**NIETZSCHE ON PSYCHOLOGY,**

**CREATIVITY AND HISTORY**

***“Strain every nerve to [rise] out of the atmosphere of these times,***

***… [becoming] not only wiser but above all better.”***

Friedrich Nietzsche; letter to a friend; 1870

**Paradox and Perspectivism**

Freud, supposedly, once remarked: “I stopped reading Nietzsche lest there be nothing left to discover.” Nietzsche is considered the most psychological philosopher in the history of the West. Indeed, he often viewed his writing as more psychology than philosophy.

Lawrence Cahoone devotes a chapter in *The Ends of Philosophy* to exploring Nietzsche’s inquiry into the possibility of knowledge. Throughout this chapter, Freud hovers like a ghost at the banquet. I seek to make Freud’s presence tangible, and to extrapolate into Nietzsche’s views on art, history and metamorphosis.

“Nietzsche famously [asserts] … that truth itself is an error, an illusion, a lie.” (1) Cahoone claims that Nietzsche is serious. Nietzsche is in pursuit of truth. Nietzsche is engaged in an inquiry into inquiry. Nietzche’s investigation leads us into a labyrinth, at the heart of which is a contradiction. To say that “truth is a lie” is to make a claim which is self-defeating and absurd. Was Nietzsche being frivolous? Cahoone says no. If Nietzsche is serious, are we then to dismiss Nietzsche’s own philosophy as error and illusion? Again, Cahoone says no.

Cahoone argues that Nietzsche’s inquiry into truth is enlightening despite – or rather, because of – the koan-like paradoxes to which it leads. Nietzsche’s philosophy here echoes Emerson, parallels James, anticipates Freud, and influences Heidegger and Rorty.

In his essay “Circles,” Emerson declares that beyond every circle we draw, a larger, more inclusive circle is being drawn on the horizon.

We should thus always be wary of any claim to absolute truth; cautious in our so-called certainties; skeptical of dogmatic systematizing; open to new horizons; perpetually receptive to possibilities unexplored.

Nietzsche deeply admired Emerson, although, of course, he rejected Emerson’s transcendentalism and faith in democracy. Meanwhile, anticipating William James – Western philosophy’s other great philosopher-psychologist – Nietzsche’s philosophy exhibits a naturalistic, relativistic pragmatism, in which “truth” has utilitarian value but forever eludes claims to closure.

Freud, with his so-called discovery of the so-called unconscious, famously declared that “man is not master in his own house.” There are always forces operating below egoic awareness. These forces largely determine who we are and how we behave. They operate in the labyrinthine depths of the psyche. Ego-truth is partial-truth. It masks deeper truths. It compensates for those hidden truths which contradict the constructed self-identity which passes for personhood.

Freud is building on Nietzschean insights, and echoing Hume and James. To paraphrase Hume: what passes for ego is a fiction. Egoic identity, a sense of self, is convenient, pragmatic, even necessary; but it is not a substantial reality, not a fixed truth, not a Cartesian *cogito*. It is a process, a flux, an epiphenomenon, arising out of the interplay of more primordial forces. It is, in short, a construction, a story we tell ourselves about ourselves, partly based on how others perceive and treat us. This position finds expression in one of Sartre’s earliest books, *The Transcendence of the Ego*; it is carried forward in the works of Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida.

For Hume, Nietzsche and James, the idea that egoic identity is constructed also holds for knowledge. The epistemic and the psychological share a common feature. Truth and selfhood are both constructed, not merely discovered. This view – called in postmodern philosophy “constructivism” – derives from Kant and Schopenhauer, from whom Nietzsche inherits his epistemic starting point.

While “constructivism” has an affirmative tone, it’s really just another way of referring to the “deconstruction” of traditional philosophic terms – knowledge, truth, substance, soul – catalyzed by Hume and carried forward in the writings of Kant, Emerson, Nietzsche, James, Freud, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Rorty and Derrrida.

Martin Heidegger, deeply immersed in Nietzsche’s writings, translates truth as *aletheia*: unconcealment. For Heidegger, as for Nietzsche, what passes for truth is both a revealing and a concealing. The unconcealment is never complete, because every revealing is also a concealing.

Heidegger, like Nietzsche, goes back behind Aristotle, Plato and Socrates to the earliest Western philosophers – especially Parmenides and Heraclitus – for a concept of truth as paradoxical. For Nietzsche and Heidegger, “truth” is a tension-filled ambiguity. Revelation is surrounded by, if not indeed permeated by, hiddenness. To paraphrase Heraclitus, opinions and beliefs – human “certainties” – are like “toys in the hands of children.”

**Archeology of the Psyche**

Knowledge – what passes for truth – is of course not constructed from nothing; it is always *situated*. It is biologically, historically, culturally and linguistically conditioned. While Kant thought truth was conditioned by unchanging *a priori* categories of the mind, Hegel famously temporalized truth by turning it into a historical process. Nietzsche goes beyond Hegelian idealism – the hidden hand of *Geist* – to claim that “truth is a mobile army of metaphors.” (2)

While Freud barely mentions Nietzsche, Jung frequently bows to Nietzsche as the true founder of depth psychology. Nietzsche foreshadowed the Freudian concepts of repression, denial, compensation, sublimation, transference, symptom formation, libidinous instincts, the socialized superego as an internal moral agency, and id and ego as, respectively, primary and secondary psychic systems. He anticipated Jung’s notions of archetypes, personality temperaments, the “collective unconscious,” the power of myth, paradoxical thinking, and the *Ubermenschean* task of self-actualizing “individuation.” Nietzsche anticipated Adler’s notion of group psychology, as well as Jung’s analysis of healthy versus decadent cultures.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: “I, Zarathustra, … the advocate of the circle.” (3) If Zarathustra’s circle is “eternal recurrence,” it also echoes Emerson’s essay “Circles,” in which Emerson reminds us of the contingency of knowledge, the infinity of mystery, the “never ending” quality of pursuit of truth.

Zarathustra’s “circle” is a “labyrinth,” into which Nietzsche invites us. There is more than one labyrinth at work here.

At the ever receding center of both psyche and the epistemic, we glimpse an angst-ridden paradox, a Minotaurian contradiction, the unresolved and unresolvable tension between revealing and concealing.

Nietzsche, Freud and Jung were archeologists of the psyche. In exploring psychic depths, they go back in collective time, not merely biographical time.

In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche goes back to Pre-Socratic Greece to emphasize the long-lost *balance* of Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Freud goes back to classical Greek drama to find his name for the Oedipus complex (which he parallels with the Electra complex in women). Jung goes back in time in a psychiatric and world historical survey of mythic themes, guided partly by alchemy and Taoism, giving rise to his Platonic notion of “archetypes” and his Neoplatonic notion of gnostic World Soul.

Nietzsche anticipates Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*. He foreshadows Jung’s greatest work of cultural criticism, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. In a comment which calls to mind Plato’s *Republic*, Cahoone observes: “Nietzsche wanted to understand the vicissitudes of the achievement and maintenance of excellence in cultures and personalities. This also requires an understanding of the conditions of degenerate and decadent qualities in culture and personality.” (4)

Nietzsche’s worldview is atheistic, expressed in his most famous assertion, “God is dead.” Existence is sheer “will to power” in endless play. Nietzsche asserts that life has no intrinsic meaning; no purpose except intensification of power.

If life has any meaning, it is to be found most sublimely in art; especially in the psychological art of “self-overcoming,” in which – with “light feet” and a “gay spirit” – one turns one’s own life into a work of art, worthy of being repeated in “the eternal recurrence of the same.”

Most people, Nietzsche thinks, live in *mauvaise foi* – Sartre’s term for “self-deception.” For Nietzsche, modern Western culture, despite its progress and achievements, is marked by collective denial and delusion. Nietzsche writes in 1875: “My general task: to show how life, philosophy and art can have a more profound and congenial relationship to each other, in such a way that philosophy is not superficial and the life of the philosopher does not become mendacious.” (5) Thus Nietzsche’s philosophizing – “with a hammer” – is therapeutic. Nietzsche’s notion of philosophy as therapy anticipates Wittgenstein, echoes Kierkegaard, and stretches back to Socrates.

As a scathing, skeptical, thunderous, often cynical critic of Western civilization, Nietzsche is sometimes considered a nihilist. But this is a category mistake. It confuses the message for the messenger. Nietzsche believes Western culture is itself nihilistic; in Sartre’s terms: “self-defeating and absurd.”

Nietzsche predicts the catastrophes that marked the first half of the twentieth century. Nietzsche was, thus, prophetic. His philosophy is not so much nihilistic as a prophetic criticism of the nihilism which haunts modernity. In Heideggerian terms, Nietzsche’s philosophy seeks to “nihilate” the religious and political nihilism which presages more apocalypse.

Although Nietzsche had little use for democracy, he was a grandchild of the Enlightenment. He was a naturalist, with a firm belief in science. He thought the instinct for knowledge – though fraught with danger – should be pushed to its limits.

**Angst and Uncertainty**

What has been said of Hinduism is also true of Nietzsche: Whatever you say, the opposite is also true. Thus, for example, though Nietzsche greatly admired the seventeenth century scientific revolution and its consequent advances in biochemistry, optics, geology, physics and evolutionary biology, he also saw science as simply inverted metaphysics. In Nietzsche’s view, Western culture had replaced the god of religion with a new god called science.

Though he preferred science to religion, Nietzsche saw a Faustian danger in substituting one absolute for another. He saw in science an equally doomed quest for absolute truth. Nietzsche’s thunder, in its various forms, was consistently aimed at absolutism in all its forms.

His “naturalistic epistemology” and relativistic pragmatism fall under the umbrella term “perspectivism.” All human truth is perspectival. There is no way to jump out of the human skin to see if any human perspective corresponds to truth as such.

Therefore, the pursuit of, or claim to, “truth as such,” is itself error and illusion. Human perception is contingent, relative, conditional, perspectival. In Rorty’s terms, the idea that perception can ever act as a “mirror of nature” is delusion on a grand scale. Hence Rorty argues that philosophers and scientists should abandon the quest for Truth with a capital “T” and settle for the small, contingent, changing, pragmatic “truths” which, along with our fantasies and biases, are the fundamental actors in the existential drama called “the human condition.”

How are truth, knowledge, perception necessarily deceptive, artistic, metaphoric?

Adopting Kant’s position that the mind is an active agent creatively co-constructing its experience, Nietzsche argues that raw sensory data streams, starting out as neurological stimuli, are biologically translated into coordinated gestalts (sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile feelings) called perceptions. These perceptions are best thought of as primordial metaphors. From them, we “abstract” ideas (universals, concepts, notions), which then further condition experience in a second act of coordination, classifying objects into recognizable phyla, genus, species.

Thus, Nietzsche argues, humans are neurologically and conceptually “artistic.” He declares that humans are “clever animals,” by which he means that humans are spontaneously symbolic. Without this spontaneous, bio-psychic functioning, there would be no sense of world, and no sense of self to experience it. This primordial, metaphoric, symbolizing artistry is the foundation for creativity in the larger sense – which the Greeks called *praxis* and *pragma* – by which humans fashion language, tools, myth and ritual into the ongoing tragicomic opera called culture.

Cahoone summarizes: “For Nietzsche, nature is artistic in that it generates and requires illusion. … So, we see how complex is Nietzsche’s web, in which art and knowledge are opposed but intertwined. … His main point follows quickly. Perception and cognition are fundamentally dissimulative.” (6)

*The Diamond Sutra*, a primary text in Mahayana Buddhism, asserts: “Perception is deception.” Says Nietzsche: “Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.” (7)

In a sense, then, Nietzsche’s quest for “the truth” about the human condition is Buddhist, Platonic, Freudian, therapeutic. He seeks to uncover, to “recollect,” what we have forgotten. This anamnesis – this remembering – will be healing, cleansing, liberating. But what will it liberate us for?

It will liberate us to live comfortably with uncertainty. To be satisfied with perspectivism.

This has been accomplished in quantum physics. Postmodern philosophy is a leap in that direction.

For Nietzsche, says Cahoone, “cognitive representation is an *aesthetic* relation.” (8)

**Eros and Thanatos**

We now approach what Freud called the “life instinct” clashing with the “death instinct.” Later writers named this agonistic alchemy as that between Eros and Thanatos.

Cahoone quotes Nietzsche to connect the aesthetic-epistemic to the *agon* of psyche: “Life itself aims at ‘semblance … error, deception, simulation, delusion, self-delusion ….’ So the will to truth seems to oppose life, to be a will to death.” (9)

For Nietzsche, “the ‘optimism’ and ‘cheerfulness of the theoretical man’ …, like Socrates, according to which knowledge can solve the pain and contradiction of life, is both false and impoverishing: false, because as Kant had shown, it cannot achieve its aims; impoverishing, because [as Schopenhauer had shown, ceaseless] disappointment ultimately leads to skepticism, hence inaction and loss of confidence. Thus the search for knowledge threatens to undermine art, culture, even life itself.” (10)

For Nietzsche, the instinct for knowledge is part of what Freud calls the life instinct. But the quest for truth is doomed to fail.

This failure undermines life. Hence we seek release in the death instinct. Nietzsche’s *Ubermensch*, the “overman” whose self-overcoming turns life into art, lives in the tense balance between opposing instincts, much as, in Nietzsche’s view, the Pre-Socratic Greeks lived in the balance between Apollonian and Dionysian forces.

The Apollonian impulse is toward rationality, morality, moderation, elegance and form. The Dionysian impulse is toward dissolution, intoxication and frenzy. In Freudian terms, the ego is a battlefield between the Dionysian instincts of the id and the hyper-Apollonian ethics and guilt-inducing punishment of the superego.

What Freud called “the unconscious,” Nietzsche called (in Cahoone’s terms) “the intuitive impulse,” or “the intuitive spirit.” (11) Intuition is the psychic underground; a fountain of sensations, desires and feelings which “the rational impulse” – “the rational spirit,” what Freud called “ego” – must coordinate, evaluate, and balance against the opportunities and demands of the world, all in order to … make choices.

To choose is to exercise freedom in the midst of facticity; to respond to life, and thereby create a life. Choice, of course, involves anxiety. This is a basic point of existentialism. Freedom is fraught with uncertainty, responsibility and the ceaseless temptations of *mauvaise foi*.

If we conceive the Freudian id as a perpetually erupting, Dionysian, volcanic cauldron, and if we conceive the Freudian ego as an Apollonian instrument of coordination, moderation and decision-making, we may conceive the Freudian superego as the *internalization* of what Nietzsche calls “the dragon” of “thou-shalt-not” in the story of camel-lion-child – the “three metamorphoses” – told in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. We shall soon return to these metamorphoses.

**Psychosynthesis**

Freud said the purpose of psychotherapy is to enable a person “to love and to work.” Nietzsche would have criticized Freud’s therapeutic goal as an impulse toward mediocrity; suitable for a necessary majority, but anathema to the *Ubermenschean* struggle for life as art. For Nietzsche, the “free spirit,” the “gay spirit,” the “noble few,” would rather die on the battlefield of existential self-overcoming than settle for a life of compromise.

For Jung, the task of individuation – psychological maturation – is an *Ubermenschean* project, anticipated by Nietzsche quoting Pindar: “Become who you are.” Individuation is creative adventure. Self-discovery, self-formation, self-transcendence. Maximizing elegance of endless metamorphosis.

Nietzsche is closer to Freud than Jung in his atheism and scientism. Nietzsche is closer to Jung than Freud in his “gay spirited,” “free spirited,” “dancing” affirmation of life as a playground of stupendous opportunity. Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, “A thinker is … that being in whom the impulse for truth and [the pre-established] life-preserving errors clash …. Compared to the significance of this fight, everything else is a matter of indifference ….” (12)

Cahoone articulates the conundrum at the center of Nietzsche’s philosophy, and which any interpretation of Nietzsche must confront: “If there is no truth, how can Nietzsche propose his own view as true?” (13) Cahoone suggests that Nietzsche intends to contradict himself, and that this contradiction is rich with provocation and enlightenment.

Nietzsche’s philosophy is dialectical. It functions in a circle of perpetual tension. Unlike Hegel, however, Nietzsche’s dialectic offers no transcendent synthesis, no existential comfort.

Nietzsche admits: if he battles against Socrates, it is because Socrates mirrors his own struggle. If he thunders against “Socratism,” it is because he is shadow-boxing his own inquiry into the value of inquiry.

In short, Nietzsche intends his philosophy to be Socratic. He hopes his philosophy will have a provocative, sting-ray effect; to “awaken” us – as Hume liberated Kant – from “dogmatic slumber.”

Nietzsche’s philosophy echoes Heraclitus: “Up down one same.” It functions, as Cahoone notes, like a Zen koan. If Nietzsche’s philosophy engages us in a battle of wits, ending in an Escher-like, circumambulating, aporetic “no exit,” in which there is only more Promethean struggle, this is indeed Nietzsche’s intent.

Cahoone concludes: “More than anyone, Nietzsche is the philosopher of the *kirkos*, the circle or circus in which inquiry dwells, along with everything else.” (14)

Freud derives from Nietzsche the notion that ego is a theater of ever shifting characters and voices: a social network mediating internal and external forces. Herman Hesse – influenced by Nietzsche, Freud and especially Jung – illustrates the diaphanous character of ego-identity in the “magic theater” of his novel *Steppenwolf*, wherein psyche is a stage-play of protean personae.

Freud concludes that the most that psychotherapy can offer – or, indeed, the most that civilization can offer – is to make life a little less unhappy. Nietzsche, in contrast, concludes that a “free spirit,” a “gay spirit,” conducts life like a “dancing star.”

Affirmation of life is the essential message of Nietzsche’s “eternal return.”

Within the circle of our finitude – life as bounded by birth and death, and nothing more except more of the same in “eternal recurrence” – it is possible to live each day *as* our last, treasuring what beauty there is, open to the infinitude of mystery, adding to life our own beauty, and therefore making life a work of art.

Nietzsche here partakes of the spirit of Zen and Camus. There is a sense in which, for Nietzsche, personhood is a finite infinity.

In a thoroughly contingent, perspectival, relativistic, processive sense, and with an eye to the inevitability of “eternal return,” Nietzsche, despite himself, drinks from the cup of Plato and Blake, wherein lies the *Ubermenschean* opportunity of life: the possibility of experiencing each day the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the momentary.

Nietzsche says in *Twilight of the Idols*: “Nothing is more necessary than cheerfulness.”

**Metamorphosis**

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche’s stand-in narrator, Zarathustra (a variation on the Persian Zoroaster), famously articulates what he calls “The Three Metamorphoses” – camel, lion, child. There’s an irony here; an unanswered question; a bubble-like almost-koan. In this famous passage, Zarathustra describes the metamorphosis from camel to lion; then from lion to child. But this is only two metamorphoses.

What is the invisible, unarticulated third? It is the original metamorphosis from innocent, inquisitive child to the socialized “beast of burden” called camel.

Zarathustra’s “three metamorphoses” involve four characters: child, camel, lion, child. This exhibits Jung’s observation regarding archetypes: “Trinity seeks completion in quaternity.” The final child is a return to the innocence of the first, but with wisdom gained from experience. The wise person has regained the wonder emanating from the eyes of childhood. The individuating adventure is a return journey to, in Chogyam Trungpa’s words, “the sanity we were born with.”

It is helpful to contrast Zoroaster’s three metamorphoses – camel, lion, child – with the three metamorphoses Nietzsche articulates in his later book, *The Genealogy of Morals*, where the sequence moves from lion to camel to *Ubermensch*.

In both trinities, the camel is “the beast of burden” epitomized by Judeo-Christian slave morality, wherein weakness, timidity, obedience are transformed into virtues. Nietzsche calls this the “ascetic ideal,” which places faith in other-worldly redemption. The psychological process here anticipates Freud: religion is repression, compensation, sublimation and projection, a process first articulated by Ludwig Feuerbach.

Nietzsche’s atheistic, scientific naturalism is a rebellion against all forms of metaphysical idealism.

In the *Genealogy*, the lion is the Pre-Socratic Greek, the “blond beast,” exhibiting a healthy balance of Apollonian and Dionysian energies. The *Genealogy* here echoes Nietzsche’s first book: *The Birth of Tragedy Out of The Spirit of Music*.

The camel is the world-denying Platonic idealist and Judeo-Christian moralist, embodied in Nietzsche’s infamous assertion: “Christianity is Platonism for the masses.”

The *Ubermensch* is a Promethean hero, creating his own values out of the moral and aesthetic wreckage of Western “civilization.” Even more than Napoleon, Nietzsche’s *Ubermenschean* exemplars are Goethe and Emerson.

Prometheus had the courage to defy Zeus. The leonine Renaissance rebels had the courage to defy the Church.

But the heirs of the Renaissance lost their Promethean quality when, during the course of the 18th century Enlightenment, they substituted science for God, worshipping a new absolute, engaged in what Nietzsche calls “inverted metaphysics.”

So Nietzsche’s *Ubermensch* actually presages a *new* kind of man: the gay-spirited “free spirit” of the future, for whom we still await, and glimpses of which we have seen, says Nietzsche, in men like Heraclitus, Goethe, Emerson and, viewed a certain way, Socrates and Jesus – Promethean rebels one and all.

In Nietzsche, the camel archetype remains the same in both trinities. But whereas the *Genealogy* places the healthy blond-beast lion in Pre-Socratic Greece, *Zarathustra* implicitly identifies the lion as the Renaissance rebel whose thundering “No” defies the cultural “dragon” of conformity which keeps the camels – the herd, the timid, the mediocre majority – in their theological, slave-working place.

But the lion – having sloughed off his camel skin to release the roar within – is fatally flawed. He mostly knows how to say No (while saying Yes to himself). Knowing how to thunder, how to reject and rebel – he remains too full of pride. He needs to learn humility and wonder: how to say Yes to *life*, even with its multifarious tragedies. He needs to slough off his lion skin to release the child within; to regain the wonder of childhood, now tempered by maturity.

In Zarathustra’s tale, Nietzsche’s gay spirit, the free spirit, the *Ubermenschean* child, creatively conducts life like “a dancing star.”

Thus Camus concludes, with Nietzschean boldness: “One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” (15) For Nietzsche and Camus, the great threat, the pervasive temptation, the only serious anti-Christ, is the Faustian bargain: the selling of one’s soul, one’s humanity, for mere glitter. In his 1948 essay “Helen’s Exile,” Camus observes that in forgetting the virtue of Socratic ignorance, “we have forgotten our virility. We have preferred the power that apes greatness – Alexander first of all, then the Roman conquerors, whom our school history books, in an incomparable vulgarity of soul, teach us to admire.” (16)

In his 1948 essay “Prometheus in the Underworld,” Camus notes: “If Prometheus were to reappear, modern man would treat him as the gods did long ago: they would nail him to a rock, in the name of the very humanism he was the first to symbolize.” (17)

The camel says yes to conformity. The lion says no to authority. The child says yes to life.

Implicit in Zarathustra’s tale is the notion that the original, innocent, wonder-eyed child is still present in the unconscious depths of the camel-like beast of burden. When the camel, courageously facing his inner anxiety and responding to “the call of conscience,” wanders away from the herd, asks his question – Who am I? – and sloughs off his camel skin and shouts No to the dragon of conformity-authority, he is liberating the child within.

But this liberation remains incomplete, constrained by the lion’s skepticism, cynicism, rebellion and pride. The lion, having recovered an authentic sense of “I”, remains psychologically imprisoned by his sense of Cartesian cogito: his ego-identity. The final metamorphosis – the final and full release of the child within, the god within – yet awaits.

Zarathustra’s tales climaxes in the lion’s transformation into child. Here, ego has become diaphanous, making space in daily lived-experience for a Dionysian sense of unity with Life itself: the wondrous feeling of macrocosmic wholeness.

The authentic *Ubermensch* has replaced the sneer with a smile, becoming once again child-like; his Apollonian willfulness tempered by a deep and ongoing sense of the Dionysian *mystery* of Life: the rush and flow of “will-to-power,” rich with mystery and creative potential.

Zarathustra’s tale – with its transformation of lion into child – parallels Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and motives, where, at the top of the pyramid, “self-actualization” leaps into “self-transcendence.” Zarathustra’s climactic child and Maslow’s “self-transcendence” both indicate the “peak experience” of a radical flexing of Apollonian ego boundaries in holistic, Dionysian force-fields.

This is Nietzsche’s atheological mysticism. But there is a crucial element implicit in Maslow’s self-transcendence which is lacking in Nietzsche. This is the Stoic, I-Thou, *bodhisattva* ethic of universal brother-sisterhood, where merging with wholeness includes not just nature, but all our brothers and sisters in the human family.

One can well imagine Nietzsche – like Heidegger – being appalled at our poisoning and pillage of Mother Earth. But one can never quite imagine Nietzsche (or Heidegger) embracing the heart of the Torah and the Gospel of Matthew, as epitomized in Martin Buber’s call for “I and Thou,” echoing the insistence of Kant, Mill and Marx on respect for human dignity.

If Nietzsche’s *Ubermenschean*, Zarathustrean, post-leonine “child” remains in Dionysian rapture with the macrocosmic process-mystery of Nature, pride at last having given way to humility, one can’t help but see Nietzsche’s final flaw crystallized in Heidegger, who loves his Germanic, black forest trees more than his fellow humans.

But if Nietzsche’s philosophy is flawed by elitism, it also sparkles with inspiration. Camus observes in a 1951 interview: “What is admirable, in Nietzsche, is that you always find in him something to correct what is dangerous elsewhere in his ideas.” (18) Nietzsche says in *Twilight of the Idols*: “Life without music would be a mistake.” “Wisdom sets bounds even to knowledge.” “Whatever doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.” (19)

**Gods and Imagination**

If Nietzsche seems anti-humanist, he nevertheless sings a hymn to human greatness. Let us therefore conclude with his reflection on “*The greatest advantage of polytheism*,” from Book 3 of *The Gay Science*. This passage sets the stage for Nietzsche’s appraisal of human psychology, creativity and history.

For an individual to posit his own ideal and to derive from it his own law, joys, and rights – that may well have been considered hitherto as the most outrageous human aberration and as idolatry itself. The few who dared as muchalways felt the need to apologize to themselves, usually by saying: “It wasn’t I! Not I! But *a* *god* through me.” The wonderful art and gift of creating gods – polytheism – was the medium through which this impulse could discharge, purify, perfect, and ennoble itself; for originally it was a very undistinguished impulse, related to stubbornness, disobedience, and envy. Hostility against this impulse to have an ideal of one’s own was formerly the central law of all morality. There was only one norm, *man*; and every people thought that it possessed this one ultimate norm. But above and outside, in some distant overworld, one was permitted to behold a *plurality of norms*; one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him. It was here that the luxury of individuals was first permitted; it was here that one first honored the rights of individuals.

The invention of gods, and overmen of all kinds, as well as near-men and undermen, dwarfs, fairies, satyrs, demons, and devils was the inestimable preliminary exercise for the justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual: the freedom that one conceded to a god in his relation to other gods – one eventually also granted to oneself in relation to laws, customs, and neighbors.

Monotheism, on the other hand, this rigid consequence of the doctrine of one normal human type – the faith in one normal god beside whom there are only pseudo-gods – was perhaps the greatest danger that has yet confronted humanity. It threatened us with the premature stagnation that, as far as we can see, most other species have long reached; for all of them believe in one normal type and ideal for their species, and they have translated the morality of mores definitively into their own flesh and blood. In polytheism the free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man attained its first preliminary form – the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes – and ever again new eyes that are even more our own: hence man alone among all the animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives. (20)

**Stefan Schindler**

**Footnotes**

1. Lawrence Cahoone, *The Ends of Philosophy: Pragmatism, Foundationalism and Postmodernism* (Blackwell Publishing; 2002; p. 157).

2. Nietzsche’s most famous sentence in the 1872 essay “Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” (published posthumously in the first of the *Untimely Meditations*).

3. Cahoone, 157.

4. Cahoone, 158.

5. Cahoone, 158-159.

6. Cahoone, 162.

7. Cahoone, 163.

8. Cahoone, 164.

9. Cahoone, 165.

10. Cahoone, 161.

11. Cahoone, 164.

12. Cahoone, 165.

13. Cahoone, 182.

14. Cahoone, 191.

15. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (Vintage; Random House: New York; 1955, 1983; p. 123).

16. Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (ed. Philip Thody; trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy; Vintage; Random House: New York: 1968; p. 150).

17. Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 139.

18. Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays,* p. 354.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale; Penguin Books; 1968, 2003; p. 36, 33).

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (trans. Walter Kaufmann; Vintage Books; 1974; p. 191-192).

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