
THE NEW NIETZSCHE

Contemporary Styles of Interpretation

Edited and Introduced by
DAVID B. ALLISON



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CONTENTS

PREFACE ix
INTRODUCTION xi

PART I Main Themes 1

Michel Haar:
NIETZSCHE AND METAPHYSICAL LANGUAGE 5

Alphonso Lingis:
THE WILL TO POWER 37

Martin Heidegger:
WHO IS NIETZSCHE'S ZARATHUSTRA? 64

Gilles Deleuze:
ACTIVE AND REACTIVE 80

Pierre Klossowski:
**NIETZSCHE'S EXPERIENCE
OF THE ETERNAL RETURN 107**

Maurice Blanchot:
THE LIMITS OF EXPERIENCE: NIHILISM 121

PART II Oblique Entry 129

Jean Granier:
NIETZSCHE'S CONCEPTION OF CHAOS 135

Gilles Deleuze:
NOMAD THOUGHT 142

Eric Blondel:
NIETZSCHE: LIFE AS METAPHOR 150

Jacques Derrida:
THE QUESTION OF STYLE 176

Jean Granier:
PERSPECTIVISM AND INTERPRETATION 190

Sarah Kofman:
METAPHOR, SYMBOL, METAMORPHOSIS 201

PART III Transfiguration 215*Henri Birault:***BEATITUDE IN NIETZSCHE 219***Thomas J. J. Altizer:***ETERNAL RECURRENCE AND KINGDOM OF GOD 232***Paul Valadier:***DIONYSUS VERSUS THE CRUCIFIED 247****SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 263****NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 265****INDEX 267**

PREFACE

Nietzsche's biography is uninspiring, to say the least. Nonetheless, this subject appears to have been the principal source of inspiration for the tiresome array of books that has followed him. The situation changed, however, with the publication of Heidegger's two-volume study, in which Nietzsche finally emerged as one of the prodigious thinkers of the modern age. Perhaps it is a measure of greatness in a thinker that he demands an equally profound critic to recognize the importance of his thought. In any case, the distinction rests with Heidegger for succeeding in this attempt. Not only was Heidegger the first to seriously take up the principal, and most difficult, themes of Nietzsche—Will to Power, Eternal Return, and Overman—but he demonstrated that, together, they formed an integral conception of the entire development of Western thought: of its very ground and highest expression.

It was the magnitude of this insight that now reveals Nietzsche—posthumously, as he himself correctly foresaw—as one of the underlying figures of our own intellectual epoch, and shows that what remains to be considered within Nietzsche's own thought somehow stands as a model for the tasks and decisions of the present generation. To overstate the case somewhat, the decisions to be taken concern the very validity of our contemporary forms of intelligibility, for we have now effectively seen the finite and axiomatic character of what is meant by the thought of "our age"—all forms of technological control and domination being but one dimension of this problem. In this sense, the prospect of understanding Nietzsche's thought as a confrontation with, or even as an overcoming or a getting-around of, this tradition, is at once the most philosophically critical project since Kant's *and* the one that bears the greatest urgency; for, as Nietzsche suggests, so much rests in the balance. It is an adventure, then, with an urgency that is, strictly speaking, *unheard of*.

If this prospect was opened by Heidegger in Europe, to all appearances it remains a European avenue. With only two exceptions (Heidegger and Haar), none of the essays included here have previously appeared in English; several have been written expressly for the present volume. Each has been selected with two purposes in mind: to address the issues of crucial importance to an understanding of Nietzsche, and to introduce a generation of

contemporary thought that is just beginning to find its own inspiration in Nietzsche. While Heidegger, Deleuze, and Klossowski have so far emerged as the most influential figures in this project, their meditation has already been enriched by the thought of post-phenomenological analysis, structural analysis, and modern linguistics, as well as by critical theory and contemporary literary criticism. The unity of the present volume, therefore, should be located in its tasks rather than in any particular orthodoxy, European or otherwise. It certainly does *not* consist in one more pointless series of oversimplifications, biographical anecdotes, or convenient summaries—a tradition to which the English-speaking audience has long ago become accustomed.

Where possible, citations of Nietzsche's texts have been taken from the available English sources, oftentimes with some minor changes of translation. Until the Colli-Montinari edition of Nietzsche's complete works appears in English, the principal translation will continue to be that of Kaufmann. But, while most English citations are from the Kaufmann editions, I have often gone to Reinhardt, Cowan, Hollingdale, Levy, and others when necessary. In all these cases, reference to Nietzsche's texts is made according to chapter and section number of the particular title, rather than to page numbers of any particular translation.

I am deeply grateful for the help and kindness extended to me by each of the contributors to this project, and I am especially grateful to my comrades at Stony Brook, who aided and abetted me at every stage. My particular thanks must be given to Martha Kinney and Richard Huett at Dell, who not only saw the need for such a work, but guided me with considerable erudition in the preparation of the manuscript. I would also like to thank Richard Cohen, who prepared the index.

D.B.A.
March, 1977
Stony Brook, New York

INTRODUCTION

Lofty and ennobling: this may well be said to characterize Nietzsche's language, or at least his intent. Yet all too often both are seen as a kind of *rigor mortis* of late romanticism, as the poetic thought of a rekindled belief in transcendence. Understandably, then, most readers of Nietzsche have been quick to place him within the terms of traditional thought. Whether they conceive Nietzsche as a higher-order social Darwinist, as the teacher of a boundless and destructive will, as the nihilist *par excellence*, as the structural complement to Judeo-Christian thought, as the liberator of a culturally repressed sexuality, or as the teacher of a new word or doctrine (Overman, Eternal Return, Will to Power), they not only find his thought to be coherent and continuous with the language of traditional metaphysics, but to be fully circumscribed by it. In short, it is most often claimed that there *is* no new word or doctrine, that Nietzsche is himself fully bounded by the tradition he so strongly attacks—i. e., by what has now come to be called the language and thought of onto-theology, what Nietzsche himself simply called God.

What is at stake in *deciding* these claims is therefore considerable—not merely the nature of one somewhat enigmatic thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche, but the viability of conventional thought itself, its own prospects of limitation, decline, or future. This is perhaps the underlying issue for the present work, even if it is approached from what appear to be divergent standpoints. Thus, each text represented in the present volume constitutes an *interpretation* of Nietzsche's thought in view of this larger issue to be decided. The question of interpretation, then, is no longer marginal. On the one hand, Nietzsche stands to be interpreted, and on the other, his subsequent critics perform the mechanics of interpretation. The value of the interpretations can be judged—at least in part—through the attempts of the present contributors. But as to Nietzsche's writing itself, what kind of access can we claim in the first place? What are the means of interpreting Nietzsche's writing? To what extent is Nietzsche's text something *to be* interpreted?

1. READING NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche himself provides us with several rather specific indications as to how we should approach his work. We know, for example, that he addresses a particular audience. He never tires of invoking the classical distinction between “the few” and “the many,” and this results in a two-tiered, if not duplicitous, text: one level, the esoteric, for those few who are capable of understanding it (whom he calls *we* “opposite men,” “free thinkers,” “attempters,” “wanderers,” “immoralists”), and another, an exoteric text, for “the others.”¹ Indeed, it is on the basis of this distinction of audience that he will construct the whole argumentation for *The Genealogy of Morals*, the distinction between two fundamentally different kinds of humanity—active and reactive—together with their different systems of moral valuation: aristocratic morality, and slave (or “herd”) morality. And it is with the latter, he claims, that the *need* arises for postulating every form of transcendence: an otherworldly religion, the metaphysical ideals of unchanging being, permanence, unity, soul, the moral ideals of ascetic virtue, absolute truth, and divine justice. As to the former: “What can it matter to *us* with what kind of tinsel an invalid decks out his weakness?”

Even granting this distinction of audience, Nietzsche knew his contemporary readers were few indeed. To construct a text, much less to have it understood, on some basis other than the reactive tradition of theology, metaphysics, and morality—this requires both a new style of expression and a new audience. Indeed, Nietzsche described himself throughout his life as a posthumous writer, one who writes for the future, one who will live only in the future—as a ghost.

We, too, associate with “people;” we, too, modestly don the dress in which (*as* which) others know us, respect us, look for us . . . We, too, do what all prudent masks do . . . But there are also other ways and tricks when it comes to associating with or passing among men—for example, as a ghost, which is altogether advisable if one wants to get rid of them quickly and make them afraid. Example: One reaches out for us but gets no hold of us. That is frightening. Or we enter through a closed door. Or after all lights have been extinguished. Or after we have died. The last is the trick of *posthumous* people par excellence. . . . It is only after death that we shall enter *our* life and become alive, oh, very much alive, we posthumous people!²

Nietzsche’s text, therefore, is necessarily ambiguous. There is no simple face or surface value to it. Thus, Nietzsche will call his own works “questions,” “hieroglyphs,” or “masks,” just as he would call any other thing, person, or tradition.

But a tension seems to arise here between the styled ambiguity of Nietzsche's writing and the intensely personal tone of his expression. He repeatedly asserts that his texts are the inscriptions of intense personal experiences, sometimes of elevated moods, feelings, or states, sometimes of the greatest intellectual inspiration.³ What accounts for this apparent discrepancy, then, this transfer of the text from its "source" in the contracted, individuated personal experience to its "emergence" as an ambiguous text? If the text is a testament to the life of its author, we must be cautious not to judge such a life according to the narrow biographical sense of the term, as if the author's life were itself an open book, an explicit and comprehensive bibliography of sorts.

Rather, Nietzsche asks the reader to consider the general conditions of life—its prognosis for advance and decline, its strength or weakness, its general etiology—as well as that of its sustaining culture and values. Thus, the innermost part of an author—what is most personal—must be understood as having its genesis in conditions outside himself. The texture of the text, therefore, is itself woven from "the hieroglyphic chains" of these universal conditions or forms of existence. Indeed, it is in this sense that Nietzsche will repeatedly criticize the very notion of a personal self or ego as being a "grammatical fiction," or state that the individual consciousness is merely "the surface phenomena" of unconscious forces and drives—and in the same breath claim, "I am every name in history."

The demands imposed on his readers are thus considerable. And if few thinkers have been so maligned and abused as Nietzsche, fewer still have lent themselves to precisely this kind of misinterpretation: "My writings are difficult; I hope this is not considered an objection." Everywhere, Nietzsche's style is to write in excess, in extravagance, or, as he says, "in blood." His thought issues in total profusion, and resists every attempt to make it systematic. Indeed, "It is not easily possible to understand the blood of another."⁴

Nowhere, then, has the *style* of a philosopher's expression so forcefully reflected its content. What he says and how he says it are so much the same. Both style and world, for Nietzsche, emerge as a play of appearances—what he calls the Will to Power, the will to will, to form and create—and the dynamism of this play expresses an overabundance of force, energy, life—teeming and recurrent affirmation.

How greedily this wave approaches . . . But already another wave is approaching, still more greedily and savagely than the first, and its soul, too, seems to be full of secrets and the lust to dig up treasures. Thus live waves—thus live we who will . . . Carry on as you like, roaring with overweening pleasure and malice—or dive again, pouring your emeralds down into the deepest depths, and throw your infinite white mane of foam and spray over them: Everything suits me, for

everything suits you so well, and I am so well-disposed toward you for everything; how could I think of betraying you? For—mark my word!—I know you and your secret, I know your kind! You and I—are we not of one kind?—You and I—do we not have *one secret*?⁵

It is this kind of fertility or richness that refuses to be systematized, discretely categorized, and, ultimately, calcified by some ruse or device of language, some simple definition, or essence, or form. His use of the aphorism or apothegm, for instance, is fully crucial to this dynamics; in fact, it is probably his most distinctive stylistic feature:

Praise of aphorisms—A good aphorism is too hard for the tooth of time and is not consumed by all millennia, although it serves every time for nourishment: thus it is the great paradox of literature, the intransitory amid the changing, the food that always remains esteemed, like salt, and never loses its savor, as even that does.⁶

The aphorism (i.e., the short, terse, incisive remark that expresses a wider truth) is itself alive and animate—it responds to the genius and inspiration of a critical mind, but it resists formalization and catechism. It is a turn of phrase and thought—a movement of expression that, of itself, directs us beyond a fixed idea, a fixed place-holder in a static system of rules and beliefs.⁷ Indeed, the aphorism destroys the possibility of such a simple correspondence because it is essentially incomplete. The aphorism demands that an operation be performed upon itself for its very intelligibility: that it be inserted into ever new contexts, that it be related to ever new referential sets. The aphorism, then, is essentially metaphorical: it gathers, culls, collects, compares, and assembles—however briefly—this movement of thought. Like metaphor, the aphorism brings together scattered elements in a single move. In this sense, metaphorical thought is continually active. Like Zarathustra himself, the metaphor is homeless, a wanderer. It gathers its strength in a continual process of displacement and transference (*metapherein*), in always finding its message from without and above: “I look down because I am elevated . . . In the mountains the shortest way is from peak to peak; but for that one must have strong legs. Aphorisms should be peaks—and those who are addressed, tall and lofty.” And, as Zarathustra will add, “I am *building* a mountain range out of ever more sacred mountains.”⁸

Perpetually active, incomplete, manifold, and alive, the metaphor not only characterizes a movement of thought, it also stands as an analogue for what exists. The metaphor is an analogical expression for the dynamic flow of appearances themselves—what Nietzsche calls the Will to Power. Moreover, if Will to Power is the most comprehensive of all things, without

itself being *a* thing—or substance, or matter, or form—and if all things are expressions or appearances of Will to Power, then Nietzsche can only write about it metaphorically. Thus, when Nietzsche attempts to discuss Will to Power as such, it is always metaphorical: Will to Power as force, as will, as power, as definition, as limitation, as knowledge, as life, etc. Indeed, he describes it as a text that has disappeared underneath its interpretations—in which case there is no unitary being, essence, form, category, or identity that can be applied to the metaphorical “notion” of Will to Power.

If the metaphor is *essentially* relational, so is the Will to Power:

A quantum of power is designated by the effect it produces and that which it resists. The adaphorous state is missing . . . It is a question of struggle between two elements of unequal power: a new arrangement of forces is achieved according to the measure of power in each of them.⁹

Essentially relational and not static, what appears to us as existent is only the factored product of other, nonapparent and differential forces. And this factored product stands as a *symptom* or *sign* of the precedent forces, which are themselves only relatively determinate and calculable. Thus, Nietzsche’s account of Will to Power provides the basis for two kinds of interpretation—what could be called the differential analysis and the genealogical analysis. Taken together, they are meant to serve as a general theory of signs, of semiotics. Furthermore, the motivation for this general theory of signs is coextensive with the whole question of metaphor.

Even in his earliest work, Nietzsche questioned the veracity of conventional language. Words are only metaphors; indeed, they are doubly metaphorical:

One designates only the relations of things to man, and to express them, one calls on the boldest metaphors. A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor.¹⁰

In which case, Nietzsche denies the fundamental correspondence between the signifier and the signified: the word never expresses an identical meaning, much less an identical object. There is no order of meaning independent of the words or signs used to designate them. Consequently, there is no transcendent meaning, no ideal signification, no privileged reference, no univocal equation between “designations” and “things.” The use of words is entirely conventional, and their signification consists in the manipulation of other words—convenient, agreed-upon fictions, that out of habit pass as representatives or rude equivalents for our own perceptual images.¹¹ If the strict univocal reference between word and object, word and meaning, is

thus denied, it follows that the classical concept of propositional truth becomes an impossibility—and this is due precisely to the primacy of metaphor.

What, then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power . . . To be truthful means using the customary metaphors—in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory to all.¹²

Nietzsche is fully willing to embrace the consequences of this position, for what is important is not the pretension to seize upon an unchanging truth, an ideal meaning, or fixed being, but rather to uncover the considerations that incline or impel us to follow such conventions. What is in question, then, is the *deciphering* of the code that assigns a value to certain terms and the rules that govern our use of these terms. What complicates matters is that we are largely unaware of these codes: hence the necessity for grasping these terms as *signs*, and the need for a theory of interpretation understood as a general semiotics.

2. SYSTEM: METAPHOR-METAMORPHOSIS

Let us first state the relation between metaphorical signification and Will to Power that Nietzsche uses to develop this general semiotics (and later elaborate this in terms of differential and genealogical analysis): in brief, it consists in a parallel rejection of transcendence.

a. On the one hand, we have seen that metaphorical signification amounts to a chain of substitutions, of metonyms, that is limited to a field of conventional language. While the number of possible substitutions (or references, transfers, transpositions) is finite—i.e., is bounded by the resources of a given language—the process of substituting one for another is open-ended. The constitution of the metaphor is thus a process that is at least temporally open to infinity. The metaphor, then, enjoys a “finite” but “open” economy.

Finite: Signification is limited to the order of the *signifier* alone (words, references, substitutions, representations, all the grammatical resources of a language—indeed, of all known languages, natural or artificial). Thus, there is no transcendent or transcendental order, nothing beyond language, to guide or subtend linguistic signification from without. Language makes

sense because it can draw upon itself; what it has to say can be said. If language seems deficient, this is because its own resources have yet to be fully exploited and expressed. Nietzsche will suggest that such elements as rhythm, style, tempo, music, tone, gesture, image, and metaphor are resources *of* language that, as yet, have barely been recognized, much less practiced. In any case, signification comes from within, from the metaphorical order of the signifier, and not from without, not from some transcendental signified that would stand *outside* language and pretend to govern it. Consequently, for Nietzsche, there is no divine principle of intelligibility, no first word of grace or truth, no final meaning, no privileged signified—such as God, thing in itself, phallus, pure idea, soul, production, or profit—that would irrevocably determine the sequence and value of the signifiers within language. Within language: that is, within culture, society, politics, and history.

Open: Each element within the signifying order, as well as the relations between these elements, can therefore be continually reinvested, churned, altered, and transformed by virtue of the temporally “open” character of the metaphorical economy. It is this infinitely “open” aspect of transformation that liberates the whole field of signification from its traditional finitude. It does this by removing the restrictions and prohibitions imposed on it by a particular axiomatic set (e.g., the privilege of one epistemological, logical, or metaphysical set of valuations), by eliminating specific rules of operation and derivation upon this set (which rules, for example, might ultimately result in bureaucratic tyranny, capitalism, psychoanalysis), by extending or dispensing with particular laws (e.g., laws of judgment, classification, action, grammar, decision, behavior, or even laws for codification itself), and, ultimately, by overcoming the conventional hierarchy itself (e.g., slave morality). All such restrictions were previously held to be “binding” on a given society and its entire conceptual order; they were thought to have been imposed from without, from beyond, and invariably to enjoy some transcendental sanction (God, logos, myth, sacred tradition, or idealized nature).¹³

b. If the economy of metaphor is “finite” yet “open,” this is precisely how Nietzsche describes the metamorphic economy of Will to Power: as the continual expenditure of a finite field of forces.

Regarded mechanistically, the energy of the totality of becoming remains constant; regarded economically, it rises to a high point and sinks down again in an eternal circle. This “Will to Power” expresses itself in the interpretation, in the manner in which force is used up.¹⁴

Just as any signifier results from the metaphoric play of language, so does every organic or inorganic state result from the metamorphic play of Will to Power. Thus, Will to Power “expresses” itself or “interprets” itself at

every moment. And so far as the finite resources of language “define” every term within the language—with no need to postulate a transcendental source—the same holds for Will to Power. Each state, each “expression” or “interpretation,” is produced by the continual metamorphosis of a constant or finite Will to Power and is thus “defined” by it—again, with no need of postulating any transcendental source. Like the economy of language, the economy of Will to Power is also “open”: what Nietzsche calls, from his earliest to his latest work, “becoming” (i.e., all movement, metamorphosis, play of appearances, dynamics, mechanics, growth and diminution: in short, all organic and inorganic processes). Only two things remain fixed for the Will to Power: its constant or finite quantity, and its perpetual metamorphosis, its infinite becoming. The Will to Power never attains equilibrium, therefore, even though it accounts for all definition in the natural or cultural world. Here, definition is understood as the temporary limitation of force encountering another force; as the master will controlling and delimiting a subservient will; as the factoring of force vectors that results in their incorporation; as the rivulets of force that coalesce to form a flood, a wave, an impact against a still larger force; as the chemical consolidation of ionic structures; as the legislator imposing direction upon his subjects; as tradition and authority bearing the judgment of the centuries; as the eruption of psychological drives into a concerted effort; as the repression of one impulse by another; as the sublimation of one will by a stronger will; as the submission of the weak to the strong; as the response of the weak to gather together and overcome the strong in turn. In each case Will to Power appears, expresses, or interprets itself as organic or inorganic definition, and it does this through a continual process of differentiation and limitation—of one force by another, whether by fusion, accumulation, or strife. And this is precisely what Nietzsche means by *life*.

Thus, Nietzsche recognizes two kinds of signifier: word and thing. The word, the linguistic sign, stands as the metaphorical product of its linguistic resources, and the thing, the organic or inorganic state of affairs, stands as the metamorphic product of Will to Power. Moreover, both are fully immanent to their respective spheres. While they are both defined *by* their spheres, they also serve as defining elements *within* their respective finite systems—that is, as signifiers, they both point to other signifiers and are pointed to by them; together, they form a finite totality. The function of each signifier within its respective system is thus eternally recurrent or recursive—which is to say that the prospect of transcending either system is denied from the outset. Indeed, the very possibility of transcendence as such—and, most importantly, of one system by the other—is also denied. It is precisely this doctrine of total immanence that will be the “Joyful Wisdom,” the “Gay Science.” What it teaches us, above all, is that the system Metaphor-Metamorphosis is essentially *one*, that word is no longer opposed to thing, nor thought to nature, *logos* to *physis*, soul to body, speech

to writing, presence to absence. In short, Man is no longer opposed to World:

The whole attitude of “man *versus* the world,” man as world-denying principle, man as the standard of the value of things, as judge of the world, who in the end puts existence itself on his scales and finds it too light—the monstrous impertinence of this attitude has dawned upon us as such, and has disgusted us—we now laugh when we find “Man *and* World” placed beside one another, separated by the sublime presumption of the little word “and”!¹⁵

Man and world, word and thing, both belong to the order of the signifier, the *only* order of things—a doctrine that will be variously repeated throughout Nietzsche’s works under three titles: Eternal Return, Will to Power, and Overman.¹⁶ For such a doctrine, the whole of this “pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature” becomes a text to be interpreted—and so does the reader of the text, he who has become “naturalized” by this doctrine.

3. INTERPRETING NIETZSCHE

Now we can see why the ambiguity of Nietzsche’s text extends—pointedly—to the reader. For whether he chooses it or not, the reader is necessarily implicated in the text:

Ultimately, nobody can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience one will have no ear . . . This is, in the end, my average experience and, if you will, the originality of my experience. Whoever thought he had understood something of me, had made something out of me after his own image—not uncommonly an antithesis to me.¹⁷

In this sense, the author, too, remains ambiguous: he is “merely mouth-piece, merely the medium of overpowering forces.” The text thus stands as a system of exchanges—between the author and his experience, between word and thing, between history and its future. And if, for Nietzsche, consciousness itself seems to be dispossessed of its “subject,” its “author,” the text is even more so; it no longer seems to be the simple testament of an idiosyncratic will. Strange:

The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things

themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors (“Here all things come caressingly to your discourse and flatter you; for they want to ride on your back. On every metaphor you ride to every truth . . . Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak”). This is *my* experience of inspiration.¹⁸

In a letter to Jacob Burckhardt (22 September 1886), he will describe this kind of inspiration as “uncanny,” and claim that “articulating it may well be the most dangerous venture there is, not for the one who dares to express it but for the one to whom it is addressed.”

The danger for the reader ultimately lies in the dispossession of his own identity and the loss of his conventional world. And this danger begins once the reader enters into the text, once he interprets it. To understand a text, word, or thing is to interpret it, to decipher it. For Nietzsche, this means to perform a *genealogical* analysis upon it—and in two senses. The first is to perform a historical deconstruction or desedimentation of the terms involved, in order to decipher the conditions of their development. As he says in *The Genealogy of Morals*, this “art of exegesis” must be carried out in the spirit of “rumination”—without guile, meanness, or preconceived intent. The interpretation of morality, for example, begins with the question, “Under what conditions did man devise these value judgments; good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess?” It proceeds by establishing the elements that are included in moral systems generally, the relevant historical facts and their conditions—among which he cites specific ages and epochs, various kinds of peoples, different types of individuals, and their respective social stratification. The analysis then turns to the dynamics of social stratification, where moral value is first fixed according to class distinction. In this way, the claim of any moral value can be understood as precisely that—a claim. What the value signifies, therefore, is far more extensive than its stated surface claim: it can be variously understood as (or in terms of) its consequences, as the symptom of an age, as a mask, as self-righteousness, as the cause of a subsequent state of affairs, as the remedy to a prior state of affairs, as a stimulant, or, even, as a poison.

Furthermore, insofar as the signification of each term derives from its relations to other terms, the relations disclosed by analysis emerge to form a pattern of stress or structural opposition. Thus, the genealogical analysis provides a strictly coherent means of interpreting each term within the context of a more comprehensive set. For Nietzsche, each moral term will find its value and significance with respect to a set of such relational oppositions as body-soul, life-death, strength-weakness, rational-irrational, gain-loss, conscious-unconscious, absolute-relative, pretended-actual, pleasure-pain, public-private, intent-deed, theory-practice, etc. And by

viewing one set of oppositions from the perspective of another, one can discern the organic character of a particular system and effectively pursue the questions Nietzsche poses. We can ask, for example, about the stated origin of a given moral term, and follow with its pretended or actual origin—in the conscious intentions of the founder, or in the subconscious habits of its proponents or subjects. We can then ask for its purpose, its organizing principles. We can also ask, “*Who* derives benefits from a particular ethical code?” Only the believers? The public at large? The founders? Its priests? The prince? No one?

Nietzsche performs a genealogical analysis in a second sense, which is both etymological and grammatical. “The signpost to the right road was for me the question: what was the real etymological significance of the designations for ‘good’ coined in the various languages?”¹⁹ Thus, moral terms themselves stand as the etymological traces of a historical past. In this way they serve as surnames that testify to an origin and a subsequent line of succession. And if etymological analysis locates the origin of moral valuation in the social distinction between the higher and lower classes—where “good” corresponds to “noble” and “bad” to “plebeian”—the analysis of grammatical categories constitutes a genealogy that extends to the whole domain of Western thought. First, it reveals that Western thought is a unified system:

That individual philosophical concepts are not anything capricious or autonomously evolving, but grow up in connection and with each other; that, however suddenly and arbitrarily they seem to appear in the history of thought, they nevertheless belong just as much to a system as all the members of the fauna of a continent—is betrayed . . . by the fact that the most diverse philosophers keep filling in a definite fundamental scheme of possible philosophies.²⁰

Second, the analysis suggests that this system has a single origin that commands its subsequent development, an origin that is itself hidden, nonapparent, or unconscious:

Under an invisible spell, they always revolve once more in the same orbit; however independent of each other they may feel themselves with their critical or systematic wills, something within them leads them, something impels them in a definite order—to wit, the innate systematic structure and relationship of their concepts. Their thinking is, in fact, far less a discovery than a recognition, a remembering, a return and homecoming to a remote, primordial, and inclusive household of the soul, out of which those concepts grew originally: philosophizing is to this extent a kind of atavism of the highest order.²¹

Finally, this “remote, primordial, and inclusive household of the soul” can be specified. It is the unifying basis of Western intelligibility as such—namely, the very grammar *by which* it thinks:

The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Where there is affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions—that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world-interpretation. It is highly probable that philosophers within the domain of the Ural-Altai languages (where the concept of the subject is least developed) look otherwise “into the world,” and will be found on paths of thought different from those of the Indo-Germanic peoples and the Muslims . . . So much by way of rejecting Locke’s superficiality regarding the origin of ideas.²²

The grammatical functions determine the terms *of* thought as well as the rules *for* thought: thus, subject, predicate, affirmation, and negation will permit the development of a double axiomatic set (identity and causality) and favor only certain operations to be performed upon this set (e.g., binary opposition). The concepts that derive from this axiomatic system thus circumscribe Western thought as such—i.e., all “possible philosophies.” Identity gives rise to the concepts of unity, plurality, specific difference, number, permanence, movement (space and time), subject and substance (self, ego, soul, God, particle). Causality gives rise to the concepts of cause and effect, action and passion, free will, determinism, universal law, mechanism, process and change. Finally, this set is factored according to the operations of binary opposition. This governs the working-out of the system, and the development of subsequent systems of thought, by establishing such regulative limits as true-false, real-apparent, good-evil, worldly-otherworldly, human-divine, body-soul, immanent-transcendent, virtue-sin, and the whole system of conceptual oppositions we inherit today. The very threshold of metaphysics is to be found here, in this genesis of oppositions.²³

Yet genealogical analysis quickly encounters its own limits: its very form of analysis, the regressive analysis of precedent causes—the quest for a discrete origin that can be evidenced to the inquiring subject—is itself governed by the axioms of identity and causality. Its critical capacity is thus dependent on the system it holds in question. Because of this limitation, Nietzsche will progressively stress the differential form of analysis, an analysis that corresponds to the defining character of Will to Power, in his later work. Now the object of analysis is the apparent product of the differential interaction of force (force taken in its widest sense). Epis-

temologically, the perceived object is only a sign of the difference between two sets of forces: that of the perceptual and the sense-giving forces on the part of the subject, together with the quantum of natural forces that he initially encounters. Ontologically, the same process occurs: the object is itself the factored product of a multitude of forces, most of which are nonapparent and necessarily obscured by the defining play of forces. Beginning with the object, with the temporary end product of the metaphoric-metamorphic chain, its conditions are *not* necessarily, or even practically, ascertainable. As in vector analysis, one has to *begin* with stated conditions and constants in order to *arrive* at a calculation of the final force vector. And for Nietzsche, this is ultimately not possible, since Will to Power as a finite whole is also chaos, chance, fate. In the process of defining itself—in the process of definition itself—Will to Power necessarily obliterates its origins. Beginning, origin, purpose, etc., are forcibly overcome in the ensuing relational field of Will to Power—i.e., of the system metaphormetamorphosis. A lacuna arises in the heart of genealogical analysis, therefore—one that testifies to an ultimate *loss* of “meaning” and “purpose” (in the conventional sense of either recovering origins, establishing ends, or deciding the “value” of any text). In the textual *center* of *The Genealogy of Morals* (in the middle section of the middle essay: Part II, §12), Nietzsche concedes this irreparable loss of center:

All events in the organic world are a subduing, a becoming master, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous “meaning” and “purpose” are necessarily obscured or even obliterated.

Thus Nietzsche’s conflicting and oftentimes contradictory interpretations of a particular subject matter indeed make sense: that thought, for example, is dictated by the conventions of Indo-European grammar—certainly. But *also*, and just as frequently, he will claim that thought is inexorably dictated by morality, theology, biological utility, the need for communication; by social utility; by psychological, historical, cultural, physiological, occupational, and even nutritional restraints. Where in all this could a discrete origin, meaning, or purpose be found? A discrete genealogy?

A field of signs is thus accessible to analysis, but the analysis itself results in an infinite regress: forms of intelligibility, interpretations, occur for a given culture and obtain for a given epoch (e.g., “two thousand years of Christianized Platonism”), yet the constellations of significance owe their disposition to a continual process of creation and destruction—namely, to the metaphoric-metamorphic field of Will to Power. And, in the end, these generative traces cannot be tracked down, for they precondition all determination, all definition or specificity. Any analysis that relies exclusively on such categories as static and genetic, synchronic and diachronic, etc., must

finally confront the fact that they are only relative determinations of chaos itself.

The danger of interpretation, therefore, is the prospect of loss: of a text that no longer makes sense according to the traditional logocentric hierarchy. But the greatest danger, Nietzsche said, belongs to the person *to whom* the text is addressed.

What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forward, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker?²⁴

Such a person will no longer be what he was—i.e., he will no longer be taken up in the rational-moral-theological world of the previous epoch, our epoch. Ultimately, he will attain an entirely new form of thought, of sensibility and affectivity, and find himself in a transformed world. To the extent that present forms of sensibility are themselves evanescent configurations of an epoch, there will emerge ever new forms of humanity, emotions, and aspirations—no longer earth-bound, no longer bound to the past, to the *ressentiment*-laden “it was” or its transcendent surrogates. If this is a danger, it also and at the same time offers the greatest prospect of liberation through its infinitizing economy of Eternal Recurrence.

If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the heaviest burden. *Or*, how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?²⁵

Already this is apparent in the Nietzschean text—let us say that the use of metaphor, aphorism, apothegm, styled ambiguity all stands apart from the very system of Western thought that demands specific unity and identification. The text of Nietzsche no longer is constrained to a foundation of univocal meaning, discrete cause, unifying origin, to the principle of identity and specific difference. It no longer promises a final aim, goal, or purpose. It demands a dangerous explosion on the part of the reader even to follow such a text. Thus, one reads Nietzsche across heretofore unheard-of registers—by way of all the emotions, sensibilities, and dreams that can be brought to bear upon it. The Nietzschean text becomes something to be ingested, digested, transformed, and transfigured, and, together with it, the reader. Such a text becomes inseminated by the reader and disseminated

through the reader, just as the reader inevitably undergoes this exchange with the world.

Thus, the invocation of the Eternal Return in the passage cited above is not merely another evangelical rhapsody. Despite its profound psychological appeal, it effectively situates the reader himself as a metaphoric and metamorphic element within the text. First, it asks *us* to be ratified within the eternal cycle. Not only would our lives be repeated to infinity, therefore, but the very cycle of past and future—from antediluvian eons to the final cataclysm—would be ceaselessly, interminably, relived. But second, and more important, if we were to grant the finite and open economics of the system we would also grant the untold, myriad permutations this finite system could endure, and our present dust-speck existence would be taken as one micro-instant of one set of atomic arrangements. This would be a system of crypto-incarnations, of insemination and dissemination of our own sub-particulate matter: like Leibniz' illustrious monads, we would reflect a universe at all times, we would literally inhabit an infinitude of worlds. We would be found on the steppes of Asia, in the forests of the night, under the waves that crash headlong onto Portofino's cliffs—and we would indeed know their secret.

Would not the fear of a vengeful God and the reprobations from a host of priests disappear like a sweet aftertaste in the light of this conception? To be buried—only to rise again and again pass away, metamorphosed by another wrinkle, another fold in the crystalline vaults? Not only would this Eternal Return be a psychological incentive to accept immanence, but it would itself be the highest expression of the will to live. It—the Eternal Return itself—would be the grandest and most complete expression of the Will to Power. Its conception would bring us a superhuman happiness. Its inception would bring us *to* humanity and history:

In fact, this is one aspect of the new sentiment. He who knows how to regard the history of man in its entirety as *his own history* feels in the immense generalization all the grief of the invalid who thinks of health, of the old man who thinks of the dream of his youth, of the lover who is robbed of his beloved, of the martyr whose ideal is destroyed, of the hero on the evening of the indecisive battle which has brought him wounds and the loss of a friend. But to bear this immense sum of grief of all kinds, to be able to bear it, and yet still be the hero who at the commencement of a second day of battle greets the dawn and his happiness as the one who has a horizon of centuries before and behind him, as the heir of all nobility, of all past intellect, and the obligatory heir (as the noblest) of all the old nobles; while at the same time the first of a new nobility, the equal of which has never been seen nor even dreamt of: to take all this upon his soul, the oldest, the newest, the losses, hopes, conquests, and victories of mankind: to have all this at

last in one soul, and to comprise it in one feeling: —this would necessarily furnish a happiness which man has not hitherto known—a God’s happiness, full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness which, like the sun in the evening, continually gives of its inexhaustible riches and empties into the sea—and like the sun, too, feels itself richest when even the poorest fisherman rows with golden oars! This divine feeling might then be called—humanity.²⁶

Here, it is not so much a question of projecting ourselves onto the world from without as if we, too, were neocolonialists surveying an empire; rather, it is the reverse—it would be as if world, history, and humanity became *us*, became transformed and included in our history—it would be as if they constituted precisely what we are. All this unfolds itself through us and across the Nietzschean text. We become the heirs and possessors of this titanic dance: that would be the blood that courses through our veins, the figures and emotions that generate themselves through the faces at Marienbad, that dance “La Ronde.”

If text is world, and if style is in some measure capable of expressing content, then Nietzsche has succeeded in overcoming the principle of transcendence. Transcendence in this light now appears fully coextensive with immanence, with the eternalization of metaphor and metamorphosis:

We philosophers and “free spirits” feel ourselves irradiated as by a new dawn by the report that “the old God is dead;” our hearts overflow with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment, and expectation. At last the horizon seems open once more, granting even that it is not bright; our ships can at last put out to sea in the face of every danger; every hazard is again permitted to the discerners; the sea, *our* sea, again lies open before us; perhaps never before did such an “open sea” exist.²⁷

NOTES

1. “The long prefaces which I have found necessary for the new edition of my complete works tell with a ruthless honesty some curious things about myself. With these I’ll ward off ‘the many’ once and for all. . . . I’ve thrown out my hook to ‘the few’ instead, and even with them I’m prepared to be patient. For my ideas are so indescribably strange and dangerous that only much later (surely not before 1901) will anybody be ready for them.” Letter to Malwida von Meysenburg, May, 1887. See also *Beyond Good and Evil*, §30; *The Gay Science*, §381.

2. *GS*, §365. “You see what posthumous thoughts occupy my mind. But a philosophy like mine is like a tomb—it seals one off from the living. *Bene vixit qui bene latuit* (Who has hidden himself well has lived well); that’s

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