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Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of Humanities

Camus' Reception of Nietzsche's Mythopoesis

by

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Abstract

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Nietzsche uses mythopoesis in order to communicate a number of related ideas that can only be expressed in the medium of myth. His aim is to establish a *rapport* with his readers who through his mythopoeic works are called upon to act. The ideas Nietzsche attempts to communicate concern an attitude and disposition towards life he calls the *Dionysian* and the action his readers are called upon to perform relate to the social stratification of society with the aim of facilitating the emergence of 'great individuals'. However, Nietzsche also employs mythopoesis to communicate ideas concerning the mythopoeic method itself and the process of pursuing philosophical ideas in depths greater than usually attempted. In other words, Nietzsche uses mythopoesis in an attempt to make clear how mythopoesis works. To successfully establish a *rapport* with Nietzsche and correctly answer his calls to action one must receive his mythopoeic works as mythopoesis and not something else.

Albert Camus carried out his philosophical inquiries in the medium of myth. His early works, those in his 'Absurd' cycle, can be read explicitly as responses to Nietzsche's mythopoesis. In his works Camus always invites the readers to join him in his philosophical investigations. Reading Nietzsche in the light of Camus' work brings us much closer to discovering the meaning of his calls to action. However, Camus is neither merely a follower nor guide; his work brings out the meaning of Nietzsche's call but not uncritically. Careful study of Camus' response to Nietzsche's mythopoesis reveals those insights that are invaluable and those which require correcting.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

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2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

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Most of all I would like to thank my wife Helen without whom none of this would have been possible or worthwhile.

Abbreviations of Nietzsche's Works

Unless otherwise stated, I have used the following translations of Nietzsche's works, referring to them with the following abbreviations.

AC ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols.* Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005)

BGE ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil.* Edited by Rolfe-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013)

BT ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Edited by Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008)

D ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak*. Edited by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003)

EH ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols.* Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005)

GM ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On The Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2017)

GS ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013)

HH ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human.* Edited by Marion Faber. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1994)

TI ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols.* Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005)

UM ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Untimely Meditations*. Edited by Daniel Breazeale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2011)

WP ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited by R. Kevin Hill. Penguin Classics (2017)

Z ..... Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006)

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is not only to offer an account of what I understand mythopoesis to be but to help make the case that both Nietzsche and Camus have produced mythopoeic texts that, in order to receive the mythopoesis contained within, must be read in a particular way. This particular way of reading can be called 'reading for mythopoesis.' It is by no means that I am suggesting that any text can be read for mythopoesis; rather only those that have been consciously written as mythopoesis can benefit from this kind of reading.[1] Accordingly, there exist texts, and sections of text within texts from both authors that will not benefit at all from mythopoeic reading. Much of this thesis is concerned with how to recognise texts that will benefit from this reading. More importantly, I am certainly not suggesting that works by Nietzsche nor Camus can *only* be profitably received when read for mythopoesis. Nor am I suggesting that reading for mythopoesis is a stand-alone alternative to any other kind of reading. Rather, reading for mythopoesis is best when considered as complementary to other kinds of readings.

We will see in this thesis that Camus did his philosophising in the medium of myth and was enormously influenced by his reading of Nietzsche. My argument is that his reading of Nietzsche was a mythopoeic reading. The title of this thesis is "Camus' Reception of Nietzsche's Mythopoesis"; this refers not only to how Camus reads Nietzsche but to Camus' own mythopoeic works. Much of his output, in particular those texts devoted to his most popular ideas, 'the absurd' and 'rebellion', can be considered a mythopoeic response to Nietzsche's mythopoesis. My own reception of Nietzsche and response to his mythopoesis has been through a Camusian lens. The hope I have for this thesis is that it offers to those working in both Nietzsche studies and Camus studies a way of reading the works of these authors that will provide additional insights. That is, not a replacement for current and traditional readings but a complementary approach to be used alongside and in addition to this important work.

In the **first chapter**, I offer an account of what I understand mythopoesis to be. In brief, a mythopoeic text is one that attempts to establish a *rapport* with its readers through the medium of myth, in order to call for action on some issue. Typically, authors using mythopoesis do so in order to draw attention to some aspect of their society or milieu which they believe is negatively

[1] Neither Nietzsche nor Camus would have heard the term 'mythopoesis' which was not in use at the times they were actively working. However, it should be clear by the end of this thesis that both authors were doing so despite having not heard of the technical term for what they are doing.

affected by misguided beliefs concerning commonly held values. Through mythopoesis, they seek to encourage their readers to re-evaluate their values.

However, mythopoesis is a process not solely concerned with persuading an audience to act in some way; the myths contained within the text are also the medium through which the authors attempt to understand and describe the particular issues that concern them. It is useful to think of a mythopoeic text as an attempt to recreate in the readers a revelatory experience encountered by the author. Because of this, the power of myths to help establish a *rapport* between author and reader is a vital part of the process.

The myths created by mythopoeic authors often draw upon existing myths. Although there are obvious practical benefits to reusing well-known myths to reach a wide audience, mythopoeic authors often find themselves challenging existing values that were established by previous mythopoesis. Camus, for example, uses the myth of Silenus used by Nietzsche in order to challenge his mythopoesis; Nietzsche uses Silenus to challenge Christian mythopoesis with reference to ancient Greece mythopoesis.

This approach to myth is quite different to how myths are typically received today. Typically, myths are considered to be traditional stories with fantastical elements previously believed to be true in more primitive days but no longer taken as the literal truth today. In addition, labelling something 'a myth' is often used as a shorthand for something being widely believed but in fact not true. An example of the former understanding of myth is the story of Odysseus tricking Polyphemus the cyclops. An example of the latter is the idea that eating carrots is beneficial for the eyesight. When this is referred to as 'a myth' what is meant is that it is not true despite being believed so by many people. These two conceptions of myth I refer to as 'the everyday understanding myth' and in chapter one, I show how both Nietzsche and Camus use myths in a different way. I refer to this approach to myth as 'myth-making in an older sense' and show that Nietzsche and Camus approach myth in a way similar to that of the ancient Greeks.

Much of the first chapter is devoted to drawing out what I identify as 'the four characteristic factors of mythopoesis. In brief, these are: (1) an attempt to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable; (2) an attempt to make clear that something is important or valuable; (3) an attempt to establish a *rapport*; and (4) a call to action. I argue that for a text to be mythopoeic all four factors must be present. At the end of the chapter, the reader will be able to identify texts by Nietzsche and Camus as candidates for mythopoeic reading.[2]

[2] And any other mythopoeic texts by other authors.

In **chapter two**, I look in detail at Nietzsche's unusual conception of music. I begin with an extended exploration of *GS* 106 and the idea of music as an intercessor and an advocate. My analysis of this aphorism reveals that Nietzsche's 'music', as a medium with which to communicate particular ideas in a particular way, is intended to serve the same purpose as that which I identify as mythopoeic. It is clear to see that the kind of 'music' that Nietzsche refers to covers something much broader that what we traditionally understand music to be. For example, Nietzsche considers his texts to be musical works and, as such, to be received (and performed) as 'music'. In this chapter, I show that Nietzsche consciously composes his texts to be performed by his readers. I do not claim that we should take him literally when he suggests that his works must be sung in order to be properly received; but I show that Nietzsche produces texts that can be received not just by the kind of traditional reading that is standard for philosophical texts and other literature but in this other 'musical' and performative way. My claim is that what Nietzsche refers to as 'musical' is another way of saying 'mythopoeic'; and that a musical and performative way of reading his texts is another way of saying 'reading for mythopoesis'.

As shown in chapter one, mythopoesis must call for action of some sort. If Nietzsche's 'music' is mythopoeic then there must be some action he is calling for. Here, in chapter two, I also look at what I call Nietzsche's 'musical puritanism'. I show Nietzsche's belief that access to music must be strictly limited and restricted because of the potential power it has over the masses. This need to restrict music to control its political application and potential misuse and abuse is something Nietzsche shares not only with the Puritans but with Plato. I explore the idea that the reason music, understood in the broad way Nietzsche does, must be controlled is because it is mythopoeic.

I continue my investigations into Nietzsche's mythopoeic conception of music in **chapter three**. Here, I look in particular at what he understands 'Dionysian music' to be. The 'core myth' at the heart of Nietzsche's mythopoesis is his myth of Dionysus; I seek to use this chapter to establish the importance of Dionysus and the mythopoeic role played by this myth in Nietzsche's writings. The main textual focus of the chapter is Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, with particular emphasis on his 'Attempt at Self-Criticism' written some time later and included in the second edition of the text. In this chapter, I demonstrate that Nietzsche begins his philosophical writing career by writing mythopoeically, and that later when he critiques his earlier writing, he chides himself for being too moderate in this mythopoesis. This analysis shows us that Nietzsche begins his philosophical career writing mythopoeic texts and continues to value mythopoesis as a medium through which to express his philosophy in later years.

In the same chapter I also explore what Dionysus and the Dionysian mean to Nietzsche in terms of mythopoesis as a way of understanding the world. As we have seen, mythopoesis is not solely a means of convincing like-minded readers to act; but it is also a way of making sense of something about life, the world or the human condition that has been revealed through a revelatory episode experienced by the mythopoeic author. That is, I introduce the idea of Dionysus and the Dionysian as not just, for Nietzsche, the core myth at the heart of his mythopoesis but also a way Nietzsche has of understanding how mythopoesis itself works.

In **chapter four**, I turn my attention to Nietzsche's use of history in his mythopoesis. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated Nietzsche's use of mythopoesis in his first published book; in this chapter, I explore the rapid evolution in Nietzsche's approach to history from his first essays and public lectures to *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this chapter, we see how history is typically used in mythopoesis and how Nietzsche's use of history in his works is often mythopoeic. I also aim to show that for Nietzsche, the value of history derives from its use-value for mythopoesis. My investigation of Nietzsche's use of history in his mythopoesis shows how the historical content of his texts can be received when they are read for mythopoesis.

History, in this chapter, is approached in terms of teaching and the relationship between students and masters. This adds to the previous discussion, in chapter two, of *GS* 106 and the need for a musical mythopoesis in order to pass down teachings regarding social innovation. Another of my aims for this chapter is to show that Nietzsche considers the best teachers 'mystagogues' and the best students a small minority capable of receiving such teaching. We see that his elitism in education has a practical purpose. In chapter two, I discussed Nietzsche's call for limits and restrictions to be placed on music. I said that he does so because he believes that mythopoesis used by the wrong people and/or read by the wrong audiences poses a danger to the state. In particular, that he believes this a threat to the emergence of great individuals capable of leading their cultures to 'greatness'. Here in chapter four, I address this issue in terms of the genealogy of the idea in Nietzsche's own learning experience and how it relates to his mythopoesis, in particular his mythopoeic use of history.

Chapter five takes a close look at *GS* 125 and Nietzsche's concept of the death of God. Here, I explore Nietzsche's political anthropology and his mythopoeic attempt to say what it is to be a human being and how best to improve humankind. In chapter one we saw that mythopoesis is used to challenge previous mythopoeic efforts. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Nietzsche's 'Madman' expresses this idea in *GS* 125 when he claims that God is dead. That is, the previous Christian mythopoesis is dead and needs to be replaced with something new. This new

mythopoesis will have profound and possibly devastating effects on humankind, including what we believe it is to be a human being.

One of the main aims of this chapter is to show Nietzsche's concern with the process of mythopoesis as well as the use of mythopoesis in his texts. We also see here one of the key influences that Nietzsche's philosophy has on Camus. His work on the absurd is an investigation into the possibility of human existence without myths. The absurd itself is the unpleasant experience of suddenly finding oneself facing the world or contemplating life bereft of the myths that make sense of it.

In **chapter six**, I take a close look at *GS* 341 and Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return. One of the approaches to reading a text for mythopoesis is to ask oneself: what previous mythopoeic efforts is this author responding to? Here, I demonstrate that with his concept of the eternal return, and related ideas, Nietzsche is offering a counter myth to St. Paul. In particular, he opposes Paul's idea that the mysterious is best communicated in straightforward language.

In order to demonstrate what I consider to be 'reading Nietzsche for mythopoesis', I offer an extended and detailed comparison of the idea of eternal return as it appears in *GS* 341 and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In particular, I pay close attention to a neglected and overlooked phrase that appears in *Zarathustra* and is, I attempt to show, of great importance in our understanding of how the idea of the eternal return can be read as a counter myth to the mythopoesis of Pauline Christianity. This phrase is 'Mit klingendem Spiele.'[3] First, I discuss the apparent difficulties various translators have had in the past; how each has offered their own rendering with most opting for nothing like a literal translation. Then, I argue for the importance of understanding what Nietzsche intends this phrase to mean because it is spoken by, arguably, his most important creation, to qualify his most important idea: the eternal return. My aim is to show that the mythopoeic reading of 'Mit klingendem Spiele' offers a rich and fruitful line of inquiry that is missed by other approaches to reading Nietzsche.

In **chapter seven** I look at Nietzsche's 'mask metaphor'. My aim is to show that Nietzsche uses the idea of masks in order to investigate and discuss the process of mythopoesis. I show that he uses the idea of removing layer after layer of masks as a metaphor for ever deepening philosophical investigation. The idea is that when the last mask we have to remove is taken away, we are left with either nothing or an abyss that we cannot see into. I argue that this imagery is Nietzsche's metaphor for the limits of human understanding. Recalling Partenie's observation on the role of myth that we saw in chapter three of this thesis, I seek to show that Nietzsche uses his Dionysus

[3] *Z*, 'On the Vision and the Riddle' 1.

myth to capture the human need to 'approximate the truth about what lies beyond its experience.'[4]

The myth at the heart of his mask metaphor is the god of masks: Dionysus. Masks are put on to both hide and reveal at the same time. For example, actors on the Greek stage all wore masks and so their faces were hidden from the audience; however, these masks revealed the faces of the characters the actors were portraying. Nietzsche says that behind the masks of every character on the Greek stage is Dionysus.[5] Here we have two answers to the question of what lies behind an actor's mask. What is literally behind the actor's mask is the actor's actual face but metaphorically behind the mask we find Dionysus. In this chapter I aim to show that if we receive Nietzsche's texts as a special kind of 'music' to be 'performed', that is, to read his texts for mythopoesis, we will find characters within or, thought of another way, 'actors on Nietzsche's stage' that are wearing masks. For example, two such characters or actors are Socrates and St. Paul. A question I ask in this chapter is what will be found under the Socrates mask or St. Paul mask? In other words, when we read Nietzsche for mythopoesis and encounter Socrates or St. Paul, what will we find if we remove the masks of the 'actors'? The answer I give is that it must be Nietzsche himself or Dionysus. What I seek to show is that if we look for and find Nietzsche behind his portrayal of Socrates or St. Paul then we will discover his philosophical investigation of the process of mythopoesis; however, if we find Dionysus, then we encounter Nietzsche's mythopoeic, Dionysian philosophy.

Chapter eight draws on the previous chapter as here I look in detail at one of Nietzsche's most persistent and intriguing masks: St. Paul. I begin with a discussion of *The Antichrist* and argue for this text to be understood as being anti-Paul. In particular, I make the case that rather than being anti-Jesus, anti-Christ or anti-Christian, Nietzsche's text is opposed to Pauline Christianity. Reading for mythopoesis, the Paul to which Nietzsche is opposed in the text is Nietzsche's mask. That is, Paul is received as one of Nietzsche's masks. What we have on this reading is Nietzsche's mythopoesis in opposition to the mythopoesis of (Pauline) Christianity; or put in Nietzschean terms: Dionysus versus the Crucified. In making this case, I draw parallels between Nietzsche's mythopoeic use of Paul with Camus' mythopoeic use of Sisyphus.

In this chapter, I put forward my reading of Nietzsche's myth of Paul and his account of Christian mythopoesis to which he opposes his Dionysian mythopoesis. That is, Nietzsche's mythopoeic case against Christianity. I attempt to show that Nietzsche's case is that Pauline/Christian

[4] Partenie (2009), xix.
[5] *BT*, 10.

mythopoesis must be countered because what it calls for inhibits the establishment of great humans and 'greatness' itself.

In the **final chapter**, I look at Camus' response to Nietzsche's mythopoesis in his own works. We see how Camus immerses himself in Nietzsche's myths and heeds his call to action. I go into detail, showing how the various myths employed by Nietzsche are reimagined and reused in Camus's own mythopoeic works. That Camus was hugely inspired by Nietzsche, to the point of considering him a 'spiritual mentor' is well-known in Camus studies. In addition, the fact that Camus philosophises in the medium of myth can hardly go unnoticed: his most important philosophical text has 'myth' in the title and concludes with Camus' own version of the Sisyphus myth! However, to my knowledge, there has been no other attempt to catalogue the shared myths used by Camus and Nietzsche in their mythopoeic writings.

Importantly, I show that Camus is not a blind follower of Nietzsche but a careful reader that takes mythopoesis seriously. Indeed, Camus not only reads for mythopoesis but creates mythopoeic works in order to challenge Nietzsche's ideas. In this chapter we see that both Nietzsche and Camus use mythopoesis but that their individual calls for action are quite different. Put simply, Nietzsche is elitist and seeks a *rapport* with a very select audience; he calls for the cultivation of great individuals capable of making their communities 'great'. Camus is an egalitarian and seeks a *rapport* with as wide an audience as possible. He believes all human beings to be in some way inherently 'great' and calls upon us to recognise this through what he calls 'rebellion' which is constant contemplation of 'the absurd'. For Camus, the absurd is the unpleasant experience of being momentarily bereft of myths that can be employed in mythopoeic reflection. Accordingly, Camus calls for all of us to regularly engage in mythopoesis; his hope is that by doing so we will come to see a shared requirement to hold sacred human solidarity.

Chapter 1 The Four Characteristic Factors of Mythopoesis

In this chapter I discuss what is meant by 'mythopoesis' in this thesis. First, I look at the difference between mythopoesis and myth-making. Mythopoeic works create new myths; usually out of old myths but authors can create completely original myths if they choose. For a work to be mythopoeic it must, of course, contain myths but also other characteristic factors of mythopoesis. Myth-making that does not contain these other factors is not mythopoeic. Second, I compare mythopoesis, as it is understood here, with what could be called 'the everyday understanding of myths'. In everyday use, the word 'myth' is typically used to refer to a traditional story often involving fantastical elements, or as a shorthand for 'something widely believed to be true but is not.' However, mythopoesis does not necessarily involve traditional stories nor is there any requirement for fantastical elements.[6] Having said this, mythopoesis can and often does make use of, what we could call, fantasy elements. Examples of two such myths will be studied in detail in this thesis: Camus' Sisyphus myth is set in the fantastical backdrop of Tartarus; and aphorism 341 in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* begins with the intrusion of a demon.

The important thing to bear in mind is that the kind of myths we are interested in, that are contained within the mythopoeic texts under investigation here, are those that attempt to represent an aspect of the world as it is. Mythopoesis, here in particular the mythopoeic texts of Nietzsche and Camus, uses myths in order to highlight aspects of the world that require action of some kind. That is, myths represent aspects of the world as the myth-maker sees it and mythopoesis seeks to talk about the world as the speaker believes it ought to be.

Finally, in this chapter, I identify four characteristic factors of mythopoesis with a discussion of each with references to the works of Nietzsche and Camus. The aim of this chapter is to provide a solid understanding of mythopoesis; how it is used by Nietzsche and Camus to draw attention to what they see as 'something rotten in the state'; and to find a like-minded audience of readers on whom they can call for action.

1.1 What is meant by mythopoesis?

Mythopoesis refers to the *creation* or *retelling* of myths for the benefit of a society that no longer accepts such myths literally.[7] Typically, myths are repackaged and presented anew so that the

[6] The myth of the Norman yoke for example.
[7] Slochower (1970).

hero's quest becomes a critique of current social norms and values whilst typically pointing the way to an alternative future, preferable to the one towards which the author's society is headed under their current trajectory.[8] Unlike new myths that can be created anew in order to capture some novel aspect of the world, freshly experienced, new mythopoesis is aimed at an existing mythopoesis. According to Harry Slochower, mythopoesis begins with a similar concern to that voiced by Marcellus in Act 1, Scene 4 of *Hamlet*: 'something is rotten in the state.'[9] The mythopoeic texts of Camus and Nietzsche addressed in this thesis are all concerned in some way with challenging existing social norms and values. These existing social norms and values will themselves be the product of previous mythopoeic efforts that have had their calls to action answered and acted upon.[10]

The creation of myths is an activity distinct from the production of mythopoesis. As mentioned above, myths are used in order to talk about some aspect of the world as it is, whereas mythopoesis is the use of myths in order to talk about how, from the point of view of the mythopoeic myth-maker, some aspects of the world ought to be. While it is possible to create from scratch myths to be used in mythopoesis, it is most often the case that the myths used already exist and are well-known within the community towards which the mythopoesis is directed.[11] These well-known myths are typically changed in some way in order to fit the needs of the myth-maker.[12] Camus, for example, uses the myth of Sisyphus but omits some details and changes others to suit his purpose. Most significant is the change in emphasis from Sisyphus' ascent up the mountain to his journey back down. As a further example, in *GS* 341 Nietzsche evokes the existing idea of Greek daimons (δαιμόνιον), intermediaries between human beings and the gods.

It would not be controversial to claim that without first having a way of drawing attention to aspects of the world that ought in some way to be other than they are (or will be on the current trajectory), there cannot be any calls for action concerning possible change. It would also be equally uncontroversial to claim that the history of the evolution of human civilisations reveals a series of such calls to action, some successful and others not, in bringing about changes to aspects

[8] For myths in which there is no obvious hero, for example the myth of the Norman yoke, the narrative can be understood as an appeal for the audience to accept the quest and become the hero.
[9] Slochower (1970) 113. Slochower actually refers to the Divine Comedy but borrows the expression from Hamlet 'There is something wrong in the state [of Denmark].'
[10] According to Blumenberg (2010), the first myths and mythopoesis occurred sometime shortly after human beings began to walk upright and were confronted by the horizon.
[11] On a purely practical level it will be much easier to use myths that are already well-known to the audience. In chapter 3 of this thesis I include a discussion of the difficulties faced by St. Paul when attempting to use previously unheard of myths.
[12] Blumenberg (2010) refers to this process as 'work on myth'. See also Bottici (2009).

of the human experience. Nietzsche invokes such a series in the first essay of *On The Genealogy of Morality*. In section 16, he describes radical changes in Western word-view in terms of a repeated series of 'battles' fought by 'Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome'. The world-changing events he references are the Christianisation of Rome, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French Revolution and the arrival of Napoleon. Although Nietzsche never uses the term explicitly, the mythopoesis that would have been in use during the world-changing historical events he refers to would have consisted of myths designed to show the way things are and are used to call for action in order to change the way things are. As such, the mythopoesis aimed at changing the way things are, during say the Renaissance, would target previous mythopoeic efforts that sought to change the way things were in order to Christianise Rome. It is not my intention to claim that all changes in world-view throughout human history have been brought about solely through mythopoeic means; rather, I am claiming that when mythopoesis has played a part bringing about these changes, it has done so by targeting previous mythopoeic efforts. Thus I say that new mythopoesis is always aimed at existing mythopoesis. The relevance for my thesis is that when reading Camus or Nietzsche with mythopoesis in mind, it will be beneficial to explore what previous mythopoeic efforts these authors are targeting. In other words, when reading Camus' Sisyphus myth mythopoeically, we can ask ourselves what is it about the world that Camus believes ought to be changed and in particular what previous calls for change is he addressing.

It is worth mentioning here that new mythopoesis does not necessarily have to point to a different path to a preferable alternative future. It is possible for a mythopoeic text to confirm the values already held by a society and approve of the direction in which they are heading.[13] Here we can expect to see old myths repackaged or new myths created in order to test existing myths with a positive response.[14] In this case we have a *re*-evaluation of values that finds in favour of existing values.[15] Mythopoesis, whether of the former or latter kind, always involves myth-making aimed at a *re-e*valuation of values. My interest is in Camus and Nietzsche, both of whom use mythopoesis to critique and challenge social norms; and so, I will focus here solely on mythopoesis intended to point the way to alternative, preferable futures.

In this chapter I argue that there are four characteristic factors of mythopoesis that must be present in all mythopoeic texts. Each of these factors is discussed in detail below with illustrative

[13] Flood (2002).
[14] Even with positive outcomes, testing or challenging is viewed negatively. Consider Deuteronomy 6:16 and Matthew 5:7.
[15] As an example of this process, consider a painting valued at a million dollars; it is re-evaluated and the new valuation agrees with the previous valuation. The value of the painting after re-evaluation remains unchanged.

examples from the works of Nietzsche, Camus and elsewhere. In brief, these four characteristic factors are: (1) an attempt to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable; (2) an attempt to make clear that something is important or valuable; (3) an attempt to seek or establish a *rapport*; and (4) a call to action. Some of these characteristics can be found in mediums of communication other than mythopoesis but *all* will be present in a mythopoeic text.

Firstly there must be a myth contained within the mythopoesis. Accordingly, there must be (1) an attempt to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable. Since the mythopoeic author seeks to bring about change, in particular a change in commonly held values, the kind of myths they create will be focused on (2) making clear that which is important or valuable.[16] As we shall see, while it may be used in conjunction with rational argument, mythopoesis itself does not make use of arguments in order to make its case. Rather, the mythopoeic author seeks to (3) establish a *rapport* with their audiences. Finally, mythopoesis is the use of myths to draw attention to something that requires re-evaluation and action in order to change some aspect of the world. Accordingly, there must be (4) some kind of call to action within the mythopoesis.

1.2 The difference between myth-making and mythopoesis

Mythopoesis can be distinguished from 'simply' myth-making in the following way. All mythopoesis contains myths but not all myths are mythopoeic. Myths are the narrative core of the mythopoeic work, they are what we can point to when asked where 'the myth' is in a mythopoeic text. For example, in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the myth is the Sisyphus myth which concludes the text. The first two characteristic factors of mythopoesis concern the creation of the myths that will be used; the remaining two apply to how the creator uses the myths just created.

The final two characteristic factors of myth, treated on their own, can be found in mediums other than mythopoesis. A couple of examples: with poetry it is possible and common to attempt to establish a *rapport*; and shouting 'fire' is a call for action. Attempts to establish a *rapport* without the creation and use of myths are not attempts at mythopoesis; and the same goes for shouting 'fire' in an crowded theatre with the hope of triggering a speedy evacuation. Someone might ask

[16] 'Just-so' or naming myths can be distinguished from myths created to express value. However, myths can often combine the two. Verses 1-29 of the Book of Genesis express a just-so myth that seeks to show how the world came to be and is the way that it is. The final verse which contains the line 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good' is a value myth. Both the myth of the Norman yoke and that of manifest destiny seek to express how things currently are and why it is important to act. Because mythopoesis always contains a call to action, there will always be a value myth present.

about a piece of poetry that does create and use myths in order to call for action via the establishment of a *rapport*. In that case, the poetry is a mythopoeic text.

It is also the case that myths can be created without mythopoeic intent. Here, these myths possess only the first two characteristic factors of mythopoesis and remaining simply myths. A mythopoeic work requires all four for it to be mythopoeic; lack one and there is no mythopoesis. Consider, for example, the aetiological myth of the abduction of Persephone by Hades to explain the changing seasons. This myth, as it stands, contains no call to action nor obvious attempt to seek or establish a rapport. With some ingenuity and if the circumstances were right the myth could be *retold* as part of some mythopoeic effort. As a myth it is amenable to this since it already possesses the first two characteristic factors of mythopoesis. All the mythopoeic creator needs to do is find a way of using the idea of the abduction of Persephone to condense a complex idea into something easily grasped that establishes a *rapport* between creator and audience so that a call for action can be made.

1.3 Everyday understanding of myth

In everyday usage the word 'myth' typically refers to one of two things: (A) a traditional story often featuring fantastical elements; (B) an idea widely believed to be true that is, in fact, false. An example of myth in the first sense is the story of Sisyphus, a former king condemned to endlessly roll a rock up a mountain only to watch it fall back down to the bottom every time he nears the top. An example of myth in the second sense is the commonly held but false idea that eating carrots is particularly good for the eyesight.[17] In this chapter, I will not be using the term myth in either of these everyday usages. In fact, these two common understandings of myths and how they are used and received can cause confusion. Let us briefly explore this idea.

Consider the first commonly held understanding of myths, presented as (A) above, that they take the form of fantastical narratives, often featuring supernatural elements. Although myths usually take the form of a narrative, or in the case of non-spoken and non-written media always *suggest* a narrative, there is no requirement for myths to contain fantastical or supernatural elements.[18] For example: the myth of the Norman Yoke and the myth of Manifest Destiny are presented as narratives but neither contain fantastical or supernatural elements.[19] Note also, that the use of

[17] The origin of this myth dates back to WW2 when, in order to keep newly developed radar technology secret, the RAF explained away the increase in enemy planes shot down with the claim that their pilots ate carrots for improved eyesight.
[18] I am focused here on written texts because that is the medium of 'myth-delivery' that concerns me. For myths expressed in other media, for example photographs, see: Barthes (2009); and Flood (2002).
[19] For more on these myths and other non-fantastical myths, see: Tudor (1972).

either myth, and any of those like them, does not require any mystical conjoining of the myth-maker and some kind of fantastical element. That is, one does not need to defer to, say, some kind of *daimonion* in order for the myth to be used effectively. If we stick too rigidly to the expectation that myths always take a particular familiar form then we run the risk of an author's myth-making being lost on readers expecting but not finding what they consider to be essential mythopoeic tropes. It is important, therefore, not to be too rigid in thinking about the forms taken by mythopoetic narratives. Let us turn now to confusions that may be introduced by the second commonly held conception of myth: that the label 'myth' is a shorthand for widely believed but untrue.

The idea of myth expressed in (B), that is, that myths refer to something widely believed but nevertheless untrue can also cause confusion. It is certainly a useful shorthand.[20] However, when I say that Camus or Nietzsche seek to create myths I do not mean to suggest that they want to fool people into believing something that is untrue; for example, creating a useful deceit such as Plato's noble lie.[21] Rather than creating falsehoods, both Camus and Nietzsche, in their myth-making, are attempting to communicate something they believe to be true about the world; something, I will go on to show, that can only be expressed in the medium of myth. Confusion is caused when people receive myths of the kind I am suggesting Camus and Nietzsche create but with the preconception that *all* myths must express falsehoods. Let us look at an example of what I mean.

Here we can consider Maudemarie Clark's objection to Bernd Magnus' claim that Nietzsche's account of eternal recurrence, notably expressed in *GS* 341 '*The Heaviest Weight*', should be interpreted as a counter myth to the Platonic myth of another or "true" world.[22] Clark objects to the idea that Nietzsche has created any kind of myth on the grounds that once 'a myth' is known to be a myth it loses all its power:

> By making this world eternal, [Magnus] claims, the myth of recurrence counters the Platonic devaluation of this world. But how can it do this if it is recognized as a myth? Heaven and hell certainly lose their psychological effects when regarded as myths.[23]

Her objection, in particular, is to the idea that Nietzsche's *GS* 341 should be received as a mythopoeic text. The objection rests on the idea that once we have recognised a myth *as myth*,

[20] Typing 'it is a myth that…' into a search engine will pull up a myriad of suggested examples.
[21] Plato. Rep. 414b-c.
[22] Magnus (1978).
[23] Clark (1991). 250.

we can no longer believe the narrative concerned to express a truth. In Clark's example, the concepts of Heaven and Hell lose their power if taken to be narratives widely believed to be true but are in fact false. That is, that the idea of Heaven, for example, would no longer be effective for Christians if it came to be thought of as something 'made up'. I do not doubt that these concepts would lose their power if understood as widely disseminated falsehoods; but Magnus is not using the label 'myth' as a shorthand for widely believed but untrue. His suggestion is that Nietzsche expresses something he believes to be true, via a myth, in *GS* 341. Clark dismisses the idea, out of hand, that Nietzsche offers '*The Heaviest Weight*' as a myth because she evidently believes that myths must *always* be taken as falsehoods once understood *as myths*. Accordingly, she does not treat *GS* 341 as a myth and so, in her investigation, receives Nietzsche's idea as something else. The problem here, as we shall see, is that if myths are not received *as myths* but as something else (thought experiments, allegories, extended metaphors, and so forth) then the inevitable result is one of confusion. If there is something that can be gleaned from mythopoesis that can only be gleaned by receiving the text at hand *as* mythopoesis—and if Nietzsche is, indeed, offering *GS* 341 *as* mythopoesis—then there will be something potentially valuable that is missed if *GS* 341 is received as something other than mythopoesis. Someone might object, at this point, that reading *GS* 341 (or any other suitable text) as mythopoeic might run the risk of missing something non-mythopoeic within the text. To this I would respond that it is not my intention anywhere in this thesis to suggest that Camus and Nietzsche ought *only* to be read for mythopoesis. I would argue for as many different readings as possible for both authors *including* the mythopoeic.

So far I have claimed that Camus and Nietzsche both present ideas in mythopoeic form and that their myths should not be taken as necessarily featuring fantastical or supernatural elements;[24] and that we should not receive their myths as attempts to create falsehoods—even noble ones.[25] What kind of myth-making, then, do Camus and Nietzsche employ in their works?

1.4 Myth-making in an older sense

The kind of myth-making that I am interested in, with regards to Camus and Nietzsche, is something that might usefully be described as myth-making in an older sense. In their mythopoesis both authors are heavily influenced by the Greeks. For the ancient Greeks myth has

[24] In fact, Camus' *The Stranger* does contain a fantastical element. The hero himself, Meursault, can be considered 'philosophically fantastical'. As we shall see Robert Solomon makes this observation, although he does not consider the novel as a mythopoeic text.

[25] As it happens, the myths I am concerned with here do all contain fantastical and supernatural elements but the point is that they do not have to be properly considered myths.

no necessary connection with falsehood. Indeed when Plato and Aristotle use the term *mythos* it simply refers to stories or narration.[26] Stories, narratives, can be true or false depending on the creator and purpose for which they are created but are not necessarily false. Accepting the commonly held correspondence theory of truth, that is, a story is 'true' if it corresponds to reality, it is possible to tell a 'true story'. We will explore this idea more thoroughly when we come to Nietzsche's approach to history. For the Greeks, however, there exists no sharp distinction between *mythos* and *logos*. Both are seen as tools to be used by philosophers in order to communicate their ideas: *logos* to demonstrate truth with rational argumentation and *mythos* to express the idea in images and to elicit an emotional response. As an example of this, consider Plato's *Protagoras* in which the titular sophist offers to demonstrate that virtue is teachable using either *mythos* or *logos*.[27] What is of interest here is that the distinction between these two methods of communication has nothing to do with falsehoods or misinformation. Protagoras, in this case, offers two different ways of expressing something he believes to be true about the world. Here, myth is accepted as a medium for expressing something about how the world is or ought to be (rather than a synonym for falsehood). This is the understanding of myth upon which Camus and Nietzsche are operating.

A word of caution is in order at this point. It would be a mistake to take from the above example the notion that the same ideas can always be communicated either via *mythos* or *logos* and that it is up to the author (or their audiences) to choose which they prefer. *Mythos* and *logos* are complementary tools to be used when appropriate; and like most tools they are designed to be used in specific ways for specific tasks. It is often the case that a text offered by an author contains both myth and rational argument. That is, mythopoesis can, and often is, complemented with rational arguments. Sometimes, when there is a call for action, that is, the thing the mythopoeic creator wants their audience to do, this is expressed clearly and in everyday language. Here, myths are used to make an issue comprehensible and in order to convey the importance of what is at stake, and once both are established the audience are straightforwardly told what it is they ought to do next. The important thing is that within a text, those parts offered as myth and those given as rational arguments cannot be switched and retain the meaning. As we shall see: that which is offered as a myth by Nietzsche and Camus can *only* be successfully expressed and received as a myth. This is because myth here utilises a way of speaking about things that can, at least for now, only be expressed in myth. It may be the case that one day what both Nietzsche and Camus are attempting to express can be put into everyday language. In other

[26] Bottici (2009). 30.
[27] Plato. Prot. 320b.

words, someone will come along who is able to express in logos what they could only express with mythos. It would, however, be a rare individual indeed who is capable of this feat. As we shall see, two of Nietzsche's most frequent targets, Socrates and St. Paul, are both associated with this ability.

Alcibiades' claim, in the *Symposium*, is that Socrates stands out as someone who has the rare ability to express in logos what others can only express in mythos. This ability is included in a list of similarly 'superhuman feats' such as drinking alcohol without getting drunk, not requiring sleep and imperviousness to the cold and sexual seduction. In chapter 6 of this thesis we see that one of Nietzsche's problems with St. Paul is the latter's claim that things which usually can only be expressed in myth can be expressed via logos.

It will be shown in this thesis that for Nietzsche and Camus, that which can only be expressed by mythopoesis can only be expressed by this medium. For Camus, in particular, his key concepts of 'the absurd', 'rebellion' and 'measure' can only be understood via the medium of myth and calls for action based on these concepts must be expressed mythopoeically.

1.5 Four characteristic factors of mythopoesis

When a creator wishes to express an idea that cannot be communicated via rational argument, that is, when they want their audience to somehow *feel* that what has been revealed is true, important and ought to be acted upon, then mythopoesis is the best medium. One would not go far wrong to consider that which is communicated via mythopoesis in terms of *revelations*. Revelation refers to the act or process of disclosing something previously secret or obscure, especially something true.[28] The mythopoeic creator attempts to reveal to their audience something previously revealed to them (the creator). Consider Nietzsche's comments, in *Ecce Homo*, describing his experience of the revelation of the idea of the eternal return:

> If you have even the slightest residue of superstition, you will hardly reject the idea of someone being just an incarnation, mouthpiece, or medium of overpowering forces. The idea of revelation in the sense of something suddenly becoming visible and audible with unspeakable assurance and subtlety, something that throws you down and leaves you deeply shaken—this simply describes the facts of the case [...] The most remarkable thing is the involuntary nature of the image, the metaphor; you do not know what an image, a metaphor,

[28] *Dictionary.com* s.v. "Revelation" (https://dictionary.com/browse/revelation accessed Sept 5 2023).

> is any more, everything offers itself up as the closest, simplest, most fitting expression. It really seems (to recall something Zarathustra once said) as if things approached on their own and offered themselves up as metaphors (—'here all things come caressingly to your speech and flatter you: because they want to ride on your back. Here you ride on every metaphor to every truth. Here words and word-shrines of all being jump up for you; all being wants to become a word here, all becoming wants to learn to speak from you—'58). This is my experience of inspiration; I do not doubt that you would need to go back thousands of years to find anyone who would say: 'it is mine as well'.—[29]

This was Nietzsche's experience of a particular revelation. Someone else experiencing a revelatory moment might not feel the same sense of becoming the 'mouthpiece' of some overpowering force. Indeed, Nietzsche thinks himself to be unusual in this case. The final line of the excerpt above does not suggest that he thinks people today do not experience revelation but that they do not experience it in the way he does. It is important to note that the 'overpowering force' for which one acts as the mouthpiece does not have to be a force from outside; it could be something internal. In *BGE* 292, Nietzsche defines a philosopher as 'a person that experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, and dreams extraordinary things; who is struck as if from outside, from above and below.' The problem for anyone that wants to communicate that which has been revealed to them is that in order to be understood they must either find a way of translating what they have learned into ordinary language or find a way of inducing a similarly revelatory experience in their audiences. Consider some of Pierre Klossowski's remarks on Nietzsche's revelatory experience concerning the eternal return. In the second, Klossowski imagines himself in Nietzsche's shoes, so to speak.

> The idea of the Eternal Return came to Nietzsche as a sudden awakening, thanks to a feeling, a certain state or tonality of mind. Initially confused with this feeling, the idea itself emerges as a specific doctrine; nonetheless , it preserves the character of a revelation—a sudden unveiling.[30]

> If, in this ineffable moment, I hear it said: "You will return to this moment—you have already returned to it—you will return to it innumerable times," as coherent as this proposition seems according to the sign of the circle from which it flows,

[29] *EH* 'Zarathustra' 3.
[30] Klossowski (1977). 107, 108.

> all the while remaining this selfsame proposition, so far as this is really me in the context of everyday signs, I fall into incoherency.[31]

That which is revealed during the experience of a revelation is usually mysterious and ineffable although it does not have to be. God's revelation to Moses via the burning bush was quite straightforward. However, mythopoesis is always concerned with the creation of myths in order to express ideas that are mysterious and ineffable; those that have yet to emerge as specific doctrines. As they are, the author does not have the means to translate that which has been acquired via revelation into straightforward, ordinary language. We see in Klossowski's remarks above that the full meaning and significance of the idea of the eternal return has yet to be translated, by Nietzsche, into ordinary language. Attempts to do so will fall into incoherency. Instead, it must be communicated in the medium of myth. For a literary example of an attempt to communicate a revelation in ordinary language we can look to Camus' *The Stranger* and Meursault's attempt to reveal to the court his revelatory experiences on the beach on the day of the murder.

> The presiding judge coughed a little and very quietly asked me if I had anything to add. I stood up and since I wanted to say something, I said, rather confusedly, that I hadn't intended to kill the Arab. The presiding judge replied that I had always made that claim but that, up until now, he had found it difficult to understand my defence and that he would be happy, before hearing my lawyer, to have me explain in detail what had motivated me to commit my crime. I said rather quickly, muddling up my words a bit and completely aware of how ridiculous I sounded, that it was because of the sun. Laughter rang out in the courtroom. My lawyer shrugged his shoulders and immediately afterwards he was given the floor.[32]

Camus is making an allusion to Plato's myth of the cave. Meursault attempting to explain to the court what he experienced under the blinding light of the sun, stumbling over his words and receiving laughter for his efforts is Camus' modern take on Plato's prisoner attempting to communicate on his return from the surface to the cave. From *The Republic*:

> If such a one should go down again and take his old place would he not get his eyes full of darkness, thus suddenly coming out of the sunlight?" "He would indeed." "Now if he should be required to contend with these perpetual prisoners in 'evaluating' these shadows while his vision was still dim and before his eyes were accustomed to the

[31] Klossowski (1977). 113.
[32] *The Outsider* (2012).

> dark—and this time required for habituation would not be very short—would he not provoke laughter, and would it not be said of him that he had returned from his journey aloft with his eyes ruined and that it was not worthwhile even to attempt the ascent? And if it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him?" "They certainly would," he said.[33]

When a creator wants not only to communicate ideas that have been revealed to them but also to use these ideas in order to call for change of some sort then unless they have the power to translate their revelation into ordinary language they will have to use mythopoeic means. In the examples above both Camus' character Meursault and Plato's escaped prisoner fail to find the correct language that will reveal to their listeners that which has been revealed to them. Choosing instead to attempt communication in everyday language, they both find themselves stumbling over their words and failing to communicate with their audiences. To successfully bring about a revelatory experience in their audiences and use this to make one's call for action be heard, four tasks must be fulfilled. The requirement for fulfilling these tasks make up the four characteristic factors of mythopoesis.

It is worth repeating that some of these, with the exception of (1) and (2), can be employed by mediums other than mythopoesis. For example, it is possible to call for action (4) without using mythopoesis. In addition, a poet, to give just one example, can seek and establish a rapport (3) with their audience. (1) and (2) are specifically relevant to the creation of the myths which is, of course, an essential aspect of mythopoesis (we cannot have mythopoesis without myths); however, if the myth-maker is not calling for action then myths are created but with no mythopoesis.

When mythopoesis is employed it is because all four factors listed below are required:

1. To make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable (concerned with comprehensibility).
2. To make clear that something is important or valuable (concerned with significance).
3. To seek or establish a rapport with an audience.
4. To call for action.

Let us look first at (1) and (2) both of which involve 'making clear'.

[33] Plato. Rep. 7.516e-517a.

1.6 To make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable

1.6.1 Explaining and making clear

Two of the key functions of myths are to provide *meaning* and *significance* with regards to the world and the human condition.[34] They do so by 'making clear' ideas that are unclear and by assigning value. Making clear is not the same as *explaining*: myths do not explain.[35] We can think of the difference in the following way: 'making clear' is what happens *before* a thing can be explained. When an idea is fleetingly glimpsed and barely grasped it must first be made clear before it can be subjected to rational analysis.[36] That is, ideas that are a mystery and therefore ineffable must be somehow made clear before there is any hope of an explanation. There is perhaps a danger that references to 'making clear' implies full comprehension and total understanding. To see how this might not be the case consider the experience of a phobia. Here, it is clear to an arachnophobe that they have a horror of spiders but at the same time they may have no clear idea why this is the case nor can they explain rationally why spiders are to be feared. In other words, it is clear to the individual arachnophobe that they are scared of spiders but they do not know why spiders scare them so much. Compare this condition with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) in which there is no specific thing that brings about anxiety in the sufferer. While the arachnophobe is clear on what causes anxiety, if not the root cause, the individual with GAD may not even be aware they have a problem. In the case of the latter, they know they suffer but perhaps consider constant anxiety to simply be part of the human condition. But suppose they want to articulate their suffering, the origins and causes of which are mysterious; how, in other words, are they to disclose this hidden and obscure idea? 'Unspeakable and nameless is that which causes my soul agony and sweetness and is even the hunger of my entrails.'[37] If you want to speak without stammering and stumbling over your words, such ideas are best revealed by myth. With this in mind, consider Meursault and the escaped prisoner that returns back down into his former prison both struggling to express what has been revealed to them. They both have been 'blinded' by the light of that which has been revealed to them and when they attempt to express to others what they have experienced, they are first met with laughter and then with life-threatening hostility. Meursault is condemned to death because he cannot express in words that his contemporaries can understand what happened to him on the day of the Arab's killing on the

[34] Blumenberg (2010). 34-35; Bottici (2009). 250; Tudor (1972). 126; Flood (2002). 10.
[35] Blumenberg (2010). 127.
[36] This is not to suggest that the idea appears to be any less important. An idea may be fleetingly glimpsed and difficult to grasp but suggest tremendous importance nonetheless.
[37] *Z* 'On the Passions'

beach. Neither Meursault nor the returning prisoner attempt to use myth in order to communicate with their contemporaries. This, we can take from these examples, is why their attempts to be understood fail. Here we can consider Klossowski's observations on attempting to communicate that which has been experienced via revelation and falling into 'incoherency'. Neither Camus nor Nietzsche can be understood as believing that all attempts to be understood when attempting to communicate such insights are doomed to failure. If they did, why would they bother to publish their mythopoeic attempts to do just that? What they are attempting is to find adequate expression for that which appears mysterious. Mythopoesis, we can conclude, is for them an adequate expression for that which appears mysterious. With this in mind, consider the use of the Silenus and Sisyphus myths below.

The myth of the wisdom of Silenus makes clear the idea that human beings ought not be well-disposed towards life because life is not worth living; I intend to show Camus' Sisyphus myth and Nietzsche's '*Heaviest Weight'* (*GS* 341) attempt to make clear, in their own ways, that human beings can feel well-disposed towards life. Here, Camus and Nietzsche attempt to counter the myth of Silenus. According to Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the whole of Greek mythology is an attempt to overcome Silenus.[38] In other words, according to him, all of Greek mythology is an attempt to create counter-myths to the Silenus myth. However, nothing here is explained but rather it is made clear.

To further assist us in thinking about how myths make clear without explanation, we can think of Socrates' *daimonion*. This mysterious 'speechless voice' that appears several times throughout Socrates' life makes it clear that he should not do this or that but never offers an explanation. It cannot, since it is a voice that cannot speak.[39] Yet, somehow it still makes it clear to Socrates when he should not do something. For example: he ought not to cross a stream;[40] or leave the gym;[41] associate with this person or that.[42] It also makes other ideas clear, for example that death is not evil.[43]

[38] *BT* 3. In order for the Greeks 'to be able to live,' Nietzsche says, 'the very same existence [is shown to be] surrounded by a higher glory in its gods [...] the gods justify the life of men by living it themselves.' Intriguingly, this means that the myth of Silenus, which is a part of Greek mythology, is an attempt to overcome itself.
[39] Plato. Apology. 31d.
[40] Plato. Phaedrus. 242b-c.
[41] Plato. Euthyd. 272e.
[42] Plato. Theaet. 151a.
[43] Plato. Apol. 40a-c.

1.6.2 Myths and mystery

In situations where what we seek to explore and investigate is a *mystery*—that is, difficult or impossible to understand, explain or identify—myths are required in order to provide adequate expression for that which appears mysterious. The key point here is that we can not use *logos* and *mythos* interchangeably when *mythos* is specifically required due the mysteriousness of the subject matter. However, once an idea has been made clear we can subject it to other methods of inquiry, for example, rational argumentation. This is why myth and rational argumentation are seen as *complementary* tools. Accordingly, myths and other forms of communication cannot be used interchangeably. Consider Károly Kerényi's remarks on ideas expressed by myths:

> [They are] not something that could be expressed just as well and just as fully in a non-mythological way. Mythology is not simply a mode of expression in whose stead another, simpler and more readily understandable form might have been chosen.[44]

And:

> There are times when the greatest "thoughts" could have only been expressed in music. But in that case the "greatest" is precisely what can be expressed in music and in no other way. So with mythology.[45]

The reference to music is apt. We often say of someone who is particularly talented at hearing, repeating and understanding music that they have 'an ear for music'; Kerényi, drawing on this idea, speaks of the requirement of 'having a special ear' for mythology. Here we glimpse another use of myth, which is to seek out and establish *a rapport* with audiences that share the author's 'ear' for particular ideas—ones that can only be expressed via myth. Consider the following remarks in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* on finding people with the 'ears' to share with him a similar pathos:[46]

> Always supposing that there are ears—that there are people capable and worthy of a similar pathos, that there are people you can communicate with.—

[44] Jung and Kerényi (1951). 4.
[45] Jung and Kerényi (1951). 4.
[46] Having 'ears to hear' is, of course, found throughout the Bible. See for example: Deuteronomy 29:4; Jeremiah 5:21; Isaiah 6:10; Psalm 40:6; Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:15; 13:43; Mark 4:9; Mark 4:23; Luke 8:8; Luke 14:35; Romans 10:16-17; 1 Peter 3:12; Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 3:13. For a discussion on Nietzsche's use of the phrase see: Lange (2001). 97.

> Meanwhile, my Zarathustra, for instance, looks for people like this—and oh! He will have to look for a long time!—You need to be worthy of hearing him...[47]

We can now turn to the second characteristic factor of mythopoesis from the list above: *To make clear that something is important or valuable (significant)*. Much of this discussion anticipates Camus' attempt to use the absence of myth as a foundational myth in his mythopoeic response to Nietzsche. There we will see the confusion that has arisen in the secondary literature due to a failure to keep track of when Camus is talking about 'meaning' in terms of comprehensibility and meaning in terms of significance. This failure has led to a widespread mistaken belief that Camus thinks a meaningless existence is preferable to a meaningful one. In fact, Camus is actually talking about the creation of new myths in order to maintain a meaningful existence after the value of the previous myths has been called into question. Rather than advocating for a meaningless existence, Camus is concerned that our existing myths, intended to make clear what is significant in life, cannot be maintained. But, I am getting ahead of myself.

1.7 To make clear that something is important or valuable

Mythopoesis calls for a re-evaluation of existing myths. Its myths are aimed at countering other myths; therefore, mythopoeic works are concerned with questioning values. In this thesis, taken as a whole, I am concerned with Nietzsche's attempts to counter Christian myths and Camus' attempts to counter both Christian myths and Nietzsche's myths. Here we have three distinct attempts to make clear, amongst other things, how well-disposed human beings ought to feel about life: Christian mythopoesis (creating counter myths to those of Judaism and Paganism); Nietzsche's mythopoesis (creating counter myths to those of Christianity); and Camus' myths (creating counter myths to those of Christianity and Nietzsche).[48] One's attitude towards life and how well-disposed one is towards life is captured well by Nietzsche's idea of having a *why* for your life. Let us take a closer look at this idea.

1.7.1 On having the *why* for your life

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche says that as long as we have the *why* for our life, we can get by with any how.[49] Having the '*why* for your life,' is having the belief that life is worth living. In other

[47] *EH* 'Books' 4.
[48] This is simplified for the purposes of explanation. Camus' mythopoesis included counter myths to those of the fascists and Communists; both Camus and Nietzsche create counter myths to those of the Greeks and Romans.
[49] *TI* 'Arrows' 12.

words, your why for life is essential for feeling well-disposed towards life. Whereas the first characteristic factor of mythopoesis is concerned with comprehensibility, the second factor is concerned with making clear why we should believe what has been made clear is significant or meaningful.[50] Christian mythopoesis claims that life is valuable because it is given value by God.[51] In addition, the *kerygma* expresses the idea that there is a purpose to human life that has been planned out by God.[52] Together these are intended to make clear *why* certain things are important and ultimately why life is meaningful. Nietzsche refers to this as 'the why for your life'. For Tolstoy, Christian myths provide the answers he lacked to the nagging question of *why* that threatened to render life insignificant. In contrast, Camus and Nietzsche are both concerned with the failure of Christian myths to provide answers to the *why* question with a resulting nihilism they believe must follow.

Consider the following two aphorisms from Nietzsche :

> When you have the *why* for your life, you can get by with almost any *how*—
> Humanity does *not* strive for happiness; only the English do.
>
> *Nihilism*: there is no goal, no answer to this question: why?[53]

Borrowing from Nietzsche, we can say that there are *how* and *why* questions. *How* questions relate to how we live, that is the things we do to stay alive and get by. As I understand him, the *why* question is concerned with finding meaning, value and significance in life itself. Having the '*why* for your life,' is having the belief that life is worth living. In other words, your 'why for life' is what makes life meaningful.

Nietzsche's reference to happiness and 'the English' is an allusion, I take it, to utilitarianism. Here the value of things in life is calculated by their utility in the pursuit of the goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number.[54] In the first aphorism, Nietzsche separates the *why* from *how* with the reference to utilitarianism. By this I mean that looking at the *how* will not give you the *why*. We will look at an example from Camus relating to this below. Note that Nietzsche's claim is that if you have the *why*, you can get by with almost any *how*; it does *not* work the other way around. That is, Nietzsche is *not* saying: if you get by with almost any *how*, you have the *why* in

[50] Here I use the words interchangeably.
[51] *Genesis* 1:31. 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good.'
[52] For a good overview of the idea of *kerygma* see: Baird (1957).
[53] *WP* 'Nihilism' 2.
[54] Or some other utilitarian happiness-oriented goal.

your life. For Nietzsche, then, it does not seem to matter much what one does in life as long as one has an answer to *why life is worth living*.

In the second aphorism given above, the belief that life is meaningless (nihilism) is expressed as having no goal, or in Nietzsche's words, 'no answer to this question: why?' What then is the relationship between having the *why* for your life and having a goal, are they the same thing? If so, why do 'the English' not have a yes for their lives? The goal for utilitarians, put simply, is the greatest good for the greatest number; but in the first aphorism Nietzsche suggests that this goal is not the answer to the *why* question. That is, striving for happiness will not provide the *why* for your life. It is worth noting that Nietzsche does not have a problem with either happiness or having a goal. In *Twilight of the Idols* he says: 'A formula for my happiness: A yes, a no, a straight line, *a goal…*'[55]

Nietzsche would accept that utilitarians have a goal, after all he says they strive for happiness. But he does not believe this goal provides the *why* for life.[56] The reason for this, I take it, is that he thinks striving for happiness is concerned with the *how for life* rather than the *why*. Ask a utilitarian why they believe X is important and they will answer in terms of X's utility in the pursuit of the goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. But this reply does not address the question of the meaningfulness of life.

Happiness itself does not equate with meaning. In a thought experiment created by Thaddeus Metz, he suggests that time spent in an 'orgasmatron' is a prima facie good candidate for happiness. However, it seems commonsensical that life spent in such a machine, while certainly pleasurable, would not be meaningful.[57] Whatever happiness is, I suspect that it cannot be reduced to pleasure alone. We see Patrice Mersault in Camus' *A Happy Death* attempt *and fail* to find happiness through a life of meaningless sensation. But let us say temporarily, for the sake of the argument, that meaningless pleasure is a kind of happiness. The pursuit of this kind of happiness would give us the *how* for our lives, that is, what we should be doing with our days; but it cannot alone give us the *why* for our lives. The *why* that Nietzsche is talking about is about looking for an answer to why the pursuit of happiness, or pleasure, or anything else you might pursue, is meaningful. This answer must cover not just why a life spent in the orgasmatron is meaningful but why life *itself* is meaningful. Whilst in the orgasmatron, the *why* question would never arise; we would be too preoccupied enjoying this particular *how*. It is only outside of the machine that we can think about the meaningfulness of time spent inside. In reality, the *why* and

[55] *TI* 'Arrows' 44; see also *GS* 267.
[56] Utilitarians are 'so seldom right, it is pitiful!' *GS* 84.
[57] Metz (2001). 140.

hows of life are not so easily separated as they are in a pithy aphorism or thought experiment. The pleasure we derive from the things we do is probably so wrapped up in the meaningfulness that we ascribe to these things that it is impossible to entirely untangle the *why* from the *how*. But there are times when it certainly seems possible to separate the two. This occurs when we 'take a step back', so to speak, to look at our lives from a distance.

Consider the following from *The Myth of Sisyphus*; here Camus is talking about the absence of myth (the experience of which he calls 'the absurd') and provides this now famous example of the absence of answers to a *why* question:

> Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.[58]

Camus is talking about what is known colloquially as 'the daily grind', something with which most of us are all too familiar. Indeed, in the essay Camus is at pains to point out that all the examples he offers of the unpleasant experience of the absence of myth are well known to almost everyone.[59] Human life is hard and requires a great deal of effort simply to get by. As Thomas Nagel puts it in his essay on the absurd:

> We take ourselves seriously whether we live serious lives or not and whether we are concerned primarily with fame, pleasure, virtues, luxury, triumph, beauty, justice, knowledge, salvation or mere survival. If we take other people seriously and devote ourselves to them, that only multiplies the problem. Human life is full of effort, plans, calculation, success and failure: we *pursue* our lives, with varying degrees of sloth and energy.[60]

Given this, and our ability as human beings to stand back from our lives and take a look, it is hardly surprising that it frequently occurs to people to ask why they bother and what makes it all worthwhile. It might be tempting at this point to say things like: we tolerate the daily grind because we need to earn money. But this does not capture what Camus is referring to as a *why* tinged with weariness and amazement; or what Nietzsche is talking about when he says when we have the *why* for our life we can get by with almost any *how*. These would be pretty banal observations if it did. Were we to understand it this way, Nietzsche would be saying something like, for example: as soon as you know your goal is to get money in order to buy food to prevent

[58] *Myth*. 11
[59] *Myth*. 12
[60] Nagel (2013). 14.

yourself from starving to death, you can get by with any paying job. Or, once you become aware of the responsibility to play your part in the continuation of the human race, you can get by having children however you can. The reason these ideas are banal is because the *why* has been ignored and replaced with another *how*. Buying food and earning money are both *hows*; adding to the next generation of human beings and having children are both *hows*. None of these attempt to answer a question about meaningfulness. The *why* that concerns Nietzsche, Camus and, as we shall see in a moment, Tolstoy is about why our continued existence or the continued existence of the human race should be considered important. The question arises when we take a step back to review our lives and the meaningfulness of life itself. In full, the *why* question is something like: why do I take life so seriously, or, why is my continued existence important? Expressed in myth the question can be put in the mouth of one mythological character and posed to another. For example, in the myth of the wisdom of Silenus, the satyr says to Midas:

> But for men it is utterly impossible that they should obtain the best thing of all, or even have any share in its nature (for the best thing for all men and women is not to be born) ; however, the next best thing to this, and the first of those to which man can attain, but nevertheless only the second best, is, after being born, to die as quickly as possible.[61]

Expressed in myth, the question can be put in the mouth of one mythological creature and posed to another. For example, in the myth of Silenus, the satyr tells Midas that (in the Nietzschean sense discussed above) there is no *why* for life. Silenus expresses total nihilism. His advice to human beings is to die as quickly as possible. The myth can be received as a challenge. That is, the listener instinctively rejects Silenus' claim that life offers nothing better than a quick death. The question, implicitly posed by the myth, is how to overcome Silenus. That is, what *why* can be found for life?

The wisdom of Silenus is, essentially, that life is not worth having. As we can clearly see from Plutarch's account above, according to Silenus, human beings would be better off had they never been born; but if they do happen to suffer the misfortune of being born, then the best thing for them to do is commit suicide and as quickly as possible. Put simply, Silenus is saying that there is no *why* for our lives and we would be better off without the *hows*. Note here, with regards to the previous section, the wisdom of Silenus does not explain but rather it is made clear. The awareness that life is not worth the effort comes as a revelation.

[61] Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Apollonium* 27.

This is the background to the problem Camus claims, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, to be the most serious in philosophy:

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem in philosophy and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to asking the fundamental question of philosophy.[62]

One of the main goals of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is to find a way of judging whether or not life is worth living. It is important to note that judging whether or not life is worth living is not quite the same as attempting to put a value on life. Paul Loeb has suggested that Nietzsche would question the wisdom of Camus' project.[63] Here, Loeb draws upon a passage, concerning judgments on the value of life, taken from *Twilight of the Idols*.

> Judgement, value judgement on life, for and against, can ultimately never be true: they have value only as symptoms,—in themselves, judgements like these are stupidities. You really have to stretch out your fingers and make a concerted attempt to grasp this amazing piece of subtlety, that *the value of life cannot be estimated (abgeschätzt).*[64]

Nietzsche goes on to say that 'it is an objection to the philosopher if he sees a problem with the *value* of life, it is a question mark on his wisdom, an un-wisdom.' Loeb references this passage but fails to put it into the context in which it appears. Nietzsche is talking about philosophers that put a negative value on life, Socrates in particular. What he considers a stupidity is attempting to measure the value of life. Nietzsche's point, as I understand it, is that there is no standard by which we can measure the value of life itself. There are two ways we can understand him: (1) that it is impossible to judge yes or no that life itself is valuable; or (2) that we can *only* judge yes or no that life is valuable. In the second sense it is possible to say that life itself has or does not have value; but once we decide that life is valuable we cannot estimate how valuable life is. As an example of what I mean, consider pregnancy. There are many things that can be discovered about a particular pregnancy by medical testing, for example physical characteristics of the foetus. However, none of these tests can reveal one person to be more or less pregnant than another. A doctor can be asked how far along in terms of months a particular pregnancy is or how viable a pregnancy might be; but asking "how pregnant" a person might be is a confusion. In a similar sense we can ask many questions about the value of a particular life judged by some standard or

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[62] *Myth*. 1.
[63] Loeb (2008).
[64] *TI* 'Socrates' 2.

another; but of life itself, like pregnancy itself, we can only ask one yes or no question. Staying with the idea of pregnancy, the equivalent question to the topic of attempting to estimate the value of life would be trying to estimate or assess *the value* of the pregnancy. Posing a question about the value of pregnancy (why is pregnancy valuable?) is not the same as attempting to put a value *on* pregnancy (how valuable is pregnancy?). In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus is concerned with how one might judge whether or not life is valuable, not with measuring what this value might be. His Sisyphus myth, with which he concludes the essay, is the answer he provides. In other words, for Camus, it is revealed that life is valuable through myth.

The point is that if we want to know why life is valuable or why we ought to feel well-disposed towards life, then the answer will be found in myth. In what follows, I look at Tolstoy's account of his attempt to find the *why* for his life. Or, to put it another way: how it was revealed to Tolstoy that life is valuable.

1.7.2 Tolstoy and the why for life

In his short account of coming to Christianity, *Confession*, Tolstoy uses the word 'why' forty-two times. Before accepting the Christian faith, he was frequently brought to a halt by the question: why do anything? He knew the *how* and *what* of his position in Society, his role as a father and a writer; his obligations and how to fulfil them. But as we can see from the excerpt below, he did not have the *why*:

> Before I could be occupied with my Samara estate, with the education of my son, or with the writing of books, I had to know why I was doing these things. As long as I do not know the reason why, I cannot do anything. In the middle of my concern with the household, which at the time kept me quite busy, a question would suddenly come into my head: "Very well, you will have 6,000 desyatins in the Samara province, as well as 300 horses; what then?" And I was completely taken aback and did not know what else to think. As soon as I started to think about the education of my children, I would ask myself, "Why?" Or I would reflect on how the people might attain prosperity, and I would suddenly ask myself, "What concern is it of mine?" Or in the middle of thinking about the fame that my works were bringing me I would say to myself, "Very well, you will be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere, more famous than all the writers in the world—so what? And I could find absolutely no reply.[65]

[65] Tolstoy (1983). 27.

Tolstoy's problem was that he was attempting to employ the wrong method. In his *Confession*, he lists the various branches of science and philosophy towards which he turns to find his answers:

> These areas of knowledge completely ignore the question of life. They say, "We cannot tell you what you are and why you live; we do not have the answers to these questions, and we are not concerned with them. If you need to know about the laws of light, however, or about chemical compounds or the laws governing the development of organisms; if you need to know about the laws governing physical bodies, their forms and the relation between their size and number; if you need to know about the laws of your own mind, then for all this we have clear, precise, indubitable answers."[66]

Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, makes a similar point. Discussing the inability of the sciences to answer his questions about the value of life, he says:

> I realise that if through science I can seize phenomena and enumerate them I cannot for all that apprehend the world. Were I to trace its entire relief with my finger I should not know it any more. And you give me a choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure.

What Tolstoy and Camus are insisting upon is the inability of a particular kind of inquiry to answer a particular kind of question. Namely, the inability of methods of investigation designed to answer *how* questions to answer *why* questions. The solution for Tolstoy was to find a way of answering *why* questions. For him the answer was to be found in the Christian faith. In aspects of Christianity he found a way of approaching and answering these questions.

> Faith is the knowledge of the meaning of human life, whereby the individual does not destroy himself but lives. Faith is the force of life. If a man lives, then he must have faith in something. If he did not believe that he had something he must live for, then he would not live.[67]

While both Camus and Nietzsche would disagree that Christianity provides the best answers, they would agree that it at least addresses *why* questions. Compare Nietzsche's description of a human being in search of meaning with Tolstoy's account above:

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[66] Tolstoy, 37.
[67] Tolstoy, 61.

> His existence on earth had no purpose; 'What is man for, actually?'—was a question without an answer; there was no will for man and earth; behind every great human destiny sounded the even louder refrain 'in vain!' This is what the ascetic ideal meant: something was missing, there was an immense lacuna around man,—he himself could think of no justification or explanation or affirmation, he suffered from the problem of what he meant.[68]

Dire as this suffering appears, Nietzsche identifies the ascetic ideal as offering a solution:

> [S]uffering itself was not his problem, instead, the fact that there was no answer to the question he screamed, 'Suffering for what?' Man, the bravest animal and most prone to suffer, does not deny suffering as such: he wills it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind,—*and the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning!*[69]

Over the coming chapters of this thesis I will attempt to show, in detail, Nietzsche's complex and complicated account of Christian mythopoesis and how it relates to what he calls 'the ascetic ideal'. In particular, I will show why Nietzsche believes Christian mythopoesis is life-denying, world-slandering and ultimately self-destructive. I will also show his attempt to create a counter-myth to oppose Christianity: '*Dionysus versus the crucified*.'[70]

I have now discussed the first two characteristic factors of mythopoesis. These are concerned with the creation of the myths that are used in mythopoesis. As I have said, it is possible to create myths without mythopoesis; I offered the aetiological myth of the abduction of Persephone by Hades to explain the changing seasons as an example. This myth, as is, contains no call to action nor obvious attempt to seek or establish a rapport. However, exploring the history of the creation of this myth, and those like it, *will* reveal the presence of characteristic factors (1) and (2).[71] The remaining two characteristic factors, (3) to (4) are all related to how myths that have been created or retold specifically for mythopoesis are used. For instance, the third characteristic of mythopoesis, *seeking a rapport*, is something the myth-maker is attempting to do *with* the myth or myths they have created. The call for action is also something done *with* the myth. And the fact that myths contain many complex ideas condensed into a simple quickly grasped idea is something that *describes* the myths. Now, with mythopoesis all four factors will be present and

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[68] *GM* III, 28.
[69] *GM* III, 28.
[70] *EH* 'Destiny' 9.
[71] Blumenberg (2010); See also: Gödde (2021).

taken into consideration by the mythopoeic creator when they created their myths. That is, when Camus or Nietzsche create their myths they do so for mythopoeic concerns; accordingly, they will write in such a way as to seek or establish a rapport with all or some of their readers and they will include a call to action.

I said that after the discussion of characteristic factors of mythopoesis (1) and (2), I would offer an example of a current, present day myth as an illustration. As promised, below is a brief account of *the myth of human dignity.* Afterwards, we shall look at the remaining three characteristics of mythopoesis.

1.7.3 The 'myth' of human dignity

A modern example of a commonly used myth that is non-fantastical and serves to express something ineffable is the idea of human dignity. Both the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and *The Charter of Fundamental Human Rights of the European Union* refer to 'dignity', placing it first in their articles, but neither define what dignity is and consists of. As far as I am aware, no international proclamation does so. The meaning of *dignity* is left to the reader's intuition. Writing for *The American Journal of International Law*, Oscar Schachter sums up the situation as follows:

> We do not find an explicit definition of the expression "dignity of the human person" in international instruments or (as far as I know) in national law. Its intrinsic meaning has been left to intuitive understanding, conditioned in large measure by cultural factors. When it has been invoked in concrete situations, it has been generally assumed that a violation of human dignity can be recognized even if the abstract term cannot be defined. "I know it when I see it even if I cannot tell you what it is."[72]

We can see that rather than attempt to define dignity, its meaning is suggested by the idea of violations of human dignity: rape, murder, torture, slavery, etc. Because what is meant by dignity is ineffable, its meaning is captured and expressed through the idea of the violation of dignity. In other words, when we wish to reveal to others the existence of human dignity, that *life is valuable*, we do so by inducing something like 'a revelation' through the striking and dramatic imagery of the violation of human dignity.[73] Additionally, when we want to talk about human

[72] Schachter (Oct 1983). 849.

[73] For most people, they are born into a society in which human dignity and the value of life has already been revealed. This being so, it never occurs to most people to question it or attempt to explore the genealogy of this idea. Something made clear in the works of Nietzsche and Camus.

dignity, we have the language to do so. This is shown by the fact that it is possible to have international declarations on human dignity despite not being able to fully articulate what human dignity actually is. Note that none of these declarations attempt to argue for or defend the concept of human dignity. When we talk about human dignity we do so assuming that we are talking to like-minded individuals, a speaker and an audience who are 'of one mind' on the matter. This brings us on to the third characteristic factor of mythopoesis.

1.8 To seek or establish a *rapport* with an audience

Seeking or attempting to establish a *rapport* is necessary but not sufficient for mythopoesis. As we saw earlier, other mediums of communication can and often do seek to do both. It is hard to imagine, for example, someone publishing poetry without concern for seeking or establishing a *rapport* with their audience.[74] As we have already seen, mythopoeic creators are often attempting to communicate something that has been somehow revealed to them by inducing similar revelatory experiences in their audiences. To be *en rapport* the creator and their audience must be of one mind, to have a mutual understanding of that which has been and is being revealed.[75] In *GS* 341 Nietzsche wonders how his readers would react to the demon's revelation, will they be overcome with joy or fall to the ground gnashing their teeth? There are other possible responses: readers may feel nonplussed or indifferent. In this case the mythopoeic creator has attempted but failed to achieve a *rapport*. As we shall see by the end of this thesis, one of the differences between Camus and Nietzsche is that while the former seeks to establish a *rapport* with all his readers the latter has only a select readership in mind. In addition, Nietzsche suspects that there may not be any readers within his lifetime with whom he can establish a *rapport*.

I have already mentioned Kerényi's requirement of 'having a special ear' for mythology. Mythopoeic creators seek out those already sympathetic to their ideas or attempt to establish an audience that share their 'special ear' for particular ideas—ones that can only be expressed via mythopoesis. In the first instance the author is looking for people with whom there will be some kind of like-mindedness and mutual understanding. Since mythopoeic work contains a call to action, creators are looking for an audience that will agree with them regarding what ought to be

[74] The emphasis is on *publishing* or perhaps *performing* poetry for an audience. Someone writing poetry for their own pleasure that will never be shared has no concerns over *rapport*. A *rapport* with whom?
[75] It is useful to note that as used in hypnotism and mesmerism, being *en rapport* means sharing one mind. See: Yager (2008).

done. We saw Nietzsche's remarks in *Ecce Homo* on finding people with the 'ears' to hear what he has to say:[76]

> Always supposing that there are ears—that there are people capable and worthy of a similar pathos, that there are people you can communicate with.—Meanwhile, my Zarathustra, for instance, looks for people like this—and oh! He will have to look for a long time!—You need to be worthy of hearing him...[77]

Consider also Nietzsche's appeal, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, to those few 'born of the womb of music' that will be able to find what he has to say 'immediately comprehensible'. He says: 'I can appeal only to those who have a direct affinity with music, who were born of its womb so to speak, and who relate to things almost exclusively via unconscious musical relationships.'[78] In the same section, Nietzsche identifies those to whom he cannot appeal:

> I cannot appeal to those who use the images of the events on stage and the words and the passions of the *dramatis personae* in order thereby to get closer to a feeling for the music; for such assistance, they can only go as far as the entrance hall of musical perception, without ever reaching its innermost sanctum.

This section begins with Nietzsche referring to his attempt at communication as 'exhortation' (note the fourth characteristic factor of mythopoesis: call to action) and those to whom Nietzsche is exhorting are a select few, capable of hearing his exhortations. We see here something that runs through Nietzsche's work: an elitism that expresses a preference for those that are capable (and worthy) of receiving his mythopoesis. Nietzsche considers himself an unusual thinker; we will see plenty of references to him referring to his voice as 'strange', his ideas being 'difficult' and of himself being so far ahead of his time as to make him a 'posthumous person'. All this being so, an audience of like-minded, fellow travellers with whom he can establish a *rapport* are going to be drawn from quite a small pool. Indeed, none may yet be alive. We will see below the difficult and challenging conditions Nietzsche believes must be met for someone, already part of a small and very select group, to be *en rapport* with him. We note the superior attitude, the *elitist* tone, with

[76] Having 'ears to hear' is, of course, found throughout the Bible. See for example: Deuteronomy 29:4; Jeremiah 5:21; Isaiah 6:10; Psalm 40:6; Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:15; 13:43; Mark 4:9; Mark 4:23; Luke 8:8; Luke 14:35; Romans 10:16-17; 1 Peter 3:12; Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 3:13. For a discussion on Nietzsche's use of the phrase see: Lange (2001). 97.
[77] *EH* 'Books' 4.
[78] *BT* 21.

regards to Nietzsche's select readership in the above excerpt, those not born of the womb of music *may not enter* the inner sanctum of musical/mythopoeic perception.[79]

It may be suggested that the mythopoeic creator, in seeking a rapport with their audience, runs the risk of 'preaching to the converted'. Taken literally, preaching to the converted is something that traditionally happens in Churches all over the world on Sundays. However, when used in the pejorative sense as a possible objection to the idea of a creator seeking an audience with whom there is already some kind of like-mindedness and mutual understanding, what is being suggested is that the creator is wasting their time. Precisely, the creator wastes their time because they are attempting to convince or persuade a readership of something they already think or believe in. At its most absurd, we would have something like Nagel's example of a person passionately arguing for a motion that has already been passed.[80] However, if there is some element of 'preaching to the converted' in mythopoesis then it is closer to that found during Church services. The purpose of preaching, sermonising and homolysing is to direct congregations of like-minded individuals towards a particular call to action. In the Catholic tradition, for example, the aim of the preacher is typically to call upon the audience to detest sin and love God.[81] St. Francis de Sales, writing on the subject, speaks of a requirement for the preacher's voice to meet the ears of the congregation and their heart to meet the hearts of the congregation.[82] In a later discussion of Nietzsche's aphorism *GS* 106, we will see that his innovator thirsts for his teachings to be expressed as a kind of 'music' because he wants to reach the ears and hearts of his potential audiences. In the aphorism, Nietzsche contrasts this medium of communication with direct teacher to student instruction. Here we see his preference for something akin to preaching over direct communication.

Let us take a look at the kind of like-minded individual with which Nietzsche hopes to establish a *rapport.* Nietzsche says that he wrote *Human All too Human*, in part, to compensate for his lack of friends. The 'free spirits' to whom the book is dedicated were invented to keep him company and, he says: 'to keep me cheerful in the midst of evils'. Of them he says:

[79] The relationship between music and mythopoesis will be made clear in the next chapter.
[80] Nagel (2013).
[81] Liguori, Alfonso. *Sermons for All the Sundays in the Year*. Kessinger Publishing (2007). (Kindle).
[82] Ibid. This invokes St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in which he talks about preachers speaking of love without love in one's heart.

> Already I see them coming slowly, slowly; and perhaps am doing something to hasten their coming when I describe in advance under what auspices I see them originate, and upon what paths I see them come.[83]

Nietzsche is using his works to draw in like-minded fellow travellers. He wrote to his friend Franz Overbeck complaining about the poor sales of his books, *Zarathustra* in particular, laying the blame on his publisher Ernst Schmeitzner.[84] Intriguingly, Nietzsche refers to fishing for readers:

> I have come to the conclusion that my writings must be liberated [from Schmeitzner] … as quickly as possible … I am in need of followers in my lifetime and if my published works cannot be used as fishing rods then they have missed their calling.[85]

From this letter we can clearly see that Nietzsche views his books as a way not only of finding a readership but *followers*. Nietzsche also says that he needed his 'followers in his lifetime'; it is certainly interesting to compare this with one of his 'arrows and epigrams' from *Twilight of the Idols*:

> What? You are looking for something? You want to multiply yourself by ten, a hundred? You are looking for disciples—look for *zeroes*—[86]

And from *The Gay Science*:

> *Vademecum—Vadetecum*
>
> Lured by my style and tendency,
> you follow and come after me?
> Follow your own self faithfully—
> take time—and thus you follow me.[87]

The Latin title of Nietzsche's poem contains some neat wordplay. *Vademecum* refers to a guidebook or handbook, it means 'go with me'. *Vadetecum* can be translated as go with yourself. We can understand Nietzsche as saying that to use him as a guide, to follow him, i.e. to be one of

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[83] *HH* 'Preface' 2.
[84] He would be interested to know that someone recently spent £32,500 on a first edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. See: https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6179985 (accessed Sep 6, 2023).
[85] Cited in Shaberg, William. "Nietzsche's Publication History as an Insight into the Philosopher and his Works." Paper presented to the Nietzsche Colloquium. Sils Maria, Switzerland. Sept 30 1995.
[86] *TI* 'Arrows' 14.
[87] *GS* 'German Rhymes' 7. Kaufman's translation given here makes Nietzsche seem less urgent; the original German ends with 'gemach! gemach!' *come on! come on!*

the followers his works are looking to attract, you need to follow yourself. Nietzsche does not want disciples, he is not looking for 'zeroes', he wants to find people like himself. Like Zarathustra who thinks one repays a teacher badly if one always only remains a pupil, Nietzsche wants readers that, through his teaching, become his equals.[88] We must be careful here: Nietzsche is an elitist, he does not think that everyone who picks up and reads his works is capable of being his equal; only those with whom, via the text, are capable of being *en rapport*.

When Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, appeals to those 'born of the musical womb' that are capable of reaching the 'inner sanctum of musical perception' he is appealing to readers that are like himself.[89] In the Preface to *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche gives a list of conditions that are required in order to understand him: honesty to the point of hardness concerning spiritual matters; to consider yourself above politics and national self-interest; indifference to concerns over whether truth does any good or will be our undoing but have a new conscience for truth that has been silent until now; a liking for questions that require more courage than anyone currently possesses as well as courage for the *forbidden*; a predestination for the labyrinth; new ears for music and new eyes for the most distant things; economy of the great style. In addition you must respect yourself, love yourself and have unconditional freedom over yourself. Nietzsche says he only cares about readers that meet these conditions. Of the rest, that do not meet the requirements, he says: 'who cares about the *rest of them*? The rest are just humanity.'[90]

What is of great interest to the present discussion is that before providing the conditions his readers must meet in order to understand him, he says: 'The conditions required to understand me, and which in turn *require* me to be understood,—I know them only too well.' From this, we can say that not only does Nietzsche possess the qualities just listed, it is *because* he has these qualities that he feels himself somehow *required* to seek out like-minded readers that share these qualities. But if having these qualities requires a person to seek out others with these same qualities, then those readers in possession of these qualities, that can read Nietzsche and understand him, will also feel *required* to seek out him. This back and forth of mutual understanding is exactly what being *en rapport* means. The word has its origins in the French verb *rapporter* which means to 'carry something back'. When a *rapport* is established between an author and their reader, there is a kind of 'mirroring' between the two: the author 'sees themself' in the reader just as the reader 'sees themself' in the author. It is interesting here to note that Mersault in Camus' *The Stranger* is well-liked and even respected by his peers but fails to achieve

[88] *Z* 'Bestowing Virtue' 3.
[89] Pushing the metaphor, they are his brothers and sisters.
[90] *AC* 'Preface'.

a *rapport* with anyone. He attempts to live a life devoid of myths and as such has no shared understanding of the significance of life with others in his community. Interestingly, he also has no understanding of himself which Camus represents by Meursault's failure to recognise himself in mirrors. It is only at the end of the novel, when he discovers, in Nietzschean terms, a 'why' for life, that he experiences a feeling of *rapport* with his mother.

Nietzsche had a genuine desire to seek and establish a *rapport* with like-minded readers. Indeed, his talk of being *required* to be understood by them suggests he saw himself as on some kind of mission. In this, he is a bit like Socrates who, after the revelation that no-one in Athens was wiser than he, went on a mission to find out what this meant.[91] Nietzsche creates his works for a very select audience. Indeed, he begins the preface we have just been discussing with:

> This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them are alive yet. Maybe they are the ones who will understand my Zarathustra. There are ears to hear some people—but how could I ever think there were ears to hear me?—My day won't come until the day after tomorrow. Some people are born posthumously.

Compare this with another one of his arrows and epigrams:

> Posthumous people (me, for instance) are understood worse than contemporary ones but *heard* better. More precisely: no-one ever understands us—and *that's* what gives us our authority…[92]

Nietzsche is writing for people just like himself, those that meet the requirements necessary to understand that which has been revealed to him. However, it is possible that he is the only one around who meets these requirements; he might be long dead before anyone else like him comes along;[93] hence his references to being a posthumous person. I take Nietzsche's claim to gain authority through not being understood as an expression of his belief (or hope) that although there may currently be no readers that fully understand him, his works will intrigue enough people to read him that, over time, after much effort to understand him has taken place, eventually there will be a breakthrough and readers will emerge that are capable of establishing a *rapport*.[94]

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[91] Plato Apology 21a-21b.
[92] *TI* 'Arrows' 15.
[93] Consider section 3 of *The Antichrist* where Nietzsche talks about people he thinks of as 'more valuable types' only occurring infrequently as lucky strikes. He suggests that these people are 'bred' rather than leaving it to nature. Nietzsche's works can be considered his contribution to this 'breeding programme'.
[94] Perhaps each new generation, born into a world in which the previous generations devoted themselves to the study of Nietzsche's works, will start their explorations of Nietzsche with a world-view that, thanks to

With mythopoeic texts, mutual understanding and agreement have to do not only with what creators are revealing to their audience but also with what they are calling upon them to do. With this idea in mind, we move on to the fourth characteristic of mythopoesis: a call for action.

1.9 To call for action

At the top of this chapter I noted Slochower's remark that mythopoeic creators share a similar concern to that voiced by Marcellus in *Hamlet*: 'something is rotten in the state.' Mythopoesis is always aimed at countering existing myths. Mythopoeic works might not always be explicitly expressed as such; indeed, due to the widespread belief that labelling something a myth is a shorthand for 'widely believed but untrue', creators rarely mention the word 'myth' in their calls to action.[95] In addition, our dominant cultural myths, those that make clear who we are as people and express our values, most often go unnoticed because, as Lance Bennett has observed, they are the basic components of everyday perception.[96] According to Chiara Bottici they largely go unseen and are difficult to analyse because they are 'the lenses through which we see this world.'[97] Consider in this respect the marketplace atheists in *GS* 125, who fail to realise the impact of the death of God on their cultural values. They are unaware that they see the world through a Christian mythopoeic lens. Finally, consider what Nietzsche says, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, about the 'daemonic guardians': 'The images of myth must be the unnoticed but omnipresent, daemonic guardians under whose tutelage the young soul grows up and by whose signs the grown man interprets his life and his struggles.'[98]

Counter myths are designed to *oppose* existing myths; this opposition can take many forms. I have been referring to calls *for* action and calls *to* action, both are similar. When action is called *for* those doing the 'calling' are usually appealing for someone else, typically those with the power to do so, the government, a ruling body, management, and so on, to act. The intent is to apply pressure on those they are calling upon by encouraging like-minded others to join in their appeals for action. When people are called *to* action, the person doing the calling is appealing to like-minded others to join with them in some action. Here, the action, whatever it is, is to be done by the like-minded audience. The most extreme version of this is the *call to arms* in which the person doing the calling is appealing to their audience to make ready for a confrontation. It is important

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the dedication of their forebears, gets ever closer to that of Nietzsche's. So that one day, far in the future, readers with a world-view much closer to Nietzsche's than those of his contemporaries will be able to understand his works and establish a *rapport*.

[95] Consider Maudemarie Clark's response to Bernd Magnus discussed earlier in this chapter.

[96] Bennett (1980).

[97] Bottici (2009). 225.

[98] *BT* 23.

to note, that in calls *to* and *for* action, what is being called for might be vague, indeterminate or simply left unsaid. Here, what is being called for is for *something* to be done. At the very least, a mythopoeic call to action may simply consist of calling attention to the existence of other myths with an exhortation to see these myths and give a response. It was noted above that cultural myths are difficult to analyse because they are the lenses through which we see our world; mythopoesis can bring these myths into the light and call for a response to these myths made visible.

Nietzsche's mythopoesis is concerned with two aspects of human life. The first has already been mentioned and is concerned over the value of life: seeking to overcome the myth of Silenus. Here the call to action is simply to live, to flourish and thrive. The Silenus myth expresses the idea that life is not worth the suffering it entails; that we would be better off never having been born and failing that, to die as soon as possible. And so, related to Nietzsche's attempt to counter Silenus are his views on how we ought to interpret suffering. Consider in this respect his claim that what does not kill him, makes him stronger.[99] Consider also the following observation: 'the discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering—don't you know that *this* discipline has been the sole cause of every enhancement in humanity so far?[100] These ideas are made clear by Nietzsche's myths of Zarathustra and the Dionysian and their attitudes to fate and suffering that seek to counter Silenus. The call to action is to 'say yes to life even in its strangest and harshest problems.'[101]

But Nietzsche is also concerned with myths of the state, those 'omnipresent, daemonic guardians under whose tutelage the young soul grows up and by whose signs the grown man interprets his life and his struggles'. All political associations, from the smallest tribes to the largest modern States, place great demands on their members. Freedoms must be given away, work, often back-breaking and dangerous, must be carried out and at times of war lives must be given up. The cultural myths of a society justify the demands made of its people. Consider how a myth we have already come across, the myth of human dignity, is used in the following excerpt from Nietzsche's essay *The Greek State*:

> [W]e may compare this grand Culture with a blood-stained victor, who in his triumphal procession carries the defeated along as slaves chained to his chariot, slaves whom a beneficent power has so blinded that, almost crushed by the

[99] *TI* 'Arrows a' 8.
[100] *BGE* 225.
[101] *EH* 'The Birth of Tragedy' 3.

> wheels of the chariot, they nevertheless still exclaim: "Dignity of labour!" "Dignity of Man!"[102]

Note that Nietzsche is not drawing attention to this myth in order to call for a lifting of the yoke of the contemporary weak and wretched. The opposite is true in fact. Nietzsche is exposing our current belief that slavery is objectionable:

> The enormous social problems of today are engendered by the excessive sensitivity of modern man, not by true and deep pity for that misery; and even if it were true that the Greeks were ruined because they kept slaves, the opposite is even more certain, that we will be destroyed by the *lack* of slavery.[103]

From his first published essay to the last, Nietzsche repeatedly warns us of the danger of allowing 'the weak' not only to have positions of power and influence but to *believe* that this position is justified. A significant part of this mythopoesis is aimed at making clear the need to maintain a strict social inequality. Note his use of myth in order to make this clear in *The Greek State*:

> Accordingly we must learn to identify as a cruel sounding truth the fact that slavery belongs to the essence of a culture [call to action]: a truth, granted, that leaves open no doubt about the absolute value of existence. This truth is the vulture which gnaws at the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture. The misery of men living a life of toil has to be increased to make the production of the world of art possible for a small number of Olympian men [call to action]. Here we find the source of that hatred that has been nourished by the Communists and Socialists as well as their paler descendants, the white race of 'Liberals' of every age against the arts, but also against classical antiquity. [counter myths] If culture were really left to the discretion of a people, if inescapable powers, which are law and restraint to the individual, did not rule, then the glorification of spiritual poverty and the iconoclastic destruction of the claims of art would be more than the revolt of the oppressed masses against drone-like individuals: it would be the cry of compassion tearing down the walls of culture [call to action].[104]

When we study a work for its mythopoesis we are interested not so much in what actions are being called for but what myths are being countered. Nietzsche's main target is Christianity. In his

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[102] The Greek State (Kindle).
[103] The Greek State (Kindle).
[104] The Greek State (Kindle).

'attempt at self-criticism' added to a later edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* he says that Christianity was his main target all along:

> [A]s an advocate of life my instinct invented for itself a fundamentally opposed doctrine and counter-evaluation of life, a purely artistic one, an *anti-Christian* one. What was it to be called? As a philologist and man of words I baptised it, not without a certain liberty—for who can know the true name of the Antichrist?—by the name of a Greek god: I called it *Dionysiac*.

And from Ecce Homo:

> Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified…*

In the next chapter

I have made clear what is meant by mythopoesis and how it is used by Nietzsche and Camus to draw attention to what they see as 'something rotten in the state'; and to find a like-minded audience of readers on whom they can call for action. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to Nietzsche's understanding of the role of music in myth-making and mythopoesis. In this chapter and the third chapter, I will be focusing on *The Birth of Tragedy* as a mythopoeic text.

Chapter 2 Music and Words

In this chapter I focus on Nietzsche's understanding of the role of music in myth-making and mythopoesis. The main aim is to make clear what Nietzsche means by *Dionysian music* and the role such music plays in his mythopoesis. First, I look at Nietzsche's somewhat unusual attitude to music, in particular his notion of music as an intercessor or an advocate. Here, I take a close look at aphorism 106 from *The Gay* Science in order to show that what Nietzsche means by teaching in the language of music is very similar to what I have already identified as mythopoesis. From here, I rather provocatively consider Nietzsche as a kind of musical puritan; drawing parallels between his attitude to music and that held by the establishment in the eleven years England was under Puritan rule (1649-60). My intent here is to demonstrate the political aspect of Nietzsche's beliefs about music. I will show that for Nietzsche there are two kinds of music. One is the mystical *Dionysian* kind whose origins are mysterious and which is capable of communicating previously hidden eternal secrets. The other kind of music is simply made up of sounds intended to stimulate and entertain the Philistine masses. To help make clear what Nietzsche believes *Dionysian* music to be, I move on to an examination of his 1871 essay "On Music and Words". The main aims of this chapter are to make clear the difference between Dionysian music and other music; and the political use to which this distinction can be put.

2.1 Music as an intercessor or as an advocate

We will see in this chapter that Nietzsche's idea of music is different to that which we ordinarily understand as music. My aim here is to draw out Nietzsche's unusual conception of music. As a first step in this process one of the things I want to explore is what he might mean by music as either an 'intercessor' or an 'advocate'. My reference for this idea is taken from *The Gay Science*, aphorism 106.

GS 106 is subtitled: 'Musik als Fürsprecherin'. We can translate this into English as 'Music as an intercessor' or as 'an advocate'[105]. Exploring these two ideas gives us a useful insight into a particular type of communication that interests Nietzsche that is very close, if not the same thing, as mythopoesis. Why this is the case will be drawn out in what follows. But before that, I will look

[105] In the Cambridge University Press (2001) edition translator Josefine Nauckhoff goes with 'Music as advocate.' Walter Kaufmann's earlier translation also goes with advocate. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books (1974).

closely at the short aphorism itself in order to familiarise the reader with its content and then explore the difference between an intercessor and an advocate so that we can better understand what Nietzsche might mean when he refers to music as one of these two things.

Nietzsche introduces us to two characters: an 'innovator' and his disciple. The aphorism begins with the innovator telling his disciple that he desperately wants to find 'einem Meister der Tonkunst' (a master of the art of sound) that can intercede between him and other people.[106] What he wants is a master composer who learns from him and then is able to speak on his behalf to other people 'in the language of music'. One of the reasons given for wanting the services of a master composer is that once his teachings are expressed in music they 'will better penetrate into people's ears and hearts.' It is also important to note that the innovator does not want his ideas put *to* music, that is he does not want some kind of musical accompaniment for his works but rather his ideas communicated *as* music. If the innovator was simply looking for someone to write a musical score for the presentation of his ideas then presumably he would just say so. But in the aphorism he says he wants the composer to learn his thoughts and then to speak them in his language. It is important to note that the innovator does not want his teachings expressed in music simply because he believes this to be the best medium for reaching his audience; he wants his ideas expressed in music because, he says, music is irrefutable. To explore this idea, let us now look at the rest of the aphorism and the innovator's desire for music to make his ideas irrefutable.

As we read through the aphorism we see his disciple refer to the innovator's teachings as being part of a 'cause'. Here we see that the innovator has a principle, an aim or is himself part of a movement on whose behalf he seeks to advocate. It gives us a clue as to what kind of innovations the innovator might have to teach. For example, the idea of his having a cause as well as a disciple does not really fit if his innovation is some new idea or product to aid, say, the agricultural industry, perhaps a new design of seed distributor. In addition, if his innovations are of this mundane variety, it is not clear why he would feel the need to reach the ears *and* the hearts of his audience; surely reaching the ears would suffice. The fact alone that he has a disciple suggests that his teachings are of a philosophical or religious variety. In the previous chapter we observed the similarity between mythopoesis and preaching in terms of seeking a *rapport*. We saw that both require a voice that reaches the ears of the audience and a heart that reaches the hearts of the audience. The fact that the innovator wants to reach the hearts as well as the ears of his audience suggests that the teaching he has in mind is akin to preaching and mythopoesis.

[106] He does not just want one, he actually says he is 'thirsting' ('Ich habe Durst') for one.

So, the innovator has a cause, for which his innovation and teachings will serve but he is not willing to settle for simply the best way of spreading his teachings; he wants his ideas expressed in music because music is irrefutable. As he says, 'who can *refute* a tone?' It is not difficult to understand why the innovator would thirst for a way of advocating for his cause that is irrefutable; what advocate would not want their case to be considered irrefutable? What is of interest is that the innovator only wants his teachings to be considered so *temporarily*. Let us look at the rest of the aphorism to find out why.

The rest of the aphorism is devoted to why the innovator wants his teachings to be irrefutable. An important nuance here, as just mentioned, is that he only wants his teachings to be *temporarily* irrefutable, albeit a temporary period that lasts 'a good while'. No estimate of how long this period might be is given; my feeling, given what he hopes to achieve, is that he has several generations in mind. According to the innovator, for a teaching to be believed (by the people) there must be a period of time in which it is considered irrefutable.[107] Using a sprout-to-tree metaphor, the innovator says that teachings (starting as sprouts) must be strong enough (having grown into trees) to weather the 'storms' of doubt and the 'worms' of malice. He welcomes these 'storms and worms' but only when the 'tree' is strong enough to receive them. While the teachings are fresh and new (just sprouts) they cannot be refuted but only destroyed. In other words, the ideas when new are too fragile to withstand any testing or challenge. Only when strong enough to withstand it can the teachings be subject to criticism and objection of all kinds. We can detect some political realism here; the innovator anticipates not only genuine and good faith objections to his social innovations but also opposition born of doubt and malice.

We have seen that the innovator wants to protect his teachings until they are strong enough to stand on their own; and that the only way he sees for them to gain this strength is to be accepted as irrefutable for some time prior to facing challenges. For this to happen, the innovator says that he requires music as an intercessor and an advocate. To understand how music might function in this way it will be useful to make a comparison between what Nietzsche's innovator hopes to achieve with music, in order to implement his social innovations, and a similar project proposed by Socrates in *The Republic*.

Reading *GS* 106 it is difficult not to draw parallels between what Nietzsche's innovator hopes to achieve with music and Socrates' hopes for his 'myth of the metals' in *The Republic*. Here Socrates

[107] The teachings are believed by the disciple and without the help of music to make them first appear irrefutable. Nietzsche begins the aphorism with the innovator thirsting for a master composer in order to render his teachings suitable for people in general. I understand this to mean that the innovator believes his innovations can be taught teacher-to-discipline without music but for the people as a whole he requires music to make his teaching appear irrefutable.

talks of a new way of thinking about the origins of humanity. This new idea is that we are born of the Earth and contained within each of us is one of three different kinds of metal: gold, silver and bronze. The new idea is of course a lie, albeit apparently a noble one, that Socrates hopes will one day come to be considered the irrefutable truth. The intended purpose of the myth is to support the institution of a new caste system. The idea is that those with gold inside them are best suited to lead, those with silver are best suited to be guardians and the bronze folk are best suited to farming and the crafts. Socrates recognises the enormous challenge of getting the people to believe his myth at first but hopes that once it is established then subsequent generations will accept it.[108] Difficult as it may appear, to get the people to accept what seems to be a preposterous lie, it is not without precedent. On this point Socrates refers to people coming to believe the myth of Cadmus sowing dragon's teeth from which sprang armed men.[109] We can see that just like Nietzsche's innovator, Socrates has a cause in mind involving social innovations that he believes must become accepted as irrefutable. To give an example, one proposed innovation is that for a large proportion of the public the right to travel is to be strictly limited and no pay offered in return for labour but only food and lodging.[110] That things ought to be this way is to be accepted without challenge based upon people's natural dispositions influenced by their 'inner metals'.[111] It is important to note that Socrates has his own ideas for why these restrictions are for the good of a just republic, which he explains to Adeimantus, but these reasons are not what will be given to the people; rather the myth of the metals will be offered instead. We see something similar in *GS* 106 in which the innovator teaches his innovations to his disciple in a way that is different to how he would teach the general public.

The medium through which Socrates believes his myth is best taught to the masses is music.[112] Music, for Socrates, also includes tales and fables.[113] It is well-known that Socrates argues for censorship and strict restrictions on music. This is because he does not want a musical challenge to undermine his myth. Music, for him, must be controlled because it has the power to seduce people into error (which is why it would be such a good medium for disseminating the myth of the metals). This is something Nietzsche's innovator also seems to understand and appreciate; as he says: 'with tones one can seduce people into every error and every truth.' Socrates' proposed censorship and restrictions on music are designed to protect the myth of the metals, his noble lie and the social innovations that spring from its general acceptance. Where Socrates and

[108] Plato. Rep. 3.415d.
[109] Plato. Rep. 4.414c.
[110] Plato. Rep. 4.420a.
[111] Plato. Rep. 4.420a.
[112] Plato Rep. 2.376e; Plato Rep. 4.424b. Cf. Plato. Laws 3.700.
[113] Plato. Rep 2.376e.

Nietzsche's innovator differ is on allowing challenge once their teachings and innovations are accepted. Socrates will permit no challenge whereas the innovator positively welcomes it. As we have already seen, the innovator invites both doubts and malice but *only* after a period in which his teachings are believed irrefutable. The reason he gives for welcoming challenges is that only by 'storms, doubts, worms and malice' can the 'true nature and strength' of the teaching be revealed. He even goes on to suggest that his teachings deserve to be destroyed if they break under such testing.

Now that we have an idea of what Nietzsche's innovator hopes to achieve with music and why, we can begin to explore what he might mean by music as an intercessor or as an advocate. Let us start by looking at the difference between intercession and advocacy.

An intercessor is an intermediary that gets between two people in order to bring them together by bridging a gap that separates them. In a simple, everyday sense someone might intercede between two violently opposed parties and through their intercession allow the two warring sides to communicate and understand one another without anger and the threat of violence keeping them apart. Typically, this is achieved by making one of the two parties comprehensible to the other; that is, the intercessor speaks on behalf of one of the parties involved. However, with intercession it is not the task of the intercessor to make and present a case for those on whose behalf they intercede. Rather, they re-present the case already made by one party but in a way that the other party can understand. We can clearly see in *GS* 106 that is what the innovator wants from the master composer. That is, for the composer to 'learn his thoughts' and then speak them in the language of music. But there is more to intercession than mere translation. One of the tasks of the intercessor is to bring the sides together. If the innovator wants music as an intercessor he wants music not just to better penetrate the ears and hearts of this audience but to bring him and his audience together. But what of the idea of music as an advocate? Unlike intercessors, advocates plead on behalf of someone or some cause and it is the task of the advocate to make the case themselves. Since the innovator wants music to make his teachings appear irrefutable then it seems that he also has an advocacy role in mind for music as well as intercession. It is worth point out here that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive and that although the roles and tasks are distinct a person can be both an intercessor and an advocate. To better understand this dual role we can look to advocacy and intercession in Christianity.

In Christian prayers of intercession, the idea is that God and some person, people or events are brought together by the individual at prayer. Prayers of intercession are not intended as pleas on behalf of people put to God but rather a bringing together of the two. In Catholicism, the intercessors between God and mortal humans are the saints and the Virgin Mary. The idea is that

it is their elevated position that gives them the position, somewhere between God and mortal beings, that allows them to bring the two together. The ultimate intercessor in all Christian denominations is Jesus, without whom God cannot be known.[114] However, Jesus is also considered an advocate who pleads on behalf of human beings to God.[115] It can be seen here that the role of intercessor and advocate can be held by the same person and that a distinction can be made between the two. An important difference is that intercession meets its aims when a gap between the opposing sides is bridged; whereas advocacy is successful when the party on whose behalf the advocate speaks is successful in achieving what they want, i.e. 'winning their case.' We have seen that Nietzsche's innovator wants music as a intercessor but clearly also wants music as an advocate because he wants teachings to be considered irrefutable. The idea of an intercessor also being an advocate is not difficult to grasp; however, the idea of 'music' somehow being either an intercessor, an advocate or both at the same time is still an idea that is as mysterious as it is intriguing.

For music to be an intercessor, in the sense that Nietzsche is talking about in *GS* 106, it must be capable of somehow bridging a gap of understanding between the innovator and his audience by speaking on behalf of the innovator; and in addition, it must somehow be instrumental in bringing Nietzsche's innovator and his audience together in the first place. It is in this sense, we can think of music as interceding between the innovator and his audience in a similar way to how Silenus and Socrates' daimonion intercede between mortals and the gods.

In the Silenus myth, discussed in the previous chapter, Silenus can communicate things to human beings previously known only to the gods because he is a satyr and as such stands somewhere between gods and mortals. When he reveals 'his wisdom', that the best thing for human beings is to have never been born, he is neither sharing his opinion on the matter nor arguing for a position that ought to be taken against life. Rather he is acting as an intermediary passing on to human beings something previously only known to the gods. In a similar way, Socrates' daimonion also lets him know something only previously known to the gods and thereby intercedes between the gods and a mortal man. What is important to note here is that neither Silenus nor Socrates' daimonion speak in defence of human beings (or the gods) against some kind of adversary. In this way, clearly, neither act as advocates. We can note also, that in these two cases, that which is passed on by Silenus and Socrates' daimonion is something that requires the intercession of a

[114] Heb 7:25.
[115] 1 John 2: 1-2.

special kind of intercessor.[116] When Nietzsche's innovator talks of music as an intercessor he probably has a special kind of intercession in mind. I will offer two reasons to support this idea.

Firstly, it is odd that Nietzsche refers to 'music' as the intercessor and not the master composer. *GS* 106 begins with the innovator telling his disciple that he thirsts for a master composer that will learn his thoughts and then speak them in the language of music. A straightforward reading of this would be that the innovator wants a master composer to intercede on his behalf. Confounding this reading is Nietzsche's subtitle for the aphorism: 'Music as an intercessor (or advocate)'. Since it is 'music' that Nietzsche considers to be the intercessor, the master of the arts of sound mentioned by the innovator must be a personification of music. In other words, the master of the art of sound that the innovator thirsts for is music itself. For the ancient Greeks, the master of music was Apollo, the god that presides over all music, songs, dance and poetry. Whether Nietzsche actually intends readers to think that the innovator is referring to Apollo is only conjecture; however, the description of music and its role as intercessor in this aphorism is certainly mysterious. What we do know is that the innovator is seeking to communicate his teaching via a medium that is anything but straightforward. This brings us on to my second point.

Music, as a medium through which innovations can be taught, is an alternative to the method already used by the innovator to teach his disciple. We know this because the innovator is still thirsting for a master composer when the disciple already knows enough about the innovations to subject them to every kind of challenge imaginable. Indeed, when he asks the innovator why he needs music when he already has a disciple that (a) understands and fully accepts the teachings, and (b) is willing to challenge them in all possible ways, the innovator acknowledges that this type of discipleship 'is best'. However, Nietzsche ends the aphorism by suggesting that the innovator's particular teachings are not best suited to this method. That is, the innovator thirsts for a kind of music that will render his teachings for some period of time irrefutable to the masses rather than seeking to teach them directly to disciples.

As is the case with most of Nietzsche's aphorisms, it is difficult to pin down exactly what it is he intends to say; however, we can see that the use of music as some kind of intercessor and advocate is clearly something different to the teaching one might expect from some kind of master passed down onto a student.

What we can take from *GS* 106 is that there are, at least, two ways of disseminating one's teachings: the musical way of reaching ears and hearts intended to be irrefutable; and

[116] The same is also true in the case of intercession between humans and God by the saint, the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

straightforward mouth-to-ear teaching from teacher to student. There are also, it seems, some teachings that are not suitable for both approaches. The mythopoeic reading of Nietzsche (and Camus) that I have drawn from my research into Camus' reception of Nietzsche, encourages us to receive certain of Nietzsche's texts as if they were attempting to express ideas in this first 'musical medium', and in addition are possibly unsuited to the second approach. This second approach to reading Nietzsche, that I have just referred to as 'teacher to student', is what I would consider the current standard approach to Nietzsche. In this rest of this chapter, I will be exploring the idea of receiving Nietzsche's work as a kind of music of the like just discussed.

2.2 Nietzsche's musical puritanism

In some ways Nietzsche is a musical puritan. He holds some music in very high regard whilst maintaining a very low opinion of others; in addition, he believes that music can be dangerous when permitted to be heard by the wrong people and in the wrong places. In Nietzsche's philosophy, music, as we shall see, plays an important role in both securing power and control over the masses and as such music must itself be controlled. Music is irrefutable and so are myths. Sorel famously observed: 'A myth cannot be refuted because it is, at bottom, identical to the convictions of the group.'[117] It is the power of music to spread irrefutable truths to the group that is a major interest and concern for Nietzsche. This concern contributes to what I identify as a *puritanism* in his attitude to music. Let us take a closer look at this.

It is a belief widely held to be true but is in fact false that the Puritans detested music.[118] Yet, the first opera to be performed in England, William Davenants's *The Siege of Rhodes*, was produced in 1656; that is, during the eleven years England was under Puritan rule (1649-60). Lest we think this a strange exception to the rule, it is worth noting that Oliver Cromwell had his own private musicians, vocal and instrumental performers that would play whenever he felt like listening to music. Musical apprenticeships were still ongoing and musical education remained prominently placed on the curricula in both boys' and girls' schools.[119] Music was prohibited in churches during religious services and from inns and public houses. It is well known that the organ was removed from Magdalen chapel in Oxford and resituated in Hampton Court for Cromwell's personal enjoyment. We are interested in this chapter in music *and* words so it is noteworthy that spoken-word plays were banned by the Puritans but *masques*, elaborate theatrical performances

[117] Sorel (1999).
[118] A 'myth' in the second of the everyday usages identified in chapter one, along with the widely held but false idea that carrots are especially good for the eyesight.
[119] Scholes (1993). 4, 5.

involving masked actors, were not only permitted but put on for high society and visiting dignitaries.[120] Finally, a wide variety of written music was still openly published and sold freely under Puritan rule. It can be clearly seen that music produced and reserved for the elites was valued and encouraged whereas what we would call today 'lowbrow' musical entertainments were banned.[121] Although Nietzsche never explicitly mentions the Puritans' attitude to music, he appears to appreciate their stance on the uneducated masses (der Pöbel): 'Asceticism and Puritanism are almost indispensable means of educating and ennobling a race that wants to gain control of its origins among the rabble, and work its way up to eventual rule.'[122] I am referring to Puritanism in order to illustrate and make clear something that Nietzsche and they had in common with regards to their attitudes to music. It is not clear exactly how much Nietzsche knew or thought about these people and this period of history: he quotes Cromwell in *HH* 359 and wonders whether he will share the same fate as the former Lord Protector in *GS* 315; he was certainly familiar with Victor Hugo and Nietzsche's discussion of the comic and the sublime in *BT* 7 shares similar concerns with Hugo's well-known preface to his 1827 play *Cromwell* which suggests the work and its subject may have been known to him. However, what is of real interest here is not so much Nietzsche's attitude to Puritanism but his puritan attitude to music. In particular, his elitist attitude and concerns over the dangers of music being enjoyed by the wrong audiences. There is a strong emphasis on social control in this attitude; political not in the sense 'party political' or 'politics' but in questions of how a political association ought to be organised. With this in mind let us return to *BGE* 61, partially quoted above, this time to look at how Nietzsche begins the aphorism. He starts by elaborating upon how 'we free spirits' see the role of philosophers in society; those who bear the weight of responsibly for 'the overall development of humanity':

> [T]his philosopher will make use of religion for his breeding and education work, just as he will make use of the prevailing political and economic situation. The influence that can be exerted over selection and breeding with the help of religions (and this influence is always just as destructive as it is creative and formative) varies according to the type of person who falls under their spell and protection. For people who are strong, independent, prepared, and predestined for command, people who come to embody the reason and art of a governing race, religion is an additional means of overcoming resistances, of being able to rule. It binds the ruler together with the ruled, giving and handing the consciences

[120] Scholes (1993). 5.
[121] Along with other 'uncultured' entertainment such as bear-baiting, maypoles and Morris dancing.
[122] *BGE* 61.

> of the ruled over to the rulers—which is to say: handing over their hidden and most interior aspect, and one which would very much like to escape obedience. And if individuals from such a noble lineage are inclined, by their high spirituality, towards a retiring and contemplative life, reserving for themselves only the finest sorts of rule (over exceptional young men or monks), then religion can even be used as a means of securing calm in the face of the turmoil and tribulations of the cruder forms of government, and purity in the face of the necessary dirt of politics.

It is in this light that we go on to read Nietzsche's claim, already quoted in this chapter, that Puritanism is the almost indispensable means of educating and ennobling a race that wants to gain control of its origins among the rabble, and work its way up to eventual rule. He goes on to say:

> Finally, as for the common people, the great majority, who exist and are only allowed to exist to serve and to be of general utility, religion gives them an invaluable sense of contentment with their situation and type; it puts their hearts greatly at ease, it glorifies their obedience, it gives them (and those like them) one more happiness and one more sorrow, it transfigures and improves them, it provides something of a justification for everything commonplace, for all the lowliness, for the whole half-bestial poverty of their souls.

Given the power of music to control the masses, we can understand both Nietzsche's and the Puritans' concerns over controlling who gets to listen to what and to whom. The latter, much like we do today, believed there was something like high and lowbrow music: the former worthwhile musical pursuits that are also good for society and the latter which are damaging to society and also in some way damaging to the soul. A proper education involved being educated in a proper appreciation of music. Nietzsche would have no problem agreeing with this.[123] But for him, there is a danger too in allowing the 'lesser types' access to good music: 'What helps feed or nourish the higher type of man must be almost poisonous to a very different and lesser type.'[124] Here there is no altruistic concern for the welfare of the masses (identified as those who lack depth or have speedy bowels).[125] Nietzsche believes that once 'poisoned' by exposure to good music or books, such people can become detrimental to society. Consider what he has to say about it in *The Gay Science*. Referring to the most dangerous and insidious advocates for morality, those 'self-

[123] Consider what he says in section four of his preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*.
[124] *BGE* 30. Nietzsche here is referring to books but the same applies for music.
[125] *BGE* 263.

despisers' that are ashamed of their existence, he says that they got this way as a result of reading books they had no right to and through more spiritual company than they can digest.[126] He continues:

> … such a thoroughly poisoned human being—for spirit becomes poison, education becomes poison; ownership becomes poison, loneliness becomes poison in persons who have turned out badly in this way—eventually ends up in a state of habitual revenge, the will to revenge. . .What do you think he finds necessary, absolutely necessary, to give himself in his own eyes the appearance of superiority over more spiritual people and to obtain the pleasure of an accomplished revenge at least in his own imagination?

What this poisoned human being finds necessary is morality, what Nietzsche calls 'the boom-boom of justice, wisdom, holiness [and] virtue.' Such incurable self-despisers are, in Nietzsche's eyes, '*enemies of the spirit*.'

We see similarities between Nietzsche's elitist view of music and that of the English Puritans. He shares with them ideas about the value of music but also the potential dangers of music. But despite these similarities and shared views, he saw music very differently to the Puritans. In fact, as we shall see, he had a very broad conception of music that covered under its wide umbrella a lot more than people in the seventeenth century, or today for that matter, would even consider music. Let us take a closer look at this.

2.3 Two kinds of music

For Nietzsche there is, taking a very broad view, two kinds of music. One is the mystical *Dionysian* kind whose origins are mysterious and which is capable of communicating previously hidden eternal secrets. The other kind of music is simply made up of sounds intended to stimulate and entertain the Philistine masses. 'Masses' are always large groups but Nietzsche here includes everyone incapable of appreciating music in the first sense just mentioned, what he calls 'the pure musical effect'. Euripides, for example, is one of Nietzsche's 'Philistines' and, some years after writing the essays currently under discussion, he will come to consider Wagner a Philistine as well.

In this chapter I am interested in music *and* words. My aim is not to draw out *exactly* what 'music' is for Nietzsche but rather to show the importance of 'music' in Nietzsche's mythopoesis. He has a

[126] *GS* 359. The reference to 'more than they can digest' is probably related to Nietzsche characterisation, elsewhere, of people having 'speedy bowels' (Geschwind-Därmen).

very broad understanding of music.[127] For example, he considered his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, read in a certain way, to be music.[128] *The Birth of Tragedy*, he says, should be sung![129] In an 1888 letter to his composer friend Peter Gast (Heinrich Köselitz), Nietzsche refers to *The Case of Wagner* as 'operetta music.'[130] It seems that he wrote his works to be *performed* rather than passively read. Imagine the audience of a book, its *readers*, that sit down and simply *read*, in a similar way that the audience of a musical piece might simply sit and *listen*. Nietzsche is no fan of sitting: 'Sit as little as possible; do not believe any idea that that was not conceived while moving around outside,—with all your muscles in celebratory mode as well. All prejudices come from the intestines.—Sitting down—I have said it before—is a true *sin* against the Holy Spirit.'[131] Nietzsche does not want passive readers. Nor does he want readers that will read (or 'listen to him') and then go away and ponder what he says.[132] Nietzsche wants readers that will join in with his works, perhaps even sing them. As I said, his works are to be *performed*.[133] Consider in this respect Michael Gillespie's observation regarding *Ecce Homo*: 'The truth of *Ecce Homo* thus lies not in the content of the words in the text but in the text as a performance, as the musical unfolding of the god of music performed by his disciple Friedrich Nietzsche.'[134]

Graham Parkes and Michael Gillespie have both offered very detailed accounts of how, in their views, Nietzsche wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols* as if they were symphonies. It is interesting that Parkes and Gillespie go along with Nietzsche's specific claim that his work is *symphonic* and not, as we might expect, operatic. Let us hear what Parkes has to say:

> Why does Nietzsche insist on calling his work a *symphony*? Given that the protagonist not only speaks but also sings at crucial junctures of the book, then why not an opera—a new *Ring* in a different medium? Or given the predominance of Zarathustra's voice over all the others, why not an oratorio with a dominating soloist, or even a concerto with Zarathustra's voice as the solo instrument? Yet no lesser authority than Gustav Mahler confirms Nietzsche's claim about his favourite work: 'His *Zarathustra* was born completely out of the

[127] Gillespie (2017). 128.
[128] Parkes (2008).
[129] *BT* 'Self-Criticism' 3.
[130] Cited in Gillespie (2017). 91.
[131] *EH* 'Clever' 1. See also: *TI* 'Arrows' 34.
[132] He also does not want readers that 'wallow in books as if in their own filth'. *BGE* 26.
[133] In some way. How exactly one of Nietzsche's texts should be performed is not clear to me. In other words, I am not sure what a performed reading would look like from the outside. I suspect that what Nietzsche has in mind is more than simply reading the words aloud. The key idea here is that Nietzsche clearly thinks his work should be read differently to how other philosophical texts are usually read.
[134] Gillespie (2017). 128.

> spirit of music, and is "symphonically constructed". Given that Mahler understood the structure of classical symphony as well as any human being that ever lived, this comment deserves to be taken seriously.[135]

Nietzsche himself seemed unsure of what kind of music his *Zarathustra* was, although sure it was some kind of music; he wrote to Gast pondering the question before answering with: 'I almost believe it comes under "symphonies".[136] What he immediately goes on to say is interesting: 'What is certain is that with this I have crossed over into another world.' Parkes and Gillespie each give fascinating accounts of how *Zarathustra*, for Parkes, and *Twilight of the Idols*, for Gillespie, are structured like classical symphonies. Both commentators demonstrate how the characteristic three (or four) movements are clearly identifiable in these works, with themes, developments, recapitulations, codas and, for Gillespie, even a time signature all recognisably present.[137] Interesting as these accounts undoubtedly are, my concern here is not in music *per se* but with the idea of music (inextricably tied to words) communicating something Nietzsche might refer to as 'otherworldly'. *Otherworldly* in the sense of devoted to imaginative and intellectual pursuits rather than the actual belief in another world. When Nietzsche says to Gast, in his letter mentioned above, that he has 'crossed over into another world,' I understand him to be referring to his work as capturing the 'world' by means of mythopoeic expression rather than straightforward argumentation. That is, the 'music' of his *Zarathustra*, talked about in the letter, as well as that of *The Twilight of the Idols* and other works, captures something of *this* world, and not some other world. And, for Nietzsche, captures it in the way *only* music of this kind can. Put simply, the 'other world' is part of *this* world but a part only accessible and communicable through what Nietzsche is referring to as 'music'. This music is not something we ordinarily recognise as music, the only instrument is the human voice (and this is only if his works are read aloud or sung).

However, we do not need to agree with Nietzsche that any of his works are a kind of music. To think so would probably require a kind of revelatory experience that could make this clear. Nietzsche certainly offers no convincing arguments that, for example, his *Zarathustra* is a symphony. I suppose that one can either accept that it is because they have the 'ears to hear'

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[135] Parkes (2008). 12.
[136] Cited in Parkes (2008). 12.
[137] Is Gillespie going too far when he says: 'The preface to [*Twilight of the Idols*] is divided into two sections separated by a line of Latin. There are 135 words above and 180 words below the Latin line, which constitutes a proportion of ¾. This division suggests the preface is the time signature, specifying ¾ time (triple meter). Triple meter is more or less equivalent to ancient trochaic meter, which according to Nietzsche, is the meter of the bacchic dance, used specifically by Aeschylus in his choral odes; it does not imitate speech but instead remains fundamentally musical and thus ennobles tragic poetry.' (95, 96).

Nietzsche's text as 'music' or they do not. Parkes and Gillespie both make convincing cases that Nietzsche *himself* believed at least some of his writings to be a kind of music but not that *we* should receive them as such. But it does not really matter, in terms of this thesis, whether I think any of Nietzsche's works are kind of music or not. What does matter is that Nietzsche believes that if you read (and write) a text in a certain way, it acts, in some mysterious way, like music. The reverse would also be true. Music can act like certain texts in that it has themes, repeats them, alludes to other music, etc. But Nietzsche is saying that there is something special that music can do that a certain kind of writing can also achieve and not simply observing some superficial similarities. This kind of music is inextricably linked to words. It has to be since there are no instruments other than the human voice and the sounds made are words written on the page read aloud. Does Nietzsche actually believe that his works should be read aloud or sung for the reader to gain the full benefit? Possibly. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he chastises German readers for not reading aloud: 'they do not read for the ear but only with the eye, keeping their ears in a drawer in the meantime.'[138] He goes on to point out that in the ancient world when people read it was out loud and in a loud voice. Here he lays great stress on the performance of texts; all of which, he says, were written to be performed. The ancients enjoyed hearing long sentences spoken in a single breath; we moderns have lost the lung-capacity for it. Nietzsche here chides us for being short-winded (Kurzatmigen).

Nietzsche thinks that he ought to have sung *The Birth of Tragedy*, but he says he should have sung 'and not talked.'[139] The singing and talking, then, refers to the written words on the page; Nietzsche is referring to a style of writing. It is quite possible that the reader can join in with Nietzsche through a kind of reading that is not necessarily reading (or singing) out loud. When I say that Nietzsche's works are *performative*, I am not just referring to his writing style but also to a kind of reading style. In other words, Nietzsche's works need to be read in a way that is different to most other philosophy books. Consider, in this respect, the following two passages from Nietzsche. The first, from *The Gay Science*, concerns the idea of *active* books:

> Our first question about the value of a book, a person, or a piece of music is: 'Can they walk?' Even more, 'Can they dance?'[140]

The second, from *Beyond Good and Evil*, I have reproduced in full below. It is a long quote but makes clear Nietzsche's approach to writing and reading *performative* works. Note that in the first sentence he refers to the 'third ear' which represents an intuitive way of hearing, or in this case

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[138] *BGE* 247.
[139] *BT* 'Self-Criticism' 3.
[140] *GS* 366.

reading, what someone is saying; of being receptive to another kind of meaning other than that expressed by a straightforward understanding of the words themselves. Theodor Reik, a psychoanalyst and student of Freud, used Nietzsche's idea in his most well-known work *Listening with the Third Ear*. For Reik, listening with the third ear is not about searching for conclusions nor jumping to them but being receptive and ready for conclusions to, in a sense, jump out at you.[141] In other words, to be receptive to a revelatory experience.

> What torture German books are for anyone with a third ear! How reluctantly he stands by the slowly revolving quagmire of toneless tones and rhythms without dance that the Germans call a "book"! And the Germans who read books! How lazily, how grudgingly, how badly they read! How many Germans know (and require themselves to know) that there is art in every good sentence! Art that wants to be discerned to the extent that the sentence wants to be understood! A misunderstanding about its tempo, for instance, and the sentence itself is misunderstood! To have no doubts as to the rhythmically decisive syllables, to feel breaks in the most stringent of symmetries as deliberate and attractive, to extend a subtle and patient ear to every staccato and every rubato, guessing the meaning of the order of vowels and diphthongs and how tenderly and richly they can change colour and change it again when put next to each other—who among book-reading Germans is well-meaning enough to acknowledge duties and demands like these and to listen for so much art and intent in language? In the end, people just do not have "the ear for it," and so the strongest contrasts in style go unheard and the most subtle artistry is wasted as if on the deaf.—These were my thoughts as I noticed two masters in the art of prose being crudely and thoughtlessly mistaken for each other, the one whose words drip down with coldness and hesitation, as if from the roof of a damp cave (he counts on their dull sound and resonance) and another who handles his language like a supple rapier and, from his fingers to his toes, feels the dangerous joy of the quivering, over-sharpened sword that wants to bite, sizzle, cut.[142]

Nietzsche here speaks of two masters of the art of prose, one whose words 'drip down with coldness and hesitation' and the other who 'handles his language like a supple rapier'. If their work were performed then the cold drip of the first and the flashing swish of the blade should be present in the sound of the narrator's performance. If not, if the reading is 'flat' so to speak, then

[141] Frankel (1968). 36.
[142] *BGE* 246.

something important is lost from the text in its reception. A question to keep in mind here is how, for example, would Nietzsche want his *GS* 341 to be performed? The feelings induced by the reading itself, that is how the reader actually reads the text, should play a part in the reception of the aphorism as much as the ideas contained within. In other words we should pay attention not only to what Nietzsche has to say but to our performance (reading) of the text.

Whether or not Nietzsche seriously believes that his books are best read out loud or that to grasp the full meaning one must read out loud is unclear. Although, I suspect he would have been more insistent upon it if the latter were the case. However, it seems perfectly clear that for Nietzsche his books ought to be read in a particular way. I have referred to this way as performative. In "Music and Words" Nietzsche says of pieces of music that people do not really understand them if they do not join in with the singing: 'only for *him that joins* in singing do lyric poetry and music exist,'[143] Let us take a closer look at this text.

2.4 On Music and Words (1871)

Nietzsche begins "On Music and Words" by making some claims about verbal and non-verbal communication. The words we speak are symbols that represent the thing about which we are attempting to communicate. There is no connection between word and thing other than common agreement among speakers of the same language that this word denotes this thing. Different languages have different words that symbolise the same thing found in the world. A word, he says, is not a 'direct bridge that can take us to the innermost nature of things.' Words are just 'metaphorical expressions' with which we become familiar. We are not affected by the essence of things but 'the play of feelings, sensations, emotions, volitions,' are known to us through these metaphors. He makes a similar point elsewhere when he says that the expectation that people be truthful is the expectation that people will use the metaphors invented to make clear things in the world in the same way and to mean the same thing as everyone else.[144] Words then are only related to the thing they symbolise by convention, any word as long as it is commonly agreed upon will do.

In "Music and Words", Nietzsche is interested in the spoken word. All spoken words are, he says, simply a combination of noise and gesture. Words cannot be spoken without some kind of physical gestures, they are tones made by 'the *positions* of the organs of speech'. Tone and gestures are how we communicate. He says that all degrees of pleasure and displeasure

[143] "Music and Words" (Kindle).
[144] "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense", 1.

'symbolise themselves in *the tone of the speaker*; whereas all the other conceptions are indicated by the *gesture-symbolism* of the speaker.' Nietzsche makes a similar point in *GS* 354.

From the above we can see that Nietzsche comes around to the idea of language having some useful role worth mentioning ('not only language') but is still interested with other forms of communication. In the early works we are considering, those written around the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*, we can see Nietzsche downplaying, dismissing even, the value of the *content* of what is spoken; i.e. the commonly agreed upon meaning of the words. For the particular type of 'music' he is concerned with, it does not seem to matter to him what language the words were spoken in or indeed if the sounds made were part of any known language.[145] In his discussion of Beethoven's Ninth symphony, in which the composer uses Schiller's poem "Ode to Joy" (with some changes to the text) in the final movement, Nietzsche again downplays the value of the words. In Beethoven's piece, he says, the human voice is used as an instrument; that which is communicated comes from the sound of the singing rather than the words (content) of the poem. The same is true for some religious music, Gregorian chants for example; here the music 'does not incite in us any rational conceptions [...] but touches us with the impression of well-known symbolic creeds.'[146]

In the present discussion, Nietzsche is interested in music *and words*. Because of his enthusiasm for music and reverence to the point of deference in his attitude to Wagner, the treatment of words can appear overshadowed by his focus on the music. We have already seen that the content of the words does not seem to matter to Nietzsche; indeed the spoken word so far has been considered as a kind of music to be played by a human instrument. But we know that Nietzsche is not only interested in sounds. It is important not to forget the part played by gesticulation in Nietzsche's account. He refers to the physical movements required to make speech sounds; we can imagine this to include a combination of tongue, teeth, jaw, vocal cords and breath control, but he also mentions the 'gesture-symbolism' used by speakers when they communicate. Here again we see a *performative* element to the kind of communication Nietzsche is interested in. Gesticulation comes naturally to speakers; some people are more expressive than others but the text itself will play its own part. When we read Nietzsche aloud, it is difficult to do so whilst remaining static and expressionless. But it is more than the sounds of words that move us, both physically and spiritually. It is clear from *BGE* 246, quoted in full above, that *both* the musicality of the writing and the meaning of the words are important to Nietzsche. Yet there are times when Nietzsche suggests that Dionysian music has no need of words and that when one is

[145] Like scatting in Jazz.
[146] "Music and Words" (Kindle).

affected by such music, the words themselves are no longer perceptible. What sense can we make of this?

Nietzsche says that music gives birth to myth. These myths can only be properly received if we understand Nietzsche's texts as a kind of music. It is from these texts that we received his myths. These myths can only be properly received if we read his texts in a particular way, what Nietzsche might refer to as musically and what I have been calling performative. Understood this way, Nietzsche's 'music' gives birth to myth.[147]

But in the same works he also says that: 'If we experienced feelings as pure Dionysian beings, however, myth would now, as allegory, come to a standstill beside us, completely ineffective and ignored.'[148] Since as human beings we cannot experience feelings in this way, myth is required. In other words, the meaning of the content of Nietzsche's works is important; his words are not simply sounds to be played on the human instrument. What we can see here is that, for Nietzsche, music and myth are inextricably linked. When we read *The Birth of Tragedy* and hear Nietzsche talk about music, we should think not only of music in the sense we are used to, sounds made by musical instruments or perhaps sung, but of Nietzsche's works being musical and his mythopoesis as performative.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that Nietzsche, very broadly, thinks that there are two kinds of music: the mystical *Dionysian* kind whose origins are mysterious and which is capable of communicating previously hidden eternal secrets; and music intended to stimulate and entertain the Philistine masses. I want to return now to this idea.

2.5 Dionysian music

Nietzsche claims that 'the single tone' set against a metaphor is 'already Dionysian'. That is, for Nietzsche, one toot on the flute or twang of the lyre set against an appropriate image is sufficient to reveal the Dionysian mysteries. What is crucial, here, is that the tone *is set against* the appropriate images (expressed in words). A trumpet signal, sounded to trigger horses into a trot, for example, is not set against appropriate imagery. Accordingly, this musical note, or series of notes, is not Dionysian. The same goes for military drummers or indeed the sound of someone drumming their fingers on the kitchen table and, to give a very modern example, the bleep of a microwave. If all it took were sounds to trigger Dionysian reveries, we would be continually in the thrall of the dark god. This does not mean that these sounds have no power to induce some kind

[147] *BT* 16.
[148] *BT* 21.

of emotional response. The sound of the microwave going off might cause someone to start salivating like one of Pavlov's dogs and incessant tapping can be extremely irritating. A band marching with full honours, or as Nietzsche might put it *mit klingendem Spiele*, can certainly stir the passions in some.[149] Sounds can have a stimulating effect without what Nietzsche calls a purely musical effect. An example of this from the theatre would be the use of clashing cymbals to accompany the entrance of a powerful figure onstage designed to make the hairs stand up on the backs of the theatre-goers' necks.

Here, Nietzsche addresses what is a recurring theme in his works: the appropriation by the lowest classes of that which he believes ought to be the preserve of the elite.[150] Concerning modern opera, it is possible to find bad works intended for the masses that when compared to good (or genuine) opera is like comparing a marionette puppet to a real human being. What the masses are offered is, Nietzsche says, *jugglery* and *diversion*. The music serving the spectacle is merely *permitted* by the audience and not appreciated for what it is. Here, those watching bad opera are *listening* to the music not taking part in the Dionysian aspect of the music. As long as the sounds accompanying the words 'tickle the skins' of the theatre-going masses agreeably enough, it will be appreciated. Three kinds of theatre goers are identified by Nietzsche in the text: the pleasure-hunting, dull-eyed sensualist; the conceited 'educated person' that likes to think they appreciate music but does not; and the absent-minded egoist who needs the occasional blast of music to grab their wandering attention.[151]

What is interesting here is that unlike, say, a signal sounded on a hunting horn that is not set to appropriately Apolline imagery and so would not induce Dionysian reverie, even *bad* operas often attempt to employ music in the service of words designed to capture Apolline ideas. We might wonder how they can possibly fail in this attempt. If a single tone paired with the appropriate words is 'already Dionysian' then how can even the worst composer fail to induce the Dionysian in their dramatic musical works? Music in ancient times was often little more than a single instrument providing a series of tones to accompany spoken words in recitative style.[152] This being so, it does not seem to be the case that someone would need to be an especially talented musician to create music for an ancient Greek performance. In addition, it is not immediately obvious why one would even need to be a very talented writer since once the simple music takes effect, no-one is going to be paying attention to what the performers are saying. 'Already

[149] *Z* 'Vision' 2.
[150] We will see this again in Nietzsche's early essay on Theognis. A very similar idea appears in *The Genealogy of Morals* and again in *The Antichrist*.
[151] "On Music and Words" (Kindle).
[152] Silk and Stern (1981). 164, 165.

Dionysian' music, Nietzsche says, dims the eyes that see the action and the drama is temporarily forgotten by the audience. It is only when the 'Dionysian spell' is broken that the drama becomes alive again. Therefore, if a simple toot on the flute set to the right subject will not only trigger the Dionysian but drown out the words, the bar does not seem to be set very high for creating works for the Greek theatre. How then, for Nietzsche, does a modern day *bad* opera, even one with complex and proficiently played music set to an appropriate theme, manage *to not send* its audience members into an orgiastic Dionysian frenzy?

What Nietzsche hides in the final paragraph of the essay is that poetry, the words, are every bit as essential as the music. Just as there is bad music that merely stimulates and tickles the skin of the great Philistine masses, there is bad poetry that achieves the same effect with words. Nietzsche compares good music and good poetry that results from a complementary and harmonious union of the Dionysian and appropriate imagery with bad music and bad poetry that work together only to mask the deficiencies in each that would interfere with the pleasurable reception of the work by the uneducated masses. That is, when the music falls flat, the words assist the audience in understanding how they are supposed to be feeling; and when the drama falls flat, the music is used to get the audience going like an early version of the 'jump-scare' in cinema. For the uneducated masses that cannot tell the difference between good and bad opera, they fail to notice that the lack of Dionysian reveries is masked in this way. This is how is it possible to make bad opera.

But what of this idea of Dionysian music, present in all good opera, blinding the receptive audience to the action and causing them to forget the drama? When we read Nietzsche's performative works with ears to hear the Dionysian music, we do not seem to miss the action and forget the drama within. One answer might be that even if Nietzsche writes the greatest books ever written, they might not have the same powerful effect as watching a tragic play on stage in Ancient Greece. This being so, we do not get the full Dionysian effect when we read Nietzsche's works, even if we do so performatively. But I cannot see Nietzsche looking upon this idea with much favour. Perhaps what is happening is something like hypnotism. As we read, receptively and performatively, the words come to us like a hypnotist counting us down into a hypnotic state. But once the Dionysian takes hold, it is like we are under hypnosis; the hypnotist is still speaking to us and we hear the words but we do not receive them as we usually do. Imagine someone going to a hypnotherapist because they want to give up smoking. The therapist uses words to induce a hypnotic trance and while their client is under she tells them that they no longer need cigarettes and when she snaps her fingers they will find themselves back in the room and with no desire to smoke. In order for the process to work, the client must hear and be aware of what the therapist

is saying: the words are important; but at the same time what is happening before them is dimmed and the action forgotten.

This is not my experience of reading Nietzsche, I have to admit; but as we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, he puts enormous demands upon his readers. If he really is a posthumous writer, perhaps there is no-one yet alive that is capable of experiencing the Dionysian in this way through his works. Alternatively, perhaps Nietzsche's account of Dionysian music is a myth, created by him as an attempt to make clear the different kinds of ways his texts can be read. In other words his myth of the Dionysian is a myth about mythopoesis.

2.6 In the next chapter

I have made clear the difference between what Nietzsche understands to be Dionysian music and how it differs from popular music. We have seen a strong division in terms of social stratification in Nietzsche's account of the role of music. In the next chapter I will be focusing on *The Birth of Tragedy* and exploring the idea that Nietzsche considers his works to be a kind of Dionysian 'music' that are best understood when *performed* rather than merely read. Here we will see how mythopoeic works are intended to be received differently to non-mythopoeic works.

Chapter 3 The Birth of Tragedy

I look at *The Birth of Tragedy* and discuss how we should receive Nietzsche's Dionysus myth. Here I borrow an idea from Maudemarie Clark and suggest that we 'play the game' with Nietzsche.[153] Mythopoeic works use myths that are no longer taken literally by the audience; when we 'play the game' with Nietzsche, we do not take his account of Dionysus literally but we do immerse ourselves with him in the myth. I then turn my attention to Nietzsche's "Attempt at Self-Criticism", a commentary on *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche included in the second edition of the text. The aim of this chapter is to draw out how Nietzsche's work might be received as a mythopoeic text. In doing so, I seek to make clear what Nietzsche understands Dionysus and the Dionysian to be.

3.1 The Birth of Tragedy

Released in 1872*, The Birth of Tragedy* was Nietzsche's first published book. He published a new edition of the book, in 1886, largely unchanged save for a new prologue entitled "An Attempt at Self-Criticism." This work clearly illustrates the four characteristic factors of mythopoesis I discussed in the previous chapters. He begins by saying that the Greeks had a way of seeing something with certainty that involved 'something more' than concepts and logical insight. This *something more* was a way of thinking that used the 'penetratingly vivid figures of their gods.'[154] What kind of things were the Greeks thinking about?

- The 'profound mysteries'.[155]
- 'Life.'[156]
- 'Death'.[157]
- The reciprocal necessity of the 'Apolline' and 'Dionysiac.'[158]

[153] I discuss what is meant by 'playing the game' in section 3.2
[154] *BT* 1.
[155] *BT* 1.
[156] *BT* 24, *passim.*
[157] *BT* 3, 5, *passim.*
[158] *BT* 4.

- The 'true essence of things';[159] ' universal facts';[160] 'the most delicate secrets of unconscious stirrings'.[161]
- 'Wisdom' in particular its unnaturalness and destructive power.[162]
- Justification'.[163]
- Suffering'.[164]

In the text, Nietzsche says that: (a) the Greeks required their myths in order to think about these things; and (b) there was an 'enormous need' that 'gave rise' to these myths. Here we have two uses of myth, let us take a look at each. Firstly, myths are needed because the subject matter requires the Greeks to make clear something mysterious and otherwise ineffable (the first characteristic factor of mythopoesis). Secondly, myths are needed because the subject matter concerns 'the terrors and horrors of existence' and in particular the significance of *overcoming* these things (the second characteristic factor of mythopoesis).[165]

Nietzsche is concerned with the role played by Greek myth in providing insights into the nature of human suffering and the finding of meaning, value, significance and even dignity, justice, pleasure and delight in the face of suffering and horror.[166] But he is not offering a simple account of ancient people and their myths. His argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* is that the myths of the Greeks were replaced by new myths that formed part of the Christian mythopoesis which has remained a force in Europe to this day. However, Nietzsche anticipates the possibility of new myths and a new mythopoesis, much closer to the Greeks, emerging on the horizon. His goal, for the text, is to exhort like-minded readers to embrace and welcome this new mythopoesis.[167] In doing so he lays the groundwork for the creation of a powerful countermyth to Christianity. This is his myth of Dionysus. In this chapter I will attempt to draw out Nietzsche's Dionysus myth from *The Birth of Tragedy* and later works. My particular focus will be on his attempt at self-criticism.

By 1886 Nietzsche had a much clearer idea of his Dionysus myth and its place in his wider mythopoesis. It is by careful reading of what he says here that we can best see the relationship

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[159] *BT* 7.
[160] *BT* 21.
[161] *BT* 22.
[162] *BT* 9.
[163] *BT* 9, *passim.*
[164] *BT* 12, *passim.*
[165] *BT* 3.
[166] *BT:* meaning: 1, 7, 8, 9; value: 3, 7, 15, 17, 18, 23, 24; significance: 16, 18, 21; dignity: 3, 5, 9; pleasure/cheerfulness: 7, 17, 19; justice: 9, 11, 16; delight: 16, 17, 19, 21, 24.
[167] *BT* 21, 24.

between his earlier and later thinking on Dionysus and the Dionysian. In addition, in 1886 Nietzsche was more forthright in his opposition to Christianity than he appeared in 1872. By focusing our attention on the later attempt at self-criticism we get a clearer picture of Nietzsche's Dionysus myth as a countermyth to Christianity. This is particularly well drawn out when we look at Nietzsche's opposition to St. Paul and his idea of an 'unknown god'. But before I move onto Nietzsche's attempt at self-criticism, I want to briefly say something about my approach to his Dionysus myth.

3.2 Approaching Nietzsche's Dionysus Myth

In his mythopoesis, Nietzsche does not just talk about the myth of Dionysus, he creates his own Dionysus myth and immerses himself within it. That is, there are times when he *appears* not just to offer a myth but to be making a declaration of faith; for example, when he refers to himself as an initiate and disciple of Dionysus. On these occasions, Nietzsche remains faithful not to a god but to the myth, he 'stays in character' so to speak. I said in a previous chapter that Nietzsche is seeking a *rapport* with his readers, to be of one mind; this being so, if he is immersed in his mind then to be *en rapport* we must be immersed with him. In other words, we need to 'play the game.'

In her discussion of *GS* 341, Maudemarie Clark suggests that we need to 'play the game' when we attempt to interpret what the demon means.[168] What she means by this is that we should go along with the spirit of what Nietzsche is attempting to communicate rather than analyse the content of the aphorism. I discuss Clark's response to *GS* 341 in more detail in chapter six but for now I am interested in her idea of 'playing the game'.[169] The basic idea here is that we suspend doubts concerning the truth or conceivability of the idea of the eternal return and play along with Nietzsche rather than worry about considerations over, for example, whether or not we would be able to remember previous existences from earlier recurrences. There are many problem with this approach, which I address in chapter six; however, the basic principle of playing the game is useful here. Clark is attempting to go along with the idea of the eternal return, accepting it 'preanalytically' to be a fact about the world in order to test her reaction to this 'fact'. Once her reaction is duly noted she can go on to answer the questions set by Nietzsche about possible responses to the idea of the eternal return given in the aphorism. Using the distinction made in the previous chapters between audiences receiving Nietzsche's texts with both their ears and their hearts, we could say that what Clark refers to as playing the game is an attempt to receive

[168] Clark (2009). 270.
[169] See chapter six, section 6.4

Nietzsche heart-to-heart. What I am suggesting with regards to playing the game when Nietzsche talks about Dionysus in a particular way is that we do so in order to get to the heart of what he is attempting to do with these ideas to better see how they are used by him to communicate other ideas. That is, when Nietzsche says, for example, that he is an initiate and disciple of Dionysus, and that he 'knows' Dionysus and can communicate with the dark god, I will 'play along' so to speak. To be clear, I believe that Nietzsche is talking about the reception and communication of ideas but he expresses this in myth. When he refers to himself as an *initiate* of *Dionysus* he is talking about some kind of revelation, that can only be the result of some kind of revelatory experience, the type of which he attempts to make clear by references to Dionysus. If we know what a revelation is and we know, as far as we can, what Nietzsche means by Dionysian, then we are getting close to understanding what he is attempting to communicate. If he can induce, through his writings, a revelatory experience in his readers that is characterised by the Dionysian, which is sufficient to establish a *rapport* with him*,* then we should entirely understand what he means with his references to Dionysus and the Dionysian.

I began the definition of mythopoesis by saying that it involves the *creation* or *retelling* of myths for the benefit of a society that no longer accepts such myths literally. I do not believe that Nietzsche is talking about any kind of god of which he considers himself a disciple. That is, I do not think he is speaking of a literal belief in Dionysus and is not expecting his audience to take him literally when he does. However, it is important to remember that Nietzsche is communicating his idea mythopoeically, and not just making references to myths in order to *illustrate* his ideas. What he is doing is different from what someone like Thomas Carlyle is doing when Carlyle invokes the idea of people 'worshipping at the altar of mammon' in order to illustrate the idea of Victorian greed.[170] In *Past and Present* there is no sense that Carlyle is suggesting greedy Victorians literally worshipped money; he merely utilises the idea to convey a sense of avarice. Nietzsche goes much deeper in his use of myth; he presents his ideas in myth and 'stays in character' so to speak for extended periods in the text. That is, Nietzsche's references to his discipleship of Dionysus can be received as myths in themselves and not simple metaphors like those used by Carlyle. Accordingly, careful readers ought to receive Nietzsche's use of myths differently to how they would when reading an author that uses myths as we have seen Carlyle does. One way of helping us to see the difference is by exploring the relationship between Nietzsche's mythopoesis and the role of music, as he sees it, in his works.

[170] Carlyle (2023).

3.3 Nietzsche's Attempt at Self-Criticism

We saw in the previous chapter that an important part of Nietzsche's account of myth here, in particular the reception of myth, concerns the role played by music. However, Nietzsche would later place less emphasis on music and would distance himself somewhat from the ideas expressed in this youthful work. His distancing from his mentor, Richard Wagner, is well known; as is his embarrassment at the deference and reverence shown to the composer in the text. It is also clear, from reading Nietzsche's works, that the way he talks about 'the Dionysian' changes over time. As mentioned above, Nietzsche reissued the book with an 'attempt at self-criticism.' It may be wondered whether, along with his changes of heart over music and Dionysus, he may also have changed his position on mythopoesis. However, his criticisms, useful as they are, make no difference to how Nietzsche approaches and uses mythopoesis in the text. That is to say, in his 'self-criticism', Nietzsche does not display any change in his attitude towards mythopoesis. In fact, he expresses regret at restricting and limiting the mythopoeic elements in the text. Let us take a closer look at his 'self-criticism'.

Nietzsche first criticises *The Birth of Tragedy* for the quality of writing: 'I declare that it is badly written, clumsy, embarrassing [...] uneven in pace.'[171] He also criticises the text for being 'too long'. A text can be accused of these things without renouncing the ideas and arguments contained within. However clumsy the writing or the pacing, the approach to mythopoesis will be unaffected.[172] Nietzsche also criticises the text for a certain amount of deference to authority and 'personal reverence' to Schopenhauer and Wagner.[173] But again, a work can be criticised for being overly deferential and reverential without necessarily criticising the ideas and arguments within. We are interested in Nietzsche's approach to and use of mythopoesis; if he does so whilst being overly deferential to another person this is a side issue. What is important for this present chapter is that Nietzsche's criticisms are not directed at his view of mythopoesis. We read that Nietzsche also regrets not being more direct about his opposition to Christianity in the original work. His hostility to Christianity, he says, 'is silent' in the text, which he puts down to an over-cautiousness on his part.[174] Christianity is the target of Nietzsche's mythopoesis; however, the regret, here, is over his failure to include Christianity specifically as an example of the 'greatest antithesis' to the 'justification of the world' he offers in the text. This is no repudiation of his mythopoesis.

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[171] *BT* 'Self-Criticism' 3.
[172] The power of the text to induce a revelatory experience in the reader may be reduced by bad writing. But this pertains to the practice of producing mythopoeic texts, not the approach.
[173] And for making himself write in the style of 'Kantian formulations.' *BT* 'Self-Criticism' 6.
[174] *BT* 'An Attempt at Self-Criticism' 5.

Nietzsche does not criticise himself for focusing on mythopoesis but regrets not being bolder and more direct in identifying his target as Christianity.

There are two criticisms, expressed by Nietzsche, that concern the arguments in the text rather than merely his timidity or the quality of the writing in this work. Firstly, he admits to being mistaken in his hopes for the betterment of 'German character' through 'German music'. Indeed, he outright admits to being wrong on this when he first published the book. Secondly, he admits that, as well as being poorly written, the text contains no proof for the arguments contained within, which in his 'arrogance', he disdained. Why Nietzsche was 'mistrustful' of efforts to provide supporting evidence for his claims and doubted the 'propriety' of so doing, is of great interest here. To be clear, he does not regard a lack of evidence as a shortcoming but his attempt to provide evidence as a shortcoming. Myths do not offer evidence or proof, they invoke, make clear and reveal. As we shall see shortly, Nietzsche does not regret using myth in this way but rather the tone of clumsy almost fanatical enthusiasm that, in his youthful passion, is exhibited in the work. That is, Nietzsche does not regret disdaining to provide proof or supporting evidence but the 'arrogant' way he went about it. But first, let us look at his mistaken hopes for German music.

Nietzsche regrets his hopes, expressed in the work, for a rediscovery of 'German character' through its music:

> I had attached hopes to things where there was nothing to hope for, where everything pointed all too clearly to an end. And that I should have begun to invent stories about the 'German character', on the basis of the latest German music, as if it were about to discover or rediscover itself—and this at a time when the German Spirit, which had recently shown the will to rule Europe and the strength to lead Europe, had *abdicated*, finally and definitively, and, using the pompous pretext of founding an empire, was in the process of transition to mediocrity, democracy, and 'modern ideas'. Since then I have indeed learned to think hopelessly and unsparingly enough about this 'German character', and the same applies to current *German music*, which is Romanticism through and through and the most un-Greek of all possible forms of art.[175]

[175] *BT*, 'Self-Criticism' 6. We can note Nietzsche's objection to Romanticism (with a capital 'R'). This may seem strange as Nietzsche can be seen as a romantic figure (with a lower-case 'r') and to share with figures associated with Romanticism a similar interest in mythopoesis. In *GS* 370, Nietzsche reappraises his conception of Romanticism and concludes that his earlier favourable identification with the movement was a error. What is wrong with Romanticism, in his eyes, is not their appreciation of mythopoesis but their

Here, Nietzsche is claiming that he was mistaken concerning his beliefs about and hopes for German music and that he has subsequently changed his views. However, this change of position makes no difference to his approach to mythopoesis. He regrets his mythopoeic call to action with regards *specifically* to his hopes for German music but he does not renounce mythopoeic calls to action. Despite Nietzsche's opinion that his hopes for Germany 'ruined' *The Birth of Tragedy*, he still maintains that: 'the great Dionysian question [the text] poses remains (with regards to music, too) as valid as ever: what would music be like if it were no longer Romantic in its origins, as German music is, but *Dionysiac*?'[176] This brings us on to what is, for this chapter, the most interesting part of Nietzsche's attempt at self-criticism: his attitude to the Dionysiac.

3.4 Nietzsche, Dionysus and the Dionysian

In the excerpt below, taken from the third section of the attempt at self-criticism, we can see four important ideas. For ease of reference I have added numbers to the passage:

> (1) [L]acking the will to logical cleanliness, very convinced and therefore too arrogant to prove its assertions, mistrustful even of the *propriety* of proving things, a book for the initiated, 'music' for those who were baptised in the name of music, who, from the very beginning, are linked to one another by shared, rare experiences of art, a sign by which blood-relations *in artibus* could recognise one another—(2) an arrogant and wildly enthusiastic book which, from the outset, shuts itself from the *profanum vulgus* of the 'educated' even more than from the 'common people', but also one which, as its effect proved and continues to prove, knows well enough how to seek out its fellow-enthusiasts and to entice them onto new, secret paths and places to dance. (3) At any rate—and this was admitted with as much curiosity as aversion—a *strange* voice was speaking here, the disciple of an as yet 'unknown god' [...] (4) here one heard—as people remarked distrustfully—something like the strange voice of a mystical and almost maenadic soul which stammers in a strange tongue, with great difficulty and capriciously, almost as if undecided whether to communicate or conceal itself. I ought to have *sung*, this 'new soul', and not talked! What a pity it is that I did not

approach to and use of art. In brief, Nietzsche believes that art and philosophy cures suffering and aids sufferers and that there are two kinds of suffering in the world: suffering from an 'superabundance of life' and suffering from an 'impoverishment of life'. Those that suffer from the former, he says, like Dionysian art and a tragic outlook. And those suffering the latter seek stillness, calm, numbness and redemption from themselves. "All romanticism in art and in knowledge," he says, "fits the dual needs of the latter."

[176] *BT*, 'Self-Criticism' 6.

> dare to say what I had to say at that time as a poet; perhaps I could have done it![177]

Firstly, Nietzsche expresses his mistrust at attempts to prove that which he is revealing or making clear in the text. But he goes on to say that the book is 'for the initiated' (Eingeweihte) and it is not only about music but is music *itself* for those 'baptised in the name of music' (getauft). Note here, the penultimate line of the excerpt above: Nietzsche's view that *The Birth of Tragedy* ought to be sung! With clear mystical overtones, Nietzsche is saying that the book is for readers for whom the secrets hidden within have already been revealed. We also see the sense of *rapport* that Nietzsche expresses between readers of this kind both to each other and the text.

Secondly, we see further references to a *rapport* between the select and the many. Nietzsche expresses a familiar concern for putting distance between those he considers fellow-travellers and the coarse and uneducated masses. Here, they are referred to as the *profanum vulgus*; in "On Music and Words" Nietzsche goes with 'the great Philistine public nodding its thousand heads.' What does Nietzsche want from *his* readers? To offer them a series of linked arguments directed towards a single conclusion? No, the text is meant to 'entice' them to wander down 'secret paths' and find 'places to dance'. To receive the full benefit of a mythopoeic text the audience must approach the work in a way that is receptive to the myths within. Nietzsche says of Dionysian music that meaning can only be grasped by those joining in and not by mere spectators listening to sounds. In "On Music and Words" he says that a person in a state of Dionysian excitement does not have a *listener*. In the same way, an orgiastic crowd does not have a listener with whom they are attempting to communicate. Nietzsche compares anyone attempting to 'listen in' on Dionysian music—rather than joining the orgy—to the mythological Pentheus.[178] Regarding, for example, the text of a mass by Palestrina, a cantata of Bach or an oratorio of Händel, Nietzsche says that they cannot be adequately understood unless one joins in the singing.[179] We remember here that Nietzsche says *The Birth of Tragedy* is best understood when sung.

Thirdly, in a probable reference to Acts 17:23, Nietzsche refers to himself as a disciple to an 'unknown god'. In the Bible, Acts 17 tells of St. Paul's visit to Athens, in which he wanders around observing all the objects of worship available to the religious Athenians. One thing that grabs his

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[177] *BT*, 'Self-Criticism' 3.

[178] I think what Nietzsche is getting at here is that they would be an intruder, not part of the music, in other words an outsider for whom the hidden secrets will not be revealed. In the myth, Penthus listens in rather than takes part and is mistaken for a wild animal by the revellers, including his own mother, and they tear him apart as sacrificial animals sometimes were in Dionysian rituals. However, Nietzsche's suggestion, I take it, is not that someone attempting to listen to Dionysian music (rather than taking part) will be destroyed but that they are estranged from what is going on.

[179] "On Music and Words" (Kindle).

attention is an altar with the inscription 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD'. What strikes him is that the religious Athenians are ignorant of the very thing they worship. A clear understanding of what is meant by an unknown god tells us a great deal about what Nietzsche is attempting to communicate *about* and *with* his conception of Dionysus.

3.5 Dionysus as an unknown god

An 'unknown god' is significantly different to a known god and is not the same thing at all as a nameless god. Apollo, for example, is a god that is generally considered known and knowable. Known gods have names, there is a common understanding of what they look like, they have histories and origin stories. In addition, we know some things about what they like to do. They have plans and personalities much like us; so that despite the fantastical elements we can relate to these gods. Apollo was born on the island of Delos. His father is Zeus, his mother Leto and he has a sister called Artemis. He is athletic and very good looking despite not having a beard. Amongst other things he likes attending drinking parties and can play the lyre. The Judeo-Christian God has no name, no image, no origin story and while it is commonly understood that 'he' has a plan, the details of this plan are unknown.[180] It is possible to conceive the idea and talk about the personal plans of 'known gods', whether, say, it is to go to a party or have a bath, in a way that is simply not possible with unknown gods. For example, the Greeks could imagine Zeus, Hera or Demeter disguised as humans sitting down to eat with them; the same thing is unimaginable with God.[181]

When Moses asks God his name the reply comes: 'I AM WHO I AM'. He is told that if any of the Israelites in Egypt want to know, Moses should say: 'I AM has sent me to you.'[182] In a sense, the Jewish God is the ultimate unknown god, which might have been what attracted Paul to that particular altar in Athens.[183] Nameless or anonymous gods, to which several altars were purportedly dedicated in Athens at the time of Paul's visit, are not the same thing as unknown gods.[184] The former are distinct from the latter in that altars dedicated to 'nameless gods' are simply those that have no inscription identifying to whom they are dedicated. Either the inscription has fallen off, worn away or the original builders failed to anticipate future generations

[180] For example: Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28; Psalm 33:11.
[181] No-one can see God's face and live, Exodus 33:20.
[182] Exodus 3:14.
[183] Guy Stroumsa claims that the Athenians might have considered Paul's account of the Jewish God as an unknown god *par excellence*. That Paul deliberately draws their attention to 'unknown gods' in order to show what kind of god his God is. In other words, a god without a name of which no image is known and whose being is ineffable. See: Stroumsa (2003). 235.
[184] Henrichs (1994).

forgetting the gods in whose honour these altars were erected. An unknown god, by contrast, is one that has no name (or whose name cannot be known by humans), of whom we have said there are no images and almost nothing is known. Consider how God appears to Moses, not in the flesh but via a miraculous burning bush.[185] Such gods are totally mysterious and ineffable. For modern audiences the concept of an unknown god ought to be quite familiar as many features are shared with the Judeo-Christian God as well as Allah. Referring to gods as 'unknown' does not imply that they are entirely unknowable. Rather, it means that they can only be known in a particular way. This particular way is via some form of mystical union. So, when Nietzsche refers to Dionysus as an unknown god he is saying that his god can only be known through some form of mysticism. It is well beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss whether the Jewish or Islamic conceptions of God are of an unknown God. However, for Pauline Christians at least, God is known through a mystical union with Christ.[186]

Regarding his unknown god, Nietzsche frequently refers to himself as an *initiate* and, as we shall see below, refers to his 'mystical soul' attempting to speak through *The Birth of Tragedy*. This suggests that Nietzsche believes himself to know at least *something* of Dionysus; you cannot be an initiate without being initiated into some hidden secrets. In order to know anything about an unknown god there must also be some kind of mystical union in which the unknown god makes themselves known (usually to a chosen few).[187] Nietzsche introduces a fascinating nuance when he says his unknown god was *as yet* unknown. In German he writes: 'der Jünger eines noch unbekannten Gottes.' This could be translated as a *still* unknown god. Whatever your preferred translation—*as yet* unknown, or *still* unknown—the implication is that the god is *now known* and, therefore, in some way *knowable*.[188] In other words, the god was still not yet known in the early 1870s when Nietzsche wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* but is now. Does he mean that the god was unknown to him or his readers; and how can an unknown god become known?

'Unknown gods' are unknowable by nature, they do not somehow become 'known gods'. Consider how even after two thousand years Christians do not know anything more about their

[185] In Exodus 33:20 God tells Moses that no-one may see him and live.
[186] See: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Colossians 1:18:20; Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:19; 4:13. Nietzsche's account of Christianity is for all intents and purposes Pauline Christianity.
[187] If an unknown god made no attempt to communicate or it was impossible to achieve a mystical union then it would be impossible to know they existed and for all intents and purposes they may as well not. If the idea of an unknown god is used to say something about the world or the human condition but this was entirely unknowable in any way then we would have no inkling that this thing exists.
[188] If when referring to the past we say something was 'still unknown' it generally means that it *was* still unknown but is known now. For example, if we say something like 'the dangers of using chloral hydrate on a regular basis were still unknown in Nietzsche's day,' it means the dangers were not yet known in Nietzsche's day but are today. However, if we say the full effects of chloral hydrate use are still unknown, we mean, of course, that these full effects are currently, in other words *still*, unknown.

god than St. Paul knew. Nietzsche clearly uses the idea of Dionysus and the Dionysian to talk about the revelation of 'hidden secrets'. He is using the idea of communicating with an unknown god in order to communicate mythopoeically about, amongst other things, mythopoesis itself. In *The Birth of Tragedy* the Dionysian is used to make clear how revelations are experienced and later, in *Ecce Homo* for example, Nietzsche uses the idea of the Dionysian to make clear what is revealed. This is a bit of an oversimplification and I will discuss it further but for now it should get the point across. When Nietzsche refers to his 'unknown god' being *as yet* unknown he must be referring to 'knowing' in an additional way.

Another way to 'know' someone is to have intimate relations with them. One way, for example, was how Adam *knew* Eve in Genesis 4:1 (KJV). Here, to *know* an unknown god is to enter into some kind of intimate relation with them, at least during episodes of communication. 'Knowing' an unknown god in this sense can be contrasted with other forms of communication such as interpreting signs.[189] So, when Nietzsche refers to an 'as yet unknown god' the idea of *knowing* performs a double service: firstly it indicates what kind of god Nietzsche is talking about and secondly that this god has *yet* to communicate with someone or some group of people. But *who* has yet to communicate with Dionysus; is Nietzsche referring to himself or someone else? The answer will help us to understand what Nietzsche means by Dionysus and the Dionysian. In what follows I break this question down into three questions. The first two focus on Nietzsche and the third on his readers.

- At the time of writing *The Birth of Tragedy,* does Nietzsche know the god of whom he considers himself a disciple and in whose secrets he has been initiated?
- Does Nietzsche not know (but thinks he knows) the god in the early 1870s but does know this god by the mid-1880s?
- Is the god always known to him but as yet unknown by his readers?

It is quite clear that the god Nietzsche is referring to in *The Birth of Tragedy* is some version of Dionysus.[190] As we shall see in the discussion below, he describes his authorial voice in the text as 'Maenadic'. Despite Nietzsche's claims of discipleship, it is also quite clear that Nietzsche does not believe that there is a being with whom he can communicate; like, for example, some Catholics

[189] Consider also Exodus 33:11. Here God speaks to Moses 'face-to-face' but we know that Moses cannot see God's face and live. Many English translations qualify this with 'that is *openly*' or 'like a friend'. The idea is that Moses is in personal communication with God. He is not reading and interpreting signs but interacting one-to-one.

[190] By 'some version' I mean Nietzsche's version. Just as Camus offers us his Sisyphus, Nietzsche offers us his Dionysus.

believe they can communicate with the saints or the Virgin Mary. He does make, of course, many references to the Greek conception of the god. Dionysus in the text is associated with drunkenness and intoxication, and is paired with Apollo as well as other characters usually associated with the Greek Dionysus: satyrs, Maenads, and in "On Music and Words", Pentheus. Nietzsche is obviously drawing upon the Greek conception of Dionysus; however, *his* Dionysus, the god of whom he declares his discipleship, is surely not intended to be closely related to *that* version of Dionysus. That is, if Nietzsche is using the idea *mythopoeically*, in other words creating myths in order to communicate something to those who do not take these myths literally. Consider his remarks in *Ecce Homo* that he does not want 'true believers' and how he expresses his fear that he might one day be considered 'holy'.[191] That he feels the need to mention this, as he says 'to stop any nonsense' of this kind, is due to how immersed within the myth of Dionysus his readers with him must become for him to communicate his message.

Nietzsche is using the myth of Dionysus in order to communicate something. But, for him, 'Dionysus' appears to be something different to, say, the mere personification of some human experience. In "On Music and Words" he claims that music is an imitation of nature and in its most basic form because, somehow, music captures the Dionysian (and the Apolline). Dionysus, therefore, is something out there in the world to be captured. The name 'Dionysus', as Nietzsche uses it, denotes some mysterious aspect or aspects of the world and it is only by naming the mystery that he is able to talk about it. As Bottici has observed, 'the basic performance of myth is to provide names […] it is only by giving something a name that it can become "graspable".'[192] The first characteristic factor of mythopoesis, as we saw in chapter one, is to make the ineffable, effable. This is certainly what Nietzsche appears to be doing with his version of the myth of Dionysus. The task for a mythopoeic reading of Nietzsche's use of the Dionysian is to grasp for ourselves what Nietzsche is himself attempting to grasp.

However, the way Nietzsche talks about Dionysus seems to change over the course of his writings. That is, he appears to think differently about Dionysus in his later works than he does in the earlier ones. One reason for this might be that he simply changes his mind over the years. He does say in *Beyond Good and Evil* that he has learned more about Dionysus since writing *The Birth of Tragedy*.[193] If this is the case, it would make sense of his claim that he was a disciple of an as yet unknown god. In other words, when he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* in the beginning of the 1870s,

[191] *EH* 'Destiny' 1.
[192] Bottici, (2009). 116
[193] *BGE* 295.

he thought he knew Dionysus but was yet to fully understand the Dionysian. This is the idea expressed in the second question above.

Before we accept this idea, we need to know whether it is what Nietzsche understands the Dionysian *to be* that changes over time or if it is simply the way he *talks about it* that has changed. The difference can be explained by the fact that when he first talks about Dionysus, it is to express how a particular kind of information is received and communicated but when he later uses the idea of the Dionysian, it is to talk about a certain attitude or belief. Accordingly, there are times when Nietzsche uses his myth of Dionysus to talk about communication itself and other times when he uses the same myth to talk about that which is being communicated. I have already said that in *The Birth of Tragedy,* the Dionysian is used to make clear how revelations are experienced (emphasis on communication) and later, in *Ecce Homo* for example, Nietzsche uses the idea of the Dionysian to make clear what is revealed (emphasis on what is communicated). If this is the case then we can go for a yes to the first question above. Nietzsche does not change his mind on Dionysus; that is, he does not come to know the god at a later date. Let us take a closer look at this.

When, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche talks of Dionysus as if he were a god whose mysteries can only be revealed through some kind of mystical union with someone appropriately receptive to receiving the hidden secrets, he is attempting to communicate how a particular kind of knowledge is revealed. We can think of it as a myth, created by Nietzsche, attempting to make clear mythopoesis. But when he later refers to the concept of the 'Dionysian' as *a deed*; or as a way of regarding oneself—'the highest type of everything that exists' and 'the eternal yes to all things'—he is not talking about *how* this is revealed (how mythopoesis works) but *what* has been revealed (through his mythopoeic works).[194] In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche says that 'Dionysus' is the name he has given for 'the highest of all possible beliefs.'[195] Shortly afterwards, in "What I Owe the Ancients" in the same work, he says that the Dionysian refers to 'an excess of strength'.[196] In section four he discusses a 'will for life' that is expressed only by the Dionysian mysteries; he speaks of eternal creation and the 'holiness of pain'—eternal rebirth requires an eternal agony of labour that must be embraced if one is to embrace life. He says:

> The word 'Dionysus' means all of this: I do not know any higher symbolism than this Greek symbolism of the Dionysian. It gives religious expression to the most profound instinct of life, directed towards the future of life, the eternity of life,—

[194] *EH* 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' 6.
[195] *TI* 'Skirmishes' 49.
[196] *TI* 'Ancients' 4.

> the pathway to life, procreation, as the holy path . . . It was Christianity with its fundamental ressentiment against life that first made sexuality into something unclean, it threw filth on the origin, the presupposition of our life . . .

We might accuse Nietzsche of attempting to use his myth of Dionysus to communicate too many ideas but there is no reason, I can see, to believe that his later references to Dionysian deeds and beliefs supersede his earlier references to the Dionysian as the way something is revealed. Accordingly, I think we can be reasonably sure that when Nietzsche talks of an as yet unknown god in his attempt at self-criticism, he is *not* talking about himself. That is, when he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* he considered himself to have known (communicated intimately) with Dionysus, an unknown god.

This leaves us with the third option, that it is his readers that as yet (or still) have not known (communicated intimately) Dionysus. This option has an appealing prophetic quality. That is, as a disciple, Nietzsche is using the text as a call to action (the fourth characteristic factor of myth) to proselytise. It also fits Nietzsche's claims of being a posthumous writer. That is, there are no readers yet alive that are capable of communing with his god but there will be one day. *The Birth of Tragedy* was Nietzsche's first published book, he could be suggesting that his audience in the early 1870s were still unaware of his god but by the mid-1880s when he was writing the attempt at self-criticism there are some who by now knew his god. The important thing with this interpretation is that Nietzsche here is someone who sees himself as instrumental in revealing a new way of thinking. Consider in this respect his infamous reference to himself as dynamite:

> One day my name will be connected with the memory of something tremendous,—a crisis such as the earth has never seen, the deepest collision of conscience, a decision made against everything that has been believed, demanded, held sacred so far. I am not a human being, I am dynamite.[197]

This passage is from 'Why I Am A Destiny' in his *Ecce Homo*. He ends this section with the question: 'Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified…*'[198] Written a couple of years after his attempt at self-criticism, we can understand this as Nietzsche expressing his doubts that anyone has yet known his 'unknown god'.

St. Paul introduced Athens to an as yet unknown god. Today, everyone has heard of his god. However, although God is known, he remains an 'unknown god'. Christians worship an 'unknown

[197] *EH* 'Destiny' 1.
[198] *EH* 'Destiny' 9.

god' in the sense He can only be known through revelation and myth. What is believed to have been revealed, through the intercession of Christ, is a set of values justified by God. Nietzsche's mythopoesis seeks to challenge this. Through his Dionysus myth he compresses many complex ideas in the hope of establishing a *rapport* with readers on whom he can call to action. In this light consider the following from *Ecce Homo*:

> —*Revaluation of all values*: that is my formula for an act of humanity's highest self-examination, an act that has become flesh and genius in me. My lot would have it that I am the first *decent* human being, that I know myself to be opposing the hypocrisy of millennia . . . I was the first to *discover* the truth because I was the first to see—to *smell*—lies for what they are . . . My genius is in my nostrils...

Here we see Nietzsche opposing and challenging current values. The 'hypocrisy of millennia' refers to Christianity. Note that he claims to have discovered the truth about Christianity via his senses rather than through rational thought. He continues:

> I contradict as nobody has ever contradicted before, and yet in spite of this I am the opposite of a nay-saying spirit. I am a bearer of glad tidings as no one ever was before; I am acquainted with incredibly elevated tasks, where even the concept of these tasks has been lacking so far; all hope had disappeared until I came along.

He is challenging the current Christian values in a way that no-one before him has done so before. He also claims to be the bearer of glad tidings.[199] In this, he is remarkably similar to St. Paul. It was he who challenged existing values in a way that no-one before him had done so. We saw above that the God whose glad tidings or *Gospel* he was in Athens to preach was so new and unheard of that he needed to make reference to their unknown gods as the nearest similar idea. Yet despite the obvious similarities between himself and St. Paul, Nietzsche says that he is the bearer of glad tidings 'as no-one ever was before.' Not only does Nietzsche know something about tasks that are to be carried out, the very idea of these tasks has only just been made known to him. Because of Nietzsche we have hope for the future. He continues:

> And yet I am necessarily a man of disaster as well. Because when truth comes into conflict with the lies of millennia there will be tremors, a ripple of earthquakes, an upheaval of mountains and valleys such as no one has ever imagined. The concept of politics will have then merged entirely into a war of spirits, all power structures

[199] See also: *EH* 'Twilight' 2.

> from the old society will have exploded—they are all based on lies: there will be wars such as the earth has never seen. Starting with me, the earth will know great politics—

Here Nietzsche is saying that what he has to say will bring about a great conflict. There will be a war of spirits with presumably the Dionysian spirits on one side and the enemies of the Dionysus on the other. This vision is similar to that expressed in *On The Genealogy of Morality*. Towards the end of the third essay, he says that we are standing on the threshold of the destruction of Christian morality and he anticipates two hundred years of the most terrible and most questionable drama in Europe.[200] What is important here is that if Nietzsche's prophecy is fulfilled then there will be Dionysian spirits. In other words, it will no longer be the case that Dionysus is *as yet* or *still unknown*.

Now, before we move away from this investigation into Nietzsche's unknown god, we must ask two more questions. When we read *The Birth of Tragedy* is Dionysus speaking to us through the text? If the answer is yes then what does this mean in terms of Nietzsche's understanding of Dionysus and the Dionysian? I have already made clear that what we are concerned with in this chapter and the thesis as a whole is Nietzsche's own myth of Dionysus and its role in his wider mythopoesis. Mythopoeic works, we remember, use myths to communicate truths but these myths are not to be taken literally. Accordingly, we have no reason to believe that Nietzsche even remotely believes that some kind of god is communicating with him. But if there is no god that is responsible for Nietzsche's revelations then who or what is? Let us look first at the idea that Dionysus is speaking through the text.

3.6 Is Dionysus speaking through the text?

In section four of the attempt at self-criticism, Nietzsche identifies the Dionysian, the medium through which a person 'who knows' (ein Wissender) communicates; and he says it is one of these 'knowers' who is speaking through *The Birth of Tragedy*. Since it is Nietzsche who is speaking through the text, we might naturally assume that he considers himself to be the one who knows. However, it could be that when Nietzsche refers to the one 'who knows' that is speaking though the text, he is referring not to himself but Dionysus. In other words, *The Birth of Tragedy* is 'Dionysian' because it is the medium through which Dionysus, the 'one who knows', is speaking. Why would anyone think this?

[200] *GM* III, 27.

Nietzsche claims in "On Music and Words" that Dionysiac creators do not understand the meaning of their own words because Dionysus is speaking *through them*. If Nietzsche believes himself to be a Dionysiac creator and that *The Birth of Tragedy* is a Dionysian work then it must be Dionysus who is speaking. Remember, Nietzsche considers *The Birth of Tragedy* to be a work of 'music' written for those 'already baptised in the name of music'. The lyric musician, Nietzsche says, sings 'as the bird does'.[201] By this he means it would be just as useless and foolish to ask the musician about the meaning of their music as it would be to ask a bird about theirs. In addition, musicians, like birds, not only cannot let the listener in on the meaning of their 'music', they cannot put into words for *themselves* what their music means. All they can do is make more music when divinely inspired. Nietzsche asks his readers if they, *honestly*, believe that any of the ancient lyric poets thought it possible to make what they were saying clear to the masses of people standing around and listening. The answer he expects is: 'well, of course not!' He says that Dionysiac poets were entirely unconcerned about the meaning of their words being known to anyone that did not join in with the song.[202] That is, 'only for *him who joins* in singing do lyric poetry and music exist'. So, if *The Birth of Tragedy* is Dionysiacally inspired, we would not expect Nietzsche to know and to be able to communicate *directly* the meaning of the ideas contained within—including the idea of Dionysus. All he can do is act as Dionysus' amanuensis when the inspiration takes him.

But since there is no actual Dionysus for whom Nietzsche can act as a conduit to pass on hidden secrets, what is the actual source of his revelations? In his myth of Dionysus, there is a god with whom he can establish a *rapport*. During this mystical union, the two become one and secrets are revealed from the god to Nietzsche. In his writings Nietzsche attempts, through his mythopoesis, to establish a similar *rapport* with his readers so that the secrets revealed to him are revealed to them. But if there is no god communicating with Nietzsche, then either he himself is the origin of that which is revealed or something else is. That is, either Nietzsche is the source of the revelations that are induced in his readers through the medium of myth in his text; or there are revelatory experiences to be had and hidden secrets to be revealed to anyone with 'a third ear' who is listening out for them. The difficulty here reveals something about myths and mythopoesis: when we attempt to demythologise something that can only be expressed in myth, we are left with no way of expressing in words what it is we want to talk about. The myth itself is the expression of the idea in words. When we try to understand without Dionysus what Nietzsche is grasping at here with his use of Dionysus, we do not have the language with which to express

[201] "On Music and Words" (Kindle).
[202] Cf. Plato. Apology 22c

our inquiry. Without myth to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable that thing *remains* mysterious and ineffable. Consider the following from Catalin Partenie:

> [M]yths enable us to explore matters that are beyond *our* limited intellectual powers [...] the human mind has limitations of many sorts, so it sometimes needs myths to approximate the truth about what lies beyond its experience.[203]

The concept of an unknown god makes clear a way of thinking about those aspects of the world that are beyond our limited intellectual powers. The source of Nietzsche's revelations is a mystery that can only be expressed through the medium of myth. Nietzsche uses his Dionysus myth in an attempt to do just that. The only way someone else could know if Nietzsche is successful is by reading his works and finding themselves *en rapport*. But Nietzsche is not content with simply attempting to make clear a way of thinking—he wants this way of thinking to challenge and actively oppose Christianity. In this he is not just creating myths but using myths mythopoeically.

The reason that this discussion is drawn out of a piece of writing that Nietzsche refers to as an attempt at self-criticism is not because his is critical of his Dionysus myth; nor is it because he has changed his position on the value of mythopoesis but because he feels that his attempt at mythopoesis in *The Birth of Tragedy* is weak. The writing itself, how Nietzsche expresses his ideas is what he is criticising. This brings us onto the fourth point.

3.7 A 'strange voice', a 'strange book'

We saw in the previous section that the 'voice' that speaks in *The Birth of Tragedy* is mysterious. For those immersed in Nietzsche's Dionysus myth, it is the voice of the dark god. But it is also Nietzsche's voice because Dionysus is his creation. Nietzsche is not criticising himself for the book being strange because of this. All such books will appear strange. His criticism is of the quality of the writing and some of the questionable decisions made by the author. Due to failures here, the readers find themselves unable to be fully immersed in the myth and distracted by Nietzsche's 'stammering'.

Another reason that the book and the voice appeared strange to Nietzsche's initial readers is because the type of work he is offering for their consideration is unusual, even alien, to that which they expected and were familiar with. As a promising young professor of philology publishing his first book, his audience expected something more scholarly, to be carefully and meticulously footnoted and referenced, as well as written in the usual academic style. In other

[203] Partenie (2009). xix.

words, the content of *The Birth of Tragedy* is 'strange'. For the 'wrong type of readers'—the dull-eyed sensualist, the conceited 'educated person', and the absent-minded egoist—this kind of text will always appear 'strange'.[204] Nietzsche's concern, as I understand it, is over the quality of his writing. We have already seen that he criticises himself for being too timid and deferential for attempting to write in a particular style. In section six of the attempt at self-criticism he writes:

> I wonder if the reader understands which task I was already daring to undertake with this book? I now regret very much that I did not yet have the courage (or the immodesty?) at the time to permit myself a *language of my very own* for such personal views and acts of daring, labouring instead to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer.[205]

The 'strangeness' in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche is criticising is not the mythopoesis (which simply due to the nature of mythopoesis itself will always appear strange) but his attempt to moderate his mythopoeic writing. We could put it like this: mythopoesis to those unfamiliar with it will sound strange; but moderated mythopoesis sounds strange even to the initiated. He chastises himself for restraining himself and failing to use the appropriate language. Here Nietzsche is not repudiating his use of mythopoesis but blaming himself for not giving himself full reign in his mythopoeic expression. As a reminder:

> (4) [In the text] one heard—as people remarked distrustfully—something like the strange voice of a mystical and almost maenadic soul which stammers in a strange tongue, with great difficulty and capriciously, almost as if undecided whether to communicate or conceal itself. I ought to have *sung*, this 'new soul', and not talked! What a pity it is that I did not dare to say what I had to say at that time as a poet; perhaps I could have done it!

Nietzsche's reference to the mystical refers to an attempt by an initiate to absorb themselves into a god; that this god is Dionysus is made clear by reference to a Maenadic soul. The Maenads were the followers of Dionysus, literally 'the raving ones.' His reference to the mystical and maenadic both refer to methods of communication usually reserved for those capable of receiving insights via a certain kind of *rapport*. This can be contrasted with the kind of straightforward language used in a scholarly essay to directly communicate one's point. When Nietzsche says that *The Birth*

[204] "On Music and Words" (Kindle).
[205] *BT* 6.

of Tragedy reads as if he were undecided over communication or concealment, we can understand this as self-criticism concerning his clumsy approach to the text.

3.8 In the next chapter

In this discussion of Nietzsche's understanding of Dionysus and the Dionysian, three things should now be clear about his mythopoesis:

1. He is attempting to create a countermyth to Christianity.
2. He is seeking a *rapport* with like-minded people.
3. He wants to influence the state and prevent the weak and vulgar gaining power (and prevent the strong and noble from weakening).

In the next chapter I will be exploring Nietzsche's use of history. Here we will see his mythopoeic call to action on what he considers to be 'true education' in order to assist the emergence of great individuals.

Chapter 4 Nietzsche's Use of History

In this chapter I look at Nietzsche's mythopoeic call to action on the value of education and the study of history. First, I look at what Nietzsche believes to be 'true education' and the vital role he considers it to play in the emergence of great individuals. My main focus here will be on the series of public lectures made by Nietzsche in the early 1870s entitled: *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. Then, I turn my attention from his ideas on the value of history to Nietzsche's own use of history in his works. I begin by looking at one of his earliest essays, written while he was still at school, on the Ostrogoth King Ermanarich and then turn my attention to his life-changing essay on the Ancient Greek poet Theognis. In both these essays we see the development of Nietzsche's attitude to the use of history and his concerns over the dangers of egalitarianism and democracy. I then show how these ideas, approached differently, reappear in Nietzsche's later works. The goal of this chapter is to show how Nietzsche's use of history develops over his career from doing history in a traditional sense to its use in service of his mythopoesis. I will attempt to demonstrate that Nietzsche calls upon his readers to join him in an effort to assist in the emergence of great individuals capable of leading the state to greatness. An important aspect of this effort, I will argue, is Nietzsche's position on education and the masses; in particular his opposition both to attempts to educate the masses and to writing history from 'the standpoint of the masses'. It will be seen that these are, for Nietzsche, impediments to greatness.

4.1 The value of Education and the Study of History

In this section I will be discussing Nietzsche's ideas of a 'true education'. As we shall see, what he believes true education to be is actually quite mysterious. We do know, however, that the study of history, broadly speaking, is essential to this pursuit. For Nietzsche, great teachers are guides and mystagogues that have one hand outstretched back to Ancient Greece. In what follows, I will refer to the value of education and the value of studying history almost interchangeably since for Nietzsche it is not possible to have one without doing the other. There is potential for confusion over the ideas of 'doing history' and 'using history'. It can be seen that in discussions of the value of history, a distinction can be made between doing history and using history. This distinction is discussed below.

'Doing history' is attempting, in some way, to acquire knowledge about things that happened in the past and then representing these things, in some way, in the present. 'Using history' is using

such discoveries (and their various representations) in the service of some other goal. In the latter case, the value of history is measured in terms of its utility in achieving the desired goal.

When we consider doing and using history in terms of education, that is with some kind of pedagogical goal in mind, the idea of the value of history is often expressed in one of three ways.[206] Firstly, we have the idea that knowledge acquired through the activity of doing history is valuable in its own right. That is, history is taught and studied because it is something worth doing for its own sake. Below, I will refer to this idea as 'history for history's sake' and compare and contrast this idea with that of 'art for art's sake'. The second idea given of the value of doing history is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge about the past that can be put to practical use today. That is, students can learn from the successes and failures of past individuals and peoples and apply what they have learned to the problems of today. We can include here the idea that it is of practical use to learn the history of your cultural or societal group. That is, the idea that learning how your present society came to be and the trials and tribulations involved in this coming to be is of practical use in deciding, say, public policy. A third way of thinking about the value of using history focuses on the character-building aspect of doing history. In particular, the idea that the activity of doing history is beneficial because the activity itself is character-building. Here, it would not much matter what period of history is taught and studied. Unlike the second view of the value of doing history, what is learned is not considered to be of any practical use. We can think of doing history here as similar to lifting weights in the gym: history is taught and learned in order to build character like the weights are lifted to build muscle mass. It does not matter what weights a person uses as long as they train the body; and the weights are not lifted for any practical purpose other than to exercise the muscles of the bodybuilder. Similarly, on this view, it would not matter if the students are taught the history of ancient Greece, the English Civil Wars or the Cultural Revolution in China. As long as the history is 'done' in the correct way, the character-building will be successful.[207]

In practice, it is often hard to tell when a historian is *doing* history, *using* history or even what *exactly* history is. That this remains a vexed question is witnessed in the enduring popularity of E. H. Carr's hugely influential series of lectures published as *What is History?*[208] However, as should be clear by the end of this chapter, that in the particular case of Nietzsche's writing we can quite easily discern a distinction between his doing history and his use of history. For example, in *On The Genealogy of Morality* he attributes the Christianisation of Rome to four Jews which he then

[206] Although not explicitly laid out in these terms we find this idea in in Carr (2018) and Nietzsche (2016)
[207] How history 'ought to be done', in a pedagogical sense 'taught' is a vexed subject in its own right. Nietzsche, in his lectures, does not broach this subject.
[208] Carr (2018).

links to the emergence of Napoleon in nineteenth-century France by way of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the French Revolution. It is clear that when he does so, Nietzsche is in a sense using history rather than doing history. Few would read the *Genealogy* to learn about the history of any of the things just mentioned. But at the same time, these historical events are not simply illustrations used to make a point about something else whereby similar examples from literature could have been used to make the same point. That is, although the history offered in the text is so over-simplified as to hardly be considered history at all, readers are still expected to perceive a relevant truth in what Nietzsche is saying. In other words, although he does not adequately explain how Rome became Christianised, Nietzsche hopes his readers will share the notion that there is some truth in the idea that Jesus, Peter, Paul and Mary did play a necessary part. Why? Because he thinks that important individuals, good and bad, play vital roles in shaping history. One of the calls to action, put simply, in *The Genealogy* is to cultivate great leaders. Nietzsche uses history to help him make that call.

From the discussion above we can see that there are broadly three positions on the value of history:

- There is value in knowing what happened in the past simply for the sake of knowing what happened in the past. (e.g. knowledge for the sake of knowledge)
- Knowing what happened in the past is valuable because we can learn from the past and use what we have learned for our benefit today. (e.g. knowledge for practical use)
- The study of history is valuable not for anything particular we may learn about from history but because the activity of 'studying' is beneficial to the student. (e.g. character forming)

Concerns such as these are still as relevant today as there were in Nietzsche's time. Regarding the value of education, broadly considered, students and teachers often have difficulty expressing what the purpose of a university education is: is it to further knowledge; a means to an end in terms of future employment; or to in some way 'better oneself' by getting an education? Nietzsche addressed concerns such as these in a series of five public lectures titled *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, delivered between January and March 1872. Although he planned to publish these lectures as a book, this never came to fruition. It is interesting to note that a recent English translation of the lectures was published under the title *Anti-Education*.[209] However, in these lectures, which were by all accounts a tremendous success, Nietzsche is not

[209] Nietzsche (2016)

against education *per se* but rather against the current state of education.[210] Of relevance to this thesis is Nietzsche's hostility towards the education of what he would see as the wrong type of person. Consider the following from his second lecture:

> [Teachers] treat every student as being capable of literature, as *allowed* to have opinions about the most serious people and things, whereas true education will strive with all its might precisely to *suppress* this ridiculous claim to independence of judgement on the part of the young person, imposing instead strict obedience to the sceptre of the genius.[211]

Here the teacher is the one at fault. In the third lecture Nietzsche complains that there are 'too many people with no true calling [that] end up as teachers.' According to him, due to the 'overwhelming numbers' of teachers and because *similis simili gaudet* (like delights in like) the spirit of the educational institutions is shaped by mediocrity.[212] However, the problem is not just with the teachers, for Nietzsche; the great majority of their students are not up to the task.

> So few people nowadays realise that one in a thousand, at most, is justified in putting his writing before the world. *Everyone* else who attempts it, at his own risk, earns as the just reward for every sentence he sees into print nothing but Homeric laughter from readers capable of true judgement—for truly, it is a spectacle for the gods, watching a literary Hephaestus limp up with his pathetic offerings.[213] To inculcate serious and unrelenting critical habits and opinions is one of the highest tasks of formal education; the ubiquitous encouragement of everyone's so-called 'individual personality' is nothing but a mark of barbarity.[214]

For Nietzsche, the problem here is not precisely that the uneducated are attempting to educate the uneducable; but rather individuals that falsely believe themselves to be educated are teaching others to falsely believe that they are gaining an education. Recalling the title under which these lectures were published in 2016, *Anti-Education*, we can see what probably motivated the publishers to choose that title; it is not Nietzsche who is anti-education but, in his mind, the so-

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[210] This is in stark contrast to the reception of *The Birth of Tragedy* published shortly afterwards.
[211] Nietzsche (2016). 26.
[212] Nietzsche (2016). 40.
[213] In Greek mythology, Hephaestus is the half-brother of Dionysus. The relevance here is probably that Hephaestus, as a blacksmith that made things for the other gods, was a worker and because he was cast out of Olympus for being ugly and physically impaired; hence the reference to 'limping' with pathetic offerings. In this respect consider Nietzsche's remarks in *TI* 'Socrates' 3: 'But ugliness, an objection in itself, was also a refutation for the Greeks'.
[214] Nietzsche (2016). 27.

called educational institutions: 'we are well aware that the demand for more schools comes from a sphere inimical to true education, and that it results in nothing but anti-education.'[215] He says, the academic and the truly educated man of culture belong to two different spheres. It is possible, in certain individuals, to be both an academic and truly educated but not at the same time.[216] In other words, a truly educated person of culture can enter the academy and attempt to teach but they will not truly educate. We can already sense the danger, that Nietzsche thinks he detects, in what passes for education in Germany. The rare, perhaps exceptionally so, 'truly educated' person will not only waste their time but assist in what Nietzsche sees as a grand assault on education and culture. His issue is not with laziness or ineptitude running rampant in the schools but with a cultural movement whose 'fundamental goal is the emancipation of the masses from the rule of the great individuals.'[217] Remember that Nietzsche believes that students ought to be discouraged from thinking themselves capable of forming their own critical opinions and instead taught a strict obedience to 'the sceptre of the genius.' Consider, now, his characterisation of the fundamental goal of the enemies of education:

> What they are working toward is the overthrow of the most sacred order in the empire of the intellect: the servitude, submissive obedience, and instinctive loyalty of the masses to the sceptre of genius.[218]

He goes on to say:

> Education for the masses cannot be our goal—only the cultivation of the chosen individual, equipped to produce great and lasting works.[219]

The question is: who are the enemies of true education and why are they promoting education for the masses? For Nietzsche the answer is: the state. The state, he says, hates 'the genuine German spirit' and they fear the power a true education has to enhance the aristocratic nature of great individuals with the capacity to lead the people. Instead, the state would rather the masses lead themselves, under, of course, the guidance of the state. As we read the passage below, we should remember that for Nietzsche the 'masses' are not just the lumpenproletariat but included are the restaurant and theatre going pleasure-hunting dull-eyed sensualists and conceited 'educated people' that occupy all stations in society.[220]

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[215] Nietzsche (2016). 48.
[216] Nietzsche (2016). 40.
[217] Nietzsche (2016). 41.
[218] Nietzsche (2016). 41.
[219] Nietzsche (2016). 41.
[220] "On Music and Words" (Kindle).

> Why does the state need such a surplus of educational institutions and teachers? Why promote national education and popular enlightenment on such a scale? Because the genuine German spirit is so hated—because they fear the aristocratic nature of true education and culture—because they are determined to drive the few that are great into self-imposed exile, so that a pretension to culture can be implanted and cultivated in the many—because they want to avoid the hard and rigorous discipline of the great leader, and convince the masses that they can find the path themselves … under the guiding star of the state! Now that is something new: the state as the guiding star of culture!

Running the state, Nietzsche acknowledges, is not easy. In order to prosper, peace must be preserved and law and order maintained whilst all the time dealing with millions of people, the great majority of which are: 'boundlessly selfish, unjust, unreasonable, dishonest, envious, malicious, mean-spirited, thoroughly narrow-minded and perverse.'[221] On top of the pressures within, there are all the external enemies and rivals to worry about. It is little wonder, Nietzsche says, that the state turns to any ally it can in the struggle to survive. Then, fortune of fortunes, one such ally appears: the educational system; that 'holds up as the task of education the job of discovering where and how a person can best serve state interests.'[222]

> How surprising is it that the state then falls into the arms of such an ally, crying out with full conviction, in its deep, barbaric voice: "Yes! You are education! You are culture!"[223]

Something is rotten in the state but what is the alternative? Nietzsche never elaborates on anything like an actual educational programme. As we shall see, he mysteriously suggests that a true educational institution would be one severely restricted to a few potential geniuses guided by the hand of an actual genius whose other hand is stretched out and back to 'the saving hand of the Greek genius.'[224] He expresses little hope of a true education being on offer in any educational institution. In fact, his lectures are almost entirely pessimistic and offer little in the way of hope or even a proper conclusion. This might be why he chose not to publish them as a book, against his original intentions. Despite the pessimism, or perhaps even because of it, these lectures are the most well-received of any presentation of ideas in his lifetime. The three hundred seat lecture halls were consistently filled.[225] This indicates to me that Nietzsche's concerns over the state of

[221] Nietzsche (2016). 51.
[222] Nietzsche (2016). 52.
[223] Nietzsche (2016). 52.
[224] Nietzsche (2016). 35.
[225] Reitter, Paul and Wellmon (2016) xvii (fn. 16).

education were to at least some degree shared with the general public. And, as I said above, we still struggle today with pinning down exactly what it is to be educated and the value of having an education. But, if anyone is looking to Nietzsche for solutions to either of these questions, disappointment awaits. However, what these lectures do reveal, that is of use to this present study, is Nietzsche's position on the value of education, and in particular the use of history.

With regards to the three positions on the value of history, listed above, we can rule out for Nietzsche the first position. That is, there is no indication in what he has to say in these lectures or elsewhere that studying history is worth doing simply for the sake of accumulating knowledge of history.[226] In other words, Nietzsche is not an advocate of knowledge for knowledge's sake. Consider in this respect what he has to say, later in *The Twilight of the Idols*, about the idea of art for art's sake.[227]

Here Nietzsche talks about art as a great stimulus to life. He says of art: 'doesn't it praise, doesn't it dignify, doesn't it select, doesn't it have preferences?' Of course he thinks it does all these things and because of this art '*strengthens* or *weakens* certain value judgments.' For Nietzsche, art cannot be done simply for the sake of doing art because when an artist creates art, they do so out of a 'most basic instinct' that seeks to express the '*desirability of life*.' Art cannot be done *for* art; because, as a stimulus to life, art is *for* life. In his lectures, Nietzsche suggests that the purpose of a true education has something to do with the emergence of the genius. These geniuses, the '*few* truly educated members of the German people,' are poets and artists.[228] On the relationship between educational institutions and the emergence of genius, Nietzsche is quite mysterious.

> Only with this metaphor of the mother can we grasp the importance of the true popular education and its duty to the genius. The genius is not actually born of culture, or education: His origin is, as it were, metaphysical—his homeland is metaphysical. But for him to appear, to emerge from a people; to reflect as it were in its full array of colours the whole image of a people and its strengths; to reveal this people's highest purpose in the symbolic essence of one individual and his enduring work, thereby linking his people to the eternal and liberating his people from the ever-changing sphere of the momentary—all of this genius can do only if it is ripened in the womb and nourished in the lap of his people's culture. Without this sheltering, incubating home, there is no way for the genius

[226] In the forward to "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" Nietzsche says that knowledge unattended by action ought to be hated by us. He begins by approving of Goethe's remark that he hates everything that merely instructs without invigorating activity.
[227] *TI* 'Skirmishes' 24
[228] Nietzsche (2016). 24.

> ever to unfold his wings and take eternal flight. Instead he sadly, swiftly steals away like a stranger driven forth from an uninhabitable country into wintery desolation.[229]

Nietzsche's lectures are rather theatrically presented as a dialogue between an old philosopher and a former disciple that was 'overheard' by Nietzsche and a friend. Unlike the dialogues of Plato that begin with a short scene-setting introduction in which the characters are often stopped on their way somewhere and persuaded to have philosophical conversation, Nietzsche's *entire* first lecture sets the scene, in great detail, of how this imaginary dialogue came to be heard by Nietzsche and his friend. The views on the value of education are presented as those of the old philosopher and his disciple but they are clearly Nietzsche's own. Why he chose to present his case in this way is open to interpretation. It certainly was not the standard style for these public lectures which were usually presented with various charts and tables in a traditional academic style.[230] It is interesting to observe, in the light of what has already been said in this thesis, the *performative* aspect of Nietzsche's presentation. We can see in the hints given by Nietzsche, what a true education would involve, that there is a performative element. But before looking at this, let us take a brief look at the disciple's response to the philosopher's 'metaphor of the mother' given above.

The disciple can only grasp a 'dim sense of the truth' from what the philosopher has said. That which the older man has attempted to communicate is as mysterious to his disciple as it is to us. The philosopher is presented in Nietzsche's dialogues as a leader and guide, an expert on pedagogy. The value of such leaders and guides, according to Nietzsche, is that they are 'pathbreaking mystagogues of classical education, with whom alone can be found the true path back to classical antiquity.'[231] The duty of these 'mystagogues' is to provide a true education that guides students to the discovery of the 'mysterious bond' that links 'the innermost essence of the German and the genius of the Greek'.[232]

The classical world provides a model for instilling 'serious and unrelenting critical habits and opinions.'[233] Here, Nietzsche is not so much interested in students learning the *opinions* of the Greeks but how they formed their opinions. In other words, mere familiarity with the content of great works is insufficient for a true education. Academic skills and proper scholarly technique are still essential and the students' training should be 'rigorously disciplined,' but this must always be

[229] Nietzsche (2016). 43.
[230] Reitter, Paul and Wellmon (2016) xvii.
[231] Nietzsche (2016). 30.
[232] Nietzsche (2016). 35.
[233] Nietzsche (2016). 27.

in the service of creating 'a proper feeling for the greatness of our classical writers.'[234] Nietzsche says students should be forced to '*listen* to the great thinkers,' rather than philosophise on their own; they should *speak* classical languages rather than think it sufficient merely to understand them.[235] We remember here Nietzsche's claim that his works should be read aloud or even sung, discussed in previous chapters of this thesis.

Of the three positions on the value of history, given above, we have already ruled out the first. This leaves the second position on the value of history being of practical use that can perhaps be best expressed as something like the familiar idea that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.[236] And the third position, which is that studying history is valuable because it is character forming. In the lectures we have been discussing, Nietzsche seems to be somewhere between the two but with a much greater emphasis on the character forming aspect of education and studying history. What seems to be most valuable for him is students grasping the *feelings* of the Greeks, of their attitudes and disposition towards life. Put colloquially, for Nietzsche, when studying history the onus is not on attempting to do what great people *say* but attempting to do what they *do*. The aim is to establish a *rapport* with the great and the good. Obviously, it will probably not be possible for most current students, but that is why Nietzsche wants to severely restrict who gets access to education to just those with the potential to establish a *rapport*. Simply put, it is not sufficient to know what, say, Heraclitus had to say but rather the goal is to be of one mind with Heraclitus. In fact, a good student can do so without necessarily agreeing with Heraclitius' particular ideas. On this, consider the following from Nietzsche in a later work. In the first preface written for *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche writes:

> I am going to tell the story—simplified—of certain philosophers. I am going to emphasise on that point of each of their systems which constitutes a slice of *personality* and hence belongs to incontrovertible, non-debatable evidence which it is the task of history to preserve.[237]

In a later preface to the same work, he writes:

> I have selected those doctrines which sound most clearly the personality of the individual philosopher, whereas the complete enumeration of all transmitted doctrines, as is the custom of the ordinary handbooks to give, has but one sure

[234] Nietzsches (2016). 29.
[235] Nietzsche (2016). 32, 33.
[236] Santayana (1981). Accessed Aug 20, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.
[237] Nietzsche (1998). 24.

> result: the complete silencing of the personality [...] It is possible to present the image of a man in three anecdotes; I shall try to emphasise three anecdotes in each system and abandon the rest.[238]

We can clearly see from the above that the value, for Nietzsche, in studying the philosophers he has chosen (which includes Heraclitus) is found more in the personalities of these thinkers and not their thoughts. Indeed, in the later preface we read: 'The only thing of interest in a refuted system is the personal element.' Nietzsche makes clear in the first preface what he believes to be the purpose of studying history: 'The task is to bring to light what we *must ever love and honour* and what no subsequent enlightenment can take away: great individual human beings.'

The problem with students that have received a bad education, those that leave their educational institutions *uneducated*, is not that they do not love and honour the Greeks but that because they mistakenly believe there is something beneficial to be gained from simply reading the content of Greek works, having done so they are *shameless* and *smug*. Unaware that they have not been initiated into the hidden secrets of the Greeks, they leave 'education' and join the rest of the 'conceited uneducated masses'. Here is what the old philosopher has to say:

> Just look at the younger generation of philologists: How rarely among them do we see any sense of shame, any sense that we have no right to exist at all in light of a world like that of the Greeks. How cool, how brazen this young brood is, building its miserable nest in among the most magnificent temples! Smug and unashamed, they have been wandering around in that world's astonishing ruins since their university years; to the vast majority of them, a mighty voice should boom out from every corner: 'Away from here, uninitiated, you who will never be initiates! Fly without a word from this sanctuary, silent and ashamed![239]

Now that we have seen what Nietzsche has to say about education and, in less detail, the state in these lectures, let us turn to his method; in other words, his mythopoesis.

4.2 Nietzsche's mythopoeic call to action on true education

As we have seen previously in this thesis, the four characteristic factors of mythopoesis are: (1) an attempt to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable; (2) an attempt to

[238] Nietzsche (1998) 25.
[239] Nietzsche (2016). 43.

make clear that something is important or valuable; (3) an attempt to seek or establish a *rapport*; (4) a call to action. A very loose caricature of mythopoeic text can be expressed as follows:

1. Look at this.
2. This is bad!
3. Don't you agree?
4. We should do something about it.

The process is, as we have seen, much more complicated than this but as a caricature it gets across the thrust of the idea. If we feed Nietzsche's mythopoesis from the lectures into the steps above we end up with: (1) look how true education and the emergence of geniuses is being obstructed for the benefit of those running the state; (2) it is bad that without educated geniuses there will be no great leaders or greatness at all while the conceited uneducated masses hold power; (3) do you understand what I am saying and agree with me? (4) We must cease mass education that only encourages the ineducable in the smug and shameless misconception that they are educated and focus attention on the cultivation of exceptional individuals.[240]

There are number of things in Nietzsche's mythopoesis that are worth mentioning before we move on:

- The perceived need for great leaders and for 'greatness' itself.
- The dangers, he sees, of egalitarianism and by extension democracy.
- For Nietzsche, when studying history, the content is less important than establishing a *rapport* with great people from the past.

We move now from looking at the value of education, for Nietzsche, and in particular the study of history to how Nietzsche himself uses history. I begin with looking at Nietzsche's earliest efforts in producing history in order to show how his attitude develops over time. What we will see is that even from his schooldays, Nietzsche had an interest in certain themes, in particular the need to cultivate great leaders and the dangers of allowing the masses to rise above their stations in life. We will also see how Nietzsche turns from *doing* history to *using* history in the service of mythopoesis.

[240] It might be wondered what the difference is between this process and simply a rhetorically charged critique of the educational institutions. My response would be that Nietzsche's mythopoesis here *is* a rhetorically charged critique that makes use of myth.

4.3 Nietzsche's use of history

Nietzsche's first sustained effort in philology, written as a teenager whilst still in school, focused on the saga of the Ostrogoth King Ermanarich whom he considers a great leader. What interests the young Nietzsche in particular is how different historians have used the history of Ermanarich for their own ends. What is particularly fascinating for him is how in the process Ermanarich came to be considered a noble hero, a coward and wife-murderer.[241] There are conflicting accounts in the various historical sources of Ermanarich's death: he committed suicide in anticipation of the victory of the Huns over the Ostrogoths; or he died valiantly on the battlefield; or he was murdered to avenge the brutal death of his wife who he had torn apart by horses as punishment for her infidelity. To be clear, Nietzsche understands that a task for historians is to fill in gaps in the historical record and to de-conflate various ideas that have become merged over the years. What interested Nietzsche here, however, was why one historian might choose to produce a history of Ermanarich as a hero, another might want to show him up as a coward and yet another as a brutal wife-murderer. In other words, Nietzsche is interested in the *genealogy* of these ideas.

In his essay, Nietzsche set about separating the historical testimonies relating to Ermanarich and the use to which these accounts were put. As just mentioned, he seeks to explain how a great heroic leader can prefer suicide over battle and fail to defend his people; or be a cuckhold so brutal in his jealousy over his wife's betrayal. The answer Nietzsche 'discovers' is that a leader cannot be a great hero and a cowardly cuckold at the same time. He argues that later historians have offered a distortion of events in order to discredit Ermanarich. To convince his readers of this, he attempts to *undermine* these later accounts by offering a more plausible interpretation of events that remains consistent with the idea of Ermanarich as a great hero. Without offering much in the way of evidence other than appeals to plausibility, Nietzsche suggests that the woman torn apart by horses was probably not the wife of Ermanarich. His reason for believing this is that this was a punishment usually reserved for treason and not infidelity. Nietzsche then suggests that the executed woman in question must have been the wife of a senior Ostrogoth advisor that had defected to the Huns. Her death, therefore, was a punishment for his treachery. Ermanarich was then murdered by the woman's brothers in retaliation for her brutal execution. According to Nietzsche, then, the great king did not then die a coward's death by committing suicide on the eve of a battle he anticipated losing but was assassinated.

Nietzsche's history of the Ostrogoth King is plausible but his method is more interesting. Ostensibly, the essay offers a historical account of Ermanarich and a discussion of the conflicting

[241] Jensen (2013). 9.

accounts in the literature. Nietzsche clearly shows a preference for presenting Ermanarich as a German legendary hero. He undermines conflicting accounts by offering a perfectly plausible but different account of his own. What we see here is an attempt to oppose myth with countermyth.[242] As Anthony Jenson observes:

> But rather than simply identify the equipollent knot and suspend his judgement—in the matter of a scholarly skeptic—Nietzsche offers an artistically plausible but philologically unverifiable solution. He has in fact constructed a hypothetical Ermanarich character to explain what the 'facts' could not prove.[243]

There are a number of things we can take from this essay, written by Nietzsche while still at school, which demonstrate a very early interest in ideas that will still occupy him in his final active years. We see his interest in great individuals and the role they play in shaping history. His interest in the genealogy of ideas is present here as he explores how the same man can come to be considered a hero *and* a coward. Nietzsche displays an early awareness that myths can be undermined by countermyths and the use of history for the creation of myths. However, unlike his later use of history, Nietzsche still adheres to academic conventions. That is, his work is well-researched and textual evidence is carefully referenced and footnoted. Compare this to his comments, discussed in chapter three of this thesis, on his disdain for providing evidence for his claims or even of the *propriety* of proving things.[244] Something that seems quite apparent, in both this essay on Ermanarich and his published essay on Theognis that we are about to discuss, is that Nietzsche believes that the events described actually happened and that it is possible to re-present these events in his writing. A contrasting view to this is pithily expressed by Carl Becker in his claim that 'the facts of history do not exist for any historian until he creates them.'[245] A similar idea, widely attributed to Napoleon is that history is nothing but a fable agreed upon. Michael Oakeshott offers the following: '[History] is 'made' by nobody save the historian; to write history is the only way of making it [...] The course of events is, then, the result, not the material of history.[246]

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[242] Nietzsche may believe or would like to believe that he is performing a kind of speculative alternative history. But the difference between speculative alternative history and mythopoesis on my view is that former is motivated by a primary intent to understand something that may have happened in the past; whereas the primary motivation of the latter is to motivate others to act upon something that is happening now. Nietzsche, on my reading, appears to be more interesting in succeeding in the later rather than the former endeavour.
[243] Jensen (2013). 11.
[244] *BT* 'An Attempt at Self-Criticism' 3.
[245] Becker (1967). 12.
[246] Oakeshott (2015). 76.

Unlike the views expressed here, Nietzsche thinks there is more to history than agreed upon fables. Let us turn now to Nietzsche's essay on Theognis. This is a much more sophisticated effort. It was on the strength of this published essay and subsequent recommendation by Ritschl, who published it in his journal the *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, that Nietzsche earned his professorship at the University of Basel.[247] In this essay we will see a clear concern for the dangers of corrupt rulers, egalitarianism, and the degenerative effects of allowing the uneducated access to education.

4.4 Nietzsche's essay on Theognis

In the first part of the essay on Theognis, Nietzsche presents a biography of the poet. He begins the second part with a discussion of the reception of Theognis by later Greeks as a writer of lessons for the instruction of the children. Here there are two conflicting histories of the same man: Theognis the great poet and Theognis the writer of works considered as 'baby food' (*nutrimentum infantium*).[248] The idea of a poet whose work is suitable only for infants is obviously at odds with Theognis' reputation in Nietzsche's day as a rigorous moralist and a writer whose works include drinking songs and erotic, even obscene, poems. As he was with Ermanarich, Nietzsche is interested in the genealogy of these disparate ideas. He then turns his attention to contemporary reception of Theognis, including passages from Goethe. Meticulously, he goes through the extant works, subjecting passage after passage to close scrutiny. As we have seen, his philological method is greatly appreciated by Ritschl. Reading through Nietzsche's essay, with his later philosophy in mind we can note in passing how certain themes and passages jump out. For example, consider the following excerpt in which he quotes from Theognis and compares it to the wisdom of Silenus he will later refer to in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> For those on earth, never being born is best,
>
> Never to have seen the sun's burning rays.
>
> Thus when born, head straight for Hades' gates:
>
> Make your earthen grave and then lie in it.[249]

From *The Birth of Tragedy*:

[247] Young (2010). 65.
[248] Nietzsche (2015). 33.
[249] Nietzsche (2015). 67.

> Suffering creature, born for a day, child of accident and toil, why are you forcing me to say what is the most unpleasant thing for you to hear? The very best thing for you is totally unreachable: not to have been born, not to exist, to be nothing. The second best thing for you, however, is this: to die soon.[250]

More interesting, perhaps, is Nietzsche's attention in the third section of his essay on *Theognis* to the relationship between the nobility and the base with ideas of good and bad. Consider the following excerpt from Nietzsche:

> Theognis began to manifest himself most fiercely as the champion of the class of the optimates, he also separated the population in his poetry in such a way that he pronounced one part the good, i.e. the optimates: the good men among whom was supposed to be every religious piety to the gods; and towards men, every righteousness and goodness. The other part he called the bad or the lowly, among whom every moral depravity, irreverence and ungodliness was said to exist. Whence, it is evident why, in Theognis' opinion, matters divine and human are so closely related.[251]

One thing to point out here is Nietzsche's use of 'optimates' to describe the social class championed by Theognis. It is a term used by Theodor Mommsen who presented them, alongside their opposites and counterparts the 'populaires', as straightforwardly comparable to the right/left wings of contemporary politics.[252] Useful, as far as it goes, the anachronistic reference to modern politics ends up with a confused picture of ancient politics. Nietzsche's identification of Theognis with optimates suggests he is applying modern ideas to his study of the past. While, admittedly, it is a small point it does offer some indication of Nietzsche's historical approach at this early stage in his career. Of greater interest is Nietzsche's early interest in ideas that he will return to frequently. For example, the identification of good with what is good for the noble caste,[253] and the 'pathos of distance'.[254] In addition, in this very early essay Nietzsche also displays an interest in how the *weaker* of two classes ends up the more powerful. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche will devote considerable time to the 'slave revolt'; an idea so key to his philosophy that Aaron Ridley has called it, 'probably the single most important event in Nietzsche's reconstruction of our moral past.'[255] Nietzsche begins by offering 'five characteristic

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[250] *BT* 3.
[251] Nietzsche (2015). 73.
[252] Mouritzen (2017). 112.
[253] *GM* I, 4
[254] *BGE* 257; *GM* I, 2; *TI, 'Skirmishes'* 37; *A* 43.
[255] Ridley (1998). 15.

factors of the optimates' authority and dignity,' amply supported with textual evidence.[256] He then offers an account of how 'the authority of the nobility gradually slipped by the day.'[257] The five factors are: (1) the lineage of optimates is known and respected by all, whereas the plebeians sprang up from useless and pernicious stock,' whose origins are 'shrouded in mystery'; (2) the military and public offices, including the legal system, are run and administered by the optimates; (3) the carrying out of all sacred rites is the prerogative of the optimates, they believe themselves favoured by the gods and the plebeians despised; (4) the optimates possess great riches, luxury and splendour in comparison to the plebeians who are driven by penury to crime; (5) The optimates inherit the benefit of wealth and have access to education and good company, the plebeians by contrast are born 'bad' and have no opportunity to better themselves or avoid bad company.[258] How, then, did it come to pass that the plebeians rose above the optimates?

First of all new opportunities for trade, especially in coastal areas, provided the plebeians with a previously unavailable source of wealth. Booming trade allowed them to first equal and then surpass the optimates in extravagance and luxury. These riches allowed for education previously only available to the optimates and on top of this travel to far off places in the pursuit of trade provided further opportunities for learning, education and betterment. Secondly, concurrent with the rise of the plebeians there was a degeneration of the optimates. They neglected their duties and education, gave themselves over to luxury and pleasure but without the belief in their exclusive claim to goodness. Running themselves to poverty, the only way out was through intermixing, via marriage, with the plebeians.

> So it came about that the nobles no longer separated themselves from the plebeians, but rather by intermarrying, they sought wealth, whilst the plebeians by such means strove after and received dignity—Theognis said "Wealth dilutes birthright."[259]

However, this does not fully explain how this social revolution came about. Looking back at the five characteristic factors of the optimates, we can see that they did not just have great wealth and power but the belief that their superiority was ordained by the gods. Indeed, their wealth and power was, to them, evidence of the divine favour in which they were held. In addition to this, the plebeians were in a wretched condition with no obvious route to betterment. How could they have dragged themselves out of the mud, so to speak, sufficiently high enough to exploit the new

[256] Nietzsche (2015). 73.
[257] Nietzsche (2015). 83.
[258] Nietzsche (2015). 73-81.
[259] Nietzsche (2015). 83.

trade opportunities and become rich? Once rich, where did they find the wisdom required to leverage this into power? Nietzsche's answer, via his study of Theognis, is that they received help. He attributes the flourishing of the plebeians to the tyranny of Theagenes, who born of noble lineage styled himself a leader of the people and exploited the plebeians to seize power.

> Assuredly, nothing was more detrimental to the nobles than the tyranny of Theagenes, who, born of an illustrious lineage, carried on for a while as a populist. Then, with the approbation of the plebeians, he seized power. As Aristotle, *Politics* 5, 3, 1 noted "*Oligarchies come to an end, especially when a leader of the people emerges from out of these oligarchs*."[260]

The result of Theagenes' power-grab was the 'overthrow of all beliefs,' including a loss of belief in the gods. This led to a kind of nihilism in which the former optimates, Theognis included, were prepared to free themselves from their new lowly position by any means necessary. This position was extremely bleak; there was a time for Theognis, the great poet, when death seemed preferable to life.[261] It is during this period in his life that the poet writes these lines, quoted above, that echo the so-called 'wisdom of Silenus' that it is best 'to have never been born.'

Nietzsche ends the essay with a conjecture: that Theognis endured the overthrowal of his beliefs and altered his opinion of the plebeians. In his old age, he was more liberal in his views concerning the dignity of the poor and cautions others against reproaching anyone for their poverty. Nietzsche's main concern in the essay is with this shift in attitude, apparent in Theognis' later work. The lesson he takes away from his study is that it is thanks to the political opportunism of Theagenes that the weak and uneducated gained power and influence which led to the loss of the great poet. Nietzsche ends his essay with the words of George Grote, that Theognis the one great poet was 'diminished and broken'.[262] It is clear from these last remarks that the poet's revised, more liberal views are not something Nietzsche celebrates. However, it is also clear from the text that Nietzsche offers no evidence or even an argument for his claim that Theognis' apparent change in views on social matters was as a result of Theagenes' political treachery or the increase in political power of the lower classes. As with his earlier essay on Ermanarich, Nietzsche attempts to get his point across by offering a plausible counter story to the ones he is challenging with the text. Rather than conclusively show other histories of Theognis to be in error, he offers a different account that undermines the others on offer simply by offering a plausible alternative. It is rather like a barrister who instead of attempting to prove her client was not at the scene of the

[260] Nietzsche (2015). 83.
[261] Nietzsche (2015). 87.
[262] Nietzsche (2015). 91.

crime shows the jury that any number of people were there and one of them could be the guilty party. How convincing this will be for the jury will depend largely on how they feel about the accused and what they want to believe.

Nietzsche references Theognis again, several years later, in the first essay of his *Genealogy of Morality*. In section five he is discussing an etymological link between words for 'good', 'truthful' and 'real' and with the nobles and people of higher rank in various societies. We saw above that this was something Nietzsche highlighted in his early Theognis essay. In the previous section, of the *Genealogy*, he made the claim that the association with words for good with the upper classes and words for 'bad' or 'plain' with the lower classes held no derogatory implication until around the time of the Thirty Years War. For Nietzsche the change was due to 'the destructive influence of the democratic bias'. Without any evidence he claims there was a massive cultural shift in attitudes as a result of what he considers an unbridled prejudice to the point of hatred. The bias even creeps into the natural sciences and physiology. As an example Nietzsche refers to the English historian Henry Thomas Buckle but without any citations or explanations of how, exactly, the democratic bias influenced his work. In section six, in which Theognis is namechecked, Nietzsche also mentions Rudolf Virchow whom we imagine must be one of those scientists under the influence of democratic bias. Since the 1860s, Nietzsche had been reading his way through several heavy-going scientific works on physiology and neurophysiology; including works by Rudolf Virchow.[263] Virchow was a political liberal and was actively involved in social reform politics.[264] His most influential idea, in this respect, is that whole populations could be sick and political intervention the cure.[265] In what remains the largest study on hair pigmentation ever carried out, Virchow collected data on almost four million individuals and found no pattern in the pigmentation of any race in Germany.[266] This last fact is of interest here since the reason Nietzsche brings up Virchow is to say that he is wrong with regards to hair pigmentation and race. As mentioned, Virchow had carried out the largest ever investigation into the subject with a sample of participants in the several millions. Nietzsche offers no arguments against Virchow or in support of his own claims.[267] Curiously, section five ends with the line: 'The grounds for this supposition will not be gone into here.' The supposition in question regards Nietzsche's false claim that the Goths got their name from the German word 'gut'.[268] What we see in these two

[263] Landgraf (2013): 472–88.
[264] Weller (1921): 33–39.
[265] Mackenbach (2009): 181-184.
[266] Katsara and Nothnagel (2019): 109-118. 112.
[267] One of which is the bizarre claim that 'the Celts were a completely blonde race.'
[268] As far as I am aware there has never been an association between the etymology of the name Goths and the German word *gut*. The Goth name derives not from the word for good but the proto-German verb 'to

sections of *The Genealogy* is Nietzsche using history, science and linguistics in order to give flavour to what he is attempting to communicate rather than to provide evidence for his claims. Of the three people mentioned by name, Theognis is cited as an authority on the use of language in the ancient Greek world whereas Buckle and Virchow, both supposedly 'educated' and whose ideas contradict those of Nietzsche, are introduced simply as examples of those who are wrong.[269]

In section 16, Nietzsche talks about the Christianisation of Rome. Before this, Nietzsche says, the Romans were 'stronger and nobler than anybody hitherto had lived or been dreamt of on earth.' Their defeat, the greatest people the Earth had ever seen, he attributes to four individuals: Jesus, Peter, Paul and Mary. Nietzsche then gives an account of history from this point up until Napoleon in the nineteenth century. History is characterised by a tit-for-tat battle between 'Judea and Rome'. Judea scored its first victory with the Christianisation of Rome but the tables turned with a Roman victory over Judea with the Renaissance. However, Judea struck back with the Reformation and then struck again with the French revolution. In this account, the four Jews that Nietzsche believes 'conquered' Rome were a carpenter's son, a carpet-weaver (tent-maker?), a fisherman and a mother. The Reformation was a 'basically proletarian *ressentiment*-movement and the French nobility collapsed 'under the *ressentiment-instincts* of the rabble.' Rome gets its revenge in quick order, however, with the emergence of Napoleon. With the rise of Napoleon the previous slogan '*priority for the majority*' was countered with *'priority for the few!*' Clearly, none of this can be intended as anything like historical evidence in support of Nietzsche's claims. Instead, Nietzsche is attempting to communicate the idea of a continual struggle between two forces; the base versus the noble. We can also note here how on Nietzsche's account it is powerful individuals that move history. The focus of all the historical events just mentioned are people: the poet Theognis, the historian Buckle, physician and anthropologist Virchow, the carpenter's son Jesus, fisherman Peter, carpet-weaver Paul, mother Mary and Napoleon, emperor of the French.

4.5 The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life

Since we have already spent a lot of time discussing *The Birth of Tragedy* there is no need to go into detail here but it should be quite clear that Nietzsche's approach to the history and source material is entirely different to that which he exhibits in his essays on Ermanarich and Theognis. We saw that he even questioned the *propriety* of providing evidence of his claims in the work. It is

pour' from which we get the English word 'gutter'. The Goths were thought to have originated from settlements around the river Guthalus hence the idea of pouring or flowing. Wolfram (1990). 21.

[269] Buckle thought that history was not made by Great man but by social forces beyond their control.

clear that Nietzsche develops quite early in his philosophical career a distinct attitude to the use of history. We cannot talk about Nietzsche's attitude to the use of history without looking at his 'untimely meditation' on "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life".

One of the first things to note is that in the original German Nietzsche says 'Historie' and not 'Geschichte'. As David Jaspers has observed: the former refers to 'a description of how events actually happened,' and the latter 'is a description of what events *mean*, both to those who first experienced them and to us now.'[270] This seems to suggest that, in the essay, Nietzsche is concerned with *descriptions* of past events and the advantages and disadvantages of using these for life. And not concerned with how the *meaning* of these past events, both as then and now, can be used for life. However, reading the text it seems quite clear that Nietzsche is actually more interested with the latter. For example he writes: 'He who has learned to recognise this in the meaning of history (Historie).'[271] What is being recognised is that:

> History (Geschichte) belongs above all to the man of deeds and power, to him that fights a great fight who needs models, teachers, comforters and cannot find them among his contemporaries [...] It is the man of deeds that Polybius has in mind when he calls political history the proper preparation for governing a state and the best teacher who, by recalling to us the misfortunes of others instructs us in how to steadfastly endure our own changes of fortune.[272]

Nietzsche is suggesting that descriptions of past events are being used by the wrong kind of people and he wants to highlight the disadvantages of this. He identifies three approaches to history each with their advantages and disadvantages: the *critical*, the *antiquarian* and the *monumental*. Let us take a closer look at each in turn.

The *critical* historian is more interested in ensuring that what is said to have happened can be correctly and accurately shown to have actually happened. Such an approach will not rest content with an idea until proven, for example, that something like scales fell from the eyes of Saul before he was baptised.[273] For Nietzsche, the critical approach is a useful antidote to an undue willingness to accept traditional stories. However, there is a danger in focusing too heavily on critical history. That is, the historian might get so carried away by their demands for proven facts that they reject almost everything from the past. In addition, they ignore how much of their own

[270] Jasper (2004). 93.
[271] *UM* 'History' 2.
[272] *UM* 'History' 2.
[273] Acts 9:18.

lives and attitudes, including their attitude to critical history, is an inheritance from the kind of traditional belief they would cut from history.

The *antiquarian* approach to history is almost the opposite to that just discussed. Such historians revere and value the past to such a degree that they are unwilling to 'cut away' any of it. They are hoarders of the past unwilling to relinquish any part of it but such an attitude gives equal value to everything they as historians have preserved. In addition, when everything from the past is held in such high esteem, how can anything from the present hope to compete? For Nietzsche, the problem with this approach is that it denies the value of life in the present.

The antidote to this is found in the third approach, the *monumental*. With this approach the historian looks to the great people and events of the past in the hopes of such events occurring again today and in the future. Nietzsche says this approach to history learns from the past 'that the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again.' Looking back at the past, 'the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain, that this chain unites mankind across the millennia like a range of mountain peaks.'[274] From what we have seen earlier in this chapter, it might be expected that Nietzsche will advocate this approach to history. However, he identifies problems with the *monumental* approach just as he did with the *critical* and *antiquarian*. The trouble with focusing solely on the great events of history is that the non-great aspects are overlooked and ignored. Instead of embracing life, in all its aspects, the monumental historian hopes for the future recurrence of great events. As we will see in chapter six of this thesis, the view of eternal recurrence Nietzsche will offer in *Gay Science* 341 is not about joyously anticipating the great things in life eternally returning but *all things* with 'nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unspeakably small or great [...] all in the same succession and sequence.'

What we can see with these three approaches is that relying on one to the neglect of the others ends up, according to Nietzsche, becoming history against life. Better would be a balanced approach, taking the best from each attitude and rejecting that which ends up working against life. There is no practical advice on how exactly Nietzsche believes history ought actually be done other than *for life*. One final thing worth mentioning is that in this essay Nietzsche takes aim at the idea that history is moved by forces outside of human control. We saw above in discussion of *The Genealogy* Nietzsche's contempt for Buckle for holding this view. In "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", he takes aim at Eduard von Hartmann for similar reasons.

[274] *UM* 'History' 2. Nietzsche uses the same imagery of great moments forming a chain that like mountain peaks unite humankind across the millennia in "On the Pathos of Truth."

Hartmann believed that individuals had no real control over the unfolding events in history and that the study of history ought to focus on the masses rather than exemplary individuals.[275] For Nietzsche:

> To sum up: history is written by the experienced and superior man. He who has not experienced greater and more exalted things than others will not know how to interpret the great and exalted things of the past. When the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it.[276]

Here we see again Nietzsche the mystagogue: *only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it.* What is abundantly clear, however, is Nietzsche's view of 'the masses'. Sharply condemning the view that the proper study of history is written from the 'standpoint of the masses' with the aim of discovering supposed 'laws' that move the masses, he has this to say:

> The masses seem to me to deserve notice in three respects only: first as faded copies of great men produced on poor paper with worn-out plates, then as a force of resistance to great men, finally as instruments in the hands of great men; for the rest, let the Devil and statistics take them!

4.6 In the next chapter

In the next chapter I look at Nietzsche's concept of the death of God. Here I focus on *GS* 125 and the disorientation of the 'madman' in the absence of God. The chapter explores Nietzsche's political anthropology and his mythopoeic attempt to say what it is to be a human being and how best to improve humankind. Related to this chapter on Nietzsche's use of history, we will see in the next chapter Nietzsche's mythopoeic account of the formation of early human societies.

[275] Jensen (2006): 41–61. 49.
[276] *UM* 'History' 6.

Chapter 5 The Madman

In this chapter, I look at Nietzsche's concept of the 'death of God'. I begin by taking a close look at *GS* 125 'The Madman' in which the idea of the awesome ramifications of the death of God are made clearest in Nietzsche's work. In order to unpack this idea, I look at different ways that the 'Madman' can be considered 'mad'. For Nietzsche, and for Camus, the 'death of God' provides the opportunity for human beings to create their own myths and to give life a meaning of their choosing. One of the aims of this chapter is to show how myth-making is essential for establishing and maintaining political associations of all sizes. We have already seen that the central idea of mythopoesis, that 'something is rotten in the state', is always aimed at countering such myths. After my discussion of the madman, I look at Nietzsche's use of political anthropology in his myth-making. The main concerns of anthropology in his time were to provide a non-theological answer to the question of what human beings are; and to use these answers to improve humankind culturally. At the end of the chapter, I will look at how in his use of the concept of the death of God, Nietzsche subverts an idea usually found in Christian theology to counter Christian mythology.

5.1 *GS* 125 'The Madman'

GS 125 begins by asking if we have ever heard of the madman seeking God. Nietzsche's 'madman' rushes around the marketplace, in broad daylight, with his lantern lit. But unlike Diogenes of Sinope he is not looking for a man but God Himself. These antics are met with amusement and mockery from many of the market-goers that Nietzsche explicitly points out do not believe in God. It is noteworthy that they appear neither angry nor upset and there is no gnashing of teeth in response to the madman but rather amusement. Pretending to help, they offer mocking suggestions as to where God might be.

'Where is God?' the madman cries out and proclaims: 'I'll tell you! We have killed him—you and I! We are all his murderers.' He then proceeds to spell out the consequences of the 'death' of God and in doing so puts to an end the mockery from the atheists. Before we look at these consequences let us first take a closer look at why Nietzsche might have chosen a 'madman' to proclaim the news that God is dead.

5.2 The 'madness' of Nietzsche's madman

I would like to discuss now three ways in which the 'madness' of Nietzsche's madman can be understood. Here I make no preference for one over the others, indeed I think all three are plausible and that the madman can be considered 'mad' in all three ways.

1. An allusion to Diogenes of Sinope.
2. A precursor to a new way of thinking (and a 'convincer' that the new way is right).
3. A loss of contact with reality (psychosis).

5.2.1 Diogenes of Sinope

The first I have already alluded to. By introducing us to the madman walking around the marketplace in broad daylight with his lantern lit, Nietzsche clearly has Diogenes of Sinope in mind. In *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* Diogenes Laertius recalls that '[Diogenes of Sinope] lit a lamp in broad daylight and called out, as he went around, "I am looking for a man."[277] He lived in the marketplace, in a large ceramic jar, and used his poverty and simple lifestyle to challenge what he saw as a corrupt and confused society.[278] A simple interpretation of Nietzsche's choice to model the hero of his story on Diogenes is that he wants to put in his readers' mind the idea of an idiosyncratic, but not necessarily wrong, critic of a society's culture and values. However, the choice to give his madman a lit lantern during the early morning sunshine may not be as silly as first appears. Even in daylight there are still dark places. Shadows are by definition dark and lanterns illuminate dark areas.[279] If the madman is looking for God's shadow, he will need to look *in* the shadows. To 'overcome' this shadow, he will need a lamp.

5.2.2 Madness as precursor and convincer

A second way we can think of 'madness' is as a precursor to a new way of thinking. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche says: 'Almost everywhere it was madness that prepared the way for a new idea, which broke the spell of a venerated usage and superstition.'[280] In the same section he imagines a Christian 'madman' seeking God and praying:

[277] Laertius, Diogenes *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Book VI, Chapter 2, 41
[278] Laertius, Diogenes *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Book VI, Chapter 2. 22
[279] On Gods castings shadows see *GS* 108
[280] *D* 1: 14. See also: *GM* II: 2

> 'I am consumed by doubt, I have killed the law, the law anguishes me as a corpse does a living man: if I am not more than the law I am the vilest of all men. The new spirit which is in me, whence is it if it is not from you? Prove to me that I am yours; madness alone can prove it.'[281]

To fully understand what is happening above, we need to look at the Second Essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*. In the first few sections of the essay Nietzsche explores the formation and development of the very first human associations. At the time of writing he was voraciously reading several well-known textbooks on political anthropology and this shows in his work.[282] In these early days of the subject, the main concern of anthropology was to provide a *non-theological* answer to the question: what are human beings? If we consider *GS* 341 and the idea of fervently longing for a universe without God, we can see how the new discipline of anthropology would appeal to Nietzsche. Unlike modern anthropology, the discipline familiar to him was considered not only an empirical science but as a tool that could be used for moral and cultural improvement.[283] This was certainly how Kant, one of the first to lecture on anthropology at the university level, saw things.[284] Nietzsche begins the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* with a question fundamental to political anthropology: what is required for even the most primitive political associations? His answer is the ability to make promises and to create memories.

5.2.2.1 Making promises

Nietzsche refers to what he calls 'nature's task', which he says is the breeding of an animal with the prerogative to make promises. This appears to be the same concern as that expressed by Thomas Hobbes in chapter 14 of his *Leviathan*.[285] What Nietzsche calls 'nature's task' can be understood, poetically, as the creation of the human animal—an animal that lives and thrives in political associations of various sizes. For these associations to be possible, human beings must make contracts of some kind and also be bound to these contracts by promises or, in Hobbes'

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[281] *D* 1: 14

[282] Iain Morrison has shown that leading up to and during the writing of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche not only read the major works of John Lubbock and Edward Tylor, the leading English anthropologists of the day, but that he also read the latest works by German anthropologists including Otto Caspari and Albert Hermann Post. Morrison also cites the Hackett Classics edition of *The Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic* (1988) in which the editors, Maudemarie Clare and Alan Swensen, list at least twelve direct references by Nietzsche to Albert Post in the Second Essay. See: Morrison, Iain P. "Nietzsche, the Anthropologists, and the Genealogy of Trauma." *Genealogy* 5: 23 (2021). According to David Thatcher, Nietzsche never travelled anywhere without his copy of Lubbock's influential *Origin of Civilisation and The Primitive Condition of Man* (1875, German translation). See: Thatcher, David. "Nietzsche's Debt to Lubbock." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44:22 (1983) 293-309. 295.

[283] Kant (2006).

[284] Kant (2006).. vii, viii.

[285] Hobbes (2017).

terminology, 'covenants'. The problem for primitive societies is how to bind people to their promises; in other words what is to stop people from breaking the contract holding society together if it becomes opportune to do so? For Nietzsche, the answer is that primitive associations were held together by what he calls 'The morality of custom'.[286] Here, appeals to a mysterious outside authority are made to justify the importance of keeping the promises that have traditionally been kept. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche says: 'What is tradition? A higher authority which one obeys, not because it commands what is *useful* to us, but because it *commands*.'[287] It is fear of this higher authority that compels people to keep their promises; a special kind of fear, Nietzsche says, fear of 'a higher intellect that commands'; one whose power is indefinite and incomprehensible: fear brought about by 'superstition' (Aberglaube).[288]

The value of keeping one's promises, as well as every other important idea keeping the group together and functional, not least the idea of the feared authority figure in command, must not only be made clear but also *impressed on the memory*. Such values are made clear via appeals to custom and tradition, which are in turn justified by appeals to a mysterious higher authority. That is, via *myth*. Myths are impressed on the memory via ritual and ceremony. Let us turn now to Nietzsche's idea of making memories.

5.2.2.2 Making memories

Based no doubt on his anthropological reading at the time, Nietzsche believed that the way to impress values upon the memory was through pain and ritual. Consider the following from the *Second Essay*:

> 'How do you give a memory to the animal, man? How do you impress something upon this partly dull, partly idiotic, inattentive mind, this personification of forgetfulness, so that it will stick?' … This age-old question was not resolved with gentle solutions and methods, as can be imagined; perhaps there is nothing more terrible and strange in man's prehistory than his technique of mnemonics. 'A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory: only something that continues to hurt stays in the memory'—that is a proposition from the oldest (and unfortunately the longest-lived) psychology on earth [...] When man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices: the most horrifying sacrifices and forfeits (the sacrifice of the first-

[286] *D* 1: 14; *GM* II: 2.
[287] *D* 1: 14.
[288] *D* 1: 14.

> born belongs here), the most disgusting mutilations (for example, castration), the cruellest rituals of all religious cults (and all religions are, at their most fundamental, systems of cruelty)—all this has its origin in that particular instinct which discovered that pain was the most powerful aid to mnemonics.[289]

The purpose of rituals is to remind the people of their obligation to keep with tradition and custom.[290] They are ceremonial re-enactments of that which is 'well done' or 'done according to the rules.'[291] Whereas myths are created to make clear the customs and traditions of a society, rituals are ceremonial practices designed, in Nietzsche's words, to burn these ideas into the memory.[292] When we consider the *fear* of the supernatural power whose authority justifies the customs and traditions of the society and couple this with the *cruel* and *horrific* rituals that reinforce these in the collective memory we can begin to understand the prayer of the 'Christian madman' cited above. To explore this idea further let us turn now to the idea of collective responsibility.

5.2.2.3 Collective responsibility

A key idea regarding the use of myth and ritual in primitive society is that these are manifestations of *collective* desire.[293] The requirement of keeping promises was not considered to be up to the individual but a collective responsibility. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche observes that individuals, those who take their own path, do so 'under the highest disapprobation of all advocates of morality of custom.'[294] Furthermore, when custom is breached by an individual it is believed that the expected supernatural punishment for this transgression befalls not only those that violate the law but *all* of society. Collective desire does not imply an egalitarian society; totalitarian regimes are typically headed by absolute dictators held to be the personification of collective desire.[295] Nietzsche's account of ritual and society bears a very close resemblance to Baruch Spinoza's, found in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), a philosopher whom Nietzsche considered a 'precursor' to himself.[296] Here the Dutch philosopher expresses the idea that myth

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[289] *GM* II: 3.
[290] Bottici, (2009). 173.
[291] Bottici, (2009) 129.
[292] Not all myths have corresponding rituals. See: Tudor. *Political Myth* (1972). 29. Additionally, despite Nietzsche's references to child sacrifice and castration, not all rituals have to be spectacles of horrific sacrifices and mutilation.
[293] Cassirer (1973). 280.
[294] *D* 1: 9.
[295] See: Cassirer (1973).
[296] In a letter to Franz Overbeck dated July 30, 1881 he writes of Spinoza: 'I am really amazed, really delighted! I have a *precursor* and what a precursor! "Nietzsche's Letters 1881" *The Nietzsche Channel* (accessed April 26 2023) http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/correspondence/eng/nlett-1881.htm

and ritual both serve to reinforce the idea that the authority of the ruler (or rulers) of a particular society comes from a higher supernatural authority whose commandments are expressed in myth and impressed on the memory via ritual and ceremony.

Spinoza begins by comparing a theoretical society, in which all members are equal with no one person having authority over the others, with societies ruled by just a few people or one person alone. In the latter case, the leader requires more than brute power forcing people to obey but rather to be seen as having authority whereby the people give their obedience because it is considered the right thing to do. If all the leader has is brute force, Spinoza reasons, the regimes will not last long due to the inevitable animosity of the people.[297] He says that for the leader to be seen to have the authority to command, the people will have to be 'educated from the beginning to hang on the words of the ruler.'[298] As a case study Spinoza offers the story of Moses. Here, he says, a fully egalitarian society with no one person having authority over another was not possible due to the unsophisticated nature of the Hebrews at the time and the psychological privations they had suffered in Egypt whilst living in bondage. Instead, Moses set himself up as absolute ruler and drew his authority from God.[299] In order to keep power for himself and to successfully manage his society, Moses 'by divine power and command introduced religion into the Republic, so that the people would do their duty not so much from fear as from devotion.'[300] From this point, every permissible aspect of life was justified by reference to the authority of God, whose wishes were communicated to the people via his messenger Moses. Now, with Nietzsche's account of the role played by myth and ritual formation and maintenance of political associations in mind, consider the following from Spinoza:

> Finally, in order that the people, who were not capable of being their own masters, should hang on the words of the ruler, he did not permit these men, accustomed as they were to bondage, to act just as they pleased. For the people could do nothing without being bound at the same time to remember the law, and to carry out commands which depended on the will of the ruler. For it was not at their own pleasure but according to a fixed and determined command of the law, that they were permitted to plow [sic], to sow, to reap. Likewise they were not permitted to eat anything, to dress, to shave their head or beard, to rejoice, or to do absolutely anything, except according to the orders and

[297] Curley (2016). 144.
[298] Ibid 146.
[299] The parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:29) and God answering Moses in front of the people at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:19) would most certainly have helped in this respect.
[300] Ibid 145, 146.

> commandments prescribed in the laws [...] This, then, was the object of the ceremonies: that men should do nothing by their own decision, but everything according to the command of someone else, and that they should confess, both by constantly repeated action and by meditations, that they were not their own master in anything, but were completely subjected to someone else's control.[301]

With all this in mind we can now return to the second of the three ways of understanding Nietzsche's choice of 'madman' for the central character of *GS* 125. As a reminder, this was madness as a precursor to a new way of thinking. I introduced the idea with a quotation from *Daybreak*, an imagined Christian prayer:

> 'I am consumed by doubt, I have killed the law, the law anguishes me as a corpse does a living man: if I am not more than the law I am the vilest of all men. The new spirit which is in me, whence is it if it is not from you? Prove to me that I am yours; madness alone can prove it.'[302]

Let us break this down into bite-sized ideas and compare them to ideas we have already seen expressed in *GS* 125, 341, the *Genealogy* and *Daybreak*.

I am consumed by doubt. The voice behind the prayer is unsure of themselves, they have lost the certainty provided by the old morality of custom.[303] They are also afraid. Respect for the previous authority was won out of awe-inspired fear of authority and reinforced via horrific spectacles of cruelty.[304] Turning our attention to the madman, we can see that he is also consumed by doubts and uncertainty about the future:

> But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?[305] What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder?

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[301] Ibid. 146.
[302] *D* 1: 14.
[303] Ibid; *GM* II: 2.
[304] *GM* II: 3.
[305] See: 'But without myth every culture forfeits its healthy, natural creative force: only a horizon defined by myths completes the unity of a whole cultural movement.' (*BT* 23).

> Isn't night and more night coming again and again? Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning?

I have killed the law, the law anguishes me as a corpse does a living man. The madman also acknowledges his anguish at the killing of the law (the law of Christ) and over the corpse itself.[306]

> Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition?—Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!

If I am not more than the law I am the vilest of all men. We saw earlier that Nietzsche says that those individuals that break with the law (the morality of custom) do so 'under the highest disapprobation of all advocates of morality of custom.'[307] We remember, the prayer begins with doubt; if the individual praying discovers that they are, in fact, in error it is not just others in society that will pass judgement on them but they will judge *themselves* to be vile.

The new spirit which is in me, whence is it if it is not from you? The new law, revealed to the individual at prayer, is attributed to God: a new feared supernatural authority whose wisdom supersedes the old authority behind the morality of custom. Consider here one of the possible responses to the demon in *GS* 341: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.'

Prove to me that I am yours; madness alone can prove it. We saw previously that in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche says: 'it was madness that prepared the way for a new idea, which broke the spell of a venerated usage and superstition.'[308] Madness, according to Nietzsche, serves as a convincer for those who are proclaiming the new ideas and heralding the new law, as well as for their audiences. For the individual concerned, madness 'awoke in the bearer of a new idea himself reverence for and dread of himself and no longer pangs of conscience and drove him to become the prophet and martyr of his idea.' For the people, the visible signs of madness 'seemed to mark the madman as the mask and speaking-trumpet of a divinity'.[309] In the prayer, we see the Christian ask for madness as proof of something. Consider what they are asking for proof of: *that I am yours*. It is interesting to compare this with the idea of the thought of eternal recurrence gaining power over us, expressed in *GS* 341. In the next chapter in this thesis we will see that this, and the reference to an 'ultimate eternal confirmation and seal', refers to the seal of the Holy Spirit, mentioned in *Ephesians*, understood as marking Christians out as God's possessions.

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[306] See: Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21.
[307] *D* 1: 9.
[308] *D* 1: 14. See also: *GM* II: 2.
[309] *D* 1: 14.

For Nietzsche it is not madness alone that serves as a convincer. For the madman and his audience there must also be pain and suffering to be endured and *to be seen* to be endured.[310] Consider the plea that precedes the lines of the individual's prayer we have been looking at from *Daybreak*:

> 'Ah, give me madness, you heavenly powers! Madness, that I may at last believe in myself! Give deliriums and convulsions, sudden lights and darkness, terrify me with frost and fire such as no mortal has ever felt with deafening din and prowling figures, make me howl and whine and crawl like a beast: so that I may only come to believe in myself!'

And compare this with the following, also from *Daybreak*:

> All those spiritual leaders of the peoples who were able to stir something into motion within the inert but fertile mud of their customs have, in addition to madness, also had need of voluntary torture if they were to inspire belief—and first and foremost, as always, their own belief in themselves![311]

The new ideas—the new law—introduced by the suffering madman must, like all the previous ideas, be impressed on the memory. We saw above that commandments are expressed in myth and made memorable via ritual and ceremony. These rituals are spectacles of suffering. To repeat a quote from earlier, Nietzsche says: 'when man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices'[312] 'Pain,' he says, '[is] the most powerful aid to mnemonics.'[313] With a new law, there will be new memories that must be made and accordingly a need for new rituals and ceremonies to aid mnemonics. The madman acknowledges this; he asks: 'what festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves?' With God dead and, as we shall see, more importantly *remaining dead* there is no atonement for our sins.[314] Atonement is, of course, a key part of the Christian *kerygma*. If God does not exist, there is no need for atonement. This being so, our current festivals of atonement, for example Processions of the Cross (including, in some parts of the world, self-flagellation and voluntary

[310] It could equally be a mad woman and her audience.
[311] *D* 1: 18.
[312] *GM* II: 3.
[313] Ibid.
[314] See: Romans 3:25.

crucifixion)[315] will need to be replaced. Replaced with *exactly what*, the madman does not know and cannot yet know.

5.2.2.4 Killing God, becoming gods…

The individual, whose prayer Nietzsche imagines in *Daybreak*, will have been born into a pre-Christian society subject to the morality of custom. The traditional myths, rituals and ceremonies will now be replaced with new ones as Christianity takes over as the new law and authority. This is achieved, in part, by Christian mythopoesis. For the madman, who lives in a society already subject to Christianity, he anticipates a new society subject to a new and currently unknown law. Future generations will be born *into* this new society under the new law. The magnitude and importance of this is not lost on him. Referring to the 'killing' of God, he says: 'There was never a greater deed—and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now!' He wonders: 'Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it?'

In section 19 of the *Genealogy of Morals Second Essay*, Nietzsche offers an account of how the founders of a tribe or society are transformed, in the imaginations of their descendants, from revered ancestors into feared gods. He says: 'There is a prevailing conviction that the tribe exists only because of the sacrifices and deeds of the forefathers,—and that these have to be paid back with sacrifices and deeds'. One such great deed could be the 'killing of God' referenced in *GS* 125. The new generations born after the death of God would not exist without the killing of God carried out by the madman's contemporaries who are the ancestors of future generations. To pay back those who kill God (the revered ancestors) future generations will have to make 'Sacrifices (originally as food in the crudest sense), feasts, chapels, tributes, above all, obedience—for all traditions are, as works of the ancestors, also their rules and orders.' However, there will always be, Nietzsche says, the gnawing suspicion that they are not paying enough. And so the rituals and ceremonies, as has already been mentioned, must ever increase in pain and suffering, shedding 'blood, human blood.' The more successful and powerful a society becomes, the more power and influence the ancestors appear to wield. Nietzsche says: 'the ancestors of the most powerful tribes must have grown to an immense stature and must have been pushed into the obscurity of divine mystery and transcendence:—inevitably the ancestor himself is finally transfigured into a god.'

[315] Gomez, Jim. "Nailed to a cross, Filipino prays for Ukraine war to end." ABCNews.go.com (accessed April 27, 2023) https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/filipinos-nailed-crosses-despite-church-objection-98423240

The madman refers to the future to come and the next generations to be born after the death of God as 'a higher history'. We have seen that, according to him, never before has there been a great deed as great as 'killing' God. Both the future generations and the madman's generation will be *transformed*. We can expect there to be a marked change in the people to come, born into a world post death of God; and the madman's generation will be transformed, in the minds of their descendants, into gods. That is, of course, if they are not destroyed by their deed. Consider here Nietzsche's prediction in *GS* 341 of those taken hold of by the idea of eternal recurrence and the impossibility of God: 'it would transform and possibly crush you.'

5.2.3 Madness as a loss of contact with reality

There is a third sense in which we can understand the 'madness' of the madman in *GS* 125. We have already noted the total disorientation of the madman after the realisation that God is 'dead'. To the atheists in the marketplace he says: 'are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing?' For the madman, without God the Christian mythopoesis that previously made the world clear and revealed that which is valuable and important now seems worthless. His lament can be understood as: without the 'truth' revealed by God and now 'the way' is no longer marked out, we can not have a meaningful and significant 'life'.[316] In this, the madman is in total agreement with the most basic tenet of Christianity.

From the vivid description of life in the aftermath of the death of God, it would seem that Nietzsche is suggesting, via his madman character, that life becomes not just less meaningful but *without* meaning. That is, *incomprehensible*. If this reading is correct, we should read the madman's lament in *GS* 125 as suggesting that without Christianity to light the way, the universe is in a sense unreadable and that we are left stumbling around in the dark. Consider, in this context, Galileo's remarks on mathematics as the language by which we can 'read' and understand the universe; without mathematics, he says, 'one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.'[317] We can understand the madman's predicament in a similar way: without God as the guarantor of a reality, revealed via Christian mythopoesis, he is lost in the dark: backwards may as well be forwards, up might be down, and so on. On this reading, in the absence of God the madman's grasp on reality is lost. This condition is the definition of *psychosis*: to be so affected by an idea that one loses contact with reality.

[316] John 14:6.
[317] Drake (1957). 238.

But are things really as bad as the madman makes out? Even if the death of God means that we can no longer consider the myths of Christianity as literally true, we do not need to do so in order to benefit from Christian mythopoesis. *Mythopoesis*, we remember from the introduction to this thesis, refers to the *creation* or *retelling* of myths for the benefit of a society that no longer accepts myths literally. We saw in chapter one that two of the main purposes of myth are: (1) to make clear things that are otherwise mysterious and ineffable; and (2) to make clear things that are important or valuable. Even if 'God is dead' in the sense of people not taking Christian myths literally, these myths can still be used for the purposes just expressed in (1) and (2). That is, even if God is dead, Christian mythopoesis can still make clear what is mysterious and ineffable and can also make clear what is important and valuable. This being the case, even if we have 'killed God', it is not immediately clear why anyone would end up as disorientated as the madman. A possible problem for Nietzsche, I am suggesting here, is that his madman's total disorientation seems unwarranted because we can still use ideas found in Christianity in order to make the mysterious and ineffable clear (including questions of value) without having to believe Christian ideas as literally true. Nietzsche knows that the content of myths do not have to be believed as literally true. And so, a second part of this problem that Nietzsche must provide an answer for, is why Christian myths cannot still be used in order to prevent the kind of total disorientation suffered by the madman. I will address the first and second parts of the problem separately.

There are a number of possible responses Nietzsche might make to address the first part of the problem. For clarity: *why can we not use Christian mythopoesis (that we do not believe is literally true) simply as a tool to make things clear?* There are two possible responses Nietzsche might offer, both of which I believe provide an answer to the problem and shed some light on what he is trying to achieve with his mythopoesis. However, I do not think they are totally satisfying in that the problem is more side-stepped than resolved. These responses are: (a) the madman's lament does not have to be consistent with Nietzsche's wider mythopoesis; and (b) myths are not required to have the same levels of consistency as other kinds of narratives. After a brief discussion of (a) and (b), I will then suggest a reading of the madman's lament in *GS* 125 that does not suffer from the problem of being unwarranted. This is, that the disorientation the madman refers to does not apply simply and only to the absence of God but to the lack of *any* kind of myths. In other words, the madman is referring to a state of affairs in which God has been killed but without any new myths to replace those of Christianity. As we shall see, the absence of all myths is the condition Camus refers to in *The Myth of Sisyphus* as the absurd. Like the madman, Camus wonders how (and if) it is possible for human beings to live without myths. Let us look now at the response that the madman's lament does not have to be consistent with Nietzsche's wider mythopoesis.

By responding with (a), Nietzsche could simply dismiss the issue by saying that the madman has been driven out of his mind and is not thinking clearly (if he were, he could see that Christian mythopoesis is still viable even after the death of God). He might argue that emphasis should be not on the extremity of the madman's reaction but *the lack of reaction* from the marketplace atheists who fail to see a problem with God's death. By responding with (b), Nietzsche could point out that myths do not need to make sense or require the same level of consistency as other kinds of narratives. Consider Cain's punishment for killing his brother in *Genesis*.[318] After killing Abel, Cain is one of only three people on Earth, yet when banished by God and cursed to wander the land without rest he laments that the people he meets will kill him. God gives him the 'mark of Cain' to protect him from any potential retribution sought by other people. What people could he possibly be talking about since the only other people on Earth are his parents, Adam and Eve? Cain's punishment for murder is not that he will have to face the retribution of the mob, or anything like that, but rather he must restlessly wander the Earth. However, as well as avoiding punishment by his fellow humans he also appears to avoid God's punishment. Despite his being cursed to wander endlessly, we are told that he finds a wife, settles down and establishes a city. The point here is that in order to make certain things clear—in this case about murder, punishment and so on—myths do not require strict logical consistency.[319] Nietzsche could reply that a profitable reading of *GS* 125 can simply ignore the fact that the madman's 'madness' is unwarranted (because Christian mythopoesis can still be used even after the death God) and instead understand his disorientation as a dramatic way of highlighting the enormity of God's death and the complacency of the marketplace atheists. Here, the response is similar to Clark's idea of 'playing the game' with regards to *GS* 341 mentioned above.

Both these responses, to (a) and (b), side-step the apparent problem that the madman's disorientation is inconsistent with Nietzsche's wider mythopoesis but I think there is a stronger response. And this is that the madman is not referring solely to the death of God but to the absence of myth—*all myths*. To understand this we need to take another look at Nietzsche's fascination with anthropology and in particular his concern with the idea of the horizon.

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[318] Genesis 4: 12-16.

[319] Which is why the myths from unfamiliar cultures can be so difficult to remember and understand; they lack logical consistency. The most well-known example of this is Bartlett's 'War of the Ghosts experiment' in which Western audiences exposed to a native American folk tale altered the story on retelling to fit their own world-view which was markedly different to that of the story-tellers. See: Bartlett (1932).

5.3 The part played by the horizon in the creation of myths

During his interaction with the marketplace atheists, the madman refers to the wiping away of the horizon. In a philosophical sense, 'a person who has a horizon knows the significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near, far, great or small.'[320] Without a horizon, then, nothing has significance. In the discussion that follows, my focus will be on the part played by the horizon in the creation of myths and how without these myths the world and life itself are incomprehensible. Here I am concerned with the purpose of myth in the first sense (1) to make clear things that are otherwise mysterious and ineffable. Afterwards, when the discussion turns from myths in general to Christian myths specifically, my focus will be on the second purpose of myth: (2) to make clear things that are important or valuable.

5.4 Anthropological influences

At some point in our prehistory, our distant relatives attempting to survive (in what John Bowlby terms the *Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness*)[321] availed themselves of the sensory advantage of raising upwards to a bipedal posture. However, the advantages of life on two legs came at the price of losing the protection of a hidden life amongst the rocks and plants. Our ancestors had to adapt to 'the situational leap, which made the unoccupied distant horizon into the ongoing expectation of hitherto unknown things.'[322] It is at this point that Hans Blumenberg introduces the key idea of what he calls 'the absolutism of reality'. This is his name for the paralysing anxiety brought about in human beings confronted with the unknown from all directions. In order to survive, early humans needed to anticipate and prepare for, in Blumenberg's words, that which was 'absent, beyond the horizon.'[323] Constant awareness of the horizon and the danger of the unknown was formative, producing 'a readiness for an attitude of expectation, of feeling one's way forward, that refers to the entire horizon.'[324] However, the anxiety created by this constant awareness can not be maintained indefinitely and, according to Blumenberg, 'must be rationalised into fear.'[325] This is done by naming things and the creation of myths. Through myths humans create *their world*. The idea here is that a familiar world is a 'friendlier' world.[326] The purpose of myths for Blumenberg is to 'kill fear':

[320] Gadamer (2013). 313.
[321] Bowlby (1969).
[322] Blumenberg (2010). 4.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid. 5.
[325] Ibid.
[326] Ibid, 113.

> [Fear] contains both ignorance and, more fundamentally, unfamiliarity. In connection with ignorance what is important is not that supposedly better knowledge—such as later generations in retrospect, have considered themselves to possess—was not yet available. Even very good knowledge about what is invisible—like radiation or atoms or viruses or genes—does not put an end to fear. What is archaic in the fear not so much of what one does not yet know as merely of what one is not acquainted with, it is nameless; as something nameless it cannot be conjured up or appealed to or magically attacked. Terror, for which there are few equivalents in other languages, becomes "nameless" as the highest level of fright. So the earliest and not the least reliable form of familiarity with the world is to find names for what is undefined. Only then and on the strength of that can a story be told about it.[327]

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus expresses almost the same idea in reverse. Rather than looking at a world without myth, *pre-myth*, he considers a world viewed suddenly without myth. He says:

> At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose their *illusionary meaning with which we had clothed them*, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia. For a second we cease to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the *images and designs that we had attributed to it* beforehand, because henceforth we lack the power to make use of that *artifice*. The world evades us because it becomes itself again.[328]

Blumenberg, in his work on the horizon, was strongly influenced by the philosopher and anthropologist Arnold Gehlen. In *Work on Myth*, he finds particularly useful Gehlen's theory of *institutions*. In brief, institutions can be thought of in the following way: unlike non-human animals, human beings are born and released into a world in which their instincts and drives are not matched by a species-specific environment. Therefore, in order to make sense of their surroundings and survive, the burden is upon human beings to create their own stability through the creation of their own 'worlds'. These worlds can never be as firm and stable as those of the

[327] Blumenberg (2010). 34-35.
[328] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2010). 12,13. My emphasis.

animal world and so they 'must be continually produced and reproduced in human activity. As a result, they are inherently precarious and destined to change.'[329]

In the *Second Essay* of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche is concerned with the very same idea. Beginning very early in human development, indeed life has not yet left the oceans, he talks of the difficult transition from 'water animals' to 'land animals'.[330] The latter had to adapt to their lives on dry land or perish. Nietzsche turns next to the new challenges of walking upright:

> Now they had to walk on their feet and 'carry themselves', whereas they had been carried by the water up till then: a terrible heaviness bore down on them. They felt they were clumsy at performing the simplest task, they did not have their familiar guide any more for this new, unknown world, those regulating impulses that unconsciously led them to safety—the poor things were reduced to relying on thinking, inference, calculation, and the connecting of cause with effect, that is, to relying on their 'consciousness', that most impoverished and error-prone organ![331]

Although he does not mention the horizon explicitly here, the problems and challenges Nietzsche mentions regarding the 'new unknown world' and the new reliance on 'on thinking, inference, calculation,' are the same ones Blumenberg discusses with explicit reference to the horizon. Anticipating Blumenberg's mentor, Gehlen, Nietzsche refers to early humans as 'semi-animals' that, due to their new extraordinary circumstances, find themselves 'at one go,' with all instincts 'devalued and "suspended"'[332] Humans' earliest ancestors for both Nietzsche and Gehlen, are not fully like other animals (hence: semi-animals, *Halbtieren*), because their instincts and drives are not matched by a species-specific environment. Both Nietzsche and Blumenberg speak of the wretched conditions of the earliest humans. We have seen that Blumenberg talks of the continual anxiety that had first to be 'rationalised into fear' in order to be lived with. And Nietzsche says of this time in our prehistory: 'I do not think there has ever been such a feeling of misery on earth, such a leaden discomfort.'[333] Both see this as the precondition of the creation of myths. In *GM* II, 16, Nietzsche begins his account of the evolution of human beings with the move from the sea to the land and ends with the creation of myths in order to adapt to an environment that, unlike animals, we are not naturally matched. Standing erect, facing for the first time the horizon:

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[329] Berger and Hansfried (1965). 110-115.. 111, 112.
[330] *GM* II, 16.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Ibid.

> was something so new, profound, unheard-of, puzzling, contradictory and momentous on earth that the whole character of the world changed in an essential way. Indeed, a divine audience was needed to appreciate the spectacle that began then, but the end of which is not yet in sight,—a spectacle too subtle, too wonderful, too paradoxical to be allowed to be played senselessly unobserved on some ridiculous planet![334]

5.5 Wiping away the horizon

In a fascinating line, the madman asks: 'Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?' Consider Hans-Georg Gadamer's remarks on the use of the idea of the 'horizon' in Nietzsche's works:

> The horizon is the range of vision that everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we can speak of narrowness of vision, of the possible expansion of the horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth. Since Nietzsche and Husserl, the word has been used in philosophy to characterise the way thought is tied to its finite determinacy and the way one's vision is gradually expanded [...] A person who has a horizon knows the significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near, far, great or small.[335]

Nietzsche frequently refers to the horizon in his other writings.[336] In his *Untimely Meditations* he tells us: 'And this is a universal law: a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon.'[337] For animals that, of course, have a vastly reduced understanding of the world and their place within it, they dwell 'within a horizon reduced almost to a point.'[338] Compare the brute in the field to Goethe in his study; the horizons of the German writer, Nietzsche tells us in *Twilight of the Idols*, are enormously broad.[339] The *Sorrows of Young Werther* author, according to Nietzsche, stands in the middle of life, saying yes to all. In terms of how broad Goethe's horizons were, he stands second only to Napoleon Bonaparte in Nietzsche's

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[334] Ibid.
[335] Gadamer (2013). 313.
[336] See: *BT* 23, 25; *UM* 'History' 1, 9, 10; *Untimely Meditations* 'Schopenhauer' 5. 8; *UM* 'Wagner' 4, 10; *D* 117, 130, 318; *GS* III: 120, 124, 125; 143; *GS* IV: 337; *GS* V: 343, 370, 373; *TI* 'Skirmishes' 49; *TI* 'Wagner' 3'; *Contra Wagner* 'Antipodes'; *BGE* 188, 230.
[337] *UM* 'History' 1.
[338] Ibid.
[339] *TI* 'Skirmishes' 49.

estimation.[340] Such a position is only possible, according to Nietzsche, for those with the faith (Glaube) that 'everything redeems and affirms itself'. This kind of faith he baptises (getauft) in the name of *Dionysus*. Knowing the history of Nietzsche's use of horizon metaphors helps us then to better understand what he intends by having the madman talk of wiping away the horizon with a sponge.

Without myths to make clear and mark out that which is meaningful and significant we cannot do something that is arguably one of the defining characteristics of what it is that sets apart human beings from other animals. That is, form political associations. We remember that Nietzsche is drawing on the political anthropology of the day; a discipline investigating, in a non-theological sense, what the human animal *is* and which is concerned with the *moral and cultural improvement* of the human species. We have seen that 'making promises' and 'creating memories' are essential to the formation and maintenance of cultures and societies and that myth-making is indispensable in these endeavours. Consider again the following remarks from *Birth of Tragedy* on the importance of myth for a healthy culture and notice in particular the 'unnoticed daemonic guardians':

> But without myth every culture forfeits its healthy, natural creative force: only a horizon defined by myths completes the unity of a whole cultural movement [...] The images of myth must be the omnipresent but unnoticed daemonic guardians, under whose protection the young soul grows to maturity and whose signs enable the grown man to interpret his life and his struggles: and even the state knows no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation.[341]

In a Christian society, even one for whom 'God is dead', the 'daemonic guardians' refer, I take it, to the guiding 'voices' similar to Socrates' *daimon* and the demon of *GS* 341. That played, in some mysterious way, a part in the formation and maintenance of the fundamental myths that hold societies together. As discussed in the 'Call to action' section of this thesis in chapter one, these usually go unnoticed by individuals who, like the marketplace atheists depicted in *GS* 125, fail to address the genealogy of their cultural beliefs, but the 'unseen presence' of these myths still allow people to interpret their lives and struggles. It is the *raison d'être* of mythopoesis to bring these

[340] In his works Nietzsche refers to Napoleon more than any other political figure, approximately 150 times and almost always favourably. See; Dombowsky's *Nietzsche and Napoleon: The Dionysian Conspiracy*. University of Wales Press (2014) for an authoritative study. Napoleon, for his part, held Goethe in high regard. On their first meeting he stood to his feet to greet the writer proclaiming 'Here's a man!'. He also reread *Sorrows of Young Werther* so frequently that the pages of his copy, which now resides at the Pierpont Library in New York, are barely attached to the binding. See: Roberts (2014). 291.
[341] *BT* 23.

unseen and unnoticed myths into the light and to undermine them with countermyths. Were the 'demonic guardians' to fall without countermyths to replace them, the results would be disastrous for a society. In this light, consider the following from *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> [T]he abstract man bereft of guiding myths, with his abstract education, abstract morals, abstract law, abstract state; let us imagine the roaming of artistic imagination, bereft of rules and no longer held in check by an indigenous myth; let us imagine a culture, which has no fixed and sacred original seat, but is condemned to exhaust all possibilities and feed wretchedly on all other cultures—that is our present age, the result of that Socratism directed towards the annihilation of myth. And now man bereft of myth stands eternally starving among all the past ages and digs and rummages in search of roots, even in the most remote of the ancient worlds. What does the tremendous historical need of this dissatisfied modern culture, the collection of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge point to, if not to the loss of myth, to the loss of the mythic home, of the mythic maternal womb?[342]

Unlike the madman, those in the marketplace professing not to believe in God are entirely unaware of the consequences of their loss of belief. 'This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars—and yet they have done it themselves!' This is why their first reaction to the madman was one of amusement and mockery. The idea that God is dead (or does not exist) is for them neither shocking nor worrying. As far as those who do not believe in God are concerned, the madman's claim is literally banal: among them, it is common knowledge that God is, metaphorically, dead. Accordingly, the madman's claim that 'we have killed Him!' is trivial, of no consequence.

At the end of *GS* 125 we find out that the madman left the marketplace and forced his way into several churches and started singing 'his *requiem aeternam deo*' (Grant God eternal rest). This is a play on the funeral prayer 'Lord, grant them rest'. He is ejected from the churches.

5.6 Death of God in Christian theology

Imagining the world without God, in particular how life might be different for societies currently imbued with Christianity, is not an idea unique to Nietzsche. It is, of course, found at the heart of Christianity. An indispensable notion in the Christian dogma is that Jesus Christ, 'true God from

[342] *BT* 23.

true God [...] suffered, died and was buried.'[343] Equally as indispensable, of course, is the idea that after death, 'he rose again in fulfilment of the scriptures.'[344]

It is also useful to compare Nietzsche's account of the death of God with the first known literary expression of the idea: Jean Paul Richter's *Siebenkäs*.[345] Here John Paul's character falls asleep and dreams about a world in which God is dead. In his dream he has a similar experience to Nietzsche's madman but he is dreaming and on waking up discovers, much to his relief, that God is not dead. The purpose of *death of God theology* is to explore the relationship between God and our human worldly values, as well as our understanding of the universe and our place within it. Nietzsche uses death of God theology in order to ask the same questions although his aim is to counter Christian ideas. Note that for both Richter and Nietzsche they are focused on the relationship between the death of God and the comprehensibility of the world and our place within it. Both suggest that without God life is incomprehensible, practically unimaginable. For Richter, this is the power of the myth: to those receptive to it, the idea of the death of God shows that human life is unimaginable without God. However, for Nietzsche the idea of the death of God presents a fascinating opportunity to begin imagining the world *anew*. That is, to those receptive to Nietzsche's myth, it is impossible to imagine a life without God. Consider here Camus' comments in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, mentioned above, about the world losing the imaginary meaning with which we previously clothed it. He says, we remember, of the world after the death of God: 'we cease to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the images and designs that we had attributed to it beforehand, because henceforth we lack the power to make use of that artifice.' But for Camus, someone who is receptive to Nietzsche's myth, the loss of the meaning—those images and designs we previously relied upon in order to make sense of the world and the significance of our place within it—presents us with an opportunity to create new ones.

We have seen two ways in which the idea of the death of God can be used: (1) theologically, in order to better understand the nature of God and religious belief, (2) mythopoeically, in order to draw attention to something occurring in the present day that the myth-maker thinks ought to be acted upon (either to change or to maintain the way things are). It does not matter whether the person using this idea is a Christian or not. Or if they are using it to say that there is 'something rotten' in the state or something pure. I said in the introduction to this thesis that mythopoesis

[343] Appleby, R. Scott. "THE CREED." U.S. Catholic, December 1998, 10. Gale Academic OneFile (accessed April 26, 2023). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A53390210/AONE?u=unisoton&sid=oclc&xid=729e8fca.
[344] Ibid. See also: 1 Corinthians 15.
[345] George Steiner has suggested that Nietzsche took the idea of the death of God from *Siebenkäs*. As far as I know there is no evidence that Nietzsche read Richter. See: Steiner (1987): 12–28. 17.

does not necessarily have to point to a different path to a preferable alternative future. It is possible for a mythopoeic text to confirm the values already held by a society and approve of the direction in which they are heading. Here we can expect to see myths repackaged or new myths created in order to test existing myths with a positive response.[346] In this case we have a *re-*evaluation of values that finds in favour of existing values.

The German philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich was profoundly influenced by his reading of Nietzsche. As Richard Schacht observes, Tillich was able to 'endorse' Nietzsche's death of God 'as a prelude to a religiousness that does not involve and revolve around belief in the existence of God as any sort of being at all.'[347] Tillich not only finds in Nietzsche's work on the death of God a confirmation of his faith in God but, as we shall see in the next chapter, he finds in *Zarathustra* the courage to maintain his faith in God. Here we see a feature of mythopoesis not previously mentioned in this thesis. Previously, we have seen the idea of readers being *en rapport* or failing to establish such a connection. In the latter case, the result may not necessarily be one of reader indifference or bemusement but rather a powerful sense that something (other than what was intended by the author) has been revealed with the strongly felt need to act upon this revelation. This is one of the inherent dangers of mythopoesis. For Nietzsche, what would be more disturbing for him, were he to discover what Tillich took from his mythopoeic works, would not be the confirmation and bolstering of his Christian faith but rather his application of Nietzsche's ideas in the service of Socialism.[348]

5.7 In the next chapter

In the next chapter I turn my attention to *GS* 341 'The heaviest weight' and Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return. I look at how this idea is used mythopoeically by Nietzsche in order to offer a counter myth to St. Paul. In particular, I look at how Nietzsche opposes Paul's idea that the mysterious is best communicated in straightforward language., I explore the consequences of a phrase that appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that greatly inspired Tillich but has been largely ignored in the secondary literature: 'mit klingendem Spiel'. I will argue that the correct understanding of what Nietzsche means by the idea provides a key to receiving his mythopoesis.

[346] Even with positive outcomes, testing or challenging is viewed negatively. Consider Deuteronomy 6:16 and Matthew 5:7.
[347] Schacht (2014). 62-79. 66. Interestingly, in this article Schacht reveals that it was Tillich who introduced him to Nietzsche while he was a student at Harvard.
[348] Tillich (1977). 38, 39.

Chapter 6 The Eternal Return

In this chapter I focus on Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return. In particular, I concentrate my attention on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 'On the Vision and the Riddle' and *GS* 341 'The Heaviest Weight'. The aim of this chapter is to draw out what Nietzsche believes to be a fundamental concept in his philosophy. I will argue that the eternal return is used by Nietzsche as a counter myth to Christian mythopoesis. In particular, Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians.* The goal of this chapter is not only to show how Nietzsche uses the idea of eternal recurrence to undermine Christianity but also as a way to make clear how mythopoeic works should be received.[349] To draw out the latter, I examine an underexplored idea found in *Zarathustra*: the idea of approaching life 'mit klingendem Spiel.' I end the chapter by offering my own reading of *GS* 341 as mythopoesis.

6.1 *Gay Science* 341 'The Heaviest Weight'

For the purposes of explication it will be helpful to reproduce *GS* 341 in full:

> *The heaviest weight*.—What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again?' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?[350]

[349] In this thesis I use 'eternal return' and 'eternal recurrence' interchangeably.
[350] *GS* 341.

In order to get a better understanding of what is going on here it will be useful to compare the above with a later work: 'On the Vision and the Riddle' in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. We begin with Zarathustra onboard a ship travelling home and talking to the sailors who are discussing their adventures.[351] His story starts with his struggle to climb a mountain with a weird half-mole, half-dwarf creature perched on his shoulders. Zarathustra calls the Dwarf 'the spirit of heaviness' ('Du Geist der Schwere!'). We can note here that *GS* 341 is titled '*The heaviest weight*' (*Das größte Schwergewicht*). As he attempts to reach the summit, the Dwarf whispers demoralising thoughts into Zarathrustra's ears.[352]

As seen above, in *GS* 341 the demon shares news that is either devastating or joyous depending on how well or badly it is received. The 'demon' (ein Dämon) possibly refers to the Greek daimons (δαιμόνιον), intermediaries between human beings and the gods, interpreting and transporting information.[353] Viewed this way, the 'demon' has a supernatural authority.[354] The 'loneliest loneliness' (in deine einsamste Einsamkeit) into which the demon creeps also describes Zarathustra's state of mind as he struggles up the mountain under the heaviest weight: 'to you alone I tell the riddle that I saw—the vision of the loneliest one (des Einsamsten).'[355] As we picture Zarathustra climbing up the lonely mountain, heading towards the summit struggling under a heavy weight, we can clearly see the similarities between this narrative and the Sisyphus myth. In addition, in Camus' version of the myth, once freed of his burden, his rock, Sisyphus experiences a reversal in attitude from despair to happiness; similarly once freed of the Dwarf, Zarathustra also experiences a change from negative to positive.[356] After throwing off the Dwarf, Zarathustra sees a mysterious gateway. It is described as follows:

> "It has two faces. Two paths come together here; no one has yet walked them to the end. This long lane back: it lasts an eternity. And that long lane outward—that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths; they blatantly offend

[351] *Z* 'On the Vision and the Riddle' 1.
[352] These are referred to as 'lead-shot thoughts' (Bleitropfen-Gedanken), Nietzsche possibly has lead-drop towers in mind, in which molten lead is passed through a sieve into cold water in order to make musket balls. Effectively, the Dwarf's words end up like musket balls in Zarathustra's head but rather than fired from a gun they slowly drip, drip, into his brain.
[353] Plat. Sym. 202e. Paul Loeb has made the case for Nietzsche intending his 'demon' to refer to Socrates' *daimon*. See: Loeb (2013). 649.
[354] Compare this 'supernatural authority' with that which legitimises the morality of custom discussed later when we come to *GS* 125 *The Madman*.
[355] *Z* 'On the Vision and the Riddle' 1.
[356] Interestingly, the dwarf jumps off Zarathustra and settles on a rock in front of him.

> each other—and here at this gateway is where they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed at the top: 'Moment.'"[357]

Zarathustra asks the Dwarf if he believes that the two paths go off in opposite directions infinitely; the reply comes back that 'time itself is a circle.'[358] The gateway, marked 'moment', represents *now*, the present moment in time, and walking one way through the gate leads back into the past and walking in the opposite direction follows the path into the future. If time is circular then, eventually, whichever way one walks through the gateway one will end up back at this moment in time. Zarathustra exclaims:

> And are not all things firmly knotted together in such a way that this moment draws after it all things to come? Therefore—itself as well? For, whatever can run, even in this long lane outward—must run it once more!—And this slow spider that creeps in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all of us have been here before?—And return and run in that other lane, outward, before us, in this long, eerie lane—must we not return eternally?

The spider and the moonlight are familiar to us, they are also mentioned by the demon in *GS* 341.[359] The idea expressed by Zarathustra is the same as that revealed by the demon: the life we now live and have lived will have to be lived over and over innumerable times again with nothing new in it and all in the same succession and sequence. Here we can observe that Sisyphus suffers a very similar fate (with the difference that while each day consists of the same activity and for eternity, he is free to think his own, presumably different, thoughts each day).

GS 341 contains more than a demon simply informing us of the eternal return, Nietzsche is concerned with our possible reactions to the news. This is what I want to turn to next. But before

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[357] *Z* 'On the Vision and the Riddle' 2.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Spiders are a recurring symbol in Nietzsche's work. Almost always, spiders (or their webs) refer to some aspect of Christianity. In *Antichrist* 17 and 18, God is referred to as a spider. In *Untimely Meditations* 'History' 9, Nietzsche refers to 'the great cross-spider' on whose threads we were previously supported but tear apart with every new grasp of knowledge. *Zarathustra* 'Apostates' refers to 'Churchy-types, Holy Joes' (Betbrüder) who spend their evenings watching 'the cunning lurking cross-spider, which preaches cleverness to the spiders themselves and this teaches "there is good spinning amongst crosses!"' 'World-slanderers' who preach equality in the name of justice but who are motivated by revenge are referred to by Zarathustra as 'tarantula's: 'They speak in favour of life these poisonous spiders even though they are sitting in their holes and have turned against life, because they want to do harm.' He clears away their webs only to be bitten by one (*Zarathustra* 'On the Tarantulas'). When Zarathustra and the Demon (*GS* 341) *both* point out a spider that will eternally return it is not too far-fetched to interpret this as a deliberate reference to the idea that 'life-denying', 'world-slandering' Christianity will also return along with everything else.

doing so I would like to introduce an idea, which I will return to, that is neglected in the secondary literature.

6.2 Mit klingendem Spiel

When Zarathustra defeats the dwarf he does so by proclaiming: 'Was *that* life? Well then! One More Time!'[360] On the face of it, this seems like a straightforward affirmation of life. It clearly anticipates the idea of the eternal return that will be introduced in the next section of 'On the Riddle and the Vision'. However, Zarathustra describes his proclamation as containing much 'klingendes Spiel'. It is not at all obvious how to translate this into English. It is important to get it right because Nietzsche, through the mouth of his most important character, uses the phrase three times in quick succession to qualify the idea of his most fundamental affirmation of life: the concept of the eternal return.

As we shall see below, almost every translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into English translates 'klingendes Spiel' differently. Literally, the closest translation into English is 'sounding play.' Nietzsche says that in every courageous attack, there is 'sounding play'. He then says that 'sounding play' can overcome any pain. Finally, when Zarathustra affirms life there is much 'sounding play'. What exactly does klingendes Spiel mean? Let us take a quick overview at how various translators have rendered it over the years.

Thomas Common went with 'sound of triumph'.[361] R. J. Hollingdale preferred 'triumphant shout'.[362] This is curious, since neither of the two words in the original German refer to triumph. A more recent translation by Graham Parkes seems closer to the original: he goes with 'ringing play'.[363] Of the six translators I will be surveying here, Parkes is the only one that offers a rationale for his translation: 'klingendes Spiel', he says, alludes to the ringing of the blade (Klinge) of a sword in combat, but also has a connotation of the sound of a military band.[364] The following year, in a translation by Adrian Del Caro, we see the biblically inspired 'sounding brass'.[365] Interestingly, Walter Kaufmann also refers to brass with his 'playing and brass.'[366] Finally, in the

[360] *Z* 'On the Vision and the Riddle' 1.
[361] Nietzsche (2022). 246, 247.
[362] Nietzsche (2003). 177, 178.
[363] Nietzsche (2008). 135.
[364] Ibid. fn 135, 308.
[365] Nietzsche (2006). 125.
[366] Kaufmann (1982). 269.

most recent translation at the time of writing this thesis, Michael Hulse's 2022 translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* opted for 'clashing play.'[367]

As I mentioned, only Parkes offers a rationale for his translation and so I will have to guess what motivated the others to go with their choices. Parkes talks of the ringing of the blades in sword fights and I assume that was on Hulse's mind when he went with 'clashing'. Parkes also mentions military bands. There is an association with the phrase Nietzsche uses and military music. For example, the journal of the German Society of Military Music is titled: *Mit klingendem Spiele* and German composer Carl Faust, producing music in Nietzsche's lifetime, composed a military march titled *Mit klingendem Spiele*.[368] In Wilhelm and Marion Pauck's biography of Paul Tillich, they choose to render the phrase, evidently a favourite of Tillich's, as 'the sound of fife and drum'. In the passage below we can see that this is directly linked to military music and that Tillich consciously borrowed the phrase from Nietzsche.

> Tillich did not speak of God, with Otto, as the "wholly other," or with Barth as the "unknown stranger," but as "das Unbedingte," or "the Unconditioned," a phrase he substituted for the Absolute. To this he always added that he who is grasped by faith in God is filled with confidence, marching forward as it were like soldiers, mit klingendem Spiel, i.e., to the sound of fife and drum. Tillich had borrowed the phrase from Nietzsche. Those who first heard this expression from him were forever after bound in their imaginations to its emotionally charged association.[369]

For Tillich, then, *mit klingendem Spiel* or with fife and drum refers to a sense of confidence born of faith, which in his case was in God but in Zarathustra's was in his positive attitude towards life. Military music has its origins in the logistics of movement; the drums beat a time for the soldiers to march to and the fife relayed signals and alarms.[370] Over time, in addition to servicing logistical needs, fife and drum music evolved a symbolic value. As well as raising morale, specific tunes came to represent, in some way, the people for whom the music was associated. *The British Grenadiers* is still used today to symbolise 'Britishness' in film and television; as *Yankee Doodle* is used to symbolise the American revolutionary period. So far, there is, as yet, no direct link to the idea of courage here; although we can imagine that once sounds of fife and drum came to be associated with a national identity and cause, it served to bolster enthusiasm for war. But that is

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[367] Nietzsche (2022). 145, 146.
[368] Carl Faust. Mit klingendem Spiel. https://archive.org/details/mit-klingendem-spiel accessed 21 August 2023.
[369] Pauck and Pauck (1976). 96.
[370] Dobney (2000) Accessed 21 Aug 2023 http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ammu/hd_ammu.html

not to say there is no direct association in history between courage and this music. Surrendering armies that had nevertheless fought *courageously* in the enemy's eyes were permitted to leave the field *mit klingendem Spiel* or, in English, with the honours of war. In practice this meant that the losing army could march out in full uniform, often fully armed with fife and drums playing.[371] In this instance, the 'fife and drums' are primarily used to *acknowledge* courage rather than bolster courage. If we want to claim that the music raises the spirits or gives courage to the defeated soldiers, then the question is how does this impact our understanding of Zarathustra's attack *mit klingendem Spiel*? Are we to think of him as victorious in defeat, or surrendering courageously? Neither of these seem applicable because in the text he is triumphant; over the dwarf and over death.[372] Perhaps we go too far here, over-analysing the passage when we ought rather 'play the game' and accept the spirit of the fife and drums? If so, then this hints at a possible attitude to *GS* 341 regarding the spirit of the aphorism and the dangers of over-analysis.

Putting all this together, if the idea of fife and drums as discussed above is close to what Nietzsche intended, then Zarathustra's affirmation of life expresses a confidence and a faith in who he is and what he stands for. It is a rousing expression of identity and confidence in that identity: *ecce homo!* It is mythopoeic in that it captures the ineffable but it also suggests a direction, a call to action. Note that, according to the Paucks, all those who heard Tillich use Nietzsche's phrase to refer to his faith in God: 'were forever after bound in their imaginations to its emotionally charged association.' Recalling chapter two of this thesis, we see here the mythopoeic power of music. And in chapter three we saw the idea of making known an 'unknown god'. Otto's 'wholly other' and Barth's 'unknown stranger' clearly reference an unknown God but Tillich's conception of God, discussed in chapter five, as 'pure being' goes much further. For him God is a mystery that is revealed *only* through the affirmation of his existence *mit klingendem Spiel*. Applying this to Nietzsche, how and why it is possible and desirable to feel well disposed towards life is a mystery only revealed through the 'fife and drum'. Here we note that what conveys both these ideas is a kind of music that induces revelatory experiences. With this in mind, let us now turn to the other translations.

Common and Hollingdale both introduce the idea of sounding or shouting triumph. My best guess at their thinking is influenced by the fact that Zarathustra has just triumphed over the dwarf, and he is most likely shouting if we take into consideration the two exclamation marks punctuating 'Well then! One More Time!' However, this rendering does not fit very well with the other times

[371] This custom is still in use today. The United States permits, in the appropriate circumstances, surrendering officers to keep their side-arms.
[372] If the eternal return is literally true, Zarathustra is in a sense also eternal. If the idea of the eternal return means he no longer fears death, then death has been beaten. See: 1 Corinthians 15:55

Nietzsche uses *mit klingendem Spiel* in the same section. For example, why would Nietzsche make a special point of saying 'but' (aber) after slaying death there is much triumphant shouting? The word 'but' is typically used to introduce an idea that contrasts with what has just been said. How is the idea of killing 'even death' *contrasted* with the idea of being triumphant? I think Common and Hollingdale miss the mark here. Let us move on to sounding brass. This is my preferred translation. As I will show, it not only captures the sense that the fife and drum translation does, but it better draws out Nietzsche's anti-Christian and pro-Dionysian mythopoesis.

Both Kaufmann and Del Caro refer to *brass* in their translations. The former goes with 'playing and brass' and the latter with 'sounding brass'. The idea of sounding brass originates in Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*. Paul is talking about speaking of love without feeling love. In 'On the Riddle and the Vision' 1, Zarathustra loudly proclaims his affirmation of life in order to combat the life-denying vitriol spewed into his ear by the dwarf. But, if Nietzsche is referencing Paul, then could he be implying that Zarathustra does not *feel* well disposed towards life but merely *speaks* of feeling well-disposed, i.e. *just says he does*? If this is the case then Zarathustra's affirmation is just talk. Below, I will argue that we ought not think that this is the case because Nietzsche reverses the ideas expressed by Paul as he so often does in his mythopoeic treatment of Christianity.

With Paul the emphasis is on the *talking*, that is the content of what is said. In his letter, Paul is addressing Corinthian Christians tempted to speak about love without love in their hearts. He does so because he is primarily concerned for their audiences. That is, he is more concerned with the audience hearing the person speak, and listening to what they have to say, than the person who is speaking. It is the same earlier in the letter when he talks about Christians eating meat that has been sacrificed in pagan worship. They should refrain only if there is a danger that anyone watching mistakenly believes that Christians also worship the gods to which these animals were sacrificed.[373] Paul's emphasis is on the audience and the words. For Nietzsche, his emphasis is primarily on what Zarathustra is feeling in his heart rather than the words he speaks. Remember that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche says that if it were possible to experience feelings as pure Dionysian beings then there would be no need for words.[374] Nietzsche's emphasis is on Zarathustra and the feeling. So when Nietzsche, thought of as the anti-Paul, speaks of 'sounding brass' he is *not* saying that Zarathustra is speaking of something he does not feel but when he proclaims—'Was *that* life? Well then! One More Time!'—the words are less important than the feeling. That is, what Zarathustra feels is more important than the words used to communicate

[373] 1 Corinthians 8.
[374] *BT* 21.

this feeling. At this point someone might ask: since Nietzsche does not use the word brass in the text, what reason do we have for thinking that he is referencing 1 Corinthians 13? Let us look at this now.

Paul is Nietzsche's closest rival and 'go-to opponent' when it comes to Zarathustra, the eternal return and the Dionysian. Nietzsche's countermyths are targeted at Christianity and Nietzsche's version of Christianity is decidedly Pauline. In his response to Paul, Nietzsche almost exclusively restricts himself to *First Corinthians*. It clearly holds a special place for Nietzsche. For example, in 1885 after receiving a sizable sum in a court settlement against his publisher, he bought a headstone for his father's grave upon which he had inscribed: 'Love Never Fails (1 Cor 13:8)'[375] As we shall see later in this thesis, *The Antichrist*, the text in which Nietzsche most openly makes his case against Christianity, is structured around Paul's concepts of Faith, Hope and Love expressed in *First Corinthians*.[376] Below I will show how Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, expresses a position on music and revelation that is the direct opposite to what Nietzsche advocates in his writings on music, Dionysus and the Dionysian. We saw in the previous chapter how Nietzsche took the theological concept of the death of God and reversed it to make his point. We will see that in opposition to Paul's rejection of 'sounding brass' as something to be avoided, Nietzsche says that 'sounding brass' is a necessary aspect of the Dionysian attitude to life. Let us take a closer look at this intriguing idea.

The first verse of the thirteenth chapter of Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* in the King James Bible reads as follows: 'Though I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity, I become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.' What Paul is attempting to communicate is that if a person talks about love, either speaking straightforwardly or in the language of angels, without feeling love then what they have to say is meaningless. The metaphor Paul uses is cleverly designed to appeal to the Corinthians in two respects. Firstly, Corinth was well known for its brassworks, and the idea of sounding, ringing or echoing of brass captures the atmosphere. The Greek word is *chalkos*. We saw in the previous chapter how Paul used the local altars dedicated to unknown gods in order to help his audience identify with his message. The tinkling cymbal, next referred to, should not be thought of as a crashing cymbal or gong-like instrument that is struck noisily with a hammer but rather a small bowl or cup-like instrument that is usually struck by a matching second bowl. The Greek *kymbalon* derives from *kymbos* meaning 'cup'. These would be

[375] Young (2010). 9.
[376] 1 Corinthians 13:13 ('And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'). Nietzsche explicitly addresses this passage in section 23. He further critiques the importance of faith in sections: 32, 33, 39, 41, 50, 52 and 54. Hope is addressed in sections 16 and 23. Love is addressed in sections: 2, 7, 16, 30, 50.

recognised by Paul's audience as instruments used in pagan rituals in which the participants tinkled their cymbals whilst working themselves up into a frenzy. For example, and this would appeal to Nietzsche, they were popular among Dionysian worshippers.[377] It is important to note that Paul is not referring to two objects; the sounding brass *is* the tinkling cymbal. He is employing, as he often does, the rhetorical device of pleonasm of which Nietzsche would be very familiar. So, what is Paul trying to communicate? The answer lies in his unusual use of the Greek word *kymbalon*. This would sound very odd to his audience since the word they would be expecting would be in the plural *kymbala*. In order to 'tinkle' or make a sound, two kymbalon are stuck against each other, in other words a pair of kymbala. When Paul refers to a single *kymbalon* tinkling it is, as Anathea Poitier-Young observes, like asking about the sound of one hand clapping.[378] A single tinkling *kymbalon* does not make sense. What is the sound of one hand clapping? The question cannot be answered because it is incomprehensible. The point Paul is making to the Corinthians is that if a person who does not have love in their heart speaks about love in straightforward language or is acting as the conduit through which angels are speaking (speaking in tongues), then what they are saying is incomprehensible both to themselves and their audiences like a single *kymbalon* tinkling.

Nietzsche can actually agree with Paul on some of this. We remember from chapters two and three of this thesis that in Nietzsche's Dionysus myth a person cannot comprehend the Dionysian mysteries without achieving a *rapport* with the dark god. To receive the hidden secrets they must feel them in their hearts. In other words, if someone reads Nietzsche's works and then attempts to reveal the secrets within, without love (of fate?) in their heart, then they will fail. This is because without establishing a rapport with Nietzsche they cannot understand him and therefore cannot properly communicate his ideas. A key idea in Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian is that in order to understand it you must first be the kind of person *capable* of understanding it; in other words, the kind of reader that can establish a *rapport* with Nietzsche. One way he differs from Paul, is that the latter believes that God's message can be communicated to everyone that is prepared to listen. He believes that the message can be put in everyday, straightforward language rather than only in myths that must be received and interpreted in a special way. We remember from chapter two of this thesis that Nietzsche opposed Euripidean theatre and music that was used not in the pure Dionysian sense but to stimulate the audience and to help them recall ideas. In this light, consider what Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 14:1-19.

[377] Portier-Young (2005) 101.
[378] Portier-Young (2005) 104.

Here he says that when a person speaks in tongues they are talking with God and in a language no-one else can understand. Accordingly, no-one can say 'Amen' after hearing a prayer in tongues because they do not know what they are saying Amen to. Referring to the voice of 'lifeless things', instruments in other words, Paul says that unless we have a common understanding of what the sounds indicate, we cannot understand the music. For example, unless it is made clear beforehand, the fife and drums cannot signal troops to ready themselves for battle. How would the soldier know what the signal meant? Today when we watch a film or television programme and hear *The British Grenadiers* or *Yankee Doodle* we know what the music represents because we already know how the sounds are to be interpreted. The kind of 'pure music' that Nietzsche extols in "On Music and Words" and *The Birth of Tragedy* is of little worth to Paul because the secrets revealed by such music cannot be put into straightforward language and would, therefore, be incomprehensible to an audience listening to him speak about what has been revealed.

It is important to note that in *First Corinthians*, Paul is not rejecting mysticism outright. Indeed, a mystical union with Christ is the heart of Pauline faith. He is also not against speaking in tongues: 'I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.'[379] What Paul is rejecting is the attempt to communicate what it is to be a Christian in anything other than straightforward language. Anyone who does attempt this, he says, is like 'sounding brass'. In opposition to this idea, Nietzsche says that in all courageous attacks there is something essential but unintelligible that cannot be expressed in straightforward language. But expressed it must be as it is fundamental to a Dionysian attitude to life. If Nietzsche wants to establish a *rapport* with his readers and encourage them to embrace the Dionysian then he must sound like sounding brass.

I have offered two interpretations of Nietzsche's reference to mit klingendem Spiel. We first saw, what we could call, the 'fife and drum' interpretation. Then we saw the 'sounding brass' interpretation. I do not think that we have to prefer one over the other. Both express an attitude that is mysterious and ineffable, and considers an attitude towards the value of life; the final judgement being; 'Was *that* life? Well then! One More Time!' The sounding brass interpretation is not a rival to the fife and drum but adds more nuance by drawing in and contrasting Paul's ideas. One thing we see here that is not present in the fife and drum interpretation is the idea that what gives courage to Zarathustra is not necessarily available for everyone. Paul's opposition to sounding brass is that the ideas will not be understood by everybody. For Nietzsche, only the privileged few that are *en rapport* can know the meaning of sounding brass.

[379] 1 Corinthians 14:18.

With the above discussion in mind, I now turn to the reception of *GS* 341. My argument, for a mythopoeic reading of this aphorism, is that we ought to read it for the feeling it creates, that is we should be concerned with revelation rather than rational argument.[380] Below I look at four possible responses to the demon: anger, despair, joy and indifference. I will argue that Nietzsche offers up this aphorism as a kind of 'sounding brass' and to receive it as such we need to focus on mythopoesis rather than rational analysis. I begin by looking at reactions to *GS* 341 in the secondary literature.

6.3 Reactions to the demon

It is widely accepted that Nietzsche suggests two possible reactions to the demon's revelation: the gnashing of teeth with cursing; or proclaiming the demon a god, never having heard something so divine. A surface reading of *GS* 341 seems to reveal this. However, what is missed in the secondary literature is that 'teeth gnashing' represents *two* different reactions to the demon. Gnashing teeth holds enormous symbolic significance in Judeo-Christian theology. It occurs eleven times in the Bible and each time it refers either to anger or despair brought about by a rejection of, *or by*, God.[381] What is interesting about teeth gnashing representing *either* anger or despair is that Nietzsche's use of the idea presents two possible negative responses to the demon's revelation about eternal recurrence:

1. *Teeth-gnashing in anger*: the demon is proclaiming something counter to the Christian dogma and *kerygma* and is, therefore, for a Christian, offensive.

2. *Teeth-gnashing in despair*: the demon has revealed the lie entailed in the belief in God and this, for the (now former) Christian is devastating.[382]

So, along with the option of reacting positively, proclaiming the demon a god, we now have three possible responses to the demon.[383] However, much of the commentary on *GS* 341 in the secondary literature has been concerned with a fourth possible response: something like bemusement or indifference. Aaron Ridley suggests that 'the only proper response to the demon, surely, is a shrug of the shoulders.'[384] He goes on to say that 'the thought of Eternal Recurrence,

[380] My intention is not to say that we ought only to read the aphorism mythopoeically. Rather that this reading is prior and separate to any exploration of rational argument that may be contained with the text.
[381] Matthew 13:42; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30; Mark 9:18; Luke 13:28; Acts 7:54; Job 16:9; Psalm 35:16; Psalm 37:12; Psalm 112:10; Lamentations 2:16.
[382] For 'the lie entailed in the belief in God' see: *GM* 3: 27.
[383] We can note in passing that pronouncing the demon a god is a violation of *Exodus* 20:3. This is important when we come to consider *GS* 341 as a *countermyth* to Christian mythopoesis.
[384] Ridley (1997) 19-25. 20.

then, should be a matter of the deepest indifference. Why *care?*'[385] Bernard Williams has suggested that a very natural reaction for most people would be 'to forget about it.'[386] Maudemarie Clark, surveying similar responses by Georg Simmel, Ivan Soll and Bernd Magnus, claims that there is no adequate, well thought out answer to the objection that the idea of eternal recurrence suggested by the demon should be met with anything other than indifference.[387]

The *basic objection* is that if we are to repeat our lives *exactly* as they were, are, and will be, with nothing different, then nothing we do can ever change things. Moreover, if our recurring lives are always exactly the same as this one (and, do not forget, *this one* is a recurrence of infinite exactly identical previous lives) then in each time around we will have no memory of our previous lives. Put simply, the objection is that since there is nothing we can do about it and no way of noticing the repetition, there is no reason to get upset or worked up about it.[388] In the face of this objection, two things are immediately puzzling: (a) why anyone would think the demon a god for expressing something that seems inconsequential or claim they have never heard anything so divine; and (b) why anyone would, in Nietzsche's words, '*long for nothing more fervently.*'

What all these objections have in common is that they result from subjecting *GS* 341 to rational analysis and not treating the content as mythopoeic. For someone that reads the text as mythopoeic, all such responses make the same error: they *rephrase* the content of the myth in order to 'convert' the narrative into a rational argument. It should be clear by now where the problem lies with this approach:

1. The purpose of myth is to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable.

2. Nietzsche is offering 'sounding brass' in order to induce a feeling and not offering any arguments.

Regarding (1), if *GS* 341 can be rephrased and communicated in a non-mythopoeic way, for example as a thought experiment, then what is being expressed is neither mysterious nor ineffable.[389] The trouble with treating *GS* 341 as a thought experiment is that there is nothing

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[385] Ibid.
[386] Williams (2013).
[387] Clark (2009). 268.
[388] Additionally, there is the problem that each recurring life cannot be identical because they are numerically distinct. As Bernd Magnus puts it: 'Even though recurrences are not simultaneous, the fact remains that we recur at different points and times in the cosmic series. But recurring at different times within a series is sufficient, in my opinion, to defeat the identity' See: Magnus (1973): 604-16. 615.
[389] Here, I understand a 'thought experiment' to require something akin to 'experimental conditions' in which each element of the experiment is clearly defined as is any standard of measurement used in the process. For example, in order to carry out Thomson's 'famous violinist' experiment, designed to show

really to be gained by doing so. This is not to say someone cannot create a thought experiment out of the content of *The Heaviest Weight*—you can use almost anything to create thought experiments—but the results of the experiment are rather banal and uninspiring. Let us explore this idea.

Someone tempted to consider *GS* 341 as a *thought experiment*—perhaps designed to see how well disposed we are to our lives, or to life itself—must ask themselves why Nietzsche did not simply communicate the idea in a more straightforward way. Consider for a moment some well-known philosophical thought experiments, for example, Judith Jarvis Thomson's 'famous violinist'[390] and Robert Nozick's 'experience machine'.[391] These can be quite fanciful but the ideas expressed within are straightforward and expressed straightforwardly. In Camus' *Happy Death*, Patrice Mersault summarises Nietzsche's idea as follows: 'You know the famous formula—"if I had to live my life over again"—well, I would live it over again just the way it has been.'[392] If *GS* 341 can be rephrased and expressed in this simple way, why did Nietzsche not do so in the first place? The answer, it seems to me, is quite clear. Nietzsche does not use this way of communicating the idea because this is *not the idea* he is attempting to communicate. Two further considerations support this view.

Firstly, the 'rephrased idea', such as the one expressed by Patrice Mersault and also, as we shall see, in Maudemarie Clark's 'marriage test' is perhaps useful in gaining a few insights but hardly something about which we would expect someone to respond: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.' Put simply, as a thought experiment there is nothing particularly special about Nietzsche's '*Heaviest Weight*' in *GS* 341.

Secondly, something completely overlooked with these 'thought experiment' approaches is what I consider to be the much more important question, asked by Nietzsche at the end of *GS* 341: how well disposed would you have to be to yourself and to life itself to want *nothing more fervently* than eternal recurrence? The emphasis here is on not simply feeling well-disposed to the idea of eternal recurrence but intensely longing for it. In the kind of thought experiments we have been considering there is nothing in these responses to *GS* 341 about wanting eternal recurrence to be

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something about the philosophical problem of the moral problem of killing and letting die, we need to already have a grip on the possible distinction between killing and letting die. In mythopoesis, the intention is to capture the idea of such a distinction. We could say that mythopoesis is something that must occur prior to thought experiments.

[390] Thomson, (1971): 47–66.

[391] Nozick (1999). 42-45.

[392] *Happy Death* (Kindle).

true *even slightly*, let alone with an intense passion.[393] In addition, for these thought experiments to work, we do not need to want eternal recurrence to be literally true; just *imagining* recurrence is enough for the test. Indeed, the recurrence aspect needs only happen *once* for these affirmation tests to work.

Maudemarie Clark offers an interesting take on receiving *GS* 341 as a kind of affirmation test: 'the marriage test'. Although I have rejected receiving the *'The Heaviest Weight*' as a thought experiment, I do think that she presents a useful and interesting approach that she refers to as 'playing the game'. Let us take a look now at Clark's 'marriage test' response to Nietzsche's demon.

6.4 Maudemarie Clark's 'marriage test'

Clark suggests an alternative to a well thought out response to the demon's revelation that answers, what I referred to above as, *the basic objection*; she says: 'we can answer it only if we incorporate an unrealistic or uncritical model of recurrence into our formulation of Nietzsche's ideal of affirmation.'[394] Here, Clark's suggestion is that we approach *GS* 341 in 'an uncritical or preanalytical manner, suspending all doubts concerning its truth or conceivability.'[395] In other words, instead of subjecting the demon's revelation to strict philosophical inquiry, we 'play the game' and suspend our doubts 'concerning its truth or conceivability'.[396] She offers as an example of the kind of thing she has in mind something she calls 'the marriage test'. In what follows I will offer some criticisms of Clark's take on *GS* 341 as presenting some kind of affirmation test. However, despite her approach containing what I believe to be serious flaws in interpretation, her focus on the 'feeling' of the idea of eternal return rather than on rational analysis is very useful in terms of treating *GS* 341 as a mythopoeic text.

The marriage test. The idea here is that someone asks their spouse: if you had the opportunity of living your life over again would you still marry me? An honest 'yes' or 'no' in response reveals how well the respondent is inclined towards the idea of their marriage. Clark is, of course, comparing this question to the one Nietzsche asks about life in *GS* 341; which is in her words: 'would you be willing to live this same life eternally?'[397] While she accepts that the marriage test is unrealistic and contradictory—actually living your life over again *as it was* would require you to

[393] Imagine someone wanting nothing more fervently than to be kidnapped by a society of music lovers and to wake up in a hospital attached by wire and tube to a famous violinist.
[394] Clark (2009). 270
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Ibid. 169.

meet your future spouse *without* the knowledge of your marriage you currently possess—she also says: 'one can adopt the unrealistic model it presupposes through imagination, the model is the right one for the purpose. Refusal to adopt it would show evasion, not intellectual honesty.'[398]

If her analogy is correct then indifference does not seem a genuine response to the demon. For clarity, let us recap the four possible responses to the demon that I have already laid out: (1) anger at the denial of Christian eschatology; (2) despair over the revelation of the lie entailed in the belief in God; (3) joy at never having heard something so divine; (4) indifference. Clark offers us a fifth response which for ease of reference we can call something like: (5) the chance to test how positively we value our current lives, in short: an affirmation test. She says:

> To use eternal recurrence as a test of affirmation, one must be willing to "play the game," to imagine eternal recurrence in an uncritical or preanalytical manner, suspending all doubts concerning its truth or conceivability. As in the case of the "marriage test," one may refuse to play and analyse the test instead. The absence of memory links and continuity will then make indifference seem rational. But if one plays the game and imagines the recurrences of one's life as continuous with and therefore as adding suffering and joy to one's present life, the extreme reactions Nietzsche describes—gnashing of teeth or calling the demon divine—make sense and complete indifference would seem psychologically impossible.[399]

However, reducing *GS* 341 to a thought experiment—*would you be willing to live this same life eternally?*—may well be a useful test of how well disposed you are towards your own lives but, as mentioned above, would it really 'make sense', when thinking about it in this way, to respond to the demon with teeth-gnashing or by calling it divine? Clark's 'marriage test' is really the question: if you could go back in time, *knowing what you know now*, and live your life again—would you still marry your current spouse? Or, put another way, it is simply asking if, all things considered, your marriage is a good one and not one which you have come to regret.[400] The analogous question with regards to life would be: if you could go back in time, knowing what you know now, and live your life again—would you change anything? Or, put another way, it is simply asking if, all things considered, your life is a good one and not one which you have come to regret. However the

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[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid. 270.

[400] Another way of interpreting the marriage test would be to say that if someone was filled with joy at the thought of reliving their marriage, from beginning to end, over and over for all eternity then they must really enjoy being married. Here there is also the necessity of 'playing the game' because if you have no memory of previous goes around then you are not really reliving the marriage over and over. A simpler way of testing a person's attitude to their marriage would be to ask: if you knew you and your current spouse would live forever, would you still get married?

question, as it is put by the demon, requires that *you do not know what you know now*; he certainly goes to quite some trouble hammering the point home.[401] But let us play Clark's game for a moment.

Most of us, I think, if we had the chance to live our lives over (but with the knowledge we now have) would keep some things the same. For example: marriages or partnerships, having children, various cherished moments, and all those events that if they do not occur would mean the things we want to keep can not occur (for example reliving visiting the place where you and your spouse first met, etc.). For many, going back and doing it all again will also include reliving some unpleasant events that are the necessary catalysts for more pleasant outcomes. The important idea behind the affirmation test, I take it, is that without the key events we go through in our lives, the good and the bad, we would not be the people we are today. We affirm our lives by choosing to live through all these again.

However, if we did have the opportunity to relive our lives, it seems plausible that there are lots of events that we can change or omit without risking who we are. Do I really need, for example, quite so many embarrassing, painful and regrettable moments to be the person I am now? Surely missing out a few when reliving my life would not make a difference.[402] But, if I have to live them all over again the thought of doing so hardly merits the gnashing of teeth.[403] For instance, as I write, it was a month ago that I broke the little finger of my right hand; I consider this event life-*annoying* rather than life-altering and cannot imagine it would make a difference to who I become if on 'the next time around' I am a bit more careful and avoid the accident. However, even if I must break my finger, over and over for all eternity, it is hardly something that would set me gnashing my teeth and proclaiming that there cannot be God!

Suppose, however, that there is something truly awful in my life that I would never want to experience again; something someone did to me, or perhaps worse, something that I did to someone else. I believe that Clark's thought experiment could give me the insight that, without this event, I would not be the person I am today. And, in order to end up who I am today, if I relived my life I would have to relive this event (and, in the case of an awful act for which I am responsible, *subject others* to this event). Useful as this insight may be, the focus, it seems to me,

[401] Going by the English translation, 42.5% of the total word count is devoted to making clear that everything will recur in *exactly* the same way.
[402] We can observe in passing that this idea of missing out some events goes against Nietzsche's view in *Beyond Good and Evil* 56 in which he stresses 'who wants it again *just as it was*.'
[403] This is especially so if we understand teeth-gnashing in the Biblical sense.

is on how well disposed I am *to the event* and its impact on particular lives (mine and anyone else impacted) rather than how well disposed am I to life as a whole—to *life itself*.

It seems to me that *GS* 341 asks more of readers than how well disposed they feel to their own lives and the events they have lived through and will live through in the future. Firstly, the focus of Nietzsche's question, at the end of '*The Heaviest Weight*' is on how we would feel about the *eternal repetition* of events in our lives and *all events*. He says: 'how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life.' His reference to 'yourself' I take to mean a reference to the reader's individual life and the life-altering, character-forming events through which they have lived (and will live). When he goes on to say, 'and to life,' I understand him to refer to something like *life itself*. To understand the difference we can consider the myth of the wisdom of Silenus. When Silenus says that, for human beings, dying as soon as possible is second only to having never been born, he is saying that all human life is not worth the effort. He is not restricting his gloomy advice to only those people whose suffering is so great that death would be a relief. For him, *all human beings* would be better off had they never been born. To be well-disposed towards your own life and to life itself is to believe that life itself is valuable even if the events in your personal, individual life are unpleasant.

In addition, in the last line of *GS* 341 Nietzsche asks how well disposed you would have to be to yourself and to life *to want nothing more fervently than eternal recurrence as an ultimate eternal confirmation and seal*. This implies more than a fervent longing for a particular theory about the origin and state of the universe to be the case but an intense desire for *something else* to be the case that is somehow connected to eternal recurrence.

In what follows, I will lay out in detail what I understand to be a mythopoeic reading of *GS* 341 '*The Heaviest Weight*'. As will be seen, this reading avoids what I have called *the basic objection* and explicitly addresses the idea of wanting nothing more fervently than eternal recurrence as an ultimate eternal confirmation and seal. I begin by providing a brief overview of what I take from *GS* 341; this is followed by a point by point elaboration of Nietzsche's use of mythopoesis in this text.

6.5 A mythopoeic reading of *GS* 341 '*The Heaviest Weight*'

In *GS* 341 '*The Heaviest Weight*', the basic subject matter concerns the origin and state of the universe (or world). If eternal recurrence is the case, then the universe has neither beginning nor end. As a theory it is incompatible with both the Big Bang theory and Christian dogma, both of

which hold that the universe has a beginning.[404] The idea of eternal recurrence is also incompatible with Steady State theories that deny the universe has a beginning and theorise the continuous creation of matter. If eternal recurrence is a fact about the universe then there must be a starting point or beginning that is returned to on each recurrence; and at some point the creation of matter must cease in order to restart and begin the next repetition. Of course, there might be some wiggle room here for arguments concerning these various scientific theories, but my point is that *GS* 341 is concerned with something else and not that Nietzsche seriously suggests a new theory of the origins and state of the universe. For those tempted to believe this might be Nietzsche's aim, my response would be the same as that which I offered for the idea that *GS* 341 ought to be received as a thought experiment: if this really is Nietzsche's intention then why does he not use straightforward language? And, more compellingly, why does Nietzsche place such heavy emphasis on people fervently longing for eternal recurrence to be the case? That is, if *GS* 341 is really only concerned with a theory about the universe, what sense can be made of the idea of longing for nothing more fervently than it to be the case? There simply must be more to it and—other than the content of *GS* 341 itself—Nietzsche gives use a clue in *Will to Power*:

> A final attempt to conceive of a world that *began* has been recently made several times with the help of logical rigmarole—and in most of these cases, as one might imagine, the attempts were made with an ulterior theological motive.[405]

The suggestion here is that what motivates a person to attempt a theory of the origin and state of the universe are theological motives. That is, a concern with the nature of God and religious beliefs. Nietzsche says of his preferred view of the origins and state of the universe, that it concerns a 'mysterious' Dionysian world of eternal self-creation and eternal self-destruction.[406] It seems safe to assume that when Nietzsche refers, in *GS* 341, to questions concerning the origins and state of the universe, his concern is more with the theological than the scientific. The language that runs through *The Heaviest Weight* strongly suggests this:

- 'Demon'. A reference to daimons (δαιμόνιον) intermediaries between human beings and the gods. This suggests that the ideas being communicated are concerned more with the theological than the scientific.

[404] Big Bang models first appeared some years after Nietzsche's death. The existence of these models only adds nuance to *GS* 341. Genesis 1:1 can be thought of as a kind of Big Bang model. Steady state theories in some form or another have been around since the 13th Century.
[405] *WP* 1066 (2).
[406] Ibid. 1067.

- ‘This spider’. Also appears in the account of eternal recurrence in *Zarathustra*. When Nietzsche mentions spiders (or their webs) in his works he is always referring to some aspect of Christian belief.

- ‘The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ In several places in the Bible, human beings are referred to as specks of dust and *returning* to dust. ‘All came from dust and all will return to dust’.[407]

- ‘Gnash your teeth.’ The Biblical significance of this expression has already been given above. As mentioned, wherever it appears in the Bible it always refers to a rejection of God or rejection by God.

- ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ A direct violation of Exodus 20:30. ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’ Eternal recurrence, as we have seen, is incompatible with Christian dogma and the *kerygma*. To have never heard anything more divine is a clear rejection of Christianity.

- ‘Ultimate eternal confirmation and seal’. A reference to Ephesians 1:13, a key scripture in Christian confirmation rites.[408]

Ephesians 1:13 is a key scripture in Christian confirmation rites: ‘And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.’ The seal of the Holy Spirit, mentioned in Ephesians, is understood as marking Christians out as God’s possessions and under His protection. In the last lines of *GS* 341 Nietzsche talks of the idea of eternal recurrence ‘gaining power’ over a person. When someone believes the demon, that is, they believe in eternal recurrence they are ‘transformed’ (or crushed). Joyous acceptance of eternal recurrence transforms a person and this new, totally unprecedented life needs ‘a divine audience to appreciate it.’[409] We see here Dionysus versus the crucified.[410] For Paul, a person that has faith in Jesus stands righteous before God; for Nietzsche a person that has faith in Dionysus stands righteous before themselves. Faith in Jesus, for Paul, involves becoming one body with Jesus.[411] As we saw in chapter three, for Nietzsche, Dionysus represents both a mysterious something

[407] Ecclesiastes 3: 20. As a representative sample, see also: Genesis 2:7, 3:19; Job 10:9, 34:15; 1 Corinthians 15:47; Psalm 103:14; Isaiah 40:15.
[408] One of the very rare occasions that Nietzsche addresses a text by Paul that is not First Corinthians.
[409] *GM*II: 16.
[410] *EH* ‘Why I Am A Destiny’ 9.
[411] 1 Corinthians 12:12.

(expressed in 'sounding brass') with which a person can establish a *rapport* (become one body) and an attitude or disposition towards life. Success or failure in attaining this attitude or developing this disposition can serve as a standard by which we can judge ourselves and others.[412]

The similarities can be seen between the seal of the Holy Spirit and the seal of eternal recurrence. As just mentioned, the idea is central to Christian confirmation rites. In the Lutheran tradition, confirmation is considered a 'saying yes' to God's promise of salvation; it is also a remembrance of God's 'saying yes' to His creation.[413] Reimagined and applied to the eternal return, the 'eternal confirmation and sealing' refers to a continual 'yes-saying' not to God but to life. Here, it is useful to consider Nietzsche's comments on *amor fati* (love of one's fate) and saying yes to life.[414]

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche directly contrasts yes-saying with Christian belief. After claiming that there is no such thing as a Christian who is also an artist, he imagines someone objecting with reference to Raphael, to this he replies: 'Raphael said yes, Raphael did yes, and consequently Raphael was no Christian . . .'[415] In *The Antichrist*, he says that Paul and his Christianity are opposed to 'yes-saying defenders of life.'[416] To long for nothing more fervently than the ultimate confirmation and seal is to long for nothing more fervently than to say yes to life; and this, for Nietzsche, necessarily involves saying no to Christianity. We can see this yes and no-saying in the excerpt from *Ecce Homo* below. Not only do we see here the call to action present in his writing (fourth characteristic factor of mythopoesis) but also Nietzsche's desire to establish a *rapport* as he looks around 'for anyone related' to him. We saw in chapter one, in the discussion of the third characteristic factor of mythopoesis, seeking a *rapport*, that Nietzsche had written in a letter to Overbeck that he thought of his books as 'fishing rods'; here he uses the same metaphor.[417]

> —All my writings from this point on have been fish hooks: perhaps I know how to fish as well as anyone? . . . It was not my fault if nothing was caught. There weren't any fish . . .[418]

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[412] We can read *Gay Science* 276 as the expression of a desire to attain the Dionysian attitude: 'some day I want to be a Yes-sayer!'
[413] "Confirmation" *Folkekirken* (accessed April 19 2023) https://www.lutheranchurch.dk/liturgy-and-worship/sacraments-and-rites/confirmation
[414] *GS* 276. See also: *EH* 'Clever' 10. In Camus' essay 'Road to Tipasa' we find the interesting line: 'There is thus a will to live without rejecting anything of life, which is the virtue I honour most in this world.'
[415] *TI* 'Skirmishes' 9. Nietzsche greatly admired Raphael's *Transfiguration* which he saw depicted the Apolline world of beauty contrasted with the terrible wisdom of Silenus. See: *BT* 4.
[416] *Antichrist* 24.
[417] In the letter to Overbeck he is talking about *Zarathustra* and other books being fishing rods but in *Ecce Homo* he suggests that he considers his books *Zarathustra* to be fish hooks. It is curious that he says 'from this point on'. I wonder why Nietzsche here does not consider all his books to be fishing hooks.
[418] *EH* 'Zarathustra' 1.

We can see from the discussion above that what Nietzsche is attempting to communicate, regarding the origins and state of the universe and the Dionysian alternative to God, is quite mysterious. With his 'sounding brass' he certainly seems to be making an attempt to make clear something that is otherwise mysterious and ineffable, which I have identified as the first function of myth. Let us take a brief look at the other functions of myth, identified above, and how they manifest in *GS* 341.

To make clear that something is important or valuable. With his counter myth to Christian mythopoesis Nietzsche is challenging Christian values. With his 'sounding brass' Nietzsche attempts to make clear the value of the Dionysian attitude or disposition to life over the Christian view of life. The stakes are clearly very high; the suggested responses to the demon's revelation of eternal recurrence range from intense joy to the anguished gnashing of teeth. In the passage from *Twilight of the Idols* below, we see the repetition of the idea of joy and rejoicing in the Dionysian attitudes or disposition. Nietzsche refers to himself as the last disciple of Dionysus and the teacher of the eternal return. Eternal recurrence is offered as something select people might long for more fervently than anything else. More precisely, as we have just seen, what these exceptional people might long for is eternal recurrence as an 'ultimate eternal confirmation and seal'. Such longing is the rejection of the nay-saying Christian God.

> Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is the bridge I found to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not to escape horror and pity, not to cleanse yourself of a dangerous affect by violent discharge—as Aristotle thought—: but rather, over and above all horror and pity, so that you yourself may be the eternal joy in becoming,—the joy that includes even the eternal joy in negating . . . And with this I come back to the place that once served as my point of departure—the 'Birth of Tragedy' was my first revaluation of all values: and now I am back on that soil where my wants, my abilities grow—I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus,—I, the teacher of eternal return . . .

To seek or establish a rapport with an audience. We have already seen many examples of Nietzsche's desire to seek a *rapport*, speaking of those who have the ears to hear him and of those being worthy of hearing him. Consider the following from *Ecce Homo*:

> Always supposing that there are ears—that there are people capable and worthy of a similar pathos, that there are people you can communicate with.—

> Meanwhile, my Zarathustra, for instance, looks for people like this—and oh! He will have to look for a long time!—You need to be worthy of hearing him...[419]

To call for action. By offering his Dionysus myth as a counter-myth to Christianity, Nietzsche calls upon his reader to reject Christianity and to embrace the Dionysian attitude or disposition to life. In addition, Nietzsche creates, in those readers that are *en rapport*, the feeling that the ideas expressed in *GS* 341 are not only significant and worthwhile but ought to be pursued. Perhaps for some of these readers, they come to the text with only a faintly glimpsed and weakly grasped sense of the ideas Nietzsche is communicating; and here they find what was previously mysterious and ineffable expressed and made clear in the aphorism. If these ideas gain power over them, the call to action might become like a 'calling' in the Biblical sense.[420] In other words, they reject Christianity and embrace Dionysus. What next? Nietzsche does not say but he does hint at coming wars. 'There will be wars such as the earth has never seen.'[421] Is this a call to arms? He seems to suggest that these coming wars will start with him. Politics, he says, will 'merge entirely into a war of spirits' and then he says that starting with him 'the earth will know great politics'.[422] We saw above, in the quote from *Ecce Homo*, that he refers to the revaluation of values as 'the great war.' He also says that he has 'a right to wage war on Christianity.'[423] These wars may not be literal wars, Nietzsche's words may simply be the sound of fife and drum in order to encourage his readers. That is, the military metaphor is used to bolster their spirits, as the thought of eternal return gave Zarathustra the strength not to give up on the mountain path. One of the potential hazards of mythopoesis is that the call to arms, especially for those failing to establish a true *rapport* with the creator, can easily be misconstrued. We saw above the powerful effect that Nietzsche's *mit klingendem Spiel* had on Tillich; the sounds of fife and drum he detected in Nietzsche's work encouraged his faith in God and powerfully affected others who heard him use Nietzsche's sounding brass as that which brought him closer to God. This hardly seems like a victory in Nietzsche's war on Christianity.

6.6 In the next chapter

In the next chapter I focus on Nietzsche's mask metaphor as a way of communicating his idea of Dionysus and the Dionysian but also his method. That is, Nietzsche uses the idea of putting on and

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[419] *EH* 'Books' 4.
[420] See Romans 1:6 and 8:28.
[421] *EH* 'Destiny' 1.
[422] *EH* 'Destiny' 1.
[423] *EH* 'Wise' 7.

removing masks in order to communicate how deeply he ventures with his philosophical analysis of life.

Chapter 7 Nietzsche's masks

In this chapter I look first at Nietzsche's mask metaphor and the idea of peeling away mask after mask until we reach the final one. This discussion will help us better understand Nietzsche's myth of Dionysus and the Dionysian. In addition, I offer my interpretation of *GS* 295 in which Nietzsche expands on not only his understanding of Dionysus but on the reception of his myth by philosophers and potential 'friends'. What we will see is that philosophers mistrust his use of myth to do philosophy and his potential 'friends' (those with whom he might be *en rapport*) are put off by his talk of God and gods. Consider in this light his later remarks in *The Genealogy*, that the 'more spiritual men of the age', a group of which Nietzsche considers himself a member, breathe the air of unconditional, honest atheism; and that he does not know of any friends.[424] We can read into this that Nietzsche is concerned that the closest thing he has to friends, sympathetic readers, will be put off his work by his references to the Dionysus and the Dionysian. The main goal of this chapter is to show not only the depths into which Nietzsche was going with his philosophical enquiry but how he attempted to use mythopoesis to make clear what he was doing philosophically and to call upon like-minded readers to join him.

7.1 Nietzsche's use of the idea of masks

Nietzsche uses the idea of masked figures in two ways: firstly, 'masks' are a metaphor for how we are seen by others and how we want to be seen; secondly, the idea of a masked person invites, provokes, perhaps compels us to think about who or what is behind the mask. Something intriguing that Nietzsche explores in his works is the idea of masks upon masks; that is when we remove the top mask what is revealed underneath is a second mask, and behind that a third and so on. The fascinating and uncanny idea Nietzsche exploits in his use of this metaphor is the idea that under the final mask there may be nothing at all. Here 'nothing' should not be imagined as a void but more of an abyss where there is a point at which the viewer staring in cannot see beyond. In other words, what is behind the final mask is beyond human comprehension. In this respect we can think of Dionysus, the masked god and the god of masks, who has no face behind the mask. As we have seen, in previous chapters of this thesis, Nietzsche uses the ideas of Dionysus and the Dionysian to make clear something mysterious and otherwise ineffable: an

[424] *GM III*, 27.

attitude or disposition towards life and a way of thinking about this attitude or disposition.[425] If removing the layers of masks is a metaphor for going deeper and deeper into philosophical investigation; and if what lies behind the final mask is nothing or, in other words, something beyond human comprehension then Nietzsche's mask metaphor is an attempt to communicate the idea of knowing something without knowing how we know it. For example, we may feel certain that we are justified in having a positive attitude towards life but without knowing if or how this is justified. As we pursue the idea, a pursuit characterised by Nietzsche as the removal of layers and layers of masks, or as we shall see below, by exploring ever deeper caves, plumbing greater and greater depths or wandering ever-widening labyrinths, we get to a point where we can go no further. We reach the limits of human comprehension.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus uses the idea of 'stage-sets collapsing' to reveal a desert beyond human comprehension. Both Nietzsche and Camus invoke an idea already expressed by Galileo. As we saw in chapter five of this thesis, Galileo said that without mathematical language life would be like stumbling around a labyrinth in the dark. This stumbling around in which up might be down and down might be up is the vertigo experienced by Nietzsche's madman in *GS* 125. Camus saw that without myth to clothe the world it is incomprehensible in its nakedness. Myths are languages by which we can comprehend the world.[426] In Nietzsche's mask metaphor these myths, the stories we tell ourselves and each other, are the masks we put on the world and the people within it. Thinking about the metaphor in this way, peeling away masks is peeling away the myths with which, in Camus' words, we clothe the word. However, once the world is naked there are no more myths and it is incomprehensible. What is most disconcerting is not finding oneself alone in a dark labyrinth but the heavy realisation that what previously guided us through its corridors was something we invented for ourselves. The concern here is that, to give one example, if Jesus is no longer the way or the truth how can we live blind in a labyrinth.[427] The main question posed in Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* is once our world has been denuded of myths, is it possible to create new myths? With this discussion of masks and myths in mind, let us take a closer look at Nietzsche's use of the mask metaphor.

7.2 Nietzsche's masks metaphor

Theatrical masks serve two functions: they cover up the face of the actor wearing the mask; and they reveal the face of the character depicted by the mask. In fact, all masks in a sense hide one

[425] See chapter three of this thesis.
[426] Blumenberg (2010).
[427] John 14:6.

face and reveal another. A bank robber's face is hidden behind a mask but the mask reveals the man to be a bank robber; that is as the robbery is performed, the bank teller sees the bank robber. When Nietzsche talks about the 'masks' in his works there is a sense of the hidden but also something seen. For example, Nietzsche talks of people with profound secrets who need to hide their hidden and profound shame from even their closest and most trusted friends; such a person 'wants and encourages a mask of himself to wander around, in his place, through the hearts and heads of his friends'.[428] Even if one of these profound spirits does not want to be masked, and even thinks that they are not masked, Nietzsche says they will in time discover that they were all along: 'a mask is constantly growing around every profound spirit, thanks to the consistently false (which is to say shallow) interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he displays.'[429] In another aphorism, Nietzsche imagines a scene in which a mysterious wanderer is offered hospitality by another person. The wanderer is inscrutable and when given the choice of anything they want which will relax them they reply: 'another mask! A second mask!'[430] The wanderer is asking for a mask, which means it is a mask that will be given to them by the other person. If the 'mask' given to someone refers to how that person is seen, then the wanderer is asking the host to see them differently. The second mask will come from the host but there are two possible interpretations concerning the first mask. Either the first mask was also given to the wanderer by the host or the wanderer put that mask on themselves. In the first instance we can imagine the host saw the wanderer (put a mask on them) and thought to themselves 'this person is someone I can approach and to whom I can offer hospitality.' In the second instance we can imagine the wanderer was already wearing a mask, whether they chose to or not, that showed them to be an approachable person receptive to offers of hospitality. Either way the wanderer wanted a new mask and not to be seen in this way.

But it is not just those with profound secrets to hide that are walking around in masks. In *BGE* 194, Nietzsche suggests that not only is everyone walking around with a mask but that we put masks on everyone we meet. He begins by talking about three different ways in which a man might consider themselves to 'possess' a woman. The first is content with his possession of her if she allows him to sleep with her; the second will only be satisfied if she sacrifices everything she has or desires for his sake; the third wants what the second wants but he needs to be sure that the woman is giving everything up for him and not just her idea of him. In other words, he wants her to see behind the mask and to love him without any illusions as to who he really is. In the original German Nietzsche writes: 'er wagt es, sich errathen zu lassen.' The last few words in English are:

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[428] *BGE* 40.
[429] *BGE* 40.
[430] *BGE* 278.

'he dares to be guessed at.' According to the *Duden*, 'erraten' means not only to guess but to correctly guess.[431] Nietzsche repeats the idea in another example in which he looks at rulers that wish to possess a people; one is willing to do what is politically necessary, in Nietzsche's words 'employ the higher arts of Cagliostro and Cataline', whereas another wants to be seen and loved by the people for who they really are. However, in what follows in the rest of the aphorism it seems unlikely that someone ever can (or is ever inclined) to see beyond the masks. Nietzsche switches perspective to people putting masks on others. Many people who are outwardly charitable, says Nietzsche, mask the true natures of those to whom they give help. That is, before acting, they imagine the person they are about to help as deeply grateful and indebted, to be excessively servile and so on. In a similar way, mothers and fathers put masks on their children, in their likeness, and call this an upbringing; as do 'the teacher, the state, the priest and the prince.' When we watch a play, we do not usually want to see the actor behind the mask; and the bank-teller will probably only ever see a thief, with no interest in seeing beyond the mask. This is in all likelihood reciprocated in that when the actor looks out from the stage they want to see 'an audience' and not individual faces; the bank-robber would probably prefer to point their gun at a bank-teller and not the person behind the job title.

Consider the following two remarks from Nietzsche:

> Every philosophy *conceals* a philosophy too: every opinion is also a hiding place, every word is a mask.[432]

> It seems that all great things, in order to inscribe eternal demands in the heart of humanity, must first wander the earth under monstrous and terrible masks.[433]

Nietzsche questions whether philosophers can have "final and actual" opinions. Likening philosophers to hermits, living and thinking alone in caves, he wonders 'whether for a philosopher every cave does not have, must not have, an even deeper cave behind it—a more extensive, stranger, richer world above the surface, an abyss behind every ground, under every "groundwork."'[434]

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[431] Judith Norman renders this line curiously as: 'he does not dare to let anyone figure him out.' Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: A Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2002).
[432] *BGE* 289.
[433] *BGE* Preface.
[434] *BGE* 289.

Now that we have seen how Nietzsche uses his mask metaphor, let us turn to his use of masks in his works.

7.3 Nietzsche's works as masked performances

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche says that for a long time the only hero present on stage was Dionysus and that all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus etc., are merely masks of that original hero.[435] And, in chapter two of this thesis, we saw how Nietzsche considered his works to be a kind of Dionysian music; his texts are, in a sense, *performances*. Putting this together we can think of Paul, as he appears 'on Nietzsche's stage' so to speak, as Nietzsche's original hero in a mask. Nietzsche's original hero is Dionysus.

Imagine *The Antichrist* as a staged performance. An actor walks on wearing a Nietzsche mask and begins to talk. When we get to the part of the performance where Paul enters the scene, the actor puts a mask of Paul over their Nietzsche mask. If we were to rush on stage at this point and remove the Paul mask we would reveal, as expected, the Nietzsche mask beneath. But suppose we then remove *that* mask and see not the actor's face but a mask of Dionysus. The question is: what is under the Dionysus mask? Would we see Nietzsche's actual face or another mask? The answer to this question will give us valuable insights into Nietzsche's idea of Dionysus and the Dionysian. What I am attempting to elaborate here is a method.

Nietzsche's idiosyncratic use of Paul in *The Antichrist* is designed to draw in and seduce perceptive readers into attempting to lift the mask and see what lies beneath.[436] In order to remove the mask we need to clearly identify what is part of the Paul mask and what is part of the mask underneath it. We need to know what the mask we are trying to remove is made of, what it represents; who is this monster that Nietzsche created to oppose Dionysus?[437] To lift off the mask we need to separate it from the Dionysus mask beneath. For that we need to work out how we put distance between Paul and Dionysus. Once this job is done, we can perhaps remove the mask of Dionysus and maybe here we will find what Nietzsche wants us to find. Before we move on and with this in mind consider the following passages from *Beyond Good and Evil*.

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[435] *BT* 10.

[436] For an example of this technique on a much grander scale, see: Wingo (2003). Here Wingo argues the core political myths in liberal democratic states are veiled in such a way as to draw attention to what is beneath the veil.

[437] See *GS* 56. Also consider Blumenberg (2010) on the need to put a name to and create myths about ineffable enemies.

> Anyone who has sat alone with his soul in intimate dispute and dialogue, year in, and year out, day and night, anyone who has become a cave bear or treasure hunter or treasure guard and dragon in his cave (which might be a labyrinth but also a gold mine): his very concepts will come to acquire their own twilight colour, the smell of depth just as much as of mildew, something uncommunicative and reluctant that blows a chill on everything going past. The hermit does not believe that a philosopher—given that a philosopher was always a hermit first—has ever expressed his actual and final opinions in books: don't people write books precisely to keep what they hide to themselves? In fact, he will doubt whether a philosopher could even have "final and actual" opinions, whether for a philosopher every cave does not have, must not have, an even deeper cave behind it—a more extensive, stranger, richer world above the surface, an abyss behind every ground, under every "groundwork." Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy—that is a hermit's judgement: "There is something arbitrary in his stopping here, looking back, looking around, in his not digging any deeper here, and putting his spade away—there is also something suspicious about it." Every philosophy conceals a philosophy too: every opinion is also a hiding place, every word is also a mask.[438]

There are a number of interesting and useful things to take note of in this passage. There is a reference to the labyrinth. We remember that in the preface to *The Antichrist* one of the conditions Nietzsche puts on his readers is that they have 'a predestination for the labyrinth.' In the passage we will look at next, Nietzsche says Dionysus is fond of human beings that 'find their way around any labyrinth.' Interestingly, Nietzsche says Dionysus told this to Ariadne who, we know, helped Theseus navigate the Minotaur's labyrinth (and who later married Dionysus). Nietzsche also talks about caves and concepts that philosophers acquire, store and guard as their treasures. There are two things worth noting here. Firstly, what seems to be a clear reference to Plato's allegory of the cave. Nietzsche, as we have seen him do often with Christian myths, inverts Plato's myth. For Plato the treasure is found *outside* the cave and the returning prisoner finds the ideas he has discovered to be '*uncommunicable*.' This imagery suggests the difficulty of communicating what has been discovered in the caves (rather than the difficulty of communicating what was discovered outside the cave, in Plato's case). Nietzsche moves on to this subject, which is the second thing worth noting. Here we have the idea of the philosopher writing books in order to communicate what they have discovered in the caves. Nietzsche questions how

[438] *BGE* 289.

the philosopher knows that they have fully plumbed the depths, so to speak, of their caves. Consider again the 'Wanderer' in *BGE* 278, who is 'like a plumb line that returns unsatisfied from every depth back into the light (what was it looking for down there?)' Nietzsche's suggestion is that there are more and deeper caves to be explored before the philosopher is finally ready to put their ideas in print. If it is true that no writers ever complete their books but instead just stop writing them, it will be as true in Nietzsche's day as it would be in ours. Surely, this is what Nietzsche is alluding to when he says that no philosopher 'has ever expressed his actual and final opinions in books.' Due to the extent of the labyrinth to be navigated and the depths to be plumbed, it is unlikely that a philosopher can have "final and actual" opinions. Indeed, we should be suspicious of those that 'stop digging' and 'put their spades away'. That is, suspicious of philosophy presented as final and complete. 'Every philosophy,' Nietzsche says, 'conceals a philosophy too: every opinion is also a hiding place, every word is also a mask.'

Of course, this includes Nietzsche's own books and his own philosophy. He is wandering the labyrinths and plumbing the depths but we cannot take *The Antichrist*, for example, as his final and actual opinion. Nor should we attempt to present our final and actual opinion on this work. Instead we must treat every word as a mask that must be peeled away. I have already indicated that Nietzsche 'wears' a number of masks; as we peel each one away to reveal the mask beneath we ourselves go deeper and deeper with Nietzsche. Here we come to the real problem posed by the masks: what are we expecting to find behind the last mask?

What would it mean to peel away all the masks to discover Nietzsche himself? It seems unlikely that it means we will discover his final and actual opinion because, based on my interpretation of *BGE* 289, like all philosophers he does not have one to find. Perhaps, under all the masks is not Nietzsche's final opinion as in the *completion* of his philosophical endeavours but rather final in the sense of *as far as one can go*. In other words, by carefully removing all the masks covering all the words in all of Nietzsche's works we finally reveal everything he has to say, even though he never reached a final conclusion. We find the Nietzsche that is in his works to find. However, if this is what we are looking for when we read Nietzsche, then we are treating him like a guru or great teacher that we attempt to follow. We have already seen, in the first chapter of this thesis, that this is not something Nietzsche wants from his readers.

From 'arrows and epigrams' in *Twilight of the Idols*:

> What? You are looking for something? You want to multiply yourself by ten, a hundred? You are looking for disciples—look for *zeroes*—[439]

And from *The Gay Science*:

> *Vademecum (go with me)—Vadetecum (go with yourself)*
>
> Lured by my style and tendency,
> you follow and come after me?
> Follow your own self faithfully—
> take time—and thus you follow me.[440]

If not Nietzsche then who or what is under the final mask? Given everything said so far, one obvious answer is Dionysus. But another answer is 'nothing'. Dionysus is 'the masked god' but also the god of the mask.[441] This being so, Dionysus cannot be behind the mask, he *is* the mask. Consider how in the *Phaedrus*, when Socrates shows off by giving a speech against love, he is stopped by his *daimonion* because by saying that love is bad he is saying that Eros is bad.[442] Eros is not just the god *of* love, he *is* love; therefore, by saying that love is bad Socrates is not simply saying that Eros is the god of something bad but that Eros is bad. Accordingly, if Dionysus is the mask there is nothing *behind* the mask. What does this mean? Supposing that Nietzsche is wandering the darkest labyrinths and plumbing the deepest depths looking for Dionysus, if he were to finally locate Dionysus he would reach the endpoint and complete his search. But, as we have seen, this is beyond the grasp of human beings. If we peel away the masks not only in Nietzsche's philosophy but all philosophies concerned with the Dionysian, then the last mask revealed will be the mask of Dionysus. What is behind this mask is unimaginable; something beyond the comprehension of human beings. This is why we need myths to even get close. Let us remind ourselves of Partenie's observation on the role of myth that we saw in chapter three of this thesis:

> [M]yths enable us to explore matters that are beyond *our* limited intellectual powers [...] the human mind has limitations of many sorts, so it sometimes needs myths to approximate the truth about what lies beyond its experience.[443]

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[439] *TI* 'Arrows' 14.
[440] *GS* 'German Rhymes' 7. Kaufman's translation given here makes Nietzsche seem less urgent; the original German ends with 'gemach! gemach!' *come on! come on!*
[441] In a sense the Judeo-Christian God is a masked god. As we saw in chapter three, God's face cannot be seen directly. In this he is an unknown god, like Dionysus.
[442] Plato. Phaedrus. 242c.
[443] Partenie (2009). xix.

If it were possible to comprehend Dionysus directly then we would have no need of myth. Consider here Nietzsche's remarks in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> But if we felt as purely Dionysiac beings, then myth, as symbol would simply be left to one side, unaffecting and unregarded, and would not distract us for even a moment from listening to the echoes of the *universalia ante rem*.[444]

Dionysus is found at a depth below myth; myth is *born* of Dionysus.[445] What this means is that there are things about Dionysus that can only be revealed by myth and at his discretion. In this light consider *BGE* 295. In what follows I will offer my interpretation of the aphorism.

7.4 Beyond Good and Evil 295

Nietzsche begins effusively singing the praises of a god he 'forgets' to name. The god is, of course, Dionysus. Nietzsche refers to him as a 'pied piper' tempting his followers to get ever closer to him, to follow him more 'inwardly and thoroughly'. He is 'a divining rod for every speck of gold that has long been buried in a prison of mud and sand,' that leaves his followers 'full of hopes that do not have names yet.' Nietzsche continues:

> . . . but what am I doing, my friends? Who am I talking about? Have I forgotten myself so much that I haven't even told you his name? Unless you have already guessed on your own who this questionable spirit and god is, who wants to be praised in this way? [...] nobody less than the god Dionysus, that great ambiguity and tempter god, to whom, as you know, I once offered my firstborn in all secrecy and reverence. I seem to be the last one to have offered him a sacrifice: because I have not found anyone who understood what I was doing then.

Nietzsche's firstborn is, of course, *The Birth of Tragedy*. We then see an idea Nietzsche will repeat, that he is the last disciple of Dionysus.[446] By 'last' we should understand this as *currently* the last rather than the *final* disciple. In his writings, Nietzsche hints that there will be more Dionysian disciples in the future. He talks about a war between the spirits, that in chapter six of this thesis I identified as a 'war' (whatever Nietzsche means by this) fought on one side by those with a Dionysian spirit, or put another way, disciples of Dionysus. In his attempt at self-criticism, discussed at length here in chapter three, he refers to Dionysus as *as yet* unknown by his readers. We have also seen that Nietzsche considers himself a posthumous writer and that his readers,

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[444] *BT* 21.
[445] *BT* 16.
[446] *TI* 'Ancients' 5.

those capable of establishing a *rapport,* are yet to be born. He worries that these readers may never come to be; however, unless he knows this to be a fact (which he clearly does not) then it is not for sure that he is the final disciple of Dionysus. So we should think of him as currently the last disciple. Let us continue with *BGE* 295.

> In the meantime, I have learned much, all too much more about the philosophy of this god, passed on, as I said, from mouth to mouth—I, the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus: and can I, at last, start to give you, my friends, a small taste of this philosophy, as far as I am permitted? In undertones, which would be best, since it concerns many things that are secret, new, foreign, strange, uncanny.

The reference to the philosophy of Dionysus being passed on 'mouth-to-mouth' is likely to be to *Numbers* 12:8 in which God is said to speak to Moses mouth-to-mouth and not in visions and riddles as he does with mere prophets. In Judith Norman's translation above, she renders 'mit halber Stimme' as 'in undertones.' Both half voice (mezza voce) and undertone refer to musical expression, appropriate for Nietzsche who believes his philosophy ought to be sung. Kathleen Schlesinger has shown that the *aulos*, or reed-blown flute of ancient Greece that is associated with Dionysus, was constructed to produce notes in a section of the undertone series.[447] Putting all this together, those with ears to hear can understand this as Nietzsche saying that what he has received from Dionysus directly, he must reproduce in music because it contains strange, new, foreign and uncanny secrets.

> Even the fact that Dionysus is a philosopher and that, consequently, even gods philosophise, seems to me like something new and not without its dangers, something that might arouse mistrust precisely among philosophers,—among you, my friends, it has less opposition, unless it comes too late and at the wrong time: I have been told that you do not like believing in God and gods these days. And perhaps in recounting my story, I will have to take frankness further than will always be agreeable to the strict habits of your ears? Certainly, the god in question went further in dialogues like this, much, much further, and was always many steps ahead of me . . . In fact, if it were permissible to follow human custom in ascribing beautiful, solemn names of splendour and virtue to him, I would have to offer many praises for his explorer's, discoverer's heart, for his daring and genuine honesty, his truthfulness and his love of wisdom. But a god like this will

[447] Schlesinger (1939).

> have no use at all for this honourable rubbish and splendour. "Keep this for yourself," he would say, "and for those like you and anyone else who needs it! I—have no reason for covering my nakedness!"—

I said that Nietzsche must 'reproduce in music' what he has learned from Dionysus. This describes the process of the myth-making in his mythopoesis. In the passage above we can see Nietzsche's doubts that his way of communicating his philosophy will be well received. Certainly not by philosophers who he anticipates as being mistrustful; nor by those he considers his 'friends' who 'do not like believing in God and gods these days'. We can understand this, I think, as Nietzsche worrying that those who might be most receptive to his mythopoesis will be put off by the myth-making necessary in mythopoeic works. In a clever twist, he goes on to say that Dionysus himself would not appreciate Nietzsche singing his praises the way he does! The words of praise Nietzsche offers, that he refers to as 'honourable rubbish and splendour', are not imagined by him to be totally rejected by Dionysus: 'Keep this for yourself,' the dark god is imagined saying, 'and for those like you and anyone else who needs it!' Why would anyone *need* to sing these or any praises? Note here that Nietzsche says that Dionysus is always 'many steps ahead' of him. If these praises are what keeps him going, in following or pursuing Dionysus, but are rubbish and splendour then they appear a lot like *sounding brass* discussed in chapter six of this thesis. Finally here, Dionysus has no reason to cover his nakedness. In other words, the masked god has no need of masks. As we saw at the top of this chapter, the denuded world is incomprehensible; we cannot understand it without first clothing it. This is, perhaps, the profound shame Nietzsche refers to in *BGE* 40.[448] For us, Dionysus will always appear masked. In the final part of this aphorism, the idea of his mask separates two key ideas.

> You can guess: this type of divinity and philosopher is, perhaps, lacking in shame?—He once said: "I love humans under certain circumstances"—meaning Ariadne, who was present—: "I think humans are pleasant, brave, inventive animals that have no equal on earth, they find their way around any labyrinth. I am very fond of them: I think about how I can help them advance and make them stronger, more evil and more profound than they are."—"Stronger, more evil, and more profound?" I asked, startled.—"Yes," he said again, "stronger, more evil, and more profound; and more beautiful"—and at that, the tempter god smiled his halcyon smile, as if he had just paid a charming compliment. You can see: this divinity lacks more than just shame—; but you can also see that there are good

[448] The allusion to Genesis 3:10.

> reasons for supposing that the gods could learn a thing or two from us humans.
> We humans are—more human…

There are two parts to the excerpt. Nietzsche first has Dionysus praise human beings. He is being candid, not wearing a mask. After saying that he is fond of humans—Ariadne is there, a human he married—because they are pleasant and brave, he says that he thinks of how he can help us to be 'stronger, evil and more profound.' This apparently surprises Nietzsche who is left staring into the grinning mask of Dionysus. In Ancient Greek performances the mask of Dionysus was always depicted as smiling. By focusing on the mask, Nietzsche brings the 'Godhead' of Dionysus to the fore. Dionysus' mask is one put on by Nietzsche; the dark god we have been hearing about is *his* creation. The story being told in *GS* 295 is suddenly and abruptly brought to an end by a *deus ex machina*. An actor in a Dionysus mask is brought on. 'You can see: this divinity lacks more than just shame—;' Nietzsche is saying that Dionysus lacks existence. Nietzsche is not in the business of creating gods and starting a new religion; those with whom a *rapport* may one day be possible need not be put off by his talk of God and gods.

7.5 In the next chapter

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to one of the masks Nietzsche dons for his philosophical performances—we remember here that Nietzsche thinks his works ought to be sung—the apostle Paul. Here I argue that the Paul we find in Nietzsche's work, in particular *The Antichrist, is neither* the historical Paul nor the St. Paul of the Christian faith. Instead, Nietzsche's Paul is his own myth of Paul that he uses to communicate ideas about the Dionysian. That is, in the same way that Camus will later take aspects of Sisyphus from Greek myth in order to express his ideas about the absurd, Nietzsche takes aspects of Paul from Christian myth in order to express ideas about Dionysus and the Dionysian. Finally, I will draw out a key idea that Nietzsche uses his Paul myth to make clear: the dangers of egalitarianism.

Chapter 8 Nietzsche's Paul Myth

Here I argue that the Paul we find in Nietzsche's work, in particular *The Antichrist, is neither* the historical Paul nor the St. Paul of the Christian faith. Instead, I argue that Nietzsche's Paul is his own *myth of Paul* that he uses to communicate ideas about the Dionysian. That is, in the same way that Camus will later take aspects of Sisyphus from Greek myth in order to express his ideas about the absurd, Nietzsche takes aspects of Paul from Christian myth in order to express ideas about Dionysus and the Dionysian. Finally, I will draw out a key idea that Nietzsche uses his Paul myth to make clear: the dangers of egalitarianism.

8.1 Antichrist, Anti-Christian, Anti-Christ

In this brief section my aim is to show that what or who Nietzsche opposes is Paul. Jesus is mentioned in the text but in a way that almost exempts him from Nietzsche's criticism. Would a more accurate title have been *Anti-Paul*? Perhaps, but Paul is a mask worn by Nietzsche in order to put Dionysus on stage. The aim of *The Antichrist* is to make clear Dionysus and the Dionysian; and in Nietzsche's myth it is Dionysus versus the crucified not Dionysus versus Paul. Hence the focus on Christ.

It is commonly known that the title, in the original German, contains a pun or dual-meaning. *Der Antichrist* can mean either 'the antichrist' or 'the anti-Christian.'[449] The question is, what helps us to better understand the text: Christ or Christian?

Almost all of Nietzsche's claims against 'Christianity' are directed squarely at Paul and focus almost entirely on his first letter to the Corinthians. It is true that within the text, Nietzsche *does* claim that there has only ever been one Christian and he died on the cross, meaning of course, Jesus Christ.[450] Taken literally, this would mean that Paul is not a Christian in Nietzsche's eyes. But he also refers to Paul as "a first Christian."[451] This notwithstanding, his position on Jesus, *the man*, in the text, is not particularly *anti*. This is not to say that Nietzsche was *pro* Jesus. It is quite common to see in the secondary literature the idea that Nietzsche in some way admires Jesus or

[449] Nietzsche perhaps enjoyed the dual-meaning (as Camus did when he chose *L'Homme révolté* over *Le Rebelle* for the text known in English as *The Rebel*).*L'Homme révolté* can be understood both as *The revolted man* and *The man in revolt* which captures the mood of the text very nicely.
[450] *A* 39.
[451] *A* 46.

even reveres him.[452] Just because Nietzsche reserves his strongest vitriol for Paul and, by comparison, his comments on Jesus appear mild, this is no indication that he respected Jesus.[453] As he is portrayed in *The Antichrist,* Jesus is an entirely passive 'idiot' (in the Dostoevskian sense) that failed in his attempt to be a free spirit.[454] Coming from Nietzsche, being called a 'free spirit' should be taken as a compliment and he *does say*, in section 32 of *The Antichrist*, that Jesus can be called a 'free spirit'—but this is qualified by his prefacing the remark with 'one could, with a degree of licence [call Jesus a "free spirit"]'. Importantly, what Nietzsche goes on to say is a total rejection of Jesus' way of life. If we are to take Jesus as some kind of 'free spirit', we could say that for Nietzsche, he was a *bad kind* of one. On my reading, at least, there is no sense that Nietzsche is suggesting that Jesus was ultimately misguided in his attempt to be a free spirit but he ought to be respected for at least having a good go at it. Jesus, the man, in his supposed passivity and rejection of aversion and hostility, lived a way of life characterised by two attitudes Nietzsche marks out as particularly pernicious doctrines of Christianity: (1) an instinctive hatred of reality, and (2) instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all boundaries and distances of feeling.[455] Given the extensive criticism, and overt hostility, from Nietzsche towards these two in *The Antichrist*, it is difficult to accept that he could respect, let alone revere, anyone who embodied these attitudes. Still, Nietzsche's words on Jesus contain none of the vitriol aimed at Paul, who is described variously as *obscene*, *disgraceful*, a *liar*, a *tyrant*, and an *impudent windbag*.[456] We could not call Jesus an 'enemy' of Nietzsche. Accordingly, is does no good to cite *Zarathustra*'s speech on friends as evidence for Nietzsche's respect for Jesus:

> And often one attacks and makes an enemy in order to conceal that one is open to attack. "At least be my enemy!"—Thus speaks true respect that does not ask for friendship.[457]

The Antichrist is then not anti-Jesus (and neither is it pro-Jesus) and if we prefer to read the title as *The Anti-Christian*, this Christian is probably not Jesus. If there is a particular Christian being referred to it can only be Paul. But what about considering the title as Anti-Christ?

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[452] For example, see Kaufmann (1974). In particular: 338, 341 and 342.
[453] Compare this with Nietzsche's account of Jesus in *Beyond Good and Evil* 269: 'a poor man who was unsatisfied and insatiable in love, who had to invent hell for there to be somewhere to send people who did not *want* to love him.'
[454] For Nietzsche's view of Jesus as failure see *Antichrist*, 29, 30, 31. We can note in passing that Nietzsche does not refer to Jesus as similar to Prince Myshkin, as Sartre once did with Camus' Meursault, but provocatively chose 'idiot' instead. While it is clear that Nietzsche has Dostoevsky in mind, it is hardly an indication of great respect or reverence.
[455] *A* 30.
[456] *A* 41, 42, 46.
[457] *Z* 'The Speeches of Zarathustra', 'On the Friend'.

A distinction is often made between Jesus 'the man' and Jesus 'as Christ'; the latter referring to how he is depicted by the Church or by Paul. Discussing Nietzsche's ideas on the origins of Christianity, Karl Jaspers writes: 'Jesus is exempted. He stands aside. His reality, according to Nietzsche, has actually nothing to do with Christian history.'[458] If we choose to understand Nietzsche's title this way, then that which he is opposed to is *the idea of* Christ. However, the idea of Christ that Nietzsche presents and critiques in *The Antichrist* is taken almost entirely from Paul. This being so, it seems that whether we choose to read the title of this text as *The Antichrist*, *The Anti-Christian* or *The Anti-Christ*, what Nietzsche is opposing is Paul and his invention of Christ.[459] Let us turn now to Nietzsche's treatment of Paul.

8.2 Nietzsche's Paul myth

I begin here by looking at how Camus took a character from Greek mythology and used it in his mythopoesis. In order to do so, he changed some of the original ideas, omitted others and refocused the attention of the readers from Sisyphus' struggle up the mountain to his walk back down. One of his strongest recent critics is Paul Archambault. What he criticises Camus for, in particular, is failing to give an accurate account of Sisyphus taken from the original sources; and using the myth to make points about his own time and place and not that of the historical Greeks. By looking at these criticisms and comparing Camus' use of the Sisyphus myth to Nietzsche's use of Paul, we can gain a better understanding of both their uses of existing myths in their mythopoeic works.

Luke Richardson has made the astonishing observation that despite the obvious attachment Camus' philosophy has to ancient Greece there has been only one major study dedicated specifically to this subject.[460] Unfortunately, this particular study by Paul Archambault rather misses the point of Camus' myth-making. In his *Camus' Hellenic Sources* he derides Camus' observations on the Greeks as 'impressive neither for their precision nor for their critical acuity.'[461] He goes on to say that Camus' most memorable passages on the Sisyphus myth are 'most likely the product of schoolbook sources.'[462] The problem here, as far as Archambault is concerned, is that Camus writes about Greek myths without having gone to the trouble of seeking

[458] Jaspers, Karl. *Nietzsche and Christianity*. Trans. E. B. Ashton. Gateway (1963). 17.
[459] For Nietzsche's claims that Paul created Christ and Christianity see *Antichrist*, sections 41, 42, 47, and 58. Nietzsche bases his critique of Christianity around the Pauline ideas of Faith, hope and love which he introduces in section 23.
[460] Richardson, Luke. "Sisyphus and Caesar: the opposition of Greece and Rome in Albert Camus' Absurd Cycle." *Classical Receptions Journal* Vol 4. Issue 1 (2012). 66-89. 68.
[461] Archambault, Paul. *Camus' Hellenic Sources*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (1972). 169.
[462] Ibid. 170.

out the original sources. This criticism, however, completely misses the point of what Camus is attempting to do with Greek myth in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus is not, as perhaps Archambault would like him to be, attempting to understand the ancient Greek mind through their myths and myth-making; rather, Camus is attempting to use the basic narrative core of a familiar Greek myth in order to create his own myth for his own time.[463]

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus does not attempt to produce a scholarly account of the Sisyphus myth with regards to how it was used in ancient Greece. He is not interested in Greek myths in order to better understand the ancient Greek mind. Instead, Camus uses a well-known ancient myth as a narrative core upon which to build his own myth in order to better understand his contemporary milieu. Archambault criticises Camus for using secondary sources but for his project all he requires is the basic narrative core of the Sisyphus story with which his readers will be familiar. From here, as long as the core myth remains recognisable, he can make the changes required in order to tell his own story and make his own myth. This he achieves by focusing neither on Sisyphus' struggle up the mountain, nor on his dismay at watching the rock roll away, but on his hero's return journey *down* the mountain. In short, all that is required for Camus' project is the core Sisyphus story and for this schoolbook sources will certainly suffice.

We can note here that Camus only takes what he needs from the original myth and ignores anything that is not useful for his mythopoesis. For example, he makes no mention of Sisyphus' life before his punishment. There is nothing in Camus' works about Sisyphus' violation of *xenia* and how the former king took *pleasure* in killing guests at his home. Nor is there anything related to Sisyphus being extremely cunning and how he twice cheated death. The reason for Sisyphus' punishment is ignored in Camus' text. The point here is not about why Camus omitted these things, it is not hard to see why; they are irrelevant. The point *is* simply the irrelevance of these things. That is, it would not do any good to challenge Camus' use of Sisyphus by bringing in these extra details.

It does not mean it is never worth thinking about the myth in terms of its place in Greek mythology. For instance, it is quite useful to ask what it is about the Sisyphus myth in particular that serves Camus' mythopoeic purpose that is not present in similar myths involving eternal and futile punishments. Why did Camus choose Sisyphus and not, say, the Danaides condemned to fill endlessly leaking water vessels, or Ocnus condemned to endlessly weave a straw rope that is being eaten at the other end by a donkey? The answer is that it is not the futility of attempting to

[463] Archambault concerns himself with Camus' reception of the Greeks in general throughout his works, however, for the sake of brevity I will limit myself to *The Myth of Sisyphus* and then, later, *The Stranger*. Accordingly, in what immediately follows I focus on Camus' essay and his use of the Sisyphus myth.

complete an endless task that captures what Camus has to say about the absurd but rather Sisyphus' ability or opportunity to stand outside of the task and reflect upon his life that is important.

When we look at Camus' use of this particular myth, our aim is to understand how Sisyphus is used *mythopoeically*; that is, how does Camus' Sisyphus myth make clear that something is rotten in the state *today*. Camus' retelling of the myth is the creation of a new myth.[464] In the same way, I want to argue that Nietzsche's retelling of the Paul myth is the creation of a new myth: that is Nietzsche's Paul myth. Camus does not mention Sisyphus' violation of *xenia* because his Sisyphus did not do it. Which is why it would be a waste of time to bring this up in any challenge to Camus' mythopoesis. The same goes for aspects of Paul's life and works with respect to Nietzsche. It is a waste of time challenging Nietzsche's critique of Paul's account of faith or the Kingdom of God, for example, if this account of faith is found outside of Nietzsche's works.

Archambault misses the point of *The Myth of Sisyphus* because he mistakenly believes that Camus is attempting to use classical resources in order to better understand the ancient Greeks. However, Camus is *not* interested in the existential problems of a people that lived a few millennia ago but with his contemporary readers, their modern lives and modern problems. In fact, Archambault's main objection to Camus' handling of Greek myths is precisely that Camus is less concerned with offering an accurate historical account of what particular Greeks actually thought but rather with sourcing material from which he can forge his own myths.

> [Camus] approached Greek culture with his own prejudices and preconceptions [...] It seemed less important to him to understand the Greek mind than to find in it an anticipation or confirmation of his own tragic humanism.[465]

Archambault professes to sympathise with Camus' attempt to breathe new life into old myths but laments Camus' seeming need to 'sacrifice historical fidelity to artistic vitality.'[466] What he cannot understand is why Camus' accounts of the Greek myths differ from the known historical material. As we have seen, he chides Camus for using secondary sources not aimed at professional scholars and for being more interested in using Greek myths to express his own ideas rather than accurately representing theirs. While this is lost on Archambault, it has not been lost on Richardson who writes:

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[464] Blumenberg, Hans. *Work on Myth*. Trans. Robert M. Wallace. Massachusetts: MIT Press (2010); Bottici, Chiara. *A Philosophy of Political Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2009).
[465] Ibid. 171.
[466] Ibid.

> It is clear that Camus has incarnated a figure of Sisyphus quite differently from one we would recognize. He effectively inverts the traditional and familiar. Sisyphus becomes a model of eternal contentment rather than eternal suffering. This is a conscious attempt to defy expectations and to disrupt tradition. Camus immediately decentres the myth, choosing not to focus, as previous artistic depictions have, on the moment of Sisyphus' agonising struggle but rather on the moment when he walks down the mountain. This moment is absent from most depictions yet he makes it his prime focus. In focussing on this normally assumed moment, Camus is interacting with the myth rather than simply retelling.[467]

Richardson's last line expresses what Camus is doing in *The Myth of Sisyphus* rather well: he is interacting with the myth rather than simply retelling. We have already seen that mythopoesis is performative and Nietzsche's claims that his works, a kind of music that ought to be sung, are best understood when his readers join him in the performance. This brings us back to the idea of Nietzsche on stage, wearing a mask of Paul in order to represent the Dionysian. His joke about Plato's Socrates being 'Plato at the front, Plato at the back, Chimaera in the middle,' can apply to his Paul. That is, the Paul we see in Nietzsche's works is actually Nietzsche at the front and back and an imaginary Paul, made up of bits and pieces of the real Paul in the middle.[468]

8.3 Paul as seen in *The Antichrist*

Nietzsche lays out the problem to be addressed in *The Antichrist* in section three: 'which type of human we should *breed*, should *will*, as a being of higher value, worthier of life, more certain of a future.'[469] He explains the novelty of his breeding idea: 'this higher-valued type has existed often enough before but as a stroke of luck, as an exception, never as *willed*.' We saw in chapter four of this thesis the vital role Nietzsche envisages for these higher types in terms of true education and the 'greatness' of a people. The call for action, from Nietzsche, is to stop waiting for exceptional people to emerge naturally but to actively encourage their arrival. Consider in this respect the old philosopher's womb metaphor in Nietzsche's lectures on education.[470]

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[467] Richardson (2012). 72.
[468] *BGE* 190.
[469] *A* 3.
[470] As a reminder: 'But for him to appear, to emerge from a people; to reflect as it were in its full array of colours the whole image of a people and its strengths; to reveal this people's highest purpose in the symbolic essence of one individual and his enduring work, thereby linking his people to the eternal and liberating his people from the ever-changing sphere of the momentary—all of this genius can do only if it is ripened in the womb and nourished in the lap of his people's culture.'

These lectures were written more than fifteen years prior to *The Antichrist* and so we can see that Nietzsche's ideas on the need for great people to emerge remained a constant in his work. In the essay, "On The Pathos of Truth", written in 1872, around the same time as his lectures, Nietzsche also expressed concerns about greatness.

In the essay, Nietzsche talks of 'the terrible struggle of culture [being] ignited by the demand that what is great should be eternal.' He paints a bleak and desperate picture of everyday human existence. Read with *GS* 341 in mind, the oppressive atmosphere of mundane life, in particular the notion of an endless repetition of the same sequence of unspeakably small pains, every thought, every sigh is made more palpable in the following lines:

> The customary, the small, the common fills every nook and cranny of the world like an oppressive atmosphere we are all condemned to breathe, smouldering around what is great; hindering, choking, suffocating, deadening, smothering, dimming, deluding, it throws itself onto the road the great must travel on the way to immortality. The road goes through human brains! Through the brains of pitiful, short-lived creatures who, given over to their cramped needs, rise again and again to the same afflictions and, with great effort, manage to fend off ruin for a short time. They want to live, to live a bit—at any price.[471]

It is perhaps easy to miss the presence of the 'the great' in the passage above. We can see that Nietzsche believes that human greatness exists. In imagery he will use again in "On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life" he uses the idea of great moments forming a chain that like mountain peaks unite humankind across the millennia.[472] Here, in "On The Pathos of Truth", Nietzsche suggests that the belief in this chain of great moments is necessary for the existence of culture. Returning to the passage in question, we see that the 'great' is present but difficult to spot. He continues:

> Who would discern among them that arduous torch race that only the great survive? And yet time and again some awaken who, seeing what is great, feel inspired, as if human life were a glorious thing, and as if the most beautiful fruit of this bitter plant were the assurance that someone once walked proudly and stoically through this existence, another with deep thoughts, a third with mercy,

[471] "On the Pathos of Truth". 5, 6
[472] See chapter four.

> but all of them leaving behind a single lesson: that he who lives life most beautifully is he who does not hold it in great esteem.

It is clear from the above that Nietzsche is referring to some notion of looking into the past in order to enliven the present. He talks about some people that 'awaken' to the idea that human life *might* be great. It is not clear from the passage how we ought to read *as if*. Nietzsche is not here definitively saying that human life *is* a glorious thing and that the assurance that certain kinds of people previously existed *is* the 'beautiful bitter fruit' of life. These are the imaginings of imaginary people. But Nietzsche is, presumably, talking about something he believes to be true. This is the curious lesson to be learned: *the people that live life most beautifully do not hold life in great esteem*. His point is that people who overly concern themselves with life will not achieve greatness, unlike those that respond to life with 'an Olympian laugh' or if they cannot quite do that, they at least hold life in 'sublime disdain.' This idea will also be repeated in "On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life". There Nietzsche says:

> [D]o ask yourself why you, the individual, exist, and if you can get no other answer try for once to justify the meaning of your existence as it were *a posteriori* by setting before yourself an aim, a goal, a 'to this end', an exalted and noble 'to this end'. Perish in pursuit of this and only this—I know of no better aim of life than that of perishing, *animae magnae prodigus*, in pursuit of the great and the impossible.

For Nietzsche, then, great people are required as exemplars for others in order for them to see what is great and to feel inspired: as if human life were a glorious thing. We have already seen Nietzsche's formula for greatness is *amor fati*: to not want anything to be different, forwards or backwards, for all eternity.[473] This formula informs an attitude towards life, how a great person might actually live their life. As we have just seen, in the early 1870s Nietzsche talks about setting yourself a goal and pursuing it until you perish. Towards the end of his philosophical career he says in *The Twilight of the Idols*: 'Formula of my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*….'[474] He repeats this idea almost word-for-word in *The Antichrist*. The slight difference in the wording is found between formula and happiness: in *Twilight of the Idols* he says 'my' happiness, in *The Antichrist* he says: 'Formula of our happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*…' The shift from talking about *his* happiness to *our* happiness is significant in that *The Antichrist* is a book written to encourage others to join him. One person who will join Nietzsche and share this goal is Camus.

[473] *EH* 'Clever' 10.
[474] *TI* 'Arrows' 44.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he ends the section on the absurd with the following (uncited) reference to *BGE* 188:

> When Nietzsche writes: 'It clearly seems that the chief thing in heaven and on earth is to obey at length and in a single direction: in the long run there results something for which it is worth the trouble of living on this earth as, for example, virtue, art, music, the dance, reason, the mind—something that transfigures, something delicate, mad, or divine,' he elucidates the rule of a really distinguished code of ethics. But he also points the way of the absurd man.

Here in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche actually gives Christianity its due for providing something that can be obeyed at length. However, for Nietzsche Christianity, despite offering short-term gains, will always ultimately be destructive. This is because it actively opposes the emergence of superior types. In section four of *The Antichrist* Nietzsche repeats the idea of these types only emerging by chance but note also that whole peoples can be superior types:

> [There have been other cultures where] a *superior type* does in fact present itself: something that is a kind of superhuman in relation to humanity as a whole. Such serendipities of great success have always been possible and perhaps always will be possible. And even whole families, tribes, peoples can in certain circumstances represent such a *lucky hit*.

We have already seen in section three Nietzsche call upon us not to sit back and wait for superior types to occur by chance. Something ought to be done to help bring such people about. However, something else must also be done: there is the threat other than the hazards of fortune for the superior types; Christianity is waging a war against such people:

> [Christianity] has conducted a *war to the death* against this superior type of human [...] Christianity took the side of everything weak, lowly, deformed, it made an ideal out of *antagonism* toward the survival instincts of a strong life.

We can see in the above the idea of 'sides' in a conflict; not just Nietzsche and the superior types versus Christianity—*Dionysus versus the crucified*—but between the superior types and 'everything weak, lowly [and] deformed.' Christianity takes their side. In section seven of *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche identifies pity and compassion as 'the opposition to the tonic effects that heighten the energy of the feeling of life'. Christianity, he says, is the religion of *compassion*. It is their compassion for the weak that will have a 'depressive effect.' Compassion, he says in the same section: 'cancels out the law of development' and gives life to 'failures of every kind'. So what ought to be done? Nietzsche says we should think like a physician, treat pity and compassion

as if they are symptoms of a pathological illness. Like a polyp, pity ought to be pricked until popped: 'to be a physician *here*, to be inexorable *here*, to wield the scalpel *here*—that belongs to *us*, that is *our* kind of love for humanity.' A similar idea is expressed in *Twilight of the Idols*; except that here physicians are called upon to do more than cut out pity:

> Sick people are parasites on society. It is indecent to keep living in a certain state. There should be profound social contempt for the practice of vegetating in cowardly dependence on doctors and practitioners after the meaning of life, the right to life, is gone. Doctors, for their part, would be the agents of this contempt,—not offering prescriptions, but instead a daily dose of disgust at their patients… To create a new sense of responsibility for doctors in all cases where the highest interests of life, of ascending life, demand that degenerate life be ruthlessly pushed down and thrown aside—the right to procreate, for instance, the right to be born, the right to live…[475]

In chapter five of this thesis we saw, in the discussion of Spinoza, how Moses set himself up as absolute ruler of the Jews and drew his authority from God. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche argues that Jesus and his followers were rebels against the Jewish Church. In echoes of his analysis of the power-grab by the populist Theagenes, in his Theognis essay discussed in chapter four of this thesis, Nietzsche accuses Jesus of inciting the *chandala* within Judaism to revolt against the ruling order.[476]

> I cannot see what the revolt, understood or *misunderstood* as originated by Jesus, was directed against if it was not a revolt against the Jewish church, taking church in exactly the same sense as we take the word today. It was a revolt against the "good and the just" against "the saints of Israel", against the hierarchy of society—*not* against its corruption but against caste, privilege, order, formula; it was *disbelief* in the "superior humans."[477]

We can see very clearly in what has been discussed so far that Nietzsche is opposed to Christianity because the religion offers not only pity and compassion for the weak but does so in order to use the weak to conduct a 'war' against superior humans. It is important to note that not only does Christianity use the weak and inferior, they *are* the weak and inferior. In section three of *The*

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[475] *TI* 'Skirmishes' 36.
[476] *AC* 27.
[477] *AC* 27.

Antichrist, Nietzsche says that Christianity is itself a response to the chance emergence of the superior types.

> [They were] precisely what people feared most; so far, he has been practically the paradigm of the terrible;—and out of terror, the opposite type was willed, bred, achieved: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick animal: man,—the Christian.

Christians are bred, according to Nietzsche, and 'bred into them' are two instincts that make them the enemy of greatness:

1. An instinctive hatred of reality.
2. An instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all boundaries and distances of feeling.[478]

These two describe the attitude and disposition of the Christian but not how this will be manifested in action. In other words, in Christian practice. Nietzsche seeks to undermine Christian religion, in fact Pauline Christianity, with the suggestion that the currently understood version of the faith is just one of many possible stories.[479] He first gives an account of Jesus and what he supposedly symbolised before saying: I am ashamed to think of what the Church made out of this symbolism: hasn't it stuck an Amphitryon story on the threshold to the Christian 'faith'?' Amphitryon was married to Alcmene whom Zeus impregnated and of whom Heracles was born. Nietzsche goes on to make a joke about immaculate conception to make his point that 'god born of human woman' was a story that the Church added to Jesus' symbolism.[480] The idea here is clear, what today is known as Christianity is a distortion of what Jesus originally represented. The 'distorter-in-chief', so to speak, will be revealed as Paul. Let us take a brief look at what Paul distorted, according to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's Jesus represents a new way of life rather than a new faith.[481] Early Christians did not distinguish themselves by faith but by 'not resisting, neither in word nor in his heart, someone who has been evil to him [...] by not being angry at anyone, by not despising anyone.'[482] In order to show the lack of interest these Christians had in the world around them, Nietzsche says they

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[478] *AC* 30.
[479] A tactic we have seen him do before, in his teenage essay on Ermanarich and in *The Genealogy*.
[480] The joke is that the idea of immaculate conception just '*maculates the conception*.' It does not quite land since the immaculate conception does not refer to conceiving a child with a god but to being without sin when conceiving a child.
[481] *AC* 33.
[482] *AC* 33.

would never go to court, not even to divorce an unfaithful wife.[483] In *The Antichrist* we read that Jesus was entirely unconcerned with the world outside of his inner life. Accordingly:

> [A]ll history, all natural science, all experience of the world, all knowledge, all politics, all psychology, all books, all art—his "knowledge" is simply the *pure foolishness* of the notion *that* these sorts of things exist. *Culture* is unknown to him even through hearsay, he has no need to fight it—he does not deny it… The same goes for the *state*, for the whole civic order and society, for *work*, for war—he never had reason to deny "the world", he never had an inkling of the ecclesiastical concept "world"... *Denial* is the one thing entirely impossible for him.[484]

According to Nietzsche, Jesus can offer no doctrines in opposition to any other; he cannot oppose anything in the world because, for him, there is nothing to oppose.[485] Nietzsche says, 'a faith like this does not get angry, does not lay blame, it does not defend itself: it does not brandish the sword.[486] If we were tempted at this point to bring up Jesus' scourging the moneylenders, Nietzsche would probably cite this as a later Christian invention.[487]

A key point in Nietzsche's account of Jesus is that the Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of Heaven) is: 'a state of heart—not something that comes "above the earth" or "after death".[488] In order to show this, Nietzsche references the New Testament. This is an odd move, firstly because he has been at least strongly suggesting that the Gospels are a later invention and distortion of Jesus' thinking; and secondly because he gets it so wrong. Unlike the many minor errors we find in the text, most little more than typos or sloppy referencing, Nietzsche misquotes the passage he cites and conflates it with another one. Let us take brief look:

> The whole evangel is contained in the words to the *thieves* on the cross. 'That was truly a *divine* man, a "child of God"' said the thief. 'If this is how you feel,' the redeemer replied, 'then you are in paradise, then you too are a child of God…'[489]

Luke 23:39-43 is the only Gospel that records Jesus' words to the two men crucified alongside him. The first wants to know why, if Jesus is the messiah, he does not save himself and them too.

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[483] 1 Corinthians 7:10 and Matthew 5:32 both allow for divorce. But Nietzsche would say these are later distortions of Jesus' message.
[484] *AC* 32.
[485] Except snakes, scorpions and all the power of the enemy. See: Luke 10:19.
[486] *AC* 30. This is strikingly at odds with Matt 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10.
[487] Matt 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:15-16.
[488] *AC* 34.
[489] *AC* 35.

The second rebukes the first and asks Jesus to remember him 'when he comes into his kingdom.' In response, Jesus replies: 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.' The reference to Jesus truly being a godly man comes later and is spoken by another character. As we shall see, both these errors are important and interesting in their own way.

In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche is at pains to show that what Jesus meant by 'the kingdom of God,' 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'paradise' is a state of the heart, an experience, not another place 'above the earth' or something 'after death.'[490] In Luke 23:43 Jesus says to the thief that has faith: 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.' In Nietzsche's version, Jesus says 'you are in paradise' not you *will be* as it is in the text. The difference is significant. Because Nietzsche's claim is that Jesus' message is about a way of life and not a faith, he wants to show, with a Biblical quote, that the thief is experiencing a state of heart *whilst still living* that Jesus would call paradise or the kingdom of Heaven, or the kingdom of Good. This is why Nietzsche has Jesus reply, 'If that is what you feel you are in Paradise'. But, of course, in the Bible Jesus does not say that. Jesus says at a later time that day the thief will be with him in Paradise. Since they are both currently being crucified it is safe to assume that later that day, when he joins Jesus in Paradise, it will be after death.

The words, 'This is truly a godly man,' come not from either of the thieves but a Roman centurion witnessing not only the crucifixion but the immediate aftermath of Jesus' death. What is important in this instance is *why* the centurion praises God and proclaims Jesus truly a godly man. The event appears in all three synoptic Gospels and is important for Christians because the centurion is an *eye-witness* to Jesus' godliness.[491] Despite just witnessing a man suffer a fate reserved for the lowest of the low; a visual demonstration of his supposed baseness, the centurion proclaims Jesus truly righteous *because* he witnesses the skies darken and the curtain of the temple tear in two.[492] Luke writes: 'The centurion *seeing what had happened*, praised God and said, "surely this is a righteous man."'[493]

In the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Nietzsche, his readers, and theological literacy. For someone unfamiliar with the Gospels, or only able to recall today a few details picked up at Sunday school, the mistakes just highlighted would probably go unnoticed. However, for reasons already given, it is difficult to believe that Nietzsche himself failed to notice or thought his 'true readers' would fail to notice either. However, if Nietzsche is at fault here then it puts the

[490] *Antichrist*, 34.
[491] Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:38.
[492] See *GM* II, 3 for Nietzsche's account of ritual torture and sacrifice as a 'technique of mnemonics.'
[493] Luke 23:47, my emphasis.

arguments in *The Antichrist* in a different light. His point that later Christians, in particular Paul, distorted Jesus' teachings rests on an idea that Jesus had a particular belief about the so-called 'kingdom of God'. As Nietzsche has it, Jesus had no interest in life outside of himself—no "beyond"—what he had to offer was a *way of life* and not a new religion; and especially not a religion centred on the idea of another life than this one. Jesus' notion of the kingdom of God, therefore, is a way of thinking not some other place.[494] This idea, of a life after death in some other place, is for Nietzsche a Pauline invention.

But if Nietzsche was mistaken about Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God then there are no real grounds for believing there was any meaningful distortion in later accounts of history. As we have seen, Nietzsche's attempt to undermine Christianity relies on offering numerous plausible counter-stories to the currently accepted version. That is, Paul's version of Jesus is one version, Nietzsche's is another and who is to say which is more accurate? This idea, like a worm in a superintendent's heart, *undermines*. Nothing will be undermined, except perhaps confidence in Nietzsche if he is clearly in error. However, as I have already said, I do not believe Nietzsche *accidentally* slips up.

There is no need to repeat the idea that Nietzsche is looking for readers with whom he can establish a *rapport* and not the ignorant or uneducated; Nietzsche knows his Bible very well and must expect the same of his readers. I would argue that Nietzsche's *deliberate* distortion of the events depicted in the Bible are an illustration of how events in Jesus' life have been distorted to suit the ends of various authors. Recalling the previous chapter and the discussion of Nietzsche's use of masks, in the performance of *The Antichrist* when we get to the thirty-fifth section and see Jesus and thieves upon their crosses, we see Nietzsche in a mask. Just as when we 'see' Paul in his letters talk about Jesus, we see Paul in a mask. In this light, consider Nietzsche's indictment of Paul:

> On the heels of the 'glad tidings' came the very worst ones of all: Paul's. Paul epitomises a type that is the antithesis of the 'bringer of glad tidings', the genius in hatred, in the vision of hatred, in the merciless logic of hatred. And how much this dysangelist sacrificed to hatred! Above all, the redeemer: he nailed him to his own cross. The life, example, teachings, death, meaning, and rights of the whole evangel—nothing was left after this hatred-inspired counterfeiter realised what he and he alone could use. *Not* reality, *not* the historical truth! . . . And once

[494] This is how the thief on the cross can already be in 'paradise'; that is because of how he currently thinks. Although, as we have seen, this is not how the kingdom of God is presented in the Bible.

> again, the Jew's priestly instinct perpetrated the same enormous crime against history,—he simply crossed out Christianity's yesterday, its day before yesterday, *he invented for himself a history of the first Christianity.*[495]

Nietzsche condemns Paul for distorting Christianity in order to create for himself a new religion. Paul, here, is considered to be motivated by pure hatred coupled with a desire for power:

> What he did not believe himself was believed by the idiots he threw his doctrines to.—What he needed was power; with Paul, the priests wanted to return to power,—he could only use ideas, doctrines, symbols that would tyrannise the masses and form the herds.[496]

In Nietzsche's eyes, then, Paul is another version of Theagenes. That is, in order to gain power he convinces the masses to support him and put him in power. In chapter four of this thesis, we saw how the populist Greek tyrant exploited the masses in order to secure power for himself. In the process, Nietzsche says, he raised the weak and ignorant far above their natural station in life whilst bringing down the aristocracy and the elite in the process. The inevitable result and the damaged cause was the harm down to greatness symbolised by the breaking of poet Theognis' aristocratic spirit. With regards to Pauline Christianity, Nietzsche says that it is 'the rebellion of everything that crawls on the ground against everything that has *height*: [Paul] the evangel of the "lowly" makes things *lower*…'[497] The 'poison' in Christian doctrine is '*equal* rights for everyone.'[498] There is no mistaking Nietzsche's political concerns here.

> And let us not underestimate the disaster that Christianity has brought even into politics! Nobody is courageous enough for special privileges these days, for the rights of the masters, for feelings of self-respect and respect among equals—for a pathos of distance . . . Our politics is sick from this lack of courage!—The aristocratism of mind has been undermined at its depths by the lie of the equality of souls; and when the belief in the 'privileges of the majority' creates (and it will create) revolutions, do not doubt for a minute that it is Christianity, that it is Christian value judgments these revolutions are translating into blood and crimes![499]

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[495] *AC* 42.
[496] *AC* 42.
[497] *AC* 43.
[498] *AC* 43.
[499] *AC* 43.

Nietzsche begins *The Antichrist* with a call to action: to breed great individuals or superior types. He then introduces the idea of the weak or inferior types, created out of fear of the superior types: these he identifies as Christians. Not only are his readers called upon to help with the 'breeding' of superior people but they must prevent the Christians from taming the superior types. In the text, Nietzsche attempts to undermine Christianity with the idea that what we understand of Christianity today (which in his case is Pauline Christianity) is just one of many different stories that could be told of Jesus and a distortion, a fabrication, a lie. In what on the surface looks like straightforward Biblical exegesis, Nietzsche challenges Paul's account of Christianity, in particular he says that Jesus has no 'other-worldly' concerns but was only interested in his own, inner life. Indeed, Jesus was so unconcerned with life outside of his inner experience that he played no part in society, its customs and institutions. Accordingly, Nietzsche's Jesus has no interest in religion, only a *way of life*. A way of life that Nietzsche characterises as having an instinctive hatred of reality and an instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all boundaries and distances of feeling. To live such a life, Nietzsche claims, is what Jesus meant by living in the 'kingdom of God'. This way of life is quite clearly of no use for acquiring power and so Paul distorts the idea of the 'kingdom of God' to refer to another place one goes to after death. That is, if and only if one has faith. To have faith in this instance is to have faith in *Paul*. Putting this all together: the biggest threat to human greatness today comes from the Christians who have been deceived into believing that their salvation lies in a life other than this one. The threat will be realised by the prevention of great individuals emerging and the filling of every station in life by the 'lowly'. That is, the smug and conceited 'uneducated' discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

But Nietzsche is not offering a straightforward political philosophy. His concerns run much deeper. For although Nietzsche talks about what seems to be a simple matter of class divisions and social stratification and the distribution of power, his real concerns are with human life and what it is to be a human being. As pointed out in the fifth chapter of this thesis, Nietzsche held a strong interest in anthropology and the main concern of anthropology in his day were two-fold: To offer a non-religious account of what it is to be a human being; and to discover what the best life is for such a being.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Nietzsche puts on various masks to communicate his ideas. His characterisation of Christianity, of Pauline Christianity, is one such mask. That is, the content of his account is there to be peeled away in order to reveal what is behind. That this is something readers ought to do is hinted at through the presentation of material. Masks on the ancient Greek stage were grotesque and oversized caricatures of the characters they represented. This can be seen clearly in Nietzsche's representation of Paul in the Antichrist.

8.4 In the next chapter

In the next and final chapter, I look at Camus' response to Nietzsche's mythopoesis. Here we will see how Camus immerses himself in Nietzsche's myths and heeds his call to action. But, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Camus is not an uncritical follower. We will see that in his response, Camus challenges Nietzsche's idea of superior and inferior types and calls for action on the emergence of great individuals. In his mythopoeic response to Nietzsche, Camus calls for solidarity and respect for the dignity of humankind. Both thinkers seek to overcome the so-called wisdom of Silenus with their mythopoesis but with very different calls to action.

Chapter 9 Camus' Response to Nietzsche

Below I will take a quick tour through the myths that Camus shares with Nietzsche in response to his mythopoesis. My focus here is on Camus' first cycle of works on the absurd.[500] My aim in this limited survey is to show the *rapport* evident between the two thinkers. Here, Camus' *response* to Nietzsche is understood in terms of reaction to something that has been said or done. I will leave Camus' critical response, where he disagrees or seeks to correct Nietzsche until the final part of this chapter. Without delay, then, let us look at the myths shared by these two fascinating thinkers.

9.1 Sisyphus

The Arabs in *The Stranger* are described by Meursault in a way reminiscent of Sisyphus in the *Myth*. They are resting, expressionless, in their work overalls (Sisyphus is described by Camus as the *proletarian* of the gods) and by a large rock. Interestingly, one of them is playing the flute. More on this flute later.

> At the far end of the beach we finally came to a little spring running down through the sand behind a large rock. There we found our two Arabs. They were lying down in their greasy overalls. They seemed perfectly calm and almost content. Our coming changed nothing. The one who had attacked Raymond was looking at him without saying anything. The other one was blowing through a little reed[501] over and over again, watching us from the corner of his eye. He kept repeating the only three notes he could get out of his instrument.
>
> The whole time there was nothing but the sun and the silence, with the low gurgling from the spring and the three notes.[502]

We see similar elements in Camus' account of Sisyphus: there is a workman or proletarian (Sisyphus himself), a large rock, a fixed facial expression and the silence.

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[500] I have excluded his plays *Caligula* and *The Misunderstanding* out of consideration for the word count.
[501] In the text Camus first refers to the Arab's instrument as a small reed (un petit roseau) and later as a flute (la flûte).
[502] Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Trans. Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage Books (1989). 55.

> It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus [proletarian of the gods] interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! [...] That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of these moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock. [...] All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to its silence, the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up.[503]

Camus tells us that Sisyphus' fate belongs to him but does not elaborate on how. From the text, it must have something to do with his rock being 'his thing'. Sisyphus' fate is symbolised by his rock, he owns his fate by being stronger than his rock. His strength comes in the hour of breathing-space as he walks down the mountain. Camus says of this time that it is the 'hour of consciousness'. It is during this time that Sisyphus reflects upon his fate and experiences joy. But what can he be saying to himself to elicit this response? Is it something like the *sounding brass* that Zarathustra used to give himself the courage to go on? What we know is that Camus concludes the essay by saying that *we* must imagine Sisyphus happy. He offers no rational argument to support this claim; rather he appeals to his reader to examine their feelings and see that, like him, they *must* imagine him happy. Of course, not everyone who reads *The Myth of Sisyphus* will find themselves *en rapport* with its author. In order to maintain the flow of this tour through Camus' use of myths in common with Nietzsche, I shall return to the idea of a failure to establish a *rapport* later in this chapter.

Returning to *The Stranger*, after Meursault shoots the Arab, the silence enjoyed by Sisyphus (the absurd hero) as well as the absurd man is shattered:

> I knew I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness.[504]

In the original, the last sentence reads: 'Et c'était comme quatre coups brefs que je frappais sur la porte de malheur.'[505] In Matthew Ward's translation, given above, he can see that he goes with

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[503] Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books (2005). 117, 118.
[504] Ibid. 59.
[505] Camus, Albert. *Oeuvres*. Gallimard (2018). 208.

'on the door of unhappiness' for the final line of the quoted text. However, an alternative translation could go with something like 'hostile fate' or 'misfortune'. Indeed, in Stuart Gilbert's earlier translation he refers to Meursault's 'undoing' rather than 'unhappiness';[506] and Sandra Smith's more recent version goes with 'the fatal door of destiny.'[507] As we shall see, the idea of Meursault's fate is key to a mythopoetic reading of the text.

9.2 Dionysus

In Greek mythology Dionysus represents chaos and disorder; as well as insanity, ritual madness and religious ecstasy. He is also the god of the grape-harvest and wine-making. Despite Meursault's reputation in the popular imagination for being a coffee-lover he drinks a lot more wine in *The Stranger* than he does café au lait. He is intoxicated during all the key moments that shape his destiny. On the Monday after his mother's funeral he drinks too much wine at lunch and sleeps it off at home. That evening he has dinner with Raymond and drinks a bottle of wine. Under the influence of the drink he agrees to help Raymond with his plan to humiliate the sister of the Arab he will eventually kill. On Sunday, the day of the killing, Meursault drinks a lot at lunch, '[Masson] kept filling my glass' and is walking off the effects when he bumps into the stranger he will shortly kill.

As mentioned in the previous section, it is interesting to note that one of the Arabs we saw earlier, sitting by their rock, is playing a flute. Dionysus (under whose intoxicating influence Meursault finds himself) is often depicted as being preceded by flute-players. For example, in the *Symposium*, when the drunken Alcibiades makes his entrance, Plato describes him as like Silenus (companion and tutor to Dionysus), with ivy in his hair and led by a flute-girl.

> So he was brought into the company by the flute girl and some others of his people supporting him: he stood at the door, crowned with a bushy wreath of ivy and violets and wearing a great array of ribands on his head.[508]

However, although Alcibiades is introduced resembling Silenus, it is he who accuses Socrates of being Silenus-like:

[506] Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage Books (1946).
[507] Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. Trans. Sandra Smith. Penguin Books (2012).
[508] Plato. Symposium. 212d-212e.

> Referring to Socrates, Alcibiades says: 'he is likest the Silenus-figures that sit in the statuaries' shops; which our craftsmen make with pipes or flutes in their hand [...] Are you not a piper?'[509]
>
> You [Socrates] differ from him in one point only—that you produce the same effect with simple prose unaided by instruments.[510]

Alcibiades' point is that Socrates can achieve in words what others can only produce through the power of myth (or inspired by the gods). In chapter six, in the discussion of Nietzsche's eternal return, we saw that Paul in *First Corinthians* also believes it possible to put ideas normally expressed in myth into everyday language.

What is emphasised in Plato's text are Socrates' exceptional abilities. As well as being able to achieve with prose what others can only do with myth, we learn that Socrates is also, amongst other things impervious to the cold[511] and seemingly without the need for sleep.[512] Since we have been discussing Dionysus and drunken intoxication, we can note with interest that in the *Symposium* it also claimed, more than once, that Socrates can drink without getting drunk.[513] Indeed, once everyone else in the drinking party has passed out drunk Socrates calmly takes his leave to carry on the rest of the day 'in his ordinary fashion.'[514] However, the point is not that Socrates is immune to the intervention of the gods as he is to the effects of alcohol or the cold, nor that he is resistant to their intervention. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, he commends the positive influence of divine madness. Indeed, he tells Phaedrus that 'the greatest blessings come to us from madness, when sent as a gift from the gods.'[515] As we saw in chapter seven of this thesis, it was his own *daimonion* that prevented him from blaspheming against Eros. We also saw in that chapter how Nietzsche uses and inverts Plato's myth of the cave.

9.3 Plato's myth of the cave

In *The Stranger*, when Meursault attempts to put into words what happened on the beach the day of the killing, he fails completely.

[509] Ibid. 215b.
[510] Ibid. 215c.
[511] Plato. 220b.
[512] Plato. 220d.
[513] Plato. 214a, 220a.
[514] Plato. Sym. 223d.
[515] Plato. Phaedrus. 244a.

> The presiding judge replied that [...] he found it difficult to understand my defence and that he would be happy, before hearing my lawyer, to have me explain in detail what motivated me to commit my crime. I said rather quickly, muddling up my words a bit and completely aware of how ridiculous I sounded that it was because of the sun. Laughter rang out in the courtroom.[516]

We can compare the ridicule Meursault faces in the court, as he attempts to explain what happened, with Plato's myth.[517] Here, a prisoner, escaped from a cave in which he has spent his whole life, chained to his fellow prisoners and seeing only shadows on the wall, is dazzled by the sun on reaching the surface. When he later returns to explain to the other prisoners what he has seen he first provokes their laughter and then they want to kill him.[518] In his trial, Meursault cannot rationally explain to the judge what he experienced and why he fired the gun because, at the time, he was under the influence of a divinely inspired madness. However, it is not just Dionysus who is responsible for Meursault's irrational behaviour. Reading carefully, we can find in the text multiple references to the Greek god Apollo driving the action. So, let us now turn to Camus' use of Apollo.

9.4 Apollo

Apollo was many things to the Greeks: the god of music, dance, art and poetry; prophecy and truth; light and the sun; healing and diseases; archery, colonists and cowherds. In Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* Apollo represents rational thinking and order and is paired with Dionysus, the god of wine, who represents chaos and disorder. Together they form a dialectic that was fundamental for the Greek understanding of art and mythology as the attempt to overcome the so-called wisdom of Silenus.[519].

In Camus' work, Apollo represents the sun; a recurring motif throughout his works. Here I will first briefly introduce the places in the text in which Apollo appears and intrudes on Meursault's life before looking at each event in closer detail.

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[516] *Outsider,* 93

[517] Camus often alludes to the allegory of the cave in his writings. Consider his account of watching shadows on the wall in his early essay "Death in the soul" and Meursaut's references to the shadows on the walls of his prison cell.

[518] Plato. Rep. 7.517a.

[519] According to Nietzsche. His account of the Dionysus/Apollo may be a lot more modern than ancient (see: Isler-Kerényi, Cornelia and Wilfred G. E. Watson. *Dionysos in Ancient Greece*: *An Understanding Through Images*. Brill (2007). Chapter 7).

- In *The Stranger* we see clearly, when we know to look for it, Camus' use of Apollo to drive the action in the text forwards. As just mentioned, the god is represented in the novel by the sun. Indeed, throughout the text we can substitute 'Apollo' for sun without any loss of meaning.[520]

- Apollo, the god of colonists, appears and strikes when Meursault (a colonist) kills the unnamed Arab.

- For the first half of the novel, Camus chooses to take us day-by-day through Meursault's life, starting on Thursday and ending on a Sunday, the day he kills the Arab. Sunday is, according to Hellenic astrology, literally the Sun's day.

- Apollo is also the god of prophecy. It is at Apollo's temple in Delphi that Chaerephon is told by the god, via the sibyl and her interpreters, that his friend Socrates is the wisest man in Athens.[521] This intrusion into the life of Socrates, by Apollo, sets him off on the mission (to discover the truth of the claim) that will cost him his life. In *The Stranger*, as we shall see, Apollo intrudes into Meursault's life, setting him on a path that will end in death by execution.

- The god of archery, Apollo uses his fiery arrows to compel Meursault forwards towards the tragedy that will result in two deaths.

After the second altercation with the Arabs, Meursault stops at the steps of the beach house but doesn't go in. His head is 'throbbing from the sun,' and he turns around and walks back out on the beach. This doesn't make sense, surely he would be better to go inside and get out of the sun. In fact, the sun seems to be trying to get Meursault to do exactly this but he fights against it:

> I gritted my teeth, clenched my fists in my trouser pockets, and strained every nerve in order to overcome the sun and the thick drunkenness it was spilling over me.[522]

Note that when Meursault mentions his drunkenness, the intoxication comes not from the copious amount of wine he consumed at lunch but from the sun. When Meursault describes reaching the Arab that cut Raymond in the fight he says the sun was pressing him to go on.[523] At this point the sun (Apollo) unleashes its full fury on Meursault: reflecting off the Arab's blade it

[520] In fact, the text makes more sense when we do.
[521] Plato. Apol. 21.
[522] *Outsider,* 52
[523] *Outsider*. 58.

stabs him violently and repeatedly in the forehead and eyes. Meursault can no longer think clearly, he seems unable to control his own body: he steps ever forward towards the Arab and his hand involuntarily grips the revolver and squeezes the trigger.

We see clearly in Meursault's account the effect of 'divine madness'; a combination of the intrusion into his life of two gods: Dionysus and Apollo. As mentioned above this is a particularly Nietzschean combination and it is to him we turn next for our discussion of Silenus, companion and tutor to Dionysus.

9.5 Nietzsche's Silenus

The central theme of both *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* is the meaning and value of life: in essence whether or not life is worth living. This brings us to the myth of the wisdom of Silenus, that the very best thing for humankind is to die soon. Here, we turn our attention to Nietzsche, who we remember, 'points the way of the absurd man'.[524] Nietzsche gives his version of the Silenus myth (which is very similar to that found in Plutarch) in *The Birth of Tragedy*. King Midas finally catches Silenus, companion of Dionysus, and demands to know what the very best thing is for all men. The satyr replies:

> Suffering creature, born for a day, child of accident and toil, why are you forcing me to say what is the most unpleasant thing for you to hear? The very best thing for you is totally unreachable: not to have been born, not to exist, to be nothing. The second best thing for you, however, is this: to die soon.[525]

The wisdom of Silenus is, essentially, that life is not worth having. That human beings would be better off not being born; but if they do happen to suffer the misfortune of being born then the best thing to do is to commit suicide and as quickly as possible. This is the background to the problem Camus claims, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, to be the most serious in philosophy:

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem in philosophy and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to asking the fundamental question of philosophy.[526]

Since I have already discussed both Nietzsche's and Camus' response to the Silenus myth, I will refrain from repeating myself too much here.

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[524] *Myth*. 63.
[525] *BT* 3.
[526] *Myth*. 1.

Nietzsche's 'problem with Socrates' is that the Athenian does not seem to believe that life is worth living. Before drinking the hemlock that will end his life, Socrates is recorded as saying to his friend Crito: 'we owe Asclepius a rooster.'[527] Asclepius is the son of Apollo and the god of medicine and healing. By offering a sacrifice to the god, Socrates is saying that he has been cured of sickness: life. For Nietzsche, Socrates' philosophy is not about overcoming the wisdom of Silenus but accepting it. In this way, Socrates does not say yes to life but rather no.[528]

9.6 Meursault's destiny

In a seemingly puzzling passage in *The Stranger*, Camus refers to a mysterious breath of 'air'. Below, I reproduce Camus' original French and translations into English from popular editions of *The Stranger*.

- La maison était calme et des profondeurs de la cage d'escalier montait un souffle obscur et humide.
- *Matthew Ward*: The house was quiet and a breath of dark, dank air wafted up from deep in the stairwell.
- *Sandra Smith*: Everything was quiet and I felt a damp breeze rising up from the stairwell below.
- *Stuart Gilbert*: The whole building was quiet as the grave, a dank, dark smell rising from the well hole of the stairs.

In the text, this breath of air appears just at the moment when Meursault makes the decision that will seal his fate. The breath reappears in the final moments of the story when Meursault has his revelation in his prison cell. Consider the passage below with Nietzsche's words from *BGE* 295, discussed in chapter seven, in mind: 'I have learned much, all too much more about the philosophy of this god, passed on, as I said, from mouth to mouth.'

> From the depths of my future, throughout all this absurd life I had lived, a dark breath [un souffle obscur] swept towards me, stripping bare along its path everything that had been possible in years gone by, years that seemed just as unreal as the one that lay ahead [...] one unique destiny had chosen me [...]

[527] Plato. Phaedo. 118a.
[528] In this thesis, I have refrained from discussing Nietzsche's use of Socrates as a mask out of considerations of the word limit. While there is plenty to explore here, what I wanted to say with regards to Camus' reception of Nietzsche was better served by focusing on Paul.

> Couldn't this condemned man understand, and from the depths of my future … I was choking as I shouted all this.[529]

It is after his outburst to the prison chaplain that Meursault has his revelation. Here he attempts to express the Dionysian as he accepts his fate.

9.7 Meursault accepts his fate

> So close to death mama must have felt set free ready to live once more. No one—*no one*—had the right to cry over her. And I too, I felt ready to start life all over again. As if this great release of anger had purged me of evil, emptied me of hope and standing before this symbolic night bursting with stars, I opened myself up to the tender indifference of the world. To feel it so like me, like a brother in fact, I understood that I had been happy and I was still happy.[530]

Here Meursault comes to understand something—not by rational argument—but through a kind of mystical intuition. We also see the idea of being able to live life again once more. This is, of course, a reference to the eternal return and Zarathustra when he says: "Was that life? Well! Once more!" As we have seen, for Nietzsche, the mark of greatness is *amor fati* or to love one's fate.

> My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, nor less to conceal it [...] but to love it.[531]

Meursault wants nothing to be different in his life. He tells the priest that he would live it all over again with everything the same and changing nothing. His previous incarnation, Patrice Mersault from the abandoned novel *A Happy Death* (note Meursault on the eve of his death, says that he was and still is happy) expresses the same idea but more on the nose:

> [Patrice Mersault]: Am I happy? Catherine! You know the famous formula—"if I had my life to live over again"—well, I would live it over again just the way it has been.[532]

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[529] *Outsider*, 109
[530] Ibid.
[531] *EH* 'Clever' 10.
[532] *Happy Death* (Kindle).

In *A Happy Death*, Patrice shoots and kills Zagreus, a rich double-amputee. Zagreus who is, of course, Dionysus by another name. In the previous chapter of this thesis we saw Nietzsche's 'Morality for Doctors'.[533] *A Happy Death* was a direct response to this aphorism. The novel contains large chunks of text that reappear in *The Stranger* and the heroes have almost identical names; however, the plots are very different. *A Happy Death* is in two parts, as is *The Stranger*, but unlike the later work, Camus gives each part a subtitle. These are taken directly from 'Morality for Doctors':

> [A] so-called natural death: which, at the end of the day, is itself just an 'unnatural' death, a suicide. You are never destroyed by anyone except yourself. This is just a death under the most despicable conditions, an unfree death, a death at the wrong time, a coward's death. Out of love for life—, you should want death to be different, free, conscious, without chance, without surprises . . .

In the first half, Zagreus is killed by Mersault in a way that is difficult to untangle in that it is not possible for readers to be sure if they are witnessing a murder or an assisted suicide. What is more certain is that Zagreus dies in despicable conditions, unfree and at the wrong time. After the murder/assisted suicide, Camus makes a second reference to Dionysus when he refers to Meursault's 'love of the dark god he would henceforth serve.' In the second half of the novel, Mersault dies a conscious death, as described in the excerpt above but also almost exactly as described in the opening sentences of Nietzsche's aphorism; a death:

> chosen freely, death at the right time, carried out with lucidity and cheerfulness, surrounded by children and witnesses: this makes it possible to have a real leave-taking where the leave-taker is still there, and a real assessment of everything that has been achieved or willed, a summation of life—all in contrast to the pathetic and horrible comedy that Christianity stages around the hour of death.

Early as its appearance in Camus' canon is, this novel can be considered as a challenge, of sorts, to Nietzsche's mythopoesis. The text itself does not contain anything we could reasonably take to be an objection to Nietzsche but Camus' decision not to publish the novel, to put it in a drawer and start work on *The Stranger* instead, informs us of something. As Susan Tarrow has observed, the hero of *A Happy Death* appears to live a life that is not only sterile (despite the narrator's claims it is hard to see how Mersault can be happy); the way he lives his life is completely at odds with Camus' sense of social justice.[534] Patrice Mersault sides with the rich and corrupt land-owners and

[533] *TI* 'Skirmishes' 36.
[534] Tarrow (1985).

political figures, displaying no cares (as he cannot, given the terms dictated by his author) for justice. Meursault in *The Stranger* is a much more sympathetic character with sympathy (if not what Nietzsche would call 'pity' or 'compassion') for others.[535] I will return to Camus' more critical response to Nietzsche's mythopoesis at the end of this chapter.

So far I have concerned myself with an overview of Camus' *rapport* with Nietzsche. Now, I want to turn my attention to the subject of Camus' *rapport* (or the lack of it) with his readers.

9.8 A failure to establish *rapport*

Both Paul Loeb and Julian Young have criticised Camus for what they see as failing to create a suitable allegory of the lives of contemporary French proletarians.[536] Loeb argues that Sisyphus cannot represent the average Parisian worker because he is a king that exists in the afterlife. Young also criticises Camus for what he takes to be a poor allegory but in addition treats the story as a kind of thought experiment; about which he argues that the obvious response is that Sisyphus would be better off committing suicide.[537] Drawing on Young's interpretation, Loeb concludes that Camus' philosophy is *against life* and because of this Camus believes that not just Sisyphus but everyday French workers would be better off dead.[538] For those familiar with Camus' work, the interpretations of Young and Loeb are perplexing to say the least. One almost has the impression they must be reading a different text. The difference in Loeb's and Young's interpretations of Sisyphus from what we could call the 'standard reading' comes from their receiving Camus' myth as if it were an allegory or thought experiment. Rather than attempt to find in the text what it is that is mysterious and ineffable that Camus is attempting to communicate, they receive the concluding section as a straightforward allegory. That is, they ask themselves who Sisyphus is supposed to be, what his rock represents and what it means to be eternally frustrated in the attempt to complete a pointless task. The answers they feed in are: the French workers, whose rock is the trials and tribulations of their individual lives, and the requirement to complete a pointless task represents life itself. Accordingly, they both reach the conclusion that, since life as expressed in this allegory is meaningless, Camus is suggesting that we

[535] Several postcolonial readings have challenged this idea. Conor Cruise O'Brien's *Camus.* Fontana Press (1970) is the go-to text on this view. John Foley offers a useful counter to O'Brien: Foley, John. "A Postcolonial Fiction: Conor Cruise O'Brien's Camus." *The Irish Review (1986-)*, no. 36/37 (2007): 1–13. Kamel Daoud has offered an intriguing reimaging of *The Stranger* from the point of view of the unnamed Arab's family that challenges postcolonial readings of Camus' novel both for and against.: Daoud, Kamel. *The Meursault Investigation*. Trans. John Cullen. Oneworld Publications (2015).
[536] Loeb (2008).
[537] Young (2003). 104.
[538] Loeb (2008). 168.

must imagine someone living a pointless life is happy. 'But why do we have to imagine this,' they both ask, 'and on just your say so?' It is not on Camus' say so, however, nor is he saying that life is meaningless or pointless. A careful reading of his essay reveals that Sisyphus gives life meaning and his experience of life is infinitely joyful.[539] The real question, posed by the text, is *why* we cannot but imagine Sisyphus happy. That is, Camus never doubts that we ought to have a positive attitude to life, his Sisyphus myth is an attempt to communicate this idea.

However, as we have seen with Loeb and Young, a view persists in the secondary literature that Camus believes that life can have no meaning. In fact, there is a view often expressed that Camus believes life is better if it has no meaning. Let us explore this.

9.9 A life without meaning?

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus says that his motivation for seeking new myths originates from a belief that life 'will be lived all the better if it has *no meaning*.'[540] If myths provide meaning and a life without meaning is to be preferred, why then would Camus *seek* myths rather than reject them? As we shall see, this has indeed puzzled some commentators in the secondary literature. However, the problem is easily resolved when we make a distinction between meaning and significance. Put briefly, when Camus refers to 'meaning' in the line above he is referring to the idea of life coming with meaning 'built into it' by God, so to speak. He is saying that life will be better lived, that it will be more meaningful, if we reject Christian myth by replacing it with an alternative myth of our choosing. The alternative he offers is his Sisyphus myth with which he concludes the essay. The key to understanding the apparent puzzle of Camus' remark is to keep a close track on how the lexicon is used in the study of mythopoesis. And it is of no little consequence. Failure to identify exactly what Camus is referring to when he talks about 'meaning' has had a profound effect on the reception of his work. I shall discuss the confusion over Camus' claim that life will be lived all the better if it has no meaning shortly; but first, I want to make clear what *I mean* by meaning and significance.

9.10 The lexicon of mythopoesis

In any investigation of myth and mythopoesis it is important to be as clear as possible as to what exactly is meant by commonly occurring words at each appearance. Especially, those of which

[539] Sisyphus walks down the mountain in 'silent joy'. Since his fate is to spend eternity on the mountain he will spend an infinite amount of time in silent joy.
[540] *Sisyphus*, 51

authors tend to use rather loosely and interchangeably. What follows is a brief account by what I mean by 'meaning' and 'significance'.

To say of X that it has a *meaning*, is to say that it refers to something or that it conveys something. Whereas, to label X as *meaningful* is to *signify*—in other words, to make it known or to show—that X is important. Something is *important* if it is of great consequence or significance. Let us break this down. *Great* refers to size and specifically means large or big; something of great importance is, therefore, of greater consequence or significance than something which is 'merely' important. *Consequence* refers to the effect of a thing or person on something or someone else so that a change occurs. Consider here something that interests Nietzsche, 'great individuals'; these are men and women 'of consequence', and by this we mean that they have 'an impact' on the world. A person, thing or event is considered *significant* when its impact is sufficiently great. *Meaningful* and *significant* are often used interchangeably. Although, when one is contrasted with the other, that which is labelled 'significant' is typically considered more important than that which is labelled meaningful. As an illustration, consider two archaeological finds, one considered meaningful and the other significant; here the latter will be considered the more important find. My concern in this section of the chapter is with the use of mythopoesis to make clear that which is meaningful or significant.

When Camus talks about life having a meaning, in the line quoted above, he is referring to the idea that there can be an answer to the question: *what is the meaning of life?* And not about what is meaningful. The latter is about finding value *in* life. The former suggests a purpose for life itself and opens up the possibility of making a value judgement. We can ask: if the purpose of life is X, how do we know X is worthwhile and how does X make life worthwhile? In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche considers such questions stupidities:

> Judgments, value judgments on life, for or against, can ultimately never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they can be taken seriously only as symptoms,—in themselves, judgments like these are stupidities. You really have to stretch out your fingers and make a concerted attempt to grasp this amazing piece of subtlety, that the value of life cannot be estimated.[541]

In Christianity, life is considered valuable because it is given value by God.[542] The *kerygma* expresses the idea that there is a purpose to human life that has been planned out by God.[543]

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[541] *TI* 'The Problem of Socrates' 2.
[542] *Genesis* 1:31. 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good.'
[543] For a good overview of the idea of *kerygma* see: Baird, William. "What Is the Kerygma? A Study of I Cor 15:3-8 and Gal 1:11-17." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76, no. 3 (1957): 181–91.

Accordingly, for Christians life comes with meaning already 'built-in' so to speak. Here, a judgement on the value of life is made. However, Camus claims in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that life will actually be better lived if it is thought of as not coming with an inbuilt meaning. In other words, Camus is hinting, at this point in the essay, that there is an alternative to the Christian myth of *kerygma* that is preferable.

I said that Camus' use of 'meaning' understood in the sense of the 'meaning of life' introduced the question: if the purpose of life is X, why is X worthwhile? It is useful to discuss here the idea that something can have a meaning without being considered meaningful (as in significant). Consider the following observation by Thomas Nagel. Here, Nagel objects to the idea that significance can be found by living one's life in service to some greater power.

> If we learned that we were being raised to provide food for other creatures fond of human flesh, who planned to turn us into cutlets before we got too stringy—even if we learned that the human race had been developed by animal breeders precisely for this purpose—that would still not give our lives meaning, for two reasons. First, we would still be in the dark as to the significance of the lives of those other beings; second, although we might acknowledge that this culinary role would make our lives meaningful to them, it is not clear how it would make them meaningful to us.[544]

For Nagel, we are responsible for the meaningfulness of our own lives. In other words, it is up to us to find significance in life. Even if we believe in God and the *kerygma*, Nagel denies that this itself makes life meaningful. Consider the questions posed above: if the purpose of life is X, how do we know X is worthwhile and how does X make life worthwhile? If X here is understood as to fulfil that which is expressed in the *kerygma*, then what is left unanswered is how we know fulfilling the *kerygma* is worthwhile and how it will make life worthwhile. As Nagel says, 'we would still be in the dark as to the significance of our lives.'[545] Nagel is attempting to criticise Camus in this essay, but is actually doing little more than repeating a point Camus has already made in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.[546]

There, Camus' inquiry is concerned with a total loss of meaning (referring here to *incomprehensibility*) and the subsequent loss of meaningfulness (in other words, a loss of *significance*). What he wants to know is whether meaningfulness can be found after a particular

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[544] Nagel (2013). 16. See also: Bottici (2009). 124.
[545] Camus leaves open the possibility that if God does exist we could know, through grace perhaps, the value of life.
[546] In fact, Nagel is actually doing a lot less.

loss of meaning.[547] Put another way, the problem is about how to restore meaning to a life that has become incomprehensible and to restore meaning in a way that can be experienced as meaningful. The Sisyphus myth at the end of the essay is Camus' response to this problem.

To fail to seek *where* and *how* a mythopoeic text attempts to make clear that something is significant is to neglect a characteristic factor of mythopoesis. In his treatment of Camus' mythopoeic effort in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Nagel fails to see where and how Camus is attempting to find meaning, in terms of significance, within the text. In short, he fails to locate and address 'the myth' in *The Myth of Sisyphus*; and he fails to distinguish between Camus' attempts to make clear meaning and significance. As a result, he incorrectly attributes to Camus the belief that life is meaningless and therefore cannot be meaningful. In doing so Nagel introduces an image, so often repeated it has now become a cliché, of Camus 'shaking a fist at the world which is deaf to our pleas, and continuing to live in spite of it.'[548] Worse, what is implicit in Nagel but explicit in those following after him (for example Ronald Srigley, discussed below) is the idea that Camus is 'confused' in his (so-called) 'claim' that meaningfulness can be found in acceptance of the meaninglessness of life.

The objection is that Camus wants to eat his cake and have it too by claiming that life is both meaningless and meaningful at the same time. In other words, Camus seems to want to find significance *in* the meaninglessness of life. But this is not actually the case, what careful reading reveals is that Camus is actually talking about the possibility of creating a counter-myth to Christian mythopoesis. Were his essay read at the outset as mythopoeic then this would not be missed.[549] This is because to read something as mythopoeic by definition requires the reader to locate the myths within the text that attempt to counter myths 'outside' the text.

The idea that life is meaningless is not in itself a myth. However, the idea that life is meaningful because God has created it to be meaningful, as revealed in the Christian *kerygma*, is a myth. Read as a mythopoeic text, *The Myth of Sisyphus* takes aim at and seeks to counter this myth. In the attempt to offer a counter-myth a mythopoeic text re-evaluates an existing myth (expressed outside the text), that has previously been used to 'made clear' *that* and *how* life is meaningful; and offers an alternative myth in its place (within the text). In doing so the mythopoeic text attempts to make clear that which, according to the author, *really* ought to be understood as

[547] This loss of meaning is a total loss of belief in Christianity. An argument I will make later is that the hypothetical position Camus imagines in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is very similar to that of the 'madman' in Nietzsche's *Gay Science* 125.
[548] Nagel (2013). 22.
[549] It is surprising that a text that has 'myth' in the title and concludes with a myth would not be read as a mythopoeic text!

meaningful or significant. Accordingly, when we read *The Myth of Sisyphus* as mythopoesis we need to look for the myth Camus is offering and understand what myth it attempts to counter.

In a recent work Ronald Srigley has claimed that it is a mistake to understand Camus as advocating for a total denial of meaning but also considers Camus to have been 'confused' and to have 'overstated the matter' when he included the lines just discussed above.[550] However, it is Srigley who is mistaken here in his reading of Camus. As we have seen, Camus is talking at this point in the essay about the idea of life coming with a meaning and not the idea of life being meaningful. What seems to be the cause of Srigley's and Nagel's confusion is their failure to keep track of what Camus is referring to when he talks about meaning and significance. In the essay he discusses meaning in terms of comprehensibility but in the lines quoted above he is introducing the idea of meaning in terms of significance. Both Srigley and Nagel miss the switch in meaning in Camus' use of 'un sens' and 'la signification'. Srigley correctly observes that Camus does not find the meaning offered by Christian myths desirable; but Camus does not go 'too far', as Srigley thinks he does, by 'denying all meaning'. In fact, Camus says in the essay: 'I do not know if this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it.'[551] Camus is not denying the possibility of discovering meaning; when he says 'just now' he is referring to where he is in his investigation. At this point in the essay, he is exploring the idea of attempting to live without myths. His claim is that without myths it is impossible to know if the world has a meaning that transcends it. Rather than denying all meaning, Camus rejects the Christian idea of life coming with a meaning *built into it* by God. When he says later in the essay that '[life] will be lived all the better if it has no meaning,' his claim is that life considered not to have God-given built in meaning is preferable. What makes life without an inbuilt meaning better lived, for Camus, is that we are free to find meaning for ourselves.

9.11 Camus' critical response to Nietzsche

For Camus, the absurd describes the unpleasant experience of finding oneself temporarily bereft of myths. To live a full life without myths is not possible.[552] However, finding ourselves momentarily without myths is not a catastrophe; indeed if the experience is sufficiently profound

[550] Srigley (2011). 47.
[551] *Myth*. 49
[552] Obviously, one could live a life without myth by simply being alive but not fully conscious; in a coma, for example. Camus' point is that we cannot live a reflective life. Solomon refers to Meursault as a 'philosophically fantastic' character because he believes such an unreflective character could not live an apparently normal life.

it provides the starting point for creating new and better myths: life-affirming myths. However, for Camus, something else is made clear by the absurd: *human solidarity*. This solidarity is discovered through the experience of rebellion.

Rebellion for Camus is the constant contemplation of the absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he says that perpetual revolution is keeping the absurd alive.[553] He continues:

> One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second.

He returns to the idea in *The Rebel*, a long essay that traces the genealogy of the idea of revolt. Indeed, one would not go far wrong in reading Camus' essay as *The Genealogy of Rebellion* in the light of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*. Here, in a discussion of the absurd, Camus says: 'when he rebels, a man identifies himself with other men, from this point of view, human solidarity is metaphysical.'[554] What is revealed, through constant confrontation with the absurd, according to Camus, is 'an impulse that enlists individuals in the defence of a dignity common to all men.'[555]

Mythopoesis as a re-evaluation of the dominant values of a state, the expression that something is wrong in the state with a call to action, is an act of rebellion. The history of the world is a history of rebellion. As we have seen with Nietzsche, human society is continually subject to rebellion: from the first political association of the morality of custom, to its ripest fruit the sovereign individual: Moses freeing the Jewish slaves in Egypt and Jesus' rebellion against the Pharisees; Paul's distortion of Jesus' message and the Christianisation of Rome; the Renaissance, the Reformation, French Revolution and the emergence of Napoleon Bonaparte. For Camus, 'rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. I *rebel*—therefore *we exist*.'[556] 'What is a rebel?' Camus asks, 'A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself.'[557]

In the introduction to this thesis, I said there are, for Camus, always some 'dangerous ideas' to be found in Nietzsche's work that require 'correcting'. One idea that, for Camus, needs to be corrected is Nietzsche's idea of superior and inferior types. We have seen, in every chapter of this thesis, Nietzsche's concern with what he sees as the dangers of egalitarianism. Although he provides what he believes to be examples of the harms caused by democracy and the idea of

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[553] *Myth*, 54
[554] *Rebel* (Kindle).
[555] *Rebel* (Kindle).
[556] *Rebel* (Kindle).
[557] *Rebel* (Kindle).

equal rights for all, the main case presented in favour of maintaining a pathos of distance between superiors and their inferiors in Nietzsche's work is grounded in that which has been revealed to him through a mysterious process he refers to as the Dionysian.

Is Camus' mythopoeic call for the equality of humankind any more persuasive than Nietzsche's call for the pathos of distance? The answer to this will depend on the individual and whether or not they can establish a *rapport* with either thinker. I will leave the question of whether Camus' response to Nietzsche provides a compelling countermyth to the individual reader. What is clear, I hope, is that Camus' response to Nietzsche, the project of a life-time, has opened up a way of receiving Nietzsche's work that makes establishing a *rapport* that little bit easier. And when we recall the devastating conditions Nietzsche places on any reader attempting such a thing, if Camus does get us just a little bit closer this will be no small feat.

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