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NIETZSCHE.



# NIETZSCHE

AN APPROACH

*by*

JANKO LAVRIN

WITH A PORTRAIT FRONTISPIECE



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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE present study is not a new attempt to bring Nietzsche's philosophy into a system. Its primary task is to point out the bond between his personal fate on the one hand, and the trend of his thought on the other—as far as possible against the background of the crisis typical of contemporary mankind in general. Although based on one of my previous studies, this book contains a considerable amount of material which was not included in the former.

As for the quotations from Nietzsche's writings, most of them are taken from *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Dr. Oscar Levy and published by Allen & Unwin. For a number of quotations from his letters I am indebted to Mr. Anthony M. Ludovici's *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Dr. Oscar Levy (Heinemann). Several passages from his letters and posthumous writings have been translated by myself. To both the publishers and the translators my thanks and acknowledgments are due, as also to Miss Rose Fyleman who specially translated for me the poem on p. 59.

J. L.



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# I

## INTRODUCTION

### I

IN the history of modern European thought Friedrich Nietzsche occupies one of the most provocative and at the same time paradoxical positions: provocative, because he challenged all our traditional ideas, beliefs and values; paradoxical, because his work has proved both misleading and yet highly stimulating on account of its very inconsistencies and contradictions. His personal fate itself was a paradox, the dramatic character of which was increased by the fact that after a neglect, lasting throughout the whole of his creative life, Nietzsche suddenly sprang into a vogue that made his name something of an ideological battle-cry all over Europe. And however much he may have been misunderstood by his detractors and even more by his adherents, the passions aroused by his thought helped to clear the atmosphere, the mental and moral climate of our age, let alone his challenge to the whole of our civilization.

Nietzsche emerged at the dead end of our epoch—an epoch full of inner and external crises, often camouflaged in such a manner as to make the disruptive processes working behind it all appear as little disturbing as possible. But he was one of those who refused to be deluded. While one facet of his thought was visionary and prophetic, the other was intensely critical and full of ominous warnings. As a critic he gave us perhaps the most merciless diagnosis of our age; yet, as a prophet, he offered to his contemporaries an ideal which proved in the end as unacceptable and impossible in practice as it was daring in theory. His own reactions against the epoch in which he lived were the more violent for the very reason that he, too, was one

of its victims, but a victim who would not acquiesce. The war he waged against it was thus fought on two fronts—one of them being purely personal, while the other touched upon issues that went far beyond any personal considerations. His strategy, always passionate and erratic, was further complicated by his poor state of health, which made him mobilize all his resources in ratio to his physical deterioration. In the long run the conflict proved so onerous that his mental collapse at the beginning of 1889—some eleven years before his physical death—came hardly as a surprise.

It would be unjust, however, to let Nietzsche's subsequent insanity impair our judgment of the actual character and value of his thought. His catastrophe itself was partly due to the fact that he took his mental and cultural preoccupations most seriously. The whole of his life can be described as the tragedy of a man who fought against both his epoch and his personal fate with an intensity of purpose which made such an end almost inevitable. Compelled to 'philosophize with a hammer' and to 'write in blood', he always tested his thought on himself, regardless of the price he had to pay for such a method. The word *philosophy* thus meant to him not abstract reasoning but living experience. Smooth systems were of no use to him, and so he did not bother about them. 'I am not narrow-minded enough for a system,' he says, 'not even for my own system.' He concentrated, instead, on exploring the possibility of a total change of man and life.

His cardinal dilemma was in effect: can humanity and culture still be saved, or are they doomed to destruction? The very magnitude of such a dilemma appealed to his incurably romantic temperament as well as to his German love of the 'colossal'; but at the same time it fostered his inclination to see things too much in terms of antitheses, of black and white. And since he was so prone to judge his epoch by way of and through his own personal fate,

he eventually identified the two to such an extent as to find it often difficult to tell one from the other.

## II

The safest approach to Nietzsche the philosopher is, therefore, through Nietzsche the man. To do this, however, we must first discount certain notions spread by the popularization of Nietzsche. We must equally endeavour to penetrate behind the numerous masks which he donned in order to mystify his readers. Does he not himself acknowledge (in *Beyond Good and Evil*) that 'every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a *lurking-place*, every word is also a *mask*?' Blaise Pascal's *Se moquer de la philosophie c'est vraiment philosopher* can therefore safely be applied to Nietzsche in so far as the face-value of his philosophy is often entirely deceptive. On the other hand, his masks are often made plausible by the manner in which he presents them to the reader. A thinker, a fighter, a poet, and a musician (or potential musician) in one, he knows how to combine a supple feminine sensitiveness with a powerful or even harsh masculinity of style and language. True enough, one is likely to tire of his too frequent variations, however brilliant, upon the same themes. In spite of his ready wit and deadly irony, he is yet devoid of humour. He is appallingly lacking in that sense of proportion which is the best if not the only safeguard against overstatements and exaggerations. Hence his disconcerting and often brutally aggressive intolerance. But he makes up for flaws of this kind by the boldness of his metaphors, the depth of his psychological intuitions, the sparkling malice of his sarcasm and the curiously elusive magic of his personality and style, in which thought, emotion and intuition are differentiated hardly at all: each seems to be passing into and strengthening the other, whilst at the same time itself gaining in strength. Nor should one forget the electrifying overtones of his writings, which played

such havoc with his less discriminating readers. As for his message, we may entirely reject it, yet we cannot afford to ignore his passionate criticisms and warnings. Whatever his faults, Nietzsche was one of the few Europeans capable of hearing the not too distant rumbling of that volcanic eruption which threatened to destroy the whole of our cultural heritage and has by now almost succeeded in doing so. He warned us of the calamities ahead, and tried to save at least what still could be saved.

This does not mean that his methods were invariably right. His diagnosis was as a rule correct, and many of his attacks were critically valid; yet the character of his criticism often suggests that much of his strength was that peculiar and perilous strength of weakness in which, too, he was a child of his age. In his anxiety to convince himself, as well as his readers, that he was really strong, he was prone to indulge in iconoclastic fury, and his frequent inability to distinguish between violence and strength can be ascribed to the same cause. But here, too, the fault lay not so much in him as in his epoch, and particularly in the Germany of his period.

### III

This may become clearer if we underline one of the main reasons for the present-day chaos: the discrepancy between the pace of our external technical and commercial development on the one hand, and that of our inner culture on the other. The former has quickened its tempo to such an extent that there is little time, and less possibility, to adjust our inner life to the mad whirl of our external existence. Consequently the external man is bound to develop at the expense of the inner man, and cultural values are sacrificed to the requirements of our mechanical, up-to-date Tower of Babel. We are now living in the very heart of a crisis brought about by such a process, and it so happened that the crisis itself arose with particular intensity in modern Germany. There the

humanism of Goethe, Schiller and Hoelderlin was sacrificed to commercial industrialization and to a highly militarized State—methodically and ‘according to plan’. Heine, a voluntary exile from his homeland, diagnosed in his prose-writings certain disturbing trends in German politics several decades before Nietzsche—even to the length of predicting that something like Nazism would be its outcome. But Heine’s sarcastic indictments compare with those of Nietzsche as the beatings on a drum would compare with gun-salvos. Moreover, whilst Heine pronounced judgment only on certain symptoms, Nietzsche felt the onset of twilight for an entire civilization, and made desperate efforts to avert it.

The remedies he adopted and recommended were as drastic as the situation with which he tried to cope was serious. But strange as some of these may appear, we cannot take them apart from Nietzsche, and even if we are inclined to dismiss them we can hardly afford to dismiss Nietzsche himself, who challenged the cultural decadence of our age with such a passionate, even fanatical, verve. His very inconsistencies were often due not only to his own inner conflicts of mind but to contradictions in the age he fought against. Anyway, they complicated even more Nietzsche’s protean nature which defies any simplified definition. At times he seems to be not one personality but a strange mixture of personalities. The most ‘godless’ philosopher of our age and yet a mystic in disguise; a romantic of the Storm and Stress brand and, together with this, an apostle of Apollo (the god of harmony and measure); a preacher of hardness in theory and one of the meekest of men in practice—all these incongruous features can be found in him side by side. Certain elements of Pascal, Luther, Voltaire, Baudelaire, Goethe, Bismarck and Chopin seem all to have met in Nietzsche, not as allies but as foes tearing him to pieces. In his effort to preserve at least the semblance of balance, he frequently tried to ‘cast his skins’, to shift the focus

of his attention from one element to another; but every attempt of this kind only added another mask to his disguises.

Little wonder that Nietzsche himself warned his readers against those ideological 'apes' who confuse the mask with the man at the risk of missing both. But in spite of this warning, the vogue which followed Nietzsche's death was, more often than not, due to the fervour of such adepts as identified Nietzsche with his masks rather than with his substance. The first to swear by him were a number of European decadents of the *fin de siècle* type. Nietzsche's titanic individualism, preached in an age of frustrations and 'inferiority complexes', must have seemed to them a most inviting stimulant. They were equally tempted to confuse his 'beyond good and evil' with their own 'below good and evil', and thus provide a philosophic sanction for the very indulgence he so ruthlessly condemned. Some seized upon his theory of 'will to power' as justification for gross and aggressive appetites, seeking by it to sanctify them as natural and necessary to the growth of life. Many a German Imperialist went so far as to patronize this outspoken anti-German as a prophet of that zoological type of nationalism which has been largely responsible for the two most devastating wars in history. Even the Luciferean defiance of Nietzsche's struggle against Christianity was often mistaken for the 'enlightened' atheism of the penny pamphlet, as though there were not a world of difference between a challenging anti-religion and the shallow irreligion proceeding either from indifference or from ignorance and in most cases from both.

#### IV

The list could be extended. The philandering Nietzscheans usually re-made their idol in their own image, thus turning that pathetic martyr of an epoch into a modish figure, or into just a bundle of fashionable slogans. But like all fashions, the Nietzschean vogue was followed by

a more detached and sober attitude. We are no longer naïve enough to see in Nietzscheanism a panacea for our ills and discontents. On the other hand, no one will understand the deeper significance of our present impasse unless he knows something about Nietzsche's problems and also of the way in which he tried—so unsuccessfully—to cope with them. We are to-day less than ever entitled to ignore either his criticisms or his warnings, even though his philosophy may now strike us as something entirely different from what it seemed a generation ago. But perhaps Nietzsche the great transvaluer should himself be transvalued in order that he may give us what he is still able to give. It is for this reason that we must endeavour to see him in the right perspective and approach his philosophy first of all through his personal needs and crises.

A separation of the two would lead only to further confusion. It would, moreover, obscure what is original and truly valuable in Nietzsche's thought as a whole, since it is so easy to prove that—taken by themselves—his single ideas existed in some form or other long before him. They can be traced from Heraclitus and Theognis to Schopenhauer; from the moralizing French psychologists (notably La Rochefoucauld) to Goethe, Kleist, Stendhal, Gobineau and Guyau; and also to Dostoevsky, who long before had tackled Nietzsche's main dilemma with no less acumen than Nietzsche himself. Notwithstanding all this, Nietzsche offers, perhaps, the most conspicuous example of a philosophy, the first postulate of which is to come from life itself and to be realized in and through the action of living. 'A philosopher must be the evil conscience of his age,' he once said, 'but to this end he must be possessed of its best knowledge.' No one will deny such knowledge to Nietzsche, who suffered more from the anomalies of his age than did any other modern. The very crux of his thinking was a defiance of those anomalies. This is why Nietzsche's passionate subjectivism often

confers, strangely enough, an objective significance upon some of his most personal pages. Unable and unwilling to divorce philosophy from life, he made his *Erkennen* (knowledge through thought) commensurate with his own *Erleben* (living experience). He himself states in *The Joyful Wisdom* that 'it makes the most material difference whether a thinker is personally related to his problems, having his fate, his need, his highest happiness therein; or impersonally, being only able to grasp them with the tentacles of coldly prying thinking. In the latter case nothing results therefrom—so much can be promised'. And again, 'We philosophers are not at liberty to separate soul and body, as common folk separate them; and we are still less at liberty to separate soul and spirit. We are not thinking frogs, we are not objectifying and registering apparatuses with cold entrails—our thoughts must be continually born out of pain, and we must, motherlike, share with them all that we have in us of blood, heart, ardour, joy, passion, pangs, conscience, fate and fatality. Life—that means for us to transform constantly into light and flame, all that we are and all that we meet with; we cannot possibly do otherwise.'

Whilst judging that a philosophy which has to be lived and tested through pain is likely to be chaotic, we must also grant, on the other hand, that it will prove to be more vital than a smooth system reasoned out in a comfortable arm-chair. So we are the less entitled to sneer at Nietzsche's work as though it were hardly anything more than a 'pathological' documentation of a man who eventually became insane. But at the same time we cannot possibly avoid pursuing our study in the light of the dramatic contact between the man and the philosopher. Fortunately, Nietzsche's personality provides most valuable clues to his philosophy—right up to the moment of his mental collapse.

## II

### THE ALCHEMY OF PAIN

#### I

ANY student of Nietzsche is likely to notice the presence of three closely interwoven leitmotifs in his work: the consciousness of a high mission to be achieved by him in this world; his ambivalent attitude towards the fundamental problems of existence; and lastly, his malady, the complications of which led in the end to his mental collapse. Yet the collapse itself, instead of being used as a pretext for condemning his work, may, on the contrary, serve as one more proof that insanity and genius do not necessarily exclude each other. In a person more gifted than balanced, the transition from one to the other is not so rare an occurrence as one would like to think. The very lack of inner balance may provide a stimulus, since in his quest for such balance the individual is often compelled to mobilize all the mental and spiritual resources at his disposal. The history of European art and letters bears witness to remarkably sane geniuses—Goethe, Milton and Pushkin, for example. But the number of those who were less balanced or even ‘somewhat mad’ is also surprising, which is to be expected of an unstable and disruptive age such as ours. The weight of this disruption falls upon the individuals born into and shaped by the conditions of the capitalist era, an alarming symptom of which is the high number of nervous or even morbid cases among the intellectual *élite*. Leopardi, Poe, de Nerval, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Gogol, Dostoevsky, van Gogh are only a few of them, and this cannot be ascribed to mere chance, since art, philosophy and literature invariably reflect the character of the age to which they belong.

A morbidly hectic age such as ours is therefore bound

to express—directly or indirectly—its typical features through the works of contemporary artists and writers. The so-called new sensitiveness derives, perhaps, more from our reactions to the negative side of modern life than from what is generally understood by normality and health. This does not entitle us, of course, to pursue a cult of morbidity. On the other hand, no one can understand the true character of our age unless he adopts an unbiased attitude also to its negative and morbid features, which, amongst other things, are so conspicuous in modern art and literature. Yet a study of this kind is likely to reveal at the outset two different and, as it were, opposed kinds of individual morbidity. One of them is due to physical as well as mental exhaustion, while the other may be caused by the accumulated inner wealth, devoid of a reliable focus and direction. This latter kind of morbidity may even result in the tragic paradox of a man crushed by the burden of his own mental wealth, especially if the latter is too abundant to be amenable to an adequate organization. The tragedy of Nietzsche was partly of this kind. But in order to see it in proper relation to his own genius one should perhaps make a cursory mention of the processes often typical of an exceptional mind such as his.

## II

The word *exceptional* implies deviations from the average or the normal, and these can take place in two directions: either above the normal or below it. Hence the difference between the super-normal and the abnormal, although in both processes a man's unconscious self plays a highly important part. The stronger this self, the more likely will it periodically irrupt into the waking consciousness, at the risk of unsettling the balance of personality. We know that many of our 'primitive' tendencies, impulses and caprices must be suppressed if we desire to maintain a civilized pattern of existence, not to mention all sorts of inevitable frustrations relegated to

the unconscious where they may exercise such pressure upon the conscious personality as to cause a break-out of 'nerves', of hysteria, and—in extreme cases—of insanity. But energy flowing from the unconscious to the conscious self can be canalized into creative channels as well. It all depends on the quality of those currents, and also on the character-texture of the individual. A highly sensitive organism may experience creative ecstasy where coarser natures would be subject to nervous fits, epilepsy and perhaps madness.

Since there is no strict line dividing the abnormal from the super-normal, the two are often puzzlingly intermingled. Dostoevsky and several other prominent figures in art and literature are a proof. Sometimes the higher mental or spiritual faculties can be stimulated even by spurious means, such as indulgence in sex, alcohol, opium and hashish, but usually with disastrous results. The leadenly fantastic atmosphere of the work of Edgar Allan Poe occurs to one. The names of Coleridge, de Quincey, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Strindberg can be added to those authors who became more or less victimized by their own exaggerated sensitiveness. Unable to achieve a balance, to accommodate themselves to their surroundings and to accept the values of the age in which they live, such acutely sensitive individuals often fall back upon themselves and look for romantic shelters in the 'ivory towers' provided by their own imagination. But they can also become rebels fiercely denouncing that reality which they refuse to accept.

In this manner one is confronted by two different types of romanticism as well: one of them being feminine, passively contemplative and resigned; the other masculine, rebellious and aggressive. Feminine romanticism takes the line of least resistance. The compensatory escapist world of fancies and day-dreams is preferred to the harsh realities of life, which one ignores or avoids as long as one can. Masculine romanticism, on the other

hand, grows the more aggressive the greater one's uprootedness, one's isolation from the hated reality. The two types complete each other as the two poles of one and the same negative attitude towards life and the world.

The dilemma of a romantic escape is, however, made more difficult if the situation becomes complicated by physical ailments: the ever-recurring pain is usually enough to serve at any time as a prompt reminder of reality. In this case one's defiance may increase at the same rate as the deterioration of one's physical state. Moreover, as physical strength declines, the *will* often tends the more stubbornly to mobilize the resources of one's psychic vitality in order to make such a situation bearable at all. Acuteness of pain may thus become a test of endurance, summoning all the reserves of one's power, or at least of one's passionate 'will to power'. Show me how much you can endure and I will tell you what you are! Such a motto is apt to turn pain itself into an illusion or else a proof of strength and, therefore, into a stimulus of life. The extremity of pain can even be transmuted—through defiance—into a kind of ecstasy. And if the pain, anyway, is inevitable, the 'transvaluation' of it into something that *should* be endured as a proof of one's exceptional greatness can lead to most interesting mental as well as temperamental complexes and reactions. This process of transmuting pain into defiance of fate played such a vital part in the development of Nietzsche's thought as to have strongly affected both the trend and the contents of his philosophy.

### III

Nietzsche makes no secret of the bearing his state of health had upon his thought. It was sickness alone that made him resign his post at Basle University and become a restless wanderer (or a 'fugitive' as he called himself), subject to physical and nervous crises. His health was particularly bad in 1879. It improved somewhat in 1880, but only temporarily. After the strain and the

quasi-mystical elation he had experienced during the writing of his greatest book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, symptoms of a coming breakdown appeared in the very style of *Ecce Homo* and of a few other works of his last period. At the beginning of 1889, the catastrophe could be averted no longer. On January 8th of that year, his friend and former colleague, Professor Overbeck, undertook an urgent journey to Turin, where he found Nietzsche in a state of hopeless mental collapse.

Nietzsche was a chronic invalid (with brighter intervals) from 1873 until 1889, during which years he wrote all his books. So it would be bordering upon the miraculous if these did not reflect the vagaries of his health, as well as the war he waged against his illness. And since war requires tactics, Nietzsche the invalid was compelled to use philosophy itself for strategic and tactical purposes—often the only means he had at his disposal. During the course of this warfare he learned the art of ‘transvaluing’ (in theory if not in practice) certain states and conditions into their opposites simply in order to reduce his terror of them and thus maintain or even increase his own resistance. The weaker his physical condition, the stronger had to be his will to health which he wanted to triumph over all the adversities of fate.

Nietzsche gives a number of clues which explain the nature of his tactics and his power of endurance. ‘Health and morbidness: let us be careful’, he warns his readers in *The Will to Power*. ‘The standard is the bloom of the body, the agility, courage and cheerfulness of the mind—but also, of course, *how much morbidness a man can bear and overcome*—and convert into health. That which would send more delicate natures to the dogs belongs to the stimulating means of great health.’ In a further passage he adds: ‘It is only a question of power—to have all the morbid traits of the century, but to balance them by means of overflowing, plastic and rejuvenating power. The *strong man*.’

There was no end to the tactical adroitness with which he endeavoured to cajole himself into enduring the inevitable under the garb of heroism. This demanded considerable dissimulation, but he did it with good conscience, and was able to derive, both as a psychologist and a thinker, a maximum of benefit from such ambiguous states. To begin with, he exalted suffering and disease as the quickest route to knowledge and self-knowledge. In his opinion, nothing sharpens one's sensibility so much as acute pain, which stirs up one's dormant faculties by irritating them into that continuous watchfulness or tension which can often lead to new discoveries, to new perspectives of reality and life. 'The state of sick men who have suffered long and terribly from the torture inflicted upon them by their illness, and whose reason has nevertheless not been in any way affected, is not without a certain amount of value in our search for knowledge—quite apart from the intellectual benefits which follow upon every profound solitude and every sudden and justified liberation from duties and habits. The man who suffers severely looks forth upon things with terrible calmness from his state of suffering: all those little lying enchantments by which things are usually surrounded when seen through the eyes of a healthy person have vanished from the sufferer; his own life even lies before him, stripped of all bloom and colour. If by chance it has happened that up to then he has lived in some kind of dangerous fantasy, this extreme disenchantment through pain is the means, and possibly the only means, of extricating him from it.'

Since, in his case, pain and sickness were unavoidable, it was important first of all to avoid being crushed by them; and secondly, to turn them to his own advantage, perhaps even into a source of strength. The above passage from *The Dawn of the Day*, therefore, leads to the following one, taken from *The Joyful Wisdom*: 'As regards sickness, should we not be almost tempted to ask whether

we could in general dispense with it? It is great pain only which is the ultimate emancipator of the spirit. . . . It is great pain only, the long, slow pain which takes time, by which we are burned as it were with green wood, that compels us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths, and divest ourselves of all trust, all good nature, veiling gentleness and averageness, wherein we have perhaps formerly installed our humanity. I doubt whether such pain improves us; but I know that it deepens us. Be it that we learn to confront it with our pride, our scorn, our strength of will, doing like the Indian who, however sorely tortured, revenges himself on his tormentor with his bitter tongue; be it that we withdraw from the pain into the oriental nothingness—it is called Nirvana—into mute, benumbed, deaf self-surrender, self-forgetfulness, and self-effacement; one emerges from such long, dangerous exercises in self-mastery as another being, with several additional notes of interrogation, and above all with the *will* to question more than ever, more profoundly, more strictly, more sternly, more wickedly, more quietly than has ever been questioned hitherto. . . . One comes back out of such abysses, out of such severe sickness of strong suspicion—new born, with the skin cast; more sensitive, more wicked, with a finer taste for joy, with a more delicate tongue for all good things, with a merrier disposition, with a second and more dangerous innocence of joy; at the same time more childish and a hundred times more refined than before.'

In the same work Nietzsche goes so far as to identify his illness and the benefits derived from it with some of the inner and outer ailments of Europe, whose organism, like his own, seemed to him alarmingly undermined. And here, at any rate, he voiced the opinion that Europe should by no means be ungrateful to the sufferings she has had to endure. She is, in fact, like Nietzsche himself, 'an invalid who owes her best thanks to her incurability and the external transformations of her sufferings. These

constant new situations, these equally constant new dangers, pains and makeshifts, have at last generated an intellectual sensitiveness which is almost equal to genius, and is in any case the mother of all genius.'

## IV

Nietzsche's attitude towards pain is clearly shown in utterances of this kind. Knowing that he was doomed to suffer, he further transmuted his pain into an exercise, or rather into a proof of that highest courage from which he now could derive both his pride and his creative ecstasy. Nor was he reticent regarding the artistic benefits won from such psychological alchemy. In *The Will to Power* he stresses (with some exaggeration) that 'it is exceptional states that determine the artist—such states as are intimately related and entwined with morbid symptoms, so that it would be almost impossible to be an artist without being ill'. It all depends on whether such an invalid has enough vitality at his disposal to brave the ravages of illness and to turn them into creative power, even if he has little or no physical strength left.

So we come to the important distinction between strength and vitality. The two are not identical, nor are they necessarily found together. Weak and diseased persons often develop, as though in self-defence, astonishing vitality, the nature of which is psychic rather than physical. To one's surprise they can withstand certain crises better than do people with a robust physique. Psychic vitality may behave in an 'abnormal' manner even in a robust, if unartistic, person, but with a difference. Nietzsche himself pointed out that 'an overflow of spunk and energy may quite as well lead to symptoms of partial constraint, sense-hallucinations, peripheral sensitiveness, as a poor vitality does—the stimuli are differently determined, the effect is the same. . . . What is not the same is above all the ultimate result; the extreme torpidity of all morbid natures, after their nervous eccentricities, has

nothing in common with the state of the artist, who need in no wise repent his best moments. . . . He is rich enough for it all; he can squander without becoming poor.'

Viewing health and disease from the angle of their stimulating capacity, Nietzsche eventually simplified his attitude by welcoming all that could serve what he called the 'higher health', i.e. the basic creative power of man, no matter how unusual this might appear to others. Having once reached such a decision, he had to guard all the more against those moods of despondency and pessimism which were likely to obstruct the benefits he derived from it. So he turned his own philosophy into self-protective measure. 'Out of my will to health I made my philosophy. . . . For this should be thoroughly understood: it was during those years in which my vitality reached its lowest point that I ceased being a pessimist; the instinct of self-recovery forbade my holding to a philosophy of poverty and desperation.'

We certainly see here philosophy playing an intriguing role, but one of Nietzsche's merits was the frankness with which he revealed this secret. Nor did such an attitude on his part interfere with his determination to work for a higher scope which would confer upon his personal suffering and his fight against it a supra-personal meaning. This was probably one of the reasons why he projected both into the morbid tension of contemporary Europe. Unable to live the life of an ordinary human being, he *had* to dramatize himself and to live as an exception: in a grand style, that is by sponsoring a cause the issue of which surpassed, in his opinion, any average destiny. Hence he looked upon his own case, and especially upon his own fight, as being symbolic of Europe, of the whole of humanity. Private ailments of an invalid were thus transmuted into a matter of supreme importance. His resistance was no longer one of just an ordinary patient, of a helpless sick man, but something formidable and unheard of. The fight with his own destiny gave him the

conviction that he himself was something of a destiny on which the crucial dilemma of the age depended. He also thought it his duty to become worthy of such a role and to suppress within himself all those tendencies which clamoured for a different, a less dramatic and less heroic existence.

### III

#### 'OUT OF SEASON'

##### I

THE scrutiny with which Nietzsche followed up the phases of his malady helped him to diagnose certain ailments of Europe probably better than a healthier individual could have done. Not contented with that, he devised and also advocated, for the benefit of Europe and indeed of humanity in general, a therapy which was even more extravagant than were the counter-measures he employed against his own disease. Yet whatever one may think of his remedies, we cannot deny that his sharp perception unerringly detected many a cause of those modern evils which were to be fully tasted only by the generations that came after him.

Nietzsche was above all keenly aware and apprehensive of the process threatening to disintegrate our culture and reduce it to chaos. In *The Will to Power* he summed up the situation as follows: 'The whole of our culture in Europe has long been writhing in suspense which increases from decade to decade as in expectation of a catastrophe; restless, violent, helter-skelter, like a torrent that will *reach its source*, and refuses to reflect—yea, that even dreads reflection.' Believing the debacle of European culture to be imminent, he did his best to prevent it. But in order to convince his fellow Europeans of the necessity of such a task, he had first to restore to them what he regarded as the true sense of values in an age which had substituted mere quantitative evaluations of cash and credit for those of quality. Nietzsche's position in our capitalist world was therefore not unlike that of Baron Munchausen, who tried to lift himself out of the bog by pulling at his own hair. Unable to cope with

the commercialized bog around him, Nietzsche could do nothing but retire into his own loneliness, to which he was, in any case, confined by his state of health, as well as by his exceedingly shy and gentle nature. But the more isolated he was in practice the more aggressive became his theories, until finally the compulsory character of his loneliness was covered by a mask of defiant fortitude.

Aggression in theory thus served as a compensation for his weakness in practice. What he needed was first of all the conviction that it was not the world that had rejected him, but that he himself rejected the world with its 'gilded, falsified populace' and other blessings typical of the Europe of his time. He preferred to see in his isolated existence something that was due to his own free choice—the choice of a man who felt proud of 'being out of season' in a world such as this. Hence his attitude of severe criticism and negation of everything he saw around. But parallel with this he also pursued a relentless struggle against himself, and his chief if not the only stimuli in this double contest were his pride and defiance. The feeling of being a helpless frustrated *déraciné* in the midst of a doomed world was stifled, again and again, by his over-loud attacks and denunciations, the very ferocity of which was fanned into an illusion of power.

## II

But if the entire age was diseased, then the diagnosis had to be followed up by prescriptions intended to nurse it back to health. Here Nietzsche the invalid applied his personal will to health to the whole of our present-day humanity by offering it a kill-or-cure medicine in the shape of his own philosophy which he turned into a therapy of the most drastic kind. In his opinion a true philosopher had to become something of a universal physician and at the same time a 'commander and a law-giver', if he was to be of any use to humanity at all.

As it happened, Nietzsche himself had no love and less respect for the actual humanity he was so anxious to put on the right track. Like so many frustrated idealists, he was a virtuoso in contempt, which he vented upon his age with the greater relish, the more 'out of season' he felt amidst its noise, its vulgarity, and its glittering rabble engaged in a universal prostituting of culture. He turned his back on it, as described in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*:

'I asked once, and I almost suffocated with my question: What! Is the rabble also necessary for life? Are poisoned fountains necessary, and stinking fires, and filthy dreams, and maggots in the bread of life?

'Not my hatred, but my loathing gnawed hungrily at my life! Oh, oft-times I became weary of spirit, when I found even the rabble spiritual!

'And on the rulers I turned my back, when I saw what they now called ruling, the traffic and bargain for power—with the rabble!

'Amongst people of strange language did I dwell, with stopped ears, so that the language of their trafficking might remain strange unto me, and their bargaining for power.

'And holding my nose, I went morosely through all the yesterdays and to-days of the scribbling rabble!

'Like a cripple become deaf, and blind, and dumb—thus have I lived long; that I might not live with the power-rabble, the scribble-rabble and the pleasure-rabble.

'What has happened unto me? How have I freed myself from loathing? Who has rejuvenated mine eye? How have I flown to the height where no rabble any longer sits at the wells?

'Did my loathing itself create for me wings and fountain-divining powers? Verily, to the loftiest heights had I to fly, to find again the well of delight! And there is a life at whose waters none of the rabble drinks with me.'

These passages are typical of Nietzsche's aristocratic

escapism, with its 'pathos of distance'. They show that psychological *tour de force* by means of which he conjured up his 'well of delight' in order to believe in it with all the visionary ardour of his nature. Unable to withstand the world around him, he *had* to create by contrast a dream world, a phantom 'before which one could bow the knee' without blushing. The uprooted romantic in him thus made an effort to triumph not only over his scorn but even over his doubts. The more so because his disposition was that of a born educator (in the sense of Socrates and Plato) endowed with a strong reformatory as well as prophetic vein. Urges and propensities such as these must needs deflect his philosophy from Schopenhauer's pessimistic resignation with which he had started, to his own dynamic 'will to power', destined to play a most conspicuous part in Nietzscheanism and to re-echo (in its grotesquely distorted aspects) even in modern politics.

### III

In 1865 Nietzsche, while still an undergraduate at Leipzig, picked up Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea*—a work which was to be decisive in the development of his thought. His own first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, is steeped in Schopenhauer, especially in Schopenhauer's doctrine that pain is the core of life and non-existence preferable to existence. But Nietzsche was too militant a romantic at heart to accept such a negation of the will. Even at that early period, he 'transvalued' Schopenhauer's nihilism by interpreting the world as an aesthetic phenomenon and a grandiose 'self-generating work of art'. We must conceal from ourselves the gloom and horror underlying all existence, and we can do this in a worthy manner only by means of the aesthetic illusion, by art. In that book he was particularly enthusiastic about Greek Tragedy and the art of Wagner, to whom he was tied at the time by friendship. Art raised to the status of a 'metaphysical comfort' was thus designed

to counteract the consequences of a pessimistic, that is purely negative, perception and interpretation of the world.

But the sting of negation was by no means removed. Nor was the awareness that the so-called aesthetic phenomenon was a self-delusion. However fascinating Nietzsche's view of Greek pessimism (camouflaged by the Olympian myth) may be, one feels that in *The Birth of Tragedy* he was anxiously trying to resolve certain disturbing problems of his own. Much later he himself stressed in his unfinished *Will to Power* that the 'conception of the world which lies in the background of this book is extraordinarily gloomy and unpleasant; among all the types of pessimism which have ever been known hitherto, none seems to have attained to this degree of malice. The contrast of a true and an apparent world is entirely absent here: there is but one world, and it is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive and without sense. . . . a world thus constituted is the true world. We are in need of lies in order to rise above this reality, this truth—that is to say, in order to live . . . That lies should be necessary to life is part and parcel of the terrible and questionable character of existence. Metaphysics, morality, religion, science—all these are regarded merely as different forms of falsehood: by means of them we are led to believe in life. Life must inspire confidence: the task which this imposes upon us is enormous. In order to solve this problem man must be a liar in his heart, but he must above all be an artist. And he is that. Metaphysics, religion, morality, science—all these things are but the offshoot of his will to art, to falsehood, to a flight from "truth", to a denial of "truth". This ability, this artistic capacity *par excellence* of man—thanks to which he overcomes reality with lies—is a quality which he has in common with all other forms of existence. He himself is, indeed, a piece of reality, of truth, of nature: how could he help also being a piece of genius and prevarication?'

Having canonized the art of this kind, young Nietzsche was in danger of accepting the aesthetic escape from both life and action as something final. Yet he defied such a temptation as soon as he realized that for an invalid this would be the line of least resistance, and therefore a proof of weakness. So in the next, i.e. second period of his activities, he turned away from all aesthetic illusions. He was now prepared to face the 'truth', however unpleasant—partly in order to test his own strength at a moment when his ailments were at their worst, and to prove thus worthy of his self-imposed mission. In this he was assisted by his temperament of an educator anxious to influence the whole of life. More than ever before, he considered the task of a philosopher (i.e. his own task) to be also that of a reformer in a deeper ethical sense. As early as 1873, which was one of his most pessimistic periods, he wrote to Malwida von Meysenbug that the world was 'now waiting for the man of *deeds*, who strips off the habit of centuries and sets a better example for posterity to follow'. In *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876) he completed this idea by claiming for philosophy the duty to decide 'how far things have acquired an unalterable stamp and form, and, once this question has been answered, unhesitatingly and courageously to proceed with the task of improving that part of the world which has been recognized as still susceptible to change'. And even in his early essay, *The Use and Abuse of History* (a blend of his own hero-worship and of Schopenhauer's cult of genius) he addressed his audience in the rather shrill language of his first period: 'One giant calls to the other across the waste spaces of time, and the high spirit-talk goes on undisturbed by the wanton noisy dwarfs who creep among them. The task of history is to be mediator between these, and even to give the motive and power to produce the great man.'

His tendency towards the ennobling (*Veredlung*) of the human species was fostered by two other factors. A

reaction against commercialism and the sordid Philistine meanness of the age was one of them, while the other was his interest in modern biology and in the possibilities of rearing a higher type of human species. Combined, they gradually led him to the ideal of the Superman, of which he gave such a magnificent portrait in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. It should be stressed, however, that this ideal did not come to him all at once, but germinated in his mind for years before it matured into his inspired *magnum opus*. Even Nietzsche's early interest in ancient Greece harboured his dream of rearing superior individuals. Thus in the unfinished work *We Philologists* (written in 1874) he spoke of his interest 'only in the relations of a people to the rearing of individual men, and among the Greeks the conditions were unusually favourable for the development of the individual. *With the help of favourable means great individuals might be reared who would be both different from and higher than those who heretofore have owed their existence to mere chance. Here we may still be hopeful.*'

Such a blend of ancient Greece, of eugenics and modified Darwinism on the part of Nietzsche was less strange than it looks. In spite of his deprecation of Darwin in particular, Nietzsche yet accepted certain issues of Darwinism. The modified principle of the Survival of the Fittest actually became—under the new label of the Will to Power—one of the cornerstones of Nietzsche's philosophy as well as sociology. And since the survival of the strong exceptional individual means a continuous fight for the maintenance and the increase of one's power in the struggle for existence, Nietzsche was driven to regard the figure of the warrior as being ideally suitable for the *élite* of which he dreamt. As he waged a simultaneous war with his age and with his disease he naturally clamoured for hardness and Spartan ruthlessness. 'I dream of a combination of men', he says in the above-mentioned work, 'who shall make no concessions, who

shall show no consideration, and who shall be willing to be called "destroyers".'

## IV

The word 'destroyers' was here directed primarily against that effete system of life which was devoid of purpose, of all distant tasks and ideals. In spite of his afflictions, or rather because of them, Nietzsche wanted to be on the side of life, that is of creative life, regardless of the price he had to pay for it. Schopenhauer's *will to exist* with its 'lazy pessimism' was therefore transformed by him into *will to power*—with the emphasis on *will* rather than on *power*. But once this was done, Nietzsche could not avoid that 'Promethean' attitude (he loved *colossal* words) which may easily lead to excesses of defiance, even to defiance for its own sake.

In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche paved the way for precisely such an attitude by his well-known interpretation of Prometheus. 'The presupposition of the Promethean myth', he says, 'is the transcendent value which a naïve humanity attaches to fire, as the Palladium of every ascending culture. That man, however, should dispose at will of this fire, and should not receive it only as a gift from heaven, as the igniting lightning or the warming solar flame, appeared to the contemplative primordial men as crime and robbery of the divine nature. And thus the first philosophical problem at once causes a painful, irreconcilable antagonism between men and God, and puts, as it were, a mass of rock at the gate of every culture. The best and highest that man can acquire he obtains by a crime, and must now in his turn take upon himself its consequences, namely: the whole flood of sufferings and sorrows with which the offended celestials *must* visit the nobly aspiring race of man. . . . What distinguishes the Aryan representation is the sublime view of *active sin* as the properly Promethean virtue, which suggests at the same time the ethical basis of pessimistic tragedy, as the

*justification* of human evil—of human guilt as well as the suffering incurred thereby.'

The above lines reflect the hidden Promethean strain in Nietzsche himself. But in order to obtain a clearer idea of its nature we must examine some of its other sources as well. And this brings us, once more, to the vagaries of his disease.

## IV

### THE 'ARTIFICE OF SELF-PRESERVATION'

#### I

THE real cause of the malady which eventually drove Nietzsche into insanity still remains somewhat obscure. His father, the Roeken pastor Karl Ludwig Nietzsche, died in 1848 from inflammation of the brain; but this does not help us much, since the pastor's illness and death are supposed to have been due to a fall when little Friedrich was already in his fourth year. A rather unexpected verdict is given, however, by Dr. Gaston Vorberg in his book '*Ueber Nietzsches Krankheit und Zusammenbruch*' (*Nietzsche's Illness and Collapse*) published in 1933. Dr. Vorberg attributes both Nietzsche's illness and his final catastrophe to syphilis. Among the records of the Jena lunatic asylum, where Nietzsche stayed for a while as a patient, the following laconic entry can be read: '1866. *Syphilitische Ansteckung*' (syphilitic infection).

If medicine is right, then quite a few aspects of Nietzsche's case may become clearer. In his day syphilis was regarded as almost incurable, and this alone would have been enough to make the sufferer mobilize his power of resistance on a scale as formidable as was the illness itself. His struggle for health would then certainly have amounted to a duel with fate in a literal sense. Yet whatever the origin of Nietzsche's disease is ultimately held to be, all we know is that even during the first years of his professorship at Basle University (obtained at the age of twenty-four) the young savant suffered terribly from headaches and a gradual weakening of his eyesight. The attacks increased so alarmingly that in 1879 he was compelled to resign his post, after which he wandered

over a large area of Europe in search of places that might be of some help to him, but in vain.

'I have resigned my professorship and am going to the mountains', he wrote to his publisher in May 1879. 'I am on the verge of despair, and there is hardly any hope left. My sufferings have been too great, too persistent.' He signed the letter, *A Half-blind Man*. In the same year he wrote to his friend, the struggling but unsuccessful composer Peter Gast: 'Now I am in the middle of my life and so "encircled by death" that it may be here any minute. Judging by the nature of my suffering I must count upon a *sudden* death through convulsions.' 'I am on the verge of despair', he complained (in Latin) to Professor Overbeck two years later. 'Suffering is crushing my life and my will. Oh, what months, what a summer I have gone through! I experienced as many physical torments as there were changes in the sky. Five times I invoked Death as my only physician. I hoped that yesterday would be my last day—hoped in vain.' And in a letter to Baron von Seydlitz (February 1888): 'It was not "proud silence" that kept my lips sealed to everyone all this time, but rather the humble silence of a sufferer who was ashamed of giving away the extent of his own pain. When an animal is ill it crawls into its cave—so does *la bête philosophe*. It is so seldom that a friendly voice comes my way. I am alone, absurdly alone, and in my relentless subterranean war against all that mankind has honoured and loved hitherto, I myself seem unwittingly to have become something of a cave, something concealed that can no longer be found even when it is a definite object of one's reach.'

The last letter with its 'cave' and 'subterranean war against all that mankind has hitherto honoured and loved', calls to one's mind Dostoevsky's cruel *Notes from the Underworld*, the French translation of which under the title of '*L'esprit souterrain*' Nietzsche had recommended only a few months before (13 March 1887) in a letter to

Overbeck. Yet isolated and suffering as he was, he still could ward off a collapse by fighting for a task, in the name of which he defied everything there was to defy, and most of all his own illness. This produced an inner tension strong enough to mobilize in sheer self-defence all his vitality as long as it lasted. And to make it last longer, he was practically compelled to pay more and more attention to that biological momentum which informed so great a part of his philosophy. The fact that his own life was endangered made Nietzsche turn his philosophy all the more readily into a defence of life as a whole. His quest for truth thus became increasingly a quest for health, and the two were often so intermixed as to be almost inseparable.

## II

Readers of Nietzsche are familiar with the passages in which the invalid philosopher—quite in the spirit of Kant—propounds the futility of all endeavours to ‘catch’ the *real* essence of things, since we find in them only what we ourselves have put into them. Or, as he contends, it is the habits of our senses that have ‘wrapped us up in the tissue of living sensations which in their turn crouch at the base of all judgments and “knowledge”—there are no means of exit or escape to the real world! We are like spiders in our webs, and whatever we may catch in them it will be only something that our web is capable of catching.’ On this premise alone, to say nothing of pressing personal reasons, Nietzsche would have felt inclined to abandon any such futile quest in favour of something more certain and nearer at hand. If the search for transcendental truth leads nowhere, then our duty is to dedicate our efforts to what is tangible and concrete—to life itself; to the defence and the intensification of life.

Once such a position has been adopted, one is likely to regard as important only that which fosters intense and

vigorous life. The principal thing is no longer to chase the inaccessible Truth, but to impose upon chaos as much regularity as our biological earthly existence requires. And since a proceeding of this kind, anyway, involves the risk of indulging in errors, we can at least draw a line between the life-bringing and the life-destroying errors. In Nietzsche's words: '*Truth is that kind of error without which a certain species cannot exist. The Value for life is ultimately decisive.*'

The distinction between true and false in its old metaphysical sense is thus obliterated. It all amounts to the question as to 'how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-rearing, and we are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions (to which synthetic judgments *a priori* belong) are the most indispensable to us; that without a recognition of logical fictions, without a constant counterfeiting of the world by means of numbers, man could not live—that the renunciation of false opinions would be a renunciation of life. *To recognize untruth as the condition of life*, that is certainly to impugn the traditional ideas of value in a dangerous manner, and a philosophy which ventures to do so is thereby alone placed beyond good and evil.' And again: 'According to my way of thinking, "truth" does not necessarily mean the opposite of error, but in the most fundamental cases merely the relation of different errors to each other. Thus one error might be older, deeper than another, perhaps altogether ineradicable, one without which organic creatures like ourselves could not exist.' In another aphorism Nietzsche even contends that behind the will to Truth in the old metaphysical sense there might be *ein verstecker Wille zum Tode* (a disguised will to death).

In this 'pragmatic' defence of Life, Nietzsche was naturally first concerned with his own personal life that was at stake all the time. And since philosophy was the only weapon he had at his disposal, he did his best to make it as effective as possible in both defence and attack.

But in order to do this with a good conscience, he first had to expose the official 'objective' philosophy as a comedy of self-interest; to show in fact that there was no such thing as a disinterested seeker after Truth for its own sake. Suspecting personal reasons—conscious or unconscious—behind it all, Nietzsche made the refutation of any cocksure transcendental truth a prerequisite of truthfulness itself. Hence his spleen against all canonized philosophers.

'That which causes philosophers to be regarded half distrustfully and half mockingly', he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'is not the oft repeated discovery how innocent they are—how often and easily they make mistakes and lose their way; in short, how childlike and childish they are—but that there is not enough honest dealing with them, whereas they all raise a loud and virtuous outcry when the problem of truthfulness is even hinted at in the remotest manner. They all pose as though their real opinions had been discovered and attained through the self-evolving of a cold, pure, divinely indifferent dialectic (in contrast to all sorts of mystics, who, fairer and more foolish, talk of inspiration). . . . The spectacle of the Tartuffery of old Kant, equally stiff and decent, with which he entices us into the dialectic by-ways that lead (more correctly, mislead) to his categorical "imperative"—makes us fastidious ones smile, and we find no small amusement in spying out the subtle tricks of old moralists and ethical preachers. Or, still more so, the hocus-pocus in mathematical form by means of which Spinoza has, as it were, clad his philosophy in mail and mask—in fact, the "love of *his* wisdom", to translate the term fairly and squarely—in order thereby to strike terror at once into the heart of the assailant who should dare to cast a glance at that invincible maiden, that Pallas Athene; how much personal timidity and vulnerability does this masquerade of a sickly recluse betray?'

Philosophy is thus reduced largely to a weapon, and a

very subtle one at times, in one's fight for self-preservation. Here, at any rate, Nietzsche's strategy became thoroughly Machiavellian. Like a Sophist, he adopted or else discarded certain views and ideas according to the needs of his physique and—frank as he was—made no secret of this. 'The snake that cannot cast his skin perishes. So too with those minds which are prevented from changing their views: they cease to be minds.' Suspicious of all firm convictions, Nietzsche was ready to cast his skin whenever such operation was strategically and vitally necessary. As a result, his work does not resemble philosophy in the traditional sense—it is rather a spontaneous process of ideas fluctuating in brilliant if somewhat bewildering outbursts. The phases of this process may have differed, yet all his inconsistencies and contradictions were united to some extent in the biological principle which underlies the whole of Nietzsche's strategy, so aptly styled by him as 'the artifice of self-preservation'.

One usually speaks of three distinct periods which mark the development of Nietzsche's thought. The first reveals him under the spell of Schopenhauer's metaphysics and pessimism. Highly apprehensive with regard to European culture, Nietzsche was already at this stage full of preoccupations characteristic of a romantic reformer and educator of men. He saw the ideal of humanity in the philosopher, the tragic artist and the saint. His cult of Richard Wagner was almost over-enthusiastic. His style was correspondingly solemn and grandiloquent. The chief works of this period were *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Thoughts out of Season*. The latter comprises the following essays: *David Friedrich Strauss* (1873) *The Use and Abuse of History* (1874), *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), and *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876).

Nietzsche's second period was, on the whole, a repudiation of the first. He suddenly became a 'free spirit'—

free from Wagner, from Schopenhauer, and from any romantic metaphysics in general. Now he valued science above art, and undertook a thorough analysis of our moral, religious and social values. His style, too, underwent a change. The two volumes of *Human-all-too-Human* (1878 and 1879-80) are written for the most part in terse aphorisms. This applies also to *The Dawn of Day* (1881) and *The Joyful Wisdom* (1881-2). Typical of this period was the admiration Nietzsche professed for Voltaire, in whom he welcomed a kindred 'free spirit'.

A further change came over Nietzsche during his third period—roughly between 1882 and 1888. Now he turned his back upon the analytical or dissecting second phase and revived a number of ideas characteristic of his first period. Yet he remained on that vitalist-biological ground in the name of which he definitely repudiated the whole of our humanistic and humanitarian tradition. His style and thought reached their perfection in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-5)—a work written by a philosopher, a maker of myths, a poet, a prophet and a law-giver in one. Great feats of style can be found also in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1885) and *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), while the hysterically exultant language of *The Wagner Case*, *The Twilight of Idols*, *The Anti-Christ* and *Ecce Homo* (all written in 1888) is a clear indication of the approaching catastrophe. *The Will to Power*, with its ambitiously projected scheme which was to give a kind of synthesis of his philosophical thought, remained unfinished.

These three phases abound in contradictions and 'falsehoods', but Nietzsche perpetrated them honestly, without Tartuffery. They were part and parcel of his 'artifice of self-preservation' at a time when any pre-conceived dogmatic convictions might have hampered the freedom of strategy demanded by his will to health. What mattered to him was not the difference between truth and falsehood, but the 'biological' benefit resulting from one

or the other. If downright falsehood promised to be more useful in this respect, he adopted it as the right thing at the moment, for 'after all the question is to what end falsehoods are perpetrated'.

Nietzsche never tired of reiterating that men of immutable convictions, according to which they act, are of no account whatever when difficult vital problems have to be tackled: 'Convictions are prisons. They never see far enough; they do not look down from a sufficient height; but in order to have any say in questions of value and non-value, a man must have five hundred convictions *beneath* him—behind him. . . . The great passion of a sceptic, the basis and power of his being, which is more enlightened and more despotic than he is himself, enlists all his intellect into its service; it makes him unscrupulous; it even gives him the courage to employ unholy means: in certain circumstances it even allows him convictions. Convictions as a *means*: much is achieved merely by means of a conviction. Great passion makes use of and consumes convictions, it does not submit to them—it knows that it is a sovereign power.'

### III

The above passage is but further evidence that to Nietzsche the problem of 'to be or not to be' mattered more than any stable philosophic truth or system. And since life means change and flux—that is continuous becoming, he did not hesitate to base his own philosophy on the same principle and to let 'immutable' theories take care of themselves. Thus he joined a tradition which goes at least as far back as Heraclitus. But such a course was again necessitated by Nietzsche's 'artifice of self-preservation', which alone is enough to explain most of his apparent eccentricities. Why indeed should he not indulge in any point of view which promised some strategic advantage, however temporary? Was he not free to invoke to-day the artist against the thinker, and

to-morrow the thinker against the artist if necessary? He even did not mind eulogizing the religious man in order to deride the complacency of the scientist or of a shallow unbeliever. In Nietzsche's own words a 'philosopher who has made the tour of many states of health, and is always making it anew, has also gone through just as many philosophies; he really *cannot* do otherwise than transform his condition on every occasion into the most ingenious posture and position—this art of transformation is philosophy'.

So Nietzsche, as a matter of strategy, instinctively adopted the position most likely to call up the vitality he needed to counter his own diseased and decaying physique. Fully aware of his condition, he was, as a rule, also the best judge as to what kind of 'philosophic' tonic was able to sustain his strength. In a letter to Georg Brandes, dated 10 April 1888, he confessed with candour that his most cheerful book, *The Dawn of Day*, had been written 'in a winter of incredible misery at Geneva, away from doctors, friends and relatives. The book is a sort of dynamo-meter for me: I wrote it with a minimum of health and strength.' In December of the same year he made an even more startling avowal to the musician Hans von Bülow—the first husband of Cosima Wagner: 'I will make no mention of the dangerous nature of my emotions, but this I must say: the altered manner in which I think and feel, and which has been expressed even in my writings during the last six years, has sustained me in life and almost *made* me quite healthy. What do I care if my friends say that my present attitude of a "free spirit" is an eccentric pose, a *resolve* made as it were with clenched teeth, wrung by force and imposed upon my true inclinations? So be it, let all this be my "second nature", but I will yet prove that it is only this second nature that has enabled me to become possessed of my first nature.'

Deliberate self-deception as a means of directing his

will along a defined channel, thus became one of his stratagems, but again with reservations. He saw the inconsistencies inherent in such a method, and actually defended them in the preface to the second edition of his *Human-all-too-Human* (1886) against possible reproaches. 'Supposing', he asked, 'that I were reproached with good reasons, what do *you* know, what *could* you know, as to how much artifice of self-preservation, how much rationality and higher protection there is in such self-deception—and how much falseness I still require in order to allow myself again and again the luxury of *my* sincerity? . . . In short, I still live; and life, in spite of ourselves, demands illusions, it *lives* by illusions.'

This 'artifice of self-preservation', requiring continuous vigilance and a series of strategic ruses, was bound to confer quite an exceptional meaning upon the various phases of his malady. All the same, a philosophy born out of his will to health and so much affected by that will, would perhaps have been narrowed down to a matter of mere eugenics, food and hygiene—but for Nietzsche's profound reformatory zeal. He may have raged against convictions as distinct from free opinions, yet a time came when he, too, began to clamour that '*there should be no doubt* at all concerning all essential values'. So firm convictions of a sort were necessary after all to the defence of life itself.

In his conception of the *Will to Power* he even set up something of a dogma—a 'biological' dogma of his own—in which he was the more anxious to believe the more he wanted to counteract the 'decadence' he had set out to fight. It was here that his warrior ideal, full of hardness, came into its own. Yet again it would be misleading to take Nietzsche's utterances about hardness invariably at their face value. They, too, were often masks, hiding the opposite of what they pretended to be. So it is well to remember his warning (in *Beyond Good and Evil*) that 'every deep thinker is more afraid of being understood

than misunderstood. The latter perhaps wounds his vanity; but the former wounds his heart, his sympathy, which always says, oh why would *you* also have as hard a time of it as I have?' Which brings us to some further difficulties he had to cope with and to hide underneath the many masks provided by his philosophy.

V  
SELF-INQUISITION

I

'APART from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the reverse of such a creature. That energy with which I sentenced myself to absolute solitude, and to a severance from all those conditions of life to which I had grown accustomed; my discipline of myself, and my refusal to allow myself to be pampered, to be tended hand and foot, to be doctored—all this betrays the absolute certainty of my instincts respecting what at that time was most needful to my health. This double thread of experience, this means to two worlds that seem so far asunder, finds in every detail its counterpart in my own nature; I am my own complement; I have a second sight, as well as a first. And perhaps I also have a third sight.'

Nietzsche wrote these words in his last book, *Ecce Homo*; but he could have written them at any time, since the theme of a struggle between a 'decadent' and the 'reverse of such a creature' runs through the whole of his work. Each of his books marks a certain stage reached in the duel between the two antagonists. No sooner had Nietzsche discovered a 'decadent' trait within himself than he invented an antidote. The heavier the burden of his disease, the louder sounded his praise of health—often of rude, animal health. His paeans to strength were not merely a cover for his physical distress, but served to conceal also his shyness and a sentimentality of which he was secretly ashamed. His biography provides a number of data to this effect. It is known, for example, that when in love with his Russian acquaintance, Lou Salomé, he was too timid to propose to her, and asked his friend Paul Rée to do so on his behalf—with rather

disastrous results to his friendship and his love. His praise of hardness or even cruelty was in essence an intellectual compensation for his innate gentleness. As a matter of fact, he was so offended by actual cruelty that when in Turin, on 3 January 1889, he saw a coachman whipping an old horse, he sobbingly embraced the animal and then swooned. Even his 'will to power' was but another compensation demanded by his helplessness as an invalid. And whatever his theoretical pronouncements, in practice he could be cruel only towards himself and never towards others.

Nietzsche's friendship and subsequent quarrel with Richard Wagner are particularly significant in this respect. He often said that the years of friendship with Wagner had been the happiest in his life. Yet after a visit to Bayreuth in 1876 (where Wagner played the part of a spectacular 'glamour boy') he suddenly gave him up without any regard for his own feelings. This breach, as well as his later savage attacks upon Wagner's music, inspired a number of rumours and misrepresentations. Some people saw base motives in the rift, or even jealousy on the part of Nietzsche, who happened to be something of a frustrated musician and composer. Yet a more likely explanation is the view that his attacks on Wagner were first of all attacks against those 'Wagnerian' propensities which he felt within himself and now regarded as decadent. In October 1868, i.e. some eight years before his quarrel with Wagner, Nietzsche wrote to his friend Erwin Rohde: 'My pleasure in Wagner is much the same as my pleasure in Schopenhauer—the ethical air, the redolence of Faust, and also the Cross—death and the tomb.' In a word, his delight in Wagner's music was that of a romantic decadent. It would certainly be difficult to imagine a more enthusiastic panegyric to the great maestro than Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. But having reached the conviction that in serving Wagner he had paid homage to decadence itself, he at once asserted

his will to health by turning against Wagner in the most resolute manner imaginable.

Nietzsche's assault on Wagner, culminating in *The Wagner Case* and *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, was thus a matter of strategy on the part of Nietzsche the philosopher against Nietzsche the invalid and 'decadent'. In his affliction Nietzsche could not but be aware that he needed Wagner's music as a soothing narcotic. The temptation to indulge in it was made even stronger by his personal attachment to the composer who had fascinated him more than any other mortal. So he had either to break the spell or be broken by it, and he knew it. He chose to break it. But the real motive behind such a step can be gauged from this line in the letter he wrote to Peter Gast on 25 July 1882: 'With true horror did I realize how closely related I was to Wagner.' And on 3 February 1883, he confessed to the same correspondent: 'I am better, and even believe that Wagner's death was the most substantial relief that could have been given me just now. It was hard to be for six years an opponent of the man whom I had most revered on earth, and my constitution is not coarse enough for such a position.'

## II

This deliberate hardness against some of his strongest sympathies and inclinations formed the very basis of Nietzsche's auto-therapy. Whenever he detected in himself any symptoms of weakness such as pessimism, despondence, the wish to be 'soothed', a craving for rest and resignation, he immediately took the requisite counter-measures of the severest kind. There were times when he toyed with his own 'decadence' like a cat playing with a mouse before killing it. But on the other hand such inner warfare kept him on the alert and often stimulated the whole of his remaining strength. 'War has always been the great policy of all spirits who have penetrated

too far into themselves, or have grown too deep; a wound stimulates the recuperative powers.'

Feeding, after each wound, on his own recuperative powers, Nietzsche willy-nilly directed his intellect into what he calls self-inquisition. Always ready to pounce on any negative feature in his make-up, he became his own sentinel and enemy. The war within his split consciousness thus grew increasingly fierce.

'But the worst enemy thou canst meet', says Zarathustra, 'wilt thou be to thyself always: thou waylayest thyself in caverns and forests;

'Thou lonesome one, thou goest thy way to thyself!  
And past thyself and thy seven devils leadeth the way!

'A heretic wilt thou be to thyself, and a wizard and a soothsayer, and a doubter, and a reprobate, and a villain.

'Ready must thou be to burn thyself in thine own flame; how canst thou become new if thou hast not first become ashes!'

In his practice of this kind Nietzsche was not always eager to come to terms with the tendency so pronounced in *The Birth of Tragedy*. His tactics demanded now and then a rigidly honest realism, and he had to be ready to face the worst aspects of life, while refusing any comforts—metaphysical, romantic or what not; but inconsistencies were part and parcel of his method. A time came, in fact, when he began to look upon the hardest aspects of reality as a test of his own strength and endurance, for which purpose he was almost ready to welcome them. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he suddenly asserts (in glaring contradiction to some of his previous utterances) that a 'thing could be true, although it were in the highest degree injurious and dangerous; indeed, the fundamental constitution of existence might be such that one would be overwhelmed by a full knowledge of it—so that the strength of a mind might be measured by the amount of "truth" it could endure—or, to speak more plainly, by the extent to which it *required* truth attenuated,

veiled, sweetened and falsified'. In the *Will to Power* he even goes so far as to state that 'philosophy, as I have understood it, and lived it up to the present, is a voluntary quest for the repulsive and atrocious aspects of existence. . . . How much truth can a spirit endure? *For how much truth is it daring enough?* This for me was a real measure of value.' And again, 'The kind of *experimental* philosophy which I am living even anticipates the possibility of the most fundamental nihilism on principle.' To which he immediately adds: 'By this I do not mean that it remains standing at a negation. It would rather attain to the very reverse.'

This suggests a further important conclusion, since it is here that we arrive at Nietzsche's conception of the 'tragic man' as distinct from, or even the opposite of, a mere pessimist. The difference lies not only in their power of endurance but in the direction of their will. Whereas the pessimist runs away from reality to all sorts of 'comforts' or else falls a prey to nihilistic negation, the 'tragic man' directs his will towards an affirmative attitude with regard to life, *in spite of all*. He is ready to part with all wishful thinking, with his fondest desires and illusions, if this be demanded by the knowledge of life and reality as they are. He, moreover, sees in such knowledge the chief prerequisite of man's inner growth, especially when this process is accompanied by pain and suffering. 'The seeker after knowledge operates as an artist and glorifier of cruelty, in that he compels his spirit (*Geist*) to perceive *against* its own inclination and often enough against the wishes of his heart: he forces it to say Nay, where he would like to affirm, love and adore; indeed every instance of taking a thing profoundly and fundamentally is a violation, an intentional injuring of the fundamental will of the spirit, which instinctively aims at appearance and superficiality; even in every desire for knowledge there is a drop of cruelty.' A knower of this kind is also a self-knower, since we extract from existence

only the secrets we are able to pass through our own experience. But the price one pays for this is 'suffering'. A self-knower thus often becomes a self-torturer, a 'self-hangman'—)

Mid a hundred mirrors  
 False to thyself,  
 Mid a hundred memories  
 Uncertain  
 Weary at every wound,  
 Shivering at every frost,  
 Throttled in thine own noose,  
 Self-knower!  
 Self-Hangman!

Thou soughtest the heaviest burden—  
 So foundest thyself,  
 And canst not shake thyself off. . . .

### III

We thus arrive at the opposite end of all 'metaphysical comforts', and the pain which such a 'self-hangman' cannot or even does not want to shake off may and does pass into pride. The very amount of endurance may here become the measure of one's pride, especially when one's struggle is also considered a defence of life as a whole. Nietzsche, who looked upon his own struggle with himself in this light, could not but interpret his personal case symbolically. In identifying his personal ailments with those of his age, he was logically compelled to apply also his personal remedies to it: to prove as it were through *himself* that mankind, too, can still be saved. For this reason alone was he now less than ever entitled to falter and to capitulate, no matter how great the trials he had to endure. Any weakness or cowardice would have been a betrayal. And as for suicide, this would have been the worst sin against the life he was called upon to save and to affirm in the teeth of the greatest trials imaginable.

The state of a mind resolved to persevere in such a situation can be guessed. But this is how Nietzsche himself describes it: 'The formidable tension of the intellect that wishes to hold its own against pain shows everything that one looks upon in a new light, and the inexpressible charm of this new light is often powerful enough to withstand all the seductiveness of suicide and to make the continuation of life seem very desirable to the sufferer. His mind scornfully turns against the warm and comfortable dream-world in which the healthy man moves about thoughtlessly, and he thinks with contempt of the noblest and most cherished illusions in which he formerly indulged. He experiences delight in conjuring up this contempt as if from the depths of hell, and thus inflicting the bitterest sufferings upon his soul; it is by this counterpoise that he bears up against physical suffering—he feels that such a counterpoise is essential! . . . Our pride revolts as it never did before, it experiences an incomparable charm in defending life against such a tyrant as suffering and against all the insinuations of this tyrant, who would fain urge us to give evidence against life—we are taking the part of life in the face of this tyrant. In this state of mind we take up a bitter stand against all pessimism in order that it may not appear to be a consequence of our condition, and thus humiliate us as conquered ones. The charm of being just in our own judgment was also never greater than now; for now this justice is a triumph over ourselves and over so irritated a state of mind that unfairness of judgment might be excused—but we will not be excused; it is now, if ever, that we wish to show that we need no excuse. We pass through downright orgies of pride.'

These orgies of pride kept growing in Nietzsche, especially from *The Joyful Wisdom* onwards, and made him regard all craving for comfort and happiness as a high road towards spiritual slavery. His ideal definitely became the warrior as he would like to see him: free, brutally

virile and full of contempt for ease or comfort. 'The man who has won his freedom', he says in *The Twilight of Idols*, 'tramples ruthlessly upon that contemptible kind of comfort which tea-grocers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats worship in their dreams. The free man is a *warrior*. How is freedom measured in individuals as well as in nations? According to the resistance which has to be overcome, according to the pains which it costs to remain *uppermost*. The highest type of free men would have to be sought where the greatest resistance has continually to be overcome.'

## IV

Nietzsche, in whom this warrior-ideal had developed through pain and suffering, could not help postulating, by analogy, pain and suffering—with the resulting inner tension—as something desirable or even necessary for mankind at large. This is why he was so fond of ridiculing the utilitarian slogan about the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. In his vocabulary, hedonism was but another name for decay. Hence his challenge to those propensities, whether Christian, democratic, or humanitarian in general, the aim of which is to diminish or even to do away with suffering altogether.

Nietzsche is particularly outspoken on this point in *Beyond Good and Evil*, from which the following passage can be quoted as an illustration: 'You want, if possible—and there is no more foolish "if possible"—to do away with suffering; and we?—it really seems that *we* would rather have it increased and made worse than it has ever been before! Well-being as you understand it is certainly not a goal: it seems to us an *end*, a condition which at once renders man ludicrous and contemptible—and makes his destruction *desirable*! The discipline of great suffering—know ye not that it is only this discipline that has produced all the elevations of humanity hitherto? . . . In man, *creature* and *creator* are united; in man there is not

only matter, shred, excess, clay, mire, folly, but there is also the creator, the sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divinity of the spectator, and the seventh day—do ye not understand the contrast? And that *your* sympathy for the 'creature in man' applies to that which has to be fashioned, bruised, forged, stretched, roasted, annealed, refined—to that which must necessarily suffer, and is *meant* to suffer? And our sympathy is the worst enemy of all pampering and enervation? So it is sympathy *against* sympathy.'

✓ In this manner Nietzsche's defence of life actually became only another form of cruelty towards life as it is. Instead of diminishing suffering, he wanted to organize it; to turn it into a vigorous discipline and self-discipline. But at the same time he was also on the look-out for something which would confer a meaning upon such hard existence and would turn it into a source of a new heroic faith capable of moving mountains. Nietzsche found the only worthy object of such a faith in his superman as presented in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. /

## VI

### ON THE MARGINS OF THE SUPERMAN

#### I

ONE of Nietzsche's salient features was that asceticism from the other end by means of which he fought not against the body, but for and on behalf of the body. Spurred on by his own will-to-health and by the biological science of the day, he suppressed in himself without mercy all such inclinations as might have hampered him in this struggle. His defence of life thus also became a defence of the body against any encroachments on the part of the spirit and of the world 'beyond'.

'But the awakened one, the knowing one saith: "Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body!"

'The sick and perishing—it was they who despised the body, and the earth, and invented the heavenly world, and the redeeming blood-drops: but even those sweet sad poisons they borrowed from the body and the earth!

'From their misery they sought escape, and the stars were too remote for them. Then they sighed: "Oh that there were heavenly paths by which to steal into another existence and into happiness!" Then they contrived for themselves their by-paths and bloody draughts!

'Beyond the sphere of their body and this earth they now fancied themselves transported, these ungrateful ones. But to what did they owe the convulsions and raptures of their transport? To their body and this earth.'

It was for the sake of the body and the earth that Nietzsche voiced the gospel of the superman. The name itself was probably taken by him from Goethe. Its biological implications, on the other hand, he derived largely from Darwinism, which was much in vogue at

the time. If, with Darwin's blessing, man has descended from the ape, then why should he not be followed by a still higher species in the same manner as the ape was followed by man? The conclusion was logical. But Darwin's idea was modified by Nietzsche and in a way corrected by him in that doctrine of the Will to Power which became the basis of Nietzscheanism.

According to the latter, all that comes from strength and elevates life is good; all that comes from weakness is bad. The first prerequisite, therefore, is to be strong enough not to succumb in the general struggle for survival, in which (as Nietzsche bluntly puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil*) conquest and exploitation 'belong to the nature of the living being as a primary organic function; it is a consequence of the intrinsic will to power, which is precisely the will to life. Granting that as a theory, this is a novelty—as a reality it is the fundamental fact of all history: let us be so far honest towards ourselves!' Equipped with such a notion of modified Darwinism and, together with it, his old idea of the philosopher as a teacher and law-giver of mankind, Nietzsche now came forward as the prophet of the superman. †

## II

The superman, as presented in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, combined for a while Nietzsche's most divergent or even hostile impulses in a powerful focus. The evolutionary biologist exults here side by side with the romantic dreamer and metaphysician. Nietzsche the visionary and the poet collaborates with Nietzsche the moralist and the thinker. The merciless destroyer and the breaker of values works hand in hand with the stern law-giver; while the laughing Dionysian dancer seems to be on the best of terms with the solemn prophet. Nietzsche's aesthetic-didactic, religious and eugenic propensities meet in this book which, apart from being a literary and philosophic masterpiece in one is also a grandiose compensation

myth, conjured up from the recesses of the unconscious (the 'archetype' of the Wise Old Man) and charged with all the verve of a religious temperament unbound.

*Thus Spake Zarathustra* is decidedly one of the great religious-ethical masterpieces, however much it may decry our religious creeds as well as our conventional ethics. Each vital religion chooses for its symbol an ideal Man whose image serves as a 'joyful message' and a way of life for those willing to follow him. Christ and Buddha are the highest symbols of this kind. But there may be other types and ideals of perfection. Among the moderns, Nietzsche alone dared to set up such an ideal on a big scale. Yet prompted by his personal needs, this ideal, instead of transcending mere biology, on the contrary, urged him to reduce everything to a biological plane, thus ultimately undermining as it were his own objective. For however lofty one's aspirations, biology in these matters cannot escape from 'zoology', the voice of which sooner or later tends to prevail.

*Thus Spake Zarathustra* embodies the highest aspirations still possible on the plane of biology ennobled by a sincere concern about the fate of man and mankind. More than anywhere else, Nietzsche here tried to find an antidote against 'decadence', on behalf of—what he calls—the ascending type of life. In his survey of the causes of modern nihilism (in *The Will to Power*) he stressed rather sweepingly two factors in particular as being responsible for our decay: (1) '*The higher species is lacking*, i.e. the species whose inexhaustible fruitfulness and power would uphold our belief in Man (think only of what is owed to Napoleon—almost all the higher hopes of this century).' (2) '*The inferior species* (herd, "mass", "society") is forgetting modesty, and inflating its needs into *cosmic* and *metaphysical* values. In this way all life is vulgarized: for inasmuch as the *mass* of mankind rules, it tyrannizes over the *exceptions*, so that these lose their belief in themselves and become *Nihilists*.' He furthermore

identified nihilism with pessimism, the chief source of which was, according to him, physiological exhaustion. Seeing the only remedy in bodily fitness combined with an active and purposefully directed will, he remained in the charmed circle of biology even when his impulses were of a different and higher order. In his endeavour to set up a table of values based on this 'new' orientation, he was of course anxious to stress first of all the fundamental difference between his own theory of Will to Power and that of Schopenhauer's Will to Existence which, as we know, had once provided Nietzsche with a philosophic starting-point.

'He certainly did not hit the truth who shot at it the formula: "Will to Existence": that will doth not exist!

'For what is not, cannot will: that, however, which is in existence—how could it still strive for existence!

'Only where there is life is there also will: not, however, Will to Life but—so I teach thee—Will to Power!'

Yet as far as humanity is concerned, he does not make it clear whether such Will to Power operates as an independent agent, or as a predetermined tool of Necessity, or as a kind of Bergsonian *élan vital*. Nietzsche often gives the impression of wavering between these three attitudes, favouring now one, then another—to the greater confusion of an unprepared reader. What he demanded unconditionally was, however, an abundance of vitality and a will—aiming at the highest and at the same time hardest goal, attainable on that biological plane where there is scarcely any room either for our current notions of humanitarianism or for those of Christian goodness and pity. He made this point clear enough, clearer than any other aspect of his teaching.

'People hitherto have not had the least doubt in rating a "good man" as of higher worth than a "bad man", of higher worth for the advancement, utility, and benefit of man generally (including the future man)', he reasons in his *Genealogy of Morals*. 'What if there should be a

symptom of retrogression in the "good man", and likewise a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, by means of which the present perhaps *lives at the cost of the future*? No doubt more comfortably, less dangerously, but also in an inferior style, more meanly? So that morality itself would be to blame, if a *supreme degree of power and splendour* of the human type, possible in itself, should never be realized; so that morality itself would be the danger of dangers? And in one of his last books (*The Twilight of Idols*) he sums up his attitude as follows: 'Our mollification of morals—this is my cry; this if you will is my *innovation*—is the outcome of our decline; conversely, hardness and terribleness in morals may be the result of a surplus of life. When the latter state prevails, much is dared, much is challenged, and much is also *squandered*. That which formerly was simply the salt of life would now be our *poison*. To be indifferent—even this is a form of strength; for that likewise we are too senile, too decrepit; our morality of fellow-feeling, against which I was the first to raise a finger of warning, that which might be called *moral impressionism*, is one symptom the more of the excessive physiological irritability which is peculiar in everything decadent. That movement which attempted to introduce itself in a scientific manner on the shoulders of Schopenhauer's morality of pity—a very sad attempt!—is in essence the movement of decadence in morality. Strong ages and noble cultures see something contemptible in pity, in the "love of one's neighbour", and in a lack of egotism and self-esteem. Ages should be measured according to their *positive forces*; valued by this standard, that prodigal and fateful age of the Renaissance appears as the last *great* age, while we moderns, with all our anxious care of ourselves and love of our neighbours, with all our unassuming virtues of industry, equity, and scientific method—with our lust of collection, of economy and of mechanism—represent a *weak* age.'

Here, if anywhere, one can see the workings of a

biological *Weltanschauung*. It was under its spell that Nietzsche revelled in detecting the symptoms of decadence in all the aspects of contemporary life, especially in that Christian-democratic 'herd-morality' (as he called it) in which he saw only a tendency to protect the quantity of the species Man at the expense of its quality. In its attempts to undermine the biological excellence of man he saw that sort of cunningly organized weakness which, in his opinion, was the most blatant expression of the life-denying instinct, parading as a virtue and a moral imperative. Already in *The Joyful Wisdom* he came to the conclusion that our modern European 'disguises himself in morality because he has become a sick, sickly and crippled animal, who has good reasons for being "tame", because he is almost an abortion, an imperfect, weak and clumsy thing. It is not the fierceness of the beast of prey that finds moral disguise necessary, but the gregarious animal, with its profound mediocrity, anxiety and ennui.' Whence it follows that all our current morality is 'a sort of counter-movement opposing Nature's endeavours to arrive at a *higher type*. Its effects are: mistrust of life in general (in so far as its tendencies are felt to be immoral); hostility towards the senses (in so much as the highest values are felt to be opposed to the higher instincts); degeneration and self-destruction of "higher natures", because it is precisely in them that the conflict becomes conscious.'

### III

As a contrast to such 'taming' morals, Nietzsche devised a most rigorous system for rearing an *élite* of humanity. His aim was to mobilize all those biological and vitalist forces which could still lead, perhaps, to a stronger species of man. He did not shrink from the tacit implication that biological excellence may often be dangerously near the notorious 'blond beast'—even in its unsublimated shape.] In his notes to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche actually pondered upon all sorts of

suitable eugenic recipes. In one of them he enumerates rules such as these: 'A new nobility, the result of breeding. Feasts celebrating the foundation of families. The day divided up afresh; bodily exercises for all ages. *Agon* (rivalry) as a principle. The love of the sexes as a contest around the principle in becoming and coming. Ruling will be taught and practised, its hardness as well as its mildness. As soon as one faculty is acquired in a masterly manner, another one must be striven after. We must let ourselves be taught by the evil, and allow them the opportunity for a contest. We must make use of the degenerate. The right of punishment will consist in this, that the offender may be used as an experimental subject (in dietetics): this is the consecration of punishment, that one man be used for the highest needs of a future being.'<sup>1</sup>

Anxious to rear not 'good' but powerful men, Nietzsche thought in terms of the inner and outer tension between the greatest antitheses imaginable. One of his tenets was that 'with every degree of man's growth towards greatness and loftiness, he also grows downwards into the depth and into the terrible; we should not desire the one without the other—or better still: the more fundamentally we desire the one, the more completely we shall achieve the other.' As a contrast to the gradual softening of modern Europeans, Nietzsche even found it desirable that some sort of 'Promethean barbarians' should force their way into our present-day civilization; 'barbarians coming from above and not from below—thoroughly conquering and ruling natures in search of the material they could mould'. Such a biological *élite* would in the end be entitled to look upon the rest of mankind, upon the 'many-too-many', as their slaves and treat them accordingly.

Building up on these premises, Nietzsche came to the conclusion (partly under the Greek influence, especially

<sup>1</sup> It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that Hitler's Nazis adopted (and adapted) this principle in some of their concentration camps—with the ghastliest results ever recorded in history.

that of Theognis) that there were born masters and born slaves. So he postulated an aristocratic class whose fundamental belief ought to be that 'society is *not* allowed to exist for its own sake, but only as a foundation and a scaffolding, by means of which a select class of beings may be able to elevate themselves to their higher duties, and in general to a higher *existence*'. For this reason he demanded that there should be two opposite sets of values: the ascending one for the ruling masters, and the other—the descending one—for the ruled 'herd'. Such was, according to him, the basic relationship between human beings—a relationship ordained by Nature herself. But having once adopted this view, Nietzsche was quite willing to put up with the herd-morality, provided the latter was confined to the 'herd' only. He even found such a state of things desirable in so far as it procured for the masters the material on which they could exercise their will to power as on their own opposites. While violently struggling against decadence, he thus toyed with the idea that a process of decay among the masses was not only desirable but even necessary—as a kind of manure required by the growth of a 'higher' *élite*.

It was on this basis that Nietzsche reversed the values of Christianity, of democracy and of humanism in general. He postulated that man as he is should be sacrificed to the man of the future without mercy and without reserve. He did not shrink even from gruesome methods, provided these would foster the supra-human ideal of his own choice. Oblivious of the fact that on a mere biological plane there can be no strict dividing line between supra-human and sub-human, Nietzsche often and as if willy-nilly confused the two. Hence he objected to the socialists, for example, who believed that 'circumstances and social combinations could be devised which would put an end to all vice, illness, prostitution and poverty'. According to him, the abolition of these evils was neither possible nor desirable, since they belonged and must belong to all

periods of human history. Where there is growth there must also be refuse and decaying matter, for such is the law of vital processes. The highest culture and the most abject corruption and decay are parallel phenomena. They are necessary to each other. Perhaps they even condition one another.

Along this path of reasoning Nietzsche was logically compelled to advocate the co-existence of ascending and descending (that is, decadent) values, regulated by the principle of hierarchy or, as he puts it, by the order of rank. 'My philosophy aims at a new *order of rank*', he says in *The Will to Power*: 'not an individualist morality. The spirit of the herd should rule within the herd—but not beyond it: the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their actions, as do also the independent ones or the beasts of prey.'

And the standard of values? It is again one of biological fitness and power. 'The modicum of power which you represent decides your rank: all the rest is cowardice!' But such a reply reminds one of a Prussian general mustering his forces for a battle. Carried away by his idea of hierarchy and power, Nietzsche never tired of repeating, in his habitual sweeping manner, that great cultures have sprung up, so far, only in those communities which were founded on exploitation, on tyranny or even slavery—such as prevailed in ancient Greece, for instance. At times he nevertheless made concessions and seemed to vacillate between the principle of exploitation and that of co-operation. There were moments when he was inclined to reconcile the two. Or rather, (in his anti-democratic campaign he began to look upon hardship and suffering as a privilege reserved only for the pioneers of the ascending life. As for the 'good' masses, they should be spared the trials of the elect. Why not make them contented and happy, but on one condition: that they should keep their decadent 'Christian' morality only to themselves, thereby upholding the order of rank, so dear

to Nietzsche. 'I have declared war', he says, 'on the anaemic Christian ideal (together with what is closely related to it), but only to put an end to its tyranny and clear the way for other *ideals*, for *more robust* ideals. . . . The continuance of Christian ideals belongs to the most desirable of desiderata: if only for the sake of the ideals which wish to take their stand beside it and perhaps above it—they must have opponents, and strong ones, too—in order to grow strong themselves. . . . The necessity of *cleaving gulfs*, of distance, of the order of rank, is therefore imperative; but not the necessity of retarding the process mentioned above.'

## IV

How clearly can one perceive in all these harangues the voice of a patient determined to fight for the health of his own body by means of the most desperate discipline required by the strategy of the moment. But even here his essentially idealistic and reformatory temperament helped him to go beyond mere personal considerations. Having identified his own case with that of mankind at large, he now more than ever wanted to fight weakness, pessimism and exhaustion not only within his own body, but within that of Europe; of the whole humanity.

'I teach people', he says in *The Will to Power*, 'to say Nay in the face of all that makes for weakness and exhaustion.

'I teach people to say Yea in the face of all that makes for strength, that preserves strength and justifies the feeling of strength.'

Considering himself a physician of his own ailments and of those of mankind, he magnified the task undertaken by him to a degree where his personal suffering became inseparable from the great role he was called upon to play in the world. He was in fact ready to welcome any suffering in order to prove thereby worthy of his role and grow stronger through his ever-increasing

resistance. He who wants to cure, to lead, and to rule others, must first prove that he is suitable for such a task, and he can do this only through victories over himself.

“The terrible task of a ruler who educates himself: the kind of man and people over which he will rule must be forecast in him: it is in himself, therefore, that he must first become a ruler. /

“The great educator, like nature, must elevate obstacles in order that these may be overcome.”

His personal suffering could thus best be countered by an over-personal goal of titanic dimensions—a goal which made his own tragedy appear on a height lofty enough to increase his vitality, his pride, as well as his defiance. As he himself wrote to his sister Elisabeth in August 1883: “The whole meaning of the terrible suffering to which I was exposed lies in the fact that I was torn away from an estimate of my life-task which was not only false but a hundred times *too low*. And since by nature I belong to the most modest of men, some violent means was necessary to recall me to myself.” His new life-task was summed up by him in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

## VII NIETZSCHE AND RELIGION

### I

NOWHERE is the inner split in Nietzsche more evident than in matters of religion. In this respect, too, his conscious attitude was entirely different from his unconscious propensities and his inherited instincts. It is common knowledge that Nietzsche's father was a pastor and that several generations of his ancestors had followed the same vocation. As a boy he was nicknamed by his comrades *der kleine Pastor* (the little pastor)—a hint that even at that age he intended to follow the example of his father. According to his sister's testimony, Nietzsche was a very pious child and gave many a thought to religious questions, which, as she puts it, he was always anxious to convert into practice. Among the poems he wrote in the winter of 1863-4, while still a pupil at Pforta, there is one under the title *To the Unknown God* which speaks for itself:

Once more, before my vision turns  
To strange horizons, untried lands,  
To Thee I lift my lonely hands  
For whom my spirit yearns,  
To whom, within its ultimate shrine,  
Are solemn altars dedicate,  
While yet I wait  
The summoning voice to claim me Thine.  
Thereon is writ in characters ablaze  
The deep-cut legend, 'To the Unknown God';  
For His am I, although my feet have trod,  
Even to this hour, in foul and miry ways,  
Yea, I will know Thee, great Unknown,  
Who shakest the foundations of my soul,  
Urgent and clamorous as the thunder's roll,  
Eternally apart, eternally my own,  
Yea, I will know Thee—I will serve Thee.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Rose Fyleman.

On entering Bonn University, Nietzsche first registered for theology, which he gave up in the second term in order to study classical philology under Professor Ritschl. At that time he was still under the influence of German Protestantism. Gradually the vision of ancient Hellas on the one hand and the spell of Schopenhauer's philosophy on the other became such an overpowering inner experience with him that he tried to blend, or rather mix the two. Even the romantic 'Cross' (mentioned in his letter to Erwin Rohde in 1868), let alone the cult of Wagner, had its say. Then came the biological outlook which he could not so easily reconcile either with his romanticism or with his inherited Christian religion. Yet even after having condemned Christianity wholesale, he still retained his profound religious instinct which played havoc with him on so many occasions, and most of all in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, reminiscent of the style and language in Luther's Bible. Moreover, the very name of Zarathustra would hardly have been adopted by Nietzsche had he not felt a certain affinity with that old Persian sage and religious founder of cosmic duality.

Nietzsche's own ideal of a philosopher was somewhat suggestive of a founder of religion. And however much he asserted his personal self and will, his innate propensity towards religious universalism broke through repeatedly and in full measure. If ever there was a man endowed with a great but repressed capacity for warm, all-embracing love, that man was Nietzsche. In the jottings for his *Dawn of Day*, we find the following characteristic passage: 'All the time I am dominated by the idea that my fate is not merely personal; that I am doing something for many if I live and develop in this manner; I always feel as though I myself were a multitude (*Mehrheit*) which I address in a confidential, earnest and comforting way.' Or take these few lines, typical of the hidden mystical strain in Nietzsche: "The first question is by no means whether we are satisfied by ourselves, but

whether we are satisfied with anything at all. Granting that we should say Yea to any single moment, we have then affirmed not only ourselves, but the whole of existence. For nothing stands by itself, either in us or in the other things: and if our soul has vibrated and rung with happiness, like a chord, once only and only once, then all eternity was necessary in order to bring about that one event—and all eternity, in this single moment of our affirmation, was called good, was saved, justified and blessed.'

Nietzsche's misanthropy came not from any incapacity for love and sympathy in the deepest religious sense, but from the fact that he was unable to love what he could not at the same time respect and admire. Even his friendships were regulated by the amount of esteem for the person concerned—a trait which goes far to explain why he had so few friends. The isolation he felt with regard to his contemporaries was due, apart from his malady, also to his inveterate propensity to transfer his sympathies to spooks and phantoms of his own make rather than bow to such humans as he saw around. Unable to admire others, he was all the more tempted to admire his isolated self. Yet this, too, was only a compensation for his thwarted impulse to expand, to give of his very best in the sense described in Zarathustra's passages about *Bestowing Virtue*:

'Uncommon is the highest virtue, and unprofiting; beaming is it, and soft of lustre; a bestowing virtue is the highest virtue.

'Verily, I divine you well, my disciples: ye strive like me for bestowing virtue. What should ye have in common with cats and wolves?

'It is your thirst to become sacrifices and gifts yourselves: and therefore have ye the thirst to accumulate all riches in your soul.

'Insatiably striveth your soul for treasures and jewels because your virtue is insatiable in desiring to bestow.

'Ye constrain all things to flow towards you and into

you, so that they shall flow back again out of your fountain as the gifts of your love.

'Upwards goes our course from genera to genera. But a horror to us is the degenerating sense, which says: "All for myself!"'

## II

In this manner Nietzsche filled even his biological outlook with religious-moral pathos and fervour, although the two planes contradict or even exclude each other. But at the same time he repudiated any belief in God, in Providence and in a world 'beyond', no matter how cruelly such a step may have clashed with some of his secret inclinations and desires. 'The seeker of knowledge operates as an artist and glorifier of cruelty in that he compels his spirit to perceive against its own inclination and often enough against the wishes of his heart: he forces it to say nay where he would like to affirm, love and adore.'

In the state he was in he could hardly have acted otherwise without weakening his will to health and jeopardizing his self-imposed therapy. In spite of all the wishes of his heart, he persisted in 'cruelty' towards himself. So he turned his back on all religion in the very teeth of his unusually strong religious temperament. What he wanted to know was not in how far such and such a religion was true, but only whether it was valuable or harmful from the standpoint of ascending life. And no sooner had he noticed its emphasis on the 'beyond' at the expense of our earthly existence than he rejected it as being of no value at all. The same applies to the problem of God. Even had he been sure that God existed, Nietzsche would not have accepted Him unless He first produced credentials to the effect that He was not hostile to life, that is, to our 'biological' life this side of the grave.

It is here that we must seek for the roots of Nietzsche's attacks upon religion, and particularly upon Christianity in which he detected (or thought he had detected) all the

elements of nihilism and decadence. The first proof of these he saw in the hypocritical and lukewarm attitude towards religion on the part of the Christians themselves—an attitude which he regarded as infinitely more demoralizing than honest downright atheism. To call ourselves Christians, when the whole of our life is one continuous refutation of Christianity in practice is just the height of indecency and also of moral cowardice at its worst, which Nietzsche could not but despise. Neither Christianity nor a God of this kind was of any use to him, and he made no bones about it.

‘That which separates us from other people’, he argued in *The Anti-Christ*, ‘is not the fact that we can discover no God in either history or nature, or behind nature—but that we regard what has been revered as “God” not as “divine” but as wretched, absurd, pernicious; not as an error but as a *crime against life*. . . . We deny God as God . . . If the existence of this Christian God were *proved* to us, we should feel even less able to believe in Him . . . A religion such as Christianity which never once comes into touch with reality, and which collapses the very moment reality asserts its rights even on one single point, must naturally be a mortal enemy of the “wisdom of this world”. . . .’ ‘What meaning’, he continues in *Ecce Homo*, ‘have those lying concepts, those handmaids of morality, “Soul”, “Spirit”, “Free Will”, “God”, if their aim is not the physiological ruin of mankind? When earnestness is diverted from the instincts that aim at self-preservation and an increase of bodily energy, i.e. at an increase of life; when anaemia is raised to an ideal and the contempt of the body is construed as the “salvation of the soul”; what is all this if it is not a recipe for decadence?’

Only an invalid, afraid of losing the last remnants of ‘bodily energy’, could have struggled with Nietzsche’s fury against his own religious instinct. Besides, he knew full well that only a formidable enemy could make him

mobilize the stamina required for his fight. Such an enemy of life he found in Christianity, which he attacked with a kind of religious fervour and fanaticism. His real disposition was not one of irreligion, but of frantic *anti-religion*. This is why he touched now and then—from the other end as it were—on some of the profoundest aspects of the very religion he attacked. In his anti-Christian campaign he even expressed, and repeatedly, his admiration for the personality of Christ, as well as for sincere Christian ascetics. ‘All reverence on my part to the ascetic ideal, in so far as it is honourable,’ he says in one of his aphorisms, ‘so long as it believes in itself and plays no pranks on us! But I like not all these coquettish bugs who have an insatiable ambition to smell of the infinite until eventually the infinite smells of bugs.’

Unconsciously drawn towards Christ and the highest aspects of Christian teaching (described in paragraphs 33 and 34 in *The Anti-Christ*), he yet endeavoured to justify his conscious rebellion against both by certain debased forms of historical Christianity in which he was unable to see anything but weakness, mendacity and utilitarian cant. ‘The fatal feature of Christianity lies in the necessary fact that its faith had become as morbid, base and vulgar as the needs to which it had to administer were base and vulgar’, he declared in *The Anti-Christ*. But even apart from this both his logic and his taste rose against the idea of an ambiguous and vengeful God which—in his opinion—was as offensive to religion as it was to common sense, and most of all to one’s sense of decency.

‘How he raged at us, this wrath-snorter, because we understood him badly! But why did he not speak more clearly! And if the fault lay in our ears, why did he give us ears that heard him badly?’

‘Too much miscarried with him, this potter who had not learned thoroughly! That he took revenge on his pots and creations, however, because they turned out badly—that was a sin against *good taste*.

'There is also good taste in piety: *this* at last said: "Away with *such* a God! Better to have no God, better to set up destiny on one's own account, better to be a fool, better to be God oneself!'"'

This kind of rebellious/unbelief was itself a proof of Nietzsche's ineradicable religious instinct. 'O Zarathustra, though art more pious than thou believest, with such an unbelief', the Pope out of Service exclaimed after his talk with Zarathustra. 'Some God in thee hath converted thee to thine ungodliness. Is it not thy piety itself which no longer letteth thee believe in God?'

### III

'Ungodliness' as expressed by Nietzsche is quite likely to occur when men's current idea of God has not progressed with their mental and moral development: God is left behind. Besides, only a latent Christian of the highest order attacking his own secret inclinations, could have been so violently anti-Christian as was Nietzsche. This is why his fury should not be taken at its face value. Nor should its effect be over-exaggerated.<sup>1</sup> Even his Gospel of hardness was inverted Christian charity, of which he wanted to rid himself—but in vain. His sister tells us that many pious women who were in contact with him simply refused to believe that he was not a good Christian. She also relates how during his walks in the environs of Basle, Nietzsche took a fancy to an invalid child and attended to him like a nurse just to make him happy. He even made arrangements for placing him in an infirmary at his own expense, but, to Nietzsche's great sorrow, the little invalid had meanwhile died. This

<sup>1</sup> In one of his letters to H. Albert, Paul Valéry wrote, in August 1903, about Nietzsche's attacks on Christianity: 'Ses critiques du christianisme sont des ombres—brossant l'ombre d'un chrétien' (His criticisms of Christianity are shadows brushing the shadow of a Christian).

is only one of the many illustrations of Nietzsche's Christian charity in practice. Had he been a genuine pagan, he would certainly have insisted much less on his paganism. And did he not confess that in him the Christianity of his forebears, with their 'stern intellectual conscience, fostered by Christianity', had turned against itself in order to go beyond itself?

Whether it ever succeeded in this is a different matter, since the whole of Nietzsche's inner make-up was nearer to a self-tormented Pascal, or even a St. Paul, than an ancient Greek. At the same time, the manner in which he tackled the problem puts us all before the dilemma: are we still Christians, or are we not? *Can* we still be Christians? And if not, why not? Even in the case of believers, he demanded that in the name of conscience and spiritual integrity they should test their Christian faith through its opposite before definitely accepting it. Those who are still Christians at heart 'owe it *to their faith* that they should thus for once take up their abode in the wilderness—if for no other reason than that of being able to pronounce on the question whether Christianity is needful. . . . Your evidence on the question will be valueless until you have lived years without Christianity, and with the utmost desire to continue to exist without it: until, indeed, you have withdrawn far, far away from it. It is not when your nostalgia urges you back again, but when your judgment, based on a strict comparison, drives you back, that your homecoming has any significance.'

The personal reasons why Nietzsche himself refused a homecoming of this kind have already been dealt with. But as his religious temperament looked for some outlet even on a biological plane, he projected into his Zarathustra a number of compensations for his own frustrated religiosity. Zarathustra is in fact a compendium of such compensations and, for this very reason, an idealized *alter ego* of Nietzsche himself. There were two substi-

tutes in particular which he had worked out mainly in order to satisfy his religious instinct: the idea of Dionysus, and of Eternal Recurrence.

## IV

The first of them was defined by Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, not as an act of transcending one's individual consciousness, but rather of ecstatically dissolving it in nature, in the collective group-consciousness, or even in the universal Will. 'From the height of joy in which man feels himself completely and utterly a deified form and self-justification of nature, down to the joy of healthy peasants and healthy semi-human beasts, the whole of this long and enormous gradation of the light and colour of *happiness* was called by the Greek—not without that grateful quivering of one who is initiated into the secret, not without much caution and pious silence—by the god-like name of Dionysus.' In the Greece of the sixth century B.C., the differentiation between the individual and the collective group-soul (symbolized by the chorus in Attic tragedy) was not yet finally completed, and so the temptation to return to the latter—*via* all sorts of orgiastic rites and festivals—and dissolve in it must have been very strong and 'ecstatic'.

Refusing to become a mystic on a Christian plane, Nietzsche the invalid thus philandered with an *ersatz* mysticism on the plane of the 'biological' man, who instead of transcending nature, himself pantheistically returns to her—even at the risk of losing his own identity. But such going 'back to nature', i.e. to the collective unconscious, at the expense of the individualized self, can only be a temporary dope. Once the ecstasy is over, the individual consciousness may even assume a critical and hostile attitude towards 'nature'. As if dissatisfied with such a solution, Nietzsche modified the symbol of Dionysus in terms of his own pressing needs and urges. In *The Will to Power* in particular this pre-individual

deity was made to accept—like Nietzsche himself—all the pain of existence and yet say a joyful Yea to life. Dionysus became a divine anti-pessimist: an expression of that 'great pantheistic sympathy with pleasure and pain, which declares even the most terrible and most questionable qualities of existence good and sanctifies them'. At the same time Nietzsche combined this symbol with another quasi-mystical element of his philosophy: the idea of Eternal Recurrence.

The latter came to him—so he says—as a revelation at the beginning of August 1881 in the Engadine; but he must have known long before that the idea itself can be traced at least as far back as the Pythagoreans. What was new in the case of Nietzsche was of course its emotional texture, strongly redolent of his own religious urge. The whole of it is based on the supposition that our Universe possesses only a definite quantum of atoms, and that, after having passed through all possible combinations, every single combination must have been and will be repeated a countless number of times. The existence of the Universe can thus be looked upon as an eternal circular movement of rigidly determined identical processes. Each of us must, therefore, have existed and will have to exist (under identical conditions) again and again throughout the aeons.

However mechanical and tedious such a recurrence may look, in Nietzsche's case it may have been a plausible substitute for the idea of eternity, even if in the light of our present-day science his hypothesis appears to be a fallacy.<sup>1</sup> But regardless of its scientific value, the theory

<sup>1</sup> This is what Sir Arthur Eddington says on the subject in his *New Pathways in Science*, p. 68: 'By accepting the theory of the expanding universe, we are relieved of one conclusion which we had felt to be intrinsically absurd. It was argued that every possible configuration of atoms must repeat itself at some distant date. But that was on the assumption that the atoms will have only the same choice of configuration in the future as they have now. In an expanding space any particular congruence becomes more and more improbable. The expansion of the universe creates new possibilities of

of Eternal Recurrence must have appealed to Nietzsche's religious temperament on account of its would-be mystical flavour, and to Nietzsche the sufferer as another test of his courage which will become clearer if we first tackle a few other problems leading up to it.

distribution faster than the atoms can work through them, and there is no longer any likelihood of any particular distribution being repeated."

## VIII

### THE TWILIGHT OF GOD

#### I

'THE most important fact in recent history—that "God is dead", that belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of profession—is already beginning to cast its first shadow over Europe. To the few, at least, whose suspecting glance is strong enough, and subtle enough for this drama, some sun seems to have set, some old profound confidence seems to have changed into doubt: our old world must seem to them daily more darksome, distrustful, strange and old. In the main, however, one may say that the event itself is far too great, too remote, too much beyond people's power of apprehension, for one to suppose that so much as the report of it could have *reached* them; not to speak of many who already knew what had *really* taken place, and what must all collapse now that this belief had been undermined.'

This passage alone, taken from *The Joyful Wisdom*, is a sufficient indication of the seriousness with which Nietzsche took religion and Christianity. If he rejected both, he must have done so for deep-seated reasons of his own. Yet while proclaiming to the world the 'death' of the Christian God, he realized full well the consequences of such a fact, and above all the gradual but inevitable crumbling away of that system of morality which was based on the existence of the Christian God. Always prone to make the most uncompromising conclusions, he saw at once the prospect of a moral void and anarchy spreading all the world over, unless an alternative was found in time. The laments of his *Madman with the Lamp*, on becoming aware of the 'murder' of God, voice some of Nietzsche's own fears and misgivings: 'Whither are we

travelling? Away from all suns? Is there still a height and a depth? Are we not wandering towards everlasting annihilation? Do we not perceive the indications of this immense void? Is it not colder? Is not the night becoming darker and darker? Must we not light our lanterns at noon?

Much of Nietzsche's philosophy was one prolonged attempt to light the lantern in this darkness at noon. The very anxiety with which he set out to light it is a proof of how complicated his attitude towards the problem of God must have been. He was the last person to ignore its seriousness, or to by-pass the problem itself. He went so far indeed as to consider the 'death of God' the central event in mankind's inner history. But this itself gave his task a direction and a dramatic grandeur which was enough to stir up all his will and vitality. The mission he now saw before him was nothing less than to save the world from that vacuum which threatened to engulf it, once God has been ousted—without recall—from the conscience of man. Convinced that he was the first to see the gravity of the crisis, Nietzsche thought that he alone was also called upon to avert it. History—so it seemed to him—had ordained that he should become a new saviour, responsible for the future destiny of mankind. Hence his frequent references to himself as being 'fate and fatality'. Yet this only landed him in some further inconsistencies and contradictions which are well worth exploring.

## II

The mystics speak of a voluntary union between man and God, enabling the individual to achieve his highest self-realization on earth in the name of a meaning or Value which only God can confer upon life. But the ecstasy of such a mystical union has its negative counterpart in the ecstasy of what might be called magical self-assertion in its two aspects—one of them implying the belief in God, and the other utter unbelief. In the first

case one repudiates God either because one fails to find the supreme Value in Him, or else because one wants to assert one's freedom from God.<sup>1</sup> In the case of unbelief, however, one challenges not God but the senselessness of a world deprived of God and hence of Value. Having discarded God, the self-assertive individual proclaims himself as the only divinity, and, intoxicated with the temporary illusion of his own power, measures his daring by the very amount of void he is able to face and to endure. If in the past he required a God, he now actually 'delights in cosmic disorder without a God, a world of accident, to the essence of which terror, ambiguity and seductiveness belong'.

Certain reckless souls inflate themselves with such spurious power, but only until they are crushed by the nihilism it implies. Uprooted in an absolute sense, they may feel homesick for the harbours they have left behind, but in vain. The burden of the cosmic void around them grows and finally threatens to become heavier than even the most tyrannical God. Hence Nietzsche's warning in *The Joyful Wisdom*: 'We have left the land and have gone aboard ship! We have broken down the bridges behind us—nay, more, the land behind us! Well, little ship! Look out! Beside thee is the ocean. . . . Times will come when thou wilt feel that it is infinite, and that there is nothing more frightful than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt itself free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Alas, if homesickness for the land should attack thee, as if there had been more *freedom* there—and there is no land any longer.'

Nietzsche's conclusions are hardly meant to decrease one's homesickness for the land. In this infinity of void he sees but a casual, chaotic Universe, without any goal or meaning. And since its process is a blind one, there can be no real distinction between an active and a passive

<sup>1</sup> This inner process is tackled in *Dostoevsky*, by the present author.

attitude, between crime and virtue, or even between life and death. 'The living being is only a species of the dead being, and a very rare species. . . .' Yet Nietzsche, with his inverted religious instinct, did not falter. His defiance made him plunge into the void with the illusory pride of a self-appointed god. The more so because he was determined to re-mould the whole of life and to confer upon it at least that man-made significance of which it was still capable even in such a predicament. He was to be the great transvaluer in a meaningless world, and this during the most dangerous inner crisis in history. So it was his duty to become worthy of such a high office. 'God is dead! And we have killed Him! How shall we be consoled for this, we murderers of murderers? He whom the world held to be most sacred and most powerful has bled on our knives—who shall wash the stain of this blood from us? In what water can we be purified? Is not the very greatness of this act too great for us? Must not we ourselves become Gods to seem worthy of it? Never before was so great a deed performed—and all those born after us will, by this very fact, belong to a higher form of history than any that has hitherto existed.'

## III

Here one cannot help recalling Dostoevsky's maniac Kirillov (in *The Possessed*) who, long before Nietzsche, and for analogous reasons, divided history into two parts: from the gorilla to man, and from man to man-God through the 'death of God'. Overwhelmed by the fact that, having abolished God altogether, he was *bound* to regard himself as God and his own self-will (or will to power) as divine, Kirillov went mad. But as he was unable to accept, despite his 'divinity', the senseless and idiotic universe he was still doomed to live in, he saw that the only freedom left to him was the freedom to protest by committing suicide. Such was the final outcome

of his 'new terrible liberty'. But in the last resort, the void around *can* be filled, for the time being, with the pride of a self-appointed task of such dimensions as to make one ready to dispense with God even if He happened to exist. This kind of Satanic consciousness (representing the negative pole of an essentially religious mind) can be felt on many a page of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*:

'God is a conjecture: but I do not wish your conjecturing to reach beyond your creating will.

'Could ye *conceive* a God? Then, I pray you, be silent about all Gods! But ye could well create a Superman.

'Could ye *conceive* a God?—But let this mean Will to Truth unto you, that everything be transformed into the humanly conceivable, the humanly visible, the humanly sensible! Your own discernment shall ye follow out to the end!

'And how would ye endure life without that hope, ye discerning ones? Neither in the conceivable could ye have been born, nor in the irrational.

'But that I may reveal my heart entirely unto you, my friends: If there were Gods, how could I bear to be no God! *Therefore* there are no Gods.'

Here, if anywhere, the biological superman merges with the proud man-God. The very recklessness of his challenge to a world devoid of God tempts him as an adventure, full of dangerous experiments upon his 'freedom'. Nietzsche the invalid, who saw in the amount of pain he was able to withstand a proof of his courage, could not but welcome such a senseless universe as another test for his own power of endurance. 'We philosophers and "free spirits" feel ourselves irradiated, as by a new, rosy dawn, by the report that the "old God is dead"; our hearts thereby overflow with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment, and expectation. At last the horizon seems once more unobstructed, granting even

that it is not bright; our ships can at last start on their voyage once more, in face of every danger; every risk is again permitted to the knowing ones; the sea, our sea, again lies open before us; perhaps there was never such an open sea.'

This exultation, like a drug, he now required in stronger and stronger doses, marking his process of gradual self-inflation as distinct from self-realization. Yet having escaped from the 'tyranny' of God, such an adventurous man-God is landed, sooner or later, in another and worse tyranny—the determinism of a blind mechanistic universe. For if we are but casual bubbles in a process of cosmic forces, then our consciousness as well as our volition is determined down to its minutest details not by us, but by those forces, or the laws of Nature—call them as you like.

Is not then our reckless self-will as illusory as are the values promulgated by it? The titanic man-God thus reaches an impasse fraught with the dangers which Nietzsche could not possibly avoid. On the other hand, the passion with which he defied the very idea of God betrayed his repressed longing for Him. One cannot but recall the religious poem he wrote at Pforta in 1863-4: 'Once more, before my vision turns . . .' An equally religious but less defiant temperament would have satisfied this longing only by bowing to God; but in Nietzsche's case such an issue was entirely out of the question.

#### IV

In this respect he resembles Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov who repudiated God with the greater vehemence the more he was secretly longing for Him. Nietzsche's case was analogous but not identical. Ivan rebelled because of other people's sufferings, whereas Nietzsche was concerned primarily with the suffering he himself had to endure. In a state of health such as his, God might even

have allured him as the last solace and refuge for anyone willing to resign himself and to submit to divine Providence. But Nietzsche preferred the path of rebellion. Neither pride nor his innate decency would allow him to 'wag his tail' before God, when he knew that he needed Him as a solace and a comfortable shelter.

It was here that the magnitude of his own suffering became, once again, a measure of his defiance, while the defiance itself kept increasing his imagined or wishful greatness. Besides, if Nietzsche had suddenly embraced the faith in God, then his own great mission would have become superfluous—a mission designed above all for a Godless world. In his personal inflation, he would not accept God even as an opponent at whom he could hurl blasphemies on an equal footing. For he, Nietzsche, was now destined to open the eyes of humanity and to be its new saviour, warning it of all the dangers ahead, and, what is more, showing the only way to a dignified future—precisely because there was no God. It was unthinkable for him to part with such a mission or forfeit it even to a God! So there was no room for God!

Yet Nietzsche's unconscious longing for Him remained. One of the many proofs to this effect is the lament poured out by the Magician in Zarathustra's cave. The lament, expressed in the form of a highly agitated poem, is too long to be quoted in full; but a glance at the text is enough to reveal a lonely 'God-tormented' mind who curses and at the same time invokes God with all the passion of a repressed religious temperament. Although referring—supposedly—to the 'Magician' Richard Wagner, the lament could be applied to Nietzsche himself whose inner kinship with his one-time friend he acknowledged on several occasions. The ailments and tortures described in the opening passages in particular are a poetic transposition of Nietzsche's own state during the worst periods of his illness, when instead of 'wagging his tail' he preferred to challenge and to blaspheme.

—Thus do I lie,  
 Bend myself, twist myself, convulsed  
 With all eternal torture, and smitten  
 By thee, cruellest huntsman,  
 Thou unfamiliar—*God* . . .

Smite deeper!  
 Smite yet once more!  
 Pierce through and rend my heart!  
 What meaneth this torture  
 With dull indented arrows?  
 Why look'st thou hither,  
 Of human pain not weary,  
 With mischief-loving, godly flash-glances?  
 Not murder wilt thou,  
 But torture, torture?  
 For why me torture,  
 Thou mischief-loving, unfamiliar God?—

But deserted by the humans and by God, he finds his isolation less endurable than his pain. He is tempted to invoke even the company of God in order to feel less lonely in his affliction.

Away!  
 There fled he surely,  
 My final, only comrade,  
 My greatest foe,  
 Mine unfamiliar—  
 My hangman—*God!* . . .

—Nay!  
 Come thou back!  
*With* all thy great tortures!  
 To me the last of lonesome ones,  
 Oh, come thou back!  
 All my hot tears in streamlets trickle  
 Their course to thee!  
 Oh, come thou back  
 Mine unfamiliar *God!*  
 My pain!  
 My final bliss!

## IX

### 'WE IMMORALISTS'

#### I

THE 'formidable task' which Nietzsche imposed upon himself in order to save mankind from its greatest danger became one of his chief sources of the psychic vitality he needed so much in the fight for his own body. The nature of this fight determined his final attitude with regard to a number of problems, and above all to the problem of Christian morality. Theoretically, he had finished with the latter together with the Christian God whose 'death' he regarded as an irrevocable fact. In practice, however, he continued to struggle with Christian morals until the very end, and the fierceness of his attacks increased the more he realized how much of a genuine Christian there still remained in him, in spite of all. Precisely because Nietzsche the invalid knew all the allurements of the Christian kind of resignation, he intensified his defiance, until his hatred of Christian moral values knew no limits. 'As long as your morality hung over me, I breathed like one asphyxiated', he exclaims in one of his passages. 'That is why I throttled the snake. I wished to live, consequently it had to die.' Yet if he freed himself from Christian morals, he did so not in order to indulge in immorality. On the contrary, his own 'biological' standard of moral values demanded a discipline the strictness of which would have frightened the majority of so-called Christians. Having confined himself only to the plane of the body, Nietzsche discarded mercilessly everything connected with the spirit in a transcendental sense. But in doing so, he was quite willing to praise that inner earnestness which once upon a time helped to fashion the European Christian ideal. In his opinion, 'morality

*itself* in the form of honesty' urges us to deny that kind of morals in the transcendental premises of which we no longer believe and, indeed, cannot believe.

Whatever his purely personal reasons, it was above all Nietzsche's own moral sense that turned against a morality which he considered obsolete. So he was the more anxious to set up such a moral system as would serve life in its biological and earthly sense. Assuming that no actions are moral in themselves but can only become so in our interpretations, he felt entitled to interpret the whole of life in the light of values based on nature, and therefore fully acceptable—as he thought—to the new irreligious consciousness. The alternative to it he saw no longer in Christian ethics, but in moral chaos and nihilism. Hence the ruthlessness of his transvaluations, the principal victim of which was to be the entire system of our old Christian morality. In this respect he certainly was 'beyond good and evil', but only in order to create new values of good and of evil in the name of his own biological ideal and the ascending type of life here on earth. This is why his moral code resembles most of all a severe yoga-system (devised for the training of supermen) and can in fact be defined as puritanism from the other end.

It is here that Nietzsche's rigid Protestant upbringing played its part, the puritan strain of which remained indelible in him throughout all his ideological mutations. The inhabitants of that part of Genoa where he lived for a time looked upon him as a saint and actually used to call him *il santo*. Even in his last phase he thoroughly appreciated at least the disciplining role of Christian morals at their best, as we can conclude from the following passage in *The Will to Power*: 'To what extent is the *self-destruction of morality* still a sign of its own strength? We Europeans have taken within us the blood of those who were ready to die for their faith; we have taken morality terribly seriously, and there is nothing which we

have not, at one time or other, sacrificed to it. On the other hand, our intellectual subtlety has been reached essentially through the vivisection of our consciences. We do not yet know the "whither" towards which we are urging our steps, now that we have departed from the soil of our forebears. But it was on this very soil that we acquired the strength which is now driving us from our homes in search of adventure, and it is thanks to that strength that we are now in mid-sea, surrounded by untried possibilities and things undiscovered—we can no longer choose, we must be conquerors, now that we have no land in which we feel at home and in which we would fain "survive". A concealed "Yea" is driving us forward, and it is stronger than our "Nay". Even our strength no longer bears with us in the old swampy land: we venture into the open, we attempt the task. The world is still rich and undiscovered, and even to perish were better than to be half-men or poisonous men. Our very strength urges us to take to the sea; there where all suns have hitherto sunk we know of a new world.'

## II

In the 'new world' offered by Nietzsche a maximum of vitality and of biological excellence was to be ennobled by the highest aesthetic-heroic ideal he could think of under the circumstances. And his personal circumstances were such as to direct his will and vision towards the most dazzling contrast of himself, since he was so badly in need of theoretical compensations for the ailments he had to put up with in practice. At the same time the contrast itself was something more than just a compensation: it provided a disciplining ideal for himself and a message for the world. Nietzsche was, of course, fully aware of the fact that all morality invented by man is bound to be relative and can therefore lead to a confusion of values: to the destructive motto of 'all things are lawful'. But he tried to cope with the dilemma (as far as possible)

by setting up his own biological standard as an *ersatz*-absolute or a new Categorical Imperative, obligatory for all those who still care for what he assumed to be the ascending type of life. This is, however, of little help, considering the fact that each man can have his own idea as to what exactly the ascending type of life means, without accepting Nietzsche's standard as an infallible revelation from on high. The dangerous formula of 'all things are lawful' is by no means eliminated: it lurks behind the very back of the superman. What else could Nietzsche do in the end but demand that such a formula should become a privilege conferred upon those only who are big and noble enough not to abuse it. In order to possess a virtue one must first have the right to it—that is, one must be made of truly noble material. Such a man ennobles whatever he takes on. An ignoble man, however, has no right even to be virtuous, since any virtue adopted by him turns into its own parody or into a downright vice.

The biological and the aristocratic trend thus blended in Nietzsche's peculiar 'beyond good and evil'. His table of rank aimed at dividing the whole of humanity according to a rigorous census in which the categories of weak and strong were more or less identical with those of noble and ignoble, of born masters and of born slaves. Like Plato in *Gorgias*, he then proceeded to point out the difference between the morality of masters and that of slaves. And, once again, he saw the true test of a master's rightful power and nobility in an excess of physical vitality, combined with the capacity for being creatively hard—first with oneself and then with one's equals. As for the others, the 'many-too-many', he was quite willing to grant them their crutches and illusions, since after all nothing is more devastating than a truth for which one is neither ripe nor strong enough. It was Nietzsche's hardness towards himself that made him repudiate the Christian 'love for one's neighbour', at the bottom of

which he could see nothing except disguised selfishness and fear of suffering. The only love that appealed to him was the abstract love for the 'farthest one'—the man of the future, the superman.

'Ye flee unto your neighbour from yourselves,' says Zarathustra, 'and would fain make a virtue thereof: but I fathom your unselfishness.

'Higher than love to your neighbour is love to the farthest and future ones. . . .

'The farthest ones are they who pay for your love to the near ones; and when there are but five of you together, a sixth must always die.

'Let the future and the farthest be the motive of thy to-day; and in thy friend shalt thou love the Superman as thy motive.

'My brethren, I advise you not to neighbour-love—I advise you to the farthest love!'

### III

Looking upon the present-day man only as raw material for the superman to come, Nietzsche demanded that this material should be treated accordingly. Common humanity meant just so much clay to him, necessary for the fashioning of a noble work of art. His idea of biological rearing made him further clamour for those conditions of hardness and perpetual conflict which alone—according to him—could foster the strongest and the highest type on earth. From a harmonious life in peace and organized well-being he expected nothing but standardized mediocrities. So the more danger, hardship and conflicts there are to be overcome the greater will be the number of strong exceptional individuals. Nietzsche goes so far as to demand a parallel development of what he calls good and evil features. In his opinion, both good and evil (in German *böse* as distinct from *schlecht*) come from strength and are complementary, even necessary, to each other. The contrast to and the opposite of good is not what is

called evil, but what is bad (*schlecht*). The source of the latter is in weakness, and weakness is likely to be immoral no matter what virtuous and pious disguises it may put on.

Ingenious though such definitions be, one is still at a loss as to how exactly to draw a line between 'bad' and 'evil', or even between strength and weakness. Where does one cease and the other begin? Moreover, does not weakness often pose as strength, and strength as weakness? It all leads to further confusion, from which Nietzsche himself was unable to escape. In his enthusiasm for training the superman through a maximum of resistance he was *logically* compelled to postulate an ever-increasing amount of conflict and evil on earth. But life in terms of perpetual conflict ceases to be life. It becomes hell, in spite of its highfalutin labels. Nietzsche even proclaimed, in the end, the *subtilization* of the evil as a symptom of the highest culture—not unlike certain decadents, who were so prone to eulogize cruelty as to identify it with refinement.

The only excuse for such theories on his part was that Nietzsche happened to be much more cruel to himself than to others. But in his case it was rather personal gentleness turning against itself that often posed as excessive hardness. Nor should we forget the fascination which Nietzsche the invalid felt for any kind of strength—even the crude and brutal strength of the 'blond beast', as a contrast to his own physical state. His extreme utterances of this kind make an unpleasant reading, but they should always be read between the lines—not as philosophic but as psychological documents. Such a notorious tirade as the one below, taken from *The Will to Power*, can serve as an example of a rather dangerous dramatization of his own antithesis.

'Let us halt for a moment', he reasons, 'before this symptom of *highest* culture—I call it the *pessimism of strength*. Man no longer requires a justification of evil;

justification is precisely what he abhors; he enjoys evil, *pur, cru*; he regards purposeless evil as the most interesting kind of evil. If he required a God in the past, he now delights in cosmic disorder without a God, a world of accident, to the essence of which belong terror, ambiguity and seductiveness. In a state of this sort, it is precisely *goodness* which requires to be justified—that is to say, it must either have an evil and dangerous basis, or else it must contain a vast amount of stupidity; in which case it still pleases. Animality no longer awakens terror now; a very intellectual and happy wanton spirit in favour of the animal in man is, in such periods, the most triumphant form of spirituality. Man is now strong enough to be able to feel ashamed of his *belief in God*. He may now play the devil's advocate afresh. If in practice he pretends to uphold virtue, it will be for those reasons which lead virtue to be associated with subtlety, cunning, lust of gain and a form of lust for power.'

The line between the superman and the subman is thus obliterated. The worst kind of Nazi gangsters could have obtained a 'moral' sanction on such premises, had not Nietzsche himself made several important reservations.

## IV

One of them is his conviction that mere power devoid of an adequately high aim and direction is always in danger of lapsing into brutality. So he granted the right to power only to those made of the noblest material. As a contrast to the above passage, we can therefore quote this portraiture of a noble man, depicted in *Beyond Good and Evil*; 'In the foreground there is the feeling of plenitude, of power, which seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of a wealth which would fain give and bestow—the noble man also helps the unfortunate, but not—or scarcely—out of pity, but rather from an impulse of superabundance of power.' Well and good. But the trouble still lies in the vagueness of the

words employed. What exactly does Nietzsche mean by the 'happiness of high tension'? Or by 'plenitude', 'power'? The contents of these words are bound to vary with the level of consciousness on which they are taken, and two men can use one and the same word for entirely different things. This certainly does not diminish the confusion—least of all in morals. No wonder that Nietzsche had to rely primarily on man's innate decency and nobility, failing which no 'tables of value' would be of any avail, unless they were imposed and controlled by adequate dictatorial force. 'I deprive you of everything, of God, of duty—now you must stand the severest test of a noble nature. For here the way lies open for the profligate—take care.' Nietzsche—an essentially noble nature—stood the test. But how could he possibly expect others to do the same, without idealizing man as he is beyond all deserts? If God is irrevocably 'dead', then man alone becomes the measure of things. And since there is no absolute common standard of measure, each individual is free to regard himself as the centre of the Universe and to see in his own self-will the only right.

Even in an undoubtedly noble nature the morality of self-will may drift, sooner or later, towards self-glorification and self-aggrandizement. And so it does. According to Nietzsche, the noble type of man, being a determiner of values does not require to be approved of. 'He passes the judgment: What is injurious to me is injurious in itself; he knows that it is he himself only who confers honour on things; he is a *creator of values*. He honours whatever he recognizes in himself; such morality is self-glorification.' But this is only the final logical conclusion implicit in the moral chaos caused by the 'death' of God. What is more, self-glorification in its extreme form marked the climax of Nietzsche's own inner crisis, which could not but end in a catastrophe

## X

### 'NIETZSCHE-CAESAR'

#### I

IN dealing with Nietzsche's final collapse one has to take into account, apart from any other reasons, at least two external circumstances which contributed to its *dénouement*: the conspiracy of silence on the part of the German press, and his utter isolation even among his friends. Nietzsche's misunderstandings with the press, the savants and the literary men of Germany began with his very first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. In spite of its original approach to the subject, the book was ostracized by German philologists, who succeeded in discrediting Nietzsche to such an extent as to make him lose for a while most of his students. The publication of his subsequent books was largely ignored, and this at a time when beyond anything else he needed support from outside in order to believe in himself and in his mission. This is what he wrote about it to Baron von Seydlitz in 1888, that is, in the last year of his creative life: 'Look at our dear Germans! Although I am in my forty-fifth year, and have published about fifteen books, no one in Germany has yet succeeded in writing even a moderately good review of any of my works. . . . There have been enough evil and slanderous hints with regard to me, and in the papers both scholarly and unscholarly the prevailing attitude is one of extreme animosity—but how is it that no one feels insulted when I am abused? And during all these years no comfort, not a drop of human sympathy, not a breath of love.'

The last sentence is particularly poignant. It sounds like the cry of an isolated individual whose secret craving was not one for power, but for ordinary human warmth

and sympathy. The lack of loving solicitude, which he needed so much, could not be compensated for by any 'colossal' words or aims, and he knew it. On 20 August 1880 he complained in a letter to Peter Gast that 'even now the whole of my philosophy totters after one hour's sympathetic intercourse with total strangers! It seems to me so foolish to insist on being in the right at the expense of love, and *not to impart* one's best for fear of destroying sympathy. *Hinc meae lacrimae.*'

Always inclined to see in his friends also sympathizers with his philosophy, he interpreted the scarcity of these as a proof that his ideas were neither needed nor appreciated. As early as October 1874 he wrote to Erwin Rohde: 'To tell the truth, I live through you; I advance by leaning upon your shoulder, for my self-esteem is wretchedly weak, and you have to assure me of my own worth again and again.' And to the same old school-comrade he admitted in March 1881: 'Friends like you help me to sustain my belief in myself.'

Such secret lack of confidence in himself sheds much light on the eagerness with which he clung to those few friends in whom he still could confide—friends whose talents he deliberately exaggerated (as in the case of Peter Gast) in order to make them appear more significant, especially when he saw them in the role of his disciples as well. But all idealizations of this kind only led to a series of disappointments which made his own isolation even more unbearable. What the latter was like can be gathered from these bitter lines addressed to his sister on 8 July 1886: 'Like a stranger and an outcast I move among them—not one of their words or looks reaches me any longer. I am dumb—for no one understands me! . . . It is terrible to be condemned to silence when one has so much to say.' Even greater despair is recorded in these two sentences, taken from a draft for his *Will to Power*: 'It has now lasted ten years: no more sound penetrates to me—a land without rain. A man must

have a vast amount of humanity at his disposal in order not to pine away in such a drought.'

## II

Nietzsche's only means of temporarily forgetting the 'drought' was to transmute it in such a way as to be able to see in it the price he *had* to pay for his exceptional mission, as well as for his own superiority over the rest of mankind. Is it then surprising that he made a virtue out of necessity and looked upon his isolation as a privilege, of which he could feel rightfully proud? Having hypnotized himself into the belief that his loneliness had to be commensurate with the importance of his great task, he was free to interpret his predicament not as something that had been forced upon him, but as a voluntarily accepted or even welcomed gift and privilege. So he wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*: 'He shall be the greatest who can be the most solitary.' And even more explicitly in a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug (on 12 May 1887): 'There is no longer an alternative. That which bids me live, my exceptional and enormous task, also bids me keep out of the way of men so that I should not attach myself to anyone.' This, incidentally, was one of the sources of Nietzsche's 'pathos of distance'. Still, the doubt remained. Feeling secretly sceptical of his 'exceptional and enormous task', he resented any sign of doubt with regard to it on the part of others. So his isolation, too, became a kind of defence, erected against those people whose prying scepticism was likely to diminish his much-needed confidence in himself.

His correspondence is full of valuable proofs to this effect. 'One must keep out of the way of the kind of creature who does not understand awe and respect', he said apropos of the shrewd Lou Salomé in one of his letters. In another (August 1883) he warned his sister in a most unambiguous manner: 'Remember, my dear sister, never to remind me either by word of mouth or

in writing of those matters which might deprive me of confidence in myself, aye, of the very pivot of my existence hitherto.' And about a year earlier (July 1882) he confessed to Erwin Rohde that his manner of visualizing things on a large scale was, in essence, romantic self-defence. 'I find it *too hard*', he wrote, 'to live if I cannot do so in a *grand style*—this in confidence to you, my old comrade! Without a goal which I could regard as being important beyond words, I should not have been able to hold myself aloft in the light above the black floods. This is really my only excuse for the kind of literature I have been producing ever since 1875; it is my recipe, my self-concocted medicine against disgust with life.'

## III

These few lines provide one of the most important psychological clues to Nietzsche's writings. And since his illness, isolation and helplessness were on the increase, he found it necessary to increase also the doses of his 'self-concocted medicine' according to the needs of the moment, or rather of the situation. What at first was mere wishful thinking became, step by step, a fixed idea with him, and then an imaginary compensatory reality to which he clung the more tenaciously the more he suspected what its loss would have meant to him. 'If I do not go so far that for thousands of years people will make their highest vows in my name, then I have achieved nothing according to my own judgment', he wrote to Professor Overbeck in May 1884. 'Was ever anyone's attitude towards things more daring than mine?' he asked in a letter (1886) the philosopher Paul Deussen, and added: 'But one must be able to bear it (*man muss aushalten können*); this is the test; I am indifferent to what one "says" or "thinks" about it. After all—I want to be right not for to-day or to-morrow, but for millennia.' Some two years after (February 1888) he assured Baron von Seydlitz: 'It is quite possible that I am the first

philosopher of our age, yea—perhaps even something more than that, something fateful and decisive on the very threshold dividing the two millennia.’ And in a letter to his sister, written in the same year, he spoke of his own greatness in such terms as to eliminate any doubt in advance. ‘You do not even seem to be remotely conscious’, he reproached her, ‘of the fact that you are the next of kin to a man whose destiny is to decide the fate of millennia—speaking quite literally, I hold the future of mankind in my hand. . . . The task that has fallen upon me is after all due to my own nature—and in this manner alone have I now some idea of the happiness that has been in store for me all this time. I play with a burden which would crush any other mortal. What I have to accomplish is *terrifying* in every sense of the word. I do not challenge individuals—I challenge the world of mankind with a terrific indictment. Whether the judgment falls for or against us, my name will in any case be linked up with a fatality the magnitude of which is unutterable.’

The supposed magnitude of his task thus compensated him for his loneliness, as well as for most of his frustrations. He finally reached a stage at which he imagined himself as standing so high above ordinary mortals that even company or friendship with them would be a kind of pollution for him. On the self-erected pinnacle where he stood now, the distance from other human beings (i.e. his isolation) was experienced no longer as pain but as ecstasy over his own ‘daring’ role among men, and as a source of pride. It was at that stage that he wrote: ‘Neither do I believe that I could love anyone, for this would involve the supposition that at last—O wonder of wonders!—I had found a man of my own rank.’ But here he fell a prey to another danger—that of self-inflation.

## IV

We need not deal with all the phases of this process. For our purpose it is enough to point out that Nietzsche—

believing himself to be a 'fatality the magnitude of which is unutterable'—dared to challenge at last the only rival in world-history whom he still considered important enough as an enemy, namely Christ. His two books *The Anti-Christ* and *Ecce Homo* are both pathological attacks not only on Christianity but—implicitly—also on Christ Himself and on His place in history. What Nietzsche now aimed at was to achieve as great a revolution as the one Christianity had to its credit but in the opposite direction. He was to be a new saviour, wrenching both history and humanity out of the grip of Christ. A role less 'grand' than that would no longer be good enough for him, and he was quite open about it. This is how he boasted of his *Ecce Homo* in a letter to Georg Brandes in November 1888: 'It is a merciless attack against the Crucified, ending with blows and thunder directed against everything that is Christian and infected with Christianity; it is simply overwhelming. Well, I am the first psychologist of Christianity, and as an old artillery man, I can turn on it my heavy guns, the existence of which has not even been suspected by the enemies of Christianity. All this is a prelude to my *Transvaluation of Values*—a work which now lies ready before me. I swear that in two years' time the whole of our earth will be in convulsions. I am fatality itself!'

The book in question—*Ecce Homo*—is a typical example of Nietzsche's self-glorification passing into self-inflation almost at its worst. The title of the book is taken from the Gospel, but in an ironical sense. As in *The Anti-Christ* we see here the reversal of everything the Gospel stands for, but Nietzsche seems to exult also in the reversal of his own modesty, and this in a style which has little to do with good literary or any other manners. *Why I am so Clever; Why I am so Wise; Why I Write such Excellent Books*—these are only a few chapter-headings, indicative of the tone and the spirit in which the book is written. But as a reflection of the final stage

of that compensatory process which had been forced upon Nietzsche by his malady, by the circumstances, as well as by his own split character, *Ecce Homo* represents a most valuable document. It proves also that however beneficial from a 'strategic' standpoint such a process may have been earlier, at this stage it became utterly destructive, since nothing endangers the stability of the human self more than self-inflation. The shadow of the superman was the crazy megalomaniac, and it was the latter who won the final victory.

'This book, the voice of which speaks across the ages, is not only the loftiest book on earth, literally the book of mountain-air—the whole phenomenon called mankind lies at an incalculable distance beneath it—but it is also the deepest book.' Such is the author's own estimate of his *Ecce Homo*, in which he puts himself above Goethe and even Shakespeare. Yet while seeing all human beings 'at an incalculable distance' beneath his own greatness, he still condescends to be their up-to-date saviour. 'Speaking in all earnestness, no one before me knew the proper way, the way upwards: only after my time can men once more find hope, life-tasks, and roads mapped out that lead to culture—I *am* a joyful harbinger of this culture. On this account alone I am also fatality. Mankind can begin to have fresh hopes only now that I have lived.'

The same tone can be followed up in Nietzsche's correspondence during the days preceding his insanity. 'In two months I shall be the *first man* on earth', he promised in a letter to Professor Overbeck, written towards the end of 1888. On 31 December of the same year he sent to August Strindberg, who at that time also seemed to be going out of his mind, these lines: 'I have appointed a meeting-day for the monarchs in Rome. I will order the young Kaiser to be shot.' And he signed the letter—'Nietzsche Caesar'. Soon after that he lost his reason.

## XI

### ZARATHUSTRA'S IMPASSE

#### I

WHATEVER the medical aspects of Nietzsche's mental breakdown, there can be no doubt that the catastrophe itself was hastened by the conflicts of his inner life, which in the end became too involved for any normal solution. The tension of his basic duality—that of a highly religious temperament smarting under the weight of an anti-religious outlook—was itself enough to preclude the possibility of a balance, let alone that of an integration. Even his loftiest symbol, Zarathustra, strikes one as a paradox: a prophet in the old biblical manner, but on an anti-religious basis. Relying on a biological substitute for religion, Nietzsche makes his superman look with nostalgia even in the direction of the healthy 'Promethean barbarian', whose proximity to the 'blond beast' is beyond doubt. Nor is his doctrine of will to power, with all its ambiguous and contradictory facets, of much help to those who remain only on the surface of his philosophy. If the amount of physical strength and of the will to power is to be (as Nietzsche so often insists) the measure of one's right to live and to rule, who is then going to prevent an aggressive barbarian—whether 'Promethean' or otherwise—from seizing power and installing himself as the ruling superman by means of subhuman methods? Recent history has abounded in such usurpers, and it will take one or two generations before we clear away the chaos wrought by them all over the world.

Nietzsche's own romantic vision of the Zarathustra ideal was of course the opposite of such faked 'supermen'. Yet as long as we remain in the realm of mere biology, they are almost inevitable. In proportion as biology

drifts towards zoology (and who can prevent it from doing so?) the dividing line between power and brutality dwindles; and as soon as the difference is gone, the jungle method is ushered in triumphant. Furthermore, Nietzsche himself is an example of how easily self-inflation is substituted here for self-realization. But he at least had the excuse of defending his life, which was of more consequence to him than any consistency. He in fact *had* to be inconsistent, since his 'strategy' would leave him no other choice. Even some of those basic positions to which he clung with such tenacity, can hardly disguise their illusory nature, or even their role of a camouflaged impasse. Which brings us back to his doctrine of both the Eternal Recurrence and the *amor fati*.

## II

These two ideas should be explored together, since—in Nietzsche's case—they are complementary and represent as it were but two aspects of one and the same cul-de-sac. We have already seen how important—both psychologically and morally—was the element of resistance in Nietzsche's struggle. Determined to prove his own right to live, he exercised his will and his endurance to their uttermost. But in his state he could do so mainly through a growing resistance to the worst possibilities that fate did hurl or might have hurled against him. Not to flinch before anything became one of his slogans—more, one of his needs. Hence the desperate character of his stoicism which in its very defiance contained a fair amount of masochistic 'love' of pain and adversity. He actually welcomed these in so far as they gave him a pretext for affirming life even when he was most tempted to say no to it. There came in the end the crucial moment of facing the meaninglessness of life and of the universe with the composure of a man who would not shrink even from the most terrible truth imaginable. But here the impasse reached by him, threatened to

undermine a number of his tenets, including his dogma of the will to power. For if life and the universe are nothing more than an interplay of casual blind forces, then man's ego, will and consciousness are really not his own, but only a part of those forces, predetermined by the immutable laws of nature in such a manner as to leave no room for any free volition at all. In this case Nietzsche himself was but a little cog in the clockwork of a mechanistic world, and all grandiloquent talk about the superman destined to alter the history of mankind sounded like mockery. Mockery was Nietzsche's suffering, and also his resistance to suffering. Even suicide as an act of 'free' volition would only be a delusion and, therefore, another mockery. Nietzsche the invalid saw this formidable trap, and made at once the strategic *volte-face* required. Heedless of logical or other inconsistencies, he 'transvalued' the rigid *thou must* of the cosmic clockwork into the more heroic *I myself willed it so*.

'As a composer, riddle-reader, and redeemer of chance', says Zarathustra, 'did I teach them to create the future, and all that hath been—to redeem by creating.'

'The past of man to redeem, and every "It was" to transform until the Will said: But so did I will it. So shall I will it—

'This did I call redemption: this alone did I call redemption.'

The contradiction is clear. No matter what labels Zarathustra gives it, the *thou must* of the clockwork can by no means be turned into creative freedom. Such freedom is possible only on that true religious plane with which Nietzsche refused to have anything to do. So the deadlock was complete, and no strategic or tactical ruse on the part of Nietzsche was strong enough to oust it from his consciousness. Hence his private uncertainty, so different from his high-sounding words in public. In a letter to Erwin Rohde, written in May 1887, he referred to Jakob Burckhardt, Hippolyte Taine and himself as the

three fundamental nihilists 'irrevocably bound to one another', and added: 'As you perhaps suspect, I have not yet abandoned all hope of finding a way out of the abyss by means of which we can arrive at something.' This avowal was made by him at a time when his role of a supposed leader and law-giver of mankind had already reached its height. Torn between an anti-religious affirmation of man's 'biological' existence on the one hand, and his repressed urge towards a religious acceptance of life on the other, he was finally landed in a tight corner from which he would neither go forward nor turn back. But he made a further logical as well as psychological *tour de force* and found once again a temporary expedient in his *amor fati*.

## III

The change of the fatalistic 'thou must' into the would-be free 'I will' was another strategic ruse, by means of which Nietzsche hoped not only to rescue one of the fundamental tenets of his philosophy, but also to put his own *yea* to life to its last and severest test in the name of the Eternal Recurrence itself. For once his elation over this substitute for eternity was gone he became the more aware of its alarming aspects. The repeated and yet identical cycles of existence, the minutest details of which have been predetermined once and for all, implied—in Nietzsche's case—nothing less than countless repetitions of the same excruciating pain and suffering throughout eternity. Was not such a prospect too terrifying even for his power of endurance?

In *The Joyful Wisdom* he actually formulated the whole dilemma from his personal standpoint. 'What if a demon crept after thee into thy loneliest loneliness some day or night and said to thee, "This life, as thou livest it at present, and hast lived it, thou must live once more, and also innumerable times; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain, and every joy, and every thought,

and every sigh, and all the unspeakably small and great things in thy life must come to thee again, and all in the same series and sequences—and similarly this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and similarly this moment, and I myself. The eternal hour-glass of existence will ever be turned once more, and thou with it, thou speck of dust.” Wouldst thou not throw thyself down and gnash thy teeth, and curse the demon that so spake? But had Nietzsche himself done such a thing, he would have acknowledged thereby his utter defeat. Unable to give up his proud ‘I will’, he had recourse, once again, to his ‘artifice of self-preservation’ in order to convince himself that the choice between accepting or rejecting existence on these terms was still his—in so far as he ‘freely’ longed for the inevitable. So the above passage from *The Joyful Wisdom* was concluded as follows: “Dost thou want this once more and also innumerable times?” would lie as the heaviest burden upon thy activity! Or, how wouldst thou have to become favourably inclined to thyself and to life, so as *to long for nothing more ardently* than for this last eternal sanctioning and sealing?”

Anxious as he was to remain favourably inclined to himself and to life, Nietzsche answered with precisely this kind of ‘sanctioning and sealing’. Two delusions—the *amor fati* and the Eternal Recurrence—thus met and blended in order to enable him to affirm life even in its most terrifying shape. Yet the iron necessity of the cosmic clockwork cannot be transmuted into individual freedom—it can only be faked into a semblance of freedom, and the awareness of this fact is enough to bring one to utter negation of life. Among Nietzsche’s posthumous writings there actually is a passage under the title, *The Innocence of Becoming*, in which one can read the following startling confession: ‘I do not want to live *again*. How was I able to withstand life? Through having been a creator. What was it that made it possible for me to endure the look into

the future (*Ausblick*)? The vision of the Superman who says *Yea* to existence. I myself tried to say *Yea* to it—alas!

A retreat from such an impasse towards a conscious religious attitude was, at this date, no longer possible for Nietzsche, since it would have meant a refutation of his entire lifework. The only thing to do was to entrench himself behind yet another *volte-face*. So he cast his skin again and adopted, once more, the aesthetic illusion in Schopenhauer's sense. If truth becomes terrifying past endurance, there always remains a shelter, a respite, offered by the 'metaphysical comfort' of art, and why indeed not take it?

'Art and nothing else!' he exclaimed in his *Will to Power*, when commenting on his first book. 'Art is the great means of making life possible, the great seducer of life, the great stimulus to life.

'Art is the alleviation of the seeker after knowledge—of him who recognizes the terrible and questionable character of existence, and who *desires* to recognize it—of the tragic seeker after knowledge.

'Art is the alleviation of the man of action—of him who not only sees the terrible and questionable character of existence, but also lives it, desires to live it—of the tragic and warlike man, the hero.

'Art is the alleviation of the sufferer—as the way to states in which pain is willed, is transfigured, is deified, where suffering is a form of great ecstasy.'

At the end of his career, Nietzsche was thus nearer to the vacuum and the futility of existence than at the beginning. And, strangely enough, he came back to his own starting-point. Both *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Will to Power* agree that 'art is more valuable than truth'. Such an attitude helped him to barricade himself at least against the most destructive consequences of his own *Weltanschauung*. What is more, it transmuted his personal sufferings into a 'form of great ecstasy', and that was perhaps the main thing.

## IV

What all this philosophizing with clenched teeth must have cost him can be gathered from his own hint in a letter to Professor Overbeck (July 1885) where we come across this sentence: 'My life consists at present in the wish that all things be *different*<sup>1</sup> from the manner in which I understand them, and that someone would discredit my "truths" in my own eyes' (*und dass mir jemand meine 'Wahrheiten' unglauwbüridig mache*).

One of the reasons why he stuck to his positions so desperately in spite of all, was his determination not to give way to weakness—the most unpardonable sin in a heroic sufferer. But was not the 'metaphysical comfort' of art he finally adopted also a sign of weakness? And so was perhaps the very 'strength' with which he persevered in his defiant state of warfare against himself. By refusing a religious solution he abandoned perhaps the only path which might have led to an integration of his split personality, especially if we assume that what is called the spiritual plane is a complement rather than an antithesis of the biological plane. Supposing even that our spirit is (in Nietzsche's words) 'only the name of something in the body', we still cannot dismiss the fact that this 'something' has a life of its own which refuses to be forced back to mere biology.<sup>2</sup> A narrow biological view might in fact be as harmful to an ascending life as the one-sided spirituality of the ascetics and the puritans. It might preclude even a successful biological existence. If, as Nietzsche contends, truth is but that kind of error without which a certain species of living beings cannot exist, then why should we refuse to adopt that integrative religious attitude which promises a deeper and fuller life here on earth than mere 'biology' could ever give us? In the worst

<sup>1</sup> Italics are his.—J. L.

<sup>2</sup> Among the contemporary psychologists it is Carl Jung in particular who rejects the idea that man's spiritual life is a mere superstructure on his 'instinctual life'.

case this would be only one 'vital error' set up against another and less vital one.

Nietzsche's erratic pragmatism itself bids our will overcome that vitalist-biological gospel which he was so reluctant to abandon. And the more he defended it the more dearly he had to pay for it. His nerves and his health in general thus only grew more deplorable. The mysterious drug to which he was addicted for years in order to alleviate his pain, failed to improve either his physical or his mental state. The catastrophe overtook him because—under the circumstances—there was no escape from it. The surprising thing was that it had been so long in coming.

## XII

### NIETZSCHE AND ANTIQUITY

#### I

AS a typical romantic, isolated in the world in which he lived, Nietzsche looked for an escape both in the future and in the past. In his compensation-myth of Zarathustra he conjured up a wishful image of the future. And as for the past, he found an escape in ancient Greece: not in the Periclean and Socratic Greece, but in that of the sixth century B.C.—a fact which, after all, was less strange than it may seem. Apart from his intimate personal urges in this direction, there were two special reasons responsible for such a course. His concern about European culture was one of them; the traditional interest of so many German scholars in classical Greece was the other.

We need not dwell on the sincerity of Nietzsche's concern about the cultural future of Europe, whose inner ailments he knew to the core and did all he could to find the remedies required. The Swiss poet Carl Spitteler went so far as to say that if contemporary Europe had six men of Nietzsche's stamp, there still might be some hope for her culture. But if Nietzsche was often surprisingly right in his diagnosis, this does not mean that his remedies were right too. Anyway, seeing the futility of his warnings, he became more and more despondent about the future and was particularly critical of the German Reich (after 1872), which struck him as the embodiment of mere quantitative force at its worst and most arrogant. His aversion to Bismarck's Germany was so great indeed that he prided himself on having Polish blood in his veins and repeatedly stressed his admiration for French culture.

But Nietzsche was also a classical scholar, and this in a country where the enthusiasm for antiquity, confined

to an intellectual *élite*, had been on an exceptionally high level ever since the days of Winckelmann, Goethe, Schiller and Hoelderlin. Yet at a closer glance, the German enthusiasm for classical Greece showed, even in its heyday, a strangely romantic flavour. It seems to have been prompted by the proverbial longing of the northern pine-tree for the palm of the south, so aptly expressed in Heine's well-known poem. Ancient Greece, with its sunny ease, serenity and sense of measure, attracted some of the best Teutons as the land of their hearts' desire; as the complement and the necessary antipode to their northern heaviness, their *Geist der Schwere* (spirit of gravity). But such enthusiasm was by no means a guarantee of the invariable rightness of their understanding. It is known that Winckelmann himself went into ecstasies over the second-rate statues of the Graeco-Roman period. Even such men as Goethe and Lessing were not able to get rid of Winckelmann's blinkers. Goethe's *Italian Journey* is full of praise for things Winckelmann would have approved of. Lessing, on the other hand, eulogized in his *Laokoon* one of the inferior and theatrical statues bequeathed to us by decadent Graeco-Roman art. Like Winckelmann, Goethe saw in Greek antiquity only the Apollonian principle of measure and harmony. Hoelderlin guessed that the Greeks had been familiar with the disruptive and dynamic Dionysian element, but failed to develop his valuable intuition. It was Nietzsche who re-discovered as well as analysed this element, and thus transvalued the man of antiquity—to the dismay of the routine savants, then teeming in Germany. Although affected to some extent by his eminent colleague at Basle University, Jakob Burckhardt (whose work and personality must have been unusually stimulating), Nietzsche was driven by some of his own needs and dilemmas towards those conclusions about the Greeks which proved so startling and even irritating to the 'specialists' or the *Fachleute* of that period.

Analytical as he was, Nietzsche could not but notice (even before the onset of his own ailments) one of the evils prevalent among the cultured Europeans of his time: the split between Mind (*Geist*) and 'Nature' or Instinct. This separation between the two had by then already reached a stage where Mind turned against Nature, so that the 'theoretical' or dried-up intellectual man thrived at the expense of vital instincts. In order to arrive at some sort of adjustment, Nietzsche looked for a solution among the ancient Greeks and he thought he had found a clue to it in the so-called Dionysian element of collective revel and intoxication, typical of the sixth century B.C. But far from being a humane and harmonious nation, the Greeks of that period indulged, according to Nietzsche, also in an incredible lust for power—the actual source of their intrigues and rivalries; in unscrupulous realism, and in a view of life gloomy in the extreme.

## II

Some of Nietzsche's conclusions were not devoid of influences—from Burckhardt and Friedrich Schlegel to J. J. Bachofen, the Basle author of *Mutterrecht und Urreligion* (Mother-Right and the Primeval Religion). Even his important distinction between Dionysus and Apollo may have been suggested—as Charles Andler points out—by Jules Girard's book *Le Sentiment Religieux en Grèce d'Homère à Eschyle*, which appeared in 1869, that is, in the very year when Nietzsche began to work upon his own theory in his famous *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche turned to the sixth-century Greeks precisely because in them the strong instincts prevailed over the abstract theories of life—such as were current in the post-Socratic Greece, for instance. And in contrast to so many savants, he discovered even among the earlier Homeric Greeks an abyss of pessimism and potential denial of life, both of which they had averted, in his opinion, by their aesthetic transvaluation of the world.

In order to endure the horror of existence, they interposed between the actual world and themselves, the 'shining dream-birth of the Olympian world. To be able to live, the Greeks had, from direct necessity, to create these gods. . . . The same impulse which calls art into being, prompting a continuation of life, also caused the Olympian world to arise, in which the Hellenic "will" held up before itself a transfiguring mirror. Thus do the gods justify the life of man in that they themselves live it—the only satisfactory Theodicy! Existence under the bright sunshine of such gods is regarded as that which is desirable in itself, and the real grief of the Homeric men has reference to parting from it, especially to early parting.'

Apollo, the god of harmony, rhythm and measure vanquished the chaotic prehistoric Titans. At the same time, he veiled the horrors of existence by conjuring up the beautiful illusion of the laughing Olympian gods. But Apollo was also the god of individuation, i.e. of one's personal differentiation from the more or less amorphous collective or tribal group. His importance in this respect was the greater because the individual of that period was still in danger of reverting to such pre-individual consciousness, or even to the procreative will of Nature, and thus dissolving in the orgiastic Dionysian ecstasy of self-obliteration. A 'back to nature' of this kind would have led to disaster but for the Apollonian principle of measure which kept the Dionysian ecstasy itself within proper limits. This co-operation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian impulses was, in the sixth century B.C., responsible for the birth of Attic tragedy and for all that was best in Greek culture.

The reveller in Attic tragedy saw himself, according to Nietzsche, as a satyr possessed by Dionysus. But in the very transformation of his consciousness he beheld a new vision outside himself—i.e. on the stage, as a balancing and harmonizing complement of his Dionysian revels.

So the Dionysian chorus always disburdened itself anew in an Apollonian world of pictures. Its chief aim was to rid the spectators of pessimism and to make them affirm life—in spite of the fact that the sixth-century Greeks were, perhaps, more inclined to say *no* to existence than those of any other period. In the end they were able to endure life mainly because they approached it as an aesthetic phenomenon. Greek tragedy, more than any other art, thus became a sublimation of pessimism and an example of ‘metaphysical comfort’ at its best. Tragic art became, as it were, an antipode of pessimistic art.

### III

That tragic attitude which he found among the sixth-century Greeks Nietzsche gradually worked out in a manner designed to satisfy some of his own needs. It is for this reason that *The Birth of Tragedy* represents a link between Greek thought and Nietzsche’s principal ideas. This holds good despite the spell of Schopenhauer, and especially of Richard Wagner in whose work he so mistakenly looked for analogies with the spirit of Greek tragedy before Euripides.

Suffering from the split between Mind and Instinct, Nietzsche obviously stressed the *instinctive* Dionysian element as against the abstract ‘Socratic’ tendency in modern man. And since his own inner dilemma grew more and more involved, he was bound to modify also his Dionysian view, which he combined even with his thoroughly camouflaged death-instinct.

Most telling in this respect is a passage in *The Twilight of the Idols* (1888). Looking back to his first book, he commented on it in the light of all the inner and external experiences he had passed through since, and came to the following conclusion: ‘The affirmation of life, even in its most unfamiliar and severe problems, the will to life, enjoying its own inexhaustibility in the sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is

what I divined as the bridge to a psychology of the *tragic* poet. Not in order to get rid of terror and pity, *to realize in fact* the eternal delight of becoming, the delight which even involves in itself the *joy of annihilating*. In this sense I have the right to understand myself to be the first *tragic philosopher*—that is, the antithesis and antipode to a pessimistic philosopher.'

As if determined to make his attitude towards his own suffering Dionysian in this sense, Nietzsche was drawn to the Greeks of the tragic age—even if he suspected in their sensuous revels (mentioned in his first book) only a trick of nature, eternally active without any other motive except that of destroying everything she creates. But a strong man must be able to face such a truth about existence without succumbing to the temptations of Schopenhauer's pessimism. After all, the mysterious process of the World-Will demands that the revelling Dionysus should alternate with the destroyed and yet invariably resurrected Dionysus Zagreus ('cut to pieces').

#### IV

Aware of the separation between Mind and Nature, Nietzsche the invalid could not but side with Nature and Instinct as against Mind. By Mind he understood above all two phenomena against which he directed all his fury. One of them was that abstract reasoning and moralizing for its own sake the origin of which he saw in Socrates; and the other—Christian spirituality, traditionally distrustful of human instincts.

We need not dwell on Nietzsche's hatred of Socrates. But it is significant that he put even the Greek sophists higher than him. Similarly, he preferred Aeschylus to the moralizing Euripides. As for Nietzsche's struggle with his own latent Christian spirituality, it is enough to point to his *Anti-Christ* and *The Will to Power* in order to understand why he eventually summoned again his myth-making capacity in the name of Dionysus and of

'biology' combined. If Christ on the Cross is a denial of this world and of this life, Dionysus torn to pieces and resurrected *for the sake of this life* and this world is a final affirmation of existence in the very teeth of its pain and suffering.

Dionysus versus the Crucified thus meant to Nietzsche a final 'victory' over pessimism. Yet the 'Dionysian' outburst of instincts, separated from or turned against both spirituality and reasoning, cannot but become chaotic. It may lead to personal disintegration, insanity, destruction and self-destruction. Nietzsche's inner crisis, instead of being solved, was thereby only deepened and further complicated. As he could neither integrate the Crucified and Dionysus in his own consciousness nor side entirely with Dionysus, the tension between the two became so strong that he was unable to cope with it. Judging by the letters he sent to a number of people between the Christmas of 1888 and 6 January 1889, the clash between these two elements reached, during his incipient mental collapse, such a pitch that he *identified* himself now with Dionysus and then with Christ. The letters addressed to Professor Overbeck and his wife, to Erwin Rohde and to Cosima Wagner are signed *Dionysus*. Those he sent to King Umberto, to Mariani, and to the ruling house of Baden bear the signature *The Crucified*.

Whatever the physical causes of Nietzsche's breakdown, the gap between 'Dionysus' and the 'Crucified' within his own consciousness certainly speeded it up. Unwilling to be a Christian, he was yet unable to become a pagan. How little of a real 'Dionysian' pagan there was in him can be gauged even from his erotic life—the last ingredient of his inner make-up still to be examined.

### XIII

## NIETZSCHE AND EROTICS

#### I

AS in so many other things, Nietzsche was most ambiguous also in his attitude towards women. The rough manliness he was so fond of putting on when speaking about the fair sex should never be taken literally: there was a romantic behind it all, even a sentimental dreamer, much too shy to be a ladies' man, let alone a heart-breaker. The women he felt more at home with were elderly spinsters (but not of the 'bluestocking' variety), in whose company sex hardly mattered at all. How much he really yearned for that loving care which only women can give was shown by his attachment to his self-reliant sister Elisabeth, in whom he found (until she married) a friend, a nurse and the substitute for a wife in one.

This need of a loving woman-companion must have persisted in him during all the years of his loneliness and frustration. And since he failed to make any woman of the right kind fall in love with him, he once again found it necessary to interpret his lack of success in such a manner as to remain 'favourably inclined' towards himself. His egotism would not admit that the fault was with him, so it had to be on the side of women. This gave Nietzsche another opportunity of proclaiming himself a superior individual—so superior indeed, that he could not possibly associate with womenfolk, whom he pretended to despise.

'Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly.

'The happiness of man is, "I will". The happiness of woman is, "He will".

'Thou goest to women? Do not forget thy whip!'

This sounds easy in theory, but it proved more difficult in practice, especially when the problem of sex intruded. Unable to find its realization in and through love, sex often tends to divorce itself from love and to find satisfaction apart from it, or even against it. And since here, too, man's 'I will' is not necessarily answered by a woman's happiness in 'He will', cases of associating with casual women, not for love but for the mere satisfaction of sex, can occur even among high-minded individuals. We do not know much about Nietzsche's intimate sexual life, but judging by one or two puzzling facts he apparently had to pay a terrible price for his supposed early contacts with women. We have already quoted the extract from the log of the Jena clinic. In the records of the Basle hospital, too, where Nietzsche was under treatment in the first half of January 1889, one can read this rather laconic sentence: 'States that he became infected on two previous occasions.' And Dr. Baumann, who had examined Nietzsche in Turin at the outbreak of his insanity, wrote in his report: 'Maintains that he is a famous man, and is asking for women all the time.'

## II

If Nietzsche's illness and subsequent insanity were due to syphilitic infection (a supposition which is not unanimously endorsed), then one could well understand his outbursts against women. But once he had worked out his scheme of things with the superman as its apex, he could not relegate to woman the role of mere female and 'recreation of the warrior'. After all, the prospective superman had the right to postulate that his mother should be a woman worthy of giving birth to him. Aware of this, Nietzsche proceeded to depict in glowing colours the mother of the superman as he would like her to be. Yet in the same *Thus Spake Zarathustra* we find a number of dithyrambs full of such voluptuous images as though they emanated from an eastern potentate surrounded by

a swarm of beautiful odalisques. The chapter *Daughters of the Desert*, for example, could have been written only by a man whose unsatisfied sex looked for strong imaginary compensations. So we must be on our guard when Nietzsche poses as an 'experienced' connoisseur of women. Many of his spiteful references on their account came from Schopenhauer and Chamfort, rather than from personal observation. The fury of his attacks is moreover suggestive of a man in whom the craving for a loving woman and fellow-worker has only been repressed and not killed. As chance would have it, Nietzsche did meet a woman after his heart's desire, but in circumstances which precluded any hope of winning her. Her name was Cosima Wagner—the wife of the great composer.

Nietzsche used to meet Cosima regularly at Tribschen near Luzern during the heyday of his friendship with Wagner. His notes and correspondence testify to the deep impression she had made on him. Never before or after did he admire a woman as much as he admired her. It is even possible that one of the causes of Nietzsche's breach with Wagner in 1876 was his secret love for Cosima, of whom Wagner had 'robbed' him, as it were. Hence the hysterical invectives he hurled, later on, at his former friend, whom he suddenly wanted to unmask as being a *Falschmünzer* (forger) of music, a *poseur*, and a compendium of all decadent vices. The important thing was to prove to the world, and above all to Cosima herself, that of the two rivals for her love Wagner was decidedly unworthy of her.

After his breach with the composer Nietzsche never saw Cosima again. But neither did he get rid of her image—the image of the only woman whose love might, perhaps, have helped him to come to terms with himself and with life. In 1887, i.e. less than two years before his collapse, he wrote in his notebook: 'Frau Cosima Wagner is the only woman made in a greater style I have ever

met, but I grudge her the fact that she ruined Wagner. How could such a thing have happened? He was unworthy of such a wife: so as a matter of thanks he became her victim (*zum Dank dafür verfiel er ihr*).

## III

Cosimía was not the only frustrated love in Nietzsche's life. During the festivals at Bayreuth, in 1876, he met a certain Mme Louise Ott—a charming Parisienne who made a strong impression upon him and who, incidentally, was already happily married. Nietzsche's attitude towards her was chivalrous in the extreme, and his letters to her are full of respect. In the same year he was introduced, at Geneva, to Mathilde Trampedach—a girl from the Baltic provinces, and fell in love with her. This time he made a proposal in writing, but was rejected. As though wounded in his manly pride, he retired within himself and only six years later—when he met '*die interessante Russin*', Lou Salomé—did he venture to think again of a woman in terms of love and marriage.

Nietzsche and Lou Salomé were introduced to each other in 1882 by that sincere if fussy philanthropist Malwida von Meysenbug, with the benevolent intention of bringing about a match between the two. Although not beautiful, Lou was well educated, intellectually alert, and had a flair for the things that matter. Perhaps it was she who introduced him to certain aspects of Russian culture, especially to Dostoevsky, whom Nietzsche considered the 'only psychologist in Europe from whom I could learn something'. Lou and Nietzsche spent a summer together at Tautenburg in Thuringia, during which he became much attached to her. Having found in her not only a friend but a potential disciple (he could never separate the two), Nietzsche gave an enthusiastic account of her in a letter to Professor Overbeck. He even set to music her *Hymn to Life*, or *Lebensgebet* (Life-Prayer) as it was originally called. Nietzsche's influence on her

comes out so strongly at the end of this poem that its few lines deserve to be quoted:

Lass deine Flamme meinen Geist entzünden,  
Lass in der Glut des Kampfes mich  
Die Rätsellösung deines Wesens finden,  
Jahrtausende zu denken und zu leben,  
Wirf deinen Inhalt voll hinein—  
Hast du kein Glück mehr übrig mir zu geben,  
Wohlan, noch hast du deine Pein.

(Let thy flame my spirit kindle,  
Let me in the glow of strife  
Find the solution of thy essence,  
Let me think and live a thousand years,  
Throw all thy contents wholly into it—  
Hast thou no happiness left to give me,  
Well, thou canst still give me thy sorrow.)

In October of the same year (1882) he was with her and their mutual friend, Paul Rée, in Leipzig. Here he proposed to her—through Rée—and was rejected. The somewhat unpalatable part played by Rée in this matter made Nietzsche indignant and disgusted. The whole affair can only serve as another proof of how much he always idealized his friends: seeing in them not real men and women, but the phantoms his wishful thinking had turned them into. A further blow came from his own mother and sister, both of whom disliked Lou Salomé from the very first and consequently did their best to interfere with his wooing. His sister's reactions in particular were full of provincial gossip, slander and petty jealousy. The rupture between Nietzsche and Lou Salomé thus took place amidst misunderstandings and vile family quarrels. The bitter taste they left behind can be felt in Zarathustra's *Grave Song*:

"To kill *me*, did they strangle you, ye singing birds of my hopes! Yea, at you, ye dearest ones, did malice ever shoot its arrows—to hit my heart!

'At my most vulnerable point did they shoot the arrow, namely at you, whose skin is like down—or more like the smile that dieth at a glance!

'But this word will I say unto mine enemies: What is all manslaughter in comparison with what ye have done unto me?

'Worse evil did ye do unto me than all manslaughter: the ir retrievable did ye take from me: thus do I speak unto you, mine enemies.'

## IV

Nietzsche was thirty-eight years old when he parted with Lou Salomé. Nothing reliable is known about his sexual life from that time on, apart from the fact that he still cherished the hope of getting married. But his demands were now less exacting. In a semi-bantering tone he kept urging a few of his friends, especially the good-hearted Malwida, to be on the look-out for a suitable *Hausfrau* for him, even if she were unable to share any of his deeper interests. He seemed to have resigned himself to such modest ambitions particularly after his sister's marriage (in 1884) to a man whom he despised, but these hopes, too, were doomed to failure. 'The only course left was to accept the inevitable and to 'transvalue' his defeat into an asset and a virtue by lowering woman, once again, to something unworthy of him and therefore undesirable. Yet no matter how much he tried to repress his libido, his need of a woman's love and affection, smouldering in the deeper layers of his consciousness, threatened all the time to break through. A most interesting illustration is his fragment *Naxos* (1885). Here Nietzsche actually fashioned out of Cosima, Wagner and himself a symbolic-mythological trio, in which Cosima figures as Ariadne, Wagner as the caddish Theseus, and Nietzsche himself as Dionysus, who magnanimously marries Ariadne after Theseus has so cowardly deserted her in Naxos.

Nietzsche's wishful thinking thus became transparently clear. Three years later, when his mind had already collapsed in Turin, Cosima received from him three notes, in the second of which he addressed her as 'Princess Ariadne, my beloved one!' And among the records of his disconnected babbling in the Jena clinic (March 1889) we read the sentence: 'My wife, Cosima Wagner, brought me here.' Another and this time the last poignant clue to the tragedy of Nietzsche's frustrated love-life.

## XIV

### NIETZSCHE AND POLITICS

#### I

THE personal element in Nietzsche's philosophy may have at times deflected or even distorted the trend of his thought, yet it never undermined his interest in mankind and its future. Nor were the analogies he drew between his own dilemma and that of modern decadence entirely arbitrary, since in both cases the problem of averting the menace of disintegration was of primary importance. The vigilance with which he followed the various phases of his own ailments undoubtedly sharpened his eyes also with regard to the evils of his epoch, some of which he saw more clearly, one is tempted to say—more clairvoyantly, than any of his contemporaries. However much we may reject his prescriptions we can hardly deny the frequent accuracy with which he diagnosed the growing moral and cultural maladies of Europe at a time when private and official optimism in this respect was still considered a matter of course. Nor can one help agreeing with some of his 'biological' warnings, especially those concerning the levity with which we allow the incurable, the imbeciles, and the criminal degenerates to breed posterity. It is only when one comes across Nietzsche's political pronouncements that one doubts the reliability of his vision and most certainly that of his remedies.

Nietzsche himself was not much interested in politics *qua* politics. The unscrupulous *canaille politique*, so characteristic of our age, struck him as an alarming sign of our decadence and therefore awakened in him nothing but contempt. 'Among people of strange languages did I dwell, with stopped ears: so that the language of their

trafficking might remain strange unto me, and their bargaining for power.' When he thought of politics at all, he did so in terms of broader issues, inseparable from his premonitions about the future of Europe. Many of his opinions were later deliberately perverted by such would-be followers in politics as were anxious to drag Nietzsche down to their own level. But is it not Nietzsche's own ambiguity which often enables one to prove almost anything by means of single passages, taken outside and apart from his work as a whole? So much so that one is quite used by now to such expressions as Nietzsche and Mussolini, Nietzsche and Hitler, even Nietzsche and A. Rosenberg.

This ought to make us, however, doubly careful not to identify Nietzscheanism with the real and essential Nietzsche. Least of all should we identify him with some of those political theories which, not so long ago, used to be cynically peddled by the self-appointed 'leaders' and champions of 'dynamic' politics. What could be more ironical than the fact that the blackout of modern culture, which Nietzsche tried so hard to avert, has largely taken place in his name? Practically all the Fascist and Nazi theories can find some support in Nietzsche's texts, provided we give them the required twist. The same applies most particularly to the apostles of German *Realpolitik* during the last two generations, including such historians as Treitschke and Bernhardi. So it may not be beside the point to mention at least a few of those Nietzschean tenets which have a bearing upon the political confusion of our age.

## II

Nietzsche's view that permanent struggle and notably war is one of the desirable disciplinary and 'selective' measures is a case in point. To us, who have seen the staggering waste of life through the slaughter of our finest biological individuals, his opinion that war purifies

and elevates the human race seems ludicrous in the extreme. 'Biology' without our present-day technique might have given perhaps some justification to such an attitude; but what possible justification could ever be found in an atomic age in which personal strength and courage do not count at all? The only excuse for Nietzsche is that instead of taking into consideration a future full of limitless technical possibilities (and therefore capable of limitless destruction), he preferred to look back, to the Greeks of the tragic era, or to the Renaissance of the Cesare Borgia period. His own view of war was tinted all over with a compensatory heroic-romantic ideal, whose gist becomes clear only if we study Nietzsche's thought through Nietzsche himself. To invoke Nietzsche in support of modern militarism is therefore naïve, to say the least.

Let us take as a second example Nietzsche's attitude towards democracy. We need not refer to his impressionistic method of thinking, full of emotionally dramatized antitheses, in order to explain why his thought so often moves in the area of extreme contrasts and situations. Unfortunately, he applied the principle of black and white also to his sociological and political schemes, thus risking further misinterpretations. Convinced that every elevation of human species has always been and always will be the work of an aristocratic *élite*—an *élite* 'believing in a long scale of gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings', he was horrified by the mere possibility of a future belonging to the masses; to the mere quantity and the vulgar mediocrity.

This was more or less what Nietzsche understood by democracy, which he rather arbitrarily confused with plebeianism. Yet the difference between the two is enormous. Whereas genuine democracy can only be visualized as a universal process of levelling up, the function of plebeianism is just the reverse: a process of universal levelling down to the most common denominator.

In confusing the two, Nietzsche—like so many intellectuals of that period—saw in the democracy and especially in the working-class movement of our time, a purely quantitative tendency directed against the quality of the individual and of the cultural *élite*. In his opinion, the masses were not ripe for culture but, at the most, for general education which, in any case, he regarded as being primarily a matter of statistics. He also interpreted the democratic and socialist ideas as being direct offsprings of Christianity; for which reason they were doubly hateful to him.

Working on these premises, he reduced both democracy and socialism to the rising of the 'botched and bungled' against the superior type of man. Rather sweepingly, he saw in our socialist movement in particular the 'tyranny of the meanest and the most brainless—that is to say, the superficial, the envious, and the mummers, brought to its zenith'. Hence the *naïveté* of his own aristocratic system, with the superman as its apex and the well-organized slavery as its base. In this totalitarian system he combined certain elements of Plato's *Republic* and *The Laws* with those of the Hindu *Code of Manu* (based on the severest caste-principle), and even with the tradition of the Junkers. But in postulating for his *élite* a maximum of biological fitness and power as one of the first requisites, he was obviously in danger of mistaking the means (power) for the end. So it was all the easier for some of his followers to confuse might with right and to substitute one for the other. And here again, it was his shrill, provocative wording that was often to blame. Some of his passages actually eulogize power in its crudest aspects. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he is even ready, in spite of all his cultural preoccupations, to affirm might pure and simple as against right. 'Let us acknowledge without prejudice', he generalizes once more, 'how every higher civilisation hitherto has *originated!* Men with a still natural nature, barbarians in every terrible sense of

the word, men of prey, still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races (perhaps trading or cattle-rearing communities), or upon old mellow civilizations in which the final vital force was flickering out in brilliant fireworks of wit and depravity. At the commencement, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste—they were more *complete* men (which at every point also implies the same as “more complete beasts”).’

Knowing the intimate reasons by virtue of which the gentle invalid Nietzsche was fascinated even by his most barbarous opposites—provided there was strength in them, we shall think it twice over before taking such a generalization literally. This does not make him, however, less harmful for those who, for reasons of their own, are determined to take all his utterances at their face value. Why indeed should not a few modern ‘complete beasts’ of the sort try to justify their lust for power and prove—in the name of Nietzsche—that might, duly supported by Krupp’s guns, is the only right? The superman can conveniently be replaced by the Super-nation and thus open the gates to further fakes and distortions whose name is million. The most tempting of them will obviously be to set up a standard according to which good is only what benefits the nation concerned, while everything that obstructs its appetites is proclaimed evil, and this not in a relative but in an absolute sense—as evil in itself. Violence and the cult of violence, mistaken for strength, are thus enthroned in all their glory. Here we reach that point where Nietzsche’s popularized will to power is mixed up with modern power politics in the worst sense, and this in spite of Nietzsche himself.

### III

It would not be without interest to follow up, at this juncture, the path of German imperialistic thought from

Bismarck to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and A. Rosenberg's *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, the two books most typical of the Nazi ideology as well as practice. But in order to make the whole of that trend such an overwhelming though temporary success it was first necessary to alter, as far as possible, the mental and moral climate of Germany—a long and complicated process. There is no need to dwell on the part played in this process by the economic struggle between the modern nations; nor on the incurable 'inferiority complex' of so many Germans who were only too glad to indulge in any doctrine capable of stirring up their frustrated ambitions. The very vogue of Nietzsche was partly due to the accelerated pace of German imperialism and lust for conquest. A judiciously 'interpreted' selection of his writings was always sure to stimulate in his compatriots that overbearing attitude which, since the days of Bismarck, made them see in organized might the only right. Promoted by irresponsible political adventurers to the rank of a 'super-nation', they were easily induced to look upon all other nations as their inferiors and potential slaves in one. The cult of the 'mailed fist' fostered the German dreams of national expansion first on a European and then on a global scale. The notorious *Realpolitik* (in its zoological sense) thus led to the two most destructive wars history has ever known.

In this respect, at any rate, applied Nietzscheanism proved to be a fatality, but in the opposite sense from what Nietzsche himself had aimed at. It is true that here, as on so many other occasions, his own brutal criticism of Christianity and democracy had played into the hands of his political would-be followers, not to mention his doctrine of hardness, as well as his readiness to consider a 'big cause' (whatever this may be) more important than humanity itself. Such a dictum as 'We must learn how to sacrifice *many people* and to take our cause sufficiently seriously not to spare mankind', taken literally and out of

its context, can do any amount of harm. So we need not wonder why the eulogist of Nazism, Richard Oehler, declares that 'Nietzsche's thought is Hitler in action'; or why Nietzsche's aged sister, Frau Elisabeth Foerster-Nietzsche, hails the one-time paper-hanger as the incarnation of the superman her brother had dreamed of. One could mention hundreds of equally silly instances.

The comical side in all this is the fact that Nietzsche himself was the last man to have a flattering opinion of the Germans whom the Nazis wanted to install, in his name, on the pinnacle of world-history as a super-nation. Even if we take it for granted that in his criticism there was always a certain amount of *odi et amo* (hatred through love), we cannot help placing his utterances about the Germans among the severest things ever said about them. He was fully aware of the bewildering complexity of the German nation which he sized up by this brief sentence in *Beyond Good and Evil*: 'As a people made up of the most extraordinary mixing and mingling of races, perhaps even with a preponderance of the pre-Aryan element, the Germans are more intangible, more ample, more contradictory, more unknown, more incalculable, more surprising, and even more terrifying than other people are to themselves—they escape *definition*.' Yet in his rancorous and spiteful criticism he made a number of statements about them which are almost too sweeping to be entirely true.

One of his well-known sayings is that 'every great crime against culture during the last four centuries lies on the conscience of the Germans'. Already in his youthful *Thoughts out of Season* he defined Germany as the 'flatland of Europe', and showed scant respect for her eclecticism or for that encyclopaedic book-keeping in matters of culture with which she was so anxious to impress the world. 'The German heaps up around him the forms, colours, products and curiosities of all ages and zones and thereby succeeds in producing that garish

newness, as of a country fair, which his scholars then proceed to contemplate and to define as "*Modernism per se*"; and there he remains squatting peacefully in the midst of this conflict of the styles.' In *The Twilight of the Idols* he goes so far as to hurl at his compatriots sentences such as this: 'I despise in them every kind of filthiness of ideas and values. . . . For almost a thousand years they have tangled and confused everything they have laid their hands on.' In *The Wagner Case* he calls Prussia (with much justification) the 'blackest spot on earth', while in one of his letters to Hippolyte Taine (1888) he bluntly states that all his instincts are 'at war with Germany'.

But the number of quotations is irrelevant. Suffice it to say that even the spurious racial doctrine, subsequently turned by the Nazis into one of their dogmas, was defined by Nietzsche as that 'brazen humbug of racialism'. In a letter to his publisher Fritzsche he furthermore declared that he had always found the Jews more interesting than the Germans. One of his aphorisms (205) in *The Dawn of Day* is a regular paean to the Jews, whom he compliments with things he would never have dreamed of saying about the Germans. But how silent were the Nazi eulogists of Nietzsche about this aspect of his thought! His hatred of Germany turned in the end even into a kind of obsession. In December 1888—that is on the very eve of his insanity—he wrote to Professor Overbeck: 'I am busy with a Memorandum addressed to the Courts of Europe with the object of forming an anti-German League.' One can guess how he would have reacted against Nazi Germany, with her ruthless organization of that very nihilism in which he foresaw the most destructive agency in modern history.

The shallowness with which the Nazis 'adapted' Nietzsche to their own political and ideological purposes is, however, best illustrated by the difference between his and the Nazi attitude towards the State. It is known that the Nazi system represented the final phase of that

state-worship which began with the Prussianism of Frederick miscalled the Great and later received a metaphysical or even mystical endorsement in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. The idea of the Prussian State, being according to Hegel the ultimate embodiment of the self-revealing universal Spirit himself and, in any case, the supreme goal of history, did eventually sanction—for all its romantic flavour—the brutal 'realism' of Bismarck, Wilhelm II and Hitler. But a police-state, in which the individual is reduced to a mere tool piously listening to the decrees of those in power, is bound to lead sooner or later, as it actually did, to the blessings of concentration camps. It is therefore only fair to say that no one condemned such state-worship more passionately than Nietzsche. These few passages from Zarathustra's sermon *Of the New Idols* can serve as an example:

"The State is called the coldest of all monsters. And coldly it lieth, and this lie creepeth out of its mouth: "I, the State, am the people."

"It is a lie! Creators were they who created the peoples and hung one belief and one love over them; thus they served life.

"Destroyers are they who lay traps for many, calling them the State: they hung a sword and a hundred desires over them.

"The State is a liar in all tongues of good and evil: whatever it saith it lieth; whatever it hath it hath stolen.

"False is everything in it; with stolen teeth it biteth, the biting one. False are even its intestines.

"On earth there is nothing greater than I. God's regulating finger am I", thus the monster howleth. And not only those with long ears and short sight sink upon their knees!

"What I call the State is where all are poison-drinkers, the good and the evil alike. What I call the State is where all lose themselves, the good and the evil alike. What I call the State is where the slow suicide of all is called "life".

'Where the State ceaseth, there beginneth that man who is not superfluous: there beginneth the song of the necessary, the melody that is sung once and cannot be replaced.'

## IV

It is beyond the scope of this book to deal with the more substantial influences of Nietzsche's thought—via Sorel, Max Weber, Pareto, Oswald Spengler, etc.—on certain aspects of modern social-political trends and theories. His own interest in politics was, however, motivated by two reasons which actually complete each other. First, he was on the look-out for such conditions as would be likely to put a stop to our 'nihilism', with its chaos of values. Secondly, whatever pattern of existence he advocated, his principal concern was the ascending type of life (as he understood it), with the aim of promoting a higher species of man. Yet in his attempts at achieving this he eventually reached the conclusion that our 'democratic' chaos of values was desirable at least in so far as it favoured the advent of a ruling *élite* whose task would be to shape mankind according to the strictest order of rank.

Nietzsche, who more than anybody else rejected the State as a monster demanding a continuous 'slow' suicide (i.e. sacrifice of human beings) thus suddenly postulated that the same sacrifices should be made to his own idea of a social structure in which the ruling *élite* was to be separated from the 'herd' by an immeasurable 'pathos of distance'. A scheme of this kind might fit into a period of totalitarian feudalism; but in a technical age such as ours it is utterly 'out of season'; the more so because our highly developed technique tends to raise and to spread the general standard of living so as to minimize, at least in this respect, the gap between the masses and the elect. Culturally, too, our problem is no longer how to make an *élite* of the mind thrive at the expense of the masses, but how to make the *élite* itself

collaborate with the masses in order to raise the general standard of culture to a height where commercialized modern plebeianism would no longer threaten to level everything down to the commonest and the most vulgar denominator. After all, an *élite* can exist only if supported by the masses, and a high standard of culture can be achieved and maintained only if the two are complementary instead of being antagonistic.

The truth is that in an age such as ours, the choice is no longer between an aristocratic *élite* and the 'herd', as Nietzsche would have it, but one between true democracy and plebeianism. In confusing the last two, Nietzsche would not even contemplate the possibility of a *qualitative* democratic culture, accessible to all who are willing to acquire it. Thinking only in terms of privileges, he was therefore obliged to look back to the past—to the Renaissance period and to Greece, as if such a past could be of any use to us who are grappling with entirely different tasks and conditions. So in spite of the role played by 'applied' Nietzscheanism in recent politics, it would be unwise to take Nietzsche himself seriously as a politician. Above all it is necessary that the *essential* Nietzsche should be dissociated from those who claim to have been 'inspired' by him—we know well enough how such inspirations can be manufactured *en gros* nowadays. Far from being among the actual originators of Nazi Germany, Nietzsche at his best moments advocated a cultural integration of that very Europe which the Nazis were so anxious to disintegrate in order to turn it into a German colony. It is this aspect of Nietzsche that still remains to be dealt with.

XV  
THE 'GOOD EUROPEAN'

I

ANY reliable approach to Nietzsche confronts one, sooner or later, with his ideas about the European culture as a whole and with his 'good Europeanism'. For in spite of all his vagaries and contradictions, Nietzsche remained a 'good European'—one of the best after Goethe. Steeped in the cultural tradition of Europe, from ancient Greece onwards, he was profoundly aware of the organic character of that tradition, and felt in consequence all the more acutely the tragedy of its decline. His very inconsistencies were often due to the conflict between his 'biological' and his cultural preoccupations. On the biological plane, for example, Nietzsche the invalid demanded incessant strife and struggle in order to increase thereby one's will to power. On the cultural plane, however, it was Nietzsche the man who longed for an integration of Europe—an integration which only could take place if the political and economic rivalries of the various European states were put aside in the name of a broad pan-European outlook.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for instance, he points out what he calls an 'immense physiological process' of the assimilation of Europeans; their 'increasing independence of every definite *milieu*, that for centuries would fain inscribe itself with equal demands on soul and body; that is to say, the slow emergence of an essentially *supernational* and nomadic species of man, who possesses, physiologically speaking, a maximum of the art and power of adaptation as his typical distinction. . . . With all the more profound and large-minded men of this century, the real general tendency of the mysterious labour of

their souls was to prepare the way for that new *synthesis*, and tentatively to anticipate the European of the future.'

One could prove by further quotations that, in this respect, Nietzsche was heir to Herder and Goethe in Germany, and to the best cosmopolitan minds in other countries. His career actually coincided with that era in which European consciousness was still a vital factor even in Germany. But from 1872 onwards Germany tried more and more persistently to disrupt that consciousness in order to satiate her own political and territorial ambitions at the expense of her neighbours. Nietzsche sensed the dangers inherent in such a tendency and did not mince words. It was he who said bluntly to his compatriots that their military victory over the French in 1871 was the greatest debacle for German culture. It was he again who anticipated nothing but disaster in a Europe dominated by Germany which, in her turn, was already dominated by the Prussian jackboot.

Both the first and the second World Wars have surpassed Nietzsche's worst apprehensions. But if this be so, the 'good Europeanism' in which he saw the only remedy for a disintegrating continent acquires a special significance now that the resurrection of a European consciousness has become a question of life and death. For let there be no mistake: unless the 'balkanized' Europe becomes integrated—that is, united not only from without but also from within—she will soon be nothing more than a wasteland, and the focus of history will definitely be shifted away from her to some other part of our globe. If Europe is to survive at all as Europe, then her political and economic unity (if it ever comes) must be preceded by that inner bond which springs from the awareness of a common historical and cultural heritage. The alternative is either chaotic or else organized barbarity, and the latter is in many respects even worse than the first.

## II

As a child of his age Nietzsche grew up right in the centre of a Europe doomed to a process of rapid industrialization, the dehumanizing function of which was clear enough. Unfamiliar with economic factors but at the same time keenly aware of their worst results, he was all the sharper in his judgments. These were prompted, among other things, by his own aspirations of a cultured European who was already doubtful of the culture of Europe. It all amounted to the verdict that modern Europe, with her chaos of values and her 'demi-monde of intellect', was a prey to nihilism, threatening her with a disaster without a parallel in the past.

True enough, he succeeded in conjuring up the ideal of a heroic existence as the opposite pole of the decadence so typical of his time. But even if it were feasible, such a romantic ideal would of necessity have corresponded only to long-term tactics. His short-term tactics, on the other hand, had certain definite objectives to fight for and also to fight against. And since one of his short-term aims was a united Europe, he saw his immediate foe in the narrow-minded nationalism: not only in the nationalism of the Bismarckian Germany, but in that of any modern nation whether big or small. It was in such a mood that he exhorted all true Europeans to overcome it at any cost. 'A little fresh air, for heaven's sake! This ridiculous condition of Europe *must not* last longer. Is there a single idea left at the back of this bovine nationalism? What possible value can there be in the encouragement of such arrogant self-conceit when everything to-day points towards greater and more reciprocal interests; when spiritual inter-dependence and denationalization, obvious to all, are paving the way for those mutual *rapprochements* and fertilizations which constitute the real value and the sense of our present-day culture!' In *Human all-too-Human* Nietzsche expressed his admiration even for the

medieval Christian Church as 'an institution with an absolutely universal aim, involving the whole of humanity: an aim, moreover, which—presumably—concerned man's highest interests; in comparison therewith the aims of the States and nations which modern history exhibits make a painful impression; they seem petty, base, material and restricted in extent'.

As far as Nietzsche approved of a country's or a nation's prestige at all, he was willing to do so only on the ground of its cultural and not its political or purely technical achievements. 'It is the men of culture who determine the rank of their country, and they are characterized by an innumerable number of great inward experiences, which they have digested and can now value justly', he says in *The Dawn of Day*. But while stressing the need and the role of superior individuals whose prerogatives he jealously defended, he yet, for once, expressed the wish that such individuals and their nations should be complementary to each other. 'How many real individual actions are left undone merely because before performing them we perceive or suspect that they will be misunderstood—those actions, for example, which have some intrinsic value both in good and evil. The more highly an age or a nation values its individuals, therefore, and the more right and ascendancy we afford them, the more actions of this kind venture to make themselves known—and thus in the long run a lustre of honesty, of genuineness in good and evil, will spread over entire ages and nations, so that they—the Greeks, for example—like certain stars, will continue to shed light for thousands of years after their sinking.'

We need not be disturbed by the word *evil* used by Nietzsche in this context. It stands for that unavoidable and, perhaps, necessary antagonism to good without which good itself would (in his opinion) grow static and sterile. The important fact is that while laying due stress on the individual achievements, Nietzsche—with

all his advocacy of struggle and competition—was yet the last man to relish those political squabbles and nationalistic rivalries which threatened to disrupt the compactness of Europe and of European tradition. Hence his repeated allegiance to European consciousness in the best and broadest sense.

## III

This allegiance links him to other 'good Europeans' of repute, such as Montaigne, who openly acknowledged that he regarded any national kinship as inferior to the human and universal one. But as human and universal kinship can thrive only on a high cultural level, all nationalism is potentially anti-cultural in so far as it tends to become exclusive and to breed intolerance, as well as obtuse provincialism. Nietzsche, whose youth and early manhood were spent in a provincial atmosphere then prevalent in Germany, knew full well why he rejected everything 'local' and provincial for the sake of a larger and more cultured supra-national life. His Janus-like nature became nowhere more evident than in the passion with which this champion of individual exclusiveness, of rivalry and struggle, at the same time strove for universalism and for a broad supra-national orientation—in defiance of all things 'local', that is, complacently nationalistic. 'One must not heed men when they complain of the disappearance of all that is local', he writes in a posthumous passage; 'it is precisely through paying this price that man raises himself to the supra-national level and becomes aware of the universal purpose of humanity . . . it is in this manner that he ceases to be a barbarian.'

Devoid of both nationalism and provincialism, Nietzsche the scholar set an example of what a 'good European' should really be like. His cultural interests embraced ancient Greece, the Renaissance, and especially French civilization. He also felt curious affinities with the Slavs, towards whom he was drawn instinctively, as it were, and often referred to his Polish ancestry. While still a senior

boy in the boarding school at Pforta, he gave talks on the Serbian folk-ballads (which he had read in Miss Talvj's translation), but in his later years he manifested a particular interest in the Russians who, in contrast to the more settled Europeans, struck him by their capacity for 'grandiose aims', their 'generosity of youth, their madly fantastic élan, and true will-power'. He anticipated the threatening might of Russia and was ready to welcome it—largely because he hoped that such a threat would make the other nations (in sheer self-defence) draw more closely together and thus promote the desirable unity among the countries belonging to the sphere of European civilization. Last but not least, as a perpetual wanderer, Nietzsche spent most of his mature years in Switzerland, Italy and Southern France—at a respectable distance from the Bismarckian Germany in which he saw the sore spot of Europe and a negation of what was still left of 'good Europeanism'.

## IV

Events which took place in the first half of the twentieth century confirmed that Nietzsche's fears had been only too well founded. Twice in our lifetime Europe has been raped, trampled down and paralysed, even though by some miracle she escaped the fate of being turned into a huge concentration camp after the Auschwitz and Belsen pattern. Starved and martyred, she is now licking her wounds, while striving painfully towards a more tolerable future. But will she ever recover her spirit? And if so, on what conditions? Will the few sparks of 'good Europeanism' that are still smouldering under her ruins be strong enough to flare up into a flame which may brighten our prospects of a better, a more human and humane world?

But since prophets are among the major casualties of the last war, it is no use indulging in prophecies. All one can say for certain is that if Europe—including the new

post-war Germany—does not work out her own salvation, she will have to perish. And there is only one path along which both cultural and political salvation is still possible—the path of ‘good Europeanism’. An epoch priding itself on having conquered space and abolished the boundaries between continents, surely ought to be able to do away with our interminable wrangles and to promote that unity which (at least in his brighter moments) was advocated by Nietzsche. ‘I see over and beyond all these national wars, new “empires”, and whatever else lies in the foreground’, he writes in *The Genealogy of Morals*. ‘What I am concerned with—for I see it preparing itself slowly and hesitatingly—is the United Europe.’ Let us remember that in spite of his inconsistencies, his gospel of hardness and of a ruthless will to power, Nietzsche anticipated not only the idea of a League of Nations, but also the advent of the supra-national European man as a new biological type, resulting from the mixture of races: one more proof of how much he had at heart the integral unity of Europe.

We need not dwell on those factors which have frustrated such unity. Besides, a true account of them would tarnish the reputations of too many ‘statesmen’ for whose muddleheadedness and political imbecility the world is now paying such a terrible price. One of the basic features of professional politicians is their inability to learn from events. But is at least the common man intelligent enough to learn from the expensive lessons of history? On the answer to this question will perhaps depend not only the fate of Europe but the future of the world, now on the threshold of the atomic age. It is for Europe and the world to make the choice.

XVI  
NIETZSCHE AND DOSTOEVSKY

I

A COMPARISON between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky is tempting to anyone familiar with the work of these two anatomists of the cultural and moral disintegration in the present-day world; the more so because there are quite a few points of contact between them. To begin with there are the effects that adversities of personal fate must have had on the thought of each of them. If Nietzsche was impelled to fight a long and painful illness, Dostoevsky passed through the agony of an expected execution which was averted only at the last moment. Then followed his penal servitude in Siberia, attacks of epilepsy, years of misery and wanderings abroad, relieved only by the love and the help of a loyal wife—a help that was denied to Nietzsche. Both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche found their chief creative stimulus in their very ailments which, more than anything else, fostered their psychological insight and also their belief in the value of tense and extraordinary states of mind. Anti-rationalistic with regard to the fundamental problems of existence, they were both great questioners and doubters, inwardly torn between a strong religious temperament and equally strong anti-religious ideas. Finally, both were ‘underworld minds’, unable as well as unwilling to come to terms with the world in which they lived.

Another interesting question is how far Nietzsche was directly influenced by Dostoevsky’s works, since he himself stated that Dostoevsky was the only psychologist from whom he could and did learn. He admired above all *The House of the Dead*, with its deep analysis of the criminal as a strong man whose frustrated strength has

taken a destructive direction. He must have been familiar also with another formidable study in frustration—Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underworld*. Whether and in how far he knew such novels as *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, remains a matter of conjecture.<sup>1</sup> But one thing is certain: apart from treating the identical problems and dilemmas, both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky were among the great explorers of the unconscious even before the latter was taken up by professional psychologists. Further analogies can be drawn between Dostoevsky's will to self-assertion and Nietzsche's will to power, regarded by each of them respectively as the basic impulse in man.

There are other coincidences which make one wonder in how far they are due to mere chance. But quite apart from any personal acquaintanceship with some of Dostoevsky's writings, Nietzsche may have been further initiated into the world of his characters by the Russian-born Lou Salomé who, later on—as Frau Andreas-Salomé, introduced also the poet Rainer Maria Rilke to certain deeper aspects of Russian mentality, so poignantly recorded in *Stundenbuch* (The Book of Hours). Besides, the years of Nietzsche's quest and struggle were also those of Russian realism at its height, when the names of Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were becoming household words all over Europe. Be this as it may, it is not only the similarities but also the contrasts between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky that are of a complementary nature: they explain each other particularly when they differ most from one another.

## II

Illustrations can be found in abundance. If Nietzsche was a decadent continually fighting his own decadence,

<sup>1</sup> Raskolnikov's tragedy seems to be hinted at in Zarathustra's sermon about the 'Pale Criminal', in the first book of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Dostoevsky was a 'nihilist' at heart and a secret unbeliever, anxious to overcome his unbelief and his inner chaos. The problem of Man and God was the root-dilemma of their quest. The potential denial of God (with a corresponding change of the moral outlook) in Dostoevsky and the actual rejection of God by Nietzsche were both of a rebellious nature. The psychological starting-point of both of them was the 'underworld' man—the individual thrown out of gear with regard to society, to the world, and to himself. Whether this be due to weakness, fastidiousness, poverty, or disease, makes little difference: the frustrated and uprooted man asserts himself, by means of ruthless criticism and a process of 'transvaluation', against the world with which he has little or nothing in common. Self-assertion of this kind usually starts on the social plane in order to proceed, sooner or later, to a protest against the metaphysical order of the world and the universe.

The process of individual self-assertion, up to its final blind alley, has been worked out by Dostoevsky with unsurpassed skill and insight. If *The Notes from the Underworld* is still confined primarily to the social plane, *Crime and Punishment* goes far beyond it and tackles the problem of will (or rather self-will) and of moral values *sub specie aeternitatis*. It was here that the dilemma of God and Man emerged in all its acuteness as being inseparable from one's quest for the ultimate standard of morality and for one's highest self-realization (as distinct from mere self-assertion) on earth. Actually, it was in Raskolnikov's inner drama that Dostoevsky forestalled the crux of Nietzsche's moral dilemma. The doctrine concerning the superman and his notorious 'beyond good and evil' was thus formulated by Dostoevsky long before Nietzsche; but it was also rejected by him on account of its being morally and psychologically untenable. Raskolnikov, like Nietzsche, divided the whole of mankind into the 'herd' on the one hand, and into the few exceptional supermen or born rulers on the other. While the 'herd's'

business is to obey, the higher individuals show their exceptional character first of all by daring to 'overstep' the line of the common good and evil—that is, they trample upon the 'herd' morality in the name of their own self-will, or else of the high purposes dictated by the latter. Anxious to prove to himself that he, too, being an exceptional individual, was daring enough to overstep the moral values of the 'herd', Raskolnikov committed murder. But no sooner had the crime taken place than—quite against his convictions and expectations—his entire inner world crumbled and in the end he voluntarily surrendered to the very law which he despised. Enticing in theory, the principle of self-will or of 'beyond good and evil' proved so terrible in practice that Raskolnikov, frightened of the ensuing inner void and devastation, beat a hasty retreat, even back to the 'herd' morality of the naïve Sonya.

Further aspects of the same dilemma can be studied in such novels as *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. The crazy 'superman' (or man-God, as he calls himself) Kirillov draws from Raskolnikov's premises the final conclusions and acts accordingly. He, too, enunciated the dictum that if there is no God, man is the only divinity on earth and therefore subject to no moral law except that of his own self-will or will to power. But Kirillov goes further than Nietzsche in that he proclaims a world devoid of God and of any higher meaning as being utterly unacceptable to a highly developed consciousness. In this way, he is *morally* impelled to protest against life in such a world and on such conditions; and he does so by destroying it at least in himself—through suicide. Self-extinction thus becomes the final logical (and psychological) act of one's cosmically uprooted self-will or will to power.

What happens if the self-will is projected on to the social plane is shown in the same novel by the two complementary characters, Verkhovensky and Shigalyov. While one of them revels in destruction for destruction's

sake, the other devises the scheme for a new world order which starts with absolute freedom of one's self-will and inevitably leads to absolute totalitarian slavery—with a few self-appointed 'supermen' on top of it all. Such a character as Stavrogin, again, is so undermined by his own scepticism as to be unable to see in any action (whether positive or negative) anything real, and therefore walks about like a living corpse, equally indifferent to everybody and everything. A prey to his own inner void, he has reached that final dead line along the path of the 'beyond good and evil' which is likely to crush even the strongest individual.

Nowhere, however, did Dostoevsky tackle Nietzsche's own dilemma with a deeper psychological and spiritual insight than in Ivan Karamazov. In Ivan's Grand Inquisitor we see as it were a tragic parody of Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The Grand Inquisitor, too, is a superman, a born ruler, who is aware of the irrevocable 'death of God' and of the ensuing desolation in an orphaned world. But unlike Nietzsche's Zarathustra, he is overcome by his pity for the herd, for the many-too-many, whom he wants to protect, although he despises them on account of their weakness, their sloth and their irresponsibility. It is for this reason that he modifies his own totalitarian system in such a way as to make the masses at least happy—by treating them like children in a nursery. But he can achieve this only at the price of denying them all freedom of conscience, all choice between good and evil for which, anyway, they are much too weak. Ivan, like his Grand Inquisitor, cannot endure the suffering inflicted upon human beings, however much he may despise their stupidity, their spiritual and moral torpor. His tragedy is due to the depth of his own conscience which bars his way towards the hardness of a Nietzschean superman. At the same time his intellectual integrity prevents him from going in the opposite direction—that of a religious acceptance and affirmation of

life, however much he would like to do so. This vacillation between utter negation and a passionate will to believe proved, however, infinitely more painful than downright scepticism. Unable to remain in the same tension as Ivan, nor willing to adopt a solution such as that of Nietzsche (which he considered no solution at all), Dostoevsky was driven to a conclusion peculiarly his own, which, in its essentials is the exact reversal of everything Nietzsche had stood for. This contrast between the two seekers who had started with the same premises and were anxious to fight the same 'nihilism' is so symptomatic of our time that it deserves some further comment.

## III

Not long before his death Dostoevsky wrote in his private diary: 'There came the moment when the man-God met the God-man, and that was the most critical moment in the history of our earth.' Looking upon history not in terms of economic factors, but as a process of man's inner evolution through the growing antinomies within his consciousness, Dostoevsky brought the clash of those antinomies to a climax in Raskolnikov, Kirillov, and Ivan Karamazov. It was through these characters that he explored Nietzsche's path of self-will and of the superman or 'man-God', at the end of which he found nothing but a cul-de-sac, with anarchy, madness and suicide preying upon anyone entering that realm. This alone is enough to explain the eagerness with which Dostoevsky turned his quest in the direction of God-man, whose perfect embodiment he found in Christ—as visualized by His adversary the Grand Inquisitor on the one hand, and expounded by Father Zossima (*The Brothers Karamazov*) on the other.

Whereas Nietzsche saw in historical Christianity only decadence—a 'rising of the slaves' against the values of their masters, or else an attempt on the part of the Church at weakening the healthy and aggressive 'blond beast'

through Christian morality, Dostoevsky clung in the end fervently to Christ whom he interpreted as the acme of spiritual heroism. Christ as seen by his Grand Inquisitor is by no means a sentimental dreamer offering to mankind an 'easy yoke'. On the contrary, the actual task He imposes upon humanity—the task of overcoming all inner doubts at one's own risk, and of freely choosing between good and evil—is of so difficult a nature indeed that the Inquisitor decides to burn Him at the stake as a punishment for having dared to cherish such a high opinion of human beings. In this manner he hopes to save man from the predicaments implied by Christ's demands.

'Didst Thou not know that he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth,' the Inquisitor reproaches Him, 'if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? They will not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than Thou hast caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems.'

It was such unanswerable problems that Dostoevsky tried to answer by projecting them into the consciousness of his principal characters, where the battle between the man-God and the God-man was fought with an intensity verging on madness. And the outcome was certainly not in favour of Nietzsche's superman or man-God. Having discovered in the latter the most destructive of blind alleys, Dostoevsky saw more than ever before the only possibility of a solution on the religious plane of Christ. In a solution of this kind the verdict of his irrational religious instinct and temperament had to be endorsed also by his rational logic and reason. Yet unable to reconcile the two, he gave the priority to the irrational over the rational. In this manner Dostoevsky's will to believe in God was at least as strong as was Nietzsche's will to believe in his own fiction of the superman. And the difference between the planes towards which their beliefs were directed was the one between the God-man and the

man-God: the two polar points of mankind's conscience, as well as consciousness.

## IV

Having started with the same or similar premises as Nietzsche, Dostoevsky thus undermined—even on the psychological ground—Nietzsche's positions. He ridiculed (through Mitya's scathing allusions to Claude Bernard in *The Brothers Karamazov*) not only the biological trend, but also laughed, in Ivan's nightmare dialogue with the devil, at the idea of Eternal Recurrence. His fight for the integration of man was directed towards the summits of man's spirit, but without condemning—à la Tolstoy—earthly joys and passions as something immoral. The ideal he finally arrived at was that dynamic balance between the physical and the spiritual which makes man all the more attached to earth because his ultimate roots are attuned to the mystery of cosmic life as a whole.

Dostoevsky was no less aware of our modern cleavage between Mind and Instinct, i.e. Nature, than Nietzsche or Tolstoy. But he saw a solution of the problem neither in regression to 'biology' (like Nietzsche) nor in a return to the amorphous pre-individual collective as Tolstoy would have it. Instead of going 'back', Dostoevsky actually went *forward* to Nature, and this on his own terms—the terms of a man who accepts Nature because he knows he transcends her. Nietzsche, on the other hand, remained confined to the vicious circle of the 'iron laws' of Nature, of determinism, of eternal creation for the sake of mere destruction. Did not he himself state that a living being is only a species of the process of death and a very rare species? But in a world devoid of any higher meaning the nullity of existence in general makes one realize, sooner or later, the nullity of one's personal existence, no matter how much one tries to impose upon it all sorts of highfalutin emergency tasks and meanings.

Behind it all one can sense that abysmal void which drove Tolstoy nearly insane in his frantic attempts to find an escape. It is significant that while Tolstoy sought for a solution in a complete denial of the individual self, Nietzsche looked for it in individual self-inflation, but neither worked.

It was in the throes of similar dilemmas that Dostoevsky arrived at that religious solution which Nietzsche would not and could not accept. Dostoevsky adopted such a course not because he was absolutely convinced that he was right, but because outside it he saw nothing except chaos, destruction and self-destruction. At the same time the path of Christ opened up for him a new type of dynamic Christianity which, far from being a compensation for one's frustrated life, brings precisely our earthly existence to all its intensity and fullness—through integrating one's personality not only in the individual and social, but also in the cosmic sense: in the sense that we can live fully only if our personal life is rooted in universal life and completed by it. We can therefore repeat the words of Father Zossima, without minding his somewhat ecclesiastic style: 'God took seeds from different worlds and sowed them on this earth, and his garden grew up and everything came up that could come up, but what grows lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds. If that feeling grows weak or is destroyed in you, the heavenly growth will die in you. Then you will be indifferent to life and will even grow to hate it.' Dostoevsky thus turned with all his verve and passion against mere 'biology' and the ideal of Nietzsche's superman because at the bottom of it he saw only Death, masquerading in the gorgeous robe of life.

## CONCLUSION

ON studying the various facets of Nietzsche the man and the thinker one cannot but come to the conclusion that a great deal of his philosophy is obviously a process of self-dramatization. But in his case this, too, has its value: it is philosophy in terms of human experience, or better still—in terms of a threatened existence.

For Nietzsche the only incontestable reality was life itself—life in its individual uniqueness, in its tendency to assert itself and to expand *in spite of all*. This feature links him to such representatives of 'existential philosophy' as Heidegger and Jaspers<sup>1</sup> in Germany, and Jean-Paul Sartre in France. True enough, his impressionistic method has opened wide the gate to philosophic dilettantes who, more than anybody else, succeeded in distorting his thought. But on the other hand, his disregard of the much too detached academic traditions can help us to bridge the gap between philosophy and life—a gap which since the days of Kant has steadily been widening.

We need not and indeed cannot accept Nietzsche's own answers to all the basic problems of our age. The very manner in which he asks them is bound to stimulate our own independent thinking and answering. What matters even more is the fact that he is a landmark, standing at the end of an entire cultural cycle. He can even be regarded as an important symbol at the crossroads where man's consciousness either must transcend its present limits and find its realization on a new plane, or else fall a prey to its own contradictions. And this can equally be applied to humanity at large. Humanity either must integrate or else perish in a war of all against all,

<sup>1</sup> Professor Karl Jaspers is the author of one of the best recent books on Nietzsche (published in 1935).

in which our own technique triumphant threatens to assume the role of a global Frankenstein monster. Anyway, such is the main conclusion one arrives at through a study of Nietzsche.

There are quite a few signs that the interest in Nietzsche is reviving—not in Nietzsche the ‘guide’ or the teacher, but in Nietzsche as one of the great critics, symptoms and warnings of our time. A proper approach to him can certainly help us to see more clearly the workings of the inner crisis of contemporary man, as well as of the age in which we live. And we can perhaps cope with either only if we first take the trouble to understand them.



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