FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
1844–1900

Friedrich Nietzsche is the wild man, the self-proclaimed anti-Christ, of Western thought. A brilliant polemicist, he champions energy over reason and art over science while contemptuous of the quiet, "timid" virtues of domesticity, democracy, and peace. His extravagances not only remind us of modernism's persistent desire to shock the staid middle classes but also recall the many twentieth-century figures—from W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound to MARTIN HEIDEGGER and PAUL DE MAN—whose genius is inextricably mixed with dubious political views. But Nietzsche, an inveterate foe of Christianity and of Platonic philosophy, is absolutely central to modern and postmodern attempts to rethink the Western tradition's most fundamental assumptions.

Nietzsche was born in Röcken, a small village in Prussian Saxony. He was the son and grandson (on both sides of the family) of Lutheran ministers. His father died when he was four and his younger brother died the next year, leaving him the only male in a household with five women. Nietzsche's subsequent infatuations with the work of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and with the work, theories, and wife of the German composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883), followed by his equally violent rejections of the two men, are sometimes explained in terms of "surrogate father figures" and oedipal rebellion. Certainly, Wagner and his wife Cosima dominated Nietzsche's life in the early 1870s. Having received his doctorate at the University of Leipzig, Nietzsche was appointed professor of philology at the University of Basel in Switzerland in 1869. He met Wagner and Cosima von Bülow in late 1868, and his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), combines a new theory of Greek tragedy with an extended argument that Wagner's work constitutes a German rebirth of that ancient form. By 1876, however, Nietzsche had broken completely with Wagner, repelled by Wagner's turn to Christianity and his increasing anti-Semitism. That same year, ill health forced Nietzsche to stop teaching. In 1879 he officially resigned his university post, receiving a small disability pension. He spent the next ten years writing the books that present his ambitious attempt to overthrow Christianity and post-Socratic philosophy through a radical "revaluation of all values." The last ten years of Nietzsche's life were lost to incoherent madness. After a mental breakdown in 1889, he returned to Röcken to live with his mother; when she died, in 1897, he came under the care of his sister Elisabeth, which continued until his death.

Even before Nietzsche's death, his sister wrote a biography to publicize his work, and she published her own editions of his writings. She stressed those elements that accorded with her own anti-Semitic and pro-Aryan views and is often blamed for the Nazis' later appropriation of Nietzsche as a philosopher sympathetic to their policies. But blaming his sister does not absolve Nietzsche. Some aspects of his thought chime with National Socialism, while others contradict it. Those who read and interpret Nietzsche's challenging work must grapple with his relation to the Nazis, just as they must take into account his tremendous influence on modernism, existentialism, and poststructuralism.

Our selections from *The Birth of Tragedy* show how Nietzsche returns to Greek thought before Plato to discover the artistic form and worldview that he prefers to the Platonic and Christian traditions. (MATTHEW ARNOLD in the nineteenth century and MARTIN HEIDEGGER and ERICH AUERBACH in the twentieth also return to the pre-Socratic Greeks for principles to counter modernity.) Nietzsche's mantra in this text is that "only as an aesthetic phenomenon do existence and the world appear justified!" This formula draws on the root meaning of *aesthetics* as "pertaining to sense perception." Nietzsche says that life is worthwhile only if we experience

strong feelings or sensations. As WALTER PATER, who was writing at almost exactly the same time, would put it, the quality and intensity of our sensations indicates the quality of our lives. And for Nietzsche, as for Pater, the step from the "aesthetic" as sensation to the "aesthetic" as art is a short one. Art is the realm of heightened sensation. But whereas Pater stresses the experience of the spectator, Nietzsche focuses on the exuberant joy felt by the artist/creator in the struggle to bend recalcitrant materials to his or her will.

Nietzsche thus appears to promote heroic individualism and transcendent genius. He has often been read this way, not least by countless modernist artists, who also responded to his diatribes against the conformist "herds" that try to curb the strong, amoral artist. Much in Nietzsche celebrates the "will" of the "overman" (superman) and denigrates everything (from conventional morality to democracy) that would make the genius answerable to any authority outside of his self. "His" is used advisedly—Nietzsche often contrasts this individual's manly strength to the effeminate weakness of lesser souls.

Yet to read Nietzsche as a philosopher of heroic individualism is to miss much. Human suffering figures largely in Nietzsche's thought; the individual is subjected to a world that precedes and is more powerful than the self. Greek tragedy, in Nietzsche's view, grants us a glimpse of a "primordial unity" that predates individuation (which Nietzsche associates with comedy). He takes seriously the claim that Greek tragedy originated in choral songs performed at a festival of Dionysus and that Aeschylus introduced the first individualized characters.

Such individuation, Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is necessary for artistic expression, artistic form. (In his later work, he often claims that "the subject" is a grammatical form that we consistently mistake for a metaphysical entity.) The chaos of Dionysian nondifferentiation (intimated by music) can be rendered intelligible or expressible only by the "calm" Apollonian "semblance" (conveyed by words and images). But the glory of Greek tragedy is that it does not take Apollonian semblance for truth—or, at least, not for the entire truth. Prometheus becomes Nietzsche's primary example of the need to establish an existence apart from the primordial unity. But Prometheus "must suffer for the fact of [his] individuation." And Nietzsche insists that it is the sufferings of Dionysus himself, whose repeated deaths and rebirths enact the "end of individuation," that are represented in every tragedy. The "primal contradiction hidden within the things of this world" is that while humans can experience energy, will, and sensation only as individuals, the process of individuation separates them from the universe. Thus suffering is inevitable; the essence of the tragic view is to affirm that suffering, to glory in the active wrongdoing by which the hero offends the way things are, and to say, as Nietzsche imagines Aeschylus saying: "All that exists is just and unjust and is equally justified in both respects."

Tragedy can exist only so long as we recognize, accept, and affirm the irresolvable contradiction between our hopes and how the world is. Once we believe that suffering is not inevitable, tragedy dies: we begin to demand justice from our gods, and life is justified not as an aesthetic phenomenon but rather because justice is finally done. In the comic ending, the good are rewarded, the bad punished, and human desires and worldly facts are aligned. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche blames Euripides and Socrates for the death of the tragic worldview in ancient Athenian society. Euripides effects a reconciliation with the gods in many of his plays, thus assuring the audience that all can be made right in this world. Socrates, and then PLATO, suggests that reason can lead humans to ascertain the truths of the universe to which they can conform.

Later in his career Nietzsche attacked Christianity for its essentially comic vision. We get hints of that critique here when he contrasts the Semitic notion of "sin" to the Aryan notion of "wrongdoing." This passage, with its oppositions of Aryan and Semite, masculine and feminine, points to problematic features in

Nietzsche's work (as does his lyric call for a rebirth of the German spirit). Nietzsche highlights our admiration of the tragic hero, who often (as in Oedipus's case) could not have avoided wrongdoing. The notion of "sin," however, indicates both that one is free to act and that acting differently would have been better, would (it is strongly implied) not have led to suffering. Nietzsche urges us to have the strength to love life even though suffering is inevitable. Indeed, he suggests that we are most alive when we suffer, because that is when we are feeling most intensely. The murdered and resurrected god whose myth embodies this worldview is the tragic Dionysus, not the comic Christ.

This mixture of nobility and masochism, of rebellion (against Plato and Christianity) and submission (to Dionysus), proved heady stuff to many modernists. Of course, other factors—ranging from SIGMUND FREUD's use of the Oedipal myth to the slaughter of a generation in World War I—also shaped the modernist fascination with tragedy and pre-Socratic Greece. But Nietzsche is central to attempts during the previous and present centuries to find imaginative and historical alternatives to both the Christian worldview and to the narrative of Western progress and enlightenment. That such attempts come from both the political left and the right indicates the complexity of the Western heritage and of Nietzsche's engagement with it.

Our second selection, the essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" (written 1873), was not published during Nietzsche's lifetime. It articulates a number of Nietzsche's major themes and became a favorite reference point for poststructuralists such as JACQUES DERRIDA and Paul de Man during the 1970s. Nietzsche's target here is nothing less than the epistemological foundations of Western philosophy. From Plato on, Western philosophy has been committed (with a few exceptions) to ascertaining the fixed and solid truth that exists independently of human minds. Nietzsche simply denies that we can ever know anything except through the lens of human perception. We cannot put that lens aside in order to judge which perceptions accurately portray the world and which do not. Given this impossibility, why are humans committed to the search for "truth"? Because, Nietzsche answers, truth is a useful illusion, one that serves a fundamental drive to survive. Nietzsche's explanation here is recognizably Darwinian. Behaviors that sustain life will be adopted by the species as a whole. Truth is a comfortable lie; it suggests that "the world [is] something which is similar in kind to humanity," and it boosts self-confidence, the untroubled conviction of being right. While Nietzsche is scornful of this smug "anthropomorphism," he does underline its utility.

The essay's account of language's role in human cognition has been especially influential among literary theorists. Nietzsche accepts that the outer world impinges on the human perceiver, but we translate that experience into human terms by naming it. This "first metaphor" introduces an unbridgeable gap, which leads Nietzsche to conclude that "subject and object" are "absolutely different spheres." Nor do the nonrepresentational additions ("supplements") supplied by language stop there. We also use the same name to designate separate experiences of nerve stimulation. We call today's "leaf" by the same word used to label yesterday's. This substitution of one "concept" in the place of multiple experiences is the "second metaphor" that Nietzsche identifies—and his account of how concepts erase awareness of differences would later echo throughout poststructuralism. "Every concept," he writes, "comes into being by making equivalent that which is non-equivalent[,] . . . by forgetting those features which differentiate one thing from another."

Once Nietzsche pulls the veil of illusion from our eyes and shows that truth is a "mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms," what next? One possible response is stoicism, described in the essay's last paragraph. Alone in an alien world, humans could just endure, preserving a "dignified equilibrium" in the face of everything to which life subjects them. More extreme is the "nihilistic" denial of this world as "fallen" or "evil," a position that Nietzsche associates with Christianity. Against stoicism and nihilism, Nietzsche calls on humans to forcefully and joyfully

step into the vacuum created by the death of truth, of God, and of the other metaphysical guarantees on which the West has traditionally relied. We must learn not just to accept but to proudly affirm that "humanity" is a "mighty architectural genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water." Nietzsche celebrates the creativity and the will that builds a world for humans to inhabit—and he takes the artist as his prime example of an individual responding joyfully to the challenge of shedding the illusion of truth.

For the modernists of the early twentieth century, Nietzsche was often more an attitude, a stance, than a philosopher. A few powerful phrases—"the death of God," "overman," "will to power," "herd morality," and "beyond good and evil"—suggested his blasphemous demystification of progressive, "enlightened" values. Nietzsche's aestheticism, his disdain of reason, and his lyrical style led many readers to see his work as existing somewhere between poetry and philosophy. But his work has received much more extensive scholarly and philosophical analysis after 1945. His critiques of truth, of substance, and of the self, along with his accounts of language and the formation of moral codes, were all taken extremely seriously, despite their summary dismissal by some intellectuals. Perhaps debates about Nietzsche's politics have been especially fierce because his views have often been adopted—and not just by poststructuralists.

For literary critics, Nietzsche's methods may be as important as any view he holds. Famously described by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) as, in company with KARL MARX and Freud, a founder of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," Nietzsche teaches us not to take any pronouncement at face value. If we want to understand the meaning of a term, we must discover its "genealogy"—the way the term has been deployed in specific circumstances to achieve specific results. (MICHEL FOUCAULT later explicitly adopted this Nietzschean method in his studies of the prison and of sexuality.) From the perspective of Nietzschean genealogy, terms are tools and weapons in the continual struggles and conflicts that characterize human interactions with the world and with each other. Nietzsche's own effort to alter our understanding of tragedy is concerned less with determining the "truth" of tragedy than with revising the dominant worldviews that his readers have inherited from Christianity and Western philosophy. The success of that attempt stands apart from whatever virtues his genealogical method possesses—but those to whom the method appeals have usually been sympathetic to the message.

***The Birth of Tragedy* Keywords:** Aesthetics, The Canon/Tradition, Drama, Literary History, Philology, Religion
"On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" Keywords: Deconstruction, Interpretation Theory, Language, Poststructuralism, Representation, Rhetoric

From The Birth of Tragedy[1]

1

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have come to realize, not just through logical insight but also with the certainty of something directly apprehended (*Anschauung*), that the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the *Apolline* and the *Dionysiac* in much the

1. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Except as indicated, all subsequent notes are the translator's; in the text, he occasionally retains the original German in parentheses. The full title is *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music.*

with harmonious sounds and a rhythmical language of gestures—would such a person, with all this beauty streaming in on him from all sides, not be bound to call out, as he raised a hand to Apollo: 'Blessed people of Hellas! How great must Dionysos be amongst you, if the God of Delos considers such acts of magic are needed to heal your dithyrambic[6] madness!' It is likely, however, that an aged Athenian would reply to a visitor in this mood, looking up at him with the sublime eye of Aeschylus: 'But say also this, curious stranger: how much did this people have to suffer in order that it might become so beautiful! But now follow me to the tragedy and sacrifice along with me in the temple of both deities!'

1872

On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense[1]

1

In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been poured, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the 'history of the world'; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die. Someone could invent a fable like this and yet they would still not have given a satisfactory illustration of just how pitiful, how insubstantial and transitory, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature; there were eternities during which it did not exist; and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no further mission that might extend beyond the bounds of human life. Rather, the intellect is human, and only its own possessor and progenitor regards it with such pathos, as if it housed the axis around which the entire world revolved. But if we could communicate with a midge we would hear that it too floats through the air with the very same pathos, feeling that it too contains within itself the flying centre of this world. There is nothing in nature so despicable and mean that would not immediately swell up like a balloon from just one little puff of that force of cognition; and just as every bearer of burdens wants to be admired, so the proudest man of all, the philosopher, wants to see, on all sides, the eyes of the universe trained, as through telescopes, on his thoughts and deeds.

It is odd that the intellect can produce this effect, since it is nothing other than an aid supplied to the most unfortunate, most delicate and most transient of beings so as to detain them for a minute within existence; otherwise, without this supplement, they would have every reason to flee existence as quickly as did Lessing's infant son.[2] The arrogance inherent in cognition

6. Manifest in dithyrambs, choral poems originally sung in honor of Dionysus and later associated with highly excited music and impassioned language. Delos: Greek island in the Cyclades, site of an important oracle of Apollo [editor's note].

1. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Except as indicated, all notes are the translator's.

2. Lessing's first and only son died immediately after birth, followed soon after by his mother. This drew from Lessing the comment: "Was it good sense that they had to pull him into the world with iron tongs, or that he noticed the filth

and feeling casts a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of human beings, and because it contains within itself the most flattering evaluation of cognition it deceives them about the value of existence. Its most general effect is deception—but each of its separate effects also has something of the same character.

As a means for the preservation of the individual, the intellect shows its greatest strengths in dissimulation, since this is the means to preserve those weaker, less robust individuals who, by nature, are denied horns or the sharp fangs of a beast of prey with which to wage the struggle for existence. This art of dissimulation reaches its peak in humankind, where deception, flattery, lying and cheating, speaking behind the backs of others, keeping up appearances,[3] living in borrowed finery, wearing masks, the drapery of convention, play-acting for the benefit of others and oneself—in short, the constant fluttering of human beings around the one flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law that there is virtually nothing which defies understanding so much as the fact that an honest and pure drive towards truth should ever have emerged in them. They are deeply immersed in illusions and dream-images; their eyes merely glide across the surface of things and see 'forms'; nowhere does their perception lead into truth; instead it is content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to play with its fingers on the back of things. What is more, human beings allow themselves to be lied to in dreams every night of their lives, without their moral sense ever seeking to prevent this happening, whereas it is said that some people have even eliminated snoring by willpower. What do human beings really know about themselves? Are they even capable of perceiving themselves in their entirety just once, stretched out as in an illuminated glass case? Does nature not remain silent about almost everything, even about our bodies, banishing and enclosing us within a proud, illusory consciousness, far away from the twists and turns of the bowels, the rapid flow of the blood stream and the complicated tremblings of the nerve-fibres? Nature has thrown away the key, and woe betide fateful curiosity should it ever succeed in peering through a crack in the chamber of consciousness, out and down into the depths, and thus gain an intimation of the fact that humanity, in the indifference of its ignorance, rests on the pitiless, the greedy, the insatiable, the murderous—clinging in dreams, as it were, to the back of a tiger. Given this constellation, where on earth can the drive to truth possibly have come from?

Insofar as the individual wishes to preserve himself in relation to other individuals, in the state of nature he mostly used his intellect for concealment and dissimulation; however, because necessity and boredom also lead men to want to live in societies and herds, they need a peace treaty, and so they endeavour to eliminate from their world at least the crudest forms of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*.[4] In the wake of this peace treaty, however,

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so quickly? Was it not good sense that he took the first opportunity to leave it again?" (Letter to Eschenburg, 10 January 1778). [GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING (1729–1781), German dramatist and critic—editor's note.]

3. The verb Nietzsche uses is *repräsentieren*. This means keeping up a show in public, representing one's family, country, or social group before the eyes of the world.

4. War of all against all (Latin): phrase associated with Thomas Hobbes' description of the state of nature before the institution of political authority (*cf.* Hobbes, *De cive* I.12 and *Leviathan*, chapter XIII). [Hobbes (1588–1679), English political philosopher—editor's note.]

comes something which looks like the first step towards the acquisition of that mysterious drive for truth. For that which is to count as 'truth' from this point onwards now becomes fixed, i.e. a way of designating things is invented which has the same validity and force everywhere, and the legislation of language also produces the first laws of truth, for the contrast between truth and lying comes into existence here for the first time: the liar uses the valid tokens of designation—words—to make the unreal appear to be real; he says, for example, 'I am rich', whereas the correct designation for his condition would be, precisely, 'poor'. He misuses the established conventions by arbitrarily switching or even inverting the names for things. If he does this in a manner that is selfish and otherwise harmful, society will no longer trust him and therefore exclude him from its ranks. Human beings do not so much flee from being tricked as from being harmed by being tricked. Even on this level they do not hate deception but rather the damaging, inimical consequences of certain species of deception. Truth, too, is only desired by human beings in a similarly limited sense. They desire the pleasant, life-preserving consequences of truth; they are indifferent to pure knowledge if it has no consequences, but they are actually hostile towards truths which may be harmful and destructive. And, besides, what is the status of those conventions of language? Are they perhaps products of knowledge, of the sense of truth? Is there a perfect match between things and their designations? Is language the full and adequate expression of all realities?

Only through forgetfulness could human beings ever entertain the illusion that they possess truth to the degree described above. If they will not content themselves with truth in the form of tautology, i.e. with empty husks, they will for ever exchange illusions for truth. What is a word? The copy of a nervous stimulation in sounds. To infer from the fact of the nervous stimulation that there exists a cause outside us is already the result of applying the principle of sufficient reason wrongly. If truth alone had been decisive in the genesis of language, if the viewpoint of certainty had been decisive in creating designations, how could we possibly be permitted to say, 'The stone is hard', as if 'hard' were something known to us in some other way, and not merely as an entirely subjective stimulus? We divide things up by gender, describing a tree as masculine and a plant as feminine[5]—how arbitrary these translations are! How far they have flown beyond the canon of certainty! We speak of a snake; the designation captures only its twisting movements and thus could equally well apply to a worm. How arbitrarily these borders are drawn, how one-sided the preference for this or that property of a thing! When different languages are set alongside one another it becomes clear that, where words are concerned, what matters is never truth, never the full and adequate expression;[6] otherwise there would not be so many languages. The 'thing-in-itself'[7] (which would be, precisely, pure truth, truth without consequences) is impossible for even the creator of language to grasp, and indeed this is not at all desir-

5. "Tree" is masculine in German (*der Baum*) and "plant" (*die Pflanze*) is feminine.

6. Nietzsche uses the term *adäquat*, which indicates that the meaning of something is fully conveyed by a word or expression; English "adequate" alone does not convey this sense completely.

7. Term used by the German philosopher IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804) for the real object independent of our awareness of it. Kant argues that such categories as time and space, mentioned later by Nietzsche, are part of our own form of thought, not of what we observe [editor's note].

able. He designates only the relations of things to human beings, and in order to express them he avails himself of the boldest metaphors. The stimulation of a nerve is first translated into an image: first metaphor! The image is then imitated by a sound: second metaphor! And each time there is a complete leap from one sphere into the heart of another, new sphere. One can conceive of a profoundly deaf human being who has never experienced sound or music; just as such a person will gaze in astonishment at the Chladnian sound-figures in sand,[8] find their cause in the vibration of a string, and swear that he must now know what men call sound—this is precisely what happens to all of us with language. We believe that when we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess only metaphors of things which in no way correspond to the original entities. Just as the musical sound appears as a figure in the sand, so the mysterious 'X' of the thing-in-itself appears first as a nervous stimulus, then as an image, and finally as an articulated sound. At all events, things do not proceed logically when language comes into being, and the entire material in and with which the man of truth, the researcher, the philosopher, works and builds, stems, if not from cloud-cuckoo land, then certainly not from the essence of things.

Let us consider in particular how concepts are formed; each word immediately becomes a concept, not by virtue of the fact that it is intended to serve as a memory (say) of the unique, utterly individualized, primary experience to which it owes its existence, but because at the same time it must fit countless other, more or less similar cases, i.e. cases which, strictly speaking, are never equivalent, and thus nothing other than non-equivalent cases. Every concept comes into being by making equivalent that which is non-equivalent. Just as it is certain that no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other leaf, it is equally certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by dropping these individual differences arbitrarily, by forgetting those features which differentiate one thing from another, so that the concept then gives rise to the notion that something other than leaves exists in nature, something which would be 'leaf', a primal form, say, from which all leaves were woven, drawn, delineated, dyed, curled, painted—but by a clumsy pair of hands, so that no single example turned out to be a faithful, correct, and reliable copy of the primal form. We call a man honest; we ask, 'Why did he act so honestly today?' Our answer is usually: 'Because of his honesty.' Honesty!—yet again, this means that the leaf is the cause of the leaves. We have no knowledge of an essential quality which might be called honesty, but we do know of numerous individualized and hence non-equivalent actions which we equate with each other by omitting what is unlike, and which we now designate as honest actions; finally we formulate from them a *qualitas occulta*[9] with the name 'honesty'.

Like form, a concept is produced by overlooking what is individual and real, whereas nature knows neither forms nor concepts and hence no species, but only an 'X' which is inaccessible to us and indefinable by us.

8. The vibration of a string can create figures in the sand (in an appropriately constructed sandbox) which give a visual representation of that which the human ear perceives as a tone. The term comes from the name of the [German] physicist Ernst Chladni [1756–1827], whose experiments demonstrated the effect.

9. Hidden property (Latin).

For the opposition we make between individual and species is also anthropomorphic and does not stem from the essence of things, although we equally do not dare to say that it does *not* correspond to the essence of things, since that would be a dogmatic assertion and, as such, just as incapable of being proved as its opposite.

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins. Yet we still do not know where the drive to truth comes from, for so far we have only heard about the obligation to be truthful which society imposes in order to exist, i.e. the obligation to use the customary metaphors, or, to put it in moral terms, the obligation to lie in accordance with firmly established convention, to lie *en masse* and in a style that is binding for all. Now, it is true that human beings forget that this is how things are; thus they lie unconsciously in the way we have described, and in accordance with centuries-old habits—and precisely *because of this unconsciousness*, precisely because of this forgetting, they arrive at the feeling of truth. The feeling that one is obliged to describe one thing as red, another as cold, and a third as dumb, prompts a moral impulse which pertains to truth; from its opposite, the liar whom no one trusts and all exclude, human beings demonstrate to themselves just how honourable, confidence-inspiring and useful truth is. As creatures of *reason*, human beings now make their actions subject to the rule of abstractions; they no longer tolerate being swept away by sudden impressions and sensuous perceptions; they now generalize all these impressions first, turning them into cooler, less colourful concepts in order to harness the vehicle of their lives and actions to them. Everything which distinguishes human beings from animals depends on this ability to sublimate sensuous metaphors into a schema, in other words, to dissolve an image into a concept. This is because something becomes possible in the realm of these schemata which could never be achieved in the realm of those sensuous first impressions, namely the construction of a pyramidal order based on castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, definitions of borders, which now confronts the other, sensuously perceived world as something firmer, more general, more familiar, more human, and hence as something regulatory and imperative. Whereas every metaphor standing for a sensuous perception is individual and unique and is therefore always able to escape classification, the great edifice of concepts exhibits the rigid regularity of a Roman *columbarium*,[1] while logic breathes out that air of severity and coolness which is peculiar to mathematics. Anyone who has been touched by that cool breath will scarcely believe that concepts too, which are as bony and eight-cornered as a dice and just as capable of being shifted around, are only the left-over *residue of a metaphor*, and that the

1. Originally a dovecote, then a catacomb with niches at regular intervals for urns containing the ashes of the dead.

illusion produced by the artistic translation of a nervous stimulus into images is, if not the mother, then at least the grandmother of each and every concept. Within this conceptual game of dice, however, 'truth' means using each die in accordance with its designation, counting its spots precisely, forming correct classifications, and never offending against the order of castes nor against the sequence of classes of rank. Just as the Romans and the Etruscans divided up the sky with rigid mathematical lines and confined a god in a space which they had thus delimited as in a *templum,*[2] all peoples have just such a mathematically divided firmament of concepts above them, and they understand the demand of truth to mean that the god of every concept is to be sought only in *his* sphere. Here one can certainly admire humanity as a mighty architectural genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water; admittedly, in order to rest on such foundations, it has to be like a thing constructed from cobwebs, so delicate that it can be carried off on the waves and yet so firm as not to be blown apart by the wind. By these standards the human being is an architectural genius who is far superior to the bee; the latter builds with wax which she gathers from nature, whereas the human being builds with the far more delicate material of concepts which he must first manufacture from himself. In this he is to be much admired—but just not for his impulse to truth, to the pure cognition of things. If someone hides something behind a bush, looks for it in the same place and then finds it there, his seeking and finding is nothing much to boast about; but this is exactly how things are as far as the seeking and finding of 'truth' within the territory of reason is concerned. If I create the definition of a mammal and then, having inspected a camel, declare, 'Behold, a mammal', then a truth has certainly been brought to light, but it is of limited value, by which I mean that it is anthropomorphic through and through and contains not a single point which could be said to be 'true in itself', really and in a generally valid sense, regardless of mankind. Anyone who researches for truths of that kind is basically only seeking the metamorphosis of the world in human beings; he strives for an understanding of the world as something which is similar in kind to humanity, and what he gains by his efforts is at best a feeling of assimilation. Rather as the astrologer studies the stars in the service of human beings and in relation to humanity's happiness and suffering, this type of researcher regards the whole world as linked to humankind, as the infinitely refracted echo of an original sound, that of humanity, and as the multiple copy of a single, original image, that of humanity. His procedure is to measure all things against man, and in doing so he takes as his point of departure the erroneous belief that he has these things directly before him, as pure objects. Thus, forgetting that the original metaphors of perception were indeed metaphors, he takes them for the things themselves.

Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor, only by virtue of the fact that a mass of images, which originally flowed in a hot, liquid stream from the primal power of the human imagination, has become hard and rigid, only because of the invincible faith that *this* sun, *this* window, this table is a truth in itself—in short only because man forgets himself as a

2. Literally, a space marked out; the space of the heavens; sanctuary, temple (Latin) [editor's note].

subject, and indeed as *an artistically creative* subject, does he live with some degree of peace, security, and consistency; if he could escape for just a moment from the prison walls of this faith, it would mean the end of his 'consciousness of self'.[3] He even has to make an effort to admit to himself that insects or birds perceive a quite different world from that of human beings, and that the question as to which of these two perceptions of the world is the more correct is quite meaningless, since this would require them to be measured by the criterion of the *correct perception*, i.e. by a *non-existent* criterion. But generally it seems to me that the correct perception—which would mean the full and adequate expression of an object in the subject—is something contradictory and impossible; for between two absolutely different spheres, such as subject and object are, there is no causality, no correctness, no expression, but at most an *aesthetic* way of relating, by which I mean an allusive transference, a stammering translation into a quite different language. For which purpose a middle sphere and mediating force is certainly required which can freely invent and freely create poetry. The word appearance (*Erscheinung*) contains many seductions, and for this reason I avoid using it as far as possible; for it is not true that the essence of things appears in the empirical world. A painter who has no hands and who wished to express in song the image hovering before him will still reveal more through this substitution of one sphere for another than the empirical world betrays of the essence of things. Even the relation of a nervous stimulus to the image produced thereby is inherently not a necessary relationship; but when that same image has been produced millions of times and has been passed down through many generations of humanity, indeed eventually appears in the whole of humanity as a consequence of the same occasion, it finally acquires the same significance for all human beings, as if it were the only necessary image and as if that relation of the original nervous stimulus to the image produced were a relation of strict causality—in exactly the same way as a dream, if repeated eternally, would be felt and judged entirely as reality. But the fact that a metaphor becomes hard and rigid is absolutely no guarantee of the necessity and exclusive justification of that metaphor.

Anyone who is at home in such considerations will certainly have felt a deep mistrust of this kind of idealism when once he has become clearly convinced of the eternal consistency, ubiquitousness and infallibility of the laws of nature; he will then conclude that everything, as far as we can penetrate, whether to the heights of the telescopic world or the depths of the microscopic world, is so sure, so elaborated, so endless, so much in conformity to laws, and so free of lacunae, that science will be able to mine these shafts successfully for ever, and that everything found there will be in agreement and without self-contradiction. How little all of this resembles a product of the imagination, for if it were such a thing, the illusion and the unreality would be bound to be detectable somewhere. The first thing to be said against this view is this: if each of us still had a different kind of sensuous perception, if we ourselves could only perceive things as, variously, a bird, a worm, or a plant does, or if one of us were to see a stimulus as red, a second person were to see the same stimulus as blue, while a third were even to

3. The word Nietzsche uses here—*Selbstbewußtsein*—could also mean "self-confidence."

hear it as a sound, nobody would ever speak of nature as something conforming to laws; rather they would take it to be nothing other than a highly subjective formation. Consequently, what is a law of nature for us at all? It is not known to us in itself but only in its effects, i.e. in its relations to other laws of nature which are in turn known to us only as relations. Thus, all these relations refer only to one another, and they are utterly incomprehensible to us in their essential nature; the only things we really know about them are things which we bring to bear on them: time and space, in other words, relations of succession and number. But everything which is wonderful and which elicits our astonishment at precisely these laws of nature, everything which demands explanation of us and could seduce us into being suspicious of idealism, is attributable precisely and exclusively to the rigour and universal validity of the representations of time and space. But these we produce within ourselves and from ourselves with the same necessity as a spider spins; if we are forced to comprehend all things under these forms alone, then it is no longer wonderful that what we comprehend in all these things is actually nothing other than these very forms; for all of them must exhibit the laws of number, and number is precisely that which is most astonishing about things. All the conformity to laws which we find so imposing in the orbits of the stars and chemical processes is basically identical with those qualities which we ourselves bring to bear on things, so that what we find imposing is our own activity. Of course the consequence of this is that the artistic production of metaphor, with which every sensation begins within us, already presupposes those forms, and is thus executed in them; only from the stability of these original forms can one explain how it is possible for an edifice of concepts to be constituted in its turn from the metaphors themselves. For this conceptual edifice is an imitation of the relations of time, space, and number on the foundations of metaphor.

2

Originally, as we have seen, it is *language* which works on building the edifice of concepts; later it is *science*. Just as the bee simultaneously builds the cells of its comb and fills them with honey, so science works unceasingly at that great *columbarium* of concepts, the burial site of perceptions, builds ever-new, ever-higher tiers, supports, cleans, renews the old cells, and strives above all to fill that framework which towers up to vast heights, and to fit into it in an orderly way the whole empirical world, i.e. the anthropomorphic world. If even the man of action binds his life to reason and its concepts, so as not to be swept away and lose himself, the researcher builds his hut close by the tower of science so that he can lend a hand with the building and find protection for himself beneath its already existing bulwarks. And he has need of protection, for there exist fearful powers which constantly press in on him and which confront scientific truth with 'truths' of quite another kind, on shields emblazoned with the most multifarious emblems.

That drive to form metaphors, that fundamental human drive which cannot be left out of consideration for even a second without also leaving out human beings themselves, is in truth not defeated, indeed hardly even tamed, by the process whereby a regular and rigid new world is built from its own sublimated products—concepts—in order to imprison it in a fortress.

The drive seeks out a channel and a new area for its activity, and finds it in myth and in art generally. It constantly confuses the cells and the classifications of concepts by setting up new translations, metaphors, metonymies; it constantly manifests the desire to shape the given world of the waking human being in ways which are just as multiform, irregular, inconsequential, incoherent, charming and ever-new, as things are in the world of dream. Actually the waking human being is only clear about the fact that he is awake thanks to the rigid and regular web of concepts, and for that reason he sometimes comes to believe that he is dreaming if once that web of concepts is torn apart by art. Pascal is right to maintain that if the same dream were to come to us every night we would occupy ourselves with it just as much as we do with the things we see every day: 'If an artisan could be sure to dream each night for a full twelve hours that he was a king,' says Pascal, 'I believe he would be just as happy as a king who dreamt for twelve hours each night that he was an artisan.'[4] Thanks to the constantly effective miracle assumed by myth, the waking day of a people who are stimulated by myth, as the ancient Greeks were, does indeed resemble dream more than it does the day of a thinker whose mind has been sobered by science. If, one day, any tree may speak as a nymph, or if a god can carry off virgins in the guise of a bull, if the goddess Athene herself is suddenly seen riding on a beautiful chariot in the company of Pisistratus through the market-places of Athens[5]—and that was what the honest Athenian believed—then anything is possible at any time, as it is in dream, and the whole of nature cavorts around men as if it were just a masquerade of the gods who are merely having fun by deceiving men in every shape and form.

But human beings themselves have an unconquerable urge to let themselves be deceived, and they are as if enchanted with happiness when the bard recites epic fairy-tales as if they were true, or when the actor in a play acts the king more regally than reality shows him to be. The intellect, that master of pretence, is free and absolved of its usual slavery for as long as it can deceive without *doing harm*, and it celebrates its Saturnalian festivals[6] when it does so; at no time is it richer, more luxuriant, more proud, skilful, and bold. Full of creative contentment, it jumbles up metaphors and shifts the boundary stones of abstraction, describing a river, for example, as a moving road that carries men to destinations to which they normally walk. The intellect has now cast off the mark of servitude; whereas it normally labours, with dull-spirited industry, to show to some poor individual who lusts after life the road and the tools he needs, and rides out in search of spoils and booty for its master, here the intellect has become the master itself and is permitted to wipe the expression of neediness from its face. Whatever the intellect now does, all of it, compared with what it did before, bears the mark of pretence, just as what it did before bore the mark of distortion. It

4. *Pensées* VI.386. [Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French mathematician, theologian, and philosopher—editor's note.]

5. Herodotus 1.60. [The Greek historian (ca. 484–ca. 425 B.C.E.) describes in the passage cited a ruse of the Athenian ruler Pisistratus (d. 527 B.C.E.) after he was forced out of the city in 566: he dressed a tall, handsome woman in armor and led the people to believe that Athena, goddess of war and wisdom and the patron of Athens, was herself restoring him to power. "The guise of a bull": Zeus, the Greek king of the gods, took the form of a bull when he abducted Europa, a Phoenician princess—editor's note.]

6. Roman holidays at the winter solstice during which no business was conducted, slaves were temporarily freed, and the normal rules of propriety were suspended [editor's note].

copies human life, but it takes it to be something good and appears to be fairly content with it. That vast assembly of beams and boards to which needy man clings, thereby saving himself on his journey through life, is used by the liberated intellect as a mere climbing frame and plaything on which to perform its most reckless tricks; and when it smashes this framework, jumbles it up and ironically re-assembles it, pairing the most unlike things and dividing those things which are closest to one another, it reveals the fact that it does not require those makeshift aids of neediness, and that it is now guided, not by concepts but by intuitions. No regular way leads from these intuitions into the land of the ghostly schemata and abstractions; words are not made for them; man is struck dumb when he sees them, or he will speak only in forbidden metaphors and unheard-of combinations of concepts so that, by at least demolishing and deriding the old conceptual barriers, he may do creative justice to the impression made on him by the mighty, present intuition.

There are epochs in which the man of reason and the man of intuition stand side by side, the one fearful of intuition, the other filled with scorn for abstraction, the latter as unreasonable as the former is unartistic. They both desire to rule over life; the one by his knowledge of how to cope with the chief calamities of life by providing for the future, by prudence and regularity, the other by being an 'exuberant hero'[7] who does not see those calamities and who only acknowledges life as real when it is disguised as beauty and appearance. Where the man of intuition, as was once the case in ancient Greece, wields his weapons more mightily and victoriously than his contrary, a culture can take shape, given favourable conditions, and the rule of art over life can become established; all the expressions of a life lived thus are accompanied by pretence, by the denial of neediness, by the radiance of metaphorical visions, and indeed generally by the immediacy of deception. Neither the house, nor the gait, nor the clothing, nor the pitcher of clay gives any hint that these things were invented by neediness; it seems as if all of them were intended to express sublime happiness and Olympian[8] cloudlessness and, as it were, a playing with earnest things. Whereas the man who is guided by concepts and abstractions only succeeds thereby in warding off misfortune, is unable to compel the abstractions themselves to yield him happiness, and strives merely to be as free as possible of pain, the man of intuition, standing in the midst of a culture, reaps directly from his intuitions not just protection from harm but also a constant stream of brightness, a lightening of the spirit, redemption, and release. Of course, *when* he suffers, he suffers more severely; indeed he suffers more frequently because he does not know how to learn from experience and keeps on falling into the very same trap time after time. When he is suffering he is just as unreasonable as he is when happy, he shouts out loudly and knows no solace. How differently the same misfortune is endured by the stoic who has learned from experience and who governs himself by means of concepts! This man, who otherwise seeks only honesty, truth, freedom from illusions, and

7. Phrase used to describe Siegfried in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (Act III). [Richard Wagner (1813–1883), German composer who was Nietzsche's friend and mentor until their falling out in 1876. *Götterdämmerung*, the conclusion of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, was first produced in 1876—editor's note.]

8. That is, characteristic of Mount Olympus, the home of the Greek gods [editor's note].

protection from the onslaughts of things which might distract him, now performs, in the midst of misfortune, a masterpiece of pretence, just as the other did in the midst of happiness: he does not wear a twitching, mobile, human face, but rather a mask, as it were, with its features in dignified equilibrium; he does not shout, nor does he even change his tone of voice. If a veritable storm-cloud empties itself on his head, he wraps himself in his cloak and slowly walks away from under it.

1873 1903

OSCAR WILDE
1854–1900

Oscar Wilde is known for his epigrammatic wit, dazzling skills in conversation, and scandalous homosexual behavior, which in 1895 led to his trial and imprisonment for sodomy. But Wilde was more than a brilliant—and tragic—cultural personality. He was a gifted, wonderfully entertaining, and disquieting writer, the author of an impressive body of work that includes the superb comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the haunting novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and sharp, suggestive critical essays.

Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland. His father was a surgeon and respected author; his mother also wrote both verse and prose. Educated in classics at Trinity College, Dublin, Wilde won a fellowship to Magdalen College, Oxford University. There he was influenced by the eminent art historian John Ruskin, WALTER PATER, and the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood of English poets and painters. The young Wilde began to lead his life as if it were a work of art, to be crafted, cultivated, and made to sparkle. Defying orthodoxy and social convention, he was flamboyant and theatrical.

In 1881, at his own expense, Wilde published his first book, *Poems*, a promising but derivative volume that reflects the influence of Wilde's reading of John Keats (1795–1821), Algernon Swinburne (1837–1909), Pater, and the Pre-Raphaelites. In the following year, Wilde toured and lectured in the United States. It is said that on his arrival in New York City, when asked by customs officials if he had anything to declare, he replied, "Only my genius." Wilde was by now a leader of the aesthetic movement, which rallied around the dictum of "art for art's sake." His deliberate eccentricity and exuberant self-regard drew ridicule in the weekly comic periodical *Punch*, and he was parodied as Bunthorne in Gilbert and Sullivan's 1881 operetta *Patience*.

Though Wilde had (in the words of one recent scholar) "flirted" with homosexuality for a number of years, he married Constance Lloyd, daughter of a prominent Irish barrister, in 1884. For his two sons Wilde wrote stories—inspired by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen—included in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1892). He also wrote reviews for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and, from 1887 to 1889, served as the editor of *Woman's World*, a popular periodical to which Constance also contributed articles on politics and women's issues.

In the early 1890s, Wilde hit his stride. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared first in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890; the book, revised and expanded by six chapters, was published in 1891. It recounts the story of a beautiful young man who seems