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Between the Prophets and Nihilism:  
Nietzsche Responds to Apocalyptic Thought

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Satisfaction of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in History

by

William Edward O'Mara IV

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Mark A. LeVine, Chair  
Professor John H. Smith  
Professor Touraj Daryaei

2017

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Liam O'Mara IV  
Spring, 2017

# Curriculum Vitae

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- 'Decolonizing the West'. Review of John Collins, *Global Palestine*. H-Net Reviews. July 2012. <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=35646>

## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

Between the Prophets and Nihilism:  
Nietzsche Responds to Apocalyptic Thought

by

William Edward O'Mara IV

Doctor of Philosophy in History  
University of California, Irvine, 2017  
Professor Mark LeVine, Committee Chair

The problem addressed in this study is nihilism. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche traced its origin to the long history of apocalyptic and eschatological thought in Western religions, and to the survival of the linear and universalizing aspects of their theology in modern secular thought. Nietzsche saw this unconscious legacy affecting everything from Enlightenment *philosophes*, to the natural and biological sciences, to politics and economics. An existential crisis in European civilization – the advent of nihilism – thus came about because of the “death of God”, *i.e.*, the loss of unshakeable objective faith amongst Europeans in the truth of the Abrahamic faiths.

I take seriously Nietzsche’s suggestion in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of a genealogical relationship between the ancient Iranians and the ancient Hebrews, which Nietzsche scholars have neglected. Exploring that historical interchange allows us to establish that Zoroastrian concepts of universal time and absolute morality entered Judaism, and thus the West, at a formative stage. I then discuss some key modern thinkers to which Nietzsche’s project responded, and



show that apocalyptic eschatology lived on in the work of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and the Darwinians. Having established for himself that modernity was tainted at its origin by this kernel of religious dogma, Nietzsche saw no need to save modernity from itself, and thus looked beyond it, and beyond the naïve worship of reason that underpinned it.

The solution to the problem of nihilism, in Nietzsche's view, was not to overcome religion, but to transform it. What was needed was a new mythology – one consistent with the natural sciences, and one which glorified the world as it is, and not an ideal world to come. His challenging notions of Eternal Recurrence and Overhumanity were contributions to this new, life-affirming mythology.

I make use of an extensive body of primary sources, ranging from the works of philosophers and scientists of the nineteenth century, to that of the ancient Greeks whom Nietzsche so admired, to the scriptural traditions of Zoroastrianism and Judaism. The work involves close reading and historical contextualization, seeking to establish contingent relationships as ideas moved and were transformed over time.

## 1.0 Introduction: A Prophet Against the End-Times

*In the horizon of the infinite.* – We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us – more so, we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more *freedom* there – and there is no more 'land'!<sup>1</sup>

Famous around the world for proclaiming the death of God, Friedrich Nietzsche is not commonly approached as a religious thinker. In the following pages, I will not only address Nietzsche's explicit critique of some key features of modern religious life, but will characterise Nietzsche's overall project as a kind of religious revival, intended to return myth to its originally life-affirming rôle by helping to restore our sense of awe and wonder about nature. Strongly influenced by the pantheist thinker Baruch Spinoza, Nietzsche comes occasionally close to similar sentiments, but ultimately he wishes to do something quite opposite what his monist predecessor sought. Rather than deifying nature, Nietzsche seeks something of how the ancient Greeks viewed nature – as a primal and unpredictable force to be feared and respected, perhaps even loved, but in

1 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. 124. Bernard Williams (ed.). Josefine Nauckhoff (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 119.

no way personified. In fact, Nietzsche flips Spinoza's famous equation of God with nature (*Deus Sive Natura*) by positing instead *Chaos Sive Natura*, chaos or nature.<sup>2</sup> Rather than deify the natural world in place of a metaphysical one (Nietzsche rejects that option even more forcefully), he wishes us to understand the world as unfolding chaos – utterly without plans or intrinsic meaning. All meaning that exists in the world – and this explicitly includes Nietzsche's own mythologizing – is a human invention, applied *ex post facto* to a nature that is itself utterly devoid of intrinsic value beyond its very existence.

Yet this is in no way a nihilistic formulation! The death of God is not, as many would have it, a celebration, but a tragic realisation. We, in our development of the natural sciences, have stripped the universe of much of its mystery, much of its magic. In so doing we have undermined belief in metaphysical realities like the Platonic forms or the Christian heaven. Nietzsche cries out that we can no longer believe seriously in such things, and yet, what has replaced them? The nation-state? Ethnic chauvinism? These can only lead to war and atrocities, as Nietzsche many times observes, and in no way address the underlying distress caused by the death of ultimate meaning since they cannot fully occupy the weighty space where God once lived in our hearts. It is the nihilism that follows from the death of such external meanings which motivates Nietzsche's writing – he is pointing the way out of our cultural cul-de-sac and towards a new vision of humanity within nature that can fulfil our desire for meaning without requiring us to deaden ourselves to the revelations of science.

In this study I will make many references to Nietzsche's reading in the natural sciences, but I wish to stress that he is not concerned to make his work scientific per

2 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. 9:11 [197].

se, only plausible within a scientific framework. Nietzsche is not a scientist, he is a myth-maker – and like the best myth-makers of the past, he wants his ideas to take full account of the state of the art of human knowledge so that they will seem all the more powerful, compelling, and indeed believable. He and the sciences have differing objectives, for while scientific naturalism is ultimately concerned with Being, Nietzsche is inclined to shift our focus entirely towards Becoming. That shift is, indeed, a central part of the argument I will make in the following chapters. For the dominant myths of the West – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – all have chosen to ground their thought in apocalyptic time. They view this universe as finite, and as having a definitive ending at a time that God has chosen, to be replaced by a more perfect creation. Nietzsche instead orients us toward an appreciation of eternity. There is no simple formula with which we can reduce the universe and contain its wonder. We must so construct our myths to celebrate wonder and mystery instead! Uncertainty has hitherto been something that the dominant scriptural religions have suppressed, and culturally we have been conditioned to deem it undesirable. Yet for Nietzsche, this uncertainty is the underlying reality that we have obscured with our religions.

Consider the epigram at the beginning of this section. The land is our once-stable conception of reality, including the God-concept, and the sea is the chaos of nature, of the universe. Science has put us out to sea and there is no going back, for the land has been destroyed! And while the sea may seem calm at times – *i.e.*, we may not always be troubled by the resulting death of meaning – it can rear up and send us spiralling into crises for which there is no solution, for we can no longer reach the land! What is the solution? Not the creation of new land, but an effective replacement for it: a set of myths which allow us to resign ourselves to a life on infinite seas. There is a kind of

Stoic fatalism here, a love for what is, rather than what we might wish to be – *amor fati*, as Nietzsche often puts in – and his own project of criticism and remythologization are intended to make it easier for those so inclined, and so gifted as to be capable, to embrace life, embrace nature, embrace the world as it is. Against thousands of years of religious teaching that the world is fallen and must be changed, Nietzsche asserts that it is we who have fallen, and must now pick ourselves up. The path he charts for that is the focus of this study.

In the chapters which follow I will take us through Nietzsche's response to apocalyptic thinking and lay out his path to re-naturalizing humanity through life-affirming myth. The next chapter – the first main chapter – addresses the character of Zarathustra, which Nietzsche introduces in *The Gay Science* and to whom he then devotes his most inscrutable text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I will argue that Nietzsche is actually engaging much more directly with the ancient Iranian prophet Zarathushtra than is commonly known, and will do so in part by exploring Nietzsche's own sources of information on the religion of the Iranians, and in part by showing that Nietzsche's main philosophical concerns are inversions of the message of that prophet. The third chapter will explore the background of Zoroastrianism, or Mazdaism – the religion that evolved from Zarathushtra's thought.<sup>3</sup> I will trace some of its early formulations and situate it in its Central Asian context, and then show the ways in which it has markedly influenced the intellectual development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This is a crucial point,

3 You may already have noticed a spelling difference here, so I will explain why it exists. The best English approximation of the Avestan-language name for the Iranian prophet is Zarathushtra. The sources that Nietzsche read, however, rendered the name as Zarathustra, and that is the form that he adopted in his own work. I will use the latter when referring to Nietzsche's prophet, and the former when referring to the Iranian original. Note also that some sources I will quote in the text use a Hellenized name, Zoroaster, for the prophet's name, and some use the Middle Persian form Zartosht or Zardusht; each of these forms should be taken as synonymous with Zarathushtra.

though it will take us far from Nietzsche's own thought, for it highlights the absolute centrality of Zarathushtra to the creation of the modern Western religious traditions with which Nietzsche engaged, and justifies his adoption, and subversion, of the prophetic figure himself. I will also deepen our exploration of apocalypticism in particular, by exploring the forms that it takes not only in Zoroastrianism, but in some of our other religious traditions. This will include Greek understandings of it, as well as the Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and other forms with which Nietzsche – and perhaps the reader – would be familiar. The purpose here will be to set up the central argument of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and of Nietzsche's later writings in general: the Eternal Recurrence of the Same and the goal of Overhumanity.

In order to reach that point, chapter four will discuss the secularization of the notion of progress, which I will argue is intrinsically linked to apocalyptic thinking. I will do this by looking in particular at Immanuel Kant and at some of the early Darwinian thinkers with which Nietzsche engaged, as well as other thinkers like Hegel and Marx with which he did not (as a way of showing just how firmly entrenched apocalyptic thinking has become in the Western canon). From there we will shift into the alternatives, by outlining in chapter five some of the naturalistic and philosophical bases for Nietzsche's rejection of progressive modernist thought. This will include an examination of its Greek roots, in particular in the thought of Heraclitus, and also in the Stoics thinkers, whose Conflagration and rebirth of the cosmos in identical form anticipates Nietzsche's Recurrence. Chapter five will also include a more extensive discussion of the naturalistic bases of Nietzsche's rejection of progressive, teleological, apocalyptic thinking, by addressing his relation to the progressive "Darwinists" of the time. A sixth, brief concluding chapter will discuss both Eternal Recurrence and

Overhumanity as existential imperatives and life-affirming myths, put forth as alternatives to the prevailing apocalyptic myths of the Western world. Their utility in combating nihilism and their relation to the chaos of Becoming will, by that point, be clearer. And by concluding on these points, we will return full-circle to the prophet Zarathustra, whom Nietzsche sent to us in order to undo the damage caused by his Iranian namesake.

## 2.0 Friedrich Nietzsche and the Prophet Zarathushtra

In this chapter I will introduce the basic problematic of Nietzsche's relationship to religions in the Western tradition, identify the question of myth and myth-making as a possible way out of the philosophical dead-end that he perceives in nineteenth-century thought, and establish the foundations and relevance of Zoroastrianism to any study of Nietzsche's seminal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The interaction between Iranian religion and the Judeo-Christian tradition with which Nietzsche directly engages in his writing is little understood or known by the intellectual historians who typically work on Nietzsche's writing, and hence has been entirely neglected as a source of inspiration up to this point. Having come upon the sources of information from which Nietzsche himself studied the Iranian religion – in particular the two-volume cultural history by Friedrich von Hellwald which Nietzsche read more than once – I believe that an exploration of the Zoroastrian overtones in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is long overdue.

## 2.1 Religion and Nietzsche, Only Partly at Odds

Nietzsche is not an irreligious or anti-religious thinker. To be sure, he is critical of many *forms* of religion and the religious life, in particular the Christian faith in nineteenth century Europe, and has offered up some of the most trenchant and biting critiques of religiosity in modern times. But he is in no way opposed to the functions that religion plays in human life, nor to the religious imaginary as such. In fact, I will argue throughout this text that Nietzsche's work demonstrates a keen understanding of the social and cultural utility of religion, and betrays an obsession with returning western civilisation to older, and historically more common, approaches to religion – that is, to myth. And, in fact, to new forms of myth which are fundamentally modern, grounded in empirical and natural science, and which would situate humanity within a natural context (rather than above the natural world, as is the understanding in the Western monotheisms).

In modern understandings, religion and myth are often separated from one another. Religions are understood (rightly or wrongly) to make universal truth claims and to serve as the foundations upon which human knowledge of the world may proceed. Myths seldom make such grandiose claims, and indeed often exist in tacit acknowledgement that other myths exist and have similar explanatory power. One purpose of myth is to provide meaning to existence – to answer questions of meaning, to enrich our lives with fables, to rationalize natural phenomena, and to help us relate to our tribe and our world. Myths are not just stories about gods. Myths are traditional stories, whether wholly fictitious or merely fictionalized, which provide explanations for natural or social phenomena, and which embody particular values, beliefs, and norms.<sup>4</sup>

4 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Fifth Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press,



Mythology is, therefore, the original domain of the religious in human life. Culturally-specific stories emerged everywhere in the world in order to explain things of interest to that society, and such stories were often borrowed later and re-purposed by other cultures. This could be done because truth was understood by their authors more as a function of utility than as literal claims to knowledge that transcended human experience.

Religion and myth are, therefore, at their core innately allegorical and metaphorical. Myths represent a mapping of language onto an unknowable reality in a symbolic fashion, allowing human beings to shape their world in a purposive and meaningful way. For Nietzsche, the modern understanding of religion is a reductive act which sacrifices the original ambiguity of mythology.

James Clifford has noted this two-ness in the ethnographic text: 'A scientific ethnography normally establishes a privileged allegorical register it identifies as 'theory', 'interpretation', or 'explanation'. But once *all* meaningful levels in a text, including theories and interpretations, are recognized as allegorical, it becomes difficult to view one of them as privileged, accounting for the rest.' This is precisely the case of Nietzschean metaphor. On Nietzsche's view, all forms of human ideation are instances of mapping one domain onto another. Consequently, one domain of the mapping operation cannot be given the kind of absolute privilege conferred on domains by both the metaphysics of ontotheology and modern reductive, scientific realism.<sup>5</sup>

2002. 'Myth'.

- 5 Tim Murphy. *Nietzsche, Metaphor, Religion*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. 12.

We will have cause to revisit the nature of science in Nietzsche's thought in later chapters. For now, it suffices to understand that the inherent privileging of interpretive models that comes of assuming they are indicative of a deeper, literal truth about reality is always problematic for Nietzsche. It may, in fact, be the ultimate meaning behind the oft-quoted aphorism, 'There are no facts, only interpretations.'<sup>6</sup> Or put another way in a different notebook, "The same text allows of countless interpretations: there is no 'correct' interpretation."<sup>7</sup>

Things appear to have changed with the rise of Christianity – at least, this is a common view. One suspects that Nietzsche may have been profoundly sympathetic to the account given in Charles Freeman's book *The Closing of the Western Mind*, which chronicles the last days of the Classical world and the rise of Christian Orthodoxy.<sup>8</sup> Yet the problems that Nietzsche sees in Christianity are much older. We can break down the issues as: the Platonic and Idealistic influence (*i.e.*, metaphysical truth claims and both reality and values); and the Apocalyptic and Eschatological aspects of the Western faiths (*i.e.*, absolute good and evil, the progress of linear time, and the final judgement and divine dispensation). What bothers Nietzsche, then, are the absolute truth claims and the otherworldly focus of the Western faiths. Christianity was (and is) the largest exemplar of that tradition, but as Nietzsche well knew, they did not originate the ideas – for that we need to look to a potent combination of Persian, Hebrew, and Greek ideas (especially the Pythagorean and Platonic influences).

It was not religion itself which was problematic for Nietzsche, any more than it

6 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Nachlass* 7[60]; cf. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Rüdiger Bittner (ed.). Kate Sturge (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 139.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Nachlass* 1[120]; cf. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Rüdiger Bittner (ed.). Kate Sturge (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 63.

8 Charles Freeman. *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002.

was for the ancient Greek philosophers. Rather, it was the reduction of all truths to a single, literal *truth*, the denial of reason and tolerance, and the imposition of orthodoxy through the application of state power. In Freeman's account this was accomplished through the unification of clerical zealotry with the institutions of the Roman imperium, and later through the Roman Catholic Church, itself an heir both to the messages of Jesus and Paul, and to the architecture of the Roman state. Nietzsche gets at this death of reason in his usual polemical way in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

The sort of faith demanded (and often achieved) by early Christianity in the middle of a sceptical, southern, free-spirited world, a world that had century-long struggles between schools of philosophy behind and inside it, not to mention the education in tolerance given by the *imperium Romanum* – this faith is *not* the simple, rude, peon's faith with which a Luther or a Cromwell or some other northern barbarian of the spirit clung to its God and its Christianity. It is much closer to Pascal's faith, which has the gruesome appearance of a protracted suicide of reason – a tough, long-lived, worm-like reason that cannot be killed all at once and with a single stroke. From the beginning, Christian faith has been a sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, of all pride, of all self-confidence of the spirit; it is simultaneously enslavement and self-derision, self-mutilation.<sup>9</sup>

And so, Nietzsche is not opposed to religion, merely to certain *kinds* of religion, namely those which privilege certain truth claims and which have life-denying

9 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. §46. Rolf-Peter Horstmann & Judith Norman (eds). Judith Norman (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 44.

attributes. A significant handful of Nietzsche scholars have advanced a similar view, as have some scholars of religion, but approaching Nietzsche as a kind of modern-day mythologist seems an uncommon approach in the scholarship. But we need to reckon with this aspect of Nietzsche's project, as it neatly ties together so many other strains in his thinking. Consider, for example, the "philosophers of the future" which he broaches in *Beyond Good and Evil*. What are these philosophers to do? Try something new, chart new territory, create life-affirming values, and steer culture in a direction that can save it from the nihilism of modernity. As Laurence Lampert puts it,

in the midst of a dying Platonism that so disastrously prepared the religion that has given religion a bad name, it is necessary to understand religion as profoundly as Plato did and act as decisively as Plato did, though in an anti-Platonic way. It is necessary for religion once again to pass into the care of philosophy, for the philosopher once again to use religion as a means of education and nurture, as an instrument for the spiritual cultivation of a new sort of human being loyal to nature and the natural.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche also observes in *Beyond Good and Evil* that scholars have forgotten what religion is good for, and what it does for society and the individual, and in neglecting religion they have become blind to the ways that they carry on some of its worst biases and mistakes. The foundational ideas of Judeo-Christian faith can latch onto themselves and manifest in even the most stridently anti-religious writers (Marx is a noteworthy example, as I will address in chapter four). Nietzsche had noticed the difficulty with which scholars took religion seriously in his own day, observing that they

10 Laurence Lampert. *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. 124.

regard it “with an air of superiority, almost gracious amusement, which is sometimes mixed with a slight contempt”.<sup>11</sup> One legacy of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution was to undermine faith in the traditional religions of Europe, and indeed to undermine faith in any form of religion at all. Yet while they abandoned the basic tenets of their faith, they clung to many of its core assumptions, transferring their loyalty to various substitutes – the nation-state, scientific naturalism, human rights, *etc.* Everything from progressive theories of evolution to racist nationalisms to atheistic nihilism can be traced back to these first fateful steps into a post-Christian world-view. And all the while, scholars continued to think that they were overcoming the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition<sup>12</sup>. As I will argue from section 2.2 below and throughout the book, it is not Christianity which first makes these key errors, it is the vastly more ancient Persian faith of Zarathushtra, known in the West as Zoroastrianism; and as I will argue in later chapters, the apocalyptic legacies of this ancient faith were not so much overcome as transfigured into a secular faith which had nothing like the power of the original. It was Nietzsche’s contention that a new faith was needed to replace the lost one – that the “death of God” was not a positive step, but a crisis point, and that a faith more “faithful to the earth” was needed in order to redeem humanity and avert a nihilistic future (as in the “Last Man” imagery in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*).

### 2.1.1 The Rôle of Myth in Human Life

11 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 58. Rolf-Peter Horstmann & Judith Norman (eds). Judith Norman (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 51.

12 It becomes something of a mouthful, but perhaps Zoroastrian-Jewish-Christian-Islamic tradition is a more apt description, as these four major religions exist along a continuum of ideas and borrow heavily from one another. I will tend to refer to them jointly as the Western monotheistic faiths.

Before we can profitably explore the legacy of Zoroastrian thought for later Western religious traditions, we need to have a better grasp of the rôle played by myth in human life. As stated earlier, myths offer a purpose to life. And they do indeed give us truths and meanings, help us to understand things with which every human population must grapple – birth, death, and everything in between. But I would like now to complicate that, with the help of Joseph Campbell, in a way which brings it closer to the manner in which Nietzsche understands myth and religion alike.

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.<sup>13</sup>

To get a sense of what it is that human beings draw from myths, Campbell suggests that we "[r]ead other people's myths, not those of your own religion, because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts – but if you read the other ones, you begin to get the message."<sup>14</sup> And this, indeed, is what Nietzsche himself did throughout his life. We all know that he was steeped in Greek and Roman myths – he was, after all, a Classical philologist – and his discussions of Judaism have elicited much commentary. What is less well known is how widely read he was in Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and indeed in Zoroastrianism. In all of these he was

13 Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991. 4-5.

14 Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991. 5.

considering the ways in which their belief systems contributed to their way of life, and whether he considered what they did to be ultimately life-affirming. Like Campbell, Nietzsche was most concerned with that we can draw from myths in order to live well, and how we can best place ourselves in balance with nature and the universe.

Sarah Kofman gets at this quite succinctly in her study of metaphor in Nietzsche's work. In evaluating the output of the ancient Greek philosophers, Nietzsche was

looking neither to approve of them or to refute them, for one cannot refute conditions of existence... A system must be evaluated not according to its truth, but according to its force and beauty: it is a question of knowing whether what made the system possible was a superabundant or a needy form of life, whether the philosopher was affirming or denying life by it. Metaphorical style is the sign of a plenitude of life, just as 'demonstrative' style indicates a poverty of life.<sup>15</sup>

This contrast between life-affirming or life-denying ideas and cultural attributes would be a major focus throughout Nietzsche's career, and one to which we will return many times in this study.

One key difference between the older mythologies of the world and the monotheistic and universalistic faiths of the last couple millennia can be found in the relative power of the godhead. The more powerful the deity, the more power is taken from the human beings who create or sustain that deity. On this point both Ludwig Feuerbach and Nietzsche's projects are in agreement – humanity weakens itself when it

15 Sarah Kofman. *Nietzsche and Metaphor*. Translated by Duncan Large. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993. 19.

projects consciousness onto a transcendent and perfect plane of existence, and the mystical and ascetic traditions in particular excel at losing themselves in the idea of God.<sup>16</sup> This lies at the heart of Nietzsche's objections to this sort of religiosity, for as we shall see, Nietzsche's radical stance on individualism and human agency demands that this power be clawed back from the divinity and returned to the sovereign subject.

What has been surrendered to God for so long is also a major impetus for Nietzsche's project of revaluation. He argues in many places that the loss of God as the locus of ultimate belief and justification for our entire social, historical, and philosophical order is of profound significance. This, in fact, is the essential missing context for many readers of the famous 'death of God' scenes in *The Gay Science* and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! *We killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers. ... How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us?<sup>17</sup>

Lawrence Hatab addresses the rationale for this statement as well as I ever could: "To say that God is dead is not the same as saying there is no God. God has 'lived' in the past, but the modern world has 'killed' God in the wake of its scientific, secularized world-view. The madman is not attacking the faithful, rather he is addressing nonbelievers..."<sup>18</sup> And it is to those non-believers that Nietzsche speaks repeatedly

16 Tyler T. Roberts. *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. 58.

17 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. 125. Bernard Williams (ed.). Josefine Nauckhoff (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 119-120.

18 Lawrence J. Hatab. 'Appolo and Dionysus: Nietzsche Expressions of the Sacred'. In



through his works, understanding that it is not his rôle to undermine the remaining support for religion, but rather to show his fellow secularists that their own projects are fundamentally flawed until they grasp the extent to which the idea of God continues to guide their thinking.

Hatab goes on to note that “The Christian God – conceived as a unified, eternal, rational, benevolent creator – represented the metaphysical foundation of a stable origin and guarantee of truth that has operated in all areas of Western intellectual culture, in morality, politics, philosophy, even science”.<sup>19</sup> This much is true, and it is also true that – as resident in a Christian culture – it was to Christianity that Nietzsche most often addressed himself. One should not assume, however, that this foundation stone of Western culture *began* with Christianity, and as I will begin to argue in the next section below, not only Judaism preceded Christian universalism, but Zoroastrianism preceded that, and the ideas that led to the empowering of a single, transcendent deity that can serve as the root force to all that follows can be found first in Zoroastrianism. The Christian God is a direct, linear descendant of an archetype fashioned on the steppes of Central Asia.

Returning to the death of God, it is clear that the consequences of this tectonic shift have been felt long after Nietzsche’s death and continue to trouble the Western world in the contemporary age. While some lose themselves in nihilistic consumption, others cling tenaciously to the last shadows of God and hope to restore a transcendent faith that most have simply outgrown. It is, I argue, precisely this that Nietzsche foresaw in the century to come when he spoke of great wars and calamities – not, as

*Nietzsche and the Gods*. Weaver Santaniello (ed.). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. 45.

19 Lawrence J. Hatab. ‘Appolo and Dionysus: Nietzsche Expressions of the Sacred’. In *Nietzsche and the Gods*. Weaver Santaniello (ed.). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. 45.

many has supposed, merely the nationalistic excesses of the early twentieth century. We are far from having passed through the eye of the needle here, and much additional bloodshed awaits us so long as we delay the reckoning with this new world that science has bequeathed to us. As Nietzsche himself put in, through the mouth of the madman:

Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worth of it? There has never been a greater deed – and whoever is born after us will on account of this history belong to a higher history and all history up to now!<sup>20</sup>

The death of God is not simply a catastrophe for human societies, though as Nietzsche rightly points out it is certainly that. It is also an opportunity. And here lies the genesis of Nietzsche's project of revaluation, and of his proposed return to a mythic understanding of humanity and its place in the universe. The Biblical tradition and the Zoroastrian-Jewish-Christian-Islamic God all belong to a particular class of mythology that has inherently life-denying attributes. Campbell helpfully elucidates two distinct orders of mythology: "There is the mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you're a part. And there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society. You are not simply a natural man, you are a member of a particular group."<sup>21</sup> As a sharp critic of nationalism, racism, and chauvinism, Nietzsche comes down especially hard on the sociological order of mythology to which Christianity belongs. Such myths are inherently exclusive – there is an in-group and an out-group. "For example, the ten commandments say, 'Thou shalt

20 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. 125. Bernard Williams (ed.). Josefine Nauckhoff (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 120.

21 Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991. 28-29.

not kill.’ Then the next chapter says, ‘Go into Canaan and kill everybody in it.’ That is a bounded field.”<sup>22</sup>

One of the main purposes of this book is to show that whilst Nietzsche is a critic of the sociological order of mythology, he is quite devoted to the nature-oriented order, and that many of his key concepts – the Will to Power, the Eternal Recurrence, and Overhumanity – are actually intended to be taken as mythic concepts that can empower individuals to live in harmony with their own natures and with the natural world. I will address the Will to Power here and there in shorter sections, but the other two ideas will be explored in dedicated chapters, which will not only show their mythic roots, but also their relation to the science of Nietzsche’s day (since he believed that any new myths that humanity were to fashion must not contradict the evidence of the natural sciences), and how they contradict the basic orientation of Zoroastrian (and hence Judeo-Christian-Islamic) civilization.

## 2.2 Zarathushtra and the “Original Errors of Religion”

In order satisfactorily to make the points I wish to make in this section, and to serve as a kind of opening shot that justifies this entire line of research, I would like to quote at length a passage from Nietzsche’s semi-autobiographical sketch *Ecce Homo*. I will do so in pieces, taking each segment in turn and showing its significance to the present study and to Nietzsche’s project overall.

I have not been asked as I should have been asked what the name

22 Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991. 28.

*Zarathustra* means coming from *my* mouth, the mouth of the first immoralist: because it is precisely the opposite of what constitutes that Persian's monumental and unique place in history. Zarathustra was the first to see the struggle of good and evil as the true wheel in the machinery of things, – morality translated into metaphysics as force, cause, goal in itself, is *his* work.<sup>23</sup>

What we see here is precisely what motivates the present volume. It is with the Persian prophet Zarathushtra that the moral world-order was first conceived. He painted a stark picture of cosmic forces of light and dark struggling for dominance, and gave all human beings a choice – would you serve Truth or Lie? Nietzsche, therefore, seizes upon the Persian prophet as his spokesman precisely to make him undo the errors of his original teachings, and to set us free from the fantasy of a universal morality. More than that, Zarathushtra opened the way to an apocalyptic vision of linear time ending in a final judgement of souls, and Zoroastrianism was the first of the world's religions to make such claims in a compelling and durable fashion. This, too, is problematic for Nietzsche, and is the justification for his counter-myth of the Eternal Recurrence.

Continuing our foray into Nietzsche's explanation for his choice of spokesman:

But this question [what does that name Zarathustra mean] essentially answers itself. Zarathustra *created* this fateful error of morality: this means that he has to be the first to *recognize* it. Not only has he spent longer and had more experience here than any other thinker – the whole of history is in fact the experimental

23 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo*. 'Why I Am A Destiny' 3. Aaron Ridley & Judith Norman (eds). Judith Norman (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 145.

refutation of the principle of the so-called 'moral world order' –: more importantly, Zarathustra is more truthful than any other thinker. His teaching is the only one that considers truthfulness to be the highest virtue – that means the opposite of the *cowardice* of 'idealists', who take flight in the face of reality; Zarathustra has more courage in his body than all thinkers put together. To speak the truth and *shoot well with an arrow*, this is the Persian virtue.<sup>24</sup>

The question of truth is an important one, for Nietzsche as well as for Zarathushtra. The latter did, indeed, make it the highest virtue, commending it many times in the *Gathas*. He also attached cosmic significance to it by essentially referring to the forces of good itself as Truth and the forces of darkness as Lie. Zarathushtra spoke the truth as he saw it more than three thousand years ago. Nietzsche sees a different truth – that we live in denial of the death of God and the rise of contingent science – and so he resurrects the ultimate prophet of truth to show us the way out of our moral blinders.

Yet whilst this passage points directly to the reasons for Nietzsche's choice, in fact the question of why Nietzsche chose this figure has been left untouched in the secondary literature until now. How is it that Nietzsche scholars have, for an entire century, utterly neglected the significance of the historical Zarathushtra to Nietzsche? In all the classic studies of Nietzsche's philosophy, from Walter Kaufmann to Richard Schacht, Arthur Danto to R. J. Hollingdale, the prophet merits not a word. Laurence Lampert's otherwise brilliant study of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* deals with the original figure entirely through recourse to Nietzsche's own statements on the subject, *i.e.*, the passage I am quoting in this section.<sup>25</sup> Stanley Rosen's no less edifying but considerably

24 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo*. 'Why I Am A Destiny' 3. Aaron Ridley & Judith Norman (eds). Judith Norman (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 145.

25 Laurence Lampert. *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

less clear study deals with the matter in a stunningly-insulting way by skipping it entirely and reading a parallel to Jesus: "We first encounter the prophet in his thirtieth year: the age of Christ as his mission comes to fulfilment."<sup>26</sup> He then goes on to make the important connexion to the Greek age of wisdom (40) in order to account for the long sojourn in the mountains before Nietzsche's Zarathustra comes back down to preach again.

But what is missed in this account? The Persian prophet Zarathushtra was *also* thirty years old at the time of his awakening to the message of Ahura Mazda! And just as with the revelations of Christ, Nietzsche wishes to show that the teaching that Zarathushtra then imparted to his followers were the half-baked delusions of youthful exuberance, lacking the hard tempering of later reflexion and self-discovery. It is this that his resurrected figure is meant to share with us. My point here is that the secondary literature, when it mentions the Persian original at all, deals with him solely through the medium of Nietzsche's own words, and just as often skips it entirely and takes the figure as a stand-in for Jesus or Plato. As the following section will show, this is fairly inexcusable.

Have I been understood? . . . The self-overcoming of morality from out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of moralists into their opposites – *into me* – that is what the name Zarathustra means coming from my mouth.<sup>27</sup>

And the self-overcoming of ignorance about the Zoroastrian contribution to Western thought – that is what Zarathushtra means coming from *my* mouth.

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986.

26 Stanley Rosen. *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004. 23.

27 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo*. 'Why I Am A Destiny' 3. Aaron Ridley & Judith Norman (eds). Judith Norman (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 145.

### 2.2.1 Nietzsche's Exposure to the Historical Zarathushtra

The figure of Zarathustra, Nietzsche's version of the Persian prophet Zarathushtra, was in some small sense a wholly-original creation, but is better understood within the context of the historical figure upon whom he was based.<sup>28</sup> We can better understand the inversion of values that Nietzsche's figure represents when we see exactly what were those values and ideals that Zarathushtra originally preached. And we do know that Nietzsche was aware of the Persian prophet, likely from more than one source but one in particular we know directly. The anthropologist and cultural historian Friedrich von Hellwald published a two-volume history of the world's major cultures, including a stunning amount of detail on many of them. Especially illuminating for us is the large chapter on Iranian and Indian (Vedic) religious culture.

This book was to have a profound impact on the development of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, with many ideas and phrases borrowed almost verbatim, and the basic characterization of Zarathushtra (which borders on the hagiographic) was undoubtedly the starting point for Nietzsche's own admiration for the man. Thomas Brobjer, in his exhaustive study of Nietzsche's reading and intellectual development, notes that "Nietzsche's reading of this book appears not to have been examined in spite of the fact that it probably was of immense significance to him."<sup>29</sup> The present study is a

28 Throughout this text I will be using the more phonetically-accurate spelling Zarathushtra for the historical figure, and Nietzsche's spelling – which drops the second 'h' – to refer to his own character. Exceptions to this rule will be in the citation of other author's works, where I will generally use the form that they used. You will also occasionally see the name rendered in its Greek form, as Zoroaster, again generally in quoting other author's works.

29 Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography*.

beginning to this examination, though many more sections of it could be mined for insights. In particular, Nietzsche's long consideration of Buddhism, Hinduism, and even Confucianism many have been influenced by the sections in this book that deal with those cultures.

I will return numerous times to this book in order to show places where Hellwald's ideas directly impacted Nietzsche's work, but I would like to give here a quick peek at the shadow Hellwald's material cast on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I will do so by quoting from the paragraph where Hellwald introduces Zarathushtra, and then placing the first few lines of Nietzsche's Prologue to his own Zarathustra's mission.

Zarathustra, the great prophet of the Iranians... was from Azerbaijan and born in the city of Urmi beside the lake of the same name... In his 30th year of life he left his home, moved east into the province of Aria and spent ten years in the solitude of the mountains engaged with composition of the Zend-Avesta. After this time passed, he turned to Balkh to announce his new teachings and claimed a divine mission.<sup>30</sup>

Note the way that Nietzsche paraphrases Hellwald here: "When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude and for ten years he did not tire of it. But at last his heart transformed..."<sup>31</sup> Thus does Nietzsche launch the prophet's new divine mission and open his most influential work. The parallels between these two texts ought to be

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. 83-84.

30 Friedrich von Hellwald. *Culturgeschichte in ihrer natürlichen Entwicklung bis zur Gegenwart*. Augburg: Lampart & Company, 1875. Volume I. 128. [Translation is mine.]

31 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Zarathustra's Prologue: 1. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 3.



clear to the reader.

The original incarnation of Zarathushtra was also known to Nietzsche, and to a wider European readership, from a couple of other directions. Firstly, he was known and respected in a great many traditions and guises. And secondly, he had been rediscovered and reintroduced to Europe early in Nietzsche's education when a copy of the Zend Avesta was acquired from the Parsis of India and translated. I will deal with each of these sources in turn.

First of all, in his guise as Zoroaster, the Persian prophet had a stellar reputation in the Classical world, and of this Nietzsche could not fail to be well aware given his profession. "Writers from the time of Xanthus of Lydia in the fifth century BC onwards accorded him huge respect as 'the greatest religious legislator of ancient times'".<sup>32</sup> Considered to be a philosopher, a mathematician, an astrologer, a wizard, or all of the above, the name given to the priests of his faith – the Magi – was adopted into Greek and became our word for magic. This identification of Zoroaster with magic persisted for some time. "In the fifteenth century, at the height of the Renaissance, the head of the new Platonic Academy in Florence, Marsilio Ficino, argued for a pagan theological tradition, descending from Zoroaster via Hermes Trismegistus to Orpheus and Pythagoras and culminating in Plato."<sup>33</sup> The Magi themselves also appeared in a story with which many are familiar, but without ever noticing the presence of Zoroastrians in it. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter two, we read that "In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we

32 Paul Kriwaczek. *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas That Changed the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. 37.

33 Yuri Stoyanov. *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*. New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2000. 22.

observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”<sup>34</sup> In the original Greek of this text the word used for the so-called “Wise Men” is Magi, thus indicating both astrologers and – presumably and likely intentionally – Zoroastrian priests.

Although Greek sources divulge relatively little about the actual beliefs of Zoroaster or his devotees, nevertheless his influence is thought by some “to have shaped the views of philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato.”<sup>35</sup> The *Historia Scholastica* by Peter Comestor, composed in the twelfth century, credited Zoroaster with the invention of magic. The Renaissance kept up this identification of Zoroaster with magic, “and it was in this shape that he entered the legends of Faust, who himself could be styled the ‘second Zoroaster’.”<sup>36</sup> Yet his connexion with the Greeks and philosophy were not forgotten, and he is sometimes cited as one of the figures in Raphael’s enigmatic fresco *The School of Athens*.<sup>37</sup> It was not under the Enlightenment era that Zarathushtra began to be recognized more sensibly as the founding prophet of the Iranian religion, and a significant work by Thomas Hyde appeared in 1700 which collected every reference available to him in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after this point, Zarathushtra began to appear in European arts. Voltaire cited him as one of the transmitters of God’s natural laws, and Mozart included him in *The Magic Flute* (as Sorastro).<sup>39</sup>

34 Matthew 2:1-2. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 1669.

35 Paul Kriwaczek. *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas That Changed the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. 37.

36 Yuri Stoyanov. *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*. New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2000. 22.

37 Michael Lehanas. ‘The School of Athens, Who is Who?’. <http://www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/Science/en/SchoolAthens.html>

38 Paul Kriwaczek. *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas That Changed the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. 37. The work in question was *Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum eorumque Magorum*.

39 Paul Kriwaczek. *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas That Changed the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. 38.

The other major source of information available in Nietzsche's day on Zarathushtra and the religion of the ancient Iranians came through the translations efforts of one Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil du Perron, an ambitious and gifted young Frenchman who in 1754 set out on a lengthy and fascinating adventure in South Asia. He had been intrigued by a few scraps of material taken from the *Vendidad*, a portion of the *Avesta*, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism. After many trials, he managed to find instruction in the Pahlavi script and Middle Persian, as well as Avestan itself, and acquired access to the text of the *Avesta* through the Parsi community of Zoroastrians in India. His adventure is retold in gripping prose and some detail in Paul Kriwaczek's book *In Search of Zarathustra*, and will not be related here. The important thing is that knowledge of the content of the *Avesta* was widespread in philological circles as Nietzsche was entering school, and was translated into several European languages, including German.

In this context, I find Kriwaczek's speculation to be entirely plausible:

Nietzsche may well have heard of the Persian prophet at the very start of [his second year as a student of philology at the University of Bonn], though the event is nowhere recorded. He would have learned that the newly translated Zoroastrian texts saw in the struggle between good and evil 'the essential wheel in the working of things', and though it took a long time to come to the surface, the impact of the discovery was profound and disturbing.<sup>40</sup>

The appearance of Zarathushtra in an academic context, and the excited discussion around his ideas and their antiquity that was then current, could very easily have

40 Paul Kriwaczek. *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas That Changed the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. 49.

reached a young Nietzsche's ears in any number of ways. That exposure could also have helped to launch him into a life-long pursuit of the question of good and evil.

### 2.3 The Aryan Roots of Zoroastrianism

The advent of Zoroastrianism represents a revolution in world religious thought, and its influence can be felt in the most fundamental elements of the world's largest and most pervasive religions (Christianity and Islam). It is, in fact, easily argued that this little-known ancient religion is both the oldest of the prophetic, revealed religions, and marks the true beginnings of Western civilization. But like all religions of the world, it came about through an evolutionary process of intellectual accretion and historical contingency, and at its earliest stages was a part of the shared Aryan (Indo-European) tradition that eventually gave rise to Hinduism. In their most enduring forms, these two religions differ dramatically in key areas, and before we can address the Zoroastrian ideals that would inform the Western world-view, we must first recognize this earlier divergence.

Aryan religion emerged on the southern steppes of Central Asia, somewhere to the north of modern-day Iran and perhaps encompassing the Pontic-Caspian steppes as far as modern Ukraine.<sup>41</sup> It took a recognizable shape in the centuries following the migration westward of populations that eventually settled most of Europe. The rest migrated southward in stages, with perhaps an intermediate settlement along the upper Oxus (Amu Darya) river at what is to-day the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex,

41 Richard C. Foltz. *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World's Religions*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2004. 6.

divided between the modern nation-states of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.<sup>42</sup> These remaining peoples would eventually split, with half becoming the ancestors of the Iranians and moving towards the south-west, and the other half heading south-east through the Khyber Pass and founding the Vedic culture of northern India. This split, unlike the earlier, was rooted in profound religious disagreement.<sup>43</sup>

As a pastoral nomadic people, the Aryans lacked elaborate temples for religious service, and rituals took place outdoors – a fact which helps to highlight the strong bond then existing between man and nature. As with other native religions, theirs grew out of a powerful symbolic relationship with the natural world, and many important deities put a face on the elements. (For example, Mithra was connected to the rain, Agni to fire, and Mazda to the sun and stars.) Fire was to prove especially important in the Aryan religion, a circumstance which carried into Brahmanism (the ancestor to Hinduism) and which persists in Zoroastrianism to the present. Agni's presence was felt in the existence of fire anywhere, from the sacrificial altar to the lowliest cook-hearth.<sup>44</sup>

The naturalistic basis of Aryan religion can also be seen in its use of plant-based hallucinogens during rituals, and in its reverence for animal life. The plant that gave rise to *soma* for the Brahmins and *haoma* for the Zoroastrians was in fact a divine essence that looked out for the people and preserved them from famine. Zarathushtra maintained the tradition of *haoma* use in Zoroastrianism, but criticized the intoxicating aspects of it. Identification of the plant originally meant has long eluded scholars and practitioners alike, and there are no psychoactive properties in the form used in ritual

42 Prods Oktor Skjærvø. 'Avestan Society'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*. Touraj Daryaee (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 57-58.

43 See, for example, Foltz, *Spirituality*.

44 Karen Armstrong. *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. New York: Anchor Books, 2006. 4.

during recorded memory.<sup>45</sup>

Animal sacrifice lay at the heart of religious services, but not in the frivolous and blood-thirsty ways one might picture from bad Hollywood movies. All life was precious and the taking of life was a dramatic act that was never undertaken lightly. The sacrifice was intended to replenish the life-energies of the cosmos (which itself began in an act of sacrifice, as many ancient peoples believed). Most commonly, grains or curds were used in minor sacrifices, but animal sacrifice was a prominent feature of Aryan religious life. The Aryans lived close to their cattle and relied upon them for sustenance, which inspired a certain reverence for them. The animals sacrificed were not wasted, but consumed by the worshippers.<sup>46</sup> The Aryans, so far as we can tell, only consumed flesh that was sanctified through ritual slaughter and religious rites, and there is some cause to suspect that vegetarianism was an ideal (though difficult to realise on the steppes). Echoes of this dynamic may be found in everything from the kosher laws of Judaism to the status of cattle in Hinduism.

Moreover, the killing of animals outside of sacrifice was a matter of special religious significance in the Zoroastrian world-view. It in fact was a part of their dualistic vision of creation itself, in that "killing a noxious creature [such as a snake] is in effect killing Angra Mainyu, but killing a good creature [outside of ritual sacrifice] is (at least symbolically) killing Ahura Mazda."<sup>47</sup> That is, "in killing a noxious Ahrimanic creature the power that the Evil Spirit is able to exercise over the Ahuric creation is lessened. Killing an Ahuric creature, on the other hand, increases Ahrimanic power

45 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 46 and 167n.

46 Karen Armstrong. *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. New York: Anchor Books, 2006. 5-6.

47 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 84.

since a struggle for space is being fought in the *getig* realm.<sup>4849</sup> It may be on this basis that we can see the definitive split between the Vedic and Avestan (Indian and Iranian) people taking shape, since the former were cattle rustlers and raiders who delighted in mayhem and slaughter. Treatment of animals on the whole is an area of some importance to the Aryan and later Zoroastrian ethical position. Only certain animals could be killed at all – others, and including all young, were protected. Animals could not be made to work too hard, and could not be beaten (dogs in particular are mentioned). Those being killed must be stunned first.<sup>50</sup> Again the parallels with later Kosher laws might be noted here.

In a critical divergence, the Aryans who were to settle in northern India either abandoned a linear understanding held by the aboriginal Aryans in favour of a Dravidian-influenced cyclical viewpoint, or they maintained and expanded upon a cyclical view of time held by the ancestral Aryans – lacking records from those earliest times, it is impossible to know for sure. But we can take Zoroastrianism as both a bridge between the traditions of the East and the West, and perhaps as the originator of a fundamental difference. In the religions of the East, whether we mean those of India (the Brahmans & Hindus, Jain, and Buddhists), of China (Taoism), or Japan (Shinto), we find a picture of the world that is full of reverence, not condemnation. As Joseph Campbell put it, “the world was not to be reformed, but only known, revered, and its

48 Angra Mainyu and Ahriman both refer to the Evil force in Zoroastrian theology, whereas Spenta Mainyu and Ahura Mazda both refer to the Good force. Ahura Mazda is the chief diety (and on some interpretations the only one), who is accorded responsibility for the creation of the world. Getig and Menog are Middle Persian terms that refer to the two modes of existence – Getig is the material world, and Menog is the immaterial realm. On the latter, see the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article listed in the bibliography.

49 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 84-85.

50 Michael Stausberg. *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction*. Translated by Margret Preisler-Weller. London: Equinox Publishing, 2008. 54.

laws obeyed. Personal and social disorder stemmed from departure from those cosmic laws, and reform could be achieved only by a return to the unchanging root.”<sup>51</sup>

And depart the Zoroastrians did from those Aryan roots they share with Hinduism, by laying down a premise which was to be echoed in all subsequent monotheistic faiths in the Abrahamic tradition – that the world has fallen, has been corrupted, and that it must be redeemed through adherence to the message of the prophet. It is hard to overstate what a novel proposition this was in the ancient world. Taking the universe as eternal and perfect-in-itself was hardly unique to the East and South Asian religions, but could be found throughout Europe, Africa, and the Americas prior to the spread and eventual domination of the monotheistic religions. We can see much similarity between the Eastern religions and the philosophical orientation of Greek and Roman thinkers, and this fundamentally differing approach to time and nature underlay some of the conflict and discord in the later Roman era, as the older pagan world-view came into uneasy coexistence with Christianity.

The slow migration of the Aryans, both to Europe as well as to Iran and India, remained a subject of academic interest from the time it was first hypothesized on the basis of linguistic evidence in the eighteenth century, all the way to the present, with a particular prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We need not here revisit the ways in which Germanic nationalists repurposed the Aryan idea to build up their supposed genetic superiority to speakers of Slavic and Semitic languages, or how those language families were all transmuted into biological races via a perversely ahistorical “race science”. But it may be of interest at various points in the present volume, given the context in which Nietzsche was living and writing – a Bismarkian and

51 Joseph Campbell. *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*. NY: Penguin Compass, 1964. 191.



hyper-nationalist German-speaking Europe. And, as a Classical philologist and obvious Hellenophile, I wonder how Nietzsche might have taken Hellwald's observation that the Hellenes represented a "debased" form of the Aryan culture!<sup>52</sup>

### 2.3.1 A Fateful Split: The Indo-Aryans and the Iranians

The basic Aryan views on divinity involved both *amesha* (or *ahura*) and *daeua*, representing two distinct classes of divine beings. The distinction was to become critical after the revelations of Zarathustra, who was to associate the *daeua* with evil intent, and as Zoroastrianism developed they came to be seen as false gods. As to the *amesha*, as the faith developed the sense of these beings as gods (in the sense normally understood) faded, to the point where Zoroastrianism took on a quasi-monotheistic or dualistic character, but initially it is likely that what became the "divine Heptad" of Zarathustra were tribal gods of the semi-nomadic Aryans. It is worth noting that, before he began his prophetic mission, and uniquely amongst the world's prophets, Zarathustra was already a priest in another religion (that of the Aryans).

Major deities amongst the Aryans<sup>53</sup> include Agni and Soma near the top (though there is, as such, no strictly hierarchical representation of the gods, these two are of critical importance to both every day existence and ritual actions). Agni was associated with fire – both fire in its mundane sense and in its ritual / sacrificial uses. This also connected him with heat and with the sun.<sup>54</sup> So far so good – the sun and light have

52 Friedrich von Hellwald. *Culturgeschichte in ihrer natürlichen Entwicklung bis zur Gegenwart*. Second Edition. Augburg: Lampart & Company, 1883. Volume I. 156.

53 I am here using the Vedic forms of their names, as preserved in the *Rig Veda*.

54 Gavin Flood. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 46.

been acknowledged as the source of divine goodness by countless faiths previous to the Aryan legacies. (See, for example, the Hymn to Aten attributed to the Pharaoh Akhenaten from the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE – “Splendid you appear on the horizon of heaven, O living Aten, creator of life! When you have dawned on the eastern horizon, You fill every land with your beauty.”<sup>55</sup>) Soma is not the plant of the same name, though that substance was a way of accessing his power.<sup>56</sup> “Like Agni, Soma is a deity who intercedes between man and the gods and is regarded as a link between the human and divine, the pillar of the sky and the bringer of ecstasy and understanding of the divine realms.”<sup>57</sup>

Beyond the clear parallels these gods offer us with the sacred fire and *haoma* use of the Zoroastrian faith, we need now to consider the probable basis for the split in the southward-migrating Aryans. Indra was a warrior god, beloved of the warrior caste of the Aryans, who wielded a thunderbolt club and was accompanied the Maruts, a class of minor storm gods. Indra embodied the warrior ethos of Aryan society at this stage, as well as that of the conquering Vedic society; his power would have accompanied his warriors on cattle-raids against the surrounding peoples of Central Asia and into the subcontinent.<sup>58</sup>

A heroic age had begun. Might was right; chieftains sought gain  
and glory; and bards celebrated aggression, reckless courage, and

55 ‘Great Hymn to Aten’. Translated by R. J. Williams. In D. Winton Thomas (ed.). *Documents from Old Testament Times*. London: Thomas Nelson, 1958. 182.

“Thou dost appear beautiful on the horizon of heaven, living thou who wast the first to live. When thou hast risen on the eastern horizon, Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty.”

56 Remember that *haoma* and *soma* are synonymous in our Indian and Iranian descendants of the Aryans.

57 Gavin Flood. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 46.

58 Gavin Flood. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 46.

military prowess. The old Aryan religion had preached reciprocity, self-sacrifice, and kindness to animals. This was no longer appealing to the cattle rustlers, whose hero was the dynamic Indra, the dragon slayer, who rode in a chariot upon the clouds of heaven.<sup>59</sup>

As the Rig Veda itself notes,

Heroes with noble horses, fain for battle, selected warriors, call on me in combat. I Indra Maghavan, excite the conflict; I stir the dust, Lord of surpassing vigour.

All this I did. The Gods' own conquering power never impedeth me whom none opposeth. When lauds and Soma juice have made me joyful, both the unbounded regions are affrighted.<sup>60</sup>

And it is with the observation of this shift, from kindness to brutality, that a young Zarathushtra was called to his mission.

Those tradition-minded Aryans who were disgusted by the soma-fuelled aggression of the raiders found a voice in Zarathushtra, and he in turn found his voice in the revelations of Ahura Mazda. On a fateful morning during the spring festival, Zarathushtra awoke at dawn and went to the river to collect water for the day's sacrifice. After immersing himself in the water to refresh himself, he emerged to see a radiant being standing upon the shore. This was Vohu Manah ('Good Purpose'), who led Zarathushtra into the presence of Ahura Mazda, greatest of the *ahuras*. There he was told to "mobilize his people in a holy war against terror and violence."<sup>61</sup> This tale held

59 Karen Armstrong. *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*. New York: Anchor Books, 2006. 8.

60 Ralph T. H. Griffith. *The Rig Veda*. New York: Book of the Month Club, 1992. 4.42.5-6. 228.

61 Karen Armstrong. *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*.

the promise of a new beginning for the Aryans, and henceforth I will refer to this branch of the Aryan family as the Iranians.

His vision convinced Zarathushtra that Ahura Mazda was not merely one of the *ahuras*, but the greatest of them all. "Himself uncreated, Ahura Mazda was the first cause of everything in the universe that is good, whether human or divine, animate or inanimate, abstract or concrete".<sup>62</sup> Indra was, on this reckoning, demoted to one of the *daevas* – an evil spirit rather than a mighty god. And it is worth noting that the split thus inaugurated was a two-way one. The Vedic term for the chief gods – *deva* – is etymologically related to the Avestan term *daeva*, whereas the Vedic *asura* is related to the Avestan *ahura*. The Brahman mythology has both of these classes of divine being born from a creator-god, Prajāpati, but has neatly inverted their rôle in the cosmic scheme.<sup>63</sup> There can be, to my mind, no clearer an indication of mutual rejection of the other group's world-view than this.

### 2.3.2 The Iranian Religion of Zoroastrianism

The ethical orientation of Zoroastrianism completes this rejection by establishing a rigid, and often quite specific, series of laws regulating right and wrong. This makes it an ethical religion in the strictly technical sense of a faith with a legal code and a system of rewards and punishments for how they are observed. Ethical religions had, to this point in history, been relatively uncommon – the Egyptian religion evolved in this

New York: Anchor Books, 2006. 9.

62 Norman Cohn. *Cosmos, Chaos & the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*. Second Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 81.

63 Gavin Flood. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 45.

direction, but there are few other contemporaneous manifestations. One set of rules having its basis in the oldest Zoroastrian texts, the hymns of Zarathushtra himself, is likely a response to the raiding of the Indra-led Aryans. "These rules attach great importance to property and establish possessions, food, and family as key values."<sup>64</sup>

What of the religion of Zoroastrianism was actually introduced by Zarathushtra himself is a matter of debate. Some view a huge amount of its ritual and legal tradition as originating with Zarathushtra and being held as a form of "oral law", akin to the way many traditional Jews believe that the arguments of the Talmud go all the way back to Moses. But what is most commonly agreed as having the particular antiquity and style that fit the figure of Zarathushtra (some time between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) are the *Gathas* – a series of seventeen hymns that lie at the heart of the *Yasna* liturgical ritual of the *Avesta*. The tiny surviving priesthood of the Zoroastrian faith in India and Iran still recite these hymns every day from memory. They were, in fact, preserved for many centuries in an entirely oral form before finally being committed to writing. Their original meaning was actually obscured for a long time, since the spoken language had changed dramatically – from Avestan to Old and Middle Persian – by the time they were written down, but their precise recitation was held in itself to have power.<sup>65</sup> Another parallel here can be seen in the way that Torah or the Qur'an are recited, with the words themselves held to be the actual divine words of God himself, and holding ritual significance irrespective of the speaker's ability to understand them.

The forms of the *Gathas* are metrical and not unlike the Hebrew Psalms, and also like them include some highly personal details about the speaker – with many of them

64 Michael Stausberg. *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction*. Translated by Margret Preisler-Weller. London: Equinox Publishing, 2008. 43.

65 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 2.

taking the form of a dialogue between Zarathushtra and Ahura Mazda. "Although they are not primarily doctrinal treatises, or instructional compositions, they contain much that forms the basis of the Zoroastrian religion, and therefore they can rightly be said to embody the essential truths of Zoroastrianism as Zarathushtra would have understood and taught them."<sup>66</sup> They also go a long way towards helping to date the revelations of Zarathushtra, since not only is the language itself quite ancient – having diverged relatively little from the Sanskrit of the Vedas, and having a much smaller resemblance to the later Iranian languages – but the context fits that of a pastoral people on the steppes of Central Asia, and not to the highly urban culture of the later Iranian peoples. The basic concerns with property and theft, truth and falsehood, the *daevas* and the *ahuras*, all serve to connect it with the Aryan myths that would inform Vedic Indian civilization, and in particular a pointed rejection of many aspects of that world-view.

Zoroastrian theology/cosmology establishes a split between two forces, *Asha* and *Druj*. The former has variously been translated as Truth or "cosmic order", and manifests in the physical world as light. This, you will recall, develops out of the Aryan worship of Agni and the sacred fire, and fire would take on an especially prominent rôle in Zoroastrian worship. *Asha* thus underlies not only the cosmic source of goodness and life, but also informs the social world of "morals, politics and ritual: the orderly and truthful behaviour and communal life as well as the orderly implementation of ritual. Those who conform to the 'true order' in their thoughts, words and deeds, are 'practising Asha'; they are 'Asha-practitioners'."<sup>67</sup> We will have cause to return to this

66 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 2.

67 Michael Stausberg. *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction*. Translated by Margret Preisler-Weller. London: Equinox Publishing, 2008. 27.

theme many times in the present text, and indeed the next chapter has it as its focus.

The form of the godhead and the divine Heptad surrounding Ahura Mazda are some of the trickiest concepts for outsiders to grasp, since they are rather unique points. Aryan cosmology had already held that in the beginning there had been only one plant, one animal, and one human (and that all else sprang from them). As he reflected upon the traditions of his faith, the prophet "came to apprehend a similar original uniqueness in the divine sphere, namely that there was only one God, eternal and uncreated, who was the source of all other beneficent divine beings."<sup>68</sup> This God was Ahura Mazda, who "had created the world and all that is good in it through his Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, who is both his active agent and yet one with him, indivisible and yet distinct."<sup>69</sup> So far this does not sound unlike the Christian Holy Spirit or the neo-Platonic Jewish notion of the divine *Logos* (the co-eternal Word of God which acts on the world in his interests). From *Yasna* 44 of the *Avesta*:

This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Lord. Who in the beginning, at creation, was Father of Order [*asha*]? Who established the course of sun and stars? Through whom does the moon wax, then wane? This and yet more, O Mazda, I seek to know. This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Lord. Who has upheld the earth from below, and the heavens from falling? Who [sustains] the waters and plants? Who harnessed swift steeds to wind and clouds? Who, O Mazda, is creator of Good Purpose? This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Lord. What

68 Mary Boyce. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 12.

69 Mary Boyce. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 12.

craftsman created light and darkness? What craftsman created both sleep and activity? Through whom exist dawn, noon and eve, which remind the worshipper of his duty? ... This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Lord. Who fashioned Devotion together with Power? Who made the son respectful in heed of the father? By these [questions], O Mazda, I help [men] to discern Thee as Creator of all things through the Holy Spirit... This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Lord. Who will be victorious to protect through Thy teaching those who are the progeny in my house? As Healer of the world, promise to us a judge. Then let Harkening come to him with Good Purpose, O Mazda – to him whomsoever Thou dost wish.<sup>70</sup>

But Zoroastrianism is traditionally considered a dualistic faith – though this is disputed in some traditions and by some scholars. The distinction between dualistic faiths (including the Gnostic traditions) and strict monotheism is a tricky theological issue that we need not dwell on, save for the ways in which it impacts the question of good and evil – a key touchstone issue for Nietzsche. Mircea Eliade did not take Zoroastrian theology as dualistic, “since Ahura Mazda is not confronted by an anti-god”, but this is not an altogether clear point.<sup>71</sup> To illustrate the level of confusion in Zoroastrian theology, as well as the difficulty of rendering a clear translation from the Avestan original, I would like to present a single verse from the *Avesta* in five different versions:

70 Mary Boyce. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 34. Parentheses in original are here changed to brackets in order to maintain stylistic consistency.

71 Mircea Eliade. *A History of Religious Ideas, Volume 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 310.



(Boyce:) "Truly there are two primal spirits, twins renowned to be in conflict. In thought and word, in act they are two: the better and the bad."

(Kellens:) "I wish to proclaim the two fundamental state of spirit, which are known as twin dreams at the time of the thought and the speech; at the time of the act, there are two acts..."

(Humbach:) "These are the two spirits present in the primal stage of one's existence, twin who have become famed (manifesting themselves as) the two kinds of dreams..."

(Insler:) "Yes, there are two fundamental spirits, twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action, they are two..."

(Duchesne-Guillemin:) "Now at the beginning the twin spirits have declared their nature, the better and the evil, In thought and word and deed..."<sup>72</sup>

The good spirit in this verse is Ahura Mazda, of course. But what about the other? Contrary to Eliade's reading, this spirit – Angra Mainyu in the *Avesta*, and Ahriman in its Middle Persian form, is the dark force in the universe and was on many accounts perceived as a god roughly equivalent in power to Ahura Mazda (but to be defeated by him at the end of time). And in a further twist, the later Zurvanite 'heresy' (or interpretation) of Zoroastrianism argued that it was restoring the faith to its true form by conceiving of a being that existed above both Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, and which gave birth to this twin spirits, and on this Zurvanite account Zoroastrianism

72 *Yasna* 30.3. First version taken from: Mary Boyce. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 35. Alternative translations borrowed from: Touraj Daryaei. *Zoroastrianism*. Lecture, University of California, Irvine.

would clearly be a monotheistic faith. Whilst this form was important in the Sasanian period and would influence some Western scholars readings of the Parsi Zoroastrian texts, it is not actually attested in the earliest sources and will be discounted here.

Further confusing matters, Iranian cosmology envisioned a seven-fold world, which began as a flat earth and was divided into seven *karshvars* (regions) by a torrential rain, and Zoroastrianism extended the number seven to encompass the divine agents who assist Ahura Mazda. This equates to seven divine beings on the good side of the eschatological binary – Ahura Mazda and six others – each of whom were associated with a particular facet of creation. Ahura Mazda was represented by the just man or the priest, in the guise of Spenta Mainyu, and the other six were expressed in the sky, the water, the earth, plants, cattle, and fire. Some later readings of Zoroastrianism take these beings as emanations of Ahura Mazda himself (in a manner perhaps not unlike the way Jewish Kabbalists divide the godhead into different *sephirot*), but the earlier sense has them as beings created by Ahura Mazda to embody those different aspects of creation and serve as ritual foci associated with them.<sup>73</sup>

Some early commentators on Zoroastrianism in Europe were unable to take the text of the *Avesta* at face value, reading it instead through the twin prisms of Vedic Sanskrit and Christian theology. Ahura Mazda was, on this reading, considered to be the only being worthy of worship, and Zarathushtra became the prophet of a monotheistic

73 Since I will have (or already have had) cause to mention a number of these beings or emanations in this text, it is perhaps useful here to name them:

- Ahura Mazda, aka God or Lord, the supreme figure of the Heptad
- Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Spirit of God (connected with just men / priests)
- Vohu Manah, aka Good Purpose (connected with sacrificial cattle)
- Asha, aka Truth or Order (connected with the ritual fire)
- Khshathra, aka Power or Dominion, (connected with the sky)
- Spenta Armaiti, aka Piety or Devotion (connected with the earth)
- Haurvatat, aka Health or Wholeness (connected with ritual water)
- Ameretat, aka Long Life or Immortality (connected with plants & haoma)

faith. The other divine beings were either discounted or became something more akin to angels than to gods or demigods. This, of course, greatly distorted the actual message of Zarathushtra. At any rate, though there are some arguments to be made either way, I will side with Zoroastrianism as a dualistic faith, and take the divine Heptad as servitor-gods. The distinction between monotheism and dualism may be less important than at first it seems, however. Not only were there dualistic forms of Christianity, present from the earliest years and still widespread until the early modern period (note the long life of the Bogomil form of Christianity in the Balkans), but the ethical model of all the monotheistic faiths (if not the godhead itself) remains thoroughly dualistic in the same fashion as in Zoroastrianism.

To see this, we need look no farther than the idea of free will or choice in the way one lives on earth, and the notions of reward and punishment that follow on such choices. This choice, in Zoroastrianism, actually mirrors the cosmology of Christianity in that Satan, the great deceiver, *chose* to rebel against God and his creation, just as for the Zoroastrian twin spirits “differ rather by *choice* than by *nature*.”<sup>74</sup> Consider the following two passages from the *Gathas*.

Of these two spirits the deceitful one chooses to do the worst things, but the most holy spirit, clothed in the hardest stones [chooses] truth [as do those] who, with true actions, devotedly gratify Ahura Mazda.<sup>75</sup>

And from earlier in the same passage:

Hear with your ears the best things. Reflect with clear purpose,

74 Mircea Eliade. *A History of Religious Ideas, Volume 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 310. Emphasis in original.

75 *Yasna* 30.5. From: Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 7.

each man for himself, on the two choices for decision, being alert indeed to declare yourselves for Him before the great requital.<sup>76</sup>

Thus do we see clearly the split between good and evil, existing on a cosmic level of truth, written into the fabric of existence itself, and that human beings must choose to serve one or the other of these, at risk of their immortal souls. Zarathushtra built upon an existing Aryan tradition about the journey of the dead into the beyond, "but stresses the importance of the judgement: each will be judged by the choice that he made on earth. The just will be admitted into paradise, into the 'House of Song'; as for the sinners, they will remain 'forever the guests of the House of Evil (*Yasna* 46.11)."<sup>77</sup>

#### 2.4 From Zoroastrianism to Judaism, Christianity, and Beyond

We have seen in the section above that Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the world's revealed and scriptural religions. Many of the concepts that we most identify with the Abrahamic, monotheistic faiths were first present among the Iranians, from heaven & hell, to the figure of Satan, to the significance of the sacred texts, and to the very understanding of time and the creation. The next chapter will begin to highlight the relevance of Zoroastrianism for Nietzsche and for Western cultures by tracing some of its many influences upon later religions of the Near East, starting with Judaism.

76 *Yasna* 30.2. From: Mary Boyce. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 35.

77 Mircea Eliade. *A History of Religious Ideas, Volume 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 312.

### 3.0 The Legacies of Zoroastrianism for the West

This chapter will focus upon the early evolution of the Western monotheistic faiths and will discuss the many elements of Iranian religion which have entered them – mostly without the adherents being aware of their presence. The reasons for this fall in line with the justification for this entire book – Zoroastrianism is so little known that few people have any idea how many of their own beliefs originated on the other side of Mesopotamia on the Iranian Plateau and the Central Asian steppes. More directly, this case is essential to my understanding of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as not merely a response to European Christian culture, but a riposte directed at the ultimate origins of that religious culture. Bear in mind the genealogical method that Nietzsche was simultaneously developing for himself at that time, and which would be used to great effect in his most systematic work, *The Genealogy of Morality*. Such methods had a long history by the time Nietzsche was working, having been famously employed by a powerful influence on Nietzsche's own thinking – Baruch Spinoza, the seventeenth century Dutch-Jewish philosopher. What Spinoza did was to apply historical and philosophical criticism to the scriptures, highlighting problems that would then go on to exercise the minds of theologians all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It makes good sense, therefore, for us to consider the genealogy of the good-and-evil problematic that would dominate Nietzsche's work until the very end of his career, and show that the eschatological binary and many others aspects of the Judeo-Christian ethos that have Iranian roots.

In the chapters which follow this one, I will be exploring some of those beliefs most relevant to Nietzsche's criticism of apocalyptic eschatology in greater detail, given

that it flows from his reception also of progressive thought and scientific naturalism. This section is meant, therefore, primarily to provide a historical and theoretical foundation for understanding that pervasive Iranian influence. I will be showing areas and periods of historical overlap and contact, and pointing to a number of similarities which appear only subsequent to that contact. Those few aspects of theological and ethical overlap that are directly relevant for us will be continued, but the curious reader is directed to the sources used if more information on this interaction is sought. The largest sections will address the status of Judaism prior to Zoroastrian influence and then after, then move to Christianity and its own dialogue with Iranian-influenced Judaism and with Zoroastrianism more directly. For our purposes I will be leaving out Islam, as well as the myriad minor faiths of the region, as they have almost no bearing on Nietzsche's work, but the connexions there are every bit as strong. I will also be making frequent comments on the apocalyptic aspects of the faith, as these are the key to understanding Nietzsche's proposed alternative to the Zoroastrian-Jewish-Christian-Islamic concepts of time and redemption.

### 3.1 The Earliest Hebrew Religion

Followers of the modern religions based upon the Hebrew God (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and some others) frequently assume that the God they encounter in their holy books was from the start a universal and exclusive deity, and that the ancient Hebrews were monotheists. Even in translation, there are strong indicators that this was not so; setting aside modern assumptions and examining the Bible in Hebrew

makes this scenario untenable. When we combine a study of the Hebrew Bible with a careful reading of history, the archaeological work done in the last few decades, and extant information on concurrent religions, a much clearer picture of God's evolution can be seen, and the idea of ancient monotheism replaced by a mixture of polytheism and henotheism.

I will begin with the historical context. Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations predate that of the Levant by a considerable degree, but large cities began to appear in northern Syria as early as 2500 BCE. Whilst these held out against Mesopotamian aggression, they fell into economic decline and were later subsumed into a new polity.<sup>78</sup> From around 2000 BCE a wave of Semitic migrants began pouring into the Levant, permanently altering the earlier social norms of pastoral nomadism. Several large and fortified cities appeared along the northern coast – such as Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos – and many cities farther south as well, such as Megiddo. Whilst the search for a historical figure of the patriarch Abraham has been in vain, it is perhaps intriguing to view him in light of this migration, for reasons I will touch on momentarily. To begin with, we can note that traditionally his migration to Canaan from Mesopotamia has been placed anywhere in between 2100 and 1800 BCE.

Why, now, this connexion between the Hebrew patriarch and these early city-states? For the simple reason that, in all likelihood, the distinctive cultures of Israel and Judah evolved out of the Canaanites context.<sup>79</sup> Those Semitic migrants to the Levant called themselves Kinaani, and are to-day grouped into two populations based upon the outside powers with whom they interacted – Phoenicians in the north,

78 Glenn S. Holland. *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. 192-193.

79 This thesis is extensively documented and supported in: Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001.

Canaanites in the south. But we need to understand that they were exactly the same people in order to move along in our story. We also need to be aware of a stunning innovation that these Canaanites/Phoenicians did before any other people: they invented an alphabet. This alphabet was to go on to influence all of the others to develop in the Mediterranean, from the Greek to the Etruscan to the Latin. But more importantly, it is *identical* to what scholars refer to as Palaeo-Hebrew – the script used by the ancient Israelite kingdoms prior to the Babylonian Captivity and the subsequent domination of Aramaic. That's right – the alphabet that everyone calls 'Hebrew' to-day actually *replaced* the original Hebrew alphabet under foreign domination. Why is this important? Because it serves to ground the ancient Hebrews within their Canaanite context, to which we will return shortly in a religious sense.

But we can quickly note here that Canaanite and Israelite cultures cannot be fully separated in the formative period of Hebrew history, which is evidenced by the artefacts being uncovered in Israel/Palestine today. In archaeological terms, much of what we had once taken as representative of ancient Israelite culture have now also been found along the southern coastline (in the independent kingdom of the Philistines) and in the Trans-Jordan region, neither of which had Hebrew populations at the times to which these artefacts are dated.<sup>80</sup> There are also numerous linguistic parallels in the religious terms used in Hebrew and in the Ugaritic texts referring to the same forms of worship, *i.e.* discussions of burnt offerings and rituals intended to elicit forgiveness.

And beyond this, we know that Canaanite scribes and priests were certainly aware of the Mesopotamian religions – significant texts from those traditions have been found at numerous sites in the Levant, including Ugarit and Megiddo.<sup>81</sup> One key

80 Mark S. Smith. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. Dearborn, MI: Dove Booksellers, 2002. 22.

81 Richard J. Clifford, S.J. 'The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth'. John J.



example of this borrowing is the flood narrative, which exists in multiple Mesopotamian iterations (the Atrahasis epic, the Epic of Gilgamesh, etc.), appears in a Ugaritic Canaanite text, and finally in the Hebrew Bible, where it achieved its enduring form. The similarities amongst these texts are truly remarkable, and given the contact amongst the peoples who wrote them down, transmission and transformation are an unavoidable conclusion.

The biggest player in the Torah itself is Moses, with nearly four-fifths of the text devoted to the events around his life. But archaeology has long-since proven what good sense always indicated – that the Exodus story is a socially-oriented myth, not a historical event.<sup>82</sup> I will mention only one deeply salient piece of evidence, which is that from the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE reign of Thutmose III the entire region of Syria-Palestine was brought under the domination of the Egyptian New Kingdom, which remained the local hegemon until the Neo-Assyrian epoch.<sup>83</sup> This means, in short, that were a prophet Moses to have led his people out of Egypt and into Canaan in the twelfth century BCE, he would have been leading them... right into Egypt again. The whole length of the Levant, from north to south, was peppered with heavily-armed Egyptian garrisons, and Egyptian archaeological remains have been found throughout the area.

What we can say about the religious life of the Hebrews/Canaanites in this time comes from a mixed bag of sources, from the Torah text to the Ugaritic documents to the archaeological record. We will begin with the Torah, which itself begins with the words, “When God began to create the heaven and the earth”.<sup>84</sup> Here the reader is

Collins (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*. NY: Continuum Publishing, 2000. 21.

82 Again, for an extensive treatment of this issue, see Finkelstein & Silberman, especially chapter 2.

83 Glenn S. Holland. *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. 193-197.

84 Genesis 1:1, *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

immediately confronted by the contemporary conception of God: that is, an omnipotent deity which created our universe *ex nihilo*. This notion depends upon non-Hebrew versions of the Torah and upon later Jewish tradition, however, for the word here rendered as God is 'Elohim'.<sup>85</sup> The 'im' ending denotes a plural form, and this word is more accurately translated as 'gods'. The implication in this usage is that a 'council of gods' has collaborated to create the world.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, with the later growth of YHVH's cult in the southern kingdom, we can see a gradual shift in the meaning of this word when it is later used in the Torah to refer to gods other than YHVH, *e.g.* Exodus 20:3, "You shall have no other gods [Elohim] beside me."

A further statement of the polytheistic nature of this word is seen in Genesis 1:26, "And God<sup>87</sup> said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...'. Quite often this is taken by modern readers as an example of the 'Royal We', whereby we assume that God is really just talking to himself; this despite there being no such linguistic conception in ancient Hebrew. Others have assumed that He was speaking to His angels, or to His Wisdom.<sup>88</sup> However, the word for God used in this passage, Elohim, brings us back to our understanding of a plurality of gods involved in the Creation myth, and this is echoed in the Canaanite myths from which it was ultimately derived. I say this because the gods of ancient Israel are found throughout Canaanite mythology.

85 אלהים

86 Note further that the text implies that the universe (as both we and the ancients conceived it) existed before our world, and no gods are credited with its creation. There is no evidence to suggest that the ancients made the same assumption that modern religions do – that is, that God's creation of the universe is an implied and/or obvious dependent condition for the acts of creation that are described.

87 Elohim.

88 Certain Jewish and Christian traditions hold that God first created His Wisdom, and then spoke to it and commanded it in the Creation. For Christians, as for those Jews inspired by the interpretation of Philo of Alexandria, this is interpreted as the Logos (or Jesus); for mystically-inclined Jews, it is an element of Kabbalah, wherein God is understood to be broken into ten Sefirot.

In addition to the Torah, we can uncover a great deal of information on ancient Hebrew faith through the Ugaritic<sup>89</sup> texts that have been recovered by archaeologists working in the Holy Land. These fragments commonly feature the god El, who is known to us as the mostly-amiable God of the Patriarchs. El's consort in Canaanite religion was Asherah, who will figure prominently in later Hebrew religion. Also mentioned in these texts are Baal and his sister Anat; Baal, of course, is also familiar to us from the Torah. His name, in fact, is later used to refer to Canaanite gods in general, *e.g.* 'the baals'. Unlike in the Mesopotamian creation stories, there is no close triad of gods, and the gods Enlil and Ea have no precise or named analogues.<sup>90</sup> El does preside over a council of gods, and some have important aspects (Mot – death, Yamm – the sea, Baal – war & weather), but El appears to sit alone above them all, perhaps helping to pave the way for later henotheistic and monotheistic interpretations of him.

El is by far the oldest of the names of God, and it is he that stands at the head of the world-creation council in Genesis. As "head of the Semitic pantheon and the father of gods and mortals", he is similar in nature to the Mesopotamian god Anu and the Greek god Cronus.<sup>91</sup> But he is also given some less flattering depictions in Canaanite myth, underscoring the anthropomorphic nature of early beliefs. In one surviving text he is said to have "drank wine until he was full, new wine until he was drunk"; another deity then "smeared him with his crap and piss" and he "collapsed like a corpse" while

89 Ancient texts uncovered in Ugarit, which detail Canaanite religion; see, for example: G. del Olmo Lete. *Canaanite Religion According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999. And: Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith. *Stories From Ancient Canaan*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

90 Richard J. Clifford, S.J. 'The Roots of Apocalypticism in Near Eastern Myth'. John J. Collins (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*. NY: Continuum Publishing, 2000. 21.

91 Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith. *Stories From Ancient Canaan*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012. 175.

the other gods left to go hunting!<sup>92</sup> This is hardly the way later Israelite myths would choose to portray their god, but in the earliest days it was likely not so different as we might imagine.

Genesis 32 gives us a description of the way El was perceived by the Patriarchs.

Yaakov [Jacob, the third patriarch] was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him. Then He said, 'Let me go, for dawn is breaking.' But he [Jacob] answered, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' Said the other, 'What is your name?' and he replied, 'Yaakov.' Said he, 'Your name shall no longer be Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with beings divine and human and prevailed.' Yaakov asked, 'Pray tell me your name.' But He said, 'You must not ask my name!' And He took leave of him there. So Yaakov named the place Peni-El, meaning 'I have seen [El] face to face, yet my life has been preserved.'<sup>93</sup>

Within this passage, we can see clearly expressed the older Canaanite view of the gods, as preserved and merely re-interpreted by succeeding generations of Hebrew readers. The word here translated in English-language Bibles as God, and as "beings divine" in the version above, is El, the name always used in reference to Avraham's god. Where readers to-day are expected to take this passage as allegorical, or to assume that Yaakov was wrestling with an angel of God, we have every reason to

92 Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith. *Stories From Ancient Canaan*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012. 172.

93 Genesis 32:25-31, *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

believe that the ancients who recorded these stories intended this passage to indicate precisely what it does; namely, that Yaakov wrestled with the god El in a human form. That Yaakov knows with whom he wrestled is made clear by his choice of names for the location: Peni-El means 'El's Face'. Further, not only do we see the god shrinking from the possibility of being seen in daylight (in ancient faiths, gods and spirits were understood to appear only at night), but the god's reluctance to reveal his name is important, as names were understood to bestow power over supernatural beings.

If the God of the Patriarchs is El Shaddai (El of the Mountains), one of the traditional Canaanite gods, who, then, is YHVH, this God of Moshe (Moses) who replaced El and forged a new covenant with the Hebrews at Sinai? It is not known if YHVH was an entirely new god, or one discovered by the Hebrews and adapted to their needs. It has been suggested, and this fits the God depicted in Exodus, that YHVH is a warrior god, and a god of volcanoes, who had previously been worshipped in Midian, which is in modern-day Jordan.<sup>94</sup> This idea is often discounted, as there is no way to know for certain, but consider that Moshe had been living in Midian after having fled Egypt, and that it was here that he saw the vision of the burning bush. It also accounts for the description of an active volcano during the giving of the Law at Sinai, and for the savagery and partiality of the god who brought the plagues down upon Egypt.

That He was a warrior god is clear enough from His early rôle in Hebrew history, and by His violent and repressive policies towards other gods and peoples. Note the following passage from Exodus 23.

When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites,  
the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the  
Jesubites, and I annihilate them, you shall not bow down to their

94 L.E. Bihu. 'Midianite Elements in Hebrew Religion'. *Jewish Theological Studies*. 31.

gods in worship or follow their practices, but shall tear them down  
and smash their pillars to bits.<sup>95</sup>

We see here YHVH's rôle in advancing the military successes of His people, and also His jealous nature towards the other gods, whose existence is clearly implied. YHVH's status as primarily a god of war can be seen as well by the fact that other gods were retained for specific purposes long after the establishment of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the state sponsored cult of YHVH. We know, for example, that Baal, a Canaanite storm god, was worshipped for rain and in his fertility aspect from the time of the Judges all the way through the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah, suggesting that these were things lacking in the cult of YHVH.

Despite later syncretism in conceptions of El and YHVH in the post-Mosaic period, enough fragments survive within the Hebrew Bible to attest to their original identities as distinct deities. For example, we can turn to Deuteronomy 32:8-9, which in the original Hebrew casts YHVH into the rôle of a subordinate or son of El.

When the Most High gave nations their homes and set the divisions  
of men, He fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to the  
number of divine beings<sup>96</sup>. For the Lord's portion is His people,  
Yaakov His allotted heritage.

The name rendered here as Most High is in Hebrew El Elyon, which is one of the many names of El. In contrast, the name rendered here as Lord is YHVH. The implication in translation is that the Lord and Most High are the same being; if this were the original

95 Shemot 23:23-24, *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

96 This phrase, "bene Yisra-el," is often translated as "Israel's numbers." For the rationale behind this wording, see Mark Smith, *The Early History of God*, notes, p. 32. It can also be translated as "Israel's children", though this is also likely anachronistic. In any event, the meaning would remain largely the same, as we can see YHVH receiving an allotment of people from El Elyon.

intention, it is highly doubtful that the names would be used in this way.

We find, in reviewing the Hebrew text, that there are many such instances of translation or interpretation or syncretism that create ideas which would not (and likely could not) have existed in the minds of the original authors. We depend a great deal upon centuries of further development in Western religions when we make certain assumptions, such as a denial of the existence of other gods, whilst the Torah itself, in frequently denunciations of the worship of other gods, does not once deny their existence.

### 3.1.1 The Hebrews Just Before Babylon

The Biblical narrative tells us of the original United Monarchy of David and Solomon. This is, to put it bluntly, not substantiated in any way by the archaeological record, nor by the assembly of the text of the Bible itself. Throughout the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, the peoples of the northern hill country of Samaria (Israel) and the peoples of the southern hill country and desert of Judea (Judah) were always quite distinct. Each developed out of the earlier Canaanite material culture, and each show evidence of independent development throughout the Biblical period until the aftermath of the Assyrian conquest of the north.<sup>97</sup>

There is, however, no doubt that these states had much in common.

Both worshipped YHWH (among other deities). Their peoples shared many legends, heroes, and tales about events in the distant past.

97 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001. Chapter 6.

They also spoke similar languages, or dialects of Hebrew, and by the eighth century BCE, both wrote in the same script. But they were also very different from each other in their demographic composition, economic potential, material culture, and relationship with their neighbours. Put simply, Israel and Judah experienced quite different histories and developed distinctive cultures. In a sense, Judah was little more than Israel's rural hinterland.<sup>98</sup>

This last is an interesting thought when you consider that it is the southern kingdom which contained Jerusalem, and which gives us the ethonym 'Jews'. Clearly something dramatic happened to alter the historical trajectory of these peoples.

That something was the Neo-Assyrian Empire. But before we get to their invasion, we need to see something of the indigenous development towards henotheism in the Hebrew kingdoms. BY way of quick definitions, henotheism is the exclusive worship of a single god, without denying the existence of any others. This is the term which best fits accounts in the Torah, from the covenant with Abraham all the way to the newer one with Moses. The jealous nature of the newer deity of the Hebrews, YHVH, is prominently displayed in the passage of Exodus later called the Ten Commandments:

God spoke all these things, saying, 'I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods beside me. You shall not make for yourself a sculpted image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall

98 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001. 159.



not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned<sup>99</sup> God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.<sup>100</sup>

These commandments and those that follow form the basis of a new Jewish covenant with God, yet it is a covenant which makes far less sense when taken out of the polytheistic world of its origin and placed within the framework of a single, universal deity. In a world filled with gods, the idea of binding one people to your exclusive worship is not such a radical concept. Forming a covenant of exclusive worship, and promising favours for doing so (and punishment for not) in a world that has, in reality, only one God to choose from, which needed merely to be revealed, is a far stranger idea with which to credit the Hebrews! Furthermore, if these commandments were really intended to define a relationship between the Hebrews and the single, universal God of creation, why did He not take the opportunity here to deny the existence of the other gods, rather than merely proscribing their worship “before” Him? Had this been done, the Hebrews might have had an easier time sticking with their bargain and the worship of Baal and others faded away.

Yet by all accounts, the worship of Baal was widespread from the time of the Judges through the end of the Kingdoms. Exactly how widespread is difficult to ascertain with any reliability, but periods of royal patronage, such as that of Jezebel, wife of Ahab, gave the cult a fairly high profile. Ahab, in fact, went so far as to

99 This is often translated as ‘jealous’, but ‘impassioned’ is generally considered closer to the Hebrew meaning and is used in Jewish translations, though it may also obscure one original intent of the passage and reflect the later monotheistic understanding of God.

100 Exodus 20:1-6. *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

construct a temple to Baal in Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Further, cultic paraphernalia related to Baal (as well as Asherah) was more than once removed from the Temple of YHVH in Jerusalem.

In addition to Baal, at least that one other god (goddess, in this case) found traction amongst the ancient Hebrews: Asherah. Early legends surviving in the Ugaritic texts show her as a consort to El, and there is some indication that she was later taken to be YHVH's wife after He had preëmpted El's place in Hebrew religion – an inscription has been found in Palestine that is dedicated to "YHVH and His Asherah".<sup>101</sup> At any rate, we know that her cult survived in Israel even after belief in her as a goddess equal to YHVH had disappeared. Cultic symbols associated with her, such as a long pole used for healing and divination, had at various times been kept in a place of honour in the Temple at Jerusalem.<sup>102</sup>

As indicated by the Biblical accounts, the Baal worshipped in Yisrael and Yehuda compares well with the Baal mentioned in Ugaritic texts. His primary aspect seems to have been storms, and fertile pockets caused by erosion from winter storms were known as 'Baal's land'. He was known to the Canaanites as Hadad or Rommon, both of which mean 'the thunderer'. He is said to have died and arisen with the seasons, giving him a fertility aspect not unlike that celebrated in the Greek mystery cults.<sup>103</sup> His aspects in both sources suggest that he might have originally been synonymous with Melqart, a Phoenician god and the Lord of Tyre. Considering the prominence of the Phoenician city-states in the Syro-Palestine region, this god is likely to have spread widely along with trade. Yet Baal worship was roundly condemned by the prophets

101 Mark S. Smith. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. Dearborn, MI: Dove Booksellers, 2002. Chapter 3.

102 see 1 Kings 15:9-14. *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

103 John Gray. *Near Eastern Mythology*. London: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1969.

Elijah and Jeremiah, and the first seeds of Hebrew monotheism were perhaps sown by these and other Prophets. By attacking first the cult of Baal<sup>104</sup> and then the idea of 'the baals' as false gods who tempt the Hebrews from YHVH's favour, the Prophets laid the groundwork for a radical new interpretation of God.

It is important to note here that the Hebrew conception of Prophets was (and is) markedly different from that of the Christians who later appropriated the Hebrew Bible and sought to use its text in defence of their new ideas. The Prophets were believed to have been inspired directly by YHVH, with a mission to perform in their own lifetime which generally involved admonishing the Hebrews for failing to maintain their obligations to YHVH. Prophets were not seen as prognosticators or sooth-sayers; their messages were meant almost exclusively for the people of their own day, and only very rarely were their statements intended to reflect upon some future date or condition. They were seen as guardians of the covenant and a spiritual voice for the people. Additionally, their ideas were frequently at odds with older conventions, and the Prophets were instrumental in the development of Judaism, as can be seen in the following example.

Isaiah, a member of the Judean royal family, had a vision in the Temple in 742 BCE, of YHVH on His throne, and was filled with terror at the sight.<sup>105</sup> He set out to bring the Hebrews, engulfed in chaos and near extermination at hands of foreign powers, back to YHVH's exclusive worship, believing that only this could avert disaster. At this time, a pagan sat upon the throne of Yehuda (Ahaz, son of Uzziah) and the Northern Kingdom, which had long since adopted the worship of other gods alongside

104 see 1 Melachim (Kings) 18:1-40, wherein Eliyahu humiliates and murders the priests of Baal, and demonstrates the power of YHVH. This is an example of the type of violent repression always favoured by YHVH whilst the Hebrews had power. Afterward, under foreign domination, they turned to simply denying the existence of other gods.

105 see Yisheyah, *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

YHWH, was being menaced by Tigleth-Pileser III of Assyria. By decrying the cultic rituals of YHWH and trying to steer the Hebrews into a more spiritualistic faith, Isaiah was perhaps trying to instil in the people a personal awareness of the divine presence. He exhorted the people to take up what he considered the true meaning of the covenant, which was a moral responsibility, and not a mark of privilege. Unsurprisingly, his message was not well received, particularly in the north.

The fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE at the hands of the Assyrians under Sargon II, and Jonah's subsequent mission to Nineveh<sup>106</sup>, first brought forth the idea of YHWH as a universal God of history, one who was capable of working through the Assyrians, of using them as a tool of His wrath. If this were possible, it must mean that the gods of the Assyrians were unable to protect them, that they fall under the control of YHWH despite not worshipping him and having no covenant with him. It is a short step from here to the idea that these Assyrian gods never really existed in the first place, and that there was only YHWH. But there is a problem – these texts do not appear to have been known in the period prior to the destruction of the northern kingdom, and likely circulated at earliest during the period between the Assyrians pulling out of Israel and the later destruction of Judah by the Chaldeans.

The first big steps toward Hebrew monotheism likely occurred during a brief renaissance in the tiny kingdom of Judah. A vassal of the Assyrians, Judah had avoided being conquered and took the opportunity to buttress its defences (building new walls around Jerusalem and a fantastic tunnel below the bedrock to a hidden spring). Once the Assyrians began to retreat from the Levant (being threatened by the coalition of Medes and Chaldeans that would succeed in destroying Nineveh in 612 BCE), a rather remarkable king of Judah named Josiah came onto the stage. To avoid an even longer

106 see Yonah, *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

detour into political specifics that we do not need, suffice to say that the fifth book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, is only attested from this period (when it was 'found' buried in the Temple), and the so-called Deuteronomic History (the six books that follow the Torah) also appeared. This account, which tells the story of the United Monarchy and its collapse, may well have been produced under Josiah in order to legitimate his conquest of the northern kingdom following the Assyrian retreat.<sup>107</sup>

In any event, we do know that Josiah is called the "greatest messiah" in the book of 2 Kings for his actions in the north, where he struck down the Samaritan altars and enforced the cultic centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>108</sup> What is interesting about this account is that Josiah's expedition follows roughly the same course as the so-called conquest of Canaan under Joshua, the successor of Moses (a conquest for which there is, as yet, no actual evidence). And the details given in the tale of Joshua actually match the world of Josiah's age, not of the period of the Exodus, suggesting quite strongly that at the very least they were committed to writing only during or around Josiah's reign.

But whilst the newly-empowered kingdom of Judah now controlled the most prosperous land in the hill country, it would not long survive as an independent state, for one of the allies who took down Assyria was beginning to flex its muscles. Trying to play the two regional superpowers off of one another, "Judah shifted loyalties between Egypt and Babylon [*i.e.*, the Chaldeans] six times during the last twenty years of its existence."<sup>109</sup> This dithering and betrayal was rewarded with the invasions of Nebuchadnezzar of the Chaldeans, who in 587 BCE took the city of Jerusalem,

107 This is the primary argument in Finkelstein and Silberman's book.

108 2 Kings 23:25, *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

109 Glenn S. Holland. *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. 197.

destroyed the First Temple, and deported the élites to Babylon. Thus began the Babylonian Captivity – a nearly 50 year period in which the priestly reforms of Josiah were useless (no Temple!) and during which the Hebrews would need to revise their relationship with God.

### 3.2 The Persians and Ending the Babylonian Captivity

Beyond the aforementioned cultic centralization in Jerusalem (problematic during the Captivity), the Hebrew religion still evinced almost none of the features that were to distinguish Judaism in the ancient world. Its basic structure was still akin to that of the pagan polytheists that surrounded it, and its understanding of God was not unlike that of any other high god / sky god in the pagan world. It was only during the Babylonian Captivity, and through the interpretations of the Prophets and the canonization of scripture, that Judaism was born.

And for that to happen, the Persians would need to intervene. They did so in a rather spectacular way, by toppling the kingdom of the Medes and then invading Mesopotamia. Having defeated the Chaldeans and creating the largest state the world had yet seen, Cyrus II founded the Achaemenid Persian Empire and declared himself the King of Kings (Shahanshah). The importance of these events for world history are not easily overstated, in part for the transfiguration of Near Eastern religions that would result from the influence of Zoroastrian ideas.

Few details exist about the lives of the Hebrew exiles in Mesopotamia in the early years, aside from some obscure allusions in the Prophetic texts, but the period after the

arrival of the Persians is relatively well documented in the Bible, as well as in outside sources.<sup>110</sup> First we will deal with the Babylonians (Chaldeans) themselves, as it will help to establish the sort of policies the Persians applied to subject peoples. An important archaeological artefact – the so-called Cyrus Cylinder – serves as our best evidence for Cyrus's religious policies. It contains a rather astonishing account that I will excerpt a small portion of here:

...a low person was put in charge of his country ... and, intolerably, he brought the daily offerings to a halt... In his mind, reverential fear of Marduk, king of the gods, came to an end. He did yet more evil to his city every day... he brought ruin on them all by a yoke without relief. Enlil-of-the-gods became extremely angry at their complaints... Ex[alted Marduk, Enlil-of-the-Go]ds, relented. ... He inspected and checked all the countries, seeking for the upright king of his choice. He took under his hand Cyrus, king of the city of Anshan, and called him by his name, proclaiming him aloud for the kingship over all of everything. ... He had him enter without fighting or battle right into Shuanna; he saved his city Babylon from hardship. He handed over to him Nabonidus, the king who did not fear him. All the people of Tintir, of all Sumer and Akkad, nobles and governors, bowed down before him and kissed his feet, rejoicing over his kingship and their faces shone. The lord through whose trust all were rescued from death and who saved them all from distress and hardship, they blessed him sweetly and praised

110 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001. 298.

his name.<sup>111</sup>

This remarkable text suggests that the Chaldeans' god, Marduk, summoned Cyrus to conquer their country because they had a lousy king who was not respecting the cultic ritual of Marduk (and thus bringing ruin to the people). It is clear, therefore, that the Achaemenid administration did not impose the Iranian religion on their vassals. This policy was repeated for other populations that we know of, including the Hebrews – freed from bondage by Cyrus – and the Egyptians (conquered by Cyrus's successor, Cambyses, who then undertook all of the appropriate rituals to become pharaoh).

The Hebrews had much cause to celebrate their liberation by the Persians, and the Prophets wrote of it in similar terms to that above. Note the following excerpt from the prophet Isaiah:

Thus said the Lord to Cyrus, His anointed one<sup>112</sup> –  
Whose right hand He has grasped,  
Treading down nations before him,  
Ungirding the loins of kings,<sup>113</sup>  
Opening doors before him  
And letting no gate stay shut:  
'I will march before you  
And level the hills that loom up;  
I will shatter doors of bronze  
And cut down iron bars.  
I will give you treasures concealed in the dark

111 Cyrus Cylinder. Translated by Irvine Finkel, Curator of Cuneiform Collections at the British Museum. [BritishMuseum.org](http://BritishMuseum.org). Accessed December 2015.

112 That is, Cyrus is called a messiah, as Josiah and others had been before him.

113 *i.e.*, rendering them helpless.



And secret hoards –  
So that you may know that it is I the Lord,  
The God of Israel, who call you by name.<sup>114</sup>

The Hebrew Bible thus uses the same logic as the Cyrus Cylinder, substituting their own God for the Babylonian god Marduk. Why might this be the case? Cyrus not only freed the exiles and allowed them to return as his representatives in Judea, he paid for the construction of the Second Temple! Clearly he must have been seen as doing God's work in these things.

The dating and authorship of this passage is, however, crucially important. The Book of Isaiah has at least two authors – Isaiah of Jerusalem, who warned the kingdom of Israel about the Assyrian threat, and an unnamed poet writing at the end of the Babylonian Captivity, who references not the Assyrian but the Chaldeans and Persians. Often called Second Isaiah, we know nothing about the identity of this author, but from chapter 40 on it is his book.<sup>115</sup> The context and the ideas in the latter half of this book are of extraordinary importance in shaping the Hebrews' theology, as we shall see. His characterization of "the rise of the Persians under Cyrus as ground for renewal and hope for the exiles" is more true than is commonly realised.<sup>116</sup>

The Captivity was the beginning of the longest-lived Jewish community outside of Palestine, that in Mesopotamia, which survived until the late twentieth century. The community in Mesopotamia was to become the intellectual heartland of the Jewish people in many ways, producing many of its greatest prophetic works, canonizing its scriptures, and later authoring the most complete version of the Talmud (the Oral Law).

114 Isaiah 45:1-3. *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

115 Stephen L. Harris and Robert L. Platzner. *The Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2008. 279-280.

116 J. Maxwell Miller and John H Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Second Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 492.

The cultural shifts in Mesopotamia, then, are of great significance in the evolution of Judaism, both before and after the advent of the Persians. In the period before, some cultural assimilation was already noticeable. The Aramaic language became the *lingua franca* of the Jewish people, and the Aramaic block letters slowly replaced the original Hebrew/Canaanite alphabet. The calendar was altered to use the Babylonian names for the months. The synagogue style of worship, requiring only a minimum number of believers to reach a quorum, replaced the cultic rites of the Temple for most Jews thereafter. And some Jews were even given the names of Mesopotamian gods, which may or may not have indicated conversion.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.2.1 Judaism in Persia's Shadow

There are many sources for the period of Persian influence over the exiles and their co-religionists back in Judah (which became a satrapy – a province – of the Persian Empire). The primary Jewish ones are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the dating of which are quite difficult as both led missions to Jerusalem but perhaps at different times, as well as the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah. (The book of Esther is set in the Persian lands, but contains no useful historical information.)<sup>118</sup> Other books composed in the same time period contain themes which echo Persian ideas, such as Ezekiel. In this section I will make a point about the overall chronology of the materials that appear, and how their content may have been influenced by the altered

117 J. Maxwell Miller and John H Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Second Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 495.

118 J. Maxwell Miller and John H Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Second Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 498.

cultural context (*i.e.*, living under Persian rule and surrounded by worshippers of Ahura Mazda), and I will begin with an interesting parallel eschatological / prophetic idea in Ezekiel.

The actual figure of Ezekiel, a priest turned prophet who lived through the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar and took up the prophetic vocation from exile in Mesopotamia, represents a key turning point in the development of Judaism under Persian influence. The biblical sources themselves suggest that his work was accomplished during the Chaldean period, there are tantalizing clues in the text which suggest that it may either date from the Persian period which followed, or at least that the Iranian faith was already known and practised in Mesopotamia, perhaps brought in by the Median allies of the Chaldeans in their conquest of the Assyrian empire.<sup>119</sup> The example that I will give is from Ezekiel 37:1-10 – The Valley of Dry Bones:

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

119 Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang. *Heaven: A History*. NY: Vintage Books, 1990. 12.

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.<sup>120</sup>

The book of Ezekiel then uses this resurrection as an apparent foretelling of the national resurrection of the nation of Israel, giving the scene a political meaning. But it is likely that this bodily resurrection, which in time was to contribute to the development of a literal understanding of bodily resurrection in Judaism at the End of Days, had a Persian inspiration, given its setting.

As a faith with its origins on the steppes of Central Asia, and developed further on the Iranian Plateau – both relatively treeless landscapes – Zoroastrianism takes an unusual position on the disposition of the body after death. Corpses are laid out on platforms where carrion birds and other scavengers will consume the flesh from them. The bones remain out in the sun for an extended time before finally being collected and interred. It seems likely that this practice is analogous to the purification by fire practised in the Hindu art of cremation.<sup>121</sup> The Hindu and Zoroastrian faith are siblings,

120 Ezekiel 37:1-10. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 1150.

121 Alan F. Segal. *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West*. New York: Doubleday, 2004. 187.

having diverged in Central Asia when their practitioners' ancestors parted ways and migrated in opposite directions. Both traditions have an emphasis on ritual purity, but whereas the ancestors of the Hindus settled in South Asia amid rich semi-tropical forests, the ancestors of the Zoroastrians settled on the Iranian Plateau, which broadly lacks substantial forest cover. It may be that this bleaching by the heat of the sun was intended to serve the same purpose, clearing the body of flesh and contaminants so that it could not spoil the earth.<sup>122</sup>

I mention this section in Ezekiel because the idea of a field of bones is so very reminiscent of early forms of the Towers of Silence used by the Zoroastrians. There is also the idea of a resurrection in Ezekiel – an idea with no earlier parallel in Judaism, but which exists from a very early date in Zoroastrianism. Diogenes Laertius tells us that Theopompus wrote “that according to the Magi [Zoroastrian priests], men shall live again and be immortal and that everything known permanence through their invocations”, and Aeneas of Gaza wrote “Zoroaster predicts that there will be a time in which there will be a resurrection of all the dead”.<sup>123</sup> The Greek term Aeneas uses is the same one used in Christian literature to describe the resurrection of the dead body. Some Zoroastrian sources seem to refer to a spiritual resurrection, rather than a purely bodily one, but not all, and a “concept of bodily resurrection is attested in a passage [Yasht 19.89] that speaks of this moment as a time when the dead will rise and be made imperishable through the reviving activity of the *saoshyant*.”<sup>124</sup> We also have the

122 The standard model for a Tower of Silence consists of a round walled stone structure. Corpses are laid out on the stone floor to be stripped of flesh by carrion-eaters and the bones bleached in the sun. After they had completely dried out, they were swept into a central pit and left to decay.

See, e.g.,: Michael Stausberg. *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction*. Translated by Margret Preisler-Weller. London: Equinox Publishing, 2008. 94.

123 Albert de Jong. *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 1997. 327.

124 Jenny Rose. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 27-28.

Jewish book of Daniel, which was written inside the Persian empire, and which – in 12:2-3 – most clearly breaks with the ancient Hebrew concept of *sheol*, the underworld. Daniel speaks of the dead being restored to life as they were before, not existing in a different state or plane of existence.<sup>125</sup> This clearly echoes the Zoroastrian view of the remaking of the world at the End of Days. Looking to Daniel, and to the existence of confused sources from antiquity like the Greek ones mentioned above, suggests quite strongly that the notion of a bodily resurrection at the end of time in Judaism – and, indeed, of the afterlife more generally – may ultimately have Persian origins.

The relationship between Judaism and Zoroastrianism stems from their close association in Mesopotamia during the Persian period. Cyrus II, the Great, first emperor of the Achaemenids, conquered the Chaldean empire in 539 BCE. In so doing, he liberated the Jewish exiles who had lived there in Babylon for nearly fifty years. The book of Ezra purports to begin with a royal proclamation of Cyrus, which appears in the text in Aramaic rather than Hebrew, lending some weight to its identity as a court document.

Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of you of all His people – may his God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem...<sup>126</sup>

The passage goes on to suggest that any who remain are free to contribute materially to the reconstruction of the Temple. It also notes that “King Cyrus of Persia released the

125 Daniel 12:2-3. *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

126 Ezra 1:2-3. *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

vessels of the Lord's house which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem and had put into the house of his god."<sup>127</sup> Cyrus therefore not only contributed his own treasure directly, but gave up some of the spoils of conquest that had originally been in the First Temple and returned these to the Hebrews.

Some opposition came from those back in the Holy Land. "The people of Samaria – the ex-citizens of the northern kingdom and the deportees who were brought there by the Assyrians – heard about the beginning of the construction of the second Temple" and "asked to join the work", but they were sent away ("You have nothing to do with building a house to our God" Ezra 4:3). "The faction that had preserved itself in exile now believed that it had the divine right to determine the character of Judahite orthodoxy."<sup>128</sup> The peoples of the south and the descendants of the exiles would continue to lord it over the so-called Samaritans from that point on, and for their part the Samaritans would maintain a goodly number of distinctive customs that lacked the higher degree of Mesopotamian and Persian influences found amongst the Jews.<sup>129</sup>

A legal challenge was later raised during the reign of Darius I, the third Achaemenid emperor. Darius discovered the documents authorizing construction in his state archives and reaffirmed Cyrus's edicts. But in "a plot twist [of which] Diaspora writers were particularly fond[,] Darius not only orders the rebuilding to continue but also insists that the cost be borne" by those who had objected to the project!<sup>130</sup> Thus again does it seem that God's work is being done by the Persians. Darius, as the

127 Ezra 1:7. *NJPS Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

128 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001. 299.

129 Their Torah is still written in the Palaeo-Hebrew script, and they maintain traditions of animal sacrifice to this day, lacking the significance of Jerusalem and hence its Temple monopoly on such things.

130 Stephen L. Harris and Robert L. Platzner. *The Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2008. 305.

principal architect of the political order that was to last another two centuries, organized the former territory of Israel and Judah into a new province – a satrapy – of the empire, which was called Yehud.<sup>131</sup>

The principal source for this material from the reigns of Cyrus and Darius is the book of Ezra, but Ezra himself was not around at the time. He entered the scene during the reign of the fifth Achaemenid, Artaxerxes I, and probably arrived in Jerusalem only in 458 BCE. He came on a mission from Artaxerxes, accompanied by a number of other exiles and carrying additional funds and judicial authority. "Ezra was shocked to find out that the people of Israel, including priests and Levites, did not separate themselves from the abominations of their neighbours. They intermarried and freely mixed with the people of the land."<sup>132</sup>

Ezra's admonitions to the people are recorded in the eponymous book, but his status is actually much greater than it might at first appear. It has been convincingly argued that it was during the mission of Ezra that the Torah as we know it to-day first appeared – not the later works that make up the full Tanakh (which would include all of the post-Exilic material), but rather the five books traditionally ascribed to Moses. "In the entire Bible, two men are known as lawgivers: Moses and Ezra."<sup>133</sup> Along with the authority granted him by Artaxerxes, Ezra brought back with him "the Torah of Moses", which appears not to have been in circulation in Judah (especially given the condition of the priesthood there when he arrived). Along with the Persian governor, Ezra "enforced the observance of the Sabbath" and "forced intermarriages between Jews and others to

131 J. Maxwell Miller and John H Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Second Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 522-523.

132 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001. 300.

133 Richard Elliott Friedman. *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997. 159.



be dissolved.”<sup>134</sup> It may well be that Ezra, then, is the main redactor and codifier of the Mosaic Law as it has been passed down to us – Ezra, a figure from the court of the fifth Persian emperor who was only briefly in the Holy Land, and whose home was the Mesopotamian community of exiles.

Equally important was another emissary from the court of Artaxerxes, the writer Nehemiah whose chronological relationship with Ezra’s is so confused. Nehemiah was the cup-bearer to Artaxerxes, a high court position that literally held the power of life and death over the king of kings! This trusted official was later despatched to Jerusalem, and he was appointed governor of the province. This point needs to be stressed again – the Persians appointed satraps directly, often choosing from within the royal family or from especially trusted figures valued for their personal loyalty.<sup>135</sup> That this fits Nehemiah suggests a man, not so much living in two worlds equally (the Persian and the Jewish), but rather a man whose first loyalties were to the Persian state, even while his personal sympathies lay with his people.

During his mission, Nehemiah worked to fortify the walls of Jerusalem, buttressing the satrapy against its neighbours. He “was also active in implementing social legislation, condemning those who extracted interest, and urging restitution of land to the poor. At the same time, he too prohibited Jewish intermarriage with foreign wives.”<sup>136</sup> Between the two of them, Ezra and Nehemiah established the foundations of Second Temple Judaism, which was to thrive almost exclusively under foreign rule, and which saw the strict separation of the Jews from other peoples, the ascendancy of the

134 Richard Elliott Friedman. *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997. 159.

135 Lindsay Allen. *The Persian Empire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 113.

136 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001. 301.

Levite priesthood, the enforcement of the Torah Law, and the beginnings of a state-sponsored monotheism.

This era also included the works of many post-Exilic writers who took a markedly different view of God from their ancestors. Let us take as our starting point the passage from Second Isaiah quoted previously. Like the passages (also from the period of exile and after) which refer to God manipulating the Assyrians and using them to his own ends, we saw in Isaiah the manipulation of the Persians and their entire empire to serve the interests of God's chosen people. This was truly, then, a god of history – a universal god, able to influence and control even those peoples with no covenantal relationship with Him. This, it must be stressed, was a new development in Hebrew theology, and has no parallels in the pre-Exilic period.

Indeed, the entire conception of God had radically shifted in the span of less than a century, from the henotheistic covenant of Abraham and Moses (with its frequent backsliding into polytheism and the consistent maintenance of polytheistic traditions amongst ordinary folk), to a world-view in which YHVH was the only god and his people were the only ones blessed to know this. YHVH "had finally absorbed his rivals in the religious imagination of Israel; in exile, the lure of paganism had lost its attraction and the religion of Judaism had been born."<sup>137</sup> This theology was presented through the interpretation of the Prophets which justified the destruction of the two Kingdoms as the responsibility of a people who had lost sight of the true faith, and offered a path towards redemption if greater fidelity could be demonstrated. This system of belief "succeeded not because it could be demonstrated rationally but because it was effective in preventing despair and inspiring hope."<sup>138</sup> The essence of Judaism as a religion able

137 Karen Armstrong. *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993. 61.

138 Karen Armstrong. *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and*

to withstand catastrophic loss was born at this time, and undoubtedly provided a solid foundation upon which the rabbis could build a religion of permanent exile after the Romans took apart the Second Temple in 70 CE.

Many of the specific doctrinal changes and influences will be documented in the following two chapters, which will be focussed upon a handful of key Zoroastrian doctrines which lie at the heart of Nietzsche's critique of Western religions. These will include discussions of linear time and progress; a universal deity; the eschatological nature of the world, with its cosmic struggle between absolute good and absolute evil; an apocalyptic vision of the end of time; the devil / Satan as a super-powerful source of temptation and world-corruption; and a messianic saviour who will come to make the world right again. In short, the key features that distinguish the Western religious sensibilities of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, were found first in Zoroastrianism, and the exilic period placed the former élites of Judah into direct and sustained contact with a Zoroastrian political and social élite. This interaction also persisted long, long after the first Persian Empire had become dust and memory. Jews continued to live in the east, and indeed spread farther into it, settling across the Iranian Plateau, into Central Asia, and even to the south-west coast of India. The Silk Road trade put Jewish merchants into constant contact with Zoroastrians throughout the Parthian and Sasanian eras.<sup>139</sup> These eastern Jewish communities continued to exert a strong influence upon the intellectual direction of their western co-religionists until well into the Islamic period.

But before we move on, I wish to note very briefly two other sets of connexions between the Iranian religion and the Western traditions – namely, the syncretic religion of Mithraism, and some of the directions taken by Christianity in its formative years.

*Islam*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993. 61.

<sup>139</sup> See, e.g., the discussion in: Richard Foltz. *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Pattern of Globalization*. Second Edition. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

### 3.3 The Impact of the Gnostic Understanding of the World

Gnosticism was an approach to religion widely shared among faiths in the Greco-Roman (Hellenistic) world, as opposed to being a religion itself. It is distinguished by a particular approach to the godhead, to the question of evil, and to truth. The name for the movement comes from a Greek word for knowledge, and Gnostics believed that the truth was hidden and salvation came from an esoteric reading of scripture to find this hidden knowledge. For Gnostics, there was a transcendent God who was divorced from this world, and another – evil – god who created the world in which we live. Sparks of the divine from the transcendent god survive in the human soul, however, allowing us to transcend the limitations of the flesh and the corruption of the world in order to return to a pure state in the next life. The 'hidden' aspect can be seen in the ways that Gnostics read earlier scriptures, which understandably lack any hints of this view of the universe. Being able to read the Torah and finding evidence of ethical and cosmological dualism is perhaps the essence of the Gnostic orientation, and it is curious that it corresponds so closely to the dualism of Zoroastrianism.

Consider how one authority on Gnosticism points to its origins: "The historical roots of the gnostics reach back into the time of the Greeks, Romans, and Second Temple Jews. Some gnostics were Jewish, others Greco-Roman, and many were Christian."<sup>140</sup> Absent in this chronological situation are the Zoroastrians, whose basis religious orientation overlaps Gnosticism to a considerable degree. And consider the

140 Marvin Meyer. 'Gnosticism, Gnostics, and *The Gnostic Bible*'. Introduction to: Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer (eds). *The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts of Mystical Wisdom from the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*. Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2006. 2.

sequence – if Gnosticism does not appear until the Second Temple era at earliest, what historical interaction has already begun? Correct, that puts it in the post-Exilic world of constant interaction between the Jewish and Iranian worlds.

It is, in my view of the material, most likely that the Gnostic world-view arose amongst the Second Temple Jews out of a fusion of Zoroastrian dualism, Neo-Platonic Idealism, and the philosophical approach taken in the Hellenistic mystery cults that spread far and wide through the territories that Alexander conquered. The self-conscious syncretism of the Gnostic movements perfectly fit the cultural milieu of the Hellenistic era, when all of the many cultures of the ancient Near East and Central Asia were thrown together. Pagans, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and philosophers freely mixed in the cities founded by, and in the wake of, Alexander. And Gnostics played a key rôle in the dissemination of spiritual ideas in the ancient world, given their extremely heterodox orientation and openness to the wisdom of others. "In addition to Jewish sacred literature, Christian documents, and Greco-Roman religious and philosophical texts, gnostics studied religious works from the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Zoroastrians, Muslims, and Buddhists. All such sacred texts disclosed truths, and were to the celebrated for their wisdom."<sup>141</sup>

The main question that Gnostic sources bring to light is one of definition. What did it mean to be Jewish in the Hellenistic world, or Christian in the Roman era? The ideas that we to-day view as "orthodox" were not widely shared at the time, this much is certain. Indeed, in both the Jewish and the Christian cases, the eventual orthodoxy emerged out of a long political process and was contested long after its emergence. "Instead of assuming that all these [Gnostic] texts deviate from what is 'normal,

141 Marvin Meyer. 'Gnosticism, Gnostics, and *The Gnostic Bible*'. Introduction to: Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer (eds). *The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts of Mystical Wisdom from the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*. Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2006. 2.

mainstream' early Christianity [or Judaism], we are finding that they have opened up to us a far wider range" of once-acceptable, indeed 'normal' approaches to being Jewish or Christian at this stage in their evolution.<sup>142</sup>

And the issue that bears most closely on the present study is precisely how these texts addressed the question of evil. Whilst the dualistic approach to the godhead of most Gnostic works eventually faded in the Jewish and Christian worlds<sup>143</sup>, the basic understanding of good and evil flourished through the ascetic movements of late Second Temple Judaism and early & mediaeval Christianity, and persists to the present day. Gnostics viewed this world as inherently corrupt – the product of a demiurge, or evil creator-god. That god was later reabsorbed by the godhead but the notion of the world as Fallen and corrupted persisted. The Second Temple era witnessed the birth of an interpretation of Genesis that saw humanity locked away from Paradise for the sins of Adam and Eve, and this view was adopted into Christianity, eventually becoming the doctrine of Original Sin (after a bit of creative rethinking by men like Augustine, a former Manichaean).<sup>144</sup> For Jews, a duty arose to combat the evil of the world and reject its temptations so that it could one day be 'repaired' or restored to its originally-intended form. *Tikkun Olam*, the perfecting of the world, became a widely-shared and accepted duty of Jews, and also how they came to see themselves as somehow an example for the world ('a light unto the nations').<sup>145</sup>

142 Elaine Pagels and Marvin Meyer. 'Introduction'. In: Marvin Meyer (ed.). *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007. 9.

143 It survived for more than a millennium after being declared 'heresy', in both the Cathar form that existed in southern France and the Bogomil form that was spread throughout the Balkans. It also doubtless continued to influence many mystical and ascetic traditions even in 'normative' Christianity.

144 Elaine Pagels. *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988. 117-119.

145 Joseph Telushkin. *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991. 120-122.

Extreme forms of rejection of this world spread through the fabric of both faiths, from the ascetic community of Qumran that left us the Dead Sea Scrolls, to the Stylites Saints of early Christianity. Asceticism later faded in Judaism, once the Roman cultural context in Palestine ceased to be a factor (namely, through destruction of the Second Temple and the beginnings of permanent exile), but it was codified and enfolded into the very nature of Christian life through the development of monastic orders and the perpetuation of extreme forms of asceticism. And, I will argue in the next chapter, that this rejection of the world, and the need to improve upon it, is a legacy of Zoroastrianism for the West. Indeed, the very notion of a heavenly Paradise as a reward for resisting the temptations of this world is an Iranian idea, as is the ever-present Tempter, the Devil, which only entered Jewish (and later Christian) works after encountering and living alongside the Ahura Mazda / Angra Mainyu duality.<sup>146</sup>

### 3.3.1 Zoroastrianism and the Gospel of Matthew

The complex relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and the latter's development out of a fertile mix of Greco-Roman mystery religions and philosophies, the intellectual debates in late Temple-era Judaism, and the influence of Gnostic and Zoroastrian ideas, is a subject which could itself occupy another hundred pages or more of this manuscript. As it is a Christian context to which Nietzsche is responding, and that Christianity developed out of Judaism and Roman culture is indisputable and was well-known to anyone in Nietzsche's day, there is little reason for me to belabour the

146 Richard Foltz. *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization*. Second Edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 27.

point beyond a few basic matters. Rather than, as I did before with Judaism, trace out the broad outlines of influence, I will instead limit myself to a few comments on the closest relationship between the faiths – the Gospel of Matthew.

Scholar generally place the composition of Matthew in the city of Antioch in Syria. This comes from a number of clues within the text itself, such as the point made in Matthew 4:24 that Jesus' fame "spread throughout all Syria" – which seems such an odd comment to make, when the text of Matthew (and of its probable source, Mark) restricts Jesus's mission to the Galilee region of Judea, and since Jesus repeatedly says that his message is only for the Jews.<sup>147</sup> There are also marked similarities between a couple of Syriac fragments from the second century which reference Zoroastrian myths about a star leading the Magi to the place of the birth of their saviour. The star which leads the Magi to Judea, and thence to Bethlehem itself, is mentioned only in the book of Matthew, and so may actually be a reference to these Zoroastrian ideas so as to aid in missionary work among them in Syria and Cappadocia.<sup>148</sup> It should be noted clearly that the Greek term for the "wise men from the east" in Matthew 2:1-2 and 2:9-10 is *magoi*, the word used in numerous Greek texts for Zoroastrian priests.<sup>149</sup> There is thus a clear indication that the author of Matthew intended to show Zoroastrian priests coming to acknowledge Jesus as the foretold saviour.

This also neatly helps to explain the virgin-birth which Matthew adds to the story of Jesus. The conception of Jesus to an unwed virgin mother has always presented numerous problems for biblical scholars and apologists alike, not least because of the

147 Matthew 4:24. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 1674.

148 Michael Stausberg. *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction*. Translated by Margret Preisler-Weller. London: Equinox Publishing, 2008. 109-110.

149 Matthew 2:1-2 and 2:9-10. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 1669-1670.



specious claims that it was in fulfilment of a Jewish prophecy in Isaiah. The Greek text of the Septuagint renders the word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 as “virgin”, but the Hebrew word only means young woman.<sup>150</sup> There is, in the Jewish tradition, no prediction of a saviour being born to a virgin mother. On the other hand, there is such a prophecy in the Zoroastrian canon! Not only is this redeemer figure born of a virgin, he serves to bring on the final judgement. In *Bundahishn* 33 we learn of Sōshāns, called Astva-ereta in the *Gathas*, who is the third and last of Zarathushtra’s eschatological sons, and who is born of a maiden who goes into a lake to wash herself and comes out pregnant (Zarathushtra’s seed had been preserved in the water).<sup>151</sup> This child goes on to lead the forces of light in the final days as the *saoshyant*, the messiah. As Jenny Rose explains it, the term *saoshyant*

“has also been translated as ‘redeemer’ or ‘savior’, which has Christian overtones, but which is not entirely discordant with the way in which the term develops in later Avestan and then Middle Persian texts. These include mention of a single *saoshyant* who will benefit the whole corporeal world, bringing about the final defeat of evil. The use of the future participle indicates an eschatological sense already in the *Gathas*.”<sup>152</sup>

Parallels to Zoroastrian ideas crop up several times later in the Gospel of Matthew, especially in relation to the eschatological mission of Jesus as the Christ, the redeemer of all. Consider the time of his temptation in the desert before his mission began. When the Gospel of Mark, the earliest extant gospel, discusses the matter, the

150 Isaiah 7:14. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 924.

151 see, e.g., Prods Oktor Skjærvø. *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 165-166.

152 Jenny Rose. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2011. 23.

author calls the figure Satan, a reference to the Hebrew figure of the Tempter. The Jewish understanding of Satan is not as an independent power, but as a servant of God. Matthew, however, in 4:1-11, refers to the character as “the devil”, using a word which entered Greek through Avestan.<sup>153</sup> The devil here takes on the form of an independent spirit, whose goal it is to wreck the divine plan and bring Man to ruin. This is far more reminiscent of the figure of Ahriman, who opposed Ahura Mazda and tried to tempt men into serving the cosmic Lie.

The last parallel that I will address concerns the End of Days and the Judgement of the Nations in Matthew 25:31-46. What is described here is very much a physical separation of the peoples, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”. Those which he moves to the right side are blessed with eternal life and peace, but those separated to the left “are accursed” and he tells them “depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”.<sup>154</sup> This idea is closer in spirit to the Zoroastrian apocalypse than to any Jewish ideas then current. It puts me in mind of the Arbiter’s Crossing, or Bridge of the Separator, which the wicked will face in the judgement. They will be separated physically from the good and just by the weight of their own wicked deeds.<sup>155</sup>

I will return to these eschatological and apocalyptic themes in light of Nietzsche’s critique of linear and progressive thought in a later chapter. Suffice it to say for now that there are many reasons to assume a connexion, not only between Zoroastrianism and Judaism, but also a Zoroastrian influence bearing directly upon the emerging

153 Matthew 4:1-11. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 1672-1673.

154 Matthew 25:31-46. Harold W. Attridge (ed.). *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperOne, 2006. 1713.

155 see, e.g., Yasna 51:13 in: M.L. West. *The Hymns of Zoroaster: A New Translation of the Most Ancient Sacred Texts of Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. 159.

Christian idea, even if only to gain converts from among the Zoroastrian diaspora on the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire.

#### 4.0 The Secularization of Progress in the Enlightenment

Having done much thus far to establish the relationship between Zoroastrianism and its Abrahamic cousins, we must begin to explore in detail how the linear and progressive nature of apocalyptic-eschatological time was systematically altered by the secular thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In one way or another, each of the figures addressed below responded directly to the apocalyptic eschatology that Christian Europe inherited from Judaism and Zoroastrianism. We will first encounter Kant and examine how he took the core teleology of Christianity and modified it to suit his radical epistemological scepticism. From there we will see how Hegel, Marx, and the dialectic were made to serve a progressive notion of time, which should give some indication of how fiendishly difficult it has been for Western thinkers to escape the long shadow of Zarathushtra. Finally, we will look at many of the key early evolutionists, including Spencer, Wallace, Darwin, and Haeckel. This will set us up for a discussion of Nietzsche's naturalistic influences, with which the chapter after this one will begin. Our discussion both of these figures and of the ancient Greek thinkers that were so foundational to Nietzsche's project will enable us to appreciate the way that his myth of Eternal Recurrence was intended as a specific counter to apocalyptic thinking, in both its religious and secular forms.

#### 4.1 Kant and Teleology: Naturalizing Progress

The content and character of Kant's thinking on progress, teleology, and religion remain contested terrain, and it has become far too easy to read him in the spirit of more recent analytical philosophy, as arguing for a stricter epistemic régime than he intended. Such is the nature of Kant's genius that his circumscription of the knowable and the unknowable has outlived the philosophical discourse from which it was composed. In this paper I will not be reading Kant as if he were actively censoring his own work in order to accommodate a world that was not ready for his ideas. Rather, I will approach Kant's thought from within the institutional discourses of the late Enlightenment, and imagine his work not so much as a radical assault on pre-critical philosophy, as it is a creative reaction to the disconcerting implications of the changes taking place around him.

In the wake of the Copernican revolution and the inauguration of the Newtonian paradigm it became increasingly easy to attack the dogmatic understanding of philosophy inherited from the Scholastics. Against the resurgent scepticism of the Enlightenment, Kant's project was pitched as an attempt to save the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the Creator of the universe from the threat of a deterministic and rational universe that had no need of them. Kant's methodology would prove revolutionary in itself, but his motivations were rooted in a pious upbringing and lay far from the atheism they implied. He would, in fact, have been appalled at the more radical applications of his epistemology that would occupy future thinkers like Nietzsche.

As we will see, Kant's God was not merely the "*as if*" postulate that survives in his work, but in fact played a far more active rôle as the culmination of historical progress, without which the whole would have remained unsatisfying. The intervention of Kant's critical philosophy was intended to preserve and protect religion against further erosion in the service of rationality. Just as Nietzsche would later recognize the growing nihilism and self-destructive impulses of the late nineteenth century, Kant would have appreciated the long-term implications of the Enlightenment turn toward naturalism, and saw in them the potential erosion of the bases for morality itself. Without the freedom to act morally, and without a beneficent God to serve (at the least) as the motivation for a striving toward the ideal in human existence, what prevented human society from devolving into barbarism?

It was not, therefore, an end to metaphysics that Kant sought, but rather their revitalization. His critical system to place metaphysics on a stable footing vis-à-vis the scientific and naturalistic revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was broadly accepted, and it helped to insulate philosophy and theology from the implications of this shifting intellectual climate for another century at least. In this section I will be tracing out some of the ways in which Kant reflected the traditions of progress and historical purposiveness that were common to nearly all nineteenth-century thinkers who followed him. Some of his admirers in natural science would adhere closely to the religious undertones of Kant's position, whilst others would seek fully to naturalize teleology and progress; but as I will demonstrate, the fact that evolution was conceived by many in terms that were directly complementary to Kant's progressive theories should not be in any doubt.

Along the way we will explore the essential contours of Kantian teleology, which

was generally characterized as a “regulative principle of the understanding”. Purposiveness, like causation and time, were conceived by Kant as contingent upon subjective experience; they were introduced into the world by human understanding. This does not, in itself, mean that these ideas had no objective reality. On the contrary, Kant believed that the understanding worked in accordance with the underlying principles that governed the universe. And as a review of his moral and progressive thought will demonstrate, Kant surpassed the epistemic limitations of his critical system in order to posit a world that did, in fact, have an objective purpose.

#### 4.1.1 Living Things as “Natural Purposes”, and Nature as a System

Before we can understand the distinctions Kant will make between regulative and constitutive principles, or reflective and determinative judgements, we should be clear about the most basic movement in Kant’s epistemology. Kant drew a distinction between the objects of experience, which we know from sense data, and those objects of no possible experience, which are only accessible to us through the application of pure reason. The objects of sensibility he termed *phenomena* (from the Greek stem *φαίνο*, or *phaino*), and the concepts accessible to pure reason he termed *noumena* (from the Greek *νόος*, or *nous*), which he also calls the thing-in-itself. This division introduces an enduring preoccupation with appearance or representation into philosophy, and delimits the realm of theoretical cognizance in such a way as to eliminate dogmatic assertions about the *noumenal* world beyond human experience.

For Kant, then, the “material world” can be conceptualized “as mere

appearance", beyond which "it is at least possible" to imagine "something as [its] substrate, as thing-in-itself (which is not appearance), and to regard this thing-in-itself as based on a corresponding intellectual intuition (even though not ours)."<sup>156</sup> This allows Kant to argue that there is, for nature, "a supersensible basis of its reality", although being restricted to the sensible world "we could not cognize this basis."<sup>157</sup> Thus, in spite of the constraints imposed by the limited sphere within which our own understanding operates, we can infer a world that exists beyond our senses. This world must, in its essence, be set aside, as Kant argues that we can give it no "content" (*i.e.*, we cannot know what it is really like); nevertheless, its existence will be central to his resuscitation of metaphysics. Indeed, it will hang like a shroud over our capacity to understand even the *phenomenal* world in which we live, as the finite nature of our minds will be unable to penetrate the intricate mysteries of organic lifeforms or of nature *as a system*.

Kant will argue that we cannot conceive of organic life—what he calls organized beings—without recourse to purposive thinking, nor can we think of nature as a whole without such thinking. Whether or not this must remain *only* as an aspect of human understanding (*i.e.*, just in our heads and not in the world itself) depends greatly for Kant on how life itself is to be conceived. He claims that when we consider an organized being,

though we can try on it all the laws of mechanical production that we know or may yet discover... we can never [account] for the possibility of such a product without appealing to a basis for its

156 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 77, Ak. 409, Pluhar 293.

157 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 77, Ak. 409, Pluhar 293.

production that is wholly distinct from the mechanical one, namely, a causality through purposes. Indeed, absolutely no human reason (nor any finite reason similar to ours in quality, no matter how much it may surpass ours in degree) can hope to understand, in terms of nothing but mechanical causes, how so much as a mere blade of grass is produced.<sup>158</sup>

This is due to his conception of organized beings as *Naturzwecke* (or natural purposes), which I argue requires—in conjunction with the “moral law” and his proof for the existence of God—that nature as a system be constituted according to a progressive teleology. Kant’s methods will prevent us from conceiving in any great detail what those purposes might be; but that we perceive their necessity, and can infer the broad outlines of their nature, follows logically from his core assumptions and from the structure of his moral philosophy.

In order to see how the concept of *Naturzwecke* would lead Kant to an objective teleology, we must first consider what he means by the term. An organized being is a natural purpose when and because it meets two criteria: “*First*, the possibility of its parts... must depend on their relation to the whole.” And secondarily, “the parts of the thing [must] combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form.”<sup>159</sup> Meaning, that organic beings on a fundamental level *produce themselves*, and their parts cannot be considered apart from the function within the larger scheme of the whole. This is on one level merely a heuristic principle for explaining form and function (*i.e.*, one cannot usefully consider the heart without noting

158 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 77, Ak. 409, Pluhar 294.

159 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 65, Ak. 373, Pluhar 252.



that its “purpose” is to pump blood), but it is also the basis for Kant’s reading back into nature a genuine *telos*. As he notes,

organized beings are the only beings in nature that, even when considered by themselves and apart from any relation to other things, must still be thought of as possible only as purposes of nature. It is these beings, therefore, which first give objective reality to the concept of a *purpose* that is a purpose *of nature* rather than a practical one, and which hence give natural science the basis for a teleology, *i.e.*, for judging its objectives in terms of a special principle that otherwise we simply would not be justified in introducing... (since we have no *a priori* insight... into the possibility of such a causality).<sup>160</sup>

Kant thus moves from the recognition of lifeforms as internally-purposive entities to the notion that teleology may be applied—as a necessary principle of natural science—to the world as a whole. Empirical science, Kant argues, must always seek first its answers in mechanical principles, but in the case of life these principles alone are inadequate.

Hence we would consider in terms of mechanical laws whatever is necessary in nature as an object of sense; but the harmony and unity of the particular laws of nature and of the forms based on them are contingent in terms of mechanical laws, and [so] this harmony and unity, as objects of reason, we would at the same time consider in terms of teleological laws (as, indeed, we would

160 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 65, Ak. 375-6, Pluhar 255.

consider the whole of nature as a system). So we would judge nature in terms of two kinds of principles, and the mechanical kind of explanation would not be excluded by the teleological as if they contradicted each other.<sup>161</sup>

In fact, “although the principle of a mechanical derivation of purposive natural products is compatible with the teleological principle, the mechanical one could certainly not make the teleological one dispensable.”<sup>162</sup>

What remains unresolved at this juncture is the precise *nature* of these teleological judgements. Kant states clearly, in his discussion of nature as a system, “that this principle holds only for reflective but not determinative judgement, that it is regulative and not constitutive.” In other words, thinking teleologically “only serves us as a guide that allows us to consider natural things in terms of a new law-governed order by referring them to an already given basis [a purpose] as that which determines them.”<sup>163</sup> But what is this “law-governed order” to which he alludes? It is here that we must move beyond his conception of humanity and examine the underlying vitalism Kant perceives within the natural world.

#### 4.1.2 Vitalism and the Moral Law

Like his followers Schelling and Goethe, Kant appears to have had an

161 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 77, Ak. 409, Pluhar 293-4.

162 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 77, Ak. 409, Pluhar 294.

163 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 67, Ak. 379, Pluhar 259.

understanding of immanent nature that echoes Spinoza's philosophical pantheism, though with a clear separation of God from the vital forces of nature. As discussed above, his conception of organic bodies sharply distinguished them from inorganic matter—to which applied all the laws of Newtonian physics—by considering them *Naturzwecke*. These self-organizing and self-generating beings “cannot derive... organization merely from the moving forces of *matter*.”<sup>164</sup> Therefore, a

single (thus, immaterial) being must be assumed as the *mover* outside or within this body—whether as part of the world of sense, or as a being distinct from it. For matter cannot organize itself and act according to purposes. Whether this being (a world-soul, as it were) possesses understanding, or whether merely a capacity which is analogous to the understanding in its effects, is a judgement which lies beyond the limits of one's insight.<sup>165</sup>

Thus, as with God and the human soul, although it is impossible to supply this concept with positive content as to its nature, it is likewise impossible to deny its existence. He argues that the totality of “organized bodies... indicate[s] an immaterial principle, and, insofar as organization extends through all parts of the world (transforming bodies and replacing dead ones with new formations in their place) indicate[s] an *anima mundi*”, or world-soul.<sup>166</sup>

There is an epistemological qualification to be made here, as Kant is clear that we can have no *empirical* verification of the world-soul's existence. Nevertheless, his

164 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 85.

165 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 85.

166 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 147.

belief in life-forms as *Naturzwecke*, and his insistence that “only an immaterial substance”, perhaps open to theorization as a *Lebenskraft* (or vital force), “can contain the ground of possibility for organized bodies,” leaves little doubt about the concept standing in the shadows: something at least akin to the monist “god or nature” of Spinoza.<sup>167</sup> Having postulated this immaterial vital essence behind life, Kant expected that, no matter how far our knowledge of biological science progressed, some mystery would always remain:

For it is quite certain that in terms of merely mechanical principles of nature we cannot even adequately become familiar with, much less explain, organized beings and how they are internally possible. So certain is this that we may boldly state that it is absurd for human beings even to attempt it, or to hope that perhaps some day another Newton might arise who would explain to us, in terms of natural laws unordered by any intention, how even a mere blade of grass is produced.<sup>168</sup>

This reflected not only the inability of materialist science (in Kant’s day) to explain organic beings, but also the underlying, religious sensibility so cleverly expressed in his discussion of the beautiful and the sublime.<sup>169</sup>

Kant’s critical philosophy cannot be appreciated apart from its pietistic motivations, yet it is plain that Kant followed Hume in rejecting the anthropomorphic Creator of Christian theology. Whilst the famously sceptical Scottish thinker ventured that the search for “a purpose, an intention, a design, strikes everywhere the most

167 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 149.

168 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 75, Ak. 400, Pluhar 282-3.

169 Cf. the first part of the third *Critique*.

careless, the most stupid thinker”, he nevertheless did not discount the value of teleological thinking in a naturalized form.<sup>170</sup> Kant agreed with Hume that teleology remained a perfectly natural manner of thinking, irrespective of the removal of a theoretically-justifiable God; hence his retention of teleology as both a necessary postulate of his moral philosophy, and as a heuristic tool in his epistemology. As Paul Guyer puts it, “Kant accepts Hume’s rejection of theoretical cognition of an anthropomorphic God, but argues that we must replace that with an anthropocentric, but *morally* anthropocentric, conception of nature.”<sup>171</sup>

But it is far from clear to what extent Kant’s “nature” remained consciously god-like. As he observed in his final major work,

it remains undetermined whether [the immaterial principle that makes organized bodies possible] encompasses the entire universe and hence underlies [everything] in cosmic space—as a world-soul, as a unifying principle of all life (which thus must not be called *spirit*)—or whether several be arranged hierarchically.<sup>172</sup>

To be fair, we must also acknowledge his protestation that “God is not the world-soul.”<sup>173</sup> Rather, God can only be considered as spirit, since to infer his existence as world-soul (as Spinoza did) “would make him dependent upon empirical determinations, as a sense-object.”<sup>174</sup> Kant’s epistemology demanded that the “transcendent concept [of God be] always only negative”, and based not in “knowledge

170 David Hume. In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, and Other Writings*. Edited by Dorothy Coleman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 89-90.

171 Paul Guyer. *Kant*. London: Routledge, 2006. 338.

172 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 197.

173 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 225.

174 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 215.

of the world, but the knowledge of all human duties *as* divine commands”, *i.e.*, through the categorical imperative.<sup>175</sup> Rather than offering, then, a simple re-tread of Western theological philosophy, Kant presents a form of natural teleology *qua* natural theology. This has the effect of an evasion, as Kant avoids the more startling implications of empirical science by simply moving God beyond the reach of philosophy. In this way the monotheistic God and its religion can be safeguarded from empirical critique, as a now-independent metaphysical force stands in for the functions previously ascribed to the God of history.

This brings us to consider how the natural world, in its new *quasi*-religious rôle, might be impacted by Kant’s moral philosophy, as alluded to in the first *Critique* and more fully developed in the second. Despite occasionally sounding as though freedom of the will was only a necessary illusion (thus keeping human action within the deterministic framework of the first *Critique*), it is clear that for Kant human beings are not fully constrained by their existence within nature.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, he introduces a peculiar form of dualism in his discussion of moral autonomy, whereby human beings must be considered “as belonging to the world of sense [and hence under the deterministic laws of nature] and yet *at the same time* to the world of the understanding.”<sup>177</sup> Despite the constraints on our physical realities, which “would have to be taken to conform... wholly to the natural law of desires and inclinations”, Kant insists that all of our actions as “a member of the world of understanding would... conform perfectly with the principle of autonomy of the pure will”.<sup>178</sup>

175 Immanuel Kant. *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster, translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 215-6.

176 Cf. the first *Critique*, A536.

177 Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Ak 4:453. In *Practical Philosophy*. Edited by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Ak 4:453, Gregor 100. [emphasis added]

178 Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Ak 4:453. In *Practical*

Resolution of this transcendental definition of the self is beyond the scope of our discussion, but it is important to note that Kant viewed human beings as rational, autonomous, *moral* agents, and as such believed that they were subject to the “moral law” (*i.e.*, the categorical imperative).<sup>179</sup> Further, for an action to be considered moral, he argued that it must be performed from a sense of “duty”, rather than from baser or more unconscious means. It is only through duty that we can give ourselves meaning as *free* beings, for only in “freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature” can we find that which

elevates a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world), what connects him with an order of things that only the understanding can think and that at the same time has under it the whole sensible world and with it the empirically determinable existence of human beings in time and the whole of all ends (which is alone suitable to such unconditional practical laws as the moral).<sup>180</sup>

This conception of human beings as moral agents was, as Nietzsche will point out, drawn from Christianity, not reason (whether pure or practical). It led Kant to maintain that the distinction between men and other animals was not only quantitative, but qualitative. “Human beings,” in fact, “because they are moral agents” are said to

*Philosophy*. Edited by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Ak 4:453, Gregor 100.

179 The categorical imperative is a universal principle in three parts, usually distilled by reference to its most famous formulation, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: We must always “act only in accordance with that maxim through which [we] can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” Kant. *Groundwork*. Ak. 4:421, Gregor 73.

180 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*. In *Practical Philosophy*. Edited by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Ak. 5:86, Gregor 210.

“possess infinite worth.”<sup>181</sup> Kevin Hill notes that such an orientation would lead Kant to the realization that “nature as a system can be conceived as designed to provide a site for the realization of human aims... as far as they are moral.”<sup>182</sup> This would seriously impact the logical structure of Kant’s teleology, and would affect the way that it was taken up by less cautious followers like Fichte and Schelling.

But for Kant himself, this conception of man would ultimately lead him to a betrayal of his own critical philosophy—or, to what *appears* in hindsight to be a betrayal. In truth, Kant’s elimination of teleology was never so clean as a modern reading of the third *Critique* might suggest. His practical philosophy in actuality *demand*s a certain kind of natural-historical teleology; witness the way that he transitions from the ability of human beings to apply subjective, reflexive judgement to themselves, to a larger point about the world:

Man is indeed the only being on earth that has understanding and hence an ability to set himself purposes of his own choice, and in this respect he holds the title of lord of nature; and if we regard nature as a teleological system, then it is man’s vocation to be the ultimate purpose of nature,<sup>183</sup>

provided that this ultimate purpose is sought *outside* of nature itself. This would be, on the simplest level, the operation of the moral law. But in its fuller realization, this “ultimate purpose” of nature reveals the latent chiliastic expectations that Kant shared with nearly all of his contemporaries.

181 R. Kevin Hill. *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundation of his Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 58.

182 R. Kevin Hill. *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundation of his Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 58.

183 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 83, Ak. 431, Pluhar 318.



Kant had, in discussing his teleology, remained adamant that he was not trying to restore an “argument from design” for the existence of God; in fact, he rejected explicitly the idea that biological structures—or the existence of nature as a vitalistic system—could provide direct evidence for God’s own existence.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, the structure of his arguments make the inference impossible to refuse: without God, Kant’s conception of man and nature collapses into nonsense. He was, after all, suggesting that one of the scientist’s most pressing tasks must be to “find out what nature can accomplish in order to prepare man for what he himself must do in order to be a final purpose”.<sup>185</sup> What, Kant asks, does nature itself offer to man on the way to perfecting himself, and how can man then prepare to exceed nature and—through his dutiful action—prepare himself and his society for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

One of the fundamental tasks of Kant’s third *Critique* is to de-couple the concept of purpose from that of design; in this way, Kant expected that the best features of natural and rational teleology could be argued without the requirement of a dogmatic belief in God. This separation, even in Kant’s own mind and writings, was not to prove successful; for although he did not prove that God was necessary for the world to exist, he *did* argue that it would be impossible to reckon that man was aiming in his moral acts for the “highest good” without *also* supposing that there *were* a God who desired such a striving. And Kant could not have understood morality as animal in origin, or as entirely subjective and relative, rather than as a necessary postulate of reason and divine beneficence.

184 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 68, Ak. 381-2, Pluhar 261-2.

185 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 83, Ak. 431, Pluhar 318.

In consequence, regardless of our inability—objectively and theoretically—to prove that there exists a world-designer, Kant’s moral law *demands* that there *be* such a designer, and hence Kant’s interests in teleology flow naturally from his practical philosophy. The reason for this is made plain by the question of theodicy: If there is evil in the world and in nature, it must serve some divine purpose. Kant’s solution is an appeal to historical teleology, and the argument that history itself can be given a “narrative structure in which the evils of nature continually challenge us to cultivate ever more powerful science and technology, while the evils of human misconduct continually challenge us to devise ever more adequate social and political arrangements.”<sup>186</sup> Thus Kant deduces in the travails of human life an impetus to cultivate an ever more perfect society, and he asserts that man’s “ultimate purpose” lies surely in culture. It is to this end that he focusses all of his moral exhortations (postulated as “duties”), and to which he sees the flow of history leading. But how did Kant picture historical progression itself?

#### 4.1.3 Progress and Perfection, in Culture and in Nature

Whatever his insistence upon the necessity of free will as an anchor for moral agency, Kant directly prefigured Hegel’s philosophy of history in his essay on the *Idea for a Universal History*. He argues that “the will’s manifestations in the world of phenomena, *i.e.* human actions, are determined in accordance with natural laws, as is every other natural event.”<sup>187</sup> Kant claims that universal history

186 R. Kevin Hill. *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundation of his Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 58.

187 Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In *Kant:*

is concerned with giving an account of these phenomena, no matter how deeply concealed their causes may be, and it allows us to hope that, if it examines the free exercise of the human will *on a large scale*, it will be able to discover a regular progression among freely willed actions. In the same way, we may hope that what strikes us in the actions of individuals as confused and fortuitous may be recognised, in the history the entire species, as a steadily advancing but slow development of man's original capacities.<sup>188</sup>

With his notion of *Geist* unfolding dialectically through time, Hegel also argued that the world was inexorably progressing towards a specific goal. He then suggested that through observation of this slowly-unfolding plan, the hand of God (abstracted in Kantian fashion as pure Idea) could be seen acting on and through the world throughout human history. Although he differs in the end result, and in the extent to which we can learn the details of this cosmic *telos*, Kant pursued much the same strategy. His engagement with the political and social turmoil in his of life brings this strategy to light, and I will try to illustrate this with his attentiveness to the unfolding drama of the French Revolution.

In line with his categorical imperative to act morally in all things and at all times, Kant claims that the actions of the revolutionaries themselves need not be considered moral—and indeed would have difficulty being so considered, as they must defy authority and act violently. Yet Kant was certain that the Revolution itself could serve a moral purpose; writing in 1798, he observed that:

*Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1991]. 41.

188 Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1991]. 41.

The revolution which we have seen taking place... in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such a price, even if he could hope to carry it successfully at the second attempt. But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race.<sup>189</sup>

We can see here the way that Kant's assumptions about the moral nature of man influences his estimation of the implicit meaning behind the sympathy he feels for the Revolutionaries, even *after* the commencement of the Terror. In the heart of this most pacific and quiescent philosopher, even violence—an expression of “antagonism within society”—could be the “means which nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities”, such as a more just and moral constitution.<sup>190</sup> His belief in moral-teleological purposiveness led him to assert that in avowed Revolutionary principles “there must be something *moral* which reason recognises not only as pure, but also (because of its great and epoch-making influence) as something to which the human soul manifestly acknowledges a duty.”<sup>191</sup>

189 Immanuel Kant. *The Contest of Faculties*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 182.

190 Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1991]. 44.

191 Immanuel Kant. *The Contest of Faculties*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 184.

The invocation of “duty” brings the reader’s mind to practical philosophy and its imperative of sustained moral action under free will (recalling that autonomy is one of the signature elements of the critical system). Progress could not be assumed to produce in mankind “an ever increasing quantity of *morality* in its attitudes”, but rather enshrine in the cumulative effect of moral action a more perfect culture.<sup>192</sup> Progress would emerge from “an increasing number of actions governed by duty, whatever the particular motive behind these actions may be. In other words, the profit [to be found in progress] will result from man’s good *deeds* as they grow ever more numerous and successful, [*i.e.*], from the external phenomena of man’s moral nature.”<sup>193</sup> This will be an essential point to reconsider in the context of Lamarckian evolution, to be discussed later.

It follows that Kant is not commending the Revolution as a model itself, but pointing to the good that can arise through the positive influence of its ideals in the world. Kant does not refer to the necessity of another revolution in Europe, but to “the *evolution* of a constitution governed by *natural right*.”<sup>194</sup> He sees the activities of the Revolution as serving to advance, through progressive historical development, the good of the whole world. Thus,

the proposition that the human race has always been progressively improving and will continue to develop in the same way is not just a well-meant saying to be recommended for practical purposes.

Whatever unbelievers may say, it is tenable within the most strictly

192 Immanuel Kant. *The Contest of Faculties*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 187.

193 Immanuel Kant. *The Contest of Faculties*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 187-8.

194 Immanuel Kant. *The Contest of Faculties*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 184.

theoretical context. And if one considers not only the events which may happen within a particular nation, but also their repercussions upon all the nations of the earth which might gradually begin to participate in them, a view opens up into the unbounded future.<sup>195</sup>

It is precisely this kind of universalizing progressive tendency that would infect the popular Darwinians.

The penultimate proposition in *Idea for a Universal History* neatly encapsulates the larger *telos* within which all of these expectations exist:

The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realisation of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.<sup>196</sup>

Yet quite unlike his follower Hegel, whose belief in progress could foresee a possible resolution through the actions of men alone (having once realized the potential of Spirit), Kant did not think that man could attain *final* perfection on his own. He envisioned a gradual development that, in accordance with the dictates of duty, brought perfection closer every year, but Kant's residual chiasm made him stop just short of paradise. To highlight the unsatisfactory nature of an unending progress that might have no resolution without the intervention of Providence, Kant draws a parallel with the state of an individual's life:

Even assuming a person's moral-physical state here in life at its

195 Immanuel Kant. *The Contest of Faculties*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 185.

196 Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1991]. 50.

best—namely as a constant progression and approach to the highest good (marked out for him as a goal)—, he still (even with a consciousness of the unalterability of his disposition) cannot combine it with the prospect of *satisfaction* in an eternally enduring alteration of his state (the moral as well as the physical). For the state in which he now is will always remain an ill compared with a better one which he always stands ready to enter; and the representation of an infinite progression toward the final end is nevertheless at the same time a prospect on an infinite series of ills which, even though they may be outweighed by a greater good, do not allow for the possibility of contentment; for he can think that only by supposing that the *final end* will at sometime be *attained*.<sup>197</sup>

There is more at work here than the psychological quirk summed up in the cliché about grass being greener on the other side of the hill; this observation brings Kant back to God and rational religious faith.

Kant had sought in the first *Critique* to delimit the proper realm of theoretical knowledge, and he followed this in the second with a strong defence of the transcendent through the intuitions of morality. But Kant's moral law could only stand if it was backed by a just and beneficent God, which drove him to the positions of the third *Critique* wherein, in the words of Roger Scruton, "our sentiments of the sublime and of the beautiful combine to present an inescapable picture of nature as created. In beauty we discover the purposiveness of nature; in the sublime we have intimations of its transcendent origins."<sup>198</sup> And man, as the only conceivable object of such a display of

197 Immanuel Kant. *The End of All Things*. In *Religion and Rational Theology*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Ak 8:335, Wood 227-8.

198 Roger Scruton. *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

creative wonder, takes on a special significance as the keystone species of the natural world—for whom nature as a whole can be said to exist. Terry Pinkard argues that this “*moral*” conception of humanity requires that we think of the whole world as purposively structured” to provide the possibilities for men to achieve the “highest good”, conceived as “the union of virtue and happiness”.<sup>199</sup> This in turn “requires us to conceive of a moral initiator (*Urheber*) ... who has designed the world in that way.”<sup>200</sup> Thus unlike the Marquis de Condorcet, whose belief in social progress and the perfectibility of humanity made no reference to a God of history, Kant was unable to escape the long, eschatological shadow of Christianity.

Both within Kant’s lifetime and in the century to follow the millenarian ideals of Christianity were translated into progressive beliefs about the potential of human society when guided by reason. This form of “salvation” would not involve an easy slide into earthly paradise, but would come about only as the result of hard work and deliberate effort, and it was to this purpose that Kant aimed his moral philosophy. As he argued, “reason does not itself work instinctively, ... it requires trial, practice and instruction to enable it to progress gradually from one stage of insight to the next.”<sup>201</sup> This would not be possible in the span of a single life or in the faculties of any single being, but would emerge in the collective intelligence of man; and it would “require a long, perhaps incalculable series of generations, each passing on its enlightenment to the next, before the germs implanted by nature in our species can be developed to that

2001. 110.

199 Terry Pinkard. *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 77.

200 Terry Pinkard. *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 77.

201 Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1991]. 42.



degree which corresponds to nature's original intention."<sup>202</sup> Here lies the root of Spencerian progress and evolution, which I will address later below.

For Kant himself, this position led him to theorize a steady evolution of political and cultural forms, whereby man could (after much trial and experimentation, not to mention philosophizing) bring himself as close to the Kingdom of God as possible. Kant's God stood at the head of a universal religion, which had only fragmented into separate faiths; and in a revitalized church of reason Kant saw "the germ and the principles of the object unity of the true and *universal* religious faith to which it [*i.e.*, the Christian church] is gradually being brought nearer."<sup>203</sup> His faith lay perhaps, not in the particulars of Christianity, but in an Enlightenment godhead to be found somewhere between the deified Nature of Spinoza, the abstract god of Aristotle, and the Cult of Reason invoked by the Jacobins. After Kant, it would grow easier to approach a natural teleology without holding to so definite a religious sentiment, and it is to the progressive thinkers of the nineteenth century that we now turn.

#### 4.2 Hegel and Marx – the Dialectic, Materialism, and Progress

The current section need not be as detailed as the previous or succeeding ones, since neither Hegel nor Marx figure in Nietzsche's direct intellectual influences. They are, however, essential to our story for their own wide significance in the period. A large

202 Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In *Kant: Political Writings*. Edited by Hans Reiss, translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1991]. 43.

203 Immanuel Kant. *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. In *Religion and Rational Theology*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Ak. 6:125, Wood 154.

number of authors with which Nietzsche did engage were influenced by or responding to Hegel, and socialist ideas – not least those of Marx – were widely circulating in Nietzsche’s later active years, and his negative opinion of socialism is well known. What I hope to demonstrate quickly in this section is the way in which both Hegel and Marx were indebted to the same kind of apocalyptic and progressive ideals that underlie the major monotheistic faiths since Zoroastrianism, since this teleological Achilles’ heel was a major factor in Nietzsche’s view of such philosophies.

#### 4.2.1 Hegel’s Progressive Dialectic and the Myth of Purposive History

Like Kant, Hegel was entirely unable to escape the hold of teleology – and, in a very real sense, of apocalyptic eschatology. Unlike Kant, he actually stopped trying, and spent his all of his mature work choosing instead to turn towards a mystical form of Christianity which he hoped to turn to the service of the state. His earliest thought saw him grappling with the needs of a civil religion in the influence of Kantianism, and finding Christianity unsuitable to the task, in part because of its focus on personal salvation over that of the nation. He was in this period heavily influenced by Kantian moral philosophy, and if anything “saw Kantian morality as the essence and purpose of religion”.<sup>204</sup> In his Frankfurt (and Jena) years, by contrast, he set religion above Kantian morality, and set about defending even the most irrational and faith-dependent aspects of Christianity as essential to it. From at least 1799, in a period including all of his most important philosophical works, Hegel appears to have been a believing Christian and defended its rôle within his ideal European state. He broke with some of the more

204 Frederick Beiser. *Hegel*. London: Routledge, 2005. 132.

mystical and experiential aspects he brought to light in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, turning by the time of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to a reliance upon pure reason, but he never fully broke with the core elements of faith.

That said, Hegel could hardly be considered to be an especially orthodox Christian thinker, and he steadfastly refused to refer to his philosophy as Christian. Indeed, he felt that in most respects he was *transcending* Christianity and laying out an alternative to the struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism. But he also refused to separate the religious and the philosophical into separate magisteria as Kant did, explicitly criticising their dualistic approach and seeking a reconciliation of reason and faith.<sup>205</sup> And in many of his core ideas, he remains – perhaps unconsciously – utterly indebted to Christian ideals. Even his famous expression “the death of God”, which appears often in his work, has an entirely different meaning than it will later in Nietzsche’s writings. The latter noted the “death of God” as signifying the collapse of belief in an absolute and beneficent God, and indeed its irrelevance to modern life. Hegel, but contrast, meant only the death of an orthodox or traditional interpretation of Christianity, and the dawning of a new form of the religion which – in his mind – was stripped of those features unsuitable to its use in his ideal state structure.<sup>206</sup> In fact, he was making a subtle reference to the death of Christ on the cross, and how this represented a withdrawal of God from the human sphere.

Hegel’s attitude toward Christianity in his last works is considerable more ambivalent and nuanced. As Frederick Beiser puts he, Hegel “wanted to unite paganism with Christianity, to divinize nature and to naturalize the divine”, and that both the Christian and humanist readings of Hegel miss the point by being one-sided and

205 Frederick Beiser. *Hegel*. London: Routledge, 2005. 135.

206 Frederick Beiser. *Hegel*. London: Routledge, 2005. 137.

absolutist.<sup>207</sup> His views were complex and difficult to simplify quickly, but we need not concern ourselves with the details of this relationship here, as it is mainly the progressive and apocalyptic nature of time that I wish to show in his work, as this ties him to the Zoroastrian past and points toward the materialist rejection of his legacy. No-where is this more self-evident than in the extremely difficult *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and “[e]arly readers... had trouble figuring out just what the book was even about”.<sup>208</sup> It involved philosophy, certainly; and like many of Hegel’s works, also touched on European history and politics – “but it was also about religion (and was possibly even a book of theology)”.<sup>209</sup>

What the *Phenomenology* did was inaugurate a new understanding of the dialectic which has – in the short term, through the Left- and Right-Hegelians, and in the long run through Marxism – been a revolutionary tool in the hands of critical theorists. But in some ways, the dialectic can best be conceived as an anti-methodology – a way to surpass the complexities of epistemology by, in a sense, suspending the study of them and abandoning all preconceptions about them. It centres on *der Begriff*, the “inherent form of an object, its inner purpose.”<sup>210</sup> If the inner purpose of something could be riddled out, we would know all that we need to know about it. The dialectical method is a way to figure out the “‘inner necessity’ and ‘inherent movement’” of a thing.<sup>211</sup> And so it is with his study of the universe, of creation itself: Hegel’s goal in the *Phenomenology* was to uncover the meaning of existence by means of working out its purpose, and therein lay Nietzsche’s problem with Hegelian thinking. Hegel is

207 Frederick Beiser. *Hegel*. London: Routledge, 2005. 138.

208 Terry Pinkard. *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 222.

209 Terry Pinkard. *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 222.

210 Frederick Beiser. *Hegel*. London: Routledge, 2005. 160.

211 Frederick Beiser. *Hegel*. London: Routledge, 2005. 160.

unequivocally a teleological thinker.

Hegel conceived of history as a series of stages in development, with each building on that which came before and with perfection as its ultimate goal. Here we can see an echo of the Zoroastrian and Jewish (and Christian) views of time as proceeding along a set course, with perfection as its objective. Terry Pinkard sums this up neatly by noting that

Hegel's thesis in the *Phenomenology* is that the claims of reason as making a universal demand on us are themselves historical achievements and could not thus emerge on the scene in their full form until they had gone through a long and somewhat painful process of historical development, with various candidates for such claims (and counter-claims) proving themselves to be unsatisfactory in the course of that development – their authority 'dissolving' in the same way that the authority of the putative 'truth-makers' of consciousness had dissolved.<sup>212</sup>

For Hegel, the entirety of history has been marching steadily towards the nineteenth century German state, and the universe itself is the unfolding self-awareness of the creator. "The 'beautiful soul' [that is Spirit] is its own knowledge of itself in its pure, transparent unity – the self-consciousness that knows this pure knowledge of *pure inwardness* as Spirit. It is not only the intuition of the Divine but the Divine's intuition of itself."<sup>213</sup> Perhaps Hegel intended a kind of monist "God" like that of Spinoza, but either way he did suggest that through our understanding of the directionality of history we

212 Terry Pinkard. *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 230.

213 G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. § 795. 483.

could not only come to understand the mind of God, but God could come to understand itself through us (or rather, through the European state and society).

Critically, too, Hegel had a distinctly apocalyptic notion of time coming to an end with the self-consciousness of Spirit through us – “Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time.”<sup>214</sup> And time itself, in this view, “appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is not yet complete within itself”.<sup>215</sup> In other words, once Spirit has achieved self-consciousness in the modern state, time itself ends and a state of perfection has begun! This is the root of so many secular-apocalyptic concepts that followed, from Marx’s dialectical materialism and its culmination in the achievement of communism, to Fukuyama’s “end of history” in the collapse of so-called Communism and the triumph of neoliberal democracy.

Hegel’s own version had as the purpose of history the self-realisation of the spirit, making his a distinctly more spiritual and religious kind of teleology, but the secularized attempts at a Hegelian dialectic are coloured by this same apocalyptic and eschatological way of thinking – they are just, like Hegel himself to a somewhat lesser extent, unaware of the religious roots of their way of thinking. Each iteration of neo-Hegelianism takes that same fundamental move of perceiving an inherent directionality and purposiveness within nature itself. Though Hegel’s approach to progress in history was founded on laws of spiritual development, his less overtly religious successors would merely substitute other laws of development, such as Marx’s economic determinism or the neo-Kantians’ view of moral development.

214 G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. § 801. 487.

215 G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. § 801. 487.

#### 4.2.2 Marx and the Secularization of Hegel's Progressive Teleology

Karl Marx argued in *Capital* that his dialectic was "not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it", on account of his transformation of a neo-theological concept and a branch of philosophical idealism into a purely materialistic (though still deterministic) understanding of history.<sup>216</sup> This is a fine way of putting it, since Marx did indeed change the motive force of history, from Spirit unfolding in an effort to know itself, to a deterministic drive forward through various economic models. It is slightly reductive to say so, but I still think it fair, to view Marx as an economic determinist – he saw all cultural achievements through a lens centred on the means of production. "The productive forces give rise to relations of production, and it is these relations... which constitute the economic structure of society", be it feudal-manorial, bourgeois capitalist, or communist.<sup>217</sup> "This economic structure, in turn, is the foundation on which the superstructure rises" – the superstructure being the entirety of our cultural lives, including religion, as well as our political and social institutions and power structure, and the state itself.<sup>218</sup>

This means that for Marx the economic foundations of a society are what determine nearly everything else about it. As he noted, "The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist."<sup>219</sup> Not only did

216 Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. Ben Fowkes (trans.). New York: Penguin Books, 1990. 'Postface to the Second Edition'. 102.

217 Peter Singer. *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. 48.

218 Peter Singer. *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. 48.

219 Karl Marx. Cited in Singer. *Marx*. 49.

Marx see the social system arising by necessity out of certain innovations, such that the development of hand-mills naturally gave rise to the entire manorial system of serfs and barons, but he saw all of history itself as a dialectical unfolding of economic systems. Marx was very much a Hegelian thinker in this respect. Materialist he was, but Marx could not escape the shadow of Judeo-Christian teleology and eschatology. He may not have been looking for God, but he was still looking forward to an inevitable perfecting of the world – he merely substituted a communist utopian for Hegel's bourgeois Christian state. In expressing this materialist dialectic early in his career, Marx noted that at a certain point in labour's developing relation to capital, the

last form of servitude assumed by human activity, that of wage labour on one side, capital on the other, is thereby cast off like a skin, and this casting-off itself is the result of the mode of production corresponding to capital; the material and mental conditions of the negation of wage labour and of capital, themselves already the negation of earlier forms of unfree social production, are themselves results of its production process.<sup>220</sup>

This teleological reading of history led Marx into a number of awkward positions, as when he sought to justify the bourgeois capitalist exploitation of India. Recognising the extraordinary brutality of the British colonial presence in South Asia, Marx placed it in a category of its own, noting that there cannot "remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindostan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindostan had to suffer before."<sup>221</sup> And yet he went on to

220 Karl Marx. *Grundrisse*. In: Robert C. Tucker. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. second edition. NY: W. W. Norton, 1978. 291.

221 Karl Marx. 'The British Rule in India'. In: Robert C. Tucker. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. second edition. NY: W. W. Norton, 1978. 654.



justify all this death and misery on account of the narrowness of the Asian mind and the need for it to be opened forcefully by Europeans. He spoke of the "Oriental despotism" which had "restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies."<sup>222</sup> He referred to existence in pre-colonial South Asia as an "undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life", suggested that their culture had "transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny", and therefore that historical forces had been kept at bay.<sup>223</sup> Not only does Marx here betray the same sort of nineteenth-century racism and Orientalism\* that Hegel and Darwin shared, but he is giving us a window into his historicism. While acknowledging the selfish interests of the British in India, he shifts our attention away from that brutal stupidity. To Marx,

that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever my have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.<sup>224</sup>

Marx, therefore, presented an ultimately deterministic vision of human destiny, unfolding in a dialectical manner through successive stages of socio-economic development, until at last perfection was achieved through communist revolution. And in recognising this, we can see the sort of thing that helped turn Nietzsche off to then-

222 Karl Marx. 'The British Rule in India'. In: Robert C. Tucker. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. second edition. NY: W. W. Norton, 1978. 658.

223 Karl Marx. 'The British Rule in India'. In: Robert C. Tucker. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. second edition. NY: W. W. Norton, 1978. 658.

\* Here I mean the concept introduced by Edward Said, in which the world is divided into a dynamic West and a stagnant East, which is to be held as ontologically distinct and thus able to be subjugated by force.

224 Karl Marx. 'The British Rule in India'. In: Robert C. Tucker. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. second edition. NY: W. W. Norton, 1978. 658.

contemporary concepts as diverse as democracy, socialism, and evolution. The naked hypocrisy of many nineteenth century reformers, and the obviously teleological thinking that still pervaded nineteenth century society were serious problems affecting Nietzsche's reception of their ideas. This is where his genealogical method for the study of cultural values, and indeed his projected Revaluation of All Values, came in – as an attempt to ride Western cultures of their lingering dependence upon apocalyptic eschatology, absolute good and evil, and metaphysics. In short, the intellectual legacy of Zoroastrianism for the West, and why he summoned the ghost of Zarathushtra himself to bring up this message.

Nietzsche and Marx both agreed that ideologies and mythic structures are essentially illusions developed contingently by men – both are materialistic thinkers who have no time for metaphysics, Platonic or any other. Yet Marx sought to exclude his own dialectical materialism from this recognition, and Nietzsche merely completed the cycle by suggesting that the inevitability of history marching forward – even if for purely materialistic purposes like economic relations – was yet another illusion placed by men upon the world in order to provide purpose to something which does not need the human concept of purpose to justify itself. For Nietzsche, a simply recognition of the natural drives of organic life and the deterministic laws of inorganic matter were sufficient. Some have suggested that his “will to power” was a kind of metaphysics (notably Heidegger and those influenced by his reading of Nietzsche), but I feel that this completely misunderstands the notion. What Nietzsche was after was far less systematic or explanatory, and was in all likelihood a mere heuristic for conceptualising the animating drives of organic life. Certainly he never saw will to power as providing a *purpose* for the universe or for history! And this question of purpose behind life was to

be a significant factor in his troubled reception of evolutionary theory.

### 4.3 Materialism, Progress, and the “Darwinians”

In the chapter following this one I will lay out some of the basic elements of Nietzsche’s naturalism and evolutionism, as these features are a major constituent element in his response to apocalypticism. In the last section of this chapter I want to focus on the development of evolutionary thinking across the nineteenth century as it relates specifically to progress. As we have seen above, progressive thought on time is a modern, secular manifestation of apocalyptic thinking. I wish here to make the point that notions of development and the “perfection” of “higher” forms of life are also descendants of this linear view of universal time. Having reviewed both secular and religious forms of apocalyptic eschatology, Nietzsche’s response to all of this thinking, both in ancient and modern forms, will occupy the remainder of this volume.

#### 4.3.1 Herbert Spencer: The Siren of Progress

The archetypal Victorian polymath and autodidact, Herbert Spencer is to-day best remembered both for his advocacy of *laissez-faire* economics (he was an early editor of *The Economist*, an influential weekly newspaper), and for his contributions to the unfortunately-named philosophy of “social Darwinism”. It was Spencer, in fact, who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”, which Darwin adopted in later writings and

which eventually came to represent all that was most objectionable about Darwinism.

An early convert to “transformationism”, Spencer was deeply affected by the arguments of French zoölogist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, to whose doctrines he adhered throughout his life.<sup>225</sup> A clear and early statement in support of progressive evolution appeared in Spencer’s popular *Social Statics* of 1851, a book that Nietzsche owned and returned to many times, wherein Spencer first propounded the progressive teleology that was to become a mainstay of his career:

Progress [in human society] is not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. The modifications mankind have undergone, and are still undergoing, result from a law underlying the whole organic creation; and provided the human race continues, and the constitution of things remains the same, those modifications must end in completeness... [And this completeness *must* come to pass, just] as surely as there is any efficacy in educational culture, or any meaning in such terms as habit, custom, practice;—so surely must the human faculties be moulded into complete fitness for the social state; so surely must the things we call evil and immorality disappear; so surely must man become perfect.<sup>226</sup>

225 Lamarck was the first to outline a consistent and convincing case for biological evolution, beginning in 1800 and most notably in his influential 1809 work *Philosophie Zoologique*. Lamarck’s principle contribution to evolution was the insistence upon the heritability of acquired characters (*i.e.*, the ability to pass on to descendants the changes an organic body undergoes during its lifetime). August Weismann was systematically to disprove this notion, but Spencer never rescinded his support for it; to have done so would have imperilled the progressive features of his philosophy.

226 Herbert Spencer. *Social Statics, or The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of them Developed*. London: John Chapman, 1851. 65.

It was (for Spencer) a rather small step to move from socio-economic claims that an advancing Western civilization would—through industrial capitalism and free enterprise—soon dominate the globe, to an ideology that submerged the brutalities of imperialism beneath the placid surface of a universal *progressus* towards freedom and morality. Adam Smith could place the fate of society in the “invisible hands” of the market because he believed in the *moral* purpose of his fellow creatures, and that profits from exploitation would in the end permeate every level of society. The Victorians excelled him by priding themselves on individual responsibility, and the drive of many—such as Spencer and J. S. Mill—towards greater personal freedom can best be understood in the context of a pervasive moral orientation. So far as many prominent Darwinians were concerned, the struggle for life and survival of the fittest would necessarily result in a more just and virtuous society.

The topic of evolution was picked up again in earnest in Spencer’s 1857 article for the *Westminster Review*, ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause.’ In it he outlined the evolutionary theory that was later to underpin his entire system of “synthetic” philosophy. That system was in turn announced in *First Principles*, an 1862 tome in which he laid out the basic contours of the intellectual enterprise that was to consume the rest of his life. Foremost amongst the principles enumerated within is that of evolution, to which he devotes fully half the book (or just over thirteen chapters).<sup>227</sup>

Spencer felt that the new science of biology demanded the utmost attentions of philosophy. Following the embryological and physiological investigations of Wolff, Goethe, and von Baer, Spencer argues that all of the stages of life “constitute an advance from homogeneity of structure to heterogeneity of structure”, such that the

227 Herbert Spencer. *First Principles*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1862. 484.

complex ever evolve out of simpler forms.<sup>228</sup> Spencer was slightly ahead of the curve when he argued that the realization that “every existing organism has been developed out of the simple into the complex, is indeed the first established truth of all; and that every organism which existed in past times was similarly developed, is an inference no physiologist will hesitate to draw.”<sup>229</sup> However, he does show plainly that evolution was “in the air” (so to speak), and that the pioneering speculations of Lamarck, Goethe, Kant, and Erasmus Darwin had opened a way to evolution as a soon-to-be dominant explanation for the diversity of life. Spencer, as we will see, embraced this notion with relish, and used it to build a comprehensive explanatory principle for nearly *everything*, from cosmic bodies to social organization.

Kant’s place in this early-evolutionary schema did not entirely depend on those scattered comments in the third *Critique* that (mostly with the aid of hindsight) most clearly presage evolutionary theory, nor upon the progressive social views in his political writings. A more immediate source appears as a direct influence on Spencer: the so-called Kant-Laplace “nebular” hypothesis, which applied Newton’s laws of gravitation to clouds of cosmic dust, arguing that these clouds would—over great spans of time—have coalesced into the familiar planetary bodies. Spencer drew out the implications for his own system: “Should the Nebular Hypothesis ever be established, then it will become manifest that the universe at large, like every organism, was once homogeneous; that as a whole and in every detail, it has unceasingly advanced towards greater heterogeneity.”<sup>230</sup>

228 Herbert Spencer. ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause’. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative, Vol. I*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1891. 9-10.

229 Herbert Spencer. ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause’. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative, Vol. I*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1891. 14.

230 Herbert Spencer. ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause’. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative, Vol. I*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1891. 60.

Ultimately, what most distinguished Spencer's biology as teleological was in fact a kind of reductionism, whereby he claimed that any good scientific principle must be reducible to relations of matter and force. Whereas Darwin and many others held themselves back from making excessive claims about evolution and what impelled it, Spencer felt the need to extend progress into a general law of nature, such that he could place it into the context of the other laws he accepted. These so-called "primary truths" were "the indestructibility of matter", "the continuity of motion", and "the persistence of force", the last of which he claimed "is ultimate and the others [merely] derivative."<sup>231</sup> It was Spencer's need to reduce *evolution* to the persistence of force (*i.e.*, its being "unchangeable in quantity") that pushed him towards a necessarily progressive conclusion: things would advance in complexity because it was impossible for nature *not* to advance.

In his discussion of evolution in *First Principles*, Spencer asks the reader:

Must we rest satisfied with the conclusion that throughout all classes of concrete phenomena such is the course of transformation? Or is it possible for us to ascertain *why* such is the course of transformation? May we seek for some all-pervading principle which underlies this all-pervading process?<sup>232</sup>

That answer was an unqualified "yes", and Spencer codified this answer into a simple law of progressive evolution; *viz.* that "every active force produces more than one change—every cause produces more than one effect."<sup>233</sup> Spencer saw this principle in operation everywhere in nature, and suggested that this

231 Herbert Spencer. *First Principles*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1862. 484.

232 Herbert Spencer. *First Principles*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1862. 360.

233 Herbert Spencer. 'Progress: Its Law and Cause'. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative, Vol. I*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1891. 37.

multiplication of effects, which is displayed in every event of to-day, has been going on from the beginning; and is true of the grandest phenomena of the universe as of the most insignificant. From the law that every active force produces more than one change, it is an inevitable corollary that during the past there has been an ever-growing complication of things.<sup>234</sup>

Thus the law of progress, when combined with the “survival of the fittest”, could produce for Spencer the picture of a world inexorably, necessarily, clawing its way towards perfection as expressed in ever greater complexity – i.e., in “higher” forms of life. What began on a secure scientific foundation quickly escalated, through Spencer’s need to document an *ultimate* cause rather than the mere proximate cause of the Darwinian model, into a totalizing *telos* which could “explain” everything that fell beneath the philosopher’s gaze. Given the degree to which Nietzsche’s critiques of Darwin so often stood in for his repudiation of Spencer, we will later consider the implications of that vast gulf separating their respective philosophies of natural science.

Here it is far more pressing to draw attention to the rôle of altruism in Spencer’s view of evolution, for he sincerely believed that progressive evolution would serve eventually to *eliminate* conflict. As Mike Hawkins puts it, Spencer’s evolutionary sociology suggested that “as humanity became more rational and altruistic it became correspondingly more peaceful and warfare was eradicated.”<sup>235</sup> Spencer saw altruism and egoism, not as predicated on cultural or social mores, but as locked by nature into a reciprocal relationship where each defined and reinforced the other. He argues that “if

234 Herbert Spencer. ‘Progress: Its Law and Cause’. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative, Vol. I*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1891. 38.

235 Mike Hawkins. *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature and Model and Nature and Threat*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 86.



we define altruism as being all action which, in the normal course of things, benefits others instead of benefiting self, then, from the dawn of life, altruism has been no less essential than egoism."<sup>236</sup>

Social relations, then, would evolve over time and, according to the law of progress, lead man to a more complex social order where competition would be relegated to the marketplace and violence would recede into the primordial past.<sup>237</sup> Spencer was, like Nietzsche, critical of social programmes to aid the poor and afflicted, but unlike Nietzsche he saw developmental value in their application. He argued that, despite first impressions, "the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest" need *not* "be left to work out their effects without mitigation." Instead, he urged

only that there shall not be a forcible burdening of the superior for the support of the inferior. Such aid to the inferior as the superior voluntarily yield, kept as it will be within moderate limits, may be given with benefit to both—relief to the one, moral culture to the other.<sup>238</sup>

This "moral culture" would then, over time, contribute to evolutionary progress. As a committed Lamarckian, Spencer believed that the goodly actions of the living would help to fashion the disposition of their descendants. Consider the similarity here with Kant's idea, that moral progress in society would accrete over historical epochs. In this way Spencer could rationalise the existence—and indefinite necessity—of the Christian virtues of charity and suffering. Nietzsche's genealogical critique, which sought to

236 Herbert Spencer. *The Data of Ethics*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1879. 201.

237 Mike Hawkins. *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature and Model and Nature and Threat*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 86.

238 Spencer, Herbert. *The Principles of Biology, Vol. II*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896. 533.

expose the contingent origins of these virtues, would lead him to a harsh condemnation of Spencerian ethics.

#### 4.3.2 Progress and Natural Selection: Darwin and Wallace

Spencerian evolutionism and progressivism was to leave an indelible mark on the three most prominent British Darwinians: Charles Darwin, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Alfred Russel Wallace. All three had their books and articles quickly translated into German and widely disseminated on the Continent, as William Montgomery has shown.<sup>239</sup> Darwin, in fact, had a complete edition of his works released in German in 1875, well before this was done in the original English! As I will emphasize below, shades of Spencer were to combine with a peculiarly German interest in teleology to make the work of these scientists fall very much within a progressive vein, though each for slightly differing reasons.

Where Huxley was to follow Spencer, his mentor and friend, somewhat more closely, Darwin and Wallace shared a preference for natural selection—the principle they had developed independently but presented jointly in 1858. Though acknowledging the debt he owed to Chambers, Lamarck and Spencer, Darwin was usually careful to distance himself from their respective theories of evolution; in part this was to draw attention to his own “more scientific” contributions, which were presented in far more modest language. In truth, his published work took on more Lamarckian elements in successive editions, since he could never adequately account for the engines of

239 William M. Montgomery. ‘Germany’ In Thomas F. Glick. *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. 82.

variations and heredity. The resistance he encountered from Spencer, Huxley, and others with respect to a perceived “inadequacy” of natural selection to account for species’ development was to factor heavily in this.

Wallace, however, followed August Weismann in rejecting the fundamentals of Lamarckism, and insisted on a stricter adherence to natural selection. And yet, his views on natural selection were leavened with a note of Spencerian optimism regarding the future evolution of man’s moral and intellectual faculties. He argued that, if evolution were proven correct, “it must inevitably follow that the higher—the more intellectual and moral—must displace the lower and more degraded races”.<sup>240</sup> He echoed Spencer’s take on social theories by arguing that natural selection “must ever lead to the more perfect adaptation of man’s higher faculties to the conditions of surrounding nature, and to the exigencies of the social state.”<sup>241</sup> Despite a later shift towards socialism and away from the libertarian economics of Spencer and his ilk, Wallace never lost his connexion with the prevailing historicism and implicit teleology of Victorian evolutionary thought.

Connecting Wallace to Spencer is not especially difficult; so “wildly enthusiastic” was he at reading *Social Statics* in 1853 that he later named his son Herbert Spencer Wallace.<sup>242</sup> He also endorsed the Spencerian notion of progress from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, but with some reservations. Although he believed that the “theory of evolution in the organic world necessarily implied that the forms of animals and plants have, broadly speaking, progressed from a more generalised to a more specialised structure, and from simpler to more complex forms”, he was careful to note

240 Alfred Russel Wallace. *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection: A Series of Essays*. New York: Macmillan, 1870. 329.

241 Alfred Russel Wallace. *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection: A Series of Essays*. New York: Macmillan, 1870. 329.

242 Michael Ruse. *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. 198.

that this progress did not proceed smoothly or without frequent regression.<sup>243</sup> He was therefore critical of the radical extension Spencer advocated, arguing on the contrary that the “remarkable advance in the higher and larger groups does not imply any universal law of progress in organisation”.<sup>244</sup> His examples here include snakes, which lost their limbs in order to attain their present form. In the main, however, Wallace only sought to *clarify* the basic Spencerian position to introduce a bit of nuance, thus better accounting for the occasional regressions in the natural world.

Where man was concerned, on the other hand, Wallace took a radically opposite position. Although he endorsed a view that placed man on a continuum with the rest of the animal kingdom in his basic *form*, he refused to accept that natural selection might account for the higher faculties, and in particular the moral and aesthetic dimensions of the human experience. Wallace was determined not only to leave himself room to argue for man’s essentially moral nature, but also to retain what some have called a “god of the gaps” and maintain that spiritual dimension of existential meaning that remains so important to this day. Wallace notes, *contra* Darwin, that just “because man’s physical structure has been developed from an animal form by natural selection, it does not necessarily follow that his mental nature, even though developed *pari passu* with it, has been developed by the same causes only.”<sup>245</sup> Indeed, much like Ernst Haeckel’s would, Wallace’s views on human evolution took on more subtle (and not-so-subtle) supernatural overtones as he aged.

But man was always to occupy a special place in Wallace’s work, and in his views

243 Alfred Russel Wallace. *Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection, With Some of its Applications*. New York: Macmillan, 1890. 375.

244 Alfred Russel Wallace. *Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection, With Some of its Applications*. New York: Macmillan, 1890. 120.

245 Alfred Russel Wallace. *Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection, With Some of its Applications*. New York: Macmillan, 1890. 463.

on race he took a decidedly conventional approach. As the nineteenth century unfolded, earlier and more liberal attitudes towards other races began to fall victim to imperial models that showed Europeans at the top of a hierarchy of development. Enlightenment views on the uniformity and universality of human nature gradually fell by the wayside, and non-white races then coming under European domination were increasingly depicted as “the ‘missing links’ in human evolution, only one step higher than the ape-like Neanderthals.”<sup>246</sup> Wallace, for example, suggested that human beings would continue to evolve mentally and morally and, as technological and social organization aided in the conquest of the planet, would proceed further in “the development of that perfect beauty which results from a healthy and well organized body, refined and ennobled by the highest intellectual faculties and sympathetic emotions”, until at last the world was occupied by a perfect and homogeneous master race.<sup>247</sup>

Evolutionary theory did not create such attitudes, but it helped to provide a “scientific” basis for racism and empire. And racial theories were not restricted to one or two thinkers, but were ubiquitous amongst Victorian evolutionists, whether Darwinian or no. Natural selection itself offered a scientific explanation for progressive transformationism, but it did so at a cost: If taken at face value and as the sole motor of change, it would require an epistemic rupture with prevailing social and moral ideals. Consequently, “Darwin realized that, whatever his own views on the implications of his theory, it would have to be presented as a contribution to progressionism”, with all that such an attitude entailed.<sup>248</sup>

246 Peter J. Bowler. *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 106.

247 Alfred Russel Wallace. *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection: A Series of Essays*. New York: Macmillan, 1870. 329-330.

248 Peter J. Bowler. *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 152.

The question remains, was Darwin a progressive thinker? Did he hold to a teleological view of the natural world? Despite the implications of natural selection, it is not difficult to conclude that Darwin did indeed cleave to teleology. Asa Gray wrote in *Nature* that "Darwin's great service to natural science" lay "in bringing it back to Teleology; so that, instead of Morphology *versus* Teleology, we shall have Morphology wedded to Teleology."<sup>249</sup> Referring back to this article, Darwin wrote to Gray, "What you say about Teleology pleases me especially, and I do not think any one else has ever noticed the point."<sup>250</sup>

On the question of European hegemony, Darwin may have evinced a more innocuous or mild form of racism than many of his peers, but he was nevertheless still to regard the natives of Tierra del Fuego as little better than apes; as he was later to recall, he simply "could not have believed how wide was the difference between savage and civilized man".<sup>251</sup> Regarding progress amongst the races of man, Bowler notes that, "like most of his contemporaries, Darwin saw European civilization and the white race as the highest products of social and mental evolution, and dismissed 'lower' races as branches of the human species which had not advanced so far up the scale of development."<sup>252</sup>

Whatever his more nuanced feelings about human difference—and there is some evidence to suggest that he felt other races, savage or no, had a potential at least close to that of the Europeans—Darwin was still a man of his time. Looking on as Britain

249 Gray, Asa. *Darwiniana: Essays and Reviews Pertaining to Darwinism*. New York: D. Appleton, 1884. 288.

250 Charles Darwin. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Vol. II*. Edited by Francis Darwin. New York: D. Appleton, 1888. 2: 367.

251 Charles Darwin. *Journal of Researches in the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle Round the World...* London: John Murray, 1876. 263.

252 Peter J. Bowler. *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 94.

spread her dominion overseas, Darwin considered the application of natural selection to human history:

At some future period... the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes... will no doubt be exterminated. The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as at present between the negro or Australian and the gorilla.<sup>253</sup>

Speculations like this were not peripheral to Darwin's research; indeed, the third stated purpose of his book *The Descent of Man* was to investigate "the value of the differences between the so-called races of man."<sup>254</sup> Darwin returned to this theme in far bolder and more aggressive language in a number of letters, but in print he was nevertheless more restrained on these matters than some of his German followers were to prove.<sup>255</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Ernst Haeckel and German Materialism

253 Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, Vol. I*. London: John Murray, 1871. Vol. I: 201.

254 Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, Vol. I*. London: John Murray, 1871. Vol. I. 3.

255 As, e.g., in the letter of 3 July 1881: "Remember what risk the nations of Europe ran, not so many centuries ago of being overwhelmed by the Turks, and how ridiculous such an idea now is! The more civilized so-called Caucasian races have beaten the Turkish hollow in the struggle for existence. Looking to the world at no very distant date, what an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races throughout the world." Charles Darwin. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Vol. I*. Edited by Francis Darwin. New York: D. Appleton, 1888. 1: 286.

In the following section I will discuss the German materialists who flocked to Darwin's theory, and expose in them not only a lasting sympathy for the Idealist and Romantic movements as they descended from Kant, but to a similar commitment to progressive development. "It has been said that while Darwinism was born in England, it found its true home in Germany"; the extent to which this might be considered accurate, at least of that Darwinism extant in the nineteenth century, may be reflected in the rapid adoption and exceedingly wide dissemination of Darwin's ideas.<sup>256</sup> In fact, this discussion had begun much earlier, as witnessed by the morphological speculations of such luminaries as Goethe and Kant, in the pioneering physiological studies of Karl Ernst von Baer (effective founder of embryology) and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (whose vitalism influenced Kant), and even in the translation from English of Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, which appeared in German well before Darwin's *Origin*.

The *Origin* itself first appeared in German in 1860, less than one year after its début, and excited immediate controversy. Throughout the 1860s and '70s "a flood of books and articles appeared in Germany that touched on Darwin's theory in one way or another."<sup>257</sup> In no time at all there were "hundreds" of books on Darwinism in German, ranging from the fierce denunciations of the pious to the eager coöptation of Darwin by social radicals.<sup>258</sup> Alfred Kelly notes that "from its very earliest days... German Darwinism was closely identified with progressive attitudes", and it is to these that we now turn, as the political agendas of many prominent Darwinists were to prove

256 Peter J. Bowler. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 [2003]. 187.

257 William M. Montgomery. 'Germany'. In *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*. Thomas F. Glick (ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. 81.

258 Kelly, Alfred. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 6.



instrumental in shaping Nietzsche's response.<sup>259</sup>

Some, such as the radical theologian and Biblical scholar David Friedrich Strauss, made much of an adherence to Darwin's theory, and tried to place man within nature as a party to all the struggle and pain that entailed. In his best-selling work *The Old Faith and the New*, he challenged his readers to consider:

"[that] if we can no longer transfer to G-d the choice between an existence devoid of pain and death, but likewise of motion and life, and one wherein life and motion are bought by pain and death, we have, nevertheless, the choice whether we will try to understand the latter, or whether, in fruitless negation of what actually exists, we insist on preferring the first."<sup>260</sup>

As Nietzsche would point out in an early essay, Strauss (like most) missed the more base implications of Darwin's theory, and held fast to a concept of morality not so dissimilar from Kant's.<sup>261</sup> He argued that "moral action" must bring the individual "into abiding concord with the idea and the destiny of mankind", and that such action is the very "essence of the duties which man owes to himself."<sup>262</sup> Whilst accepting man's descent from the apes and his vital connexion with the rest of nature, thinkers like Strauss simultaneously transferred the notion of a special destiny from theology to science. He wrote: "In man, nature endeavoured not merely to exalt, but to transcend herself. He must not, therefore, be merely an animal repeated; he must be something

259 Kelly, Alfred. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 6. 22.

260 David Friedrich Strauss. *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*. London: Asher & Co., 1873. 256.

261 i.e., Nietzsche, 'David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer', in the *Untimely Meditations*.

262 David Friedrich Strauss. *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*. London: Asher & Co., 1873. 274.

more, something better.”<sup>263</sup>

The moral psychologist Paul Rée, who was for a time a close companion and confidant of Nietzsche, also failed to recognize in his appropriation of Darwinism the legacy of Christian ethics. His notion of progress, though interpolating the Christian virtue of selflessness, owes something to Darwin, Spencer, and Lamarck:

Moral progress occurs when people become better, that is, less egoistic, in the course of time. This can happen in two ways: through natural selection, that is, through the survival (in the struggle for existence) and reproduction of those individuals who are the most non-egoistic, or of those tribes that contain the greatest number of non-egoistic individuals; or through the frequent experience of non-egoistic feelings and frequent performance of non-egoistic actions.<sup>264</sup>

Thus, not only is altruism considered a positive outcome of evolution, but the good of the community or the species is held above the selfish interests of the individual. Group selection and the inheritance of moral proclivities were present in Darwin’s own work, of course, as when he concurs with Spencer that there appears “not the least inherent improbability... in virtuous tendencies being more or less strongly inherited”.<sup>265</sup>

Moralizing was, indeed, to play a frequent rôle in the writings of German Darwinians. For most, the “human race was important because it was at the forefront of nature’s steady march toward a higher state. Furthermore, the fact that nature was

263 David Friedrich Strauss. *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*. London: Asher & Co., 1873. 280.

264 Paul Rée. *The Origin of the Moral Sensations*. In *Basic Writings*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003. 153.

265 Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, Vol. I*. London: John Murray, 1871. Vol. II: 102.

progressive ensured that the lessons it taught were indeed moral lessons, designed to enhance the perfection of the human race."<sup>266</sup> The continuity of such reasoning with the neo-Kantian and Hegelian philosophies should be as clear to us in hindsight as the Christian genealogy of those philosophies was to Nietzsche.

More important still were the political implications of popular Darwinism. "There were social reasons... why the more radical implications of Darwinism were attractive (if not the details of natural selection). Some German scientists, of whom Ernst Haeckel was the most active, were political radicals who saw Darwin's rejection of design as a weapon in their fight against conservatism."<sup>267</sup> For Haeckel, the Darwinian theory was scientific proof that the old institutions of society were out of step with the progress of history:

Progress is a natural law that no human power, neither the weapons of tyrants nor the curses of priests, can ever succeed in suppressing. Only through progressive movement are life and development possible. Standing still is in itself regression, and regression carries with it death. The future belongs only to progress!<sup>268</sup>

Such certainties about the nature of evolution were far from exceptional; they were the norm. Kelly observes that "there was a certain inevitability about Darwinism's progressive image, for to accept Darwinism usually entailed challenging the church, and to challenge the church was to challenge the state itself."<sup>269</sup> It did not take long for this

266 Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Vol. I. London: John Murray, 1871. Vol. II: 102.

267 Peter J. Bowler. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 [2003]. 187.

268 Ernst Haeckel. *Gemeinverständliche Vorträge und Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Entwicklungslehre*. 1:4-5, 30. Bonn: E. Strauss, 1902. Quoted in Kelly.

269 Alfred Kelly. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany*,

to become an integral part of the Darwinian image in Germany, and “the public fight about Darwinism” then “became almost as much political as scientific.”<sup>270</sup> Evolution became the “magic bullet” capable in one shot of destroying the old theistic and aristocratic world order, and radical materialists like Vogt, Büchner, and Moleschott revised their work to incorporate Darwinism to varying degrees. Friedrich Ratzel wrote a popular natural history with the explicit goal of making “propaganda for ‘progressive tendencies’”, and in the minds of materialists throughout Europe, Darwin and progress slipped seamlessly into the place formerly reserved for G-d.<sup>271</sup> Büchner later claimed that

if there is a certain order and harmony in the world around us, this is due, not to *chance*, which is supposed to be the only refuge of the materialist, but to the great principle of evolution. There is no such thing as the alternative choice of ‘God or chance’ which is always being pressed on us; there is a third alternative, evolution, the magic word with which we solve one riddle of the universe after another.<sup>272</sup>

Haeckel deserves special attention as very probably the foremost source of information on Darwinism in the nineteenth century. “By 1900”, his *History of Creation* “had gone through nine editions and was well established as the layman’s starting point for a study of evolution.”<sup>273</sup> Ruse suggests that he “has fair claim to being the world’s

1860-1914. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 23.

270 Alfred Kelly. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 23.

271 Alfred Kelly. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 22.

272 Ludwig Büchner. *Last Words on Materialism and Kindred Subjects*. Translated by Joseph McCabe. London: Watts & Co., 1901. 17.

273 Alfred Kelly. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 25.

most important (certainly, most influential) evolutionist in the post-Darwinian period".<sup>274</sup> Haeckel's characterization of evolution is thus crucial to the perception of Darwinism as progressive and (at least nominally) teleological. Like a number of other materialists, Haeckel was an outspoken critic of teleology in its more common, religious variety, and, like Nietzsche's mentor F. A. Lange, he considered Darwin to have provided a conclusive refutation of the notion. But the special place of man in the greater scheme of nature was not so easily overcome, and Haeckel's evolutionary tree bore little resemblance to Darwin's own sketches or to the lines of descent as they are now understood.

The tree of life presented itself to Haeckel as a single great trunk leading upward to mankind, as the pinnacle of nature's achievement. All other species branch sideways from this trunk, such that connexions can be made between man and the other animals, but only in a strictly teleological fashion whereby the rest of the natural world appears to have spiralled outward into various evolutionary dead-ends: only man has realized the full potential of nature. (See the illustration reproduced in the appendix.) Darwin's own diagram appears more like a shrub than a tree, and shows only the gradual divergence of species one from the other, and a steady increase in overall complexity. (As above, see the graphic in the appendix.) Such a view does not privilege man nearly so much as does Haeckel's interpretation, though it is worth noting that Darwin's own sympathies may have lain closer to this latter than his own theory could support: the difference between these two renderings coming down to Darwin's more conservative scientific methodology.<sup>275</sup> Darwin thought that Haeckel's approach was not

274 Michael Ruse. *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. 179.

275 In a letter from 19 November 1868, Darwin wrote to Haeckel regarding his *History of Creation*: "Your chapters on the affinities and genealogy of the animal kingdom strike me as admirable and full of original thought. Your boldness, however, sometimes makes me tremble, but as Huxley remarked, some one must be bold enough to make a beginning in drawing up tables of descent." Darwin. *Life and Letters, Vol. II*. 2: 286.

so much *inaccurate* as counter-productive, and prone to alienating those unconvinced by the arguments for evolution.<sup>276</sup>

Like Darwin, Haeckel extended this teleological notion to sub-divisions within humanity as a whole, but as the Germans were wont more generally, Haeckel's ideas were far more drastic than those originating across the Channel. In his discussion of east African peoples, Haeckel claims that "all attempts to introduce civilization among these, and many of the other tribes of the lowest human species, have hitherto been of no avail; it is impossible to implant human culture where the requisite soil, namely, the perfecting of the brain, is wanting."<sup>277</sup> Suggesting that for the objective scientist "the only way to arrive at a knowledge of natural truth is to compare kindred phenomena, and investigate their development," Haeckel makes a most startling suggestion:

The final result of this comparison is... that *between the most highly developed animal souls, and the lowest developed human souls there exists only a small quantitative, but no qualitative difference*, and that this difference is much less than the difference between the lowest and the highest human souls, or than the difference between the highest and lowest animal souls.<sup>278</sup>

He proceeds elsewhere to divide the human species into ten or twelve *different species*, and made Australian aborigines and black Africans out to be more closely related to apes than to (other, especially white) men. (See the image reproduced in the appendix.) In both the social-historical and the biological realms, Haeckel and the

276 e.g., the letter of 21 May 1867. Darwin. *Life and Letters*, Vol. II. 2: 251

277 Ernst Haeckel. *The History of Creation, or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, Vol. II. New York: Kegan Paul, 1899. 2: 490.

278 Ernst Haeckel. *The History of Creation, or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, Vol. II. New York: Kegan Paul, 1899. 2: 489.

German Darwinists contributed greatly to that historicism so characteristic of Victorian evolutionism. For Haeckel, “the truth of these two great laws”—differentiation and “progress (*progressus*) or perfecting (*teleosis*)”—must be taken “as necessary inferences from the theory of selection.”<sup>279</sup> The scientific assertion of necessary progression of forms was easily married to social commitments stressing intellectual and moral development as the destiny of man, and in particular of European civilization standing at the zenith of nature’s achievement.

Frederick Gregory writes that whilst “Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner may have agreed that Darwin had helped to eliminate teleology from science... they did not mean... that the world contained no purpose.”<sup>280</sup> On the contrary, they—like Darwin, Haeckel, and all the rest—“believed in the progress of history. None of them assumed that the world and the development of life was the result of chance.” What these men opposed was merely an *external agency* like the Christian Creator, and what they proposed was a naturalized teleology very much akin to that inaugurated in Kant’s philosophy. Further, the German and British Darwinists alike frequently evoked in their popular and scientific writings a sentiment not unlike what Kant claimed as “nature’s ultimate purpose”: “namely, man’s aptitude in general for setting himself purposes, and for using nature ... as a means [for achieving them] in conformity with... his free purposes...” Kant claimed that:

Producing in a rational being an aptitude for purposes generally  
(hence [in a way that leaves] that being free) is *culture*. Hence only  
culture can be the ultimate purpose that we have cause to attribute

279 Ernst Haeckel. *The History of Creation, or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, Vol. I. New York: Kegan Paul, 1899. 1: 316.

280 Frederick Gregory. *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1977. 186.

to nature with respect to the human species.<sup>281</sup>

And since culture could only consist in the gradual perfection of man's moral and aesthetic potential, the state of European civilization in the late nineteenth century took its place at the apex of a distinctly progressive interpretation of history.

## 5.0 Naturalism Between the Ancient Greeks and Modern Biology

*Reading nature as though it were a proof of God's goodness and providence; interpreting history in honour of divine reason, as a constant testimonial to an ethical world order and ethical ultimate purpose; explaining all one's own experiences in the way pious folk have done for long enough, as though everything were providence, a sign, intended and sent for the salvation of the soul: now all that is over, it has conscience against it, every sensitive conscience sees it as indecent, dishonest, as a pack of lies... weakness, cowardice—*<sup>282</sup>

The present chapter seeks to outline the non-progressive, naturalistic views upon which Nietzsche's existential imperatives are built. I will begin with several sections exploring the scientific, empirical, and materialistic biases informing Nietzsche's thought, so that we can situate his moral thought within its biological and tragic

281 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Werner S. Pluhar (trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987. § 83, Ak. 431, Pluhar 319.

282 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. III: 27. Keith Ansell-Pearson (editor), Carol Diethe (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994. 118-119.



foundations. I will look at his critique of purposiveness, of man's special status in the natural order, and the 'misunderstanding' of Darwinism and its teleological nature which led him to proclaim himself the anti-Darwin. I will then take us back into Nietzsche's formative years as a philologist at Basel University, and look at the way that Greek thinking and its naturalistic modes was to influence Nietzsche throughout his life. Specifically, we will look at the Heraclitean understanding of the universe in a constant flux of Becoming, and the Stoic concept of a universal Conflagration and rebirth of the universe. Both of these ideas will then be placed into dialogue with the linear apocalypse of the Zoroastrians, as way of taking Nietzsche full circle through his rejection of linear time and his embrace of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same – the key revelation of his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and an idea that is anticipated by the Stoic philosophers in ways that are unlikely to be fully coincidental.

### 5.1 Nietzsche *Contra* Progress: The Scientific Roots of Nietzsche's Critique

It hardly seems necessary to discuss the religious beliefs of the man whose madman-character announced the death of God, but Nietzsche's atheism must be kept in mind.<sup>283</sup> His was not the deism of Hume or the pantheism of Spinoza, nor even the pitiable absence in Schopenhauer, but an active and positive assertion of God's irrelevance to the world. This was not simple negation: Nietzsche announced the death of God, not because he *wanted* it, but because it was (for him) an established fact of the post-Enlightenment era, and because European civilization then teetered on the

283 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 125. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 119-120.

brink of self-destructive nihilism in the absence of a pervasive common mythology.

Nietzsche claimed that for those like himself, those “more spiritual men of the age”, only “unconditional, honest atheism” would do.<sup>284</sup> The task presented to them was epic in scale: *something* would need to replace the dying faith, and Nietzsche had little regard for the more popular alternatives (from socialism to pantheism). There would be “new battles” for such men to fight, and he warned those to follow that even though “God is dead... given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. — And we — we must still defeat his shadow as well!”<sup>285</sup>

That spectre has come up time and again in this paper, under the names of altruism, morality, progress, man, nature, purpose. Nietzsche’s genealogy sought to uncover the Christian origins of values that the West has more recently tried to pass off as natural or universal, and sought to expose the hidden agenda beneath those values in their original form: the *ressentiment* of the majority, deployed in the guise of democracy and virtue to restrain the powerful few. In the “slave morality” created by Christianity, the herd instincts that lay behind all social organization were elevated into virtues, and obedience and self-sacrifice because the highest ideals.<sup>286</sup> Nietzsche hoped to expose the moral philosophies of Kant and the Darwinians as ahistorical rationalizations, with no basis in nature or in the world as such. He argued that in society, “to be moral” is merely “to act in accordance with custom, to be ethical means

284 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. III: 27. Keith Ansell-Pearson (editor), Carol Diethe (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994. 118-119.

285 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 108. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 109.

286 Of course, Nietzsche was critical of master *and* slave morality, and thought that both would be supplanted in a post-human future. This point is often missed in casual interpretations of Nietzsche, which suppose that he sought to empower a new aristocracy of masters.

to practise obedience towards a law or tradition established from of old.”<sup>287</sup> And the efforts of Kant to overturn the *particular* in moral custom in order to reveal the supposed universal imperative beneath led only to comforting lies.

Nietzsche claimed that one such illusion was the prevailing belief in human altruism. His perspective on this most-useful social function might fit well within the contemporary framework of reciprocal altruism, *i.e.*, the idea that coöperation evolved out of, and serves, what are ultimately selfish motives.<sup>288</sup> He had nothing but contempt for the Spencerian, progressive notion that human beings are growing more genuinely altruistic over time; this he felt was no more than a Victorian phantasy. It was, in fact, a conscious *denial* of what makes human beings what they are: particularly clever animals, but animals nonetheless. Nietzsche believed that the “beginnings of justice, as of prudence, moderation, bravery—in short, of all we designate as the *Socratic virtues*, are *animal*” impulses. Meaning that “if we consider that even the highest human being has only become more elevated and subtle in the nature of his food and in his conception of what is inimical to him, it is not improper to describe the entire phenomenon of morality as animal.”<sup>289</sup>

Against the virtues of Christian charity and against the egalitarianism of the Enlightenment, Nietzsche proclaimed a kind of radical naturalism. Kant argued from the realization of man’s ability to *deny* his impulses and to act in ways contrary to his deepest wishes, and thought that by acting thus through a sense of “duty” man might

287 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All-Too-Human*. I: 96. R. J. Hollingdale (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986. 51-52.

288 For Nietzsche, *e.g.*, *Human, All-Too-Human*, I: 92. R. J. Hollingdale (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986. 49-50.

For the scientific debate, see Austin Burt and Robert Tribers, *Genes in Conflict: The Biology of Selfish Genetic Elements*, and Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*.

289 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. 26. R. J. Hollingdale (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982. 20-21.

uphold reason and the moral law; and further, that working *through* those very capacities was thereby proved the destiny of human civilization. Nietzsche turns Kantian morality on its head, and argues instead that morality must fit our human (*i.e.*, animal) nature. He declared that

every naturalism in morality—which is to say: every *healthy* morality—is governed by an instinct of life... But *anti-natural* morality... which is to say almost every morality that has been taught, revered, or preached so far, explicitly turns its back on the instincts of life,—it *condemns* these instincts, sometimes in secret, sometimes in loud and impudent tones.<sup>290</sup>

“Good”, for Nietzsche, should be understood not as reflecting a universal ideal that was “out there” somewhere, but in a relativistic fashion as attached to whatever it was that those in power *thought* was good *at some point*. This perspectival or relativistic orientation was to figure prominently throughout Nietzsche’s work, always calling the reader to consider the *position* from which a thing’s utility or value was asserted. For example, Nietzsche was sharply critical of the Darwinian biologists who echoed Kant in identifying the “purpose” of a given organ. Nietzsche took a much stricter line on the Kantian distinction between the regulative use of teleology and its appearance in the world as such. He argued that, in non-subjective terms, “the utility of an organ does *not* explain its origin, on the contrary!”<sup>291</sup> The eye, which in a regulative judgement might be considered as “*for*” seeing, could not in a determinative judgement be likewise argued. Nietzsche claims that an

290 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols*. ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’, 4. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Aaron Ridley (editor), Judith Norman (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005. 174.

291 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe, Sämtliche Werke*. Giorgio Colli (editor),azzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. *xiii*. 7[25].

impartial investigator who pursues the history of the eye and the forms it has assumed among the lowest creatures, who demonstrates the whole step-by-step evolution of the eye, must arrive at the great conclusion that vision was not the intention behind the creation of the eye, but that vision appeared, rather, after *chance* had put the apparatus together. A single instance of this kind — and ‘purposes’ fall away like scales from the eyes!<sup>292</sup>

This would lead him to argue that there may be

no more important proposition for every sort of history than that which we arrive at only with great effort but which we really *should* reach,—namely that the origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate; that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering, dominating*, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former ‘meaning’ and ‘purpose’ must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.<sup>293</sup>

292 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. 122. Brian Leiter (editor), R. J. Hollingdale (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982. 77.

293 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. II: 12. On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings. Keith Ansell-Pearson (editor), Carol Diethe (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994. 50-52.

Purposes simply do not exist *in* nature, and they are not added to it in an incidental fashion: they are *created* by human perceptions and human willing.

This emphasis on the *power* to determine the status of things emerges from Nietzsche's efforts to find an ultimately reductive scientific principle: some basic force to which all phenomena could be linked in hierarchical fashion. He called this principle the "will to power", though this has led to an unfortunate tendency (in English) to read intention in the "willing" part of the phrase. Will to power does not simply motivate actions; it *is* the motive force of actions. When trying to explain the actions of the simplest organisms, there can be no recourse to higher functions such as willing or intentionality; on the contrary, the

protoplasm stretches out pseudopodia to seek something that resists it—not out of hunger but out of a will to power. Then it tries to overcome what it has found, to appropriate it, incorporate it—what is called 'feeding' is merely a subsequent phenomenon, a practical application of that original will to become *stronger*...<sup>294</sup>

Nietzsche extends this logic throughout nature, to the point even of insisting that there are no unitary organisms, only collectives of multiple, antagonistic parts! He characterized the self as a multiplicity of competing and expanding forces—a concept drawn in part from the work of biologists Wilhelm Roux and William Rolph. Nietzsche reasoned that:

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought

294 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. *xiii*. 14[174].

and out consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of cells in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals...<sup>295</sup>

From this examination of the most minute physical functions, Nietzsche extends his gaze outward into nature as a whole. He argues that

the 'development' of a thing, a tradition, an organ is... certainly not its *progressus* towards a goal, still less is it a logical *progressus*, taking the shortest route with least expenditure of energy and cost, —instead it is a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation...<sup>296</sup>

This matches his view of the universe as unconnected with any external *telos*, and as ordered not by rules that it possesses in itself, but by the rules we read into it. Nietzsche claimed that "the total character of the world... is for all eternity chaos, not in the sense of a lack of necessity, but of a lack of order, organization, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else our aesthetic anthropomorphisms are called."<sup>297</sup> In a late work he summarized his position on teleology itself in this way:

*Nobody* is responsible for people existing in the first place, or for the state or circumstances or environment they are in. The fatality of human existence cannot be extricated from the fatality of everything that was and will be. People are not the product of some special design, will, or purpose, they do *not* represent an attempt

295 Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann (editor, translator), R. J. Hollingdale (translator). New York: Vintage, 1968. 490.

296 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. II: 12. On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings. Keith Ansell-Pearson (editor), Carol Diethe (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994. 50.52.

297 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 109. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 109-110.

to achieve an 'ideal humanity', 'ideal happiness', or 'ideal of morality', — it is absurd to want to *devolve* human existence onto some purpose or another. We have invented the concept of 'purpose': there *are* no purposes in reality...<sup>298</sup>

In arguing this way, Nietzsche has truly radicalized Kant's model of teleology; not only are we unable to see clearly down to the purposes of nature, not only are purposive judgements always relative to the cognizing subject, but there literally are no such things as identifiable purposes in the universe itself.

Of that notion of progress which I have argued was so essential to the deliberations of the Darwinians, Nietzsche had only the deepest scorn. In a passage that could as easily apply to Christians, Hegelians, or Darwinians, Nietzsche claims that

Reading nature as though it were a proof of God's goodness and providence; interpreting history in honour of divine reason, as a constant testimonial to an ethical world order and ethical ultimate purpose; explaining all one's own experiences in the way pious folk have done for long enough, as though everything were providence, a sign, intended and sent for the salvation of the soul: now all that is *over*, it has conscience *against* it, every sensitive conscience sees it as indecent, dishonest, as a pack of lies... weakness, cowardice

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Nietzsche challenges the reader, conditioned by multiple possible discourses to believe

298 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols*. 'The Four Great Errors', 8. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Aaron Ridley (editor), Judith Norman (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005. 182.

299 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. III: 27. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. Keith Ansell-Pearson (editor), Carol Diethe (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994. 118-119.



that life is meaningful, that things happen for a reason: “Let’s not deceive ourselves!”, he cries. “Time moves forwards—we would like to believe that everything in it moves forwards too... that development is a forwards development”, but it is not so. “This is the appearance that seduces even the most circumspect: yet the nineteenth century does not represent progress over the sixteenth...”<sup>300</sup> Things change—indeed, for Nietzsche all things are in perpetual flux, in a state of becoming—but they do not change *for* anything, or according to any plan or design, whether dictated by God or coded into the universe by chance.

Thus human beings, too, must be knocked from the self-declared perch at the top of the evolutionary ladder. Nietzsche was “opposed to a certain vanity that re-emerges” within the progressive theories of his contemporaries, so many of whom were “acting as if human beings were the great hidden goal of animal evolution. Humans are in no way the crown of creation, all beings occupy the same level of *perfection*...”<sup>301</sup> Not only is man an animal, as Kant and the Darwinians agreed, but “mankind does not advance” either; he simply “does not represent progress over the animal...”<sup>302</sup> Haeckel’s evolutionary tree, synonymous with the progressive view of Darwinism in Germany, was for Nietzsche pure nonsense.<sup>303</sup>

This leads at last to one of the more complicated aspects of Nietzsche’s epistemology and cosmology, which I will dramatically simplify as a kind of arch-

300 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor),azzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xiii. 15[8].

301 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Antichrist*. 14. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Aaron Ridley (editor), Judith Norman (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005. [emphasis added]. 12.

302 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor),azzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xiii. 15[8].

303 It is worth mentioning that Nietzsche’s own idea of the *Übermensch* was never intended to represent a coming stage of biological evolution, at least not in the way that such a “higher being” presented itself in the popular imagination. Cf. *Ecce Homo*. ‘Why I Write Such Good Books’, 1.

determinism and radical subjectivity. Nietzsche's critique of the concept of free will, which as noted above is essential to the Kantian (and generally Western) characterization of moral action, is actually related to Kant's proof that causality is a function of the understanding, and not a property demonstratively inherent in the universe. One of the reasons that Nietzsche could come down so hard on Darwinism was on account of its pretensions: it claimed to operate according to discoverable natural laws. Yet from within his own far stricter Kantian epistemology, Nietzsche argued that all science, including physics and biology, was an "interpretation"; he cautioned:

Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities: there is no-one who commands, no-one who obeys, no-one who transgresses. Once you know that there are no purposes, you also know that there is no accident; for only against a world of purposes does the word 'accident' have a meaning.<sup>304</sup>

He points to a kind of radical scepticism from which—if the scientific method is itself to be considered sound—we can never escape. As he puts it:

In science, convictions have no right to citizenship... only when they decide to step down to the modesty of a hypothesis, a tentative experimental standpoint, a regulative fiction, may they be granted admission and even a certain value in the realm of knowledge—though always with the restriction that they remain under police supervision... But doesn't this mean, on closer consideration, that a conviction is granted admission to science

304 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 109. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 109.

only when it *ceases* to be a conviction? Wouldn't the cultivation of the scientific spirit begin when one permitted oneself no more convictions?...<sup>305</sup>

To the explanations offered up by science, Nietzsche can only point back to the source of all theorizing, which he sees as having taken place within what we would now call Foucaultian relations of power and knowledge. There is "simply no 'presuppositionless' science."<sup>306</sup> Even in the exact sciences, "physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to ourselves! if I may say so) and *not* an explanation of the world."<sup>307</sup> Thus for Nietzsche, there can be no "laws" to be found within evolutionary biology, only observations that could serve this or that contingent and power-determined interpretation of the empirical facts of biology. No grand scheme in nature awaits discovery, and all the clever scientific theories—by which I mean the systematic organization of scientific knowledge—are ultimately conceived within a particular discourse and serve particular ends.

Nietzsche challenged the Darwinians for claiming to have found out the great mysteries of life, when all he could see was the perpetuation of self-serving, teleological delusions. The scientific world-view offered man the ability to cast off the superstitions of religion, and Nietzsche saw him replacing them with new idols: objectivity, mechanism, progress. And against this trend, Nietzsche, who imagining himself the iconoclast *par excellence* of the nineteenth century, happily proclaimed himself the

305 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 344. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 200-201.

306 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 344. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 200-201.

307 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 14. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (editor), Judith Norman (editor). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002. 15-16.

“anti-Darwin.”

## 5.2 Encountering Nietzsche’s Scientific and Philosophical Naturalism

A survey of Nietzsche’s scientific background should begin with some of the basic trends in philosophical materialism and evolutionary biology with which he was aware. At the arrival of René Descartes and the beginnings of modern philosophy came a series of thought-experiments which brought to a wide audience, not only a naturalistic explanation for cosmology, but the radical suggestion that lower animals should be viewed in solely materialistic terms. Descartes stubbornly failed to account for the emergence of life, however, and shied away from including man amongst the animals, but the door had been opened to applying human reason to the question of origins, and elaborations were not long in coming. Nietzsche himself offered this extension:

As far as animals are concerned, it was Descartes who, with admirable boldness, first ventured the idea that they could be seen as *machina*: the whole of physiology has been working to prove this claim. We are even logically consistent enough not to exclude humans, as Descartes did: to the extent that human beings are understood at all these days, they are understood as machines.<sup>308</sup>

The speculations of Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon—outlined in a twenty-three volume natural history with twelve supplements—reconfigured the scientific landscape. It is best known for two controversial claims: a series of

308 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Antichrist: A Curse on Christianity*. 14. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Aaron Ridley (editor), Judith Norman (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005. 12.

evolutionary suppositions, and an epistemological treatise for the natural sciences.<sup>309</sup> The latter made a case for the careful accumulation of observational data, over the abstract formulations of the mathematical disciplines, as the superior path to knowledge. Though he occasionally denigrates its pursuit as being suited best to narrow, arid—and diligent—minds, there can be little doubt that Nietzsche appreciated the value of such empirical research. In addition, he appears to have been influenced by the notion of anchoring a world-concept in the realm of 'pure experience'—as notably urged by Richard Avenarius and Ernst Mach, the founders of empiriocriticism.<sup>310</sup>

Buffon's evolutionary speculations appeared from Volume Fourteen of his natural history, wherein he pondered

the evolutionary origins of similar species from common ancestral types—perhaps as few as thirty-eight original forms for the two-hundred-odd mammalian species known at the time... For example, he proposed that all the world's various lions, tigers, leopards, pumas, and domestic cats 'degenerated' in response to local climatic conditions from a single ancestral type of cat.<sup>311</sup>

Buffon's theory of 'internal moulds' guiding the spontaneous generation of life may have turned the corner from Biblical literalism, but it failed to convince more than a handful of scientific men, and it did nothing to challenge the ultimate problem of design. However, as we shall see, this approach was echoed in the work of Karl von Nägeli, and Nietzsche's own views on evolution are distinctly a part of this internally-guided lineage.

309 E. C. Spary. *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000.

310 Gregory Moore, Gregory and Thomas H. Brobjer. *Nietzsche and Science*. London: Ashgate, 2004. 41-44.

311 Edward J. Larson. *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory*. New York: Modern Library, 2004. 14.

French science itself soon fell under the spell of Georges Léopold Chrétien Frédéric Dagobert Cuvier, the founding father of palaeontology and a visionary in comparative anatomy and geology, who established the presence of a fossil record with a long history of extinctions. Cuvier refused steadfastly to derive an evolutionary explanation for variation at different geological strata, preferring instead to explain the fossil record through catastrophism—the idea that the world was subject to periodic mass extinctions as the environmental conditions changed, followed by careful repopulation of properly-adapted species by a beneficent Creator. This had the advantage of not contradicting the Bible in an irreconcilable manner, and its appeal on this account was enough to retard the progress of alternatives, such as the radical theories of Lamarck.

Coming to his evolutionary ideas relatively late in life, Jean Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck, was a philosophical materialist solidly in the Enlightenment tradition, who had the misfortune of presenting his theories well after the scientific mood had shifted away from such foundations. He suggested a mechanism of spontaneous generation, followed by the accumulation of adaptations driven directly by the needs and will of the organism itself. This notion of internally-driven evolution—the inheritance of acquired characteristics—would return to the scientific scene after Darwin's ideas had arrived, and would serve as the basis not only for some of the strongest opposition to natural selection, but also as its complement in the writings of nearly all of the Darwinians (including, significantly, Darwin himself).

Lamarck's view was, in fact, almost universal amongst the evolutionary biologists of Nietzsche's day, and in all likelihood contributed materially to retarding the development and spread of Mendelian hereditarianism. As Peter Bowler observes, to

biologists:

of the late nineteenth century, [Lamarck] was the founder of an evolutionary mechanism compatible with the knowledge of their own time... It was assumed that Lamarck's theory postulated the evolution of all living things from a common ancestor and that he had proposed the first plausible mechanism to explain how species adapt to their environment.<sup>312</sup>

This is not strictly accurate but was nonetheless taken quite seriously at the time. As Ernst Haeckel put it in 1868: "To him [Lamarck] will always belong the immortal glory of having for the first time worked out the Theory of Descent, as an independent scientific theory of the first order, and as the philosophical foundation of the whole science of Biology."<sup>313</sup>

Tellingly, Nietzsche also attributes the real innovations in evolutionary theory to Lamarck (and to Hegel), complaining that Darwin was only an 'after-effect' of these revolutionary earlier revelations.<sup>314</sup> And we know that Lamarck's work would have appealed to Nietzsche precisely because it was open-ended and dynamic, admitting of internal *and* external factors, and drew the organic and inorganic worlds closer together: in Pietro Corsi's words, "his analysis of fluids and their movements enabled him to overcome the nature-life dichotomy".<sup>315</sup> But in Lamarck's own era, the influence of Cuvier effectively marginalized his approach to variation in nature.

312 Peter J. Bowler. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. Berkeley: University of California, 1989. 82.

313 Ernst Haeckel. *The History of Creation, or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner Co., 1899. [orig. 1868.] Volume I: 114.

314 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xi. 34[73].

315 Pietro Corsi. *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France, 1790-1830*. Jonathan Mandelbaum (translator). Berkeley: University of California, 1988. 119.

### 5.2.1 Darwinism Between Idealism and Materialism, Teleology and Mechanism

Most commentators are accustomed in the twenty-first century to view evolution in terms explicitly materialistic and mechanistic; the situation in Europe in the later nineteenth-century was far more complicated. For many decades after the weight of scientific discovery began to force uncomfortable questions in some quarters about human values and divine order, the pursuit of knowledge found a productive co-existence alongside philosophical and theological positions that had changed but little from the earlier Enlightenment. Bowler describes the underpinnings of the competing *Weltanschauungen* in political terms:

Materialism was an integral aspect of a revolutionary ideology that wanted to sweep all traces of the old social hierarchy aside. Natural theology and idealism were invoked by conservatives who wanted to preserve their position in that hierarchy: the world was designed by a God who intended us all to accept our place in the preordained social scale. The situation was complicated, however, by a growing middle class making fortunes out of the new mechanized industries.<sup>316</sup>

Many of the scientific theories that sprang from these societies reflected in broad terms the social and political aspirations of the theorists themselves.

Adding to this intellectual ferment were a large number of genuinely strange

316 Peter J. Bowler. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. Berkeley: University of California, 1989. 97.



ideas, along with a growing number of real break-throughs. Detailed information, for example, was now available about every stage in the development of the embryo, and the stunning similarity of the earlier stages of development were an important step on the path to evolutionism. But each new area of research also attracted its share of creative speculation—such as that of the pre-formationists. “Unfortunately” for the idea’s proponents, notes Ernst Mayr, “the extreme representatives of the... school postulated pre-existence, that is, that a miniaturized adult (homonculus) was somehow encapsulated in the egg (or in the spermatozoon), an assumption the absurdity of which was rather easily demonstrated.”<sup>317</sup> Alternative morphologies generally fell back on a vital force (*Bildungstrieb*), which hardly kept scientists on the path to naturalistic explanations.

For the most part, German scientists of

the nineteenth century abandoned such bizarre notions, but adopted a confused theory of ‘blending inheritance’ in which the offspring’s characters were always intermediate between those of its parents. Most authorities still thought that heredity was ‘soft’, *i.e.*, that the transmission of characters to the offspring could be modified by changes taking place in the parents’ bodies due to new habits or a new environment. Even Charles Darwin accepted these incorrect ideas and enshrined them in his own theory of ‘pangenesis’.<sup>318</sup>

In the absence of good data, much of what we know as good biology (and in many

317 Ernst Mayr. *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982. 106.

318 Peter J. Bowler. *The Mendelian Revolution: The Emergence of Hereditarian Concepts in Modern Science and Society*. London: Athlone Press, 1989. 3.

cases, good scientific methodology) was simply unavailable. Making matters worse, since the time of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics... a belief was prevalent... that there is a purpose, a pre-determined end, in nature and its processes. Those with this view... saw the clear expression of a purpose not only in the *scala naturae*, culminating in man, but also in the total unity and harmony of nature and its manifold adaptations.<sup>319</sup>

Nietzsche is consistently critical of teleology, whether in the ancient Greeks or in modern science. His views are summarized in *Twilight of the Idols*:

*Nobody* is responsible for people existing in the first place, or for the state or circumstances or environment they are in. The fatality of human existence cannot be extricated from the fatality of everything that was and will be. People are not the product of some special design, will, or purpose, they do *not* represent an attempt to achieve an 'ideal humanity', 'ideal happiness', or 'ideal of morality', — it is absurd to want to *devolve* human existence onto some purpose or another. We have invented the concept of 'purpose': there *are* no purposes in reality...<sup>320</sup>

Darwin's views, on the other hand, are much more difficult to ascertain. Michael Ruse presents the case:

Opinion is divided. Darwin's great English supporter, Thomas Henry Huxley, wrote: 'That which struck the present writer most forcibly

319 Ernst Mayr. *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982. 47-8.

320 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols*. 'The Four Great Errors', 8. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Aaron Ridley (editor), Judith Norman (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005. 182.

in his first perusal of the *Origin of Species* was the conviction that Teleology, as commonly understood, had received its death blow at Mr Darwin's hands'. Darwin's great American supporter, Asa Gray, however, wrote of 'Darwin's great service to Natural Science in bringing it back to Teleology; so that, instead of Morphology *versus* Teleology, we shall have Morphology wedded to Teleology'. ... And Darwin himself is no great help. He thought that Gray's thinking on the subject verged on taking evolutionary biology out of the range of genuine science. Yet he praised Gray, telling him that 'what you say about teleology pleases me especially'.<sup>321</sup>

Amongst Nietzsche's readings on materialism and natural science one can find conflicting positions on teleology as a concept; and, more importantly, on whether the Darwinian theory was teleological. Friedrich Albert Lange, a powerful if infrequently-acknowledged influence on Nietzsche's development, was quite explicit in praising Darwin's accomplishment in his *History of Materialism*:

All teleology has its root in the view that the builder of the universe acts in such a way that man must, on the analogy of human reason, call his action purposeful. ... It can now, however, be no longer doubted that nature proceeds in a way which has no similarity with human purposefulness; nay, that her most essential means is such that, measured by the standard of human understanding, it can only be compared with the blindest chance.<sup>322</sup>

321 Michael Ruse. *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution have a Purpose?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. 91.

322 Frederick Albert Lange. *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance, Vol. III.* London: Routledge, 1892. 33.

It is not necessary here to explain Nietzsche's views on chance, but his affinity for the position above can be inferred by reference to his reformulation of Spinoza's '*Deus sive Natura*'. In *The Ethics*, the boldly pantheistic philosopher's master-work, the relation of man to nature is elaborated thus:

The power by which singular things (and consequently, [any] man) preserve their being is the power itself of God, *or* Nature, not insofar as it is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained through the man's actual essence. The man's power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God *or* Nature's infinite power, that is, of its essence.<sup>323</sup>

For clarity, it should be noted that 'or' in the quotation above is a rendering of the Latin *sive*, which typically indicates equivalence. For Nietzsche, nature can no longer be identified with or as God, but rather as a site of perpetual conflict and multiplicity—in short, '*Chaos sive Natura*'.<sup>324</sup>

The situation amongst the ostensible Darwinists of Germany was convoluted and often contradictory; the case of Ernst Haeckel, the most widely-known and significant of Germany's evolutionary theorists, is emblematic. Haeckel insisted that

although there were no blind-chance events—the law of cause and effect kept things on a narrow and predictable path—neither was there any purpose to anything in the universe, living or non-living. Darwin's monumental contribution, said Haeckel, had been the final destruction of teleology.<sup>325</sup>

323 Spinoza, Benedict de. {Baruch Spinoza} *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Writings*. Edwin Curley (translator). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. 202-3.

324 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor),azzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. ix. 11[197].

325 Kelly, Alfred. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany*,

Yet as we will see in our discussion of progress below, this principle was routinely violated in Haeckel's works. To wit:

All nineteenth-century naturalists realised that the history of life has been a very complex process, but many of them preserved the belief that there is a central theme running through the variety of natural developments toward a single goal. Although he called himself a Darwinian, Haeckel used the recapitulation theory to present an image of the tree of life as a structure with a 'trunk' that runs upward to the human race as the pinnacle of natural development. Haeckel thus evaded the lesson taught by K. E. von Baer's much earlier demonstration that the embryo grows by a process of specialization, not by the ascent of a hierarchy defined by a series of 'lower' forms.<sup>326</sup>

Never quite able to accept Darwin's failure to address the matter of life's origins—whether through spontaneous generation or some other theory—Haeckel began in his later work to espouse an almost mystical or metaphysical basis for life. This effort culminated in his belief in a 'living universe', wherein "plants are conscious and... atoms have [a] soul" (a position for which Nietzsche had nothing but scorn<sup>327</sup>). Alfred Kelly states that "there is no doubt that [Haeckel's] animated matter represented a lapse into the very romantic *Naturphilosophie* that he had denounced as metaphysical and teleological."<sup>328</sup>

1860-1914. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 26

326 Peter J. Bowler. *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988. 52.

327 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 109. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 109-110.

328 Alfred Kelly. *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany*,

But to be fair, the new drive to get biology onto a firmly mechanistic and causally-determined footing experienced near-constant set-backs. Indeed, William Montgomery notes that in Germany,

outside the realm of cell theory and physiology, the new mechanist philosophy was more preached than practised. Taxonomy and comparative anatomy could not really get along without the type concept; nor was embryology able to dispose of the *Bildungstrieb*. And these were the very fields in which the question of evolution was more pertinent. In the minds of most biologists, both idealist and mechanist principles operated in uneasy coexistence.<sup>329</sup>

Exerting a constant influence on the development of German science was the intellectual legacy of her culture, especially as distinct from the English. Some writers of the day were wont even to use these purported national differences of character in defence of their scientific perspectives.

They argued that the success of the English in devising mechanical machinery such as the steam engine was behind their preference for a mechanistic model of physical reality; and the old dispute between supporters of Newton and Leibniz was continued by some writers with barely diminished enthusiasm. Similarly, it was suggested that Darwin's idea of the struggle for existence was an expression of the English ideology of market forces... Nietzsche was far from being a German chauvinist, but from time to time echoes of this context within which his impressions of scientific

1860-1914. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981. 28.

329 William M. Montgomery. 'Germany'. In *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*. Thomas F. Glick (ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. 90-1.

ideas were gained do occur in his thinking.<sup>330</sup>

Examples of this bias, including his frequent *ad hominem* attacks against even the most influential of English writers on his own project, abound in his published work.

Many of the influences acting on Nietzsche and other Germans interested in the natural sciences were both subtle and pervasive. Foremost amongst these is a figure little remembered to-day for his contributions to biological science: Immanuel Kant. In his 1790 *Critique of Judgement*, Kant laid out the principles of what Timothy Lenoir has called teleo-mechanism, including the basic unit of study for much subsequent speculation: the morphotype—an organizational plan for the development of the organism. Kant's tentative opening was followed by Johann Blumenbach, Karl Kiemeyer, and others, who—in adding flesh to the project Kant announced—managed to set up the dominant, teleological paradigm of German science.<sup>331</sup> In time the *Bildungstrieb*, or vital force, required by these early schemes began to be supplanted by the cell theory and advances in embryology, but the vitalist element in these theories should be revisited in any thorough discussion of the will to power. In fact, the proper relation of Nietzsche's ideas to those of the neo-Kantians has seldom been explored in detail; the influence of Lange has been mentioned increasingly, but the impact of Gustav Bunge, *e.g.*,—whose *Vitalismus und Mechanismus* Nietzsche read in later years—remains to be explained. But as Kevin Hill has demonstrated, Kant's *Critique*, read early in Nietzsche's philosophical life, was to play a significant part in that work's development.<sup>332</sup>

Further idealistic sources for Nietzsche's naturalism can be found in the

330 Robin Small. *Nietzsche in Context*. London: Ashgate, 2001. xii.

331 Timothy Lenoir. *The Strategy of Life: Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth Century German Biology*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1982.

332 R. Kevin Hill. *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundations of His Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

*Naturphilosophie* expounded by Friedrich von Schelling and—more significantly—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Schelling attempted to marry the approach of Johann Gottlieb Fichte to the imperative of natural beauty in Kant's *Critique*, though it must be said without much success. Nevertheless, he was important enough in the inspiration of scientific materialism to merit an enduring influence, and Dutch physiologist (and Lamarckian evolutionist) Jacob Moleschott once "complained that Schelling's service was [not] appreciated enough, although he acknowledged that... *Naturphilosophen* had forced scientists to become hostile to speculation and to become lost in fact gathering."<sup>333</sup> This death of the Romantic spirit in the name of pure science would be lamented many times by Nietzsche, as notably in the *Gay Science*:

A 'scientific' interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore still be one of the *most stupid* of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning. This thought is intended for the ears and consciences of our mechanists who nowadays like to pass as philosophers and insist that mechanics is the doctrine of the first and last laws on which all existence must be based as on a ground floor. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially *meaningless* world. Assuming that one estimated the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, expressed in formulae: how absurd would such a 'scientific' estimation of music be!<sup>334</sup>

333 Frederick Gregory. *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1977. 178-9.

334 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 373. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 238-239.



This criticism must, however, be qualified:

For Nietzsche, mechanism is not just one scientific theory among others, but the most advanced and successful kind of science. Sometimes he attacks it in strong terms, yet he often goes in the opposite direction, and even takes up what looks like a reductionist approach in his own thinking.<sup>335</sup>

Behind his occasional attacks on mechanism, as with those on science and empiricism in general, lies a conviction that science cannot answer the fundamental questions of existence—it can only offer an *interpretation*, which then must find its way into a constructive philosophy of affirmation.

Serving many times as an exemplar of Nietzsche's self-overcoming *Übermensch*, Goethe is celebrated consistently throughout Nietzsche's career. Walter Kaufmann quotes a compliment in an early notebook, where Nietzsche marvels at his "impetuous naturalism which gradually becomes severe dignity. As a stylized human being, he [Goethe] reached a higher level than any other German ever did."<sup>336</sup> Goethe's Romantic naturalism may have been one of Nietzsche's earliest 'scientific' influences; the philosopher-poet had "sought the archetypal form of plants and speculated about a process of historical development in the vegetable kingdom."<sup>337</sup> Haeckel tells us that Goethe "assumed the interaction of two distinct formative tendencies—a conserving or preserving, and progressive or changing formative tendency—as the causes of the variety of organic forms". Despite the limitations obvious to the modern reader, for Haeckel it appears that Goethe's speculations could "completely correspond with the

335 Robin Small. *Nietzsche in Context*. London: Ashgate, 2001. xviii.

336 Walter Kaufmann. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1950. 155.

337 Peter J. Bowler. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 [2003]. 121.

two processes of Inheritance and Adaptation".<sup>338</sup>

Though in all probability Nietzsche's exposure to Hegel was second-hand (and not always favourable), his progressive views would come under withering fire from Nietzsche. Despite this limited contact, Hegel will be treated in the following section, along with some of Nietzsche's more direct influences.

### 5.2.2 Progress and Nature from the Greeks to the Darwinians

*The 'development' of a thing, a tradition, an organ is... certainly not its progressus towards a goal, still less is it a logical progressus, taking the shortest route with least expenditure of energy and cost,—instead it is a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation...*<sup>339</sup>

The union of teleology and progressive biological development common to the post-Darwinian evolutionists would underlie much of the criticism Nietzsche levelled at Darwinism itself—though in most such cases it can be argued that Darwin simply stood in for Herbert Spencer. But of the concept progress itself, the following note encapsulates Nietzsche's position regarding both historical time:

Let's not deceive ourselves! Time moves forwards—we would like to believe that everything in it moves forwards too... that

338 Ernst Haeckel. *The History of Creation, or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, Vol. I. New York: Kegan Paul, 1899. I: 274.

339 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. II: 12. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. Keith Ansell-Pearson (editor), Carol Diethe (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994. 50-52.

development is a forwards development... This is the appearance that seduces even the most circumspect: yet the nineteenth century does not represent progress over the sixteenth...<sup>340</sup>

and organic evolution:

Mankind does not advance— ... [and] Man does not represent progress over the animal...<sup>341</sup>

Nietzsche's approach to evolution, and his opinions of Darwinism, are deeply coloured by his conflation of Darwinian processes and Hegelian time (one of the reasons we had to discuss Hegel in the previous chapter). Yet despite quibbles with progress, Nietzsche took something out of Hegel's work that seemed, in his mind, to set the stage for much evolutionary theory. In the *Gay Science* Nietzsche marvels at Hegel's

astonishing move, with which he struck through all logical habits and indulgences when he dared to teach that species concepts develop *out of each other*: with this proposition the minds of Europe were preformed for the last great scientific movement, Darwinism — for without Hegel there could be no Darwin.<sup>342</sup>

This point is clearly arguable, and says much about Nietzsche's misunderstanding of the Darwinian project. Nevertheless, the debt to Hegel cannot be dismissed, for it plays a substantial part in justifying Nietzsche's determination to view all things as contingent on their history, rather than accepting such concepts as the thing-in-itself or universal truth-values. As one of Nietzsche unpublished notes puts it:

340 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xiii. 15[8].

341 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xiii. 15[8].

342 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 357. Bernard Williams (editor), Josefine Nauckhoff (translator), Adrian Del Caro (translator). Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001. 217-221.

What separates us from Kant as much as from Plato and Leibniz: we believe only in becoming in the mental as well, we are *historical* through and through. This is the great revolution of Lamarck and Hegel—Darwin is only an after-effect. The *Heraclitean* and *Empedoclean* mode of thought has arisen again.<sup>343</sup>

This last line above brings us to another all-pervasive influence on Nietzsche's philosophical development—a life-long love-affair with the ancient Greeks, particularly the pre-Socratics. Without delving into a serious analysis, it seems fitting that we draw attention to the fundamental link with Empedocles that underwrote Nietzsche's understanding of evolution. This ancient thinker, born around 492 BCE, first began to identify the fundamental processes of biology, include homologous organs and the respiratory function. And, despite its phantastical depictions of supposed failed animals of the distant past, his account of the emergence of modern species is surprisingly prescient. Anthony Gottlieb recounts Empedocles' argument that

creatures owe their useful and fortunate features to the fact that there were originally many sorts of creatures and that the strange, deformed ones failed to survive because they were unsuited to do so, leaving only the well-suited creatures to reproduce their kind and populate the earth.<sup>344</sup>

We need not belabour the obvious parallels this idea has with the later theories of Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace.

This was a coincidence unlikely to be missed by a scholar of Nietzsche's training.

343 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xi. 34[73].

344 Anthony Gottlieb. *The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000. 79.

With the biases of a classical philologist, and lacking direct exposure to *The Origin of Species*, it appeared that

Darwin's conception [was] a modern version of the ideas of the ancient Greek thinker Empedocles—a comparison that Nietzsche noted on his reading of Lange in 1866 and repeated in his Basel lectures on pre-Platonic philosophy. The association provided further evidence for his view that all the basic philosophical standpoints had already been represented in these earliest Western thinkers.<sup>345</sup>

This connexion was also drawn by Haeckel as late as the 1900 publication of *The Riddle of the Universe*. In this late volume, Haeckel asks—and answers—the following question: “‘How can purposive contrivances be produced by purely mechanical processes without design?’ Kant held the problem to be insoluble”, noted the controversial biologist, but in actuality Haeckel held that “Empedocles had pointed out the direction of the solution two thousand years before. His principle of ‘teleological mechanism’ has been more and more accepted of late years.”<sup>346</sup>

The general influence exerted upon Nietzsche by Lange has been noted above, but this author is further elevated in significance for our project as he was one of the principal sources of information on Darwin's writings to which Nietzsche had access. It may be safe to assume, given the extent of their discussions and of the influence of Darwin upon his own work, that Paul Rée was Nietzsche's principal source.<sup>347</sup> As their friendship came to an end just before Nietzsche's mature work was produced, Lange's

345 Robin Small. *Nietzsche and Rée: A Star Friendship*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2005. 184.

346 Ernst Haeckel. *The Riddle of the Universe and the Close of the Nineteenth Century*. Joseph McCabe (translator). New York: Harper & Bros., 1901. 263.

347 Robin Small. *Nietzsche and Rée: A Star Friendship*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2005.

text was one of relatively few resources to which he could easily return, and may have been his most trusted.<sup>348</sup> Lange's characterization of Darwin, then, might seem an especially weighty source in the formation of Nietzsche's view, given in particular the high esteem in which Lange himself stood. Yet things are clearly not so simple, as Lange has a mostly favourable opinion of Darwin, which spilled over at times into fulsome and unstinting praise.

However, the apparent fact that Nietzsche knew no more details of Darwin's research than are found in Lange's tome places it still at the head of a short list of direct Darwinian influences. The summary of Darwinism in this work is therefore of the highest importance, and is fortunately both accurate and judicious. Lange states that in

Darwin's view... chief importance is laid upon the silent and continuous... changes which are continually going on, but the result of which only becomes apparent in long periods of time. Agreeably with this view, Darwin supposed that modifications of species arise quite fortuitously, and that the majority of them again disappear, like ordinary malformations, without leaving any sign, while some few of them, which bring some advantage to their possessors in the struggle for existence, maintain and establish themselves through natural selection and heredity.<sup>349</sup>

Yet he offers a significant emendation by introducing a fundamentally Lamarckian twist to the process, suggesting that it is "more probable that the organic forms oppose a certain resistance to the change in their life-conditions... when the disturbing influences

348 Other sources include biologists Rolph, Roux, and Nägeli, and theologian David F. Strauss.

349 Frederick Albert Lange. *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, Vol. III. London: Routledge, 1892. III: 45-6.

reach a certain height". This does not exclude the gradual modification in Darwin's theory, but such changes are deemed insufficient to the task of speciation: "the development of new kinds from the purely fortuitous development of new qualities must indeed be doubted, so far at least as the main lever of the change".<sup>350</sup> Thus Darwin had not, in this view, explained evolution itself adequately (though he had triumphantly demonstrated its occurrence). By way of example, Lange offers the following:

First let us suppose that the period of adaptation follows upon a disturbance of equilibrium, and for that very reason involves an increased tendency to variation. Why now are we to exclude all immediate causal connexion between the change of the conditions of existence and the change of forms?<sup>351</sup>

As we will see, Nietzsche departs from this in rejecting the preponderant position granted to external circumstances, in both Darwin and Lange's models.

In one of the great ironies of Nietzsche's career, two of the writers so frequently maligned in his work may well have been two with whom—had he read more widely in their respective oeuvres—he would doubtless have found areas in which their ideas achieved a singular concord. The first to which I refer is the inspiration for this paper, Charles Darwin. The second is that oft-slighted Englishman Herbert Spencer. Nietzsche's engagement with Spencer appears primarily to have been restricted to *The Data of Ethics*, a text he owned and to which he returned frequently over the years.<sup>352</sup> Aside from this, he owned two volumes of sociology, but it is uncertain if he ever encountered

350 Frederick Albert Lange. *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, Vol. III. London: Routledge, 1892. III: 46.

351 Frederick Albert Lange. *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, Vol. III. London: Routledge, 1892. III: 46.

352 Thomas H. Brobjer. 'Nietzsche's Reading and Private Library, 1885-1889'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.4 (1997): 663-680.

the remaining elements in Spencer's 'System of Synthetic Philosophy'. Of particular note here are the works *First Principles* and the *Principles of Biology*, in both of which Spencer devotes a considerable amount of time to his evolutionary theories.

It has been argued many times that Spencer, as the prototypical 'social Darwinist', had merely adapted Darwin's natural selection to the human social sphere; the truth could not be further off. In fact, Spencer's writings on evolution pre-date Darwin's own, and despite later adopting natural selection (which he famously termed 'survival of the fittest'), he retained significant areas of disagreement with Darwin's conclusions. Given Nietzsche's lack of exposure to these theories, however, we must essentially neglect to examine their common features. In the main, Spencer's work will be engaged in our later discussion of altruism and egoism, and briefly below on the matter of progress in evolution. But before skipping over this fertile area of comparison, a few brief comments should be made.

It is first worth noting that many of Nietzsche's most biting criticisms of Spencer flow from the latter's views on altruism. The broader contours of this debate will appear later, but here we draw the reader's attention to a feature of his progressive evolutionism found in *The Principles of Biology*. Rather than expecting perfect co-operation to be the desirable end-goal of human society, Spencer observes that such co-operation should remain beneath the dominion of egoistic individualism. *Viz.*—

It does not follow that the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest must be left to work out their effects without mitigation. It is contended only that there shall not be a forcible burdening of the superior for the support of the inferior. Such aid to the inferior as the superior voluntarily yield, kept as it will be within moderate



limits, may be given with benefit to both—relief to the one, moral culture to the other.<sup>353</sup>

We are here confronted with the sort of passage that identifies Spencer as the philosopher of 'social Darwinism' *par excellence*. Yet at least part of the sentiment would find eager resonance with Nietzsche, a thinker who spent much of his energy campaigning against the feeling of pity (that tender-yet-condescending emotion so ably demonstrated in his own life), and against the subordination of cultured élites to the will of the majority.

Where the two differ, of course, is in Nietzsche's recognition that the culturally-elevated are often at a substantial disadvantage in modern society; those Nietzsche calls the stronger, higher men, are those in whom he sees strength of character, resolute will, artistic greatness. In one of his notebook entries labelled 'Anti-Darwin', Nietzsche presents the following diagnosis:

Strange as it sounds: one has always to arm the strong against the weak; the fortunate against the failures; the healthy against those decaying and with a hereditary taint. If one wants to formulate reality as *morality*, then this morality runs as follows: the average are worth more than the exceptions, the products of decadence more than the average...<sup>354</sup>

Yet in Darwinian terms, the attributes of Caesar that Nietzsche celebrated have relatively little to do with survival qualities, whereas the famous general's epilepsy very likely could have. It is probable that Nietzsche developed this association of Darwinian

353 Herbert Spencer. *The Principles of Biology, Vol. II*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896. 533.

354 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor),azzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. *xiii*. 14[123].

strength and cultural worth from Spencer, and it is for this reason that this author holds Spencer to be the greater source of Nietzsche's (mis)perceptions of Darwin. The Darwinism that Nietzsche so often criticizes is not Darwin's theory, but Spencer's: 'social Darwinism'.

There is one other idea, a mechanism we would ask the reader to bear in mind as we further our examination. Nietzsche characterized the self as a multiplicity of competing and expanding forces—a concept drawn in part from the work of Wilhelm Roux and William Rolph. Nietzsche reasoned that:

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and out consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of cells in which dominion resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command...<sup>355</sup>

We might combine this formulation with the following, on the will to power as life:

Let us take the simplest case, that of primitive feeding: protoplasm stretches out pseudopodia to seek something that resists it—not out of hunger but out of a will to power. Then it tries to overcome what it has found, to appropriate it, incorporate it—what is called 'feeding' is merely a subsequent phenomenon, a practical application of that original will to become *stronger*...<sup>356</sup>

An echo of this, albeit of an idea far less radical and more easily assimilated to

355 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann (editor, translator), R. J. Hollingdale (translator). New York: Vintage, 1968. 490.

356 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. xiii. 14[174].

our modern sensibilities, exists in Spencer's biology:

Already we have recognized the fact that the evolution of an organism is primarily the formation of an aggregate, by the continued incorporation of matter previously spread through a wider space. Every plant grows by taking into itself elements that were before diffused, and every animal grows by reconcentrating those elements previously dispersed in surrounding plants or other animals.<sup>357</sup>

All that remains is to speculate on the motivating force: is it the instinct of hunger, or an invitation to theorize the will to power? "A multiplicity of forces, connected by a common mode of nutrition, we call 'life'..."<sup>358</sup> And life itself, as Nietzsche insists, is will to power and nothing more.

### 5.3 The Greek Roots of Nietzsche's Naturalistic & Existential Imperatives

By now we have seen (what appear to us as) the teleological and progressive nature of much in modern thought, from Kant and Hegel to Marx and the Darwinians. We have seen the way in which both natural science and secular philosophy were used to mask a progressive notion of history borrowed directly from the Abrahamic faiths. In this next section I would like to deal with some elements of the pervasive Greek influence on Nietzsche's philosophical project, in particular the rôles of naturalistic thinking and the place of fire and becoming in Heraclitus and the Stoics. As we will see,

357 Herbert Spencer. *First Principles*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1862. 276.

358 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann (editor, translator), R. J. Hollingdale (translator). New York: Vintage, 1968. 641.

these lie at the heart of Nietzsche's alternative to apocalyptic-eschatological time. The linear view of time, including its definitive ending at some future date, which came down to Nietzsche through the Judeo-Christian religions, ran into obstacles on account of the natural sciences, textual-biblical criticism, and the legacy of the Greeks – Nietzsche would draw on all of these in his refutation of the notion, and its replacement with his Eternal Recurrence of the Same.

One of the principal sources of evidence for Persian origins to the the Western view of apocalypticism, which we dealt with in the early chapters of this study, is the testimony of ancient Greek authors. It should be remembered here that Nietzsche was a Classical philologist, and we can presume a great deal when it comes to his reading of the Classics – as Bernd Magnus put it, "Nietzsche was thoroughly familiar with Heraclitus and the Stoics, and their teachings probably affected the context and moment of his own discovery [of Eternal Recurrence]".<sup>359</sup> Moreover, for a great many Greco-Roman authors we need not speculate, as we have ample evidence of Nietzsche's reading history, book collection, and lecture notes. This Greek connexion was an undoubted source of information on the Zoroastrian faith and on the Iranian culture, as well, since his library and reading lists contain nearly all of the Greek authors who wrote on these matters.<sup>360</sup>

In the first subsection below I will make a few remarks on Nietzsche's understanding of Greek materialism and proto-scientific thinking. In the second, I will address the impact of Heraclitus on Nietzsche's understanding of being and time. And in the third I will discuss the Stoic apocalypse – the great conflagration – and the

359 Bernd Magnus. *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978. 49.

360 Thomas H. Brobjer. 'Nietzsche's Reading and Private Library, 1885-1889'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.4 (1997): 663-680.

resetting of the universal clock which follows it.

### 5.3.1 Materialism and the Greeks: From Homer to Thales to Aristotle and Beyond

In a series of lectures given to students at Basel beginning in 1872, Nietzsche went through the pre-Platonic philosophers and tried to connect their ideas not only to their own historical context but to Nietzsche's own contemporary cultural context. He sought to extract lessons from their lives and ideas that could be used in then-current debates raging in European civilisation. And, interestingly, the lectures are filled with references to scientific work from the nineteenth century, telling us clearly just how early in his career Nietzsche was taken with scientific advances and how important a naturalistic world-view was to him even before the start of his philosophical career.

In his lecture on Thales, the Ionian thinker commonly acknowledged as the first of the Greek philosophers, Nietzsche consciously tied him to contemporary sciences, as in the following passage:

Actually, astronomical facts justify his belief that a less solid aggregate condition must have given rise to current circumstances. Here we should recall the Kant-Laplace hypothesis concerning a gaseous precondition of the universe. In following this same direction, the Ionian philosophers were certainly on the right path.<sup>361</sup>

Where he departs from Thales is in that thinker's essentially metaphysical bases making

361 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 27-28.

this intuitive leap<sup>362</sup>, but this hardly detracts from the overall picture of a culture embracing a naturalistic world-view.

Consider the poems of Homer. Yes, his works are suffused with the supernatural – gods and powers – but there is an underlying naturalism to them which is not always appreciated. Frequently explanations are given for actions which have a distinctly material or psychological resonance. When, for example, in the *Iliad* the Achaean hero Diomedes struck the goddess Aphrodite with his spear, he was said to have been “overcome by something called *lyssa*, the wolf’s rage. Diomedes now, in the pitch of battle, is simply overcome by something inside of himself. What he’s overcome by is something that is at least quasi-natural; it’s something occupying him at a corporeal level, at the level of his very body and being.”<sup>363</sup> Daniel Robinson opines that this is something absolutely characteristic of the Homeric oeuvre, and indeed of the Greek society that emerged in its shadow.

“There is something utterly and uncompromisingly earthly about the Homeric epics. The gods themselves have a very earthly, we’re inclined to say a very *earthy* character. They have this penchant for mating with human beings. You never know when one of them is going to show up on someone’s doorstep, finding a daughter or son particularly attractive!”<sup>364</sup>

This characteristic is undoubtedly one of those which most captivated the young

362 Helmut Heit. ‘Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Early Greek Philosophy’. In *Nietzsche as a Scholar of Antiquity*. Anthony L Jensen and Helmut Heit (eds). London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 226. See also Friedrich Nietzsche. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Trans. by Marianne Cowan. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1962/1998. §3.

363 Daniel N. Robinson. “Great Ideas of Philosophy: 1 – From the Upanishads to Homer”. Lecture Series. Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2004.

364 Daniel N. Robinson. “Great Ideas of Philosophy: 1 – From the Upanishads to Homer”. Lecture Series. Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2004.

Nietzsche and sustained his interest in the Greeks throughout his life. You could, in fact, argue that Nietzsche's philosophical project is in some sense dedicated to the resurrection of this earthly, naturalistic quality of Greek thinking. They did not feel the need to hide from or disguise those things which made us human – they embraced them. Everything from sexuality to power relations to basic psychology are given a naturalistic reading in Greek thought, and this can be seen in everything from the biology of Hippocrates and Galen, to the drama and comedy of the great Athenian playwrights, to the materialist foundations of Aristotle's work, to the physics of the Epicurean and Stoic schools. And we know that Nietzsche engaged with, and admired, many of the more materialistic and naturalistic of the Greeks throughout his career – Democritus, most famous of the atomists, is oft mentioned, for example. This facet of Greek culture could easily occupy us for an entire chapter on its own, so I will instead restrain my enthusiasm and carry us into a discussion of that most pivotal (for Nietzsche) of the pre-Platonic thinkers, Heraclitus.

### 5.3.2 A Most Inescapable Influence: Heraclitus and Becoming

I would like to address here in particular the lectures which devoted to Heraclitus. These are quite revealing, even at this early stage in Nietzsche's philosophical development, as the influence of that particular pre-Platonic thinker can be seen all over Nietzsche's understanding of time, being & becoming, and chaos. As Plato famously observed, "Heraclitus says somewhere that everything moves and nothing rests; and, comparing what exists to a river, he says that you would not step

twice into the same river.”<sup>365</sup> This sense of a world in constant flux is completely opposed to the teleological views which we will illustrate throughout this chapter, and which Nietzsche sought to undermine with his philosophy.

In the lecture on Heraclitus, he make an interesting set of observations based upon physiological studies of different animals’ metabolic rates. He suggests that since “the pulse rate among rabbits is four times faster than that among cattle, these will also experience four times as much in the same period and will be able to carry out four times as many acts of the will as cattle – thus, in general, experiencing four times as much.”<sup>366</sup> The argument has major flaws from a contemporary perspective, but it is an interesting intuition, and leads him to an understanding of the subjective experience of time itself! Since different animals “proceed through the same astronomical time-space at different specific rates... it is according to these that they subjectively and variously judge the fundamental standard of time.”<sup>367</sup> “Thus we must not speak of our astronomical *time* in scale in an absolute sense.”<sup>368</sup> Nietzsche appears to have made an intuition of relativity, many decades before Einstein’s breakthrough on the matter in a cosmological sense, and his application of this idea makes it clear that his goal is to criticise the linear, apocalyptic time of the Iranians and the Judeo-Christian-Islamic world-view.

Nietzsche follows this observation by making an intriguing connexion between the law of entropy (though not named as such) and the Becoming of Heraclitus:

365 Plato. *Cratylus*, 402A. In: Jonathan Barnes. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Penguin Books, 2001. 69.

366 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 60.

367 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 60.

368 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 62.



Nature is just as infinite inwardly as it is outwardly: we have succeeded up to the cell and to the parts of the cell, yet there are no limits where we could say here is the last divisible point. Becoming never ceases at the indefinitely small.\* Yet at the greatest [level] nothing absolutely unalterable exists. Our earthly world must eventually perish for inexorable reasons. The heat of the sun cannot last eternally. It is inconceivable that this warmth produce motion without other forces being consumed. We may pose every hypothesis concerning the heat of the sun; it comes to this, that its source of heat is finite.\* In the course of tremendous time spans, the duration of sunlight and heat so interminable for us must completely vanish.<sup>369</sup>

For this students, these scientific observations and citations to then-current scientific papers must have seemed slightly out of place, but Nietzsche brought it all back to the Greeks by noting that “this is the intuitive perception of Heraclitus; there is no thing of which we may say, ‘it is.’ He rejects *Being*. He knows only Becoming, the flowing. He considers belief in something persistent as error and foolishness.”<sup>370</sup>

This sense of a world in flux, a world constantly unfolding and never still, is a

\* Both of these intuitions have broadly been borne out by twentieth & twenty-first century physics, with the discovery of a vast array of sub-atomic particles that no-one had dreamt of in Nietzsche’s own day, and on finally to the quantum level of quarks, bosons, and the like. One suspects that Nietzsche would have loved quantum mechanics, with all its curious and indeterminate aspects, but that is another matter.

\* And here Nietzsche intuits the basic process of fusion that lies at the heart of the sun’s power. That he comes to such intuitions from his appreciation of 2500 year old Greek philosophy is all the more remarkable.

369 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 62.

370 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 62.

major feature of Nietzsche's philosophy that was borrowed directly from Heraclitus. It is one half of his critique of linear, apocalyptic time, for it challenges the metaphysical Being that lies at the heart of the Abrahamic faiths' view of the world. All is impermanent, all is without a self, to invoke a little Joseph Campbell. There is no definite or solid ground for Nietzsche; his philosophy in some ways evokes – and celebrates – the primordial chaos that so many of our religious traditions sought to tame and subsume within a more predictable ontology. This clashing of forces and resulting chaos is, in a sense, the engine of creation. Nietzsche summarized in a passage on Heraclitus in an unpublished early work the

actual process of all coming-to-be and passing away. [Heraclitus] conceived it under the form of polarity, as being the diverging of a force into two qualitatively different opposed activities that seek to re-unite. Everlastingly, a given quality contends against itself and separates into opposites; everlastingly these opposites seek to re-unite. Ordinary people fancy they see something rigid, complete and permanent; in truth, however, light and dark, bitter and sweet are attached to each other and interlocked at any given moment like wrestlers of whom sometimes the one, sometimes the other is on top. Honey, says Heraclitus, is at the same time bitter and sweet; the world itself is a mixed drink which must constantly be stirred. The strife of the opposites gives birth to all that comes-to-be; the definite qualities which look permanent to us express but the momentary ascendancy of one partner. But this by no means signifies the end of the war; the contest endures in all eternity.

Everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife, and it is just in the strife that eternal justice is revealed. It is a wonderful idea, welling up from the purest strings of Hellenism, the idea that strife embodies the everlasting sovereignty of strict justice, bound to everlasting laws.<sup>371</sup>

Heraclitus revelled in contradiction and indeterminacy, and in a basic struggle between forces and ideas, as did Nietzsche. The world's principal constant was the force of its own unfolding, its Becoming, and society depended upon an agonistic striving for dominance. (This latter we will return to in the final chapter.) Heraclitus, as recorded by Clement of Alexandria, saw the world as "the same for all, neither any god nor any man made; but it was always and is and will be, fire ever-living, kindling in measures and being extinguished in measures."<sup>372</sup>

Seeing fire as somehow emblematic of the energy of creation & destruction, of the unfolding of life itself, presents an interesting bridge between the thought of the ancient Greeks and that of the ancient Iranians. Fire occupies an important place in the Zoroastrian religion, and it is probable that it always has. The use of fire in rituals is attested in Vedic-Aryan / Brahman sources, as well as in the Zoroastrian corpus going back to the *Gathas*. Its veneration and centrality to worship "can be traced back to before the time of the prophet" at least, and archaeological finds suggest its use goes back as far as the proto-Indo-Aryans.<sup>373</sup> We do not know, of course, but the use of fire in ritual may have been a constant in religion carried into Europe by the branch of the

371 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Trans. by Marianne Cowan. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1962/1998. 54-55.

372 Clement of Alexandria. *Miscellanies* V xiv 104. In: Jonathan Barnes. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Penguin Books, 2001. 59.

373 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to and Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 93.

Aryan (Indo-European) migrations that gave rise to Hellenic culture, among others. Specially-dedicated fire temples are mentioned in writings from at least the Parthian period, and were pervasive in Zoroastrian worship by the Sasanian period at least (and probably much earlier).<sup>374</sup> And since this feature comes up in Herodotus and Strabo, among other Greek authors writing on the Persians, it is reasonable to presume that fire was already closely associated with the Iranians in the Classical era.<sup>375</sup>

Indeed, Heraclitus himself may have been influenced by the Iranians – M.L. West devotes considerable time to this hypothesis in his study of early Greek philosophy in its Eastern context.<sup>376</sup> Fire, for Heraclitus, was the one universal constant, representing a kind of order resolving out of chaos, simultaneous source of creation and destruction, and emblematic of the strife that suffuses the natural world. As Nietzsche put it, the force at play here in Heraclitus, and perhaps to some extent in Zoroastrianism as well, was “that which becomes the one thing in eternal transformation, and the law of this eternal transformation, the Logos in all things, is precisely this One, fire (τὸ πῦρ).”<sup>377</sup> Fire’s simultaneously destructive and beneficial properties were long recognized by the Aryans, and its significance in Zoroastrianism appears similar to that in Heraclitus. Like the Greek, and unlike the Iranians prior to the prophet’s advent, Zoroastrians did not worship fire *per se*. It has “a genuine sacramental quality” not unlike that of the altar in a Catholic church, but fire is itself not a god and merely “points the way to [Ahura Mazda] and even participates in [His] life in an iconic fashion”.<sup>378</sup> Fire was energy, a

374 Jenny Rose. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 81.

375 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to and Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 93.

376 M.L. West. *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. 111-202.

377 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. Greg Whitlock, trans. & ed. Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 62-3.

378 Peter Clark. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to and Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010. 93.

symbol of the divine and a form of *power* itself, and as such held great symbolic import, and remains a key feature of Zoroastrian ritual to the present day.<sup>379</sup>

### 5.3.3 The Stoic Influence on Nietzsche: Conflagration and Eternal Recurrence

The relationship between Nietzsche and the Stoics is complicated by his many dismissive or insulting comments toward them. These disguise, however, some considerable affinities. Yes, the Stoics committed a number of unforgivable sins in Nietzsche's eyes, from their theistic leanings (God plays a big part in the work of many Stoic writers) to their emphasis on justice and imposition of morality on nature itself. But both the Stoics and Nietzsche share many common prejudices and perspectives, from living in accord with human nature and the drives of life itself, to a certain conservative outlook on politics and the state, to an acceptance of all that life brings (Nietzsche's *amor fati* is essentially a Stoic doctrine teaching you to love what you have and whatever will be).

But the most interesting (for our purposes) point of overlap is in the Stoic anticipation of Nietzsche's most important teaching, the Eternal Recurrence of the Same. The Stoic concept in some ways straddles the line we have been charting throughout this study, from an apocalyptic end of the universe as seen in the Persian and Judeo-Christian-Islamic systems, to the sense of endless unfolding and Becoming that Nietzsche considers a healthier and more honest way of seeing things. The Stoics understood the universe in essentially biological terms (rather than in, say, strictly

379 Michael Stausberg. *Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism: A Short Introduction*. Trans. by Margret Preisler-Weller. London: Equinox Publishing,, 2008. 83-85

materialistic terms), though this could also be seen as materialistic in the sense that even the Gods or God often took expression in only corporeal terms. The incorporeal for the Stoics was not a realm of noumena, to use the Kantian term – a realm of abstraction filled with things about which humans cannot profitably speak, such as the void. So it is with the material world that Stoic thought primarily deals, and in this they took essentially a Vitalist position, dividing existence into contrary principles. According to Diogenes Laertius, the Stoics

hold that there are two principles in the universe, the active principle and the passive. The passive principle, then, is a substance without quality, i.e. matter, whereas the active is the reason inherent in this substance, that is God. For he is everlasting and is the artificer of each several thing throughout the whole extent of matter. This doctrine is laid down by Zeno of Citium in his treatise *On Existence*, Cleanthes in his work *On Atoms*, Chrysippus in the first book of his *Physics* toward the end, Archedemus in his treatise *On Elements*, and Posidonius in the second book of his *Physical Exposition*. **There is a difference, according to them, between principles and elements; the former being without generation or destruction, whereas the elements are destroyed when all things are resolved into fire.** Moreover, the principles are incorporeal and destitute of form, while the elements have been endowed with form.<sup>380</sup>

The destruction of the elements, i.e., material existence, happens when they are

380 Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. VII:134. In: Loeb Classical Library 185. Trans. R.D. Hicks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925. 239.

“resolved into fire” in the universal conflagration.

A destruction of the universe at some distant point in time was a common position among the most prominent Stoics. Diogenes Laertius tells us that: “The generation and the destruction of the world are discussed by Zeno in his treatise *On the Whole*, by Chrysippus in the first book of his *Physics*, by Posidonius in the first book of his work *On the Cosmos*, by Cleanthes, and by Antipater in his tenth book *On the Cosmos*. Panaetius, however, maintained that the world is indestructible.”<sup>381</sup> That means that all three of the most important early Stoics, along with some others, held to belief in a cosmos born of fire, ending in fire, and born again from fire. Why fire? Consider first the reflexions of Heraclitus above – fire seemed a dynamic force of destruction and regeneration in nature. Reflecting on the Stoics, the fifth century anthologist Stobaeus reminds us that “<fire> is said to be an element par excellence because the others are first formed from it by qualitative change and finally are dissolved and resolved into it, whereas fire itself is not subject to dissolution or breakdown into anything else.”<sup>382</sup>

An excellent run-down of the process of destruction and generation was recorded by Aristocles of Messene in one of the fragments preserved in Eusebius’s work:

They say that fire is an element of the things that exist, as does Heraclitus, and that the principles of this are matter and god (as Plato said). But he [Zeno] said that both (the active and the passive) were bodies, whereas Plato’s first active cause was said to be incorporeal. And then, at certain fated times, the entire cosmos goes up in flames and then is organized again. And the primary fire

381 Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. VII:142. In: Loeb Classical Library 185. Trans. R.D. Hicks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925. 247.

382 Stobaeus. *Anthology*. 1.10.16. In: Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson. *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008. 97.

is like a kind of seed, containing the rational principles and cause of all things and events, past, present, and future. And the interconnection and sequence of these things is fate and knowledge and truth and an inescapable law of what exists. Thus, all things in the cosmos are organized extremely well, as in a very well-managed government.<sup>383</sup>

Consider carefully what it is Aristocles is saying here. The cosmos is rational, and thus the sequence of events that happens is fated. (Nietzsche makes countless references of fate, remember.) When the cosmos comes to a fiery end at some point, the fire itself contains the seed of its rebirth, and because the universe was already perfect, it will play out again just as it did before! Does this not echo Nietzsche's own Eternal Recurrence? "This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence".<sup>384</sup>

I would like to take a moment to return us to the Zoroastrian ideals whose contradiction is at the heart of Nietzsche's work. I would like here to place some points about the Zoroastrian apocalypse in dialogue with these Stoic Greco-Roman ideas, in order to see how they relate to one another and to Nietzsche. Unsurprisingly, fire plays a key part in the Zoroastrian apocalypse, where it helps to purify the earth and its people. Consider the following passage from the *Bundahishn*, 34: 16-21, and especially

383 Aristocles, recorded in Eusebius. *Preparatio Evangelica*. 15.14. In: Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson. *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008. 96.

384 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. 341. Bernard Williams (ed.), Josefine Nauckhoff with Adrian Del Caro (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 194.



the part in bold.

During that Perfectioning of the world, those good men, about whom it is written 'they are alive', fifteen men and fifteen women (his Companions), will come to assist Sōshāns. Then the snake Gōchihr, which is in the firmament, will fall down to earth from the sharp edge of the moon. The earth will feel such pain as a sheep when a wolf tears off its fleece. **The Fire and the divine Ērman (Airyaman) will melt the metal in the hills and mountains, which will stand on the earth like a river. Then all people pass through that molten metal and become pure. Whoever is good, to him it will seem like he walks through warm milk, but, if it is a bad person, then it will seem to him just like he walks through molten metal.** Then all people come together in great love for one another. Fathers, sons, brothers, all men who were friends, ask other men: 'Where were you all those years, and what judgement did your soul receive? Were you good or bad?' First the soul will see the body and will ask it. When it answers, they will all shout loudly together and praise Ohrmazd and the Amahrspands.<sup>385</sup>

The news that a final judgement is coming permeates the Zoroastrian sources, from the earliest revelations of Zarathushtra in the *Gathas* to the later Sasanian texts – the purpose of the earth is to be remade at the end of a set span of time and according to the outcome of a cosmic battle between light and dark, truth and lie. The details of

385 Prods Oktor Skjærvø. *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 170.

the Zoroastrian judgement differ in many respects from that seen in later Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and Islamic texts, but the general thrust is the same. There will be a “final ending to the struggle between good and evil forces in which good will triumphs, and there is a resurrection of the dead and final judgement for all. The earth will be purified and God’s Kingdom will be established on the heavenly earth.”<sup>386</sup>

There are three stages in the play of creation according to Zoroastrian theology – the initial creation of the cosmos, the linear unfolding of time accompanied by the true religion of Zarathushtra, and finally the rehabilitation of the creation when Angra Mainyu / Ahriman, the evil force, is defeated and the world made anew. The final stage of this drama is what is recounted in the passage above from the *Bundahishn*, but the *Frasho-kereti* involves a lengthy period of prophesied redeemers (the *Saoshyant*, which we will address in the final chapter) and battles between good and evil. But the ultimate outcome is to see the forces of evil defeated, offering hope and encouragement to the believers to hold to the rituals and requirements of their faith – all will be rewarded in the end. Everything about this ideal places it into conflict with Nietzsche’s philosophy. In this section I will sketch a little of the apocalyptic prophesies of the Iranians, and note some later resonance in Jewish and Christian sources, to make that connexion between the Iranians and the Western tradition against which Nietzsche struggled.

Thinking that the world must be remade comes from belief in a fatal flaw at the birth of the cosmos, when the evil force infected creation. This notion, which may well originate in Zoroastrianism, was in time to influence Judaism and, to a far greater extent, Gnosticism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Islam. Nietzsche’s response to the idea does not make sense if we cannot first reckon with the ideal itself, and a good

386 Mitra Ara. *Eschatology in the Indo-Iranian Traditions: The Genesis and Transformation of a Doctrine*. NY: Peter Lang, 2008. 210.

place to start is one of the Greco-Roman sources that Nietzsche surely encountered in his studies. The following is a summary of both the creation and apocalypse stories of the Iranians as understood by Plutarch. The closeness of this account to that in Zoroastrian texts is a significant point of evidence for the antiquity of their apocalyptic thought. Note here the passage in bold especially, and what it suggests about the world in which we presently live.

However, they also tell many fabulous stories about their gods, such, for example, as the following: Oromazes [Ahura Mazda / Ohrmazd], born from the purest light, and Areimanius [Angra Mainyu / Ahriman], born from the darkness, are constantly at war with each other; and Oromazes created six gods, the first of Good Thought, the second of Truth, the third of Order, and, of the rest, one of Wisdom, one of Wealth, and one the Artificer of Pleasure in what is Honourable. But Areimanius created rivals, as it were, equal to these in number. Then Oromazes enlarged himself to thrice his former size, and removed himself as far distant from the Sun as the Sun is distant from the Earth, and adorned the heavens with stars. One star he set there before all others others a guardian and watchman, the Dog-star. Twenty-four other gods he created and placed in an egg. **But those created by Areimanius, who were equal in number to the others, pierced through the egg and made their way inside; hence evils are now combined with good. But a destined time shall come when it is decreed that Areimanius, engaged in bringing on pestilence and**

**famine, shall by these be utterly annihilated and shall disappear; and then shall the earth become a level plain, and there shall be one manner of life and one form of government for a blessed people who shall all speak one tongue.** Theopompus says that, according to the sages, one god is to overpower, and the other to be overpowered, each in turn for the space of three thousand years, and afterward for another three thousand years they shall fight and war, and the one shall undo the works of the other, and finally Hades shall pass away; then shall the people be happy, and neither shall they need to have food nor shall they cast any shadow. And the god, who has contrived to bring about all these things, shall then have quiet and shall repose for a time, no long time indeed, but for the god as much as would be a moderate time for a man to sleep.<sup>387</sup>

We can see here that the world has been corrupted at its very birth, for the force of evil – Ahriman – has caused it to spoil the creation itself. But a time is foretold when this will be undone in a final confrontation, during which the forces of evil will perish and the world be made anew by the good force – Ahura Mazda – alone, allowing His original intentions to hold sway. Human beings will live in peace and eternally in a land that is blessed by all that is good in nature, and all that is wicked or harmful will be washed away. This bears a great deal of similarity to many subsequent visions – from Judaism and the Fall & Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, to Gnostic views on the inherent contamination of the world by Darkness, to the Christian apocalypse and

387 Plutarch. *Isis and Osiris*. Trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt. San Bernardino: First Rate Publishers, 2016. Section 47 (edition not paginated).

judgement when Christ will return, the dead will rise, and the Kingdom of God will come to be on the earth. We will return to these similarities in the next section.

In Zoroastrianism itself, the *Gathas* of Zarathushtra set the tone for this act of divine judgement. Two excerpts from the *Gathas*, from *Yasna* 47:6 and 51:8-9, are particularly instructive for the antiquity of the idea of a judgement and trial – the separation of good and evil by fire.

“With that Bounteous Will Thou didst establish, Mindful Lord, the allocation of the good between the two parties by the fire that reinforces Piety and Right; for that will convince many proselytes.”<sup>388</sup>

And:

For I will tell Thee, Mindful One – of course a man can only say what Thou knowest – that amid ill for the wrongful one, but in bliss for him who has embraced Right... is the atonement that Thou didst set for the two parties through Thy flaming fire, Mindful One, and through molten metal, to establish proof about our characters for the harm of the wrongful one and the strengthening of the righteous.<sup>389</sup>

Here we can see that fire is symbolic of purity and righteousness, and can be used to separate the good from the bad – a theme perhaps seen most clearly in the fact that the faithful of Zoroastrianism tend sacred fires that must never go out. And we see also the way that flame and molten metal will be used to separate the worthy from the evil,

388 M.L. West. *The Hymns of Zoroaster: A New Translation of the Most Ancient Sacred Texts of Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. 133.

389 M.L. West. *The Hymns of Zoroaster: A New Translation of the Most Ancient Sacred Texts of Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. 157.

who alone will feel the destructive power of the flame as atonement for their sins. The fires of hell have, in Christianity, long been understood in this way.

The great upheavals that accompany the end of apportioned time were understood to mean a literal remaking of the world. The mountains of Central Asia would melt and the terrain become flat, with the metal flowing from this cataclysm being that used as a trial for the souls of all who have lived. I will provide two more excerpts from the Zoroastrian corpus to illustrate this end-of-days thinking, both from the *Yasht* and composed in the Younger Avestan language in the centuries after Zarathushtra but well before the Achaemenid period.

*Yasht* 19:9-12.

We sacrifice to the strong Fortune of the Kawis set in place by Ahura Mazdā, worthy of great honour, whose work is superior, skilful, careful, and crafty, set beyond other living beings, which was Ahura Mazdā's, when, by it, he set in place the creation, many and good, beautiful and wonderful, perfect and radiant.

With it *they* shall make the existence Perfect (*frasha*), incorruptible, indestructible, undecaying, unrotting, ever-living, ever-life-giving, having command at will, so that when the dead arise again *he* will come, making alive and free from destruction, and the existence will be made Perfect in exchange value.

Living beings who hold the announcements of Order will be indestructible.

The Lie will be destroyed and dispelled to the very place it had come from for the destruction of the sustainers of Order, as

well as yonder seed and being. The villainess will cower in fear, and the villain will be destroyed. Thus is the model.<sup>390</sup>

*Yasht* 19:95-96.

The Companions of obstruction-smashing Astwad-erta will come forth, those of good thought, speech, and deeds, of good vision-souls, who none of them have ever have ever once spoke anything wrong with their own tongue. Wrath with the bloody mace, he of evil Fortune, will retreat before them. With Order he shall overcome the evil Lie, the one of Darkness, of evil seed.

He overcomes even evil thought. His good thought overcomes it. He overcomes the wrongly spoken speech. His correctly spoken word overcomes it. Wholeness and Immortality shall overcome both hunger and thirst, evil hunger and thirst.

The Evil Spirit, who performs no deeds that are not evil, shall retreat, commanding nothing at will.<sup>391</sup>

I hope by now the contrast is clear between this kind of apocalyptic scenario – so familiar in its core elements from the Christian apocalypse – and that of the Greeks in general and the Stoics in particular. Where the Zoroastrians and their later successor faiths viewed the world as inherently corrupt and in need of perfecting, the Greeks (and Nietzsche) viewed the world as perfect in itself. The Stoic apocalypse, then, sees not a remaking of the world in a way that corrects its flaws, but a rebirth which sets in motion the same exact sequence of events. The Stoics were unable to see the world as

390 Prods Oktor Skjærvø. *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 158.

391 Prods Oktor Skjærvø. *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 159-160.

“fallen” or corrupt in the way these other theologies could. The great Roman writer Cicero sums this whole naturalistic process of destruction and renewal in his work *On the Nature of the Gods*. Pay especial attention to the section in bold text.

The stars, moreover, are by nature fiery and so are nourished by vapours that rise from the earth, sea, and bodies of water, having been produced by the sun’s warming of the fields and waters. The stars, and the entire aithereal region, are nourished and renewed by these vapours; and then they pour them forth again and in turn draw them back from the same source, with virtually no loss [to the vapours] except for a very little bit which is consumed by the fire of the heavenly bodies and the flames of the aither. And for this reason **our school [the Stoics] thinks that there will someday occur** the event which they say Panaetius had his doubts about, i.e., **the final conflagration of the entire cosmos**. This will happen when all the moisture is used up and the earth cannot be nourished [any longer] and the air cannot return—for air cannot arise if all the water is consumed; so there will be nothing left except fire. **This, though, is an animal and a god, and so in turn it produces the renewal of the cosmos and the emergence of the same beautiful order...**<sup>392</sup>

Now, the basic reasons for this understanding of the world being perfect, and thus needing to repeat its events in the same perfect sequence, is different in Nietzsche’s thought. For the Stoics, this is because God set things up just as they

392 Cicero. *On the Nature of the Gods*. 118. In: Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson. *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008. 73-74.



should be, and their view of God is very similar to that in the Christian tradition that Nietzsche so famously rejected. Diogenes tells us something of the Stoic understanding of God: "The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape. He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all..."<sup>393</sup> This is, of course, utterly unacceptable to Nietzsche, and differences on the matter of the deity undoubtedly helped Nietzsche to dismiss the Stoics for their apparent monotheism and metaphysical crutches, even as he lifted the idea for a perfect recurrence of the universe from their heads. Because, even as he rejected the picture of divine justice and beneficence, he advanced his own mythology of Eternal Recurrence in remarkably similar terms, as the replaying of exactly this universe we now experience. The reasons for Nietzsche's own understanding of Recurrence will be summed up in the brief concluding chapter which follows.

## 6.0 Overturning Eschatology: Nietzsche's Alternative to Apocalypticism

I beseech you, my brothers, *remain true to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! They are poison-mixers, whether they know it or not.

They are despisers of life, themselves the decaying and poisoned, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them!

393 Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. VII:147. In: Loeb Classical Library 185. Trans. R.D. Hicks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925. 251.

Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died,  
and those sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the  
most dreadful sin, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable  
higher than the meaning of the earth!<sup>394</sup>

Because Nietzsche is an anti-metaphysical thinker, the death of God does not possess intrinsic meaning. Its significance lies in what we do with this knowledge – in its effects. The death of God can liberate us to seek new meaning in human lives, to forge our own purposes without the epistemic constraints of an objective and omnipotent God watching over everything. Or it can lead us to our own destruction, should the collapse of external meaning prove too much for fragile human spirits. The fight against nihilism is perhaps the defining element of Nietzsche's philosophy, hanging over his entire corpus as a guiding principle. Nietzsche's concern with the death of God comes from this concern over nihilism being the primary consequence of the loss of God as final arbiter of objective truth, purpose, and meaning for humanity. It is thus the rôle of God, the impact of the *idea* of God, which concerns Nietzsche, not the metaphysical reality of God per se, and it is to the replacement of God that he directs his thinking. What could possibly fill the void left by such a concept? It would need to be compelling both logically and emotionally; it would need the gravity of a forceful and experiential revelation, but need to hold up under scientific scrutiny or be able to exist alongside it with no inherent contradiction. The answer for Nietzsche was a new mythology centred on art and cultural creation, with Overhumanity celebrated as the creators of new values, and Eternal Recurrence as the motivating principle for such creators.

394 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra's Prologue 3. Translated by Clancy Martin. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005. 10.

In this final section I will outline, as briefly as I can, two of Nietzsche's most distinctive suggestions – the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, and Overhumanity, aka the Superman or Overman. I will begin with the concept of Eternal Recurrence and discuss how it can motivate and guide the "philosophers of the future" to fashion life-affirming values and embrace all that is. The difficulty inherent in absorbing and living by Eternal Recurrence underlies the concept of Overhumanity – a catch-all term for those able to accept the great burden of Recurrence and turn it to their advantage. These are the artists, philosophers, scientists, musicians, and poets of the future whose task is to guide the great mass of humanity to the acceptance of values which are also life-affirming. There is an inherent subjectivity and perspectivism behind the idea of Overhumanity, which is why Nietzsche so often speaks of them being "beyond good and evil" – by which he means there will no longer be an objective, divine standard by which to judge their actions. This does lead him to a bit of hero-worship and to tolerance of violence in the pursuit of "higher" purposes, but there is an essentially moral point to the idea of Overhumanity, as they are to lead us, by hook or by crook, into accepting our place in nature and what we can make of ourselves as free spirits and as human beings. By consciously seeking to overcome the label of Man, Nietzsche seeks liberation from the constraints of monotheistic epistemology, for Man is conceived of as a *created* being, imbued with purpose and destiny by an all-powerful force. The death of God strips humanity of that *telos*, and thereby undermines the idea of Man. Nietzsche's Overhumanity is, therefore, "the meaning of the earth" in the sense that its coming allows humanity to create *its own* destiny, divorced from metaphysics and grounded in empirical science.

## 6.1 "The Greatest Weight": Willing the Eternal Recurrence of the Same

Nietzsche referred to the idea of Eternal Recurrence as his most profound, and spoke excitedly of it in letters to friends. He believed that this idea was the key to unlocking a great puzzle – how to inspire the “philosophers of the future”, his Overhumanity, to embrace this world in all its complexity. But what is this idea in a nutshell? Nietzsche puts it best in the concept’s first appearance in his published work:

*The heaviest weight.* – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable

times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?<sup>395</sup>

Eternal Recurrence is a necessity that must be willed. It must be accepted, yes, but also *embraced* in order to have its effect. It must be embraced such that I now, as a subject, *will* it into existence. Recurrence is not intended as an objective fact of nature, though it is meant to be consist with it in order at least to be possible or plausible. No, it is intended as an existential imperative – a way to force an accounting with the self, and a radical embrace of one’s whole existence. It is a way to force one to embrace life itself. And it must be willed – “Man who has become godless must give himself his own will.”<sup>396</sup> Humanity must choose to be free.

Recurrence is, at base, a radical form of acceptance, both of who we are as a totality, and also of this life as the only life we will ever know. It signifies not only a rejection of afterlife ideas and apocalyptic scenarios, but a thorough embracing of this life as the only one worth possessing, by willing it to repeat in all its details *ad infinitum*. This kind of radical acceptance is not new in philosophy – Buddhists and Stoics both had versions of it, and Nietzsche was well familiar with their ideas. But both the Buddhists and the Stoics rely upon some ideas beyond the self and beyond nature, whether it be karma and reincarnation in the Buddhist sense or cosmic justice in the Stoic. Understandably, these are somewhat problematic assumptions for Nietzsche as an alternative.

395 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. 341. Bernard Williams (ed.). Josefine Nauckhoff (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 194.

396 Karl Löwith. *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. Translated by J. Harvey Lomax. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 49.

Nietzsche is, by contrast, giving us a myth of acceptance couched in non-metaphysical language and structured such that it cannot ever be proven or disproven. It is a psychological tool, just as many tricks in the Buddhist and Stoic canon are psychological tools, and it is meant to force us to take care with how we live, what we do and say, how we think and feel. More than that, it is meant to force us to accept even our failings, for surely we all fail to uphold our own ideals. Recurrence gives us a reason to keep trying, like Sisyphus rolling his boulder up that hill for all eternity. We cannot escape our lives through projecting a compelling fantasy like the afterlife – this is our hill, and our rock, and our fate, and like Sisyphus we must push ever onward. And, if Nietzsche had his way, we would smile while doing it.

The myth of Sisyphus calls to mind an eminently Greek idea which Nietzsche is giving a new spin here – that of Fate. Nietzsche many times makes reference to what he calls *amor fati*, the love of fate, yet he has something in mind with it that breaks the mould a little. Fatalism presupposes a *plan*, some kind of destiny of which I know little or nothing but which has been mapped out for me by the universe, Providence, what-have-you. Nietzsche's thought over and over again rejects the notion of purposiveness in the universe, however, and thus Fate itself cannot hold sway. There is a certain determinism in his thinking at times, true, but also a hint of chaos, and it is to chaos that his true allegiance lies as a description for the universe. The old Apollonian / Dionysian contrast, brought to light in his first book, stayed with him in some fashion throughout his career. The Apollonian represents the human will and intellect – our ability to make sense out of chaos. So, it is not to some kind of passive ideal to which Nietzsche points, but to the Greek ability to *fight back* against destiny, and against the chaos of the universe!

What Nietzsche suggests by *amor fati* is not mere submission to a divine plan or cosmic destiny, but a thorough-going *embrace* of what is, and a *challenge* to the universe. It is not fatalism that he seeks at all, but a kind of willed determinism, though without for a moment surrendering our responsibility for ourselves, or our ability to shape who we are through our actions. It seems almost a peculiar paradox, but by accepting the world as it is, *and* accepting that human beings, subjectively, have a need for purpose, meaning, and creation, Nietzsche suggests that we consciously *choose* to be *what we are*. And, having done so, to will ourselves to exist in this way, to repeat all of our choices and lessons and mistakes for all time. Only in this way, Nietzsche argues, can we accept the deterministic logic of the universe and still push ourselves to create ourselves in every moment, in every decision – to *become what we are*.

#### 6.1.1 On the Truth of the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence

Some commentators writing on Recurrence have been captivated by the *Nachlaß*, where Nietzsche experiments many times with “scientific” or logical proofs for the doctrine of Recurrence. This is misguided. As Lawrence Hatab ably puts it, “repetition of the course of occurrences can neither be proven nor disproven (no “law” *within* the process can really determine whether the process itself will or will not repeat itself).”<sup>397</sup> This is an effective use of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, arguing that a statement about the system composed within the system cannot be proven beyond doubt. I believe that Nietzsche himself understood this, perhaps intuitively, perhaps logically.

397 Lawrence J. Hatab. *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*. London: Routledge, 2005. 64.

Eternal Recurrence as an idea has many precedents. I have already discussed the Stoics, for example. That this notion came to Nietzsche suddenly is important, but it is hardly a unique thought. What makes it important is how he used it – what he meant it to accomplish. It was the advent of nihilism and the loss of faith which motivates its use. It is not enough to overturn faith in God – apocalyptic time must go as well! Consider the points made in an earlier chapter about Marx: he was writing of a world-view devoid of gods, but still constrained by teleological, progressive thinking. This is that Nietzsche is after – the replacement, not only of God/gods, but of our whole notion of linear time, and the opening up of the human mind to something new.

I would like to illustrate this point about difference and renewal by reflecting for a moment on the ‘Three Metamorphoses’ which Zarathustra introduces in the First Part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The “three metamorphoses of the spirit” are discussed through the images of a camel, a lion, and a child. The camel is a beast of burden – it “wants to be loaded” with the heaviest burdens and carries its culture on its back; it is, in fact, the very “paragon of its culture, the embodied highest standards and achievements of its own crowd”.<sup>398399</sup> But in the desert of its toil, sometimes the spirit seeks instead to become a lion – to “be master in its own desert”. The lion represents the spirit of negation – he challenge to old values and socio-political orders. It is rage, critique, and the overturning of tradition, yet it cannot create new values – it can only destroy.

The final metamorphosis turns the lion into a child, because it is only in the innocence of rebirth that we can create for ourselves anew. It is not merely a return to

398 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Zarathustra’s Prologue: 1. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 16.

399 Bernd Magnus. *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978. 35.



instinctive ways of living in accord with nature that Nietzsche seeks, nor is it a hierarchical and feudal social order of masters and slaves. These things lie in our past, and it is the freedom to create which Nietzsche seeks. Critique only takes us so far, and it must be remembered that Nietzsche's own genealogical project of critique was supposed to be followed by an attempted revaluation of all values. Tracy Strong argues that Nietzsche's emphasis on "knowledge" and critique are a "preliminary first step", and mean

that there is no chance to return to a state of nonrationality and that what men have learned in slave morality must not be rejected, but rather transfigured. It certainly means that a usual picture of Nietzsche as advocating that men live more 'instinctually' is desperately wrong; the [implication is] that *men do not have 'instincts' to live by any more, and that they will first have to develop them*. There is not in Nietzsche that petty romanticism that finds 'natural' man under the verdigris of civilization.<sup>400</sup>

Eternal Recurrence represents an ideal of strength – the strength to say *yes!* to life and to create new values. And so, to return to the notion of facticity in Recurrence, we must conclude by saying that the point of Nietzsche's many scribblings trying to deduce some "proof" for the doctrine was to satisfy himself that it could not easily be *disproven* scientifically or logically. There is a reason he left such musings out of all his published writings – they are beside the point! Recurrence is an existential imperative, not a scientific theory. Taking Nietzsche's naturalistic and empiricist biases into account, his attempt at myth-making needed only be consistent with scientific naturalism. So

400 Tracy B. Strong. *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 258.

long as it could not be shot down as impossible, it could serve its intended purpose. And one of those purposes is surely the coming of Overhumanity.

## 6.2 "The Meaning of the Earth": Willing the Coming of Overhumanity

Much has been said about the Overhuman idea that is flat-out wrong. It may be the most oft-confused idea in Nietzsche's oeuvre, and contributed greatly to his mistaken association with Nazism and violence. Kathleen Higgins and Robert Solomon address this aspect of the concept well in their introduction to a recent translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

The *Übermensch* is often envisioned as a cartoonish character not unlike Conan the Barbarian, brute strength combined with an utter lack of sophistication or civilization. Combined with the fact that Nietzsche celebrates what he calls 'the will to power'..., the *Übermensch* would seem to suggest that Nietzsche has an unhealthy enthusiasm for unbridled, unrefined, naked power. But Nietzsche was among the most refined men of his generation. He had exquisite taste, and he had little but contempt for those who did not appreciate the finer things in life, such as music, art, and poetry.<sup>401</sup>

But immediately after rescuing the Overhuman from simplistic caricature, Higgins and Solomon seem to lose sight of the reason Nietzsche added this figure at all.

401 Kathleen M. Higgins and Robert C. Solomon. Introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Clancy Martin. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005. xxi.

Perhaps the decades of misuse of the concept has made it difficult for them to credit the idea with any substance at all. They note that “the *Übermensch* idea appears only briefly in *Zarathustra* (and nowhere else), with few mentions beyond the first part of the book”, and argue that “[there] is very little in *Zarathustra* or in any other of Nietzsche’s texts to support the importance given to the *Übermensch* in popular conceptions of Nietzsche and his philosophy.”<sup>402</sup> This interpretation is, in my view, gravely mistaken.

Setting aside references to things like self-overcoming and virtue and the like (which get at the ideals of the Overhuman indirectly), as well as the references to “higher men”, “philosophers of the future”, “free spirits”, and the like which pepper Nietzsche work, the concept is mentioned directly by name in *TSZ* in at least nineteen separate sections of the book. They are also incorrect to say that the Overhuman appears no-where else. There are at least four other appearances in later works *On the Genealogy of Morality* (one instance), *The Antichrist* (one instance), and *Ecce Homo* (two instances), and these are only looking directly at the use of the term – the idea itself continues to crop up constantly in his references to culture, evolution, morality, and “higher types”. Combined with the ideals that the Overhuman embodies (and which his precursors are to cultivate), it is fair to say that the Overhuman concept is one of the two main themes of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is also fair to characterize it as a prophetic-sounding summation of a theme that Nietzsche worked on throughout his entire career, from his earlier references to Goethe and Wagner as “higher men”, to his Greek-inspired emphasis on the struggle for greatness, to the quest for knowledge undertaken by “free spirits”, to those “philosophers of the future” predicted in the later-

402 Kathleen M. Higgins and Robert C. Solomon. Introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Clancy Martin. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005. xxi.

period works, to his own self-aggrandizing final scribblings.

It is also of vital importance for us to recognize that the Eternal Recurrence of the Same and the ideal of the Overhuman are inseparably intertwined. These are not distinct ideas, as they are often treated in the secondary literature on Nietzsche's thought. The Overhuman exists only to the extent that it is able to accept and embrace the idea of Eternal Recurrence, for it is in that very act that it demonstrates its own worthiness. Overhumanity is much less a physical ideal than it is a goal – something to replace the metaphysical hopes which Nietzsche despised. The recognition that human beings crave purpose can thus be satisfied by presenting them an aspiration, a manifestation of perfect acceptance and free-spirited creation and life-affirmation. The previous section discussed the rôle that Recurrence itself plays in Nietzsche's work, and the paramount significance which he ascribes to it, whilst the present section seeks to extend this idea by showing why *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* included the figure of the Overhuman at all.

#### 6.2.1 The Appearance, Meaning, and Purpose of Overhumanity

The idea of the Overhuman appears very early in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, being the ideal behind the great teaching that Zarathustra descends from his mountain solitude to share. The events of Zarathustra's epic throughout the text mark many changes in his approach to this philosophy, and to his understanding of himself. Zarathustra comes to believe that his preaching of the Overhuman was a mistake, and that he will not reach his audience in this fashion. Laurence Lampert suggests that

Zarathustra's negative "verdict does not entail the conclusion that all the ideas in these opening speeches are abandoned, but it does entail that caution be exercised in judging these incautious words."<sup>403</sup> It seems clear to me that the Overhuman that Zarathustra first brought to light in that prologue represents a set of key ideals that remain in play throughout the narrative, and which constitute one of its central lessons for us. The Overhuman is nothing less than the embodiment of those traits which Nietzsche feels best suit a post-metaphysical world-view, and serves as an ideal representation of a humanity which has shaken off those negative traits which Nietzsche believes have come to taint the very idea of humanness at its origin.

The call for the creation of an Overhuman is not, as is sometimes argued, an evolutionary or biologically-progressive goal.<sup>404</sup> The main reason for this is not because Nietzsche rejects the evolutionary roots of humanity or the possibility that our species will continue to develop. It is for the simple reason that the two concepts have nothing to do with one-another. Nietzsche sees the need for an Overhuman, not because humanity is deficient in any really physical sense, but because of a perceived error in our distant past – the creation of metaphysical values and the positing of an otherworldly reality. Far from being a peripheral idea (as characterised by Solomon and Higgins, for example), Nietzsche's Overhuman "is rooted in the deepest concerns of

403 Laurence Lampert. *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. 19.

404 For alternative views which, to varying degrees, connect Overhumanity & evolution, see:

S. L. Sorgner. 'Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism. *Journal of Evolution and Technology*. 20(1), 2009. 29-42.

Kathleen M. Higgins. 'Reading *Zarathustra*'. In: Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds). *Reading Nietzsche*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. 143.

Ansell Pearson, Keith. *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Elizabeth Grosz. *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Nietzsche's philosophy", and is his "response to an event that has befallen humanity" – namely, the death of God and the rise of nihilism in the absence of a powerful mythic belief system (which only became a problem in the first place due to that ancient turn toward metaphysics).<sup>405</sup> The purpose of the Overhuman as an idea is to help solve the problem of nihilism by giving to humanity a non-transcendent goal to structure their lives and reshape society in ways which foster creativity.

The difficult nature of this new ideal, this moving forward into a post-apocalyptic, post-metaphysical world-view, are captured in those early references in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. "Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and [Overhuman] – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still."<sup>406</sup> Zarathustra teaches that "mankind is a polluted stream" due to its nihilism.<sup>407</sup> The death of God has not been something to celebrate, but something to fear, something dreadful which causes a flight into self-deception or a collapse into nihilistic despair. Nietzsche offers Overhumanity as a solution – a concept so outlandish, yet so much within our grasp were we to choose it, that it can provide direction. Overhumanity is, then, just like Eternal Recurrence, an existential imperative, rather than a literal goal. We must choose to subsume that polluted stream within the mighty sea of the Overhuman; we must choose to cross over and into something new. "What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over*

405 Keith Ansell Pearson. 'The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light'. In *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 30, 2005. 18.

406 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Zarathustra's Prologue: 4. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 7.

407 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Zarathustra's Prologue: 3. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 6.

and a *going under*”, as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra says.<sup>408</sup>

### 6.2.2 On the Necessary Qualities of Overhumanity

For an idea which, by its name and the various references to violence, evil, and the like, seems to evoke the spectre of civilizational collapse and apocalyptic chaos, one might well wonder what Nietzsche was after in suggesting the emergence of a post-human future. This was, after all, the late nineteenth century, and Eugenics theories were just coming into vogue. Non-Darwinian and semi-Darwinian evolutionary theories were all the rage in both popular and intellectual circles, with many authors suggesting that the “struggle for existence” and “survival of the fittest” be deployed in service of war, imperialism, and extermination.<sup>409</sup> The idea of an *Übermensch* seems tailor-made for such a world, and it is little wonder that it was hit upon by right-wing “Nietzscheans” fairly early on.<sup>410</sup>

Yet these uses of the Overhuman are vulgar perversions of Nietzsche’s actual aim, which was the resurrection of something like what he saw as the infinitely more creative Greco-Roman age, with its many competing philosophies of life and its

408 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Zarathustra’s Prologue: 4. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 7.

409 cf. Herbert Spencer & Ernst Hæckel.

410 Steven E. Aschheim. *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Jacob Golomb & Robert S. Wistrich (eds). *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Robert C. Bannister. *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979.

Mike Hawkins. *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

emphases on personal virtue and excellence. How could Overhumanity stand for nought but mindless destruction, when creativity and virtue stand at the very heart of Nietzsche's philosophical project? What of all his arguments for self-discipline and self-mastery, then? And what of his arguments for a kind of pluralistic state where each is able to pursue his own project? Nietzsche personally disdained the idea of dictatorship in one of his notebooks: "Rule? Ghastly! I would not press my type on others. My happiness lies in multiplicity!"<sup>411</sup> Such a thought would be anathema to the fascists (and neo-fascists) who find in Nietzsche a call to a new aristocracy, a new authoritarianism.

Again, we must remember that Nietzsche was not a believer in progress, and did not think of humanity as "higher" than the rest of the animal world. On the contrary – he saw our hiding from our instincts and animal natures as part of the problem! "Humanity does not represent a development for the better, does not represent something stronger or higher the way people these days think it does."<sup>412</sup> What he was after in the Overhuman was not a new species, or a new race of beings, but certain types of individual, or perhaps certain socio-cultural orders, which could stand apart from the "herd" and dare to create new dreams, new concepts, new values.

"In another sense, there is a continuous series of individual successes in the most varied places on earth and from the most varied cultures; here, a *higher type* does in fact present itself, a type of overman in relation to humanity in general. Successes like

411 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Kritische Studienausgabe. Sämtliche Werke, in 15 Bänden*. Giorgio Colli (editor), Mazzino Montinari (editor). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. X, Sommer-Herbst 1883 15 [21].

"Herrschen? gräßlich! Ich will nicht meinen Typus aufnöthigen.  
Mein Glück ist die Vielheit!"

412 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Anti-Christ*. 4. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 5.



this, real strokes of luck, were always possible and perhaps will always be possible. And whole generations, families, or peoples can sometimes constitute this sort of bull's eye, *right on the mark*.”<sup>413</sup>

Examples abound in Nietzsche's work for such "higher types", some of whom – like Julius Caesar or Cesar Borgia – were violent conquerors. But many other, more creative or simply revolutionary types are provided, including Goethe, Beethoven, Jesus, Socrates, Zarathushtra, and of course himself, as well as the entire ancient Greek civilisation. This brings us to a troubling notion – that of master & slave morality. This is often taken to be a regressive justification for the rule of force in human life as in nature, but the truth is much more subtle than that. What Nietzsche suggests is that many people *want* to follow – human beings are herd animals, and they need a shepherd. Whether in the military, the arts, the sciences, or wherever, "higher types" can emerge as heroes, rôle models, and leaders. Those whom we have hitherto seen are the archetype for Overhumanity – a conscious cultivation of these "higher types" in a society which allows for the full flowering of their creative (and destructive) energies.

I would like to submit a couple of excerpts from Ralph Waldo Emerson on the notion of heroes, as a way of getting at what Nietzsche found so important in the idea. The parts in Nietzsche's own copies of these books which are underlined have been rendered here in bold text. First up, following a reference to Plutarch's histories and warriors like Scipio, and how we need adventure-filled books like that:

"Our culture therefore must not omit the arming of the man. Let him hear in season that he is born into the state of war, and that the commonwealth and his own well-being require that he should

413 Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Anti-Christ*. 4. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 5.

not go dancing in the weeds of peace, but armed, self-collected and neither defying nor dreading the thunder, **let him take both reputation and life in his hand, and with perfect urbanity dare the gibbet and the mob by the absolute truth of his speech and the rectitude of his behavior.**"<sup>414</sup>

Here we see one of the most essential qualities of Overhumanity – a willingness to defy the herd, to act as s/he requires, to accept the consequences, and allow her/himself to be judged on the basis of her/his qualities as a person. Emerson builds upon this in the following passage, which lays out a definition of the heroic temperament which must have resonated with Nietzsche as its DNA can be seen throughout his own writings.

"Towards all this external evil the man within the breast assumes a warlike attitude, and affirms his ability to cope single-handed with the infinite army of enemies. **To this military attitude of the soul we give the name of Heroism. Its rudest form is the contempt for safety and ease, which makes the attractiveness of war. It is a self-trust which slights the restraints of prudence, in the plenitude of its energy and power to repair the harms it may suffer. The hero is a mind of such balance that no disturbances can shake his will, but pleasantly and as it were merrily he advances to his own music, alike in frightful alarms and in the tipsy mirth of universal dissoluteness.** There is somewhat not philosophical in heroism; there is somewhat not holy in it; it seems not to know

414 Ralph Waldo Emerson. *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 228.

that other souls are of one texture with it; **it has pride; it is the extreme of individual nature.**"<sup>415</sup>

Emerson believed that he could "clearly see that man's value [was] declining in history".<sup>416</sup> Nietzsche shared this view, and both felt that "great men" were a vital part of one's cultural education. The ideal of Overhumanity is meant to encourage the emergence of such exemplars of virtue and will.

The Overhuman was meant to be free from conventional morality, existing in a state beyond good & evil, with only their own will and virtue to guide their choices. Further, those choices were to reflect a spirit of experimentation, creativity, and courage, leading them to devise new values and new systems of thought. This places Nietzsche's ideal of Overhumanity as somewhere in between conventional notions of the heroic archetype from antiquity, and a newer and more radical form of individualism befitting Nietzsche's own age. His character was meant to withstand soul-crushing pain and isolation, and to allow for the embrace of uncertainty, flux, and becoming (rather than the false security of false certainty). In a very early work, Nietzsche tells us that the "everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is, as Heraclitus teaches it, is a terrible, paralysing thought. ... It takes astonishing strength to transform this reaction into its opposite, into sublimity and the feeling of blessed astonishment."<sup>417</sup> It is that strength which allows for the willing of Eternal Recurrence, as both the ultimate test and as a reinforcement of all that makes the Overhuman distinct from the "herd".

415 Ralph Waldo Emerson. *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 228-229.

416 George J. Stack. *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992. 268.

417 Friedrich Nietzsche. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Trans. by Marianne Cowan. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1962/1998. 54.

### 6.3 Closing Thoughts

Over the course of this study I have attempted to advance one central argument, though doing so has required innumerable twists and turns into several fields of knowledge. Nietzsche looked around at his world and he saw the destructive potential of nihilism made manifest, and he expected things to get far worse if the problem were not addressed. By way of his genealogical critique, he traced the origins of nihilism to the “death of God”, by which he meant the loss of literal and absolute faith in a transcendent reality and universal morality. He saw in efforts to redirect human thought – such as the Enlightenment, liberalism, socialism, and nationalism – the spectre of linear apocalyptic concepts inherited from the Abrahamic faiths. Modern ideas of progress, so ubiquitous in nineteenth century political and scientific thinking, he then traced ultimately to the Persian prophet Zarathushtra, who first hit upon the idea of universal values, and apocalyptic judgement, and a perfect world. In order to wipe away the last remnant of metaphysical thinking, Nietzsche believed that we needed to let go of these notions of universal morality and a perfecting of the world, and accept both that values are culturally contingent and that this world is already perfect.

Therefore, in unleashing ideas like Eternal Recurrence in his middle-period work *The Gay Science*, and the flurry of mature ideas in his faux-biblical *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche was attempting to provide an alternative mythology to shape a post-metaphysical, post-nihilistic world-view. It was important to him that what he offered be consistent with scientific naturalism and structured in such a way that, while

it need not be provable, it was at least not *disprovable*. And it was of vital importance that this mythology contain lessons that were ultimately life-affirming. Nietzsche's distinction between master and slave morality meant that he – unlike the socialists and some liberals – did not believe that all peoples could accept the same reality or possess the same potential. He believed that a distinction would always remain between the creators and the followers. His encouragement was aimed at inspiring a future generation of creators to dream extravagantly, and to create a compelling vision which might inspire the great mass of humanity towards cultural values that were naturalistic in orientation and fundamentally life-affirming. He feared what a world comprised of “last men” would produce – and we have hardly disappointed in that, with our present obsession with consumption and shallow fame, and with the continuing vitality of the old religions and ideas like nationalism. But we have succeeded in another way, in my view, since the liberal democratic society leaves a space, at least, for free thinkers and free spirits, for the flourishing of creative types, and perhaps one day humanity will come upon a compelling-enough vision which allows it to begin a new chapter.

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