Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*

1888

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THE PROBLEM OF SOCRATES

1

About life, the wisest men of all ages have come to the same conclusion: it is no good. Always and everywhere one has heard the same sound from their mouths — a sound full of doubt, full of melancholy, full of weariness of life, full of resistance to life. Even Socrates said, as he died: “To live — that means to be sick a long time: I owe Asclepius the Savior a rooster.” Even Socrates was tired of life. What does that prove? What does it demonstrate? At one time, one would have said (and it has been said loud enough by our pessimists): “At least something must be true here! The consensus of the sages must show us the truth.” Shall we still talk like that today? May we? “At least something must be sick here,” we retort. These wisest men of all ages — they should first be scrutinized closely. Were they all perhaps shaky on their legs? tottery? decadent? late? Could it be that wisdom appears on earth as a raven, attracted by a little whiff of carrion?

2

The irreverent idea that the great sages are types of decline first occurred to me precisely in a case where it is most strongly opposed by both scholarly and unscholarly prejudice: I realized that Socrates and Plato were symptoms of degeneration, tools of the Greek dissolution, pseudo-Greek, anti-Greek (Birth of Tragedy, 1872). The consensus of the sages — I recognized this ever more clearly — proves least of all that they were right in what they agreed on: it shows rather that they themselves, these wisest men, shared some physiological attribute, and because of this adopted the same negative attitude to life — had to adopt it. Judgments, judgments of value about life, for it or against it, can in the end never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms; in themselves such judgments are meaningless. One must stretch out one’s hands and attempt to grasp this amazing subtlety, that the value of life cannot be estimated. Not by the living, for they are an interested party, even a bone of contention, and not impartial judges; not by the dead, for a different reason. For a philosopher to object to putting a value on life is an objection others make against him, a question mark concerning his wisdom, an un-wisdom. Indeed? All these great wise men — they were not only decadents but not wise at all. But let us return to the problem of Socrates.
By birth, Socrates belonged to the lowest class: Socrates was plebeian. We are told, and can see in sculptures of him, how ugly he was. But ugliness, in itself an objection, is among the Greeks almost a refutation. Was Socrates a Greek at all? Ugliness is often enough the expression of a development that has been crossed, thwarted in some way. Or it appears as declining development. The anthropological criminologists tell us that the typical criminal is ugly: *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo* [monstrous in appearance, monstrous in spirit]. But the criminal is a decadent. Was Socrates a typical criminal? At least that would be consistent with the famous judgment of the physiognomist that so offended the friends of Socrates. This foreigner told Socrates to his face that he was a *monstrum* — that he harbored in himself all the worst vices and appetites. And Socrates merely answered: “You know me, sir!”

Socrates’ decadence is suggested not only by the admitted wantonness and anarchy of his instincts, but also by the overdevelopment of his logical ability and his characteristic thwarted sarcasm. Nor should we forget those auditory hallucinations which, as “the daimonion of Socrates,” have been given a religious interpretation. Everything about Socrates is exaggerated, *buffo*, a caricature; everything is at the same time concealed, ulterior, underground. I want to understand what idiosyncrasy begot that Socratic idea that reason and virtue equal happiness — that most bizarre of all equations which is, moreover, opposed to every instinct of the earlier Greeks.

With Socrates, Greek taste changes in favor of logical argument. What really happened there? Above all, a noble taste is vanquished; with dialectics the plebs come to the top. Before Socrates, argumentative conversation was repudiated in good society: it was considered bad manners, compromising. The young were warned against it. Furthermore, any presentation of one’s motives was distrusted. Honest things, like honest men, do not have to explain themselves so openly. What must first be proved is worth little. Wherever authority still forms part of good bearing, where one does not give reasons but commands, the logician is a kind of buffoon: one laughs at him, one does not take him seriously. Socrates was the buffoon who got himself taken seriously: what really happened there?
One chooses logical argument only when one has no other means. One knows that one arouses mistrust with it, that it is not very persuasive. Nothing is easier to nullify than a logical argument: the tedium of long speeches proves this. It is a kind of self-defense for those who no longer have other weapons. Unless one has to insist on what is already one’s right, there is no use for it. The Jews were argumentative for that reason; Reynard the Fox also — and Socrates too?

Is the irony of Socrates an expression of revolt? Of plebeian ressentiment? Does he, as one oppressed, enjoy his own ferocity in the knife thrusts of his argument? Does he avenge himself on the noble audience he fascinates? As a dialectician, he holds a merciless tool in his hand; he can become a tyrant by means of it; he compromises those he conquers. The dialectician leaves it to his opponent to prove that he is not an idiot: he enrages and neutralizes his opponent at the same time. The dialectician renders the intellect of his opponent powerless. Indeed, in Socrates, is dialectic only a form of revenge?

I have explained how it was that Socrates could repel: it is therefore all the more necessary to explain how he could fascinate. That he discovered a new kind of contest, that he became its first fencing master for the noble circles of Athens, is one point. He fascinated by appealing to the competitive impulse of the Greeks — he introduced a variation into the wrestling match between young men and youths. Socrates was a great erotic.

But Socrates guessed even more. He saw through the noble Athenians; he saw that his own case, his idiosyncrasy, was no longer exceptional. The same kind of degeneration was quietly developing everywhere: old Athens was coming to an end. And Socrates understood that the world needed him — his method, his cure, his personal artifice of self-preservation. Everywhere the instincts were in anarchy, everywhere one was within sight of excess: monstrum in animo was the common danger. “The impulses want to play the tyrant; one must invent a counter-tyrant who is stronger.” After the physiognomist had revealed to Socrates who he was — a cave of bad appetites — the great master of irony let slip another clue to his character. “This is true,” he said, “but I mastered them all.” How did Socrates become master over himself? His case was, at bottom, merely the extreme case, only the most striking instance of what was then beginning to be an epidemic: no one was any longer
master over himself, the instincts turned against themselves. He fascinated, being an extreme case; his awe inspiring ugliness proclaimed him as such to all who could see: he fascinated, of course, even more as an answer, a solution, an apparent cure for this disease.

When one finds it necessary to turn reason into a tyrant, as Socrates did, the danger cannot be slight that something else threatens to play the tyrant. Rationality was hit upon as a savior; neither Socrates nor his “patients” had any choice about being rational: it was necessary, it was the last resort. The fanaticism with which all Greek reflection throws itself upon rationality betrays a desperate situation; there was danger, there was but one choice: either to perish or — to be absurdly rational. The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato on is pathologically conditioned; so is their reverence for logical argument. Reason equals virtue and happiness, that means merely that one must imitate Socrates and counter the dark appetites with a permanent daylight — the daylight of reason. One must be clever, clear, bright at any price: any concession to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads downward.

I have explained how Socrates fascinated his audience: he seemed to be a physician, a savior. Is it necessary to go on to demonstrate the error in his faith in “rationality at any price”? It is a self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists if they believe that they are extricating themselves from decadence by waging war against it. Extrication lies beyond their strength: what they choose as a means, as salvation, is itself but another expression of decadence; they change the form of decadence, but they do not get rid of decadence itself. Socrates was a misunderstanding; any improvement morality, including Christianity, is a misunderstanding. The most blinding daylight; rationality at any price; life, bright, cold, cautious, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts — all this was a kind of disease, merely a disease, and by no means a return to “virtue,” to “health,” to happiness. To have to fight the instincts — that is the definition of decadence: as long as life is ascending, happiness equals instinct.

Did he himself understand this, this most brilliant of all self-deceivers? Was this what he said to himself in the end, in the wisdom of his courage to die? Socrates wanted to die: not Athens, but he himself chose the hemlock; he forced Athens to sentence him. “Socrates
is no physician,” he said softly to himself, “here death alone is the physician. Socrates himself has only been sick a long time.”

“**REASON**” IN PHILOSOPHY

1

You ask me which of the philosophers’ traits are most characteristic? For example, their lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their respect for a subject when they dehistoricize it *sub specie aeternitas* — when they turn it into a mummy. Everything that philosophers handled over the past thousands of years turned into concept mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. Whenever these venerable concept idolaters revere something, they kill it and stuff it; they suck the life out of everything they worship. Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections — even refutations. Whatever has being does not become; whatever becomes does not have being. Now they all believe, desperately even, in what has being. But since they never grasp it, they seek for reasons why it is kept from them. “There must be mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from perceiving that which has being: where is the deceiver?”

“We have found him,” they cry jubilantly; “it is the senses! These senses, so immoral in other ways too, deceive us concerning the true world. Moral: let us free ourselves from the deception of the senses, from becoming, from history, from lies; history is nothing but faith in the senses, faith in lies. Moral: let us say No to all who have faith in the senses, to all the rest of mankind; they are all ‘mob.’ Let us be philosophers! Let us be mummies! Let us represent monoton-o-theism by adopting the manner of a gravedigger! And above all, away with the body, this wretched *idée fixe* of the senses, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic, refuted, even impossible, although it is impudent enough to behave as if it were real!”

2

With the highest respect, I exclude the name of Heraclitus. When the rest of the philosophic crowd rejected the testimony of the senses because it showed multiplicity and change, he rejected their testimony because it represented things as if they had permanence and unity. Heraclitus too did the senses an injustice. They lie neither in the way the Eleatics believed, nor as he believed — they do not lie at all. What we make of their testimony, that alone introduces lies; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence. “Reason” is the reason we falsify the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the
senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The “apparent” world is the only one: the “true” world is merely added by a lie.

3

And what magnificent instruments of observation we possess in our senses! This nose, for example, of which no philosopher has yet spoken with reverence and gratitude, is actually the most delicate instrument so far at our disposal: it is able to detect tiny chemical concentrations that even elude a spectroscope. Today we possess science precisely to the extent to which we have decided to accept the testimony of the senses — to the extent to which we sharpen them further, arm them, and have learned to think them through. The rest is miscarriage and not-yet-science — in other words, metaphysics, theology, psychology, epistemology — or formal science, a doctrine of signs, such as logic and that applied logic which is called mathematics. In them reality is not encountered at all, not even as a problem — no more than the question of the value of such a sign-convention as logic.

15

The other characteristic of philosophers is no less dangerous; it consists in confusing the last and the first. They place that which comes at the end — unfortunately! for it ought not to come at all! namely, the “highest concepts,” which means the most general, the emptiest concepts, the last smoke of evaporating reality — in the beginning, as the beginning. This again is nothing but their way of showing reverence: the higher may not grow out of the lower, may not have grown at all. Moral: whatever is of the first rank must be causa sui. Origin out of something else is considered an objection, a questioning of value. All the highest values are of the first rank; all the highest concepts, that which has being, the unconditional, the good, the true, the perfect — all these cannot have become and must therefore be causes. All these, moreover, cannot be unlike each other or in contradiction to each other. Thus they arrive at their stupendous concept, “God.” That which is last, thinnest, and emptiest is put first, as the cause, as ens realissimum. Why did humanity have to take seriously the brain afflictions of these sick web-spinners? We have paid dearly for it!

25

At long last, let us contrast the very different manner in which we conceive the problem of error and appearance. (I say “we” for politeness’ sake.) In the past, alteration, change, any becoming at all, were taken as proof of mere appearance, as an indication that
there must be something which led us astray. Today, in contrast, precisely insofar as the prejudice of reason forces us to posit unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being, we see ourselves somehow caught in error, compelled into error — so certain are we, on the basis of rigorous examination, that this is where the error lies.

It is no different in this case than with the movement of the sun: there our eye is the constant advocate of error, here it is our language. In its origin language belongs to the age of the most rudimentary psychology. We enter a realm of crude fetishism when we summon before consciousness the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language — in plain talk, the presuppositions of reason. Everywhere reason sees a doer and doing; it believes in will as the cause; it believes in the ego, in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-substance upon all things — only thereby does it first create the concept of “thing.” Everywhere “being” is projected by thought, pushed underneath, as the cause; the concept of being follows, and is a derivative of, the concept of ego. In the beginning there is that great calamity of an error that the will is something which is effective, that will is a capacity. Today we know that it is only a word.

Very much later, in a world which was in a thousand ways more enlightened, philosophers, to their great surprise, became aware of the sureness, the subjective certainty, in our handling of the categories of reason: they concluded that these categories could not be derived from anything empirical — for everything empirical plainly contradicted them. Whence, then, were they derived?

And in India, as in Greece, the same mistake was made: “We must once have been at home in a higher world (instead of a very much lower one, which would have been the truth); we must have been divine, because we have reason!” Indeed, nothing has yet possessed a more naive power of persuasion than the error concerning being, as it has been formulated by the Eleatics, for example. After all, every word and every sentence we say speak in its favor. Even the opponents of the Eleatics still succumbed to the seduction of their concept of being: Democritus, among others, when he invented his atom. “Reason” in language — oh, what an old deceptive female she is! I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.

It will be appreciated if I condense so essential and so new an insight into four theses. In that way I facilitate comprehension; in that way I provoke contradiction.
First proposition. The reasons for which “this” world has been characterized as “apparent” are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable.

Second proposition. The criteria which have been bestowed on the “true being” of things are the criteria of not-being, of naught, the “true world” has been constructed out of contradiction to the actual world: indeed an apparent world, insofar as it is merely a moral-optical illusion.

Third proposition. To invent fables about a world “other” than this one has no meaning at all, unless an instinct of slander, detraction, and suspicion against life has gained the upper hand in us: in that case, we avenge ourselves against life with a phantasmagoria of “another,” a “better” life.

Fourth proposition. Any distinction between a “true” and an “apparent” world — whether in the Christian manner or in the manner of Kant (in the end, an underhanded Christian) — is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the decline of life. That the artist esteems appearance higher than reality is no objection to this proposition. For “appearance” in this case means reality once more, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction. The tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible — he is Dionysian.

HOW THE “TRUE WORLD” FINALLY BECAME A FABLE. The History of an Error

1. The true world — attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he is it.

(The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, “I, Plato, am the truth.”)

2. The true world — unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man (“for the sinner who repents”).

(Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible — it becomes female, it becomes Christian.)
3. The true world — unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it — a consolation, an obligation, an imperative.

(At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.)

4. The true world — unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also unknown. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us?

(Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cockcrow of positivism.)

5. The “true” world — an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating — an idea which has become useless and superfluous — consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Bright day; breakfast; return of bon sens and cheerfulness; Plato’s embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

6. The true world — we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.

(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)

**MORALITY AS ANTI-NATURE**

1

All passions have a phase when they are merely disastrous, when they drag down their victim with the weight of stupidity — and a later, very much later phase when they wed the spirit, when they “spiritualize” themselves. Formerly, in view of the element of stupidity in passion, war was declared on passion itself, its destruction was plotted; all the old moral monsters are agreed on this: il faut tuer les passions. The most famous formula for this is to be found in the New Testament, in that Sermon on the Mount, where, incidentally, things are by no means looked at from a height. There it is said, for example, with particular reference to sexuality: “If thy eye offend thee, pluck it out.” Fortunately, no Christian acts in accordance with this precept. Destroying the passions and cravings, merely as a preventive
measure against their stupidity and the unpleasant consequences of this stupidity — today this itself strikes us as merely another acute form of stupidity. We no longer admire dentists who “pluck out” teeth so that they will not hurt any more.

To be fair, it should be admitted, however, that on the ground out of which Christianity grew, the concept of the “spiritualization of passion” could never have been formed. After all, the first church, as is well known, fought against the “intelligent” in favor of the “poor in spirit.” How could one expect from it an intelligent war against passion? The church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its “cure,” is castratism. It never asks: “How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a craving?” It has at all times laid the stress of discipline on extirpation (of sensuality, of pride, of the lust to rule, of avarice, of vengefulness). But an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life: the practice of the church is hostile to life.

The same means in the fight against a craving — castration, extirpation — is instinctively chosen by those who are too weak-willed, too degenerate, to be able to impose moderation on themselves; by those who are so constituted that they require La Trappe, to use a figure of speech, or (without any figure of speech) some kind of definitive declaration of hostility, a cleft between themselves and the passion. Radical means are indispensable only for the degenerate; the weakness of the will — or, to speak more definitely, the inability not to respond to a stimulus — is itself merely another form of degeneration. The radical hostility, the deadly hostility against sensuality, is always a symptom to reflect on: it entitles us to suppositions concerning the total state of one who is excessive in this manner.

This hostility, this hatred, by the way, reaches its climax only when such types lack even the firmness for this radical cure, for this renunciation of their “devil.” One should survey the whole history of the priests and philosophers, including the artists: the most poisonous things against the senses have been said not by the impotent, nor by ascetics, but by the impossible ascetics, by those who really were in dire need of being ascetics.

The spiritualization of sensuality is called love: it represents a great triumph over Christianity. Another triumph is our spiritualization of hostility. It consists in a profound appreciation of the value of having enemies: in short, it means acting and thinking in the opposite way from that which has been the rule. The church always wanted the destruction
of its enemies; we, we immoralists and Antichristians, find our advantage in this, that the church exists. In the political realm too, hostility has now become more spiritual — much more sensible, much more thoughtful, much more considerate. Almost every party understands how it is in the interest of its own self-preservation that the opposition should not lose all strength; the same is true of power politics. A new creation in particular — the new Reich, for example — needs enemies more than friends: in opposition alone does it feel itself necessary, in opposition alone does it become necessary.

Our attitude to the “internal enemy” is no different: here too we have spiritualized hostility; here too we have come to appreciate its value. The price of fruitfulness is to be rich in internal opposition; one remains young only as long as the soul does not stretch itself and desire peace. Nothing has become more alien to us than that desideratum of former times, “peace of soul,” the Christian desideratum; there is nothing we envy less than the moralistic cow and the fat happiness of the good conscience. One has renounced the great life when one renounces war.

In many cases, to be sure, “peace of soul” is merely a misunderstanding — something else, which lacks only a more honest name. Without further ado or prejudice, a few examples. “Peace of soul” can be, for one, the gentle radiation of a rich animality into the moral (or religious) sphere. Or the beginning of weariness, the first shadow of evening, of any kind of evening. Or a sign that the air is humid, that south winds are approaching. Or unrecognized gratitude for a good digestion (sometimes called “love of man”). Or the attainment of calm by a convalescent who feels a new relish in all things and waits. Or the state which follows a thorough satisfaction of our dominant passion, the well-being of a rare repletion. Or the senile weakness of our will, our cravings, our vices. Or laziness, persuaded by vanity to give itself moral airs. Or the emergence of certainty, even a dreadful certainty, after long tension and torture by uncertainty. Or the expression of maturity and mastery in the midst of doing, creating, working, and willing — calm breathing, attained “freedom of the will.” Twilight of the Idols — who knows? perhaps also only a kind of “peace of soul.”

I reduce a principle to a formula. Every naturalism in morality — that is, every healthy morality — is dominated by an instinct of life, some commandment of life is fulfilled by a determinate canon of “shalt” and “shalt not”; some inhibition and hostile element on the path of life is thus removed. Anti-natural morality — that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and preached — turns, conversely, against the instincts of life: it is condemnation of these instincts, now secret, now outspoken and impudent. When it says, “God looks at the heart,” it says No to both the lowest and the highest desires of life, and
posits God as the enemy of life. The saint in whom God delights is the ideal eunuch. Life has come to an end where the “kingdom of God” begins.

5

Once one has comprehended the outrage of such a revolt against life as has become almost sacrosanct in Christian morality, one has, fortunately, also comprehended something else: the futility, apparentness, absurdity, and mendaciousness of such a revolt. A condemnation of life by the living remains in the end a mere symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether it is justified or unjustified is not even raised thereby. One would require a position outside of life, and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the value of life: reasons enough to comprehend that this problem is for us an unapproachable problem. When we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values. From this it follows that even that anti-natural morality which conceives of God as the counter-concept and condemnation of life is only a value judgment of life — but of what life? of what kind of life? I have already given the answer: of declining, weakened, weary, condemned life. Morality, as it has so far been understood — as it has in the end been formulated once more by Schopenhauer, as “negation of the will to life” — is the very instinct of decadence, which makes an imperative of itself. It says: “Perish!” It is a condemnation pronounced by the condemned.

6

Let us finally consider how naive it is altogether to say: “Man ought to be such and such!” Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the abundance of a lavish play and change of forms — and some wretched loafer of a moralist comments: “No! Man ought to be different.” He even knows what man should be like, this wretched bigot and prig: he paints himself on the wall and comments, “Ecce homo!” But even when the moralist addresses himself only to the single human being and says to him, “You ought to be such and such!” he does not cease to make himself ridiculous. The single human being is a piece of fatum from the front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be. To say to him, “Change yourself!” is to demand that everything be changed, even retroactively. And indeed there have been consistent moralists who wanted man to be different, that is, virtuous — they wanted him remade in their own image, as a prig: to that end, they negated the world! No small madness! No modest kind of immodesty!
Morality, insofar as it condemns for its own sake, and not out of regard for the concerns, considerations, and contrivances of life, is a specific error with which one ought to have no pity — an idiosyncrasy of degenerates which has caused immeasurable harm.

We others, we immoralists, have, conversely, made room in our hearts for every kind of understanding, comprehending, and approving. We do not easily negate; we make it a point of honor to be affirmers. More and more, our eyes have opened to that economy which needs and knows how to utilize everything that the holy witlessness of the priest, the diseased reason in the priest, rejects — that economy in the law of life which finds an advantage even in the disgusting species of the prigs, the priests, the virtuous. What advantage? But we ourselves, we immoralists, are the answer.

THE FOUR GREAT ERRORS

1

The error of confusing cause and effect. There is no more insidious error than mistaking the effect for the cause: I call it the real corruption of reason. Yet this error is one of the most unchanging habits of mankind: we even worship it under the name of “religion” or “morality.” Every single principle from religion or morality contains it; priests and moral legislators are the originators of this corruption of reason.

Here is an example. Everybody knows Cornaro’s famous book in which he recommends a meager diet for a long and happy life — a virtuous life, too. Few books have been read so widely; even now thousands of copies are sold in England every year. I do not doubt that scarcely any book (except the Bible) has done as much harm, has shortened as many lives, as this well intentioned oddity. Why? Because Cornaro mistakes the effect for the cause. The worthy Italian thought his diet was the cause of his long life, whereas the precondition for a long life, the extraordinary slowness of his metabolism, was the cause of his slender diet. He was not free to eat little or much; his frugality was not a matter of “free will” — he made himself sick when he ate more. But whoever has a rapid metabolism not only does well to eat properly, but needs to. A scholar in our time, with his rapid consumption of nervous energy, would simply destroy himself on Cornaro’s diet. Crede experto — believe me, I’ve tried.
The most general formula on which every religion and morality is founded is: “Do this and that, refrain from this and that — and then you will be happy! And if you don’t...” Every morality, every religion, is based on this imperative; I call it the original sin of reason, the immortal unreason. In my mouth, this formula is changed into its opposite — the first example of my “revaluation of all values.” An admirable human being, a “happy one,” instinctively must perform certain actions and avoid other actions; he carries these impulses in his body, and they determine his relations with the world and other human beings. In a formula: his virtue is the effect of his happiness. A long life, many descendants — these are not the rewards of virtue: instead, virtue itself is that slowing down of the metabolism which leads, among other things, to a long life, many descendants — in short, to Cornaro’s virtue.

Religion and morality say: “A people or a society are destroyed by license and luxury.” My revalued reason says: when a people degenerates physiologically, when it approaches destruction, then the result is license and luxury (that is, the craving for ever stronger and more frequent stimulation necessary to arouse an exhausted nature). This young man easily turns pale and faints; his friends say: that is because of this or that disease. I say: he became diseased, he could not resist the disease, because of his pre-existing impoverished life or hereditary exhaustion. The newspaper reader says: this party destroys itself by making such a mistake. My higher politics says: a party that makes such a mistake has already reached its end; it has lost its sureness of instinct. Every mistake (in every sense of the word) is the result of a degeneration of instinct, a disintegration of the will: one could almost equate what is bad with whatever is a mistake. All that is good is instinctive — and hence easy, necessary, uninhibited. Effort is a failing: the god is typically different from the hero. (In my language: light feet are the first attribute of divinity.)

The error of a false causality. Humans have always believed that they knew what a cause was; but how did we get this knowledge — or more precisely, our faith that we had this knowledge? From the realm of the famous “inner facts,” of which not a single one has so far turned out to be true. We believe that we are the cause of our own will: we think that here at least we can see a cause at work. Nor did we doubt that all the antecedents of our will, its causes, were to be found in our own consciousness or in our personal “motives.” Otherwise, we would not be responsible for what we choose to do. Who would deny that his thoughts have a cause, and that his own mind caused the thoughts?
Of these “inward facts” that seem to demonstrate causality, the primary and most persuasive one is that of the will as cause. The idea of consciousness (“spirit”) or, later, that of the ego (the “subject”) as a cause are only afterbirths: first the causality of the will was firmly accepted as proved, as a fact, and these other concepts followed from it.

But we have reservations about these concepts. Today we no longer believe any of this is true. The “inner world” is full of phantoms and illusions: the will being one of them. The will no longer moves anything, hence it does not explain anything — it merely accompanies events; it can also be completely absent. The so-called motives: another error. Merely a surface phenomenon of consciousness, something shadowing the deed that is more likely to hide the causes of our actions than to reveal them. And as for the ego ... that has become a fable, a fiction, a play on words! It has altogether ceased to think, feel, or will!

What follows from this? There are no mental causes at all. The whole of the allegedly empirical evidence for mental causes has gone out the window. That is what follows! And what a nice delusion we had perpetrated with this “empirical evidence;” we interpreted the real world as a world of causes, a world of wills, a world of spirits. The most ancient and enduring psychology was at work here: it simply interpreted everything that happened in the world as an act, as the effect of a will; the world was inhabited with a multiplicity of wills; an agent (a “subject”) was slipped under the surface of events. It was out of himself that man projected his three most unquestioned “inner facts” — the will, the spirit, the ego. He even took the concept of being from the concept of the ego; he interpreted “things” as “being” in accordance with his concept of the ego as a cause. Small wonder that later he always found in things what he had already put into them. The thing itself, the concept of thing is a mere extension of the faith in the ego as cause. And even your atom, my dear materialists and physicists — how much error, how much rudimentary psychology still resides in your atom! Not to mention the “thing-in-itself,” the horrendum pudendum of metaphysicians! The “spirit as cause” mistaken for reality! And made the very measure of reality! And called God!

The error of imaginary causes. To begin with dreams: a cause is slipped after the fact under a particular sensation (for example, the sensation following a far-off cannon shot) — often a whole little novel is fabricated in which the dreamer appears as the protagonist who experiences the stimulus. The sensation endures meanwhile as a kind of resonance: it waits, so to speak, until the causal interpretation permits it to step into the foreground — not as a random occurrence but as a “meaningful event.” The cannon shot appears in a causal
mode, in an apparent reversal of time. What is really later (the causal interpretation) is experienced first — often with a hundred details that pass like lightning before the shot is heard. What has happened? The representations which were produced in reaction to certain stimulus have been misinterpreted as its causes.

In fact, we do the same thing when awake. Most of our general feelings — every kind of inhibition, pressure, tension, and impulsion in the ebb and flow of our physiology, and particularly in the state of the nervous system — excites our causal instinct: we want to have a reason for feeling this way or that — for feeling bad or good. We are never satisfied merely to state the fact that we feel this way or that: we admit this fact only — become conscious of it only — when we have fabricated some kind of explanation for it. Memory, which swings into action in such cases without our awareness, brings up earlier states of the same kind, together with the causal interpretations associated with them — not their actual causes. Of course, the faith that such representations or accompanying conscious processes are the causes is also brought forth by memory. Thus originates a habitual acceptance of a particular causal interpretation, which, as a matter of fact, inhibits any investigation into the real cause — it even excludes it.

The psychological explanation: to extract something familiar from something unknown relieves, comforts, and satisfies us, besides giving us a feeling of power. With the unknown, one is confronted with danger, discomfort, and care; the first instinct is to abolish these painful states. First principle: any explanation is better than none. Because it is fundamentally just our desire to be rid of an unpleasant uncertainty, we are not very particular about how we get rid of it: the first interpretation that explains the unknown in familiar terms feels so good that one “accepts it as true.” We use the feeling of pleasure (“of strength”) as our criterion for truth.

A causal explanation is thus contingent on (and aroused by) a feeling of fear. The “why?” shall, if at all possible, result not in identifying the cause for its own sake, but in identifying a cause that is comforting, liberating, and relieving. A second consequence of this need is that we identify as a cause something already familiar or experienced, something already inscribed in memory. Whatever is novel or strange or never before experienced is excluded. Thus one searches not just for any explanation to serve as a cause, but for a specific and preferred type of explanation: that which has most quickly and most frequently abolished the feeling of the strange, new, and hitherto unexperienced in the past — our most
habitual explanations. Result: one type of causal explanation predominates more and more, is concentrated into a system and finally emerges as dominant — that is, as simply precluding other causes and explanations. The banker immediately thinks of “business,” the Christian of “sin,” and the girl of her love.

The whole realm of morality and religion belongs in this category of imaginary causes or “explanations” for disagreeable feelings. These feelings are produced by beings that are hostile to us (evil spirits: the most famous being the labeling of hysterical women as witches). They are aroused by unacceptable acts (the feeling of “sin” or “sinfulness” is slipped under a physiological discomfort; one always finds reasons for feeling dissatisfied with oneself). They are produced as punishments, as payment for something we should not have done, for something we should not have desired (impudently generalized by Schopenhauer into a principle in which morality appears as what it really is — as the very poisoner and slanderer of life: “Every great pain, whether physical or spiritual, declares what we deserve; for it could not come to us if we did not deserve it.” World as Will and Representation). They are the effects of ill-considered actions that turn out badly. (Here the affects, the senses, are posited as causes, as “guilty”; and physiological calamities are interpreted with the help of other calamities as “deserved.”)

We explain agreeable general feelings as produced by our trust in God, and by our consciousness of good deeds (the so-called “good conscience” — a physiological state which at times looks so much like good digestion that it is hard to tell them apart). They are produced by the successful termination of some enterprise (a naive fallacy: the successful termination of some enterprise does not by any means give a hypochondriac or a Pascal agreeable general feelings). They are produced by faith, charity, and hope — the Christian virtues.

In fact, all these supposed causes are actually effects, and as it were, translate pleasant or unpleasant feelings into a misleading terminology. One is in a state of hope because the basic physiological feeling is once again strong and rich; one trusts in God because the feeling of fullness and strength gives a sense of rest. Morality and religion belong entirely to the psychology of error: in every single case, cause and effect are confused; or truth is confused with the effects of believing something to be true; or a state of consciousness is confused with its physiological origins.
The error of free will. Today we no longer have any tolerance for the idea of “free will”: we see it only too clearly for what it really is — the foulest of all theological fictions, intended to make mankind “responsible” in a religious sense — that is, dependent upon priests. Here I simply analyze the psychological assumptions behind any attempt at “making responsible.”

Whenever responsibility is assigned, it is usually so that judgment and punishment may follow. Becoming has been deprived of its innocence when any acting—the-way-you-did is traced back to will, to motives, to responsible choices: the doctrine of the will has been invented essentially to justify punishment through the pretext of assigning guilt. All primitive psychology, the psychology of will, arises from the fact that its interpreters, the priests at the head of ancient communities, wanted to create for themselves the right to punish — or wanted to create this right for their God. Men were considered “free” only so that they might be considered guilty — could be judged and punished: consequently, every act had to be considered as willed, and the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within the consciousness (and thus the most fundamental psychological deception was made the principle of psychology itself).

Today, we immoralists have embarked on a counter movement and are trying with all our strength to take the concepts of guilt and punishment out of the world — to cleanse psychology, history, nature, and social institutions and sanctions of these ideas. And there is in our eyes no more radical opposition than that of the theologians, who continue to infect the innocence of becoming by means of the concepts of a “moral world-order,” “guilt,” and “punishment.” Christianity is religion for the executioner.

What alone can be our doctrine? That no one gives a man his qualities — neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself. (The nonsense of the last idea was taught as “intelligible freedom” by Kant — and perhaps by Plato.) No one is responsible for a man’s being here at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in this environment. The fatality of his existence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be. Human beings are not the effect of some special purpose, or will, or end; nor are they a medium through which society can realize an “ideal of humanity” or an “ideal of happiness” or an “ideal of morality.” It is absurd to wish to devolve one’s
essence on some end or other. We have invented the concept of “end”: in reality there is no end.

A man is necessary, a man is a piece of fatefulness, a man belongs to the whole, a man is in the whole; there is nothing that could judge, measure, compare, or sentence his being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole. But there is nothing besides the whole. That nobody is held responsible any longer, that the mode of being may not be traced back to a primary cause, that the world does not form a unity either as a sensorium or as “spirit” — that alone is the great liberation. With that idea alone we absolve our becoming of any guilt. The concept of “God” was until now the greatest objection to existence. We deny God, we deny the responsibility that originates from God: and thereby we redeem the world.

THE “IMPROVERS” OF MANKIND

My demand of the philosopher is well known: that he take his stand beyond good and evil and treat the illusion of moral judgment as beneath him. This demand follows from an insight that I was the first to articulate: that there are no moral facts. Moral and religious judgments are based on realities that do not exist. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena — more precisely, a misinterpretation. Moral judgments, like religious ones, belong to a stage of ignorance in which the very concept of the real, and the distinction between what is real and imaginary, are still lacking. “Truth” at this stage designates all sorts of things that we today call “figments of the imagination.” Moral judgments are therefore never to be taken literally: so understood, they are always merely absurd. Semiotically, however, they remain invaluable: they reveal, at least for those who can interpret them, the most valuable realities of cultures and psychologies that did not know how to “understand” themselves. Morality is only a language of signs, a group of symptoms: one must know how to interpret them correctly to be able to profit from them.

A first, tentative example: at all times morality has aimed to “improve” men — this aim is above all what was called morality. Under the same word, however, the most divergent tendencies have been concealed. But “improvement” has meant both taming the beast called man, and breeding a particular kind of man. Such zoological concepts are required to express
the realities — realities of which the typical “improver,” the priest, admittedly neither knows anything nor wants to know anything.

To call the taming of an animal its “improvement” sounds almost like a joke to our ears. Whoever knows what goes on in kennels doubts that dogs are “improved” there. They are weakened, they are made less harmful, and through the depressive effect of fear, through pain, through wounds, and through hunger, they become sickly beasts. It is no different with the tamed man whom the priest has “improved.” In the early Middle Ages, when the church was indeed, above all, a kennel, the most perfect specimens of the “blond beast” were hunted down everywhere; and the noble Teutons, for example, were “improved.” But how did such an “improved” Teuton look after he had been drawn into a monastery? Like a caricature of man, a miscarriage: he had become a “sinner,” he was stuck in a cage, tormented with all sorts of painful concepts. And there he lay, sick, miserable, hateful to himself, full of evil feelings against the impulses of his own life, full of suspicion against all that was still strong and happy. In short, a “Christian.”

Physiologically speaking: in the struggle with beasts, making them sick may be the only way to make them weak. The church understood this: it sickened and weakened man — and by so doing “improved” him.

Let us consider the other method for “improving” mankind, the method of breeding a particular race or type of man. The most magnificent example of this is furnished by Indian morality, sanctioned as religion in the form of “the law of Manu.” Here the objective is to breed no less than four races within the same society: one priestly, one warlike, one for trade and agriculture, and finally a race of servants, the Sudras. Obviously, we are no longer dealing with animal tamers: a man that is a hundred times milder and more reasonable is the only one who could even conceive such a plan of breeding. One breathes a sigh of relief at leaving the Christian atmosphere of disease and dungeons for this healthier, higher, and wider world. How wretched is the New Testament compared to Manu, how foul it smells!

Yet this method also found it necessary to be terrible — not in the struggle against beasts, but against their equivalent — the ill-bred man, the mongrel man, the chandala. And again the breeder had no other means to fight against this large group of mongrel men than by making them sick and weak. Perhaps there is nothing that goes against our feelings more than these protective measures of Indian morality. The third edict, for example (Avadana-
Sastra I), “on impure vegetables,” ordains that the only nourishment permitted to the chandala shall be garlic and onions, seeing that the holy scripture prohibits giving them grain, fruit with grains, water or fire. The same edict orders that the water they drink may not be taken from rivers or wells, nor from ponds, but only from the approaches to swamps and from holes made by the footsteps of animals. They are also prohibited from washing their laundry and from washing themselves, since the water they are conceded as an act of grace may be used only to quench thirst. Finally, Sudra women are prohibited from assisting chandala women in childbirth, just as chandala women are prohibited from midwifing to each other.

The success of such sanitary police measures was inevitable: murderous epidemics, ghastly venereal diseases, and thereupon again “the law of the knife,” ordaining circumcision for male children and the removal of the internal labia for female children. Manu himself says: “The chandalas are the fruit of adultery, incest, and rape (crimes that follow from the fundamental concept of breeding). For clothing they shall have only rags from corpses; for dishes, broken pots; for adornment, old iron; for divine services, only evil spirits. They shall wander without rest from place to place. They are prohibited from writing from left to right, and from using the right hand in writing: the use of the right hand and of from-left-to-right is reserved for the virtuous, for the people of pure blood.”

These regulations are instructive enough: we encounter Aryan humanity at its purest and most primordial; we learn that the concept of “pure blood” is very far from being a harmless concept. On the other hand, it becomes obvious in which people the chandala hatred against this Aryan “humaneness” has become a religion, eternalized itself, and become genius — primarily in the Gospels, even more so in the Book of Enoch. Christianity, sprung from Jewish roots and comprehensible only as a growth on this soil, represents the counter-movement to any morality of breeding, of race, privilege: it is the anti-Aryan religion par excellence. Christianity — the revaluation of all Aryan values, the victory of chandala values, the gospel preached to the poor and base, the general revolt of all the downtrodden, the wretched, the failures, the less favored, against “race”: the undying chandala hatred is disguised as a religion of love.
The morality of breeding, and the morality of taming, are, in the means they use, entirely worthy of each other: we may proclaim it as a supreme principle that to make men moral one must have the unconditional resolve to act immorally. This is the great, the uncanny problem which I have been pursuing the longest: the psychology of the “improvers” of mankind. A small, and at bottom modest, fact — that of the so-called pia fraus [holy lie] — offered me the first insight into this problem: the pia fraus, the heirloom of all philosophers and priests who “improved” mankind. Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the Jewish and Christian teachers have ever doubted their right to lie. They have not doubted that they had very different rights too. Expressed in a formula, one might say: all the means by which one has so far attempted to make mankind moral were through and through immoral.

**WHAT I OWE TO THE ANCIENTS**

In conclusion, a word about that world to which I sought interpretations, for which I have perhaps found a new interpretation — the ancient world. My taste, which may be the opposite of a tolerant taste, is in this case very far from saying Yes indiscriminately: it does not like to say Yes; better to say No, but best of all to say nothing. That applies to whole cultures, it applies to books — also to places and landscapes. In the end there are very few ancient books that count in my life: the most famous are not among them. My sense of style, of the epigram as a style, was awakened almost instantly when I came into contact with Sallust. Compact, severe, with as much substance as possible, a cold sarcasm toward “beautiful words” and “beautiful sentiments” — here I found myself. And even in my Zarathustra one will recognize my very serious effort to achieve a Roman style, for the aere perennius [more enduring than bronze] in style.

Nor was my experience any different in my first contact with Horace. To this day, no other poet has given me the same artistic delight that a Horatian ode gave me from the first. In certain languages that which Horace has achieved could not even be attempted. This mosaic of words, in which every word — as sound, as place, as concept — pours out its strength right and left and over the whole, this minimum in the extent and number of the signs, and the maximum thereby attained in the energy of the signs — all that is Roman and, if you will believe me, noble par excellence. All the rest of poetry becomes, in contrast, something too popular — mere sentimental blather.
From the Greeks I have not at all felt similarly strong impressions, and to be blunt, they cannot mean as much to me as the Romans. We do not learn from the Greeks — their manner is too foreign and too fluid to create a commanding, “classical” effect. Who could ever have learned to write from a Greek? Who could ever have learned to write without the Romans?

Please do not throw Plato at me. I am a complete skeptic about Plato, and I have never been able to join in the customary scholarly admiration for Plato the artist. The subtlest judges of taste among the ancients themselves are here on my side. Plato, it seems to me, throws all stylistic forms together and is thus a first-rate decadent in style: his responsibility is thus comparable to that of the Cynics, who invented the *satura Menippea*. To be attracted to the Platonic dialogue, this horribly self-satisfied and childish kind of dialectic, one must never have read good French writers — Fontenelle, for example. Plato is boring. In the end, my mistrust of Plato goes deep: he represents such an aberration from all the basic Greek instincts, is so moralistic, so pseudo-Christian (he already takes the concept of “the good” as the highest concept) that I would prefer the harsh phrase “higher swindle” or, if it sounds better, “idealism” for the whole phenomenon of Plato. We have paid dearly for the fact that this Athenian got his schooling from the Egyptians (or from the Jews in Egypt?). In that great calamity called Christianity, Plato represents that ambiguity and fascination, called an “ideal,” which made it possible for the nobler spirits of antiquity to misunderstand themselves and to set foot on the bridge leading to the Cross. And how much Plato there still is in the concept “church,” in the construction, system, and practice of the church!

My recreation, my preference, my cure from all Platonism has always been Thucydides. Thucydides and, perhaps, Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* are most closely related to me by the unconditional will not to delude oneself, but to see reason in reality — not in “reason,” still less in “morality.” For that wretched distortion of the Greeks into a cultural ideal, which the “classically educated” youth carries into life as a reward for all his classroom lessons, there is no more complete cure than Thucydides. One must follow him line by line and read no less clearly between the lines: there are few thinkers who say so much between the lines. With him the culture of the Sophists, by which I mean the culture of the realists, reaches its perfect expression — this inestimable movement amid the moralistic and idealistic swindle set loose on all sides by the Socratic schools. Greek philosophy: the decadence of the Greek instinct. Thucydides: the great sum, the last revelation of that strong, severe, hard factuality which was instinctive with the older Greeks. In the end, it is courage
in the face of reality that distinguishes a man like Thucydides from a man like Plato: Plato is a coward before reality, consequently he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has control of himself, consequently he also maintains control of things.

3

To sniff out “beautiful souls,” “golden means,” and other perfections in the Greeks, or to admire their triumphant calm, their ideal cast of mind, their noble simplicity — my psychological skills protected me against such “noble simplicity,” a *niaiserie allemande* in any case. I saw their strongest instinct, the will to power: I saw them tremble before the indomitable force of this drive — I saw how all their institutions developed as protections against this inner impulsion. The tremendous inward tension that resulted discharged itself in terrible and ruthless hostility toward the outside world: the city-states tore each other apart as the citizens tried to find resolution to this will to power they all felt. One needed to be strong: danger was near, it lurked everywhere. The magnificent physical suppleness, the audacious realism and immoralism which distinguished the Greek constituted a need, not “nature.” It was an outcome, it was not there from the start. And with festivals and the arts they also aimed at nothing other than to feel on top, to show themselves on top. These are means of glorifying oneself, and in certain cases, of inspiring fear of oneself.

How could one possibly judge the Greeks by their philosophers, as the Germans have done, or use the Philistine moralism of the Socratic schools as a clue to what was basically Hellenic! After all, the philosophers are the decadents of Greek culture, the counter-movement against the ancient, noble taste (against the agonistic instinct, against the polis, against the value of race, against the authority of descent). The Socratic virtues were preached because the Greeks had lost them: excitable, timid, fickle comedians every one of them, they had a few reasons too many for having morals preached to them. Not that it did any good — but big words and attitudes suit decadents so well.

4

As the key to understanding the older, inexhaustibly rich and even overflowing Greek instinct, I was the first to take seriously that wonderful phenomenon which bears the name of Dionysus, which is only explicable in terms of an excess of force. Whoever followed the Greeks, like that most profound student of their culture in our time, Jacob Burckhardt in Basel, knew immediately that something had been achieved thereby; and Burckhardt added a special section on this phenomenon to his *Civilization of the Greeks*. To see the counter
example, one should look at the almost amusing poverty of instinct among the German
philologists when they approach the Dionysian. The famous Lobeck, above all, crawled into
this world of mysterious states with all the venerable sureness of a worm dried up between
books, and persuaded himself that it was scientific of him to be glib and childish to the point
of nausea — and with the utmost erudition, Lobeck gave us to understand that all these
curiosities really did not amount to anything. In fact, the priests could have told the
participants in such orgies some not altogether worthless things; for example, that wine
excites lust, that men can sometimes live on fruit, that plants bloom in the spring and wither
in the fall. And the astonishing wealth of rites, symbols, and myths of orgiastic origin, with
which the ancient world is literally overrun, gave Lobeck an opportunity to become still more
ingenious. “The Greeks,” he said (Aglaophamus I, 672), “when they had nothing else to do,
laughed, jumped, and ran around; or, since man sometimes feels that urge too, they sat
down, cried, and lamented. Others came later on and sought some reason for this spectacular
behavior; and thus there originated, as explanations for these customs, countless traditions
concerning feasts and myths. On the other hand, it was believed that this droll ado, which
took place on the feast days after all, must also form a necessary part of the festival and
therefore it was maintained as an indispensable feature of the religious service.” This is
contemptible prattle; a Lobeck simply cannot be taken seriously for a moment.

I have quite a different feeling toward the concept “Greek” that was developed by
Winckelmann and Goethe; to me it is incompatible with the orgiastic element out of which
Dionysian art grows. In fact I believe that Goethe excluded as a matter of principle any
orgiastic feelings from his concept of the Greek spirit. Consequently Goethe did not
understand the Greeks. For it is only in the Dionysian mysteries, in the psychology of the
Dionysian state, that the basic fact of the Hellenic instinct finds expression — its “will to life.”

What was it that the Hellene guaranteed himself by means of these mysteries? Eternal life,
the eternal return of life, the future promised and hallowed in the past; the triumphant Yes
to life beyond all death and change; true life as the continuation of life through procreation,
through the mysteries of sex. For the Greeks a sexual symbol was therefore the most sacred
symbol, the real profundity in the whole of ancient piety. Every single element in the act of
procreation, of pregnancy, and of birth aroused the highest and most solemn feelings. In the
doctrine of the mysteries, pain is pronounced holy: the pangs of the woman giving birth
consecrate all pain; and conversely all becoming and growing — all that guarantees a future
— involves pain. That there may be the eternal joy of creating, that the will to life may
eternally affirm itself, the agony of the woman giving birth must also be there eternally.
All this is meant by the word Dionysus: I know no higher symbolism than this Greek symbolism of the Dionysian festivals. Here the most profound instinct of life, that directed toward the future of life, the eternity of life, is experienced religiously — and the way to life, procreation, as the holy way. It was Christianity, with its heartfelt resentment against life, that first made something unclean of sexuality: it threw filth on the origin, on the essential fact of our life.

The psychology of the orgiastic as an overflowing feeling of life and strength, where even pain still has the effect of a stimulus, gave me the key to the concept of tragic feeling, which had been misunderstood both by Aristotle and even more by modern pessimists. Tragedy is so far from being a proof of the pessimism (in Schopenhauer’s sense) of the Greeks that it may, on the contrary, be considered a decisive rebuttal and counterexample. Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and most painful episodes, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustible vitality even as it witnesses the destruction of its greatest heroes — that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge — which is how Aristotle understood tragedy — but in order to celebrate oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity — that tragic joy included even joy in destruction.

And with that I again touch on my earliest point of departure: The Birth of Tragedy was my first revaluation of all values. And on that point I again stand on the earth out of which my intention, my ability grows — I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus — I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence.