Nietzsche's Written and Painted Thoughts

by Timothy J. Freeman

> Alas, what are you after all, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young, and malicious, full of thorns and secret spices—you made me sneeze and laugh—and now? You have already taken off your novelty, and some of you are ready, I fear, to become truths: they already look so immortal, so pathetically decent, so dull! And has it ever been different? What things do we copy, writing and painting, we mandarins with Chinese brushes, we immortalizers of things that *can* be written—what are the only things we are able to paint? Alas, always only what is on the verge of withering and losing its fragrance! Alas, always only storms that are passing, exhausted, and feelings that are autumnal and yellow! Alas, always only birds that grew weary of flying and flew astray and now can be caught by hand—by *our* hand! We immortalize what cannot live and fly much longer—only weary and mellow things! And it is only your *afternoon*, you, my written and painted thoughts, for which alone I have colors, many colors perhaps, many motley caresses and fifty yellows and browns and greens and reds: but nobody will guess from that how you looked in your morning, you sudden sparks and wonders of my solitude, you my old beloved—*wicked* thoughts![1]

Thus Nietzsche closes *Beyond Good and Evil*. What *are* they after all, Nietzsche's written and painted thoughts? While this is surely the question in the problem of the interpretation of Nietzsche, it is undoubtedly also a crucial question in the ongoing debate concerning the nature of philosophy in the controversy surrounding postmodern thought. For at stake in Nietzsche's parting remarks is the status of the philosophical text. What are they after all, the writings of a philosopher? Nietzsche's writings are provocative and very often deeply troubling. Yet perhaps nothing in his writings is so troubling to philosophers as the writing itself. Turning to address his own writing, Nietzsche raises the issue of writing, and in so doing questions what it is to be a philosopher. It would be safe to say that no one in the Western tradition before Nietzsche so completely rethinks the notion of what it is to be a philosopher, and thus, so radically raises the question of how it is that one writes as a philosopher—and thus also, forces so radical a rethinking of how it is that one reads the writings of a philosopher.

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[1]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1966), §296.

Sometime just before the final collapse into madness on 3 January 1889 Nietzsche completes the writing of *Ecce Homo*—that strange "autobiography" that recounts his life as a writer. The extreme hyperbole in the language of the text, exemplified by such chapter titles as "Why I Am So Wise," "Why I Am So Clever," "Why I Write Such Good Books," and "Why I Am a Destiny," would only seem to confirm the onrush of madness. With the caveat that it is against his habits and the pride of his instincts—but not without that characteristic hyperbole—Nietzsche opens the preface screaming this warning:

> Seeing that before long I must confront humanity with the most difficult demand ever made of it, it seems indispensable to me to say *who I am*. Really, one should know it, for I have not left myself "without testimony." But the disproportion between the greatness of my task and the *smallness* of my contemporaries has found expression in the fact that one has neither heard nor even seen me. I live on my own credit; it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live.
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> I only need to speak with one of the "educated" who come to the Upper Engadine for the summer, and I am convinced that I do *not* live.
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> Under these circumstances I have a duty against which my habits, even more the pride of my instincts, revolt at bottom—namely, to say: *Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else!*[2]

And yet we know how tragically he was mistaken—even if we are no longer sure what it means to say he was mistaken, no longer sure we can say who Nietzsche is.

Nietzsche comes on the scene of postmodern thought like Dionysus, in *The Bacchae*, entering Thebes. The tragic play begins with Dionysus announcing his identity. He has come to "reveal himself" to Pentheus and all of Thebes as "the god I really am."[3] And yet Dionysus comes with his divine form exchanged for that of a mortal. That is, he comes masked. His identity is that of a masked god. Through the enigmatic mask his identity is both manifested and disguised.[4]

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[2]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1969), Preface, §1.

[3] *The Bacchae* 47-50. Use has been made of the translation by C.K. Williams, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990), p. 5; and of the translation by G.S. Kirk, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 30.

[4] Jean-Pierre Vernant draws out the play of revealing and concealing in the mask of enigmatic god: "Dionysus wants to be seen to be a god, to be manifest to mortals as a god, to make himself known, to reveal himself, to be known, recognized, understood. This 'manifestness' that must, in certain conditions, be a feature of the god's presence, is expressed forcefully in the fourth stasimon by the chorus of Lydian women devotees, who first state their desire that justice should "be manifest (*phaneros*)" (993), then

Nietzsche comes as the masked philosopher. His writings are full with the play of masks and veiled in their enigma. It would be quite safe to say that no other philosopher ever put what he had to say in the mouths of so many different characters, consciously addressing his readers in different voices and tones and with different glances, as if he is always on stage, wearing a constantly changing series of masks. This presents a considerable challenge to the reader: one knows one can never, even when he appears to be most in straight face, take what he has to say at face value. One understands why the duty he feels at the outset of *Ecce Homo* is so opposed to his habits and instincts. One then wonders all the more so how one can heed his warning. How is one to hear Nietzsche and to hear him in such a way as to avoid mistaking him for someone else if he is always masked?

> Everything profound loves a mask; the profoundest things of all even have a hatred of image and parable. Could it not be that *antithesis* is the one proper disguise for the modesty of a god to stride forth in? A questionable question: it would be odd if some mystic had not ventured something to that effect. There are occurences of such a delicate nature that one does well to cover them up with some rudeness to conceal them; there are actions of love and extravagant generosity after which nothing is more advisable than to take a stick and give any eyewitness a sound thrashing [. . .]. A man whose sense of shame has some profundity encounters his destinies and delicate decisions, too, on paths which few ever reach and of whose mere existence his closest intimates must not know: his mortal danger is concealed from their eyes, and so is his regained sureness of life. Such a concealed man who instinctively needs speech for silence and for burial in silence an who is inexhaustible in his evasion of communication, *wants* and sees to it that a mask of him roams in his place through the hearts and heads of his friends. And supposing he did not want it, he would still realize some day that in spite of that a mask of him is there—and that this is well. Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely *shallow*, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives.[5]

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declare what is for them a matter of principle: 'My happiness depends upon pursuing what is great and manifest (*phanera*)' (1007). Next they proceed to invoke the Dionysus of epiphanies, calling upon the god to show himself too, to make himself manifest: 'Appear!'(*phanēthi*) (1018). But Dionysus reveals himself by concealing himself, makes himself manifest by hiding himself from the eyes of all those who believe only in what they can see, in what is 'evident before their eyes,' as Pentheus himself puts it at line 501, when Dionysus is there before him, under his very nose, but invisible to him beneath his disguise. It is an epiphany alright, but of a god who is masked." Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 391.

[5]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* §40.

The specter of Nietzsche's masks continues to gaze hauntingly upon the scene of postmodern thought. For in confronting the enigma of the masked philosopher one faces most acutely the problem of interpretation at issue in the controversy concerning postmodern discourse. Nietzsche's mask play contrasts starkly against the more straight-faced philosophical discourse in which one *wants* above all to make oneself clear so as to leave no doubt about what one is saying, and about who one is. Reading Nietzsche is obviously much more problematic if one knows that one cannot take him at face value. Why then the constant masquerade if Nietzsche really wanted, in the end, to be understood? He supposes that even if one did not want to roam about masked, a mask, if one is at all profound, is continually growing. One might get the impression that the mask grows because interpretation does not go deep enough; and thus, if one does not remain at the surface, if one is somehow able to tear away the mask of shallow interpretations, if one is at all profound, one may find Nietzsche without masks. And yet elsewhere, Nietzsche seems to suggest that interpretation cannot penetrate the surface. The very desire to penetrate the surface, to reveal a truth without veils, shall ever remain frustrated. The play of masks in Nietzsche's texts, a play of revealing and concealing, raises questions that challenge the very possibility of interpretation, the possibility of ever being able to know if one has mistaken Nietzsche for someone else.[6]

Nietzsche has come to be considered a sort of postmodern prophet. The masks that are his texts and certain of the masks of Nietzsche that are interpretations of these texts—principally Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche and Derrida's of Nietzsche and Heidegger's *Nietzsche*—chart a certain trajectory of thought most often referred to as

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[6] Different approaches to the masked philosopher: On the one hand Nietzsche is "playing a game with the reader, forcing him not only to think about the subject under discussion but also to follow the elusive scent that is being laid and to attempt to discover the 'real' Nietzsche underneath the mask." W.D. Williams, "Nietzsche's Masks" *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought*, ed. Malcom Pasley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 84. For Charles E. Scott the "'mask' does not suggest in Nietzsche's writing a deceptive countenance placed on a self-revealing identity. It is not an ontological opposite to 'ground' or to transcendental reality. It does not mean something that covers something else that is more basic but indicates rather the enigma and dissemblance of phenomena." Scott thus suggests "that one of Nietzsche's projects is to let the mask show itself as mask." Charles E. Scott, "The Mask of Nietzsche's Self-Overcoming," *Nietzsche as Postmodernist*, ed. Clayton Koelb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 217.

postmodern. The postmodern debate between "hermeneutics" and "deconstruction" inevitably seems to turn on the differences in Heidegger and Derrida's approach to Nietzsche's masks. What then, in concealing, do Nietzsche's masks reveal of Nietzsche's philosophy and the trajectory of the postmodern?

That Dionysus appears only through the mask does disclose something of the identity of the god. As for Nietzsche, insofar as the mask is a metaphor for the philosopher's text, it discloses something of a Nietzschean conception of interpretation, of the very possibility of disclosure itself. The mask might then be considered a metaphor for Nietzsche's *perspectivism*, which might be said to be the view that reality never presents itself unmasked. But if reality is never unmasked, if there are no facts outside of interpretation, no true face that could serve as a neutral ground for evaluating competing interpretations, how are interpretations to be justified? What kind of discourse is philosophy if the philosopher's text is a mask?

The mask, for Nietzsche, is, of course, an artistic metaphor, a metaphor drawn from art, indeed, from tragedy—from the appearance of Dionysus on the Greek stage. The enigmatic mask is crucial to Nietzsche's early interrogation of tragedy, an important feature of his characterization of both the Apollinian and Dionysian and thus also that mysterious progeny of their strange coupling. The mask, then, is a symbol of tragedy. Insofar as the development of Nietzsche's thinking about art is bound up with his encounter with the mask of tragedy, the mask is an important metaphor for understanding Nietzsche's turn toward art or *aestheticism*. The metaphor of the mask might then suggest how closely related Nietzsche's perspectivism is to his aestheticism, and thus how closely his mature thought may be traced back to *The Birth of Tragedy* and the famous line that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*".[7] One could say that in considering the philosopher's text a mask, Nietzsche considers the philosopher's text as an aesthetic phenomenon, and thus it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that interpretation is justified. The discourse of philosophy is thus submitted to a kind of transfiguration: a turn from an epistemologically centered form of discourse to something of an aesthetic

[7]Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), §5.

discourse. Although, insofar as Nietzsche's aestheticism breaks with traditional aesthetics, it might be better to consider it a "post-aestheticism." This turn from an epistemological discourse to a post-aesthetics, the turn from truth to art, might be considered the postmodern turn.

Not only does Nietzsche come on the scene in a manner similar to Dionysus' appearance on the Greek stage, the consequence of his arrival might be likened to that of the strange god who brought madness and destruction. At least one can say that the controversy surrounding Nietzsche and postmodern philosophy echoes something of the debate concerning the interpretation of the *Bacchae*. For some, Euripides' last drama is a final condemnation of the cult of Dionysus and a defense of the emerging rationalism—a reading which would be in accord with Nietzsche's position in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Euripides, as a mask of Socrates, is responsible for the banishment of Dionysus from the stage and thus the death of tragedy. The tragedy of *The Bacchae*, of the madness that befell the women of Thebes resulting in the dismemberment of Pentheus at their hands, is then a warning of what can happen if the irruptive influence of Dionysian *mania* is allowed to penetrate into the community. For others, the drama is the epiphany of Dionysus, an indication of Euripides' conversion at the end of his career. The women of Thebes are driven to madness and Pentheus is torn to pieces because they have all been unable to recognize Dionysus. The madness that lead to Pentheus' destruction is the result of Pentheus' own kind of madness, the madness of a community that refuses to recognize the Dionysian, the madness of a community torn apart by its own denial and repression. Here *The Bacchae* testifies to the need for a community to open within itself a place for Dionysus, to open up the space of tragedy, the scene of rapturous ecstasy, of carnival and masquerade.[8] Nietzsche is, then, again like Dionysus in that the philosophical debate

[8] Vernant sketches the outlines of the debate concerning the interpretation of *The Bacchae*: "This same text, read by excellent Greek scholars, has given rise to two radically different types of interpretation. Some scholars have read into it categorical condemnation of Dionysism, an attack against religion in line with the skepticism displayed toward the gods for which Aristophanes criticized Euripides. Others, in contrast, have regarded it as evidence of a veritable conversion on the part of the poet who, as his life drew to a close, seems to them to have been touched by grace as it were, and to have wished to exalt a superhuman form of wisdom that, in contrast to the arrogant knowledge and reason of the sophists, stemmed from abandoning oneself to divine ecstasy, the mystic madness of the god of blessed possession"

concerning the mad philosopher, if he is to be taken seriously as a philosopher at all, turns on whether his thought is to be strongly resisted, or whether in his thinking there is something vitally important that needs to be heard. But we are back to the question of how it is that Nietzsche can be heard at all. Who is Nietzsche? Dionysus? What is tragedy? All are masks.

One of the more haunting characterizations of the modern/postmodern scene is the opening of *Gravity's Rainbow*, a scene of general crisis and a pervasive uncertainty whether or not things are leading toward a resolution of the crisis or only a further knotting into.[9] The trajectory of the modern/postmodern is like that of the rocket Pilot watches in the distance. If modernism is undeniably a period defined by crisis, a feeling of imminent catastrophe, postmodernism is perhaps most characterized by undecidability. Does the post-modern come after the crisis of modernity has been overcome? Or is postmodernism only an acceleration of modernism, really only a form of late-modernism—perhaps the fall after the point of no return?

The name of Nietzsche is inscribed all along this trajectory. Nietzsche is, at once, both high priest of modernism and postmodern prophet. This is not merely a matter of the shifts and changes in the development of Nietzsche's career as a writer. It is not simply a matter of charting the movement from a youthful romanticism to a late postmodernism. The

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(383-384). Vernant's own reading is on the side of the epiphany of Dionysus (a reading opposed to Nietzsche's early conclusions about Euripides but which nevertheless comes to quite Nietzschean conclusions concerning the Dionysian and the need for opening up the space of tragedy); he understands the Dionysian not so much in terms of a kind of mysticism but rather, as a recognition of otherness: "The tragedy of *The Bacchae* shows the dangers that are involved when a city retrenches within its own boundaries. If the world of the same refuses to absorb the element of otherness that every group and every human being unconsciously carry within themselves, just as Pentheus refuses to recognize that mysterious, feminine, Dionysiac element that attracts and fascinates him despite the horror that he claims to feel for it, then all that is stable, regular, and the same tips over and collapses and the other, of hideous aspect, absolute otherness and a return to chaos, come to appear as the sinister truth, the other, authentic, and terrifying face of the same. The only solution is for women to use the controlled trance, an officially recognized *thiasos* promoted to the status of a public institution, while men turn to the joy of the *komos*, wine, disguise, and carnival and for the city as a whole, in and through the theatre, to make it possible for the other to become one of the dimensions of both collective life and the daily life of each individual. The victorious eruption of Dionysus is a sign that otherness is being given its place, with full honors, at the center of the social system." Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 402.

[9]Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973).

same text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for example, or even *The Birth of Tragedy*, can be read as essentially romantic, as a manifesto of modernism, and yet also as already postmodern.

The high expectations Nietzsche held out for art, the anticipation of a "philosophy of the future" drawn from the resources of art, is a consistent theme throughout his writings and certainly has a precedent in Romanticism. And yet, in emphasizing the new as a radical break with the past, with tradition—a rupture within history—Nietzsche is a very modern figure. The command to break the old tablets and create the new that he puts in the mouth of Zarathustra might be said to set the agenda for modernism. Moreover, Nietzsche also anticipates modernism, especially in the arts where his influence on artists and theorists would be difficult to overestimate, in foretelling of the crisis that would accompany this radical break, a crisis to which he would append the name of *nihilism*. In the closing section of *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche acknowledges his fate in telling us who he is:

> I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous—a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against* everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man, I am dynamite.[10]

It may be easy to brush this off as madness, but there is a sense in which Nietzsche is dynamite. In the century that has passed since he made this announcement of his identity Nietzsche has virtually exploded into fragments, into a multiplicity of masks—into so many Nietzsches. This dissemination of masks is a consequence of the post-aestheticism that leads Nietzsche to consider the text as a mask and to thus address his readers wearing a constantly shifting series of masks. Every reading, since interpretation is no longer a matter of revealing the true face, of reproducing an original, produces another mask. Of course, for some, this is the very reason that the name of Nietzsche has become associated with the most terrible memory, and thus the reason why his perspectivism or post-aestheticism should be rejected.

The Raging Discordance Between Art and Truth

[10]Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a Destiny," §1.

In his parting address to his written and painted thoughts, Nietzsche warns his readers. Although in their colorful youth these thoughts may have been malicious, thorny provocations, they induced at most a sneeze and a laugh. But now, as he completes the writing and closes the book, he fears that some of his written and painted thoughts are ready to become truths.

Considering the history of the interpretation of Nietzsche, and especially of the political consequences extracted from his "truths," that fear is certainly understandable. However, what is most unsettling for philosophers trying to make sense of Nietzsche is that this fear does not simply betray an attitude toward a few of his more dangerously "wicked" thoughts, but is rather an expression of his attempt to undermine the very concept of truth. Indeed, the first section of *Beyond Good and Evil* begins with a questioning of philosophy's most cherished assumption:

> The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect—what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! That is a long story even now—and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun. Is it any wonder that we should finally become suspicious, lose patience, and turn away impatiently? that we should finally learn from this Sphinx to ask questions, too? *Who* is it really that puts questions to us here? *What* in us really wants "truth"?
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> Indeed we came to a long halt at the question about the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete stop before a still more basic question. We asked about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?[11]

How can a lover of wisdom not want truth? Even more, how can a philosopher prefer untruth rather than truth, the uncertain over the certain, and ignorance instead of knowledge? Surely Nietzsche must here be writing ironically and not really seriously questioning the value of truth? Surely this denial of truth can only be an example of the hyperbole characteristic of so much of his writing? How seriously is one to take these strange, wicked, questionable questions? What leads Nietzsche, anyway, to question the value of truth, to seemingly call into question the very possibility of the love of wisdom?

[11]Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §1.

In closing his prelude to a philosophy of the future Nietzsche laments that something *vital* is lost when his written and painted thoughts become truths. He laments an impending death. Already, he notes, his thoughts, written and painted, have lost something of their novelty, their colorfulness, their provocativeness, their secret spices. As truths they may gain immortality, but at the cost of becoming pathetically decent and dull. Perhaps most lamentable of all, no longer would they make one laugh. By the time they become truths they will be as dead as the moon. The embalmers will have to be summoned. As truths his written and painted thoughts face *mummification*. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche comments on the "Egypticism" of philosophers, their "hatred of the very idea of becoming":

> They think that they show their *respect* for a subject when they de-historicize it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. When these honorable idolaters of concepts worship something, they kill it and stuff it; they threaten the life of everything they worship.[12]

There is no life in the texts of these philosophers. And yet, how is it that things will be any different with Nietzsche's writings? Does he even think that they can be any different? The lament at the end of this prelude to a philosophy of the future is more than a concern for some of his written and painted thoughts. Something about writing, or about language itself, determines that it has always been this way, perhaps always will be this way—perhaps philosophers can never be more than mandarins with Chinese brushes. Nothing alive survives the passage from thought to inscription. All that can be captured in writing are birds weary of flying, storms already spent—only what is afternoon, what is withered and faded and ready to go under like the sun.

Nietzsche's lament echoes with a number of images and associations that recall a certain chain of significations that have determined the understanding of philosophy and of the philosopher's text in the West since Plato, and thus, on the one hand, might seem to

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[12]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), '"Reason" in Philosophy,' §1.

suggest that things could not be any different with Nietzsche's writings.[13] In other words, Nietzsche's parting words might seem to lament that there can be no break from these previous philosophers, from this "Egypticism"—another name for "Platonism," that problematic unfolding referred to as the history of metaphysics. In drawing the connection between writing and a certain kind of death, and especially this link between writing and painting, Nietzsche's lament recalls the condemnation of writing that Derrida is well known for having identified, in a sense, with that history, and for having traced back to a certain Egyptian "myth" retold in the "back room" of "Plato's *pharmacy.*"[14] In that "myth of Theuth," writing is rejected by the king, the god of gods, the father, because it substitutes

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[13] Among other allusions consider the aviary metaphor in the *Theaetetus* in which the mind is likened to an aviary and knowledge to birds that can be caught by hand: "Now consider whether knowledge is a thing you can possess in that way without having it about you, like a man who has caught some wild birds—pigeons or what not—and keeps them in an aviary he has made for them at home." Plato, *Theaetetus* 197*c*. The translations to Plato's dialogues to which I will refer is *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns), Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961). The dialogues have been translated by the following: R. Hackforth (*Phaedrus*); Paul Shorey (*Republic*); F.M. Cornford (*Theaetetus*). Nietzsche's lament that writing can not capture the living but only birds weary of flying would only echo the condemnation of writing in Plato. Nietzsche had elsewhere made use of the same metaphor to a similar effect: "I caught this insight on the way and quickly seized the rather poor words that were closest to hand to pin it down lest it fly away again. And now it has died of these arid words and shakes and flaps in them—and I hardly know any more when I look at it how I could ever have felt so happy when I caught this bird" (*GS* 298). Note Graham Parkes' consideration of these allusions in his treatment of Nietzsche's psychology in Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 216-217.

[14] The deconstruction of the Platonic opposition that debases writing in favor of speech is one of Derrida's frequent themes, perhaps one could say—even though it is rather problematic—the major "thesis" of his early writings. Here I refer to the 1968 essay "La pharmacie de Platon," a masterful, often hilarious, text woven around the play of the *pharmakon* in Plato's condemnation of writing. Writing is condemned by Plato because it is a *pharmakon*, a word that is often mistranslated, as Derrida points out, in that in the original it contains both the sense of "remedy" *and* "poison." Writing is thus condemned because of an inherent dangerousness that can be attributed to its pharmaceutical operation, its double nature, its undecidability that subverts the logic of identity upon which the hierarchy of oppositions depends. The deconstruction of Platonism is already at work in Plato's text, as Derrida's title playfully suggests, since the condemnation of writing takes place in "Plato's Pharmacy," that is, since the condemnation of writing also relies upon the *pharmakon* and thus cannot escape its effects. This all goes on in the "back room" of the pharmacy in the sense that, on the one hand, Derrida focuses on the "myth of Theuth" recounted at the end of the *Phaedrus*, a myth regarded by traditional interpretations as extraneous to the main argument of the dialogue, and thus relegated, so to speak, to the "back room" of the pharmacy. But there is also the further sense in that, for Derrida, it is explicitly "in the back room, in the shadows of the pharmacy, prior to the oppositions between conscious and unconscious, freedom and constraint, voluntary and involuntary, speech and language, that these textual 'operations' occur." Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 69-198; English translation: "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-171, 129.

dead repetition for living memory, dead discourse for living speech, and is thus not the remedy it is presented to be, but rather a poison, a poisoned present that would implant forgetfulness in the soul.[15] After recalling this myth, Socrates, the pharmacist in the back room of the pharmacy, draws this analogy between writing and painting: “You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever.”[16]

Writing and painting are linked in the *Phaedrus* not only through the play of the *pharmakon* but also by their stubborn muteness, their mask of silence that prevents them for answering for themselves with the proper living word.[17] Painting, Derrida notes, is here

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[15] The myth Socrates recounts tells the tale of the presentation of the gift of writing, along with other arts, by Theuth, the inventor and god of writing, to Thamus, the king, the god of the gods: "On each art, we are told, Thamus had plenty of views both for and against; it would take too long to give them in detail. But when it came to writing Theuth said, 'Here, O King, is a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories; my discovery provides a recipe (*pharmakon*) [writing is explicitly presented as a *pharmakon*] for memory and wisdom.'" The king, however, recognizes the danger and will have nothing to do with writing: "But the king answered and said, 'O man full of arts, to one it is given to create the things of art, and to another to judge what measure of harm and of profit they have for those that shall employ them. And so it is that you, by reason of your tender regard for writing that is your offspring, have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe (*pharmakon*) not for memory, but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing, and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows.'" *Phaedrus* 274*c*-275*b*.

[16] *Phaedrus* 275*e-d*. Derrida's strategy involves suggesting how Plato's text is caught up in the play of the *pharmakon*. Even as he opposes the *pharmakon* of writing, Socrates, "he who does not write," is also master of the *pharmakon*. Derrida first suggests that behind the portrait of Eros in the *Symposium* one can make out the face of Socrates, the face of a *pharmakeus* (magician). "Plato's Pharmacy," 117. In a more radical move, Derrida then connects Socrates to the *pharmakos,* a sorcerer or even the "scapegoat." Derrida's suggestion, perhaps something of a little joke, challenges the very notion of the "text" since *pharmakos* is not a word Plato actually used and is thus supposedly "outside" of Plato's text. Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 128-134.

[17] Derrida points out that not only is writing explicitly identified as a *pharmakon* in Plato's text, but that elsewhere, in the *Republic,* the painter's colors are called *pharmaka* (420*c*). Derrida further points out that in

called *zōgraphia*, and is thus explicitly a drawing of the living. Similarly, writing was supposed to paint the living word.[18] Both, however, cannot properly represent the living, they are, as Derrida puts it, "mere figurines, masks, simulacra."[19] Writing and painting are death masks. They are silent, unable to respond with the living voice. For Socrates this inability to answer for itself, to defend itself from misreading, is the trouble with writing: “And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself.[20]

Derrida's aim in recounting Plato's condemnation of writing and painting is, at least in part, to show how Plato's discourse, here and in the myth of Theuth, is constrained by a system of hierarchical oppositions: speech/writing, life/death, father/son, legitimate son/orphan-bastard, soul/body, inside/outside, good/evil, seriousness/play, day/night, sun/moon, truth/art, and so on. Plato's condemnation of writing and painting is thus, not so much attributed to an author, Plato, but is determined by this system that holds in opposition art and truth. Writing and painting are both forms of art, or *tekhnē*. Both, also, are forms of *mimesis* and are thus, according to the famous condemnation of art in the *Republic*, "three removes from the king and the truth."[21] The distance between art and truth inscribed in the *Republic* is the distance between the sensible and intelligible, the sensuous and the supersensuous, the distance that separates myth and logic, rhetoric and dialectic, philosophy and art in the history of metaphysics.

Greek, *"pharmakon* also means to paint, not a natural color but an artificial tint, a chemical dye that imitates the chromatic scale given in nature." Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 129.

[18] Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 136.

[19] Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 136.

[20] Plato, *Phaedrus* 275*e-d*.

[21] Plato, *Republic* X, 597*e*.

Thus, on the one hand, Nietzsche's lament that nothing alive survives the passage from thought to inscription seems to suggest that things could not be any different with his writings. In drawing together writing and painting with autumn and afternoon and that which is passing, exhausted, on the verge of withering and losing its fragrance, Nietzsche seems to follow Plato, or rather, seems to be caught up in the same chain that constrains Plato to link writing and painting with death.[22] And yet, even as it relies upon it and is even caught up in it, Nietzsche's lament concerning his written and painted thoughts twists and contorts this chain. For now it is truth that is linked with death. Subverting the Platonic order, Nietzsche's lament is not at all a condemnation of writing or painting, but rather a lament for the passing of his written and painted thoughts into truth, into death.

Or, perhaps it is not even a lament at all. Perhaps Nietzsche's parting address to what he has just written is rather another provocation, a warning to the reader not to take what is written as truth, and a temptation to take his philosophy as nothing other than written and painted thoughts, in other words—as art. It is through this twisting of the chain of Platonic oppositions, art/truth, life/death, that Nietzsche attempts to distance himself from the "Egypticism" of previous philosophers. In any case, this temptation to take philosophy as art rather than truth is perhaps the most characteristic feature of Nietzsche's anticipation of a "philosophy of the future." Indeed, it is this turn from truth to art, a move that some refer to as Nietzsche's *aestheticism* that is generally regarded as having inaugurated the trajectory of postmodern thought.[23]

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[22] Derrida's essay even further suggests how Nietzsche's address to his written and painted thoughts is caught up in this chain through the *pharmakon*: "The magic of writing and painting is like a cosmetic concealing the dead under the appearance of the living. The *pharmakon* introduces and harbors death. It makes the corpse presentable, masks it, makes it up, perfumes it with its essence, as it is said in Aeschylus. *Pharmakon* is also a word for perfume. A perfume without essence, as we earlier called it a drug without substance. It transforms order into ornament, the cosmos into a cosmetic. Death, masks, makeup, all are part of the festival that subverts the order of the city, its smooth regulation by the dialectician and the science of being. Plato,as we shall see, is not long in identifying writing with festivity. And play. A certain festival, a certain game." Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 142.

[23] Allan Megill portrays Nietzsche's "aestheticism" as setting the agenda "for the whole of modernist and postmodernist art and thought." Megill traces this aestheticism from Nietzsche through Heidegger and Foucault to Derrida, in whom he finds this trajectory of thought to come to an end. Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1. See also, James J. Winchester, *Nietzsche's Aesthetic Turn: Reading Nietzsche after Heidegger, Deleuze, and Derrida* (Albany: State

In suggesting this turn from truth to art, Nietzsche's parting address to his written and painted thoughts challenges the prevailing conception of philosophy and thus revives, one might say, the quarrel, already ancient in Plato, between philosophy and poetry.[24] Since Plato, who would make kings of philosophers and exiles of artists, philosophers in the West generally have thought of themselves as occupying a higher, more exalted role in culture than that reserved for artists. While the philosopher is dedicated to the serious task of obtaining true knowledge, the artist, consigned to the realm of appearance, a realm of lies and illusions, can only play with fictions. According to the famous condemnation of art in the *Republic*, if art is to be at all accepted into the community, it must be submitted to the authority of reason. Without the guidance of reason the artist is a danger to the *polis*. Rather than leading toward true knowledge, the tragic poet and the painter alike possess a dangerous seductive power that nourishes and arouses the feelings and passions, impairing reason, leading away from truth. Charged with a serious task, philosophy, for the most part of the history of metaphysics, is aligned with the sciences rather than the arts. With Descartes' quest for certainty and the adoption of scientific method, modern philosophy became ever more closely tied to the rise of science, ever more rigorous in its concern with foundations and justifications. The conception of philosophy as rigorous science dictates everything from the subject of valid philosophical inquiry to the very style in which philosophy is written. As a countermovement to the heavy seriousness of the traditional philosophic discourse, Nietzsche's written and painted thoughts embarks upon a "philosophy of the future" characterized by play, by a certain lightness, laughter, and dance—a *fröhliche Wissenschaft*.

The countermovement begins for Nietzsche, perhaps, even in his first work. The narration of the story of the birth and death of tragedy might be considered his first attempt at distancing himself from Platonism, his first attempt at reciting the fable of what he would

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University of New York Press, 1994).

[24] Plato, *Republic* 607*b*.

later call "The History of an Error."[25] In recounting the contest between the tragic poets and Socrates, Nietzsche revives the ancient quarrel, this time with a decisive turn in favor of art. *The Birth of Tragedy* invests the greatest hope for the future in art. In the original preface Nietzsche writes that he is convinced that "art represents the highest task and truly metaphysical activity of this life." This highest task is then suggested in the line—important enough to have been stated twice in the original text—that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*".[26]

Such high expectations of art have a precedent in Romanticism and in Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's denigration, in the 1886 "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," of the youthful romanticism and Schopenhauerian language of his first work might lead one to think that the development in his thinking, the shift in his thought that is generally thought to occur after *The Birth of Tragedy*, after distancing himself from Schopenhauer and Wagner, might involve less of an emphasis on art. Yet in that "Self-Criticism" Nietzsche explicitly ties his later critique of morality to the aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world to which his first book was devoted. This would suggest that whatever turn or break occurs in Nietzsche's thought after *The Birth of Tragedy*, the development of his mature thought is never far from his thinking on art.

Nietzsche certainly shares with Romanticism "a similar cult of the mythical, manifesting itself in the search for a 'new mythology,' a similar divinization of art, a similar scorn of philistinism, a similar predilection for a fragmentary or aphoristic style, a similar desire for an 'aesthetic revolution' based on a recovery of the Greek spirit, a similar search for an 'aesthetic thinking,' and a similar anticipation of a 'philosophy of the future' that would somehow draw on the resources of art."[27] The German Romantics, such as Schlegel, spoke of a "progressive universal poetry" that would unite philosophy and poetry, and a

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[25] The subtitle for "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable" in *Twilight of the Idols*, § IV.

[26] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5, 24.

[27] Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, 8. This brief review of the precedents to Nietzsche's aestheticism is largely indebted to Megill's work. Megill cites here an essay by Ernst Behler that traces these connections. Ernst Behler, "Nietzsche und die Frühromantische Schule," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 7 (1978), 59-96.

collapse of the boundary between philosophy and poetry, or philosophy and literature, is evident in Nietzsche's use of polysemantic metaphors rather than concepts—the colorfulness of his written and painted thoughts. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in particular, with its rich imagery and metaphorical language—it is painted as much as written, contrasts so starkly in style from a traditional philosophical text that many of Nietzsche's detractors, read it as essentially Romanticist, and in consigning it to the realm of literature, deny altogether its philosophical import. On the other hand, for those that endeavored to read Nietzsche as a philosopher, his use of metaphor was often considered a poetic embellishment to the thought, which, in order to be revealed, must be stripped of its rhetorical raiment.

Despite the apparent continuities, Nietzsche's use of metaphor and exploration of stylistic possibilities, demonstrates rather a sharp break with his Romanticist predecessors. Not until the recent French interpretations has there been any attempt to regard Nietzsche's use of metaphor as philosophically significant. Eric Blondel, to take one example, suggests that "Nietzsche's use of metaphor is demanded by a specifically philosophic necessity, and that his discourse is intrinsically metaphorical, precisely because his thought is *meta-phorical*."[28] The purport of this French interpretation calls attention to the question of style in Nietzsche's writing—or rather, styles, since, as Derrida remarks: "If there is going to be style there can only be more than one."[29] Nietzsche's texts are immediately distinguishable from traditional philosophical texts not only by their colorful metaphorical language but also by the varied palette of styles employed. One of the reasons for his success as a writer, Nietzsche tells us, is that he has "many stylistic possibilities—the most multifarious art of

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[28] Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche: "Life as Metaphor," trans. Mairi Macrae, in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge, Ma.: The MIT Press, 1986., p. 151. This volume is well known as an introduction (for English readers) to "The French Scene" in the contemporary interpretation of Nietzsche. For a review of this "scene" see Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 77-94..

[29] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles,* trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 139. A translation of "Eperons. Les styles de Nietzsche," from vol. 1 of *Nietzsche aujourd'hui?*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974).

style that has ever been at the disposal of one man".[30] By contrast, traditional philosophical discourse is marked by a certain constancy of style (following Derrida—a lack of attention to style), holding fast to the scholarly text as the proper style for philosophy. Painted in a variety of styles Nietzsche challenges the traditional philosophical discourse by suggesting that there is no style "proper" to philosophy. In the wake of the French readings, it is no longer adequate to consider Nietzsche's use of many styles as merely a Romanticist exercise in style—it is rather a stylistic strategy that puts into question the very distinction between style and content, between the content of the thought and the manner of presentation. It is a feature of Nietzsche's aestheticism that, as Alexander Nehamas has put it, "results from his effort to bring style into the center of his own thought."[31]

Nietzsche's use of many stylistic possibilities, as Nehamas' work endeavors to demonstrate, might then be considered a strategy of his perspectivism. One might think, then, of Nietzsche's aestheticism as a corollary of perspectivism, of the view that every view is only one view among many possible views, that every interpretation is only one among many possible interpretations. In trying out a number of stylistic possibilities Nietzsche's multifarious art of style draws attention to the point that the narrative voice is situated within a particular perspective. One could draw the connection between his perspectivism and aestheticism, after all, in that the term "perspectivism" itself, Nietzsche allows, "is borrowed from "an expression painters use".[32] To develop the analogy, Nietzsche thinks of "perspective" already from the point of view of modern painting, already from the perspective in which the Cartesian plane of representation is broken, where it is no longer possible to paint from the perspective that would pretend to be no perspective at all.

Thought together with his perspectivism, Nietzsche's aesthetic turn marks a departure from Romanticism and thus from "aestheticism" as it is usually understood. In contrast to the romanticist retreat from the "real world" into the isolation of the aesthetic, Nietzsche's

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[30] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," §4.

[31] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 39.

[32] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §2.

aestheticism moves in the opposite direction. It is "an attempt to expand the notion of the aesthetic to embrace the whole of reality."[33] Whereas usually one makes a distinction between the perception of a "mere thing" and a work of art—art being richer in meanings insofar as the meaning of the work is in part the responsibility of the interpreter—Nietzsche collapses the distinction between art and philosophy by insisting that all interpretation is aesthetic. From the viewpoint of his perspectivism, the "world" itself is a "work of art" in the sense that it becomes, "'infinite' for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*."[34] Nietzsche's turn toward art departs from prior aesthetics also in that he thinks of art not from the point of view of the spectator, or of the work of art, but from the perspective of the artist.

Finally, the distance between Nietzsche and his Romanticist predecessors is most obvious if one considers the glaring contrast between their expectations in making an aesthetic turn. An important motif of Romanticism, it has been suggested, is that of a "circuitous journey," a "move from alienation, through spiritual crisis, to a redemptive reintegration with the cosmos and with our own possibilities."[35] The aesthetic turn in Romanticism is thus a return, a passage through crisis and back to some hoped for comforting unity. If Romanticism developed out of the failure of the Enlightenment, out of a loss of faith in reason, the celebration of the genius of the artist and the inspiration of art was as a means of attaining the same goal towards which the Enlightenment thinkers had placed their faith in reason. The Romanticist expectation of art, in short, was the hope of gaining access to knowledge. In regarding art as a source of truth, Romanticism involved something of a reversal of the Platonic opposition between art and truth, but it was not a break—not even an attempt at a break—from Platonism. Nietzsche's turn to art, by contrast,

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[33] Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, 2.

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1974), §374.

[35] Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, 18. Megill further states: "We can discover a circuitous journey in the plot lines of Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* and Hegel's *Phenomenology*; in Hölderlin's *Hyperion*; in Goethe's *Faust*; in Novalis's romances; in Blake and Coleridge and Shelley and Carlyle." Megill cites as illuminative on this issue: M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).

was conceived specifically as an attempt to break from Platonism. In Nietzsche's aestheticism—or rather what might be called, in order to mark the difference from Romanticism, a "post-aestheticism"—there is no hope for a return to some unity. There is no circuitous journey that ends in a return home. Nietzsche's circuitous journey, the eternal return, may even be viewed as a parody of Romanticist hope.[36] Finally, Nietzsche aesthetic turn, as his parting address to his written and painted thoughts suggests, is an attempt to decidedly break from Platonism by turning philosophy away from truth toward art.

The controversy surrounding this post-aestheticist, or post-modern Nietzsche, centers around the question of whether this aesthetic turn turns out of or only further into the crisis of modernity. Many commentators find this Nietzsche, and the postmodern trajectory of thought inaugurated by this Nietzsche, to only deepen this crisis, to end, after all, in *nihilism*. In the working notes to his uncompleted final project Nietzsche explicitly characterizes art as initiating the "countermovement" to nihilism.[37] Art is here affirmed as "the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life. . . . the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is . . . antinihilist *par excellence*."[38] Richard Schacht, in summing up his treatment of Nietzsche's thinking about art, comments that "of all the points he seeks to make none is of greater interest and importance than his contention that art is the clue and key to the possibility of discovering a way beyond nihilism."[39]

This idea that art may be the key to the overcoming of nihilism, is central in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, spanning the course of several decades and marking a turning in Heidegger's own career, is noted for its

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[36] "Above all, eternal return does not 'round back.' On the contrary, it stands as a kind of perpetual crisis, in which the desire to round back is countered by the conviction that all paths are broken." Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, 19.

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), §794.

[38] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* §853.

[39] Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 529.

complexity and resistance to simplification. Although there are several important later essays, the principle text is the massive *Nietzsche*.[40] The decisive factor in Heidegger's reading, as to whether Nietzsche is successful in overcoming nihilism and twisting free of metaphysics, turns on the problem of the "raging discordance between art and truth" that resounds throughout Nietzsche's writings. In a late unpublished note Heidegger finds this startling confession:

> Very early in life I took the question of the relation of *art* to *truth* seriously: even now I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance. My first book was devoted to it. *The Birth of Tragedy* believes in art on the background of another belief—that it *is not possible to live with truth*, that the "will to truth" is already a symptom of degeneration.[41]

Even though Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is marked by a constant oscillation, it is, for Heidegger, as if Nietzsche reveals here the key to his writings. Even as he is engaged in twisting free of metaphysics, Nietzsche reveals that he still stands in holy dread before the discordance between art and truth. It would not be surprising that the discordance is at the heart of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but that he remains standing before this discordance, even during the writing of *Twilight of the Idols*, indicates at least a continuity between the astonishing preview and the final attempt at the overturning of Platonism. What is dreadful is that it is not possible to live with truth, that the "will to truth" is a symptom of decline.

For Heidegger, the statement initially sounds perverse. But then, as he goes on to point out, the strangeness dissipates as one realizes that by "will to truth" Nietzsche means "the will to the 'true world' in the sense of Plato and Christianity, the will to

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[40] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume One: The Will to Power as Art,* translated by David F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1979). This is a translation of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, Band I (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1961), pp. 11-254. Further references to this text will cite *Nietzsche*, I followed by page number. When necessary page numbers from both the English and the German will be cited with a backslash [/] distinguishing between the translation and the original.As Ernst Behler has recently commented, Heidegger's *Nietzsche* "presents the most comprehensive, self-enclosed interpretation of Nietzsche yet produced" even if it "cannot be reduced to individual statements." Ernst Behler, *Confrontations: Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche,* trans. Stephen Taubeneck (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 36, 17. Translation of Ernst Behler, *Derrida—Nietzsche, Nietzsche—Derrida* (Schönigh, Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand, 1988).

[41] Heidegger, *Nietzsche, I,* 74. Heidegger later reveals the date (Autumn 1888) at p. 163. Heidegger cites from *Nietzsche Werke: Grossoktavausgabe* XIV, 369.

suprasensuousness, to being in itself."[42] Thus, since art belongs to this world, the sensuous world, "art is *worth more* than truth."[43] Finally, Heidegger calls attention to the remark, which Erich Heller has described as "at once crystalline and tumultuous, brilliant and violent": “For a philosopher to say 'the good and the beautiful are one' is infamy; if he goes on to add, 'also the true', one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly. We possess art lest we *perish of the truth.*"[44] The discordance between art and truth never rages more severely. For Heller, what makes this so unsettling is that, although it has been said before that we cannot live with the whole truth, most notably by Plato in the cave parable, because truth "is unattainable or not meant for the treasury of man," no one has before said, "surely not with Nietzsche's aphoristic vehemence" that truth would kill "*because of its devastating ugliness*."[45]

Like Nietzsche, Heidegger regarded the problem of overcoming nihilism to be synonymous with the problem of overcoming Platonism. For Heidegger, the counter-movement to nihilism cannot be a simple reversal, but must be, on the contrary, a "twisting free" of the Platonic order that maintains the distance between art and truth. Thus, if nihilism is to be overcome in reviving the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, Nietzsche cannot simply reverse the opposition between Socrates and the tragic poets, between philosophy and art. The twisting free must involve not a reversal but a dismantling of the hierarchy—a crossing of philosophy and art. Even in *The Birth of Tragedy*, unfolding the story of the contest between Socrates and the tragic poets, Nietzsche hints of such a crossing. After leveling an unprecedented attack on the revered Socrates, Nietzsche admits that one thing gives him pause—the dream Socrates relates to his friends during those last days, a dream in which he is exhorted to practice music. This leads Nietzsche to wonder "whether there is *necessarily* only an antipodal relation between Socratism and art, and

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[42] Heidegger, *Nietzsche, I,* 74.

[43] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §853.

[44] "*Wir haben die Kunst*, damit wir nicht an der Warhiet zu Grunde gehn" (*WP* 822; *KGW* VIII 3: 296). Heidegger, *Nietzsche, I,* 75. Erich Heller, *The Importance of Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 158-173.

[45] Heller, *The Importance of Nietzsche*, 159.

whether the birth of an 'artistic Socrates' is altogether a contradiction in terms."[46] In a letter from the time he was writing *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche further hints at the gestation of a transfigured philosophy: "Knowledge, art, and philosophy (*Wissenschaft Kunst und Philosophie*) are now growing together so much in me that I shall in any case give birth to a centaur one day."[47] Another hint of this crossing of philosophy and art is found in a remark Heidegger cites from the notebooks of this period: "My philosophy an *inverted Platonism*: the further removed from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better it is. Living in *Schein* as goal."[48] Heidegger finds in this remark "an astonishing preview in the thinker of his entire later philosophical position."[49] One could say that Nietzsche devoted the remainder of his career to birthing this centaur thereby becoming an "artistic Socrates."

Nevertheless, for Heidegger, even though Nietzsche labors at nothing else in his last creative years than this overturning of Platonism, the astonishing preview in the early note is still only a preview. The final twisting free of Platonism does not take place until, if it takes place at all, the final year of Nietzsche's creative life—not until just before the collapse. The site of this final attempt at the overturning of Platonism is Nietzsche's famous renarration of the history of metaphysics, the "History of an Error" in *Twilight of the Idols*, in which the history of Platonism is turned into a fable once told, the story of "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable." That Heidegger finds the discordance between art

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[46] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* §14.

[47] Letter to Erwin Rohde, January–February 1870. *Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* II I: 95.

[48] Here it is crucial to hear, as John Sallis emphasizes, the full "spread of sense" of *Schein*—from "shine," to "appearance," "semblance" and "illusion"—which shall echo throughout this dissertation. The world of *Schein* is the "apparent" (*scheinbare*) world, the world of lies and illusion, to which the artist is consigned in the structure of Platonism. Sallis offers this brief sketch of a phenomenological analysis to illustrate the spread of *Schein*: "in order for something to have a certain look, it must show itself, must shine forth; only insofar as it shines so as to have a look can it then become an appearance, for instance, an appearance *of* something else that perhaps does not shine forth; and only insofar as something has a certain look can it look *like* something else that it is not, hence become a semblance; finally, both appearance and semblance can develop into various modes of illusion, for instance, something can look so much like something else that it gives itself out as that other thing." John Sallis, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 25-26.

[49] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, I: 154/180. For the passage cited from Nietzsche, see *KGW* III 3: 207.

and truth raging even as Nietzsche attempts the final overturning of metaphysics is the very reason for his judgment that Nietzsche, rather than twisting free, is the last metaphysician, and that, rather than overcoming nihilism, he is the consummate nihilist. However, this is not, for Heidegger, a reason not to take Nietzsche seriously as a philosopher. The way beyond nihilism must go through Nietzsche. Nietzsche's philosophy, for Heidegger, is an answer to what he understands to be the fundamental question of philosophy—the Question of Being. The unfolding history of Being, recorded in the numerous attempts to answer this question in the tradition of Western thought, moves necessarily to Nietzsche and draws there to a close.

Derrida's response to Heidegger's *Nietzsche* occupies a critically important position in this context. Derrida might be considered as agreeing with Heidegger that the discordance continues in Nietzsche until the end, but then questioning whether this results in any experience of dread. Heidegger's conclusion, it will be recalled, relies decisively on an unpublished note, as if Heidegger found there Nietzsche with the masks laid aside. This, it should be noted, is the context of Derrida's famous insistence that all of Nietzsche's writings, published and unpublished, are on par with the fragment "I have forgotten my umbrella" inscribed in the margins of Nietzsche's notes.[50] It is something of a joke then on Derrida's part. If Heidegger is going to place so much weight on this unpublished note, Derrida makes this insistence look ridiculous. Yet Derrida's ploy is more than a joke in being a strategem of his larger point that Nietzsche can never be unmasked. For Derrida, the very attempt to unmask Nietzsche, to establish Nietzsche's philosophy "proper," his true philosophy, the truth of Nietzsche behind the masks, is a symptom of the ascetic ideal, and that which binds one to metaphysics, perpetuating the history of nihilism. It is thus the very notion of truth that is ugly, against which art is needed "lest we perish."

In addition to characterizing the “philosophers of the future” as artists, Nietzsche also offers this description:

> A new species of philosophers is coming up: I venture to baptize them with a name that is not free of danger. As I unriddle them, insofar as they allow themselves to be unriddledfor it belongs to their

[50] Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, 123.

> nature to *want* to remain riddles at some pointthese philosophers of the future may have a rightit might also be a wrong—to be called *(at)tempters* (*Versucher*). This name itself is in the end a mere attempt (*Versuch*) and, if you will, a temptation (*Versuchung*).[51]

The play on the word *Versucher* is one of Nietzsche's favorite word plays. *Versuchen* can mean both to attempt, to try out, experiment, but also to tempt. Nothing so much characterizes Nietzsche's thought as this propensity to engage in what he often clearly admits are dangerous thought experiments, experiments which do not demand assent, but rather attempt to provoke thought, to question the unquestioned. One might note that Nietzsche's questioning of the value of truth is all cast in the conditional: "Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?"[52] Perhaps this is what makes reading Nietzsche so different from the experience with most philosophers—one is almost never sure how to take his "strange, wicked, questionable questions." The constant masquerade, in which one is never sure with which voice Nietzsche is speaking, holds the reader at a certain distance, challenging the reader to resist Nietzsche's temptations. In a letter of 1888 Nietzsche writes:

> I have never yet been characterized as a *psychologist* or as a *writer* ('poet' too) or as the inventer of a new kind of pessimism (Dionysian, born out of *strength* and taking pleasure in seizing the problem of existence by its horns) or as an *immoralist* (until now the highest form of 'intellectual rectitude', which is entitled to treat morality as illusion when it has itself become *instinctive* and *unavoidable*). It is not at all necessary or even desirable to side with me; on the contrary, a dose of curiosity, as if confronted with some unfamiliar plant, and an ironic resistance would be an incomparably more intelligent position to adopt.[53]

With the masked philosopher it is no longer a question of whether one agrees or not. One can only take up the experiment on one's own to see where it may lead. Taken as mere attempts, Nietzsche's "truths" regarding the affirmation of life are recognized as experiments that are not free of danger. They are not then "truths" which would demand assent. One might object that Nietzsche surely wants us to agree with him on at least some

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[51] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §42.

[52] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1.

[53] Ronald Hayman cites this letter in his biography of Nietzsche. Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 320. The letter is to Carl Fuchs, 29 July 1888.

level, to acknowledge his 'doctrine' of perspectivism, to accept that 'God is dead,' to realize that humanity must be overcome, that the way must thus be prepared for the *Übermensch*, to affirm eternal recurrence. Insofar as Nietzsche does have a "teaching" to offer, he is a *tempter*, putting forth his view not as a "truth" or a "doctrine" demanding our assent, but rather as an aesthetic phenomenon which tempts or invites us to creatively take up a thought experiment of our own.[54] Taken as art in this sense, what is written and painted in the text does not become a dead thing like the moon, but rather invites our participation in something that is alive.

[54] Megill's conclusion regarding Nietzsche's aestheticism—that the Zarathustrian mind "*demands* that we accept its view of the universe; it does not attempt to argue for such an acceptance"—thus misses entirely *das Versucherische* of Nietzsche's thought. Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, 62.

ABBREVIATIONS

Collected German Editions of Nietzsche's Work.

KGW *Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Citations are by volume number and page number.

KSA *Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Citations are by volume number and page number

Individual Works by Nietzsche (listed by date of composition).

BT *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*), 1872.

P "The Last Philosopher. The Philosopher. Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge" (*Der letzte Philosoph. Der Philosoph. Betrachtungen über den Kampf von Kunst und Erkenntniss*), 1872.

TL "On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense" (*Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*), 1873.

HAH *Human, All Too Human* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*), 1878.

D *Dawn of Morning* (*Morgenröte*), 1881.

GS *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*), 1882.

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Also sprach Zarathustra*), 1883/84/85.

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil* (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*), 1886.

GM *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*), 1887.

TI *Twilight of the Idols* (*Götzen-Dämmerung*), 1888.

A *The Antichrist(ian)* (*Der Antichrist*), 1888.

EH *Ecce Homo* (*Ecce Homo*), 1888.

WP *The Will to Power* (*Der Wille zur Macht*), a selection from Nietzsche's notebooks of the 1880s.