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1

In the Horizon of the Infinite

In the Horizon of the Infinite – We have left the land and have gone to sea! We have demolished the bridges behind us, indeed, we have destroyed the very land behind us! Now, little ship, watch out! Beside you lies the ocean: it is true that it does not always roar and from time to time it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of goodness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more terrible than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that had felt its freedom and now pushes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when you are assailed by homesickness for the land, as if there more *freedom* were to be found – and there is no ‘land’ any longer.

(GS 124)

The lure of the ocean is spellbinding for all who thirst to encounter the unknown. Its restless rise and fall communicates with an inner longing which laps at the edge of consciousness, insinuating its siren’s song into all healthy terrestrial endeavour: ‘Why go on clinging to this clod of earth, this way of life, why pay heed to what your neighbour says?’ (*UM III*, 1). If the land promises security, community and a gentle haven from the need to think, the ocean offers a freedom so boundless that it exhilarates and terrifies to rival degrees. In the horizon of the infinite the dark and ambivalent relationship that exists between desire and destruction unfolds. The urge to escape boundedness is a desire so intense that it strives even to escape itself, the thrill of liberation and the anguish of abandon

describing the movement of a single wave. Such exploratory migrations are irrecoverable within any rationally grounded philosophy yet what becomes thinkable beyond its shores may stimulate a very different adventure in thinking. In the twilight of consciousness it is not the call of reason – much less of ‘being’ – that delicately torments our dreams.

From Descartes onwards, modern philosophy has sought to construct its intellectual edifices upon firm foundations, shielding itself from the surges of violent scepticism that might sweep it away. In a striking passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant likens the ‘territory of pure understanding’ to an ‘island of truth’ surrounded by ‘a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion’ (CPR A235/B295). Where ‘many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores’, the ‘adventurous seafarer’ is ‘incessantly’ deluded with vain hopes which he is unable to satisfy yet can never fully relinquish (ibid.). Since the desire to migrate beyond the familiar is insatiable and prone to recur, Kant cautions against any contact with alterity which is not already safely anchored in the *form* of the same – the territory of possible experience. Indeed, given that the unknown (noumenon) is in principle inaccessible to experience, he suggests that it should function as ‘a limiting concept’ (CPR A255/B311), curbing the pretensions of sensibility and marking the coastline as the border of legitimate exploration. For the cartographer of reason, the possibility of navigating the vast expanses beyond the isle of ‘the knowable’ is a hazardous enterprise and one that can only be charted in relation to the land.

To ‘leave the land’ is to incur certain loss – the loss of certainty itself – for the price of a glory so captivating that it must engulf all who discover it. Such suicidal submission to the terrors of thought without foundation is decisively rejected by metaphysical and transcendental philosophy alike, the former by seeking to maintain, *inter alia*, a substance ontology of coherent subjects and objects, and the latter by thinking of the conditions of the real object of knowledge in terms of the conditioned – the ‘I’ of representation. Since that which eludes the *form* of being cannot be ‘known’, that is, it cannot be *re-cognized as the same*, philosophical consciousness can at best speculate about the unknown from the perspective of *terra firma*, commuting it to the status of an unknown *object* and thus maintaining the familiar relation of a subjective representation to

what is objectively represented – as if the ocean were a mirror eternally reflecting the shore. The paradox of modern thought is that it strives to extend the boundaries of its contact with otherness by reinforcing the limits of its conditions in advance – like a sea wall protecting the subject from the threat of collapse. It is scarcely fortuitous that Freud should liken the project of shoring up the ego so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the unconscious to the work of land reclamation: ‘Where id was, there ego shall be. It is a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee’ (*PFL* 2, 112).

It is for these reasons that Nietzsche characterizes the philosophical tradition as always having confused exploration with recognition, generously furnishing itself at the outset with the principles that it aspires to uncover. In a note from 1887 he writes:

The *form* counts as something enduring and therefore more valuable; but the form has simply been invented by us; and however often ‘the same form is achieved’, it does not mean that it is the same form – what appears is always something new (*WP* 521)

According to Nietzsche, concepts are generated by discarding individual differences between things, thereby furnishing a generic identity which ‘simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases – which strictly speaking are never the same and simply are dissimilar’ (*TL* 1). Continual usage of the concept prompts the idea that in addition to individual particulars, an original ‘form’ exists which *governs and accounts* for the distribution of myriad differences. This reification of the principle of identity is epitomized by the concept ‘God’ which is abstracted from the ‘flux of becoming’ and then miraculously projected back upon it as its extrinsic explanatory principle. The conditions of production thus become confused with their products and we fall for our own subterfuge, believing in the validity of the ‘truths’ that we have forgotten are illusions (*TL* 1). Salvaged from the deep, these pearls of ‘truth’ shimmer with the lustre of eternity, steely and seemingly ungendered as if washed ashore from a world more perfect than our own.

No suggestion is made here that philosophy should ‘renounce’ concepts. On the contrary, Nietzsche argues that thinking ‘must assert substance and sameness, because knowledge of something

altogether fluctuating is impossible; it has to *conjure up* properties for being, in order itself to exist' (KSA 9/11[330]). What philosophy forgets, he suggests, is that the conditions of possibility for thinking are fundamentally 'illusory' – *a priori* fictions and finely honed metaphors which intelligent life skilfully fabricates in order to provide a narrative for itself. Since these illusions become progressively 'incorporated' into the human organism, 'conceptual thinking' will of necessity inhibit any genuine contact with alterity, for specific difference will always be mediated by representation within a concept of identity. In effect, philosophy establishes its so-called 'truths' by denying its primary inventiveness and (save to manufacture ever more baroque architectonics within which to 're-find' them) dissociates itself from its creative impetus.

To think, just for a moment, that the world might be organized otherwise is to submit to the vertigo of a world beyond identity, to awaken from dogmatic slumber to a different kind of dream.

Only through forgetting this primitive world of metaphor, only through the petrification and paralysis of the mass of images that originally streamed forth from the primary faculty of human imagination in a fervent fluidity, only through the inassailable faith that *this sun, this window, this table* is a truth in itself, in short, only through forgetting that that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject, does the human subject live with any calm, security and consistency; if, just for a moment [*Augenblick*], he could get out of the prison walls of this faith, his 'self-consciousness' would slip away immediately. (TL1)

It is but a *moment* yet all of Nietzsche's philosophy unfolds in this dizzying instant of release. With Nietzsche, philosophy embarks on an exploratory enterprise which entails a departure from foundational thinking in all its forms. The voyage into the horizon of the infinite constitutes a journey away from the land – from the *ground as given*. Thought is no longer premised on transcendent forms nor channelled through the faculties and secured in the bedrock of the unitary subject. It is such *stasis*, such inertia of knowing, which precludes any connection with the strange, the unexperienced and the new.

Yet a disturbing problem now glimmers through the last mists of evaporating reality. However calcified these concepts might be, it is

uncertain how philosophy could viably function in the absence of the coordinates of knowing. If there is no longer any 'land' in what sense is there still any 'sea'? Indeed, in default of the law of identity, in what sense are there any significant differences at all? In this regard, it is not without consequence that Nietzsche's 'In the Horizon of the Infinite' passage in *The Gay Science* should directly precede the famous 'The Madman' section in which the 'death of God' is announced:

Where is God? [...] I shall tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backwards, sideways, forward, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Are we not straying as if through an infinite nothing? (GS 125)

In the wake of God all is void and vacancy. Without foundation there is no point of orientation, direction, framework: no horizon of overarching truth, no sun to navigate by: 'We have abolished the true world: what world is left? The apparent one, perhaps? ... But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent world!*' (TI 'How the "True" World Finally Became a Myth'). As absolute being haemorrhages into *infinite nothing* the chill horror of the *horizon of the infinite* impacts. If it is no longer possible to measure this transient, apparent world against the highwater mark of the true, then it is no longer possible to ground a coherent philosophy for, as Nietzsche so convincingly argues, knowledge and becoming exclude one another. The bloody sacrifice of God marks the disintegration of transcendent form and its reabsorption into the immanent productive process, the 'flux of becoming'. For Nietzsche, this is the moment at which the icy blast of nihilism impacts, provoking the terrifying realization that the *eternal values* invoked to render existence meaningful are merely exotic fantasies and that the world has no goals or ends as such (WP 12). Ironically, it is the 'truthfulness' cultivated by Christian morality that eventually turns against itself, discovering its teleology and brutally exposing needs for 'untruth'

that can be no longer esteemed (WP 5). It is in questioning what grounds the ground that philosophy becomes *abyssal* – returns to the ocean upon which all order floats. Indeed, it is by virtue of striving to know (to err beyond the errors and illusions so effectively embedded in the species) that nihilism is encountered in its most *extreme* form: ‘existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: “*the eternal recurrence*”’ (WP 55). If one strives to know deeply enough *one returns to the depths* – the point at which knowledge becomes creative *once again*.

Nietzsche famously and provocatively asserts in *The Birth of Tragedy* that it is ‘only as an aesthetic phenomenon that the existence of the world is *justified*’ (BT ‘Attempt..’ 5). In this profound and extraordinary early work Nietzsche claims that it is as a consequence of the ‘sublime metaphysical delusion’ that thought can penetrate the deepest abysses of being that knowledge is conducted ‘again and again to its limits at which point it must turn into *art* – *which is really the aim of this mechanism*’ (BT 15). Rather than relinquishing the philosophical quest, it is through an augmentation of the desire to know that philosophy returns eternally to the conditions of its genesis. Hence for Nietzsche, artistic activity is no mere flight into an ‘other’ world of the imagination but a reconnection with the productive process that generates all idealities and forms – an active surrender to the ever changing waves of becoming. Everything rides upon how this plunge into the depths is to be thought if one is to avoid drifting as if through ‘infinite nothing’. If, as Nietzsche readily concedes, thinking *must* assert substance and sameness, the challenge is to *evoke that which cannot endure*. The possibility of philosophy after the death of God must now be thought *from* the abyss.

Nietzsche acknowledges that it is ‘some enigmatic desire’ that compels an individual to ‘think pessimism through to the bottom’, to really gaze ‘into the most world-denying of all possible modes of thought’ – for in the process (and without intention) one may glimpse the opposite ideal, ‘the ideal of the most exuberant, most living and most world-affirming man’ who, beyond mere resignation, *wants* ‘to have it again *as it was and is* to all eternity’ (BGE 56). This craving fails to register on any intelligibly human scale. One has to thirst for one’s ruin, be consumed by the rapture of the deep,

if one is to perceive – and wholly by chance – the devastating profundity of Nietzsche's thought. Perhaps by that very act one will come to long *again* for one's ruin as if caught up in the maelstrom of the *circulus vitiosus deus* (ibid.). For such explorers, the absence of God, wholly affirmed, opens thinking to a horizon of transcendence beyond the eternally transcendent One.

[W]e philosophers and 'free spirits' feel, on hearing the news that the 'old God is dead', as if illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment, expectation. Finally, it seems to us as if the horizon were free again, although perhaps not so bright; finally, our ships may set sail again, sail out towards every danger; every hazardous enterprise of the knower is permitted again; the sea, *our sea*, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea'. (GS 343)

Significantly, Nietzsche does not announce a new beginning or starting point for thinking but a *return*. The enterprise of the knower begins (finally) again yet such a re-beginning is not grounded within a pre-established horizon. The catastrophe of God's death marks the collapse of the origin and *telos* according to which the trajectory of thinking might be mapped and implicitly rediscovered. If it is still intelligible to speak of relations between 'subjects' and 'objects' this can only proceed in default of the principle of identity which has always served as a mooring rope, yoking knower to known. With his voyage into the horizon of the infinite, Nietzsche conducts philosophy into the dark, uncharted waters of repetition without foundation.

If philosophy is to *become creative again* this 'again' is not to be taken to imply a 'state' to be emulated and re-presented. If there is no 'ground' – no 'same' or 'identical', then repetition cannot be a return to the same. *We have destroyed the very land behind us*. Indeed, no originality of occurrence is possible if sameness is thought conceptually, that is, as a retrieval of a forsaken identity within a closed metaphysical economy of essences. On the contrary, Nietzsche implies that what is at stake is a return *of* the same – the again and again of an 'incessant' and 'enigmatic' *desire*. It would seem that it is only by virtue of *intensifying* metaphysics – by willing nihilism to its

limit – that the possibility of a very different way of thinking might appear. One is reminded of Nietzsche's 'demon' who claims that the thought of *the eternal return of the same* has a tremendous transformative power: 'If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight' (GS 341). But what could it mean to become so 'well disposed' to oneself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than the ultimate, eternal 'confirmation and seal' of eternal return?

Such desire finds few advocates in the identifiably human realm but it is touched in those ecstatic moments that are shared with the demonic ('You are a god and never did I hear anything more divine!'). Amid the delirium of erotic love, of sublime entrancement, of visionary and hallucinatory bedazzlement, there is a joy that wills itself so intensely that *it wants itself more and again*. There are many readings of Nietzsche which champion a facile ethic of 'self-creation' ('Live as if every moment were worth reliving') but such a focus misses the vital sense of eternal return as an ecstatic thought. It is the thought itself which is aggressive – which changes the 'one' who thinks it. The tremendous moment is the point of an uncanny transition but one which must engulf its thinker in order to occur. From this point – which is the limit point of a human life – the horizon becomes free again. Once thought, one is eternally undone and nothing will ever be the same – rather, will only be the same – *again*.

The horizon is free but perhaps not so bright. The ecstatic revelation of the thought of eternal return is not a 'truth' that would anchor a new way of thinking, not a meaningful thought in any obvious sense. Indeed, after the death of God, it is dubious whether it is a thought that is available for *comprehension* at all. As Nietzsche so astutely observes, metaphysical philosophy depends upon its own logic of eternal return of the same, inasmuch as the reiteration of the identical across time and space is constitutive for conceptual reasoning as such. The question is how to exacerbate this logic, how to ride its wave such that it might be driven to use its own energy against itself. On the assumption that the 'reality' of the world of phenomena was first created by us and lies in 'continual recurrence of identical, familiar, related things in their logicized character' Nietzsche

suggests that ‘the antithesis of this phenomenal world is not “the true world” but the formless unformulable world of the chaos of sensations – *another kind* of phenomenal world, a kind “unknowable” for us’ (WP 569). This is not the Kantian realm of things in themselves for as Nietzsche points out, ‘thingness’ is merely a metaphorical device and we have no way of knowing whether ‘things’ as such exist. His question is ‘whether there could not be many other ways of creating such an apparent world’ (ibid.). Such a world is strictly speaking ‘unknowable’ because it lacks the forms and formulations of logical identity but it may be sensed and encountered. Configured in this way, the unknown is no longer conditioned by the known – privatively determined as an unknown ‘object’ in default of representation. Exploration now emerges as a rather different endeavour – one which *returns* to the ‘realm of appearances’ once again.

This return is a transformative repetition, an inquiry into the matter of thinking anew. In suggesting that the processes through which the world of ‘things’ is constructed as such are not themselves explicable in terms of ‘things’, Nietzsche is doing rather more than making a transcendental point about the necessary conditions of experience. While the belief that things retain an identity is enshrined in the form of the concept which determines the possibility of repeatable experiences, the material flows which condition any given experience are the fluctuating, non-repeatable ground for the difference between instantiations of the concept. The concept can only explain the form that a *possible* actualization will take but it can never account for the existence of any real actualization.

Has a force ever been noticed? No, only effects translated into a completely foreign language. However, we are so used to regularity in succession that we *never wonder at its oddity*. (WP 620)

Nietzsche’s question is what makes a difference prior to representation – what generates a vital effect. This leads to his development of the notion of differentiation as a positive principle of production – the *material* difference of ‘dynamic quanta in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta’ (WP 635). Such a locution might be taken to imply an oppositional and inverse relation to the conceptual difference that organizes philosophical discourse, but perhaps this is not to say much since materialist discourse must also be rendered

intelligible in this completely foreign language. The key point is that there is no reason to suppose that what makes no difference at the level of recognition makes no difference at all. For Nietzsche, this tensional dynamics is 'not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* – the most elemental fact from which a becoming and an effecting first emerge' (*WP* 635). It is in terms of a sense of power that intensive forces first differentiate themselves. In other words, the 'aesthetic' is the real condition of experience and it is from this material plenum that the conceptual is to be thought. Accordingly, the task for the philosopher after the death of God is to diagnose which forces are operative in a given phenomenon.

Behind the highest value judgements that have hitherto guided the history of thought, misunderstandings of living constitution lie concealed – be it of individuals, ranks or whole races. All those bold insanities of metaphysics, especially answers to the question about the *value* of existence, may always be regarded first of all as symptoms of particular bodies; and if such world affirmations or world negations were to be scientifically measured lock, stock and barrel, without yielding a grain of significance, they are all the more valuable for historians and scientists as hints, as symptoms of the body, of its developments or failures, its plenitude, power, self-mastery in history, or its inhibitions, fatigues, impoverishments, its premonitions of the end, its will to the end. (*GS* Preface, 2)

Perhaps it is this recourse to the physiological that has been most misunderstood in Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's professed 'naturalism' has frequently been treated as a reductive materialism, an uncritical or positivist valorization of brute animality over and above the cultivated reaches of 'spirit'. Such a judgement tacitly assumes the polarity between the natural and the spiritual; indeed the assumption of the validity of bilateral disjunctions is made from a position which remains unilaterally idealist. Nietzsche's notion of differential forces resists the thought of an ideal limit marking the difference between transcendence and immanence. This is not simply a methodological point, for it already bears within it an evaluation of *physis* as a primary self-differentiating element. In other words, there is no suggestion that difference implies mutual discon-

tinuity between terms. In a note from 1881 Nietzsche defines his task as 'the dehumanization of nature and then the naturalization of man, after he has reclaimed the pure concept of "nature"' – a thought which suggests the immanence of the human to nature with the latter as a primary term (KSA 9/525/11[211]).

When Nietzsche comes to embellish this remark in *The Gay Science* he refers to the task of 'de-deifying' nature (GS 109). His basic thought is that the values which have been 'incorporated' over the course of several centuries of Western history will not be extinguished by the mere 'event' of God's murder. Thus, even though the guarantor of truth, purpose, unity and design has met a bloody demise, humanist values continue to retain their cultural currency. It is not the case that there is anything intrinsically life-affirming or life-negating about the human. For Nietzsche 'the human' is an adjective rather than anything else. His point is simply that the cultivation of the human animal has been an exercise in harnessing potent energies and redirecting them against the self ('morality as anti-nature'). Consequently, his exploration of a post-human or *übermenschlich* physiology is integral to his attempt to 'transvalue' the 'form of the same'. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche says that we should guard against all aesthetic anthropomorphisms which tempt us into positing the world as a living being modelled on the concept of the 'organic'. For Nietzsche the 'organic' is something 'unspeakably derivative, recent, rare and accidental' whilst the arch-anthropocentric tendency is to regard the 'crust of the earth' and its latest 'development', consciousness, as something 'essential, universal and eternal' (GS 109, 11) The modern scientific by-product of the belief in God is faith in the universe as an organism. Such a scientific view cannot fail to reduce superabundant nature to the servile mechanism of the 'organized' and the functional. Deeply contemptuous of this, Nietzsche emphatically rejects the suggestion that the universe 'obeys laws', that it has a drive for 'preservation' or any other kind of drive and that the ascription of moral judgements such as 'heartlessness' and 'unreason' are ever valid (GS 109). Unlike a living being this world does not grow or expand but it is 'in all eternity chaos' lacking every kind of order that might be attributed to it and expressing only *necessity*.

At first glance, Nietzsche's de-deification of nature appears purely negative, a simple withdrawal of all familiar predicates. In fact, this

is only the necessary first stage of the reclamation of nature from its metaphysical accretions. The crucial point is to show how values are already *implicated* in matter. The imperative is to reassess from an atheistic and anti-humanistic perspective the series of determinations consonant with an anthropocentric determination of life (organization, integrity, self-preservation) as vectors of *value for life*. It would be precipitate to assume that 'slave morality' is entirely life-negating – a subtlety which Nietzsche's ambivalence towards the ascetic ideal seems to reflect. If it is fair to say that the human animal has largely been tutored to think its nature reactively – in terms of wants and needs and in terms of preservation from perceived dangers – the question might be how different evaluations of life are to be lived and embodied. In other words, how might an active or life-affirming physiology be nurtured and created?

In the Preface to *The Gay Science* Nietzsche draws an explicit link between affectivity and philosophical production. We are told that the philosopher gives birth to his thoughts out of his pain and endows them with heart, blood and fire: 'Life – that means for us, constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame – including everything that wounds us – we simply *can* do no other' (*GS* Preface, 3). For Nietzsche, it is only great pain, 'the long, slow pain that takes its time – on which we are burned, as it were with green wood' that compels the philosopher to descend to his ultimate depths and to put aside everything 'that is mild, that is medium – things in which formerly we may have found our humanity' (*ibid.*). From such depths of torment one emerges 'as a different person' with an ever renewed taste for all that is perplexing. Arising phoenix-like from the ashes, the thinker is literally 'on fire' for thought: his delight sparks up 'again and again [*immer wieder*] like a bright glow over all the distress of what is problematic' (*ibid.*). Having been charred to a husk he returns as the fire that rekindles his own thought, he has become the thought *of* fire. If the 'art of transfiguration *is* philosophy' it would seem that it is by redirecting the affects, making even the most painful experiences *productive* that 'we know a new happiness ...' (*ibid.*).

The importance of this 'art' ought not to be underestimated. Nietzsche suggests that it is only through the transformation of 'nature' that a transformation of thought is possible. There is a sense in which philosophy must become ecstatic if it is to succeed in

thinking beyond the values which perpetuate the logic of the same. A philosophy which practises this art fails to commensurate with work or even with discourse, both of which forestall the tendency towards collapse. Rather, as a taste for all that is problematic, philosophy is a passion. The legacy of Nietzsche's philosophy will concern this appeal to affectivity. It is this that is to be understood if philosophy is to be renewed.

After Nietzsche

Having blazed an intense and glorious trail throughout the history of art, religion and philosophy, spanning classical accounts of 'divine inspiration' to Romantic and modernist notions of genius and transcendence, Eastern and Western spirituality from Christian martyrology to mystic and shamanic practices, the phenomenon of 'ecstasy' has resurfaced in the twentieth century as a dominant feature of a range of continental philosophies.¹ The conviction that a non-foundational philosophy must be *fundamentally* ecstatic is undoubtedly paradoxical but it is scarcely fortuitous that after Nietzsche this prospect should have claimed the imagination of so many thinkers. The concept of an ecstatic or self-transcending existence was most explicitly formulated by existentialist thinking to define the inner constitution of a 'groundless' subjectivity and to mark it apart from the 'objective reality' of classical epistemology. As Alphonso Lingis writes:

Existential philosophy defined the new concepts of ecstasy or of transcendence to fix a distinct kind of being that is by casting itself out of its own given place and time, without dissipating, because at each moment it projects itself – or, more exactly, a variant of itself – into another place and time. Such a being is not ideality, defined as intuitable or reconstitutable anywhere and at any moment. Ex-istence, understood etymologically, is not so much a state or a stance as a movement, which is by conceiving a divergence from itself or a potentiality of itself and casting itself into that divergence with all that it is.²

As Lingis indicates, to 'exist' (or 'ex-ist' from Latin *ex-sistere*) means to 'stand out' but in its existentialist usage it signifies the dynamic

notion of 'transport'. For existentialism, human existence is always already 'ecstatic' inasmuch as *ecstasis* (the Greek cognate of 'existence') defines the human animal as the being whose distinctiveness is constituted in and through its very evasion of 'essence'. In its transcendence of the determinate existence that would consolidate its identity 'in itself', the existentialist subject is always eluding the possibility of foundation. As Sartre says, the for-itself is always bound up in its 'worldly' projects yet is never wholly defined by them (the for-itself determines its being as *a lack*). In a similar manner, in its infamous 'return to the things themselves', phenomenological philosophy marks a thought of transcendence which is intraworldly, endorsing the Kantian insight that it is *paralogistic* to suppose that the subject can be determined or grasped as if it were a being somehow separable from its own functioning. Despite the considerable differences between the exemplars of these perspectives, the ecstatic imperative, if we may call it thus, is to think beyond the opposition between the 'apparent' and the 'true', not to restore certainty this side of the beyond. It is notable that in this endeavour, a number of influential thinkers have identified the ecstatic with the move beyond metaphysics and with the broader, ongoing attempt to rethink the transcendental.

To the extent that the phenomenological movement concerns itself with what Nietzsche so aptly calls 'the nearest things', it could be said to have taken inspiration from his attempt to re-evaluate 'appearance' after the death of God. It is also to be remarked that this process has often been identified with a rethinking of art and the nature of the artwork and that existentialism and deconstruction have been greatly informed by reflection on the literary. However, while there are family resemblances between Nietzsche's thought and the hermeneutical philosophies of a range of twentieth-century thinkers, there is no reason to suppose that all retreats from the philosophy of identity should be themselves identical. It could be said that while phenomenology and deconstruction have sought to think the immanence of Being to beings and to expose the confusion of the transcendent with the transcendental, it has not been the chief goal of these movements to explore a thinking 'beyond the same' at the level of value.³ Arguably, it is Deleuze and Bataille who have been most alert to the 'materialist' implications of Nietzsche's attempt at a 'revaluation of all values' and in this respect

could be said to contribute to a philosophy of physiology and desire which develops the resources for thinking how life affirmation might be embodied.

According to Deleuze, one of Nietzsche's central concerns is the radicalization of Kantian critical thinking. Deleuze suggests that Kant's genius was to conceive of an immanent critique but that he lacked a method which permitted reason to be judged from the inside. Kantian philosophy discovers conditions which still remain external to the conditioned: 'Transcendental principles are principles of conditioning and not of internal genesis' (NP 91). While Kantian critique brings itself to bear on dogmatic claims to knowledge and truth, it fails to criticize knowledge and truth as *values* (for example, the value of the *a priori* is never called into question). In *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze argues that Nietzsche's thinking impacts upon contemporary philosophical sensibility in terms of a fulfilment of the critical enterprise:

[W]ith Nietzsche, we must begin from the fact that the philosophy of values as envisaged and established by him is the true realisation of critique and the only way in which a total critique may be realised, the only way to 'philosophise with a hammer'. (NP 1)

Deleuze suggests that for Nietzsche the fundamental values which support and frame transcendental philosophy have to be challenged. Evaluation presupposes values on the basis of which phenomena are judged, while values similarly presuppose evaluations – 'perspectives' of certain kinds of life. As Nietzsche puts it, the 'value of these values must be called into question' and for that there is needed a knowledge of the condition and circumstances in which they grew and changed (GM Preface, 6). Echoing this sentiment, Deleuze writes that the problem of critique is that of 'the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their *creation*' (ibid.).

Understood as material effects or symptoms of a living constitution, values are regarded by Nietzsche as orientations of *life* rather than simply determinations of being and this is as applicable to non-foundational philosophies as it is to the 'bold insanities of metaphysics'. Nietzsche suggests that 'when we speak of values we

do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when we establish values* (*TI* 'Morality as Anti-Nature, 5). Something is sensed, is 'known' sensitively: 'the *will to power* is the primitive form of affect, [...] all other affects are only arrangements of it' (*WP* 688). Since evaluations are ways of being, 'conditions of life' for those who evaluate, they serve as principles for the values that these 'evaluators' use. For Deleuze, the crucial point is that '*high and low, noble and base, are not values but represent the differential element from which the value of values themselves derives*' (*NP* 2). 'High' and 'low' do not represent fixed points on a scale of evaluations but mark what type and degree of confrontation or relation of domination is operative between 'forces' – what conditions of life are determinative in any given state. No state is interpreted independently of the forces which instantiate it, consequently no phenomenon 'in itself' is incontrovertibly noble or base (not even the much maligned Platonism). What is no longer tenable is the concept of a *value in itself*; even 'truth' must be understood as the *product* of the differential element or interrelation of forces. Deleuze's aim in thus aligning Nietzschean genealogy with critique is to articulate a thought of difference which is not already constituted by identity. Hence Nietzsche's great insight: to reject the 'perspective illusion' of unity that the ego promotes and take instead the *body* as 'starting point' for critique (*WP* 492).

Following Nietzsche's cue, Deleuze relates a philosophy of difference to the physiological. Every force is related to other forces which either obey or command: 'What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body[...] as soon as they enter into a relationship' (*NP* 40). Consequently, the 'being' of force is plural and is the prior condition of conceptual determination. This is not a 'given' sensory manifold because it is only the contingent relations between actual forces that constitute the 'being of the sensible'. Deleuze proposes that 'in a body the superior or dominant forces are known as *active* and the inferior or dominated forces are known as *reactive*' (*NP* 40). Active and reactive are the qualities which express the relation of force with force. Whereas an active force affirms its difference from another force, a reactive force merely 'denies all that it is not and makes this negation its own essence and the principle of its existence' (*NP* 9). The difference between a body conditioned by 'the

form of the same' and an exuberant or transformative body starts to emerge at this point.

Nietzsche claims that the noble mode of evaluation 'acts and grows spontaneously', engaging its opposite only to affirm itself triumphantly (*GM I*, 10). However, because active forces are non-teleological, unpredictable and excessive, they escape apprehension by consciousness (whereas reactive forces can be understood in relation to superior forces). Modern thought attends almost exclusively to the reactive aspect of forces, overlooking the 'essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, encroaching, form-giving forces' that give 'new interpretations and directions' (*GM II*, 12). A prime example of this is evolutionary theory which foregrounds concepts such as 'adaptation' and survival. Against this logic, Nietzsche insists that 'life is not the adaption of inner circumstances to outer ones, but will to power, which, working from within, incorporates and subdues more and more of that which is "outside"' (*WP* 681). Contrary to the Darwinists who construe life as fundamentally reactive – a tactics of environmental adaptation for survival – Nietzsche suggests that life is ineluctably superabundant, fervently creative and combative:

The will to power can manifest itself only *against resistances*; it therefore seeks out that which resists it, – this is the original tendency of the protoplasm when it sends out pseudopodia and feels about. Appropriation and incorporation are above all a wanting-to-overwhelm, a forming and shaping and reorganizing until finally that which has been overwhelmed has merged completely into the power of the attacker and has increased it. (*WP* 656)

The insatiable drive to appropriate manifests itself in the riotous inundation and assimilation of whatever is alien, recalcitrant or weaker than itself. This is the most basic tendency of life as will to power, which even in its elementary animal forms 'seeks to incorporate into itself as much as possible, not just to *compensate* for loss – it is *acquisitive*' (*KSA* 9/490–1/11[134]). The restorative impulse is superseded by a thirst for expansion and conquest but it is an exorbitant desire, too great to be attributed to any perceived 'goal'. In fact, Nietzsche asserts that one 'cannot ascribe the most basic and primeval activities of protoplasm to a will to self-preservation, for it

takes into itself absurdly more than would be required to preserve it; and above all, it does not thereby “preserve itself,” it falls apart’ (WP 651).

In this passage and in related notes Nietzsche explicitly denies that hunger or the drive to self-preservation are ‘first causes’ and emphasizes the point that such excessive engorgement is by no means a matter of ‘restoring a loss’ (WP 652). It is here that Bataille’s thinking is at its closest to Nietzsche’s. A hymn to the splendour of sacred expenditure, Bataille’s philosophical writings succeed in giving voice to the *need for utter loss*, a thought as remote from the notion of desire as lack as it is from the logic of reciprocal exchange. In defining eroticism as ‘assenting to life up to the point of death’, Bataille declares that this site of excitations is ‘in the first place an exuberance of life’ – a way of dissolving the boundaries which inhibit a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self (E 11). Life as ‘active incorporation’ is sacrificial – fatally indifferent to its own self-preservation. If the challenge for an exploratory philosophy is to evoke that which cannot endure, the consummation of transcendental critique may now be said to entail the cultivation of *unproductive* or sacred values. Such an approach would depart from a thought of practical or ‘worldly projects’ and would resituate the ecstatic in terms of intensive states. Bataille speaks of seeking to grasp that which takes flight as soon as it is seen – a task he relates to the aesthetic. It is the futile and exultant efforts of the artist to create pathways for the ‘endless reattainment of that which flees’ which attests to the joy of the ungraspable (VE 241). Art has the force to attain the ‘sacred instant’ by its own resources, perhaps because it engages the affective states that reactive forces inhibit and negate. For Bataille, the ‘sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled’ (VE 242).

What is felt in these explosions of joy is the entry of active or ‘life-affirming’ values into thought. Accordingly, Deleuze’s suggestion that the will to power produces values as the internal, differential and genetic element of forces is to be grasped in a physiological context as the growth of new capacities: ‘The will to power *interprets* (it is a question of interpretation when an organ is constructed): it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power’ (WP 643). Since values are produced in accordance with the capacity for a life

form to interpret itself (for example, as active or reactive) they simultaneously express an immanent evaluation of their mode of expenditure (growth) – an argument which relocates the *agency* of critique at the level of the physiological.

Nietzsche suggests that ‘the task of *incorporating* knowledge and making it instinctive’ is a task that human thought has only begun to glimpse (GS 11). The suggestion that humankind has hitherto only incorporated ‘errors’ is not necessarily to be taken negatively. The will to survive is not trivial but it only attains sovereignty when tested against the lure of self-ruin. As an exorbitant index of sacred desire, ‘incorporation [*Einverleibung*]’ connotes an openness to the ‘horizon of the infinite’ predicated on the thought of dissolvent boundaries. In other words, the receptivity to the unknown that is implied by this process of ‘becoming-body’ is not mediated by a pre-existent interiority: the body which incorporates is itself *created by incorporation*. Whatever is taken in ‘from the outside’ *forms* the ‘inside’ as such. In this way, what the body consumes or incorporates becomes the same as itself, a ‘oneness’ exorbitantly generated from diversity.

Since the ‘logical’ concept of the self-identical ‘same’ integral to the philosophy of identity is derived from the process of ‘making the same’, it is treated as an entity that has *finished* becoming: ‘All thinking, judging, perceiving as *comparison* has presupposed a “*positing* as same”, earlier still a “*making* the same”. The making the same is like the incorporation of appropriated material into the amoeba’ (WP 501). Nietzsche suggests that the *strength* of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life (GS 110). These conditions, inherently corporeal, present the question as to whether a life form is able to expend itself – sacrificing its own ‘ground’ – or whether it seeks to preserve itself, inhibited by its thirst for secure terrain. Nietzsche says that the thinker is that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for their first fight, after the impulse for truth has proved to be also a life-preserving power (GS 110). The question and the ‘experiment’ concern the extent to which truth can bear incorporation (ibid.).

Consequently, for the incorporating body the ‘same’ in no sense constitutes a substantive state, rather *materializes as immanent to the*

fluid, metamorphic movement of becoming. This entails in turn that recurrence is no longer posited as a transcendent principle which modifies a given set of entities but is itself to be thought of as internal to becoming-the-same. Such a physiology is ecstatic in that it overcomes what it has become. In this respect it is possible to see how will to power functions as a principle of Nietzsche's own philosophy of eternal return – as the differential element where all forces will be played out. In Deleuzian terms it might be said that the will to power is a *derivative transcendental*, derivative because it is the plane generated by forces, yet transcendental because it is where forces synthesize. Diversity thus emerges as something that is *produced* by incorporation as irreducible indeterminate difference. The differential element expresses that which is shared in a multiplicity, a sameness which materializes in the process of incorporation.

These reflections on physiology will significantly shape the possibilities for philosophy after Nietzsche. The question to pose to any cultural phenomenon (including contemporary philosophies of ecstasy) is never merely ontological but is inherently perspectival: 'Is it hunger or plenitude (*Überfluss*) that has here become creative?' (GS 370). Following Nietzsche, it could be asked whether philosophies which express disdain for the natural or animal, which privilege values of utility, industry and responsibility, and which reify notions of the limits of 'our' history and conceptual heritage, flow from evaluations which are life-affirming or life-negating. Even a phenomenology of the body risks impoverishing 'life' if it resists those pulsions which lead beyond 'our world'. Perhaps Nietzsche is right to insist that 'it is only from the conception "I" that there follows, derivatively, the concept "being"' (TI 'Reason in Philosophy', 5). Thought in terms of life rather than being, the 'world' for Nietzsche is not the nexus of human meanings and involvements but is *will to power*.

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end [...] set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be 'empty' here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and

many, accumulating here and at the same time diminishing there; a sea of forces flowing and raging together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and flood of its forms [...] *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides! (WP 1067)

In the wake of the death of God, the will to power emerges as a new syntax of thought, one in which difference of force is thought immanently in terms of the value economies it creates. In this turbulent ocean of becoming, forms ebb and flow beyond the rescuing shore of a world 'for us' and an economic vocabulary of tides, intensities, peaks and troughs supplants the semiotics of 'structure, sign and play'. Philosophies which fail to experience the death of God as the death of theological values will never succeed in taking the will to negation to the limit – will never experience the ecstasy of abandon – because the limit is always thought as that which co-exists with what has yet to cross it (TP 432). Ecstasy is no more in excess of stasis than the sea is in excess of the land. The ocean has no margins.

For Bataille, the death of God is not an ontological problem but an orientational one, a voyage into the *unknown* which 'is distinct from Nothingness by nothing which discourse can enunciate' (IE 114). The frequent references to be found in Bataille's work to a 'nostalgia' for continuity no more signify a 'return' to an Edenic nature prior to the Fall than Nietzsche's glorification of tragic dissolution signals a wistful yearning for the primitive. Those who would seek to dismiss sexual taboos and advocate a return 'to the good old days of animalism' fill Bataille with a genuine sense of dread. On his account, man differs from the animal in that he is able 'to experience certain sensations that wound and melt him to the core' (ME 140) but like Nietzsche with his fascination for slave morality, Bataille regards human nature as an ingenious aberration of matter and resists valorizing the pure spontaneity of the natural order – itself an abstraction. Enthralled by the tensions and torsions of affectivity that describe the arcs of discontinuity, Bataille pursues a base materialism which is the obstinate negation of all idealism and – at this level – of all philosophy (VE 45). Yet in his protracted meditations on the poignant, indeed violent impulses, alternatively

of revulsion and attraction, to which sensibility and intelligence are 'inseparably attached' he resists proposing an ontological disjunction that demarcates self and other along epistemological lines (*ME* 138–9). It is only in the intolerable surpassing of itself that being is given to the human animal.

Since we have known only slavish values, have known only a negating will to power, Nietzsche does not strive to change values but seeks a change in the element from which the value of values is derived, that is, the will to power. According to Deleuze, reactive forces become active by affirming their own negation and in this spirit Nietzsche advocates an active destruction of the values that stasis represents – God, Eidos, Identity, the One – thereby conducting force to the limit of what it can do – at which point it becomes transformative. This is why he pursues an active destruction of nihilism rather than a nihilistic deconstruction. If the finite animal is the beast of finality – of goals, projects and ends – ecstasy impacts as a self-annihilating power that dispossesses and transfigures.

Let it be recalled that it is only when nihilism is intensified, when the desire to know becomes the impetus for the exacerbation of itself that a return to unknowing is realized. The enigmatic desire for the eternal return of the same, encountered ecstatically at the point of collapse, is a thought which *takes itself as its own object*, wills to have it again as it was and is to all eternity, eternally flooding back. To the inertial repetition of the same, Nietzsche counterposes a darkly inhuman philosophy of excitation. Thought in terms of the libidinal rather than the liminal, ecstasy describes *a feeling of life*, not the definition of self-exceeding presence. Perhaps this will mean that the philosopher must stammer in an alien tongue, translating the inner 'echoes of the world symphony' into the form of concepts (*PTAG*, 3). For all this, the problem which philosophy faces after Nietzsche is not one of language but one of *life*. How 'well disposed' would one have to become to oneself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than the ultimate, eternal 'confirmation and seal' of eternal return? To consecrate one's life to this thought one must have experienced a 'tremendous moment', have experienced a joy so extreme that one can only ever want it again. Nietzsche's philosophy is the anatomy of this longing, a series of notes towards a philosophy of ecstasy.

We aeronauts of the spirit! – All these bold birds which fly out into the distance, the farthest distance – it is certain! At some point or other they will be unable to go any further and will perch on a mast or a barren rock and will be even thankful for this pitiful lodging! But who could dare conclude from this, that there was *not* an immense, clear expanse before them, that they had flown as far as one *could* fly! All our great teachers and forerunners have finally reached a halt, and it is not with the noblest or most graceful of gestures that weariness comes to a halt: you and I will fare the same! But of what concern is that to you and me! *Other birds will fly further!* This insight and trust of ours flies with them and with this wager of theirs, up and away; it ascends above our heads and beyond powerlessness into the heights and from there looks out into the distance, sees flocks of birds far stronger than us ahead, which strive where we have striven, and where everything is still sea, sea, sea! – And where would we go then? Would we want to go *beyond* the sea? Where does this mighty craving draw us, this craving which is worth more to us than any pleasure? Why go just in this direction, where hitherto all the suns of humanity have *gone down*? Perhaps it will be said of us some day that we too, *heading westward, hoped to reach an India* – but that our fate was to be wrecked against infinity? Or, my brothers? Or? (D 575)

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