

The Will to Power/ Friedrich Nietzsche; New York: Vintage Books, 1967. (35-39 p.)

55 (June 10, 1887)⁵¹

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind. Thus the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim- and meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable. Nihilism appears at that point, not that the displeasure at existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any "meaning" in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain.

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That this "in vain" constitutes the character of present-day nihilism remains to be shown. The mistrust of our previous valuations grows until it becomes the question: "Are not all 'values' lures that draw out the comedy without bringing it closer to a solution?" Duration "in vain," without end or aim, is the most paralyzing idea, particularly when one understands that one is being fooled and yet lacks the power not to be fooled.

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Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: "*the eternal recurrence.*"⁵²

"Plunging down—negating life—that, too, was supposed to be experienced as a kind of sunrise transfiguration, deification.

"I want to make the concept of 'progress' more precise and am afraid that toward that end I have to fly in the face of modern ideas (but I am comforted by the fact that they really have no faces but only *masks*).

"Diseased limbs should be amputated: the first moral of society.

"A correction of the instincts: their detachment from ignorance—

"I despise those who demand of society that it ought to protect itself from those who would harm it. That is not enough by a long shot. Society is a body in which no member may be diseased without endangering the whole. A diseased member that corrupts [the reading of this word is not certain] has to be amputated: I shall name the amputable types of society."

⁵¹ See the footnote to section 4 above.

⁵² For a detailed discussion of this idea, see Kaufmann's *Nietzsche*, Chapter 11. Cf. also sections 1,053 ff below.

This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the "meaningless"), eternally!

The European form of Buddhism: the energy of knowledge and strength compels this belief. It is the most *scientific* of all possible hypotheses. We deny end goals: if existence had one it would have to have been reached.

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So one understands that an antithesis to pantheism is attempted here: for "everything perfect, divine, eternal" also compels a faith in the "eternal recurrence." Question: does morality make impossible this pantheistic affirmation of all things, too? At bottom, it is only the moral god that has been overcome. Does it make sense to conceive a god "beyond good and evil"? Would a pantheism in this sense be possible? Can we remove the idea of a goal from the process and then affirm the process in spite of this?— This would be the case if something were attained at every moment within this process—and always the same. Spinoza reached such an affirmative position in so far as every moment has a logical necessity, and with his basic instinct, which was logical, he felt a sense of triumph that the world should be constituted that way.

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But his case is only a single case. Every basic character trait that is encountered at the bottom of every event, that finds expression in every event, would have to lead every individual who experienced it as his own basic character trait to welcome every moment of universal existence with a sense of triumph. The crucial point would be that one experienced this basic character trait in oneself as good, valuable—with pleasure.

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It was morality that protected life against despair and the leap into nothing, among men and classes who were violated and oppressed by *men*: for it is the experience of being powerless against men, not against nature, that generates the most desperate embitterment against existence. Morality treated the violent despots, the doers of violence, the "masters" in general as the enemies against whom the common man must be protected, which means first of all encouraged and strengthened. Morality consequently taught men to hate and despise most profoundly what is the basic

character trait of those who rule: their will to power. To abolish, deny, and dissolve this morality—that would mean looking at the best-hated drive with an opposite feeling and valuation. If the suffering and oppressed lost the faith that they have the right to despise the will to power, they would enter the phase of hopeless despair. This would be the case if this trait were essential to life and it could be shown that even in this will to morality this very "will to power" were hidden, and even this hatred and contempt were still a will to power. The oppressed would come to see that they were on the same plain with the oppressors, without prerogative, without higher rank.

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Rather the opposite! There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power. Morality guarded the underprivileged against nihilism by assigning to each an infinite value, a metaphysical value, and by placing each in an order that did not agree with the worldly order of rank and power: it taught resignation, meekness, etc. Supposing that the faith in this morality would perish, then the underprivileged would no longer have their comfort—and they would perish.

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This perishing takes the form of self-destruction—the instinctive selection of that which must destroy. Symptoms of this self-destruction of the underprivileged: self-vivisection, poisoning, intoxication, romanticism, above all the instinctive need for actions that turn the powerful into mortal enemies (as it were, one breeds one's own hangmen); the will to destruction as the will of a still deeper instinct, the instinct of self-destruction, the will for nothingness.

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Nihilism as a symptom that the underprivileged have no comfort left; that they destroy in order to be destroyed; that without morality they no longer have any reason to "resign themselves"—that they place themselves on the plain of the opposite principle and also want power by *compelling* the powerful to become their hangmen. This is the European form of Buddhism—*doing* No after all existence has lost its "meaning."

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It is not that "distress" has grown: on the contrary. "God, morality, resignation," were remedies on terribly low rungs of misery: active nihilism appears in relatively much more favorable conditions. The feeling that morality has been overcome presupposes a fair degree of spiritual culture, and this in turn that one is relatively well off. A certain spiritual weariness that, owing to the long fight of philosophical opinions, has reached the most hopeless skepticism regarding all philosophy, is another sign of the by no means low position of these nihilists. Consider the situation in which the Buddha appeared. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence would have scholarly presuppositions (as did the Buddha's doctrine; e.g., the concept of causality, etc.).

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What does "underprivileged" mean? Above all, physiologically—no longer politically. The unhealthiest kind of man in Europe (in all classes) furnishes the soil for this nihilism: they will experience the belief in the eternal recurrence as a curse, struck by which one no longer shrinks from any action; not to be extinguished passively but to extinguish everything that is so aim- and meaningless, although this is a mere convulsion, a blind rage at the insight that everything has been for eternities—even this moment of nihilism and lust for destruction.— It is the value of such a crisis that it purifies, that it pushes together related elements to perish of each other, that it assigns common tasks to men who have opposite ways of thinking—and it also brings to light the weaker and less secure among them and thus promotes an order of rank according to strength, from the point of view of health: those who command are recognized as those who command, those who obey as those who obey. Of course, outside every existing social order.

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Who will prove to be the strongest in the course of this? The most moderate; those who do not require any extreme articles of faith; those who not only concede but love a fair amount of accidents and nonsense; those who can think of man with a considerable reduction of his value without becoming small and weak on that account: those richest in health who are equal to most misfortunes and therefore not so afraid of misfortunes—human

beings who are sure of their power and represent the attained strength of humanity with conscious pride.

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How would such a human being even think of the eternal recurrence?

56 (Nov. 1887-March 1888)
Periods of European Nihilism

The period of unclarity, of all kinds of tentative men who would conserve the old without letting go of the new.

The period of clarity: one understands that the old and the new are basically opposite, the old values born of declining and the new ones of ascending life—that all the old ideals are hostile to life (born of decadence and agents of decadence, even if in the magnificent Sunday clothes of morality). We understand the old and are far from strong enough for something new.

The period of the three great affects: contempt, pity, destruction.

The period of catastrophe: the advent of a doctrine that sifts men—driving the weak to decisions, and the strong as well—