
Chapter 1

Nihilism and Nietzsche's "Last Man"

The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is still rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirl!

Zarathustra on the "last man,"
Nietzsche 1968b [1883–1892], p. 129¹

THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

Profound thought usually grows out of a sense of crisis. The crisis of modernity² involves the suspicion that we are subordinating ourselves to the restrictive social and economic systems that we have created. In some ways this crisis is similar to those of other ages: one feels that a vital human quality or force is being sacrificed for something of lesser value. In ancient philosophy, for example, Plato expressed the fear that the "lower" instincts or passions might usurp the reign of reason within the individual and society. During the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Descartes expressed a similar fear, though he was more optimistic about the ability of reason to overcome the obstacles of passion and prejudice. Other thinkers, usually in the minority, indicated the opposite suspicion—that too many dimensions of human existence had been sacrificed to the constrictive form of reason that arose as a response to the earlier fear of the passions. Although both sets of thinkers worried about the fate of humanity, they felt certain that human beings would be able to retrieve the lost dimensions at a later date. Each person, knowingly or unknowingly, would harbor within himself or herself the remnants of the vanquished force.

The crisis in modernity, however, is distinctly different—one worries that consciousness itself (or its equivalent in discursive practices or creative forces) might be reduced to just those parameters necessary for the continual reproduction of restrictive and univocal social, cultural, and economic systems. The power to transform old ways of existing into new ones, to create and explore new dimensions of social, economic, and cultural life, would be forever channeled into one set of repetitive structures, whatever their surface appearance of variety and novelty. As humanity has grown in its power to control nature, it has also increased the possibility of using this power to constrict its own life.

One may view the crisis of modernity more specifically as the dominance of a “technocratic” order in contemporary societies. The term *technocratic* refers to the standardized techniques of training and organization employed in the military, factory, prisons, hospitals, schools, and other bureaucratic institutions. In modern times, the twin engines of capitalism and the state have disseminated such standardized techniques into all aspects of society. Capitalism, “the transformation of money into commodities, and the change of commodities back into money, or buying in order to sell” (Marx 1906 [1867], p. 164), has been able to expand only by bringing social relations and the bodily and mental activities of individuals into conformity with the standardized techniques, disciplines, and time schedules of mass production systems.³ The state, partly in collusion with capitalism, partly on its own institutional momentum, has passed from the throne of sovereignty, with its limited if absolute demands, into the wholesale “administration of life” (Foucault 1978b [1976]) or “computerization of society” (Lyotard 1984 [1979]).

Along with their pervasiveness in modern society, the techniques of production and social control are becoming the “rationality,” a “technocratic rationality,” of modernity. They determine in advance what will count as “real” or “relevant” in society; any aspect of the environment or any goal of society that cannot be converted into a problem for the precise, efficient, and steplike or “computational” processes of these standardized techniques is not accorded the status of a concern; the “rational” is real, the “real” is rational. Not only is the understanding of society and its problems reduced to the practices of this technocratic rationality, a technocratic elite or social stratum is growing in importance as the necessary technicians and managers of this new society. As more people become part of this stratum, and as mental activity adapts itself to these new techniques of production and administration, the species that originally erected these systems is progressively “produced” or shaped by them.

Because we usually identify psychology with the study of our more uniquely human aspects, we should expect it to indicate those of our resources that will help us to resist our subordination to this technocratic rationality and elite. We should expect this particularly of the psychological paradigm that is dominant in society today, cognitive psychology and its computational or computer model of mind. Not only do its adherents proclaim that this psychology is "revolutionary," they say that it is also at once a humanistic advance over its predecessor, behaviorism, and yet just as scientific as the latter. In the following section, we shall provide a preliminary outline of cognitive psychology and its computational model of mind. We shall then ask if this psychology doesn't hide from view another psychology—one that suggests that the hold of technocratic rationality is even deeper than our description of the crisis of modernity has indicated and that, nonetheless, the means of overcoming this form of rationality, indeed, of its self-overcoming, is waiting in the wings.

THE "MIND'S NEW SCIENCE"

Because the majority of its adherents adopt the computer model of mind, cognitive psychology is part of an interdisciplinary field called *cognitive science*. Not only does cognitive science provide a systematic and unitary approach to such diverse areas as psychology, artificial intelligence, linguistics, anthropology, neuroscience, and even economic history,⁴ its leading expositors and practitioners, such as Howard Gardner (1985), refer to it as the "mind's new science" and describe it as a "revolutionary" change in the way we view mental activity and ourselves. More specifically, Gardner says that cognitive scientists view cognition as involving mental representations, posit a level of analysis "separate from the biological or neurological, on the one hand, and the sociological or cultural, on the other" (p. 6), utilize the electronic computer as a model of how the mind functions, and deemphasize, at least at this stage of its development, "the influence of affective factors or emotions, the contribution of historical and cultural factors, and the role of the background context in which particular actions or thoughts occur" (p. 6).

Although cognitive psychology and its computational model of mind is part of cognitive science, it differs from the other cognitive disciplines listed earlier in two respects. First, cognitive psychologists attempt to explain and simulate the way the mind functions rather than limit themselves to, for example, the design and construction of "intelligent" machines or the modeling of neural networks. Second, cognitive psychologists utilize the experimental method and findings

of psychology to develop and verify their theories. Some cognitive psychologists tend to think that the mind *is* a computer, though one constructed of protoplasm, whereas others adopt the view that the computer provides only a heuristic model or metaphor of the mind.⁵ But even the second approach restricts the mind to such activities as utilizing representations and following rules, so that one can argue (as we shall) that all of cognitive psychology implicitly or explicitly adopts the computer as its regulative ideal. One can also argue (as we shall) that the differences between the linear processing and the more recent parallel-processing systems (and the difference between the "standard" or "symbol system" model and the "connectionist" model of computational cognition) are irrelevant in relation to the most important considerations for characterizing and evaluating the computational model of mind.

Just as Gardner views the broader area of cognitive science as a revolutionary development, so most psychologists believe that psychology has also undergone a "cognitive revolution" (Baars 1986) and that the mind indeed has a "new science." According to these psychologists, we should understand our mental activities and competencies as analogous to the processes of computers:

Computers take symbolic input, make decisions about the recoded input, make new expressions from it, store some or all of the input, and give back symbolic output. By analogy, that is most of what cognitive psychology is all about. It is about how people take in information, how they recode and remember it, how they make decisions, how they transform their internal knowledge states, and how they translate these states into behavioral outputs. (Lachman, Lachman, and Butterfield 1979, p. 99)

Not only do cognitive psychologists view their new science as revolutionary, many of them also claim that it is humanistic, at least relative to the behaviorism that it recently replaced as the dominant paradigm in psychology. Baars (1986) has documented the importance of the humanistic appeal of cognitive psychology during its early development in the 1950s and 1960s; and Boden (1977), speaking of the closely related field of artificial intelligence, links this humanism to the sense in which the computer analogy allows us to distinguish ourselves from "mere matter":

Contrary to common opinion, the prime metaphysical significance of artificial intelligence is that it can *counteract* the subtly dehumanizing influence of natural science, of which so many cultural critics have complained. It does this by showing, in a scientifically accept-

able manner, how it is possible for psychological beings to be grounded in a material world and yet be properly distinguished from "mere matter." Far from showing that human beings are "nothing but machines," it confirms our insistence that we are essentially subjective creatures living through our own mental constructions of reality (among which science itself is one)... The more widely these points are recognized, both within and outside the profession, the less of a threat will artificial intelligence present to humane conceptions of self and society. (p. 473)

Noam Chomsky, recognized as one of the leading catalysts in the revival of the mind as an explanatory principle of human behavior (Lachman, Lachman, and Butterfield 1979; Gardner 1985), ascribes the humanistic aspect of the computer model to its emphasis on "rule following" and contrasts it with the behaviorist, particularly the Skinnerian, model of human activity. According to Chomsky, behaviorism strips away the functions previously assigned to "autonomous man" and transfers them one by one to the controlling environment. In making this transfer, behaviorism renders the person "a fit subject for the 'shaping of behavior' by the state authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat, or the central committee" (1970, p. 404). Because his generative linguistics shares the computational "rule following" model of cognitive psychology and is thereby a continuation of the humanistic Cartesian tradition (Chomsky 1980, pp. 3-4), Chomsky thinks his linguistic model can provide a space for the autonomous or "free and creative" self that the behaviorist eliminates: "I think that the study of language can provide some glimmerings of understanding of rule-governed behavior and the possibilities for free and creative action within the framework of a system of rules that in part, at least, reflect intrinsic properties of human mental organization" (1970, pp. 404-405).

Although cognitive psychologists attempt to provide their psychology humanistic status by placing a mind between the stimuli and responses of the behaviorist account of human behavior, they feel that they can accomplish this without sacrificing the scientific rigor of behaviorism. Besides the "purposiveness" that the processes of computers appear to share with human behavior, they, like other material processes, are divisible, measurable, and in principle completely transparent to those who study them. If mental acts are like computational processes, psychologists can utilize experimental methods to link variables of psychological interest with the time a mental activity or any of its presumed sub-routines require to reach completion and claim that they are achieving a full understanding of mental life. By treating men-

tal acts as computational processes, therefore, cognitive psychologists assume that they can reintroduce the mind as the proper subject matter of psychology (be "humanistic") and yet continue to employ the experimental methods of the natural sciences (be "scientific").⁶

Besides proclaiming its revolutionary, humanistic and scientific status, the advocates of cognitive psychology feel that their view of cognition also avoids the "mind-body" problem that has always hindered the development of a complete or coherent scientific psychology. They also suggest that their psychology promises to change the popular view of mind and hence our view of ourselves. In relation to the mind-body problem, the computer model allows one to view "mental states" in terms of their contribution to the functioning of a system of similar states rather than in terms of their ontological status. One can thereby pass over the difficulty of understanding how a presumably nonmaterial state of the mind can causally interact with a brain state. Cognitive psychologists have become so successful in their efforts to identify mental activities with computational processes that people are incorporating terminology from cognitive psychology into their commonsense or "folk" psychology, much as people did with the terminology of psychoanalysis and behaviorism during the periods when these were the dominant psychologies:

The recent ascendancy of information-processing is a significant change in the study of higher mental processes. The change was essentially paradigmatic: it concerned man's basic character as well as theories of how he thinks.... The [information-processing] paradigm has potential applications beyond cognitive psychology—in clinical, social, and educational psychology, for instance. We would not be surprised to see the information-processing paradigm influence all of psychology. If it extends to the larger society as well, many people's conception of human nature will be affected. (Lachman, Lachman, and Butterfield 1979, p. 33)

Within the midst of the crisis of modernity, then, a new psychology has emerged. Besides claiming that it is revolutionary, humanistic, and scientific, the adherents of this psychology believe that it avoids the traditional mind-body problem and provides us with a new way of viewing ourselves.

THE MIND'S NEW SCIENCE AND GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE

Despite the claims of its revolutionary, humanistic, and scientific status, the computer model of cognitive psychology is all too compatible with the anonymous administrative and economic structures that

shape our society and with the type of technocratic intelligence that is gaining a controlling position in technologically advanced societies. One cannot help suspecting, therefore, that cognitive psychology is a product of the technocratic rationality of the computer age, that it serves the interest of the new technocratic elite by emulating their style of thinking, and that it appears compelling only to the degree that we view ourselves through the lenses provided by technocratic rationality. To confirm this suspicion, we shall clarify the notions of technocratic rationality and the computational model of mind and reveal the degree to which they converge on one another. We also shall show that the type of discursive and experimental evidence that psychologists offer in support of the computational model of cognition is a product of that model and therefore provides only a circular form of support.

In our effort to assess the degree to which cognitive psychology is part of the "ideology" of a technocratic order, we may also discover that cognitive psychology and technocratic rationality conceal a deeper significance—that both are the "surface" of a more basic dynamic. More specifically, we may find that an interpretation of ourselves in terms of a machine indicates a tendency toward self-denial or self-deprecation, and is a reaction against the counter-tendency to affirm our "flesh and blood" existence. For example, Nietzsche thinks that Christian doctrine, particularly the notions of "good and evil" and "original sin," are a form of self-hatred, not merely a condemnation of particular actions but a rejection of "human nature" itself. Because such notions stand as a reaction against those tendencies and values in the same culture that are implicit affirmations or celebrations of life, they are "nihilistic." Similarly, the enthusiasm with which cognitive psychologists and many others in contemporary society think of mental activity in terms of computer processes may indicate the continuation of a discourse (as opposed to an individual's motive) that embodies this type of rejection and a tacit unwillingness to live with, let alone affirm, the ambiguities and uncertainties of the human situation. If this is so, then cognitive psychology's humanism is either an antihumanism or the culmination of a humanistic tradition that itself has stood as the unacknowledged renunciation of the "human condition."

To assess whether cognitive psychology is the symptom of a "nihilistic" tendency in Western culture, we must go beyond an ideological critique of the computer metaphor of mind and perform a "genealogical critique" in the Nietzschean sense. Rather than beginning with an abstract definition of this type of critique, we shall present Nietzsche's own genealogical critique of the value and meta-

physical codes that have characterized Western (and presumably a good deal of Eastern) thought. This exposition will allow us to use Nietzsche's work not only as a model for genealogical critique, but also as a model for the "genealogical psychology" that we hope to advance in our "psychology of cognitive psychologists" and in our participation in what Nietzsche refers to as the "self-overcoming" of nihilism. In later chapters, we shall find that we have to go beyond Nietzsche's own terminology in order to specify the meaning of "nihilism" and its opposite, the "self-affirmation of life." This specification will constitute our unique contribution to the growing number of genealogical critiques in the area of cultural studies.

In carrying out this genealogical critique, we emphasize that we shall view cognitive psychology in terms of Nietzsche's notion of a "value-creating power" (1967 [1887], III sec. 25) and not as the product of its practitioners' explicit intentions; that we shall view cognitive psychologists *as* cognitive psychologists—as agents of a discipline—and not as individuals in the usual, and fuller, sense of the word. Moreover, even if our genealogy does undermine the sense in which cognitive psychology is "revolutionary," "humanistic," and "scientific," this does not rule out the value of cognitive psychology as one psychology among others. In particular, our genealogy cannot deny that cognitive psychology is an important approach to some domains of mental activity, a partial insight into the sense in which we are "mechanical-like" beings, a source of useful technologies and techniques, and a stimulant to other views, such as genealogical psychology itself. At the very least, a genealogical "psychology of cognitive psychologists," along with the other paths that we shall explore in this book, for example, phenomenological psychology and post-structuralist "decenterings" of the self, will suggest important revisions that cognitive psychologists might make within their own account of mental activity.

In a parenthetical note to one of the sections of his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1967 [1887]), Nietzsche states that "Plato versus Homer" is "the genuine antagonism" of human existence: "Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism—there the sincerest advocate of the "beyond," the great slanderer of life; here the instinctive deifier, the *golden nature*" (III, sec. 25). Because Nietzsche views this opposition between Plato and Homer as the key to understanding Western culture, we should begin with this opposition as we find it in Plato's own writings. Moreover, Plato's psychology or "philosophy of mind" is a precursor of the tradition that will eventually culminate in cognitive psychology, and the ideal city he advocates is the forerunner of contemporary technocracy. Therefore, a clear exposition of his posi-

tion will also serve us well in the genealogical critique of cognitive psychology and technocratic rationality that lies ahead.

PLATO VERSUS HOMER

In an essay entitled "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche (1968 [c. 1872]) says that the ancient Greeks preferred "the activity of fights which are contests" to the "activity of fights of ambition" (p. 35). So central is the contest or "*agon*" to the Greek spirit, continues Nietzsche, that if a member of a Greek community were to be best at something, the others would have him or her ostracized to another community: "That is the core of the Hellenic notion of the contest: it abominates the rule of one and fears its dangers; it desires, as a *protection* against the genius, another genius" (p. 371).

Given the centrality of the notion of contest to the Greeks, one should not be surprised that Plato refers in the *Republic* (1968) to a contest about "becoming good or bad" (608b). He does this in the context of his own battle against art, specifically the poetry of Homer.⁸ Plato's general argument is that poetry has nothing directly to do with truth, and that, unless guided by philosophy, it can lead to the undermining of the natural order of one's soul and thus to something "bad." Plato therefore concludes that poetry "mustn't be taken seriously as a serious thing laying hold of truth, but that the man who hears it must be careful, fearing for the regime in himself, and must hold what we have said about poetry" (608b). In order to understand his point, we must first examine his theory of "Ideas."

Plato's Theory of Ideas

Plato's distrust of poetry is animated by his view of reason as a desire and vehicle to unite ourselves with a realm of pure being, of eternal and unchanging "Ideas." According to Plato, the world of changing objects that we immediately inhabit vaguely reminds us of the realm of Ideas and yet bars us from it. Unless we are able to turn away from the attractions of the sensory world and direct ourselves toward the Ideas, the *mimetic* role of sensory objects will serve only our worldly need to make approximate identifications of sensory objects and ascertain their more immediate advantage to us. Like the persons in Plato's famous cave, we shall mistake the realm of becoming for the realm of being and remain imprisoned in the sensory world.

Besides viewing the realm of temporal sensory objects as less valuable than the realm of the eternal Ideas, Plato believes that sensory objects have a specific identity for us only insofar as they "remind"

us of the Ideas in which they "participate." To perceive an object is to recollect the Idea that it, or one of its properties, approximates. Apart from these Ideas, "we cannot fix [sensory objects] in the mind," cannot say truly of a sensory object, at the same time and in the same respect, that it is beautiful (or large, or square, etc.) or not beautiful, or that it is both or neither of these (479c). The object will always appear different relative to that which it is compared.

Whereas Plato has a distaste for (and is distressed by) the inherent ambiguity of the sensory objects in the realm of becoming, he is enraptured with the univocity or singularity of the Ideas. So strict is the identity of an Idea, so independent of outside influence, that Plato says even a god cannot make more than one Idea for a given category of sensory object, "because if he should make two, again one would come to light the form of which they in turn would both possess, and that, and not the two, would be the object that *is*" (597c). Thus Plato views reality as double tiered, and the "supersensuous" Ideas that are "above" hold sway over the sensory objects "below" and set the standard for their identity (cf. Heidegger 1979 [1961]), p. 201).

In support of his view that we are involved in two realms of being, one more worthy than the other, Plato also distinguishes between a part of the soul that "calculates" (602d) and two other parts, spirit and desire, that either obey or disrupt the just order of the soul, that is, uphold or subvert the rule of reason (the calculating part) over themselves. Plato is particularly anxious that reason should control the desiring part of the soul, for he compares that part to "a many-colored, many-headed beast that has a ring of heads of tame and savage beasts and can change them and make all of them grow from itself" (588c).

Because of its desire for knowledge of the unchanging Ideas and the need to control the soul's baser appetites, the calculating part of the soul has two employments: As "dialectical" reason, it desires to unite with, to know, the Ideas and thereby transform the soul and render it complete by leading it out of the shadows of the cave and into the light of truth and the Ideas (531d-539d). Plato suggests that dialectical reason is playful, even erotic, once it is freed of the worldly dross of the senses and engages exclusively in the realm of the supersensuous Ideas. As "applied" or "instrumental" reason (though Plato does not use these terms), on the other hand, reason descends from the heights of the Ideas to the lower levels of reality and knowledge on Plato's well-known "divided line." On these levels, one utilizes reason and the knowledge gained by its dialectical employment to master and control the sensory world and the soul's more mundane

desires (522d–e; 525b; 526d–e). "Imprisoned" within the body once again, reason is transformed from a principle of erotic play into a principle of worldly domination. Plato thereby inaugurates the philosophical tradition that distinguishes between an "emancipatory" and an instrumental form of reason and that then restricts the emancipatory form to an other-worldly or purely "spiritual" realm (cf. Marcuse 1966, p. 118). In anticipation of what is to come later in our text, Plato prepares the ground for the eventual elimination of substantive forms of reason in favor of instrumental forms, of reason as an end in itself in favor of reason as a means to extrinsic ends.

On the basis of the power of dialectical reason to reveal the Ideas, Plato advocates that a city should be divided into three classes: a guardian class of "philosopher-activists" who would rule the city on the basis of their knowledge of the Ideas, particularly the Idea of justice; a class of military auxiliaries to protect the city from internal and external enemies, from "injustice"; and a class of producers to provide the material necessities of the city. Just as our knowledge of the Ideas can transform everything in the realm of becoming into "stillness," can place the ever-shifting sensory objects under the dominion of the Ideas and thereby promise us complete mastery over nature, so such knowledge can also serve as the basis for a technocratic state, a state governed by a class of "experts."

Using the guardians' rule in a just state as his model, Plato argues that reason rules over the spirited and desiring parts of a just soul. Plato's institutionalization of the "calculating part" as the ruling force in the soul and in the city carries implications for the nature of the other virtues as well. Thus Plato treats justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom as essentially involving reason's control of the desire for honor, material gain, and other pleasures concerning the sensuous world. Obtaining these pleasures requires practical knowledge based on the Ideas, and in the just soul the acquisition of these worldly pleasures never subverts the desire for knowledge or living in accordance with the Ideas of the virtues. Thus Plato desires that life be fitted as much as possible into the narrow but virtuous grid of the Ideas, and his psychology or theory of the tripartite soul is intended to support this narrative of liberation and its metaphysical basis.

Plato's Attack on Art

Plato's attack against Homer concerns poetry's relation to knowledge and "justice" in both the city and the soul. Plato begins his criticism of Homer and poetry by first presenting his audience with an unflatter-

ing epistemological portrait of the visual arts. He claims that craftsmen are able to make a couch because they imitate the "one that is in nature" (597b), that is, the "ideal" or original couch that sets the standard for the rest. In contrast, painters can present a couch only from one perspective at a time, and therefore they are merely the imitators of the *appearance* of material couches and their paintings are only the imitation of an imitation of the ideal, the, for Plato, *real* couch.

Plato is as harsh with poets as he is with painters. He says that if poets knew the Ideas of the things about which they speak, they would not be concerned with mere imitations of them and would not write poetry in the first place (598c–599b). With his ideal of the philosopher-ruler in mind, Plato also says that if Homer (or any other poet) had firsthand knowledge of the Ideas, legislators would honor him for his teaching on governance, and generals for his advice on tactics; he would produce useful inventions, and people would follow his style of life, as they did that of Pythagoras, and seek him as an educator on virtue (599c–600e). But none of these things happened to Homer; he was even neglected in his later life. Thus poetry and imitation are "a kind of play and not serious" (602b).

Plato is not content to criticize poetry as merely useless with respect to gaining knowledge and carrying out practical tasks. He also views it as decadent and unhealthy, claiming that it keeps "company with the part in us that is far from prudence, and is not comrade and friend for any healthy or true purpose" (603b). Not only is poetry produced by the part of the soul that is "full of faction" (603d), it indulges and prolongs the sadness and pain of this part rather than immediately try to "cure" it (604c–e). Indeed, Plato seems to have a deep fear that one can be swept away by the desiring part of the soul and its henchman, poetry, much like Freud's anxiety of being engulfed by his *id*:

Therefore it would at last be just for us to seize [the poet] and set him beside the painter as his antistrophe. For he is like the painter in making things that are ordinary by the standard of truth; and he is also similar in keeping company with a part of the soul that is on the same level and not with the best part. And thus we should at last be justified in not admitting him into a city that is going to be under good laws, because he awakens this part of the soul and nourishes it, and, by making it strong, destroys the calculating part, just as in a city when someone, by making wicked men mighty, turns the city over to them and corrupts the superior ones. Similarly, we shall say the imitative poet produces a bad regime in the soul of each private man by making phantoms that are very far removed from the truth and by gratifying the soul's foolish part, which doesn't distinguish

big from little, but believes the same things are at one time big and at another little. (605b-c)

Besides driving poetry out of his "city in speech" (except when it is guided by philosophy), Plato also replaces the Homeric and popular view of the soul with his own vision of the interior regime of reason. According to the Homeric view, the soul is a shade, a replication of the entire person, though invisible or breathlike (Claus 1981, pp. 61, 183). For this shade, the "calculating part" is not a part of the soul, but one form of life, one type of soul or personality among others that have their own styles of rationality, including the "transfigurative" or "imaginative" rationality of the poets.⁹ Along with his dismissal of poetry, then, Plato champions a psychology of calculating reason over a more "holistic" psychology of different "styles" of cognition (or, in Nietzsche's terms, "value-creating powers") that are not decomposable into transpersonal "interchangeable" parts or "faculties."

In the name of a supersensuous realm and the desire to unite with it, and also in the name of the desire to subdue the sensory world and create an orderly society, Plato introduces a new cultural force and discourse, "calculating reason," that usurps the domains of Homeric poetry and psychology. As we shall see, the history of psychology since Plato is a series of variations on Plato's "partite" psychology and eventually eliminates his "emancipatory" or "dialectical" form of reason although retaining and developing the more instrumental or applied version of reason in the service of a "will to mastery and control." This version of reason will become technocratic rationality, and the "soul" in which it is lodged will become the computational mind championed by the cognitive psychologists.

NIETZSCHE'S GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE OF "ASCETIC VALUES"

Genealogical Critique and Active and Reactive Forces

Through a genealogy of the most important values in Western culture, Nietzsche attempts to show that Plato's metaphysics is the philosophy of a decaying form of life whereas Homer and poetic discourse signify an affirmation of the generative powers of life. For the genealogist, indeed, all values and their associated practices or social institutions serve "value-creating powers" (III, sec. 25) or "forms of life." The goal of genealogy is to understand and assess these values and practices in terms of the value-creating powers that they serve and often conceal and to see how one and the same word or set of practices can serve successive and distinct, even opposed, value-creating

powers, thus taking on a new significance at every turn (II, sec. 12).

We can also speak of these genealogical evaluations as "critiques." The values and practices that genealogists evaluate present themselves as "universal" or as "true" in an unqualified sense. By revealing the value-creating power that these values and practices serve and disseminate, however, genealogists show their "grounds" or basis—how it was possible for them to appear universal or true without qualification—and their limits, that is, their necessary partiality. In carrying out this critique, moreover, genealogy itself is a value-creating power, one opposed to the "life-denying" and hegemonic tendencies of practices that the genealogy attempts to critically evaluate and overcome.¹⁰

In his writings, Nietzsche implies that value-creating powers can be divided into two major types, "active" and "reactive," whatever their more specific identities. He suggests, moreover, that one may view a culture as the hierarchical arrangement of these "forces" and refers to such an arrangement as a "will to power." The culture is a "negative will to power" when the reactive forces dominate, and an "affirmative will to power" when the active forces hold sway.¹¹ To illustrate how an affirmative will to power is transfigured into a negative will to power, Nietzsche performs a genealogy of the value pair "good and evil" and of the other major "ascetic values" that characterize Western culture and find their greatest support in Plato's metaphysics and psychology of the soul.

Nietzsche begins his genealogy by presenting us with a fundamental opposition between a "knightly aristocratic class" and a "priestly aristocratic class." He describes the knightly aristocrats as possessing a "powerful physicality" and "overflowing health," and as sharing leadership over society with the priestly aristocrats (1967b [1887]I, sec. 7). In contrast to the knightly aristocrats, the priestly aristocrats are overly temperamental, weakly constituted, avoid action, and can barely contain their hatred of the knightly aristocrats in whose shadows they must live.¹² The illness and disgust of these priestly aristocrats grows so intense that they become, ironically, both dangerous and interesting animals, acquiring depth, in their attempt to "cure themselves"—in their attempt to increase their rancor as a means of overcoming their spiritual exhaustion:

For with the priests *everything* becomes more dangerous, not only cures and remedies, but also arrogance, revenge, acuteness, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease—but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became *an interesting animal*, that

only did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*—and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts! (I, sec. 6)

The priests are particularly dangerous because their social position and training permit them to create new values. To overcome the physically powerful knightly aristocrats, they translate their "*ressentiment*" into a new value code that embodies the reactive or "slavish" quality of the priestly aristocrats and that equates the powerful with evil and the weak with goodness and piety: "This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction" (I, sec. 10).¹³ Once the knightly aristocrats are seduced into adopting this new value code, presumably after centuries of indoctrination and weakening due to military defeat or natural calamities, then the code of "good and *evil*" replaces the previous code of "good and bad," and the entire community exists as a reaction against the self-affirming activity that previously characterized at least its most powerful class.¹⁴

Nietzsche says that this inversion of the knightly aristocratic "value equation" is also the realignment of a hierarchy of value-creating forces. The priestly aristocratic values are a *reactive* force: they exist exclusively as the negation of an *active* force, of a force whose values are an affirmation of itself first and the disparagement of anyone else only secondarily and out of a "pathos of distance" (I, sec. 2). When the knightly aristocrats accept the values of the priestly aristocrats, however, they too become a reactive force and their vigor is turned toward the depreciation of their previous form of life. Because reactive forces then dominate the hierarchy of forces that characterizes the society of the knightly and priestly aristocrats, the affirmative "will to power" or hierarchy of active and reactive forces is transformed into a negative will to power.

"Negative Nihilism"

Although the opposition between the knightly and priestly aristocrats might lead one to expect that Nietzsche advocates a social-conflict theory of the origin of values,¹⁵ he appears to see the ascendancy of the value code "good and *evil*" as a symptom of our resentment against the conditions that constitute the human situation. Nietzsche often refers to these conditions as "chaos," as "force throughout, as a

play of forces and wave of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there, a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms...as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness" (Nietzsche 1967b [1883–1888], sec. 1067; 1974 [1882], sec. 109; cf. Heidegger 1987 [1961], 80).

In his essay on Nietzsche's thought, Deleuze utilizes the term *negative nihilism* to refer to our inability to embrace this chaos as the condition and setting of our existence and says that it signifies the most basic of the three forms of nihilism (negative, reactive, and passive) to which Nietzsche alludes (1983 [1862], 147–148).¹⁶ Although Nietzsche is not strict in his use of the term *chaos*, he appears to equate it and its synonym, the *world*, with his notion of "will to power" and to indicate that this notion and *chaos* refer to the interplay of value-creating powers, or active and reactive forces, that characterize linguistic communities.¹⁷ Negative nihilism, that is, our resentment against chaos and hence against the will to power itself, is therefore our inability to affirm the unending interplay of interpretations that constitutes the life of the linguistic community and its members.¹⁸ Rather than celebrating the "eternal return" of the same interplay of interpretations (though not necessarily of the same interpretations),¹⁹ we seek an interpretation that would put this on-going interplay to rest—we seek, for example, the Platonic Idea whose revelation would spell the death of the dialogue entrusted with revealing it or the world-historical meaning whose fulfillment would mark the spiritual completion and end of the history that harbors this meaning.

Because the thinkers of the Western tradition have not been able to accept a world that always invites further interpretations, they have had to establish what Nietzsche calls "ascetic ideals"—good and evil, God, truth, and the other ideals, values, and virtues that cluster around these and form the axiological and metaphysical codes of Western culture. These ideals replace the sensuous world of "becoming" as the home of humanity, and give people something "other-worldly" for which to live. But Nietzsche points out that these ascetic ideals conceal the original will to nothingness or negative nihilism that gave rise to them:

We can no longer conceal from ourselves *what* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance,

change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—let us dare to grasp it—a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a *will!*... [M]an would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will. (1967 [1887], III, sec. 28)

Ascetic ideals are therefore ultimately a series of "nots"—not material, not animal, not human—that signify a force whose goal is the destruction or denial of that which is negated by ascetic ideals. According to Nietzsche, the chief of these ideals is truth itself, and "the truthful man, in the audacious and ultimate sense presupposed by science" affirms a world other than that "of life, nature, and history," and in doing so denies its antithesis, our world (III, sec. 24). This faith in science, moreover, is the unacknowledged continuation of a "meta-physical faith," of "a faith millennia old, the Christian faith, which was also Plato's, that God is truth, that truth is *divine*" (III, sec. 24).

We usually portray "truth" as the ability to escape our own and every other partial perspective and thereby to see things "in themselves." Because it is really constructed from, and signifies no more than, the negation of the world, Nietzsche views "truth" as empty, as "a symptom of the decline of life" (1968c [1888], p. 484), and, along with God, as "our *longest lie* (1967b [1887], III, sec. 24). The "view from nowhere" is necessarily a view of nothing. Whereas Plato says that the world of the senses or becoming is inherently deceptive, Nietzsche's suggests that the type of "reason" that desires truth introduces the "lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence" into "the testimony of the senses." Without this "lie," the "testimony of the senses" would show "becoming, passing away, and change," and thereby indicate that the "true world" is a fiction added on to the only world, the "apparent" one (1968c [1888], pp. 480–481), the world of the "will to power." Within the world as will to power, the opposition between the "real" and the "apparent" world is only one interpretive strategy among others.

Nietzsche's critique of "truth" does not entail that one cannot "get a hold on things," only that one cannot reduce them to the dimensions of univocal concepts, to a single or even a set of singular interpretations.²⁰ According to Nietzsche, we see things metaphorically, by way of interpretations (1979 [1870], pp. 88–89). The rationality of a culture operates by converting favored metaphors into concepts or "truths," that is, by forgetting that they are metaphors. For Nietzsche, therefore, truths are only dead metaphors:

What then is truth? a moveable host of metaphors, metonymics, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embell-

ished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (1979 [1870], 88–89)

This placing of metaphor over truth, of Homer over Plato, or rather, the elimination of the distinction between metaphor and truth, also reveals more clearly the sense in which a negative will to power is dominated by reactive forces: the notion of truth is the negation of the will to power, the will to power's negation of itself, insofar as it denies that life is the endless interplay of value-creating powers. The triumph of the "ascetic ideal" is therefore the victory of Plato over Homer, of "good and evil" over "good and bad," and the will to power over itself.

We can now see the sense in which Nietzsche's genealogy is an "imaginary-historical" or "hermeneutical," rather than a "factual-historical," account of "ascetic ideals": it recreates "origins" and "transfigurations," such as those concerning the notion of "good," to make explicit what we already dimly suspect about ourselves and our culture. But making this knowledge of ourselves explicit, that is, this knowledge of the negative nihilism signified by our axiological and metaphysical codes, is simultaneously the emergence of a new value-creating power and the avatar of the self-overcoming of nihilism.

"Soul" and "Absurd Rationality"

Nietzsche views the notion of "soul" as part of an ascetic metaphysical code. He holds that we *are* our interpretive or value-creating activity, our own "chaos" of drives and instincts or evaluative interpretations,²¹ and that the idea of a soul ("being") behind and independent of this activity ("becoming") is a fiction. Not only is this fiction encouraged by the subject-predicate structure of our language, it is the means by which we can say that we *choose* to be, rather than are, "weak," that we choose to renounce our material being rather than that we fail to live up to its possibilities: "The subject (or, to use a more popular expression, the *soul*) has perhaps been believed in hitherto more firmly than anything else on earth because it makes possible to the majority of mortals, the weak and oppressed of every kind, the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom, and their being thus-and-thus as a *merit*" (1967b [1887], I, sec. 13).

Just as Nietzsche views the concept of truth and the Platonic

realm of Ideas as signs of decay, so he deems the *type of rationality*, and hence the *type of soul*, behind them as equally a sign of the ill-health of humanity. Just as Plato issued his attack on Homer through the mouth of Socrates, moreover, so Nietzsche now practices his genealogy of Platonic reason through a caricature of Socrates. Nietzsche begins this caricature by suggesting that only persons whose instincts threaten to destroy them would invent a countertyrannical instinct to come to their rescue. Because of his excesses, "his cave of bad appetites," and his instincts "turned *against* each other" (1968c [1888], p. 477), Socrates is forced to become "absurdly rational" (1968c [1888], pp. 476–477) and stands as the prime example of the type of existence that must become its own jailer.²²

This absurd reason is valorized through linkage to such virtues as justice, temperance, wisdom, courage, and happiness, but these are also defined negatively in terms of control over the "lower" desires or instincts:

Socrates was a misunderstanding; *the whole improvement-morality, including the Christian, was a misunderstanding*. The most blinding daylight; rationality at any price; life, bright, cold, cautious, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts—all this too was a mere disease, another disease, and by no means a return to "virtue," to "health," to happiness. To *have* to fight the instincts—that is the formula of decadence: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness equals instinct. (1968c [1888], pp. 478–479)

To connect the computational cognition of cognitive psychology with this "absurd rationality," we will have to show what the cognitive psychologists as a "value-creating force" are ultimately reacting against. We shall have to see what "instincts" have led to the origin and maintenance of a centuries-long repetition of a discourse that denies and attempts to counter these instincts.

The "Higher Struggle" and "Reactive Nihilism"

Nietzsche's genealogy of ascetic values clarifies the sense in which values are themselves to be evaluated in terms of the value-creating power from which they originate. As part of a negative will to power, a nihilistic cultural tendency transforms other cultural and social forces into the means of its own self-preservation. In the case of negative nihilism, the creative powers that celebrate the fecundity of the sensuous world—of its constant dispersal into new and different interpretations—are converted into the denouncement and depreciation of themselves and the sensuous world. The emblems of this

nihilistic value creating power are ascetic ideals—ideals that serve as a standpoint from which to condemn the sensuous world but that are no more than the mere negation of the sensuous world.

Despite the hegemony of ascetic ideals in Western culture, Nietzsche argues that the struggle between the two opposing value codes, “good and bad” and “good and evil,” between the deifier of life, Homer, and the worshiper of a beyond, Plato, still continues and at a “higher level”:

The two *opposing* values “good and bad,” “good and evil” have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years; and though the latter value has certainly been on top for a long time, there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided. One might even say that it has risen ever higher and thus become more and more profound and spiritual: so that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a “*higher nature*,” a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values. (1967b [1887, I, sec. 16])

But in a later section of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche explains how this battle, though never fully resolvable—it is the human condition or will to power—might undergo a reversal of fortunes, with the result that a negative will to power could be transfigured into an affirmative will to power. This “self-overcoming” will occur through a second kind of nihilism, which Deleuze (1983 [1962], pp. 147–148) refers to as “reactive nihilism” and which comes after the self-undermining of ascetic ideals. Nietzsche claims that this self-undermining of ascetic ideals takes place because one of their number, the ascetic ideal of truth, leads to their undoing.

In support of this claim, Nietzsche (1967b [1887], III, sec. 27) says that our demand for truth—for the subsumption of the world under univocal concepts—leads to skepticism concerning the ascetic ideals. First, the belief in the existence of God is doubted and then rejected—the “death of God”—then even science finds that it cannot determine the meaning of the will to truth that it requires for its own legitimation. Because humanity has erected truth and the other ascetic ideals as the source of the *meaning* of existence, distrust in these ideals naturally leads to a complete distrust in life and in oneself—leads to the view that existence is meaningless. The erosion of ascetic ideals, therefore, brings about a second kind of nihilism, “reactive nihilism.” This form of nihilism, ironically, is a rejection of the sensuous world because of the devaluation of the very ascetic ideals that were established in response to the original unwillingness to affirm the endless