

Chapter 1

THE SUBVERSION OF CATEGORIES AND IDENTITIES

After a century of commentaries¹ (the most inspired of which—Heidegger's, Deleuze's, and Klossowski's—are as indispensable as they are unforgettable) Nietzsche's work remains enigmatic. It escapes its commentators and keeps its strength of novelty intact. It remains secretive, upsetting, explosive. The astonishing polyphony of its stylistic registers (discursive, descriptive, polemical, aphoristic, poetic) is irreducible to traditional philosophical language and yet, as we shall see, does not steer clear of it entirely. Nietzsche is at the same time translatable and untranslatable into a universal language. He is at the same time a "thinker for everybody and nobody," familiar and distant, assimilable and impossible to assimilate. No interpretation grid could explain the plurality and detail of his contrasts and contradictions, which, to be sure, emerge from the collision within him of twilight and dawn ("I am decadent and at the same time a beginning"²): Conjointly he offers the stark assessments of collapse and failure, promises of unutterable metamorphoses, distress and prophecy, mixed bitterness and joy, and so many indescribable tonalities emerging in thought and writing. A succession, an alliance, and a collision take place between subtlety and violence, passion or verve, and analytic coldness, dryness and lyricism, irony and incantation. The most disconcerting aspect of his thought originates in the indefinable mixture of destruction and affirmation (destruction that regenerates and affirmation where all acquired certainty is dissolved and slips away). Far be it from me to claim to provide the key to unlock it, for it necessarily has several "entrances."

Its elucidation however has been made easier today, for many of the earlier mistakes or falsifications have been set aside or have

fallen into discredit. Thus, no one thinks anymore of demoting Nietzsche to the level of the literati and the poets, of the brilliant and inconsistent essayists, or of suggesting that madness insinuated itself into his thought (when in fact it interrupted it definitively), or of putting him among the anti-Semites (when in fact he fought against them with extreme vigor), or the Pan-Germanic, or the defenders of a superior race (when in fact he sought to define a new type of humanity that would not be founded on hatred of oneself and of world). We no longer confuse the metaphysical theme of the Will to Power with the vulgar craving for power or the desire to dominate others. We understand more fully now that Nietzsche intentionally took upon himself—and borne—nihilism in order to better analyze it, fight it, and find ways to overcome it. We better understand that his thought is a stupendous experimentation and suffers from its dangers. We now accept the idea that his critique of “humanism” does not propound inhumanity and barbarity, but aims at overcoming a mere anthropocentric focus and man’s complacency in making himself a banality and his own idol. In short, we have ceased making Nietzsche into the diabolical. Some of his most daring propositions (on the body or on God) are now mistakenly heralded as self-evident. People have started writing lives of Nietzsche as in previous times lives of the saints were written. He is in great danger of being taken for an edifying author. He himself had foretold with fright: “I have a frightful fear of being canonized one day. ... I do not want to become a holy man, I would rather pass for a buffoon.”⁷³

To be sure, Nietzsche hides himself behind his very accessibility. For he can be read easily and quickly; so much so that one may have the illusion of understanding him immediately and with little effort because he hardly uses any “technical” vocabulary, and everyone can find favorites to pick and choose from among his aphorisms, depending on the mood of the moment. Furthermore, one can see in him a “psychologist,” in the line of the French moralists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, without exactly making an erroneous assessment. In short, it is difficult to stop and take the time to “ruminate” his aphorisms as he invites his readers to do, for it is simply too pleasant to continue reading.

Still, Nietzsche’s inaccessibility really derives from something more fundamental, most likely the strange and ambiguous position of his own writing confronting the traditional language of philosophy. Indeed, Nietzsche develops, in direct opposition to the tradition and its language, a language of his own, a form of expression particularly insinuating, insidious, complex and designed for *subversion*. On the one hand, when making use of current metaphysical oppositions

(which, for him, all come down to the Platonic opposition between the "true world" and the "apparent world"), he does so with a view to eradicating and abolishing these very distinctions; there is thus inevitably an ambiguity weighing upon his use of terms having a precise meaning within the tradition, terms such as "true" and "false," "good" and "evil." On the other hand, the key words of his *own* vocabulary (Will to Power, Nihilism, Overman, Eternal Return) elude conceptual logic. Whereas a concept, in the classical sense, comprises and contains, in an identical and total manner, the content that it assumes, most of Nietzsche's key words bring forth, as we shall see, a plurality of meanings undermining any logic based on the principle of identity. Insofar as they include significations that are incompatible with one another, these words might be understood as bursting at the seams: a word such as Nihilism designates at once the most despicable and the most "divine" mode of thought. But they function above all to burst open some traditionally accepted identity (e.g., Will, Ego, Man). The recourse to polysemy and the attempt to destroy the great identities of the tradition are based on a theory of language construed as a machine fabricating false identities. And for Nietzsche, every identity is "false," in particular any identity born of conceptualization. As he says, "Every concept arises from identifying what is not identical."⁴ Every concept results from a series of metaphorical transpositions (so primeval that they are always forgotten), the "truest" concept being simply the one that corresponds to the identification, i.e., image, which is most familiar and most common (most effaced in its character as a mere image). Far from attaining to the "truth," concepts, like language in general, function as instruments for "gregarious" use, *viz.*, they are identifications for the greatest number.

While the dominant words of Nietzsche's discourse (especially Will to Power and Eternal Return) are meant to subvert, fracture, and dismiss concepts, his overall effort aims at setting in motion the entire logical, semantic, and grammatical apparatus (in which the philosophical tradition has naively taken up residence) in the direction opposite to its most general tendencies; namely, against the assignment of proper nouns, the reduction to identity, and the passage to the universal. In other words, the specific nature of Nietzsche's discourse might well be defined in the first instance as an attempt to encourage disbelief in the laws of logic and the rules of grammar (the final refuge of a defunct theology): it is necessary, he says, to "know how to dance with words," "dance with the pen."⁵ This dancing penmanship attempts to rock, to topple, to dissociate, to disperse all conformity, i.e., all truth subjected to the rule of correspondence ("*adaequatio*"). With its various games of irony, parody, interro-

gation, innuendo—but especially with its ruptures, shifts, displacements, and the like (which it would be necessary to delineate in detail)—Nietzsche's style aims finally at destroying, or at least check-mating, all logical and, especially, dialectical "seriousness," the goal of which is always to establish identities or to reveal the one absolute Identity.

Finally, the method of genealogy, the critical method discovered by Nietzsche himself and presented as the art of deciphering symptoms *ad infinitum*, raises a particular difficulty for the exposition of Nietzsche's thought. Contrary to Plato's method (consisting in gathering sensuous diversity into a unity of essence), Nietzsche's method aims at unmasking and unearthing phenomena, but in an *indefinite* way, i.e., without ever pretending to lift the last veil and to reveal an originary identity or a primary foundation. Thus, the method itself manifests a deeply rooted repugnance for any and all systematization. Hostile to the idea of an ultimate revelation of truth, and rejecting all unique and privileged interpretation ("There is no solely beatifying interpretation"⁶), the method of genealogy is necessarily hostile to all codification of its own results. Moreover, the fragmented, aphoristic, and bursting character of the text corresponds to Nietzsche's own grasp of the world: it is a world scattered in pieces, teeming with explosions; a world freed from the ties of gravity (i.e., from relationship with a foundation); a world made of moving and light surfaces where the incessant shifting of masks is named laughter, dance, game.

Thus, both Nietzsche's language and Nietzsche's method possess an explosive energy: what has vanished in each case is identity, on which every system rests.

However, in each instance the destruction is possible only on the basis of a new and more radical affirmation. Thus, there arises a most penetrating question: might there not be, in Nietzsche, a subtle restoration of metaphysics and ethics (to the extent, for example, that it is difficult *not* to conceive of the Overman as an ideal)? Here we encounter the supreme perplexity that rests permanently at the horizon of my own question: in what sense does Nietzsche "overcome" the metaphysics he combats?

Without doubt, the strictly Platonic structure of metaphysics (based on the separation of true being and lesser being) is abolished, and not just overturned. Every "ulterior world," every foundation, is dissolved, and the final symbol of Dionysos—another word for the Will to Power—summons all the attributes of beings, the "true" as well as the "false," the "real" as well as the "fictitious." Indeed, these terms become interchangeable, insofar as the "true" of which Plato

speaks proves to be fictitious and therefore false, and insofar as the real is true if it is taken as false in Plato's sense yet *also* as containing the fictitious within it.

If, however, according to another (more Heideggerian) definition, the metaphysical approach consists of "identifying" beings in their totality—i.e., designating with one name the character of beings as such and in their entirety—is not Nietzsche then still a metaphysician? For if metaphysical thinking is the kind of thought which aims at discovering the unique and ultimate word that seals the character of presence upon every thing present, then it might well be that Nietzsche, by uttering the term "Will to Power," *did* reenact the traditional gesture of metaphysics.

But to what extent is the term Will to Power still an identity? Does it not, like all great themes in Nietzsche, refer back to identities that are broken, disfigured, forever dispersed and unrecoverable? Such are the questions that will serve as a constant background for the present inquiry into the Will to Power, Nihilism, Genealogy, the Overman, and the Eternal Return. This style of approach leaves aside the question of Nietzsche's progressive elaboration of these ultimate themes (and therewith also the problem of distinguishing between the various phases of his work) for two reasons: first, such problems go beyond the limits of the present exposition; second, the exposition is based on the view (not defended here) that the substance of Nietzsche's effort can be found, although in an enveloped, unthought, and veiled way, in the first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, the work he never ceased to rethink and defend, the one that he was finally to complete.

The Will to Power

Nietzsche explicitly underscores and affirms in various ways that everything that exists is, at bottom and in its totality, Will to Power: "The essence of the world is Will to Power;" "The essence of life is Will to Power;" "The most intimate essence of being is Will to Power." World, Life, Being, these are not ultimate things, but only formations of the Will to Power: herein we find the "ultimate face."¹⁰

Accordingly, we must accordingly discard from the very start, as a gross misconception, an interpretation of the Will to Power as *merely* psychological or anthropological. So construed, it would simply be synonymous with hunger for power, and it would be a mere matter of each individual's desiring to dominate others and to subjugate things. It can easily be shown that such a will would, in reality, be impotent,

constantly suffering from inadequacy, and affected with endless longing. Alternatively, it might be taken as synonymous with a "superiority complex" (after the fashion of Adler), always wanting to extend itself without seeing any limit to its imperialism. Whatever the psychologizing interpretation might be, power is understood as a concrete and empirical goal, something exterior to the will (riches, political power, glory), a goal pursued or manipulated with presumptuousness. In any case, there would be a distinction between the power and the will, one being the object desired or possessed by the other.

However, in Nietzsche, the Will to Power is something totally different from the psychological relationship between will as subjective and power as objective. Will to Power is indeed the "word for being," but this word is a locution, whose two terms are inseparable, with each term losing its habitual meaning. Although the issue is the affirming of the totality of beings (and in this sense is a "metaphysical" claim), the locution is designed first of all to destroy and eliminate the traditional metaphysical concept of the will. As for the term "power," it receives its own meaning only in the course of the attempt to overcome that concept: it comes to designate the very essence of this newly-thought will. Thus, the Will to Power, a term bursting at the seams, a term that cannot be reduced to an identity, comes to express anything but one variety of volition.

The classical view of the will in effect turns it either into a metaphysical substance or, more commonly, into a faculty of the subject. Moreover, this view sees in the will the cause and source of our actions. Finally, it conceives of the will as a unity, an identity.

In opposition to this classical conception, Nietzsche posits as the guiding theme of his analyses of the will the astonishing affirmation that "there is no such thing as will."¹¹ Why does he do this? First of all, because the will as a conscious faculty is neither a unity nor a primary term. It is plurality and complexity, and it is derived. What we call "will" is only the symptom and not the cause. On the one hand, "will" in the psychological sense and in everyday language entails the simplification of a complex interplay of causes and effects. On the other hand, the will, posited as a *center* or as a *foundation*, is taken falsely by metaphysics as a unique origin within reality as well as within the individual: for there is no center, and there is no foundation. There is no such thing as will: this means, as against Schopenhauer, that there exists no unique and universal will constituting what things are in themselves, that behind the phenomena there is no substantiality of the will.

No such thing as will: this also means that the individual does not possess an identical and permanent will from which all his

actions flow. What the individual calls his "will" is a plurality of instincts and impulses in constant battle with one another to gain the upper hand. An analysis of the individual's "I will" shows that what we call "will" is the result of a reduction following the dictates of practical necessity as well as of linguistic structure, and that it represents merely an imaginary entity, a pure fiction. Volition is composed of distinct emotions and polarities: there is that which wills and that which is willed, and then also, at the very core of the "individual," that which commands and that which obeys, the pleasure of triumphing over a resistance and the different pleasure of feeling oneself as an instrument doing its job. What language designates by the word "will" is in reality only a complex and belated feeling, which *accompanies* the victory of one impulse over others, or the translation into conscious terms of the temporary state of equilibrium that has obtained among the competing impulses.

Indeed, the will, like consciousness itself, is for Nietzsche not a beginning but an end, not the first term but the "last link in a chain." The will (like consciousness and thought in general) is the distant echo of a battle that has already been fought out, the aftermath coming to the surface, or the "code language" for a subterranean struggle of impulses. To will is to feel the triumph of a force that has cleared a way for itself quite apart from our knowing anything about it: the supreme illusion consists in taking this feeling, this sentiment, for a free causality. "There is no will" means that there is no fixed and defined center (the center is always shifting and it cannot be grasped), but rather a plurality of elementary "wills," i.e., unconscious impulses, forever in conflict, alternately imposing themselves and subordinating themselves. "There is no will: there are rather fulgurations of the will that are constantly increasing and diminishing their power."¹² Seen with regard to these impulses, the whole of our conscious motivations comes down to a fiction or, rather, a *symptom*. In psychology we never cease to confound effects and causes. Generally speaking, the realm of the intellect and the sphere of consciousness are but symbols to be decoded, symptoms of impulsive movements, i.e., symptoms of bodily movements. That is why it will always be necessary to philosophize, i.e., to interpret the phenomena, by taking the *body* as the "abiding clue."

Is the Will to Power, then, merely a name designating the realm of the unconscious, the realm of the body? Quite the contrary. On the one hand, the locution applies to every possible kind of force: it does not refer uniquely to the forces that underlie psychic phenomena (i.e., the impulses of the body) but rather to all the phenomena of the world. On the other hand, the locution applies more precisely to the

inner dynamism of these forces, to the orientation that qualifies them. In fact, rather than naming these forces themselves (as new metaphysical substances of the sort that Nietzsche rejects as fictitious), the Will to Power names the polarity that orients them, structures them, and defines their *meaning*. It is not an absolute meaning, nor a univocal direction, nor any finality whatsoever, but a multifaceted meaning that takes its shape from the moving diversity of perspectives. In its widest signification, the Will to Power designates a deployment of forces that is non-finalized but always oriented. Every force, every energy, whatever it may be, is Will to Power—in the organic world (impulses, instincts, needs), in the psychological and moral worlds (desires, motivations, ideas), and in the inorganic world itself—inasmuch as “life is just a special case of the Will to Power.”¹³ Every force participates in this same essence: “It is one and the same force that one expends in artistic creation and in the sex act; there is but one kind of force.”¹⁴ However, the concept of a single force diversifying itself does not suffice to account for the Will to Power: “To the concept of force must be attributed an inner will, what I refer to as ‘Will to Power,’ i.e., as an insatiable demand for the demonstration of power.”¹⁵

It is this “insatiable demand for the demonstration of power” that expresses the meaning of the complementary phrase “to Power,” conveying the sense of the “movement toward” contained in the German *Wille* “zur” *Macht*. What, then, is this Power? It is precisely the intimate law of the will and of all force, the law that to will is to will one’s own growth. The will that is Will to Power responds at its origins to its own internal imperative: *to be more*. This imperative brings it before the alternative: it is bound either to augment itself (to surpass itself) or to decline (to degenerate). According to the direction the force takes (progression or regression), and according to the response (positive or negative) one makes to the conditions imposed upon life or imposed on life by life itself (as Zarathustra says: “I am the one who is ever forced to overcome himself”¹⁶), there appear *right at the origin*, at the very heart of the Will to Power, two types of force, two types of life: the *active* force and the *reactive* force, the *ascending* life and the *decadent* life. If all volition is a volition to be stronger, if all power is overpower, our volition can also try to escape from itself and from its own demand for growth. There is a paradox here, for, strictly speaking, it is impossible to cease to will, because that would mean to cease to be. However, the decadent will that refuses to “admit the fundamental conditions of life” remains nonetheless a will: “Man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will at all.”¹⁷ Only, in this case, the direction of the will is reversed: growth becomes

advance in decadence. The "intensification" essential to the Will to Power works itself out backwards. For Nietzsche, in the special case of moral decadence, its most extreme creation is the ascetic ideal.

The Will to Power therefore always has to do with itself. It possesses a fundamental reflexivity, it always overcomes itself, through action or reaction. At its origin it presents itself to itself as a chaotic and contradictory diversity of elementary impulses; it is primordial affectivity. What Nietzsche calls "chaos" is this primordial indetermination of the Will to Power. Undetermined as it is, it can assume all forms, for it is just so many masks: it is Proteus. Being without form because of its excess of possibilities, Chaos signifies, on the one hand, not disorder at all, but rather the multiplicity of impulses, the entire horizon of forces, within which knowledge and art are to delineate their differing perspectives. On the other hand, Chaos is to represent equally the moment when, after the collapse of all values, the Will to Power returns to itself, returns to a sort of zero point.

When considered in conjunction with Chaos, the Will to Power appears both as the principle defining a hierarchy for the forces contesting for the upper hand and as the tendency to appropriate an ever larger field of action. That will is strong which can harmonize its own forces, forces in themselves divergent, and can dominate their constant development. That man is powerful "who longs to see chaos," i.e., who agrees to face all impulses (or at least the greatest number possible), and who can master them. This mastery is conveyed in and by such expressions as "great style," "great politics," "great reasoning," "great educator," "great hope," in which the adjective "great" designates a Will to Power attaining, in each case, its fullest affirmation. In contrast, that will is weak which cannot bear this task and seeks out a solution in the elimination or repression of this or that force. When affirmative and strong, the Will to Power takes upon itself variety, difference, and plurality. When negative and weak, it shrinks into reflexes of flight and defense, willing but its own diminution in the shadow of a bloodless ideal, in complete opposition to the grand simplification that perfect mastery can produce.

This initial bipolarity of the Will to Power forms the basis from which the whole enterprise of genealogy receives its definition. The "genealogical" critique of values consists in relating any given value to the ordinary direction (affirmative or negative) of volition, in unveiling the long lineage issuing from this primordial orientation, and in unraveling the long thread weaving together encounters and inventions that have since frozen into "values."

But what are values? As instruments that the Will to Power grants itself in order to confirm itself in its initial direction, values

constitute the conditions of its existence; they are the "points of view" that permit it to maintain itself and to develop itself. Nietzsche defines values as follows: they are "conditions of conservation and increase, namely in regard to complex creatures having a *relative duration* of life within the realm of becoming."¹⁸ The production as well as the "hierarchy" of values (i.e., their situation, constantly in flux, with regard to one another, e.g., as the changing rank of art with respect to knowledge at a given time) makes sense only in relation to the originary direction of the Will to Power; the "position" of values favors, sustains, and propels movement in this direction.

As the origin of values, and the origin also of every hierarchy of values, the Will to Power fixes the value of all values. But this origin cannot be reduced to a primordial unity, to any kind of identity, because it is nothing but a direction to be determined each time. On the other hand, this origin has and gives meaning only in retrospect, namely in and through the genealogical development that issues from it, and by which it is recognized.

Nihilism

But what does the genealogical view discover when it turns toward the prevailing—the supposedly "highest"—values? It finds them in the throes of that crisis called Nihilism.

In this word, too, we can read a duality (if not a plurality) of meaning. On the one hand, it designates the contemporary situation (probably destined to last for a long time) where the "highest," i.e., the absolute, values are rendered null and void. On the other hand, the word applies to the unfolding as well as to the internal "logic" of all so-called "European" history since Plato. In this second sense, Nihilism has more historical continuity than the "decadence" marking the moments of "weakening" of the Will to Power (the Alexandrian civilization as against ancient Greece; Christianity as against imperial Rome; the Reformation as against the Renaissance). Inasmuch as Nihilism presided over the original institution of those values that are currently tottering, and inasmuch as it directs their evolution and every possible transmutation, Nihilism is in some fashion *always* present, *always* at work—before, during, and after the moment of its violent explosion. Concurring with the very humanity of man, it can rightly be called man's "normal condition" (whereupon the question might be asked whether a race of men who no longer knew nihilism would still be men). But insofar as it is the peculiar disease of contemporary man (one requiring a homeopathic remedy), Nihilism is also a "passing pathological condition."

Indeed, Nihilism is much more than *critical thought* wielded by man and his culture against beliefs, values, and ideals: it assails man and his culture as the experience and sentiment of a *critical condition* that has become brutally current. For, before crashing down with all its weight, Nihilism makes inroads as “the most alarming of all guests”¹⁹ and installs itself insidiously as a sentiment first of gloom, then of terror, in the face of the collapse of all meaning. It is the progressive consumption of everything having signification, the growing predominance of empty significations, drained to the last drop. It is the moment when we feel ourselves flowing or drifting toward ill-defined borderlands where every previous meaning, every previous sense, still subsists, but has been converted into non-sense (as in the onrush of a nightmare or as in a complete disorientation in space and time). “The wasteland is growing,” Zarathustra says. All the old meanings (whether moral, religious, or metaphysical) slip away, steal away, refuse their services: “The goals are missing.”²⁰ All sense totters, vacillates, sputtering like the few last rays of a dying sun. Nihilism, the experience of the exhaustion of meaning, amounts to a great weariness, a “great disgust,” on the part of man, and directed at him as well. Nothing is worth much anymore, everything comes down to the same thing, everything is equalized. Everything is the same and equivalent: the true and the false, the good and the bad. Everything is outdated, used up, old, dilapidated, dying: an undefined agony of meaning, an unending twilight: not a definite annihilation of significations, but their indefinite collapse.

Precisely because it is *complete* disorientation, this kind of nihilism can abruptly change in *Stimmung* (mood, tone), ceasing to be anxious *inquiétude* and changing to complacent quietude. Here we have the experience of a will satisfied with meaninglessness, with non-sense, a will happy that there is no longer any sense or any meaning to look for, a will that has found a certain comfort in the total absence of meaning and a certain happiness in the certainty that there is no answer to the question “why?” (or even “what?”). Nietzsche describes this stage as that of the “last man.”

The remark made by Zarathustra and taken up again in *The Gay Science* (Section 125) that “God is dead” summarizes the collapse of all values. For disaffection in regard to religious faith is only one sign among many indicating the bankruptcy of every ideal: not only of every ideal, but of every intelligibility, *every idea*. With God there disappears the guarantee for an intelligible world, and therewith the guarantee for all stable identities, including that of the ego. Everything returns to chaos. Nietzsche compares this event to a natural catastrophe: to a deluge, to an earthquake, but most often to an *eclipse of the sun*. The Sun of intelligibility has grown dark and the

Earth has lost its orbit, becoming a roving star that suffers the eclipse by growing dark itself. Here we have "complete nihilism," although it is neither its first nor its last form.

Initially, Nihilism is the expression of a decadent will, of impotent Will to Power recoiling from an affirmation of "life" and changing into negation. (That which is negated in and by Nihilism is what Nietzsche calls "life," i.e., the world as plurality, as becoming, as contradiction, as suffering, as illusion, as evil.) This negation of "life" and of the world proclaims that "this world is worth nothing and nothing in it is worth anything." Taking this proclamation as its point of departure, Nihilism invents a "true world," i.e., a world that possesses all the attributes that "life" does not have: unity, stability, identity, happiness, truth, goodness. Thus the division of the two worlds, the feat undertaken by Plato, constitutes the nihilistic act *par excellence*. All metaphysical values and all categories of intelligibility contain, implicitly, a will to negate, to depreciate, and to slander life. But in its first form (the Socratic and Platonic one), Nihilism remains *latent*. Negation does not show itself. Only affirmations are in evidence: the affirmation of great, supersensible values (the True, the Beautiful, the Good), and, later on, the affirmation of the great principles of logic (identity, causality, sufficient reason, etc.).

Between the larval nihilism of triumphant metaphysics and the "complete" nihilism declaring that none of the earlier constructions, nor any value, has any meaning, we encounter various forms of "incomplete nihilism." In these forms, the will for negation comes more and more into the open. Incomplete nihilism is but the decomposition of the "true world," the recurrent attempt to find replacement values to substitute for the Platonic and Christian ideals (Christianity having only "popularized" the concept of a "true world" with its idea of a "world beyond"). One noteworthy substitute, among others, is the Kantian ethic, which can no longer do more than *postulate* the other world: "Fundamentally the same old sun, but now obscured by fog and skepticism; the Idea grown sublime, pale, northerly Koenigsbergian."²¹ And, then, there are the "secular" ideals: the faith in progress, the religion of happiness-for-everybody (socialism appearing as the successor of Christianity insofar as it promises happiness on earth), the mystique of Culture or of Man. However, after killing God, i.e., after recognizing the nothingness of the "true world" and placing himself where God once was, Man continues to be haunted by his iconoclastic act. He cannot venerate himself, and soon ends up turning his impiety against himself and smashing this new idol. Among the forms of incomplete nihilism are to be found the characters that Zarathustra calls the "superior men," the "vestiges of God

on earth," those who desperately uphold an ideal the fragility of which they know all too well. They are like that "conscientious soul" who, latching onto the ideal of a perfect science, no matter how limited and ridiculous, studies but one thing, albeit very thoroughly: the brain of the leech! For this study he gives his blood and his life, and he grinds himself into the dust.

Although not yet "consummated," Nihilism is "complete" when the will to nothingness has become manifest and patent. Up to that point nothingness (i.e., the condemnation of "life" as non-being) hides behind various representations of the ideal and various fictions of the supersensible. It is on these representations and fictions that Nihilism, their proper counterpart, now expatiates. The distrust that had given rise to the "true world" turns against its own creations. The sensible having been depreciated and the supersensible ceasing to be of value, the essential metaphysical differences (Platonic, Christian, and also Kantian) between being-in-itself and appearance, between truth and illusion, end up rejected. What gets abolished is not only the "true world," whereupon we would have to re-evaluate the "appearance" that would be left over, but also the very distinction between the "simple" appearance and the idea: "With the true world we have also done away with the apparent world."²²

"Appearances," according to Nietzsche's conception of them, become the "only reality," the All: that is why the whole range of predicates associated with what used to be called appearance, "including contrary predicates," are suited to this reality. This "new" sense of appearance contains both truth and lie, both reality and fiction. It signifies at once "appearance" in the sense of paralogism (a sin against logic) and in the sense of a veracious vision of being as Chaos. Gathering within itself all contraries, it deliberately shatters the logic of identity. Appearance, thought of in this new way and transfigured by the abolition of all opposition, never comes to the point of referring to an ultimate foundation, nor to a central focus of interpretation, nor to anything "in itself": rather, it always refers to a further appearance. Everything is a mask. A mask once uncovered uncovers another mask. "Becoming" is simply the indefinite play of interpretations, an indefinite shifting of masks.

Thus, Nihilism is not overcome simply because the essential metaphysical distinctions cease to be of value. In order to transform "complete" nihilism into "consummated" nihilism (or "ecstatic" nihilism, that which precisely allows us to take leave [*ek-statis*] of the difference), it is necessary that we pass from the mere observation of the dissolution to an active, affirmative dissolution. The new affirmation includes an *act of destruction* whereby all the relations issuing

from the difference are destroyed. This unity of creation and destruction at the core of a force supremely affirmative (active nihilism) comprises a perspective that Nietzsche also calls “Dionysian”: the perspective of the joyous, pure affirmation of the unity of contraries.

It is in this latter sense—namely, as an invalidation of all metaphysical differences and as a radical abolishment of the “true world,” as a negation of the singular God (Christian representative of the world)—that “nihilism might indeed be a divine manner of thinking”:²³ delivered from the paralysis effected by the Singular, the instinct creative of Multiple gods would be re-animated. This “divine” form of Nihilism prefigures an essential transition.

Genealogy and the Former Codes

As a kind of symptomatology or semiology, the genealogical critique interprets values as so many signs (values being but a “cipher-language” to be decoded), signs of subterranean impulses or, more precisely, signs of the originary direction, whether ascendant or decadent, of these impulses. Genealogy shows at once a birth and an affiliation: it allows us to see how the initial direction prevailing in such-and-such evaluation persists through each and every derivation and transformation, no matter how distant from the origin. Like all values, the True and the Good serve as instruments, as conditions for the possibility of a Will to Power maintaining and developing itself thanks to them. Just where and how the line is to be drawn between the true and the false, the good and the bad, depends upon the kind of life that these values uphold. They have no intrinsic value at all; their entire “truth” lies in their adequacy to a particular Will to Power. “You will always have only that ethic which suits your own force,”²⁴ i.e., which will harmonize with the orientation of this force. Values that advise being prudent or taking risks are dictated by a particular type of force. In exactly the same way, the supposedly immutable principles of logic, as well as the discoveries of science, serve as a support, as a base of operations for a determinate type of humanity. “The force of the various modes of knowledge does not lie in their degrees of truth, but ... in their character as conditions of life.”²⁵

Thus, Nietzsche strives to demonstrate, by the genealogical method, that science (and knowledge in general), contrary to its own pretensions, is not at all disinterested, but rather is supremely “interested.”

There is no “immaculate knowledge,” says a chapter of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (II, “On Immaculate Perception”). And Nietzsche

attacks the myth of a “pure” objective knowledge that could hover over reality without being implicated in it, that could, without prejudice or point of view, be the faithful mirror of reality. The illusion peculiar to knowledge, i.e., the illusion of objectivity, consists in imagining that it is possible to penetrate the essence of things, right down to its innermost recesses, while merely reflecting it. However, knowledge is essentially active even when it takes itself to be passive, it is essentially solar even though it takes itself to be lunar (i.e., revolving around reality and borrowing from it what little cold light it possesses). All knowledge thus comes down to *belief* and *conquest*.

Knowledge is *belief*, inasmuch as truths (including the principles and categories of logic) do not correspond to any “In-itself” of things, are not adequate to “objects” but rather to the Will to Power. We are forced to believe in a logic in order to bring things under our control. To “deduce” logic from the Will to Power means to relate it to needs and desires: the desire for stability introducing simplicity, order, identity; the need for prediction inventing the categories of causality and finality, which in turn make possible various systems of repetition and the consequent foreseeable character of phenomena. Logic rests upon a useful and necessary falsification, born of the vital need to lean upon identities despite the fact that nothing real is reducible either to unity or to identity. Therefore, “truth is that kind of error without which a certain kind of living being cannot live.”²⁶ But truth is, in addition, “*falsification of the False*,” for the “In-itself,” namely “pure becoming,” presents itself to us as Chaos, i.e., as non-(logical)-truth, eternal and infinite.

Knowledge is also *conquest*, inasmuch as it is imperative by nature, inasmuch as it imposes laws upon Chaos, inasmuch as it is an assimilating activity. Knowledge behaves like a despot because it never ceases to suppress, to simplify, to equalize. Like ethics, logic springs from a will to reduce all phenomena to “identical cases.” While feigning objectivity, the enterprise of knowing schematizes and creates a fictitious coherence, as it appropriates with inexhaustible voracity everything strange to or other than it, with the sole view of mastering it. But that is not all: the schematizing and assimilating activity of knowledge is not even the work of consciousness. This activity emerges at the level of the body, and from there passes on to the conscious level. Knowing and judging are simply matters of recognizing a particular schema of assimilation that happens to be available because it is already traced out by the body, i.e., by the Will to Power.

The destruction of logic by means of its genealogy brings along with it the ruin of the psychological categories founded upon this

logic. All psychological categories (the ego, the individual, the person) derive from the illusion of *substantial identity*. But this illusion goes back basically to a superstition that deceives not only common sense but also philosophers, and is in keeping with the belief in language and, more precisely, in the truth of grammatical categories. It is grammar (the structure of subject and predicate) that inspires Descartes' certainty that "I" is the subject of "think," to which Nietzsche objects that it is thoughts that come to "me": at bottom, faith in grammar simply conveys the will to be the "cause" of one's thoughts. The subject, the self, the individual are just so many false concepts, since they transform fictitious unities that have at the start only a linguistic reality into substances. Moreover, the "self," once brought into relation with the Will to Power, proves to be a simple illusion of perspective insofar as it is posited as an underlying unity, permanent center, source of decision. Rather, the "self" and the individual are fictions concealing a complexity, a plurality of forces in conflict. Conscious and personal identity, aside from being but a "grammatical habit," hides the original and fundamental plurality constituting the Will to Power in bodily form. "We are a plurality that has imagined itself a unity,"²⁷ a multiplicity of impulses that have provided themselves with an arbitrarily coherent and substantial center. The actual "functioning" of the Will to Power comes into clearest view with regard to the body, originally understood as a multiplicity, yet ascribing a unity to itself. To philosophize by taking the body as the "abiding clue" amounts to revealing the "self" as an instrument, an expression, an interpreter of the body. It also amounts to revealing the body (in opposition to our petty faculty of reasoning, where only surface "causes" make their appearance) as the "great reason," i.e., as the totality of deeply buried causes in their mobile and contradictory diversity. Philosophy has never ceased showing disdain for the body; it has not wished to recognize that it is the body that whispers thoughts to the "soul," and that consciousness is only a superficial and terminal phenomenon. Psychology has always idolized superficial unities for fear of facing the unsettling multiplicity at the depths of being.

Our logical and psychological categories derive their falsehood precisely from this "will to find out the truth," i.e., what is fixed, stable, identical, and noncontradictory. But by devaluing contradiction, we bring into evidence a *moral prejudice* at the very basis of knowledge. This prejudice can be summed up as follows: what is always stable, always identical, is not only True, but also *Good*, and in a twofold way: knowledge claims to bring salvation and is itself haunted by an ideal of ethical honesty. It is as shameful to deceive as it is to be

deceived, and the true has more *ethical* value than the false. If the will to know the true is the will to be good and to be saved, this will is, then, a way of negating "life."

Indeed, if the logically true takes shape in the course of searching out identity at all costs and rejecting the contradictory character of life, the will to truth is associated with a nihilistic Will to Power, or, put more bluntly, with a covert will to die, a covert deathwish. All knowledge is motivated by this ascetic will, this will to self-destruction that turns out to be the supreme form of ethics. There is in all knowledge an aspiration to place oneself definitively beyond all contradiction, which Nietzsche construes as placing oneself within nothingness.

Thus, any genealogy, whether it be of logic, science, psychology, or anything else, comes down to a genealogy of morals, since the ethical ideal is the archetype and source of every ideal, and especially of truth. Things are true or false only inasmuch as they are good or evil. The ideal of knowledge turns out to be but a special and derived case of the general ideal: "The need to know what *should* be gave rise to the need to know what *is*."²⁸ The genealogy of morals is more radical and poses the question about the *meaning* of the Ideal, i.e., about the originary direction of that Will to Power to which such an invention corresponds and renders service. While at the same time detailing and unveiling the process by which the Ideal is fabricated, genealogy reveals moral consciousness as a formation issuing from a long development and assuming varying degrees.

From a genealogical point of view, it appears that ethical systems can only be defined univocally, in purely negative and pejorative terms: moral consciousness and its ideals are analyzed and unmasked as inventions of "ressentiment." But what does resentment mean if not hatred, condemnation, depreciation of "life"? In other words, ethical systems derive from a weak and impotent Will to Power reacting against the most affirmative impulses and favoring negation and destruction. Resentment is, as Nietzsche most generally defines it, the instinct of negating life, "the instinct of decadence." Since every value expresses the point of view necessary for the maintenance and growth of certain beings and for a certain period of time, and since every value also serves as a condition of existence, an ethical system, itself a sign of sickness, constitutes at the same time a remedy, or rather an attempted recovery. It serves the purpose of a defensive wall, of a systematic protection against the unrelenting impulses of sex, egoism (every ethic being a disdain for the self, a rejection of the self (*Entselbstung*)), aggression, cruelty, etc. Since these impulses cannot be taken up and expressed as such, they are kept at a distance, or,

if at all possible, extirpated (morality playing, for Nietzsche, the role of an instrument of castration) by assigning to them their specific nature: the embodiment of Evil and of immorality. Their "immoral" nature amounts to a projection of the fear they arouse.

But why can't these impulses be expressed? Two obstacles, one internal and the other external, stand in the way. 1. On the one hand, these impulses are *already* weakened, degenerate, and sickly, in such a way that they cannot in any case find a satisfactory outlet (witness the case of Socrates, who distrusts instincts simply because his own are decadent). This internal obstacle is by far the more complex of the two, for it arises from an ambivalence: although the decadent type is characterized by an unprecedented decay as far as his instincts go (Socrates: the "amystical" creature *par excellence*, monstrously insensitive to art and to music), and by a hypertrophy of his reasoning and conscious faculties, he is also one who feels that he is "capable of every evil" and always on the brink of brutally expressing his desires and erupting into all sorts of bestiality. The decadent man feels within himself the terrifying proximity of animality, which is poorly constrained by a frail film of civilization, of civility and good manners, and is on the verge of breaking out. "Instincts want to play the tyrant: it is *necessary* to invent a *counter-tyrant* that is stronger yet."²⁹ The Socratic ethic (virtue is knowledge, the only sin is ignorance, a virtuous man is a happy man) represents this counter-tyranny; it is the ultimate and obligatory recourse in the face of instincts that are at once weakened and yet also threaten at any moment to boil over into anarchy. 2. On the other hand, the external obstacle consists of the repressive external organization (society, in essence) that prevents these impulses expressing themselves.

The development of man's "interiorizing process" and the birth of his ethical consciousness takes its foothold and beginning from the impotence of the instincts, their powerlessness to find a way of expressing themselves outwardly, and the resultant turn inward. However, precisely in the figure of his adversary Plato (Plato the man rather than Plato the philosopher) Nietzsche envisages still a third possibility to account for the origin of the reactive (ascetic) ethic: there are indeed people in whom the overabundance of life and sensuality is such that asceticism, in them, redoubles their strength by giving them a victory in the face of an obstacle that they set for themselves for the sole pleasure of proving themselves triumphant over it. In this sense, we might say that Plato was an extremely sensuous man who happened to be "enamored with his own contrary." But this explanation holds neither for Platonism nor for Christianity.

Whatever the case may be, the illusion peculiar to any ethic lies in its erecting into a universal rule, into an *imperative*, that which is

only a *constraint*, i.e., a need, an imperious condition of existence.

Meanwhile, and at the same time, the genealogical method reveals the ambivalence and the duplicity of the concept of "morality." For even if it is ordinarily a function of a weak and reactive Will to Power, it can also arise from the values willed by a strong and active will. In addition, the *highest* point of view of the affirmative Will to Power necessarily is reached beyond good and evil, since the very distinction of good and evil itself is the work of weakness. To the affirmative Will to Power, the strong and the weak appear equally moral and equally immoral. Immorality finds itself assessed from two different angles. Unilateral morality is thereby dissolved. As Nietzsche says in *The Genealogy of Morals*, the concept "good" has no one meaning.³⁰ There are neither "virtues" nor "vices" that could not be taken in at least two diametrically opposed ways. Just as there is a lowly and vile prudence of the weak, so there is a noble and proud prudence of the strong; a cowardly and weak cruelty as well as courageous and strong cruelty; a pessimism that is a symptom of exhaustion and decomposition as well as a pessimism that manifests a superabundance of energy, that constitutes a kind of luxury of strength. The need for destruction and change can be the expression just as much of an exuberant and overflowing strength as of a hatred and malcontent in the face of what is. In the same way, the need for stabilizing, fixing, and "eternalizing" can come as much from generosity and happiness as from rancor and a morbid desire to perpetuate suffering and unhappiness. In the same culture, the "good" man can mean "he who is courteous and nice," but also "he who longs for battle and victory." Thus, the genealogical point of view brings to light a *typology of antithetical morals*: the initial fundamental opposition between "strong" and "weak" reappears in the gregarious type (passive, defensive, vulgar) and the solitary type (active, aggressive, noble). The profound insight of Nietzsche is that this antagonism is necessary and *not to be overcome*: "The moral instinct consists in constructing types; for that it needs antagonistic values."

Of course, Nietzsche's analysis does not preclude a multiplicity of degrees and intermediary stages, even mixed types. However, the antagonism of the two types must be thought of not as a conflict that brings them into mutual relations and attaches them to each other, but as a mutual separation that detaches and distinguishes them from each other. A caesura, a fault, keeps the two apart. The Hegelian opposition of master and slave is a dialectic, a reciprocity of relations. Nietzsche's opposition is based upon a rupture, a cleavage within humanity. Nietzsche does not want the moat between them to be filled in. He rather wants to underscore what he calls the "pathos of distance." The antagonism must be further aggravated, pushed as

far as possible, to bring out the two irreversible propensities leading, on the one hand, to making gregarious, to leveling, to uniformity, and, on the other hand, to the formation of higher men, exceptional men, "great solitary figures."

At first, the antithesis was present not only in the opposition between the "noble" as self-affirmation and the "vile" as self-negation, but also in the opposition between Dionysian tragedy (affirmation, even of suffering) and Christian theory (negation, even of happiness). It was then repeated in the modern opposition between the classical type (capable of mastering all contradictions) and the romantic type (expressing the weakness of instinct). Finally, it is bound to recur in the future (at the other extreme) in the ultimate opposition between the "last man," the complete nihilist, and the Overman.

But, to come to the point, why and how did the weak man, the man of resentment, come to be exclusively identified with the moral man? From whence derives this prolonged immobilization of the Good exclusively on one side, this "hemiplegia of virtue," as Nietzsche calls it?

By inventing moral inwardness (from which stem the ideas of doing wrong and being justified, of being in debt and having responsibilities) the weak man has "triumphed" over the strong, happy man who affirms himself in his individuality apart from obligations and without need for approval. Once moral inwardness was discovered, the strong man was bound to doubt the legitimacy of his actions. Ever since Socrates, the Good has not taken care of itself; instinctive action has become suspect; only that action is good which can give answers before the inner court. The logical and disinterested appearance of Socratic dialectic is now unmasked: it is the "weapon" of the weak man who seeks to unsettle whatever is affirmative without daring or being able to engage in mortal combat with it. For the man of resentment, the "slave," never enters into a truly reciprocal relationship with the man of strength, the "master"; rather, he receives his only definition as the one who rejects the ethic of the "master." It is clear enough that, for Nietzsche, the "master" (and such are the Overmen, the future "Masters of the Earth") is not the master of the slave, but the master of himself, his acts, and, above all, his "inward chaos." The master is the individual who gives himself his own law, and whose ethic is built on pure self-affirmation. The master is the one who is *different*: "My ethic would be to deprive man more and more of his universal character and to specialize him, to make him to a certain extent unintelligible to others." Here is the ethical principle of the master: "That which is good for me is good in itself." By contrast, the man of resentment rejects every form of affirmation, of joy, of happiness. He bears a grudge against life. Nothing is good enough for him.