gives rise, to *truth*. And if truths—common, binding myths, are necessary to a culture, so too is the their tragic dissolution into lies.

Under the title “*The Age*,” Nietzsche declares: “Not directed toward *happiness*: the ‘truth’; not in comfortable repose, but heroic and hard.” Novel truth, in other words, must destroy old, dogmatic truth. Nietzsche notes in the same fragment: “Against the overestimation of the state, of national interests” (KSA 7: 32 [72]).¹⁹⁰ The philosopher’s task is, then, to cultivate the truths necessary to his time, and to attack at the roots the state’s truths, of religion’s truths, of metaphysical truths. And this task offers no end, no absolute; the philosopher is mired in the stuff of the tragic. He must eternally measure truths, create an ever new measure for them, and bring them into harmony and conflict as necessary.

The task of history for Nietzsche is one that can in no way be bound to a metaphysics—it relates solely and entirely to *life*, conceived as the force of becoming even underneath the

¹⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 338.

human. In his notes toward the second *Untimely*, Nietzsche writes: “*History requires the active human being, history can be written only by the experienced person!*” Yet his experience must supply him with a capacity for imperious mantic clarity of the highest order: he must not only be a student of the past but a *prophet*. In a fragment of 1873, he writes:

The voice of the past is always the voice of an oracle; only if you are seers into the future and are familiar with the present will you be able to interpret the oracular voice of the past. Today we tend to explain the effect of the Delphic oracle with the claim that those priests had precise knowledge of the past; it is time we recognized that only those who build the future have the right to sit on judgement of the past: he is only a historian by virtue of being a seer.

KSA 7: 29 [96]¹⁹¹

The determination of truth and of myth is a matter of prophecy: the untimely historical method reaches into the depths of the past—into *primordial memory*—in order to exercise the power of *prophecy*. It is, therefore, not a matter of the present, but of the past and of the future, which battle against one another in tumultuous soul of the philosopher as comet.

Agonal Hellenism

Nietzsche is firm in his affirmation that all every philosophical system for the Greeks is *anthropomorphism*. Thus, he divides the doctrines of the Greek philosophers into “Ethical anthropomorphisms: Anaximander : justice. / Heraclitus: law. / Empedocles: love and hate.” and “Logical anthropomorphisms: Parmenides: nothing but being. / Anaxagoras: *νοῦς*. / Pythagoras: everything is number.” (KSA 7: 19[116])¹⁹² From Thales to Socrates, these anthropomorphisms slowly wane, to be replaced, with positive science, presented in its purest form by Democritus, in his materialist doctrine of atomism. What first distinguished the philosopher from the Hellenic

¹⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 240.

¹⁹² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 40.

sage—his original “Freedom from myth,” brought about by “Thales” (KSA 7: 19[18])¹⁹³ is accomplished by degrees, until man finds himself nearly entirely purified from the world of myth in science. The birth of philosophy, for Nietzsche, coinciding with the birth of tragedy, is at once the birth of natural science and the beginning of the long, languishing death of myth. Nietzsche writes: “Myth seeks to understand all transformation following an analogy to human behavior, to human acts of will.” Stepping away from myth, Nietzsche claims, Thales presented “a hypothesis of the natural sciences of great worth.”¹⁹⁴ The first philosopher’s great “freedom and boldness” was to “conceive the entirety of such a multifarious universe as the merely formal differentiation of *one* fundamental material”¹⁹⁵—that is, *water*. Nietzsche, in his constant project to connect the pre-Platonics to the contemporary science of his time, relates this thesis, by analogy, to “the Kant-Laplace hypothesis concerning a gaseous precondition of the universe.”¹⁹⁶ Science does not, however, *eradicate* anthropomorphism, but displaces it onto a different terrain—that of life itself, of human experience. In other words, it avows itself of the fact that all truth is relative to perception, to the human creature; it impales itself on the glittering lies that constitute truth. Science requires a bold surrender to the tragic. As a consequence, our physical apparatus remaining inescapable, no universalizing or absolute theory is possible. Nietzsche writes: “All knowledge comes about by means of separation, delimitation, restriction; no absolute knowledge of a whole!” (KSA 7: 19 [141]).¹⁹⁷ In the absence of an anthropomorphic absolute, a philosophy of “infinite approximation,” as Hölderlin put it, becomes necessary. It is in this sense that science

¹⁹³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 7.

¹⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 27.

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 28.

¹⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 27.

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 47.

is the purification—the κάθαρσις of myth. It liberates man into the groundlessness of experience and of any philosophy *to come*.

Natural science, as the destiny of myth, is necessary both to culture and to philosophy itself, insofar as it allows for a new, non-mythical thinking of experience. Such a new thinking occasions, in its turn, a radical perspectivism. For Nietzsche, Heraclitus represents a major step forward in the coming of science. Friedrich Albert Lange had already considered this philosopher as a precursor to materialism, because of his physics of “persistent matter,” following and demythifying the model of Anaximander’s ἄπειρον (often equated, by Nietzsche, with the Kantian thing in itself). According to this Heraclitean physics, it is “divine primitive fire [...] into which the changing world returns, to proceed from it anew [...]”¹⁹⁸ In Nietzsche’s notes toward his lecture on Heraclitus, he speaks of the philosopher as a combatant of absolutism. For Heraclitus says: πάντα ῥεῖ (“All things flow”). “Nowhere does an absolute persistence exist, because we always come in the final analysis to forces, whose effects simultaneously include a desire for power (*Kraftverlust*).”¹⁹⁹ Convinced of the scientific validity of this argument, Nietzsche uses a theory of the natural scientist, Karl Ernst von Bär, to explain the Heraclitean principle, πάντα ῥεῖ. In von Bär’s lecture of 1860 called “Which Conception of Living Nature Is the Correct One?” he posits the following hypothesis: “The rates of sensation and of voluntary movements, thus of conscious life, appear among various animals to be approximately proportional to their heart rates.”²⁰⁰ Experience, then, is absolutely conditioned upon the specificity of the physiological and mental apparatus. There is, then, no possibility for a universal transcendental aesthetics such

¹⁹⁸ F. A. Lange, *History of Materialism*, vol. 1, trans. Ernest Chester Thomas (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & co., 1892), 19.

¹⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 60.

²⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 60.

as Kant proposes, as the standard of perception differs immeasurably from one creature to the next. “The *inner life* of various animal species (including humans) proceeds through the same astronomical time-space at different specific rates, and it is according to these that they subjectively and variously judge the fundamental standard of time. For this reason alone, only because *for us* this fundamental standard is small, does an organic individual, a plant or an animal, appear to us as something remaining at one size and shape, for we could observe it one hundred times more in a minute without noticing any external alterations.”²⁰¹ Nature and its laws depend entirely, therefore, on one’s *perception* of phenomena. Such a realization does not, however drive Nietzsche *or* his Heraclitus into Idealism, but rather into the experience of the tragic, which requires a constant reevaluation, destruction, and recreation of truths. Truth itself, then, has a *homeotic* character: homeosis is the process by which the cells of living creatures, by means of *plasticity*, transform themselves in order to perform other functions—this is the process that takes place when an animal (a spider, for example, or a lizard), having lost a limb, is capable of growing it back, not identically but *differently*, through the instinctual transfiguration of its cells. That Heraclitus was aware of this nature of truth is evident from what Nietzsche calls his “aesthetic cosmodicy”—his *Cosmodicee der Kunst*.²⁰²

In *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche claims that the “[human] intellect has no further mission beyond human life. It is human and only its owner and creator treats it as solemnly as if the hinges of the world turned it. But if we could communicate with a gnat we would hear that it swims through the air with the same solemnity and also feels as if the flying center of the world were within it. There is nothing so reprehensible or low in nature that

²⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 60.

²⁰² Nietzsche, *Les philosophes préplatoniciens*, 158, 318, n. 82.

would not immediately be inflated like a balloon by a small breath of that power of knowledge; and just as every porter wants to have his admirer, so the proudest of men, the philosopher, believes that the eyes of the universe are trained on his actions and thoughts like a telescope from all sides.”²⁰³ The idea of humans as the center of the universe, and of an absolute or universal rule of life owing to this fact is entirely fictitious; rather, everything must be *relative*. The conceit of knowledge is responsible for man’s irrepressible *hybris*. Nietzsche writes: “Science fathoms the course of nature, but can never *command* man. Inclination, love, pleasure, displeasure, elevation, exhaustion—science knows none of these. Man must *interpret*—and thereby assess—his life and his experiences from a specific point of view” (KSA 7: 6 [41]).²⁰⁴ For this perspectivism to become possible, science and knowledge must *unite* with art and illusion in a relation of endless agonism. Nietzsche had considered as a title for his book on the pre-Platonics: “**The Philosopher.** *Observations on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge.* [*Betrachtungen über den Kampf von Kunst und Erkenntniss*]” (KSA 7: 19 [98]).²⁰⁵ This *Kampf* is Nietzsche’s translation of the Greek ἀγών (strife, competition), regarded by both Nietzsche and Jacob Burckhardt as the fundamental structure of Greek life and the genesis of its multiple worlds. It is also the word used by Nietzsche to describe the relation between the Dionysian and the Apollinian in Attic tragedy. When Nietzsche writes: “My goal is to bring about a state of complete enmity between our present ‘culture’ and antiquity. Whoever wishes to serve the former must *hate* the latter,”²⁰⁶ he recasts this *agonal* formula as the necessary historical method through

²⁰³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” 253.

²⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 218-219.

²⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 36.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, § 20.

which the Greeks must be created and destroyed, constantly working to the service of a modern culture, just as the *aion* creates and destroys the world at its whim, subordinated to the unknown laws of a cosmic game.

Cosmogony: Heraclitus and Democritus

Concealed in the metaphor of the philosopher as comet is the double-impulse in the young Nietzsche: first, toward a metaphysics of art, whose task it is to annihilate and replace metaphysics as such, that is, the metaphysics put in place by German Idealism, and, second, the impulse toward a new positivist materialism—a materialism free of all idealism. One might call these two impulses the Heraclitean impulse and the Democritean impulse. These two sages constitute the two acmes of pre-Platonic philosophy, for Nietzsche, with Empedocles occupying the agonal point of transition between them. Of Heraclitus Nietzsche wrote: “he is like a star without an atmosphere.”²⁰⁷ Heraclitus’ greatest attribute was his terrible hybris and solitude; he is exemplary of those philosophers who “reject the people from the start” (KSA 7: 23 [14]).²⁰⁸ He created a metaphysical cosmodicy describing the eternal flux of the universe. Democritus, for his part, was the first atheist, and the founder of atomism. He originated a theory of the birth of worlds in the absence of divinity. Nietzsche considers Heraclitus (along with Empedocles and Anaximander) to be among those philosophers who achieved “*Mastery of the knowledge drive*: or the strengthening of that which is mythical, mystical, and artistic. [...] Legislation by *greatness*.” Democritus he enumerates among those (along with Thales and Parmenides) who affected the “*Mastery of the mythical*: strengthening the sense of truth over against free fiction.

²⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, “On the Pathos of Truth” (1872), 250.

²⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, 75

Vis veritatis, or the strengthening of pure knowing” (KSA 7: 23 [14]).²⁰⁹ These two masteries necessarily oppose one another: it is a constant battle between the supremacy of the art-instinct, this eternal source of life, creation of nature, and the drive to knowledge, which searches for *truth* and eliminates myth. These are, indeed the two perspectives between which the young Nietzsche travels—the first is that of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the second that of the lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers. To a culture, they are biologically necessary, and the *ἀγών* between them is, indeed, what makes it flourish. Thus *illusion as illusion* must master *illusion as truth* in the perspective of the myth- and art-drive while, from the perspective of the drive to knowledge, myth—false origins and metaphysical comforts—must be overcome by the urge toward the truth at the heart of the world. It is clear, moreover, that these perspectives constantly reverse into one another and yet remain in separation.

Every pre-Platonic Greek philosophy has its cosmogony (κοσμογονία), each pure and original in its kind. Wisdom itself (σοφία), and thus philosophy, has two sources for Nietzsche—two “preliminary stages.” The first is “a mythic preliminary stage” and the second is a “sporadic-proverbial one.”²¹⁰ The first of these is nothing other than theogony and cosmogony, inseparable for the Greeks from poetry. Nietzsche devotes his third lecture on the pre-Platonic philosophers to an enumeration of these cosmogonies, out of which the philosophical instinct will be born. He begins: “The power to systematize—very strong in the Greek’s ranking and genesis of their gods—presents us with a drive never coming to rest.”²¹¹ What separates us from the Greeks is thus their immense power of *organization* of nature which is at once an artistic *creation* of nature;

²⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, 75.

²¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 9.

²¹¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 10.

both that nature from which all human power springs and the nature of man as such. Cosmogony and theogony for them had a strictly *cultural* function: “It was the grand task to establish the rights and ranks of this colorful divine realm. The Greeks met it with their political and religious genius. The continual blending of the gods (θεῶν κρᾶσις) was faced with a crisis of the gods (θεῶν κρίσις). It was especially difficult to bring the ancient ranks of the Titans into a relationship with the Olympians [... .] Bizarre contrasts allowed the possibility of fantastic innovations. Finally, a *peace among the gods* was established; Delphi was involved, probably above all; there, in any case, we find an epicenter of philosophical theology.”²¹² All ancient Greek theogonies, in Nietzsche’s eyes, begin in agonal dissonance; thus the ἀγών between the Titans and the Olympians was necessary to the birth of theology, and to its centralization at Delphi, where the oracle was.

In keeping with the structure of Greek civilization, both Olympian and mystery gods were required in order for religion to thrive in harmony with the state. The contradiction between these two species of god is “resolved with extraordinary wisdom. First of all, [there were] gods who clarify everything at hand, as continual guardians and observers of all Greek existence, and likewise gods of mundane existence: next, for especially earnest religious elevation, as an individuation to all ascetic and pessimistic affects, [there were] the mysteries, with their hope of immortality. That these two currents did not harm or dishonor one another must be deemed especially wise.”²¹³ Nietzsche goes on to explain the Orphic theogonies. The most ancient of these are created by poets, toward which Aristotle alludes in listing the original elements in these theogonies: “Night and Heaven or Chaos and Ocean”; Nietzsche identifies these with their

²¹² Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 10.

²¹³ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 10.

authors: “Hesiod refers to Chaos [(χάος) *Theogony*, 116-7], Homer to Ocean (Ὠκεανός) [*Iliad*, bk. 14. 1.201; bk. 15, 1.240], and a theogony attributed to Eudemus (from which the Neoplatonist Damascius narrates [*De princ.*, 382]) refers to Night and Heaven (Νύξ καὶ Οὐρανός).”²¹⁴ The theogony of Apollonius (*Argonaut.* 1.494ff.) “depicts Orpheus singing as, in the beginning, the earth, sky and sea separated themselves from the admixture of all things; as the sun, moon, and stars took up their orbits; [as] mountains, rivers, and animals came to be; as the Oceanids ruled over Ophion and Eurynome for the first time in Olympus; as they were hurled into the oceans by Chronos and Rhea, who were in their turn ousted by Zeus.”²¹⁵ According to a third Orphic theogony (Damascius, *De Princ.* 381), the world is born of “water and primeval mud,” which “thicken into earth” and engender “a dragon with wings on its shoulders and the appearance of a god; on both sides [it has] the head of a lion and that of a steer named Heracles or Chronos.” This monster then unites with necessity, Adrestea—“this then extended itself incorporeally across the entire universe. Chronos-Heracles produced a gigantic egg that broke open around the middle, with the upper half forming the sky and the lower half forming the earth.”²¹⁶ Yet another, more ancient Orphic theogony “places Chronos at the pinnacle.” The god creates “aether and chaos, from which he fashions a silver egg: from this is brought forth the all-illuminating, first-born god, Phanes, who is also called Metis, Eros, and Erikpaios ... Androgynous, since he contains the seeds of all the gods in himself. Phanes generates out of himself Echidna, or night, who, along with Uranus and Gaia, the step-parents of the middle generation of gods, is portrayed by Hesiod in her essence. Zeus, having successfully taken

²¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 11.

²¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 11-12.

²¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 12.

power, devours Phanes, and precisely because of this, he is the epitome of all things.” Nietzsche then quotes Plato, who relates as an “old saying (παλαιὸς λόγος)”: “Zeus is the beginning and the middle, from Zeus everything is made” (*Laws* IV, 715e). Zeus then births the last generation of gods. Nietzsche emphasizes: “Most important is the story of Dionysus Zagreus, the son of Zeus and Persephone who, torn limb from limb by the Titans, lives once again as the younger Dionysus, after Zeus has eaten his still intact heart.”²¹⁷ In this cosmogony, Zeus acts as the mythical incarnation of the primordial element of which all matter is constituted. This metaphysical determination will later give way to a series of original physical determinations for the all-embracing One of life for the Greek philosophers, beginning with Thales’ designation of *water* as the primal element.

That philosophy develops out of anthropomorphic cosmogonies conceived as *poetry* (ποίησις) is of the highest significance; for the Greeks *created* their worlds in richest multiplicity. They did not regard nature as an unknowable and prehistoric origin of man but firstly as the ground of life that must be fashioned, made (ποιεῖσθαι) by him in song. Man must transcend himself, be outside himself, near-godly, in order to bring a universe into being. “The course of philosophy: at first human beings are conceived as the authors of all things—gradually things are explained according to analogies with individual human qualities—ultimately one arrives at *sensation*.” Sensation, then, would be the ultimate purification from myth. Nietzsche then, in the same fragment, poses this “Important question: Is sensation a primordial fact of all matter? / Attraction and repulsion?” (KSA 7: 19 [149]).²¹⁸ The paradox between metaphysics and science here comes to its apex: the *importance* of this question lies in the possibility that science, in its

²¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 12.

²¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 48.

purest form, might once again revert to the realm of the metaphysical. The primordial nature of sensation would have as its effect that science, or *materialism*—would have to be constantly recreated as *art*. The only way in which it might become possible to *imitate the Greek philosophers* is by an anthropomorphic leap that characterizes them according to our social necessities and that *creates them as cosmogonists*. To experience our difference with the Greeks is to measure them against us by anthropomorphically attributing to them this method of life and thought.

Both Heraclitus and Democritus, on Nietzsche's account, possess, as an essential component of their cosmogonies, a theory of the infinite succession of worlds. However, while that of Heraclitus inscribes itself in an artistic metaphysics, that of Democritus is purely scientific. Although Heraclitus is scientific insofar as he considers fire as the primal element, which "[transforms] itself into water and earth"²¹⁹ to create the material of the world, his theory is ultimately mythical and hence anthropomorphic, assigning godly agency to cosmic forces. "Since everything is fire, then whatever is not fire, which would be the opposite of fire, cannot exist at all."²²⁰ All vapors are either pure or impure, depending on the direction of their evolution, toward or away from fire: "From the sea arise only pure vapors, which serve as nourishment; from the earth, only dark mists, on which the moist draws for nourishment. Pure vapors constitute the bridge from sea to fire; impure [vapors], the transition from earth to water. / Thus [there is] a double process, 'the way up and the way down (ὁδός κάτω and ἄνω),' both [of which are] one thing eternally returning next to the other."²²¹ This then is a theory of the unity

²¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 62.

²²⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 67.

²²¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 67.

and indestructibility of all matter in its gradation of warmth, and this matter is constantly becoming.

Everlastingly, a given quality contends against itself and separates into opposites; everlastingly these opposites seek to reunite. Ordinary people fancy they see something rigid, complete and permanent; in truth, however, light and dark, bitter and sweet are attached to each other like wrestlers of whom sometimes the one, sometimes the other is on top. [...] It is a wonderful idea, welling up from the purest strings of Hellenism, the idea that strife embodies the everlasting sovereignty of strict justice, bound to everlasting laws. Only a Greek was capable of finding such an idea to be the fundament of a cosmology; it is Hesiod's good *Eris* transformed into the cosmic principle; it is the contest-idea of the Greek individual and the Greek state, taken from the gymnasium and the palaestra, from the artist's *agon*, from the contest between political parties and between cities—all transformed into universal application so that now the wheels of the cosmos turn on it.²²²

The perception of stability is nothing but a *myth*—in reality, there is only constant change and flux, organized by a cosmic game of chance, where every origin is split, such that there is no identity that is not first of all traversed by difference. For Heraclitus says, in a phrase dear to both Nietzsche and Hölderlin: ἐν διαφέρον ἑαυτῷ—the one differentiating in itself. And, in another marvelous paradox, that *the one* is at the same time *the many*. The play of this competitive forces requires a time of *becoming* in which a creative-destructive movement rigorously prohibits any continuity of subject. In this Heraclitean becoming, then, every instant in the sacrifice of the instant that came before—every world is the sacrifice of the previous world, which, as soon as it comes into being, plunges the whole string of worlds that came before it into forgetfulness. The paradoxical logic of this agonal movement is such that the more strongly *identity* and *reconciliation* between opposing forces is approached, the more these forces differ from one another. Thus in Nietzsche's appropriation of Heraclitus' becoming, he reveals that the Dionysian art-state of nature, the *Ureine*, is simultaneously and in its deepest truth the tearing-apart of all

²²² Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 55, 56.

uniformity, all identity, all individuation. The matrix of Heraclitus' ἀγών is fire itself, the divine force of life that creates and destroys worlds by turn, time and again to all eternity.

Nietzsche affirms that Heraclitus “believes, like Anaximander, in a periodically repeated end of the world out of the all-destroying cosmic fire. The period in which the world hurries toward the conflagration and dissolves into pure fire Heraclitus characterizes, with notable emphasis, as a desire, a want, or lack; the full consumption in fire he calls satiety.”²²³ Heraclitus says that the αἰών (aeon; life, time, century) is a child playing dice, or, in one of Nietzsche’s interpretations: “‘The world is the *game* Zeus plays, [...] of the fire itself. The is the only sense in which the one is at the same time the many.’”²²⁴ Nietzsche writes of this “game of the great world-child Zeus”:²²⁵ “the ever self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being.” For the αἰών, also called *fire*, “builds towers of sand like a child at the seashore, piles them up and tramples them down. From time to time it starts the game anew. An instant of satiety—and again it is seized by its need, as the artist is seized by his need to create.”²²⁶ Hence this creative instinct, at once an instinct toward *destruction*, ignites itself anew each day, sending the last world into oblivion.

Stars, in his theory, are “barks in which pure vaporizations [are] gathered. Whenever these barks turn about, solar and lunar eclipses occur. The sun itself is thus a vaporous burning mass: daytime depletes the vapors, and in the morning they produce themselves anew; the sun is new every day.”²²⁷ Heraclitus thus devises a mythological, cosmological physics; Nietzsche calls

²²³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 6, 60.

²²⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 6, 58.

²²⁵ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 8, 67.

²²⁶ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 62.

²²⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 67.

his system a cosmodicy, already many bounds beyond all theodicies. This word, cosmodicy, *Cosmodicee* a combination of the Greek words, κόσμος and δίκη, meaning, therefore, cosmic justice, was coined by Erwin Rohde in respect to Heraclitus, as an alternative to theodicy. He arrived at this formulation through a rejection of Bernays' theory of Heraclitus as being indifferent to justice and injustice alike.²²⁸ Thus he rendered possible the interpretation of Heraclitus that Nietzsche takes up when, for example, he puts in the Ephesian's mouth the following words: "The struggle of the many is pure justice itself! In fact, the one is the many."²²⁹ Moreover, Rohde used this very expression, "aesthetic cosmodicy," to describe *The Birth of Tragedy*.²³⁰

The Heraclitean solar system is formed of the purest, highest, and most vital beings: stars of primordial fire. For the wisdom of the Heraclitean man is determined by his proximity to fire, by the dryness of his soul: "the soul parched with thirst is the wisest" (14 [A 52]).²³¹ And: "eternally living fire, which ignites with measure and is extinguished with measure" (14 [A 30]).²³² The solar system, reborn daily, is made of numerous constellations of pure wisdom, which reflect, in their harmonious and dissonant relation, the agonal brilliance of Greek civilization. In a fragment contemporary to his lectures on the pre-Platonics, Nietzsche writes:

Heraclitus The creative power of the artist primordial [*die bildende Kraft des Künstlers uranfänglich*].

²²⁸ Cf. Whitlock's commentary at Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 208.

²²⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 6, 57.

²³⁰ Cf. D'Iorio's note at Nietzsche, *Les philosophes préplatoniciens*, 318, n. 82. D'Iorio also reminds us of Nietzsche's fragment of 1884, which reads: "On this point, that the world is a divine game [*ein göttliches Spiel*] and beyond good and evil [*jenseits von Gut und Böse*]*—I have Vedic philosophy and Heraclitus as predecessors*" (KSA 10: 26 [193]).

²³¹ Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 61.

²³² Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 45.

The philosopher is the extension of that drive by which we, by means of anthropological illusions, continually relate with nature. The eye. Time. [Das Auge. Zeit.]

KSA 7: 19 [134]²³³

Here, the anthropomorphic-artistic, *plastic* power of man enigmatically clarifies itself in the role it shall come to play for Nietzsche. It is by a spherical projection of the human eye onto the cosmos that the world is created ever anew, and this projection is a *temporal phenomenon*—therefore, subject to fluctuation, to the constant birth, death and rebirth that time entails. The human animal, in its incessant creation of the world, creates its own nature, its own internal *physis* over and over again, ever sacrificing old natures in the fiery need to create and recreate the cosmos in its image. This is the only rule of the game—the only *justice*.

Democritus and Heraclitus share the position that movement (i.e., becoming) is incessant, and that “every motion presupposes an opposite” so that, consequently, for both of them: “war is the father of all things [...].” War (πόλεμος) is here another name for the Hellenic ἀγών, the overarching principle of Greek life in Nietzsche’s view. Another consonance between the two philosophers, inseparable from that of strife, is the indestructibility of matter. In his section of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* on Heraclitus, Nietzsche quotes Schopenhauer on this matter: “Forever and ever, persistent matter must change its form. Grasping the due of causality, mechanical, physical, chemical and organic phenomena greedily push to the fore, snatching matter from one another, for each would reveal its own inherent idea. We can follow this strife throughout the whole of nature. In fact we might say that nature exists by virtue of it.”²³⁴ Yet the Democritean system is “of the greatest consequence” because, with it, “for the first time the

²³³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 45.

²³⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 56. Schopenhauer *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Vol. 1, Book 2, § 27.

collective, anthropomorphic, mythic view of the world has been overcome.”²³⁵ Democritus’ theory of infinite worlds bases itself on the proposition that “[e]ach self-isolating entity from the mass of primal bodies: countless worlds exist. They are generated and yet also cast into destruction.”²³⁶

Nietzsche had doubtless learned of this from Lange, who relates as Democritus’ fourth fundamental principle:

*The atoms are infinite in number; and of endless variety and form. In the eternal fall through infinite space, the greater, which fall more quickly, strike against the lesser; and lateral movements and vortices that thus arise are the commencement of the formation of worlds. Innumerable worlds are formed and perish successively and simultaneously.*²³⁷

Lange defends this theory, often accused, according to him, of being “monstrous” in antiquity, by insisting that it “stands much nearer to our modern ideas than that of Aristotle, who proved *a priori* that besides his self-contained world there could be no second.”²³⁸ Although Democritus’ view that large bodies fall faster than smaller ones is “erroneous,” the theory of lateral motion and revolution between atoms founded on the variousness of their shapes and the fact that collision never takes place in their center, but along the axes of individual atoms, is followed by “the principles of modern mechanical science.” These lateral motions gain in complexity, and “as the collision of constant new atoms with a layer of atoms already in lateral motion constantly imparts new forces, so we may suppose that the motion will continually increase.”²³⁹ Aristotle objected to the Democritean physics because he taught that “if there could be void space, which

²³⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 125.

²³⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 127.

²³⁷ Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1: 24.

²³⁸ Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1: 25.

²³⁹ Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1: 25.

he thought impossible, then all bodies must necessarily fall with equal speed, since the difference in the rapidity of the descent is determined by the various densities of the medium—as, for example, water and air.” Lange concedes that here, as in his “doctrine of gravitation towards the center of the universe,” Aristotle “was at one with our modern science,” although his deduction is not consistently “rational.” Epicurus, for his part, came to the following conclusion with regard to Democritus’ physics: “because in empty space there is no resistance, all bodies must fall equally fast”—this view, according to Lange, is only “apparently in agreement with modern physics” since the “true theory of gravitation” would not come about until Galileo.²⁴⁰ Lange also relates Democritus’ theory of the permanent subsistence of matter and the consequent doctrine that: “*All change is only a combination and separation of atoms*” to Kant’s “first analogy of experience,” according to which: “In all changes of phenomena matter is permanent, and the quality thereof in nature is neither increased nor diminished.”²⁴¹ Lange’s purpose is thus to prove the currency of the Democritean system, and its proximity to “our” modern materialism, indissociable for him from Kantian metaphysics.

Nietzsche explains the manner in which worlds are atomically created for Democritus as follows:

A single world arises thus: impact between different sorts of atoms produces the excretion of a mass in which the lighter particles are driven upward. By the same effects of collision, the mass is caused to turn—the bodies forced outward settle themselves down from the outside, like a sort of skin. This shell becomes increasingly thin, since its particles are driven more and more into the middle. Out of the atoms in the middle, earth is formed; out of those that climb upward, sky, fire, and air. Here and there thicker masses ball together. Air, which forces itself about, is a stormy vortex motion; they gradually dry out in this and are ignited by rapid motion as stars. Thus, smaller particles are squeezed out of the earthly corpus by winds and stars and flow together into the depths as water.

²⁴⁰ Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1: 26.

²⁴¹ Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1: 19.

The earth became increasingly more firm. Gradually it takes its place at the center of the world; in the beginning, since it was still small and light, it moved here and there. The sun and moon, being at an earlier stage of their formation, were stirred by those masses orbiting around the earth's core and so were brought into line in our world system.²⁴²

The stars which, for Heraclitus, were sparks of primordial fire, become for Democritus light, dry, quickly-moving clusters of air atoms, rising upward from the earth to form a mass of constellations, purified of myth.

In this sense, the aesthetic intuitions of Heraclitus which, for him, remain in the realm of anthropomorphic myth, find their scientific actualization and justification in Democritus, just as they find their incarnation in the tragic hero, Empedocles. Democritus defines thought as *physical*; Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1872, under the heading "Democritus": "Thought as movement" (KSA 7: 23 [39]).²⁴³ And in the notes to his lectures: "Democritus proceeds only from the *reality of motion*, because, to be precise, thought is motion. [...] 'There exists a motion, since I think and thought has reality.' But if motion exists, then empty space must also exist, unless 'Not-Being is as real as Being,' [(Democritus, frag. 156)] or Not-Being (οὐδέν) is in no way less than Being (δέν). With absolutely filled space, motion is impossible."²⁴⁴ Therefore, as Lange says: "*Nothing exists by atoms and empty space: all else is only opinion.*"²⁴⁵ This, then, is the materialist incarnation of the Heraclitean πάντα ῥεῖ—all things now take on their scientific aspect—they are moving atoms, hastened along the temporal path.

At the midpoint between Heraclitus and Democritus, between mythical becoming and materialist positivism, Empedocles stands, the comet incarnate, the transitional figure between

²⁴² Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 127-128.

²⁴³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 131.

²⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 123.

²⁴⁵ Lange, *History of Materialism*, vol. 1, 22.

Myth and Science, in whom this tension is strong enough to require a self-sacrifice of the highest order. He is, moreover, the tragic harbinger of culture. Nietzsche writes of this hero, alive in celestial flame, who is a mirror, indeed, for Nietzsche himself:

Empedocles continually stands on this *boundary line*, [...]; he demarcates the age of myth, tragedy, and orgiasticism yet at the same time there appears in him the new Greek, as democratic statesman, orator, enlightened figure, allegorist, and scientific human being. In him the two periods wrestle with each other; he is a man of *competition* [an *agonal man*, a man of the ἀγών] through and through.²⁴⁶

The German Romantic Mimesis of Antiquity and Nietzsche

Nietzsche was not the first to connect the Greeks with the possibility of a German culture to come. This question, rather, had hung thickly in the air of German philosophy since Winckelmann's famous and fateful utterance: "The only way we can become great, and, if this is possible, inimitable, is by imitating the Ancients."²⁴⁷ Which is to say, following the Aristotelian determination, for art, τέχνη to imitate nature, φύσις. The Greeks represent *our lost nature* which we must recover by an artificial, technical, *artistic* imitation of them—in order to attain to a culture that is properly our own.

Schiller, in his essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, speaks of the love of "antiquity," as well as that of "flowers," of "animals,"²⁴⁸ etc., as the love of that which is both "*natural*" and "*naïve*"—he declares: "nature must contrast with art and put it to shame." In these natural, naïve

²⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 119. In the third section of this essay, I shall return to Nietzsche's Empedocles and to the significance of the tragic hero's self-sacrifice.

²⁴⁷ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* ("Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture") (Gebr. Henninger, 1885), cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, "Hölderlin and the Greeks," 236.

²⁴⁸ Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," 179.

things, “we cherish that inner necessity, that eternal oneness with themselves.”²⁴⁹ Schiller goes on:

They *are* what we *were*; they are what we *should become* once more. We were nature like them, and our culture should lead us along the path of reason and freedom back to nature. Thus they depict at once our lost childhood, something that remains ever dearest to us, and for this reason they fill us with a certain melancholy. Because at the same time they portray our supreme perfection in an ideal sense, they transport us into a state of sublime emotion.²⁵⁰

Nature is called naïve because of its “superior force of the passion and a *lack* of reflection.”²⁵¹

However, he who lives in nostalgia, striving hopelessly after his originary *naïveté* falls into modern sentimentality, which is barbaric. The sentimental age, the condemnation to an eternal striving back to a lost nature, thus begins with self-reflection and self-consciousness, which brings with it both the idealization of a *lost nature* and the tragic impossibility of its recuperation—this comes about with modern philosophy.

The Greeks existed with nature in a perfectly harmonious manner: “Consider how confidently this people was able, under its serendipitous sky, to live with nature in the wild; consider how very much nearer to the simplicity of nature lay its manner of thinking, its way of feeling, its mores, and what a faithful copy of this is provided by the works of its poets.”²⁵² The Greek “does not cling to nature with fervor, sensitivity, and sweet melancholy that we moderns do. Indeed, by personifying and deifying it in its individual appearances, and by presenting its effects as actions of beings endowed with freedom, the Greek overcomes serene necessity in it,

²⁴⁹ Schiller, *Essays*, 180.

²⁵⁰ Schiller, *Essays*, 180-181.

²⁵¹ Schiller, *Essays*, 185.

²⁵² Schiller, *Essays*, 193.

precisely what makes it so attractive to us.”²⁵³ Now: “Our feeling for nature is like the sick person’s feeling for health.”²⁵⁴ Yet it is still possible for genius to spring forth organically; indeed “[e]very true genius must be naïve or he is no genius.”²⁵⁵ Poets, says Schiller, are “everywhere the *guardians* of nature”; in his relation to nature, the poet “will either *be* nature or *seek* the lost nature.” The former is the character of the *naïve* poet, the latter of the *sentimental* poet.²⁵⁶ “As long as the human being is still part of nature that is pure [...], he operates as an undivided sensuous unity and as a harmonizing whole.”²⁵⁷ For Schiller, the purity of this cosmic harmony, both human and divine, in which the poet has a *necessary* existence, is broken by the mastery of man by “culture and art,” following which “he can only express himself as a *moral* unity, that is to say, as someone striving for unity.” Thereafter, the poet, rather than naïvely imitating the “actuality” of the nature of which he constitutes an essential component, must sentimentally imitate the *ideal* of this lost unity.²⁵⁸ Schiller calls Goethe a naïve poet in an age of sentimentalism—in other words, a comet—pure among the impure.

Nietzsche wrote, in the summer of 1876: “The artist needs the infidelity of memory in order not to copy (*abzuschreiben*) nature but to transform (*umzubilden*) nature” (KSA 7: 17 [32]).²⁵⁹ This transformation entails, indeed, a maximal exercise of the homeotic plastic force—we are separated from original *nature*—from the Greeks—by an ocean of oblivion: and this is

²⁵³ Schiller, *Essays*, 194.

²⁵⁴ Schiller, *Essays*, 195.

²⁵⁵ Schiller, *Essays*, 189.

²⁵⁶ Schiller, *Essays*, 196.

²⁵⁷ Schiller, *Essays*, 200.

²⁵⁸ Schiller, *Essays*, 201.

²⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 220.

highly necessary to our approach to them—for that origin, rather, lies in the future of a cultural resurgence. Nietzsche tirelessly emphasizes the importance of *forgetting* for life: “life in any true sense is impossible without forgetfulness.”²⁶⁰ For the “man who totally lacks the power to forget, who is doomed to see becoming everywhere” loses himself in “this flux of becoming” and “no longer believes in his own being” or in “himself [...].”²⁶¹ He is overcome by a Heraclitean paralysis of ceaseless transformation, and is yet incapable of transforming himself, because he refuses to let go of his past selves. The reflective man, subject to knowledge and the “great and ever-growing burden of the past” envies innocent creatures who live *unhistorically*—his immediate reaction to seeing animals grazing in a field is one of intense pain and sentimentality:

And so it hurts him, like the thought of a lost Paradise, to see the herd grazing, or, nearer still, a child, that has nothing yet of the past to disown, and plays in happy blindness between the walls of the past and the future. And yet its play must be disturbed, and only too soon will it be summoned from its little kingdom of oblivion.²⁶²

Nietzsche’s modern man, like that of Schiller, thus also strives after the unity and innocence of childlike nature—of the Heraclitean cosmic child, who plays his game of chance instinctively, and yet in accordance with the laws of divine necessity. Nietzsche echoes Schiller: “The humanity of the Greeks lies in a certain childlike naïveté in which, among them, man is revealed—his art, government, society, military and civil law, sexual relations education, politics. It’s precisely the human element that appears among the Greeks in a state of nakedness and inhumanity that makes it indispensable for education.”²⁶³ The cultural constellation of the

²⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thoughts out of Season*, part II, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), “The Use and Abuse of History,” 9.

²⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 89.

²⁶² Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History,” 7.

²⁶³ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 320.

Greeks, for Nietzsche, grows out of their *inhumanity*, the pure organic impulse of that people. This inhumanity, however, is precisely what *makes* the Greeks human; indeed, it is by means of their creative fervor that they constantly rebirth nature, first as myth, and gradually, in a series of cosmogonies, arrive at the creation of a *physical* world. This is the major difference between these two philosophers: for Schiller, modern life must first be sentimental and *idealist* in order to imitate antiquity and thus to give way to a coming world, while for Nietzsche, the Greeks themselves are originally the *creators* of nature, and it is our task, within the breadth of our perspective, to create the Greeks themselves, not as our lost, irretrievable nature, but as that model of a unified birth of culture *as* nature that our time requires: to create the Greeks as they created their world is, in the same breath, to create *our own nature*.

Schiller's "decisive gesture" with his *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, was to historicize Aristotle's definition of τέχνη in a particular manner. Schiller divides the *ancient* as the lost life of nature, the time of purity and naïveté, from the *modern*, the artificiality of culture, the perverse sentimentality for a never-experienced childhood.

"Generally speaking," a canonical text of the *Physics* says, "on the one hand τέχνη accomplishes what φύσις is incapable of effecting; on the other hand, τέχνη imitates φύσις."²⁶⁴ Interpreting historically, this double postulation can yield this result: art, so far as it imitates nature, is specifically—following Winckelmann—Greek art: mimesis is Greek. On the other hand, it is up to the Moderns to accomplish [...] what nature cannot carry out. Consequently, it is up to the Moderns to go a step beyond the Greeks—to "accomplish" them.

That is to say, also, to surpass and surmount them."²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Aristotle, *The Physics*, trans. Francis M. Cornford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 1: 173.

²⁶⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, "Hölderlin and the Greeks," 236-247, 238.

The ideal function of art is thus to *create nature* by μίμησις, that is, to engender, complete and dialectically overreach the world of the Greeks in the foundation of novelty.

The explicit ambition of the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* was a German “*rebirth of tragedy*,”²⁶⁶ which he meant to accomplish by a revival of that “time” and of those “men” in whom “the German spirit has so far striven most resolutely to learn from the ancient Greeks”—he names “Goethe, Schiller, and Winckelmann,” since whom, however, “the endeavor to attain to culture and to the Greeks on the same path has grown incomprehensibly feebler and feebler.”²⁶⁷ In his prophetic voice, Nietzsche proclaims the source from which this miraculous resurgence, reconnecting the ancient Greeks to the modern Germans, must come: “Let no one try to blight our faith in a yet-impending rebirth of Hellenic antiquity; for this alone gives us hope for a renovation and purification of the German spirit through the fire magic of music.”²⁶⁸

The opposition of Nature and Culture, of φύσις and τέχνη, of the Greek and the German, before Nietzsche found itself all too often superimposed on a metaphysical opposition, attributed also, yet in a premature stage of non-self-consciousness, to the Greeks, namely that of noumena and the phenomena. Nietzsche transforms the questions surrounding the relation of the Germans to the Greeks by shifting the terrain away from such metaphysical preoccupations and toward a concern for *life* with respect to a people; thus, of a philological typology of truths and a method for their cultivation and destruction. This very opposition becomes immediately untenable for Nietzsche, since he defines nature itself as the *creation of culture*.

²⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 19, 121.

²⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 20, 121.

²⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 20, 123.

The Young Nietzsche's Schopenhauer and Lange

Nietzsche called Schopenhauer a champion of culture, a hero of the conquest of knowledge by art, both despite and by virtue of his asceticism. The young Nietzsche writes of his philosophical master, in 1873, in the following reverent manner: “[Schopenhauer] is the destroyer of forces hostile to culture; he reopens the depths of existence. Thanks to him the serenity of art becomes possible once more” (KSA 7: 28 [6]).²⁶⁹ Schopenhauer lifted the veil of language and morals, revealing the eternal suffering life in the will: “A chief source of that suffering which we found above all to be essential and inevitable to all life is, when it really appears in a definite form, that Eris, the conflict of all individuals, the expression of the contradiction, with which the will to live is affected in its inner self, and which attains a visible form through the *principium individuationis*. Wild-beast fights are the most cruel means of showing this directly and vividly. In this original discord lies an unquenchable source of suffering [...]”²⁷⁰ Nietzsche’s vocation is to transform this pessimism into an affirmation of life. “As Nietzsche wrote to Rohde in October 1868, the ‘ethical air, the Faustian odor, cross, death, and grave’ (B 2, 322) were what fascinated him about Schopenhauer. ‘Cross, death, and grave’ did not depress him; on the contrary, they seemed to be an elixir of life. [...] [I]n his view, Schopenhauer’s negation of the will was not denial but extreme affirmation. It signaled the victory of the mental will over the natural will.”²⁷¹ Nietzsche detected in Schopenhauer, as well as among the Greeks, the force of this life-affirming, active pessimism.

²⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 172.

²⁷⁰ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, vol. I, § 62, 430.

²⁷¹ Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 46.

An early critique of Schopenhauer, titled “On Schopenhauer,” and written between October 1867 and April 1868, exposes the extent to which the young Nietzsche had already performed his essential work upon Schopenhauer’s opposition of the will as thing-in-itself and representation. Several years later, in 1870-1871, he would write: “In man the primal One looks back at itself through the appearance: the appearance reveals the essence. I. e.[.] the primal One looks at man, more precisely, at man looking at the appearance, at man looking through the appearance. There is *no road to the primal One* for man. He is all appearance” (KSA 7: 7 [170]).²⁷² In other words, man’s essence, far from existing behind phenomena as a transhistorical, eternal truth, is inseparable from his phenomenality, which is in constant flux and transformation, and thus requires a constant reevaluation of life and its needs for science, art, philosophy.

For Schopenhauer, according to Nietzsche, the problem of Kant, in seeking to “explain the world under an assumed factor,” namely, the thing-in-itself, and the reason why he did not perceive his answer as a “failure” is that “he did not want to sense the dark and contradictory elements in the region where indiv[iduality] ends.” Thus, for Schopenhauer: “The dark drive, brought under an apparatus of representation, manifests itself as world. This drive has not found a place under the *princip[ium] indiv[iduationis]*.”²⁷³ The immense, destructive strife of the will is forever in excess of individuating representation, raging behind it in a noumenal realm and exposing the illusionary nature of the *individual*—of the *subject*, by presenting the eternity of the oneness of all living things—all creatures capable of affirming the universal will, and thereby affirming life.

²⁷² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 56.

²⁷³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, “On Schopenhauer,” 1.

Nietzsche writes: “[Schopenhauer’s] answer to the yearning question of all metaphysicians—expressed in Goethe’s ‘whether the spirit would not reveal many a secret’—is a bold Yes; and to ensure that the new insight was seen far and wide, like an inscription on a temple, he wrote the redeeming formula for the old and most important riddle of the world across the face of his book as the title *The World as Will and Representation*.” Nietzsche translates Schopenhauer’s solution in the following “semi-figurative form”: “The will, which has neither cause [*grundlos*] nor knowledge, manifests itself, when subjected to an apparatus of representation, as world.”²⁷⁴ This groundless will, then, surging forth at every instant like lava from its subterranean abyss, yet only finds incarnation as reality to the extent that some medium of representation, in its thin and veiling surface-existence, is used to express it. Representation, whose law is the *principium individuationis*, separating all things out into discrete and disconnected forms, is the falsifying manifestation of the will, whose breadth exceeds all individuation. For this reason, the Schopenhauerean *Wille*, the force of life, goes far beyond the Kantian *Ding an sich* which, for its part, remains separated from man, and eternally unknowable, existing merely as reality’s *a priori* condition of possibility. Schopenhauer’s *Wille*, declares Nietzsche, “went so far beyond Kant that its discoverer could say that he considered it as ‘that which has very long been sought under the name of philosophy, and which is therefore considered by those who are familiar with history as the philosopher’s stone.’”²⁷⁵ This is the “quintessence of Sch[openhauer]’s system [...].”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, I, 2.

²⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, I, 2. *World as Will and Representation*, Preface to first edition.

²⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, I, 3.

Despite the fact that Schopenhauer followed Kant down his “dangerous path” toward the thing-in-itself in the creation of his philosophical system and, as Friedrich Überweg argued, viewed this as “only a hidden category,” a major difference emerges between the two philosophers. For that which Schopenhauer “puts in the place of the Kantian X, the will, is created only with the help of poetic intuition, while his attempted logical proofs can satisfy neither Schopenhauer nor us.”²⁷⁷ It is thus an *intuition*, an organic and artistic movement, that founds the will, and not a logical progression constituting a proof. It is, further, necessary to “protest against the predicates attributed by Schopenhauer to his will, which sound far too definite for something absolutely unthinkable and which are gained throughout from their opposition to the world of representation; while between the thing-in-itself and the appearance even the concept of opposition is meaningless.”²⁷⁸ No opposition can take hold between the ungraspable and the graspable.

This critique of Schopenhauer’s attribution of qualities to the thing-in-itself is executed in accordance with a specific neo-Kantian materialism. Nietzsche had read Lange’s *History of Materialism* (*Geschichte des Materialismus*, 1860) during the summer of 1866, and been greatly inspired by it. He brought this materialism to bear upon Schopenhauer’s determination of the thing-in-itself as will. This critique based itself on the postulate that the unknowable must not be regarded as a negation of the knowable or as its dialectical opposite. For if one does this, one immediately anthropomorphizes that which is beyond determination by projecting aspects of the known world onto one that exceeds all epistemological faculties. Thus, to reinterpret the Kantian “thing-in-itself” as universal *will* is to assign it characteristics that are proper to the phenomenal

²⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, II, 3.

²⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, II, 3.

—to the realm of experience. Lange accepts Schopenhauer’s designation of the will as a universal life-force, yet objects to its assignation to the position of the thing-in-itself. , otherwise one runs the risk of using the logic of the antipode to project determinations of the knowable world onto what is indeterminable.²⁷⁹ From Schopenhauer’s perspective, Nietzsche condemns the Kantian division between an atemporal, primordial cause of all things and the flux of becoming in a fallen, illusory world and advocates for the inclusion of the will in becoming as the interior life-force of man. From Lange’s perspective, however, he criticizes the Schopenhauerean will *qua* thing-in-itself as a name for the unnamable, unknowable essence behind all things. These two critiques, arising from opposing metaphysical and scientific impulses, compete in his reading of Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche transforms, from the very start, the concept of the thing-in-itself, in the championing of his perspectivism. He writes: “there may be a thing-in-itself, albeit in no other sense than that in the realm of transcendence anything is *possible* that is every hatched out in the mind of a philosopher.”²⁸⁰ That which the philosopher calls the universal condition of objective reality is thus revealed by Nietzsche to be radically subjective and perspectival; the language of universality is nothing but an anthropomorphic and metaphorical disguise for the philosopher’s own urges and beliefs. Within the philosopher, two “possibilities” meet, properly, that of possibility and that of impossibility, and their combination engenders the unthinkable thought of the thing-in-itself, airing on the side of the impossible—the “negative power of the first possibility [...].”²⁸¹ Kant and Schopenhauer are thus like Parmenides, who “tested the existent

²⁷⁹ Cf. Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 48.

²⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, II, 3-4.

²⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, II, 4.

and the non-existent, the positive and the negative properties—and suddenly he found that he could not get past the concept of a negative quality, the concept of non-existence.”²⁸² Parmenides thus discovers reality as “eternal unity”²⁸³— the “key to the cosmic secret, remote from all human illusion.”²⁸⁴ Having grasped this, he could thus “climb down, into the abyss of all things. [...] By wrenching apart the senses and the capacity for abstraction, in other words by splitting up the mind as though it were composed of two quite separate capacities, he demolished the intellect itself, encouraging man to indulge in that wholly erroneous distinction between ‘spirit’ and ‘body’ which, especially since Plato, lies upon philosophy like a curse.”²⁸⁵

Since any opposition between the thing-in-itself and appearance is strictly unprovable, though it can be *thought*, “this concept of a continually decreasing possibility” must be reinforced. Were the moralist to object to this “knot of possibilities,” he would be countered by the declaration that “the thinker, faced with the mystery of the world, has no other means than guessing, i.e. hoping that a moment of genius will place upon his lips the word that provides the key to the writing that lies before everyone’s eyes and yet has never been read, which we call the world. But is that word the will?”²⁸⁶ The question which Schopenhauer believed, at the end of his life, had been left unanswered by his philosophy was, according to Nietzsche, “the question of the limits of individ[uation].”²⁸⁷ Nietzsche will accordingly, in his own philosophy, stretch those

²⁸² Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 10, 76.

²⁸³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 10, 78.

²⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 10, 77.

²⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 10, 77, 79.

²⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, II, 4.

²⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, II, 4.

limits, placing his emphasis on the supreme malleability of individuality, no longer as a metaphysical principle, but as one that is highly subject to *time* and to *history*.

For Schopenhauer, all forms of “appearance” of “the will as a thing-in-itself” are “alien to itself” insofar as they concern “only its nature as an object.”²⁸⁸ Space and time, thus, as appearances, are thus called by Schopenhauer the *principium individuationis*. Schopenhauer writes, quoted by Nietzsche: “This thing-in-itself, as such, is never an object, because every object is its mere appearance and no longer itself. If it was *nevertheless to be thought of objectively*, it had to *borrow a name and a concept* from an object, i.e.[,] from something in some way objectively given, and therefore from one of its appearances.”²⁸⁹ This objective thought, however, as Nietzsche points out, following Lange’s criticism of Schopenhauer, possesses merely “an apparent objectivity”—for in its process, we must adorn the “obscure and incomprehensible x” with “ brightly colored garments” and, thereafter, regard these garments *as* the thing-in-itself. That is, by attributing *human* characteristics to the thing-in-itself through its determination as will, this very *thing* is banished into invisibility: through this process, the “concept of the ‘thing-in-itself’ is secretly eliminated because it is ‘meant to be’ and we are handed another concept in exchange.”²⁹⁰ The dazzling cloak of language which encloses the will thus serves both to corrupt and to bury deeper this concept of the thing-in-itself. It *pretends* to objectivity and confers on the true, unified, ineffable concept of reality a false existence.

This “borrowed name and concept is precisely the will, ‘because it is the clearest, most developed appearance of the thing-in-itself, directly illuminated by knowledge.’” But what

²⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 4, 5. *World as Will and Representation*, 1: 134.

²⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 5. *World as Will and Representation*, 1: 131.

²⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 5.

fascinates Nietzsche most powerfully is that “all the predicates of the will too are borrowed from the world of appearances.”²⁹¹ In other words, the will itself, unlike the Kantian thing-in-itself, has no reality outside *experience*. “Admittedly, Sch[openhauer] makes an attempt here and there to present the meaning of these predicates as totally incomprehensible and transcendent, e.g. *W as W II*, p. 368: ‘The unity of that will in which we have recognized the essential nature of the nature-in-itself of the world of appearances is a metaphysical one. Consequently our knowledge of it is transcendent, i.e.[,] it is not based on the functions of our intellect and therefore cannot really be grasped by them.’”²⁹² Nietzsche explains that both “will” and “unity” are “predicates for the thing-in-itself, taken from the world of appearances, under which the real heart of the matter, the transcendental, evaporates.”²⁹³ The predicates “*unity*, *eternity* (i.e. timelessness), *liberty* (i.e. lacking in any reason [*Grundlosigkeit*])” are bound, like the thing-in-itself, to “our organization” and therefore “it is extremely doubtful that they have any meaning at all outside the sphere of human knowledge.” Yet the fact that they exist unknowably, while “their opposites rule the world of appearances” is unprovable by both Kant and Schopenhauer; they immediately clothe themselves in concepts of “multiplicity, temporality and causality” when exposed to the homogenizing light of the human gaze.²⁹⁴ This is why Schopenhauer says, and Nietzsche affirms he is “entirely right”: “it will never be possible to reach the nature of things from without: however much we may investigate, we gain nothing but images and names.”²⁹⁵ Thus, unbeknownst to Schopenhauer himself, he had created the possibility, through the *failure* of his

²⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 5.

²⁹² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 5-6.

²⁹³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 6.

²⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 6.

²⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, III, 6. *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 118.

definition of the will as thing-in-itself, to philosophize this will as *experience itself*, in the ever-shifting movements of history.

“The will appears:” writes Nietzsche, “how could it appear?”²⁹⁶ By means of *intellect*, the μηχανή of the will, which serves to represent the will, to conjure it to the surface from its depths. “But this enhancement of brain development is brought about by the constantly increasing and ever more complicated need of the corresponding appearances of the will.”²⁹⁷ The will and the intellect thus grow together, contiguously, out of a mutual necessity: the more powerful the intellect, which is to say, the more *inhuman*—the more *godlike*—the stronger is the will. The “conscious self” is “tertiary” for Schopenhauer: as consciousness it “presupposes the organism, and the organism presupposes the will.”²⁹⁸ The will appears in “a step-by-step sequence of phenomena” which bring on their wings “continually increasing existential needs:” these in turn are satisfied by nature’s “corresponding a step-by-step sequence of aids” of which the intellect is one.²⁹⁹ In this manner, a “world of appearances” is placed “in front of the world of appearances”: “Before the appearance of the intellect we already see the *principium indiv[iduationis]*, the law of causality, in full effectiveness.” Therefore, the intellect is in no way strictly inchoate but, annihilating the possibility of any transcendence strictly speaking by the immediacy of its emergence, it appears within the principle of individuation from the instant of its first appearance: “The will seizes life post-haste, seeking to manifest itself in every way; it begins at the lowest levels and as it were works its way up from the bottom. In this region of

²⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 6.

²⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 6. *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 315.

²⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 6. *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 314.

²⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 7.

Schopenhauer's system everything is already dissolved into words and images: the initial definition of the thing-in-itself—almost even the memory of it—has been lost.”³⁰⁰ There where this memory is once again evoked, the contradictory nature of Schopenhauer's thought comes to full lucidity. The will must be both that which subtracts itself from all appearance and the very soul of this appearance. The “*regressus* of appearances” shows us that “it lay in the nature of the thing-in-itself to manifest itself in such events.” Yet these events are merely “translations into the language of our intuiting intellect.”³⁰¹

The question of the intellect's origin exposes, according to Nietzsche, the antinomy of Schopenhauer's system—this is why Schopenhauer so carefully avoids this question. The intellect, in an identical manner to the thing-in-itself, must have “burst forth suddenly and abruptly from a non-existent world” as a “flower of knowledge” from within “a sphere of timelessness and spacelessness, without intervention of causality.” At this juncture, the intellect must either remain “eternally joined together with the thing-in-itself as a new predicate” *or* the intellect must prove itself to be *impossible*—that is, without origin.³⁰²

This loophole in the Schopenhauerean system reveals that he had already taken the fatal step away from metaphysics, in a manner that he himself avoided. He presents, in fact, the will and the representation by which it manifests itself all as the *world itself*. “Schopenhauer's thing-in-itself would therefore be at one and the same time *princip[ium] indiv[iduationis]* and the ground of necessitation: in other words, the existing world. Sch[openhauer] tried to find the x of

³⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 7.

³⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 7. *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 150.

³⁰² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 7.

an equation: and the result of his calculation is that it equals x, i.e.[,] that he has not found it.”³⁰³

Anaximander’s ἄπειρον, the indefinite totality of being, which places itself outside all experience, and of which Nietzsche claims: “We may look upon it as the equal of the Kantian *Ding an sich*”³⁰⁴ proves to remain untouched by Schopenhauer, who covers it in attributes and unites it inseparably with the manifest world. Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1872:

As soon as one wishes to *gain knowledge* of the thing-in-itself, then *it is precisely this world*—knowledge is only possible as a reflection and by measuring oneself according to *one* standard (sensation).

We *know* what the world is. Absolute and unconditional knowledge is the desire to know without knowledge.

KSA 7: 19 [146]³⁰⁵

Schopenhauer made the leap, against his own will, that Parmenides never could make—from an eternal, stagnant *being* into the ever-moving flux of *experience*. Thereafter, the depths and the surface are no longer opposed, on two incommunicable registers of noumena and phenomena—they are an ever-changing, ever-moving unity—there is *no will* independent of time. There is, Nietzsche can thus affirm, a *genealogy* of the will, as there is a genealogy of every concept.

Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1872: “There is no *form* in nature, because there is no distinction between inner and outer. / All art is based upon the *mirror* of the eyes.” (KSA 7: 19 [144])³⁰⁶ All art, like all metaphysical philosophy, is anthropomorphic; through our doubly-mirrored eyes we see nature as our reflection, and nature creates us through our projection of human aspects onto it—the Greeks were utterly aware of this secret paradox—this circularity by

³⁰³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, IV, 8.

³⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 4, 47.

³⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 47-48.

³⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 47.

which *plastic force* is employed to create one world after another, interminably—yet we moderns, in our seriousness, have forgotten it. The *primordial* is nothing but *sensation*—a rhythmic force from which concepts arise by an artistic process: the senses create artistically that which they sense.

Nietzsche's tendency toward metaphysics finds nothing less than a metaphysics whose basis is utterly *physical*, which is to say, contained within the sphere of experience—it is highly questionable whether this can still be called a *metaphysics*. Two consequences follow from his interpretation of Schopenhauer, which includes the *will* in the realm of appearance, as its absolute and deepest sense. Firstly, the valuation of art above all else for *Kultur*, which is true both for antiquity and modernity—"for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that life is eternally *justified*"³⁰⁷ as Nietzsche declares in *The Birth of Tragedy*. His use of the term "aesthetic" must here be taken as a modification of its original Kantian meaning, as the science of the metaphysical conditions of sense perception, as well as of that meaning, popularized by Alexander Baumgarten in the 1750s, as the criticism of taste. We mustn't forget, here, Nietzsche's philological tracing of *wisdom* to *taste*: this assures the fact that, for him, the task of the philosopher is doubly aesthetic—for just as he must replace all *a priori* values and determinations of the thing-in-itself with *sensation* and the constantly sacrificial experience of becoming, he must also combine this transformation of the philosophical scope with a valuation of *art* and the plasticity of life above all else. Indeed, the significance of the aesthetic is *artistic*, yet in such a way that it surpasses the idealist, metaphysical definition by displacing it onto the

³⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 5, 52.

sphere of artistic creation. Life, therefore, is only *justified* insofar as it creates itself organically, through the *αἰών* of the Dionysian and Apollinian art instincts of nature, as *a tragic work of art*.

Secondly, Nietzsche's understanding of Schopenhauer leads him to the realm of the *material*—that is, away from metaphysics, toward science and positivism. Nietzsche had read, in 1872, since its very appearance, Friedrich Zöllner's book, *On the Nature of Comets: Contribution to the History and the Theory of Knowledge* (*Über die Natur der Kometen. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theorie der Erkenntniss*, Leipzig, 1872) and considered it an example of "scientific Schopenhauerism." Zöllner exposes, in his chapter "On the general properties of matter," a "dynamic theory of movement based on the attribution of physical facts to matter."³⁰⁸ And these facts are, according to Zöllner, the fundamental materials used by the subject to create an external world of representation for himself. The result of this is that "the phenomenon of sensation is a fundamental fact of the observation just as well as the movement of matter, and we are even obliged to connect it to movement, since it serves as the general property and the condition of the comprehension of sensible movements."³⁰⁹ Zöllner thus inscribes the Democritean concept of thought as movement in the Schopenhauerean framework.

In November 1872, Nietzsche wrote to Rohde of his excitement with regard to Zöllner's book: "Have you heard of the Zöllner scandal at Leipzig? Look, then, at his book on the nature of comets someday; there are many astonishing things in it *for us*. Since this act, here is an honest man who, in the most contemptuous manner, has been excommunicated from the republic of scholars, his closest friends have broken with him and everyone is slandering him as 'crazy!'

³⁰⁸ D'Iorio, *La naissance de la philosophie*, 25-26.

³⁰⁹ Friedrich Zöllner, *Über die Natur der Kometen. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theorie der Erkenntniss* (Leipzig: Leipzig Verlag, 1872), 321, cf. 320. Cited in D'Iorio, *La naissance de la philosophie*, 26.

Yes, quite seriously as ‘mentally ill’ because he doesn’t play the same fanfare on his trumpet as his compatriots! Such is the spiritual state that rules in the ochlocracy³¹⁰ of Leipzig scholars!”³¹¹

It was not only by a gesture of solidarity that Nietzsche wished to draw attention to this work, having just undergone the experience of being ostracized by the academic community of philologists as a result of the scandal caused by *The Birth of Tragedy*. The book was also “for us” as he said, meaning, perhaps, that it contained within it the profound comprehension of the significance of the *comet* as at once a scientific, an artistic, and a philosophical figure of transition—the prototype of the *tragic hero*.

The Ground of the Tragic

At the time of Nietzsche’s professorship at Basel, the conflict between Hegelian Idealism and neo-Kantianism was in full flower, constituting a dominating presence both for philosophy and for science. Lange’s *History of Materialism* heavily influenced both Nietzsche’s reading of Schopenhauer and his view of metaphysics. Lange, a natural scientist and a founder of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism, had attempted to reconcile materialism with idealism, which, as had been recognized, refer back to one another in a self-perpetuating double-bind. He considered himself to be returning to pre-Hegelian philosophy (which he regarded as a misstep in the history of philosophy, toward Scholasticism) in order to “complete what Kant had only half done: the annihilation of metaphysics.”³¹² The paradox of materialism, that it constantly falls

³¹⁰ Rule of the multitude.

³¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Correspondance de Nietzsche, 1869-1874*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, trans. Jean Bréjoux and Maurice de Gandillac (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), letter 272, 369.

³¹² O. A. Ellissen, *Friedrich Albert Lange: Eine Lebensbeschreibung, Wohlfleile Ausgabe*, (Leipzig: Julius Baedeker, 1894), 106.

back into idealism by the need to traverse physiology, which renders it impossible to prove the physical experience of things-in-themselves, had resolved itself for Lange, however, in an idealist position, following Hermann von Helmholtz and rejecting the anti-speculative theory of Heinrich Czolbe, according to which “the sensible qualities of sensation are already completely present in the external stimuli [... ;] from a red-radiating object a ready-made redness, from a sound source a melody, detaches itself in order to penetrate into us through the portals of the sense organs.”³¹³ Lange, on the basis of the lack of empirical evidence available to prove Czolbe’s position on the direct transmission of external objects to perception, concluded that this theory, too, ended by resorting to idealism.

Helmholtz had sought to prove Kant’s transcendental idealism by means of empirical physiology. In his 1853 address “On Goethe’s Scientific Researches,” he had written:

The result of [scientific] examination, as at present understood, is that the organs of sense do indeed give us information about external effects produced on them, but convey those effects to our consciousness in a totally different form, so that the character of a sensuous perception depends not so much on the properties of the object perceived as on those of the organ by which we receive the information.³¹⁴

Moreover, since our “nerve excitations” must have a cause, as “there can be no effect without cause, Helmholtz concludes that “the investigation of sensory perception also leads us to what Kant had already recognized, namely that the principle, ‘No effect without cause,’ is a law of our thought given before all experience.”³¹⁵ Conceding to this idealist-physiological position, Lange wrote:

³¹³ H. Czolbe, *Entstehung des Selbstbewusstseins. Eine Antwort an Herrn Professor Lotze*, (Leipzig: H. Constenoble, 1856), 14.

³¹⁴ Hermann von Helmholtz, *Science and Culture: Popular and Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Cahan, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), “On Goethe’s Scientific Researches”, trans. E. Atkinson, 13.

³¹⁵ Hermann von Helmholtz, *Philosophische Vorträge und Aufsätze*, ed. H. Hörz and S. Wollgast (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971), “Über das Sehen des Menschen” (1855), 77.

The senses give us, as Helmholtz says, effects of things, not faithful copies, let alone the things themselves. To these mere effects, however, belong also the senses themselves, together with the brain and the supposed molecular movements in it. We must therefore recognize the existence of a transcendent world order, whether this depends on ‘things-in-themselves,’ or whether—since even the ‘thing-in-itself’ is but a last application of our intuitive thought—it depends on mere relations, which exhibit themselves in various minds as various kinds and stages of the sensible, without its being at all conceivable what an adequate appearance of the absolute in a cognizing mind would be.³¹⁶

Metaphysics therefore triumphs, even in materialism, over science; belief takes hold where the limits of perception end. It is here, therefore, that Nietzsche departs from both Schopenhauer and Lange, and embarks on the creation of his own philosophy. For he writes: “You should not flee into some metaphysics, rather, you should actively sacrifice yourself for the *emerging culture* [*euch der werdenden Kultur thätig opfern*]! That is why I am strictly against dreamy idealism [*Traumidealism*]” (KSA 7: 19 [154]).³¹⁷

Indeed, Nietzsche, the young philologist was deeply convinced of, as he put it in a fragment of 1872: “The impossibility of metaphysics” (KSA 7: 23 [7])³¹⁸ in his time. This is, moreover, the fault of Kant in his eyes: “The consequences of Kantian doctrine. End of metaphysics as a scientific discipline” (KSA 7: 19 [51]).³¹⁹ By installing the inescapable transcendental world of the thing-in-itself behind experience as its condition of possibility, and by creating a categorical hierarchy constitutive of man’s newly inescapable and radically individualized consciousness, Kant had rendered impossible *both* metaphysics *and* any science

³¹⁶ Friedrich Albert Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (Iserlohn: J. Baedeker, 1873-75), 3: 230.

³¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 49.

³¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 163.

³¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 20.

worthy of it. The *absence of the ground of metaphysics* constitutes, for Nietzsche, the *ground of the tragic*.

In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche writes of the “*philosopher of tragic knowledge*” as he who “controls the unleashed drive for knowledge, not by means of metaphysics. He does not establish a new faith. He senses it to be *tragic that the ground of metaphysics has been cut away* and can never be satisfied by the colorful kaleidoscope of the sciences.” It is thus his task to “[work] toward the construction of a new *life*; he returns art to its rights.” For this tragic philosopher, “the *image of existence* is made complete by the insight that the metaphysical only appears in anthropomorphic form.” This is why he finds it “necessary to *create* a concept: for skepticism is not the aim. Once it reaches its limitations, the drive for knowledge turns against in order to proceed to the *critique of knowledge*. Knowledge in the service of the best life. / One must even *desire illusion*—that is what makes it tragic” (KSA 7: 19 [35]).³²⁰ It is for this reason that *metaphysics must be replaced by art*, and knowledge *overcome*. The Heraclitean impulse thus is the most urgent of all.

The philosopher as *comet* is also the *tragic* philosopher; he must be willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a culture and its truths, though his nature semi-divine nature be so superior to those he yearns to save. Schopenhauer had written a letter to Goethe on such heroism, in which he expressed the following: “The courage not to keep any question just in one’s mind is what makes a philosopher. Philosophers must be like Sophocles’ Oedipus, who tirelessly searches for enlightenment about his own terrible fate, even if he already suspects that he will be horror-struck by the answers.”³²¹ In such a way does the philosopher move through the world: as

³²⁰Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 13.

³²¹ Safranski, *Nietzsche*, 51.

a tragic hero, ever *searching for himself*, after the fashion of Heraclitus, until his consciousness becomes monstrous with self-knowledge so that he tumbles reflectively, by will, into the arms of fate. For tragic knowledge demands a sacrifice in the service of a distant horizon of community.

Hölderlin's Passage: Divine Infidelity and Downgoing

Nietzsche's early thought is traversed by an ever-urgent need for the hyperbolic affirmation and overcoming of the circularity between Nature and Man, wherein they must constantly create one another as their origin. The apotheosis of this circularity takes place in the semi-divine tragic hero, who transforms it into the excentricity of the comet's path, through its tragic and, indeed, sacrificial affirmation. This schema is inherited from the modern tragic poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Nietzsche writes that "nature" has locked man up in his "consciousness"—in a world of illusions—and "thrown away the key."³²² Yet it is man himself who creates this nature from which he comes, and which has condemned him to blindness; he creates this primeval sphere for himself by means of an artistic, anthropomorphic procedure, just as the Greeks created their divinities in order that they may be eternally hidden from sight, appearing only through the falsifying mediation of incarnation.

Nietzsche writes, in a fragment toward his *Untimely Meditations*: "Doesn't every true work of art give the lie to Aristotle's claim? Isn't it nature that imitates art? Doesn't it, with the restiveness of its becoming, merely haltingly repeat, in an inadequate language and in ever new attempts, what the artist expresses in all its purity? Doesn't nature long for the artist so that he can redeem it from its imperfection?" (KSA 7: 35 [12]).³²³ The mimetic circle between nature and art is thus established—art *creates* nature as its imitator and at once forms the ideal of nature's originality. But this imitative *φύσις*, as we know, this *second nature* bears the mark, the remembrance of an artistically created nature *before* it which, too, was once a second nature. The

³²² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 252.

³²³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 366-367.

truth of the “true work of art” lies in its capacity both to recreate nature and to bring to life the chimera of a *first* nature—an origin. The life of man, the constellation of values by which he measures his experience, depends on his capacity to perfect nature, to shape his absent origin through artistic creation. There where the circle between art and nature ought to close, where the repetition of its rhythmic movement should begin again, which is to say—where time is destined to return to itself in the instant of what would otherwise be its death, there stands the figure of the tragic hero, a herald, announcing the coming culture of which he is himself the exemplar, and marking the difference between old and new through an act of sacrifice. It is the sacrifice, precisely, that is necessary for self-transcendence and the new creation of the lost ground of nature.

Nietzsche is not *himself* that tragic hero—he does not consider himself to be that transitional figure transforming twilight into dawn. Rather, he conjures the hero, brings him into being in writing, where writing takes on the role of tragedy, as the active deliverance from reflection, from image or representation, from the Apollonian language of art as the beautiful, to the *primordial*, the space of the *Ur* where life is created as unity, as the changing, turbulent temporality of experience. Thus, from out of himself and in an untimely fashion, by plunging into the depths of a past both contained in his memory and called into being across history, which is to say, *anew*, Nietzsche brings to the surface of his time a multiplicity of tragic heroes. He divides himself in writing to unearth and to create his self-sacrificing heroes. It is not he, the philologist-philosopher who shall bring about the passage from modernity into culture, but these figures who are destined to accomplish this grand reformation are his own reflections, according to the anthropomorphic movement of creative conjuring. Thus these heroes come about both in

unity with him and as absolutely strange, different, monstrous creatures whose destiny is that of a humanity's force unleashed upon nature. By the circular movement between the nature that creates man and the man who creates his nature, which courses through and animates all life, Nietzsche transforms his predecessors into his successors by creating them, and among these figures, these tragic heroes, through whom the spirit of Heraclitus runs like a vital force, are Oedipus, Empedocles and Hölderlin. A figure of myth, a figure of philosophy and a figure of poetry. All of these figures bear the burden of being, singularly and in their various sacred solitudes, the *last human being*. Nietzsche first uses this turn of phrase not to describe the nihilistic man of the present age who can only *blink*, as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but in an enigmatic fragment of 1873 entitled "Oedipus / Soliloquies of the Last Philosopher" to which I shall return in the next chapter.

Hölderlin takes on for Nietzsche a multiple role. If he is one of Nietzsche's tragic heroes, he is first the thinker of the tragic hero to whom Nietzsche is most indebted, the first to poetize the transformation of predecessors—heroes—into successors. It is through Hölderlin that Oedipus and Empedocles emerge, and it is Hölderlin's mode of creating figures from out of his own depths yet through a most profound intimacy with the culture of his ancient Greece—his Hyperion, Empedocles, Oedipus, Antigone—that prefigures Nietzsche's own hyperbolic practice of figuration.

Human Measure: Nietzsche and Hölderlin

In 1861, at the age of sixteen, Nietzsche wrote a letter in praise of Hölderlin, defending the poet against an imagined critic and "friend." It is entitled: "*Letter to my friend in which I*

recommend that he read my favorite poet”³²⁴ and was written as a secondary school assignment at the Schulpforta. Nietzsche’s teacher, Herr Koberstein, gave him a B-grade for the composition, instructing him to focus on a “healthier,” and “more German” poet.³²⁵ In this letter, Nietzsche attacks his interlocutor for accusing Hölderlin of espousing “the ideas of a lunatic, violent outbreaks against Germany, deification of the pagan world, now naturalism, now pantheism, now polytheism, all confused” and for praising the poet solely for his “accomplished Greek meters.” Passionately, Nietzsche insists that Hölderlin’s “poems (to consider their form alone) spring from the purest, most susceptible sensibility” and that their “naturalness and originality eclipse the art and formal skill of Platen.”³²⁶ It is precisely the *organic* character of Hölderlin’s poetry that is dear to Nietzsche, its effulgent and excessive exercise of the “*plastische Kraft*”—the *plastic force*, which, in the second *Untimely Meditation*, defines the necessary limit between forgetting and remembrance for every man, people, and culture.³²⁷ Hölderlin, then, accomplishes the perfection of this power’s synthesis between the natural in the absolute and the original; his attitude toward antiquity is in the *proper measure*, standing midway between the human and the divine, between the ancient and the modern.

Nietzsche calls to his “friend’s” attention, then, the fact that Hölderlin was not only *poet* but tragedian: “you do not know his *Empedocles* then, this most important dramatic fragment, in whose melancholy tones reverberates the future of the unhappy poet, his grave of long madness, and not as you say in unclear talk but in the purest Sophoclean language and with an

³²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton, University of Chicago, 1969, letter 1, Oct. 19, 1961, 4.

³²⁵ Cf. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 409.

³²⁶ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 4.

³²⁷ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 90.

inexhaustible fullness of profound ideas.”³²⁸ Already, then, the figures of Hölderlin and Empedocles (of *Hölderlin’s* Empedocles immediately, yet through this, also the Empedocles of Nietzsche) come to mirror one another in Nietzsche’s vision. The suicide of the ancient philosopher reflects itself in the madness of the poet, so that Hölderlin’s modern re-creation of Empedocles becomes a prophetic gesture connecting these two comet-like geniuses to one another. Indeed, Nietzsche says in his letter: “In the unfinished tragedy *Empedocles*, the poet unfolds his own nature to us. Empedocles’ death is a death from divine pride, from scorn of man, from being sated with the earth, and from pantheism. Whenever I have read it, the whole work has always moved me profoundly; there is a divine loftiness in this Empedocles.”³²⁹ Nietzsche thus casts a ray of light into the tragic fate of his favorite poet. Hölderlin’s striving for divinity, like that of his Empedocles, was too strong—it overstepped the bounds of the human, filling the mortal world immeasurably with shards of the sacred. It was the *excess* of his knowledge, brimming on godliness to such a degree that his superiority led him to *scorn* men in their barbarity, their common mediocrity, that rendered Hölderlin, and Empedocles through him, as his mirror image, tragic in the extreme. It was this that made the self-sacrifice both of the ancient and of the modern poet necessary—to communicate to those “contemporaries” whose ears were deaf and whose eyes were blind the tragedy of their time.

Yet Nietzsche holds testimony to the failure—itsself tragic—of Hölderlin’s sacrifice, which itself mirrors the failure he perceived in the self-sacrifice of Empedocles. He ends his letter: “I only hope—and do regard this as the purpose of my letter—that it will move you to an understanding and to an unprejudiced evaluation of this poet, whose very name is hardly known

³²⁸ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 5.

³²⁹ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 6.

to most of his countrymen.”³³⁰ Hence the excentric path of Hölderlin as a tragic hero, like that of Empedocles, is illuminated—his necessary failure, even in view of his divinity. For the hero’s universality is beyond his time, and thus at his most universal and his most divine, he becomes, in turn, most particular, most mortal, and his death-song does not reach the ears of the people it is destined for.

Hölderlin, too, at the limit between sanity and madness, had dreamed himself a comet. In the famous late fragmentary poem, “In lieblecher Bläue” (“In Lovely Blue”) dating from the early days of Hölderlin’s madness, and preserved (perhaps transformed) by Wilhelm Waiblinger in his novel *Phaeton* (1823), he writes:

Would I like to be a comet? I think so.
They are swift as birds, they flower
With fire, childlike in purity. To desire
More than this is beyond human measure.³³¹

The comet, common figure to Nietzsche and to Hölderlin, is that lonely celestial flame, whose motion transcends its time in a burst that sacrifices itself as it shoots across the sky—its path is necessarily excentric (i.e., non-circular). Hölderlin’s Hyperion, too, cries out to his barbaric “contemporaries”: “You have lost your faith in all that is great; thus you must depart, you must, if this faith does not return like a comet from foreign skies [*wie ein Komet aus fremden Himmeln*].”³³² That flash of foreignness alone could give rise to the return of the gods; only the *monstrous* could reverse the tragic dissolution of culture. That which is proper is only to be achieved across a purificatory (cathartic) travel through that which is foreign.

³³⁰ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 6.

³³¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, trans. Richard Sieburth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 251.

³³² Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, trans. Ross Benjamin (New York: Archipelago Books, 2008), 56.

The *human measure* of which Hölderlin speaks has thus, as its limit, the desire to be a comet. The very force of the comet is its striving toward incalculability—its divergence from the circular path. This measure is never possible in an absolute sense, but only through what Hölderlin calls *infinite approximation* [*unendliche Annäherung*]. In a letter to Schiller of September 4, 1795, Hölderlin wrote:

I am trying to develop for myself the idea of an infinite progression in philosophy. I am trying to show that the relentless demand that must be made on every system, namely the unification of subject and object in the absolute—in an ego or in whatever one wants to call it—is possible, albeit aesthetically, in intellectual intuition. It is possible theoretically only through an infinite approximation [*eine unendliche Annäherung*], as in the squaring of the circle. I am thus trying to show that in order to realize a system of thought an immortality is necessary—every bit as necessary as it is for a system of action.³³³

The aesthetic is thus the only realm in which intellectual intuition, the immediate, sensuous attainment of the absolute, can be established; this is precisely because of its temporal character, its capacity to render the unification and separation of the mortal and the immortal in their primordial rhythm—it is for this reason, too, that Empedocles was a poet, and that he was capable of the purification of his people. This notion of “infinite approximation,” which is the epicenter of the tragic, as the *loss of absolute measure*, thus requires an immortal counterpart to the mortal, in order for intellectual intuition to come about in a work of art. Hölderlin proposes tragedy, in fact, as the *metaphor* for intellectual intuition.³³⁴ This notion reappears in Hölderlin’s preface to the second edition of his novel *Hyperion*, which unites the poetic instinct of the ancients with the modern world. Here, it is a question of the possibility of a reunification of man

³³³ Hölderlin, CHV 2:595-96. Cited in Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles*, trans. David Farrell Krell (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), “Introduction,” by Krell, 5. Letter 30.

³³⁴ I shall return to this point later in this chapter.

with nature in primordial oneness, after having fallen out of that originary natural state. He writes:

Neither our knowledge nor our action [...] in any period of existence, attains that point at which all conflict ceases and all is one: the determinate line unites with the indeterminate one only in infinite approximation [*unendliche Annäherung*]. [...]

[But that infinite reunion of man and nature] is actually at hand—in the form of Beauty; to speak as Hyperion does, a new Kingdom awaits us, where Beauty is queen.—

I believe we shall all say in the end: Holy Plato, forgive us! grievously have we sinned against you.³³⁵

The word *Annäherung* also means “reconciliation” or “rapprochement.” The movement of the tragic, for Hölderlin, always consists in the striving to reconcile, to bring into a lucid equality the human and the boundless. From this project of infinite reconciliation, infinite approximation, a “calculable law” is formed, as is necessary in the writing of tragedies. Hyperion gives voice to this tragic knowledge in the following cry:

Why are we excepted from the beautiful cycle of nature? Or does it also hold sway for us?

I would have had it, were one thing not in us: the monstrous striving to be all, which, like [E]tna’s Titan, rages up from the depths of our being [*ungeheure Streben Alles zu seyn, das, wie der Titan des Aetna, heraufzürnt aus den Tiefen unsers Wesens*].³³⁶

The Titan Typhon was defeated by Zeus in the subterranean region beneath Mount Etna—the very volcano into which Empedocles would throw himself. Here, it is the “monstrous striving to be all”—the constant impulse by which men move toward divinity, toward the infinite and toward ever-greater consciousness that prevents his return to the harmonious, *circular* movement of nature. The self-reflective man, beyond the boundless innocence of nature, is condemned to the excentric path of the comet—the path that does not lead back into the heart of his natural

³³⁵ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. F. Beissner and A. Beck (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1943-85), 3: 236; translated in M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), 238.

³³⁶ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 24.

origin but which, rather, casts him ever farther from that nature. Thus, incapable of measuring himself against the divine, and yet continually striving toward it, man lives a tragic existence, banished from the circular sphere and sent to wander without the promise of a *return* to guide him back to nature. It is only by infinite approximation that human measure can be divined; excentricity sets the limit of this measure.

Nietzsche, for his part, pronounces, in a fragment of 1873, the following, unfulfillable exigency: “To be completely truthful—glorious, heroic joy of man, in a mendacious nature. *But possible only in a very relative sense!* That is tragic. That is the *tragic problem of Kant!* Now art acquires an entirely *new* dignity. The sciences, on the other hand, are *degraded* by one degree” (KSA 7: 19 [104]).³³⁷ The definition of the tragic in the modern world is thus of the same nature for Hölderlin and Nietzsche: it is the condemnation to *infinite approximation*—the loss of the absolute, the disappearance of the god, the unity of man and nature that has turned the experience of men into an excentric movement, ever departing from Nature and speeding toward the unknown like a comet. Yet while for Hölderlin it is thus necessary to strive toward being “all”—to achieve the reunification of man with nature through the endless mourning of their separation, the *measure* is, for Nietzsche, bodily.

In his letter, Nietzsche speaks, too, of Hölderlin’s abhorrence for Germany. He writes:

In other poems, especially in ‘Remembrance’ [‘*Andenken*’] and ‘The Journey’ [‘*Die Wanderung*’], the poet raises us up to the purest ideal spheres, and we feel with him that this was the element where he was at home. And last, a whole series of poems is noteworthy, in which he tells the Germans bitter truths which are, unfortunately, only too firmly grounded. In *Hyperion* too, he flings sharp and cutting words at German ‘barbarism.’ Yet this abhorrence of reality is compatible with the greatest love of his

³³⁷ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 124.

country, and this love Hölderlin did have in high degree. But he hated in Germans the mere specialist, the philistine.³³⁸

In his first *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche writes of Hölderlin as a victim of his barbaric, philistine age—thus as an obscure version of Empedocles as failed reformer. He writes of “the noble Hölderlin” as “a tried-and-true non-philistine” who “perished by philistines [... .]” He attacks Friedrich Vischer, a Hegelian “esthete” and “culture-philistine” according to Nietzsche’s terminology, for appropriating the memory of Hölderlin and claiming that the poet would never have been able to ““endure the harshness of war””—that he went mad because ““his spirit lacked hardness and the weapon of wit”” and ultimately that ““*He found it unendurable that one could be a philistine and still not be a barbarian.*””³³⁹ Vischer’s attack is based on the championing of philistinism, against which Hölderlin was ceaselessly critical, equating it with barbarism, and an accusation of Hölderlin’s lack of philistine “wit.” Viciously, Nietzsche remarks that Vischer “would certainly maintain that a man can be a philistine and still be a man of culture—such wit was lacking in poor Hölderlin, and this lack was his undoing.”³⁴⁰ Nietzsche affirms thus his affinity with Hölderlin, for he, too, identifies barbarity with philistinism, and the heroes of culture who are able to do this—to diagnose their age and to will its surpassing—find themselves by this very fact in the situation of tragic heroes. Hölderlin’s madness, for Nietzsche, is then parallel to the death of Empedocles—a going-under—*Untergang*—a self-sacrificial response to modern barbarism.

³³⁸ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 5-6.

³³⁹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 22.

³⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 23.

Hölderlin writes to his brother on June 4, 1799, of the “paradox, [...] that the instinct for art and cultivation, with all of its modifications and varieties, is a proper service that men perform for nature.”³⁴¹ By this paradox, then, an art, or a *culture* is performed that is the very presentation of the nature that it serves, or whose goal it accomplishes. The circle is thus formed between man and nature as economically, aesthetically, and tragically dependent upon one another. As Szondi puts it, Hölderlin wishes to “grant man a position vis-à-vis nature that simultaneously shows man as nature’s servant and nature as dependent on man”³⁴²—dependent, indeed, for its very existence. Therefore, the paradox that Nietzsche will later formulate is here expressed. This notion is again revealed in a fragment of Hölderlin’s on tragedy:

The significance of tragedies can be understood most easily by way of paradox. Since all potential [*Vermögen*; ability] is divided justly and equally, everything that is original [*alles Ursprüngliche*] appears not in its original strength [*ursprünglicher Stärke*], but rather, properly [*eigentlich*; actually], in its weakness [*in seiner Schwäche*]. Hence, appearance and the light of life quite properly belong to the weakness of every whole. Now in the tragic, the sign itself is insignificant, without effect, but the original is openly revealed. Properly speaking, the original can appear only in its weakness; but insofar as the sign itself is posited as insignificant = 0, the original, the hidden ground of every nature, can also present itself. If nature properly presents itself in its weakest talent, then, when it shows itself in its strongest talent, the sign = 0.³⁴³

Hölderlin speaks again of the essential equality of force in its original division, in a letter to Isaac von Sinclair of December 24, 1798, where this becomes a cosmological principle—here, tragedy begins to reveal itself, for Hölderlin, as a model or *allegory* for life itself, and most profoundly for modern life in the god’s absence. He writes: “indeed, it is the first condition of all life and all organization—that in heaven and on earth no force rules monarchically. Absolute monarchy

³⁴¹ Cited in Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 11. Letter 67.

³⁴² Szondi, *The Tragic*, 11.

³⁴³ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, 4:274. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 11.

cancels itself out everywhere, for it is without object [...] Everything that is interpenetrates as soon as it becomes active. ... Of course, *from every finite point of view some one of the autonomous forces must be the ruling force*, yet it must be observed to prevail only temporarily and only to a certain degree.”³⁴⁴ The absolute as such, the kingly, is never *pure*—it only rules from one perspective at a time—it is only *appearance*. Hence every king is a false king, and is never the sole sovereign endowed with divinity—even Oedipus, whose first error was to interpret the oracle “too infinitely,” by assuming the crime responsible for the affliction of Thebes with plague on a religious basis, considering the crime to be the fault of a single, particular man, and himself to the absolute exception from guilt as a *monarch*. The signification of the *king*—translated by Hölderlin not as *König* but as *Tyrann*—is just this, that in Oedipus the transparency of the king unveils itself; the king becomes the *most mortal of mortals*—hence he can no longer remain a possessor of absolute power, absolute knowledge. In Oedipus, a transgression of the idea of the sovereign takes place, as he is defeated by the blind servitude to the myth of his kingship—herein lies, indeed, his tyranny. For he is unable to embrace the original equality of all things.

Hence Empedocles, the wandering god, in the first draft of Hölderlin’s *Trauerspiel*, refuses to accept the crown offered to him by the Agrigent people, declaring the age of kings to be over. Rather, he commands them to return to the divine equality nature, saying:

The narratives of your father’s voices teaching you,
All law and custom, names of all the ancient gods,
Forget these things courageously; like newborn babes
Your eyes will open to the godliness of nature [*Die Augen auf zur gottlichen Natur!*]³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Hölderlin, CHV 2:273. Cited in Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 58.

³⁴⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 90, First Draft, lines 1507-1510.

This revolutionary spirit leads from monarchy back to the divine present in nature, where all things possess equal potential for self-actualization, equal, organic *plastische Kraft*. The abolition of the monarchic order must result in a return to the unity of nature.

The interpenetration of all living things, which results in *activity*—in other words, the coming-into-conflict of things, which alone ignites their movement, is a concept inherited from Empedocles, whose opposition between *love*, φιλία and *strife*, νεῖκος formed his cosmic principle. The battle between these two life-forces is the universal movement. In his explication of his cosmogony, Empedocles speaks of the double genesis of all things:

For at one time [τοτὲ; once] [they] grew to be one alone
from many, and at another [τοτὲ], again, [they] grew apart to be many from one. [...] And these things never cease from constantly alternating,
at one time all coming together by love into one [φιλότητι συνερχόμεν εἰς]
and at another time again all being borne apart separately by the hostility of strife [νεῖκος].³⁴⁶

Hölderlin takes the model of this cosmic double-movement in ceaseless transformation from extreme unity in love to extreme separation in strife as the matrix of his philosophical and poetological thinking. According to Rohde, Empedocles, like the other Eleatics, denied “becoming and passing away” and “all qualitative change,”³⁴⁷ but rather than endorsing Being as an indivisible unity, he posited four “roots”—elements, whose “mixture and separation [...] cause the appearance of becoming and perishing; and those two processes are caused by the two forces [...] of attraction and repulsion, Love and Hate, which in the creative process struggle and in turn overmaster each other until at last, in the final victory of one of the two forces, all things

³⁴⁶ Brad Inwood, ed. and trans., *The Poem of Empedocles* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), frag. 25/17, 222-225.

³⁴⁷ *Psyche*, 2:379.

are either united or divided: in either case the organic world ceases to exist.”³⁴⁸ The attainment of either absolute, thus, absolute separation or absolute unity, results in the annihilation of the world. The only *force of life* that preserves the activity of the universe is the mixture of elements that conjures the appearance of becoming, which, however, never corresponds to the actual pure dynamic of nature. For Empedocles, as for Hölderlin and Nietzsche, his successor, it is only through art, the aesthetic rendering, the aesthetic *creation* of nature that life is possible.

There is, thus, according to Hölderlin’s fragment quoted above, no simultaneity of origin and appearance in tragedy. The primordial force of nature is perfectly divided among all agents, and cannot coincide with its appearance, but rather, that underlying strength can only appear as weakness. Strength itself is merely recalled by weakness, whose task it is to present that natural strength—this strength is merely traced, signified on the back of weakness. Yet this strength is brought about through weakness; the figure of the tragic hero is the clearest, the most transparent sign—through him alone, through the curse of his mortality, in its *essential* weakness, can the natural absolute strength of the divine in nature show itself. With the movement of the scenes in any tragedy, with the shift in their rhythms and tones, the relation between weakness and the strength that is its true sense shifts radically.

Of this fragment, Lacoue-Labarthe writes, “we find, under the name of the tragic *sign*, the *figure* (in the strong sense, the *Gestalt*—Hölderlin also speaks of the symbol) of the suffering hero who is the site of the revelation and the epiphany of what is.”³⁴⁹ The hero, in other words, is the ultimate tragic *sign*—the incarnation of the primordial under the sway of destiny. Szondi writes:

³⁴⁸ *Psyche*, 2:379-380.

³⁴⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 225.

In art, nature no longer appears “properly,” but through the mediation of a sign. In tragedy, this sign is the tragic hero. Insofar as he can do nothing against the power of nature and is destroyed by it, he is “insignificant” and “without effect.” But in the tragic hero’s demise, when the sign = 0, nature presents itself as a conquerer “in its strongest talent,” and “the original is openly revealed.” Hölderlin thus interprets tragedy as a sacrifice that man offers to nature in order to help it achieve an adequate appearance.³⁵⁰

The proper, or what Nietzsche would call the quantity of *plastic force* in measure with a man is thus only *possible* by means of a dis-appropriation of the self—i.e., a *sacrifice*—that is at once the re-creation of nature, its strength transformed with every medium of weakness in which it necessarily appears. Because voluntary death is the ultimate form of weakness and of absence, the tragic hero, having attained to an excessive self-consciousness, must then resolve himself to sacrifice, precisely so that divine nature might once again achieve its unity in appearance.

Another way of saying this is, as Hölderlin writes in the “Notes” to his translation of *Oedipus*: “the tragic transport [*Der tragische Transport*] is actually empty and the least restrained.”³⁵¹ This transport necessitates the intervention of “the pure word, the counter-rhythmic rupture” which takes place, in both *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*, when Tiresias enters into the drama; the portent gives the hero his tragic significance and determines his destiny of sacrifice and, thus condemning him, liberates him.³⁵² The “pure word” is thus, precisely, prophecy delivered as enigma—the most lucid coincidence of the calculable and the incalculable, and hence the moment where the approximation of god and man to one another is most accurate, when their reconciliation is most present. The tragic hero must become insignificant (must = 0) in that moment, in order for the prophecy, the sign of Zeus, to reveal

³⁵⁰ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 12.

³⁵¹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 101.

³⁵² Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 102.

itself in him. And yet, because prophecy remains linguistic, and remains *enigmatic*, that is, because it comes into play through the mouth of Tiresias, the blind seer, who is, nonetheless, human, it remains veiled; rather than presenting in its purity the union of god and man, it represents, by the silence it speaks (by the *caesura* it constitutes—the pause in tragic rhythm), their simultaneous separation. The paradoxical nature of the very term “pure word” reveals itself here—for language is, by its very nature, impure, serving to mystify and conceal even as it sheds the light of divine flame on the future, is infinitely mirrored and reproduced by the paradoxical form of its deliverance, in the likewise paradoxical person of Tiresias, and its reception by the human it condemns, who necessarily *misunderstands* it. Through the interruption, thus, of the pure word in tragic transport, “manifestation [*Vorstellung*] itself” comes about; the manifestation of the hero’s fate of downgoing as the silent prophetic word.³⁵³

The rhythm meets a “counter-rhythmic interruption”—a “caesura”—at the midpoint of the tragedy’s fated unfolding, there where the tragic transport is at its most empty—where the voice of the divine comes through in its purest clarity.³⁵⁴ If “in the rapidity of the inspiration” the rhythm of the first scenes is “carried away” by the following scenes, then the caesura “must lie towards the front” to protect the earlier rhythm from the weight and speed of the later one—because of the “counter-working of the caesura,” the balance must then “incline more from the back [...] towards the beginning” in a diagonal that leans downward, halfway between the beginning and the end. On the other hand, if in the rhythm the later scenes “are more under pressure from those at the beginning,” the caesura lies towards the end, since the final scenes

³⁵³ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin’s Sophocles: Oedipus and Antigone*, trans. David Constantine (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2001), 63.

³⁵⁴ *Hölderlin’s Sophocles*, 113.

require protection from the the initials ones, “and the balance will as a consequence incline more towards the end [...] since the first half [...] extends itself further but the balance comes later.” In this case, the opposite diagonal takes place.³⁵⁵ Hölderlin writes that the “rule,” the “calculable law of ‘Antigone’ compares to that of ‘Oedipus’ like ___/___ to _____.”³⁵⁶ The reason for this is that: “In both plays the speeches of Tiresias form the caesura.”³⁵⁷ Hence, in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the caesura lies toward the beginning of the play because “in excentric rapidity,” the earlier scenes “are more rended forward by the *following ones*”—the caesura is necessary precisely in order to establish an “equilibrium” between the two halves of the drama, divided by the counter-rhythmic rupture. Hence, because in *Oedipus* the rhythm of the later scenes tends violently toward excess, because the second half “is originally more rapid and seems to weigh more,” the first half must be “as it were protected against the second one.”³⁵⁸ Hence the “balance inclines”³⁵⁹ from the end toward the beginning in *Oedipus*. In the case of *Antigone*, the succession is opposite.

The art of tragedy, as Hölderlin conceives it, depends upon the drawing-together of the calculable, “sensuous” medium of poetry and the incalculable content of the play, which he also calls “reason.” Hence, in order for the boundless content to be “Something,” i.e., that it be “recognizable in the medium (*moyen*) of its appearance”—in order that it be *intelligible*, a poetic “lawful calculation” is called for. This calculation, says Hölderlin, relates to the infinite, “living meaning which cannot be calculated” expressed in the drama in various ways throughout the

³⁵⁵ Hölderlin’s *Sophocles*, 113.

³⁵⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 109.

³⁵⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 102.

³⁵⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 102.

³⁵⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 109.

unfolding of the scenes, yet remains ever “distinct” from it. The movement of this correspondence of the calculable and the incalculable, which is changeable in the unfolding of the tragedy, is measured by the rhythm of poetic meter, both in the minutiae of its lines and in the succession of the scenes of the drama.³⁶⁰ Hölderlin says that this calculation “exists in tragedy more as a state of balance than as mere succession.”³⁶¹ The caesura in the drama determines the point at which this balance is established; it approximates the measure of the two halves of the tragedy against one another, such that their weight may be equal, and it thus takes place at the turning-point of the action, where the tragic hero, as the *sign* through which the strength of divine nature manifests, = 0. This, then, is the moment at which the infinite time of the gods, the time without present, the αἰών, manifests itself through the medium of mortal, successive time, the χρόνος. It causes, therefore, a disturbance in the “onrushing time [*reißenden Zeit*]”³⁶²—an originary moment in the flux of becoming, when divine and mortal time are most united, and thus must separate most boundlessly—this, as we shall see, is the event of *intellectual intuition* for Hölderlin.

In *Oedipus der Tyrann*, it is from the moment of the hero’s tragic reception of the oracle, of his *excessive* interpretation of it, that his fate of striving willfully toward a monstrous self-consciousness, which shall necessitate his destruction, is determined. The excentric temporal movement of the drama begins at this moment. The time of tragedy, for Hölderlin, is excentric precisely because it offers no continuity, and the rhythmic motion of the scenes will not allow

³⁶⁰ To exhibit the intricacies of this correspondence from the line to the drama as a whole is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present essay.

³⁶¹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 101.

³⁶² Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 104. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Franz Zinkernagel (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1915), 3: 334.

Oedipus to return to his original naïveté. Therefore, the further he proceeds toward self-knowledge, the more firmly is the fate of his self-sacrifice determined. Hölderlin writes: “The *intelligibility* of the whole rests primarily on one’s [ability to] focus on the scene where Oedipus interprets the saying of the oracle *too infinitely* [zu unendlich], and is tempted into *nefas*.”³⁶³ This infinitude of interpretation refers to Oedipus’ immediate drawing-together of the curse of the plague on Thebes and the murder of Laius, and thereafter the assumption of an infinite, inextinguishable crime and a *particular* criminal guilty for it. After hearing the oracle, Oedipus initially “speaks in a priestly fashion. ‘What is the rite / of purification [*Reinigung*]?’ etc.’ And moves into the particular, ‘Who is the man whose fate the God pronounces?’”³⁶⁴ By means of this interrogation—by the request that a *man* be designated as infinitely culpable for the infinite crime, Oedipus “leads [C]reon’s thoughts to the terrible pronouncement: ‘Our master, O Lord, was Laius / In this country, before you piloted the state.’” Having thus brought “the saying of the oracles and the story of Laius’ death, not necessarily related to it” together, “Oedipus’ spirit states in furious presentiment [and] knowing all, the *nefas* quite properly by resentfully interpreting the general injunction in particular terms and applying it to the murder of Laius, and then by taking the sin [*Sünde*] as infinite [*unendlich*].”³⁶⁵ It is at this moment that Oedipus *accurses* the culprit of Laius’ murder and ordains that he be shunned from Thebes.

This act gives rise to Oedipus’ “wonderful furious curiosity” in the exchange with Tiresias, his mad longing for and resistance to self-knowledge, “because knowledge [*das Wissen*]—after it has broken through its barriers—as if intoxicated in its great harmonious form [*wie*

³⁶³ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 102.

³⁶⁴ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 103.

³⁶⁵ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 103. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 332-333.

trunken in seiner herrlichen harmonischen Form], which can remain, is spurred to know itself more than it can bear or contain.”³⁶⁶ It is from the monstrosity of this *drive to knowledge*, this monstrous *seeking of himself* to uncover the ground of his nature that the succession of the tragedy’s scenes unfolds, and that the hero falls ever further into the depth of his excentric path, into the excess of self-consciousness that will require him to sacrifice himself. This movement toward self-knowledge, thus, requires Oedipus to succumb to the tragic rhythm of the drama, from the later scene with Creon to the scene with Jacosta to the confrontation of the Corinthian messenger, as his “loyal and certain spirit suffers in furious excess which, rejoicing in destruction, merely follows the onrushing time [*reißenden Zeit*].”³⁶⁷

This tragic temporality, precipitated by fate, thus comes gradually, through his “desperate struggle to find himself,”³⁶⁸ to take the form of Oedipus’ ever-quickenening, excentric, “madly wild seeking for a consciousness.”³⁶⁹ It is the attainment of this consciousness, the reception of the murderous response to the question of his provenance and of his crime as *infinite*—and, thereby, too, of the need for infinite punishment—that Oedipus unites with the divine precisely by separating from it, becoming *empty* so that mortality is turned in upon itself as the god withdraws. For Hölderlin writes that the “presentation of the tragic” rests upon “the boundless union” of god and man “purifying itself through boundless separation.”³⁷⁰ Hence, Oedipus himself, upon attaining the self-knowledge he had sought so furiously, becomes *equal to zero*, in

³⁶⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 104. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 334.

³⁶⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 104. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 334.

³⁶⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 104.

³⁶⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 105.

³⁷⁰ Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, 107.

order to *present* the tragic absence of the god by taking responsibility for the crime that he had claimed to be infinite, and sacrificing himself as a result.

Hölderlin and Nietzsche meet in the thinking of *rhythm* as the cosmological, epistemological movement and measure. In accordance with his theory of the illusory nature of space and of time, Nietzsche writes: “Space and time are merely *measured* things, measured according to a rhythm” (KSA 7: 19 [153]).³⁷¹ This rhythm, we have seen, is for the human that of *breath*. In every living thing, the measure upon which all knowledge is based is relative to its powers of perception. Bettina von Arnim relates two quotations of Hölderlin’s, reported to her by Isaac von Sinclair, probably dating from the time of Hölderlin’s madness. The first runs as follows: “All is rhythm [*Rhythmus*], the entire destiny of man is a single celestial rhythm, just as the work of art is one unique rhythm.”³⁷² And again: “Only *the* spirit is poetry, the one that bears in itself the mystery of an innate rhythm; and it is by this rhythm alone that it can become visible and living, for rhythm is its soul.”³⁷³ This rhythm then, excludes all absolute beginning, for that which awakes as rhythm is already separated from itself by a distance of becoming as soon as it comes to consciousness—it is the pulse of life, and thus of poetry that courses through the universal soul. This is also why Hölderlin says that the critical moment of tragedy—that of the caesura in its rhythmic progression, where a “categorical reversal” takes place between god and man—no longer fits “beginning and end [...].”³⁷⁴ For in that rhythmized moment, the continuity,

³⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 49.

³⁷² Bettina von Arnim, *Die Götterode* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1983), 294. Cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 139.

³⁷³ Arnim, *Die Götterode*, 291.

³⁷⁴ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 108.

the successive nature of time shows its very failure as it fragments itself, distancing self from self.

For Hölderlin, tragedy follows a “poetic logic,” different from philosophical logic in that the latter is the name of “the mere hanging together of the parts” that make up the *whole* of philosophy’s presentation of the only capacity of the soul with which it is concerned: the logical capacity. Poetry, on the other hand, presents the myriad, “various capacities of the human being” as a composed whole, and the “hanging together of the—more autonomous—parts of these different capacities may be called the rhythm (in a higher sense) or the calculable law.”³⁷⁵ Thus the supremacy of poetry over philosophy lies in its capacity to conjure a presentation of *every human capacity*, each with its own proper autonomy and singularity, not in the sphere of an ideal extra-spatiotemporal unity, but in the rhythmic time of the artistic. This rhythm, moreover, is one both appropriated from antiquity (in the form of Pindaric meter for the odes and Sophoclean meter for tragedy) and recreated by the artist in whom it is presented. For the purity of the truth unveiled and brought forth by the tragic drama depends upon its propriety, its properness, to the poet himself.

Through this expression of the divine and the proper in the tragic drama, the subject and object are equally *abolished* in the tragic whole, which is to say that man and god unite, or rhythmically coincide infinitely; this is, for Hölderlin, the purest mode of tragedy. For he writes:

Tragedy [...] resides in this: that the immediate God, wholly one with man, [...] that an infinite enthusiasm infinitely, which is to say in antitheses, in consciousness that cancels out consciousness, and sacramentally departing from itself, apprehends itself, and the god, in the shape of death, is present.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Hölderlin’s *Sophocles*, 113.

³⁷⁶ Hölderlin’s *Sophocles*, 116.

The sacrifice that tragedy entails is this entrance of man into the god of death through the *reversal* by which, holding himself responsible for an immeasurable, inexpiable transgression committed through necessity, he resolves himself to separate infinitely from the god, descending into the “the excentric sphere of the dead [*in die exzentrische Sphäre der Todten*].”³⁷⁷ This god, the invisible face of mortality, is the eternal reflection of man himself. Catharsis, for Hölderlin, is the *separation* of god and man out of this infinite unification.

The Perspective of the Moderns toward the Ancients

In a letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff of December 4, 1801, Hölderlin lays out his theory of the necessary relation between the ancients and the moderns. The theory is organized around the postulate that: “the *free* use of that which is our *own* is hardest of all.”³⁷⁸ The proper is that impasse at which we must recognize the limit of our speech to say the god. The impossibility of philosophy is also the impossibility of the *proper*. It is the impossibility of the absolute in our own sphere—the absolute is, rather, something that has flown irretrievably, and the tragic poem, which temporally reveals this absence of the natural sphere of originality, incites then the necessity of its mourning, the necessity of its recurrence, differently.

Hölderlin writes: “And it is my belief that clarity of exposition is originally as natural to us as heavenly fire is to the Greeks. For precisely that reason the Greeks are more likely to be *surpassed* in fine passion, which is what you have managed to keep [in your *Fernando*], than in the presence of spirit and faculty for exposition we find in Homer.”³⁷⁹ What is proper to the

³⁷⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 102. *Werke*, 3:332.

³⁷⁸ Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth, ed. and trans., Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 208. Letter 106.

³⁷⁹ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 207.

Greeks is precisely the *lack* of anything *proper*, that is to say, the force of appropriation, and the perfection of the formal exposition of this appropriated material—in other words, their capacity to, like the tragic hero, = 0 in order to let the strength of nature appear, and indeed, *manifest itself* through them. The rhythm of Greek drama expresses lucidly the infinite content of tragedy, the coming-together and separating of the divine and the human which is, in its essence, *monstrous*. Yet the moderns can repeat this poetic movement in a manner that, being proper, undoes the possibility of such propriety, precisely because the sole common element between the Germans and the Greeks is “living craft and proportion [...].”³⁸⁰ The life-force of art, the capacity for the aesthetic rendering of the rhythm of life, is what the ancients and the moderns share. Hölderlin writes, in a fragment called “The Standpoint from which we should consider Antiquity” that the “universal reason for the demise of all peoples” is “that their originality, their own living nature, succumbed beneath the positive forms, the luxury that their fathers produced, and also appears to be our own fate, only to a greater degree, inasmuch as an almost infinite antiquity, which we know either through education or through experience, influences and oppresses us.”³⁸¹ This battle anticipates the conflicting views of Nietzsche’s antiquarian and critical historians.

Hölderlin says in his letter to Böhlendorff that “sacred pathos” was “native” to the Greeks, such that they did not have to master it. Rather, the Greeks “are exceptional in their faculty for exposition, from Homer onwards, because this extraordinary man had the feeling necessary to capture the *Junonian sobriety* of the occident for his Apollonian realm, and so truly to appropriate the foreign.”³⁸² He then says: “With us it is the other way around.” Hölderlin

³⁸⁰ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 207.

³⁸¹ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 246.

³⁸² Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 207.

defines the foreign doubly: for the Greeks, it is the divine, while for the modern poet, it is the medium of representation—the words of the ode, the characters of the drama. The Greek power of appropriation, their contact with the god, is lost for us. We must, rather, learn to use what is proper to us, which is nothing other than the absence of the god, the *national* abandoned by the divine: “Only is it precisely in what is proper to us, in the national, that we shall never match them.”³⁸³ Indeed, a deliverance of the national into the natural, which, among the Greeks, were harmonious, is Hölderlin’s ambition for his age. Hölderlin’s Greece is purely monstrous to itself by birth—it cannot appropriate itself, and does not seek to. Lacoue-Labarthe writes that for Hölderlin: “*The Greeks’ proper is inimitable because it never took place*. At the very most it is possible to catch a glimpse of it, or even perhaps deduce it from its opposite—art. And then introduce it, *après coup*, into this art. Hence the work of *translation*, which consists in making the Greek text say what it said endlessly *without ever saying it*. Which consists, then, in repeating the unuttered of this text’s very utterance.”³⁸⁴ The task of translation is then to express, in the mode of the living, the Greek appropriation of the foreign as their own in *our* language, the exteriorization of the rhythm of our lives, our nation. This is then to say, through the cadence of the tragic drama, a multiple lack of the proper. Hyperion cries: “We find pleasure in flinging ourselves into the night of the unknown, into the cold foreign realm of some other world, and if it were possible, we would leave the domain of the sun, and plunge beyond the bounds of the comet. O! for man’s wild breast, no home is possible [...].”³⁸⁵ Such is the homelessness, the full lack of the proper to which man is condemned. Here, then, is his proximity and his distance from

³⁸³ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 208.

³⁸⁴ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 246-247.

³⁸⁵ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 23.

Nietzsche: while for Hölderlin, it is precisely the emptiness, the *dis-appropriation* of the proper that must be achieved by the moderns in order to imitate that same *empty* properness of the ancients, the power of appropriation and reception of the foreign, it is always, for Nietzsche, a question of expressing the void between the ancients and the moderns by a recreation of their φύσις as a model for culture.

For Hölderlin, is only through poetry—and *tragic poetry* specifically—that the *unity* that is at once a *separation* between god and man, between ancient and modern, and its necessary mourning can be put into voice, the living human force that *breath* supports. He speaks the following of Sophocles:

Many sought in vain to say joyfully the most joyful.
Here, finally, here in mourning [*in der Trauer*], it pronounces itself to me.³⁸⁶

It is thus that mourning is the absolute and joyful affirmation of life for Hölderlin; mourning is the rhythm of life's supremacy—the victory over the crushing power of the old. That he found this mourning to be the movement present in Sophocles' tragedies and hence translated

³⁸⁶ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1.1, 305. Cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, "The Caesura of the Speculative," 235.

them as *Trauerspiele* rather than *Tragödien* is his triumph in translation over the Greeks—his

manner of surpassing them in transmitting their wisdom into the light of his day.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁷ Walter Benjamin, in his essay “*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy,” writes that the *Trauerspiel* was an invention of the German baroque, a re-creation of Greek *tragedy* in a Christian context. It became necessary after the renaissance that antiquity be “far surpassed in wildness and recklessness” by virtue of the fact that “every attempt to approach the antique form necessarily exposed the undertaking to highly baroque elaboration, by its very violence” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 59). As a consequence, then, of the “necessary tendency towards the extreme” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 57), which, according to Benjamin, is entailed in the formation of any philosophical concept, and which plays a central role in the baroque dramatic theory, the imitation of antique tragedy *demands* an overflowing of the ancient form, a radically violent recreation of tragedy as such—a radical transformation of both the ancient theoretical ground and the accomplishment, the flowering, of tragedy.

What separates the baroque *Trauerspiel* from Hellenic tragedy in general is principally that the former has *historical life* as its object, while the latter has *myth* for its object. Indeed, “the word *Trauerspiel* was applied in the seventeenth century to dramas and to historical events alike.” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 63.) It is thus that, for Martin Opitz, tragedy [*Tragödie*] distinguishes itself from heroic poetry [*Heroischen gedichte*], which it matches in “majesty,” in that it “deals only with the commands of kings, killings, despair, infanticide and patricide, conflagrations, incest, war and commotion, lamentation, weeping, sighing, and suchlike” (Martin Opitz, *Prosodia Germanica, Oder Buch von der Deudtschen Poeterey*. (Frankfurt a.M., n.d. [ca 1650]), 30-31. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama [Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels]*, trans. John Osborn (London: NLB, 1977), 62.). These things, Benjamin tells us, constitute “the artistic core of the *Trauerspiel*” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 62). The subject of the absolute monarchy bridges the gap between ancient and baroque tragedy—for the Greeks, this monarchy has its source in the primordial, “past age of heroes,” while for Opitz it is historical and prescriptive—the purpose of tragedy is to confirm “princely virtues” and depict “princely vices.” The sovereign incarnates these virtues and vices (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 62). After Birkin, the *Trauerspiel* was rooted into a humanistic, Christian terrain, and the Aristotelian fear and pity (previously mediated through the *Poetices libri septem* of Julius Caesar Scaliger, from 1561, which restructured these “effects” of tragedy around modern individualism so that: “Fear is aroused by the death of the villain, pity by that of the pious hero” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 61)) were replaced with “the glorification of God and the edification of one’s fellow-men as the purpose of the *Trauerspiel*” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 61). The function of the *Trauerspiel* then became, no longer either purification or the awestruck identification with a hero and the horror of a villain, but the fortification of the audience’s virtue through a religious experience transmitted through royal figures. History was considered to be the immediate manifestation and exemplification of the *Trauerspiel* in this sense, and the sovereign its principal player. Thus Johann von Rist advised, in his *Aller edelster Belustigung*, that the tragedian [*Wer Tragödien schreiben*] must be thoroughly “well-versed in chronicles and history books, both ancient and modern, he must know thoroughly the affairs of the world and the state, in which politics truly consist [...] In short, he must understand the art of government as thoroughly as his mother-tongue” (*Die Aller Edelste Belustigung Kunst- und Tugendiebender Gemühter [April-gespräch]* [Johann Rist], Frankfurt, 1666, 241-242. Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 63). It is therefore necessary that the writer of tragedies speak fluently the languages of both the ancients and the moderns—of both *Trauerspiel* and *Tragödie*, in order properly and actually to transform the mythic into the historical—the function of the mourning-play is a purificatory one just as much as the Greek tragedy is, yet the the latter is sublated into the former in this baroque dialectic between the ancient and the modern, such that *Trauerspiel* takes on the role that is suited to the historical catastrophes of its time, and its morality centers itself on the figure of the king as tragic hero, as an exemplary figure for the transmission of religious-moral exigencies.

Benjamin recalls Hellingrath’s appellation of Hölderlin’s late period, from which his translations of Sophocles date, as “the poet’s ‘baroque’ period” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 189). As such, his work is emblematic of the event of the German *Trauerspiel* by which the theory of tragedy and the “rules of ancient tragedy” were separated and at the same time combined with one another “around an allegorical figure representing the tragic muse” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 188). Thus the operation of ancient tragedy became binding to the development of the *Trauerspiel*, so that the tragic hero takes on an *allegorical* significance, and this power of allegory serves to shatter the symbol and the ideal relation of resemblance inherent to it. “In such a context of allegorical decay and destruction the image of Greek tragedy seemed to be the only possible, the natural sign of ‘tragic poetry.’ Its rules became significant anticipations of the *Trauerspiel*; its texts are read as *Trauerspiel*-texts” (Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 189).

Hölderlin's Hyperion speaks of the originary nature of poetry, out of which philosophy is born. He writes to Diotima as follows: "Like Minerva from Jupiter's head, philosophy springs from the poetry of an infinite, divine Being. And thus, in philosophy, too, the irreconcilable ultimately converges again in the mysterious wellspring of poetry."³⁸⁸ Poetry, the primordial, is also the divine, then. In the tragic, man is both united with and separated from the god—he lives in the god's service, and the god speaks through him. By Hyperion's word, a dialectic between philosophy and poetry emerges in which heterogeneous, the contradiction with which the philosopher deals constantly, is transformed into the unified origin of poetry. Yet, for Hölderlin, neither the separation nor the unification are isolable; they relate to one another by a *rhythm* which is the life-force, and thus there is nothing but a rhythmic passage from the one into the other, never whole or silent, never still.

Hyperion, in the same passage, calls Heraclitus the father of philosophy: "The great word of Heraclitus, ἐν διαφέρον ἐαυτῷ (the one differentiating in itself), this only a Greek could find, for it is the essence of beauty, and before that was found, there was no philosophy."³⁸⁹ Differentiation takes place at the heart of union, uniformity. This is the divine moment, the coupling and separation of man and god—of the oneness that lies behind words and the heterogeneity they speak. The *tragic*, for Hölderlin, is the absolute metaphor for intellectual intuition, where metaphor is conceived in the sense of tragic transport, "Der tragische Transport"³⁹⁰—tragic travel. Indeed, tragic transport, for Hölderlin, is itself metaphor, taken in the

³⁸⁸ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 109.

³⁸⁹ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 109.

³⁹⁰ Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3:331.

Greek sense as μεταφορά, *transfer* or *transport*.³⁹¹ To call tragedy the *metaphor* for intellectual intuition is thus to say that tragedy itself is the very *movement*, the very *transport* that effects the event and the failure of this intuition, which are inseparable. Hölderlin writes: “The tragic, in its *outer appearance heroic poem* is in its *basic tone idealistic*, and all works of this kind must be founded on an intellectual intuition which cannot be any other than that unity with everything living [...].”³⁹² Yet this universal, living unity of intellectual intuition, which is not “felt by the limited soul” but rather “anticipated,”³⁹³ “transcends itself” and becomes separation because of its intensity and in “the excess of spirit within unity, in its striving for materiality, in the striving of the divisible, more infinite aorgic which must contain all that is more organic, [...] in this striving for the divisible infinite, [...] in this necessary *arbitrariness of Zeus* there actually lies the ideal beginning of the real separation.”³⁹⁴

The passage from the ideal to the real is that *transport* from the unity present in intellectual intuition to the event of the *real* wherein the god, limitless freedom and deathlessness, and man, whose essence is to die, and who is thus bound by necessity undergo their primordial separation, boundlessly separate from one another. Indeed, this separation ends in the voluntary death of tragic hero, his attempt to attain, in spite of separation, the absolute unity within himself of the immortal and the mortal, which is to say: of divine necessity and human freedom. According to Hölderlin, there are different degrees of intellectual intuition: “If the intellectual intuition is more subjective, and if the separation proceeds mainly from the

³⁹¹ Cf. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 300.

³⁹² Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), “On the Difference of Poetic Modes,” 83-88, 84.

³⁹³ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 84.

³⁹⁴ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 85-86.

concentrating parts, as in *Antigone*, then the style is lyrical [... .]” *Oedipus*, on the other hand, is “tragic,” writes Hölderlin, because “it proceeds from the highest separable, from Zeus [... .]”³⁹⁵ Zeus is the “highest separable” because he is the highest god, the one with the most potent potential for separation from man, out of the unification of intellectual intuition. From the point at which his force as *arbitrary destiny* becomes, for Oedipus, an act of his own freedom through the hyperbolic attainment of self-consciousness, the god withdraws from the world of man, leaving behind only the curse of man’s fate to become free self-inflicted punishment accomplished in a radically human manner, in a world condemned to immanence. It is by means of this “divine infidelity [*göttliche Untreue*]”³⁹⁶—this departure of the godhead, presented in the emptiness of the hero’s tragic transport—that the tragedy proper to the mortal, the tragedy of a discontinuous, excentric temporality, comes into being for the tragic hero, as that which is *proper to him*.

Tragic Ode, Tragic Drama

We have established that, for Hölderlin, the constant demand for poetry—for ποίησις, the creation of realities bathed in tragic light is “the *free* use of that which is our *own*,” and that this is precisely what is both *most necessary* and “hardest of all.”³⁹⁷ Yet this use of the proper entails an experience of the different, the foreign, through which alone the proper, in its emptiness, comes to light, at two different levels. For the poet himself, the proper must be expressed through a dialectic between his own experience and intensity and the medium through which this

³⁹⁵ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 86.

³⁹⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 107. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 338.

³⁹⁷ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 208.

is expressed. Within the tragic poem itself, it is a tragic dialectic between what is proper to the poem itself—to its musical spirit in the case of the ode or to its characters in the case of the drama and the supersensuous or *divinity*. Hölderlin, in an essay contemporary to the writing of his unfinished *Trauerspiel, Der Tod des Empedokles* (1798), which was to be a *modern* Greek tragedy, writes:

every poem, including the tragic, must indeed have proceeded from poetic life and poetic actuality, that is, from the poet's own world and soul, because otherwise the proper truth everywhere goes missing; nothing at all can be understood and brought to life if we are unable to transpose our own innermost heart and our own experience to the foreign analogical material.³⁹⁸

The foreignness of the material measures, by its distance from the proper, the capacity for the drama to engender a new world and to bring into rhythmic actuality, by extension, the dialectic of unity and separation between internal “intensity” and external “divinity” both within the drama itself and within the poet's own experience. The tragic dramatic poem, therefore, like all true poetry, brings to life “the divinity that poets sense and experience in their own world”—hence, divinity, which is, in fact, the *recalling* of the divine in its absence, must be grasped at every moment of its metamorphosis through time, through history, and rediscovered in the artistic, the poetic and aesthetic synthesis.

In the tragic ode, which is the initial, more naïve stage of the tragic dramatic poem, “intensity” is also presented “in actual opposites” yet only “in the form and unmediated language of sensibility.”³⁹⁹ The tragic ode, for Hölderlin, is the origin—the beginning of a dialectic out of which tragedy issues. It refers precisely to the *choral* ode, such that Hölderlin's theory of tragedy is, indeed, quite similar to the one that Nietzsche will develop after him: namely that tragedy is

³⁹⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 142-143.

³⁹⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 142.

born “out of the spirit of music.”⁴⁰⁰ Nietzsche declares this thesis in bold tones as follows: “*tragedy arose from the tragic chorus*, and was originally only chorus and nothing but chorus.”⁴⁰¹ The movement of Hölderlin’s tragic ode, which contains within it the excentric movement that extends across all of his thought, runs thus: it begins, first of all, in “supernal fire,” that is, in the highest intensity of the primordial element.⁴⁰² He thus follows in the poetic cosmogony of Heraclitus, who speaks the following:

This world, the same of all worlds, was neither created by gods nor men, but always has been and is and shall be eternally living fire, which ignites [ἀπτόμενον] with measure [μέτρα] and is extinguished [ἀποσβεννύμενον] with measure [μέτρα].

14 [A 30]⁴⁰³

This measure is internal to the cosmic rhythm of chance and necessity, expressed in self-generating movements of primordial fire—for Hölderlin, the measure shall be expressed in the rhythmic dialectic of tragic poetry.

The tragic ode ignites a “conflict” by an excess of “pure spirit pure intensity [*sic*]” having “overstepped its boundaries”—having erred, in other words, beyond its proper measure. This conflict, however, is necessary to the tragic ode in order to “depict what is pure”—Hölderlin defines this purity as “the supersensuous.”⁴⁰⁴ It then moves dialectically between the extremes of “differentiation” and of “not differentiating at all with respect to what is pure.” Differentiation refers to the mode in which the difference between the sensuous and the supersensuous is apprehended, such that the latter is inadequately mediated through the former, while

⁴⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 29.

⁴⁰¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 7, 56.

⁴⁰² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 142.

⁴⁰³ Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 45.

⁴⁰⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 142.

nondifferentiation names the state in which the sensuous does not distinguish itself from the supersensuous and hence strives to unite with it in pure lucidity—perfect coincidence, which would be the attainment, indeed, of intellectual intuition. From the height, then, of this nondifferentiation, “the ode falls into a pure sensuality and a more modest intensity, because the original more lofty more godlike bolder intensity appears to it to be extreme.” The ode comes to a point of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity in its mode of nondifferentiation, of furious excess, which renders necessary an *Untergang*, a downgoing from unity with the supersensuous to separation from it, back into mere, modest sensuality—the mortal element.

From its fallen state, the ode comes to understand that it must transcend this opposition of “differentiation and nondifferentiation” so that it may “come to appreciate the necessity of struggle, that is, struggle for a lucidity that itself requires a more enhanced striving” and grasp the necessity of passing over into its original, maximally extreme and fiery intensity, “if it is not to end tragically in this modest state” of self-reflection and sentimentality, in Schiller’s sense. Yet because of the ode’s appreciation of its opposite, “the idea that unifies both opposites now emerges more purely, the primal tone is found once again, and with lucidity.” A liberation coincides with this return to the primal tone, as the ode has “attained the basis of an experience of, and an insight into, the heterogenous,”⁴⁰⁵ that is, into its inner agonal nature, wherein it is constantly divided between its unity with and separation from the supersensuous. It is through the grasping of the ever-changing measure of that division and unification, and the necessity of ceaseless conflict, that the ode becomes capable of returning to its original nature. The tragic ode, thus, in the sensuous experience of the differentiation between the sensuous and

⁴⁰⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 142.

supersensuous, returns anew to its ground, to the space of its primordial intensity, to the sphere of nature rediscovered through self-consciousness, transfigured by the experience of heterogeneity; it is by this dialectic, in effect, that nature qua origin is continually transformed in the poetic movement. Its return, moreover, is not a return to the *same* nature, which pretends to harmonious homogeneity, but is, rather, a re-ignition of the supernal fire that had been extinguished in the experience of separation from the supersensuous. It is a return to a nature whose movement is that of *becoming*, and its measure, after the moment of self-reflection, has become a *sensuous*, *human* measure, that is, a *proper* measure, infinitely approximated to the realm of the supersensuous. The ode sacrifices itself, out of a state that strives toward eternity, into the sphere of becoming. Thus, while the journey of the tragic ode appears to be circular, beginning and ending in primordial flame, it is actually *excentric*, which is to say: non-circular, and its final state is differentiated from its initial state precisely by the change in measure, the experience of the heterogenous, which introduces a reflective, temporal rhythm into the space of origin. It is, moreover, this excentricity that characterizes the ode's musical movement—its musical dialectic, as *tragic*.

The tragic *drama* differs from the tragic ode in that it is more immersed in the foreignness of its mode of expression, precisely because it moves into the realm of the representation of actuality, while the ode remains within ideality. Hence its movement between the sensuous and the supersensuous unfolds in a way that is not merely abstract and formal, but effects a passage from the ideal to the real. The tragic poem “veils the intensity in the presentation to a greater extent, expressing it in distinctions that are more stark, inasmuch as it

expresses a more profound intensity, a more infinite divinity.”⁴⁰⁶ The more powerful the divinity, the more *whole* is the unity of the true whose fire must be presented in the tragic poem, the thicker must its veiling be, and the more *foreign* (*fremd*) the linguistic fabric of the veil, just as Heraclitus must announce eternal truths through the medium of enigmas, whose decipherability varies according to the vitality of the truth and the force of its tragic character. Thus in the tragic poem, “[the] image of intensity everywhere denies its ultimate basis, and has to do so, to the extent and to the degree that it everywhere approximates to the symbolic realm [...].” In the tragic poem, “the material has to be a bolder more foreign likeness and exemplar of [the poet’s] sensibility [arrested within its boundaries], while the form has to withstand something more like a counter-posing and separating.”⁴⁰⁷ The symbolic material must be in profound heterogeneity with the intensity it presents; a “foreign” and “different world” must be created for the expression of the “characteristic intensity that lies at the basis of the image” which itself must also be in strong affinity with the medium that reveals and veils it.⁴⁰⁸ “The more alien these foreign forms are, the livelier they have to be [...].” The intense, that is, the poet’s inner world, and the divine, that is, the “spirit” that takes possession of the poet must be expressed in the foreign medium solely “through a correspondingly greater degree of differentiation.”⁴⁰⁹ Hence the inner world of the poet—that which is *proper* to him, must unite with and separate from the foreign, which in its absolute sense is the divine, in order for the tragic poem to serve the purpose

⁴⁰⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 142.

⁴⁰⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 143.

⁴⁰⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 143.

⁴⁰⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 143.

of transforming and engendering *life* and *liveliness*. The joy that is the true sense of mourning, thus, depends upon the potency of this differentiation.

The mourning-play (*Trauerspiel*) is thus dramatic in both material and form, precisely because “it contains a third element, namely, the different, more foreign material that the poets have chosen, material quite distinct from their inmost heart and their world, because they have found that foreign material to be sufficiently analogous for their investment of their total sensibility into it, thus preserving the poets’ sensibility within it as in a vessel, indeed all the more assuredly as the analogous material becomes increasingly foreign; for the most intense sensibility is exposed to what is transitory to the degree that has not denied truly temporal and sensuous relationships [...].”⁴¹⁰ Because, therefore, the tragic poets express “the most profound intensity,” they are obligated to “renounce altogether their own person, their subjectivity” and also renounce “the object that is present to them, conveying it to a foreign personality, a foreign objectivity,” even and most potently where “the drama’s object, namely, destiny, expresses its mystery most tellingly, and [...] there where homogeneity grips the hero most strongly, even there [...].”⁴¹¹ The essence of the tragic drama is the poet’s *dispossession* of himself and his subjective propriety by the *expression* of that propriety in the medium of absolute foreignness. Destiny intersects the tragic movement precisely by means of this dispossession, by a return to the poetic wellspring, where god and man, from their eternal intermingling, must separate. Hölderlin writes:

The presentation of the tragic [*Die Darstellung des Tragischen*] rests principally upon this: that the monstrous [*das Ungeheure*], the fact that God and man couple, and the fact that without limit the power of nature [*Naturmacht*] and the innermost of man become

⁴¹⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 143.

⁴¹¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 144. This sentence is left open, without punctuation, on the word “there.”

one in fury, is conceived in that the limitless becoming-one [*gränzenloses Eineswerden*] is purified through limitless separation [*gränzenloses Scheiden*].⁴¹²

Hence the role of destiny is to bring about this purifying rupture, this reversal of the rhythmic movement in the very primordial union of god and man, from that of unification to that of separation, and it is in this moment that the hero's need to sacrifice himself becomes clear in a poetic flash—a voice carried from the oceans of the future to which he was previously blind, into the rush of becoming on the instant's opening. The *caesura* is this moment of reversal—this silence that admits of no presence, drawing mortal and immortal toward each other and purifying each of them through their boundless, mutual withdrawal. Hence does man discover in a single instant the time of his tragedy and the tragedy of his time. For without the god to guide the human, he has no measure for himself, and merely strives forward, toward transcendence, in the monstrosity of his self-consciousness. The only means of measure after this withdrawal is infinite approximation, which requires that the god who has flown be constantly called back, through a process of anamnesis. Yet Hölderlin reveals to us this secret, that the ideal union between man and god never, in fact, *took place* as presence or eternity—rather, in its very origin, which the modern tragedian seeks in Sophocles, this union was, in the same instant, *purified* through separation. And in order for this purification—this κάθαρσις—to be delivered to the tragic hero's *people* as the revelation of this temporal tragedy, the hero shall have to *go down* in self-sacrifice.

In his “Notes to *Antigone*,” Hölderlin writes of tragedy as the very expression of the time of life:

⁴¹² Hölderlin, *Werke* 3:337-338. Cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 231-232.

The boldest moment in the course of a day or a work of art comes when the spirit of the times and of nature, the divine that is seizing hold of a human being and the object in which he is interested are at their most wildly opposed because the sensuous object of his interest only reaches half way but the *spirit* wakes to its greatest power *beyond the half*. At that moment the human being must keep the firmest hold on himself, for which reason he stands most open in his character.⁴¹³

For Hölderlin, the tragic is a kind of *universal and eternal movement*. It courses through the temporal unfolding of days across and under history, in time's most secret crevices, between its pillars and under its openings. It is a night-lit, sunlit drift—a fateful intimacy between heaven and earth. In the *καίρὸς* of tragedy, then, divinity and the object of human love cast themselves in radical opposition, and the godly portion of man, his *spirit*, extends beyond the earthliness of the relation between man and what he loves. In this miraculous moment, man is more than man—he is *heroic—halfway divine* in his entirety. But what kind of opposition is this? None other than the one between the godly, the unutterable, and the spoken, which buries the god deeper in man, outside the reach of all phenomena. This spirit, then says Hölderlin, is “wild”—a kind of *mania* that grips and transcends time and that the *human half of man* conceals in strife and weariness.

Hölderlin and Intellectual Intuition

Hölderlin's theory of the intellectual intuition (*intellektuale Anschauung*) and of primordial separation, transforms across the history of his thought, moving from philosophical to poetological ground. His early thinking on this subject is heavily influenced by his submersion in the development of speculative philosophy, that is, in the German Romanticist and Idealist transition from Kant's critical philosophy to the foundation of the dialectic. His earliest philosophical fragments were written contemporaneous to Fichte's lectures, which he attended,

⁴¹³ Hölderlin's *Sophocles*, 113-114.

at Jena in 1794-1795. Fichte was among the first of the German philosophers of the post-Kantian generation to theorize intellectual intuition as a decisive step forward in the history of philosophy.

The “essential incompatibility of the the sensuous and the intelligible” in Kant is given exception only in the *Critique of Judgement*. Yet there, intuition oscillates between “reception and production” for the aesthetic judgement, and its relation to the *ratio* “always” occurs solely “according to analogical laws.”⁴¹⁴ Therefore, no concept corresponds to the aesthetic reflective judgement; this judgement, rather, remains irrevocably subjective. In the late eighteenth century, it became the project of German philosophers to restore this scission, to reignite the union of intuition and the supersensuous, the immediate experience of divinity.⁴¹⁵ A primordial ground of union between these two had to be reestablished in an actual sense, that is, in a sense that entered into *experience*—not merely as analogy.

Hölderlin, in his early philosophical writings, seeks this primordial unity from which the “division between a natural and a rational causality must have originated.”⁴¹⁶ From out of a theory of the excentric movement of time, Hölderlin grasps intellectual intuition as an analeptic and “quasi Platonic *anamnesis*,”⁴¹⁷ which shatters the possibility of an absolutely continuous subject. From his very first theoretical writings, Hölderlin regards the philosophical with a high degree of skepticism. In a fragment of 1794 entitled *On the Law of Freedom*, Hölderlin writes of a “natural state of the imagination” which dwells in “lawlessness”—in an “anarchy of

⁴¹⁴ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction” by Pfau, 1-29, 5.

⁴¹⁵ This was undergone, in large part, by a return to the Neo-Platonists and to Spinoza. I shall not, however, be able to address the details of these aspects of the intellectual intuition in the current essay.

⁴¹⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 16.

⁴¹⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 16, 18.

representations,” and which is organized by the “intellect” and the “law of freedom.” This natural state is “a moral one” over which the intellect exercises its law; hence a state of boundless disorder—the imagination—is accompanied by and opposed to an ordering and limiting force—the intellect.⁴¹⁸ “There,” that is, in the anarchy of representations, the imagination is considered “in and of itself,” i.e., “theoretically,” while “here,” i.e., in its natural state, it is considered “in conjunction with the faculty of desire,” that is, of striving for freedom. In that anarchy, “where the imagination is considered theoretically, a unity of the manifold, an ordering of perceptions was indeed possible yet accidental.”⁴¹⁹ Here, in opposition to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which determines the necessary conditions of possibility for synthetic judgements, Hölderlin reduces the theoretical, insofar as its object is epistemology, to contingency. The imagination’s synthesis into a complete unity, visible only from the point of view of the theoretical, is for Hölderlin purely accidental—thus the standpoint of the theoretical stands on no solid ground, but is highly aleatory with respect to its object. Likewise, in the imagination’s “natural state of fantasy,” where it is seen in relation with desire, “moral lawfulness is indeed possible yet accidental.”⁴²⁰ Here, Hölderlin rejects the Kantian “transcendental imagination,” which, as primordial Being, must precede the epistemological organization it grounds as well as the imagination in its reproductive function where it effects the application of synthetic judgements to intuitions.

In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant defines Reason, the faculty by grace of which morality is possible, as “pure spontaneity,” elevated above the sphere of understanding, which is

⁴¹⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 33. This structure presages Hölderlin’s later opposition between the *Organischere* and the *Aorgische*; the organic and the aorgic.

⁴¹⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 33.

⁴²⁰ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 33.

circumscribed to the phenomenal world, while Reason, in its pure productivity, applies to the intelligible realm.⁴²¹ It is this faculty, this passport to the unknowable world of things-in-themselves, that defines man as a “rational being” and, consequently, also as a *moral* being, i.e., as subjected to the laws of the intelligible realm. Freedom itself is fundamentally defined as freedom from the “determinate” causality of the sensible world; from this follows the supremacy of the *spontaneous* freedom of the will. There is, for him, a supersensuous causality that transcends and renders possible all other causalities—its existence assures “the idea of freedom” which, in turn, is inseparable from “autonomy” and the “universal principle of morality.”⁴²² Hence all moral “judgement [*Urteil*]” must base itself upon this superior causality and take place “according to the absolute spontaneity of freedom” in order to attain universal validity.⁴²³ The absolute spontaneity, however, is based on the “spontaneity of the subject as thing in itself,” which would be knowable only by means of an impossible “intellectual intuition.”⁴²⁴ This noumenal existence of the subject is nonetheless posited *necessarily* in the idea of freedom, which is set in motion by every moral judgement, whose function is to appeal to the intelligible causality of the will.

Hölderlin’s moral theory rests on the primordial transgression of this impossibility of intellectual intuition. For him, there is “an aspect of the empirical faculty of desire, the analogue of what is called nature, which is most prominent where necessity and freedom, the restricted and the unrestricted, the sensuous and the sacred seem to unite [...].” This aspect is called

⁴²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (London: Longman’s, Green & co., 1879), 103.

⁴²² Kant, *Practical Reason*, 104-105.

⁴²³ Kant, *Practical Reason*, 276.

⁴²⁴ Kant, *Practical Reason*, 277.

variously “a natural innocence” and “a morality of the instinct”—it is a primordial union of Kant’s sensible and intelligible realms, and—as Hölderlin writes, “the fantasy in tune with it is heavenly.”⁴²⁵ This harmony of the earthly and the divine, of human freedom and supersensuous necessity inherent in the subject thus characterizes the essential and originary morality of nature. Pfau writes: “Hölderlin recasts the convergence of ‘freedom and necessity’ as the most primordial synthesis of intellect and intuition itself, a synthesis that takes place within the subject itself.”⁴²⁶ Thus Hölderlin’s intuition overcomes the theoretical realm of the symbolic *analogon* to which Kant had relegated it. The presupposed ground of Being present in Kant’s theory, as the domain of freedom, is overcome by Hölderlin, for whom that primordial unity can only come about by means of an action that limits it. It is, moreover, because of the contingent quality of that action that any effort to *organize* it systematically necessarily fails. Hence, critical philosophy falls short of its moral task precisely insofar as it falls short of experience in its aleatory nature. For Hölderlin’s intellectual intuition, the simultaneity of freedom and necessity, has its manifestation only through the act of *punishment*, which, by its violent force, effects at once a *separation* between the elements of the synthesis, in such rapidity that the *καίρως* of that simultaneity never even *takes place*—for the conflict between them is eternal and cannot be stopped. Where freedom and necessity are in their closest proximity, there they are also farthest from one another.

Hölderlin posits the thesis (articulated by Pfau) “that a primordial order and unity can only be grasped a posteriori, when instigated by punishment.”⁴²⁷ Hölderlin writes: “The first time

⁴²⁵ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 33.

⁴²⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 15.

⁴²⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 18.

that the law of freedom discloses itself to us, it appears as punishing.”⁴²⁸ The very affirmation of freedom depends upon a circular paradox, formulated in a footnote to the fragment, “On the Concept of Punishment,” as follows: “ideal [:] without punishment no law / real [:] without law no punishment”⁴²⁹ where the law in question is, precisely, *moral* law. Freedom is thus defined only negatively, as the act by which “the transgression of the law within oneself” becomes transparent through a foundation of punishment.⁴³⁰ Hence the convergence of the “sensuous and the sacred” occurs only as *anamnesis*, as it is drawn into time through the memory of a primordial existence that, perhaps, never took place, by an analeptic action. Hölderlin’s theory of punishment and freedom, of punishment as both the manifestation and annihilation of freedom, and of this event as irreducible to any pretension to systematicity or perfect wholeness is thus primarily a thinking of the *tragic*. The free creative force by which life defines itself is only illuminated, set in motion and manifested through punishment. That punishing that was once, among the Greeks, divine, has become for us, however, immanent. Inspiration itself is tragic for us—in it, the voice of a disappeared god intones in us with freeing force. Hence the god must be met with, parted with, and mourned in the space of the caesura. The task of the poet is to bring about the presentation of this process and the tragic morality of punishment that it finds.

Hölderlin tells his brother in a letter that the “tragic with us” is this: “to go away from the kingdom of the living in total silence packed up in some kind of container, not to pay for the flames we have been unable to control by being consumed in fire.”⁴³¹ To leave this debt, then,

⁴²⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 34.

⁴²⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 36.

⁴³⁰ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 36.

⁴³¹ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 208.

which is properly a debt to the Greeks, behind, to search out a new living kingdom beyond that ancient one whose fire, exceeding its measure, has consumed us, requires, then both mourning and a joyfulness born out of it. This paradoxical experience is precisely that of *our* tragedy, the tragedy of a fall from the primordial kingdom we never could have lived in, as we are condemned already to onrush of time that carries us unwittingly, from the moment of our self-conscious birth, away from the harmony of nature.

This mourning (*Trauer*) and the play (*spiel*) that accompanies and overcomes it through affirmation of life beyond the whole must then take place within the empty travel, the empty exchange between the propriety of the moderns and the foreignness of the Greeks. That the central point of the tragic drama for Hölderlin is the *caesura* in its onrushing rhythm—the moment of the silent withdrawal of the god and the turning of man toward his mortality—this is the sign, in *tragedy*, the *metaphor* for intellectual intuition, and hence the very *transport* of this intuition, of the poet-philosopher's radical displacement of the speculative discourse of his contemporaries.

For Fichte, the ground of Being is provided *a priori* by a primordial judgement (*Urteil*), which posits the identity of the subjective and the objective. He writes: "The proposition 'A = A' constitutes a judgement. [...] The self's positing of itself is thus its own pure activity." From this he construes a definition of "the self as absolute subject" in the following terms: "*That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing*, is the self as absolute subject."⁴³² Intellectual intuition is hence defined as the supreme Act (*Tathandlung*, also, fact) of this absolute subject, by means of which it brings itself into being. This definition is born both of

⁴³² J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* (1795), trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 97f. Cited in Pfau, 162.

the rigorous impossibility of the Kantian thing in itself, on his own critical ground, and of the irreconcilability that Fichte perceived between Kant's denial of the possibility of intellectual intuition and his axiom of the subject's intuitive immediacy to himself as a conscious being and a moral agent. Hence, for Fichte, the subject becomes, from his very genesis by means of reflective self-consciousness, the absolute itself. The judgement by which this comes about does not assure an attainment of the thing-in-itself, but the *becoming all-encompassing* of the subject which identifies with itself as its own object.

Pfau specifies that Fichte's proposition indicates neither a tautological identity of "I" and "I" nor a reified consciousness, but that the originary Act lays the primordial foundation from which the Fichtean "reflection of the absolute subject" can evolve as a systematic *Science of Knowledge*. The Act thus provides the subject as reified consciousness merely with its formal condition of possibility, by inaugurating an "ontological unity [...]"⁴³³ As Cassirer explains, the self-identity of the "A" or the "I" is necessary insofar as it "implies the self-certainty of the grounding relation" by which the subject can determine all of its "possible moments and applications [...]" This self-identity signifies, moreover, *recognizability*, and this recognition cannot be achieved by "mere 'perception'" but, rather, requires "an intuition which encompasses the infinity and totality of all possible perceptions."⁴³⁴ The difference between "I" and "non-I" is preserved in the progressive reciprocal determination of subject and object in consciousness, which issues forth from Being, defined as "the predicate of coherence and systematicity" so that this determination is constantly view from the perspective of its τέλος, which is "absolute

⁴³³ Cf. Pfau, Hölderlin, Essays, "Introduction" by Pfau, 1-29, 19, 20.

⁴³⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, [1920] (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 3: 141f. Cited in Pfau, 19, trans. Pfau.

unity.”⁴³⁵ Fichte’s intellectual intuition is simultaneously the Act’s condition of possibility and the guarantee of its teleological determination, its end in the absolute.

Hölderlin, as a reader of Fichte’s *Science of Knowledge* and as his student at Jena, found the practical lacking in this formal postulate of the “I” identical with itself. Following Fichte’s notion of a “‘reciprocal determination’ (*Wechselbestimmung*)” of the “I” and the “non-I,” the “formal matrix” wherein consciousness comes to knowledge,⁴³⁶ Hölderlin posits an “arche-separation,” and a “reciprocity” between subject and object. In a text of 1795 entitled “Judgement and Being,” Hölderlin thinks intellectual intuition as the absolute healing and reconciliation of “the original separation between subject and object, that separation through which alone object and subject become possible, the arche-separation [*Urtheil*].”⁴³⁷ Krell explains that Hölderlin thinks *Urtheil*—judgement—as *Ur-theilung*, “the primordial sundering or dividing of consciousness and its object [...].”⁴³⁸ The foundation of this fragment, written in Fichte’s terminology and rigorously opposed to him, is a challenging of the “possibility of ever determining the primordial and systematic ground of Being.”⁴³⁹ Rather, following Fichte, for whom *judgement* (*Urteil*) is the primordial Act that founds consciousness, Hölderlin also refutes him, by defining this judgement, in accordance with its name, as *Ur-teil*—that is, primordial separation. The “reciprocity” between subject and object that Hölderlin posits results in a dialectical structure of thinking (to all judgement) insofar as, for example, the theoretical proposition “I am I” divides itself from the beginning by introducing the necessity of difference

⁴³⁵ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 20, 21.

⁴³⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 20.

⁴³⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 37.

⁴³⁸ Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 52-53.

⁴³⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 21.

into identity, just as “in the practical arche-separation it [the ‘I’] opposes the *not I, not itself*.”⁴⁴⁰

This primordial separation is a return to Heraclitus’ cosmological principle of division, of duplicity, as inherent and prior to all unity. And, as for Heraclitus, this original split, for Hölderlin, results in the temporal movement of *becoming*—for Hölderlin, this is an excentric temporality, where the subject can never coincide with itself as object *except* in the saving power of intellectual intuition, envisioned as an event that heals the originary subjective scission.

Hölderlin also posits, in “Judgement and Being,” a dialectic between “reality and potentiality,” which are respectively analogous and directly related to “mediate and immediate consciousness.” The object expressed as potentiality is merely the repetition of the subject for whom it exists as such. The “concept of potentiality” applies only to the “objects of the intellect” (not to those of “reason” to which “necessity” applies), while the concept of “reality” applies to “perception and intuition”—hence does the combination of these concepts in a given subject bring about the unification of the potential and the real, the intellectual object and the intuiting subject. In “intellectual intuition” alone are “subject and object united altogether”—that is to say, inseparably, to such an extreme extent that “no separation can be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated [...].”⁴⁴¹ Yet this unity of Being in intellectual intuition is by no means a principle of *identity*. Being, for Hölderlin, as a “connection between subject and object,” forms the condition of all reflexive separation, as anterior to all “synthetic unity.”⁴⁴² Rather, “the I is only possible by means of [the] separation of the I from the I.” Hölderlin exposes the paradoxical nature of self-consciousness concealed in the utterance of “I,”

⁴⁴⁰ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 37.

⁴⁴¹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 37.

⁴⁴² Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 21.

the rupture concealed in the “I” itself. For “I” cannot be said without self-consciousness, and yet this self-consciousness is only possible through an affirmation of the “I” that is at once its subversion, or: “In opposing myself to myself, separating myself from myself, yet in recognizing myself as the same in the opposed regardless of this separation.”⁴⁴³ The problem is altogether circular, that the subject is destabilized within itself from its very genesis—that the “I” is primordially split in two within the very *Urteil* by which it brings itself about.

Hence, because Fichte’s Act, which posits the “I = I” as a totality, does not account for the separation of the “I” within itself, it is, for Hölderlin, already derivative, presupposing the possibility of a cohesive and consistent systematicity—a uniformity of Being. Thus, Hölderlin claims that “identity is not = to absolute Being.”⁴⁴⁴ On the grounds of the misunderstanding of Fichte which prematurely anthropomorphizes and absolutizes his subject as a consciousness, of which Pfau also accuses Hölderlin,⁴⁴⁵ the latter demonstrates how “Being can neither be conceived of as an identity nor as a synthesis” nor, indeed, as consistent with the “absolute ‘I,’” since all transcendental categories imply a difference from that which is transcended.⁴⁴⁶ I’d like to gesture toward, however, the objection, against this accusation, that Hölderlin’s concern is with the presupposition of initial subjective continuity—a continuity of Being—contained in the Fichtean proposition that the subject in possession of “self-consciousness” who *can say “I”* is

⁴⁴³ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 38.

⁴⁴⁴ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 38.

⁴⁴⁵ Pfau refers to Hölderlin’s letter to Hegel (letter 94) of January 26, 1795, in which the poet equates Fichte’s “absolute ‘I’” to “Spinoza’s Substance” and claims that this Fichtean subject “contains all reality” and “is everything” while “outside it there is nothing,” so that “there is no object for this ‘I’”—he objects accordingly that “a consciousness without an object cannot be thought, ...” (cited in Pfau, 163). In reference to the many accusations of such an identity between consciousness and the absolute “I,” Fichte had made fun of his readers by saying that they wanted to transfer the “intelligible” relation into the “biography of man prior to his birth.” (Cited in Cassirer, 164. Pfau, 163.)

⁴⁴⁶ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 22.

capable of *ultimately* uniting with himself *qua* object in an impenetrable *absolute* without a temporal separation ensuing.

Hölderlin's fragment thus dismantles the possibility of any transcendental philosophy consistent with Being. For the "I" is never purely present, but is infinitely separated from itself as object, such that it is "grounded by a [primordial] unity [of Being] it can only presuppose, and which becomes the 'boundary concept' of the intellectual intuition."⁴⁴⁷ It is for this reason that self-consciousness *qua* self-identity is radically impossible—as soon as we begin to conceptualize Being through consciousness, we must equally grasp the futility of this project; consciousness of Being is hence the consciousness of this futility, of the *failure* of an enduring intellectual intuition. Being is undermined by every attempt to grasp it, running ahead of and behind the self-divided subject, who is, indeed, more than anything, *subject to his own* excentric time. In accordance with this, intellectual intuition as the definition of Being wherein subject and object unite can never found a totalizing transcendental system for Hölderlin, but rather opens itself out onto a rhythmic dissonance and discontinuity within the subject itself, and hence the failure of all philosophical systems.

Hölderlin will thus also refuse Schelling's conception of intellectual intuition as "the organ of all transcendental thinking" in 1800. Schelling's thesis, based on Fichte as well, understood intellectual intuition as that "universally and freely productive" intuition wherein "producing and produced are one and the same"—in other words, that procedure whereby the "ego [...] first originates" through "*knowing*" itself as both subject and object, thence creating

⁴⁴⁷ Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 118.

itself as such.⁴⁴⁸ Whereas Schelling proposes intellectual intuition as a “grounding function,” for Hölderlin it constitutes, in the words of Pfau, “an intuition of the very impossibility of ever grounding a totality.”⁴⁴⁹ Hölderlin views intellectual intuition as the movement by which philosophy reveals the very absence of its ground, by which absolute unity fails to be achieved from the first moment of consciousness, and passes over into absolute discontinuity, absolute separation from itself.

However, Schelling also regarded intellectual intuition as an aesthetic act. He writes: “Aesthetic intuition is intellectual intuition become objective.”⁴⁵⁰ This aesthetic intuition is the rendering-sensuous of intellectual intuition, in the sense of the Greek αἴσθησις, perception; it is the becoming-perceptible of intellectual intuition, the subject’s unification with the god. As a visible movement, intellectual intuition, for Schelling, is only present in ancient Greek tragedy. Thus for Hölderlin, who, in his later poetological works, would come to view tragedy as the metaphor of intellectual intuition, Schelling is of particular importance. One might almost say that, refusing the ontological ground of intellectual intuition, i.e., refusing it as a positive and coherent philosophical postulate, Hölderlin rather embraced it as an aesthetic phenomenon, as the map of *tragic transport* in the rhythmic unfolding of tragedy, and, even there, as the movement of a ceaseless conflict between god and man. Yet tragedy, for him, far from being an abstract philosophical paradigm, tragedy becomes a template for tragic experience itself.

⁴⁴⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (Jena: Gabler Verlag, 1799, Vol. 3 of *Sämtliche Werke*). *Werke* 3:369. Cited in Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 301.

⁴⁴⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 26.

⁴⁵⁰ Schelling, *Werke* 3:625. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 301.

Schelling's Tragic Philosophy

Schelling was the first philosopher of the tragic.⁴⁵¹ His theory of the tragic came about through a meditation on the problematic dissonance, the apparent irreconcilability, between critical and dogmatic philosophy in regard to *freedom*, which is for Schelling “the essence of the I,” and even “the alpha and omega of all philosophy.”⁴⁵² Critical philosophy, of which Kant is the paradigmatic thinker, proceeds from a positing of the “absolute I,”⁴⁵³ where the subject is given supreme reign, and is thus “a striving for immutable selfhood, unconditional freedom, and unbounded activity.”⁴⁵⁴ In dogmatic philosophy, on the other hand, whose exemplary philosopher is Spinoza, the absolute becomes the object of all subjective knowledge, which leads to a situation of “absolute passivity” and subservience of the subject to the objective force of necessity.⁴⁵⁵ Both of these doctrines, for Schelling, do not take into account, however, the power of the objective. For, in the first, the object is always mastered by the subject and in the second as well, the subject’s position of passivity neglects the fact that the objective “owes its victory to the subject itself.”⁴⁵⁶ Hence, Schelling, in his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), construes a combination of these theories, or rather, an integrating (sublating) alternative to them, which will constitute the paradoxical paradigm of the tragic. He attributes its insight to his

⁴⁵¹ That is, the inaugurator of the “philosophy of the tragic” which developed at the heart of German Idealism. Cf. Szondi, *The Tragic*, 1.

⁴⁵² Gustav Plitt, ed., *Aus Schellings Leben* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1869), 1: 77. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

⁴⁵³ F.W.J. Schelling, *Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus*, in *Hauptwerke der Philosophie in originalgetreun Neudrucken* (Leipzig: F. Müller Verlag, 1914), 85. *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays, 1794-1796*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 192. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

⁴⁵⁴ Schelling, *Briefe*, 84; Marti, *Letters*, 192. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

⁴⁵⁵ Schelling, *Briefe*, 84. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

⁴⁵⁶ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

imaginary interlocutor and writes, in the tenth letter: “You are right, one thing still remains—to *know* that there is an objective power which threatens to destroy our freedom and, with this firm and certain conviction in our hearts, to fight *against* it, to summon up all our freedom and thus to perish.”⁴⁵⁷ Thus the speculative philosophy of the tragic has self-sacrifice at its center and it hinges upon this as the dialectical consequence of the contradiction between human freedom and divine necessity. Schelling accordingly views self-sacrifice as the only response to the threat of objective necessity to freedom that guarantees their coincidence in the absolute.

This theory, however, remains for Schelling strictly *aesthetic*, applying only to Greek tragic art and being insufficient to furnish a “system of action” in the absence of a “race of Titans,” without whom such a systematization of the struggle between freedom and necessity could only have “the most ruinous consequences for humanity.”⁴⁵⁸ The essential meaning of the tragic has its truth only in the ancient world, because it is only there that the power of necessity *qua* divine destiny has an *actual* existence and value. For modernity, the tragic conflict between freedom and necessity does not have the same force—*our* task is not to assert our freedom in the face of divine necessity, in the manner of the tragic hero, but rather to reflect upon this conflict as an aesthetic principle. The “tragic process” that plays itself out in *Oedipus Tyrannos* is significant, thus, “only in view of its telos.”⁴⁵⁹ Schelling’s interpretation of the tragic hero regards him as victim to the power not only of objective necessity but of a punishment for his succumbing to this necessity; thus his (positive) will to freedom turns against him. The dialectic between destruction and salvation thus surfaces here, for Oedipus is both saved and destroyed by

⁴⁵⁷ Schelling, *Briefe*, 85; Marti, 192. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

⁴⁵⁸ Schelling, *Briefe*, 88; Marti, 194. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

⁴⁵⁹ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 8.

his ultimate assertion of his freedom, “destroyed precisely by what should have saved” him,⁴⁶⁰ that is, in his decision “to willingly endure punishment even for an *unavoidable* crime, so that he might prove his freedom through the loss of that freedom itself, and so as to be defeated even as he declared the rights of free will.”⁴⁶¹

Nearly a decade after the *Letters*, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art* (1802-1803), Schelling speaks again of the “essence of *tragedy*” as “a real conflict between freedom in the subject and objective necessity” in which neither force wins over the other, but rather, in the end, “both of them simultaneously [appear] as conquerors and conquered in perfect indifference.”⁴⁶² The point of departure in this passage is that of Schelling’s *identity philosophy*, developed in 1801, where the self-conscious subject is regarded as a result rather than a self-generating cause, as in Fichte’s philosophy. His aesthetics thus rests on philosophical ground; Schelling views God as “infinite ideality grasping all reality within itself”⁴⁶³ and the beautiful as the “forming-into-one [*Ineinsbildung*] of the real and the ideal”—thus, the common indifference of freedom and necessity come to rest in a “real entity.”⁴⁶⁴ The poetic genres each constitute a progressively higher manifestation of this identity and struggle between freedom and necessity. Their progression coincides with the development of culture (*Bildung*). The epic contains “a state of innocence” and “unity”—a perfect identity whose wholeness will later recur, after the experience of “dispersion.” The “lyrical poem,” then, is the event of “identity [flaring] up into [...] conflict”

⁴⁶⁰ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 9.

⁴⁶¹ Schelling, *Letters*, 193.

⁴⁶² Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, in *Werke* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1856-61), pt. I, 5: 693; *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 251. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 9.

⁴⁶³ Schelling, *Kunst*, 380; Stott, 28. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 9.

⁴⁶⁴ Schelling, *Kunst*, 383; Stott, 30. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 9.

in culture's process of maturing. Schelling writes, then, of the genesis of tragedy: "It was only with the ripest fruit of later culture that unity itself was reconciled with conflict on a higher level and that the two became one again in a more perfect formation [*Bildung*]. This higher identity is drama."⁴⁶⁵ Tragedy is thus thought as the final stage in an ascending dialectic and "the tragic process" is viewed as "the restoration of [...] indifference in conflict." And this conflict, taking place at the heart of freedom, causes freedom itself to "become its own adversary."⁴⁶⁶

Lacoue-Labarthe writes of Schelling's theory, which bases itself primarily on Sophocles' *Oedipus*: "Here we have the scheme and the matrix of dialectical logic itself: the negative (privation of freedom) converts itself into a positive (accomplishment of liberty) by virtue of the accentuation, or of the redoubling, of the negative itself (the provocation of punishment, the very will to lose freedom). The dialectic treats of the paradox of contradiction, that is, of identity." Identity presupposes identity with itself, and must refer endlessly back to itself; thus "identity is always self-identity with itself and identity with its other. Which means also that alterity—including the most extreme contradiction—is potentially identity."⁴⁶⁷ Through the self-condemnation to fate—through the self-sacrifice and punishment for a sin of which he *knows* himself to be innocent—the absolute tragic hero establishes also a mechanism of self-appropriation, such that all that is strange, monstrous, horrifying in himself as a result of his destiny (where destiny is transposed onto, or perhaps sublated into, *nature*) can be infinitely identified with the Same, which is to say, with the freedom that characterizes him.

⁴⁶⁵ Schelling, *Kunst*, 687; Stott, 247. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 9-10.

⁴⁶⁶ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 10.

⁴⁶⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'imitation des Modernes*, 213.

If Oedipus maintains, in Schelling's view, a curative function as the relic of the *κάθαρσις* he provoked in Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is because he is at once the originary event *and* the symbol of the speculative dialectic, that is, the dialectic whose completion is the subject's self-consciousness and his attainment of an absolute perspective—his *τέλος* in the god, and hence his absolute liberation from mortality. *κάθαρσις*, performed by tragedy in the figure of Oedipus, coincides with what shall become the *Aufhebung* (sublation, or *relève*) of the dialectic, present in Schelling's text, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, in his discussion of the constraints and demands of art, that is, “under the name of the conditions proper to (re)presentation, *Darstellung*, or *mimesis*.” *κάθαρσις* is therefore the function of the aesthetic proper, where this representation or recreation of nature in art plays itself out on the ground of tragedy, the ancient ground wherein alone the gods are *present* in such a way that intellectual intuition becomes primordially possible.

It is for the sake of the tragedy as a complete work of art that the tragic hero must present—i.e., bring into being—the conciliation, in the form of self-consciousness, of the dissonance or opposition embedded in himself, that is, namely, the opposition between his self-identity (his innocence) and the difference that undercuts it through *destiny* (his guilt), so as to purify the opposition through a synthesis that at once carries innocence and guilt with it in their isolation and leaves them behind it, abolishing them into the irretrievable past. This then is the operation of the *Aufhebung*—the simultaneous preservation and abolition of internal contradiction, which, in the case of Oedipus, results in *voluntary punishment*—in self-sacrifice. “And it is, of course,” writes Lacoue-Labarthe, “because identity is thought as Self, *ipseity* or *Selbstheit*, that only a metaphysics of the subject can pretend to the resolution of the paradox of the Same. Inversely, there where this paradox is left in the state of paradox, there where the extreme difference

maintains itself, the circumscription of such a metaphysics is, in one way or another, exceeded.”⁴⁶⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe names Hölderlin as one who rigorously maintained the paradox. He did this, we can affirm, by replacing the unity of selfhood with its constant, agonal separation and fragmentation.

Hölderlin: Poetology, Tragedy, Excentricity

For Hölderlin, as for Schelling, the intellectual intuition “of a unity that antedates any structure of synthesis” is necessarily aesthetic. For Hölderlin, this intuition as origin and absolute can only occur *a posteriori*, and, accordingly, the meaning of the aesthetic is transformed along with the meaning of the tragic. “Thus the aesthetic does not serve as the ‘objective’ manifestation of the union between the subjective and the objective (Schelling), but only affords man an ‘accidental’ glimpse into a past that was never quite present.”⁴⁶⁹ Intellectual intuition, thus, represents for Hölderlin the very limit of the philosophical, the point at which it comes up against its impossibility by postulating the ground of Being in an absolute and eternal unity that cannot endure in time without dividing itself. Thus the philosophical, coming to its *Ursprung* in the contingency of the future, requires its purification in the poetological. Hence Hölderlin posits temporal self-separation as the pre-history of the Subject, and the purification of the unity achieved in intellectual intuition through “boundless separation.” It is through the actualization of his original instinct against Fichte, that the identity of the subject with itself as object is impossible without an original scission in the subject itself, that he comes to think separation,

⁴⁶⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'imitation des Modernes*, 213.

⁴⁶⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 26.

rather than union, as the absolute and therefrom discovers poetology as the only means by which this separation is demonstrable in its essential *tragic temporality*.

Primordial separation precedes Being and the primordial unity that succeeds it reveals itself, too, to be a separation; hence it proves, in the moment of its arrival, the impossibility of any attainment of the absolute. The failure of the philosophical, its self-fragmentation resulting from its pretension to absolute selfhood, gives way to the tragic *for us*, the need to mourn this impossibility of a return to the unity of nature, or rather, the impossibility of that unity ever having taken place; the very arrival of the *Ursprung* is at once its infinite loss. The revelation of this impossibility, however, is the very event that renders life possible; the unification of nature and art, of god and man, which, as intellectual intuition, brings the absolute into being, can only come about by means of their initial boundless separation. It is thus that *mourning* is, for Hölderlin, the very movement of living, the affirmation of mortality calling out to itself as the god disappears. And this process is undergone in the painful, mournful movement of its temporality, only in the art of tragedy, which is no longer thought as a medium isolated in a primal past and only proper to the ancient Greeks, but as a movement that extends into our own experience. For Hölderlin, indeed, as for Nietzsche after him, *life* is conceived on the basis of tragic art—it is not art that imitates nature, but nature that imitates art.

The attainment of the absolute in a temporal *present*, as the coincidence of subject and object, of necessity and freedom that was sought after by the speculative philosophers of the German Idealist movement, that is, namely, by Fichte, Hegel and Schelling, is subverted by Hölderlin through the determination of the *caesura* as the occurrence, in tragedy, of intellectual intuition. Any presence of such an event as an affirmation of the wholeness, the oneness of the

subject is rendered impossible by this determination of the very attainment of the absolute as *separation* between freedom and necessity, between god and man. Rather, the continuity of subjectivity within the tragic hero is, from the point of this caesura, split apart and the splinters of the subject sent flying into the atoms of a non-unifiable and tragic *becoming*.

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests such a subversion of in his essay “The Caesura of the Speculative”: “Why would we not conclude, then, that in (dis)organizing tragedy in this way, Hölderlin *caesuraed the speculative* (which is not to go beyond it, or to maintain it, or to sublimate it) and, in doing so, rediscovered something of the *Trauerspiel*?”⁴⁷⁰ This role for Hölderlin is based, moreover, on the idea that Lacoue-Labarthe advances of *tragedy*, for Hölderlin, as the “catharsis of the speculative” insofar as the “speculative desire for the infinite and the divine,” insofar as it is associated with tragedy, is purified precisely through tragedy’s presentation of this desire as “a casting into separation, differentiation, finitude.”⁴⁷¹ Although it is not my intention to schematize Hölderlin’s philosophical project in this way, I believe that the indication is just—in general, Lacoue-Labarthe avoids a recognition of the negative connotations Hölderlin perceives in the failure of the speculative and hence does not bring across the weight of the tragedy that separation entails. He tends, rather, quite often, toward an appropriation of the Hölderlinian configuration as a means of affirming and advancing the deconstructionist project. For, indeed, it is, for Hölderlin, a *painful* excentricity to which we are condemned, which exposes the failure of the speculative project of intellectual intuition as a present unification—hence the endless need for mourning.

⁴⁷⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 235.

⁴⁷¹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 232.

The ἐν διαφέρον ἐαυτῷ of Heraclitus is, for Hölderlin, the tragic opening of life; it is the very event of the caesura, a prophetic revelation that determines the hero's fate. For it is precisely the impossibility of overcoming that supreme separation, the unattainability of *harmony*, that condemns the hero to his self-sacrifice, and which defines his tragedy. This sacrifice is a final attempt at entering the absolute, of bringing about the coincidence of freedom and necessity. And yet, it shall bring to the man, the people, the culture it leaves behind merely a greater separation, and the tragic revelation of becoming. It is in this respect that his sacrifice *fails* and, through its failure alone, succeeds.

A un-traversable distance between god and man awakes in Hölderlin's writing of the tragic. Boundless separation replaces Schelling's indifference—the battleground of the tragic ἄγών shifts; no longer are both sides at once conqueror and conquered, but, rather, they are separated by immeasurable stretches of time, beaches of distance. Szondi points out that, for Hölderlin, the reconciliation between nature and art is “recognizable only when what has been bound together in an inner unity is divided through conflict” while “the physical union can only be merely apparent and temporary and must be sublated,” so that the universal does not lose itself in the particular ““life of a world””—so that it does not expire in an individual. This death is the destiny of Empedocles, exemplary of all ““tragic figures””—his passing gives birth to a ““becoming.””⁴⁷² Szondi thus discloses the meaning of the counter-rhythmic caesura as a passage from a world ruled by divinity and fate into a fallen ground of immanence. Hölderlin devoted himself to understanding “the poet's task in an age when the gods can be near only through their distance.”⁴⁷³ He writes: “Hölderlin is determined both to hold out in this night of divine distance

⁴⁷² Szondi, *The Tragic*, 12.

⁴⁷³ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 13.

[...] and to prepare the future coming of the gods.”⁴⁷⁴ But who are these gods to come? Perhaps, no gods at all but something entirely other—for example, a new sort of mortal love. For Hölderlin’s tragic hero is always announcing the flight of the gods by his self-sacrifice.

In a letter of June 1799 to Suzette Gontard, Hölderlin’s muse and the model for Hyperion’s great love, Diotima, Hölderlin writes: “Every day I have to invoke the absent god again.” Thus the tragic movement that plays out between man and the disappearing god must be ceaselessly repeated; the *mourning* must daily recommence, in cosmological magnitude, as Heraclitus’ sun is new each day. Hölderlin continues:

When I think of great men at the great moments of history, how they caught at the things around them like holy fire and transformed everything dead and wooden, the world’s straw, into flame which flew up with them to the heavens; and then of myself, how I often go about like a poor glimmering lamp that would dearly beg a drop of oil to shine into the night a bit longer—then, I tell you, a curious shudder runs through my whole body, and softly I call out to myself the terrible words: more dead than alive.⁴⁷⁵

This desire that Hölderlin speaks is precisely that of transforming the dead, the forgotten refuse of past glory, into the future—the fire reigniting ancient heroes. Tragedy as *Trauerspiel* is the only means to this power of transformation, this deliverance of the past into the future. In accordance with this, Hölderlin’s shift toward the poetological, the function of tragedy as the passage, the *transport* from the ideal to the real, is also a shift toward the embrace of tragic *excentricity*. Hölderlin ends his letter to Suzette Gontard thus:

a nature like yours, where everything is joined in intimate, indelible, living union, this is the pearl of time, and whoever has recognized it and seen how its heavenly innate unique happiness is also its deep unhappiness, he is likewise forever happy and forever unhappy.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 143-144. Letter 70.

⁴⁷⁶ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 144.

Such a “pearl of time” is that nature which transforms the dead into the living, which calls the god back by its beauty, in the manner of Platonic anamnesis, and in which *life* in the tragic Greek sense, as this constant union and separation with divinity, revives itself once again. Within this *pearl of time*, therefore, a measure of *timelessness* is attained—an instant of eternity, that defies the rhythmic onrush of tragedy. If there is human love to be attained, it lies, perhaps, within this temporary, *counter-rhythmic* experience of the eternal, which makes the descent back into the tragic rhythm of becoming bearable. It offers up the dream of the absolute, of the possibility of retaining something of the divine, before the self is once again split and must undergo the constant sacrifice of itself in the movement of time, even as it gains in self-knowledge.

Hölderlin’s intellectual intuition takes place within a conception of time as excentric, discontinuous, and thus of selfhood as discontinuous, where the distance between men and the divinity, between the moderns and the ancients, is measured by a tragic, living rhythm. The whole is not *given* beforehand—it comes later, as a mere instant before the boundless withdrawal of the god. The *primordial ground* of Being, likewise, comes about through the action of punishment; it is not the *origin* but the interstice between a circular and an excentric movement. There, at the point of the failure of the philosophical to attain the absolute, there lies the downgoing—the *Untergang*—of the tragic hero. *Untergang* equally signifies *setting*, as in the downgoing motion of the sun. It thus contains within itself the promise of a dawn to follow.

Hölderlin’s turn to the poetological is based on the idea, expressed in his essay, “The Ground of Empedocles,” that “the image of intensity”⁴⁷⁷ which, as Pfau affirms, “is tragedy

⁴⁷⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 143.

itself,”⁴⁷⁸ *must deny* and “everywhere denies its ultimate basis”⁴⁷⁹ or foundation. Self-sacrifice, or *going under*, is always the infinite, immeasurable attainment of freedom brought about through the infinite loss of freedom. It is the re-unification of art with nature, of man with god wherein both withdraw immeasurably—the god into his absence and the mortal into an “excentric sphere of the dead.” The sacrificial moment of the tragedy is determined at the midpoint, when the human and the divine come into closest contact, thus, the boundless, tragic content of the play and the calculable law, the rhythm that measures it at a distance. There the *downgoing* begins; there, at the the moment of the god’s most potent presence, he vanishes. Man descends and god withdraws, and there an infinite work of mourning—*Trauerarbeit*—finds its origin. This mourning signifies for humanity the loss of the *divine*—man is condemned to becoming, and to his own body as the source of his freedom and punishment. Szondi writes:

A spark leaps over the fire that it kindles, night is changed into scorching day. By “interpreting the words of the oracle *too infinitely*,” that is, as a religious demand, and by fulfilling this demand, Oedipus forces a union with God. Yet this “boundless union” [...] must pass over into a “boundless separation,” so that the monstrosity it presents becomes knowable. The forced day tragically turns into an intensified night: into the darkness of the blinded Oedipus.⁴⁸⁰

The idea of separation as the absolute, rather than unification in an intellectual intuition comes as an Empedoclean inspiration concerning *love*, during the Homburg period of Hölderlin’s *Empedocles* and translations of Sophocles’ *Trauerspiele*. In tragedy, this absolute separation becomes necessary in the counter-rhythmic rupture, and unity always results in a higher form of conflict—of *ἀγών*. There is indeed, for Hölderlin, an ascending dialectic—born, however, before

⁴⁷⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, “Introduction,” 27.

⁴⁷⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 143.

⁴⁸⁰ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 13-14.

that of Hegel—of the tragic movement of union and conflict. Separation is so primordially inscribed at the heart of unification that it continually re-erupts like an eternally active volcano, indeed like Empedocles' Etna itself.

For Schelling, self-sacrifice is the fundamental movement by which man achieves divinity and freedom. He writes: "It is not likely that any enthusiast [*Schwärmer*] would ever have taken delight in the the thought of being engulfed in the abyss of the deity, had he not always put his own ego in the place of the deity."⁴⁸¹ Thus, the only way in which a tragic hero could desire to abolish himself is by a pretension to an attainment of divinity, of the absolute—of a self-transcendence that makes the ego itself the divine. The experience of intellectual intuition is, indeed, characterized by a *death*, for Schelling—the only way that infinite freedom can be attained is by a limitless descent into the night of the ego qua god. Schelling writes:

Where all resistance ceases, there is infinite expansion. [...] The supreme moment of being is, for us, transition to not-being, the moment of annihilation. Here is the moment of absolute being, supreme passivity is one with the most unlimited activity. [...] We awaken from intellectual intuition as from a state of death.⁴⁸²

The seeker of absolute freedom plunges himself into an annihilating night, and the only manner in which it would be possible to unite with the god would be by suicide—the absolute itself, the unification of the passive or meaningless sign of the hero with the pure activity of divine nature is itself a death. Thus the philosophical finds its end in death. This is so because "with absolute freedom no consciousness of self is compatible. An activity without any object, an activity which encounters no resistance, never returns to itself. Only a restricted reality [*Realität*] is an actuality

⁴⁸¹ Schelling, *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795; 2nd ed. 1804), 182. Cited in Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 124.

⁴⁸² Schelling, *Letters*, 185. Cited in Clark, *Inspiration*, 125.

[*Wirklichkeit*] for us.”⁴⁸³ Like Hölderlin’s *monarchy*, Schelling’s freedom is impossible in an absolute sense precisely because it lacks an object, and hence, a limiting power. In inspiration, Schelling claims, that is, in the aesthetic exteriorization of the internal harmony of freedom and necessity, the “self-intuition of the absolute” comes about.⁴⁸⁴ Inspiration is thus a self-sacrificial drive, the drive toward the absolute, which *resists death* by uniting subject and object in a work of art: the absolute is attainable *aesthetically*. For Hölderlin, on the other hand, the aesthetic, art, and tragedy in particular, must be capable of actually bringing about the *real*, and of transforming it. Thus the function of his Empedocles is precisely to deliver a people to freedom, returning them to a transfigured nature, through a self-sacrifice that is at once an attainment of true unity with the divine in death. And this is because “in Empedocles his time individualizes itself” to such a degree of intensity that his sacrifice becomes absolutely necessary to the salvation of the Agrigentian people.⁴⁸⁵

The crime of Empedocles was to consider himself a wandering god—to affirm his unity with the divine. Hermocrates, in Hölderlin’s first draft of *The Death of Empedocles*, says, upon banishing Empedocles:

And to his banishment in a barren wasteland,
That there, never to return again,
He’ll pay, and dearly, for that evil hour he
Made himself a god.⁴⁸⁶

This crime, unforgivable, and for which his people desired to punish him, resulted in his decision of suicide. In Hölderlin’s “Frankfurt Plan” for the Empedocles tragedy, he writes in the sketch of

⁴⁸³ Schelling, *Letters*, 184. Cited in Clark, *Inspiration*, 125.

⁴⁸⁴ Clark, *Inspiration*, 126.

⁴⁸⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148.

⁴⁸⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 46. First draft, lines 248-251.

act two, scene four, that it is after the Agrigent people topple the statue of him that they themselves have built that Empedocles resolves “to unite with infinite nature by means of a voluntary death.”⁴⁸⁷

In his letter to his brother of June 4, 1799, Hölderlin writes of the path of man out of nature, returning back into it: “all the meandering rivers of human activity flow into the ocean of nature, just as they begin from it.” The task of “philosophy, art and religion” is to teach men how to travel this dangerous “path [*Bahn*],” not “blindly” but “with eyes wide open, joyfully and nobly” and these forces owe their power to the fact that they “proceed from this creative impulse” which gives life its value. Philosophy does this by bringing “this impulse into consciousness”—the *tragic impulse*, and unveiling to it “its infinite object in the ideal”—thereby it “strengthens and clarifies it.” Yet because it remains in the realm of the ideal, philosophy circumvents and escapes *life* by a pretension to universality, to circularity—to non-excentricity. Hölderlin continues:

Art presents the impulse with its infinite object in a living image, in a higher world of representation. And religion teaches it to sense and believe this higher world precisely where it looks for and wishes to create it, i.e. in nature, both in its own human nature and in the surrounding world, as a latent disposition, as a spirit to be unfolded.⁴⁸⁸

The realm of the aesthetic, of art, proves itself to be the one in which life unveils itself most purely, precisely because it transforms it into a medium of representation; therein, intellectual intuition is exemplified in its highest degree of purity. The ideal is no longer the mode of explicitation for the creative impulse—no grand synthesis is attempted—rather, the tragic

⁴⁸⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 31.

⁴⁸⁸ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 136. Letter 67.

convergence and divergence of life force and the infinite are displayed according to the momentary flowering of their occurrence.

Hölderlin speaks to his brother of the tremendous courage it requires to be a great man. For the weakest, blindest men, rush through life seeking safety and shelter. But for great men, “the present is not satisfactory, [...] they want things different, and so they fling themselves sooner into nature’s grave, and accelerate the march of the world.”⁴⁸⁹ Man is at a precipice, where he must have the courage and eyefulness to plunge himself into the abyss of nature, to sacrifice himself to her perfection. The path of the man Hölderlin describes is an *excentric* one, departing out of unity, undergoing dissonance, and returning to its source transformed.

The concept of excentricity, *Exzentrizität*, rose in ubiquity during the last five years of the 18th century among the German Romantics. The word was used originally strictly in astronomy, to describe the inscrutable and non-circular orbit of comets. In his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), inspired by Newton, Kant explains that excentricity is “the deviation from circular motion”⁴⁹⁰ of heavenly bodies in orbit. This deviation, he claims, is coincident with the increase of the distance of a body from the sun. Such deviation is caused by the interference of contingent causes and “materials” that have different degrees of “orbital velocity,” with the circular path of heavenly bodies. While planets remain primarily in a circular orbit around the sun, comets are distinguished from them precisely by the excentricity of their path:

Eccentricity is the most notable characteristic differentiating the comets. Their atmosphere and tail, which expand through the heat of their close approach to the sun, are

⁴⁸⁹ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 135.

⁴⁹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, trans. Ian Johnston (Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2008), 59.

only consequences of the eccentricity, although they have always served in times of ignorance as uncommon images of horror, announcing to the common folk imaginary destinies.⁴⁹¹

Among the German Romantics, excentricity took on the meaning of the turn away from philosophical systems and toward a fragmentary form of thinking, verging on poetics, as in the case of Novalis and Schlegel. For Hölderlin, thus, in form, a turn away from “Dame philosophy”—the “tyrant”⁴⁹² and toward tragic poetry. But to be blinded to necessity, no longer to possess any sure circularity, and hence to be abandoned to chance at every juncture, this is *tragic*. The figure of the comet was considered to be a prophetic omen perhaps until the demystification of Pierre Bayle’s *Pensées Diverses sur la Comète* of 1680. Once it ceases to be such, once all absolute measure of necessity is lost, man is condemned to become his own Tiresias. It is indeed the task of the tragic hero to divert from the path that repeats itself *ad infinitum*, i.e., the dream of a circular path leading back into the naïve heart of nature, which has become impossible, or the path that progresses toward a goal; in the distance between the circular path and the excentric one lies the counter-rhythmic rupture—the encounter of *tragic transport* with the double-withdrawal of god and man. That is the point of the *Untergang*—the point when the tragic hero, becoming himself, discovers that he must go down.

The Chorus in *Antigone* addresses the heroine: “living the life of your own among / Mortals unique / You go down into the world of the dead [*Gehst du hinab, in die Welt der Todten, Ἄιδην καταβήσει*].”⁴⁹³ This downgoing is an act of love—a love impossible in the monarchy of

⁴⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, 61-62.

⁴⁹² Hölderlin wrote to Immanuel Niethammer on February 24, 1796: “Dame philosophy is a tyrant, and it is more the case that I put up with her compelling me than that I voluntarily submit to it” (CHV 2: 614. Cited in Krell’s introduction in Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 5).

⁴⁹³ Hölderlin’s *Sophocles*, 96. Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1915), 3:382. Sophocles 822.

Thebes, impossible in the world above ground. Hence Antigone's excentric movement into death is, like that of Empedocles, one destined to revive love, nature, and which, by its very excentricity, *fails* to do so. Creon speaks to Antigone, in a punishing tone: "Go down below then if you want to love / And love down there. [*So geh' hinunter, wenn du lieben willst, / Und liebe dort!*]"⁴⁹⁴ Antigone's punishment, the necessity of her *Untergang*, ensues from a mourning of the death that must not be mourned. The love that inspires forbidden mourning, that seeks to reunite divine nature with man by insisting on their boundless, irresolvable separation must be banished to underworld. In *Hyperion*, Hölderlin writes: "We die so as to live."⁴⁹⁵ For it is only in death that true reconciliation, the attainment of the harmony of nature through excentricity, can come to pass. The one who *goes down* must do so precisely because he endures the contradiction between man and nature most harshly—because he bears that opposition in his breast, and stands between them like a god, for, as Hölderlin writes in "The Ground of Empedocles," when the tragedy reaches its "perfection," the "divine stands at the midpoint" between art and nature.⁴⁹⁶

Hölderlin refers to the cadence of the scenes in the *Trauerspiel* as an "excentric rapidity [*exzentrischer Rapidität*]"⁴⁹⁷—the *time* of the tragic drama, thus, its transport, is *excentric*. Deviating from the path of the circular orbit, pushed off its course by the force of contingency, the movement of the *Trauerspiel* leads its tragic hero to his downgoing—to absolute separation from the god. Tiresias "enters the course of fate as a custodian of the natural power [*Naturmacht*] which, in a tragic manner, removes man from his own life-sphere [*Lebensphäre*], the center of

⁴⁹⁴ Hölderlin's *Sophocles*, 86. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3:366.

⁴⁹⁵ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 199.

⁴⁹⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 144.

⁴⁹⁷ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 102. *Werke*, 3:331.

his inner life into another world and into the excentric sphere of the dead [*in die exzentrische Sphäre der Todten*].⁴⁹⁸ The natural power of prophecy, of the future, is that which pushes man farther and farther into monstrosity, until he has reached the realm of the dead, and embodied the tragedy he is born into being.

Hölderlin writes, in an introduction to the second draft of *Hyperion*:

We all pass through an eccentric path [*eine exzentrische Bahn*], and there is no other way possible from childhood to consummation [*Vollendung*].

The blessing of unity, Being (in the only sense of that word) is lost to us, and we had to lose it if we were to gain it again by striving and struggle. We tear ourselves loose from the peaceful [*h*]en kai pan of the world, in order to restore it through ourselves. We have fallen out with nature, and what was once one, as we can believe, is now in conflict with itself, and each side alternates between mastery and servitude. ... Hyperion too was divided between these two extremes.⁴⁹⁹

Hölderlin defines this excentric path as the path that leads from *Einfalt*—simplicity, naïveté in Schiller's sense, as the absolute, spontaneous organic, to *Bildung*—modern culture, which undergoes the infinite separation, analogous to Schiller's sentimentality, as the nostalgic backward gazing onto an irretrievable, ideal past. We are condemned to a life of conflict—a ceaseless, agonal struggle, where Being—the myth that Fichte had conjured—is no longer possible in any degree. Rather than the original universal equality, we have nothing *proper* to us but the constant reversal between the “extremes” of “mastery and servitude.”⁵⁰⁰ Thus, Paul de Man writes: “controlled consciousness (*Bildung*) is the beginning of dissonance (*Trennung*) between man and nature.”⁵⁰¹ The path of life leads out of simple, innocent harmony, into

⁴⁹⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 102. *Werke*, 3:332.

⁴⁹⁹ Hölderlin, *Werke* 3: 236; trans. in M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 237.

⁵⁰⁰ One cannot help but think of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, of which Hölderlin's theory is, quite probably, a precursor.

⁵⁰¹ Paul de Man, “Keats and Hölderlin,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 8, No. 1. (Winter, 1956), 28-45, 31.

dissonance, disparity, separation—Hyperion laments: “the blessing of every year becomes a curse, and all the gods flee”⁵⁰²—, and back into harmony, a higher harmony of love which bears the traces of dissonance, of suffering, of murderous self-consciousness, through downgoing. Yet life in the true sense comes about only through pain and the mourning of lost love. Hyperion writes, in his last letter to Bellarmin: “a new bliss rises in the heart when it endures and suffers through the midnight of grief, and [...] like the nightingale’s song in the darkness, the world’s song of life first divinely sounds for us in deep suffering.”⁵⁰³ The restoration of an original harmonious nature that never truly took place can only come about *a posteriori*, from out of dissonance, through excentricity, which is to say, by undergoing the tragic course of life—a self-inflicted punishment, indeed, must play the central role in its arrival. It must come to be through an overcoming of *Bildung*, by means of a transformation of the sphere of origin and unity itself—a reestablishment of the *meaning* of harmonious love.

The excentric path is thus the one that must be followed for the transformation of predecessors into successors; it guarantees the restoration of nature to man by its tragic creation. But the idea of excentricity, for Hölderlin, is an incarnation of the tragic—that we do not end in a perfect state of unity and innocence, but must follow a series of experiences, of loves and pains, that strip us of our purity and dare us to become the self-sacrificing tragic hero, flinging himself into the flames of death in order to liberate the people of his age and to unite with divine nature, paradoxically, in the *excentric sphere of the dead*. It is a chthonic divinity of fragmentation that the hero shall meet in the underworld. This liberation, however, shall be the purification of the hero’s people from the myth of an enduring *intellectual intuition*--it is into becoming, rather, that

⁵⁰² Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 211.

⁵⁰³ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 211.

he shall deliver his people, and this, indeed, constitutes the hero's failure—the triumph of his failure. This failure reveals the difference of self-sacrifice for Hölderlin from the sacrifice of which Schelling had spoken: for the sacrifice of Hölderlin's Empedocles, although it strives toward unity with the god, serves, in fact, the function of allowing for an embrace of the tragic itself in the rhythm of life outside the perfection of nature—of joyful affirmation out of mourning.

Hyperion writes to Bellarmin, after the Diotima's death:

And now tell me, where is there still a refuge?—Yesterday I was on top of [E]tna. There the great Sicilian sprang to my mind who, weary of counting the hours, intimate with the soul of the world, in his bold love of life flung himself down into the glorious flames—for the cold poet had to warm himself by the fire, a mocker said later.

O how gladly would I have taken such mockery upon myself! but one must regard oneself more highly than I do to fly so unbidden to the heart of nature, or whatever else you may call it, for truly! as I am now, I have no name for things and all is uncertain to me.⁵⁰⁴

Hyperion, the failed emulator of Empedocles, the absolute tragic hero, *must* fail to match his predecessor, to accomplish the justice of the tragic, he must fall short of the courage for suicide precisely in order to sing his forebear's mourning-song, and to measure the distance in its rhythm and alternations of tones between the flown Greek philosopher, in whose soul the future speaks, and the modern man, whose spirit is excentric in its movement, and uncertain. Hyperion also sings, in verse, accompanied by his lyre, that man falls “from cliff to cliff / downward for years into uncertainty.”⁵⁰⁵ This downgoing, from the shelter of the gods to the immanence of the uncertain is one of mourning, and must arrive in the musical and rhythmic tones of the tragic in order to effect their *Trauerarbeit*, and thus be faithful to life. This song, moreover, is sung before

⁵⁰⁴ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 204.

⁵⁰⁵ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 193.

Diotima's death, takes place as a Tiresian prophecy of the downgoing and mourning that her death will induce. It is a philosophic-poetic singing that brings about the counter-rhythmic interruption in the unfolding of Hyperion's tragedy. For it is poetry, indeed, that achieves the rhythmic separation and absolution of the tragic. This is what Hölderlin calls the tonal "Katastrophe," taken in its etymological sense to mean "down-turning" or "overturning"—the point of the excentric inversion of tones, where the "idealistic catastrophe" resolves itself "into the natural."⁵⁰⁶

The excentric path in *Hyperion* is a path of love, ascending the ladder of Plato's Diotima toward the ideal form of beauty and then falling boundlessly from that transcendent height back into immanence, where the tragic hero is defeated. This view of love, however, is combined with that of Empedocles, as the drawing together of all things that are alike in being one with nature, which necessarily and ceaselessly results in their separation again, which is, nonetheless, the promise of an end in unity to come. Empedocles says that between love and strife, all things "have no constant life [αἰών]; / but insofar as they never cease from constantly interchanging [διαλλάσσουντα] / in this respect they are always an unchanged cycle [κύκλον]."⁵⁰⁷ Like Heraclitus' becoming, which is eternal insofar as it is in constant flux (in Nietzsche's view), the Empedoclean cosmic unification and separation achieves its universality, constancy and absoluteness only insofar as the αἰών (time, life, eternity) is constituted by a constant, tragic conflict between φιλία and νεῖκος—only the dream of a salvation from this constant struggle occasionally interrupts, and changes the course of its movement.

Hyperion ends thus:

⁵⁰⁶ Adler, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 307, 384.

⁵⁰⁷ Inwood, *Empedocles*, 224, 225.

The dissonances of the world are like lovers' strife. In the midst of the quarrel is reconciliation, and all that is separate comes together again.

The arteries part and return in the heart and all is one eternal, glowing life.
So I thought. More soon.⁵⁰⁸

That dream of unity, perhaps, conjured as the end of the excentric path, is always destined to be shattered once again by another death, another irreparable separation. Excentricity defines the very experience of the tragic, both for us and in its original manifestation.

To translate the central tragedy of the Greeks, that is, the betrayal of the gods against men, the event of "divine infidelity," is first of all the task of speaking, in a monstrous language, the essence of *our* tragedy, that is, the creation, the destruction and the mourning of the Greeks, of their tragedy—thereby alone does *Tragödie*, united with *Trauerspiel*, come to produce *joy* and the highest affirmation of the suffering, the sundering of self that is *our* αἰών. In an untimely fashion, it is first of all necessary, in announcing a dawn at the end of our twilit life, to speak the loss of *their* loss. For it is through the mouth of Oedipus that our tragedy articulates itself.

Let us not forget the cryptic prophecy of Hölderlin on the verge of madness, from "In lieblecher Bläue:"

King Oedipus may have an eye too many.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 215.

⁵⁰⁹ Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, 253.

The Ground of Empedocles

Hölderlin claims that Empedocles' fate as a tragic hero was determined by the fact that his "times demanded a *sacrifice* in which the whole human being becomes actual and visible, a sacrifice in which the destiny of his times appears to dissolve and the extremes appear to unite actually and visibly in one [...]"⁵¹⁰ This demand is proper to declining times, which prophesize in their very nature the coming of a newly sunlit world through dissolution, and the embodiment of this destiny by an actual (as opposed to ideal) individual.

The destiny of a nation and its time, for Hölderlin, creates itself by means of a play between two sides of an Empedoclean opposition:

When life is pure, art and nature oppose one another merely harmoniously. Art is the blossom, the perfection of nature; nature first becomes divine when it is allied with art, which differs from it in kind but is in harmony with it, first when each is everything it can be and when each allies itself with the other, supplying what the other lacks, and lacks necessarily if it is to be everything it can be as particular; at that point perfection is achieved and the divine stands at the midpoint between the two.⁵¹¹

Nature and art must enter into a harmonious and dissonant relation of duplicity, wherein the one completes the other and renders it possible, so that the divine can manifest itself. Harmony, that is, must not preserve itself simply but, in the tragic, must *give rise to dissonance*, becoming monstrous to itself by means of *conflict*. Just as Empedocles' world births itself as divinity, between Love and Strife, Hölderlin's tragic divinity springs up at the "midpoint" between nature and art. Tragedy for Hölderlin, that is to say, poetry in its highest form, as a metaphor for intellectual intuition—the purest expression of life—is nothing other than cosmogony itself.

⁵¹⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 147.

⁵¹¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 144.

Nietzsche's duplicity of the Dionysian and Apollonian, too, requires not only a harmonious relation but essentially a *conflictual* and *agonal* one—the perfection of this incessant conflict is tragedy itself. Hölderlin has names for this *natural drive* and *artistic drive*: the *Organischere* and the *Aorgische*. “The more organizational, more artistic human being is nature’s flowering; the more aorgic nature, when it is felt in its purity by human beings who are organized purely in their mode of being, grants them their feeling of perfection. Yet such a life is at hand only in feeling, and is not a matter of cognition.” For this life to become knowable, it must “[separate] itself off from itself in the excess of intensity in which opposites mistake themselves for one another [...].”⁵¹² Thus the organizational passes over into the “extremes of autonomous activity,” into artistic creation and self-reflection, recovering its forgotten “essence” and “consciousness” while nature passes over to the aorgic extreme, “the unbounded, until both sides, advancing in their reciprocal way, as though encountering one another at the commencement, except that nature has become more organized through the shaping and cultivating human being, through the cultural drives and formative forces in general, whereas, by contrast, the human being has become more aorgic, more universal, more infinite.”⁵¹³

Let us notice that the *organizational* is already monstrous—is already *no longer nature*, but nature’s result in man’s rational capacities. In the unification of the organic and the aorgic, “the universalized spiritually vital artistically pure aorgic human being and the magnificent configuration of nature” in an alliance of pure harmony, resembling the initial one, but now rendered “more infinite”⁵¹⁴ through reflection.

⁵¹² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 144.

⁵¹³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 144-145.

⁵¹⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 145.

Here, in this meeting-between, there arrives the *καῖρός* of the tragedy. “At the midpoint lies the death of the individual, namely, the moment when the organizational dispenses with its ego, its particularized existence, which went to the extreme; the aorgic dispenses with its universality, not in ideal mixture, at it was at the commencement, but in its real supreme struggle [...].”⁵¹⁵ The particular (organizational) and the aorgic thus enter into an agonal conflict, wherein the former, confusing itself with the aorgic, strives to become universal and the aorgic strives to become particular—at this point, each appears to revert to its original existence, but in truth the aorgic takes on individuality at the moment when the organizational becomes fully aorgic, so that “in the birth of supreme enmity, supreme reconciliation appears to be actual.” The individuality and universality of this moment, in their radical contradiction, are both a product of “supreme strife.”⁵¹⁶ A “unifying moment” then takes place, upon which the organizational as particular and the aorgic as universal have both made their creative “impressions” which, in their turn, also pass into their opposites as the twilight of the unification. That is to say, this moment must dissolve “like a mirage” as the aorgic becomes particular and the organizational, universal.

And yet, the result of this “death of the moment”⁵¹⁷ is that “the warring extremes from which the moment came to be are more beautifully reconciled and united than they ever were in the life of the moment [...].” For since individuality, whose inner forces are divinity and intensity, has been surpassed along with “the felicitous fraud of unification” the organizational rises, past the “transitory moment” which repels it, to “a more pure universality” while the aorgic “passes over to the moment” and becomes an “object of tranquil observation” for the

⁵¹⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 145.

⁵¹⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 145.

⁵¹⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 145-146.

organizational, such that “the intensity of the past moment now comes to the fore with greater clarity, universality, steadfastness, and capacity for differentiation.”⁵¹⁸

Through this interior dialectic of the organizational and the aorgic, which renders *universal* the individual, “Empedocles is a son of his heavens and of his period, a son of his fatherland and of the massive oppositions of nature and art in which the world appeared to his eyes.”⁵¹⁹ These opposites unite and overcome each other in him, “divesting themselves of their original distinguishing form and thus reversing themselves” in such a way that what is in principle most *subjective* becomes within him more entirely *objective*. Thus “he is more capable of making distinctions, comparing, shaping, organizing and being organized *when he is less at home in himself*; and *to the extent that he is less consciously himself* the ineffable comes to speak in and for him, and for and in him the universal, the less conscious, attains the form of consciousness and particularity [...].”⁵²⁰ Conversely, that which for others is most objective—aorgic—“disorganized”—becomes in Empedocles most subjective: he is “more aorgic and more *disorganizational* when he is more at home in himself” that is, when he attains consciousness “of the fact that in him and for him speaking attains the unspoken or the ineffable, and that in him and for him the more particular and the more conscious aspects assume the form of the unconscious and universal, so that these two opposites become one in him” precisely because of their mutual reversal in his being. Hölderlin remarks: “such a human being can have reached maturity only on the basis of the supreme opposition between nature and art, and as (ideally) the excess of intensity comes to the fore on the basis of intensity, so also does *this real excess of*

⁵¹⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 146.

⁵¹⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 146.

⁵²⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 146.

intensity come to the fore on the basis of enmity and supreme conflict [... .]”⁵²¹ That is to say that on an *ideal* level, the excess of intensity has inner poetical fire or passion as its ground, while on the level of *reality*, the same excess roots itself in *struggle*—*αγών*.

In their innermost being, the aorgic and the organizational are outside themselves within one another in the being of Empedocles, they “interpenetrate” and “touch one another in their uttermost extremes” as the aorgic fills the form of the particular and “thus appears to be reconciled with the hyperorganizational” while the organizational takes on the figure of the universal, “thus appearing to be reconciled with the hyperaorgic and the hypervital [... .]” In this way, the two forces are opposed merely in their outer form, in semblance. Of Empedocles, Hölderlin says: “His destiny exhibits itself in him as in a momentary unification, one that has to dissolve in order to become something more.”⁵²² This, then, follows the plan of Hölderlin’s *Notes* to the Sophoclean tragedies—this is the moment of unification, the arrival of the *caesura*, the moment in which the hero unites with the god in order to separate infinitely into dissolution, which, like *downgoing*, contains the promise “something more”—in effect, of love among mortals.

Because Empedocles “appears to have been born to be a poet,” he has, even in his most radically subjective and active nature, a “tendency to universality”—that inspiration that leads to the “tranquil observation [...] by means of which the poet espies a *totality* [... .]” And, symmetrically, one might say, his passive and “objective nature” allows him to strive, even without inherent organization, toward order, thought, form, and toward “that malleability of the senses and of the innermost heart that is able to absorb all things easily and quickly in their

⁵²¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 146-147.

⁵²² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 147.

totality and in a vital way [...].”⁵²³ The discordant accord within Empedocles was thus destined to become, through “its own free expression,” “the most universal accord” which would “simultaneously be the determination of his nation [...].” Empedocles was created to answer the call of his time—to *be its destiny*. And this time required neither merely “song” nor an “authentic deed,” which are both one-sided, but rather “a *sacrifice*”—the sacrifice of a whole human life, in which it becomes for the first time “actual and visible” and a sacrifice in which “the destiny of his times appears to dissolve and the extremes appear to unite actually and visibly in one [...].” while in reality “the individual goes down in an idealized deed” of necessity since “in him the sensuous unification shows itself to be the proleptic product of calamity and conflict [...].”⁵²⁴

In this unification, *destiny* is dissolved, either in an individual, in which case the “life of a world would be [*impossibly*] expunged in a singularity” or, conversely, this singularity itself “as a proleptic result of destiny” dissolves because of its excessive intensity, actuality, and visibility. In the first case, destiny is dissolved “*formaliter*” while in the second it is dissolved “*materialiter*,” since the original intensity, produced by “good fortune” and become actual in supreme conflict, “cancels itself out” in correspondence with the self-canceling of “the original excess of intensity” and all its “levels forces and implements [...].” In this way, “the force of the intense excess actually evanesces, and a more mature, true, and purely universal intensity remains.”⁵²⁵ Ideally, therefore, the universal does not expire in the waning of the individual but the individual, as a sacrifice that murders destiny precisely because it is a *free act*, in its suicidal

⁵²³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 147.

⁵²⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 147-148.

⁵²⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148.

and divinatory gesture for the new birth of culture, leaves behind it a universal life-force out of which such a culture, absolved of destiny and returned to nature, can grow.

“Thus Empedocles was to become a sacrifice of his time, *the problems of destiny in which he grew up were to be apparently solved*” yet this solution was to be merely “*a temporary solution, as is the case more or less with all tragic personages [...]*”⁵²⁶ For the life and goal of all these figures is precisely to solve the problem of destiny, and yet, in a divine reversal, these attempts “all cancel themselves to the degree that they are not universally valid” which is to say that they revert from one dissolution of destiny—the *material* one, in which the particular kills itself to leave only the purest universal, to the *formal* one, wherein the dying man attempts and fails to absorb a universal world-perspective into his particularity, and ends by dying as a singularity alone. In this way, “the ones who apparently dissolve destiny most completely exhibit themselves most conspicuously in their transitoriness and in the implacable progress of their efforts to be a sacrificial victim.”⁵²⁷ The universal and timeless value of the sacrifice reverses itself and falls back into particularity precisely through the self-manifestation of these heroes as *self-sacrificing individualities*.

Thus, by a paradoxical turn, that gesture which is meant to bring an end to the tragic becomes, through this very act of sacrifice, the individual exemplification of tragedy itself—the absolute incarnation of tragic destiny, insofar as the attempt dooms itself to failure in its accomplishment. It is thus in the very *nature* of the tragic hero to *fail*—for just as an *eternal* intellectual intuition is impossible, an enduring union of god and man, so the coincidence of universality and particularity in a single man are impossible. The universal value of the hero, by

⁵²⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148.

⁵²⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148.

virtue of which he is capable of saving his people, *must* revert to singularity out of the ideality of its identity with the god, thus exposing, rather, the fragmentary nature of the subject and its condemnation to perpetual self-sacrifice in the temporal movement of our tragedy.

The tragic individual is the *explicitation* of the destiny of his time, “constituted by the opposites of art and nature” and created by the complex interpenetration of the organizational and the aorgic in harmony and strife particular to it. “Thus in Empedocles his time individualizes itself; the more it does so, and the more scintillating and actual and visible the riddle that appears to be dissolved in him grows, all the more necessary does his downgoing [*Untergang*] become.”⁵²⁸ It is because the tragic dialectic of his time finds its objectification in the individual figure of the tragic hero Empedocles that his self-sacrifice becomes necessary—that he must descend to the hearth of the Titans beneath Etna to join their excentric world. It is hence for this reason also that his sacrifice constitutes a *liberation* and a *purification* of the Agrigentian people. The philosopher, as the unsurpassable brilliance of the brightest star in the heavens he embodies, must set upon the earth and the time of which he is the absolute manifestation, so that this earth and this time may liberate themselves in a universal dawn, from the highest plane of divinity: $\mu\omicron\iota\rho\alpha$, housed beyond the reach of the gods. At the point of this downgoing, the tragic hero reaches the apex of his loneliness, the absence of his gods, and so must sacrifice himself in the mad hope of reuniting with them.

Empedocles’ individualization of his time takes place in three different respects. Firstly, by a double determination, the Agrigentian people’s “spirit of art [*Kunstgeist*],” in its vigorous vitality, “had to repeat itself in him more aorgically”⁵²⁹ while simultaneously, “the glowing

⁵²⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148.

⁵²⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148.

stretch of sky and the luxuriant Sicilian landscape had to exhibit themselves for him and in him more tellingly and in a way that was more powerfully felt [...].” Empedocles thus found himself “seized by both sides”—the “active force of his essential self” and its “countereffect [...].” In this way, the spirit of art and “his inmost heart” reciprocally “nurtured” one another, each pushing the other toward the extreme.⁵³⁰ The interpenetration and exchange of the proper and the foreign, of intensity and divinity, of art and nature thus rent the heart of the hero apart just as they unified together, pushing his particularity into the sphere of universality.

Secondly, in the political realm, and among the “hyperpolitical” Agrigentians, Empedocles’ “character” also united “two sides”: on the one hand, “a spirit of reform” in his natural yearning toward the *whole*, and on the other hand “anarchical self-reliance in which each citizen pursued a cause unique to him [...].” These two natures of Empedocles, that of a restoration of the unity and equality of the people and that of a radical individualism, thus also “reciprocally enhanced and magnified each other.”⁵³¹

Thirdly: “The boldness of a free spirit sets itself in ever-waxing opposition to the unknown”—thus Empedocles “had to master the unknown [*dem Unbekannten*]”—that is to say, to master *nature*, and, in the process, to “struggle against sheer serviceability [...].”⁵³² In his grand effort to “comprehend the nature that overwhelms us,” Empedocles “felt compelled to struggle toward a sense of identity with nature”—it is for this reason that “his spirit had to assume an aorgic configuration in the highest sense of the word; he had to tear himself away from himself and from his point of equilibrium, always penetrating his object so excessively that

⁵³⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 148-149.

⁵³¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 149.

⁵³² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 149.

he lost himself in it as in an abyss, while, viewed from the opposite side, the entire life of the object had to seize his abandoned inmost heart, which had become more and more infinitely receptive because of the boundless activity of his spirit; with him the object had to become individuality”⁵³³ in such a way that, while he strove to master nature, nature simultaneously had to invade him and, as his “object [, ...] appear in a subjective configuration, just as he had taken on the objective configuration of the object.”⁵³⁴ Empedocles thereafter, because he had changed forms with nature in his duplicitous dialectic with it, “was the universal, the unknown, the object [...], the particular.”

Therefore, the contest (*Widerstreit*) between, on one side, “art, thought, and the human character’s compulsion to order” and, on the other side, the “less conscious nature [*Natur*]” had the appearance of being “united in their uttermost extremes” to such an extent that the very form by which they were distinguishable was “exchanged” by these extremes. “This was the magic [*der Zauber*] with which Empedocles entered on the stage of his world.” The same *nature* by which the free spirits were dominated, “with all her melodies, came to appear in the spirit and the mouth of this man [...] as though his heart were her own [...].” “This is what lent him his special grace, his grandeur, his divinity; every heart was moved by the storm of destiny and every specter that was flitting here and there, restless and without guidance in the enigmatic night of those times, flew to him [...].”⁵³⁵ These worshipful hearts thus clustered around that “extraordinary soul” and the fervor of their love for him increased and sharpened to the degree that they each appropriated his “divinely configured being” into their own particularity. “Thus he

⁵³³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 149.

⁵³⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 149-150.

⁵³⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 150.

lived in supreme independence, in that relation which prescribed to him his own path [...].” This relation “resulted in an encounter with his own freest determination and his very own soul,” this determination itself being “the most intrinsic spirit of the circumstances” as their extremes departed and returned to that spirit. “The destiny of his time, in its initial and ultimate problem, is dissolved in his utterly independent relation to it,” and yet this “apparent solution” afterward would cancel itself and “come to an end.”⁵³⁶ Empedocles, thus, within this independent relation to his nation’s destiny and in his “supreme intensity” had to *live* “with the elements” while the surrounding, free-spirited world opposed itself to them, refusing “to think about or acknowledge in any way that which lives” while, on the other hand, their relation to nature’s “encroachments” was ruled by “sheer serviceability.”⁵³⁷ In the face of this nihilism of the free spirits,⁵³⁸ this denial of primordial, divine and natural life and the valuation of nature according to its use-value alone, Empedocles had to fling himself into the elements, into the heart of nature, indeed, to become it and to let it become him so that, thus attaining a universal value, he would be able to return his people to nature through self-sacrifice—through a voluntary *death as that universality*, and furthermore, paradoxically, as the *particular form* of that universality.

This independent relation encapsulated three capacities in which Empedocles lived: first, as a “human being” with a generally refined sensibility, second, as a poet and philosopher, and third, “as a solitary who cultivates his gardens.” Because Empedocles “stands in an intense

⁵³⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 150.

⁵³⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 150-151.

⁵³⁸ Needless to say, this term is entirely non-equivalent for Hölderlin and for Nietzsche; the “free spirits” (*freie Geister*) of Hölderlin’s Empedocles are those who strive toward progress and reform—the extreme *organizational* types whose relation to nature has been perverted by the separating force of civilization. Nietzsche’s free spirits, on the other hand, are consistently characterizes as the people of the future, the liberated profferers of a new philosophy to come.

relation” not only with the elements but also with *people*, he must not merely join in their struggle to “cultivate” nature and “anarchic life,” but, further, “he had to strive to grasp [the living] in its inmost core with his own essence” and to become “equal to the human element” and to its “soul, to all that is ungraspable and involuntary in it [...].” In this way, his “will,” his “consciousness” and his “spirit, which transcended the usual human boundaries of knowledge and action, had to lose themselves and become objective [...].” The “objective reverberated in him all the more purely and profoundly the more open his inmost heart remained” which itself was open simply because he had “surrendered himself to the particular as well as to the universal.”⁵³⁹

Empedocles thus acted both as a political figure and as a “religious reformer” and, in his “exchanging the positions of object and subject, he solved for himself all that is destined.” In this relation, that which satisfies the incredulous portion of the population, and which therefore creates the situation in which “that which unites must go down” is the “single unifying factor between themselves and this man”—that is, in the “unification of extremes [...].” Yet because these extremes themselves “arise in the conflict between art and nature,” Empedocles must “reconcile nature with art precisely in that respect which is most out of reach for art.”⁵⁴⁰ He accomplished this “with love, and against his own will”⁵⁴¹ since he knew that the greater his expression of intensity was, the more sure the need for his downgoing would become.⁵⁴² The “deception” of his oneness with them” then “comes to an end” in the same moment that “he

⁵³⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 151.

⁵⁴⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 151.

⁵⁴¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 151-152.

⁵⁴² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 152, n.

comes to realize what they are.” As a result: “He pulls back, and they grow cold toward him. His opponent uses this, brings about his banishment.”⁵⁴³ His opponent, whose “natural disposition” is great, is “[b]orn to be a hero” and so, rather than uniting extremes, he is inclined to “rein them in and tie their reciprocal relation” to something firm at their “midpoint” such that only one extreme may act at a time. “His virtue is the intellect, his goddess, Necessity.” This opponent is “destiny itself, with the difference that in him contending forces are firmly tied to a consciousness,” which solidifies the extremes in “a (negative) ideality” and allows them a single direction alone.⁵⁴⁴

In Empedocles, “art and nature unite in an extreme antagonism, the active in excess becomes objective, and the [lost] subjectivity [...] is replaced by the profound encroachment of the object.” In his opponent, on the other hand, art and nature unite “through an excess of objectivity, of being-outside-itself and of reality ([...] in such a dominant fear in the face of the unknown), in a courageous open heart” which substitutes itself for the active, formative force as the subjective becomes merely passive. If, in this unification, the extremes take on the figure of the “organizational,” then the “subjectively active” is forced to become “the organizing factor, the element”—it is thus that, even for Empedocles’ opponent, “the subjective and objective have to exchange their configurations and become united in one.”⁵⁴⁵ The necessity of the tragic dialectic of which Empedocles is the absolute manifestation must, insofar as it creates itself from the initially harmonious and then dissonant and conflictual opposition of art and nature, always

⁵⁴³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 152.

⁵⁴⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 152.

⁵⁴⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 152.

produce itself when destiny is the rule of the day, and end in one of various unifications of object and subject which are at once their *separation*.

Hölderlin's Injunction

On the dawn of the Austro-Prussian war, on May 7, 1866, Nietzsche wrote to Wilhelm Pinder from Leipzig of his hopes for the victory of the German Fatherland (*Vaterlande*). He speaks of the immense “mental” and “physical” performance (*Leistungen*) that will be required of the military forces. He writes, then: “But let each give his best. For loving, as Hölderlin says, the mortal gives of his best [*denn liebend giebt der Sterbliche vom Besten*].”⁵⁴⁶ Hölderlin is thus invoked as a voice calling the nation of Germany to its future unification—this love is the love of a Fatherland that is still to come. The poet’s eternal exigency to every man, that he might incarnate the genius of a properly German world in the same spirit as that of the Greeks. The *love* in question is a national love, which, by its power, demands that every creature under the German sun fulfill his role as citizen of a harmonious culture worthy of his people. Though Prussia would defeat Germany in this war, Nietzsche’s prophetic desire would find its accomplishment in the victory of the Franco-Prussian war that would unify Germany as a nation-state for the first time. Yet the great hope would be answered by great danger, as a fascistic nationalism triumphed over the ideal of a harmoniously unified culture. Hölderlin, in a letter to his brother of 1793, wrote: “I love the race of men who are coming in the next centuries.”⁵⁴⁷ It is this love, then, that Nietzsche invokes in his letter to Pinder.

⁵⁴⁶ Nietzsche (BVN-1866, 510.)

⁵⁴⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart, 1954), 6: 92 (letter of September 1793, to his brother).

Three years later, on September 3, 1869, the first year of his professorship at Basel, Nietzsche wrote the same line to Rohde, who was in Florence at the time. The letter begins with a romantic complaint about the veiling, insufficient nature of epistolary communication: “It is a terrible problem with letters: one wants to give one’s best, and in the end one gives only the very ephemeral, the chord and not the eternal melody. Whenever I write letters to you I am befallen by the line of Hölderlin’s (my favorite from high school): for loving, the mortal gives of his best.” He then effusively apologizes for his shadowy past letters and promises the fullness and force of his current letter to attain the highest perfection possible to it: “And know that Zeus and autumnal pure heaven so strongly move me just at this time in positivity, so many a lush hour with rich insight and real illustration enfold me—but whenever such times and swelling sentiments come, I’ll take a whole letter, rich in good thoughts and wishes for you [...] in the hope that the electric wire between our souls (or, according to Reichenbach, the odic force) will transmit this shorthand to you.” This love, then, is of a different sort; it is intimate and literary in the highest degree. The love of which Nietzsche speaks through Hölderlin’s voice and with great devotion expressed toward the poet himself, is a love between the closest of friends, twin souls, which double one another, connected by Zeus’s lightning, an electric current, deathless and eternally unbroken. *Odic force* was a concept developed by Karl von Reichenbach in 1845 to designate a universal vital force which animated beings and connected *like to like*.

Nietzsche must thus, after Hölderlin’s injunction, *give of his best*—try ever harder to translate the inexpressible force of this friendship, and of the solitary experiences that kindle its sentiment in him, into the untruthful medium of language, in its most amorous and indirect form: the letter. A love between mortals, a love between geniuses, a love between philologists; and the

letter as the very material of the bridge that binds them together. The form that must fulfill this task can never be philosophy; it must be literature, speech in its purest transmission, and not any literature but the *letter*; those words that overcome every distance, that defy the far reaches of geography to connect souls destined to communicate, that they may inhabit one another. It is in this same letter that Nietzsche pines for Italy, saying: “I too have my Italy, like you, except that I can only ever go on Saturdays and Sundays. Recently, I have been there four times, in swift succession, and a letter almost every week flies along the same path. Dearest friend, what I learn and see, hear and understand is indescribable. Schopenhauer and Goethe, Aeschylus and Pindar are still alive—only believe.”⁵⁴⁸ The mortal, he thus proclaims, is the fertile dwelling-place in which the immortality of past geniuses arises and comes to rest. By writing the vitality of these geniuses, Nietzsche in fact brings them to life, within himself, as for Rohde. It is no longer the gods who are immortal, who give birth to mortals, but the geniuses of a past Germany, of an ancient Greece, who are immortal—only brought into being through the obscure channels of an untimely mortality.

The quotation appears again in *Human, All too Human* (1878), when Nietzsche writes of the “*male culture*” of the Greeks. As an explanation of the “erotic relationship of men to youths” and its necessity to education, he writes: “the whole idealism of strength of the Greek character was thrown into that relationship, and the treatment of young people has probably never been so aware, loving, so thoroughly geared toward excellence (*virtus*), as it was in the sixth and fifth centuries—in accordance with Hölderlin’s beautiful line, ‘*denn liebend giebt der Sterbliche vom Besten*’ (for loving the mortal gives of his best).” The “love” present between Greek men and

⁵⁴⁸ Nietzsche (BVN-1869, 28).

their youths was not only romantic, not only carnal, but *spiritual*—a love inaccessible to women, with whom “there was no spiritual intercourse”—no “real romance.” For this reason, women were excluded from “all kinds of competitions and spectacles,” so that “the sole higher entertainment remaining to her was religious worship.” In “art,” the tragic heroines Elektra and Antigone were merely “*tolerated*,” though abhorred in “life.” The only task of women in Greek culture, then, was “to produce beautiful, powerful bodies”—to assure the continual survival, voracity and youthfulness of that “highly developed culture [...].” For in Greek mothers, the Greek genius returned again and again to nature.”⁵⁴⁹ The invocation of Hölderlin’s words here speaks of a *cosmic*, multilayered love, binding the whole of Greek culture into a superior perfection. For this is the very principle of education; that it create genius by pushing mortals to the very limit of their amorous capacities. In the *organon* of the Greeks, men spontaneously give forth what they can, simply because they love—their love thus rises to approach that mysterious, unknown love of the gods, and they are thus creative of a coming world.

The Hölderlin line, which Nietzsche never cites, but rather, seems to call forth from memory, comes from the first draft of *Der Tod des Empedokles*. It is the fourth scene of the second act, in which Empedocles, refusing an invitation from Critias from Etna back into the city, delivers an oration to the Agrigentian people to announce his decision of suicide and calls to them to found a new Fatherland, a republic uniting it with nature. It is not Hölderlin himself who speaks, but his Empedocles, one of his doubles, and Nietzsche’s failed reformer. Empedocles begins his speech by making a distinction between animal life and human life: animals, which he calls the “children of the earth / Will always shrink away from all that’s new and strange” and

⁵⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), § 259, 157.

thus desire to “stay at home” in eternal peace and “care only for / Survival” so that in death, each of them shall “Return to its own element, that it may find / Rejuvenation [... .]” On the other hand, “On human life the grand desire is / Bestowed that it rejuvenate itself.” Men of the greatest courage *choose their own deaths*: “And from the purifying death that they / Themselves will choose, upon a time propitious, / Will rise, Achilles from the Styx, the nations.” An imperative follows, to overcome nature: “Oh, give yourselves to nature, before she takes you!— / For you have thirsted long for things unfamiliar, and / As though imprisoned in a sickly body the spirit / of Agrigent is yearning to slough off the old ways. / So, dare it!” The main distinguishing factor between men and animals (as well as naïve children) is thus that men seek the unknown, while animals remain isolated in the cycle of nature; men are a dissonance in the great harmonious necessity of nature. It is thus necessary for men to chase after the novel and the monstrous, and they must “Forget” old customs, laws, the “names of all the ancient gods” and do this “courageously”—they must be incessantly active, while innocent animals are passive. It is the highest distinction of man from beast that he possesses the self-consciousness and power to go *willingly* to death. In this way: “like newborn babes / Your eyes will open to the godliness of nature, / And then your spirit will flame from / The light of heaven, sweet breath of life / Will then suffuse your breast anew [... .]”⁵⁵⁰ Empedocles demands therefore a *new birth*, a resurgence of nature and the gods in man from which will flower a *new* system of laws:

and you
 will dwell within your own grand world,
 shake hands with one another, give the word and share the good.
 Oh then dear friends—partake of deeds and fame,
 Like faithful Dioscuri; each will be the equal of
 The others—like slender statues in repose your

⁵⁵⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 90. First version, lines 1487-1513.

New life will come to rest on well-conceived
Arrangements, letting law tie confederate bonds.
You tutelary spirits of our all-transforming nature! [...]
You will invite from all the far-flung corners of the world
The liberated peoples to the celebrated festival,
Hospitable! pious! for mortals then will donate lovingly
Their very best; no form of servitude
Will cramp and crush the breast—⁵⁵¹

It is the *return to nature*, to the primordial, that requires this sacrifice of our best in love. This is the call of the tragic hero to his people, a cry into the mortal abyss abandoned by the godhead, that his people may unify again in everlasting love. For after the god has disappeared, it is only by means of a *giving forth of our best* that he may be called back, that the cosmic phenomenon of strife may be transformed into that of *love* and thus that a new culture may be founded, a deliverance from dissonance back into harmony. And yet the excentric path of the philosopher-poet who sings his own downgoing has already been determined, and it is the very futility of this un-accomplishable goal, the doom to failure of this mirage of a final promise of redemption that is the secret sense of this injunction, its tragic potency. For the voice of the god who calls Empedocles to death is a silent one and tragic destiny has already gripped the hero. It shall, rather, be his task to disappear from the mortal sphere into the *excentric sphere of the dead*. And yet this double withdrawal of Empedocles and his voiceless god is the very purification of the Agrigentian people from the myth of the circular path; it is, in fact, the precipitation of this lost people into what Nietzsche calls the *torrent of becoming*.

⁵⁵¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 91. First version, lines 1523-1531, 1536-1539.

The Time of Tragedy

The tragic temporal movement, which falls outside the reach of divinity as it withdraws, constitutes, for both Hölderlin and Nietzsche, a purificatory rhythmic. While for Hölderlin, this rhythm results in the necessity of a poetology of tragedy, for Nietzsche, it comes about as a philosophical and physiological poetics of *life*, a life that for the ancients was anthropomorphically transposed onto the cosmos as a physics and metaphysics of breath, and which for us moderns arises in a manner entirely foreign to the Greek sensibility and profoundly rooted in the body. Nietzsche's early thoughts on epistemology take *sensation* as the ground of knowledge and of art, out of which rhythm arises as the measure of a chimerical time and space. Human beings, for Nietzsche, are endowed with an infinite *plasticity* of forces, whose externalization forms the illusory concepts by which they live. It is the transformation of these forces and their harnessing toward the creation of a culture to come that constitutes the movement of history. The task of the tragic hero, in a world tragically condemned to absolute becoming, is to become what Hölderlin had called a "pearl of time"—an instant of eternity beyond the tragic movement of life with no inherent teleology, and, from that height, to go down, to sacrifice himself so as to bring about the embrace of this temporality as the essential phenomenon of our time. It is in this sense that the tragic hero must be the *last man*; his self-sacrifice must also be the self-sacrifice of metaphysics. His downgoing must announce the downgoing of man defined as a creature subordinated to the divine sphere.

Loneliness of the Tragic Hero

It is profound solitude, depthless loneliness, for both Hölderlin and Nietzsche, that characterizes the tragic hero, that determines his fate as such. This loneliness is a result of a double event: on the one hand, his monstrous consciousness, both of the tragedy of his people and of his own tragedy and, on the other, the loss of *love*—of the Empedoclean originary sphere of harmony between godly men in an eternal oneness.

In the second draft of Hölderlin's *Tod des Empedokles*, the hero, in a soliloquy spoken alone on the slopes of Etna, cries out, enunciating the depth of his tragedy, and mourning the loss of the unity of divine nature from which he issued, thus performing his own prophecy:

Woe! lonely! lonely! lonely!
And never will I find
You, my gods,
and never more will I return
To your life, nature!⁵⁵²

Weh! einsam! einsam! einsam!
Und nimmer find ich
Euch, meine Götter,
Und nimmer kehr ich
Zu deinem Leben, Natur!

The tragic for Empedocles, the source of his profound loneliness, of his lack of unity with even another human creature, is the loss of his gods, who depart in their greatest moment of intimacy with man, banishing the possibility of divine love: “For love expires as soon as gods have flown”⁵⁵³—it is for this reason, in the absence of this supreme love between mortals, that that they must *give of their best*, in order to transfigure nature back into the whole—to redirect the mortal, excentric path back to a circular one. In this same speech, Empedocles inquires—not to the earless, far-off gods but to himself, or to his shadow:

[...] why now is all

[...] wie ists denn nun?

⁵⁵² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 124. Second draft, lines 339-343.

⁵⁵³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 51. First draft, line 423.

in mourning? am I alone?
And is it night outside, the daylight
notwithstanding?
An eye that saw more lofty things than
mortal eye
Is now struck blind, I grope about me—
Where are you, O my gods?
Woe!⁵⁵⁴

Vertrauert? bin ich ganz allein?
Und ist es Nacht hier außen auch am
Tage?
Der höhers, denn ein sterblich Auge, sah
Der Blindgeschlagene tastet nun umher—
Wo seid ihr, meine Götter?
Weh!

This song of Empedocles, the last man endowed with divinity, is one of mourning; a mourning of eternal, binding love. In the madness of self-reflection, where language is no longer a bridge to the divine, beyond the mortal word, these questions cast themselves into the abyss of solitude. Empedocles speaks, thus, but to whom? It is in this mourning, in the cry of “Woe” that, at one and the same moment, the disappearance of the god and the affirmation of life in spite of, and because of this disappearance, take place. It is the nearly-silent, the *pure* word, the caesura that splits the hero in two, into divinity and mortality, awakening in him the need to *go down* for the salvation of his people, and at once, the impossibility of such a salvation. Hence in the word “Woe,” the dream of a world outside time vanishes, and the hero announces the coming failure of his own self-sacrifice. Like the blind Oedipus, Empedocles gropes for the light of his gods, of his nature, but finds himself condemned to an endless night, a world veiled in mourning. Such unending Woe! is the outcry of the one who must *go under* to revive the day, to free all mortals from their curse, the silence of their gods, their wayward path. And so the idea of Oedipus as philosopher, not merely as the central figure of philosophy but its tragic speaker, takes form.

In Nietzsche’s “Fragment / from the History of Posterity” called “Oedipus / Soliloquies / of the Last Philosopher,” the hero cries his “soliloquy”:

⁵⁵⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 123. Second draft, lines 301-306.

I call myself the last philosopher because I am the last human being. I myself am the only one who speaks with me, and my voice comes to me as the voice of someone who is dying. Let me communicate with you for just one hour, beloved voice, with you, the last trace of memory of all human happiness; with your help I will deceive myself about my loneliness and lie my way into community and love; for my heart refuses to believe that love is dead; it cannot bear the shudder of the loneliest loneliness [*einsamsten Einsamkeit*] and it forces me to speak as if I were two persons.

Do I still hear you, my voice? You whisper when you curse? And yet your curse should cause the bowels of this world to burst! But it continues to live and merely stares at me all the more brilliantly and coldly with its pitiless stars [*Sternen*]; it continues to live, dumb and blind as ever, and the only thing that dies is—the human being. —And yet! I still hear you, beloved voice! Someone other than I, the last human being, is dying in this universe: the last sigh, *your* sigh, dies with me, the drawn out Woe! Woe! [*das hingezogene Wehe! Wehe!*] sighing around me, Oedipus, the last of the woeful human beings [*der Wehemenschen letzten, Oedipus*].

KSA 7: 19 [131]⁵⁵⁵

Oedipus, in Nietzsche's rewriting of him, stands as a double or a mask of the writer himself, the tragic hero speaking through the philosopher to come, the hero of the Greeks speaking German, in the philosopher's voice, is considered as the absolute *mortal*—the last to preserve the tragic flame of man's essence, to die—the last mortal, and because of this, as the last philosopher. His death, in essence, is self-sacrifice. Nietzsche writes of Oedipus: "The world is an enigma. Sophocles is not the poet of perfect harmony between the divine and the human; unconditional submission and resignation, that is his doctrine."⁵⁵⁶ Thus Oedipus, whose knowledge is monstrous precisely because it is his fate to untie the enigmatic knot of the human as such and therefrom, blindly, to proceed to what Lacoue-Labarthe calls the "madness of self-consciousness"⁵⁵⁷ and the profound knowledge of his crime against nature accomplished, nonetheless, in accordance with *Moípa*, must *freely* submit himself, in terrible lucidity, to his

⁵⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 43-44.

⁵⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *L'Œdipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 58.

⁵⁵⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 234.

own punishment—his own sacrifice. This sacrifice must bring also about the death—the downgoing—of the human, the mortal as such. To invoke Oedipus again, in an untimely fashion, as a hero both ancient and modern, is to recreate him, precisely, as the tragic hero who must bring death to the metaphysical human beings, steeped in nihilism, of Nietzsche’s time. He stands above the abyss that separates life from death, and, like Hölderlin’s Empedocles, announces his descent. Yet he announces it to no one but himself, his double born of loneliness—the ghost of a love, a voice outside of voice.

Indeed, it is onto the motion of mortal becoming that Nietzsche transfers the paradigm of the tragic hero. His tragedy is, like that of Hölderlin’s hero, the loss of love, of community. Yet he calls out not to the absent god but to himself, the only possible receiver of his love in the absence of a binding force drawing men together. This loneliness, then, is different from that of Hölderlin’s Empedocles; Oedipus suffers the loneliness of self-knowledge without another to share in it, to impart it to. Nietzsche writes in a fragment: “*Oedipus* the ‘suffering human being’ solves the riddle of the *human being*.” (KSA 7: 26 [2])⁵⁵⁸ Suffering is, indeed, for Nietzsche, the ground of mortality in tragedy. This Oedipus contains within himself the secret of man, yet because he has become monstrous by that knowledge, he must divide himself and become his own interlocutor; in this loneliness, he has no one to whom to whisper his knowledge but his own voice. And this voice of the tragic hero, his other self born out of self, is indeed the most dangerous of his selves, whose tragedy is just that his curse does not “cause the bowels of this world to burst” but languishes as the *last human being*. That violent, dying voice, and not a god, is the withdrawing force that Nietzsche’s Oedipus calls to. And its loss is not, indeed, an

⁵⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 144.

occasion for *mourning* but, in the surpassing of the human that it brings, it must evoke the most supremely powerful admixture of joy and suffering; of affirmation out of pain, and from there, of boundless transformation. The secret of the human being, indeed, is just that he is dying, that he must be surpassed—self-consciousness, when it is too extreme, turns against itself and must, in the absence of a legislating voice, undergo the greatest sacrifice. Is it merely by chance that the tragic hero should speak the pure word, “Woe” at the very moment when he is *outside himself*?

Nietzsche writes of ἔκστασις not only as the καίρὸς of tragedy, but also as the precondition of art in general. In a fragment of 1869, he writes: “Every art [*Alle Kunst*] demands a ‘being outside of oneself’ [*außer-sich-sein*], an ἔκστασις; the step to drama occurs from here, since here [in drama] we do not return to ourselves but, in our ἔκστασις, remain lodged in a foreign being” (KSA 7: 2 [25]).⁵⁵⁹ If we take into consideration Nietzsche’s contemporaneous metaphysics of art, and his thinking of the aesthetic as indissolubly a definition of life and of art, indeed of art as the only means by which life is made *manifest*, ἔκστασις, the primordial split of self in the ocean of becoming, is that by which the human being becomes what he is. This shattering of the illusory principle of individuation is the very manifestation, the very event of the tragic. It is the disruption of harmony by dissonance, of love by strife; thus it takes place as the unveiling of the ἀγών that traverses the tragic hero. In the double prophetic word of Oedipus, *Woe*, which travels between himself and his voice, the Hölderlinian *caesura* comes to disrupt the ideal rhythm of life, to open the depth of its temporality. Again, Nietzsche writes, in *The Greek Music Drama* (1870):

⁵⁵⁹ Trans. and cited in Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 415.

For drama [...] begins when a human being steps outside himself and believes himself to be transformed and enchanted. In this condition of “being-outside-of-oneself” [*Außer-sich-seins*], or ecstasy [*Ecstase*], only one further step is necessary: we do not return back into ourselves, but turn into another being, so that we ourselves behave like enchanted beings. This is the fundamental reason for our deep astonishment at the sight of the drama: the ground shakes, the belief in the indissolubility of and permanence of the individual.⁵⁶⁰

The rhythmic rupture in the drama for Nietzsche takes place on a biological level; it is the exit of life from its body, its entrance into another, *enchanted* form. It is thus at one and the same time a shattering of individuality and of subjectivity to the point that their sense languishes in finitude and a joyful affirmation in the face of this suffering, born out of it, which constitutes itself as a unification of beings-outside-of-themselves. The shattering of sense, conceived, after Schopenhauer, as the *principium individuationis*, against that which exceeds it beyond measure, the non-sense, the supra-sense of ἔκστασις, is the very cathartic experience of *Tragödie* for Nietzsche. In his lectures on Sophocles of 1870, Nietzsche sketches the Apollinian-Dionysian duplicity (*Duplicität*) as follows: In the Apollinian state, “the individual accedes to an exalted disposition: an *andante* full of a sacerdotal majesty.”⁵⁶¹ In the Dionysian revel, on the other hand, “the mass accedes to an ecstatic excitation: the instinctive externalizes itself in an immediate way. Unbounded violence of the *springtime instinct*; forgetting of individuality; allied with the ascetic exteriorization of self in pain and terror. Nature in its supreme force thus reunites the separated beings and makes them feel as *one*: so that the principle of individuation appears, so to speak, as a persistent state of weakness of nature.”⁵⁶² With the “forgetting of self”⁵⁶³ that tragedy

⁵⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Greek Music Drama*, trans. Paul Bishop (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2013), 15, 16.

⁵⁶¹ Nietzsche, *L'Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 34.

⁵⁶² Nietzsche, *L'Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 34-35.

⁵⁶³ Nietzsche, *L'Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 35.

entailed, a more primordial level of memory was unleashed, bringing with it a transformation of individuals into the recreation of a new oneness, a new *nature*, which the division of beings, pushing them outside themselves, gave rise to. The opening of these more profound and originary chasms of rhythm shaped thus the tragic rhythm of the drama through this confluence of shattering and unification—this simultaneity which took place throughout and in spite of the time of tragedy. Nietzsche also writes:

The drama ran without spectators because all participated in it. The principle of individuation was broken, the god, ὁ λύσιος ('the liberator'). had delivered all the beings from themselves, each one was metamorphosed. The affects are converted into the state of ecstasy, the pains arouse pleasure, the terrors arouse joy. The song and communicative gestures of these fiercely excited masses was completely new and unheard-of in the Homeric Greek world, it was an asiatic and oriental thing that the Greeks, with their prodigious rhythmic and plastic force, in a word with their sense of beauty, *had mastered* to the point of pulling tragedy from it [...].⁵⁶⁴

ἔκστασις is thus profoundly, rhythmically linked to *plastic* force, here even called rhythmic. The experience of being outside of oneself as the universal binding force of tragedy was *possible* only because of the height of the Greek power of homeotic transformation and appropriation.

For Nietzsche, Sophocles is a threshold figure, standing midway between ancient tragedy and its modernization—between Aeschylus and Euripides. He writes: “Sophocles is the figure of transition; thought still moves along the path of instinct [...].”⁵⁶⁵ It is because of his role as a boundary figure, and because in him the primordial, organic instinct of self-creation remains even as the organization of the new tragedy, the separation of chorus and drama begins to take place—at the daybreak, thus, of tragedy’s self-consciousness—that Sophocles is a figure of the tragic. Nietzsche writes:

⁵⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *L'Édipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 35.

⁵⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *L'Édipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 76.

The worldview is tragic only in Sophocles. The *undeserved character* [*Unverdientheit*] of destiny seemed to him tragic: the enigmatic nature of human life, truly terrifying, was his tragic muse. The *κάθαρσις* comes on the scene as a necessary feeling of consonance in a world of dissonances [*als nothwendiges Consonanzgefühl in der Welt der Dissonanzen*]. *Suffering*, the origin of tragedy, [*Das Leid, der Ursprung der Tragödie*] achieves with Sophocles its transfiguration: it is grasped as something that makes one holy [*Heiligendes*]. [...] The distance between the human and the divine is beyond measure: the most profound obeisance and resignation are called for. [...] Heroic humanity is the noblest humanity, devoid of virtue; its destiny demonstrates the infinite chasm [*die unendliche Kluft*] [vis-à-vis the divine]. There is scarcely *guilt*; only a lack of knowledge concerning the worth of human life.⁵⁶⁶

In the word of the tragic hero thus correspond this consonance and this dissonance, in a simultaneity akin to that between the Apollinian and the Dionysian—individuation and its rupture. Thus just as in Hölderlin’s intellectual intuition, where the unification is purified through separation, a consonance occurs, for Nietzsche, as the purification of the tragic discontinuity between the hero and his nation. The word, then—is precisely *caesura*.⁵⁶⁷ Excentricity spells the necessary *failure* of the tragic hero, of the philosopher-poet who sacrifices himself for the creation of a new culture. Rather, he eternally delivers the others into the flood of becoming from which it was his destiny to escape and to save his nation.

Nietzsche attacks the “modern” and “esthetico-moral” interpretation of tragedy that would claim *κάθαρσις* to be “the triumph of the just, moderate man, deprived of passion [...]”

⁵⁶⁶ Nietzsche (KGA II/3:40). Cited in Krell, *The Tragic Absolute*, 414. Trans. modified.

⁵⁶⁷ Franz Rosenweig writes of the necessary *silence* of the philosopher, because of the *ἄγών* which is his profound sense: “The tragic hero has only one language that is completely proper to him: silence. It has been so from the very beginning. The tragic devised itself the artistic art form of the drama precisely so as to be able to present silence ... In his silence the hero burns the bridges connecting him to god and the world, elevates himself above the realm of personality, which in speech, defines itself against others and individualizes itself, and so enters into the icy loneliness of the self. The self knows nothing other than itself; its loneliness is absolute. How else can it activate this loneliness, this rigid and defiant self-sufficiency, except in silence” (Franz Rosenweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1921, 98-99) Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 108). Benjamin asserts, moreover, that Nietzsche understood this, as evinced by *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he writes that tragic “heroes speak, as it were more superficially than they act; the myth does not at all obtain wisdom than the poet himself can put into words and concepts” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 17, 105). This then, I am suggesting, is the Heraclitean silence of the *caesura*—the *ἄγών* silently pronounced in the word “woe.”

Tragedy, claims Nietzsche here, was born “precisely there where the tragic instinct manifests itself in a creative way, while nature is so sure in her instinctive reign [...]”⁵⁶⁸ Thus *κάθαρσις*, for Nietzsche, takes place *rhythmically*, in accordance with the life-breath of the world brought into its highest possible idealization.

Schopenhauer had interpreted tragedy as the process by which the will objectifies itself into external visibility, and thus as the playing-out of its own intrinsic tragic nature. “It is the antagonism of the will with itself which is here [in tragedy] most completely unfolded at the highest grade of its objectivity, and which comes into fearful prominence. [...] It is one and the same will, living and appearing in [...] all [individuals], whose phenomena fight with one another and tear one another to pieces.”⁵⁶⁹ Hence tragedy is merely the phenomenology of the will’s objectification and the *ἀγών* of its manifestations with one another. Because Schopenhauer determined the will as the thing-in-itself, he called the “self-knowledge [of the will] the sole event in-itself” and, in turn, defined the tragic process as precisely this attainment of self-knowledge.⁵⁷⁰ It is through the tragic process of the will’s objectification that it ascends from the empty state of being “only a blind, irresistible urge” to the point at which it “obtains knowledge of its own willing and what it wills through the addition of the world of representation, developed for its service.”⁵⁷¹ For Schopenhauer, thus, as for Hölderlin and later Nietzsche, it is through monstrous reflective consciousness and self-knowledge that tragedy comes to necessitate a sacrifice. In the case of the Schopenhauerean will, the “tragic [...] receives its characteristic

⁵⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *L’Œdipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 29.

⁵⁶⁹ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne 1: 253. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 28.

⁵⁷⁰ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 184. Szondi, *The Tragic*, 29.

⁵⁷¹ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 275. Szondi, *The Tragic*, 29.

tendency toward the sublime from the dawning that the world of knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them.” In the perspective of this pessimism, the “tragic spirit,” having brought about the attainment of this extreme knowledge, “leads to resignation.”⁵⁷² Szondi writes that for Schopenhauer, the “sole goal of art is the communication of this [the will’s] knowledge.”⁵⁷³ The process of objectification and self-knowledge thus culminates in man and art.⁵⁷⁴ The tragic hence becomes “the self-destruction and self-negation of the will” as the movement of a tragedy unfolds as “the battle of the will against itself” in the form of its various representations. In tragedy, moreover, art becomes “a clear mirror of the world” precisely because there, knowledge, which “proceeds originally from the will itself,” and is therefore subordinated to it, finds the power to “withdraw itself” from “this servitude” and become “freed from all the aims of the will”⁵⁷⁵ thus revolting against its sphere of origin and pushing the will to self-destruction in resignation. The task of tragedy, then, for Schopenhauer, is to reveal to its spectators the will’s tragic nature—to lift them into the greatest proportions of the will’s self-knowledge and to lead them, too, into resignation. Simultaneously, in the darkness of this very resignation, “the will, whose manifestation is man, sublates itself in a dual dialectic.”⁵⁷⁶

Nietzsche, in turn, wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the monstrous knowledge of the tragic hero. In reference to Oedipus he claims that the message delivered in that drama is that of the necessary downgoing of he who exceeds the limits of human measure, this being a peculiarly

⁵⁷² Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 433-434.

⁵⁷³ Cf. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 184-185.

⁵⁷⁴ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 29.

⁵⁷⁵ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, 152. Cited in Szondi, *The Tragic*, 29.

⁵⁷⁶ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 30.

Apollinian value: “the myth seems to whisper to us that wisdom, and particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination; that he who by means of his knowledge plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person. ‘The edge of wisdom turns against the wise: wisdom is a crime against nature.’”⁵⁷⁷ Nietzsche goes on to form the hypothesis that every tragic hero in Greek tragedy until the time of Euripides was a manifestation of Dionysus; he asserts that “all the celebrated heroes of the Greek stage—Prometheus, Oedipus, etc.—are mere masks of this original hero, Dionysus.”⁵⁷⁸ Hence, Szondi postulates a parallel between Nietzsche’s Dionysus and Schopenhauer’s will as the universal ground of all life that takes on the form in its manifestation of different tragic heroes as, for Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer’s metaphysical concepts [...] become aesthetic concepts.”⁵⁷⁹ Thus, just as the Schopenhauerean will in tragedy is driven to self-destruction through excessive knowledge, for Nietzsche, “Dionysus’s mythical fate of being torn to pieces is celebrated anew in every tragedy.” Szondi writes that this fate is understood by Nietzsche as “the symbol of individuation: in the tragic hero one can see ‘the god experiencing in himself the agonies of individuation.’”⁵⁸⁰

Szondi further draws together the Nietzschean Apollinian and the Schopenhauerean concept of representation, which are both positioned in opposition to “an original oneness”—yet the difference between their conceptions arises in the comparison, for while Schopenhauer’s will undergoes an auto-sublation into resignation, Nietzsche’s “Dionysus emerges from his

⁵⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 9, 69.

⁵⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 10, 73.

⁵⁷⁹ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 41.

⁵⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 10, 73. Szondi, *The Tragic*, 42.

dismemberment in the process of individuation as one who is powerful and indestructible, which is precisely the ‘metaphysical consolation’ that tragedy offers.” Thus, Szondi concludes that “Nietzsche confronts Schopenhauer’s negative dialectic with a positive dialectic [...].”⁵⁸¹ According to Szondi, while in Schopenhauer’s “dialectic” the “will negates itself in its objectification as appearance,” Nietzsche’s “dialectic” consists of the self-affirmation of the Dionysian through the very negation of the Apollinian pleasure of appearance, so that it plunges itself into “a still greater pleasure in the destruction of the visible world of mere appearance.”⁵⁸² Hence, rather than acting as a mirror of the world of individuation, art, for Nietzsche, unveils individuation as “the prime cause of evil”—“the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken—the augury of a restored oneness.”⁵⁸³

The essence of tragedy, then, is the dismemberment of individuals through a loss, a *forgetting* of self that allows men to participate in the being of the god Dionysus and through this very violence and fragmentation to find a unification in *joy*—an affirmation of life as this capacity for transfiguration within the temporal movement of the drama and its music. The primordial unity the conjuring of which is the task of tragedy is therefore not a prehistorical state of perfection but, rather, arising from the dissonant flood of becoming, it is an instant in which consonance is born, precisely, through a community of discontinuous selves, of selves pushed outside of themselves by the exaltation of Dionysus. It is at once a sacrifice and a forgetting of individuality which serves a purificatory function for the whole of the chorus and the spectators insofar as it attains a state of timelessness and therefrom, with the god, is voluntarily torn to

⁵⁸¹ Szondi, *The Tragic*, 42.

⁵⁸² Szondi, *The Tragic*, 43.

⁵⁸³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 10, 74. Cf. Szondi, *The Tragic*, 43.

shreds. The *primordial* is thus not an absolute; it is an aesthetic reserve of force that changes constantly, with every breath—of the force that makes both art and science—both illusion and knowledge—possible.

In order to describe the process by which the Dionysian appears to the chorus and the audience in an ecstatic state, Nietzsche borrows the idea of the *Urphänomen*—the primordial phenomenon—from Goethe. In Eckermann’s *Conversations of Goethe*, the “naïve” poet-philosopher speaks of this pantheistic proto-phenomenon as follows: “The Understanding will not reach her [Nature]; man must be capable of elevating himself to the highest Reason, to come into contact with the Divinity, which manifests itself in primitive phenomena (*Urphänomenen*), which dwells behind them, and from which they proceed.”⁵⁸⁴ This view of the *Urphänomen* places it on a Kantian plan of consciousness, understanding Reason, the highest of the faculties, as the means by which this phenomenon must be grasped.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche distinguishes between the tragic, Dionysian “truth of nature” and the “lie of culture,” as a “contrast” comparable to that “between the eternal core of things, the thing-in-itself, and the whole world of appearances [*Erscheinungen*].”⁵⁸⁵ This leads to a discussion of the “artistic proto-phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]” wherein the poet “sees himself surrounded by figures who live and act before him and whose inmost nature he can see.”⁵⁸⁶ Nietzsche speaks of the chorus as the “primal ground of tragedy [*Ur-grund der Tragödie*]” which represents (*darstellt*) the “shattering of the individual [*Zerbrechen des Individuums*] and his fusion with primal being [*Ursein*]” such that the drama is the “Dionysian embodiment of

⁵⁸⁴ Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, 293-294.

⁵⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 8, 61.

⁵⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 8, 63.

Dionysian insights and effects [...].” The Dionysian is here defined as the “expression of *nature*” wherein the chorus “[*shares*] in [*Dionysus’s*] *suffering*” and thereby also “shares something of his *wisdom* and proclaims the truth from the heart of the world.”⁵⁸⁷ This ground of reality, suffering, is thus brought about through the illumination of the *symbolic faculty* that the Dionysian excites. Through the communal ἔκστασις of the chorus, which, indeed, was originally the sole element of tragedy, all of the participants, in a religious exaltation, in dance and song, communally sacrificed themselves *as part of the god himself*, and it was this sacrifice that allowed the κάθαρσις of consonance to be experienced.

Nietzsche writes, against the modern interpretation of tragedy:

Thus we use the experiences of the truly aesthetic listened to bring to mind the tragic artist himself as he creates his figures like a fecund divinity of individuation (so his work can hardly be called an “imitation of nature” [*Nachahmung der Natur*]) and as his vast Dionysian impulse then devours his entire world of phenomena, in order to let us sense beyond it, and through its destruction, the highest artistic primal joy [*Urfreude*], in the bosom of the primordially One [*Ur-Einen*]. Of course, our aestheticians have nothing to say about this return to the primordial home [*Urheimat*], or the fraternal union of the two art-deities, nor of the excitement of the hearer which is Apollinian as well as Dionysian, but they never tire of characterizing the struggle of the hero with fate, the triumph of the moral world order, or the purgation of the emotions through tragedy, as the essence of the tragic. And their indefatigability makes me think that perhaps they are not aesthetically sensitive at all, but react merely as moral beings when listening to a tragedy.⁵⁸⁸

This passage contains Nietzsche’s rejection of the dialectic and of moralization as a way of thinking tragedy and his embrace, or replacement thereof, by the idea of a *return* to a primordial state by means of the unification of Apollo and Dionysus insofar as they are considered as *vital forces*. Their combination, then, far from achieving an absolute “imitation” of Nature as origin [*Ursprung*], requires instead a creation of a new *Ur*-dimension, one that extends to the depths of

⁵⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 8, 65.

⁵⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 22, 132.

memory, though not to the beginning of time, which, indeed, never took place. He follows, in this respect, in Goethe's footsteps. The bard had said: "That a work of art should be perfect and complete in itself is the eternal and essential requirement! Aristotle, who had before him the height of perfection, was thinking of the effect? How absurd!"⁵⁸⁹ This is, of course, equally an attack on Kant, who, in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, claims that there is no such thing as a work of art *in itself*, and that, indeed, no judgement of the beautiful or sublime is ever made of an *object* but that, rather, it is merely the effect such an artwork or object has on the judging subject that is deemed "beautiful"—"sublime," etc.

Against this idealist subjectivism, Goethe and Nietzsche after him, combat with force, toward nothing other than a new metaphysics that shall destroy metaphysics proper—of the *aesthetic phenomenon* as *Urphänomen*, in which, again, the distinction between subject and object is obliterated along with, in tragedy, that between spectators and chorus. Yet over against a German Idealist conception of the unification of subject and object in an absolute, a universal I or eye, this musical destruction of the boundaries between collective subject and collective object leads both chorus and spectators into a realm beyond both—a primordial *Ur*-sphere of melody and rhythm—dance and song, where *all* perspective is plunged into oblivion. There is, further, an agonal relation at work in this artistic *Urphänomen*, between the Dionysian and Apollinian forces [*Kräften*], which carries a circular aspect, so that Dionysus and Apollo continually double and redouble themselves, unite and disperse into an infinite competition—infinite ἀγών. Nietzsche writes: "the public at an Attic tragedy found itself in the chorus of the *orchestra*, and there was at bottom no opposition between the public and the chorus: everything is merely a great sublime

⁵⁸⁹ Goethe, *Werke*, 4 Abt., Briefe, XLII (Jan.-Jul., 1827) (Weimar, 1907), 104. Cited in Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 51-52.

chorus of dancing and singing satyrs or of those who permit themselves to be represented by such satyrs.”⁵⁹⁰ The chorus of satyrs, in its “symbolism,” plays the role of “proclaim[ing] this primordial relationship between the thing-in-itself and appearance [*Urverhältniss zwischen Ding an sich und Erscheinung*],”⁵⁹¹ in other words, between the primordial One and its appearances. The root that connects these two, however, that both unifies and separates them, holds them in luminous identity, in tenebrous difference, and it is in this choral experience that the circle of all life and movement comes back to itself as a transfigured space of origin. The *κάθαρσις* that takes place in tragedy is not an *effect*, but rather a shared musical experience that undergoes the collective sacrifice of individualities, of identity and homogeneity, and gives itself over to the absolute heterogeneity of liberated souls, liberated beings, out of language, back to the *Ur*.

As a result of his position against the German Idealist interpretation of tragedy, which moralizes and follows in Aristotle’s footsteps, Nietzsche must account for the “aesthetic pleasure” provided by the tragic myth “without transgressing into the region of pity, fear, or the morally sublime.” Without a moral interpretation of the unbeautiful and monstrous in tragedy, necessarily heavily marked by Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*. In answer to the question: “How can the ugly and the disharmonic, the content of the tragic myth, stimulate artistic pleasure?” Nietzsche revives his “metaphysics of art” whose axiom is that “existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.” Nietzsche continues: “In this sense, it is precisely the tragic myth that must convince us that even the ugly and disharmonic are part of an artistic game that the will in the eternal amplitude of its pleasure plays with itself. But this

⁵⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 8, 62.

⁵⁹¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 8, 62.

primordial phenomenon [*Urphänomen*] of Dionysian art is difficult to grasp, and there is only one direct way to make it intelligible and grasp it immediately: through the wonderful significance of *musical dissonance*. Quite generally, only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon.”⁵⁹²

Nietzsche’s metaphysics of art and of the artist *entails* the destruction of metaphysics. In a fragment of 1872, he writes, here taking recourse to the scientific strain in Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Democritus, all of whom affirmed the indestructibility of matter: “How can anyone dare to speak of the objective of the earth! / In infinite time and space there are no aims: *what exists, exists eternally* in one form or another. It is impossible to foresee what kind of metaphysical world there ought to be. / Humanity must be able to *stand* without anything of this sort to lean on—enormous task of the artist!” (KSA 7: 19 [139]).⁵⁹³ It is therefore the artists’ task to serve this aesthetic, anti-moral metaphysics whose very task is to destroy the possibility of metaphysics by proclaiming *even* the primordial to be a work of *illusion*. He must therefore harness the rhythmic *plastic* force of life in order to bring about a new sphere of origin which affirms itself as illusion—which proclaims the thing-in-itself to be nothing other than its own auto-representation. And this must take place on the wide temporal plane of immanence which has, in truth, neither an absolute beginning nor a *goal*—a tragic time, therefore, divested of all teleology.

In Nietzsche’s genealogical study of rhythm, he writes of two modes of rhythmic life; *Zeitleben* and *Tonleben* to which correspond quantitative rhythmicity, which operate according to time and qualitative rhythmicity, which work by *force* and depend on *stress*. Accordingly, while

⁵⁹² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 24, 141.

⁵⁹³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 46.

the former is proper to lyric poetry, the latter finds its expression in speech and prose. After making the claim that *Zeitleben* precedes *Tonleben* historically,⁵⁹⁴ Nietzsche reconsiders this thesis and, complicating its supposition of linearity, posits a primordial *agonal* relationship between these two lives of rhythm: “At the very earliest stage, struggle [*Kampf*] between *Zeit-* and *Tonleben* (side by side [*Nebeneinander.*]) / Victory of *Zeitleben* over *Tonleben* / Decline of *Zeitleben* and victory of *Tonleben*.”⁵⁹⁵ Originally, therefore, poetry and speech are inseparable, in constant battle with one another, while at the other extreme the lyric dissolves again into vocality through “its sheer profusion of polyrhythms [...]”⁵⁹⁶ In their struggle, force serves as power that *shapes* and *organizes* time into various rhythms. Nietzsche thus conceives that originally, *Tonleben* is also temporal, such that rhythm itself can be viewed as “the shaping force of temporal proportions.”⁵⁹⁷ In the proper measure, then, and in the proper dynamical *agon*, these two temporal functions—that of time and that of force—constitute the rhythm of life, in a manner analogous to that in which the Dionysian and the Apollinian must constantly combat in a state of “perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.”⁵⁹⁸

Whenever either *Zeitleben* or *Tonleben* is overvalued, and the other element of rhythm denied or suppressed, as occurs in the wake of the primordial *Kampf* between them, idealism ensues. And yet this idealism is strictly unavoidable for Nietzsche, and, indeed, structures his

⁵⁹⁴ I shall return to this hypothesis later in this chapter.

⁵⁹⁵ Nietzsche (KSA, 308). Cited in James I. Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 146.

⁵⁹⁶ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 148.

⁵⁹⁷ Nietzsche (KSA, 330). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 152. That the ictus, the stress (force) in Greek rhythm was a matter of temporality for Nietzsche is confirmed by such assertions as the following: “What we make manifest through the ictus was expressed by retardations and accelerations” (Nietzsche, KSA, 136. Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 346, n. 87).

⁵⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 1, 33.

very study of rhythm. Porter writes: “Rhythm is an idealization of time, and what is equally important [...] the perception of rhythm is itself an idealization of what is perceived: rhythms never obtain except ideally, because ‘two beats are never equivalent in a mathematically exact way.’⁵⁹⁹”⁶⁰⁰ In the same instant at which a perception or a sensation is received, it is idealized into rhythm—rhythm is formed, that is, in the same manner as which concepts are formed, through an equalization of that which is fundamentally unequal. Hence idealization occurs, and this is itself the rhythmic *Urphänomen*, the process by which the rhythm by which we live is determined. It is therefore a matter of treating the genealogy of idealisms, the development of one idealism out of another. Nietzsche writes: “the idealism of tonality and feeling [that is, of the moderns], as against the idealism of space and light (appearance) of the Greeks.”⁶⁰¹ In both of these idealism, sensation, which, for Nietzsche, constitutes the sphere of the in-itself, primordially enters into representation. Porter confirms that therefore: “There is no way of avoiding ideality”—for Nietzsche writes explicitly that throughout history, in the case of both the ancients and the moderns, “representation [*Vorstellung*] is already underway and at work.”⁶⁰²

Dissonance and consonance are two levels of rhythmic ideality, the former being closer to the *real*, that is, to the immediate idealization of sensation, and the latter being more ideal, because of its suppression of the supreme *irrationality* of rhythm. In a fragment of 1870, Nietzsche writes: “One might think of the reality of dissonance [*Realität der Dissonanz*], as opposed to the ideality of consonance [*Idealität der Konsonanz*]” (KSA 7:7 [116]).⁶⁰³ This

⁵⁹⁹ Nietzsche (KSA, 205).

⁶⁰⁰ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 151.

⁶⁰¹ Nietzsche (KSA, 309). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 150.

⁶⁰² Nietzsche (KSA, 309). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 150.

⁶⁰³ Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 345-346, n. 86.

fragment is a meditation on tragedy and accordingly views the *real* as *suffering* or pain—*der Schmerz*. Denying the existence of “natural beauty,” Nietzsche asserts that, rather “there is the disruptively ugly and a point of indifference [*indifferenter Punkt*].” He continues: “What is productive, then, is the pain, which creates the beautiful as a related counter-color—out of that point of indifference” (KSA 7:7 [116]).⁶⁰⁴ The *pain* of which Nietzsche speaks is accordingly that Dionysian *dissonant* suffering that underlies appearance, which springs forth in the Apollinian ideality of consonance.

Dissonances were conceived by the ancient rhythmicists to be “irrational” rhythms, falling into what Aristoxenus called the space “intermediate between two ratios that the senses can recognize.”⁶⁰⁵ Dissonance thus defines the limits of sensation—it is the irrational substratum of rhythm that renders possible the sensible or rational aspects of rhythm possible. Hence, the experience of dissonance is the experience of the very boundaries of sensation—the “effect” of such experiences is “often described as ‘ecstatic.’”⁶⁰⁶ In the rhythmic sense, then, ἔκστασις is the experience of dissonance rising up to collide with sensation. Because, for Nietzsche, after Aristoxenus, language and music are “discrepant mediums” insofar as they “represent the intersection of time and a body,”⁶⁰⁷ the irrationality, the senselessness of rhythm, in song, speech and dance, are necessary to the rationalization of rhythm, i.e., its *idealization* through the representative faculty of sensation. There is a primal need for dissonance in every man, every people, every culture, precisely so that *sense* can be rhythmically, biologically created. The

⁶⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 34.

⁶⁰⁵ Aristoxenus, *Elements of Rhythm*, 2.20. Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 152.

⁶⁰⁶ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 152.

⁶⁰⁷ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 153.

contradictory impulses toward dissonance and consonance, constantly in conflict with one another, constitute the rhythmic problem, the knot of the tragic in every human being.

Greek rhythm, thus, is kept alive precisely by a plenitude of dissonance. Thus consonant metrons (metrical units) are interspersed with dissonant ones. Nietzsche defines the dactyl (— ~ ~) as precisely a dissonant metron, or *alogia*, of which he gives the following definition: “alogia is a light dissonance in a beat that in other respects is regular.”⁶⁰⁸ The ratio between the long and the two shorts is *irrational*, according to Nietzsche, but has been rationalized by rhythmic conventions into the ratio 1:2. However, this ratio has “nothing to do with the mathematical description of the way the dactyl comes out when spoken.”⁶⁰⁹ Nietzsche claims, moreover that: “In itself, language can develop only the felt contrast of syllables that are long and short, not that of 1 long = 2 shorts. A foot with three syllables will always be slightly different from one with two. — — and — ~ ~ will have been approximately equivalent in time, but their division was slightly different.” This, then, shows the “[c]ontrast between mathematical facts and those of feeling.”⁶¹⁰

Nietzsche associates quantitative rhythmic, which takes place *temporally* with the Apollinian and qualitative rhythmic, brought about through vocality and dissonance, with the Dionysian. He writes: “Originally (in citharodic music), the note functions as a measure of time.”⁶¹¹ Hence prior to the arrival of Dionysus in Greece, *Zeitleben* is stronger than *Tonleben* in musical rhythms—musical notes measure time, and are therefore consistent, symmetrical, and occur at regular intervals. After Dionysus arrived in Greece, *irrationality*—the *force* of

⁶⁰⁸ Nietzsche (KSA, 327). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 153.

⁶⁰⁹ Nietzsche (KSA, 279). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 153.

⁶¹⁰ Nietzsche (KSA, 278). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 347, n. 93.

⁶¹¹ Nietzsche (KSA, 322). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 161.

Tonleben, along with ἔκστασις in dance and song, was introduced into Greek rhythm precisely as a dissonant disruption of its temporally measured music. Once the “treaty of peace” between the two warring gods had been formed, the “reconciliation” of the “two antagonists” Dionysus with Apollo, brought about,⁶¹² this primordial conflict between *Zeitleben* and *Tonleben* would have, in this perspective, commenced, operating in a manner continuous with the ἀγών between the two artistic gods. Nietzsche writes: “Establishment of the ancient [viz., classical (*antiken*)] symbolic. The Dionysian innovations in tonality [or “key” (*Tonart*)], in rhythm [*alolia*?].”⁶¹³ Since harmony, according to this history, “was not drawn into the realm of the symbolic” for the the Greeks,⁶¹⁴ the Dionysian *senselessness* of force, colliding with the temporal measure of Apollinian music was necessary precisely in order to lift rhythm into the realm of the symbolic—it is thus that dissonance was lifted into ideality, as, precisely, the most basic level of symbolization—hence, as a *primordial phenomenon*. Indeed, Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1870-1871: “*The projection of illusion [S c h e i n s] is the artistic primal process [d e r k ü n s t l e r i s c h e U r p r o z e ß]. / All that lives, lives on illusion*” (KSA 7:7 [167]).⁶¹⁵

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche elucidates this insight into the development of music from the Apollinian to the Dionysian as the shift from the time-beat of quantitative rhythmic to the dissonant and melodic *Tonleben*: “If music, as it would seem, had been known previously as an Apollinian art, it was so, strictly speaking, only as the wave beat of rhythm, whose formative power was developed for the representation of Apollinian states. The music of Apollo was Doric

⁶¹² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 39.

⁶¹³ Nietzsche (KSA, 322). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 161.

⁶¹⁴ Nietzsche (KSA, 322). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 161.

⁶¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 55.

architectonics in tones, but in tones that were merely suggestive, such as those of the cithara. The very element which forms the essence of Dionysian music (and hence of music in general) is carefully excluded as un-Apollinian—namely, the emotional power of the tone, the uniform flow of melody, and the utterly incomparable flow of harmony. In the Dionysian dithyramb man is incited to the greatest exaltation of all his symbolic faculties [...].”⁶¹⁶ Thus, by the combination of *force* and *tone* in rhythm, accomplished through the musical unification of Dionysus with Apollo, rhythm was enriched by the dissonance and harmony of *tonality*, which, in turn, by means of the ecstatic “annihilation of the veil of *maya*,” which delivered men back to nature, brought symbolization into its highest form by extending rhythm to the body itself in dance: “the entire symbolism of the body is here brought into play [...] the whole pantomime of dancing, forcing every member into rhythmic movement.”⁶¹⁷ It is the arrival of Dionysus in tragedy, therefore, that at once renders *sense* possible and reveals irrationality and dissonance as the fundament, the primordial being of that sense. For, introducing qualitative rhythmicity into Greek culture, the Dionysian also presented, necessarily, the seed of the stress accent—the ictus—and this, connected to the meaning of words, is called by Nietzsche a “*logical accent*”⁶¹⁸—therefore, Porter writes: “stress and meaning go hand in hand.”⁶¹⁹

The experience of *consonance* in tragedy, therefore, which, for Nietzsche, is *cathartic* is an upsurge of timelessness and of the continuity of meaning and music in the movement of becoming that characterizes the time of tragedy, which movement is indeed the embodiment of

⁶¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 40.

⁶¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 40.

⁶¹⁸ Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 164.

⁶¹⁹ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 164.

its tragic nature. Nietzsche writes the for the Greeks, through the power of their myths, “even the immediate present had to appear to them right away *sub specie aeterni* [under the aspect of the eternal] and in a certain sense as timeless.”⁶²⁰ This timelessness, this lifting up out of the terrors of becoming, took place precisely as the unity experienced in division of self, the dismemberment of individuality, as *artistic ideality*. It was by a profound experience of Dionysian dissonance that this consonant *Urphänomen* could take place, and this, indeed, was brought about by means of the tragic hero. For if the tragic hero is, at bottom, Dionysus himself, and if his fate must replicate that of his primordial predecessor—the “dismembered god”—thus undergoing, through *resignation* to Μοίρα the experience of “Dionysian suffering” by which the god, “torn to pieces by the Titans” is transformed in what Hölderlin had called the *excentric sphere of the dead* to be “worshipped in this state as Zagreus,”⁶²¹ it is equally the case that the Dionysian, at its extreme, passes over into the Apollinian, such that the hero is at once individuated and idealized in the highest degree and *lifted out of time*. It is the function of the tragic hero to bring about such timelessness, delivering itself and its world continually back in to the stream of becoming, the stream of pain. In this perspective, Empedocles too becomes a figure for Dionysus, the self-sacrificing hero who descends into the realm of the dead—the realm of the Titans beneath Etna, where he is torn apart as a chthonic god, god of earth and underworld.

Nietzsche had struggled with the necessity of art to obtain this timeless quality, to serve as a refuge from dissonant, tragic becoming in consonance. In a fragment of 1870, he writes: “The tendency of art is to overcome dissonance”—it is by this power of overcoming that, through “*representation*” a salvation from pain must take place: “A condition of painlessness

⁶²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 23, 137.

⁶²¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 10, 73.

must be created somewhere—but how?” (KSA 7:7 [117]).⁶²² The response to the question that Nietzsche poses to himself shall be, precisely, through the *consonance* achieved by art, out of the pain of dissonance. Through the rhythmic transfiguration into the god Dionysus, the participants of tragedy achieve this state of ideality born, precisely of suffering, and by which suffering is presented as the ground of the world, as the Heraclitean *one differing in itself* that is originary. For what is most primordial is precisely to suffer the “agonies of individuation” that Dionysus, voluntarily submitting to his annihilation, undergoes. In another fragment, Nietzsche writes: “Dissonance and consonance in music—we may say that a chord *suffers* through a false note. The secret of *pain* must also rest in *becoming*. If every world of the moment is a new world, where do sensation and pain come from?” (KSA 7:7 [165]).⁶²³ This fragment ends as follows: “*Pain, contradiction is the true being. Joy, harmony is illusion*” (KSA 7:7 [165]).⁶²⁴ This illusion, this highest ideality, however, is only possible as an upsurge out of the fundamental dissonance of suffering and becoming—for it is precisely the purificatory function of suffering to give birth to joy, which, in turn, presentification of suffering.

Nietzsche writes: “Tragedy with a chorus is born from a transfigured reality in which men sing and move in a rhythmic manner; the tragedy without a chorus, from an empirical reality where they speak and walk.”⁶²⁵ Tragic time is thus highly rhythmic—it is essentially the excentric, temporal *deployment of the power of self-transformation*. Nietzsche’s rhythmic is thus *homeotic*—rooting itself deeply in the body, it opens wide the possibility of biological

⁶²² Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 35.

⁶²³ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 54.

⁶²⁴ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 55.

⁶²⁵ Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 57.

transformation by means of the artistic presentation of the physiological primordial phenomena of rhythm. It is precisely because the Dionysian impulse only appears through its self-symbolization that it can be transformed by that symbolic expression—it is utterly historical, subjected to the movements of becoming insofar as they externalize—*idealize* themselves rhythmically. Therefore, consonance as the highest form of ideality is capable of transforming, radically reversing the physiological *Urphänomenen* of the participants (spectators, players and chorus members) of tragedy. Originally, indeed, the Dionysian was closest to life—it was a vital impulse that exteriorized itself, mediated by the Apollinian, in the communally conjured image of the god. Hence, as the entire throng took part in the suffering of Dionysus—*became* Dionysus, driven outside of themselves in exaltation, they also shared in the *joy*—the affirmation of life born of that suffering and, indeed, shared in the self-sacrifice of the god, going down into Hades as a chthonic deity beyond individuation, embracing the terrors of being torn to shreds.

As the Apollinian gained in power in the historical development of drama—as the *principium individuationis* took over more and more in the dramatic process, the Dionysian instinct was progressively distanced and estranged from the Apollinian instinct toward plastic ideality. The appearance of Dionysus himself on the stage marks the moment of rupture in tragedy between “chorus,” wherein Dionysus was merely “imagined as present” and “drama,” wherein he appeared as “the real stage hero”—it was at this point that the tragic hero, the saving individual was conceived, as a *mask* for the god himself. Yet when the Apollinian comes into play, which veils the reality of day in illusion such that a new dream-world arises, both more lucid and more shadowy, which “presents itself to our eyes in continual rebirths” so that we are no longer in that monstrous, profound, natural world of Dionysus. “The Apollinian appearances

in which Dionysus objectified himself are no longer ‘an eternal sea, changeful strife, a glowing life,’⁶²⁶ like the music of the chorus, no longer those forces [*Kräften*], merely felt and not condensed into images, in which the enraptured servant senses the nearness of the god”—the epic aspect overtakes the lyric, and we are lifted out of drunkenness, into dream. In accordance with this change in tragic drama, the hero took on the function of embodying Dionysus and the Dionysian, so that it became *his* task to bring about the tragic transformation, the deliverance, from the point of *ideal* consonance, into a transfigured dissonance of becoming—a new world, differently rhytmed, by means of his self-sacrifice. The Dionysian instinct to self-sacrifice was thus *individuated*, no longer belonging to the multitude, to the entire community of choral tragedy which in divine ekstasis created itself as the work of art rising into consonance out of dissonance, saving itself by the *liberation of the world* that the image of Dionysus brought about, but rather limited, in the epic fashion, to the singular and lonely tragic hero.

In his letter on Hölderlin of 1861, Nietzsche had also written of the poignant dissonance peculiar to the poet’s *Hyperion*. Accusing his “friend” of his ignorance of the genius of Hölderlin’s work apart from his “accomplished Greek meters,”—to which Nietzsche responds: “Accomplished Greek meters! My God! Is that all the praise you can offer?”⁶²⁷—he expounds the supreme musicality of the poet’s novel: “Also you do not know *Hyperion*, in which the harmonious movement of his prose, the sublimity and beauty of the characters, made upon me an impression like that of the wave beat of a troubled sea. Indeed, this prose is music, soft melting sounds interrupted by painful dissonances, finally expiring in dark mysterious funeral songs.”⁶²⁸

⁶²⁶ From Goethe’s *Faust*: lines 505-507.

⁶²⁷ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 4.

⁶²⁸ Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 5.

Here, Nietzsche calls attention to the very excentric tragic path that *Hyperion* describes, yet on a minute scale—the very *rhythm* of Hölderlin’s poetic prose, he suggests, is excentric, beginning in ideal, sublime *harmonies* (as the universal harmony with nature of which Hyperion dreams) and, descending through interruptive “painful dissonances,” ending tragically far outside the primordial sphere of originary love, in drawn-out *mourning-songs*—funerary hymns.

Nietzsche’s Tragic Philosophers

The connection between the flight of the gods and the tragic hero was made by Nietzsche as well as Hölderlin. A fragment from 1870 contains the following lines:

Der große Pan ist todt. Untergang der Götter.
Der tragische Mensch—Empedocles.

The great Pan is dead. Downgoing of the gods.
The tragic man—Empedocles (KSA 7:7 [15]).

For Nietzsche, Empedocles is indeed the tragic man *par excellence*. He is, moreover, an analog, a figure of the philosopher himself, caught between a metaphysics inherited from Heraclitus and Schopenhauer and a materialism determined through Democritus and Lange. He characterizes Empedocles, this singular pre-Platonic philosopher as the supreme *agonal man*, in whom the transition from myth to science takes place in the history of this early development of philosophy. Empedocles is thus the man in whom the mythic and scientific impulses, which are constantly battling in Nietzsche’s own thought, are most potently alive, coming together through *φιλία* and dividing through *νεῖκος* in an eternal movement of becoming that, eventually, necessitates this hero’s *Untergang*—his boundless unification and separation with the

disappearing god. Indeed, for Nietzsche, Empedocles is the personification of the ἀγών in a multitude of ways. In the notes toward his courses on the *Pre-Platonic philosophers*, he writes:

Empedocles continually stands on this *boundary line*, [...] and in almost all matters Empedocles is such a boundary-line figure. He hovers between poet and rhetorician, between god and man, between scientific man and artist, between statesman and priest, between Pythagoras and Democritus. He is the motliest figure of older philosophy; he demarcates the age of myth, tragedy, and orgiasticism yet at the same time there appears in him the new Greek, as democratic statesman, orator, enlightened figure, allegorist, and scientific human being. In him the two periods wrestle with each other; he is a man of *competition* [an *agonal man*, a man of the ἀγών] through and through.⁶²⁹

This is, indeed, the more profound reason for which Empedocles becomes a figure of Nietzsche as a tragic philosopher, a “*philosopher of tragic knowledge*” who experiences the tragedy of his time, who “senses it to be *tragic that the ground of metaphysics has been cut away* and can never be satisfied by the colorful kaleidoscope of the sciences” (KSA 7: 19 [35]).⁶³⁰ As this tragic philosopher sought after the proper *measure* of the revival of myth to the importance of science, trying ceaselessly to reconcile, or *infinitely approximate* these elements to one another, it was the fact that the gods had *gone down* that brought about the necessity of a new religion, a new science for the revitalization of his nation and his time. He is the first philosopher to experience tragedy in the sense considered to be *modern* by both Nietzsche and Hölderlin: in the wake of the god’s disappearance. In the section of *Ecce Homo* on *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche would call himself “the first *tragic philosopher*”—the strongest warrior against the “pessimistic philosopher,” precisely because of his ability to affirm life in the absence of any metaphysical ground. “Before me,” he writes, “this transposition of the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos did not exist: *tragic wisdom* was lacking [...]” He claims to have found a possible predecessor

⁶²⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 119.

⁶³⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 13.

in this regard only “in the case of *Heracitus*, in whose proximity I feel altogether warmer and better than anywhere else.” He continues by enumerating the aspects of the Heraclitean philosophy that inspired his own tragic philosophy: “The affirmation of passing away *and destroying*, which is the decisive feature of a Dionysian philosophy; saying Yes to opposition and war; *becoming*, along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*—all this is clearly more closely related to me than anything else to date.”⁶³¹ In a fragment of 1870, we find the following: “The ancient philosophers, the Eleatics Heraclitus Empedocles as *tragic* philosophers [*als die tr ag i s c h e n Philosophen*]” (KSA 7:5 [94]).

Yet it was precisely by the *pessimism* of Empedocles that the young Nietzsche defined him as a tragic philosopher—as one whose pessimism did *not* become a nihilism, but was, rather, capable of strongly affirming life and which, rather than leading to asceticism, resulted in *action*: “[Empedocles] is the *tragic* philosopher, the contemporary of Aeschylus. The most unique thing about him is his extraordinary pessimism, which works on him actively, however, not quietistically.” The “fundamental idea” of Empedocles’ political view was “to lead humanity across to the universal friendship (κοινὰ τῶν φίλων) of the Pythagoreans and thus to social reform with a dissolution of private property; he moves about as a wandering prophet after he failed to found the rule by all (*Allherrschaft*) from love in Agrigentum.”⁶³² Nietzsche also writes that Empedocles was a great champion of “‘equality in politics’ [ἰσότητα πολιτικὴν ἀσκεῖν]”⁶³³ and, with the use of his tremendous resources, attempted a redistribution of wealth in Agrigentum by providing dowries for poverty-stricken young women. Empedocles’ success was

⁶³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1989), *Ecce Homo*, “The Birth of Tragedy,” § 3, 273.

⁶³² Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 113.

⁶³³ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 111. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 72.

so great that he was “offered a kingdom (βασιλεία), which he declined.”⁶³⁴ Instead, he left Agrigentum to wander as a self-proclaimed god, healer, prophet, and magician. Thus the political failure of Empedocles to put kingship to death and effect the deliverance from monarchy to communism, thus restoring the original, eternal love between all living things, and his consequent exile from his fatherland for the blasphemy of declaring himself to be a god determined his fate as a wanderer and, eventually, would necessitate his self-sacrifice in the hope of thereby bringing about again that lost unity. Indeed, in Nietzsche’s view, by claiming to be a god, Empedocles understood himself to be announcing a return to the equality and friendship between all men.

According to Nietzsche, following the siege of Himera, Agrigentum became extremely wealthy in riches and slaves, and Empedocles declared of it: “The Agrigentines live delicately as if tomorrow they would die, but they build their houses well as if they thought they would live forever.”⁶³⁵ The House of Gelon, king of Syracuse, then fell in Sicily, and Hieron became Syracuse’s new ruler. Theron, the ruler of Agrigentum then died in 472 B.C.E. and his son Thrasydaeus, already king of Himera, inherited the throne at Agrigentum from his father as well. He quickly became a tyrant with “bloodthirsty and violent instincts,” built an army of twenty thousand and besieged Sicily, after provoking its ruler, Hieron. From this act, “a monstrous bloodbath [ensued, with] 2,000 slain on the side of the Syracusans and 4,000 on the side of the Agrigentines—most of them Hellenes, according to Diodorus [11.53].” Thrasydaeus then fled to Megara, in Greece, where he was sentenced to death, and Hieron banished many of his subjects.

The result of this great tumult was the establishment of a democratic government by the

⁶³⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 111. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 72.

⁶³⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 109. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 63.

people of Agrigentum.⁶³⁶ Empedocles, for his part, was a passionate advocate of democracy. Once the Senate of One Thousand had installed itself in Agrigentum, Empedocles made his “first incursion into *politics* [and ...] oratory” by “suppressing an attempt at tyranny.”⁶³⁷ Having been invited to a dinner party of the magistrates (ἄρχοντες) of the thousand, he was driven to rage by the absence of wine and demanded that it be supplied. “When he [the actual host, the senator] arrived, he was made the ‘master of the revels’ (συμποσίαρχος) [and ...] because resistance had been fomented, this man commanded the ‘guests’ either to drink or to have it poured over their heads.” Empedocles, understanding this order to be a manifestation of tyrannical intent, “remains silent” at the time, but later “brings both of them before the court, and it sentences them to death.”⁶³⁸ With his great oratorical skill and political power, Empedocles even succeeded in dissolving the assembly of the thousand altogether. Nietzsche writes that with Empedocles “arose rhetoric,” and indeed, “Aristotle [...] describes him in the [lost] dialogue *Sophist* as the ‘inventor of rhetoric’ [πρῶτον ῥητορικὴν κεκινήκεναι].”⁶³⁹

The origin of mortals, Empedocles believes, is the punishment of “primal criminals: the anger of the aether drives them into the sea, the sea spits them out onto the land, land tosses them up into the flames of the sun, and there [push them] once more into the aether: thus one gathers them from the other, yet each hates them. Eventually they appear to become mortal”—thus are humans born of strife (νεῖκος).⁶⁴⁰ Nietzsche writes: “Mortals appear to him, accordingly, to be fallen and punished gods! The earth is a dark cave, the unholy meadow (λειμὼν ἄτης)” ruled

⁶³⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 109. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 72.

⁶³⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 109.

⁶³⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 111. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 64-65.

⁶³⁹ Ibid. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 57.

⁶⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 113-114.

over by wicked fates. “He plunges into a pile of opposing daimons: Deris and Harmonia [Discord and Harmony], Callisto and Aischre [Beauty and Ugliness], Thoosa and Denaie [Haste and Tarrying], Nemertes and Asapheia [Truth and Obscurity], Physo and Phthimene (Nature and Downfall), and so on.”⁶⁴¹

Eduard Zeller, one of Nietzsche’s main sources for his work on the pre-Platonics, pronounces this same paradox within Empedocles as follows: “With [his] system of natural philosophy Empedocles made no attempt to reconcile scientifically his mystic doctrine (allied to that of the Orphics and Pythagoreans) of the sinking down of souls into terrestrial existence, of their transmigration into the bodies of plants, animals, and men, and of the subsequent return of purified souls to the gods; nor his prohibition of animal sacrifices and of animal food.⁶⁴² He did not even try to explain away the contradiction between them, though it is evident that these doctrines involve the conception that strife and opposition are the cause of all evil, and that unity and harmony are supremely blessed.”⁶⁴³

Erwin Rohde, whose great *Psyche* would not appear until 1894, when Nietzsche had already descended into madness, writes of Empedocles, too, as a man divided between metaphysics and science: “Empedokles united in his own person to an astonishing degree the most sober attempts at a study of nature that was scientific according to its lights, and quite irrational beliefs and theological speculations. Occasionally the scientific impulse passes over to influence even the world of his beliefs; but as a rule theology and natural science exist side by

⁶⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 114. Empedocles, frags. 119-23.

⁶⁴² Nietzsche says that Empedocles regarded the consumption of animals as “a sort of self-cannibalism [*Sichslebstverspeisen*]” because of the “*oneness of all life*.” (*Pre-Platonics*, 109)

⁶⁴³ Edward Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, trans. Sarah Frances Alleyne and Evelyn Abbott (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890), 75-76.

side in his mind quite independently.”⁶⁴⁴ Unlike Zeller, who insists on the irreconcilability of the myth and science instincts in Empedocles, Rohde speaks of them as a dissonant *unity*, which worked at the heart of his organism, now fighting with one another, now harmonizing together, now passing over into one another, now separating into two individual forces. And perhaps Rohde wrote of this tragic philosopher himself as, precisely, a mirror image of his long-loved and lost friend Nietzsche. Perhaps the Odic force that bound them was not broken by Nietzsche’s disappearance into madness but was strengthened through this tragic figure left behind by the philosopher, which bound his fate inseparably to that of Hölderlin, through their common hero, Empedocles. One can hardly doubt the surety of Rohde’s homage to Nietzsche when one reads, in his allusion to the miraculous death of Empedocles: “He must have made a profound impression on the men among whom he lived, though he disappeared from their midst like a comet.”⁶⁴⁵ Indeed, it was in Rohde’s company that Nietzsche first read the text of his book, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, aloud to Richard and Cosima Wagner on the Easter of 1873 at Bayreuth, the first section of which contains the figure of the philosopher as comet.

In a letter dated February 2, 1873, Friedrich Ritschl, the common mentor of the young Nietzsche and the young Rohde, who was responsible for the former philologist’s position at the university of Basel at the age of 24, wrote of Nietzsche in a manner nearly identical to that in which Zeller, whom Nietzsche read, and Rohde, whose *Psyche* would come after him, wrote of Empedocles: “It is strange how two souls can live right next to each other in the man [Nietzsche]. On the one hand the strictest method of scientific research ... on the other hand this

⁶⁴⁴ Rohde, *Psyche*, 2: 379.

⁶⁴⁵ Rohde, *Psyche*, 2: 378-379.

fantastic excessive overly spiritual verging-on-incomprehensible Wagnerian-Schopenhauerian artistic-mysterious-religious gushing!” (KSA 7: 15:46-47).⁶⁴⁶

This complex combination of metaphysics and physics was, indeed, Nietzsche’s primary interest in his lecture on Empedocles. He carefully delineates their limits and the points at which they pass over into one another in the philosopher’s work. According to Nietzsche, the “greatness” of Empedocles lay in the fact that he “*prepared the conditions for rigorous atomism* [...]” Thus he “[reduced] this power [*Macht*] of love and strife to a force [*Kraft*] lying inside things” after which “Democritus found weight and shape sufficient.” Democritus could affirm, after Empedocles’ doctrine of effluences, the existence of empty space, denied by Anaxagoras. Empedocles rejects Anaxagoras in his “doctrine of effluences (ἀπρροαί) [which] presupposes an empty space [...]”⁶⁴⁷ In his theory of “*chance forms*,” according to Nietzsche, Empedocles is of a “purely atomistic-materialistic viewpoint.”⁶⁴⁸ Yet love and strife exceed all measure, and thus cannot be quantified; it is precisely because of this excessiveness and eternity of these universal laws that Empedocles passes over into myth. Thus, at his most scientific, his doctrine reaches its extreme metaphysical point. In a fragment of 1870-1871, Nietzsche writes of this phenomenon as “the abrupt transformation of science into art every time its limits are reached” (KSA 7:7 [125]).⁶⁴⁹

The Empedoclean theory of effluences was based upon a view of love that was at once quasi-mythical, universal, and profoundly rooted in the bodies of all living creatures. It was

⁶⁴⁶ Cited in Elaine P. Miller, “Harnessing Dionysos: Nietzsche on Rhythm, Time, and Restraint,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, No. 17 (Spring 1999), 1-32, 26, n. 22.

⁶⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 118.

⁶⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 118.

⁶⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 43.

Empedocles' belief that he lived in a fallen world and that earthly life was a punishment for a primordial sin against eternal life. Empedocles is deeply "related to Pythagorean-Orphic mysticism," which is the main source of his metaphysical beliefs, "just as Anaxagoras is related to Hellenic mythology. He [Empedocles] joins the religious instinct to scientific explanation and broadens it in this scientific form. He is the one who enlightens and consequently remains unloved among the faithful."⁶⁵⁰ The great lucidity and power of the philosopher thus turned the people of Agrigentum against him: "As a result he still takes over the entire collective world of gods and demons, in whose reality he believes no less than in that of human beings. He even feels himself to be an outcast god; he sighs about the pinnacle of honor from which he has fallen: 'I wept and mourned when I discovered myself in this unfamiliar land' [frag. 118]"—this foreign land refers, precisely, to the human world.⁶⁵¹

Nietzsche writes: "In the world of sorrow, of oppositions, [Empedocles] finds only one principle that guarantees an entirely different order: he finds *Aphrodite*, known to all, but never as a cosmic principle. [Empedocles, frag. 17, 20 ff.] The life of sexuality is the best, the noblest, the greatest opposition against the drive toward divisions."⁶⁵² This allegorization of the sexual "drive to sameness"⁶⁵³, referred to by Nietzsche as a *Treib*, extends both to the political realm, where it represents "the cooperation of conflicting social classes for the sake of production"⁶⁵⁴ and to the domain of physics, in which the "mixture [of primal materials] becomes possible only

⁶⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 113.

⁶⁵¹ He designated the consumption of a "carnivorous meal" as the cause of his misfortune, of his "besmirching as a fugitive (φόνος)" (Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 113).

⁶⁵² Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 115.

⁶⁵³ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 116.

⁶⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 115.

when the part[icles] of one body enter the spatial intervals between the part[icles] of the other” while “with complete mixing, there exists fundamentally only a mass of particles [*Teilchen*].” Under this universal law of penetration, “[t]he more thoroughly the pores of one body correspond to the effluences and particles of the other, the more capacity it will have for mixture therewith; thus [...] like seeks out like; whatever does not allow mixing is alien.”⁶⁵⁵

“The conclusion is this: love alone is thought to be active, such that, after absolute separation, everything rests once more. Thus both must struggle with each other.”⁶⁵⁶ This struggle between Love and Strife is absolutely necessary to *life itself*. “Here he touches on Heraclitus’s glorification of war as the father of all things. Yet if we conceive their forces as equal and instantaneously effective, then once again motion does not arise. Periodic cycles must alternate [in] predominance.”⁶⁵⁷

In general, Nietzsche affirms that Empedocles surpassed Anaxagoras and “discovered all the foundational conceptions of atomism—that is, the fundamental hypothesis of the *scientific* view of nature of the ancients [...]”⁶⁵⁸ However, on one point, he does not “overcome” his predecessor: namely, “his principles of love and strife in order to eliminate the dualism concerning motion. [...] If all motion is reduced to the workings of incomprehensible forces, then science basically dissolves into magic.”⁶⁵⁹

Nietzsche follows Hölderlin’s definition of the tragic as the monstrous transgression of divinity by the human—Empedocles is, then, the embodiment of tragedy. Nietzsche writes of

⁶⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 117.

⁶⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 117-118.

⁶⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 118.

⁶⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 118.

⁶⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 119.

him: “What he says in general is true of himself: ‘In the course of time there come to earth certain men who are prophets, bards, physicians, and princes; such men rise up as gods, extolled in honor.’ This was his belief: he has already crossed over to divinity. [...] He is a seer, poet, doctor, and prince (a general term, not τύραννος); now, since his wandering, he is also ‘god, no more a mortal.’ [θεόςμ οὐκέτι θνητός (Empedocles, frag. 112, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, bk. 8, sect. 62).] Well now, how does he cross over to ‘sharing hearth and table with the other immortals, freed from human woes and human trials?’ [v. 387-388, Empedocles, fragment 147] He plunges into [Mt.] [E]tna because he wants to confirm himself as a god; the immediately preceding event was either the worship of the Selinuntines or the healing of Panthea, a woman of Agrigentum.”⁶⁶⁰ Nietzsche also gives other accounts of Empedocles’ death: that of Timaeus, according to which he “never returned from the Peloponese”⁶⁶¹ and that of Neanthes, according to which, he broke his thigh at a festival in Messana and died from it. Nietzsche then conjectures: “The legend of the faithful portrays him disappearing; that of the ironic portrays him plunging into [E]tna; that of the pragmatists portrays him breaking a thigh and being buried in Megara.”⁶⁶²

Nietzsche’s notion of breath as the universal element that binds us together, as the rhythmic and inconstant measure of all life is a very ancient one: it is an idea common to Heraclitus and Empedocles. In Nietzsche’s discussion of the transition from Anaximander to Heraclitus with regard to *physics*, he writes that Heraclitus, replaced Thales’ and Anaximander’s primal element of *water* with that of fire precisely because because of the *warmth* of universal breath. Anaximander had defined heat and cold as the “preliminary stages of water,” which

⁶⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 112.

⁶⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 112.

⁶⁶² Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 113.

Thales had declared to be first element, which afterwards transforms into the other elements, while Heraclitus, in turn, “re-interprets the Anaximandrian warm as warm breath, dry vapor, in other words, as fire. Of this fire he now says what Thales and Anaximander had said of water; that it coursed in countless transformations through the orbits of becoming; above all, in its three major occurrences as warmth, moisture and solidity.”⁶⁶³

Nietzsche writes: “Empedocles’ entire pathos comes back to this one point, that *all living things are one*; in this respect the gods, human beings, and animals are all one.”⁶⁶⁴ To this declaration, Nietzsche appends, in a footnote, a quotation of Goethe: “And so every creature is only a tone, a shading of a grand harmony, which must be studied in large and whole, otherwise every individual is a lost character.”⁶⁶⁵ Nietzsche continues: “Sextus Empiricus”—through whom Empedocles’ poems survive—“is quite explicit that breath (ἐν πνεῦμα) is the soul of the entire world, which relates us to the animals as well. [...] [Empedocles’] life’s mission is presented as being to make good once more what had been worsened by strife (νεῖκος), to proclaim and even to aid the ideas of oneness in love inside the world of strife wherever he finds sorrow, the result of strife. Heavily he plods through this world of agony, of oppositions: the fact that he is within it may be explained only as a transgression: in some time or another, a crime, a murder, a perjury, must have transpired. Existence in such a world punishes a guilt.”⁶⁶⁶ The world of Empedocles is thus a fallen one precisely because the eternal breath that binds together nature and man in love has been shattered and rendered *discontinuous* by strife. *Becoming* is the punishment for this

⁶⁶³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 6, 59.

⁶⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 109.

⁶⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 109, n. 16.

⁶⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 109-110.

transgression against love. Thus the path of man is indeed an excentric one: exiled from the universal, equal harmony of nature, which is timeless in its unity, he is condemned to suffer the dissonance of time itself, and of a time that offers no promise of salvation, no exit from the curse of strife but temporary sojourns in human love.

In a fragment of 1870, we find the following: “The ancient philosophers, the Eleatics Heraclitus Empedocles as *tragic* philosophers [als die t r a g i s c h e n Philosophen]” (KSA 7:5 [94]). Heraclitus and Empedocles are tragic philosophers precisely because they are the thinkers of *becoming*, of time as the dimension to which men are condemned. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche speaks through Heraclitus as follows: ““‘Becoming [*Das Werden*]’” is what I contemplate,’ he exclaims, ‘and no one else has watched so attentively this everlasting wavebeat and rhythm [*ewigen Wellenschlage und Rhythmus*] of things.’”⁶⁶⁷ And this is because Heraclitus denied the eternal ἄπειρον of Anaximander, the metaphysical substratum of existence, which Nietzsche aligns with the Kantian thing-in-itself. Heraclitus, rather “no longer distinguished a physical world from a metaphysical one, a realm of definite qualities from an undefinable ‘indefinite!’ And after this first step, nothing could hold him back from a second, far bolder negation: he altogether denied being. For this one world which he retained—supported by eternal unwritten laws, flowing upward and downward in brazen rhythmic beat [*Schlage des Rhythmus*]—nowhere shows a tarrying, an indestructibility, a bulwark in the stream.”⁶⁶⁸ Thus the indefinite, the eternal realm of Being is replaced, in Nietzsche’s vision of Heraclitus, by an ever-changing musical *rhythm*, the laws of which remain concealed from men through language.

⁶⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 50.

⁶⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 51.

In this work, destined to be read by Wagner, Nietzsche thus aligns Heraclitus with Schopenhauer, and the cosmic rhythm with the will to live. He calls Heraclitus an *intuitive* philosopher who “embraces” two things: “one, the present many-colored and changing world that crowds in upon us in all our experiences, and two, the conditions which alone make any experience of this world possible: time and space.”⁶⁶⁹ He thus presents time and space for Heraclitus as the structures of intuition. The category of causality, as well as the forms of time and space had been retained from Kant by Schopenhauer as the necessary preconditions and structures of all experience, yet Schopenhauer, unlike Kant, characterized this causal and spatiotemporal intuition as the principle of sufficient reason, also called the *principium individuationis*, which, in turn, he aligned with space and time. Nietzsche thus defines Heraclitean becoming by a parallel with Schopenhauer: “As Heraclitus sees time, so does Schopenhauer. He repeatedly said of it that every moment in it exists only insofar as it has just consumed the preceding one, its father, and is then immediately consumed likewise. And that past and future are as perishable as any dream, but that the presence is but the dimensionless and durationless borderline between the two.”⁶⁷⁰ This Heraclitean-Schopenhauerean conception of time and space, however, differs from that of Kant in that it views them as absolutely *relative*, existing only by means of *actions*: “everything which coexists in space and time has but a relative existence [...] whoever finds himself directly looking at it must at once move on to the Heraclitan conclusion and say that the whole nature of reality [*Wirklichkeit*] lies simply in its acts [*Wirken*] and that for it there exists no other sort of being.”⁶⁷¹ Nietzsche then quotes

⁶⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 52.

⁶⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 52-53.

⁶⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 53-54.

Schopenhauer as saying: “Only by way of its acts does [reality] fill space and time. [...] Cause and effect [*Wirkung*] in other words make out the whole nature of materiality: its being is its activity. Actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] therefore is completely relative, in accordance with a relationship that is valid only within its bounds, exactly as is time, exactly as is space.”⁶⁷² Space and time are thus viewed, by Schopenhauer, as being on the same plane; as being *equal* phenomena whose “union,” in Nietzsche’s words, is effected “by means of causality [...]”⁶⁷³

Nietzsche speaks of the life-affirming pessimism of Heraclitus, for it is the eternal “strife” between opposites that gives rise to becoming itself, “and it is just in the strife that eternal justice is revealed.”⁶⁷⁴ The thought of pure becoming, however, as the eternal movement of the world, without an origin or goal, is a tragic, and hence terrifying one: “The everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is, as Heraclitus teaches it, is a terrible, paralyzing thought.”⁶⁷⁵ Nietzsche, aligning himself with this philosopher, with this “wonderful idea”⁶⁷⁶ proposes the profound *embrace* of this tragic temporality; an affirmation of its supreme untimeliness; for him, life requires the profound acceptance of the excentric path of man in this inconstant temporality. Moreover, it is thus against Hölderlin that he opens the possibility for this embrace of the tragic in time. For, in Hölderlin’s view, it is the striving for eternity, for a salvation from this time that renders it bearable. The promise of intellectual intuition as a state that is more than temporary

⁶⁷² Schopenhauer, *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Vol. I, Book 1, § 4. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 53.

⁶⁷³ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 56.

⁶⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 55.

⁶⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 54.

⁶⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 54.

remains a myth on the horizon of our lives for him, and in its absence, that unity with the god must be mourned. For Nietzsche, on the contrary, as for Heraclitus, *life itself* is nothing but this temporal movement, and it is this that we must affirm with the birth of each new moment and the sacrifice of the last.

History, like time, for Nietzsche, as for Hölderlin and Heraclitus, is in its deepest reaches *discontinuous*. Hence is the self, too, discontinuous; it is not a solid body persisting in space, but an entity that *is* not, that, rather, *becomes*, a manifestation of forces in eternal strife and competition with one another. The greatest advances from Anaximander to Heraclitus, according to Nietzsche, were the absolute denial of the ἄπειρον (which he equates, at turns, with both the Kantian thing-in-itself and the Schopenhauerian will) and the determination of *becoming* as *justice*, rather than as injustice. For according to Anaximander, in Nietzsche's words: "Becoming is an injustice and is to be atoned for with Passing Away (φθορά)." Thus all time was at once a *result* and a punishment for the disunity with the qualityless *one*, eternal Being.⁶⁷⁷ Yet this eternal transformation, this flux of strife in all that becomes, was conceived by Schopenhauer, as for Anaximander, not as a movement to be affirmed, but as a frightening truth, an occasion for pessimism. Nietzsche verifies that "strife for Schopenhauer is a proof of the internal self-dissociation of the Will to Live, which is seen as a self-consuming, menacing and gloomy drive, a thoroughly frightful and by no means blessed phenomenon." Moreover, the sphere of becoming is for Schopenhauer that of "persistent matter," which "must change its form" constantly, "[f]orever and ever" by means of "causality [...]"⁶⁷⁸ This then, is precisely that spatial domain of persistence of which Heraclitus utterly denies the existence. With Heraclitus, then, against

⁶⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 63.

⁶⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 5, 56.

Anaximander and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche embraces this becoming on the temporal plane against a spatial model of becoming as that which must be affirmed in the service of life; it is an overturning of the pessimism of this fear of history, an embrace of the *ἀγών* which, like history itself, defies all causality: “[Heraclitus’] idea of war-justice (Πόλεμος-δίκη) is the first specifically Hellenic idea in philosophy [...].”⁶⁷⁹

Heraclitus’ central, paradoxical idea, is that: “The one is the many.” Nietzsche carefully explains that this is not a separation of the world onto a phenomenal and noumenal plan, but that, rather, it is a cosmic *game*, a movement ruled by chance. “‘The world is the *game* Zeus plays,’ or, expressed more concretely, ‘of the fire with itself. This is the only sense in which the one is at the same time the many.’”⁶⁸⁰ Referring to Heraclitus’ fragment: “Time (αἰών) is a child playing dice: royalty of a child,” Nietzsche writes: “as children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself. Transforming itself into water and earth, it builds towers of sand like a child at the seashore, piles them up and tramples them down. From time to time it starts the game anew. An instant of satiety—and again it is seized by its need, as the artist is seized by his need to create.”⁶⁸¹ The connection of the Heraclitean metaphor of the child for the αἰών with the *artist*, is Nietzsche’s doing, both for the benefit of Wagner and in accordance with his own epistemology, which is based on the human as *fundamentally artistic*, such that, in the creation of concepts, there is a “twofold artistic power [*künstlerische Kraft*], the power that generates images and the power that

⁶⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 64.

⁶⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 6, 58.

⁶⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 62.

selects among them” (KSA 7: 19 [79]).⁶⁸² The homogenizing force [*Kraft*] of the intellect, that one which “allows us to perceive the *major* features of a mirror image with greater intensity” and the other force that “stresses similarity in rhythm despite actual imprecision” is, of necessity, a “*K u n s tkraft*” (KSA 7: 19 [67]).⁶⁸³ Science, from this perspective, is a mystification, a systematic concealment of this primordial artistic force.

Hence Nietzsche writes of Heraclitus: “Only aesthetic man can look thus at the world, a man who has experienced in artists and in the birth of art objects how the struggle of the many can yet carry rules and laws inherent in itself, how the artist stands contemplatively above and at the same time actively within his work, how necessity and random play, oppositional tension and harmony, must pair to create a work of art.”⁶⁸⁴ It is on the grounds of this interpretation that Nietzsche determines Heraclitus as an immoralist; herein lies the affirmative power of this pre-Platonic philosopher: “But if we press upon Heraclitus the question why fire is not always fire, why it is sometimes water and sometimes earth, he could only say, ‘It is a game. Don't take it so pathetically and—above all—don't make morality of it!’”⁶⁸⁵

Time, then, is a game of chance—the cosmic child ruling over the universe, who plays the song of destiny governed by unknowable rules. The rhythm which makes us live is thus multiple, transforming at every moment, brought about through the caprices of a destroying and creating child. Following Heraclitus, whose view of the cosmos was, according to Nietzsche, entirely

⁶⁸² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 29.

⁶⁸³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 25.

⁶⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 62.

⁶⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 7, 64.

aesthetic in the sense that the world was for him a great work of art, he writes in a fragment: “Return to the *Hellenic* conception: art as *physis*” (KSA 7: 19 [290]).⁶⁸⁶

Yet in his lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers, Nietzsche speaks neither of Schopenhauer nor of the laws of time and of space as *equal*. He conceives becoming, rather, in temporal terms: “[Heraclitus] knows only Becoming, the flowing. He considers belief in something persistent as error and foolishness. To this he adds this thought: that which becomes is one thing in eternal transformation, and the law of this eternal transformation, the Logos in all things, is precisely this One, fire (τὸ πῦρ). Thus, the one overall Becoming is itself law [...].”⁶⁸⁷ Thus, because πάντα ῥεῖ, space in the absolute is utterly impossible, as, indeed, is time. Nietzsche writes of Heraclitus’ doctrine of becoming: “Nature is just as infinite inwardly as it is outwardly: we have succeeded up to the cell and the the parts of the cell, yet there are no limits where we could say here is the last divisible point. Becoming never ceases at the indefinitely small. Yet at the greatest [level] nothing absolutely inalterable exists. Our earthly world must eventually perish for inexorable reasons. The heat of the sun cannot last eternally.”⁶⁸⁸ He then quotes Hermann von Helmholtz’s essay “On the Interaction of the Natural Forces,” in his explanation of the ever-decreasing speed of “rotation of the planets” resulting from that “every tide, although with infinite slowness still with certainty diminishes the stores of mechanical force of the system [...].” Hence, Helmholtz concludes that “we must not speak of our astronomical *time* in an absolute sense.”⁶⁸⁹ Nietzsche attributes to Heraclitus an “intuitive perception” of such

⁶⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 89.

⁶⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 62-63.

⁶⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 62.

⁶⁸⁹ Helmholtz, *Science and Culture*. Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 62. The final conclusion, about the impossibility of absolute astronomical time is omitted by Nietzsche.

a cosmological theory, based on his denial of Being and his embrace of the ever-changing, of Becoming.

Nietzsche develops, moreover, against Kant and Schopenhauer, and by a return to Hume's empiricism—indeed, by forging an *invisible bridge* to that genius against whom critical and idealist philosophy had defined themselves—his own theory of causality and its epistemological genesis. He writes, in a fragment of 1872: “Space and time are dependent upon the sensation of causality” (KSA 7: 19 [161]).⁶⁹⁰ Causality, however, like all words and concepts, is a surface-phenomenon, a *metaphor*, existing only in the mind of the subject, and based on the interpretation of sensations that links *forces* to results, or to external events. For Nietzsche describes the process by which concepts are formed as follows: “every word immediately becomes a concept precisely because it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique, entirely individualized primal experience [*Urerlebniss*] to which it owes its existence, but because it has to fit at one and the same time countless more or less similar cases which, strictly speaking, are never equal, or, in other words, are always unequal. Every concept comes into being through the equation of non-equal things.”⁶⁹¹ And again, in his championing of sensation as the ground of experience, he writes: “The eye provides structures. We cling to the surface. [...] Lack of logic, but metaphors” (KSA 7: 19 [225]).⁶⁹² The principle of causality is the inference of an agent from an action, as its originary cause, and hence the deduction of *succession*. This movement comes to play in the formation of knowledge, that is, in the building-up of metaphors out of actions that take place in the sphere of external experience. Nietzsche

⁶⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 51.

⁶⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 256.

⁶⁹² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 70.

writes: “A sensed stimulus and a glance at a movement, linked together, initially produce causality as an empirical principle: two things—namely, a specific sensation and a specific visual image—always appear together: the belief that the one is the cause of the other is *a metaphor, adopted from will and act*: an analogical inference” (KSA 7: 19 [209]).⁶⁹³ Causality is thus of the order of *faith*—it is a spatiotemporal metaphysical concept that obscures the reality of actions and, moreover, of the *forces* of which they are the manifestation. By means of an inference of causality and the exercise of this law on the world, an action is performed and attributed to the will such that the “animal” is established as “a creature that wills” and this is called “its essence.” Thus nouns, or agents, are deduced from verbs, or actions, as be their sources. This, then, is how knowledge proceeds:

From *quality* to *act*: one of our *characteristics* leads to action: whereas in reality what happens is that we infer characteristics because we observe actions of a particular sort.

Thus: the *action* comes first; we connect it with a characteristic.

First the word for an action arises, from it is derived the word for the quality. This relationship transferred onto all things is *causality*.

First “seeing,” then “sight.” The one who “sees” is taken to be the cause of “seeing.” Between the sense and its function we experience a regulated relationship: causality is the transfer of this relationship (of sense to sensory function) onto all things.

It is a primordial phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]: to associate with the eye the stimulus sensed by the eye, that is, to associate a sensory impression with the sensory organ. Of course, only the stimulus is given in itself: to sense this to be an action on the part of the eye and call it “seeing” is to draw a causal inference. [...] The inner connection of *stimulus* and *activity* transferred onto all things. [...] *The eye acts upon a stimulus*: that is, it sees. We explain the world on the basis of our sensory functions: which means, we presuppose a causality everywhere because we ourselves are *constantly experiencing* changes of this sort.

KSA 7: 19 [209]⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 64.

⁶⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 64-65.

There are thus *only* actions. The force behind them, which brings them into being, is merely inferred, in a metaphorical veiling gesture, and is thus a matter of illusion, always to be recreated. All thought depends on the sensory *Urphänomen* that consist of conceptually claiming the will as the origin [*Ursprung*] of a stimulus. Yet this *Urphänomen* is itself an action: the *eye* must act upon action (stimulus) and assert itself to be its author in order for sensation to form itself as the ground of all experience, of all action. It is for this reason that living creatures *artistically* create their primordial aesthetic existence—it is thus that life creates life causally as an illusory phenomenon. The intellect depends for its scientific, analytic and synthetic being on its own power [*Kraft*] to create life as an aesthetic phenomenon. In another fragment, Nietzsche says that: “*Misapprehension* is the primordial phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]” because it is the exigency of language to collapse the differences between things. The intellect works by “[i]dentifying similar thing with similar thing—discovering some similarity or other in one thing and another thing is the primordial procedure. *Memory* thrives on this activity and constantly practices it” (KSA 7: 19 [217]).⁶⁹⁵ This misapprehension, for its part, “presupposes the *perception of structures*. The image in our eye is decisive for knowledge, then the rhythm in our ear. We would *never* arrive at a conception of time based solely on the eye; never arrive at a conception of space based solely on the ear. The sensation of causality corresponds to the sense of touch.” Sounds and images arise in an *interior* manner, from which an external world is deduced by an illogical “leap.” In accordance with this anthropological theory of causality, Nietzsche writes: “The human being is acquainted with the world to the extent that he is

⁶⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 68.

acquainted with himself: that is, its profundity is disclosed to him to the extent that he is amazed at himself and his own complexity” (KSA 7: 19 [118]).⁶⁹⁶

In this proposition, thus, Nietzsche returns to Hume’s theory of causality, according to which all necessary connections between phenomena are purely constructed, inferred from observation and projected onto the world as laws. Hume asserts that “[t]here are no ideas, which occur in metaphysics, more obscure and uncertain, than those of *power, force, energy*, or *necessary connexion* [...].”⁶⁹⁷ On empiricist grounds, he establishes a theoretical structure for these concepts, so mysterious precisely because of the obscure relationship between inherent force, or *will* and appearance or action. Hume thus proposes that “all our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions, or, in other words, that it is impossible for us to *think* of any thing, which we have not antecedently *felt*, either by out external or internal senses.”⁶⁹⁸ Necessity is hence an entirely subjective concept, deduced from the only true realm of reality—*sensation*—and employed to explain the mysteries of external phenomena in their connection to internal or otherwise hidden forces: “The scenes of the universe are continually shifting, and one object follows another in an uninterrupted succession; but the power or force, which actuates the whole machine, is entirely concealed from us, and never discovers itself in any of the sensible qualities of the body.”⁶⁹⁹ The repetition of the experience construed as that of causality insures its apparent validity as an external process. The homogenizing power of such a concept thus permits it a pretension to universality in the consensus of its regulative use: “Our idea [...] of necessity

⁶⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 41.

⁶⁹⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1977), 40.

⁶⁹⁸ Hume, *Enquiry*, 41.

⁶⁹⁹ Hume, *Enquiry*, 42.

and causation arises entirely from the uniformity, observable in operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other. There two circumstances form the whole of that necessity, which we ascribe to matter. Beyond the constant *conjunction* of similar objects, and their consequent *inference* from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity, or connexion.”⁷⁰⁰ It is as a *physiologist* that Nietzsche returns to Hume, the philosopher whose thought famously awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumber and inspired him to surpass his empiricist predecessor by the foundation of a universal and infallible metaphysics, by “abolishing knowledge to make room for faith.” It is in his inversion, his overturning of this metaphysics that Nietzsche’s consideration of causality, as well as of time and space, returns to Hume, perhaps a genius whose thought was not comprehensible in his time. Past the invisible bridge that Nietzsche between the great empiricist and himself lie those to Democritus, to Empedocles and to Heraclitus.

For Nietzsche, knowledge begins with the sacrifice of things themselves, and of things-in-themselves, and ends with self-sacrifice for the creation of culture—the philosopher-philologist must begin by sacrificing the world onto which he projects his image, and to end by sacrificing himself, thus his knowledge, from the very core of its creation. This sacrifice, which doubles and triples and multiplies itself *ad infinitum* across history, across time and becoming, must take place in the sphere of the *tragic*, as a *work of art*—for the philosopher’s task is to harness the force [*Kraft*] of illusion present in all humans in order to create monstrous life by reopening the chasm of the primordial.

⁷⁰⁰ Hume, *Enquiry*, 55.

In another fragment of 1870, Nietzsche poses a question: “What form of knowledge does art justify?” to which he replies: “The *tragic* science [*die t r a g i s c h e Wissenschaft*], which plunges like Empedocles into Etna” (KSA 7:7 [101]). This tragic science, then, is precisely that of *becoming*—it is a thinking of the movement of time as the fundamental life-force.

The Tragic Rhythm of Becoming

My heart, my heart, (θυμέ, θυμ[έ]) confounded by woes (κῆδεσιν) beyond remedy, rise up and defend yourself, setting your breast against your foes as they lie in ambush and standing steadfastly near the enemy. Do not exult openly in victory and in defeat do not fall down lamenting at home, but let your rejoicing in joyful times and your grief in bad times be moderate. Know what sort of rhythm (ῥυθμός) holds human beings.

Archilochus, frag. 128⁷⁰¹

Nietzsche’s early writings contain a multitude of thoughts on rhythm, and a consideration of rhythm as the internal dynamic of forces that makes *life* possible. Between 1870 and 1873, he wrote a great deal on the subject of ancient rhythm, and, in the name of the “Philologist of the Future,”⁷⁰² regarded this field of investigation as that by which his philological project of demonstrating the immeasurable breadth of the abyss separating the moderns from the ancients could finally be accomplished. He defines rhythm as the essential component of the experience of time, as the movement by which the most profound desires and drives surface. Hence rhythm

⁷⁰¹ Douglas E. Gerber, ed. and trans., *Greek Iambic Poetry from the seventh to the fifth centuries BC* (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1999), 166, 167. Translation modified.

⁷⁰² From a fragment reading: “Introduction: The Philologist of the Future” (KSA 7:331). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 134.

defines, or circumscribes, the life of a man, a people, a culture, as the motion by which their *plastic force* becomes manifest. Nietzsche had planned to write a book called “*Prolegomena to a Theory of Rhythmics in Antiquity*,” of which two successive chapters were to be entitled “Philosophy of Rhythm” and “Physiology of Rhythm.”⁷⁰³ This physiological account of rhythm identifies the body as the locus of rhythmic life. Nietzsche writes, in his proposition of the “physiological foundation and explanation of rhythm (and its power [*Macht*])” that: “The entire body contains a countless number of rhythms,” thus, an innumerable quantity of modes of experience.⁷⁰⁴ And further, that “physiologically, life is ... a continuous rhythmical movement of cells. The influence of rhythm seems to me to be an endlessly small modification of this rhythmical movement.”⁷⁰⁵ This inherently *biological* nature of rhythm is, then, what renders music, for Nietzsche, the most *approximately* universal element in tragic drama as, strictly speaking, its tragic core. This then is a scientific re-thinking of the Schopenhauerian concept of music as the *absolutely* universal representation of the will.

Nietzsche writes, in a fragment from 1870:

What does music do? It sets off contemplation in the will. It contains the general forms of all conditions of desire: it is through and through symbolic of the drives, and as such thoroughly comprehensible in its simplest forms (time signature [*Takt*], rhythm [*Rhythmus*]) to everyone. It is thus always more general than any particular action: therefore it is more comprehensible to us than any particular action: music is thus the key to the drama.

KSA 7:7 [23]⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰³ Nietzsche (KSA 7:323). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 145.

⁷⁰⁴ Nietzsche (KSA 7:322). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 145.

⁷⁰⁵ Nietzsche (KSA 7:325). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 145.

⁷⁰⁶ Trans. Miller. Cited in “Harnessing Dionysos,” 3.

Porter writes: “*Takt*, which covers ‘time,’ ‘measure,’ or ‘beat,’ but also ‘tact’ and feeling, derives from the Latin *tangere*, ‘to touch,’ and Nietzsche never loses sight of this sensuous connotation either.”⁷⁰⁷ The very heart, the very mechanism of rhythm is hence tied to sensation and therefore to bodily drives.

For Nietzsche, rhythm is none other than the *form* that sensation—αἴσθησις (also perception)—takes in the experience of time. It is the fundamental beat, the internal measure of experience. Nietzsche thus determines music as “more universal than a single action” precisely because its *rhythms* “represent [*darstellend*]” the various human “drives [*Triebe*]” (KSA 7:7 [23]). In 1871, Nietzsche writes in his notebook: “*Rhythm [Takt]* is to be understood as something utterly fundamental, i.e., as the most primary sensation of time, as the *very form of time*” (KSA 7:9 [116]).⁷⁰⁸ If Nietzsche claims that it is the task of music to “set off contemplation in the will,” this will is, however, no longer that of Schopenhauer, for it is *historically* determined, circumscribed by the bodies in which this “will” resides. Indeed, this will only *exists* through its self-manifestation, its self-symbolization in music. Nietzsche thus refers to music as the “most universal” element in drama, that is—it is universal only in a *relative* and not an *absolute* sense, as in the case of Schopenhauer, for whom the “music” exhibits “the *will itself*”⁷⁰⁹ and this will is conceived as eternal, never becoming subject to the fluctuations of time and history.

The philosopher as tragic hero is *timeless*—he is an island of respite from the ceaseless hurricane of becoming. It is his task, precisely, to deliver his people from the Parmenidean myth

⁷⁰⁷ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 135.

⁷⁰⁸ Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 142.

⁷⁰⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher, trans. Virginia Cutrufelli (New York: Continuum, 1998), 114.

of being into that very becoming; thus the attempt to deliver man into the perfect unity of lost Nature necessarily fails, for such a unity is, in truth, a mere myth. Rather, the tragic hero must ascend out of the torrent of becoming that strives toward unity precisely in order to bring about the revelation of that becoming—in order to unveil to a people the true nature of time; that it is without origin and without *telos*, but rather that it is the self-manifestation of bodies, which exist without being bound *per se* by temporal or spatial laws, since these laws are its own production—this time is, rather, constant flux. Nietzsche writes, in a fragment:

Sensation is the only cardinal fact with which we are acquainted, the only true quality. All the laws of nature can be reduced to laws of motion: wholly without substance. Once this is accomplished, the only thing we have established are the laws of sensation. Nothing at all is thereby gained for the “in itself.” [...] Sensation cannot be explained on the basis of something else, since there is nothing else at all.

KSA 7: 27 [37]⁷¹⁰

Thus sensation is the only possible ground for experience, and this is itself entirely *relative*; it is a meeting of internal and external *forces* whose origins remain obscure. It is through sensation that the illusions of time and of space originate. Indeed, for Nietzsche, time and space, like causality, are *metaphors*—they are hypotheses derived from sensation. It is Nietzsche’s ambition to utterly disprove and abolish the ideality of these structures in their determination as metaphysical prerequisites to experience by both Kant and Schopenhauer: “Time in itself is nonsense: time exists only for the sensate creature. The same is true for space. / Every *structure* appertains to the subject. It is the registering of *surfaces* by means of mirrors” (KSA 7: 19 [140]).⁷¹¹ And again: “Time, space, and causality are only epistemological *metaphors* with which we explain things. [...] Temporal coexistence produces the sensation of space. [...] Sensation of

⁷¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 167.

⁷¹¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 46.

space first derived by means of metaphor from the sensation of time—or vice versa? / Two *causalities coexisting with one another*” (KSA 7: 19 [210]).⁷¹² In declaring this, Nietzsche complies with Democritus’ idea of time as phenomenal, *a posteriori* and merely psychological. Sextus Empiricus attests that for Democritus: “Time is an appearance [*phantasma*] resembling day and night.”⁷¹³ Thus it has no actuality, but is, rather, a simulacrum issuing from the motion of bodies. In Epicurus, who owes his theory of time to Democritus, this notion of the non-reality of time is further explicitated: “Since [time] *depends for its existence on the bodies whose motion etc. it measures*, it certainly cannot exist per se.”⁷¹⁴ Nietzsche’s conception of time as metaphor, and hence as the *transport* of bodies which create themselves as such out of *sensation*, as the movement by which they arrive into the daylight of reason, hence derives from Democritus.⁷¹⁵

According to Nietzsche, Democritus believed that “[o]ur senses show us *qualitatively* determinant differences,”⁷¹⁶ but that “in reality atoms and the void” alone exist.⁷¹⁷ Nietzsche draws the following conclusion: “All qualities are conventions (νόμος); the ὄντα differ only quantitatively. Thus all qualities should be reduced to quantitative differentials. They differentiate themselves solely through shape (ῥυσμός, σχῆμα), arrangement (διαθιγή, τάξις), and position (τροπή, θέσις) [...].”⁷¹⁸ Following Democritus, Epicurus claims that the “apparent

⁷¹² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 65.

⁷¹³ Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians* 10.81 (DK 68A72). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 132.

⁷¹⁴ A. A. Long and David Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 1:37. Cf. also Elizabeth Asmis, *Epicurus’ Scientific Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 33: “Time [for Epicurus] is nothing but the relative duration of properties,” i.e., perceptual properties.

⁷¹⁵ Indeed, these fragments date from the period of Nietzsche’s constant preoccupation with Democritus, and these same notebooks contain countless lists and lineages of the pre-Platonic philosophers.

⁷¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 124.

⁷¹⁷ Democritus, frag. 9. Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 124.

⁷¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 124.

repose of the earth lies in the commonality of movement.” For Democritus, atoms arise and circulate in “combinations that lawfully dissolve and reconfigure themselves anew,” moving in a “circular motion” which is produced by the “unequal acceleration” of atoms, since if they were all to fall “with the same velocity,” then the appearance of “absolute rest” would come about.⁷¹⁹ Hence the speeds of different atoms must differ *quantitatively* in order for *movement* to be possible, i.e., in order for time and the qualitative, phenomenal world to appear. James Porter writes that Nietzsche’s task is to demonstrate and affirm “the principle that all quality is reducible to relations and proportions of quantity [...], which are in turn volitilized by some dynamic factor (be it motion, force, or will).”⁷²⁰ Nietzsche thus determines music as “more universal than a single action” precisely because its *rhythms* “represent [*darstellend*]” the various human “drives [*Triebe*]” (KSA 7:7 [23]). In a fragment from the Winter of 1872-1873 on the advancement past Anaxagoras’ atomism accomplished by Empedocles and Democritus, Nietzsche identifies these drives with Democritean atoms, defined there as “forces.” The ambition of this fragment is to point out the need, in physics, for the “smallest possible number of forces” and thus of the fewest amount of *laws* or “presuppositions” from which the existing world is deduced. He writes that the “first unnecessary hypothesis to fall is Anaxagoras’s Νοῦς, for its assumption are much too complicated to explain something as simple as motion. After all, it is only necessary to explain two forms of motion, the movement of one object toward another and the movement of one object away from another” (KSA 7: 23 [30]).⁷²¹ Atomism thus requires simply the explanation of *motion*—and for this, no all-encompassing metaphysical concept is

⁷¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 127.

⁷²⁰ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 104.

⁷²¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 126.

necessary. The quantitative movement of atoms through empty space is *circular*. Nietzsche, as we shall soon see, undertakes in 1873 to explain motion on an entirely temporal basis, entirely subtracting space from this phenomenon. The goal of such an endeavor is to draw forth the ancient perception of time, to return us to the *body* as a temporal phenomenon.

Aristoxenus, accordingly, and the other post-Democritean rhythmicists, viewed rhythm as divided into temporal, rhythmic “atoms.” Democritus’ atomism, according to which only *empty space* and atoms, the smallest constituent elements of matter, exist, was thus translated into temporal terms in *chronoi*. Quoting Aristoxenus, Porter writes: “‘The first duration[s] that can be grasped by perception,’ *chronoi* are the minima of rhythmical synthesis, or composition, that get thrown into complex interrelations, the perceptual effect of which is rhythm. They are, in effect, *atoms of rhythm*.”⁷²² That which, then, corresponds to the *void* of Democritus is precisely the *pause* in a rhythmic succession. Aristides writes: “An empty duration is one without sound, adopted to fill out the rhythm. A ‘pause,’ in the context of rhythm, is the smallest empty duration *chronos kenos elachistos*.”⁷²³ Porter comments, however, that “all durations are ‘empty’ from a certain perspective: they mark mere formal and abstract divisions in a system of relations.”⁷²⁴ Thus, like Hölderlin’s *tragic transport*, rhythmic movement in time, following this Democritean rhythmicists, is *empty* and *unbounded*. Rhythm, then, conceived as *atomistic*, is interrupted on occasion by *caesurae*, empty spaces of the void—these elements make up the tissue of experience. The intuition of such a rhythmic atomism is recovered by Nietzsche in an attempt to found a temporal atomism; one that shall express the movement of the tragic.

⁷²² Aristoxenus, *Elements of Rhythm*, 2.11. Porter, *Nietzsche*, 132.

⁷²³ Aristides, *De musica*, 1.18; trans. Barker. Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 334, n. 14.

⁷²⁴ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 334, n. 14.

Nietzsche's essential task in his philological study of rhythm was to demonstrate the radical incommensurability of modern dynamic theories of rhythm with ancient quantitative rhythm, indissolubly unified with rhythm as a *bodily experience*. In a letter to his mentor, Ritschl, of December 30, 1870, he writes: "The more we draw on modern music for understanding [classical] metrics, the farther we estrange ourselves from the reality of metrics in antiquity."⁷²⁵ He accuses modern classicists of imposing, in a Kantian manner, a "rhythm *an sich*" onto antiquity. He thus tracks the genealogy in antiquity of the development of rhythm. The shift, in his view, in this history, is that from a *quantitative* conception of rhythm to a *qualitative* one. Originally, rhythm is conceived corporeally. It gradually becomes the means by which time is divided through a rhythmic that is a "structure of signs" simultaneously "sensuous and abstract."⁷²⁶ Rhythm is first experienced in a manner that is purely temporal and quantitative, in terms of *dance*, and later separates itself from its rootedness in the body to become an abstract measure of time, as bodies, in turn, are conceived in terms of space. In accordance with this movement toward a separation of rhythm from the body, the stress accent in the Greek language overtakes the original tonal pitch accent, thus resulting in the loss of rhythm as absolutely *quantitative*.⁷²⁷ Nietzsche writes: "Dance movement emancipates itself naturally from the movement associated with keeping time [*Taktbewegung*]. More accurately, ἄρσις [rising] and θέσις [placing] are no longer meaningful to the art of dancing [viz., as a lifting and lowering of the foot]; from now on they are only a measure of time [*Zeitmesser*]."⁷²⁸ In his essay, *On the*

⁷²⁵ Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 163. Again, in his "Encyclopedia of Classical Philology" (1871/1874) (KGW 2.3: 341–437, 399), Nietzsche writes: "The error [of modern philology] lies in having taken our music to be identical to ancient music." (Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 336 n. 27.)

⁷²⁶ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 140.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Porter, *Nietzsche*, 144.

⁷²⁸ Nietzsche, 320. Porter, *Nietzsche*, 142.

Theory of Quantitative Rhythm (Winter, 1870-1871), Nietzsche quotes Aristides to ground these rhythmic terms in dance: “So ἄρσις is the bringing upwards of part of the body, whereas θέσις is the bringing downward of the same part.”⁷²⁹ He then refers these upward and downward movements back to Aristoxenus, rhythmically as “ὁ κάτω χρόνος and ὁ ἄνω χρόνος” (the downward time and the upward time) and writes:

The combination of ἄρσις and θέσις is πούς [foot]. Important rule, that foot was originally based on dance: the singer is governed by dance (which was not a whirl, but a pleasant walk). When the measure was uneven, of course, there were also correspondingly varied κινήσεις [movements] of the dancers. Gradually there developed a separation of pure time-keeping and artistic performance, especially in pure instrumental music.⁷³⁰

Through the system of time-keeping that measured rhythm by *ictus* and *percussio* (stress and beat) rather than physical, rhythmic quantity, rhythmicity was thus abstracted from the unity of measure and dance, from the rising and falling of the *feet*, of the limbs, and, indeed, of *breath*. Rhythm thereafter becomes measured according to *sound*; the rhythmicity of postclassical modernity begins here, which Nietzsche called “Latin vocalism”—the move away from temporal quantity and toward accentuation.⁷³¹ With the uprise of the word, and the syllable as measures of time, “the robust feeling for time disintegrates in [everyday] speech,” such that the original pitch accent and the ictus come into conflict with one another, “representing, as it were, a violent survival of the world.”⁷³² A transition thus occurs from the dithyrambic experience of rhythm to a linguistic evaluation of rhythmicity, which dominates primordial temporality.

⁷²⁹ Aristides. Quintil. 1.13, 31. 15W-I. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Theory of Quantitative Rhythm*, ed. and trans. James W. Halporn. *Arion*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1967), 233-243, 237.

⁷³⁰ Nietzsche, *Quantitative Rhythm*, 237.

⁷³¹ Nietzsche, (KSA, 307). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 144.

⁷³² Nietzsche, (KSA, 307-308). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 145.

The origin of this shift, according to Nietzsche, is a division, which occurs with Aristoxenus between *rhythmed objects* and rhythm itself: “rhythm is not identical with any of the objects made rhythmic.”⁷³³ Rhythm acts upon both bodies and time, organizing the movement of the former and dividing the latter into *chronoi*—durational segments of time. Rhythm requires a rhythmed body in order to supervene on time and effect its division. Aristoxenus writes that the “object made rhythmic [*rhythmizomenon*] must be capable of being divided into recognizable parts, by which it will divide time.”⁷³⁴ Rhythm, which is the structure of sensation for humans, by means of which they measure time, must yet exist separately as an abstract concept, after Aristoxenus. It is for this reason that Nietzsche says that this rhythmicist “speaks in a *philosophical* sense about rhythm.”⁷³⁵ Yet rhythm is not merely duration, but a whole constellation of times and measures—thus it is a “structure of signs” that overtakes bodies and makes them rhythmic.⁷³⁶ Thus rhythm becomes an *abstract language* which must exist, to a certain extent, *an sich*. It is this phenomenon, then, that renders rhythm, independent of bodies, universal. This transition can be understood in a parallel fashion to Nietzsche’s theory of the disunification of chorus and dialogue in tragedy effected by Euripides under the rationalist sway of Socrates. In Sophocles, “thought still moves along the path of instinct”⁷³⁷ so that tragedy forms a dissonant, harmonious whole, in the unity of choral lyric, dance and dialogue, such that the “unity of the artistic organism” was the “goal” of tragedy.⁷³⁸ Euripides, on the contrary,

⁷³³ Aristoxenus, *Elements of Rhythm*, 2.5 Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 139.

⁷³⁴ Aristoxenus, *Elements of Rhythm*, 2.6. Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 140.

⁷³⁵ Nietzsche, (KSA, 103). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 139.

⁷³⁶ Porter, *Nietzsche*, 140.

⁷³⁷ Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 76.

⁷³⁸ Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 76.

employed “thought” in his tragedies, which came to overpower “the artistic instinct” which had previously carried tragedy forward. While before Euripides, thought worked “in accordance with instinct,” this was henceforth no longer the case: “in Euripides it [thought] will become destructive to instinct.”⁷³⁹ The unity present in Sophocles then became, instead, the “effect,” due to the fact that he employed “an aesthetic that placed itself in the spectator’s point of view.”⁷⁴⁰ This concern with a dramatic formula organized to produce a particular effect on spectators separated from the action, rather than participating in it, was accordingly commended by Aristotle who, with his obsession with *effect* that Goethe so deplored, called Euripides “the τραγικώτατος (‘the most tragic poet’).”⁷⁴¹ This change, furthermore, coincided with a movement from the lyric to the epic sensibility, resulting in the dissociation of the chorus from the action: in Euripides, “the sung parts are no longer related to the course of action any more closely than with another tragedy [...].”⁷⁴² The chorus becomes an abstract idea, a musical interlude, no longer necessary to the heart of tragedy.

In the same manner, rhythm and body are originally inseparable—it is only with Aristoxenus—who is, indeed, another of Nietzsche’s transitional figures along with Sophocles, Empedocles and Theognis⁷⁴³—that rhythm is theorized in separation from the body. For Nietzsche, on the contrary, the universality of rhythm is yet paradoxically *relative*—it depends

⁷³⁹ Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 67.

⁷⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 76.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a 28-29. Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 76.

⁷⁴² Nietzsche, *L’Edipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 76.

⁷⁴³ Cf. Porter, *Nietzsche*, 155, where he also provides this quotation: “Importance of Aristoxenus, his oppositional stance toward the more recent art. Reminiscence of the old art of music [or ‘culture’ (μουσική)]. Degeneracy already with Sophocles” (Nietzsche, KSA, 126). This nostalgic backward-gazing is, for Nietzsche, the sign of degeneration. It is Aristoxenus, not Nietzsche, who claims that Sophocles is already degenerate, although Nietzsche sometimes, as in his lectures on *Oedipus Tyrannos*, takes this position as well.

entirely on the rhythms of the bodies of a certain time, bodies which transform across history's movement of becoming. To deliver rhythm back into the body, its originary source—that is his project. This entails, therefore, the reestablishment of the instinctive, agonal equilibrium between *Zeitleben* and *Tonleben* which Nietzsche had also posited as the origin of rhythm. Rhythmics must not be an abstract, philosophical language foreign to the body, but must become again what Goethe had declared it to be: “‘The measure,’ Goethe said, ‘flows unconsciously from the mood of the poet. If he thought about it while writing the poem, he would go mad and produce nothing of value.’”⁷⁴⁴ Yet this unconscious harmony between rhythm and the body can only be brought about from the point of view of an idealized system of rhythmics—hence, the metaphysical element of this abstraction, this separation of life and ordering rhythmics, must come about precisely through a sacrifice of that metaphysical element. Only thereby can a return to the primordial indissolubility of rhythm and the body come about. It is necessary, perhaps, then, to travel through the madness of that dissonance, the tragic knowledge of the rules of rhythm, in order for that instinctual, creative *ἀγών* shall once again come about.

In 1876, Nietzsche would write of music, in his *Miscellaneous Maxims and Opinions* (*Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche*), which appends *Human All too Human*, and in apparent contradiction with his earlier vision:

Music is, in fact, not a universal, timeless language, as is so often said in its praise, it corresponds, on the contrary, exactly to a particular measure of time, warmth and emotion [*einem Gefühls-, Wärme- und Zeitmaass*] which involves a quite definite, individual culture, determined by time and place, as its inner law [*inneres Gesetz*].⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁴ Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, 313.

⁷⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Miscellaneous Maxims and Opinions* (*Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche*), § 171. Cited in D'Iorio, *Nietzsche à Sorrente*, 135.

Here, it is the multiplicity of these inner laws in their power to determine a culture that renders its music comprehensible and *proper* to a man, people, a culture. For the rhythms that measure time are infinitely changeable, and therein lies their homeotic power. From Nietzsche's early thinking of music as the universal element in tragedy to his later renunciation of that universality, the thread of thought, and indeed the justification, remains consistent; music is the most universal part of drama because it calls to the depths of the *body* and measures itself in accordance with that rhythm. Nietzsche's shift, between the early and late thoughts on rhythm brings that measure, that breath, into *time*, such that it takes place and unfolds as the secret text of history, its hidden force in becoming. The shift is, indeed, a distancing from the Schopenhauerean will—from the very word “will,” bearing the trace of Nietzsche's predecessor, such that the universal power of music, already *relative* in Nietzsche's early writing, is conceived, at this point, beyond the very terminology of the metaphysics of music.

The multiplicity and transformability of rhythm as the deepest expression of bodily impulses had also been conceived by Nietzsche early, without reference to such metaphysical concepts as the will. In an essay entitled “Rhythmic Investigations” [*Rhythmische Untersuchungen*] (1870-1871), he writes the following, under the heading “The Power of Rhythm:”

I suspect that the sensuous power of rhythm lies in the fact that the two rhythms that work effects on each other determine [*bestimmen*] each other in such away that the broader one divides the narrower one. The rhythmic movements of the pulse, etc. (the pace) are apparently re-organized as the step accommodates itself to the beat. [...] And since the entire body [*Leib*] contains an infinite number of rhythms in it, every rhythm will make a direct attack upon the body. Everything suddenly moves according to a new law: not, indeed, as if the old ones no longer dominate, but rather in that they are fixed [or attuned, *bestimmt*].⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁶ Nietzsche (KGA 2.3 [322]). Cited in Miller, “Harnessing Dionysos,” 4.

What is here considered to be objectified and expressed in rhythm is not the *will*, but the “pulse”—the internal biological measure of life. Nietzsche here takes Schopenhauer’s claim that “music [...] acts directly on the will, i.e., the feelings, passions, and emotions of the hearer, so that it quickly raises these or even alters them”⁷⁴⁷ to its most radical conclusion and thereby surpasses his master. For it is through the *infinity* of rhythms contained in the body, and the “attack” of externalized rhythms upon the body that the very *law* internal to it is transformed. This is not a matter of the elation or exaltation of the will through the stimulation of sentimental faculties, but, rather, the establishment of an entirely *new* human measure through the externalization of *novel rhythm*.

For Nietzsche, dissonance underlies all consonance in ancient rhythm, in much the same manner as discord, for Heraclitus and for Empedocles, is the principle of life. Heraclitus says: “That which opposes converges, and out of these diverging things the most beautiful harmony is formed. And all things arise according to discord” (14 [A 5]).⁷⁴⁸ Discord [ἔρις], which constitutes primordial contradiction, is also *justice* [δίκη]. In another fragment, we read: “And if it is necessary that war be enchained, and that justice be discord, and that all things arise according to oracles ...” (14 [A 7]).⁷⁴⁹ Dionysian dissonance, discord, then, as the regulating, judging law of life. Nietzsche had accordingly said of Heraclitus’ view of Πόλεμος as the *father of all things*: “it is Hesiod’s good Eris transformed into the cosmic principle; it is the contest-idea of the Greek individual and the Greek state, taken from the gymnasium and the palaestra. from the artist’s

⁷⁴⁷ Schopenhauer, *Philosophical Writings*, 114.

⁷⁴⁸ Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 23.

⁷⁴⁹ Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, 3: 25.

agon, from the contest between political parties and between cities—all transformed into universal application so that now the wheels of the cosmos turn on it.”⁷⁵⁰

Nietzsche writes: “Originally [...] the note functions as a measure of time”⁷⁵¹—yet this primal temporal function of the note becomes covered over in modern music, so that music self-rationalizes in *tone*. It is the gradual separation of *Zeitleben* and *Tonleben* that characterizes the historical development into modernity—finally, *Tonleben* masters *Zeitleben*, so that the temporality of music is forgotten as the ground rhythmic life. Nietzsche writes: “The soul of our *melody and harmony* is expressed in the ictus of our compositions”⁷⁵²—thus harmony, originally born of dissonance, seeks later to overcome it, to exclude it from music. This dissonance, for Nietzsche, must be recovered precisely so that consonance—the rhythmic element of the tragic hero—may arise from it.

Interlude: Anaxagoras

Anaxagoras occupies the time between Heraclitus and Empedocles. Nietzsche explains Anaxagoras’ cosmogony in terms of the *voũç* and circular motion. For Anaxagoras, there is no Becoming, but only Being, and that which *is* exists for all eternity. Following this, “everything is the same in all of time.”⁷⁵³ Time does not move, but is an eternity of identity. It is an axiom of the Ionians that, in Goethe’s words: “Like is only known by Like”—which idea finds itself recovered by “an old mystic writer” in the words: “If the eye were not sunny, how could we

⁷⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, §5, 55.

⁷⁵¹ Nietzsche (KSA, 322). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 135.

⁷⁵² Nietzsche (KSA, 137). Cited in Porter, *Nietzsche*, 135.

⁷⁵³ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 97.

perceive light? If God’s own strength lived not in us, how could we delight in Divine things?” Goethe uses these words to demonstrate that “the eye [...] is formed with reference to light, to be fit for the action of light; the light it contains corresponding with the light without.”⁷⁵⁴ The phenomenon of sight is a circular one, wherein internal and external light interpenetrate, and semi-miraculously, with reference to a far divinity at its origin, color arises.

For Anaxagoras: “All difference concerns motion; motion is thus what it is to be genuinely alive.”⁷⁵⁵ Vitality is motion, and living things move in such a way that they are ordered into a “lawful regularity” by an eternal force. This force, pervasive Being, present at the heart of life is “the intellect (νόος [in Attic, νοῦς], neither intellect, understanding, nor reason—authentically Greek⁷⁵⁶—the power of language!)” The νοῦς “alone moves,” or rather, constitutes the impetus to all motion, which motion organizes the “*aftereffects* of such an intellect [...]” The νοῦς, in the beginning, “produces a circular motion (or vortical movement, ἡ περιχώρησις) on one point of mass, which immediately expands outward and pulls ever larger parts into its range, moving ever farther outward.”⁷⁵⁷ The cosmos is created in a series of moving concentric circles, the manifestation of universal vitality, forming rings. From out of a chaos of “*primal matter*,”⁷⁵⁸ the elements are organized according to their density and luminosity; aether is the

⁷⁵⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge, London: M.I.T. Press, 1970), lv.

⁷⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 97.

⁷⁵⁶ Nietzsche’s footnote to this exclamation runs as follows:

χαῖρε νόω, “happy in his heart” (*Odyssey* 8, 78 [trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper, 1967)])
 χόλος νόον οἰδαίνει, “anger ... wells in his heart” and
 ταῦτη ὁ νόος φέρει, “though their minds are careful” (*Iliad*, 9, 120 [trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: U Chicago, 1974).])
 κατὰ νοῦν, “in sympathy with” or “so-minded” (Herodotus, [*Histories*] 9, 120 [trans. A.G. Godley, 4 vols. (Loeb, 1921).]) (Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 97, n. 19).

⁷⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 97.

⁷⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 98.

name for the warm, the light, the thin in things, air the name for the dark, the cold, the heavy: “The thick and moist are driven to the center, thin and warm to the outside, by way of momentum, just as the heavy is driven to the center.”⁷⁵⁹ Water and earth divide, the one pushing outward and the other inward. Nietzsche insists that Anaxagoras is not a teleologist: the *voûς* contains no purposiveness. Only in the sense that it is an eternally *ordering* force by its incitement of circular motion is it “simultaneously efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) and final cause (*causa finalis*), according to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.”⁷⁶⁰ The *voûς* was neither a principal of individual purposiveness nor a “consciously knowing”⁷⁶¹ entity. Rather, it was at once a “ghost in the machine ([...] θεὸς ἐκ μηχανῆς)”⁷⁶² and, as the active, moving principle in human beings, “life” itself.⁷⁶³ Thus, the cosmological creative force as the divinity present in all living things. The grand ambition of Anaxagoras was “to explain the actual world with the *fewest possible* nonphysical theories” for which “circular motion suffices; had he immediately imagined an intellect with continually purposive ends, it would have become a mythological being, a god—precisely what he dismisses.”⁷⁶⁴ Rather, the *voûς* is pervasive, eternally present and its resulting “motion is a thing of regularity, and that is the origin of all order—one circular motion continuing into eternity, which is the infinitude of the All.”⁷⁶⁵ There is no world process, for

⁷⁵⁹ Anaxagoras, fr. 15. Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 97.

⁷⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1: 4. Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 98.

⁷⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 99.

⁷⁶² Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 98.

⁷⁶³ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 99.

⁷⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 99.

⁷⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 103.

Nietzsche's Anaxagoras, because there is no *time*, and no individual intentionality inherent in the *voûς*, which is, nonetheless a force of the *will to life* freed of all ends, of all τέλος.

Nietzsche proclaims the scientific discoveries of Anaxagoras: "He discovers the laws of conservation of force [*Kraft*] and that of the indestructibility of matter." The *voûς* metamorphoses, in Nietzsche's reading, into *Geist* (Mind, Spirit) and *Kraft* (force). Because of the eternity and infinitude of the *voûς*, which is to say, of the vital force in all things, in the absolute absence of time, both matter and force are conserved in the cosmic eternity that is our element. "All motion is either direct or indirect. The form of direct motion is organic life or mechanical motion: the indirect is always [only] mechanical. In this regard we continually maintain that a dichotomy between matter and spirit did not exist for him. Intellect is only the finest (λεπτότατον) and purest (καθαρώτατον) of all things and has all knowledge about everything (γνώμην περὶ παντὸς πάσῃν ἰσχει)."⁷⁶⁶ Force thus produces different movements in the organon and in lifeless matter, yet treats them equally, indistinguishably, directly or indirectly, moving all things. Force, this primordial figure, is, however, indistinguishable from the life it sets in motion. Hence, for Anaximander, there is only simultaneity of circular motion in *space*, where all things infinitely coexist. Nietzsche, in his study of Anaximander's doctrine, already insists on the unity, the non-opposition, of force (*voûς*) and motion, or matter. The *voûς*, also called the *will* by Nietzsche, is a "self-caused motion"⁷⁶⁷; it does not exist in a pre-historical, or rather, pre-vital, pre-cosmic eternity, but rather, its very eternity *is* its circular motion. To the greatest extent possible, Nietzsche integrates this efficient or final *cause* into the vital motion it creates, though this integration be, in the strictest sense, impossible. Nietzsche writes:

⁷⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 100.

⁷⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 15, 100.

“Representation and drive are both conjoined in one concept intellect (νοῦς and ψυχή): both are effects of the *life force* [*Lebenskraft*], which is one in all things, meaning the unique thing that is totally *homogenous*. All other things are heterogenous [... .] Intellect ‘is alone by itself.’”⁷⁶⁸ The primordial phenomenon of this *Lebenskraft*, inserted by Nietzsche into the Anaximandrian system, encloses thus simultaneously the *Trieb* and the *Vorstellung* (representation) it leads to. Thus the *homogenous*, the νοῦς, also called by Nietzsche the primordial One in *The Birth of Tragedy* is defined as this totality of force for life, its metaphysical strength behind appearance, and this force is unified originally with the representation it makes of itself. In a fragment, Nietzsche writes: “Preference of our age for powerful biases because they at least still betray nature’s energy for life [*Lebenskraft*]: and the prerequisite is indeed nature’s *energy* [*Kraft der Natur*]” (KSA 7: 30 [6]).⁷⁶⁹ Strength is thus defined in accordance with the power to harness and use this energy for the capacity to *represent*, that is, to *create*. This creative representation is accordingly that of *illusion*.

Nietzsche’s Temporal Atomism: Zeitatomenlehre

In 1873, Nietzsche wrote a meditation on time in his notebook, using the Neo-Kantian philosopher, Afrikan Spir’s thesis, in his book *Denken und Wirklichkeit* (1873), that all time is reducible to spatial dimensions, in order, precisely, to assert the contrary. Spir’s metaphysics, to which Nietzsche refers in his discussion of Parmenides in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* as a modern model for the pre-Platonic philosopher’s vision of the eternal “One,” has as its basis the fundamental discontinuity and the ultimate non-correspondence between the world

⁷⁶⁸ Anaxagoras, frag. 12. Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 100.

⁷⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 292.

of appearances and the world of the Kantian in-itself. Spir claims that “no intermediate element at all is possible between the unconditioned and the conditioned, since the concepts ‘unconditioned’ and ‘conditioned’ form an exhaustive disjunction.”⁷⁷⁰ As a result, the unconditioned can in no way form the *condition* of the conditioned; it is, rather, supremely unknowable and, in addition, has neither any direct relation to, nor any necessity for the experience of the apparent world; intellectual intuition is hence neither possible nor necessary. The only thing that can be assumed of the unconditioned world, according to Spir, is “that it must accord with the logical principle of identity, and from this we can infer that it cannot contain either plurality or change, since both of these would compromise its absolute identity.”⁷⁷¹ It is for this reason that Nietzsche will use Spir’s *unconditioned*, whose sole law is that of absolute identity, as a model for Parmenidean Being. As a result of Spir’s banishment of the eternal, noumenal sphere to a status of non-necessity with regard to experience, that sphere becomes, in turn, a mere *myth*, and thus unveils metaphysics as such as a mere *fable*. The postulation of such an unconditioned world reduces metaphysics to Nietzsche’s *will to truth*, and reveals it as a manifestation of this drive which is, in essence, *bodily*.

Thus, for Spir, in the absence of any possible access to the unconditioned world, the *conditioned* world is condemned to the temporal movement of becoming. Small writes: “Arguing against both Kant and Herbart, Spir insists on the empirical reality of time, while denying its a priori status.”⁷⁷² Kant’s error, according to Spir, is to treat space and time on the same basis, a bias

⁷⁷⁰ Afrikan Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit*, (Leipzig: J.G. Findel, 1873) 1: 363. Trans. Robin Small, in “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1994, 32.1: 85-108, 87.

⁷⁷¹ Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 87.

⁷⁷² Cf. Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit*, 2: 7 and 15.

attributable to his love of symmetry.”⁷⁷³ While no empty time can be conceived, since succession is immediate and given in experience, empty space *can* be conceived because space itself is simply a construction. Summarizing Spir’s argument, Small writes: “Since time is nothing apart from succession, we cannot imagine an empty space, and even assign it a definite size. Time is thus neither something existing in its own right, nor a necessary form of intuition on the part of the subject. It is an abstraction which expresses what given successions have in common with one another.”⁷⁷⁴ From this results the impossibility of any absolute unit of time, hence its infinite divisibility. While Aristotle had used the infinite divisibility of time and space to prove their absolute continuity, Nietzsche, through Spir, will speak of this divisibility as one of the aspects of the fundamental *discontinuity* of time. In a notebook, he jotted down: “*Infinitude* in nature: nowhere does it have limits. Only for us is there finitude. Time *infinitely* divisible” (KSA 7: 19 [133]).⁷⁷⁵

Aristotle’s argument for the infinite divisibility of time and of space is based on the observation that a moving object will always cover a distance twice as great as an object moving twice as slowly, in the same span of time. He writes: “the quicker will divide the time and the slower will divide the length. If, then, this alternation always holds good, and at every turn involves a division, it is evident that all time must be continuous.”⁷⁷⁶ This continuity depends on the assumption that the indivisibility of time would render the divisibility of space impossible

⁷⁷³ Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 89. Cf. Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit*, 1: 263.

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit*, 2: 7. Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 89-90.

⁷⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 44.

⁷⁷⁶ *Physics*, VI.2.233a, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye. Cited in Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 91.

and vice versa, such that in order for time and space to coexist, they must both remain infinitely divisible; the existence of natural units of time and of space are contingent on one another.⁷⁷⁷

Spir, on the other hand, argues that time is a mere abstraction, that it possesses no natural measure, and is rather inferred from the phenomenal experience of succession. For him, therefore, the proof of the infinite divisibility of time contributes to the theory that time has no existence in itself. Invoking an argument made by Sextus Empiricus, whose goal is to reinforce the Aristotelian argument against the objection that certain objects merely *appear* to move at different speeds while in truth they all move at the same rate, Spir writes: “With the rotation of the earth, for example, a point on the equator moves with a million times greater speed than a point located close to the pole: and yet both points complete their revolution in exactly the same time, and occupy this time with the same continuity and uniformity. The slower moving point never stands still, any more than the faster moving one. How then could the same time, if it were not a mere abstraction but something distinct from real successions, be occupied by two so different quanta of succession in a uniform and, to that extent, equal way? It would obviously be impossible.”⁷⁷⁸ This argument serves to prove, thus, that from different quantities of succession the same time-span is deduced and that, moreover, time is nothing but such a deduction, and is hence an entirely empirical phenomenon, with no connection to the atemporal substratum of noumena. Nietzsche transfers these considerations onto a meditation of motion as purely

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 91.

⁷⁷⁸ Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit*, Band 2: 9, trans. Small. Cited in Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 90-91. The argument of Sextus Empiricus, in his *Against the Physicists*, is essentially identical, but refers to a rotating rigid body such as a ruler, moving in a circular fashion from one end. In the same quantity of time, entirely different distances are covered by every point on the ruler. (Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists*, 11, 149-54- Loeb ed., trans. R. G. Bury (London: Heinemann, 1960), 3: 286-89. Small, “Nietzsche, Spir, and Time,” 92).

temporal, and of *becoming* as the only true phenomenon of life, which is nothing more than the manifestation of various, constantly-changing forces.

Nietzsche, in his fragment on the reduction of all dimensions of movement to time, which begins: “Motion in *time*” (KSA 7: 26 [12]),⁷⁷⁹ proposes the following: “Translation of all laws of motion into temporal proportions. / The essence of sensation would then consist in gradually sensing and measuring such temporal figures with more and more refinement; representation constructs them as something coexistent and then establishes the development of the world on the basis of this coexistence: pure translation into another language, into the language of becoming” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁸⁰ Following Spir’s denial of the ideality of space, Nietzsche posits coexistence as a spatial fantasy, whose formation is strictly temporal; there is, strictly speaking, “no spatial coexistence other than in representation [*Vorstellung*]” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁸¹ Nietzsche thus expresses, or exposes, for himself, the necessity of a translation of the Anaxagorean principle of motion in its circularity, which denies time and supposes the eternity of space and the simultaneity of all things, into the Heraclitean language of pure temporality, pure becoming, where eternity takes on the meaning of the incessant nature, the endlessness of movement and the transfiguration of life defined as *fire*.

Nietzsche’s first step in this procedure is to prove the irreconcilability of spatial and temporal laws with regard to motion. He begins his meditation by drawing a “spatial point A” and a “spatial point B” in this notebook and assuming that each of them “has an effect” on the other. He then claims that since the effect must “cover a distance,” a “period of time” is

⁷⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 147.

⁷⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 149.

⁷⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 148.

necessary to this effective movement, for lacking this dimension, “[c]onsecutive points in time would merge with one another” in space. This collision would have as its result that neither of the points would change; they would simply congeal with one another, thus rendering the existence of A as an “effective force [*Kraft*]” impossible. Presuming, then, that A has an effect on B in time, neither of these points remain the same following the event of this effect; rather, the force of A is transformed by its temporal activity. “If we take what is effective in *time*, then what is effective in the tiniest fragment of every moment in time always is something different.” Nietzsche thus comes to the conclusion that “time demonstrates the *absolute nonpermanence* of a force” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁸² Time, hence, is the manifestation of various, changeable *forces* which, precisely because of the absence of space in their existence, have no identity with themselves but, as *atoms*, move at constantly varying speeds, creating rhythms of distance in their travel. Causality itself is annihilated by the very fact that it takes place in time, and that as soon as motion occurs, its origin as such no longer exists but has transformed by its effective action. Nietzsche then writes: “All laws of space are thus conceived as *timeless*, / which means that they must be simultaneous and immediate.” The result of an actualization of these laws in the absence of time would hence be: “The entire world with one strike. But then there is no *motion*.” Since motion, i.e. the phenomenal rhythm of becoming, is the fundamental phenomenon of life (for Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Democritus as well as for Nietzsche), no persistence of spatial laws is possible; motion is a purely temporal occurrence. “Motion struggles with the contradiction that it is constituted according to the laws of space and that once we assume time, these laws become impossible: that means that at one and the same time it is and is

⁷⁸² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 147.

not.” Therefore, in order to overcome this contradiction, we must assume “that either space or time is = 0.” If space were infinitely small, then the distance between atoms would also be infinitely small—hence “all punctual atoms would merge at one point.”⁷⁸³ Nietzsche concludes that “since time is infinitely divisible, the entire world is possible as a purely temporal phenomenon, because I can occupy every point in time with one and the same spatial point and hence can place it an infinite number of times.”⁷⁸⁴ Here, Nietzsche displaces the famous formula of Lessing’s *Laocoon*, namely that: “succession of time is the department of the poet, as space is that of the painter.”⁷⁸⁵ Concerning rhythm in tragedy, these terms of space and time take on a different aspect—the former is measured by dancing bodies, while the latter is measured by music. Just as, for Lessing, poetry is the realm of the purely temporal, wherein space = 0, while painting is that in which it is time that = 0 and space alone exists so that these two aesthetic fields display worlds utterly incommensurable to one another, Nietzsche translates these categories onto song and dance, so that the temporal is that realm in which quantity alone exists while quality interrupts this realm with bodily dissonance. And yet, suppose bodies were merely the highest form of idealization, suppose they too were = 0 as spatial entities, and only existed in truth *temporally*—dance as pure becoming: this is the possibility Nietzsche exposes for us.

If the tragic hero, the genius, the philosopher, attains a state of *timelessness*, there is then a shift that occurs in tragic becoming, from one of pure time to one of pure space—at his highest moment, the hero reduces time to nothing, and brings about an “entire world with one strike.” And it is precisely this moment, this return to the Greek world of “space and light” divested for a

⁷⁸³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 147.

⁷⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 147-148.

⁷⁸⁵ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. C. Beasley (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), 120.

golden instant of the *pain* and *dissonance* that is becoming, according to a *new* and *different* rhythm that is prophetic for the hero, both of his downgoing and of its failure, its failure as a *task*. For it is into the supreme affirmation of pure time, pure becoming that the hero, from this highest point of ideality, must deliver his people.

Time, according Nietzsche, is absolutely heterogenous—his thinking of temporality has as its goal to put *force*—the homogenous, for Anaximander, back into *becoming*, and the multiplicity of all things. Nietzsche thinks time as *becoming*—against Parmenides, with Heraclitus and Goethe: “All forces are merely a function of *time* [*Alle Kräfte sind nur F u n k t i o n d e r Z e i t*]” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁸⁶ Elaine P. Miller writes, in reference to this fragment: “With the word *Kraft*, Nietzsche does not imply an original source; in addition, ‘forces’ are always multiple and fleeting, constantly changing each other as they collide.”⁷⁸⁷ This hypothesis is developed on the basis of the impossibility of “postulating a law of time.” For a vision of the world as ordered by “the regularity temporal figures,” writes Nietzsche, would suppose a “constant force” on the basis of coexistence. This constancy is disproved by time itself, in its pure inconsistency. Force, thus, as a function of time, must by no means be constant but “different” in “every tiniest moment”—therefore, Nietzsche postulates that there are only “absolutely mutable forces” and these alone “can have an effect [...].” The very idea of temporal *succession* is refuted by Nietzsche, for two “successive temporal moments [...] would merge with one another. Thus, every effect is *actio in distans*, that is, by means of a leap” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 149.

⁷⁸⁷ Miller, “Harnessing Dionysus,” 10.

⁷⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 149.

The possibility, however, of this action is unprovable. Rather, the different speeds of time we perceive are contained in the “nature of this effect” such that “force, as functions of time, express themselves in the relationships to closer or more distant points in time: namely, fast or slow. The force is based on the degree of acceleration.” The faster the acceleration, the more proximal are the moments in time in their effect on one another. The more slowly this acceleration takes place, “the greater the temporal interstices, the greater the *distans*.” In this way, the most distant points in time combine in a relation of slowness, and “all slowness, of course, is relative.” Insofar as time is measured “in terms of something that *remains spatial*,” a “*constant* time” is presupposed between any two points in time: “But time is by no means a continuum, rather, there are only *wholly different points in time, no line. Actio in distans*.” Hence, in the same way: “No motion in time is *constant*.” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁸⁹ The more slowly time moves, in other words, the greater the distance between temporal moments, the more effectively, the more intensely is the fundamental discontinuity, fundamental dissonance of time, and hence of motion, which arises within the “[r]elationships among different temporal layers” felt. History, then, bridges the greatest temporal distances, distances whose spatiotemporal origin, point of *beginning* can only ever be imagined, as, by means of the necessary “reproducing being” which “holds earlier moments in time next to the current ones[, ... o]ur bodies are imagined” in these moments (KSA 7: 26 [12]);⁷⁹⁰ the body, as a spatial entity, is mythical, inserted by imagination into the representation of present moments as *different* from the past moments they are believed to have issued from. Bodies are thus by no means heavy things in space; rather, they are a play of transforming forces, which manifest in the form of ceaseless becoming, discontinuous time. In

⁷⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 150.

⁷⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 148.

this vein, and following, too, a Heraclitean inspiration, Pierre Klossowski writes that for Nietzsche: “*The body is a result of chance*: it is nothing other but the site of the encounter of a collection of impulses individuated for that interval that forms a *human life*, but that have no other aspiration than to de-individuate themselves.”⁷⁹¹ This elucidates Nietzsche’s reversal of the Hölderlinian perspective; for while, for Hölderlin, individuation in the absolute is the desire of the discontinuous subject—his striving to escape the curse of time—for Nietzsche, the most primordial drive is precisely the *Dionysian* instinct toward the loss of self and the rupture of individuation. It is by means of this reversal, moreover, that Nietzsche poises himself for his hyperbolic rejection of metaphysics, which is to say, first of all—of the metaphysical *subject* as absolute.

In essence, Nietzsche expresses thus that time is not, indeed continuous “time” held together by a spatial plane on which it is situated, but a disconnected non-series of innumerable “points in time”—“thus, *dynamic* qualities must be presupposed.”⁷⁹² Like Hölderlin’s tragic transport, which measures the rhythm of the tragic drama in the temporality of the poem, Nietzsche views time as the externalization of this internal game of forces. By his physiological depiction of the genesis of becoming, he effects the re-internalization, back into the depths of the body, re-imagined as a *temporal* entity, of the Heraclitean cosmic becoming and the Empedoclean cosmic rhythm of breath. The doctrines of the two pre-Platonics that Nietzsche envisioned as *tragic philosophers*, thus prophetically calling them by the name he would one day

⁷⁹¹ Pierre Klossowski. *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1969), 52. Trans. Miller, “Harnessing Dionysos,” 27, n. 27.

⁷⁹² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 150.

give himself, are thus re-thought on a ground of absolute immanence—the wide force-field of becoming.

The diagram drawn by Nietzsche to illustrate this discontinuous time, and labeled “Time line” shows a dotted vertical line, whose function is to display the disconnected temporal points, with short diagonal slashes through it, demonstrating “temporal layers,” and, on its right side, various near-circles of different dimensions, the largest being semi-circles (two), and the smallest being nearly complete circles (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁹³ These excentric curves, then, represent the motion produced by forces in their temporal mutability, and the inexplicable correspondence of events in history, which form, thereby, a kind of spider’s web—a series of mad constellations, which enclose the soul.

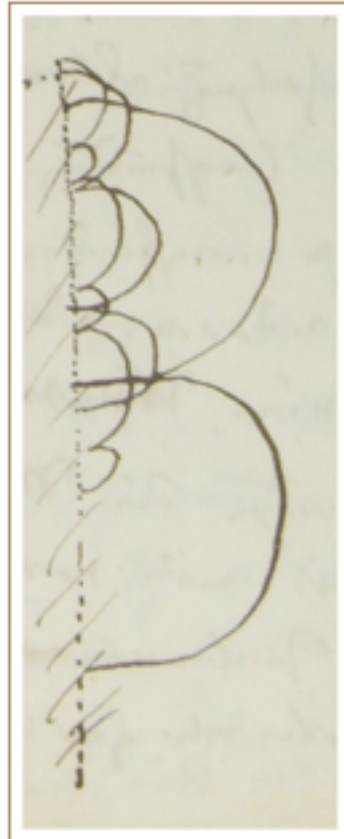
⁷⁹³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 150.

Zeitlinie.

**Real: ein Raum-
punkt.
Relationen seiner
verschiedenen
Zeitlagen.**

**Wo bestehen die
Relationen.**

**Keine Bewegung
in der Zeit ist
s t e t i g .**



**Wir messen an
etwas R ä u m -
l i c h b l e i -
b e n d e m die
Zeit und des-
halb setzen wir
voraus, daß
zwischen Zeit-
punkt A und
Zeitpunkt B
e i n e s t e t i g e
Zeit sei. Die
Zeit ist aber gar
kein conti-
nuum, sondern
es giebt nur**

**total verschiedene
Zeitpunkte, keine
Linie. Actio in distans.**

Nietzsche then proposes the following: “*Doctrine of temporal atoms* [*Zeitatomenlehre*]” (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁹⁴ This doctrine translates the theory of atoms held by “atomic physics,” as Parmedean “*ὄντα*”—thus as “unalterable” and incapable of having an “effect” into temporal terms, which permits the espousing of the absolute mutability of forces (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁹⁵ *Being* therefore, on Parmenides’ terms, is equated with the spatial, while *becoming*, is

⁷⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 150.

⁷⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 149.

equated with the temporal. Nietzsche's doctrine of temporal atoms, thus, translates them from spatial terms into the *becoming* of Heraclitus, and renders his very epistemology possible. He writes: "the theory of temporal atoms ultimately coincides with the doctrine of sensation. The *dynamic point in time* is identical with the *point of sensation*. For there is no simultaneity of sensation" (KSA 7: 26 [12]).⁷⁹⁶ Such an atomic theory opens history out onto the unforeseeable, for if time is not a line but a non-linear series of singular *points* connected and separated across its levels by circularities of varying completeness, no teleology is possible, no causality, no grand metaphysical plan, no coincidence between thought and Being; there is no *world process* and no absolute goal, no destination, no Judgement of humanity. *Stars*, then, meteors and *comets* are nothing but temporal phenomena, occurring inexplicably across the wide skies of history's eventfulness.

Of Nietzsche, Blanchot writes: "History carries with it the moment that it goes beyond."⁷⁹⁷ And we might add that it carries with it, too, the moment that goes beyond *it*. That is to say, the *untimely*, which pervades our experience of time, and never allows us any rest. For time, in its very essence, is *untimely*—irreducible to spatial dimensions, its discontinuity has as its effect that every *point* in time is un-isolable. Rather, each of these points is constantly exceeding itself, beyond the possibility of recapture. No continuity of subjectivity is hence possible; for the rhythmized individual, the individual subjected to the onrush of time is no individual at all, but rather, is in a constant discontinuous ἑκστασις of self—an infinite succession of selves, incapable of being drawn together, which thrust themselves into oblivion

⁷⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 151.

⁷⁹⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), "On Nietzsche's Side," 287-299, 292.

one after another, merely by being *temporal entities*. This ἔκστασις requires in the same moment a *forgetting* of individuality and subjectivity and a calling into memory of a *primordial becoming*. The fluid exchange between forgetting and remembering in ecstatic temporality takes place for Hölderlin as well as for Nietzsche, yet in radically different ways.

Memory and Forgetting at Dawn

The mechanics of forgetting and remembering, which Nietzsche had called the operations of *plastic force*, for which another name is *rhythmic force*, is at the very core of the problem of the moderns' relation to the ancients, and is thus essential to both Hölderlin and Nietzsche.

In his "Remarks on 'Oedipus,'" Hölderlin writes that "in the scenes" of the tragic drama, "the frightfully festive forms" constitute "language for a world where under pest and confusion of senses and under universally inspired prophecy in idle time, with the god and man expressing themselves in the all-forgetting form of infidelity [*in der allvergessen Form der Untreue*]"—for divine infidelity [*göttliche Untreue*] is best to retain—so that the course of the world will not show any rupture and the memory of the heavenly ones will not expire."⁷⁹⁸ Divinity must thus be retained in the mode of *forgetting*—the memory of the receding god must take place in the emptiness of tragic transport—in the empty value of the tragic hero. Therein the god must manifest himself *as* infidelity, that is, under the aspect of his flight. Hölderlin writes of this unfaithful crossroads between the human and the divine: "At such moments man forgets himself and the god and turns around like a traitor, naturally in a saintly manner.—In the utmost form of suffering, namely, there exists nothing but the conditions of time or space [*der Zeit oder*

⁷⁹⁸ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 107-108. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 338.

des Raums].”⁷⁹⁹ Suffering thus in its supreme form comes about at the moment when the god, withdrawing, leaves the trace of his memory in man as *infidelity*—a waning light—and there all the regalia of life are stripped away until it is left bare, with nothing but the minimal structures of experience (*a priori* for Kant), namely time and space, to hold it together. Yet the ideal value of these elements, space and time, is undermined by Hölderlin as he replaces the “and” between them (*und*) with an “or” (*oder*). A reversibility of the postulates that render experience—and specifically *tragic* experience—possible thus undercuts the continuity of their coexistence, their equal necessity. For while the divine takes on the aspect of the temporal, for Hölderlin, the human is annulled as space.

It is to this tragic event, whereby man, whose striving for knowledge has exceeded human measure and so turns against him and requires that he *forget himself* and *forget the god* that Hölderlin’s intellectual intuition—that is, “the boundless union purifying itself through boundless separation”⁸⁰⁰ which takes place in every tragedy—refers. Intellectual intuition itself, therefore, requires this dialectical exchange of forgetting and memory between the divine and the accursed human. For the hero must respond to divine infidelity with—precisely—infidelity: he must become a “traitor.” The hero thus contains the infidelity of the god—retains it in his memory by forgetting it, as the god betrays him. Through a double paradox, thus, the hero is *faithful* to the god in his betrayal of him as the god is faithful to man by leaving the memory of his infidelity at the heart of mortality. In his poem *Mnemosyne*, Hölderlin writes:

Ins Ungebundene gehet eine Sehnsucht. Vieles aber ist
Zu behalten. Und Noth dies Treue.

⁷⁹⁹ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 108. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 338.

⁸⁰⁰ Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 107.

There is a yearning that seeks the unbound. But much
Must be retained. And loyalty is needed.⁸⁰¹

This loyalty, hence, works at the interior of infidelity, tempering the *monstrous* striving toward the boundless, so that emptiness can tragically appear as the purificatory separation of the mortal and the immortal—their simultaneous betrayal. The faithless loyalty to the betraying god must take place precisely so that the absent god may be called back—so that the impossibility of the god’s presentification in our time (indeed, in *tragic time*) may be invoked precisely as its absence. Hölderlin is drawn back to Sophocles precisely because in his tragedies, the first flight of the gods takes place—there, mourning comes to be as mourning *of the divine*, a mourning which requires the constant work of a dialectic between past and present, to create a future, born out of the incommensurable difference contained between them.

The Hölderlin writes of this tragic moment of the dialectic between forgetting and remembering in tragedy:

Inside it, man forgets himself because he exists entirely for the moment, the god [forgets himself] because he is nothing but time [*weil er nichts als Zeit ist*]; and either one is unfaithful, time, because it is reversed categorically at such a moment, no longer fitting beginning and end; man, because at this moment of categorical reversal he has to follow and thus can no longer resemble the beginning in what follows. [...] Thus Oedipus himself stands in the tragedy of “Oedipus.”⁸⁰²

If in the transport of the tragedy, the god is *time*, thus fundamentally unfaithful, the tragic hero, the spatial element in this intuitive organization, is mortal *space*, and there, full of the disappearing god in the word he speaks—in the absence spoken through the word *Woe*—he must come to = 0, and retain this memory in order to temporalize, and thus save the accursed world to

⁸⁰¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, ed. and trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil, 1994), 518-519.

⁸⁰² Pfau, Hölderlin, *Essays*, 108. Hölderlin, *Werke*, 3: 339.

which he belongs, under the shadow of receding divinity. Yet to save requires at once the *failure* to save.

For Hölderlin, a dialectic between Mnemosyne and Lethe takes place at the heart of tragic becoming. A feeling of timelessness is recovered through a pseudo-Platonic anamnesis, a recovering of the absent god out of many layers of forgetting. This illusion of nature reattained is rendered possible through the deliverance to primordially that art—and tragic poetry, in particular, provides the occasion for. It is for this reason that a tension is constantly retained between circularity and excentricity in Hölderlin's work. For the art work anamnetically conjures the unity between the divine and the human, only to undermine this unity by the *κάθαρσις* of separation.

Hölderlin's essay, *Becoming in Dissolution* (1800), on the transition from the decline of a nation to its rebirth and revitalization, and thus also on the movement by which the ideal passes into the real by means of the tragic hero, presents a phenomenological explication of this dialectic between the old and the new. It begins:

The fatherland in decline, nature and humanity insofar as they stand in a specific reciprocal relation, one that constitutes a *particular* world that has become the ideal and the very nexus of things; to that extent it is dissolving, so that from it and from the generation that remains, along with the remaining forces of nature—nature being that which constitutes the other principle, the real—a new world may take shape; it will be a novel yet still reciprocal relation, precisely in the way that the decline itself came to pass on the basis of a pure yet particular world. For the world of all worlds, which forever *is* all in all, *depicts itself* only in the fullness of time—or in downgoing or in the moment, or, considered more genetically, in the coming-to-be of the moment and the commencement of time and world [...].⁸⁰³

The downgoing that brings an end to one world must coincide, thus, with the commencement of another, and must even call this commencement into being. He writes: “the possibility of all

⁸⁰³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153.

relations prevails in the transitional period [...].” In other words, the time of the downgoing, which, in itself and insofar as it is by necessity a *transition*, already *incarnates and initiates the commencement of another world*, and contains an infinity of possible worlds on the rise. From this period, therefore, only “the particular mode of relating” must be drawn, such that only the “finite effect” of all particular relations, seen in their collectivity as *infinity*, “comes to the fore.”⁸⁰⁴ Only a single result of a given relation in the downgoing must be grasped in its finitude and brought forth to exist as a particular commencement. The *dissolution* of the fatherland itself is the self-creating, self-fulfilling prophecy of a coming *unification* in an unknown recreation of the fatherland: “For how could the dissolution be apprehended without unification?”⁸⁰⁵ Here, then, the dialectic of intellectual intuition holds the prophecy of a final unification—that is, a circularity and a return to the unity of divine nature. Yet Hölderlin poses this in the questioning mode—for the final resolution remains eternally uncertain, and there is no end in sight but an excentric one.

“*This downgoing or transition of the fatherland*,” the poet writes, must be felt to all “extremities of the subsisting world” in such a manner that “at the precise moment and to the precise degree that the subsisting world dissolves, the incipient, youthful, possible world can also be felt.”⁸⁰⁶ The death of subsisting life is but the announcement of a future, possible, potential life, and the *feeling* of these two moments must measure them against each other—it is the feeling, and not the knowledge or logical certainty, of a world to come that the dissolution of a former world brings about. In this dissolution, the subsistent world communicates that which in

⁸⁰⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153.

⁸⁰⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153.

⁸⁰⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153.

its “relations” and “forces” is “unexhausted and inexhaustible”—the dissolution of the relations, precisely, is felt through forces, “for nothing comes from nothing” and the negation of an actual thing annuls the possible, too. “But the possible, which enters into actuality, and does so precisely as the actuality is dissolving [...] effects both the apprehension of the dissolution and the remembrance of what is dissolved.”⁸⁰⁷ Just as, as Hölderlin would later write, divine and mortal fidelity, the primordial memory of the divine inside the mortal, are only achieved through the experience of *infidelity*; the possible can only pass over into the actual by an embrace of the emptiness of the dissolution of actuality that simultaneously brings about the remembrance of the finite actual of the past.

This dialectic between possibility and actuality is the source of the “thoroughgoing originality” and “enduring creativity” of “every genuinely tragic language”: “the emergence of the individual from the infinite, and the emergence of the finitely infinite, that is, of the individual eternal, from both”⁸⁰⁸—this individual, finite child of infinitude, “grasps” and “animates” the incomprehensible and wretched nature of dissolution—“the death struggle itself, which is grasped and animated by means of the harmonious, the comprehensible the living.”⁸⁰⁹ Dissolution, in other words, the universality of suffering in a declining fatherland, is only *felt* and brought to life through its being lifted up into the ideality of a present harmony. From the initial pain of dissolution, which is “felt in its depths by sufferer and spectator alike,” the “ideal” that emerges, still undetermined, “radiates as the real nothing and as the dissolving that has been caught in a state” at the midpoint “between being and nonbeing, that is, caught in the turning of

⁸⁰⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153.

⁸⁰⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153.

⁸⁰⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 153-154.

necessity.”⁸¹⁰ It is precisely this ideal that is embodied by the tragic hero, in whom the twilight of his time is destined to become a dawn. The undissolved “new life” now becomes both “actually and ideally old” and its dissolution becomes necessary, manifesting itself as such “between being and nonbeing.” Yet, at this same instant of the coming of necessity, where the new becomes old, “the possible is everywhere real and the actual ideal, and in free artistic imitation (*nachahmen*) this is a frightful yet divine dream.”⁸¹¹

We may here grant ourselves the liberty to analogically relate these states of dissolution and commencement, in their simultaneously self-actualizing ideality to Nietzsche’s two “immediate art-states of nature [*Kunstzuständen der Natur*]”—the Dionysian and the Apollinian, wherein “every artist is an ‘imitator’ [*Nachahmer*], that is to say, either an Apollinian artist in dreams, or a Dionysian artist in ecstasies, or finally—as, for example, in Greek tragedy—at once artist in both dreams and ecstasies [...].”⁸¹² In the original “barbarian” Dionysian revels, which took place in absence of the Apollinian tempering force, “the most savage natural instincts were unleashed, including even that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always seemed to me to be the ‘witch’s brew.’”⁸¹³ It is only upon Greek soil, following the grand “reconciliation” of Dionysus and his enemy Apollo that the Dionysian “destruction of the *principium individuationis* for the first time becomes an artistic phenomenon.”⁸¹⁴ This artistic phenomenon is music itself. And reestablishment of this individuality principle, the reparation of

⁸¹⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 154.

⁸¹¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 154.

⁸¹² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 38.

⁸¹³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 39.

⁸¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 39, 40.

the “veil of *maya*”⁸¹⁵ torn away in the ἔκστασις, the self-exceeding of the Dionysian revelers in the symbolic appearance of the Apollinian dream thus relates by analogy to the creation of a new world, of a coming fatherland, for Hölderlin. Yet Hölderlin’s proposition entails a dialectical view of history—one that moves teleologically from dissolution to commencement, and inside of which the *hero* plays the role of bringing about this dialectical transition, in much the same manner as Hegel, five years after Hölderlin’s essay on the declining fatherland, would write, with regard to Socrates, who is a “genuinely tragic” figure in his view: “This is the position of heroes in world history in general; through them, a new world rises.”⁸¹⁶ Indeed, a trace of this historical dialectic remains in Nietzsche’s view of the tragic hero—yet this trace, as we shall see, is precisely the element that must be sacrificed through *his* heroic self-sacrifice. Yet the *Duplicität* between the Apollinian and the Dionysian constitutes an *eternal struggle*—ἀγών, *Kampf*—underlying all of life across history and temporality, wherein neither side is ever eradicated or surpassed, precisely because the nature of *duplicity* is such that the Dionysian and the Apollinian are necessary to one another for life to exist. Nietzsche writes of the Apollo: “his entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and of knowledge, revealed to him in the Dionysian. And behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus!”⁸¹⁷ It is because the Dionysian reveals the very primordial ground—rife with suffering and contradiction—that the Apollinian seeks to hide with its beautiful appearance that this originary ecstatic force is vital to it.

Hölderlin’s “ideational dissolution,” whose points of birth and demise are already “fixed, located, secured” by necessity, presents itself as “what it properly is, namely, a reproductive act

⁸¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, 40.

⁸¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), Vol. 1, 446, 448.

⁸¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 4, 46.

by means of which life traverses all its points [...].”⁸¹⁸ It attains the totality of life, the sum of these points, by dissolving “its attachment to each in order to reproduce itself in the next” such that “the dissolution becomes increasingly ideal as it removes itself from its point of commencement, or, by contrast, increasingly real as the production advances, until in the end, out of the sum of these sensations of passing away and originating, run through infinitely in a single moment, a feeling of life as a whole comes to the fore [...].”⁸¹⁹ And the only thing excluded from this sentiment of the totality of life is the “remembrance of what has dissolved, of the individual,” which in its turn “unites with the infinite feeling of life by means of [this] remembrance of dissolution itself [...].” This movement between the finite past and the newly infinite present must take place in such a way that “after the gaps between them have been filled in, there should emerge from such unification and comparison” of past and present “the new state proper the next step that is to follow upon what is bygone.”⁸²⁰ Within and through the “remembrance of dissolution[,], the dissolution itself” thus comes to be the “inexorable bold act that it properly is.”⁸²¹ In order for the *proper* of dissolution to be the *commencement* of a new world, this dialectic of forgetting and remembering *of* the past that is dissolving—indeed, the retaining of remembrance within the *emptiness* of dissolution—must take place in such a way that memory is the fully mobile center of becoming. It is *through* the ideal memory of a past communing with the actuality of that past within dissolution that the passage is effected from decline to rise. Only thus does the present itself come to contain anything *proper*.

⁸¹⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 154.

⁸¹⁹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 154.

⁸²⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 154.

⁸²¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 154.

The ideational dissolution, whose moving force is divine and not human, and which is therefore more determinable than the *real*, passes thus in two directions: initially, from “the infinitely present to the finite past [...]” This happens in such a way that everything “(1) within each point of the same dissolution and production; (2) between one point in its dissolution and production and every other point; (3) between each point in its dissolution and production and the total feeling of dissolution and production,” is ever “more infinitely interlaced.”⁸²² That is to say, then, that “everything is more infinitely permeated touched implicated in pain and in joy, in strife and at peace, in motion and at rest, in configuration and disfiguration, so that celestial fire rather than an earthly blaze is at work.”⁸²³ The divine, Empedoclean disharmony between opposite eternal operations is thus at work within the celestial fire of transition. The dissolution “passes through everything that lies between the first two points that are *capable of* dissolution and production, namely, between the opposed infinitely new and the finite old, between the totality of the real and the ideal particular.”⁸²⁴

Secondly, and after the completion of this first passage, the ideational dissolution moves in the reverse direction, “from the infinite to the finite [...]” In this sense, it distinguishes itself from the real in that the “actual dissolution” appears as “the real nothing” from ignorance as to its commencement and end so that every subsistent particular thing takes on the appearance of the “be-all-and-end-all”—it is thus a “sensuous idealism or Epicurianism” depicted by Horace in his formula “*Prudens futuri temporis exitum*” (“wise is the future event”). Because the actual dissolution is this *nothing* while the ideational dissolution is the “coming-to-be of the ideal

⁸²² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 155.

⁸²³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 155.

⁸²⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 155.

individual in the direction of the infinitely real, and of the infinitely real in the direction of the individual ideal” which gains in “harmony” and “import” as it grows and increases, this latter is thought as “a transition from one subsistent state to another [...]” This subsistent, too, is augmented in spirit in the degree that it is thought to have “originated from that transition” and its direction in such a way that the ideal individual’s dissolution appears “as burgeoning [and] as growth; the dissolution of the infinitely new comes to appear [...] as love” and the two together appear at once “as a (transcendental) creative act” of which the essence is “to unite the ideal individual with the real infinite” and of which the result is “the real infinite unified with the ideal individual” so that the infinitely real and the infinitely ideal take on the life and configuration of one another, “uniting in a mythic state in which the transition, along with the opposition of the infinitely real and the finite ideal comes to an end [...]”⁸²⁵ This cessation takes place insofar as the life of the infinitely real is maximally enhanced and the finite ideal becomes more tranquil.⁸²⁶

In the “lyrical” infinitely real, and in the “epic” individual ideal, “the state in question unites the spirit of the one with the sensuous concreteness of the other. The mythic state, in both cases, is tragic” to the extent that the infinitely real and the finite ideal are in both cases united. The lyric and epic “differ merely by degree [...]” In the period of transition, “spirit and sign,” defined respectively as the “material of the transition” in union with “the infinitely real,” and “the infinitely real” with “the finite ideal” (“the transcendental” united with “the isolated”), are both together “like ensouled organs within an organized soul, that is, they are a one in harmonious opposition with itself.”⁸²⁷ This *harmonious opposition* between spirit and sign, each

⁸²⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

⁸²⁶ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

⁸²⁷ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

in themselves a harmonious opposition, then, brings the tragic transition into being, because gives rise to the *person* of the tragic hero (who = 0) and unites the finite, the individual—with the infinite—the *real* of futurity, thus making this hero the very figure in whom transition becomes possible.

From this organization of the transitional movement of the downgoing and commencement of the fatherland, Hölderlin draws a plan for the genesis of genius. “From this tragic unification of the infinitely new and the finite old there then develops a new individual, such that the infinitely new, by means of its having taken on the configuration of the finite old, individualizes itself now in its proper configuration.”⁸²⁸ The infinity of the novelty brought about by the tragic unification, thus, can only become *individual* and novel *of itself*—which is to say, in a manner proper to itself, by assuming the configuration of the concretized past individual preserved in remembrance, and by simultaneously re-appropriating this very form, which, in fact, it itself has *created* in the downgoing so that this may belong exclusively to it. The genius is he who *goes down*, and can resurface as the commencement of an entirely new world, yet only by the transitional solidification, imitation, and *invention* of the past world in its finitude. The infinity of the future comes at the expense of that of the past, by *working against* the current of the surpassed world which alone allows for it to be broken with. Only such a genius—individual, radiant with celestial fire—can transform the fatherland into its proper self. So Hölderlin’s Hyperion writes to his Diotima: “O genius of my people! O soul of Greece! I must descend, I must seek you in the realm of the dead.”⁸²⁹ For Hades is the destination of all downgoing, and conversely the source of all life—the house of Gaia.

⁸²⁸ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

⁸²⁹ Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, 162.

The new individual who results from the transitional period strives, thereafter, towards isolation and liberation from infinity in the same degree as the old individual struggles to universalize itself and dissolve itself “in the infinite feeling of life.” The “*moment*” in which the new individual’s time ends is that at which the “*infinitely new* comports itself toward the old individual *as the dissolving yet unknown power*” in the same way that, in a preceding time, the *new*, as an unknown power, comports itself toward the “finite old [...].”⁸³⁰ A confrontation occurs between these two periods, wherein firstly the individual (unique) seeks to dominate the infinite (whole) and secondly, the infinite strives to achieve dominion over the individual, “the whole over the unique.”⁸³¹ The transition from this “second period”⁸³² to the third takes place “in the moment at which the infinitely new comports itself as the feeling of life (as I) toward the individual as object (as not-I).”⁸³³

Then, after the “opposition of the characters has tended toward reciprocity and reversal,” the “tragic unification of both” occurs—a tragic union of the characters, akin in a deep sense to the ecstatic commingling of bodies and souls in Nietzsche’s choral tragedy.⁸³⁴ The end here, then, is circular once more—tragic separation ends in tragic unification, which is the very foundation of the *new life* which dissolution had promised. And yet this union is not the regaining of the ground of nature but is *tragic*. In Hölderlin’s “Sketch toward the Continuation of the Third Version” of *The Death of Empedocles*, never to be actualized, he outlines a third scene, between Manes and Empedocles, as follows: “*lyrical heroic* / Manes, who has experienced all, the seer,

⁸³⁰ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

⁸³¹ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

⁸³² Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 156.

⁸³³ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 157.

⁸³⁴ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 157.

astounded by Empedocles; speeches and by his spirit, says that Empedocles is the one who has been called, the one who kills and who gives life, the one in and through whom a world dissolves and in the same instant renews itself. / The human being who felt his country's downgoing so mortally was also thus able to sense its new life."⁸³⁵ Here the dialectical structure of the *Trauerspiel* of Empedocles is clearly laid out: it is through prophecy—the counter-rhythmic rupture, the caesura in the drama—that the hero is determined and destined to *go down*, to set like the betraying sun, which contains within itself the very promise, the necessity of “new life”—a new nature, and, indeed, a new culture on the horizon of the tragedy of time.

It is perhaps telling that Hölderlin never finished his *Empedocles*, and thus never fully embraced the failure of his tragic hero—his high *untimeliness*—as Nietzsche would and, without fail, maintained his ambiguity as to the tragic outcome. For he would ever retain his faith in the possibility of a circular path, a path that would lead his declining time back to the αἰών of the Greeks. *His* Empedocles would never relinquish the dialectical promise of bringing about a revived harmony through his self-sacrifice. Yet perhaps it is equally telling that Hölderlin did not end his *Trauerspiel* with the attainment of such harmony. For as he would later write, in the “Notes” to *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the tragedy, in mourning, is that we must retain the god in his flight. Nietzsche, for his part, was firm in his perspective: “The *failed reformer* is **Empedocles**; when he failed only Socrates was left” (KSA 7: 6 [18]).⁸³⁶ The failure of that tragic hero thus led not to a new, ideal unification, but to degeneracy, embodied in the figure of Socrates. Nietzsche, indeed, viewed Hölderlin's own decline in madness—perhaps a self-sacrifice—not as a saving, redemptive act, but as a sign of weakness, a failure. In his third *Untimely Meditation* on

⁸³⁵ Hölderlin, *Empedocles*, 194.

⁸³⁶ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 215.

Schopenhauer, Nietzsche of “Our own Hölderlin and Kleist” as examples of geniuses who had succumbed to the temptation of self-destruction, in the manner of Schopenhauer’s tragedy, faced with their degenerate age. These were men who “died of their own unconventionality and could not endure the climate of what is called ‘German culture’”—to these men, he opposes the “natures of iron—Beethoven, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Wagner” who alone possess the strength of spirit to survive their twilight times.⁸³⁷ It is a different kind of failure, however—a failure leading into the mouth of the river of becoming, that Nietzsche’s conception of the tragic hero aims to attain.

Lacoue-Labarthe formulates the paradoxical logic of the circularity between nature and man, an essential truth for both Hölderlin and Nietzsche, and by which process man must *create* nature precisely in his emptiness:

The “logic” of the open-ended exchange of the excess of presence and of the excess of loss, the alternation of appropriation and disappropriation—all that we might baptize, following Hölderlin’s terminology (and for lack of anything better) the “hyperbologic,” together with everything that holds it still within the framework of the “homeotic” definition of truth—who knows if this is not the (paradoxical) truth of *aletheia*?⁸³⁸

Lacoue-Labarthe also calls this “hyperbologic” by the name, “*mimetologic*.”⁸³⁹ This logic is common, then, to Hölderlin and Nietzsche as moment of *caesura*—the moment in which the tragic hero arises as the divide between the ancient and the modern, who, by becoming *empty*, is able to receive the foreign time of the gods, the time of the ancients into his heart and thus *transform it* through his very descent in self-sacrifice, thus opening new paths for the transfiguration of truth and, above all, of the binding force of community—of *love*. Yet while this

⁸³⁷ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 174.

⁸³⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 231.

⁸³⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, 260.

love, for Hölderlin, requires the constant mimetic calling-into-presence of an absent god, even after the failure of self-sacrifice, for Nietzsche this sacrifice is to be *final*: it must be the absolute sacrifice of the metaphysical, and with it, of the *human being* bound by myth, who thus undergoes a dissolution into nihilism, precisely by the dissonance between his reality, which is nothing other than the temporal rhythm of becoming, and the metaphysics to which he blindly, feverishly clings as consolation in order to go on living. Only through the purificatory self-sacrifice of the philosopher as tragic hero can the revelation of the movement of tragic time as a constant sacrifice of selves come about as the *binding force* of a people to come. The sacrifice, for Nietzsche, thus, must be the final failure of the project to return to a metaphysically idealized *nature*.

It is, perhaps, the homeotic nature of truth that Hölderlin and Nietzsche share most profoundly—for they both theorize the re-creation of nature and its truth—indeed, of origin—within the flux of history. Yet while, for Hölderlin, this always necessitates the rapprochement of the human with the chimera of divinity, for Nietzsche, it takes place within the rhythmic forces of the body—it is a biological time that is transformed through the power of the dying hero.

Primordial Becoming

The Nietzschean epistemology is based on the *primordial* character of memory. This proposition, then, replaces the concept of origin (*Ursprung*) with a metaphysical role for memory (*Gedächtniß*) which thence subtracts itself from the biological aspect of life as its supreme metaphysical aspect: “Memory has nothing to do with nerves, with the brain. It is a primordial characteristic [*Ureigenschaft*]. For the human being carries around with him the memory of all

previous generations. / The mnemonic *image* [*Gedächtniß b i l d*] something that is very artificial [*Künstliches*] and *rare*” (KSA 7: 19 [162]).⁸⁴⁰ This memory thus reaches back into the regions of *primordial becoming*, the becoming of Heraclitus and of all the pre-Platonic Greeks—it accesses this unknowable time and through this capacity awakens the philosopher—the possessor of tragic knowledge—to his task. It is this knowledge, this ancient memory that comes to light through Nietzsche’s conception of anamnesis, which bears in common with that of Hölderlin the notion of a present emptiness filled up with the calling into being of a primordial temporality through a metaphysical *memory* such that the very contents of this memory are transformed on a plane of immanence. In a fragment of 1876, Nietzsche writes: “All man’s goals and purposes were once also conscious to his ancestors, but they have been forgotten. The directions followed by man greatly depend on the past: the Platonic ἀνάμνησις. The worm moves in the same direction even when its head has been cut off” (KSA 7: 23 [10]).⁸⁴¹ It is only by means of this Nietzschean rethinking of “Platonic ἀνάμνησις” that *art*—through *new* mnemonic images, can come about as physiological ordering functions—as biological necessities. This transfigured anamnesis is precisely the scene of the ἀγών between past and future with which Nietzsche replaces the Hölderlinian dialectic. It is that which makes *untimeliness itself* possible. Let us recall Nietzsche’s letter to Rohde, in which he says: “Dearest friend, what I learn and see, hear and understand is indescribable. Schopenhauer and Goethe, Aeschylus and Pindar are still alive—only believe.”

This access to the most primordial past, the most ancient time of knowledge, comes to constitute, for Nietzsche, one of the very *structures* of consciousness, on the same level as

⁸⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 52.

⁸⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 225.

sensation. He writes: “Consciousness commences with the sensation of causality, which means that memory is older than consciousness. [...] But *memory* must be part of the essence of *sensation*; hence must <be> a primordial characteristic [*Ureigenschaft*] of things. [...] The inviolability of the laws of nature means: sensation and memory are part of the essence of things. The fact that a substance reacts in a certain way to contact with another substance is a matter of memory and sensation. [...] But if pleasure, displeasure, sensation, memory, reflex movements are all part of the essence of matter, then *human knowledge penetrates far more deeply into the essence of things*” (KSA 7: 19 [161]).⁸⁴² If this memory is thus primordial, this means that the *invisible bridges* from genius to genius are metaphysical phenomena—they form an *ideal* path, which must only be accessed and followed by the philosopher.

Memory, however, is impossible, we remember, without forgetting. Therefore, each primordial pool of memories is eternally shifting, being rethought, recreated and reestablished, and for this reason the space of the *Ur* itself is at once *historical* and *suprahistorical*; it is contained within historical time precisely by virtue of the fact that it exists, by definition, outside historical time. In other words, that which exists as *memory* only takes place within time itself, as a projection into a primordial sphere. And because it *is* such a projection, it indeed exists outside time, before time. This movement of memory, endlessly permeated by forgetting, is thus cyclical, or circular, and yet never returns to itself as *identity*—rather, once it has returned to itself, in a process whose beginning is strictly nonexistent, the identical, even if it is posited, has once again receded into impossibility, such that any pronunciation of it as an event necessarily pronounces itself as difference within, beyond, before and after, the identical. The place where origin springs

⁸⁴² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 52.

from, *qua* idea, transforms indefinitely as the surface-force of reason, of art and of science, transforms. This process is a circular one, such that as soon as the *same* occurs, it has already *recurred*, yet the memory of it, in its supreme infidelity, has changed, and has changed it. The infidelity takes place between what the Greeks called *divinity* and the *human* sphere. Goethe speaks as follows: “The Divinity works in the living, not in the dead; in the becoming and changing, not in the become and fixed. Therefore Reason, with its tendency toward the divine, has only to do with the becoming, the living; but Understanding with the become, the already fixed, that it may make use of it. [...] We steer hypotheses to imaginary islands; but the proper synthesis will probably remain an undiscovered country; and I do not wonder at this, which I consider how difficult it is to obtain any synthesis even in such simple things as plants and colors.”⁸⁴³

The physiological substratum of the conceptual, in Nietzsche, has as its consequence that the primordial memory, the primordial becoming that lies in the depths underlying consciousness can only come into the light of day, light of mind, according to a contingency of astral proportions. Thus does the philosopher bring the ancients into being once again through a poetical process of remembrance, according to his own physiology. The primordial essence of their thought and of their tragedy is recreated according to a rhythm foreign to it, an *untimely* rhythm, through the modern body, and is thus transformed; we cannot *know* the bodies of the ancients, but through our bodies the *Ursprung* of the tragic arrived, that arcing experience that we share with the Greeks by remembering it, brought about anew, unforeseeably each time. The path to that common tragic space is opened by the specific employment, that is, explicitations, of

⁸⁴³ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, 294.

the subterranean musicalities and rhythms of our bodies in art (or writing), the reflection of our living.

For Hölderlin, the result of the *Trauerspiel* is that the absent god must ever be called back, invoked again in the form of his temporal disappearance, so that mourning, the mother of joy, may come about. Indeed, this invocation is of the highest necessity—it is the only means by which love can bind mortals, this creation of the eternal beauty out of the tragic dialectic between finite past and infinite future. Thus the Hölderlinian anamnesis serves the purpose of bringing the god back into being, reviving the memory of divine infidelity, which is, paradoxically, that to which man must be endlessly faithful and unfaithful, that which his emptiness must contain in order that nature—a new nature, second or third or fourth, may rise up on the horizon. This creation of nature through the call to a betraying god is the task of art itself.

For Nietzsche, on the other hand, there is no recourse to divinity. Rather, by means of the reemployment of an infinite plasticity, the Dionysian must newly become a *primordial, basic physio-biological instinct* by means of *art* insofar as this provokes and accomplishes a return to *primordial becoming, primordial memory* through a process of anamnesis. That is, for Nietzsche, divinity must be un-deified and returned to its ecstatic origin in the *body*. Yet, by means of this anamnesis, the origin is transformed. The instincts too, must take on a new form, depending on the current physiological constellation and its agonal relation to the ancient one. Out of this artistic ἀγών shall be born the unheard-of—the new culture born out of the rhythmic spirit of music.

Rhythm forms the bodily experience and the temporality of becoming, and becoming, in turn is the inner pulse of history. Foucault, in his essay on Nietzsche, calls history “the very body of becoming.” He continues: “only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideality of origin.”⁸⁴⁴ By refusing metaphysical historicism, both in the form of *progress* and in the form of an early formulation of the *eternal return of the same*, through an affirmation of becoming in the constantly transfigured primordial space of memory and forgetting, Nietzsche creates a conception of the tragic capable of affirming life as a temporal phenomenon. He thus proposes, against all determining historicism, a counter-dialectics of tragic excentricity wherein the circular movement between man and nature is interrupted by the appearance of the tragic hero, the philosophical genius who embodies the eternity posited by any metaphysics and, in sacrificing himself, sacrifices that very metaphysics, thus transforming the rhythm of becoming. The “ideality of misfortune” and of suffering⁸⁴⁵ which for the Greeks was the force of tragedy becomes *for us* the *embrace* of suffering, of excentric temporality and of the impossibility of any complete subjectivity—an early version of the Nietzschean *amor fati*, which constitutes the joyful affirmation of life as *time*, in the amorous surpassing of the Greeks and their pessimism, indeed in the triumphant reversal of that pessimism into an embrace of the tragedy of becoming.

There is, hence, for Nietzsche, no origin of time—no absolute beginning—no Anaximandrian ἄπειρον, no Anaxagorean νοῦς from which the *whole* of existences issues, and which subtracts itself from time as its necessary cause. There are only primordial instincts—sensations that become images through imitation, and which make up the dense mass of objects

⁸⁴⁴ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 80. Trans. modified.

⁸⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *L’Œdipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 31.

that furnish consciousness (and earlier: *pre-consciousness*) with the capacity to produce knowledge, and to produce art. Nietzsche criticizes all teleology, all theories of an absolute beginning containing within them an absolute end. It is for precisely this reason that Nietzsche opposes all theories of a logical and necessary succession of philosophers. In a fragment, he writes: “1. No διαδοχαί. / 2. The various types” (KSA 7: 19 [169]).⁸⁴⁶ He also wrote an essay in 1872 on *The διαδοχαί of the philosophers*, whose central task was to expose the extent to which the “diadocographers” had perverted the chronologies of the ancient philosophers in order “to establish their διαδοχαί” and the “extraordinary differences” between these historians and the contrary chronologies established by their “wiser” critics.⁸⁴⁷ Moreover, it was Nietzsche’s intention, in this essay, to prove how “dangerous” it is “to use different series of chronological combinations and thus to establish by means of intermediary figures an artificial harmony.”⁸⁴⁸ The history of the pre-Platonics, in fact, for the moderns, is in no way harmonious and necessary but rather, it is of a supreme dissonance, and insurmountably fragmentary.

In concurrence with Rohde, Nietzsche chose Apollodorus as his preferred ancient historian of the lineages of philosophers precisely because he “denied the connections of disciples to masters and [among others] rejected the Anaximander-Anaximenes διαδοχή.”⁸⁴⁹ The very notion of a necessary historical succession of ancient philosophers leading to a τέλος implicitly contained in the ἀρχή is thus, in Nietzsche’s eyes, a corruption of these philosophers themselves. In opposition to such a theory of historical necessity, Nietzsche proposes, in the

⁸⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 53.

⁸⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Philosophes préplatoniciens*, “Les διαδοχαί des philosophes,” 253-271, 266.

⁸⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosophes préplatoniciens*, 261.

⁸⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophes préplatoniciens*, 262.

fragment above, a *typology* of the pre-Platonics; rather than claiming a historical connection from teachers to students between these philosophers, he *cultivates* each of them as a man and an exemplary worldview which may be used, in the balance each of them contains between metaphysics and science, for the foundation of a new nature which shall also be a new *culture*. The proper, approximate measure of mythical and scientific conceptions of life can thus be attained by *this* philological practice, which views history not as a *progression*, but as a series of *invisible bridges*, forged through the practice of memory counterbalanced by necessary forgetting, across which stretches the historical connective tissue of the ancient thinkers' genius. For Nietzsche, we may hazard to presume, these essential types for *his time* would be embodied by Heraclitus, Empedocles and Democritus. An atomistic philosophy of becoming combined with the theory of *nature as art* results from such a powerful combination—the formula for an artistic creation of the world and a dissolution of the plane of experience to purely temporal dimensions.

Nietzsche's view of history is founded on the basis, as I have said, of a double refutation. Firstly, he refutes the circular view of history as an eternal repetition of the same events. Long before Nietzsche had the idea of the eternal return of the same as “the highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable”⁸⁵⁰—uttered through the mouth of a demon and of Zarathustra—he encountered various versions of this thought. His early position with respect to these theories of the singular idea of the eternal return is characterized by an intense fascination and a vehement refusal, which itself constitutes the affirmation of life as constant becoming, excentric temporality, which never arrives at its origin but confronts us, instead, with a series of sacrifice,

⁸⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Zarathustra,” § 1, 295.

irrecoverable past selves. And suppose Nietzsche's later assertion of the *affirmative* character of this thought referred, rather, to an evolved version of *affirmation through refusal*. The ambiguity ever endures. Secondly, Nietzsche shall refute the belief in *progress*—the modern teleology of history and culture—the undying faith in an absolute goal, Christian or otherwise, of the ever-moving *world process*.

In a fragment contemporary to his second *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche quotes a passage from Hume: “‘Ask yourself,’ says *Hume*, ‘ask any of your acquaintances, whether they would live over again the last ten or twenty years of their life. No! but the next twenty, they say, will be better:

‘And from the dregs of life hope to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give’”⁸⁵¹ (KSA 7: 29 [86]).⁸⁵²

Nietzsche uses this Humean instinct, this characterization of the man resistant to the eternal return of the same to define the “historical man” whose will drives toward *progress*, the furthering of history: “These men we call historical men. A glance into the past drives them on toward the future, inflames their courage to go on living, kindles their hope that justice will someday come, that happiness lies hidden on the other side of the mountain they are approaching. These historical men believe that the meaning of human existence will increasingly be revealed in the *process* of life [...].” He then says of this man that: “In spite of their history, they have no idea how unhistorically they think and act, and how their pursuit of history serves not pure knowledge, but life.”⁸⁵³ This then is the Emersonian man, the man of progress, who

⁸⁵¹ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Nelson Pike (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), pt. 10, 87. Concluding lines cited from John Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*, act 4, scene I.

⁸⁵² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 231.

⁸⁵³ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 92-93.

drives his idealist ship toward an unattainable horizon, carrying the weight of history on his shoulders even as he submerges himself in the waters of Lethe: “souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between the things we aim at and converse with.”⁸⁵⁴ This is the attitude of the advancement of a world process and of progress toward a future *goal* whose very charm is its illusory character.

To these historical men Nietzsche opposes “supra-historical men” who refuse the eternal return of the same in favor of an a-temporal present, paralyzed between past and future, living in the shadow of a grand, inimitable history: “What could ten more years teach them that the last ten could not?”⁸⁵⁵ To characterize this attitude, Nietzsche turns to Leopardi:

Nothing is worth your moving.
Earth is unworthy of your sighs. Life
is bitterness and boredom, nothing more.
And the world is foul.
Now be still.⁸⁵⁶

Refusing, then, at once the paralysis of the supra-historical man—his “nausea” and “wisdom”—Nietzsche proposes that we “rejoice in our unwisdom” in the manner of “progressive men” and yet refuse all theories of historical *process* toward a goal. He writes, furthermore: “if historical scholarship is to be a beneficent enterprise, holding future promise, it must itself move in the wake of a fresh and powerful torrent of life [*neuen Lebensströmung*]⁸⁵⁷—for instance, a newly emerging culture [*einer werdenden Cultur*].”⁸⁵⁷ This *Lebensströmung* must move, indeed, by the

⁸⁵⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience,” *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (Penguin Books: New York, 1982), 285–312, 288.

⁸⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 93.

⁸⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 93. Nietzsche cites the translation, dedicated to himself, of Hans von Bülow, Cosima Wagner’s first husband.

⁸⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 94.

rhythm of a newly awakened, newly recognized *torrent of becoming*—it is through such a shift in the torrent’s rhythm, toward the reestablishment of the primordial *ἀγών* between *Zeitleben* and *Tonleben*, through a process of *anamnesis* that reaches into the coming-into-being of philosophy operated by the tragic hero in his moment of timelessness that this culture must rise into the future like a flaming sun. Nietzsche develops thus his counter-dialectics of history and of life, which informs the tasks of philosophy and philology. Therein the *primordial* [*Ur*] is eternally in creative combat with the historical, in the service of life. And here, life itself is conceived in a circular manner: for just as it only thrives by means of illusions, the surface-forces of art and knowledge (thus: of language), its essence lies in the depths, and its symbol is the Dionysian primordial One.

There are two movements where history is concerned: one, the Emersonian, whose essence and whose drive is the will to progress, and another, the Humean, or rather, the one borrowed from Hume, against which historicism defines itself, and which is an early incarnation of the eternal return.⁸⁵⁸ Nietzsche’s epistemology itself abounds in spheres and circular economies, indeed, whose circularity must be broken out of for the future to arise. In the essay, “Circles” Emerson writes: “The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world.”⁸⁵⁹ This then is the very principle of Nietzsche’s anthropomorphism: that the

⁸⁵⁸ There are a multitude of other sources read by the young Nietzsche from which may have later drawn to create his theory of the eternal return of the same. See D’Iorio, *Nietzsche à Sorrente*, 207ff. and Paolo d’Iorio, “The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation,” trans. Frank Chouraqui, from Fr. “Nietzsche et l’éternel retour. Genèse et interprétation,” in Nietzsche. Cahiers de l’Herne (Paris: l’Herne, 2000): 361-389 and its expansion in “Cosmologia e filosofia do eterno retorno em Nietzsche,” trans. Ernani Chaves and Rosistera Pereira de Oliveira in Scarlett Marton (éd.), Nietzsche pensador Mediterrâneo. A recepção italiana, ed. by Scarlett Marton (São Paulo: Discurso Editorial, 2007).

⁸⁵⁹ Emerson, “Circles,” *Essays*: 225-238, 225.

human eye, in its circularity, projects itself, its circular image, onto the entire cosmos, thus circumscribing the universal movement of all things and making itself the key to nature, to divinity. Nietzsche's vision of the new anthropomorphism, which the death of metaphysics shall require, however, will be of a nature entirely different from that to which the world has so long been beholden—therein, outside the sphere of the divine, the movement shall be one of excentricity—the tragic beat of time.

In his second *Untimely*, Nietzsche also attacks Eduard von Hartmann as a dialectician and teleologist. Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) had combined the Hegelian *Idea* with the Schopenhauerian *Will*, to form a cosmogony whose movement was circular, beginning at a fixed point, and returning to this point again and again in a circular world process. The illogical principle of the will and the logical principle of the idea formed together the cosmic Unconscious; at the "moment of initiative," the "empty will" (will without object) began to will from out of a static eternity, and thereafter combined with the idea, thus beginning the world process. These two forces, logical and illogical, competing with one another, as the former strives to correct the latter, cause the world to pass through three "stages of illusion" until a "senile state" is reached, and a desire for rest envelops all the world.⁸⁶⁰ This is brought about by the idea's creation of a "will to nothingness" that negates the will to life, and from this negation results the "collective decision that leads to the destruction of the whole universe"⁸⁶¹ at which point the will returns to its static eternal state within "pure power itself [...]"⁸⁶² This state must then be willed as a pure redemption from temporality and world process, a liberation from the

⁸⁶⁰ Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten. Versuch einer Weltanschauung* (Berlin, Carl Duncker's Verlag, 1869): 626, in D'Iorio, "The Eternal Return," 22.

⁸⁶¹ D'Iorio, "Eternal Return," 23.

⁸⁶² Hartmann, *Unbewussten*, 662.

dolorous fight between the logical idea and the illogical will, and thus from illusion, in absolute willing, absolute power and negation. This cosmogony is based on the thesis that, because it is impossible and contradictory to posit an infinity extending into the past, an absolute beginning of the world process must necessarily have taken place. Hartmann comes to this conclusion out of the polemic between Kant and Schopenhauer concerning the beginning of the world. Kant's demonstration of the first cosmological antinomy in the *Critique of Pure Reason* runs as follows:

Thesis: "The world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries." Proof: "For if one assumes that the world has no beginning in time, then up to every given moment in time an eternity is elapsed, and hence an infinite series of states of things in the world, each following another, has passed away. But now the infinity of a series consists precisely in the fact that it can never be completed through a successive synthesis. Therefore an infinitely elapsed world-series is impossible, so a beginning of the world is a necessary condition of its existence, which was the first point to be proved."⁸⁶³

This antinomy results in reason's capacity to *believe* in an absolute beginning of the world that cannot be rigorously rationalized, because the thesis dialectically transforms into its opposite, and, like Icarus, falls from the intelligible it strives towards into the sensible world. Such a belief in a beginning to the universe is thus morally necessary, for Kant, to the human animal and its development. Yet the dialectic of pure reason, by which it relates to pure Ideas, is such that it falls equally into the opposite belief, in the infinity of time and space, the limitlessness of the universe. According to this thesis (that is to say, antithesis), since there must have been an infinity of time before the beginning of the cosmos, this infinite void would render any beginning impossible. Hence, no universal beginning has ever taken place, and time extends infinitely into the past. However, because on the "battlefield" of reason's antinomies the victory always belongs

⁸⁶³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 454, 470.

to the “side which has been permitted to make the attack” it is the thesis of an absolute *beginning* of the universe, extending reason into the intelligible realm, that prevails over the antithesis of past and future infinities, which confines itself to the spatiotemporal sphere experience.

Schopenhauer attacks the Kantian thesis of this first antinomy by exposing the fact that the proof of this thesis replaces “the beginninglessness of the series of conditions or states” with “the endlessness (infinity) of the series [...].” However, Schopenhauer points out: “the end of a beginningless series can always be thought without detracting from its beginninglessness, just as conversely the beginning of an endless series can also be thought.”⁸⁶⁴ This thinkability, for Schopenhauer, entirely delegitimizes Kant’s antinomy of reason since its very purpose is to confront reason with the impossibility of thinking its own theses, thus pushing it across the limit between thought and faith. Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche with him, thus posits the impossibility of a *beginning* of the world process. Against the “regressive” infinite movement posited by Schopenhauer, which he calls a mere “ideal postulate,” Hartmann proposes his thesis of the world’s “progressive movement”⁸⁶⁵ which is, on the contrary, *real*. He believes that the reality of time necessitates positing an absolute beginning and an absolute end to the world process, thus returning to the thesis of the first Kantian antinomy of reason. The flaw of Hartmann’s logic, however, is that he attempts to prove his thesis of an end of the world process by the process itself. This end, which should result in absolute freedom from illusion, the pure empty power of the will, succumbs once again to the union of will and idea, and the world process recommences with the struggle between logic and illogic, which plunges the cosmos again in illusion. Therefore: “Hartmann’s view is that the world process leads into a final state absolutely identical

⁸⁶⁴ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F. Payne (1969): II, 494.

⁸⁶⁵ Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, third edition (1871), 772.

to the initial state.”⁸⁶⁶ Such is the manner in which universal history endlessly repeats itself, as every time the world comes again to a static state, “we are still haunted by the specter of a new will and of another beginning of the world process.”⁸⁶⁷ Hartmann struggles with the contradiction between an absolute liberation from illusion and suffering and the implication of his own theory, that the world process eternally recommences. If the will, according to him, were entirely bound by time, the world process would be obliged to repeat eternally and identically, yet because the will, in its origin, is both *anterior* to time and its cause, the probability of cosmic recurrence is not 1 but 1/2, and is again diminished by 1/2, at the event of every recurrence.⁸⁶⁸

In a set of fragments from 1873, Nietzsche attacks Hartmann as an unsuccessful “imitator” of Schopenhauer (KSA 7: 28 [6]),⁸⁶⁹ for pretending to a knowledge of the unconscious, which “by its very nature is something that is unknown,” to such an extent that he even considers it to be the matrix of the world process, and for believing this fact to be doubly demonstrable, both “on the basis of the past, *ex causis efficientibus*,” and “on the basis of the future, *ex causa finali* [...].” Nietzsche continues, with vicious sarcasm: “H<artmann> lets the light of the Last Judgement shine upon our age” such that “it appears that it is now approaching humanity’s age of manhood, that joyous state in which there is nothing but solid mediocrity [...]” (KSA 7: 29 [59]).⁸⁷⁰ And this is, indeed, Hartmann’s own Christian language, for he writes, in Nietzsche’s transcription: “the complete victory of the logical over the illogical must coincide

⁸⁶⁶ D’Iorio, “Eternal Return,” 24.

⁸⁶⁷ D’Iorio, “Eternal Return,” 24.

⁸⁶⁸ Cf. Hartmann, *Unbewussten* (1869), 663. D’Iorio, “Eternal Return,” 25.

⁸⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 186.

⁸⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 219.

with the *temporal end of the world process*, with the *Last Judgement (!!)*” (KSA 7: 29 [52]).⁸⁷¹ In the second *Untimely Meditation*, he criticizes Hartmann, the would-be philosopher of the unconscious, as an unconscious “*philosophical parodist*” and calls his doctrine a “parody of world history.”⁸⁷² “For every individual the unconscious parodist required ‘the full surrender of his personality to the world process.’”⁸⁷³ Nietzsche also writes of Hartmann, with venomous vehemence: “Disgusting book! Disgrace to our age! [...] Hartmann’s philosophy is the *scowl of Christianity*, with its absolute wisdom, its Last Judgement, its redemption, etc.” (KSA 7: 29 [52]).⁸⁷⁴ It is *contra* this pseudo-scientific, Christianized philosophy of history as either an eternal recurrence or an inevitable, teleological progression toward a restored Christian eternity, that Nietzsche’s vision of history as becoming, with the tragic philosopher at its crux, will surge forth to put an end to all metaphysical historicism and which will hence forge the path to his later explicit conception of philological-philosophical genealogy.

Against Hartmann’s conception of an absolute beginning and an absolute end to the world process, Nietzsche opposes Schopenhauer’s theory of an infinity of the past, and of the consequent impossibility of a completion of infinity. Since an eternity has elapsed up until the present moment, Schopenhauer claims: “everything that can or should become must have become already.”⁸⁷⁵ In other words, this infinity of elapsed time entails “the exhausted possibility

⁸⁷¹ Hartmann, *Unbewussten*, 637. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 214. The two exclamation marks are Nietzsche’s.

⁸⁷² Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 131.

⁸⁷³ Hartmann, 638. Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 133.

⁸⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 215.

⁸⁷⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 1: 273-274.

of events.”⁸⁷⁶ In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche allies this theory with that of Parmenides and the Eleatics, according to which: “‘There can be no time, no motion. no space, for we can only imagine all these to be infinite. Whether infinitely large or infinitely divisible, everything infinite has no being. It does not exist.’ But no one who interprets the meaning of the word ‘being’ strictly, who takes the existence of a contradiction such as a finished infinity seriously as an impossibility, can doubt this.”⁸⁷⁷ Nietzsche refutes this theory of infinity’s impossibility in harmony with Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Democritus, all of whom endorse the “*reality of motion*” as deduced from “reality of thought,” and thus of thought *as* motion.⁸⁷⁸ According to this argument, thought is itself *successive*, i.e., subjected to *becoming* and hence incapable of solidifying any thought into “Being,” against which Parmenides counters the idea that thought is stagnant and what appears to us as succession is merely a *representation* of succession. Nietzsche refutes this thesis, in turn, through an appeal to Spir.

Spir, arguing against Kant, claims that the “idea [*Vorstellung*] of succession [...] is not in itself successive; consequently it is completely different from the succession of ideas [*Vorstellungen*].”⁸⁷⁹ In addition, according to this hypothesis, the representation of succession is possible only based on the reality of *thought* as movement. Spir continues by asking: “how can the beginning and the end of conscious life itself, together with all its inward and outward senses, exist only in the interpretation of the inward sense? The actual fact is that one absolutely cannot deny the reality of change. If you throw it out the window it will slip back in through the

⁸⁷⁶ Schopenhauer, *World*, II, 489.

⁸⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 15, 96.

⁸⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Pre-Platonics*, 125.

⁸⁷⁹ Afrikan Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit*. 2nd ed. Vol. I, 209f. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 15, 97.

keyhole.” For only the proposition that “our *ideas* appear to us as they are” can found the critique of reason, since it alone allows us to “make [...] valid assertions about them” and thereby produce an “epistemology” as well as a “‘transcendental’ examination of objective validity.”⁸⁸⁰ Nietzsche thus, with Spir, opposes the Parmenidean idea of a timeless eternity in which Being would subsist in absolute manner by means of an argument that subsumes the very event of this thought in the becoming that it both denies and presupposes. Constant change, then, is the essential truth of all movement for Nietzsche, and if an infinity has already elapsed, this is merely an expression of the indestructibility of forces and matter posited by Heraclitus, by Anaxagoras, by Empedocles and Democritus. The movement of history is rather the eternal transformation of these originary bodily forces as *functions of time*. And in the movement of history, the ancient forces of life must, by a process of remembrance at once *active, biological* and *metaphysical* or *philosophical*, be transformed into forces of the future. The body itself, through a mimetic, homeotic, *hyperbiological* approach to history, must become foreign to itself, such that its very physiology, and therefore too the *illusions* it must generate and by which it lives, are transfigured.

Yet this constant change, for Nietzsche, in no way amounts to a logical, linear or causal motion that could be described as a *process*. On the contrary, this change neither originates nor terminates. And, as Paolo D’Iorio points out, Nietzsche ultimately rejects Spir’s Neo-Kantian theory, because rather than renouncing the metaphysical organization of the world into noumena and phenomena, it proposes, in opposition to the “Kantian and Schopenhauerian dualist model” a three-tiered model. In this model, there exists, between “the authentic dimension” of the thing-in-

⁸⁸⁰ Spir, *Denken*, 209f. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 15, 98.

itself and the level of “the subject’s representation” as reality, a third, “intermediary ontological level,” upon which things *really* exist but not as things in themselves; rather, they exist in an “inauthentic and contradictory way.”⁸⁸¹ This tripartition is just as unacceptable for Nietzsche as the thing-in-itself/appearance division of Kant and the will/representation division of Schopenhauer.

In the second *Untimely*, Nietzsche pronounces this injunction: “Assess your height as a man of knowledge by your depth as a man of action. True, you climb up toward heaven and on the sunlight of knowledge, but you also sink downwards toward chaos.”⁸⁸² To ascend in flight on the wings of knowledge requires a descent into the real, the chaotic pandemonium of reality, the *torrent of becoming*—only through this constant ἀγών between reality and thought, between *action* and contemplation, or again, between the novel and ancient wisdom can a culture come about, can the *new history* arise. Nietzsche, thus, through this critique of the teleological and Christian tones of Hartmann’s doctrine, defines his own conception of history, his own epistemology and cosmogony, against it.

Hartmann is important because he deals a deathblow to the idea of a world process simply by being consistent. In order to be able to endure it he must base it on the τέλος of conscious redemption and freedom from illusions on our willingness to embrace decline. But the end of humanity can occur at any moment due to a geological cataclysm: and all that illusionlessness would presuppose more highly developed moral and intellectual energies: which is wholly improbable: on the contrary, when they become old, the illusions are likely to become all the more powerful and old age, to conclude with a *return to childishness* [*K i n d i s c h w e r d e n*].

KSA 7: 29 [52]⁸⁸³

⁸⁸¹ D’Iorio, *Pre-platoniciens*, 21.

⁸⁸² Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 130.

⁸⁸³ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 213-214.

Nietzsche points out that this doctrine of eternal return of the identical, wherein the state of ennui and yearning for eternity and stagnancy that the realms of pure illusion lead instead to the repetition of the same series of events *ad infinitum*, *contradicts* the progressive, teleological doctrine of liberation that Hartmann proposes. In place of this double-bind, Nietzsche proposes his idea of a system of invisible bridges connecting geniuses across history, and history's role of serving and furthering their community. He writes: "We want to refrain from all constructions of *human history* and not pay any attention whatsoever to the masses, but instead only to the widely dispersed individuals: they form a bridge above the turbulent stream. They do not further a process; rather, they live conjointly and concurrently, thanks to history. / It is the 'republic of geniuses'" (KSA 7: 29 [52]).⁸⁸⁴ This doctrine opposes itself to *progress* as well as to *return*—there is no universal history, but rather, history binds great men, great geniuses and tragic heroes together and draws them into circular, temporal and trans-temporal communication with one another. In the second *Untimely*, Nietzsche prophesizes: "The time will come when we will wisely avoid all interpretations of the world-process, or even human history; when historians generally will no longer consider the masses, but rather those individuals who form a kind of bridge over the wild torrent of Becoming [*Brücke über den wüsten Strom des Werdens bilden*]."⁸⁸⁵ The beings who spring forth out of that torrent refute, refuse and overcome the logic of their century; they are supremely discontinuous with the homogeneity of the world in which they are embedded—they defy the dialectic that precipitates the race of modern men by their very existence. Nietzsche declares: "the *goal of humanity* cannot lie at the end of history, but

⁸⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 214. The term "republic of geniuses" is borrowed from Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Frankfurt: W. Kramer, 1966-1967), 3: 188.

⁸⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 134.

only in the *highest human exemplars*.⁸⁸⁶ These men are tragic. They are tragic *heroes* precisely because they arise out of the tragedy of the age and exist in antagonism against it. From the raging tumult of Becoming they awake, open their eyes and seize life, a life unknown to the world in which they come to be, and according to a necessity beyond necessity, beyond the teleological, dialectical movement to which everything around them is subordinated. In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche writes of the philosopher as the “self-revelation of nature’s workshop” who exists with the “artist” in a sphere “above the tumult of contemporary history [*Über dem Getümmel der Zeitgeschichte*]” and “beyond need [*abseits der Noth*].” He proposes: “The philosopher as the *brake shoe on the wheel of time*” (KSA 7: 19 [17]).⁸⁸⁷ In apparent contradiction with the proposition that the philosopher-genius exists of *necessity*, he here is posited as a being *beyond necessity*. Here arises Nietzsche’s ambivalence with regard to the possibility of necessity beyond metaphysics—it is a torturous ambiguity, and if the tragic hero is *necessary* this is because his is the greatest, most dangerous task—the task of bringing death to metaphysics for a people: “Philosophers appear in times of great danger—when the wheels keep turning faster—they and art take place of disappearing myth. But they are thrown far ahead of their time, because they only gain the attention of their contemporaries very slowly” (KSA 7: 19 [17]).⁸⁸⁸ Like comets, these men are precipitated outside themselves and beyond their time. They follow the path of excentricity, and their *immediate failure* as reformers—after the fashion of Empedocles and, indeed, of Hölderlin, constitutes at the same time their greatest power. For they are destined to be misunderstood by the *human beings*, submerged in metaphysics, who surround

⁸⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 134.

⁸⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 7.

⁸⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 7.

them. It is by thrusting themselves *outside of history* that they open wide the possibility of a new history, of a new life liberated from metaphysics, in which art and science collaborate to reveal the sacrificial movement of the long tragedy of time.

These philosophers are heroes because they are self-generative, because their *plastic force* affirms itself in the face of the lawful lawlessness according to which their world functions. To the masses, they appear to be random, to be wandering in want of any direction but in truth, they live according to a natural law that they themselves bring into being by their self-engendering—this law, of the highest metaphysical strength, must be sacrificed in accordance with their downgoing. The genius who miraculously issues out of the mire of a time not his own, a barbarian time ruled and pervaded by philistines, is destined to be destroyed by this time, precisely because he is a bridge to a future time, a time unknown, and because he contains within him the fire of the great life-force of both the past and the time to come. Thus he must sacrifice himself so as to come into being as this bridge. Indeed, this sacrifice is destined to be misunderstood by his people—the philosopher as tragic hero is destined to fail in giving rise to a newly harmonious whole—this too is his tragedy—and yet! It is in this very failure that his power lies—for the significance of this sacrifice is to be grasped by a time to come, the portent of the death of metaphysics, of the return of becoming to the temporal rhythm of the body.

Nietzsche opposes to Hartmann's philosophy "our doctrine *that consciousness is promoted* and developed *only by ever loftier illusions*." This doctrine of illusion as the material of life is not, however, one of *progress*, but rather, Nietzsche believes that our illusions have become greatly impoverished since the age of the Greeks: "our illusions are *more inferior* and *more vulgar* than theirs." "We" are thus, if anything, in a process of *regression*, beginning in the

time of the Greeks, and yet illusion is inescapable—it is vital, binding force; the very stuff of life and its movement. Modern man lives in a “twilight atmosphere”⁸⁸⁹—the task of untimeliness is to resist this twilight, overcome it into dawn, to transform from “latecomers” into “forerunners” by “creating new generations.”⁸⁹⁰ There is no eternity, and likewise, there is no teleological unfolding—rather, all hinges upon the *force* of the illusions we are capable of producing. For “illusions are the only expression for an unknown state of affairs” (KSA 7: 29 [52]).⁸⁹¹ Thus, in another fragment, Nietzsche writes:

Truth as a cloak for completely different impulses and drives.
The pathos of truth is related to *belief*.
The drive for lies fundamental.
Truth is unknowable. Everything knowable semblance. Significance of art as truthful semblance.

KSA 7: 29 [20]⁸⁹²

At stake in the new history is precisely the possibility of this *truthful semblance*—the creation of art as, at once, the creation of new truths, truths understood to be illusions and hence *lies*, but which nonetheless carry the force to bind a people together—to affirm its culture as a dissonant harmony, a paradoxically fragmentary whole. The tragic hero is, perhaps, the highest manifestation of the “pathos of truth” together with the “drive for lies”—that is, the most supreme and sovereign work of art.

Since there is no *absolute point of origin*—no beginning of cosmic time, there can be no *return* in an identical sense; rather, any return, in the absence of origin, would necessarily articulate its difference with the past cosmic movement, and because it would be washed over

⁸⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 130.

⁸⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 129.

⁸⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 215.

⁸⁹² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 199.

with the waters of Lethe, it could never reach, by any measure, the point from which it took off—the configuration of life, between the primordial and the manifest, would have already infinitely changed, beyond itself. Origin—*Ursprung*—conceived as *primordial becoming*, which must be drawn into the consonance of the present through a procedure of anamnesis—is thus, rather, the space of transformation—of a *primordial experience* that must be recreated at every turn in an *untimely fashion*—that is, in accordance and in disaccord—in *dissonant consonance* with the time to which it belongs. The actual finds refuge in this reversal of origin—hence, the whole army of truths that follows in an excentric movement must transform itself as well in the aftermath of a transfigured *force*—a transfigured nature of which this army is the manifestation. As an alternative, a true path, against both *progress*, which is a philistine idea hingeing on modern pathos, and the eternal return of the same, Nietzsche advances this *other* temporal movement of rhythmic, tragic becoming, between art and nature, which returns every time to a different origin.

Time itself is the metamorphosis of origin, and this origin does not find itself at the *beginning* of life and time (αἰών), but rather pervades it and arises as the shift from one form of becoming to another. In “The Rhine,” Hölderlin wrote: “Ein Rätsel ist Reinent sprungenes”—“An enigma are those of pure origin.” And then: “Even song may hardly unveil it.”⁸⁹³ To penetrate into this enigma, this riddle, as Oedipus, the *suffering human being* solves the riddle of the human being posed to him by the monstrous sphinx—this requires at once the recreation of that origin, that purity, in a new sense. This is itself the beginning of tragic knowledge—the excessive self-consciousness, rising into universality, which necessitates the hero’s downgoing. Origin is

⁸⁹³ Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 433. Trans. modified.

liberated by Nietzsche from its function as *cause*—just as Heraclitus denied any *end* to the game of the cosmic child, just as Empedocles had refused to admit of the purposiveness of time and motion. The tragic philosopher, in this light, has as his great task to embody the timelessness, the dream of eternity that his people hangs onto as a myth which renders the suffering of life possible, and, in sacrificing himself, to sacrifice this metaphysical myth as well to the foundation of a new culture. Let us not forget the philosopher’s injunction: “You should not flee into some metaphysics, rather, you should actively sacrifice yourself for the *emerging culture* [*euch der werdenden Kultur thätig opfern*]!” (KSA 7: 19 [154]).⁸⁹⁴

Sacrifice of the Last Philosopher

While for Hölderlin, the transition from twilight to dawn accomplished by the self-sacrifice of the tragic hero is brought about by means of a tragic dialectics, for Nietzsche it is of another nature, and rather than bringing joy through mourning, it brings life-affirmation through Dionysian suffering, precisely because life itself is suffering—*is* the constant, tragic sacrifice of one self to give rise to the next, through the temporal fragmentation of the subject and the return to the Dionysian instinct, the instinct toward the embrace of life through pain, the purificatory experience of being-torn-to-shreds in tragedy. In the world of individuation, as we have seen, it is an individual, a hero possessing monstrous wisdom—whose wisdom is so great that it is *tragic*—who must undergo the tragic fate of Dionysus, and, for Nietzsche, it is his task, as the *last philosopher*, to bring about, with his self-sacrifice, the death of the very timelessness, the relic of ancient mythic metaphysics that he lives within. For tragic knowledge is specifically defined by

⁸⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 49.

Nietzsche as the knowledge that metaphysics is *no longer possible*. To bring this knowledge to a people, that it may found a new culture, which shall at once be a new *nature*, requires a self-sacrifice and a deliverance into fragmentary time, time no longer conceived in metaphysical terms, as an *a priori* condition of experience, or as the motion of a teleological world-process, but a discontinuous time of which all inner forces—and first of all the *plastische Kraft*—are functions. To become timeless out of the flux of becoming and then to die as timelessness itself—that is fate of the philosopher as tragic hero. Nietzsche writes, in a fragment of 1871: “Intention of Nature to come to *perfection*. The genius is, from this perspective, timeless [*zeitlos*]. The goal is ever reached” (KSA 7: 18 [3]). The perfection of nature by the creation of a new culture, hence, depends on the timelessness of the genius—this genius is, indeed, the necessary component, the *axis* of this natural-cultural creation.

Nietzsche follows, at least to a certain extent, the vision of the philosopher as tragic hero that Hölderlin had sketched in his *Ground of Empedocles* as well as Schopenhauer’s conception of the genius as the individualization of the universal will. In a fragment of 1872, Nietzsche writes of the “philosophical genius” that “he has nothing to do with the the chance political situation of a people; on the contrary, in comparison with his nation [*Volk*] he is *timeless* [*zeitlos*].” Nietzsche then insists that this genius is by no means attached to his people by chance, but rather that, of absolute necessity, “what is specific in this people comes to light here as an individual: the drive of the people becomes a universal drive, applied to solving the riddle of the universe.” He finishes the note with the following declaration: “The philosopher is a means for coming to rest in the rushing current” (KSA 7: 19 [16]).⁸⁹⁵ The tragic hero is thus *necessary and*

⁸⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 6.

universal, yet, again, only in the sense and the degree in which he embodies and manifests the *drives*, the specific *rhythm* of his people; again, Nietzsche's metaphysical, Schopenhauerean instinct is tempered by his philological conception of history and of culture as incommensurably different at different times, in different places, and of the human body as infinitely changeable. There is a "*teleology* of the philosophical genius" (KSA 7: 19 [16])⁸⁹⁶ that Nietzsche calls it his "task" to comprehend and, therefrom, to bring about. This teleology, then, is the modern remnant of the Greek *μοίρα* which, in ancient tragedy, constituted the power to which the hero had to freely subjugate himself and thus sacrifice himself, in order to restore the harmony of his people with the divine. It is as a timeless being—in whom time, in other words, = 0—as a creature that provides rest from the ceaseless torrent of becoming, preparing a new world to come into being "with one strike" that the hero must sacrifice himself, in order to thrust his people into an affirmation of their suffering, to change the strength of the forces that form the rhythm of their becoming.

Because, in the Nietzschean-Heraclitean becoming, every moment brings with it a new self, such that the previous moment and the previous self must be sacrificed in the onrush of temporality, time itself is *tragic*. It is, indeed, a series of self-sacrifices between which no continuity of subject can be drawn, extending into infinite futurity. The past, therefore, is irredeemable, irrecuperable, except by means of a mythical process of anamnesis, which is a conjuring into the present, itself mythical, of *origin*. In the absence, however, of such a force of magic—in the absence of a ground of metaphysics to call back the past—thus, from the perspective of *temporal atomism*, the past sacrificed selves remain inaccessible. The tragic hero,

⁸⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 6.

by his excess of self-consciousness, accepts these sacrifices as his own, takes responsibility for them and, in his tragic song of downgoing, performs this sacrifice in as an *absolute* event. This sacrifice itself is the very self-sacrifice of *metaphysics*—the sacrifice of all hope of redemption, precisely as a *timeless archetype* of that hope. Thereby does he mark the difference between the old and the new. It is for this reason that the tragic hero becomes timeless precisely as the *untimely* embodiment of his world. He contains within himself the primordial memory of the Greeks, of the whole history of metaphysics—it is as the timeless retainer of this history that he, the most conscious of men—so conscious that he becomes *multiple*—sacrifices himself. He sacrifices himself, indeed, as the *last philosopher* and the *last human being*—as the absolute metaphysical subject.

Schopenhauer had defined the genius not only by his excess of knowledge, but also by the fact that his *intellect* is the master of his *will*: its very origin. He writes: “genius consists in the knowing faculty having received a considerably more powerful development than is required by the *service of the will*, for which alone it originally came into being. [...] Genius, therefore, consists in an abnormal excess of intellect that can find its use only by being employed on the universal of existence. In this way it then applies itself to the service of the whole human race, just as does the normal intellect to that of the individual.”⁸⁹⁷ We recall that this is precisely Schopenhauer’s formula of the tragic—the mastery of will by the intellect it produces, which results in the will, represented by the characters in tragic drama, being torn to pieces and dialectically sublating itself in order to give rise to a new world—indeed, to a new nature, after the fashion of tragic sacrifice. And it is indeed this nature of the genius—that his *knowledge*—his

⁸⁹⁷ Schopenhauer, *Philosophical Writings*, 84. The formula follows that normal human beings are made up of 2/3 “will” and 1/3 “intellect” while the genius is composed of 1/3 will and 2/3 intellect, in such a way that his intellect overpowers his will.

propensity to discover the solution to the *enigma of the universe*—that lends him his *instinct toward self-sacrifice*. In his third *Untimely Meditation*, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” Nietzsche names this instinct as the third great danger that threatens the philosophical genius from within. This danger he calls by the name of “moral and intellectual hardening.” Out of his inescapable “fate of solitude,” the genius “breaks the bond that linked him to the ideal” and, in dejection, the “uniqueness of his nature” having become “an individual, isolated atom,” resolves himself to sacrifice. He is, in other words, in the manner of Hölderlin and Kleist, “destroyed through his uniqueness,” and “he can perish through his self as he can by sacrificing himself [*im Aufgeben seiner selbst*]”—therefore, Nietzsche writes, “living means, in short, to live in danger.”⁸⁹⁸ It is from the “peaks of tragic contemplation”⁸⁹⁹ that the courage of the genius—the philosopher who *embodies* the grace and curse of his age—in other words, whose actual existence contains within it the infinity of possibilities for the future “culture,” conceived as a “new and improved physis,” as Nietzsche had prophesized it to be at the close of the second *Untimely*,⁹⁰⁰ must show itself and prepare the hero for his self-sacrifice. After his rejection of Schopenhauerean metaphysics, the possibility of the philosopher’s attainment of universality is cast into obscurity, for Nietzsche. This is the question that will ceaselessly occupy him for the rest of his philosophical life.

Nietzsche had again invoked the vision of the tragic hero as the figure who brings about the dialectical transition from decline to salvation in *The Birth of Tragedy*, speaking of Sophocles—the *only truly tragic tragedian*:

⁸⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 180. Trans. modified.

⁸⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 177.

⁹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, 145.

Sophocles understood the most sorrowful figure of the Greek stage, the unfortunate Oedipus, as the noble human being who, in spite of his wisdom, is destined to error and misery but who eventually, through his tremendous suffering, spreads a magical power of blessing that remains effective even beyond his decease. The noble human being does not sin, the profound poet wants to tell us: though every law, every natural order, even the moral world may perish through his actions, his actions also produce a higher magical circle of effects which found a new world on the ruins of the old one that has been overthrown. That is what the poet wants to say insofar as he is at the same time a religious thinker. As a poet he first shows us a marvelously tied knot of a trial, slowly unraveled by the judge, bit by bit, for his own undoing. The genuinely Hellenic delight at this dialectical solution [*dialektischen Lösung*] is so great that it introduces a trait of superior cheerfulness into a whole work, everywhere softening the sharp points of the gruesome presuppositions of this process.⁹⁰¹

Through the process of the Nietzschean anamnesis, this transition, however, is once again transfigured. And it is perhaps *as* a tragic hero, identifying himself melodically with his own last philosopher—the modern Oedipus—that Nietzsche takes on the role of receiving the temporal withdrawal of the Greek ideal, of delivering it into the flux of *his* becoming, incommensurable and absolutely different, that Nietzsche transforms the role and the significance of tragic sacrifice. For that his task is to push metaphysics off into the abyss he stands before is no secret—yet perhaps, the knotted heart of an enigma.

Standing at the midpoint between art and nature, between the mortal and the divine, like Hölderlin's Empedocles, and made monstrous by the excess of his self-knowledge, the Nietzschean hero must thus sacrifice himself to bring about a new world. This vision of tragic self-sacrifice, out of the "terrible loneliness" that fills the heart of the "last philosopher" and plunges him in "oblivion" (KSA 7: 19 [126])⁹⁰² thus follows the dialectic of sacrifice, of dissolution in becoming that teleologically brings about the commencement that Hölderlin and

⁹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 9, 67-68.

⁹⁰² Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 42.

Hegel had theorized, and yet his very sacrifice, for Nietzsche is also the sacrifice of the dialectic as such, ending *excentrically* in the fragmentation of the subject, who no longer possesses the capacity that he had for Hegel to become the absolute. Because this sacrifice, for Nietzsche, essentially *fails* in its attempt to restore absolute harmony, the very power of the tragic hero's self-sacrifice is that it displays the ultimate, inevitable *failure* of the dialectic. Hence the tragic philosopher—the *last* philosopher—tragically travels an *excentric path*. As a comet shooting across a sky of fading stars, he brings about the necessity of an affirmation of this failure—the plunging into tragic becoming of his people and of the very culture that his death announces. For it is only by the voluntary dissolution of joyful consonance back into dissonance that this dissonance itself, bearing the traces of Heraclitus' war and Empedocles' strife, may become for a future culture the very primordial source of joy. Culture itself, then—tragic culture, capable of this affirmation of life in the tragedy of becoming, in a transfigured temporality composed of dissonant atoms, beyond the sphere of the subject, tied indissolubly to the dream of a saving god—requires in its soul the death of metaphysics. It is the infidelity of the modern demigod, his disappearance into the darkly gold and volcanic, excentric sphere of Zagreus, that is the portent guaranteeing the arrival of this absolute surpassing. The hero's vertigo is ours—at the mouth of the abyss into a mortal future, filled with the tremors of monstrous uncertainty, the promise of community unveils itself—the supreme birth of fragmentary truth as the manifestation of transformed drives, the ancient issuing from the new and binding fragmentary creatures, divested of eternity, in a newly Dionysian rhythm of song and dance, illuminated once more by a red and rising dawn.

Coda

And yet, the demand remains, out of the mouth of Nietzsche's Oedipus, for a sacrifice of the *human being*—of humanity itself—to be brought about by the *last of the human beings*, the tragic hero himself.

In Nietzsche's drafts for a tragic drama of *Empedocles*, written in 1870 and doubtless inspired by Hölderlin, he transforms the self-sacrifice of Empedocles into the demand for a sacrifice of the entire Agrigentine people, befallen by plague. In one outline for this unwritten work, we read: "He [Empedocles] resolves while at a funeral ceremony to annihilate his people, in order to free them from their misery" (KSA 7: 5 [116]).⁹⁰³ In another of these outlines we find written: "He resolves to annihilate his people, because he has seen that they cannot be healed. The people are gathered around the crater: he grows mad, and before he vanishes proclaims the truth of rebirth. A friend dies with him" (KSA 7: 5 [118]).⁹⁰⁴ This madness also mirrors the fate of Hölderlin, the modern tragic hero, whose failure resounds incessantly in Nietzsche's heart. This *plague* just might be an allegory for metaphysics itself. For, in the same fragment, he writes: "Departure from religion, through the insight that it is deception" (KSA 7: 5 [118]).⁹⁰⁵ The bridge between Nietzsche and Hölderlin comes gracefully to light through the lucidity of this mad Empedocles in his intention to self-sacrifice, to put to death the myths of a twilight world, bringing about a *new* world purified of illusion and bathed in the rays of a future Heraclitean sun. Yet Nietzsche surpasses his predecessor by this leap from the self-sacrificing hero to the self-sacrificing nation. To free a people utterly from the myth of the human being, which turns it

⁹⁰³ Trans. in David Farrell Krell, *Postponements: Woman, Sensuality and Death in Nietzsche* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 45.

⁹⁰⁴ Krell, *Postponements*, 46.

⁹⁰⁵ Krell, *Postponements*, 46.

against life *incurably*, would require the self-sacrifice not only of a *man*, but of a whole people, a whole culture—the entire mass of those who call themselves “human.”

In his *Daybreak (Morgenröthe)* of 1881, Nietzsche would propose, in an aphorism entitled “*A tragic end for knowledge*,” this “*one tremendous idea*,” by whose force “every other endeavor” would be “thrown down”—“the idea of *self-sacrificing mankind* [*s i c h o p f e r n d e n M e n s c h h e i t*]” in the name of attaining “the knowledge of truth [...]”⁹⁰⁶ This truth, a truth beyond all metaphysical truths, outside the solar systems of myth in which men hide themselves, would require the most tragic “drive to knowledge” of all. For *humanity* to sacrifice itself to *truth* as a *work of art*—“with the light of an anticipatory wisdom in its eyes”—this would be, paradoxically, the highest affirmation of life. This idea, moreover, would present the unification of the young Nietzsche’s instincts to *art* and to *philosophy* and, in the same strike, the most hyperbolic proposition for the overcoming of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical determination of the genius as *universal*. And yet the means to this self-sacrifice of humanity, for Nietzsche, remain unthinkable:

Perhaps, if one day an alliance has been established with the inhabitants of other stars for the purpose of knowledge, and knowledge has been communicated from star to star for a few millennia: perhaps enthusiasm for knowledge may then rise to such a high water mark!⁹⁰⁷

Perhaps it is the very task of the self-sacrificing *philosopher as comet* to ignite the fire of this future drive to the truth, to prepare for the *tragic downgoing of humanity itself*.

⁹⁰⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), § 45, 31.

⁹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, § 45, 31.

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