

BABETTE E. BABICH

NIETZSCHE'S IMPERATIVE AS A FRIEND'S ENCOMIUM:  
ON BECOMING THE ONE YOU ARE, ETHICS, AND BLESSING

*Es zeigt sich mit einem goldenen Tage  
Und die Vollkommenheit ist ohne Klage.  
Hölderlin: Der Herbst*

*In Memoriam Ivan Illich (1926–2002)*

*Among Friends: Between the Imperative and the Encomium*

Nietzsche's imperative call, *Werde, der Du bist – Become the one you are* – is, to say the least, an odd sort of imperative: dissonant and yet intrinsically inspiring. Thus Alexander Nehamas in an essay on this very theme names it the “most haunting of Nietzsche's haunting aphorisms.”<sup>1</sup> Expressed as it is in *The Gay Science*, “*Du sollst der werden, der du bist*” (GS 270, KSA 3, p. 519) – *Thou shalt – you ought to – you should – become the one you are* –, such a command opposes the strictures of Kant's practical imperatives, offering an assertion that seems to encourage us as what we are. As David B. Allison stresses in his book, Nietzsche's is a voice that addresses us as a friend would: “like a friend who seems to share your every concern – and your aversions and suspicions as well. Like a true friend, he rarely tells you what you ought to do.”<sup>2</sup>

But Nietzsche here does tell us what we ought to do, if the coincident or already achieved paradox of his imperative keeps the tone of the command intimate. It is an inside piece of advice perfectly consonant with Allison's point: Nietzsche takes us as we are. Yet taking his readers as his allies, as so many of his aphorisms seem to place us squarely on his own side, author and reader against the world – why doesn't he simply come out and express this amiable loyalty to us, his readers, in some less ambiguous and more affirmative fashion? Be just as you are! Perfection!

Ordinary, garden-variety, ethical or moral or practical imperatives urge us to alter our lives not to become what we (already) are but as ideal possibilities, contrary to immediate circumstances or fact, the idea is to *become what we are not*

---

<sup>1</sup> Nehamas, Alexander: How One Becomes What One Is. In: *The Philosophical Review* XCII, No. 3 (July 1983), pp. 385–417, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> Allison, David B.: *Reading the New Nietzsche*. Lanham, MD 2001, p. vii.

(as yet). Alternatively, practical imperatives can be exactly impracticable: conservative imperatives contrary not merely to fact, but possibility. These conservative imperatives reflect the vulnerability of perfection at the edge of its own destruction. Stay what you are, hold fast to what cannot be kept, the poet cries, from Horatian antiquity to the Keatsian present. Resist becoming and never change!

Both ethical and conservative imperatives are temporally tied to the moment, opposing the future in different ways. In the ethical, the future is the locus of perfect possibility: the moment is imperfect but perfectible. In the conservationist imperative, only the moment is perfect and the imperative commands that it be frozen against the depredations of the future as the depredations of change. The ordinary practical imperative is progressive and it assumes a present that can be corrected by action toward some still to be attained future. Becoming is a word for progressive mediation towards an unattained goal. The conservative imperative seeks to imprint the moment as a seal upon eternity. In the first case, becoming is a *mutable* danger; in the latter case, becoming is the *greatest* danger.

But Nietzsche's imperative "You should become what you are" [*Du sollst der werden, der du bist*] is neither of these temporal perspectives. Even where he writes "Be yourself" [*sei du selbst*] in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he immediately outlines a tension with the present moment: "you are not really all that which you do, think and desire now." Here the existentialist modality (being in the mode of not being, not being in that of being) is plain and what is key is the call to become. Such a call to *become* the one you are, however, seems more than a little redundant or reduplicative. Why ought you become what you already are? Why should anyone bother? And, indeed, the comforting beauty of Nietzsche's imperative is that you already are what you are. Your only task would thus be: simply to be what you *already* are, what you have *already* become. Nietzsche takes this same futural becoming as a consummate return to the present as the watchword for his own life. This is the heart of the message of *amor fati* in the epigraph affixed to *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche's auto-bibliography, specifically expressed in the subtitle's practical reflection: *Ecce homo: How One Becomes What One Is*.

*Become the One You Are: Philology and Philosophy Between Nietzsche and Pindar*

Scholars read Nietzsche's aphoristic injunction as a mistranslation *qua* incomplete rendering of Pindar (518–438 BC), the archaic Greek lyric poet.<sup>3</sup> And to be sure, Nietzsche's imperative follows Pindar's Second Pythian Ode (72)

---

<sup>3</sup> Pindar's verse itself is situated towards the end of the Ode in its entirety, a locus that and on more than one reading, may be regarded as the point of departure for an appendix interior to the poem, the first line of the so-called Kastor song: an uncommissioned, gratis postlude.

“Γένοι’ οἷος ἐσσί μαθών”<sup>4</sup> – a poetic verse famously troublesome even in ordinary, non-Nietzschean translation. Nietzsche’s imperative, however, is not a translation but an invocation or allusion. Hence, it is not accurate to claim that Nietzsche simply “forgets” to include μαθών, Pindar’s word for measure or learning in the context of becoming what one is.<sup>5</sup> We shall see that in the tradition of German translation of Greek texts, Nietzsche’s elision does more to retain the concept of measure than most renderings have done. If Nietzsche’s allusion to Pindar urgently requires commentary, it is difficult to come by, testifying to the perdurant perplexity of things assumed to be well known.<sup>6</sup>

Although Pindar’s verse is difficult to translate, there is hardly a shortage of standard and standardizing translations: “Become such as you are, having learned what that is” – as we read in William H. Race’s 1997 translation in the new Loeb edition of Pindar, shaving five words from Sandys’ earlier version: “Be true to thyself now that thou hast learnt what manner of man thou art.”<sup>7</sup> More colloquial translations give us: “Be what you know you are.”<sup>8</sup>

Extended readings are careful to highlight the didactic tradition eminent in so much of Pindar and especially in this locus. This context is important and deserves review. On R. W. Burton’s account, first offered almost fifty years ago,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pindar. It should be noted that while quietly resolving many of the philosophical debates that grew up in the wake of Nehamas, Alexander: Nietzsche. Life as Literature. Cambridge 1985, as well as a few incidental ones for good measure, Nehamas also offers a finely lapidary rendering of Pindar in Nehamas, Alexander: The Art of Living. Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault. Berkeley 1998, p. 128: “Having learned, become who you are.”

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Rosen and several others have supposed such an oversight on Nietzsche’s part. A second, more recalcitrant problem would concern the rendering of γένοιτο as *become* – and because the referent is in dispute this latter problem has to be shared with the philosophers but that is not a problem in the current context because allusion does not work as an invocation or as a cited text and because such allusion must be read not merely as giving license for free variation but within the context of the German tradition of translation as we shall see below.

<sup>6</sup> Hence Michael Theunissen, who recently authored an extraordinary study of Pindar and time, nevertheless deliberately sidesteps – in a book of 989 pages – a discussion of these same words from Pindar, an omission flagged with a footnote implying that his decision opted to deflect an entire history (not of Pindar’s poetry) centered around this one, detached phrase, and at more than one contextual remove. Theunissen, Michael: Pindar. Menschenlos und Wende der Zeit. München 2000, p. 12, note 13. For his part, Theunissen contends that his reading is in opposition to those scholars, from Löwith to Heidegger but more precisely in the wake of recent French influence in Germany, who have read the imperative *as if* from Pindar – and not less (in the specific wake of Foucault) *as if* from Nietzsche – as a command to realize one’s ownmost, fullest potentiality for the self (if not, of course, for being): expressed in literary terms as the art of living, the art of life itself.

<sup>7</sup> Pindar: Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes. Ed. and trans. William H. Race. Cambridge, Mass. 1997. J. E. Sandys’ earlier Loeb translation, originating in 1915, and reprinted in 1978, although less pithy than Race’s version, does capture the complexity of Pindar’s language as we shall consider it below.

<sup>8</sup> Archaic Greek Poetry. An Anthology. Selected and trans. Barbara Fowler. Madison 1992, p. 279.

the verse in the ode in question serves as a further or supplemental encomium directed to Hieron, the champion mule charioteer, the very epitomization of a “Dorian aristocrat.” The encomium follows from the idea of what it is to be such a noble: “The poet holds up to Hieron a mirror in which he may look and know himself, urging him to be what he is, one of the ἄνδρες ἀγαθοί.”<sup>9</sup> The point in question serves as a chiding reference to the “proverbially wise” judgment of Rhadamanthus, claiming it as the counter-to-the-ideal horn of an imperative’s yoke: “the king [Hieron] [...] has for the moment fallen short of the ideal of wisdom.” In this way Pindar’s imperative becomes an exactly counterfactual plea, urging Hieron to live up to his own better potential.<sup>10</sup> “Colloquially then, Γένου’ οἷος ἐσσί μαθῶν could be translated ‘be your age.’”<sup>11</sup> For Burton, this didactic ethos keeps the tension of the imperative plain.

More fluidly (more ambivalently open to Nietzsche’s rendering), Nehamas has rendered it, “Having learned, become who you are.” In the context of such translations, we ask: what is the point of Nietzsche’s obvious elision in his recollective allusion to Pindar’s imperative word? Why would Nietzsche – of all authors – choose not to declare the contrasting reference which would make the implicit project to be heard in the “not yet” that serves as the unspoken (and unneeded) anacoluthon – become the one you are [not yet] – the one you can be – *in potentia*. Becoming, after all, is all about possibility, why did Nietzsche who knew more than a little Greek and more than a little bit about didactic rhetoric and its possibilities, not add the edge of poised promise: and, by so doing, hold and maintain the guideline of “learning” first and foremost? Would not a complete citation of Pindar have served Nietzsche’s own imperative better than such a paradoxical allusion?

Due to such disputes regarding precision and comprehension, an effort to re-trace the Pindarian origins of Nietzsche’s imperative threatens more confusion than clarity concerning Nietzsche’s formulation of the same imperative.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Burton, R. W. B.: Pindar’s Pythian Odes. Essays in Interpretation. Oxford 1962, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> Burton’s point is to emphasize the ambiguity of reading the supposed Castor song as a “free offering, and uncommissioned ode,” or “merchandise ordered by the king.” Most for his part makes much of the “expensive” quality of Pindar’s poems, exactly corresponding to Burton’s emphasis on Pindar’s own expression: “like Phoenician merchandise” (ibid., p. 122).

<sup>11</sup> Burton is careful, after following his own excursus justifying the line as beginning a didactic supplement, to note that Pindar’s maxim requires still further reflection. Thus he claims (as against yet another translation option, “discover and live up to your values” which Burton hears as closer to Polonius and Laertes and in which we can hear the late Allan Bloom and Michel Foucault), “it is safer to suppose that the words mean, quite literally, ‘be what you are having learnt what you are’” (ibid., p. 125).

<sup>12</sup> Porter, James I.: The Invention of Dionysus. An Essay on Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*. Stanford 2000, is quite plain. Speaking as a classicist, Porter reads (and recoils from) the contradictions of Nietzsche’s thought as irremediably damned by way of Nietzsche’s reading of Kant, Lange, and Schopenhauer, and his critical reception of all three, but most lamentably Lange. As the most likely way through the skein of contradictions and inconsistencies in Nietzsche, Porter takes the oldest option, deployed a century earlier (and still going strong). Thus Porter says that

Still more confounding, standard readings have long since rendered the point a moot one. The thoroughly received perspective on this matter has assembled good textual grounds for the claim that Nietzsche mis-takes and accordingly misrepresents Pindar.

The trouble with – despite the undeniable fun of – finding Nietzsche mistaken, as the great and enduring trouble with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (see Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's 1872 critique,<sup>13</sup> and see too its Lacan-revived reprise in James I. Porter's two new books),<sup>14</sup> is the problem of scholarship (what Nietzsche literally enough named the problem of *science – Wissenschaft*)<sup>15</sup> as Nietzsche challenged the scholar's ideal throughout a scholar's lifetime of scholarly disenfranchisement: “Zarathustra is no scholar” – Nietzsche declares and mocks the sheepish source and accuracy of such a judgment, “A sheep came and ate the ivy off my head as I slept.” Nietzsche's scholarly problem is not unrelated to the problem of the supposed correctness or accuracy of Heidegger's etymologies (Heidegger's Greek is not the Greek of the classicists – for good or for ill – just as Heidegger's German is not the German of the linguists), or Heidegger's attribution of the ownership of a pair of shoes famously painted by Van Gogh (and which many regard as the center of “The Origin of the Work of Art”) to a farmer woman and her life on the earth, rather

---

Nietzsche isn't a philosopher at all (“I would say that Nietzsche has no philosophy in the proper senses of ‘having’ or ‘philosophy’”, *ibid.*, p. 4). Porter claims this assessment as conclusive, without, as he admits, arguing for it, on the self-satisfied analytic perspective that Nietzsche's work is contradictory or inconsistent, as indeed others have argued, from John Wilcox to Maudemarie Clark, to Christoph Cox, etc. Strangely, although Porter reads German his study is oddly innocent of German scholarship on Nietzsche *as* philosopher, so that in addition to Hans Vaihinger and Josef Simon, both of whom Porter might read with profit, one recommends Müller-Lauter, Wolfgang: Nietzsche. Seine Philosophie der Gegensätze und die Gegensätze seiner Philosophie. Berlin, New York 1971. It is hoped that the recent translation by the late David Parent (Müller-Lauter, Wolfgang: Nietzsche's Philosophy of Contradiction and the Contradiction of His Philosophy. Bloomington: Ill. 1999) will remedy this deficiency in future reflections of this kind.

<sup>13</sup> Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ulrich von: Zukunfts-Philologie!. In: Der Streit um Nietzsches “Geburt der Tragödie”. Ed. Karlfried Gründer. Hildesheim 1989, for an English translation by G. Pöstel/B. Babich/H. Schmid, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ulrich von: Future Philology. In: New Nietzsche Studies 4:1/2 (2000), pp. 1–32.

<sup>14</sup> Porter, James I.: Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future. Stanford 2001, is more measured and reflectively provocative than his *The Invention of Dionysus*, but likewise denounces Nietzsche's philosophy, along with his inaccuracies by the standards of current philology. See citation and comments, note 12 above.

<sup>15</sup> See my discussion of the distinction between the English use of the term science and Nietzsche's *Wissenschaft* in Babich, Babette E.: Nietzsche's Critique of Scientific Reason and scientific Culture. On “Science as a Problem” and “Chaos as Nature”. In: Moore, Gregory M./Brobjer, Thomas (eds.): Nietzsche and Science. Aldershot 2003. See also my discussion of the difference such a reflection on Nietzsche's understanding of science inevitably makes for any approach to Nietzsche's philosophy of science as such: Babich, Babette E.: Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science. Reflecting Science on the Grounds of Art and Life. Albany 1994.

than, and by contrast with, the art-historical correctness of ascribing ownership as Meyer Schapiro had done to no one but the painter himself.<sup>16</sup>

Attacking the academic accuracy of such readings is already to substitute another perspective and another problem in the place of the original problem. Thus literalist and supposedly empiricist objections abandon the original paradox with which they begin. One notes that Nietzsche's imperative does not translate Pindar's poetic injunction. Such an assertion claims no more than access to a dictionary: it ignores the larger question of obscurity in Pindar's poetry, it does not raise the critical question of what it means for a translation to be accurate or true, nor indeed does it raise the question of the relevance of these two questions (i. e., the poetic meaning of Pindar's word and the truth of translation), the one for the other. One assumes that Nietzsche's phrase is a purported translation of the ordinary kind, like the variety noted above, and finds Nietzsche insufficient as such. Yet the problem of the meaning of Nietzsche's strange command, now further burdened with the reproof of error or untruth, remains as unilluminated as ever. Typical in analytically styled approaches to philosophy and particularly to reading Nietzsche, it is implied that there is a path of reading Nietzsche that would/could avoid error,<sup>17</sup> a path that avoids untruth which same path Nietzsche himself, we are given to believe, could have, or better, *ought* to have followed. It is no accident that this is the logically frozen, Parmenidean cum Platonic-Christian path of Western self-confidence.

Ergo, Glenn Most's tactical construction<sup>18</sup> of an emphatically straightforward reading of Pindar (opposing Pindar's ordinarily attested obscurity), by way of an elegant categorizing move engendering (inventing) dual, co-incidentally overlapping, traditions of antique reception, admits the routine conviction concerning Pindar's obscurity, in order to stipulate a tradition of non-obscurity with an array of non-attestations, i. e., notices that do not claim obscurity *per se* (silence here permits us to presume the perspicacity of the unremarked upon). In the

---

<sup>16</sup> Thus and very influentially, the art-historian Meyer Schapiro meant to dispense with the post-aesthetic implications of Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* by pointing out that the peasant shoes Heidegger claims that Van Gogh depicted in his paintings of such shoes were bought and paid for by Van Gogh himself and ergo, following two-bit but manifestly efficacious logic, could not have been a farmer's shoes [!]. See for a discussion, Babich, Babette E.: From Van Gogh's Museum to the temple at Bassae: Heidegger's Truth of Art and Schapiro's Art History. Towards an Ecological Aesthetics. In: Culture, Theory, and Critique 2003; an earlier version appears as Babich, Babette E.: Heidegger's Truth of Art and the Question of Aesthetics. In Babich, Babette E. (ed.): Hermeneutic Philosophy of Science, Van Gogh's Eyes, and God. Essays in Honor of Patrick A. Heelan, S. J. Dordrecht 2002, pp. 265–268.

<sup>17</sup> Or, as in the accounts of interpreting Pindar offered by Most, Glenn W.: The Measures of Praise. Structure and Function in Pindar's Second Pythian and Seventh Nemean Odes. Göttingen 1985, and Stanley Rosen, and endorsed in Porter's *The Invention of Dionysos* but not echoed in his *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*.

<sup>18</sup> Most: The Measures of Praise, loc. cit.

in-between of this now twofold tradition, Most is able to install a claim to a formally founded assertion regarding the “tradition” of Pindar the perfectly clear.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the schematic appeal of laying out a complex structure to stand in the place of the poem itself, thus removing the poem's complexity in good linguistic (and these days, save for Lacan, nearly outmoded structuralist) fashion to the (Mostian) armature of the poem, i. e., “neat” as the achievement is, it does not, at the beginning, middle, or end of the day, render Pindar's meaning transparent or plain. The ever difficult task of reading begins with the task of attending to what Pindar means. And in Nietzsche's case, the focus of reflection requires that we read Nietzsche's imperative and its own further significance for his own reflection on the concept of temporal being or becoming.<sup>20</sup>

*Wie du anfiengst*: Nietzsche, Hölderlin, and the German Tradition of Translation

Here it is helpful to situate Nietzsche's reading of Pindar with reference to Nietzsche's reception or response to Hölderlin, another poet likewise influenced by Pindar and the whole of antiquity, a poet who in turn sought to capture Pindar's style – the variously unified, that is, Pindar's celebrated ποικιλία<sup>21</sup> – which Hölderlin finds to exemplify the passage he cites (and notoriously misrenders) from Heraclitus as “the one differentiated in itself” [ἐν διαφορεὸν ἑαυτῷ – *das Eine in sich selbst unterschiedene*].<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 11–13. See, for the compositional schema itself: pp. 69–70

<sup>20</sup> I am unable to address Theunissen's voluminous study of Pindar, although it is a book concerned with Pindar and the nature of time, transition, and transcendence and hence patently relevant here, for the decisive reason that Theunissen manages his own study without a discussion of the phrase that links Nietzsche and Pindar – a phrase one might have thought quintessentially philosophical and as exactly relevant to the question of time. Although I know Theunissen's reasons for excluding discussion are valid in his own context, and address a much more oblique tradition of the reception of antiquity, I regret the omission.

<sup>21</sup> See Race's introductory comments on his translation of Pindar: *Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes*, loc. cit., p. 26 ff. See further, Race, William H.: *Negative Expression and Pindaric ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ*. In: *Style and Rhetoric in Pindar's Odes*. Atlanta 1990 (= American Philological Association. *Classical Studies* 24).

<sup>22</sup> Hölderlin writes “das große Wort, das ἐν διαφορεὸν ἑαυτῷ (das Eine in sich selbst unterschiedene) des Heraklit – das konnte nur ein Grieche finden, denn es ist das Wesen der Schönheit, und ehe das gefunden war, gabs keine Philosophie.” Hölderlin, Friedrich: *Hyperion*. In: *Sämtliche Werke. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*. Ed. Friedrich Beißner et al. Stuttgart 1943–85. Vol. 3, p. 81. Elsewhere I argue that Nietzsche's reading of Pindar is from the start filtered through a simultaneous engagement with Hölderlin. See Babich, Babette E.: *Between Hölderlin and Heidegger: Nietzsche's Transfiguration of Philosophy*. In: *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000), pp. 267–301. For a discussion of Hölderlin and Heidegger with specific reference to Pindar, see Theunissen: *Pindar*, loc. cit., pp. 944 ff.

Hölderlin's "mis-rendering" of Heraclitus and his reference to Pindar's style is important as it characterizes an intriguing dimension in the question of translation. Nietzsche's allusion to Pindar should thus be seen within the context of a pre-existing tradition of German translation of classical and other languages, particularly Greek. In Charlie Louth's characterizing expression, this was a tradition of "calculated misprision."<sup>23</sup> In this context, Louth's study of Hölderlin importantly comprises a detailed study of the German tradition of Greek translation from Johann Heinrich Voss (whose decisive translation of both Pindar and Homer is key in this tradition) onward. It is a tradition that finds a full poetic articulation in Hölderlin and the same tradition plainly continues in reflective poetic reception, on the relationship between language and poetry, language and thought, in the Nietzsche who reflected on the translation of such things as rhythm from language to language<sup>24</sup> and the Heidegger who claims that every translation is always/already an interpretation<sup>25</sup> and in connection with Hölderlin's poetry and the meaning of *δαιμόν* writes, "Tell me what you think of translation and I will tell you who you are."<sup>26</sup> Here Heidegger is concerned to emphasize that "Genuine translation is always an encounter [*Auseinandersetzung*] and thus has its own possibilities and limits."<sup>27</sup>

Louth's study of the traditional context of translation reminds us that translation is key to the literary tradition that is the written German language.<sup>28</sup> In this context, we recall Wilhelm von Humboldt's reflection on translation, reminiscent of – and fairly contemporary with – Hölderlin's expression in his more famous letter to Böhlendorff on proximate (native) sobriety and foreign fire.

<sup>23</sup> See for a very informative discussion, Louth, Charlie: *Hölderlin and the Dynamics of Translation*. Oxford 1998, p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> BGE 28, KSA 5, p. 46–47.

<sup>25</sup> Here Heidegger writes "*aber schon*" – however, yet, "already" interpretation. "Jede Übersetzung ist aber schon Auslegung." Heidegger, Martin: *Was heisst Denken*. Tübingen 1971, p. 107. It is important to add that the point of Heidegger's own reflections in this text concerns the transformation of thought effected via language and the difference that different languages make for thinking philosophy. Thus one can read Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* but one can also read his *Die Frage nach der Technik* for a reflection on the change that is made in thinking from its beginning in Greek to its conceptual transformation not only into the theological context of school philosophy but also into the Roman language. The work of translation decides the reading of the text not only in the target language, just as a given reading of the original inevitably guides the interpretive task of translation.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, Martin: *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"*. In: *Gesamtausgabe*. Vol. 53. Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Tracing the "Dynamics of Translation," Louth contends that reflection on the substance of and traditional practice of translation is critical in the case of authors like Hölderlin (and Nietzsche and Heidegger) because from the very start, with Luther, "*the book which established written German is a translation.*" Louth: *Hölderlin and the Dynamics of Translation*, loc. cit., p. 8. Emphasis added.

Reflecting upon the same appropriate/appropriative relation between one's own and the foreign, von Humboldt muses that "every translator will always come to grief on one of these two rocks: either to the detriment of national taste and language, sticking too closely to the original, or to detriment of the original keeping too close to the peculiarity of his nation."<sup>29</sup> An exactly extreme (this is Voss's legacy to Hölderlin, and thence to Nietzsche and so on) preoccupation with translation characterizes German thinking from its inception as writing. We overlook this tradition, its Hölderlinian turn and express context, at the risk of failing to see what Nietzsche's sparsely framed, parsing of Pindar in a friendly (if also, as we see now, all-too-German context), can gain for us precisely as seekers or lovers of knowledge.

Key in the context of Nietzsche's encomium or imperative word to us, *Become the one you are*, is Nietzsche's citation of a poem that captures the spirit of the same Pindarian circuit of life, recurrent as *amor fati*. The poem in question begins with mystery and contains the provocative, veritably turned, Pindarian claim, that "as you began, so will you remain" [*Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben*].<sup>30</sup> The poem, one of only two quoted from Hölderlin at length,<sup>31</sup> is crucial to Nietzsche's reflection on the problem of becoming, specifically framed in Hölderlin as the problem of self-becoming. The focus is not on the self but fate and conscientious consummation or fulfillment. The task is to catch oneself in the act of being, the moment of illumination, the birth of recognition. As Hölderlin translates Pindar's Pythian 2, 72 "*Werde welcher du bist erfahren*"<sup>32</sup> – become what you are learned – Hölderlin's emphasis on learning attends to experience, to becoming that which one has undergone or come to know. For Nietzsche, the

<sup>29</sup> "jeder Uebersetzer muss immer an einer der beiden Klippen scheitern, sich entweder auf Kosten des Geschmacks und der Sprache seiner Nation so genau an sein Original, oder auf Kosten seines Originals zu sehr an die Eigenthümlichkeit seiner Nation zu halten" – Wilhelm von Humboldt to August Wilhelm Schlegel, 23 July 1796, cited and translated in Louth: Hölderlin and the Dynamics of Translation, loc. cit., p. 5–6.

<sup>30</sup> In this engagement with Hölderlin in a poem Nietzsche cites in 1873, we may begin to trace the redundancy of translating the mathematical measure of being. "Ein Räthsel ist Reinentsprungenes. Auch / Der Gesang kaum darf es enthüllen. Denn / Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben, / So viel auch wirket die Noth / Und die Zucht, das Meiste nämlich / Vermag die Geburt / Und der Lichtstrahl, der / Dem Neugeborenen begegnet." "Hölderlin" (Nachlass 1873, KSA 7, 29[202], citation of Hölderlin: Der Rhein. In: Sämtliche Werke. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe, loc. cit., vol. 2, p. 143. "A mystery are those of pure origin / Even song may hardly unveil it / For as you began, so will you remain, / And much as need can effect, / And breeding, still greater power / Adheres to your birth / And the ray of light / That meets the new-born infant." Hölderlin, Friedrich: Poems and Fragments. Trans. Michael Hamburger. Cambridge 1980, pp. 410–411. In addition, to his reading of Hölderlin's *Sonnenuntergang*, see note above, Nietzsche also cites Hölderlin's "Wer das Tiefste gedacht, liebt das Lebendigste."

<sup>31</sup> See note above.

<sup>32</sup> Hölderlin, Friedrich: Sämtliche Werke. Ed. D. E. Sattler. Frankfurt am Main 1975. Vol. 2, p. 130.

thought is bound to the truth of origins as the truth of genealogy. Thus this imperative poses the question of the perplexing nature of the subject of consciousness as the nature of the subject itself. Who are we, really? What in us really wants truth? What is the truth of the self?

And even the power of poetry, which Hölderlin named song, can barely prise the mystery of the subject of the self: “For as you began, so will you remain.” Hölderlin continues: “As much as need can effect / And breeding, still greater power / Adheres to your birth” that I would read to frame Nietzsche’s Pindarian word. The reference to *Zucht*, breeding, formation or *Bildung*, emphasizes not a Nazi allusion to race or to blood, but the Nietzschean sense of *Werden* here poised in coincident contrast with Hölderlinian and Heraclitean *Vergehen*.

Thus Nietzsche’s expression entails the elided sense of rule (*Du sollst der werden*) and measure (*Wie man wird* ...). In this sense, to become the one you are is to have found in the course of life, in living or becoming, an answer to the one thing that is said to be needful: the task of giving style to one’s character, as a self-appropriation that is only a return. Needfulness and what is needed, the whole of one’s beginning, means that one can only keep true to one’s start, or as Hölderlin also reflects, “But not for nothing does / our arc return us whence we began” [*Doch es kehret umsonst nicht / Unser Bogen, woher er kommt.*]<sup>33</sup>

To keep true to one’s origins, as a self-appropriative return to oneself it is not enough, as Nehamas suggests, that one “identify oneself with all of one’s actions.”<sup>34</sup> The task indeed is, as Nehamas reads Nietzsche, “to give style to one’s character” but this is interpreted again as identifying with (or *being*) becoming. And because, for Nehamas, such identification, such being, is ineliminably a matter of invention or fiction, any paradox in Nietzsche’s imperative may be reduced to a literal matter of literature as such.

This project, reading one’s life as (self-invented) literature, is in Nehamas’s case a matter of reading Nietzsche’s life as Nietzsche seems indeed to urge us to read it in *Ecce homo*, that is, as an achieved and “perfect unity,” a unity achieved, so Nehamas argues, by the expedient of writing, as Nietzsche did write, “a great number of good books that exhibit great apparent inconsistency but that can also be seen as deeply continuous with one another.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, not only will Nietzsche’s writing express his style but the very range of his books can trace the development of this same style. There is much truth in this, but because this is a reductive tactic, i. e., not only incidentally analytic, there is also not a little error, because, on most interpretations, this same vision of self-invention slides into an identification of Nietzsche which precisely “mistakes”

<sup>33</sup> Hölderlin: *Lebenslauf*, loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Nehamas: *How One Becomes What One Is*, loc. cit., p. 411. This article, for reasons that should be apparent, was to become Nehamas’s book on Nietzsche’s *Life as Literature*.

<sup>35</sup> Nehamas: *How One Becomes What One Is*, loc. cit., p. 416.

him with what he is not (this is the sense in which Nietzsche writes in this same context and this same locus: "I am one thing, my writings are another"). Thus the ideal of *Life as Literature* can become a practical project of Foucaultian self-cultivation and thus turns, almost inevitably, into *The Art of Living*. It is unclear whether Nehamas is depicting Nietzsche's strategy as such or the strategy of modern, academic ambition.

There is much here that is indebted to Zarathustra's own claim for all his "poetizing and all his art" now reflected upon the author himself, reflecting on himself and – this metonymic interpretive echo is no accident – using the same words to do so: Zarathustra tells himself, himself: Zarathustra holds discourse with himself, just as Nietzsche will do in *Ecce homo*. To return to Nietzsche's imperative is to return to a specific reflection on the same reflexive paradox of the command to become – not to be, nor indeed, contra Nehamas, to identify with – what you are. For this command does not insist that we discover or "find" ourselves where Nietzsche's happily celebrated (but by commentators often unreflected) critique of the subject highlights the very unknown heart of our fantasy image of our "selves." Asking us to place a question mark behind ourselves as behind our convictions, an objection poised here as much against any possible reader as against himself, Nietzsche reminds us that precisely as seekers of knowledge we remain irretrievably unknown to ourselves, irretrievably because our search for knowledge is turned outward. The philologist Nietzsche is (and remains) reflected in his effort to include his own preoccupations as part of the task of interpretation – on pain of presentism or what Nietzsche named a "failure of philology" (BGE 47, KSA 5, p. 69). And in our confidence in the critical search for truth we find a parallel lack or failure of critique. Thus a failure to search for truth is a word for that (self/subject) which is furthest from our minds, which is not the object of self-critical questioning or doubt. And to be fair: this is the problem of the subject as it is posed in Nietzsche's reflexive critique. We are poorly placed to raise the question of our own nature: even if we were, even if we could be, of a mind to do so. We cannot jump over our own shadow: we cannot get behind our own skin, behind ourselves, because of all the nearest and closest things that as Heidegger points out are distant from us due precisely to such proximity, *what* we are is most alien to us. For this and related reasons, Nietzsche's "become what you are" or *Werde der du bist* is not and cannot be about the cult – culture – cultivation – of the self, because, despite the cries of self-starved existentialists and academic enthusiasms or fashion, it is ultimately not about the self in the sense of self-transformation (or care) but being. The imperative urges an inevitable consummation – *Du wirst es jedenfalls*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Yet the myth of self-affirmation, like the fascist, subjectivist, self-aggrandizing image of Nietzsche is a staple for a popular and literary tradition reading Nietzsche in this light; to be sure: even Heidegger would seem to subscribe to this account of Nietzsche's subjectivism.

Once again, Nietzsche's expression of Pindar's exact, archaic ideal, *Become the one you are*, is ineliminably, *incorrigibly* paradoxical. Precisely in its concision, it is extraordinarily intuitive: counter-intuitively intuitive. The invitation to become what one is is an *encomium*, praising not one's human potential or possibility for being but what is already a consummate, measured achievement (if not for that a "conscious" one). Thus it is one's *conscience* that says: "Become the one you are!" As an encomium, Nietzsche's imperative is a return: it does not act upon or for the future but the past. One is called to come to oneself by way of a return or a recognition consonant with what Nietzsche calls the eternal return of reflection or *amor fati*. And the enduring or ineliminable paradox and intuitive problem, as Nietzsche writes, in a context related to the futural dynamic of the eternal return, is that *you* will do so in any event: *Du wirst es jedenfalls*.

We may thus emphasize the transformed problem of such an encomium/imperative in this context of inevitability where not only are you (already) what you are but where what you are called to become is ominously that which you, in any event, will do. Thus to become the one you are requires more than an "identification" with your stylized self *à la* Nehamas and more than an acceptance of yourself *à la* new age thinking or the style of Nietzscheanism currently in fashion (spurred, weak thought, body-self-care, etc.), the reflection of *amor fati* that is the eternal return of the same.<sup>37</sup>

As encomium, the words *Werde, der du bist* are words of valediction that also count as a patent *memento mori*. An example of the latter may be found in the enclosed garden of the former Dominican cloister that is now the Musée d'Unterlinden, in Colmar where a 1606 gravestone is inscribed in the local German dialect: *gedenck wer du bist / und auch wirst werden*.<sup>38</sup> In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a similarly recollective use of the same words works as a warning. Zarathustra's animals claim to know: "who you are and must become" (Za III, On the Convalescent 2, KSA 4, p. 275).

We are returned to Pindar by the valedictory fashion in which this imperative appears in the letters written to Rohde by Nietzsche as a young artillery officer. Towards the conclusion of his letter of 3 November 1867,<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche recalls

<sup>37</sup> The following reflections are offered in reply to some of the responses received following a presentation of an earlier version of this paper in June, 2002 at the Department of Philosophy at the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen to a meeting with the participants in the *Nietzsche-Dictionary Project* directed by Paul van Tongeren and Gerd Schank.

<sup>38</sup> The Unterlinden Museum in Colmar is housed in a former cloister for Dominican nuns and features the famous Grunewald alterpiece (displaced from a church, this was also cause for the aesthete in me to rue the event: so much gained for ease of viewing, so much lost in context). The full text of the gravestone runs: "FROG NIT NOCH MIR / WER ICH BIN GEWE / SEN GEDENCK WER / DU BIST UND AUCH / WIRST WERDEN" and is signed "DER EDELL UND VEST RUODOLPH VON RUOST MDCVI".

<sup>39</sup> Curt Paul Janz tells us that Nietzsche had failed to join the batallion in Berlin which would have been his first choice, and was accordingly stationed in Naumburg where, as Janz reminds

the farewell party where the two had set up a memorial inscribed with the words γέννοι' οἶος ἐσσί and christened *Nirwana*. Nietzsche writes, "If to close, I refer these words to you as well, dear friend, so might they include the best of what I bear for you in my heart [...]. I shall look back with joy and pride upon a time when I won a friend οἶος ἐσσί."<sup>40</sup> Nine years later, Nietzsche notes: "Become the one that you are: that is a cry which is *always* only to be permitted among rare human beings, yet utterly superfluous for the rarest of those rare beings."<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche's praise of his friend, οἶος ἐσσί, expresses the same sentiment as Rimbaud's "I is an other," reading Nietzsche's reflections on one's own self-distanced subjectivity in the mode of critique – you are always a different person [*du bist immer ein Anderer*] –"<sup>42</sup>

As I read it, it is in this sense that one should understand Nietzsche's aphorism noted in quotation marks in *The Gay Science*, "What does your conscience say? – "You should become the one you are."<sup>43</sup> [*Was sagt dein Gewissen? – "Du sollst der werden, der du bist."*] In this same spirit, Nietzsche writes to himself as author in the mode of self-formation that he will patent as his own in *Ecce homo*: "Become more and more the one that you are – the teacher and fashioner of yourself." (Nachlass 1881, KSA 9, 11[297], p. 555).<sup>43</sup> And in the first section of the fourth part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we hear a similarly self-creative, literally educing reflection: "For I am *he*, from the heart and from the beginning, drawing, drawing towards me, drawing up to me, raising up, a drawer, a trainer, and a taskmaster who once bade himself, and not in vain: "Become what you are!" (Za IV, The Honey Offering, KSA 4, p. 297)

The archaic phrasing alluding to Pindar's Greek in Nietzsche's letter to Rohde also recurs in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on no other theme than friendship in the section entitled "On the Friend" *Vom Freunde*. There Nietzsche reflects on the relation the hermit bears for himself as the relation to the self's other.<sup>44</sup>

---

us in his biographical account, Nietzsche had already learned to ride as an adolescent). Janz, Curt Paul: Friedrich Nietzsche. München 1995. Vol. 1, pp. 223–227.

<sup>40</sup> From a letter Nietzsche writes to Rohde in Hamburg on the 3rd of November, 1867, KSB 2, no. 552, p. 235. Janz comments on this point as a sign of Nietzsche's demanding and simultaneously affirming feeling of friendship for Rohde as the "Freund seines Lebens." Janz: Friedrich Nietzsche, loc. cit., vol. 1, p. 227.

<sup>41</sup> "“Werde der, der du bist”: das ist ein Zuruf, welcher immer nur bei wenig Menschen erlaubt, aber bei den allerwenigsten dieser Wenigen überflüssig ist." (Nachlass 1876, KSA 8, 19[40], S. 340).

<sup>42</sup> GS 307, KSA 3, p. 544.

<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche writes this note to himself following a scornful comment on nationalist sentiment: "Wer das fremde Blut haßt oder verachtet, ist noch kein Individuum, sondern eine Art menschliches Protoplasma." (Nachlass 1881, KSA 9, 11[296], S. 555).

<sup>44</sup> See, for a different but nevertheless related reading of Nietzsche on friendship in a cognate context: Tongeren, Paul van: Freundschaft, Selbsterkenntnis und Einsamkeit. Zu Nietzsches Lebensexperiment. In: *Castrum Peregrini* 253–4 (2002), pp. 5–20.

For such the friend is “always the third person: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths.” The associative allusion to Pindar’s Pythian 2 recurs in this locus as well – for Pindar characterizes the poem he sends to Hieron (the so-called Castor song): *This song is being sent like Phoenician merchandise across the grey sea* (2, 68) and promises of it a buoyancy above untutored fancy, beyond both slander and flattery:

*just as when the rest of the tackle labors  
in the depths of the sea, like a cork I shall go undipped  
over the surface of the brine.* (2, 70)

Thus the reflective voice, the transcendent balance of light feet, is the gift of friendship. Because such buoyancy would require the judgment of a Rhadamanthus, one is to take care *not* to show oneself before one’s friend unadorned, ungroomed, or uncultivated. “Should it be an honor to the friend that you give yourself to him as you are?” It is out of respect for one’s friend that one is to cultivate oneself: “You cannot groom yourself too beautifully for your friend: for you shall be to him an arrow and a longing for the overman.” It is not without irony that all Nietzsche’s efforts for the sake of his friend inevitably fell short – in *Ecce homo* he would use another mariner’s metaphor to complain that there were “no fish” to catch. And, compounding the problem of the friend, just as, at the end of his life, Nietzsche could seek to become *both* father and mother to himself, it can be argued that in the end he also sought to be his own best friend: that the same vocative address that draws us so intimately into his text, is an address that turns back upon the author himself, to seek out and to find only his own ear.

Returning to the textual, archaic context of the commandment Nietzsche used first to hail his friend and later to greet himself, we do well to ask what the words (themselves and alone) might mean? We may analyse the reflex of what this imperative commands as such: Become the one you are – *You* – that one that you are – that *x*, *become* the very one that you are – that *x*. Because ordinary logic would fail us here, yielding little more than, or at a solecistic, grammatological best, nothing but a tautology, we can note a quasi-zen tension between becoming (future or anterior protention) and finished or perfected presence.

This is the same paradox in force in the classic locus of this imperative, in standard literary or classical analyses of Pindar’s Pythian 2, 72, where the same koan-like asseveration seems to hold and to parse it commentators allude to a skein of intrigues and resentment. We are told that the phrase is a tease, a rhetorical ploy, a piece of flattery, proffered rather limpingly, after the work of the poem had been completed (where, attesting to the problem of naming it a Pythian Ode and so placing it altogether, the ode itself was not the “official”

victory poem but only secondarily commissioned), after bidding farewell to Hieron as the addressee of the poem, we now hear a coda, likewise addressed to Hieron, greeting him at the start of a new poem. *Become what you are*. Otherwise said, reversing the order of the phrase to reflect its context: Now that you have learned [what manner of man thou art], become the one you are. In this context, the expressed imperative begins a series of contrasts contra flattery, contra rhetoric, contra poor judgment, contra bad poets. Hieron, the noble born, and hence consummate, athlete, is urged to become worthy of the measure of his achievements – in contrast with, so the play of words or implied tone: the imminent danger of falling short of the same nonetheless enduring measure.

I add the last words above: *the same, nonetheless enduring measure* to emphasize what is essential in Pindar's gratuitous reflection, the so-called Castor song, or addendum and which most commentators, from Burton to Most, tend to overlook. Such added musings are not a rebuke and they do not work as flattery, as we understand it. Pindar's Greek nationality, his heritage and his language, is itself part of the interpretive problem. If, as MacIntyre in tracing the deadened aura of virtue, underscoring its shadow in the modern, post-enlightened world, has sought to remind us: Nestor's rebuke to Agamemnon in Homer's *Iliad* urges a course of action advertent to an excellence (*agathos*) without contending that any course of action could abrogate that same excellence or position,<sup>45</sup> the very least that might be concluded is that neither Homer nor Pindar offer hypothetical or practical imperatives. Hieron is urged to become the one he is. The recollection of the childish aesthetic misjudgment is contrasted with the judgment of wisdom, Rhadamanthus, and the scope of being is only seen from the perspective of the whole.

*Ethics and Time: Stamping Becoming in the Likeness of Being*

Become the one you are is all about the consummation of time – in Pindar, as in Hölderlin, and Nietzsche not mere being and not personality (even if this latter distinction disappoints fans of self-improvement or life-as-self-as-literature). Pindar hardly encourages Hieron given his achievements, to be himself (or to “act his age” as Burton renders it) but just and only to conform to his own style or veritable way of being in time. Like Nietzsche's, Pindar's imperative is an encomium. It lauds Hieron as an appeal only to come into his own.

By contrast, it is prudential advice that commands, become honest, because that is *not* what you are or because it is what you are at risk of losing (and

---

<sup>45</sup> See MacIntyre's discussion both in MacIntyre, Alasdair: *After Virtue*. Notre Dame 1972, as well as his earlier book: MacIntyre, Alasdair: *A Short Introduction to Ethics*. London 1966.

because honesty ensures felicity, or else because it is commanded ‘Thou shalt not lie,’ or else because to do otherwise violates reason itself, and hence you *qua* rational, inevitably wish to be honest, adds the suppressed premise of any assertoric practical syllogism), become righteous just because as it now stands, you fall short (or may come to fall short) of righteousness. Such recommendations or urgings are meaningful because the logic of becoming here is consonant with practical reason and the practical possibility of self-invention, of self-transformation.<sup>46</sup> It lies in the power of mortal beings to undertake activities that transform them, remaking themselves or acquiring another nature by learning (or Aristotelian habituation), thus overcoming themselves in terms of former limitations, remade in the light of a new ideal. Thus one can be asked to seek oneself (when it is assumed that until now one has not sought oneself), and some readings would have Nietzsche say, through the mouth of certain readings of Zarathustra, that one can also be called to transcend oneself, one can be invited to *become an Übermensch*.<sup>47</sup> Thus, we might be tempted to rename the subtitle to Nietzsche’s *Ecce homo*: “How To Be What You Are. – How to Be Yourself.” The endorsement: “Be yourself” seems to offer only encouragement and affirmation, only consent. It would thus also appear on this reading that Nietzsche’s Will to Power is exactly a will to self-assertion, or acceptance, lending credence to the historical legacy of this notion throughout the fascist instaurations of the last century and continuing on in our own materialist egoism or current cult of the self: Be yourself, what you are, or, more gently, follow your bliss ...

But acceptance, be it of fate or the self, if we are to learn nothing else from Schopenhauer or from the Stoic tradition, requires an abnegation of the will and Nietzsche puts his command differently. And even here we can draw from Zarathustra for understanding: *Nothing can be required* – what *would be madness* would be to imagine that the will *can* willingly cease to be what it is or *become* non-willing. To become the one you are, so he tells us, will require that you turn your own will upon itself. If the will cannot will against its own nature, if willing cannot become nonwilling, if the will is powerless against time and its “it was”: like the stone fact that shatters the steel force of will, the will is exactly not powerless on will as the durable course of *ressentiment* alone would prove. Teaching the will to will backwards as Nietzsche proposes to do, turns it back not upon the past but precisely back upon what is immediately, consummately present: it turns the whole of will, desire, or ambition, back into itself, back

---

<sup>46</sup> Here too I am directly influenced by MacIntyre’s study of virtue, a book I greatly admire.

<sup>47</sup> For an alternative and important emphatic reminder that the Overman makes no such appearance and serves no such function in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, see Allison: Reading the New Nietzsche, loc. cit., Chapter Three.

upon what is *already* what it is. It is for this reason that Nietzsche promises to explain *how* one becomes what one is. This is a practical philosophy: and encomium or not, this word of praise is perhaps the heart of Nietzsche's ethics.

For regret as resolution, as the desire to do better in the future than one has done in the past conceals, so Nietzsche tells us, not the generosity of reconciliation but a rancor that would take revenge on what has been. And the condemnation of the past, despite its greater sense of moral possibility conceals the same impulse of rancor and revenge. Simply to say "No" to a reprehensible event is an impotent desire to denounce what has been. Such "Nay-saying" does not change the past but it does institute a claim to moral superiority. To say *Amen* is different. This Yes-saying that Nietzsche affirms wills the past as it was which is not to will that the future repeat the past but to affirm that what was, was *as* it was. The affirmation of the past in the teaching of the eternal return of the same puts the seal of eternity on the past. The past is to be affirmed as having been as it was because failing the exact course of what was as it was, no part of the present or future *can* be. Thus Nietzsche's critique of the origins or genealogy of morality analyses the *ressentiment* that would take revenge on sheer being for having been, impugning the past in a variation upon Silenus' Sophoclean wisdom: *if only*, sighs ordinary regret, things had *not* been as they are, if only what has been had been otherwise. In the place of such perdurant resentment and its devastating effects on lived being, Nietzsche urges what he calls blessing or affirmation.

The image of blessing Nietzsche has in mind is sheerly, beautifully, nobly idle: *Müßiggang*. Such a good spirited moment of blessing and peace corresponds to the moment when the Lord of Creation looks upon the world created and sees and calls it *good*. This seventh-day or "spectator divinity" is also a human possibility as Nietzsche expresses the union of "*creature and creator*" – linking "material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos" together with "creator, form-giver, hammer-hardness, spectator divinity, and seventh day." (BGE 225, KSA 5, p. 161) Akin to what Nietzsche in the *The Gay Science* 337 will speak of as a god's happiness ("*voller Macht und Liebe*"), this is the moment of benediction, in the benign wake of beauty and its achievement, sauntering along the Po, as Nietzsche writes of himself, beside himself, enjoying the *Müßiggang eines Gottes*.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See Nietzsche's manifold invocation of this concept from early on his writings in *Human, all too Human*, where the reflection concerns the role of leisure in culture (and between different cultures and philosophy) as well as with regard to differing human types, to end in his reflections on the image in *Ecce homo* culminating, perhaps in the declaration/explanation of the veritable meaning of the title of his book *Beyond Good and Evil*: "The Devil is merely the idleness of God on the seventh day ..." This is the sense in which he speaks of woman as a culmination of creation, or the equivalent of the Sabbath: God's rest on the seventh day. Of himself, earlier he had written, "Es ist mein Fleiß und mein Müßiggang, meine Überwindung und mein Nachhängen, meine Tapferkeit und mein Zittern, es ist mein Sonnenlicht und mein Blitz aus dunklem Wolkenhimmel, es ist meine Seele und auch mein Geist, mein schweres ernstes granite-

This kind of divinely released blessing exposes the spirit of revenge that, in spite of the best good conscience and its every good intention, lies coiled at the heart of the desire to change the past that inheres in the desire to do better in the future (or with the future). Affirmation, yes-saying undercuts regret and it is important to notice that this undercutting deprives one of the joy (and it is joy) of throwing oneself down, the tantrum of resentment before the demon who comes with the “threat” that any life to come (any “beyond”) might bring no more than what has been, as it was: not even the promise to re-live one’s life,<sup>49</sup> only an exact recurrence of what was/is/will be, replayed like the characters in a play, or epic tale, stayed as the events depicted on a canvas, or notes in a musical score, a recorded film, exactly repeating what has already been, with nothing new or changed in it.

Importantly, Nietzsche’s insight here recalls the basis for Kant’s prohibition of the simple lie by which the liar hopes to control the world. For Kant, the liar’s hopes run counter to reason whereby the illusion is that altering perceived circumstances (and hence the circumstances’ associated antecedents or past) could assure future bliss. This error is also why Kant is careful to limit the role of law and the having of maxims to morality and not happiness. Happiness is too contingent a thing to turn with surety upon a single deed or event. Who can tell, Kant writes of popular desires for prosperity or a longer life, whether by winning such one might secure not felicity but its opposite over the course of a lifetime? For all his putative anti-Kantianism, Nietzsche takes the same long view. Like the classical thinkers of Ancient Greece, Nietzsche looks at life under the optic of a whole life but using a strikingly Christian *topos* to speak of time, it is important to add that Nietzsche looks to the light of the eternal. From the perspective of eternity: if you, the spectator, are able to affirm just one thing in all that is, *just one good thing*, you *necessarily* affirm every other thing as well. What is impossible is to pick out a single moment to affirm and call it good, while yet denying the rest as bad or evil. *If*, and this is the heart of Nietzsche’s Goethean alliance, *if* you find and affirm just one thing as good, if you say yes to a single moment, you inevitably affirm every other moment as well, for everything is yoked together: everything is part of the whole. You cannot pluck the moment out, like finding one perfect grape from the grape cluster that grows brown, without shattering everything, including the moment. A woman who gives birth, to use Nietzsche’s metaphor, is not at liberty to say (even if modern medicine gives her the option so to choose) the child I would have but not

---

nes Ich, das aber wieder zu sich sprechen kann, “was liegt an mir?”! (Nachlass 1880, KSA 9, 7[102], p. 338).

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche is not Woody Allen.

the pain of giving birth, not everything that goes along with pregnancy.<sup>50</sup> The point here is not a celebration of pain (nor is modern science the first avenue to narcotic means to dampen pain) but the interconnectedness of all that is as part of all that is. There is nothing apart from the whole – there is, as Nietzsche gnominically writes, no external locus to move, to regard, much less to judge, the world: “There is no outside!” [*Es giebt kein Aussen!*]<sup>51</sup>

If one is to become the one one is, without regretting or resenting oneself, without wishing to remake or redeem oneself, this is, it would seem, a task already accomplished: a perfect *fait accompli*. Nietzsche's paradox of time and destiny – that is *amor fati* – in the light of the teaching of the eternal return remains because it is not a vicious but perfect (perfected) paradox: an already achieved or standing paradox. Regarded, with a word from the schoolmen, as the *nunc stans*, the vision of eternity is the standing now, a standing wave in the image of resonant frequency.

And yet, one more time – returning to the contradiction with which we began, given that you are what you are anyway, where shall we place becoming? Nor, following Parmenides, may one identify (reconcile or equate) being and becoming.<sup>52</sup> To stamp becoming in the image of being is not to render being but rather to make becoming paramount: the ideal is the ideal of organic Romanticism: *Werden im Vergehen*, of flux, or as Nietzsche famously expresses the lived meaning of becoming for us, as philosophic minds, in terms of organic, very bodily, very visceral, very physical, and very limited life, i. e., in terms of a serial course of growth, procreation, death, all characterized, above all, by suffering. Thus we recall Nietzsche's rhetorical preoccupation with suffering and pain, in life and in love, inextricably bound together.

For these and other reasons, the call to become the one you are seems empty. If the goal, say, is only to arrive where we already are (as Martin Heidegger argues as the teacher of hidden or concealed truth, *aletheia*), surely we might dispense with the imperative form. Yet Heidegger reminds us, following Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Pindar, that just and merely to be the one you are is *not* given

<sup>50</sup> For Nietzsche, speaking metaphorically here, in the mystery cult of ancient Hellenic culture “the ‘pains of childbirth’ sanctify pain in general – all becoming, all growing, all that guarantees the future postulates pain.” (II, What I Owe the Ancients 4, KSA 6, p. 159).

<sup>51</sup> Za III, The Convalescent 2, KSA 4, p. 272. See, for an extended reading of “Es giebt kein Aussen!” in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* in connection with an exoteric/esoteric distinction and as a genuine completion of nihilism, Schmid, Holger: *Nietzsches Gedanke der tragischen Erkenntnis*. Würzburg 1984, pp. 78 ff.

<sup>52</sup> Plato used this opposition to create a new heaven of ideal being – the real or true world beyond all becoming. More recently, after the true world, as Nietzsche recounts it, had become a fable, existential perspectives played with the same opposition to articulate the ambiguity of (latterly existentialist) being: you are not what you are (as becoming) and you are what you are not (as becoming).

as such, nor is its consummation automatic for the kind of mortal beings we are: always at odds with what they are. This is the war of memory and desire against the past and hoped for future. This is what Nietzsche means by *Ressentiment* or rancor, a war of the self with itself, with what one has become and that is also with what one has done. For we can, and we do, fall short in being, we can fail in becoming what we are, despite the fact that we do become what we are in any case, because we can fail on the level of becoming itself as creatures of implacable resentment. This contrast is what David Allison hears in his account of the eternal return of the same.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, it is only here that Nehamas's suggestion: to *be* becoming, can come into its own – if not to be sure as an identification with literature or becoming but precisely as being (being in) the flux itself, the flow of life, that is that part of life that is a thing apart from literature, beyond the reductive reasonableness of identification. The functioning of grammar and the meaning of words and their logical implications is not enough to save us from being unknown to ourselves, for the reason already mentioned that we have never thought to seek ourselves and, most importantly, because it may well turn out that we are blocked from seeking ourselves. For the most part (instead), we presume upon ourselves. We do not easily question ourselves, even when, especially when, we question God, the world and those around us, we do not put ourselves in question: wherever would we stand, where would we have to place ourselves with respect to ourselves to pose such a question?

How *does* one become, as Nietzsche says, what one is? It is more ticklish to ask at this late juncture: why an account of this doing and this becoming might yet be of any relevance, especially if according to Nietzsche (and Pindar) it is what one will in any case do? If we are to read Nietzsche's account in its most articulate locus we will need to re-read *Ecce homo*. Bearing the subtitle of our current question, *How One Becomes What One Is*, if we read his epigraph as a key to the text, this seems patently to be a book relating Nietzsche's story of himself, which he recounts – so he tells us – to none but himself: “On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunlight has fallen on to my life: I looked behind me, I looked before me, never have I seen so many and such good things together” (EH, *Epigraph*).

*Ecce homo* recounts less the story of Nietzsche's life than the life-story of the books he writes and the adventure of the development of his reflections on

---

<sup>53</sup> See Allison's discussion of this recollective contrast in his section entitled “Memories” in: *Reading the New Nietzsche*, loc. cit., pp. 150–153.

those texts and into other texts.<sup>54</sup> To become the one you are is to become what at the end of the day Nietzsche found himself to be at 44 years of age, having composed *The Birth of Tragedy*, his *Untimely Meditations*, *Human, All-Too Human*, *Daybreak*, *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Wagner Case* ...

In other, rather literal words, *Ecce homo* is an *auto-bibliography*. And Sarah Kofman at the start of her two volume study, *Explosions*, based on her lecture courses devoted to *Ecce homo*, reminds us that the book was not accidentally but exactly such a bibliographical testament, written for very venal reasons, that is, to satisfy a publisher's imperative requirements, needed in turn to satisfy an author's wish, lacking readers in the wake of original editions of his work and hoping for the future to offer new editions to a world of readers ever new.<sup>55</sup> For Kofman, it was where and because no other candidate could be found to offer such a retrospective review and summary of Nietzsche's works to appease such a publisher's demands, in advance of reissuing a new edition of those same works, that Nietzsche himself wrote his own overview and thus meant to provide what everyone else evidently lacked the intellectual insight and the courage to have done or to do. Thus Nietzsche, as Kofman puts it in so many words, wrote his own cumulative summary of his *œuvre*, composing in the process what might be called in a perfect literary mode, an "*over-book*." Thus the plausibility of Nehamas's thesis that such a reflex can only be about a life (lived) as literature.

Nietzsche further confounds the issue here by writing "I am one thing, my writings are another." And, above all, just to be sure that we do not miss the reference, we are invited to read this an invitation to come to know the man, the author himself – *ecce homo*. Thus it is that we are likewise asked to refrain from mistaking the one with the other. By his works, as any good pastor's son

---

<sup>54</sup> Despite its title, because of its subtitle and because of the paradox of its thesis ("I am one thing," Nietzsche declares, "my writings are another". EH, *Why I Write Such Excellent Books* 1), *Ecce homo* is not a biography. How should we understand this claim? Is this not a book about becoming what one is? Is this book not a book about Nietzsche's books? How are we, who know Nietzsche *only* through his books, who cannot but imagine his being exhausted in his writing, how are we to understand this invitation (this prohibition)? How is he to be one thing, his writings another *precisely for us*, precisely for the reader who cannot know him as a man, as a human being, apart from his writings? Who is the Nietzsche we are warned against 'mistaking' here in a book that perpetrates just this mistake as an account of the man himself? The book recounts the conditions of, the genesis of Nietzsche's writings – what we read about his person is ordered to this. Hence what Nietzsche offers to explain as how one becomes what one is is an account – a recounting – of his own books. Who is Nietzsche, who can he be for we who, late born in fact not ethos, can never know him? How else could he have come to become what is than what he tells us? What else is there?

<sup>55</sup> Kofman, Sarah: *Explosion I. De l' "Ecce homo" de Nietzsche*. Paris 1992, pp. 26 ff.

would know, we, his readers, shall know him. Thus he calls, “*Listen to me! For I am thus and thus! Do not, above all, confound me with what I am not*” (EH, Foreword 1, KSA 6, p. 257). What does this mean?

### *Becoming and Bildung*

Nietzsche’s own expression of the need to give style to one’s character entails the exactly, rigorously cosmological interpretation of the doctrine of the eternal return in its strongest and most literal, determinist and statistical form. As in the description of the collision of time in the gateway of the present moment or *Augenblick* in Zarathustra (“have not all things been and must not all things recur”: “*Muss nicht, was laufen kann von allen Dingen, schon einmal diese Gasse gelaufen sein? Muss nicht, was geschehn kann von allen Dingen, schon einmal geschehn, gethan, vorübergelaufen sein?*” Za III, Vom Gesicht und Räthsel 2, KSA 4, p. 200), as in the original context of the phrase, “You will do so in any case,” it can be seen that Nietzsche’s teaching declares itself as an assertoric statement or descriptive account. What is at stake in the so-called “cosmological” (or theoretically strong) articulation of the eternal return is the force of the by no means separate (or weaker) “moral” (or performative) imperative that is the resultant of the thought of the eternal return, “My teaching says: so live, that you must wish to live again is the task – you will do so in any case [...] . Eternity reigns.”<sup>56</sup>

In this claim what is at stake is not all of Zarathustra’s/Nietzsche’s “poetizing and all his art” but the moment of perfection itself regarded in its bondage to all the past. Thus in the teaching of the eternal return of the same, as the insight of the moment, Nietzsche presents the whole and singular blessing of a life as a whole, as it can be seen forwards and backwards, bound to iron necessity or chance. Without everything just as it was, with nothing altered and holding nothing alterable, nothing at all – not even the most transient, ecstatic moment of happiness or joy – *can* have been.

Causality works forwards in this kind of passionate affirmation only by working backward like the ray of sunlight Nietzsche sees shining on his life: “I looked backwards, I looked forwards, never did I see so many and such good things at once.” Nietzsche’s account, telling his life to himself, thus *works* upon his life as a benediction. And it is this benediction which transfigures the glance, transfiguring what *was* into what *was willed as such*, which is the meaning of what it is to will backwards, declaring: “*how could I fail to be thankful to my life?*” (EH Epigraph, KSA 6, p. 263)

---

<sup>56</sup> Meine Lehre sagt: so leben, daß du wünschen muß, wieder zu leben ist die Aufgabe – du wirst es jedenfalls! [...] Es gilt die Ewigkeit!” (Nachlass 1881, KSA 9, 11[163], S. 505).

To *become* what one is, one must take over one's own life as an invention; even more importantly and at the same time, one must learn love.<sup>57</sup> The need for love, for learning how to love, and an active erotic deed or lived passion or expressed, articulated desire expresses the importance of what Nietzsche calls benediction or yes-saying. To learn love is to learn to bless and this love has an extraordinary mien: as human as divine.<sup>58</sup>

The gift of such a benediction is the affirmation of the great and the small, "a yes-saying without reserve: to suffering itself, to guilt itself, to the most questionable and strangest in existence itself," simply because "nothing that is can be subtracted, nothing is dispensable" (EH, Birth of Tragedy 2, KSA 6, p. 311). To say that "nothing can be subtracted" does not (it cannot) mean that there is or was or will be "no suffering," no guilt, nothing strange and questionable or that there are no painful or inhumane things inflicted or suffered but – this is the meaning of fate – that everything about what is is necessary or needful. What is required in everything is everything that preceded, accompanies, *and* succeeds it. Ergo, if, in a single tremendous disposition or if in the happiness of a moment, one is able to affirm or bless even one joyous fruition, one inevitably wills as well everything that has been as necessary, prerequisite, for the moment itself to be at all.

Reflecting the knotted interpenetration of everything that is, where "nothing is self-sufficient, neither ourselves nor things," Nietzsche notes that the "first question is by no means whether we are satisfied with ourselves, but whether we are satisfied with anything at all. Assuming we affirm a single moment, we affirm not only ourselves but all existence" (Nachlass 1887, KSA 12, 7[38], p. 307).<sup>59</sup> Echoing the *Saitenspiel* that is the full soul trembling like a strung chord sounding with happiness, Nietzsche notes that "all eternities were needed

---

<sup>57</sup> I discuss these points in Babich, Babette E.: Nietzsche and Eros Between the Devil and God's Deep Blue Sea. The Erotic Valence of Art and the Artist as Actor – Jew – Woman. In: Continental Philosophy Review 33 (2000), pp. 159–188, or else see Babich, Babette E.: Nietzsche et Eros entre le gouffre de Charybde et l'écueil de Dieu: La valence érotique de l'art et l'artiste comme acteur – Juif – Femme. In: Revue Internationale de Philosophie 211/1 (2000), pp. 15–55.

<sup>58</sup> And from the first moment of creation, benediction is a song of blessing or naming or calling things good. Yet what remains the unadverted stumbling block in all such arts of living and writing the self is the need for love. That is the need to learn love, which is also to say to learn to see that things are good, the necessary art or science of joy, in order to love life itself, that is, with respect to one's own life, "here and now and in little things" as Heidegger expresses it.

<sup>59</sup> The ground condition *par excellence* for all genuine creation is the consciousness of creative limit and impotence. I hear this (as Erich Heller has also affirmed) in Nietzsche's note from 1884-85 where he declares that "die Ehrfurcht vor Gott ist die Ehrfurcht vor dem Zusammenhang aller Dinge und Überzeugung von höheren Wesen als der Mensch ist [...] Der Künstler ist Götter-Bildner" (Nachlass 1884/85, KSA 11, 29[19], p. 341).

to produce this one event – and in just this moment of yes-saying all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed” (ibid.).

Thus Nietzsche retrospectively describes his own Zarathustra as “*yes-saying* to the point of justifying, of redeeming even the entire past” (EH, Zarathustra 8, KSA 6, p. 348). As he composes, singing his own song to his own soul, he is able to bring together into one “what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance.” But the times of difficulty are the very times that are hardest to hold, hardest to ambition, hardest to keep. What is to be emphasized here, becoming the one you are in conjunction with *amor fati*, is that the key to both suffering and joy will not be about *staying* the moment. Thus it must be emphasized that as much as Nietzsche’s insight draws upon Goethe’s Faustian ideal, it also opposes it, together with the contemporary ideal of the still point of present joy or youth, i. e., the preservational, salvational ideal promised by both monotheistic religion and modern science. Instead, Nietzsche’s image of eternal blessing releases the moment, letting it go. So we hear Nietzsche suggest that everything turns on the matter of personal disposition and the question of one’s being or character in the face of suffering as a matter of generosity or *gift*.

The imperative of such generosity is not only difficult but it easily remains the most troubling aspect of what Nietzsche’s teaching of the eternal return of the same entails on the level of real pain, actual and not merely theorized or academic, suffering. This generosity is the meaning of his imperative to become the one you are, as what you will, in any case, do. Not a quietism, Nietzsche emphasizes the ineluctable necessity of becoming together with the impossibility and the self-destructive blindness of the desire to abolish pain. There is no way to a philosophy that makes it possible, in Adorno’s words, to “write poetry” in the wake of Auschwitz – which does not mean that Paul Celan or René Char or Primo Levi did not write such “poetry.” One wants a way beyond the moral justification of duty, a way that would teach one to see the future and transform it. What Nietzsche reminds us is that in place of the dutiful ideal which commands us to frame an imperative for our philosophizing such that it would be impossible to permit inhumanity on the order of the Holocaust (or, dare we say, on the order of the utter oblivion and neglect of even the word for the cruelties perpetrated in the name of revenge in bombing Afghanistan and the twice-played Gulf War in Iraq) is a philosophy which, in advance of all external events, all contingent brutality, would enjoin us always to act in the love of our neighbor or the hope of eternal salvation. We already have such a philosophic foundation in the Scriptures, and we have a philosophic formulation of such a command already before Levinas in Immanuel Kant’s uncanny invention of a categorical imperative that would, *avant la lettre*, apart from the Bible itself, nonetheless enjoin its most stringent commandments, grounded not on faith but reason. Denying reason to make room for faith, Kant is able to set aside a

philosopher's rule for the sake of the gold of the living Word. For his part, Nietzsche wants something other than the imperative rule of righteousness because one cannot separate the self-gratifying succor of reason at its own service from the ideal of salvation be it achieved through pure, triumphant reason in practice, or else, reason-denied, be it achieved through faith.

Contra such an ethical imperative (which Nietzsche claims "reeks of cruelty," presaging Jacques Lacan's all-too-clever alliance of Kant with Sade), Nietzsche offers the affirmation of what he believes would redeem the innocence of becoming. This is the teaching of the eternal return of the same and it is something commentators have been eager to hear as seemingly more cruel than Kant or even Lacan: an affirmation of pain and violence as not only inevitable but necessary, of age and death and change all as necessary and as a reconstitution of the becoming that brings such change, absolved in itself as innocent, without fault. Bernd Magnus, Julian Young, and others have supposed that the sheer acceptance of the doctrine of the eternal return of the same is enough to constitute a coordinate affirmation of every event in history. Saying yes to past evil, it has been supposed, somehow endorses that past in ways that threaten a return in history. Thus affirming the past is tantamount to inaugurating a new danger of the same kind in the future.

Here, I can only address this point in a cursory and preliminary fashion. This preliminary point concerns the one to whom the imperative is uttered as it appears in Nietzsche's *Gay Science* and attending to the one to whom this directive is addressed may clarify a fairly common misunderstanding.<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return of the same is expressed as an intimate word of warning, teaching that everything in one's own life, the universe thought in reference to one's own life and all that has ever been in one's life, be it great or small, recurs. The teaching of the eternal return of the same entails that you, yourself will return, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra famously emphasizes "– not to a new life or a better life or a similar life [...] [but] this identical and self-same life" (Za III, The Convalescent, KSA 4, p. 276).

In Nietzsche's usage, the reference to "all the names of history" is hyperbolic.<sup>61</sup> Shifting the reference from Nietzsche to ourselves, we are referred to our

<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to my junior colleagues, John Davenport and Michael Baur, for challenging responses to a version of this essay which was offered as the semester's Inaugural Lesson in the Department of Philosophy at Fordham University, September 2002. In this same moral and political ethical context, I also thank the students in Catherine and Michael Zuckert's political theory seminars at Notre Dame for their provocative and thoughtful responses to a still earlier version given in March, 2002. And for his kind comments reading the text and his insight into the overall hermeneutic point – and difficulties – of translation, my colleague Gyula Klima has my respectful gratitude.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Nietzsche's letter to Burckhardt, 6 January, 1889: where he first names himself as follows: "ich bin Prado, ich bin auch der Vater Prado, ich wage zu sagen, daß ich auch Lesseps bin" and then declares, "im Grunde jeder Name in der Geschichte bin ich" (KSB 8, no. 1256, p. 577).

own destiny in our life and our disposition to that very life, as it is/was/will be and in this way we are urged to embrace an affirmative or benevolent disposition to life itself and as such, exactly in contrast with a resentful disposition. If we regard the teaching of eternal recurrence in the context of becoming the one you are, the requisite *amor fati* teaches an affirmation of what has been in one's own life, that is: one's own past. Thus what the eternal return of the same does not teach, in itself, is an affirmation of (nor yet and to be sure does it enjoin protest against) the suffering / joys of others.

Instead Nietzsche's imperative commands us to affirm our own life as it has been. In the register of real-life regret, what works to reduce us to the depths of despair tends not to be the manifold accounts of the inhumanity inflicted by human beings upon other human beings, or even as wrought against non-human and living beings in general, or contra the earth itself, but a reflection on our selves, in all our pettiness and all our much-esteemed value for and to ourselves. What kills us in the depths of our being, in our "loneliest loneliness," is not the thought of Hiroshima, not Auschwitz, not the firebombing of cities – Hamburg, Dresden, London, Baghdad – not the violence of African and South American warlords against their own peoples, not the ancient stories of horror such as the Athenian holocaust of the island dwellers of Melos, not the fall of the Etruscans, vanquished by the Romans not only from life but even unto a Roman appropriation of nothing less than their own Etruscan past recast as the past of Roman antiquity itself.

Rather what we mourn and what we regret is the paltriest of past sufferings: our concern is with nothing but ourselves. It is our own suffering that petrifies us. We look backward and forward on the ground of such remembered pain, and in Robert Burns' words, *we doubt, 'an fear*. But all our doubt and all our fear is for ourselves. To teach the eternal return of the same, to teach *amor fati*, is to teach us to let such doubts and terrors be as they are, to affirm them, like the past itself, as necessary for what is and as enabling for will be. It is not to teach us to say of Golgotha, once again, or of Waterloo, once again, or, Auschwitz, once again, or yet once more the intrusion of the Lacanian face of the Real shattering two skyscraper behemoths, shuddering into themselves as twisted debris and some three thousand lives vaporized into long, lingering poisonous dust, all now vanished from Manhattan's famously unshakeable bedrock.

It is our conviction that our willing and all our hopes really are about such things, that our deepest concern in our loneliest loneliness really is about "all the names of history" which works to cover and thus to preserve (as Nietzsche teaches us, this is the working of *ressentiment*) our more patent and cheaper fear for ourselves. It is our own life, as it was, that find difficult to affirm *as it was*.

Thus the message of *amor fati* calls us to embrace our own fatality, our own failings and weaknesses. This is what Nietzsche means by loving life as it has

and continues to happen to you, life with all its slights and losses, just because life is all these things: all the bad parts along with the good that seems to vanish from our perception with even a hint of the bad. Thus the becoming of our lives is to be redeemed in its innocence as such, without the promise of redemption or salvation, that is, for Nietzsche, so many blatant claims for compensation: "The principle of Christian love: it wants to be well *paid*." (AC 45, KSA 6, p. 222)

If Nietzsche opposes the ideal of eternal bliss as a reward he also opposes current conservative (i. e., cutting edge, Foucaultian, Deleuzian)<sup>62</sup> readings. Nietzsche's convalescence has nothing to do with recuperation or reserve (or, contra Lacan and his co-traveller de Sade: yet another effort!), instead Nietzsche's key is an intriguingly organic, biological claim on behalf of the human organism. For Nietzsche, imbued with the biological convictions of his day, convalescence is always all and only about expenditure. This is the erotic trope *par excellence*, the organismic, i. e., the orgasmic meaning of what Nietzsche describes as the defining aspect of "the *great health* – that one does not merely have but also acquires continually and must acquire because one gives it up again and again and must give it up" (GS 382, KSA 3, p. 363).

Each and every time, and drawn into the same breath with which Nietzsche teaches love of life, he underscores every last reason for despair, for frustration, for the pointlessness, the impossibility of desire. This is the tragic condition of life, where life always "presupposes suffering and sufferers." But Nietzsche does not seek to eliminate suffering as, very differently, promised by religion (in heaven or the world to come) or science (in the future that is about to become real), but rather to transvalue (this is Nietzsche's word) suffering and every tragic occurrence as such. It should not go unnoted here that such a move elevates suffering to tragic wisdom. The model he finds for this is given to him by the Greek ideal of love or *eros* (and *eris*, which last is a bit different from the *agon* as such). Beyond lust, as the erotic is beyond lust, what erotic love transforms or transfigures is one's disposition to suffering. Where suffering is thus revalued, it is transformed, made meaningful and it thereby becomes, so Nietzsche argues, infinitely bearable: "if one has one's why, one can put up with any how." (TI, Arrows and Maxims 12, KSA 6, p. 60). It goes without saying that such a transformation is as rare as that same (impossible) possibility of love, erotic or otherwise.

Thus Nietzsche writes for the ideal of the lover and he writes in this way, as Allison catches the measure of that gently erotic attunement in his reflections on this very theme,<sup>63</sup> because only the one who loves can be so attuned, as the

<sup>62</sup> NB: not, of course, contra Deleuze.

<sup>63</sup> Allison: Reading the New Nietzsche, loc. cit., pp. 152–153.

lover catches a sensuality opening his/her senses into a sensibility veritably alive to everything in life. The one who bodily, *physically* represents or embodies “the *over-fullness of life*” is capable of desiring the Dionysian and altogether erotic art Nietzsche consecrates as presupposing “a tragic view of life, a tragic insight.”<sup>64</sup>

If Nietzsche did not begin his inquiry into *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* as a conscious exploration of the erotic dimension of tragedy, it is intriguing and important in the present context that he would culminate his life-long concern with tragic art in just this tonality.<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche claimed such an erotic emphasis as his own, as “always already” having been a part of his reflections on the Dionysian phenomenon, thus regarded “as a means to understanding the older Hellenic instinct, an instinct still exuberant and even overflowing: it is explicable only as an *excess* of energy.” (TI, What I Owe the Ancients 4, KSA 6, p. 158) The Dionysian, the erotic dimension, is Nietzsche’s “triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change: *true* life as collective continuation of life, through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality” (ibid.). Now retrospectively eroticized in this fashion, Nietzsche’s consciousness of the tragic insight colors both the affirmative and the reactive dispositions of abundance and need.<sup>66</sup>

In the “orgy,” Nietzsche writes, in “the mysteries of sexuality,” – thereby proposing to claim a stumbling block for the differently classicist spirits of Winckelmann *and* Goethe, both highly eroticized men, both celebrated for excessive erotic involvement in their different affective spheres, as Nietzsche for his own part was not – *eros* expresses a will to life. This is the energetics of *eros*, the erotic dynamic, as economy of discharge. By capacitative contrast with such overflowing abundance, the modern impotence of fear seeks to preserve

---

<sup>64</sup> As an erotically charged being, the lover, precisely ecstatic, can “not only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable” as a spectacle to be admired at an aesthetic distance, but such a “Dionysian god and man” can also face the actuality of the “terrible deed and every luxury of destruction” (GS 370, KSA 3, p. 620).

<sup>65</sup> I think it important to read Nietzsche here as replying to a graphic criticism made by Ulrich von Willamowitz-Moellendorff in his review of Nietzsche’s first book, a critique uttered interior to the review’s epigraph and articulated explicitly towards the review’s conclusion, where Willamowitz challenges Nietzsche’s account of the Greeks and their relation to nature (and to sexuality): “thus the phallus is no phallus”: “the unconcealed and vigorously magnificent characters of nature”, neither do the Greeks, the eternal children, laugh at grotesque obscenities. No: “the Greeks used to contemplate with reverent wonder (the sexual omnipotence of nature).” Willamowitz-Moellendorff, *Future Philology*, loc. cit., p. 20. See epigraph citation on p. 1 (and see also my editor’s note ii).

<sup>66</sup> Whatever is replete with overflowing energy cannot be conserved – this is the economy of expenditure or expression: affirmation. The will to power that is a capacity for expression can only be given out without reserve. See Babich: *Nietzsche and Eros Between the Devil and God’s Deep Blue Sea*, loc. cit.

or save itself, to keep itself in reserve.<sup>67</sup> Where, as Nietzsche continually repeats from the end of his *Genealogy of Morals* through his *The Antichrist*, the nihilistic, played out or decadent will is an exactly grasping will *to* (acquire) power; in contrast with such a needy will to power, the power will that is positive and flourishing power can *only* be maintained if continually spent, lost, expressed. It is in the course of desire sacrificed that we find the eternal replay of the ancient story of recurrence: the eternal return of the same.

Like Paul's description of love's infinite forbearance (I Cor. 13:7), like Shakespeare's better known gloss, *love is not love which alters when it alteration finds*, Nietzsche affirms: "one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it – all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity – but to *love* it"<sup>68</sup> The consummate fulfillment of love takes everything that will be, everything that is, and everything that has been all together and at once.<sup>69</sup>

If one changes nothing thereby (nor is such an alteration possible from any perspective but *vanitas* – the past has to be seen in connection with the future and the present quite apart from such vain or impotent wishes), the point will be that in the transformative insight that is the gift of such joy one *wants* to change nothing, that one comes to affirm one's life as it has been. As a comprehensively selective benediction, with affirmation that is the teaching of the eter-

---

<sup>67</sup> Like any economy of the body and its health/sickness, an erotic economy is an economy of expenditure. Bataille and later Klossowski and Blanchot will make more of this than can Deleuze: in the economic dynamic of life seen from the perspective of what Nietzsche calls the Dionysian, the decadent or nihilistic desire for power is bound to failure. The will lacking power is the will to power that does (and can do) nothing but conserve itself in the power it lacks, already played out, already without reserve. This is the dynamic difference between the will to expend and the will to save. If one cannot spend more than one has, expenditure remains at stake.

<sup>68</sup> EH, *Clever* 10, KSA 6, p. 297. Exactly such an *amor fati* becomes the word Nietzsche gives his life in the story he tells himself at the Zarathustran moment of his life's decision. "On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunlight has fallen on to my life: I looked behind me, I looked before me, never have I seen so many and such good things together" (EH, Epigraph).

<sup>69</sup> *Amor fati* affirms the past and the future turning like the topographical course the walker traces on either side of the lake at Silva Plana: ahead and behind, the physical circuit (that is no kind of circle, either perfect or rough) – but the very recursive course of the eternal return. Nietzsche's thought of the eternal return had come to him, so he says, on just such a cyclical route – at the gateway of the pyramidal rock at Surlej. This rock stands like a tower or port at the entrance to a town where the two colliding paths of past and future meet at the stopping point of the paired contours of the tipped points of the cleft rock echoing the double mountain peaks on the other side of the same course across the lake. At that rock one looks ahead at, one looks back upon the paths that run straight away from one another as the same paths that will and already recur, not as a perfected circle but, nonetheless, as the mirrored contours of a protracted reflective circuit turn into one another.

nal return *transfigures everything* with the same golden glance, in the intoxicated wake of the glittering main of the setting sun as it pours “its riches into the sea.”<sup>70</sup>

This brilliant play of light is sheer blessing, affirmation: the still moment in the wake of the first Sabbath, Genesis, and spectator divinity: a yes-saying to all things in the vision of perfection illuminated by the light of a golden autumn and a clear afternoon

*The sphere of the earth adorned with rocks revolves  
Not like a cloud, which after dusk dissolves  
Within a golden day the earth appears  
And to perfection no complaint adheres.*

Hölderlin: Autumn<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> GS 337, KSA 3, p. 565. See Müller-Lauter’s comprehensive articulation of the scope of affirmation or *amor fati* in his essay: Müller-Lauter, Wolfgang: On Judging in a World of Becoming. In: Babich, Babette E. (ed.): Nietzsche, Theories of Knowledge, and Critical Theory. Nietzsche and the Sciences I. Dordrecht 1999, pp. 165–185.

<sup>71</sup> Hölderlin: “Der Erde Rund mit Felsen / Ist wie die Wolke nicht, die Abends sich verlieret, / Es zeigt sich mit einem goldnen Tage, / Und die Volkommenheit ist ohne Klage.” Hölderlin: Der Herbst (Hölderlin: Poems and Fragments, loc. cit., p. 594–595).