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## **Schelling and Nietzsche: On Setting Free the God of Love**

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If prudence is the best advice for those who seek to establish their identity by pursuing a career, it is courage that remains the indispensable virtue for anyone committed to philosophy. If academics in general, career-oriented as they are, can be forgiven for acquiescing to a culture of political correctness, philosophers cannot. A philosopher's duty is to question authority, regardless of which party happens to be in power. It is for this reason that I have chosen to highlight that dimension of Schelling's and Nietzsche's thinking that is most explicitly opposed to the secular religion of progress that forms the core of capitalist modernity. Whether the religion of progress manifests itself in the economic liberalism of the Right or in the cultural liberalism of the Left, the result is always the same: contempt and hostility for whatever nature herself has put forth. While it is true that, in Schelling's view, divinity steps into existence by subduing its own dark ground, it does not follow that he believes that divinity then casts aside what it has subdued. For, as is particularly clear in its pagan manifestation, the ground of divinity is nature, the shared ground of life as such. Because divinity completes itself only in being shared, it must allow the dark ground to continue to operate, finding suitable company only in what, like it, has the courage to stand up to darkness. Whereas the merely human, governed by fear, would control nature, the divinely human would much rather set it free.

Schelling, like Hölderlin, recognized in Dionysus the truth of Christ's claim that "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8: 58). Dionysus, the god of madness and drunkenness, the god dismembered in violence and resurrected in glory, was, for both Schelling and Hölderlin, more than the mythical prototype of Jesus; he was the very person himself; he was the god, now alive in the man.

But what, one may well wonder, could this joining together of the pagan and the Christian have to do with Nietzsche, the opponent of all things Christian? Or, to put the same question differently, what could Nietzsche, the self-avowed Anti-Christ, possibly have to do with Schelling, whose entire late philosophy was devoted to a restoration and transformation of Christianity, albeit a Christianity that in some important manner had been "paganized"?

But what if Schelling's purpose was not anything along the lines of "restoring Christian morality," but instead the demonstration that Christian moralism is a kind of Pharisaism in a new key that is incompatible with true Christianity? What if for Schelling too the true goal lies "beyond good and evil"? And what if, by announcing the death of God, Nietzsche's aim was less to shock the sensibility of proclaimed Christians than to challenge a secular culture that is indifferent to that death, smug in its assumption that morality was the only thing of value in the entire Christian tradition—and that government by law is its final achievement? What, in other words, if Nietzsche's real insight is that modernity, far from being the purpose of history, is itself the greatest barrier to the realization of that purpose, which is instead the birthing of divinity?

"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster himself," Nietzsche famously wrote, for "if you stare long enough into an abyss, the abyss will stare back into you."<sup>1</sup> Simply declaring the death of God does nothing to release us from the yoke of Christian morality, if it indeed turns out that our own paranoia (the God staring at us from the abyss), is what first set the yoke in place. Surveillance cameras and all of the other instruments of the panopticon that the fearful install in the name of safety (whether in the face of a highly contagious virus, the possibility of a terrorist attack, or the messiness of human sexuality) constitute a threat more objectively real than religion's fantasy of a severe and all-seeing God who looks down at us from above.

Paranoia, if unassuaged, gives rise to a social order that ends up justifying paranoia. Evil, after all, would have died out long ago if it did not keep reproducing itself in the righteous anger of its innocent victims. To fight evil is to extend its reign. Schelling's idea that the actualization of the divinity tames its own monstrous ground by letting it continue to operate is the metaphysical correlate of Christ's dictum, "resist not evil" (Matthew 5:39).

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 146, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 89.

The spirit of *ressentiment* that, within the history of Christianity, turned innocent victims into vindictive brutes, happy to oversee the horrors of the Inquisition, drives secular social-justice warriors in exactly the same way. The determination to “punish evil doers” is what keeps evil alive. If we are to learn anything from the twentieth century, it is that wars fought in the name of a purely secular conception of justice are more, not less, destructive than the religious wars of the seventeenth century. The Christian who refuses to show mercy is common enough, but at least this much can be said: he is not a true Christian. Warriors for justice, on the other hand, whether they are neo-conservatives who want to make the world safe for democracy or millennial progressives determined to cleanse the world forever of the evils of racism and sexism, operate within the bounds of ideological closure: “Do what we know to be right or accept the punishment that must follow.” Here there is no possibility of showing mercy. Precisely where it is tolerance that is to fill the void of the absent God, it will quickly become evident that intolerance cannot be tolerated. The contradiction is what guarantees the ephemerality of what sustains itself only within a reign of terror. Law as such can never accommodate the fact that what is alive undergoes constant change.

“After Buddha was dead,” Nietzsche said, “his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave.” The same thing holds, he adds, for the death of God. “Given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.”<sup>2</sup> The shadow of God is the will to punish. It has not gone away.

But the God who died was the God who was never alive, the God whose commands were final and could be known. What Pascal called the living God was a God more elusive by far: “Cut the throat of your son Isaac” is different than “Let Isaac go.” The living God is the Dionysian God. It is Jesus remembering what each of us should struggle to call to mind: before we came to life in ourselves, we were alive in nature, not at all though, who we are now.

Nietzsche the atheist and Schelling the Christian were both aware of the error of trying to understand God (whatever it is that gives life to the universe) through the shibboleth of eternal self-identity, perfection understood as rising up above and beyond time. The God of the Church was, for Schelling just as for Nietzsche, as “above and beyond” life as is death itself. In the age of nihilism, the age we ourselves inhabit, the shadow of God is worshiped in the cult of both science and the modern state, both making a claim of the self-certainty of law. The lifeless corpse of God is kept frozen in the form of a positivistic atheism that, far from being the negation of Christianity is actually its fulfillment.<sup>3</sup> What was once called God is preserved in the mechanical order that is the object of science and the project of the state.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §108, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 167.

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, § 347, 287-290.

<sup>4</sup> Éric Blondel, *Nietzsche: Le « Cinquième 'Evangile' » ?* (Paris: Les Bergers, 1980).

If Schelling, inspired by Hölderlin, recognized in Dionysus the generative principle of the whole of mythology who stepped into history with the birth of Jesus, Nietzsche discerned in him the noumenal great self who slumbers in everything that lives, awakening into divinity only in the recognition of his own eternal recurrence. But to the degree that that recurrence is eternal, it cannot be suspended or willed away. Existence at its deepest level is suffering, something we are thrust into, not something we have chosen for ourselves. If Dionysus is the ever-shifting life of all that lives, whether plant, animal, or human, Dionysus is also a reminder of how persistently even a god must look away from itself. Before taking joy in forms that can never contain it, the god is first of all consciousness in flight from the unbearable reality of the real, what Nietzsche calls its eternity. If we ourselves are in flight, it is because the god has flown into us. This is the monster that lives in us all. An existential angst that can never be overcome, it is yet the freedom that breaks forth once its truth is acknowledged, a freedom that is called madness by all of those still hemmed in by their fears.

It is this internal tension that makes the god so fundamentally illusive, discernible only in the questions that pose themselves. Is it, for example, stability and comfort that the god seeks when wearing a mask? Or is the mask put on, simply for the joy of tearing it apart, awareness of freedom so much more important than the thirst for identity? Is the god the legislator who lays down the law or the free spirit who mocks every letter of the law? How does one comprehend this Proteus, now a he, now a she, the one god alive in every god, the intoxicated spirit who is so seemingly indifferent to whether he, she, or it is in hell or in heaven? To worship such a god requires a mind and heart free of idolatry and ideology. Attuned to the rhythm of honest thought, it conceives what can be conceived, only to abandon what it has conceived once the real overwhelms the ideal. The piety of thought is the courage to live without easy answers. If the real is infinite, the ideal is necessarily finite (what can be *defined*) and thus never more than provisional.

True greatness is for that reason intrinsically bound to poverty of spirit. As Nietzsche knew, strength that arms itself against fear is never a match for the disarming strength that comes with innocence. "What can the child do that even the lion cannot? ... The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes."<sup>5</sup> Or, in the words of Christ, "Unless you change and become as little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 18: 3).

The god that Nietzsche declared dead was a god already dead, for this god (the god of morality) was just another idol. The true god is Dionysus, god of life and death and always more life. His is a movement that stretches out from a beginning to whatever shelter one can devise, always aiming for a future that will justify the destruction of temporary shelters. Nietzsche is the heir to Pascal. His Dionysus, like

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<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Of the Three Metamorphoses," 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 55.

the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the antithesis of the God of the philosophers and theologians (the inalterable  $A=A$ ).

Schelling too was in Pascal's camp. Positive philosophy, which has as its field the unpredictable saga of history, was his answer to metaphysics. Already in this Schelling had cut ties with Orthodox Christianity. If Christianity is reverence for Christ crucified, then little wonder that so few Christians dare to emulate Christ. Schelling, like Nietzsche, revered the courageous one, the god-man who set love of life above any law, knowing as he did that the kingdom of God is the strength not only to endure, but to *embrace*, the punishment that then will follow. The solace of the kingdom is not an empty promise of joy to come, the reward for obedience, but a present joy that has no need for obedience, and is so palpable and real that even the thief on the cross knew it when he saw it, knew it so well that he understood what he heard when the man tortured beside him said: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), according to Nietzsche, the words that contain the whole of the Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

Paradise, in other words, has nothing to do with the contemporary claim to a universal right to comfort, for what is paradise other than victory over pain? Once death becomes no more than just another challenge to be faced courageously, the monster has been tamed.

But death is not the ultimate monster, for death comes easily enough to the weary. The monster is the god that demands social cohesion, revealing itself in the fury of the lynch mob.<sup>7</sup> Whereas death is as natural as a tree shedding its leaves, the lynch mob acts in the name of a good that, transcending nature, rules over death. The frenzied crowd that tears its victims apart is sustained in its frenzy by its moral certitude, proud in its insistence on a law that, with the gruesome punishment in mind, will never again be defied. To have lain down the law, to have shown clearly just what it is that society will never tolerate, shows itself as a matter of such urgency that questions of guilt and innocence are regarded as secondary. In the name of justice, we deny justice to anyone who stands accused. Whether guilty or innocent, what is important is that they serve as a suitable reminder of the evil that must be cast out. The measure of the goodness of the good is that it is worth fighting for, even worth ripping people to shreds.

Wars of plunder are small and can be contained. Wars fought in the name of justice, whether uttered in a religious or a secular vein, are greater than that, just as the god in whose name they are fought is greater than his competitors. The monster-god thrives on the food that is fed him, and the best food is, as ever, human flesh.

To get a sense for what it might mean to tame such a god, the god of vengeance, we can draw our cue from Christ, who once accomplished the difficult art of defusing a lynch mob. When the crowd began to gather, each man reaching down

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<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 35, in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 158.

<sup>7</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

for a stone with which to beat down an adulteress, Christ's response was to write sins in the sand before challenging the self-righteous crowd: "Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone" (John: 8.7). The monster-god was tamed by one who, understanding in himself what others call sin, knew what it is that people conceal in themselves by pretending to find it in others. Who, after all, moved by lust, has not committed adultery in his heart? (Matthew 5: 27-28). What woman has not, in a fit of anger, wanted to commit murder? What man or woman has not, in a moment of despair, joined hands with Satan in wishing the whole world would disappear? The key to taming the monster-god without is to recognize the monster-god within, to understand that what makes us eager to believe the worst in others is that we carry this worst already within ourselves. For Nietzsche as for Schelling, the monstrous is intertwined with the heart, even into its most unconscious recesses, apparent only from time to time in dreams too morbid to recount. Recognizing the hell within is the first step in the harrowing of that hell, for recognition is the first step to acceptance. The sin I no longer hide is no longer a sin. "He who acts in truth comes into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God" (John: 3: 21).

To know oneself as a monster is already to love oneself sufficiently to initiate an introspective gaze. Self-love begins as confession. What makes confession possible is a doubling within the self, evil impulses covering over a primordial innocence that is situated in a depth greater even than the monstrous. Honesty is naïve, for it assumes that something good can come from the worst. Only the greatest honesty recognizes in the self the impulse to every crime that has ever been committed. What is genocide but the acting out of hatred? What is global destruction but the acting out of despair? There are moments when each of us has sought the destruction of all that lives and breathes. Sullied by a will that says No, we ourselves are guilty, even deserving of the collective suicide that humanity has flirted with ever since its technological prowess has grown sufficient to do the job. On a deeper level, however, the No is simply the challenge that provides depth and substance to the Yes. The only Yes that is truly a Yes understands the No as its ground and condition.

If the monster-god is to be tamed only by accepting monstrosity itself as the necessary condition of life, then the real problem of life is to find the strength for this kind of affirmation, to penetrate, that is, beyond whatever I myself may or may not desire in order to lay open the source of life itself. Jesus thus found his strength in the "Father," the seething power of nature itself. Writing sins in the shifting sands might have turned the tide when only a dozen or so were gathered in anger. But beyond that, the very son of God lacks the power to effect real change.

When history veers off the rails, there is nothing any of us can do, beyond acknowledging the despair we must feel, thankful only that the monster-god has come into sight. In an age obsessed with what by right should be ours, *amor fati* is not even remotely an option. Instead we rage at the evil we see outside of us until, like Robespierre, we ourselves fall victim to the guillotine we have put into place. Morality is unforgiving in its insistence upon purity. As much as we would like to escape the evil of self-devouring nature, our very attempt to effect that escape implicates us in it. Stoicism would appear to be our only option. It is the path taken by Nietzsche.

## II

If Schelling and Nietzsche are united in their common embrace of Dionysus, they differ in one very significant respect: whereas Nietzsche, wounded by his own fragility, insists (as any good Stoic must) upon the need to harden the heart, Schelling insists that the heart must remain open.

On both sides, however, forgiveness remains the highest virtue. Why this is the case for Nietzsche can be inferred from his unwavering critique of those who blame others for things that go wrong. What he sees as their primary mistake is their failure to understand that it is, indeed “things” that have gone wrong. Little of what happens in the world is the result of someone “willing” it. As Nietzsche remarked, “the doctrine of will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is of *finding guilty*.”<sup>8</sup> Free will construed as an active cause is a piece of fiction put into place to help us justify our desire for revenge. In pointing this out, Nietzsche was not only speaking out against the *ressentiment* that leads Christians (and other moralists) to take joy in the idea that their enemies should be damned in hell forever, but he was also just as clearly aligning himself *with* Christianity’s call for forgiveness.

In this, he placed himself on the side of the crucified Christ. Whereas the followers of Christ soon enough complained, “destroy the bastards, for they have killed our beloved” (thus giving birth to two millennia of Christian antisemitism), the one they venerated spoke the simple but seemingly impossible words, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23: 34), a sentiment that Nietzsche echoes by taking on the spirit of revenge. Caught up in evil events, human beings have the questionable habit of immediately looking for evil actors. When “shit happens” we pretend that we have been attacked by someone with a malevolent will. Even a viral pandemic will quickly be framed as a battle between good and bad people.

But the truth is that, even where it wills actively, the will wills blindly—willing for reasons that no one can fathom, reasons that impact a vast nervous system extending far beyond what we consciously feel, much less what we consciously command, until it reveals itself in a complex web of pains and desires and memories and traumas, some of which are apparent and acutely remembered, others of which are hidden and long forgotten. As much as we moderns would like to believe that the world can be bent to our own will, the true ground of action remains nature itself, for nature is the ground of all willing. As much as we would like to make it into the mechanical object of our manipulations, it is nature that is the operative subject, not the self-conscious subject of a person acting in the world. This is Dionysian insight.

It is the insight that inclined both Schelling and Nietzsche toward an ethic of forgiveness (which, for those obsessed by the need for “justice” is no ethic at all). Although Nietzsche has quite a lot to say in praise of warriors, he also has a keen sense of where wars go awry. Once we forget that a war is more like an earthquake than a willed event, our enemies appear as demons fit for torture. But a war is in fact

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 65.

like an earthquake: there are causes, to be sure, but they are indeterminate in number and hidden well from sight. A virtuous warrior rises to the challenge that an eruption of violence poses, fighting ideally without anger. In contrast, a warrior who is blinded by morality will be bent on the utter destruction and humiliation of the enemy.

But the error of blaming others is a manifold one. Exaggerating the freedom of the will in order to make the evildoer seem responsible for what has gone wrong and thus deserving of punishment is only half of the story. The bigger problem that emerges is that, in defining evil as the freely chosen action of someone who exercises power over the weak, one defines goodness as its opposite. Weakness then appears as virtue. For Nietzsche, this was the error of cultural Christianity, one that survives in today's cult of victimhood. Evil is aligned with power and excess of agency, goodness with weakness and lack of agency. From the Nietzschean perspective, the "Me-Too" movement, far from representing a courageous challenge to Christian patriarchy, simply represents the secular framing of what had always been Christianity's primary obsession, the cult of the crucified.

This does not mean that Nietzsche has simply sided with the bullies. For him, a healthy will to power is the power of self-overcoming. To this degree, he too stands on the side of the downfallen.<sup>9</sup> Only those who have fallen can pick themselves up. One thinks here of the misfits who accompany Zarathustra at the moment of his highest revelation. To pity them, though, is to "lack reverence for great misfortune, great ugliness, great failure."<sup>10</sup> This is where self-overcoming and true power begin. To exercise the will to power one must risk and even suspend whatever power one has, for the will springs to life only in the search for what one does not have. For the person who has everything, the will to power must entail the search for making do with nothing whatsoever. "Where is your inner value if you no longer know what it is to breathe freely? If you no longer possess the slightest power over yourselves? ... If you no longer believe in philosophy that wears rags, in the free-heartedness of him without needs?"<sup>11</sup>

Health is given not in the form of power but in the form of the will. The will is not the power of free choice that only those privileged with good fortune can exercise. Its condition is instead the "going under" of suffering defeat. Whereas the fantasy of equality confers honor on victims by making it seem that, lacking what others have, they "deserve" restitution in the form of their share of the pie, the only real honor comes with the discovery that, having been made to experience pain, people now know how much they can bear and the enormity of the risks they can take. They know what it is to be held up by nature, the giver of life.

True honor is neither conferred by right nor does it represent society's seal of approval. Instead it is given in the form of self-respect when one learns, for instance, that one is not simply hungry but is good at being hungry, good enough to

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Prologue," 44.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "The Ugliest Man," 277.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 206.



have the real hope of becoming an actual hunger artist. Those who enjoy success and privilege are insulated from any such urgent need to become who they are. Nietzsche regards them as “soft” and nowhere applauds them. This is why in his critique of Jewish slave morality he nowhere says anything negative about Jews themselves. If a people enslaved to the ancient Egyptians found their way to a god who inspired them to action, then all the more power to them. The critique of slave morality entails no judgment about those who have been enslaved. Once tested by forty years in the desert, the chosen land is rightfully theirs. Nietzsche speaks positively about the Jewish people, about their Bible, and about the cunning way they used slave morality to enact revenge on their enemies, even to the point of inventing Christianity to take down the Roman Empire. And if the Roman ideal was somehow Nietzsche’s ideal, he still had no reason for complaint. Good stoics, after all, become better stoics if they are sufficiently wise to find profit in their humiliation.

The cult of the victim is, according to the simple calculus of “equal rights,” geared toward a Brave-New-World dystopia in which the mass of humanity, incapable of taking care of themselves, are to be fed, pampered, and protected by a regime that denies liberty in the name of safety.

But what if, hidden away in weakness, there is an entirely different kind of strength? What, in other words, if the suffering masses, instead of being patronized and pampered, could be recognized as themselves having something to say? If a Nietzschean populism sounds implausible, it is perhaps because we still haven't understood Nietzsche.<sup>12</sup> If Nietzsche is right that suffering, instead of simply constituting a deplorable condition that deserves compensation, is itself a good to the degree that it is born with dignity and grace, what better readers could he find than members of the suffering poor?

What if innocence had nothing to do with helplessness? What if there were an innocence that is the source of a power more powerful than the power of the bully? Whereas bullies live life in the element of fear, flexing their muscles (or orchestrating their tweets) as a way of shielding themselves from potential competitors, the truly innocent have the strength of fearlessness. If ever we are to be true to the earth,<sup>13</sup> we shall have to overcome our fear of the wilderness. Rednecks in the boonies may understand truths that the children of suburban comfort can scarcely imagine.

If we are to be true to the earth, we have to begin with an innocence impervious to fear. If the fearful have set fire to the earth's vast reservoirs of coal and oil, they have done so in the name of our “right” to live in safety and comfort. In contrast, the innocent of the earth have never felt a need to build a fire larger than the one burning in the hearth. Maximum control is a tight fist that nature itself will undo, teaching, as nature always has taught, the virtue of poverty. “Back to nature”

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<sup>12</sup> Nor for that matter, have we understood ourselves. Automatically decrying every manner of populism as “right-wing” reveals just how elite and undemocratic the purportedly egalitarian Left has become.

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Prologue,” 42.

represents a horror only for those who, having been deprived of what one learns in the School of Hard Knocks, know nothing about their own resiliency.

“Praised be a moderate poverty!”—praised be those who have freed themselves of the twin idolatries of the state and of money.<sup>14</sup> In the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the poor” (Luke 6: 20), those who live in the wild open of nature. “Look at the birds of the air ... see the lilies of the field ... not even Solomon in all of his splendor was dressed like one of these” (Matthew 6: 26-30). Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity doubles as an esoteric encomium of a Christ who lives outside the state and, what on Nietzsche’s understanding is the same, outside the Church.<sup>15</sup> Sections 27 through 40 of the *Anti-Christ* pay tribute to the greatness of Christ in order to highlight the contemptible nature of a Christianity that knows nothing of that greatness.<sup>16</sup> Christ’s battle with the Pharisees anticipated and to some extent even inspired Nietzsche’s own battle with Christianity. The alignment goes further than that. Anyone who has read Nietzsche’s account of Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo* knows the degree to which he felt himself the recipient of the full force of revelation, where “all being wishes to become word.”<sup>17</sup> Nature, offering itself up as metaphor, speaks with authority to one who has sufficient humility to listen. “It is not I that speaks, but the Father that speaks in me” (John 12:49 and John 14:10), words of sufficient authority that they can get a man humble enough to have open ears crucified for blasphemy.

As the “supreme type of all beings,”<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche’s alter-ego Zarathustra is Dionysus himself.<sup>19</sup> It is Dionysus who, aware of his own eternal recurrence, is liberated from the spirit of revenge. Instead of viewing the past as a progressive does, through the lens of a sin that, ineradicable, must now be punished, one must view the past as itself worthy of affirmation. In the image of my enslaved ancestor, I can learn to see the power of endurance that is also mine. The redemption of the past is forgiveness of sin writ large. Thus, the allusions that, throughout the text of *Zarathustra*, bind together the names of Zarathustra and Christ. From “love thy enemy” (a constantly recurring theme)<sup>20</sup> to “judge not that you be not judged,”<sup>21</sup> the echoes resound. From the “Stillest Hour” (with its weary “Father, take this cup from me”) to the raucous “Last Supper” that follows (with its crowning “do this in memory

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<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the New Idol,” 77.

<sup>15</sup> To the name Nietzsche, one can add the name of Agamben, who understands clearly the tragic irony that Christ announced the Kingdom of God while history gave us the monstrosity of the Church instead. See Giorgi Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 149-163.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 301.

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 306.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 307.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 83, 87, 108.

<sup>21</sup> “And you, scarlet judge, if you would speak aloud all you have done in thought, everyone would cry: ‘away with this filth and poisonous snake!’” Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the Pale Criminal,” 65.

of me”), Nietzsche makes it clear how much he sought to have his Zarathustra walk in the footsteps of Christ.<sup>22</sup> All of this is distilled into the sheer heaviness of the doctrine of eternal recurrence, a teaching so horrific, so monstrous, that, when announcing it, Zarathustra falls into a seven-day swoon. Only those sufficiently educated in suffering will understand the monstrosity of a doctrine that calls for the eternal recurrence of pain as well as joy. It is to underscore this monstrosity that Nietzsche places it in the mouth of the world’s Ugliest Man.<sup>23</sup> What apparent foolishness to say that one night with Zarathustra has justified a lifetime of unremitting misery. Can one night really be worth an eternity in hell? Instead of representing a speculative possibility, the doctrine of eternal recurrence is meant to shame those who venerate Christ from afar by daring them to take on his power to destroy death. To redeem graves and awaken corpses is to will the eternal recurrence of one’s own death as the key to eternal life.<sup>24</sup>

And yet, for all of that, the identification of Zarathustra with Christ is far from Nietzsche’s last word. Christ is tortured and crucified in the end, whereas at the conclusion of Nietzsche’s work a swarm of doves and a roaring lion lead Zarathustra on to new adventures. Freed of pity, he takes leave of disciples who in any event have already shifted their attention to worship an ass. The ass, of course, is Jesus, who has “taken upon himself the likeness of a slave.”<sup>25</sup>

Just as the lion is not an ass, Zarathustra is not Christ. The lion roars and the clowns and buffoons who awakened Zarathustra’s pity promptly disappear. In their place, Zarathustra senses the coming of his proper children.<sup>26</sup> As a mythic hero, it is his task to inspire a new generation to a life of courage. If Christ spoke to a world of the downtrodden, oppressed by powers towering over them, Zarathustra speaks to a world of social equals, oppressed by their own need to conform. Recalling his youth when, softhearted, he looked out with tears to a world filled with too much sorrow, Zarathustra conceded that he once saw things as Christ saw them. But Christ died too early. “He himself would have recanted his teaching had he lived to my age!” Immature youth is not yet ready to affirm life and the earth. Only those who are sufficiently mature to have recovered their innocence (“there is more child in the man than in the youth”) are able to embrace life, come what may. If a child loses its innocence by learning of death, those who are old and wise have a chance to recover it by overcoming their fear of death. To love the earth is to love one’s decomposing body.

If Christ was softhearted like charcoal, Zarathustra is the one grown hard like a diamond.<sup>27</sup> To tame the monster-god, one must begin by confronting him face to face. This is no easy task. Semele, the all-too-human mother of Dionysus, burst into flame when she viewed Zeus in his full divinity. Her body was engulfed by fire

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<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 166-69, 294-96, 326.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Intoxicated Song,” 326.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 178, 329.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Awakening,” 321.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 334.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 231.



when, sinking into her death, she gave birth to the son of the greatest of the gods. Zarathustra's hardness shows the presence of the god in him who was born out of the maximum of pain. What Christ had to suffer on the cross, Dionysus suffered in his birth. If Christ speaks to anxious souls, Dionysus speaks to those who, revering their tortured ancestors, have an intuition of how much pain they can bear.

Nietzsche, of course, was just a man, human, all too human. Aware of his own fragility, aware of his desperate loneliness, he sought to die to himself, in order to be reborn in spirit—as Zarathustra. In memory of the father who abandoned him as a child by collapsing into insanity and death, Nietzsche spent decades writing at fever pitch, trying hard to ward off his own insanity and death. But his fate was to relive his father's life. This is eternal recurrence.<sup>28</sup>

Eternal recurrence is both hell and comedy. Out of fear of enemies who must be stopped, we drop our bombs and create new enemies. Out of fear of discomfort, we build combustion engines and coal-burning electric plants capable of changing the climate of the entire earth. Dionysus is the god who erupts into laughter. He is not Christ shedding tears for suffering humanity but laughs even at tragedies.<sup>29</sup> Not a malign devil, he much rather an old rogue like Mephistopheles.

The real devil is the Spirit of Gravity, those stern guardians of morality who are intent on rooting out monsters.

Zarathustra merges with Dionysus only after he has laughed away his last glimmer of pity. As Dionysus reawakened, he laughs at everything. As Euripides reported in the *Bacchae*, he does indeed look with a cold eye on suffering. Pentheus was his cousin. The women of Thebes were his aunts. But Dionysus destroyed them all without pity or remorse.

But this is not all. Perfection does not go unpunished. The most moving passage in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the *Night Song*, the melancholy lament of one who needs no one. "This is my solitude that I am girded round with light ... I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me ... oh wretchedness of all givers! ... Oh craving for desire! Oh ravenous hunger in satiety ... A hunger grows out of my beauty ... Many suns circle in empty space: to all that is dark they speak with their light—to me they are silent."<sup>30</sup>

The heavens love the earth. The diamond glimmers against the softness of flesh. In the icy solitude of Dionysian perfection, the will to Christ was born. Nietzsche himself collapsed into insanity with his arms around the neck of a beaten horse. It is here, on the other side of his doctrine, that we find Nietzsche's real meeting place with Schelling.

When Zarathustra, in the very opening of Nietzsche's prologue, cried out to the rising sun, "What would your happiness be, if you had not those for whom you shine,"<sup>31</sup> what was at stake was more than the desire to go down into the valley to

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<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 228.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Of Reading and Writing," 68.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "The Night Song," 129-30.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Prologue," 39.

spread his wisdom to those who live there. What was really at stake was his desire for the friendship of an equal. This is something that, despite all the disciples who followed him, he never attained. Nietzsche might have done better by Zarathustra, if he had learned all he could have learned from Schelling. For it was Schelling, not Nietzsche, who took up the question of what friendship might mean for a god.

### III

In Part One of his two-part 1811 *Ages of the World*, Schelling reminded us that what is first revealed to us is simply the brute force of nature itself, generous in what it brings forth and pitiless in what it then takes away.<sup>32</sup> Following the trajectory of nature into the advent of consciousness, he described an ever-spiraling swarm of tensions and obsessions and drives that emerge eternally from the most primitive either/or of “is or is not” until they erupt into full-fledged Dionysian madness, God and universe indistinguishable from one another, everything competing with everything else for space, existence, duration: an infinite surge of random nodes of energy, competing forces that swirl together into what Nietzsche towards the end of the century called the “will to power.” Indeed, a passage from Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* suffices to summarize Schelling’s text:

And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world, a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by “nothingness” as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home out of this abundance back into the simple, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord . . . this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil” . . . *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019). In the introduction to the translation, I provide a full account of what is at stake here.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1067, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), 545.

For Nietzsche, the intent was to anoint a new generation of thinkers with the strength to live in the full intensity of the real, thus unveiled. The difficulty of doing this is what underlies the construction of idealistic fantasies that are nihilistic in a twofold manner: (1) they are based on the denial of reality as it is given us, as if this is something that can be swept away and replaced with a better, more just world; and (2) they crystallize into moral codes that justify the punishment and at times the savage torture of whomever is judged to have violated them.

For Schelling, the issue is more complicated. An idealist himself, he does not simply will the eternal recurrence of the same. That said, he criticizes in the same way Nietzsche does the idealisms of Kant and Fichte, which proceeds from the self-constituted ego and not from nature. Hegel's idealism, which widens the span to include the socially-constructed ego, fares no better. For here too nature has been abandoned. Idealisms so conceived are at bottom simply nihilism. Given that nature for Fichte is no more than a reserve to be used up, a barrier to be overcome, Schelling is right in saying:

Such a complete nothing of reality is the *prius* for Herr Fichte: for the purity of knowledge, it is already a hindrance that anything at all exists, that the eternal is actually real and only *after* it really is, is it there as something to be known ... for him, it would be better if it did not exist at all so that the knowledge of it would be pure and truly a priori (SW VII: 108).<sup>34</sup>

As for Kant's version of "radical evil," Schelling recognizes that inasmuch as it posits an utterly unconditioned and hence unforgivable assertion of the "free will," it has an unforgiving regime of punishment as its necessary correlate. Here he is in complete agreement with Nietzsche's observation, already cited, that the doctrine of will has been invented for the purpose of punishment.<sup>35</sup> One suffers a calamity and, knowing that one did not will it oneself, decides that someone else must have willed it, in very much the same manner as when people of old went searching for witches with their evil eye. What Nietzsche, the philosopher of the will to power, rejects when he critiques the idea of will is clearly not the will as such, but instead the castrated will of moral righteousness, whether that be the imagined bad will of bad people or the similarly imagined good will of people who deem themselves holy by the simple act of declaring themselves so. And what Nietzsche subsequently explained in terms of *ressentiment*, Schelling explained in terms of an idealism shorn of its ground.<sup>36</sup> The will

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<sup>34</sup> Schelling, *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre* (1806). For an assessment of how Schelling's philosophy of nature represents a challenge to the entire ethical-teleological fantasy that has poisoned the contemporary university I know of no work I would more heartily recommend than Iain Hamilton Grant's *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London/New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> I discuss this issue at length in "Schelling's Metaphysics of Evil," in *The New Schelling*, (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), 167-189. Only by resituating the source of evil in the ground of reality as such, including the ground of God, does Schelling render it *forgivable* and thus compatible with a regime of love. This is his answer to Kant. It is an answer we need to draw from if we are to effectively challenge

as such always has us in its control much more emphatically than we could ever have it in our control.

The self-positing will of Kant and Fichte, those great moralists, is sheer fantasy. This is the common critique of Schelling and Nietzsche that leaves us now to wonder what we are to make of the proximity this reveals. How close does Schelling's grounded version of idealism bring the two thinkers together? Is there a Christianity with no place for *ressentiment*? If so, how does one get to it—and how might it itself accomplish what hitherto has been accomplished only by the sainted few, those seemingly impossible commands to “love thy enemy” and “resist not evil.” Achieving such inner strength, are the children of God to be thought of any longer as sheep who need the watchful eye of a beneficent shepherd—or will they not be supermen and superwomen united not in shared adoration of anything that towers above them, but instead in mutual respect, unmediated by anything resembling either idolatry or ideology?

To answer these questions, I have begun by observing what so many commentators have already observed: Nietzsche's animosity towards Christianity did not entail an animosity towards Christ. He himself could identify all too easily with the Crucified One. Even so, he did not follow Hölderlin and Schelling in any easy identification of Dionysus with Christ.<sup>37</sup> Dionysus may find himself stretched out on a cross, but instead of shedding tears for suffering humanity, he simply laughs at the absurdity of it all.

Suffering, we should concede, is for both Schelling and Nietzsche given to us not for our humiliation, but for our self-overcoming, our joyous participation in the life of the one who dispenses it. Christ/Dionysus is the resurrection and the glory, the eternal joy of becoming that “encompasses *joy in destruction*.”<sup>38</sup> It is for this reason that Christ struggled with legalism—and the hypocrisy that legalism breeds—just as Nietzsche later took up the same struggle. Suffering paid back in kind is suffering unredeemed. It is for this reason that Nietzsche would have us “mistrust all in whom the urge to punish is strong!” It is for this reason that his highest goal was to overcome the spirit of revenge.<sup>39</sup> Even the Pharisees themselves are to be forgiven, despite all of their hypocrisy, all of their potential for cruelty. “The good,” Nietzsche observed, “*have to be Pharisees ... the good have to crucify him who devises his own virtues!*”<sup>40</sup>

Recognizing the necessity with which not only the criminal is a criminal but the Pharisee is a Pharisee, we see all that was at stake in Christ's greatest

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the neo-puritanism and implicit fascism of contemporary virtue signalers and social warriors. No purist will advance the cause of social justice an iota. Adolf Eichmann made his appeal to Kant, not to Nietzsche. The banality of evil is the comic earnestness of its crusade against demons that do not exist in pursuit of a good that is pure fantasy.

<sup>37</sup> Hölderlin accomplishes this most beautifully and succinctly in his elegy *Brot und Wein* (*Bread and Wine*). Schelling's version is far more expansive, comprising as it does all four volumes of the *Philosophy of Mythology* and the *Philosophy of Revelation*.

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 120.

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the Tarantulas.”

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of Old and New Law-Tables,” § 26.



accomplishment, which was to cry out, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke, 23:34), the ultimate overcoming of the spirit of revenge.<sup>41</sup>

As to Schelling's understanding of the same thought, one need only reflect on his notion that we all share a common birth in the dark ground. What this means is that we all have the same inclinations, the same conflicting wills to both affirm and deny life. It is not just that we all have committed adultery in our hearts, but, in fits of anger, we have committed murder as well. Indeed, in moments of despair, we all have followed Satan in wishing that the world itself had never existed. As Dostoevsky has the saintly Zosima put the matter, “Each of us is guilty before everyone and for everything, and I more than any of the others.”<sup>42</sup> The saint is the one who, like Christ, has borne all the sins of the world. In other words, the saint is the one who knows what it is to have been created from the dark ground. It is his knowledge that makes Dostoevsky's Zosima more guilty than others, just as it is the fulness of the self-conquest that this knowledge facilitates that makes him a saint. As much contempt as Nietzsche had for Christians, he still venerated saints.<sup>43</sup> The path to the superman begins with a going under that, as much as it might be hidden by pride and sanctimony, is universally human. Because he sees the potential for the best of us in the worst of us, Zarathustra is a prophet of love just as much as Christ was a prophet of love. “Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman—a rope over an abyss.”<sup>44</sup> Even cowards are worthy of love once one acknowledges their sensitivity towards the abyss, a sensitivity that keeps them sheltered in their cocoons. With love actually delivered, even they would fly up to meet their destinies.

Exactly these two things form the premise of Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation*. What Nietzsche so often calls the “going under,” Christianity has called *kenosis*, placing it at the very center of the being that is Christ. Equal to God, he yet subjected himself to lowly birth and crucifixion on the cross. As to who it was that made this sacrifice, who it was that humbled himself to be born as a mortal, Schelling's answer is clear: *Dionysus*. The dismembered god is himself the god with the axe. Cronus devours his children, until finally, a child emerges that he loves, the son who transforms the monster-god Cronus into a loving father. The angel of Jehovah peers up out of the face of Isaac: “Take the lamb, not the boy.” The time of violence is over, the day of love has begun. Or, as Schelling says, apropos Dionysus: “the mild one was nothing other than the wild one; or rather the one who was first wild and horrific became in time mild and benevolent.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 35.

<sup>42</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), Book VI.

<sup>43</sup> This is implicit throughout in *Zarathustra*. More explicit statements can be found in *Beyond Good and Evil* (“What is Religious?” § 51) and the entire Third Essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, especially Section 17, where asceticism serves both as proof of Christian nihilism and as proof of the possibility of self-overcoming.

<sup>44</sup> *Zarathustra*, “Prologue,” §4, 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> “Der milde war nicht ein anderer als der wilde, sondern derselbe, der erst wilde und grausame wird in der Folge zum milden, wohlwollenden” (SW, XIII: 470).



In one of Nietzsche's poems, Dionysus announced himself as Ariadne's labyrinth. If so, who was Schelling, if not Ariadne in pursuit of Dionysus, first emergent as the wild, but there, where the labyrinth finds its end, finally revealed as the mild? Or for that matter, perhaps he was Dionysus in pursuit of Ariadne, worthy of his love precisely because she says, "I will not roll over for you like a dog, but will only be yours, mighty hunter, like a beast in the wild."

Regardless of who was chasing whom, Schelling in the end left us with an extraordinarily detailed map of the labyrinth itself, the four massive volumes that make up his *Philosophy of Mythology* and *Philosophy of Revelation*. The entire mythological and theogonic process is, for Schelling, the movement, the coming to be, of the one god Dionysus. When Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), he was doing nothing other than stating his identity with Dionysus, an identity that any one of us could lay claim to, if only we had the capacity to think that deeply. This vision, reminiscent of Giambattista Vico, is the basis for an ecumenical understanding of Christianity that has strong roots in the Epistles of Paul (the evangelist who reached out to gentiles). It does not yield its real fruit, however, until a future of Christianity is attained that Schelling likens to the Church of John, a church that is emphatically—not a church. Christianity becomes all-inclusive, according to the *Philosophy of Revelation*, only when it becomes fully compatible with atheism or, in other words, when it becomes fully secular.<sup>46</sup>

As for the completed vision, it takes the form of a complex theory of potencies, that is ultimately as straightforward as the movement from past to present to future. We emerge into a world that is initially defined by the self-enclosure of being, a world in which everyone mistrusts everyone, finding refuge first with family and friends but then finally under the protection and partial enslavement of the state. But the state too represents no more than a makeshift solution. The state's monopoly of power still has to be broken, a break that would entail a rupture more radical than the rupture between the Hobbesian state of nature and the rule of law.

This hope announces itself, as any true goal must, in the form of a dream, the dream that a time will come when everyone will love everyone, so that love will no longer be the familial and tribal love that always serves as the pretext for war. The condition for the fulfillment of the dream is—here we go back to Nietzsche—the final overcoming of the spirit of revenge. Saints are those who live in completed time, those who realize that hatred is never the proper instrument for achieving a world without hatred.<sup>47</sup> Accepting the inevitability of savages living among them, understanding that what renders them savage is the intensity of their desire for a better world, the Schellingian/Nietzschean saint knows that salvation has always already been achieved. This is what has to be communicated without sowing further divisions. It is a goal lofty enough to sustain Dionysus through countless deaths and

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<sup>46</sup> Sean McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> For a remarkably prescient little essay, of renewed interest in these days of "woke" social warriors, see the epilogue to Leszek Kolakowski's *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 255-262.

rebirths, eternal recurrence of the same as the emergence of the always unprecedented, on countless stars in countless heavens, but always in the spirit of a joy that knows the end of the story even while it knows why the story can never be completed.

Eschatological completion, even now, is available to all who understand it. Contemporary bureaucrats of diversity will abandon their offices in fear and trembling once the storm winds that create true diversity blow open the company doors. Thus Schelling, thus Nietzsche. A great awakening, not to the “wokeness” of an already fixed doctrine, but to an acceptance of human beings as they are, remains an ongoing human possibility. What we are today is not what we have to be tomorrow.

#### IV

By way of epilogue, let me now turn to Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, which, as Manfred Frank has shown,<sup>48</sup> contains the only passage that directly connects Nietzsche to Schelling. Before entering into it, it is worth noting how Schelling’s understanding of Apollo and Dionysus differed from that of Nietzsche. A few short years before Nietzsche undertook his investigation of the origins of Greek tragedy, Schelling’s *Philosophy of Mythology* and *Philosophy of Revelation* were posthumously published by Schelling’s son to be assiduously worked over by Nietzsche’s elder colleague Johann Jakob Bachofen, himself a former student of Schelling. It is Bachofen who, even more than Burkhardt (another student of Schelling) has been credited with providing the young Nietzsche with the basic elements of his theory.

It was in the *Philosophy of Revelation* that Bachofen discovered Schelling’s pithiest formulation of the relationship between Dionysus and Apollo:

The secret of the truly poetic is to be both drunk and sober, not in different moments but in one and the same moment. This is what distinguishes Apollonian enthusiasm from the merely Dionysian (SW XIV: 25).

Apollo is not, as Nietzsche had it, a god who stands opposed to Dionysus from the outside. For Schelling, there are no gods outside of Dionysus. Apollo is Dionysus, risen to self-mastery. Self-mastery is the principle of divinity that is revealed in all genuine art. Michelangelo and Mozart were both guided by Apollo, just as long before them both Homer and Socrates were guided by Apollo. Nietzsche’s critique of Socrates as somehow too “Apollonian” has to be reconceived in the light of Schelling’s understanding that Apollo has Dionysus alive inside of him.<sup>49</sup>

But this is what Nietzsche could have learned from Schelling, but did not. What he did learn, however, is equally interesting and, in the end, surely leads to the

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<sup>48</sup> Manfred Frank, *Gott im Exil* (55-58). The relevant texts are Section 10 of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and Lecture 21 of Schelling’s *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (in particular SW XIII: 481-484).

<sup>49</sup> This was the underlying premise of my *Socrates among Strangers* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2015).

same place. For the passage that reveals actual influence is the passage in which Nietzsche depicts the Dionysus of Greek Tragedy as “Zagreus,” the primordial Dionysus whose dismemberment first brought forth earth, water, air, and fire. The passage was borrowed almost word for word from the first volume of Schelling’s two-volume *Philosophy of Revelation*. What underscores its importance was that Nietzsche then went on to depict Dionysus’s rebirth first as “Bakchos” (the familiar god of wine and intoxication) and then as the god “Iakchos,” the *Dionysus yet to come*. The Trinity itself was a common enough motif in German Romanticism. What tied Nietzsche’s version directly to Schelling, and only to Schelling, however, was Nietzsche’s assertion that the entire world “torn asunder and shattered into individuals” would in the end experience the joy of Demeter, who “sunk in eternal sorrow,” learns that she is to give birth anew to her lost daughter, but this time not as the physical deity locked in the darkness at the center of the earth, but as Dionysus-Iakchos—pure spirit in which separate individuals can be reunited in love, even while, as in a successful marriage,<sup>50</sup> they remain independent personalities all their own.

So where are we? The god of the beyond is dead, just as Nietzsche said he is dead. After Copernicus, the universe can only be comprehended as having no borders. It can no longer be conceived as if it were enclosed by a celestial sphere dividing the beyond from the within; all that is left is infinitely more of what we have here. The iron cage that was erected to substitute for the missing god, refuge for cowards who are afraid to sleep under the open sky, is itself without mooring. The state will only ever seek to extend its power over the individual. So too the steady growth of capital, a compulsion only conceivable within a post-Copernican conception of the cosmos.

But this, the celebration of a greed that need not be limited insofar as, once it has devoured the earth, it can turn outward to the stars, is in fact based on an illusion. True, there is no outward limit. The universe, it would seem, does extend forever.

But there is an internal limit. We die. Our capital might grow and grow (God forbid that horror), but we ourselves must die.

And all that we accomplish by kneeling before the new idols of politics and technology and ever-growing capital, is to empty the world of meaning, for meaning is constituted only within the horizon of death. In the compelling word of Nietzsche, “the desert grows.” The earth turned into money, the future itself traded for money, and knowledge pursued solely for the sake of refining our instruments, so that the machines we build are fed on the life blood of our people. And all without rhyme or reason.

Yet, paradoxically enough, clarity grows where darkness grows. The delusions of ideology are rendered more and more transparent as the battle for power shows itself for what it is, a macabre game of musical chairs in which the highest goal left for humanity is that oppressors and oppressed might finally trade places, with new lords to lord it over the old lords, until finally it is the head not only of Danton, but of the great Robespierre himself, that falls with a thud in the basket. The

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<sup>50</sup> Christiane Singer, *Éloge du mariage, de l’engagement et autres folies* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000).



redistribution of power accomplishes nothing as long as moral certitudes fill the void once occupied by the ever-vengeful god. The spirit of revenge that lurks in the secular quest for justice is the shadow of the dead God. But when those certitudes themselves collapse, what then? Who but the living God, Dionysus breathing life into the all, could possibly fill that void? The third Dionysus, the god we still await, is the god no longer of tragedy, but of love. This was Schelling's contribution to the philosophy of Nietzsche. Only in that hope will we get beyond our obsession with making the guilty pay. For where the guilty must pay, we all go to hell. In the spirit of forgiveness, the gates of hell swing open and Dionysus makes his return. And where Dionysus returns, political divisions fall away and humanity finally comes together. What else, really, has there ever been but that to hope for?