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Review Article

About Alfred Baeumler's Nietzsche. 5. 'Nietzsche as an existential thinker'

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Abstract

In this fifth part of the series, dedicated to the research and meditations on Nietzsche of the philosopher Prof. Dr. Alfred Baeumler, we present his text entitled 'Nietzsche as an existential thinker', published in 1930. This text stands out for its conceptual clarity and intellectual brilliance. Reading it, like the texts presented in the previous installments, makes us wonder if today we are finally witnessing the slow final agony of Greco-Roman-Germanic Europe.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Baeumler, Burckhardt, Spengler, Wagner, Ancient Greece, Dionysus, Master Eckhart, Kierkegaard.

INTRODUCTION

The text presented here can only be described as 'magnificent', 'brilliant' and of an intellectual clarity that far surpasses all the post-1945 'interpretations' I have read (and I read many, many). Perhaps that is the reason why there has been an attempt to keep it in the darkness of oblivion. Baeumler edited an edition of Nietzsche's writings, which was published by Alfred Kröner from 1930 onwards and is still accessible today in new editions. After 1945, Baeumler's texts were successively replaced by texts written by somebody called Walter Gebhard. A shame. Ideas are confronted with ideas. In previous sections we have commented about the author, the philosopher Alfred Baeumler, and to them we refer those who are interested (J.-S. Gómez-Jeria, 2023; J. S. Gómez-Jeria, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). I highlight this quote from the text*: 'What I recount is the history of the next two centuries, describing what is about to happen and what cannot be otherwise: the arrival of nihilism. I can describe this history now because necessity is at work here'*. It is only today that we are approaching the end of these two centuries. Each reader will judge by himself. I also employed Nietzsche's editions in Spanish (Nietzsche, 2005, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Prof. Dr. Alfred Baeumler: 'Nietzsche as an existential thinker' (Baeumler, 1930)

'These are times of great danger when philosophers appear, just then the wheel always turns faster, philosophers and art replace the disappearing myth'. With foresight, the one who uttered these words added: 'But philosophers precede us with great anticipation, because the attention of contemporaries will only very slowly turn towards them', concluding his thought with this wise sentence: 'A people conscious of their dangers begets the Genius'. One would have had to look at history with extraordinary audacity to utter such words! The one who pronounced them is one of our precursors, a savior of the people abandoned by myth! In Berlin, a generation earlier, Hegel had declared: 'Philosophy is its own time translated into thought; it would be madness to suppose that an individual can transcend his own time and that a philosophy can surpass the world in which it appears'. The cultured German bourgeoisie joyfully welcomed Hegel's idea. For the ears of a bourgeois, what sounds better than the words that tell him that no one can transcend their own time? He is disturbed in his sleep and business if he hears people shouting in the streets: an era of the world is over, the Gods have abandoned their altars, their values no longer have any price, their children refuse obedience! As soon as they notice these voices, the preachers of morals come forward to deny the great event and calm the spirits. Everything is in order, they say, our institutions are good, our values eternal; it is men who make bad use of them. Those responsible turn out to be men, their mentality, and not the institutions. The preachers speak thus because they do not know that the wheel of history does not stop for moral considerations: *in history only action counts.* When existence, in its entire structure, is shaken

to the foundations and an era comes to an end, a correction of mentality is of no use. A bourgeois is one who does not notice such an earthquake and does not see the signs of sunset. Rightly, he fears that the end of 'his' time will bring about the end of internal and external peace. *It is no wonder, then, if the bourgeois proclaims as mad or sick, or at least unilateral for lacking measure, the philosopher who comes with great anticipation, who does not want to become an expression of his own time*.

It is natural, therefore, that two successive generations have understood Nietzsche as scandal or madness. The indomitable adversary of the culture of bourgeois Europe could not be welcomed without it denying itself. Only those who were marginal to society remained to acclaim him, or else they sought to homologate his image of Nietzsche to bourgeois humanist ideals. Today, however, it is no longer permitted to approach the reality of Nietzsche with hatred or indifference, nor even with fanatic enthusiasm. *The moment has arrived: Europe is illuminated by the meridian light of a historical-universal hour. The century has just begun, the 19th had begun three generations earlier with the death of Goethe, the century that must decide itself in relation to Zarathustra.* This decision, whatever it may be, is highly desirable and can no longer be postponed.

And this is the most significant thing we can say about Nietzsche; but certainly no more than what Nietzsche already knew about himself.

There has been talk of a judgment on Zarathustra. But who would dare to judge a fighter? *A hero triumphs or succumbs, he is never judged. It is his own action that judges him*. But then, can the era that he himself foretold judge Zarathustra? Was it not Zarathustra himself who predicted the arrival of the last man? That is, the man who has devised his own happiness under administrative guardianship, the solidary and moralistic citizen, the man of compassion ex lege, who is either sick or a nurse, *tertium non datur*, and therefore the employee who keeps this state of the sick and nurses alive in exchange for a fixed remuneration? Indeed, *if we speak of Zarathustra today, we do so not as judges but as accused!* We speak from the place assigned to us by destiny, the same destiny that sent the savior before his own collapse. We speak, then, not in psychological or literary terms, but in historical-existential terms.

Old Europe has burned itself in a war that enveloped the world in flames. The victors are still disputing the spoils, not knowing who the real defeated is: that is, whether it is that civilization in whose 'defense' they set out. If we Germans first perceived the general catastrophe of old Europe, perhaps it is because this feeling constitutes the metaphysical equivalent of our terrible defeat. At bottom: the defeated, the exhausted, sees decadence everywhere. But is the catastrophe of Europe not seen better from the outside, for example from Asia, than from the Christian soil? The peoples of the East see what many of us still today do not know how to see, but which nonetheless was glimpsed by the one who begins his last work with these words: *'What I recount is the history of the next two centuries, describing what is about to happen and what cannot be otherwise: the arrival of nihilism. I can describe this history now because necessity is at work here*'. *Who still dares to deny that nihilism has arrived, and that Europe has lost confidence in itself?* The conferences and debates are a sign not of an ascending era, but of a declining era. The culture of Western Christian Europe is no longer dynamic. And with what knowledge of the cause is Europe conducting its own destruction! *How much more time will have to pass before the reckless work of liquidation has been completed?* Only then will the serious part of history begin.

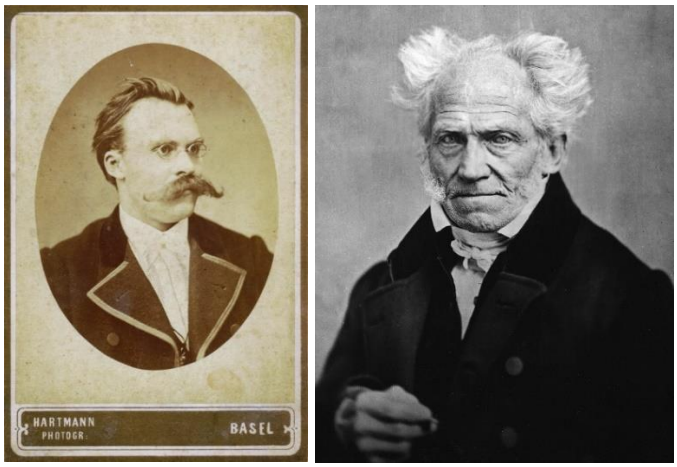

Figure 1: Left. Friedrich Nietzsche. Right. Arthur Schopenhauer

Until now, whenever the subject of Nietzsche was discussed, he was associated with Schopenhauer and Wagner, sometimes even with Hegel and Marx. In any case, the discussion never went beyond the 19th century. From the Catholic side there has been a deeper look: Nietzschean thought has been considered, in effect, the

pinnacle of nominalism, tracing a line that goes from Master Eckhart, through Luther and Kant, to Zarathustra. Josef Bernhardt believed he recognized in Nietzsche the 'expiatory sacrifice' of European atheism, the final act of the tragedy that begins with Master Eckhart and reaches its climax in Luther. From the Protestant perspective there is a radically different view; but one thing is true: *Nietzsche is an event of the Western world, not an event of the 19th century*.

The fate of Christianity is closely linked to the name of Nietzsche, as, moreover, he himself admitted by taking on the name of Antichrist: not by an act of pride, but by the effect of his own shattering impressions. '*I know my fate. My name will be associated with the memory of something terrible, the memory of a crisis never seen before on earth [...]*'.

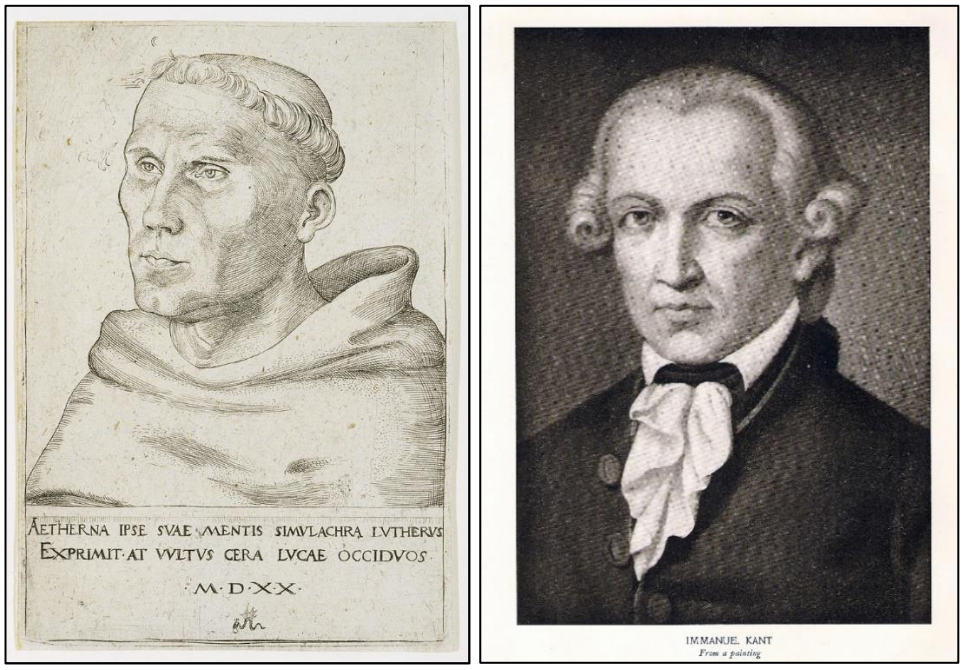

Figure 2: Left. Martin Luther. Right. Immanuel Kant

Certainly, it is not our business to denigrate the tone of the words of the Antichrist. The time when Christ is farthest away cannot be called Christian. What then should one who, without joining Christ's entourage, refuses to mock God be called? He takes seriously everything that he distinguishes around him, without pretending not to hear the voice that tells him from within: 'You are not a Christian, declare it and break over such an announcement!'.

What is the terrible event of which Nietzsche feels himself the symbol? It is a historical event, for which reason Nietzsche can only be understood if he is related to this precise historical process, just as Luther can be understood on condition that he is related to the historical event of the Protestant Reformation. *The crisis that Nietzsche foretells, describing it in all its details and experiencing it beforehand in all its horror, is the complete fragmentation of the European spiritual unity*. Nietzsche sees the rift opening up to the very foundations, sees the whole apparently solid structure of the European world tottering, when no one yet, except the Russian Dostoevsky, suspects anything. In Nietzsche nothing is better known than the appellation of good European. But what does Nietzsche mean by 'good European'? With this expression he wants to indicate the lords of the Europe of the future. *Such rulers will appear at the time of the decline of old Europe*. Nietzsche has described this decline with unmatched precision, this description is remarkable not only because it does not shine with due prominence within Nietzsche's complete work. Nietzsche wanted to put in the foreground the positive aspect of his vision, his specific end, taking for granted the fall of old Europe. *Nietzsche's goal is that the overman [Superman, Übermensch], the good European, are only possible on condition that the spiritual unity of old Europe dissolves completely*. Spengler rightly grasped in his reading of Nietzsche the thesis of decline. However, Spengler's interpretation of Nietzsche's work takes him very far from it since Nietzsche's interpretation of the 'decline of the West' is much more historically correct and philosophically profound than Spengler's.

Nietzsche does not 'poetize' history but investigates the historical process with absolute realism. Jakob Burckhardt first saw to what extent all Nietzschean thought gravitates around history. Upon receiving 'The Gay Science', Burckhardt writes: 'I cannot avoid coming back to the same question: what would come out if you taught history?! Basically, you keep imparting to us above all history lessons [...]'.

The Spenglerian thesis of decline is mistaken because it ignores the unity of a Christian Europe. By contrast, Nietzsche's foretelling of decline is based precisely on the profound intuition of the significance of Christianity for European unity. *Once Christianity disappears, Europe too ceases to exist*. Then there will only be two possibilities: either Europe returns, as in the past, to the bosom of the Church, giving rise to a new Middle Ages, or it will have to travel to the end the path of the Reformation. This journey, however, leads to Zarathustra.

He who seriously considers Nietzsche, speaks equally seriously of the past and future of Europe. From Charlemagne to Luther, Europe retains its unity. The Reformation was the last great European crisis. Crisis means division: from the 16th century on, the edifice of the Church, this last Roman building (as Nietzsche calls it), no longer encompasses Europe with its vault. In the North, a fragment of European life became autonomous, thus sanctioning the end of the Middle Ages. A century later, modern, and rationalist science comes on stage, which together with Protestantism is imposed in northern Europe until the First World War. The culture of old Europe is constituted by three fundamental elements: Christianity, Roman humanism, and rationalist science.

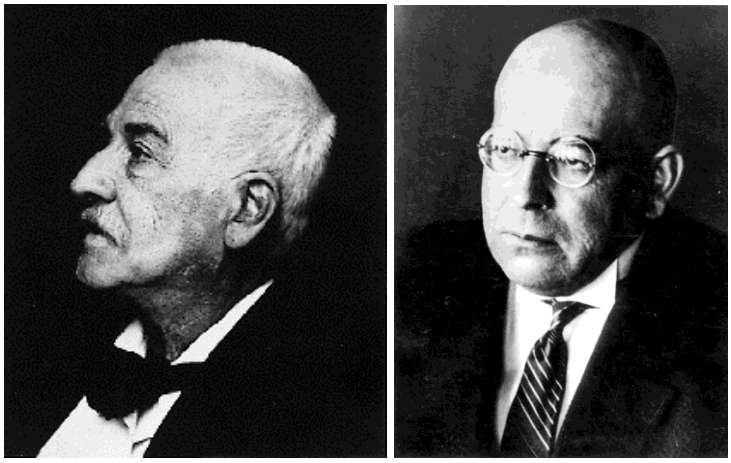

Figure 3: Left. Jakob Burckhardt. Right. Oswald Spengler

Nietzsche's extraordinary boldness is rightly understood on condition that one recognizes how he declares war on these three elements. Europe represents the synthesis between Christian inwardness, Roman culture, and the scientific spirit. Any one of these three elements would have chained even the boldest until the 19th century. The son of the Protestant pastor of Röcken, the student of Pforta, brings together in himself all the premises to become one of the most relevant exponents of the old European synthesis. But at this point an unexpected event intervenes: the young Nietzsche immediately feels alien to the European spiritual unity, although still far from fully realizing it. He moves in the surrounding world with unlimited and almost embarrassing confidence. *And only when everything withdraws from him and a loneliness of unheard-of vastness envelops him, does he realize what is happening to him. Little by little, Nietzsche understands that he is part of that group of the chosen who with their own lives must bear witness to a new state of affairs* (to a new hazard).

Before Nietzsche, only one in Europe had remained equally alone, also a German, an eternal boy figure: Hölderlin. Between Nietzsche and the poet of his childhood predilection we grasp a very significant analogy: both have shared the same strangeness in the face of the modern world: but if Hölderlin expresses it in his Hymns, Nietzsche pours it into his own philosophical work. 'The Will to Power' represents a commentary on Hölderlin's poems. Hölderlin and Nietzsche stand in the center of modern culture, strange and sublime, just as Pindar and Plato were: in both the plunging into the night of modernity symbolizes their estrangement fraught with fate.

With astonishing confidence, the young Nietzsche approaches the Greeks as his true educators. He aims not so much at a restoration of 'antiquity', as at making the Hellenic world come alive again by evoking the most hidden instincts of the Germanic essence. If one is German, one does not feel generically close to the 'ancients', but one notices a particular kinship with the Greeks. *Hölderlin and Nietzsche are equally far from the late-Roman world imbued with Hellenism, the world to which Europe owes its cultural identity.* Nietzsche only paid homage to Roman authors as models of fine prose style. His spiritual homeland is not the Hellenistic-Roman world, but the anti-Roman and anti-humanistic Iliad of the golden centuries, that is, of those centuries in which all artistic and philosophical manifestations of the coming time are rooted. Before the eyes of Hölderlin and Nietzsche appears the Greek state built on the Gods, with its young men and strong bonds of friendship, with its contests and deeds, with its Pindar and its tragedy. Not even Goethe, Schiller and Winckelmann managed to

penetrate the heart of Hellenicity, because otherwise, Nietzsche argues from his early writings, it would have necessarily derived from this a 'lasting amorous alliance' between German and Greek culture. For Germans it is not a matter of 'historically' appropriating ancient Greek culture along with other ancient cultures, but of hoping that from the original affinity a vital form similar to the Hellenic one will sprout for the Germanic essence. That is why the German spirit continually turns to question the Greeks: from them it expects to know once and for all the formula that can free it from the spell. In Nietzsche's enthusiasm for the Greeks there is no trace of historicism, however hidden it may be: for Nietzsche, the question concerns not so much culture as the reintegration of the true Germanic nature.

Figure 4: Left. Friedrich Hölderlin. Right. Richard Wagner's Bust in 'Festspielpark Bayreuth', sculpted by Arno Breker

The rediscovery in the deepest instinct of pre-Periclean and pre-Socratic primitive Greece, in short Nietzsche's most significant historical discovery, will maintain its fundamental meaning until the end. Everything else necessarily follows from this: the rejection of Christianity along with the repudiation of the Roman-humanist tradition. This is the historical meaning of the notion of the Dionysian; from this perspective, Nietzsche reconsiders the entire question of Western history, as Hölderlin had approached it in his last Hymns. According to Nietzsche, the setback consisted in the fact that the Nordic peoples lagged behind Romanic culture, without discovering the path that leads to the Greeks. In an 1875 note, Nietzsche states that for some time there has been a struggle of the Germans against ancient culture; it has always been precisely the best and deepest part of the Germans that has opposed that culture. Such stubborn opposition is justified as long as it aims to resist Romanized culture, which in turn is the residue of a nobler and deeper culture. Thus, Roman culture turns out to be Greek culture become exterior. It was Christianity that imposed and violently spread Roman exterior and decorative culture among the Germans. Thus was consummated that masterpiece that keeps united the Greek element and the priestly element, that is, Romanized antiquity and Christianity.

Nietzsche's critique of Europe rests on his essential vision of Western unity, which appears everywhere in his early writings. Moving from this background perspective one must then understand the significant fragment 'We Philologists', within which neo-humanism is greeted with honor, since Nietzsche identifies in it a strong anti-theological element.

Nietzsche enters 19th century Europe in this way: he rejects Christianity as the antithesis of the true Germanic essence, while from neo-humanism he accepts the anti-theological tendency, and fights science because it is hostile to myth and denies instinct. Nietzsche stands in opposition to the all-encompassing cultural powers that dominate his time: for him, the Greeks must be everything. He also pays tribute to the contemporary powers that assist him in the struggle: Schopenhauer and Wagner. Nietzsche, who trembles with veneration for someone, chooses them both as untimely exponents of their era, in order to proclaim the supreme hope placed in the imminent rebirth of Hellenic culture on the foundation of the German essence. It was the early mistake, the mistake typical of a young man who sees allies in the strongest spirits of his century, just when the German bourgeoisie turns to those spirits, glimpsing in them the most exalted expression of its metaphysical need for peace.

Things are different with Hegel's philosophy of history. In it, Nietzsche immediately discovers his adversary. Hegel had effected the Western synthesis, uniting Christianity with Hellenistic-Roman culture within a conceptual system. In the philosophies of Hegel and his followers, placed at the base of classical gymnasium education, Nietzsche sees condensed in

formulas that Europe against which he is fighting. When he picks a fight against the Hegelian veteran Strauss and against higher education in the image and likeness of the Prussian cultural State, Nietzsche attacks not so much Hegel and his school as ancient and Christian Europe. Christianity, science, and Roman tradition have celebrated their last wedding in the neo-Gothic and neo-humanist culture cathedral. Modern philology is the fruit of that wedding. Not by chance has the highest reason for his own task turned Nietzsche into a philologist. Modern philology is a humanistic science, then a distinctly European science. Nietzsche directs his attack precisely against that 'humanity' along with its false vision of man and his cultural State. For Nietzsche, the greatest antithesis is constituted by the contrast between philologists and Greeks, between gymnasium education and Hellenic education. The Gymnasium corresponds exactly to the science that underpins it. In Nietzschean terms, the task of this school institution is to present antiquity in such a way that it does not conflict with the Christian religion of the State, and to understand Christianity in a sense that allows classical culture to endure alongside it. One wants to be Christian within certain limits, and at the same time classical, but in moderation. The ideal consists of a Hellenicity sweetened by the catechism, and of a Christianity extended as far as Homer and the philosophers. The idea of ancient Christian Europe finds here its scientific justification as well as its pedagogical systematization. At the moment when he attacks neo-humanist philology and its Gymnasium, Nietzsche conducts an action analogous to the one he will repeat, with more potent weapons, in 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' and 'The Will to Power'. Starting from the fundamental Germanic-Hellenic vision, Nietzsche fights Roman-Christian Europe at its focal point.

Nietzsche and Hölderlin thus dissolve the Western synthesis through the Greeks: the fact, endowed with a symbolic force of very high historical significance, that Kierkegaard (the Danish and Christian polemicist, who feels sent by God to effect a similar dissolution, starting however from the perspective of Christianity) comes between them. Kierkegaard fights the union between Christianity on the one hand, and pagan culture and philosophy on the other, with the same resolution with which Nietzsche wages war on Romanic-Christian Europe. The main adversary too is the same: Hegel and the historical-dialectical cultural philosophy of Kultur. Both see in Hegel's philosophy the absence of the real man. For Kierkegaard, man stands before God with the consciousness of always having guilt, while for Nietzsche man tends to accomplish that for which he was born. Kierkegaard wants to subject man to the authority of Scripture, while Nietzsche wants to subjugate him to fate. However both converge on a negation: they are convinced, in effect, of the failure of European cultural unity, as well as that 'the human', the foundation of modern culture, is nothing more than a volatilized Christianity, a 'precipitate of Christianity', as Kierkegaard maintains.

Some have tried to understand Nietzsche in light of one of the most relevant phenomena of Nordic Christianity. No more fatal misunderstanding is imaginable. Nietzsche descends from a long chain of Protestant ancestors, has praised the healthy Protestant air of Basel (when a friend wanted to convert to Catholicism), placing the type of Christian above both the artist and the scholar, but nothing authorizes us to doubt that he took paganism, the Greeks and Dionysus very seriously. Keeping Nietzsche's deep-rooted conviction in view, to go on talking about a synthesis between Nordic Christianity and the Mediterranean Sehnsucht for beauty in one who is distinguished precisely by the unity of his will, which must be understood as a total lack of sensitivity both to Christianity and to Hellenicity. There is no atheistic Christianity. 'It was atheism that led me to Schopenhauer', Nietzsche admits to dispel misunderstandings. 'I do not by any means consider atheism a result, much less do I have it as an event: I understand it by instinct'. However absurd it may seem; what relationship does Nietzsche maintain with Christianity? He takes paganism as seriously as Kierkegaard takes Christianity seriously; it would therefore make as much sense to find a secret paganism in Kierkegaard as to glimpse an internalized Christianity in Nietzsche. We must therefore believe him when he affirms: 'From direct experience I know no true religious affliction', since his notes and works in fact demonstrate it to us.

For Nietzsche, the question arises on a different plane: not inwardly, but outwardly. *As a true man of antiquity, he sets himself the task of living what he thinks*. For Nietzsche, the question is to realize his own thoughts. Like the philosophers of antiquity, he is an educator and politician by instinct. Nietzsche went to meet shipwreck because of the impossibility of finding a solution to the problem that arises in this regard.

Whoever wants to get a true picture of Nietzsche must know how to correctly interpret the still faltering first expressions of his genius. *Dionysus is the first word uttered by Nietzsche, but also the last. Behind his hieroglyph one must look not for a Greek god, but for the secret of the one for whom the deep meaning of the world has opened up again*. If the inner experience underlying the name of Dionysus is difficult to access, well-guarded is the book dedicated to him. And what a title!: 'The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music'. And what a chaos of moods and ideas this early book contains! However, not a few consider it Nietzsche's best work. Here Dionysus has not yet discovered his own language, and yet, despite speaking with a voice not his own but veiled by the words of Schopenhauer and Wagner, he speaks with impetus and precision. At bottom, nothing is more alien to him than aesthetics. But

for a large number of reasons, the Wagnerian work of art must remain at the center of everything: thus Dionysus speaks as a metaphysician of tragedy.

Let us overlook for a moment the distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which replicates in aesthetic terms the splitting of the world between 'will' and 'representation'; let us not consider the elaborate interpretation of tragedy, which supremely reveals a modern theatergoer; let us also disregard the notion of the tragic myth; let us likewise set aside the psychological disguise (dream and intoxication), there are many things to overlook in this early and 'more than unripe' book, and yet something unusual and disturbing remains, the long trained ear knows that it is the existential coherence with which the author faces Christianity that ultimately constitutes the charm of the book.

'In my youth', Nietzsche will say later, 'I invented a theory and valuation of life opposed to the Christian ones'. 'How to define it then? As a philologist and man of letters, I baptized it, not without some freedom, for who could know the true name of the Antichrist?, with the name of a Greek god: I called it the Dionysian valuation'. What then is Dionysus? A pseudonym for the Antichrist. Only if one knows how to assess the meaning of this name does one understand Nietzsche.

Dionysus is the original formula of the 'will to power', the 'uncreated will to life that is itself creative'. Dionysus becomes the symbol of the maximum and supreme ascent of life, the moment when above all the squandering of oneself intervenes, not the preservation of oneself. The name Dionysus indicates that synthesis of pleasure and pain that the living being perceives while sacrificing itself by becoming victorious creator and annihilator in the supreme instant of its being-there. Within this vision, Nietzsche later highlighted the heroic element: glimpsing it in the good and rigorous ancient Hellenic will open to everything terrible, evil, enigmatic, annihilating, fatal in being-there, but still inclined to say yes to life even in its supreme and most pressing sorrows.

The youthful Nietzschean work accepts a trait of pain that is alien to its author. In this one notices above all the influence of Schopenhauer. What is original and authentically Nietzschean is not the pessimism of suffering and redemption, but the pessimism of will and action. The latter corresponds to the fundamentally tragic-heroic aspect of the Dionysian vision of man.

The deification of the supreme instants of life through the symbol of Dionysus already sounds pagan and yet is not enough to prevent the anti-Christian tendency of the young Nietzsche from being completely exhausted in itself. And one still says very little when we hear the thesis according to which the author, in his early work, observes a 'cautious and hostile silence with respect to Christianity'. Nietzsche himself later gave his own version: in the 'perfidious dwarfs' cited at the end of paragraph 24, one must see the priests. A little earlier, in paragraph 23, the Christian myth is bluntly rejected: '*It seems that it is almost impossible to successfully transplant a foreign myth for any length of time without irreparably damaging the tree: it may perhaps be strong and healthy enough still to expel the foreign element through tremendous struggle, but it is generally destined to consume itself sick unto death, weakened in morbid growth*'. In these words outlines the prevailing fundamental historical vision in Nietzsche from the beginning to the end, a vision which will later reappear with the same meaning in 'On the Genealogy of Morals'.

Already from his early work, Nietzsche sees in the priest and in the priestly myth his adversary. In decisive paragraph 9, faced with the 'Semitic myth of original sin', which locates the origin of evil in curiosity, in lying seduction, in lust, in short in a series of eminently feminine affects, the Aryan idea of virile crime represented by the figure of Prometheus is forcefully contrasted. Since he takes guilt and pain upon himself, the Promethean hero does not need the priest, who can only dominate where 'original sin' persists. But if sin can only be annulled through atonement, this, unlike sacrilegious crime, cannot heroically take upon itself all the consequences. Over the worldview of the acting individual looms the idea of Moira, of Fate, of Justice in the Greek sense, which can be summed up as: 'Everything that exists is just and unjust, and equally justified in both cases'.

In 'The Birth of Tragedy' the anti-Socratic tendency comes to the fore. The Dionysian is equivalent to the pessimistic and tragic, to the joy of destruction; the Socratic, on the other hand, corresponds to the theoretical and serene, to the anti-heroic and optimistic. The appearance of Socrates is one of the most significant events in world history. With Socrates, the anti-heroic man and the anti-Dionysian worldview take the lead. Intellect dethrones instinct and primary impulse, while consciousness destroys the certainty of unconscious life. For humanity in the Socratic sense, there are no more heroes, therefore no more tragedy: knowledge and happiness take on maximum value. *Socrates is the gravedigger of ancient heroic Greece: with him, Alexandrian 'serenity' is contrasted with the humanity of Aeschylean tragedy*. The intellectualist ideal is absolutely anti-Dionysian, the development of reflection reveals the conflict experienced by the Dionysian philosopher who becomes a philologist.

The theoretical man and the priestly man are hostile to life: Socratism and Christianity coincide in this mortal enmity. Dionysian philosophy strikes both in the heart. From this perspective, the Roman imperium appears as a phenomenon of 'extreme secularization'; the 'elimination of the Romanic element' is understood as a

necessary consequence of the return of the German spirit to itself and to its original Dionysian homeland.

The anti-Socratism of the young Nietzsche emerges from the depths of the positivity of his nature: he is anti-Socratic by instinct, opposing everything that is mere 'theory'. Nietzsche rejects the contrast between contemplative life and active life, a contrast that seems 'Asiatic' to him: the Greeks of the heroic era are beyond that. For Nietzsche, nothing more intolerable than the idea of eternal rest, of eternal bliss, however noble it may be; nothing is more hateful to him than the idea of a 'sabbath of sabbaths'. The sincerest praise Nietzsche ever gave Luther refers to the fact that he fought contemplative life. Here the heroic-dynamic element of Nietzsche's nature is revealed; this later returns in the notion of the overman, of the philosopher of the future, who is a creator of values and not a mere contemplator: and ultimately it underlies the global vision of 'The Will to Power'.

Nietzsche never saw embodied in a more perfect way the idea he has of the philosopher except in the proud breed of the pre-Socratics: Thales, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Empedocles. *Besides being contemplative and theoretical, they are true men of action, solitary and daring, chosen by destiny to replace the dying myth with a new vision of the world*. Philosopher is he who creates the new image of the world that takes the place of that of mythical and popular origin. He takes on the task of guide on the stage of world history, and never comes after events, but always 'projected forward'. His teaching is an educational and political program addressed to reality at once. The earliest Greek philosophy is a philosophy of pure statesmen: therefore, Nietzsche takes the term 'statesman' in its highest sense, that is, in the Greek sense.

Against the mechanized 'cultural State' of his own time, Nietzsche feels the greatest contempt; we, on the other hand, do not even know how to recognize the fracture that occurred with the Persian wars and the disappearance of Greek political philosophers.

Nietzsche was able to imagine the Greek state of the golden age with unequalled illuminating force: the polis founded on myth, wholly imbued, and set in motion by the agonal instinct, by the strongest instinct of the Hellenes: the will to power and victory. It is typical of petty bourgeois philistinism, Nietzsche repeats in 'Twilight of the Idols', to refer to the Socratic schools in order to explain what fundamentally Hellenic is: the philosophers already represent a backlash with respect to the aristocratic taste of the golden age, 'in contrast to the agonal instinct, the polis, the value of the race, the authority of tradition'. If one wants to grasp an aspect of that golden greatness, one must read Pindar and Heraclitus as Nietzsche read them. Within the fragments of the Nachlass on the Greek state, on Homeric agony, on philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks, that temple in ruins but still gathered in its recognizable majesty, which Nietzsche wanted to erect on the fundamental structure of pre-Socratic Hellenicity, rises up before our eyes. If we roll one after the other the drum columns of the fragments, we reconstruct an image of the building, although it is not the same one. What in 'The Birth of Tragedy' remains unsaid or hidden appears in all its splendor in the image of the heroic man, the man endowed with a single instinct, the instinct for struggle, triumph, and sacrifice for victory.

In this world the 'good Eris' predominates, not a false 'humanity'. The instinctive life of man, an idea deeply rooted in Nietzsche, cannot be repressed. From the deepest instincts of nature, that is, from the instinct for unsociability and wickedness, springs also what is best and noblest in man. The greatness of the Greeks derives from the fact that they discovered the way to master the strongest instincts of their warrior race, opening the way for them to agony. Nietzsche sees 'the noblest Hellenic principle' in the idea of agony, of contention, which is not limited to celebratory games, but dominates the life of both the Greek city-states and individuals.

The world is a sublime game of mutually combating forces, a 'becoming, a flowing of things, a building and destroying, without any moral implication, in an eternally equal innocence to itself'. Today, upon hearing the word 'game', we immediately go with our minds to the chaotic dance of the atoms. The Greeks, on the other hand, see in it the game of Zeus. Eternal justice reveals itself in conflict. 'Strife is the father of all things,' says Heraclitus, Nietzsche's favorite. Within mutual conflict the essence of all things is revealed: the world is a mixture that must be continually stirred.

Without fear of exaggerating, one can affirm that Nietzsche's most recurrent images before public opinion are distorted precisely at the focal point. Nietzsche is always presented, even distorting him, as a fragile and delicate man, an aesthete or sensitive artist, if not even a nervous tyrant with a poet's soul. From the details of his way of life and from not a few of his statements wrong conclusions are drawn; therefore, what is intimate in this strong man, already difficult enough to recognize in itself (in this regard, it should be emphasized how the biography written by his sister contains in many points more accurate references), remains totally unknown. How is it that in Nietzsche's writings one does not grasp the tone of the ruler, of the dictator who speaks with the fullness of power conferred on him by a destiny's predestination? And who, having ears, would not know how to hear the metallic hardness of many expressions, and who, having eyes, would not see a terrible vigor shining through, glimpsing at times, as for example in 'Ecce Homo', a solitary diamond brilliance? Nietzsche is precisely the opposite of an exhausted man of sensibility. *His Renaissance image is always insisted upon, and one does not know how to*

grasp the more significant and powerful image of primordial Greece. In the latter lives Nietzsche's soul. Never would an aesthete have been able to imagine a similar image of the polis. Not even a scholar of world history of Jakob Burckhardt's rank would have known, despite all his erudition, how to grasp the meaning of the agonal principle. The disciple of Heraclitus drew from the depths of his heart the image of the young man who resembles him.

According to factual data, Nietzsche is a robust, healthy, gifted, and hardworking young man. He enlists in the army as an artilleryman, wanting to look more like a soldier than a scholar for the rest of his life. He falls ill in Basel, feeling oppressed by his teaching duties and by his increasingly difficult relationship with Wagner. The illness itself is an enigma and has more to do with his strong will than with any possible constitutional weakness (which, moreover, has not been verified) of his psychosomatic system. Nietzsche's tireless activity during the Basel years is amazing. Deussen, meeting him one night in 1871 in Basel on his return from a meeting, describes him as a 'fiery, elastic young lion, naturally self-conscious'. This snapshot corresponds exactly to the image Nietzsche drew of himself by fitting in with the Greeks.

Before bringing the discourse on the later Nietzsche, one must understand the young Dionysian-agonal one, who struggles against the most exalted figures in history, breaks off his friendship with Wagner and courageously pushes forward his powerful pedagogical-political will. Rohde found in his friend an 'irresistible and impetuous instinct to action'. From the same instinct spring not only Nietzsche's political ties to the 19th century, but also the 'painfully unpacified pathos' of which Rohde speaks. The terrible tension between the man of will and the world around him has made Nietzsche's life tragically solitary. In the end what Wagner was finally able to achieve remains inaccessible to Nietzsche: compromise and fulfillment of himself. And even if he had lived longer, Nietzsche would have hardly been able to achieve a similar balance. Christian Germany and pre-Socratic Greece were too far apart. However, not only the pathos deriving from resistance to the world makes Nietzsche's existence tragic.

Nietzsche carries within himself a splitting that will be fatal to him: a conflict of metaphysical dimensions splits his being in two; and making them agree was the arduous task of man Nietzsche. *To the end, the philosopher and the musician dispute preeminence within him; consequently, the periods of his life are characterized by the degree and manner in which they allow themselves to be determined by music*. The philosopher wants to be the master, imposing himself on the musician, yet he cannot live without music. Nietzsche comes into contact with the world not through sight but through hearing: things speak to him through 'relationships of a musical type'. From a very young age, Nietzsche cannot live without composing and playing the piano, and even in 'Ecce Homo' he confesses how much one has to suffer because of the fate of music, 'like an open wound'.

To understand Nietzsche's inwardness and destiny, one must grasp how the philosopher and musician coexisting within him are irreconcilable contrasts. Nietzsche neglected the law that gave shape to his life only once when he attempted in his youth to reconcile these two contrasting parts during his friendship with Wagner. The result was 'The Birth of Tragedy', in which the philosopher is relegated to the background while the musician dominates the formulation of ideas. This reckless act, for which the friendship was sacrificed, was later atoned for by Nietzsche with the illness that would lead him to his death. From the nervous collapse that followed this transgression of limits, philosophy and music separate within Nietzsche. Ever after, the opposition between philosopher and musician constitutes the cardinal law of Nietzsche's life.

The antithesis between philosophy and music in Nietzsche does not coincide with the distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The notion of the 'Dionysian,' as sketched by the early Nietzschean oeuvre in close connection with Wagnerian music, is rather the emblematic formula for that fateful attempt at reconciliation. The Dionysian, as genuinely understood by Nietzsche, is intrinsically tied to the agonistic. What unites them is the joy of triumph, which includes the Dionysian joy of annihilation. The philosophical Nietzsche is the Dionysian-agonistic thinker; the political-pedagogical instinct that in turn proclaims him relates to this with coherent profundity. In 'The Birth of Tragedy', Nietzsche commits a sacrilege by denying the interference of political parties in the affairs of State and by establishing an intimate connection between philosophy and music, between Dionysus and Wagner. As he later confesses, this 'corrupts' the 'magnificent Greek question' by introducing elements of modernity. This intrusion of music into original philosophical reflection is expressed in the improbable notion of the tragic-musical myth: a melodramatic Dionysianism that has dissonance as its stylistic vehicle and Wagnerian musical drama as its *mise-en-scène*. But Dionysus is not the God of dissonance enjoyed in a deliberate, exclusive fashion by the modern listener of Tristan. He is instead a severe God, the supreme emblem of what is terrible and magnificent in lived life. Dionysus is a philosopher, not a musician: he is the philosopher of the will to power.

The late Romantic music that Nietzsche interprets as 'Dionysian music' is characterized by a totalitarian harmonic theory. Harmony is everything for it: it lacks any principle superior to harmony, whether plastic or dynamic. 'Tristan and Isolde', the emblematic work in this sense, is the masterpiece of an all-encompassing harmony of delays and dissolutions, a

work that for the first time reveals to Nietzsche the enchanted realm of music, for which Schumann had predisposed him. Nietzsche's musical conception in 'The Birth of Tragedy' feeds on the Tristan experience; the later Nietzsche still speaks of the 'perilous fascination' exerted by Tristan's music, of its 'sweetly suffered infinitude,' in a way that reveals a fragment of his soul as remaining attached to it.

The crucial event of his existence coincides with the definitive distancing from this music: it happened in the summer of 1876 in Bayreuth, during the first festival in which Nietzsche participates as a celebrated guest and at the same time as the worthy friend of Wagner. As if thunderstruck, he intuits what has been preparing itself for him for years, finally revealing to him what he sees as morbid within himself. *The pact made with Romantic music becomes for Nietzsche a terrible misunderstanding: not a simple deviation of taste, but a fateful event of metaphysical dimensions.* But how could an event of this kind happen? For Nietzsche, his friendship with Wagner was certainly decisive, along with his veneration for this 'lawgiver' figure and his 'hegemonic nature.' Yet it was not only friendship with Wagner and veneration of him that led Nietzsche astray: it was also the music he bore within himself. And precisely because the error was deeply rooted in Nietzsche's innermost being, he needed so much time to overcome the crisis. But the spiritual overcoming of the crisis would be accomplished as soon as he discovered a new conception of music, for Nietzsche's life was unthinkable without music.

Nietzsche's definitive break from Bayreuth in the summer of 1876 was the most significant politico-cultural event of the 19th century. It is precisely at this juncture that the Dionysian philosopher discovers himself. In the 'Prologue' that follows 'Human, All Too Human', which contains the most remarkable things Nietzsche said about his spiritual evolution, the most fruitful event of his life is described in terms that clearly express its Dionysian nature. In this regard, Nietzsche alludes to an 'enigmatic, questionable, problematic victory, and yet still a victory.' It was an outsized victory: the triumph over a triumphant figure. 'Bayreuth was the most glorious triumph any artist had ever achieved before.' What a tangle of contradictions! At the very moment he perceives a 'total deformation' of his instinct and stakes his life anew by tearing his heart from the people dearest to him, he grasps the supreme triumph.

Nietzsche then experiences the 'first explosion of strength and will strained toward self-determination and self-affirmation': for the first time he can truly be himself. The instant he distances himself from the music erroneously understood as 'Dionysian,' Nietzsche truly becomes Dionysos philosophos.

Well then, the fact that the literary expression of this definitive farewell is the book titled 'Human, All Too Human' is the most paradoxical aspect of an equally paradoxical life. 'Human, All Too Human' is a modest, sober work, even cold. Understanding Nietzsche comes from understanding and interpreting this book, which expresses not a way of being, but Nietzsche's will to be something, and for that very reason is Nietzsche's most energetic expression. 'Human, All Too Human' is not an immediate exposition but the first conspicuous example of an indirect presentation that will distinguish Nietzsche from now until 'Beyond Good and Evil'.

Nietzsche's early books reveal a colorful, changing, seductive and intoxicating tone. Musicality not only penetrates the metaphysics but reveals itself precisely in the form; by virtue of the exposition conducted preferably with shifting, lively images, the language becomes hermetic and metaphorical, allowing the author to glory in mocking logic. The first work that shows us philosopher Nietzsche liberating himself from music deliberately turns toward the opposite extreme: the musical, enthusiastic thinker becomes an intellectual given to analysis, a cold 'free spirit' who gives his opinion looking down on things from on high, within the strictest logical limits. The intellect, winking at scientism, chooses the most concise, least showy form, the aphorism, to express its truths in the simplest, most rigorous way possible. What leads Nietzsche to the aphorism is a choice, a decision, not a diminution of his forces (although the new form has the additional advantage of suiting someone only active during the respites his suffering affords him). The aphoristic form is consequently not the expression of any sudden love for Romanic culture.

The French school to which Nietzsche deliberately turns reveals an anti-German will: however, this will has ends quite distinct from the mere abandonment of German culturalism for the sake of subtler, more honest distinctions. The appeal to Romanic psychology and stylistic tradition functions only as an instrument toward a higher, forward-looking goal. 'Human, All Too Human' everywhere shows itself to be the result of rigorous inner discipline. One perceives in it a deliberate modulation of tones, a certain modesty toward feelings and images, a beloved monochrome background. The attenuation of any bright polychromy of life is the expression not so much of the years of harshest depression as rather of Nietzsche's sovereign will (Jakob Burckhardt would have described 'Human, All Too Human' as a 'sovereign' book). Will, not feeling, can dominate the intellect.

Consequently, in this work feeling goes silent; will speaks precisely through the intellect, thus manifesting its utmost power. If life makes a mistake in joining itself with life-hostile music, will must then intervene in defense of life itself. Will thus becomes the exponent of the Dionysian principle; thus, Nietzsche's most intellectual book turns out to be the first of his existential-Dionysian works. Nietzsche effectively

considers psychology as a weapon to employ against decadence. It is not a psychologist speaking here, but someone wanting to conquer decadence by availing himself of psychology.

'Human, All Too Human', which comes immediately after Nietzsche's most bloody and significant victory, is formally, from the viewpoint of form, a text very distant from music, precisely because *it is the first book of the autonomously philosophical Nietzsche*. It appears as the most sober and concise of Nietzsche's aphoristic books: the tone yet to come, however, remains asleep in the guarded rhythm and word that abstains from taking flight. And yet this book contains the first formulation of Nietzsche's deepest vision concerning the essence of music. Nietzsche's link to music is, so to speak, subterranean, negative. The polemic developed there against the redundancy of late Romantic music implies a new basic understanding of the essence of music. 'Music as a Late Fruit of Culture' is the title of aphorism 171, the decisive aphorism of the first volume, which says that music, among all the arts, is the last to appear in the autumn where the culture that engendered it shrivels. Someone more sensitive to nuanced metaphors, with that reticence with which the enthusiast of yesterday is defended today, would say that music, in the highest sense of the term, is a swan song.

This thought, expressed so delicately, stands at the same height as the passage that leads us from the world of the young Nietzsche into the Zarathustrian landscape. Autumn and swan song, thus intervenes that link with death which music bears within itself. Caducity, dissolution, the death contained in beauty all belong to the most authentic meaning of music. One must look to the musical-Dionysian Nietzsche in order to understand the meaning of this original intuition. In 'The Birth of Tragedy', life in its supreme manifestation is joined with the dramatic-musical work of art. Only on the basis of this identity was it possible to establish the connection between music and philosophy, between the German present and the Greek past, between Wagner and Nietzsche. But just when the alliance between these men and ideas is about to reach its pinnacle, the musical-philosophical dream dissolves. Nietzsche has the clear, terrible sensation that a decisive event has been fulfilled, without however displaying full awareness of the catastrophe's amplitude. In aphorism 171 on music, it is perhaps clearer to us than to Nietzsche himself, it is precisely in those years that he is guided by an instinctive, almost clairvoyant certainty.

Great music is a swan song, death-music, because a culture breathes its last sigh within it. How horrendous Nietzsche must have found the sensation of erring so profoundly concerning a decisive question where error is impossible, for life and death are decided here! He had believed he was hearing Dionysian life, the harbinger of a heroic culture, when in truth it was the past that spoke. Thus is dispelled the enigma of Bayreuth: it could never have been the 'dawn heralding the battle-day' of a future German culture, for in reality those were the shadows of death. Far from emerging from the primordial eternal past of nature and people, these are rather the projection of the last shadows of an epoch fated to perish. An artistic myth, a musical theater of legends had thus been substituted for the authentic myth, the disciple of Heraclitus and Aeschylus, bedazzled by his own will and enthralled by his veneration of Wagner, had failed to realize it.

In the years following the Bayreuth catastrophe, later a memory accompanied by a certain horror, Nietzsche gains a better understanding of his own nature. This is shown to us by that clear separation between the musical line and philosophical line, so easily recognizable from then on. From these two lines, whose antithesis subordinates all other contradictions within Nietzsche, the fabric of this soul's destiny unfolds. The line of death surfaces wherever the modern man speaks, the musician, the poet, whereas the line of life appears wherever the friend of the Greeks expresses himself, the Dionysian philosopher, the educator and politician. The 'Birth of Tragedy' is the book of this soul's destiny: the lines intertwine almost to the point of terrible yet fascinating entanglement; then they unravel starting from the break with Bayreuth, determining from that point on, thanks to their sage masterful co-presence, Nietzsche's entire spiritual process.

Wanting to understand Zarathustra, one must know the author's entire inward and outward biography. *Nietzsche defines Zarathustra as a 'Dionysian demon'*, asserting that in this work the notion of the Dionysian becomes 'supreme action.' Just a moment ago, we made use of the analogous expression 'existential-Dionysian.' This expression anticipates the essence of Zarathustra and enters by full rights beginning from 'Human, All Too Human'. However paradoxical it might sound, 'Human, All Too Human' is the first step toward Zarathustra.

The friendship that binds him to Wagner is felt and regarded by Nietzsche as an ancient honor. Given the great difference in age between them, the relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner can only be configured as the bond linking disciple to master. In his capacity as Wagner's worthy friend, Nietzsche fights alongside the Master of Bayreuth for a renewal of German culture. The break first and foremost signifies that he must continue fighting alone for a goal that is by no means glimpsed in Bayreuth. The solitary gradually realizes the meaning of the break with Wagner. To continue in total solitude is an exceedingly arduous thing: this is attested by the still faltering step of the first book of aphorisms. In 'The Wanderer and His Shadow' morale starts to recover; the air grows warmer in Dawn. The rays of sun filter through the dissolving clouds, the entire fourth book of 'The Gay Science' is already immersed in a new light: it concludes with an allusion to the thought of the eternal return and the incipit of Zarathustra.

This development, spanning the years between 1876 and 1882, reflects the increasing fortification following the definitive break from Bayreuth. In 1883 the liberating work is at last completed. *Zarathustra appears and Dionysus speaks through his mouth.* The mature man conducts what the youth did not manage to fulfill: Dionysian thought now speaks its own language. Zarathustra is the reverse side of 'The Birth of Tragedy'. In the latter, Wagner is Dionysus; musical dissonance corresponds to the primordial Dionysian phenomenon; the philosopher is subordinate to musical theater. By contrast, in Zarathustra the philosopher appears as lawgiver before the crowd. The Heraclitean ideal is thus effectuated: 'Heraclitus was proud; and when a philosopher is proud, his pride is truly great.' Nietzsche had to rise to the figure of Zarathustra in order to overcome Wagner. He needed the most sublime mask to achieve victory in the supreme agony beloved of the Muses. First and foremost, in Zarathustra Nietzsche celebrates his own triumph over Wagner, who is not coincidentally represented in the 'Prologue' under the guise of the clown in the tower. The relationship between disciple and master has been completely inverted: he who was once venerated now appears as the lowest rung on the ladder leading to supreme glory.

'Between envy and friendship, as between self-contempt and pride, there lies an enormous tension and separation: the Greek lives in envy, the Christian in friendship' (Aurora, 69). Nietzsche's soul is extremely torn between self-contempt and pride, since he knows well the tension that exists between envy and friendship. 'Envy' must of course be understood in its ancient sense, that is, as 'good Eris.' Envy is an ardent tension yearning for the highest prize, which can be won on condition of prevailing over a worthy adversary. For the young Nietzsche, Richard Wagner had been the 'sublime forerunner.' But as soon as Nietzsche noticed that his own goal was loftier than what was envisioned for Bayreuth, he had to triumph over Wagner in order to attain his own end. Wagner had thus succeeded in awakening what still lay latent in Nietzsche's nature: the supreme will to triumph. It was the powerful example embodied by Wagner that shattered philology in one blow. From Wagner, Nietzsche learned the way to conquer men for himself and dominate the world. Nietzsche dons the mask of Zarathustra, going forth to conquer the world and thus solitary conducting a far more momentous feat than what he had failed to take on in the company of his friend. Thus is fulfilled the destiny of one who lives out his life in the tension between envy and friendship.

Keeping this firmly in mind, we can then understand why in 'Ecce Homo' Nietzsche wrote concerning the first part of Zarathustra: 'The concluding part was completed precisely in that sacred hour when Richard Wagner dies in Venice,' and why he adds: 'My notion of the Dionysian here becomes supreme action.'

And it is music that constitutes the greatest threat to Nietzsche's philosophy. However, the herald of death must harmonize with the philosophy of life, for without music life is an 'error': the line of death can never vanish from this soul. That is why the years preceding Zarathustra are so somber: although philosophical development is in the foreground, at bottom it is marginal, since the main issue continues to be music. The question is: how can the line of death be subordinated to the line of life, and how can music be made the handmaiden of philosophy? Zarathustra constitutes the solution to the dilemma: the doctrine of the god Dionysus is announced in the new tone of sententious song. The line of life and the line of death are tightly braided: the hymn of life resonates in the tonality of death. Dionysian thought celebrates supreme triumph; Dionysus philosophos is reintegrated in his honor; and the initial error is grandly redressed. After the musician (Wagner) was transformed into Dionysus, the latter had to become musician in turn. The form of 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' gushes forth from this necessity. In it bursts out Nietzsche's innate music: he himself numbers this book among the symphonies.

In Zarathustra, the Dionysian content and the musical form are clearly and precisely separated. In Zarathustra, the lawgiver of the future is foreshadowed, the heroic man who annihilates the figure of the 'last man', the vehicle of democratic and anti-heroic culture. The Dionysian motif resonates with the purest accents within 'Of Old and New Tablets':
'Oh my will! You who ward off from me all, it is not necessary, you are my necessity! Save me from all petty victories!'

Agonal thought reaches its essential formula: Dionysus appears there as triumphant and annihilating. The creator of new values must be at the same time victor and annihilator: 'ready to annihilate in triumph.'

Zarathustra has always been considered a sui generis book: not only with regard to the content, but also in relation to the form. The latter is nourished by the lyrical dimension, without ever achieving it: the narrative does not want to lead to song, although brushing the hymn in some moments. There is therefore a tension towards poetry, but no fulfilled poetry in itself. Everything that belongs to the sphere of reflection is expressed in a hard, rough tone, in terms of command and empire; however, moments of an almost lyrical purity emerge here and there, where all the music of the book flows. It is difficult to separate some independent parts from the flow of the whole, because we do not see in it an end or an epilogue that does not seem casual, however lyrical beauty spills out precisely in isolated fragments, fragments often of just a few verses:

'Around autumn, clear sky and autumnal joy.
Look what fullness is around us! It is beautiful to lean out
from overabundance towards distant seas'.

In Zarathustra we perceive a tone that denotes a magic and exaltation not very far from Tristan. And yet in Zarathustra the accent of pain is completely lacking: its distinctive feature is perfect joy; its rhythm is of dance. 'Light steps' are Zarathustra's pride. The verses of the lyrics do express, yes, perfect joy, but also a joy presaging fate, a joy that transcends itself. Nietzsche calls this risky element 'alcyonean'. The symphony of Zarathustra has an alcyonean tonality, a tonality characteristic of a melancholic soul, attracted by death and saved by dance. For that soul, music and tears are the same. 'I cannot establish any difference between music and tears.' From melancholy is born perfection, the blissful overabundance that rests in itself in Nietzsche's favorite autumnal days. 'Indeed, this is what I ask of music: that it be serene and deep as an October afternoon.'

And in contrasting his music with Wagner's, Nietzsche declares: 'My melancholy wants to rest in the nooks and abysses of perfection: that's why I need music.' Does not the word 'perfection' have the same meaning as 'music'? And does 'music' not correspond, perhaps, to 'swan song'? The maturity for death is what hovers over the radiant autumn day of the alcyonean soul: the soft accents that put wings on dancing feet spring from the predisposition to death. 'The light and divine, everything that is divine runs on light feet.'

This last quote is taken from 'The Case of Wagner,' that is from the first of those writings to which the last alcyonean, autumnal and fruitful year of Nietzsche's conscious life is devoted. What is it that lends Nietzsche's opuscule its magical force? A poetry, and precisely an alcyonean poetry: only by mistake has this opuscule been considered a pamphlet. This incredible imprint appears as a song of praise intoned to Bizet's Carmen, a very refined device to irritate the Wagnerians. However, the music of Carmen is not devoid of an intrinsic connection with what Nietzsche defines as 'alcyonean'. This word is explained there in two passages:

‘This music is serene; however, not with a French or German serenity. Its serenity is African: over it hangs fate, its happiness is brief, sudden, pitiless. I envy Bizet for having had the courage of this sensibility which until now did not have its own language in European cultured music, the courage of this more tanned, more burnt southern sensibility... How good for us are the golden sunsets of his happiness! Do we perhaps heal ourselves in the distance? Have we ever seen a calmer sea?’

From this passage taken from 'The Case of Wagner' we go on to consider aphorism 255 from 'Beyond Good and Evil,' where the merit of music is discussed: here too it is a matter of a music that is over-German and supra-European which knows how to impose itself even over the tanned sunsets in the desert and feels at home among the superb and fierce beasts of prey... The tension towards transcendence manifests itself here starting from a different point of view: all customs disappear, including the favorite southern Europe, the soul that burns with passion only rests in the perfection of death in the desert.

Music is all this, also an elevation of music in Zarathustra. But if we want to hear the word 'alcyonean' directly from Nietzsche's mouth, we must take the other passage from 'The Case of Wagner' where everything becomes clear:
‘These young Germans of today are right: how could they miss what we alcyoneans miss in Wagner, the gay science, the light foot, the mockery, the fire, the grace, the great logic, the dance of the stars, the proud spirit, the flashes of the South, the placid sea, perfection? ...’

To this mysterious lyricism of death is linked in Zarathustra the lasting impression of absolute solitude. For the author, music and tears are identical: the mystery of the book is a solitude that induces weeping. This solitude, however, contrasts with the Dionysian motif, to which it is impossible to link it in any way; likewise, the line of life does not converge at all with that of death. And yet both are brought together here: their union expresses the ultimate hidden mystery in Nietzsche's soul in the most intimate and profound way.

Four years after the composition of the third Zarathustra, Nietzsche arrives in Turin: he feels strangely attracted from the first moment by the still unknown city: the first gift of Nietzsche's new stay is 'The Case of Wagner,' a musical fragment. Shortly before, already in Nice, Nietzsche had felt a particular closeness to music: ‘music offers me sensations as I have never perceived before,’ he writes to Gast. The last year of his conscious life passes entirely under the sign of music. It is the year of the 'Dithyrambs of Dionysus,' of which Nietzsche makes a copy during the summer; shortly before the final collapse he carefully prepares a second slightly modified version. The poems date back, in effect, to the time of Zarathustra; the novelty, however, consists in the sincere ardor with which Nietzsche sets out on his sudden inspirations. Among the Dithyrambs there is one that reveals the author's intimacy, an image of perfect alcyonean joy that touches the horrendous abyss: 'The Sun Sets,' which begins:
You will not burn for much longer still
My insatiable heart.

A mysterious feeling of transcendence dominates the couplet:
Oh day of my life!
The sun sets.

These verses introduce the definition of alcyonean perfection in the two stanzas that begin:
Come now, golden serenity!
You, first fruit of death,
Sweetest mystery.

What is the meaning of this lyrical element that has become autonomous? Among the Dithyrambs there are fragments of authentic poetry; however only a luminous reflection of poetry, not fulfilled poetry in itself. And yet the Dithyrambs are a swan song, pure music, but what does Nietzsche mean by 'pure music'?

It is a turn in Nietzsche's life, no less decisive than that of 1876. Back then Nietzsche had found himself again: the most heroic of his books from that period is absolutely anti-musical ('Human, All Too Human'). Then music prevails: in 'The Gay Science' it appears in sayings and songs, while in Zarathustra the heroic element is completely transfused into the musical one. Once balance is achieved, thought rests in the stillness of noon. The Engadine is the landscape that provides the backdrop for this moment that Nietzsche perceives as a 'heroic idyll,' the essence of Zarathustra could not be more precisely defined. The hero speaks in an alcyonean tone, Dionysus turns into an idyll...

No path would have led beyond the idyll; no road would have led to action. The 'Dionysian action' of Zarathustra consists precisely in the form. That is why the fourth Zarathustra was doomed to fail, since it had turned out to be an allegorical sketch. Nietzsche then abandoned the project of continuing Zarathustra: in the following years of waiting, he dedicated himself to the main philosophical work, 'The Will to Power'. In musical terms, 'Beyond Good and Evil' is a reply. The question of what should come after Zarathustra is implicit in everything Nietzsche undertakes from then on. Zarathustra can no longer appear since there is no passage from the heroic idyll to action. A second mask on the model of Zarathustra is now impossible.

But then something surprising happens: Nietzsche himself takes the field. Thus begins a new phase of his creative activity: the phase of direct action. Zarathustra had announced without ever having fought. There would no longer be a continuation in which he intervened as the protagonist. And here comes Nietzsche-Dionysus: 'The Will to Power' is interrupted, because Nietzsche, the subverter of all values, like the Great Corsican, intends to make his lightning appearance before all of Europe. What does the passage from 'The Will to Power,' a passionate but ultimately contemplative work, to the eruptions of the last year, 'The Twilight of the Idols'; 'The Antichrist'; 'Ecce Homo', mean?

The Nietzsche of these pages has been understood as someone who wants but achieves nothing. He who wants is by no means someone who wields vain pretensions or aspires to be ethical; Nietzsche is by no means an impotent of the will, he is rather the man of a single instinct: the instinct of the legislator, the ruler, the Victor. For Nietzsche, having a will and being a philosopher are the same thing, since by philosophy he means wisdom, not science. Viewing Nietzsche's life in this light, his so-called changes appear very different from how they have been seen so far. They have generally been viewed in the light of manifestations of a hypersensitive subjectivity on the artistic plane, conditioned by passion and arbitrariness, by the thirst for adventure or the excesses of an unusual sensibility. However, Nietzsche is the very opposite of an adventurer of the intellect.

He has become what he had to be and had to become what he wanted to be. 'Become what you are' is equivalent to: 'Want what you are.' A fate constitutes Nietzsche's intimate nature. But this fate possesses rigorous logic and sovereign will.

The young Nietzsche unconsciously opens himself to the modern world as a metaphysical dreamer, guided by instinct and veneration for Richard Wagner. He still does not know himself or the world either, and yet in him there already exists that wariness that foreshadows total solitude and a sense of destiny. His first book already hides the most significant thing behind a pseudonym: Dionysus. ('My writings know very well how to defend themselves,' he will write later.) In the third of the 'Untimely Meditations,' Nietzsche will use Schopenhauer's pseudonym, while in the fourth he will adopt that of Richard Wagner (as anti-Alexander). 'Free spirit' is the pseudonym worthy of a great diplomat.

This figure, as well as that of the god Dionysus, is invented by Nietzsche to say something very specific. It expresses an exceptional condition in biographical-spiritual terms. All the pseudonyms (except the first) correspond to a stage in the journey of a will conscious of the still distant supreme goal and determined to act only at the right moment. Each pseudonym represents the mask of a sovereign will. 'One should only speak when one cannot be silent, and only speak of what one has overcome: everything else is charlatanry, 'literature', lack of discipline.'

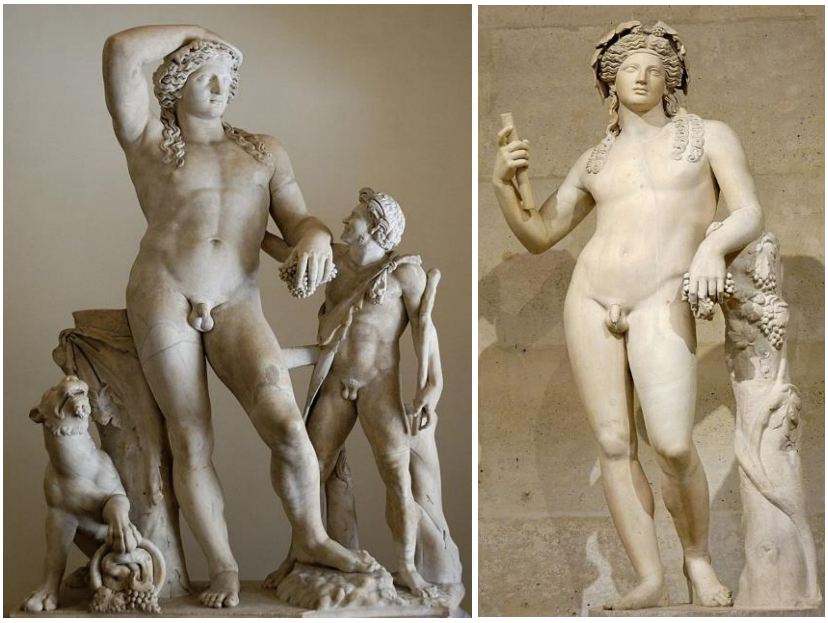

Figure 5: Dionysus. Left. Drunken Dionysus with panther, satyr and grapes on a vine. Roman copy from the 2nd century CE after a Hellenistic original. Right. Second-century Roman statue of Dionysus

Nietzsche maintains the mask of the free spirit until the moment of liberation, which is followed by Zarathustra, 'the guest of guests'. Well, Zarathustra is Nietzsche himself, not a sage from the East; however he is a particular manifestation of Nietzsche, a pseudonym, an autonomous figure: Dionysian thought as a musical-alcyonean phenomenon. *With the appearance of Zarathustra the free spirit is fulfilled.* And it is a sign of unease that in 'Beyond Good and Evil' Nietzsche once again resorts to an abandoned pseudonym. And unease reaches its peak when a programmatic writing of the mature Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals,' where there is no longer any trace of the resource of the free spirit, sees the light as a corollary to 'Beyond Good and Evil.' At this point, the whole difficulty of Nietzsche's condition after Zarathustra manifests itself: from then on he will no longer use any fiction, descending into the field without a mask.

Nietzsche's life is marked by foresight, utmost caution, tenacity, resolution, not by emotional instability and a taste for change as an end in itself. The vivid inner fullness is thus welded to an iron resolution of the will. For Nietzsche, not the changing contingency of what is experienced is decisive, but the task that remains identical.

'It still seems to prevail in us our old determination: for a long time we have known nothing but riddles. The selection of events, tension and burning longing, rejection of what we love and adore most: all this frightens us as if from us here and there emanated an arbitrariness, a whim, sick and volcanic. And all this is nothing else, however, but higher reason and foresight of our task for the future.'

What remains (because it is identical to the will) is the heroic element. In the early works, the hero is immediately celebrated: in 'Human, All too Human,' the hero speaks through formal rigor, while in Zarathustra the heroic-Dionysian thought constitutes the doctrinal content. Nietzsche does not change in relation to the decisive thing: the young Nietzsche instinctively affirms the values of the fighting Nietzsche; Zarathustra announces them; the mature Nietzsche theoretically justifies them in philosophical terms; the last Nietzsche translates them into action by delivering the decisive blow. The true image of Nietzsche accompanies the understanding of the radical nature of his heroic vision.

The image changes diametrically if we start from the line of death, insofar as it connects with the musical element and therefore with the form. It is at this point that the change becomes clear: the young Nietzsche sinks into that pseudo-Dionysian joy that is precisely the opposite of the joy of the last Nietzsche ('brief, sudden, merciless'). The passive enjoyment of the Tristan listener is dissolved by the dynamic joy of the admirer of Carmen, for whom after a musical evening dawn breaks 'filled with synthetic visions and illuminations'. What emerges in contrast in the realm of feeling and taste is seen in the realm of will as a counterpoint: here too we find an increase in activity, an acceleration and accentuation of rhythm. At this point we have not a contrast with the original will, but a final elevation and fullness. Corresponding to Nietzsche's passage from an initial pseudo-Dionysian feeling of unity and liberation to the moments of alcyonean joy of maturity and the concluding phase of his conscious life, is a mutation of form: starting from the rhetorical-Dionysian style of the early work, With an abrupt turn, Nietzsche moves on to the alcyonean music implicit in the books of aphorisms and the idyllic-heroic rhythm of Zarathustra.

The transition represented by the last volume of aphorisms, which appears under a double mask, is also expressed in formal terms. 'Beyond Good and Evil' is characterized by a maturity that is revealed even in musical similarities: here it is no longer necessary to contain feeling, so that the reader is never abandoned by the impression of consummate perfection, of a melancholic farewell, in this sense the aphorism on the prelude to Wagner's 'Die Meistersinger' must also be understood, which describes in such an incomparable way the condition of autumnal maturity, which is of the essence of the book.

The tone of 'On the Genealogy of Morals' is diametrically opposed: here for the first time rings the accent of challenge, the disdainful tone of the last Nietzsche, who abandons all masks to face the verdict of death in hand-to-hand combat. We can understand this new style as long as we do not forget the innate tension in Nietzsche: at the moment when the lyrical-alcyonean element is dismissed, only the heroic-speculative element remains, stemming from that hard and disdainful style that distinguishes the fighter bent on triumph, and no longer the seer waiting for a final decision.

The mistake made by Nietzsche's interpreters is perhaps due to the fact that his character has been sought to be grasped exclusively from the perspective of music, rather than from the perspective of the heroic will: the mutation concerns the musical and formal sphere, never however the sphere of existence and thought.

What distinguishes the last period of Nietzsche is the dissolution of the synthesis represented by Zarathustra. He always felt a sense of happiness that came from having managed to compose that work where the contradictory aspects of his nature converge into a unity. But the supreme task still required one last sacrifice: to bid farewell to the landscape of Zarathustra. Only by entering as conquering-annihilator into his own time would Dionysus have been able to celebrate the supreme triumph.

The first blow strikes at triumphant Wagnerism ('The Case of Wagner'). The next blow must be struck at the main adversary: Christianity ('The Twilight of the Idols'; 'The Antichrist'; 'Ecce Homo'), embodied in Germany, in the Reich of the Junker Christian. At the origin of the very harsh invectives launched by the last Nietzsche against the Germans lies, yes, the increasingly intolerable consciousness of his own solitude, but above all a much deeper reason. Having appeared on the European stage for the final battle for effective power, Dionysus needed a real adversary.

The matter no longer concerns mere thought because what is at stake is hegemony. Radical cultural critique and the devastating philosophy of history are no longer enough; a figure must appear, provided there is enough explosive to blow it sky high. This figure is ultimately the Reich that has outlawed Nietzsche: by striking at the Reich, he annihilates everything he has always fought against, Wagnerism, Christianity, bourgeois morality. Quoting passages about Germans extracted from Nietzsche's last works without considering the existential condition in which they were written is laconic. Already from the works in which Nietzsche uses 'pseudonyms' we can infer everything concerning Wagner, Luther and Germany, based on Nietzsche's own pedagogical tension with respect to his homeland.

Such tension culminates in his last creative year: Nietzsche no longer feels German but thinks of himself as French. All this is not a matter of fact but represents an extreme instrument of struggle. And the most critical terms themselves, bent on the annihilation of the Reich, derive not only from insights or objective knowledge, but also from 'ironic antitheses' which, expressed in the highest style, constitute instruments of aggression in the struggle for effective power in real Germany. Nietzsche was never a mere theoretical philosopher: he remains an 'existential thinker,' and he is so to the highest degree in the last period, the one in which he actually comes into his own.

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