

## ON THE UNITY OF NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

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In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel maintains that modern European political institutions have their "basis" in "the will." The will, he says, is "the place and point of origin" of the whole social and legal order. But, of course, with his larger philosophical system in view, he goes on to say much more: "it is the task of logic as purely speculative philosophy to prove" that the will is the "ultimate spring of all activity, life, and consciousness."<sup>1</sup> From the speculative, that is, the final and highest standpoint, which includes both the human and the divine, there is no being other than will.

Hegel allows that, since the will is free, the false opinion easily arises that its freedom "involves the dissolution of every restriction and every content either immediately presented by nature, by needs, desires, and impulses, or given and determined by any means whatever." This is "negative freedom" or "the freedom of the void," which "takes shape in religion and politics alike as the fanaticism of destruction (of the whole subsisting social order)... and as the annihilation of any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins."<sup>2</sup> So the negativity of the will can go to any extreme.

But Hegel affirms this negativity, this will, both from the human and the divine side. Indeed, he builds it into his Greek-inspired concept of Being and Becoming so as to harmonize and equalize the human and the divine. God, into whom everything vanishes as into a result, is also the cause who generates and maintains everything which appears to precede that result. In this reversed standpoint, what to the Greeks was a result is now a new beginning: "so that... everything which preceded... is transformed... into something which is dependent upon the result as a principle."<sup>3</sup> Human negativity and emptiness are overcome in the divine, which means that human will, the I, the ego, can be "the unity" of "universality" (power) and "particularity" (existence, goodness). "This is the freedom of the will and it constitutes the concept or substantiality of the will, its weight, so to speak, just as weight constitutes the substantiality of the body."<sup>4</sup>

Schelling thought that Hegel's "reversal" was an impossibility. "Now if this reversal were possible in the way *Hegel* wishes, and if he had not just spoken of this reversal but had tried it and really established it, then he would already himself have put a

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<sup>1</sup> G.W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, revised and edited by Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: OUP, 2008), para. 4 and para. 7, Remark.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 5 and para. 5, Remark.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, cited in F.W.J. von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 157.

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, para. 7.

second philosophy by the side of his first, the converse of the first, which would have been roughly what we want under the name of the positive philosophy." Hegel's philosophy is "merely logical and negative," which means that "real relationships" -- our "positive" experiences -- are incompatible with it.<sup>5</sup> But Schelling was certain that, far from rejecting Hegel's negative logic, his positive philosophy was a step beyond it, one required for the actual realization of the subjective, will-centered consciousness. Like Hegel, he admired Greek philosophical thinking and yearned to reconcile it with the subject-centered freedom and rationality of the modern age.

Nietzsche was intimately familiar with this modern idealistic yearning for fulfillment through contact with the ancient Greeks. And he saw that this was the direction in which German philosophy had been moving for some time: "German philosophy as a whole -- Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, to name the greatest -- is the most fundamental form of *romanticism* and homesickness there has ever been.... One is no longer at home anywhere: at last one longs back for that place in which alone one can be at home: the *Greek* world."<sup>6</sup> Homesickness is the demand of the willing ego for another world, in which it can be at home.

But for Nietzsche the willing ego driven by this demand is empty and so must turn nihilistic, that is, end up rejecting its own most cherished ideals. That is for him the true lesson of German philosophy and indeed of Western history. All authoritative "values" -- Greek, Roman, Christian, humanistic -- must collapse before a will that seeks only to affirm itself. Like all the other homeless ones in modern Europe, the Germans are in the process of discovering the irresistibly destructive nature of the will to power.

That is the negative side of Nietzsche's philosophy. The positive side is to be found in Zarathustra's teaching that a vision of eternal recurrence must "overcome" humanity's purely self-affirming will. Nietzsche's idea seems to have been that modern Europeans -- or at least some of them -- would sooner or later encounter the utter vacuity of their will and in response come to a deep, reconciling, Heraclitean affirmation of the course of things. To redeem the men of the past and to "re-create all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it' -- that alone should I call redemption."<sup>7</sup> Thus Nietzsche's confrontation with the nihilistic will moved him to look beyond the freedom of modern times and to affirm an ancient way of thinking.

In what follows, I will argue that what is essential in Nietzsche's redemptive vision is his determination of human finiteness, human relativity, against which the will exerts its enormous power. As for the eternal recurrence, it transcends the will to power,

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<sup>5</sup> Schelling, *History of Modern Philosophy*, 157-60.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), no. 419, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On Redemption," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982), 251.

but also contradicts it.<sup>8</sup> That is at once the greatness and the weakness of Nietzsche's philosophy. His affirmation of eternal recurrence alternates with the negativity, the endlessness, of human willing. The affirmation and the negativity do not coincide, precisely because Nietzsche insists on the finiteness and illusory character of the ego even as he exposes its infinite, absolute character.

### I The Negative Side

Modern philosophers identify self-knowledge with both the power of the will and the progressive development of social life. Locke, Rousseau, Hegel -- to mention some of the more influential names -- articulated this ideal self-knowledge in different ways, but they all thought that it makes both the individual and the broader society more free. As human conduct becomes more conscious, it becomes more autonomous, more the effect of understanding and reason than of fear and ignorance, weakness and superstition. That is the modern ideal. But, for Nietzsche, such optimism is naïve; it stems from "excessive delight with the [historical] process to the detriment of existence and life."<sup>9</sup>

In his account of human conduct, Nietzsche draws a distinction between the "driving" and the "directing" force. "People are accustomed to consider the goal (purposes, vocations, etc.) as the *driving force*, in keeping with a very ancient error; but it is merely the *directing* force -- one has mistaken the helmsman for the steam."<sup>10</sup> It follows that history is in no way teleological: "Against apparent '*purposiveness*': -- the latter only an expression for an order of spheres of power and their interplay."<sup>11</sup> History has nothing to do with the movement of mankind towards a predetermined purpose or an as yet unrealized goal. For not only is history aimless and directionless, but "'Mankind' ... does not even exist."<sup>12</sup>

Nihilism is the recognition that the world lacks purpose or meaning. What could this meaning have been? "This meaning could have been: the *fulfillment* of some highest ethical canon in all events, the moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal annihilation

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<sup>8</sup> From the very beginning of philosophical discussion about Nietzsche, most commentators -- notably, Karl Jaspers and Karl Löwith -- maintained that the eternal recurrence and the will to power exclude and even contradict each other. The great exception was always Martin Heidegger. Though his thoughts on the issue were subtle, Heidegger often spoke as if Nietzsche had posited nothing but a will to mastery over the entire earth. See, for example, Heidegger's *Nietzsche: Volume IV: Nihilism*, ed. David F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1980), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 316.

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 552, 300.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 90, 55.

## KIERANS: ON THE UNITY OF NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

-- any goal at least constitutes some meaning."<sup>13</sup> Here Nietzsche takes himself to be the completion, the culmination, of modern thought. Since nothing is gained or even aimed at through the process itself, we have "the agony of the 'in vain.'"<sup>14</sup>

Nihilism appears first in a weak or passive form. There is, for example, the "philosophical nihilist": he "is convinced that all that happens is meaningless and in vain; and that there ought not be anything meaningless and in vain.... At bottom, the nihilist thinks that the sight of such a bleak, useless existence makes a philosopher feel, *dissatisfied*, bleak, desperate."<sup>15</sup> This is a nihilism of rage against the world because it does not conform to one's highest ideals. The passive nihilist cannot prove that his ideals are true, but cannot abandon them either. As a result, he withdraws from the world and becomes embittered and pessimistic.

Schopenhauer's concept of the will as a wild, aimless force of nature reflects this kind of pessimism. The early Nietzsche was profoundly influenced by Schopenhauer, but he came to think that "nothing is more characteristic of his philosophy than the absence of all genuine willing."<sup>16</sup> Schopenhauer's "mistake" was to confuse "craving, instinct, drive" with the will. For Nietzsche, the will is not something driven by a lack. On the contrary, the will is the "master" of the desires, their appointed "way" and "measure."<sup>17</sup>

"Willing" is the result of "commanding," but not in some empty, indeterminate sense. For Nietzsche, genuine willing is not a willing in general but only "a willing *something*." By willing something, the I, the ego, steps into a definite existence and way of life. A commanding will knows what it wants and what it can do because it is concretely related to its "total condition."<sup>18</sup> This is the essential moment of finiteness and restriction in Nietzsche's concept of the will.

But the commanding will arises primarily in the mind as opposed to bodily desires, so that when the issue is command over oneself, i.e. self-control, the self, the ego, is at one and the same time commander and obeyer. The ego must somehow overcome the duality and establish effective command. The duality, however, remains; for the ego's freedom is the freedom of a part, not of the whole: "*we are in every given case at the same time those who issue the orders and those who obey them*; insofar as we obey, we experience the feelings of coercion," but insofar "as we are in command... we experience the sensation of pleasure...."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., no. 12 (A), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Nietzsche, of course, was not the first to raise the issue of nihilism. See Michael Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 36, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., no. 95, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., no. 84, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., no. 668, 353.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, no. 19, cited in Hannah Arendt, *Willing*, in *The Life of the Mind* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978), vol. ii, 161. I am indebted to Arendt's remarkable discussion of this passage.

The will tricks us into believing that we can "identify willing and performing, willing and acting," "and this all the more strongly as we overcome the dichotomy through the notion of the I, the ego." But the will does not actually overcome the duality between commanding and obeying. Instead, it identifies the I with the commanding part and imagines that the other part will obey: "what is called 'freedom of the will' is essentially a passionate superiority toward someone who must obey. I am free; the other must obey -- the consciousness of this is the very willing."<sup>20</sup> In commanding, I regard my body as an "other" who must obey.

The will's duality cannot be overcome by an act of divine grace. Quite apart from the fact that Nietzsche denies the existence of the Christian God, he thinks that the very idea of such a God is fixed, static, an image projected beyond the world of consciousness and having nothing to do with it. In comparison with such immovable perfection complete unto itself, the conscious ego is condemned to imperfection. Hence to posit the conscious ego as somehow "the standard and condition of life" -- as Christians do -- is the "*fundamental mistake*": "it is the erroneous perspective of a *parte ad totum* -- which is why all philosophers are instinctively trying to imagine a total consciousness, a consciousness involved in all life and will, in all that occurs, a 'spirit,' 'God.'"<sup>21</sup>

In its duality, the ego is only relative and formal. It can draw its content only from desire, impulse, inclination, etc., and so is a particular will set in opposition to whatever universal, divine good it may imagine. To be sure, this diremption in the will is just what distinguishes the human being from the unreasoning animal; it makes us "*interesting*."<sup>22</sup> But the point is that the antinomies and configurations of this will are never-ending. The merely moral standpoint -- the standpoint of *relation* -- just switches back and forth without being able to resolve the antinomies and get beyond the ought to be.

Nietzsche allows that the ego can alleviate its inner conflict by identifying with the commanding part rather than the coerced. But this feeling of superiority is an illusion, for the will, though a "liberator," "is still a prisoner."<sup>23</sup> The will brings both pleasure and pain. When one attains a condition of power, pleasure arises. "Freedom of the will is the word for that manifold pleasurable condition of the willer who is in command." The "willer" enjoys his "triumph over the resistance" and is certain "that it is his will itself that is overcoming the resistance."<sup>24</sup> In commanding, in overcoming the resistance within, there is also pain, and the pain increases the feeling of superiority: "Displeasure... actually stimulates... [the] feeling of power."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 707, 376.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace B. Samuel (Mineola, New York: Dover, 2003), essay I, sec. 6, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "On Redemption," 251.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, no. 19, cited in Arendt, *Willing*, 162.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 702, 373.

## KIERANS: ON THE UNITY OF NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

But there is for Nietzsche a contradiction in the will. On the one hand, in the shift from willing in general to a willing-something, there is an overflowing feeling of power. "Life as a special case (hypothesis based upon it applied to the total character of being --) strives after a *maximal feeling of power*; essentially a striving for more power; striving is nothing more than striving for power; the basic and innermost thing is still this will."<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, he says that we are wrong to identify our will and our feeling of power with power itself, as if we were the source, the cause, of our action. What we call the will is in truth the means for an involuntary explosion of power: "finally-- a real rechristening; one sees so little will that the word becomes free to designate something else."<sup>27</sup>

For Nietzsche, the connection between cause and effect, between our feeling of power and our conduct, rests on belief or custom. That was also Hegel's teaching. But with him this custom is justified by "spirit," the highest determination of which is God. By contrast, Nietzsche speaks of the "death of God," the main consequence of which is that our modern, human-centered system of belief can no longer be sustained. Nietzsche's madman cries, "Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the Earth from the sun? Whither is it moving now?... Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions?"<sup>28</sup>

Nietzsche has in view the post-Hegelian history of nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>29</sup> In the place of Hegel's "absolute spirit," he puts the experience of revolutionary freedom. Thus, whereas for Hegel the belief in free will is grounded in divine power and benevolence, for Nietzsche it is a fate to be suffered. For Europeans believe intensely and passionately that they are free, that their willing has an effect. In fact, they are certain that they are absolutely free in the world even before they do anything. Nietzsche speaks of a "feeling of force" which arises in us "even before the deed... (as at the site of an enemy or an obstacle to which we feel ourselves equal)."<sup>30</sup>

But Europeans can no longer attribute "the value of an action... to the *intention*, the *purpose* for the sake of which one has acted or lived... [and so] the absence of intention and purpose in events comes more and more to the forefront of consciousness." The "melancholy" result is that "Nothing has any meaning," for if "All meaning lies in intention, and if intention is altogether lacking, then meaning is altogether lacking, too." We slowly but inevitably come to grasp "that an action is never caused by a purpose." Nietzsche asks: "why could 'a purpose' not be an epiphenomenon... a pale image sketched in consciousness... a symptom of events, *not*... their cause? -- But with this we

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., no. 689, 368.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., no. 95, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 181.

<sup>29</sup> For what is still the best account of this history, see Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: the revolution in nineteenth-century thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Columbia UP, [orig. pub. 1941] 1964).

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 664, 350.

have criticized the will itself: is it not an illusion to take for a cause that which rises to consciousness as an act of will?"<sup>31</sup>

The contradiction in the will is the contradiction between its actual impotence and the feeling of power which accompanies it. To nineteenth-century revolutionaries -- Feuerbach, Stirner and many another -- the feeling of power was everything, but to Nietzsche the impotence of the human will was undeniable: since we cannot will backward, we cannot roll back the wheel of time. The problem is therefore to determine the "degree and therewith the boundary at which the past has to be forgotten if it is not to become a gravedigger of the present," "to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign," and thereby "to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds."<sup>32</sup>

This is the point of departure for Nietzsche's "genealogy" of morality: our highest ideals of freedom and benevolence (divine and human) are based on feelings of resentment towards others for what they have done to us. The idea that a moral will can dominate this resentment stems from our belief that we can undo what has been done. Yet this belief only reveals our weakness; nothing that has been done can in fact be undone. Furthermore, the conflict between the past and our belief in the future moves us to weary not only of ourselves but also of other human beings: "The sight of man now fatigues. -- What is present-day Nihilism if it is not *that*? -- We are tired of *man*."<sup>33</sup>

The conflict between the masterful feeling of giving the orders and the slavish feeling of being coerced is the source of tremendous human suffering. But "there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *overfullness* of life and want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic insight and outlook on life -- and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment* of life and demand of art and philosophy, calm, stillness, smooth seas, *or*, on the other hand, frenzy, convulsion, and anesthesia. Revenge against life itself."<sup>34</sup> The latter seek to eliminate their pain and, when they fail to do so, lust for revenge. The former want not the mere absence of pain, but the experience of release from pain. In other words, the intensity of their pleasure is related to the intensity of their pain. Their "Dionysian," "tragic" insight into life liberates them from needs and desires, from the lusts of the body, and brings them joy.

Joy as a higher, purer kind of pleasure takes one beyond all finite categories of pleasure and pain. "Life is a well of joy.... How did I fly to the height where no more rabble sits by the well? Was it my nausea itself which created wings for me and water divining powers?" For Nietzsche, nausea, suffering, is the means by which one may experience joy. "Here, in the highest spheres, the fount of pleasure wells up for me! And

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., no. 666, 351-52.

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, essay I, sec. 12, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 669-70.

here is a life of which the rabble does not drink. You flow for me almost too violently, fountain of pleasure."<sup>35</sup>

Joy is the Dionysian principle. It comes from abundance of life; but abundance has an element of violence in it. Thus joy is as thoroughly nihilistic as life itself, which is constantly producing and destroying. The Dionysian is "an urge to unity," a "feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction," a "great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life," "an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change."<sup>36</sup>

## II The Positive Side

We can see even at this point, then, that Nietzsche's confrontation with the nihilistic modern will moved him to the standpoint of the "eternal recurrence of the same." Here we have "the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the *meaningless*), eternally!"<sup>37</sup> Preaching a doctrine that "*might* in the end have been taught already by Heraclitus," he declares that all things move according to an "unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course."<sup>38</sup> The early Nietzsche wrote a penetrating essay on Heraclitus, and enthusiastically embraced the ancient philosopher's central idea that the eternally recurring flux transcends the seeming givenness and solidity of the world.<sup>39</sup> According to Heraclitus, "you could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you."<sup>40</sup> The river is, and yet is not. Only movement remains, and from out of this all else is formed; nothing exists except this movement.

Thus Becoming is the truth of Being; it is the process of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be in which both are not merely related, but identical. This is Nietzsche's ultimate vision; it is a nihilistic doctrine, but also a bold and creative one.<sup>41</sup> He grasps that Becoming contains within itself the principle of life and motion. Being and nonbeing by themselves are abstract and devoid of truth; but in becoming, being and nonbeing overlap and contain one another; the moment of negativity is therefore immanent. To the weak and passive nihilistic consciousness which maintains the separation of being and

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<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "On the Rabble," 208 and 210.

<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 1050, 539.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 55, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000), 729.

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, trans. Craig Whitlock (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), ch. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Heraclitus, *The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, trans. Brooks Haxton (New York: Viking Books, 2001), fragment 41.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Kaufmann makes this point in a lively way when he likens Nietzsche's notion of eternal becoming to Hegel's "bacchanalian whirl," tracing both ideas back to Heraclitus. See Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), 240.

nonbeing, this unity of the objective and the subjective, the real and the ideal, is incomprehensible. Yet the only truth is to be found in eternal becoming.

Nietzsche says that eternal becoming is "a lying puppet-show" performed by time itself.<sup>42</sup> Time here is no mere subjective form, a net, a way in which individuals impose order on otherwise chaotic external events, but a creative-destructive cosmic process: "again and again it reveals to us the playful construction and destruction of the individual world as the overflow of a primordial delight. Thus the dark Heraclitus compares the world-building force to a plain child that places stones here and there and builds sand hills only to overthrow them again."<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche affirms eternal becoming as a playful succession of individual worlds which come-to-be and cease-to-be according to no rhyme or reason.

To translate Nietzsche into Heraclitean terms, one could say that the eternal return is a circular process with two sides to it, "the road up and the road down."<sup>44</sup> The road up is the negative side, in that it is the reality of opposites, and the road down is the positive side, the unification of these real opposites. But both roads merge: "what agrees disagrees, the concordant is discordant."<sup>45</sup> Christians mean the same thing when they say that God in creating the world both divided it from himself and (in begetting a son) reconciled it to himself. For Nietzsche, too, difference or real antithesis is clearly necessary to the eternal return. The part is something different from the whole and is yet the same as the whole. The eternal return is therefore not mere change but the absolute becoming.

Of course, in recognizing the universality and objectivity of the eternal return, Nietzsche at the same time renounced the principle of individuality and free will. In this he is different from both Heraclitus (who knew nothing of the modern principle of individuality) and Christians (who divinize it). Nietzsche struggled mightily to demonstrate the untrue nature of our subjective consciousness. He thus renounced human beings as finite, individual units. What is valid for him is the universal -- that which eternally binds all things and all events -- and he was certain that he could not affirm such a universal if he were to maintain individual units. That is the general character and form of Nietzsche's philosophy. It advances to the infinite -- eternal return, eternal sameness -- by way of negating finite, subjective consciousness.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer As Educator*, cited in Ted Sadler, *Nietzsche: Truth and Redemption* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), 48.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), sec. 24, 142.

<sup>44</sup> *The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, fragment 69.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, fragment 54.

<sup>46</sup> Jürgen Habermas describes Nietzsche's philosophy "as the heightening of the subjective to the point of utter self-oblivion," adding that this happens "only at the cost of ecstasy -- at the cost of a painful de-differentiation, a de-delimitation of the individual, a merging with amorphous nature within and without." See Habermas, *The Philosophical*

Nietzsche offered a purely mechanistic explanation of the eternal return.<sup>47</sup> But his main concern is with the transformative psychological effects of his teaching. He holds that man's attitude to the thought of eternal return must undergo a "metamorphosis." Beyond the "Thou shalt" and the "I will" there is the "I am." The "I am" is the attitude of the child; it is creative, and it can liberate us from the nihilistic will for vengeance. "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes.'"<sup>48</sup>

The "I am" cannot be commanded as a moral imperative and cannot be willed. A heroic will must overcome moral humanity, but then the hero must become an "overhero." That is, the "sublime" hero must "discard his heroic will": "the ether itself should elevate him, the will-less one."<sup>49</sup> Beyond the "you should" and the "I will" -- both of which are incomplete -- there is the superabundant enjoyment of the childish "I am" -- a self-complete, self-contained phenomenon. There is nothing to be commanded here and hence no resentment and vengefulness; there is nothing lacking, no goal yet to be realized.

The finite and merely human "I will" must be annulled, and this annulling is the work of the hero. So long as his individuality remains, and in such a way that he affirms only his will, his work is incomplete. He will arrive at the standpoint of an infinite will, but find himself pitted against the finite as something other than himself. In other words, he cannot escape his own finitude, and so will again advance to an infinite, over and over, endlessly. The finite human will which exults itself to the infinite is merely abstract identity, intrinsically hollow and false.

One could argue that the overhero does not cease to will, but wills to bring about what happens anyway, so that his "I will" coincides with the "I am."<sup>50</sup> But this coincidence of willing and existing, doing and enjoying, is without any recognizable sense of self, of ego. It is the world of becoming without individuality. "This is the profoundest conception of suffering. . . . The isolation of the individual ought not to deceive us: something flows on *underneath* individuals."<sup>51</sup> The individual itself is a fiction. If there is a cosmic will, it is not and cannot become the object of individuals:

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*Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 93-4.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 1066, 549.

<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "On the Three Metamorphoses," 139. Karl Löwith refers to the three metamorphoses as the unifying fundamental idea in Nietzsche's philosophy. See Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley: University of California Press, [orig. pub. 1935] 1978), ch. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "On Those Who Are Sublime," 230-31.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Löwith took this to be Heidegger's position and argued against it with admirable energy. See, e.g., Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 96-127.

<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 686, 365.

"We are *more* than the individuals: we are the whole chain as well, with the tasks of all the futures of that chain."<sup>52</sup>

Eternal becoming is a circle; it is the will to power "with no goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself the goal; with no will, unless the ring feels good will toward itself."<sup>53</sup> The will of the will to power is not an individualistic, or even a human, will; it is not a will to bring about some past condition of life or some future possibility. It is an impersonal, anonymous, universal will -- the will of the world itself -- and it is joyful no matter what happens. Such "joy," however, makes sense only to those who are strong enough "to do without meaning in things... [who] can endure to live in a meaningless world."<sup>54</sup>

We live in a meaningless world because there is nothing external to the process of becoming from which meaning could be derived. There is no intention either in the process or outside of it. This really is a form of nihilism. But, for Nietzsche, when nihilism is active and strong (as opposed to passive and weak), it heralds a positive, affirming vision of the process: "Can we remove the idea of a goal from the process and then affirm the process in spite of this? -- This would be the case if something were attained at every moment within this process -- and always the same."<sup>55</sup> The world of becoming cannot be explained with recourse to final intentions; but for that very reason we can regard it as justified "at every moment." For that reason, too, we can overcome our feelings of resentment towards it: "There is no place, no purpose, no meaning, on which we can shift the responsibility for our being, for our being thus and thus. Above all: no one could do it; one cannot judge, measure, compare the whole, to say nothing of denying it!"<sup>56</sup>

This way of looking at the world has a relation to modern idealism at its climax. Nietzsche feels the need to move beyond that empty, nihilistic standpoint. For him, however, the transition cannot be dialectical. He rejects the belief of traditional Christian culture that there is a hidden, purposive connection between the negative and the affirmative. Instead, in contemplating the necessity of the transition, he only appeals to the negative consequences which follow from the standpoint of idealism.

Crucial here is Nietzsche's conviction that the yearning for an ideal world -- "a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a true world"<sup>57</sup> -- is itself nihilistic. Plato sought such an ideal world and thought he had found it. Christians believed that the ideal world had been revealed and tried in the course of a long history to transpose it onto the real world, to make it actual, but in doing so they exposed the whole

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., no. 687, 366.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., no 1067, 550.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., no. 585 (A), 318.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., no. 55, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., no. 765, 402.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., no. 585 (A), 316.

quest as a "fable."<sup>58</sup> The will to truth, Nietzsche argues, inevitably turns against itself. The result is the nihilist: "a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist."<sup>59</sup> The overcoming of nihilism requires a conception of the apparent world as redemption. "What is 'appearance' for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance!.... Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective."<sup>60</sup>

Nietzsche is not simply giving us his subjective opinion; appearance does not exist only in his feeling, his supposition. The content, activity, and vitality of the apparent world -- the positing and the objectifying -- are not merely his. He speaks of a living, overflowing world, a world which is universally true, and not subjective only. At this standpoint, Nietzsche no longer sees himself as an individual unit, a finite human being. Accordingly, he offers us not only certainty, but also truth. The universally binding and authoritative character of the world of appearance is not a mere semblance.

There is a religious dimension to all this, for Nietzsche's apparent world, the world of becoming, is totally innocent. All becoming is aimless and therefore free from guilt: "Everything is innocence." Nietzsche anticipates that wise men will eventually emerge with "knowledge" of this innocence; "wise innocent" men will supplant those who are "unwise, unjust, guilt-ridden."<sup>61</sup> Guilt and with it the urge to punish come from morality, particularly in its Christian form, which is infinitely more inward and intense than pagan morality. But, in any case, Nietzsche rejects all morality, pagan and Christian: "Wherever responsibilities have been sought, it was the *instinct of revenge* that sought." More deeply, he holds that *moral* humanity "has *deprived existence* in general of *its innocence*; namely, by tracing back every state of being thus and so to a will, an intention, a responsible act."<sup>62</sup>

For Nietzsche, the overcoming of guilt and the related concepts of causation and moral responsibility exposes the meaninglessness of our ordinary understanding of time. Despite what most moderns think, the present is not the effect of the past, and the present deed is not the cause of the future. That rectilinear view of time is nihilistic; it deepens and radicalizes our feeling that time is irreversible. We come to see time as a futile process; for just as the future disappears into the present, the present vanishes into the past. It is horrible to contemplate this raging process of destruction and ruin. The animals "do not know what yesterday and today are," but humans do, and so they feel weighed down and even crushed by the past.<sup>63</sup> When present and future can only be explained by

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<sup>58</sup> See the account of "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 485-86.

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 585 (A), 318.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingsdale (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), vol. i, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 765, 401.

<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 8.

an all-consuming past, hope inevitably turns to despair, optimism to pessimism. Even the critical, future-oriented will, the commanding will, which struggles against the past, cannot dissolve it: "it is not possible to free oneself completely from this chain."<sup>64</sup>

The only redemption from this inexorable process is the thought that the present moment does not recur or return in a merely temporal process, but comes from eternity to eternity.<sup>65</sup> The present moment must be in every moment; the past and future must be in the present. In order to have a single experience again, we must wish for everything again. "The wisest man would be the one richest in contradictions, who has, as it were, antennae for all types of men -- as well as his great moments of *grand harmony* -- a rare accident even in us! A sort of planetary motion --"<sup>66</sup> What is decisive is not what lies behind us in the past, but the relation of the will to it, whether the will suffers "the melancholy of everything *finished!*"<sup>67</sup> The will fools us into thinking that it can command the future, but the truth is that it oscillates between past and future and easily succumbs to weakness and exhaustion. To transcend commands, oscillations, is to be redeemed from time, the will and human finitude itself. Zarathustra says to the heavens, "I have become one who blesses and says Yes.... But this is my blessing: to stand over every single thing as its own heaven, as its round roof, its azure bell, and eternal security; and blessed is he who blesses thus."<sup>68</sup>

Only a universal knowledge of the world, a vision of the eternal recurrence of the same, is adequate. And this vision has at once an intoxicating and a calming effect. It manifests itself as an "extreme calm in certain sensations of intoxication (more strictly: the retardation of the feelings of time and space.)"<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche ascends to the point where the will's only negation is this retardation, this slowing down, of the feelings of time, so that all of time in its entirety may be affirmed. The will comes to know that "the fatality of its essence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be."<sup>70</sup> This is the very peak of existence. Once that is attained, all that is left is a "Yes and Amen": "For all things have been baptized in the well of eternity!"<sup>71</sup>

### III A Unity of the Two Sides?

Nietzsche therefore reaches a standpoint where he renounces individuality itself. He posits eternal recurrence in such a way that the I, the ego, is negated; in their particular subjectivity, human beings are annulled. The great result is a transition to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>65</sup> See Joan Stambaugh, *The Problem of Time in Nietzsche*, trans. John F. Humphrey (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987), 161ff.

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 259, 150.

<sup>67</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 286.

<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "Before Sunrise," 277.

<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, no. 799, 420.

<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 500.

<sup>71</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "Before Sunrise," 277-78.

something universal, something true and affirmative. But the transition is not accomplished in a systematic way, as in Christian neo-Platonism or German idealism. There is for Nietzsche no providential, teleological connection between the negative and the affirmative; he only observes that it is the nature of the limited and the finite to have its opposite present within it. The process in which one limited and finite being is superseded by another, which in turn is superseded by another, and so on endlessly, is the process of the world itself -- eternal return, eternal sameness. Thus, however much the finite, subjective consciousness may idealize the process, it cannot be the moment in which the process is present and actual. There can, accordingly, be no real unity or integration of the ego and the process of the world; the two sides are only negatively related to each other. But where does that leave the subjective consciousness? By way of conclusion, and in order to do justice to Nietzsche, I will try to answer this question from three points of view.

(1) Nietzsche's greatness lies in his insistence that if we are really to recognize the world, we must determine ourselves as universal and affirm ourselves as universal only. This is a truly philosophical -- even mystical and religious -- way of looking at finiteness. It has its roots not only in pre-Socratic Greece, but also in the Oriental world. The idea is that anyone who thinks through his circumstances and condition must discard his own sense of ego, of individuality, and lose himself in the universal. Nietzsche of course was a man of his time; he accepted the view of many of his contemporaries that the Christian God is dead. But he reasoned that if *that* God is dead, then humanity and our human, all-too-human sense of individuality must also die. When Europeans collapse God into the world, they do not raise nature and human beings to the rank of supreme value; rather, they make finite things and individual human beings disappear into an impersonal and anonymous world of becoming.

In this way, Nietzsche criticized those nineteenth-century humanists who wanted somehow to make subjectivity, individual or collective, the absolute standard and condition of life. Such humanism for him was merely the culminating point, the last gasp of Christianity, the point at which the finite subject makes itself infinite and, turning nihilistic, does away with all content. And surely he was right. The idea that human subjectivity, separate and apart from the divine, can develop a world out of itself, transmute itself as form into content, *is* incredible. No synthesis of the world and human will is thinkable without a divine and, indeed, Christian basis and foundation.

Hegel held that despite -- or rather *because of* -- the tremendous weight which Christians place on the will, the "Christian religion is the religion of *reconciliation* of the world with God."<sup>72</sup> That was Nietzsche's view as well, except that he rejected this idea of reconciliation (whether divine or secular) as a delusion. Thus he was not an atheist or naturalist in the ordinary nineteenth-century sense: he attacked those who in the wake of the death of God still privileged human existence and human freedom in the world. In

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<sup>72</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Consummate Religion*, in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and trans. R.F. Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), vol. iii, 65.

this respect, he was many degrees superior to liberals and socialists such as J.S. Mill and Karl Marx.

(2) Nietzsche's weakness was that he confined himself to the naturalistic, atheistic standpoint even as he criticized it. It is of course a fact that an entirely new consciousness and sense of self emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. An atheistic will-centered consciousness made itself the basis of all actuality, all social and political life, and then attempted (in various conflicting forms) to re-create the world in its image. Nietzsche rightly ridiculed those atheists who thought that the world could be established through human individuality, human subjectivity alone. Yet he did not allow or even consider that subjectivity may have truth when it is the form for a supernatural content. Nor was he able to explain the origin of the nihilistic, subjective consciousness which elevates itself above the world and denies all natural content. The two points are related.

How does the negativity of the will come into the world? The question cannot be answered if we think of the will as related to itself purely positively and of the world as something purely positive confronting it. Certainly, Nietzsche traced the negativity of the will back to feelings of weakness and hatred; but he did not say where these negative feelings come from. They merely succeed feelings that are naturally good and so are juxtaposed to them; in other words, it is from the outside that the negative will comes into the world. But this assumption of a purely positive, unmixed natural good makes the question of the origin of nihilism and evil impossible to answer.

That is why Hegel insisted that in thinking about evil we begin with God's will and activity. Nature is innocent -- neither good nor evil -- but the evil will is not merely natural; it is the negative opposed to the good, i.e. the divine will. Thus the negativity of human evil presupposes the positive good of the divine will and arises in reaction to it; pride, resentment, and the will to revenge are reactive emotions and ought not to be. At the same time, as the Genesis account points out, human beings become godlike when they know *both* good *and* evil. Their likeness to God is present in their freedom of choice, which is why this freedom transcends the duality of a purely positive natural good and a purely negative human will. The negativity of the will, the drama of choosing between good and evil, does not arise in some external fashion, but is built into the world at its source. Good and evil are bound up with and rooted in one another.<sup>73</sup>

Hence the solution of the problem: the godlike negativity of human subjectivity itself overcomes the dichotomy of natural innocence and evil. Since we are not natural but rather *spiritual* creatures, we can choose evil, but we need not; for everything we do originates in the will which (to quote Hegel again) is the "ultimate spring of all activity, life, and consciousness."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See Hegel's commentary on the Genesis account of evil in *Hegel's Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 42-5.

<sup>74</sup> For a robust critique of Hegel's conception of evil and the will, see Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil: a Philosophical Interrogation* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2002), ch. 2. Writing from a post-Christian, post-Nietzschean standpoint, Bernstein denies that there

(3) Nietzsche sets aside the independence of human consciousness which he sees as an empty abstraction. He conceives of a one-sided ("homesick") human willing, and in so doing completely annihilates the moment of self-knowledge in the world. In the thought of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche envisages a universe utterly without subjectivity. For this he has been, as one would expect, roundly criticized; it is asserted that human individuality, human freedom and brotherhood, should not be abandoned.<sup>75</sup> The assertion is correct, I believe, but only formally so; it merely counters Nietzsche's negativity and scepticism with a dogmatic liberal or socialist opinion.

We should recall Schelling's evaluation of Hegel; it can be usefully extended to Nietzsche. Schelling praised Hegel's philosophy insofar as it was "merely logical and negative," for this allows us to put a "second" philosophy, a "converse" and "positive" one, beside his first. Yet Schelling thought that we should keep *both* the negative *and* the positive philosophies in view; for the dissolution and the affirmation of human consciousness and freedom are unintelligible without one another. In a more definite and profound way than Nietzsche, Schelling maintained that when the world and subjectivity are built into independent totalities, both reduce themselves to moments of the divine.<sup>76</sup>

On this fundamental point, for all their differences, Schelling and Hegel were as one, and they were right. For both good and ill, the divine is fully present in the relation between subjectivity and the world; this is why there is no mere juxtaposition or switching back and forth between the two sides; they are in truth identical. Even Nietzsche, in making the transition from the negativity of human willing to the world of becoming, attests to the truth of this view. Though he was convinced that the ego is finite and illusory, he himself in his account of nihilism (which culminates in the subject-centered freedom and rationality of the modern age) brilliantly revealed the infinite and unconditioned character of the human will.

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can be a "healing" of the will in a Hegelian sense. Still, like Nietzsche himself, he cannot explain the origin of evil or its intimate connection with the good against which it struggles.

<sup>75</sup> A good example of this tendency may be found in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 84.

<sup>76</sup> See Emil Fackenheim, *The God Within: Kant, Schelling, and Historicity*, ed. John Burbidge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 103-06.