Nietzsche, Reification, and Open Comportment

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This work primarily discusses the "fallacy of reification" from the perspective of Nietzsche's late philosophy (particularly in the chapter on 'Reason' in philosophy in his *Twilight of the Idols*). While reification is typically a logical, metaphysical, or epistemological problem in Modern Western philosophy, the author attempts to show that reification is also a problem in ethics. An outline of a groundwork for an ethical "open comportment" is gestured toward by way of Nietzsche's critiques of "anti-natural morality" and the "conceptual mummies" of philosophy. The likes of William James, Willard Van Orman Quine, and Henri Bergson are discussed to expand on the points made by Nietzsche and to show how his thought could be developed further, though the scope of the paper remains mostly within the perspective of Nietzsche's late philosophy. Additionally, the likes of Hesiod, Kant, and aspects of Christianity are mentioned to serve as examples to situate Nietzsche's campaign to "re-evaluate all values" (a simultaneously destructive and creative endeavor) in the thesis.

When a reified concept replaces the "real" entity from which it is abstracted, the original entity risks being *missed* in favor of the concept. For example, if an outsider has a prejudice about what a certain group of people are like without being open to experiencing them in their multiplicity and diversity, any given person from that group is at risk of being reduced to the prejudice of the outsider, and thereby is treated and understood according to the outsider's prejudice (regardless of its accuracy in relation to the particular person on whom this prejudice is imposed). The prejudice, in this example, is a reified concept. It is not recognized as an ossified abstraction, but instead appears as a simple given truth. This blindness to the origin of concepts and their sublimation of difference under abstract sameness is as much an ethical issue as an issue for the development of human knowledge. Bergson's peculiar "infinite" shows that things are not reducible to concepts alone, and thereby suggests a possible avenue for open engagement insofar as we develop a comportment toward the irreducible indeterminacy of becoming.

To ZMRT, with all of the love in my heart.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> *"Theories are usually the over-hasty efforts of an impatient understanding that would gladly be rid of phenomena, and so puts in their place pictures, notions, nay, often mere words. We may surmise, or even see quite well, that such theories are make-shifts…"*
>
> (Goethe 69)

The *fallacy of reification* is a nearly ubiquitous problem for late nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers, though it emerges in different thinkers' works under different guises. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* features a comprehensive statement on the issue in the chapter "'Reason' in Philosophy," wherein Nietzsche offers an account of the origin and meaning of the problem of reification as it replaces the world of *becoming* with the "conceptual mummies" of Reason. The problem does not lie in the process of abstraction as such (a necessary and often highly beneficial process); the problem lies in taking an abstraction derived from some larger context as *the sole truth or reality* of that very context. For example, a syndrome in medicine often refers to a *cluster of symptoms*, not a *thing* named "X Syndrome". The latter interpretation misplaces the quality of concreteness in the *name* of the syndrome over and against the actual concrete cluster of symptoms to which it originally refers.

Insofar as the process of abstraction circumscribes that from which it abstracts by isolating certain salient features of a context and then closing off engagement with what might fall outside of that very circumscription, the resultant reified concepts from this process are reductive

abstractions that are treated as the real thing *in place of the real thing*. When this process is brought to interpersonal matters, for example, a great deal of ethical problems may emerge. If Person A is *defined* by Person B (according to their theory or abstract conceptualization of Person A or people "like" Person A), Person A is consequently understood and treated according to Person B's abstract conceptualization of them. Person A is thereby missed altogether. A morality that determines "right" and "wrong" according to rules prescribed in advance of any particular ethical quandary similarly closes off such open engagement, for it takes its contextually derived moral attitudes as universally good, true, and consequently binding on all who partake in said morality or moral theory.

This thesis is an attempt to provide a possible outline for the preconditions of a certain ethical attitude (i.e. "open comportment") that does not privatively reduce things to abstract representations and handle them according to reductive, prescribed rules, but rather tries to expand our understanding of things in their utter uniqueness in order to respond to them in their own process of becoming, in their change over time, and in all else that is easily missed when a living, fluid being is made static. A primary difficulty this work faces is the fact that these thoughts are conveyed in printed English, a static language in a static medium. My hope is that the overall point of the work emerges from the words used to help point toward it. Attempts to qualify peculiar uses of common philosophical terms are made throughout, but there remains the difficulty of trying to point beyond a tradition by way of the tools provided by that very tradition.

In what follows, there is first an attempt to provide a background for Nietzsche's thoughts in his chapter "'Reason' in Philosophy" from *Twilight of the Idols* by giving an account of the idea of becoming in Hesiod's *Theogony*. After that point a preliminary discussion on concepts

and abstraction sets up Nietzsche's first aphorism in the above mentioned chapter, which is followed by an elaboration and interpretation of the various points Nietzsche makes therein. The second chapter is focused on the fallacy of reification under the name "vicious abstraction" based on what William James calls "vicious abstractionism" in his book *The Meaning of Truth*. Passages from Willard Van Orman Quine's *From a Logical Point of View* are also discussed in order to bolster the points made by Nietzsche in his chapter on "'Reason' in Philosophy". The third chapter attempts to connect the problem of reification with Nietzsche's account of the origin of logic and his critique of morality. The fourth chapter showcases Nietzsche's immoralism and makes a distinction between active and passive nihilism in order to put forward the idea that the *destructive* aspects of Nietzsche's project to "re-evaluate all values" is only one aspect of that project. This chapter concludes with Nietzsche's thoughts on "learning to see" and "learning to love" with an emphasis on the *affirming* aspect of these approaches to engaging life. The kind of sight and love Nietzsche describes are also considered preconditions for the ethical "open comportment" which this thesis aims to gesture towards. The final chapter arrives at the idea of an open comportment, situated within the perspective established by the preceding discussions. Henri Bergson's *intellectual sympathy* and *intuition* toward an "absolute" (which, for Bergson, is a kind of qualified "infinite") in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The ultimate aim is to convey a kind of ethical attitude toward an "other" that is receptive to what might be novel, strange, and excessive to one's own knowledge or conceptualization of the other in order that one may more openly engage with the other, with a sensitivity toward their own independent life, affirming them *as they are* rather than seeing them only in terms of how they neatly fit into one's predetermined categories, expectations, and predetermined (prejudicial) moral judgments.

A key element of Nietzsche's late thought is an emphasis on life affirmation through the image of becoming. Reification is the deadening of that which *becomes* into that which abstractly *is*. Hesiod's *Theogony* provides an example of the original "source" of *becoming*. The very name of the *Theogony* (Θεογονία) means something like the genealogy of the birth of the gods. At the beginning of Hesiod's genealogy, Chaos (Χάος), more literally translated as *Chasm* or *Abyss* (Oxford), is introduced as the cosmologically *most prior* god: "ἦ τοι μὲν πρώτιστα Χάος γένετ' [English translation: In truth at first Chaos came to be (Perseus); First came the Chasm (Oxford World's Classics)]…" (Hesiod 116). The *very first* god is Χάος, superlatively primordial and self-generative. The conjugated verb γένετ' comes from the ancient Greek word γίγνομαι, which means "[to] come into a state of being," "to *become*…" or "to be born".[1] Let us note that γένετ' is a *middle voice* form of this verb, so it may additionally mean something like the Chasm *birthed itself* or *became of itself*. Thus with the Chasm comes the birth of birth itself, and with this genesis of birth comes *life*. *Becoming and the birth of life itself are inextricably linked.* Further, Θεογονία involves this very same verb of birth and becoming, γίγνομαι, and, of course, the gods (θεοί). In this cosmology we already have a sense of *birth* and *life*, though many of the original gods are "immortal", they nonetheless *come to be*. The very primordial abyss even birthed itself and plays a role in the generation of other gods! Insofar as existence starts with *birth*, *becoming* is the beginning of change and the generation of life, growth, emergence, blossoming and decaying. Χάος is the first-born of the gods. Becoming as it relates to birth is thus shorthand for the movement of life itself.

[1] This is closely related to "genesis" (γένεσις), particularly regarding origin, creation, and birth.

Time-lapse footage of the life of a rose provides an unambiguous aesthetic example of the movement becoming rather than the reified abstraction "becoming." At no point is the flower simply the thing named "flower" over the course of the time-lapse footage. Insofar as the footage captures the flower's life, we see that its life is activity and ceaseless movement, an ever changing process that begins and ends. The birth of the flower as it first blossoms marks a moment in its becoming that also grants its *being*: the flower had not yet existed, so the first act of becoming (birth) begets being, yet being is transient and subject to the movement and change of becoming.

In certain cases what was once a god comes to be treated instead as a concept. Night in the *Theogony* is a god that gives birth to day (seeming to follow the primordiality of abyssal darkness in both its theogonic *priority* and its generative capacity to birth Day). Night, however, is describable in modern scientific terms that account for the movement of the Earth on its own axis relative to the Sun, etc. In our present era, night is hardly an *entity*, but rather a condition contingent upon other conditions, and so on. The concept of night thus refers to a certain arrangement of physical matter according to our current scientific paradigms — it refers to a state of affairs instead of an object. This marks the opening of the reified concept; an opening which undoes its very reification. Yet, insofar as it is *named* "Night", the noun "night" might be mistaken for a proper noun denoting *the entity or actual thing named Night*. Even the crude "scientific" definition of "Night" above is a response to the implicit question: "What does 'night' mean?" Which implies that, in some regard, night *is*. This presses us further to ask: "What *is* night?" Whether we intend to define the *meaning* or the *existence* of night, the concept "night" is treated as a general abstraction for some singular and definable referent that exists. In short, the

concept “night” purports to have a content. This content-baring may be carried over from its use as a *proper noun* as the Greek god Night, for a proper noun names an *entity*. The names of concepts hypostatize that from which they are abstracted insofar as they are understood as being proper nouns for some entity (in this case the god) and not general terms that sweepingly refer to an array of phenomena.

Concepts distort *by way of abstraction* in order for us to comprehend. Concepts are necessarily *general*; concepts *name* their abstracted “content” (or referent). The generality of the concepts with which we think forms as the consequence of a process which abstracts from the incalculable complexity of our experience the common traits or shared similarities under some general notion—simplification by way of abstraction, reduction, and generalization is the *modus operandi* of the concept as such. Any word or name can fulfill this conceptual role (e.g. “tree” names the unthinkable variety of trees we encounter) and makes it possible to think and discuss that which it names without having to mean *solely that thing there*. The generality of such concepts makes communication and understanding possible in a *simple* and *useful* manner, so that one who may not have experienced the *particular* tree about which another speaks may still have some understanding of what the speaker means (insofar as both interlocutors have experienced some entity which fits under the concept or name “tree”).

“*Reason*” (a manner of thinking that is logically oriented and highly abstract), uses even simpler concepts to refer to increasingly more general “objects.” Instead of speaking of a particular tree and using the general name “tree” as a means to refer to the particular tree, rational thought abstracts from the trees their togetherness and names this grouping a “forest.” The forest F names and encompasses all trees and life therein, abstracting so greatly from the

dense particularity and variety of the trees, plants, animals, and the like into a *single unit* (F, "forest," etc.). Concepts unify and therefore, by a kind of necessity, exclude difference. The forest is one such concept—the difference between two particular trees is lost in favor of the overarching name "forest". One is usually accused of being "unable to see the forest for the trees," but in this instance, highly abstract thought is unable to see the trees for the forest.

Rational thought deals in such abstractions to make its calculations all the more expedient and objective. With such high degrees of abstraction, masses of multitudinous phenomena can be reduced to data points, and those data points can be manipulated in such a way that their abstraction from the preceding phenomena may tell us something about said phenomena. All of this is highly useful, efficient, and seemingly prevalent in rational thinking. Such thinking is not limited merely to the realm of logic, but also shows itself in the sciences (most obviously in physics, but also in the so-called "social sciences": economics, psychology, etc.) and perhaps most apparently in philosophy itself. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Friedrich Nietzsche levels various critiques against "Reason" in philosophy. Most notably, for our purposes, he lambasts the "concept":

> "You ask me which of the philosophers' traits are most characteristic? For example, their lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their respect for a subject when they dehistoricize it *sub specie aeternitas* — when they turn it into a mummy. Everything that philosophers handled over the past thousands of years turned into concept mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. Whenever these venerable concept idolators revere something, they kill it and stuff it; they suck

> the life out of everything they worship. Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections — even refutations. Whatever has being does not become; whatever becomes does not have being. Now they all believe, desperately even, in what has being. But since they never grasp it, they seek for reasons why it is kept from them. 'There must be mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from perceiving that which has being: where is the deceiver?'" ("Twilight of the Idols")

Nietzsche's "conceptual mummy" comes as a consequence of the highest order of abstraction: an abstraction that not only generalizes, but dehistoricizes and decontextualizes that from which it abstracts, effectively "killing" the original experience or phenomenon from which the abstraction is derived. At its most extreme, the conceptual mummy attempts to render eternal that which it has violently conformed into the shape of a concept. But if the original "stuff" out of which such a concept is derived is living, changing, *becoming*, the very movement of its life is terminated once it is ossified in conceptual stone. *This is the process and result of reification*.

Why should death, change, old age, procreation, and growth be refutations or objections? Either concepts at the highest degree of abstraction, insofar as they are universal, general, etc. are eternal and also the most *real* inasmuch as they are unchanging, or there is first the real, ever changing phenomena of life, experience, existence, etc., *then* it is abstracted from and made into concept mummies and the like. The former sketch may look akin to Platonism or its derivative forms; the latter, something utterly different. We may also illustrate this contrast by saying the former is Parmenidean while the latter is Heraclitean. On one hand, this metaphysical distinction presupposes both Being and becoming, and the differing perspectives differ only insofar as they

put more ontological weight on the former or the latter. On the other hand, the metaphysics at work in what we have spoken of thus far may allow us to move past this rigid dualism entirely (for turning this distinction on its head should also undo it and utterly change the meaning of the reversed terms). The point is not simply to decide Being over becoming, or becoming over Being, but rather to evaluate what the implications of a metaphysics that sees the flux of experience as *prior* to any conceptual attempt to understand it might mean for us. While this matter will be plumbed more deeply later on, let us, for now, look to what Nietzsche says of Heraclitus, the exemplar of a philosophy of becoming:

> "With the highest respect, I exclude the name of Heraclitus. When the rest of the philosophic crowd rejected the testimony of the senses because it showed multiplicity and change, he rejected their testimony because it represented things as if they had permanence and unity. Heraclitus too did the senses an injustice. They lie neither in the way the Eleatics believed, nor as he believed — they do not lie at all. What we make of their testimony, that alone introduces lies[2]; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence. 'Reason' is the reason we falsify the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'true' world is merely added by a lie." (*ibid*.)

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[2] Nietzsche regards the "apparent world" shown by the testimony of our senses as the only world for human beings. It is only retroactively described as the merely "apparent" world in contrast to a "lying added" "true" world, a world comprised of the empty concepts of unity, permanence, etc. For this reason Nietzsche takes the sensory experience of multiplicity and change as evidence for becoming, while being, in his sense, is the consequence of an attempt to invent a realm of permanence and consistency beyond our senses (which, for him, is itself a falsification of our senses' very testimony). The senses simply *show* multiplicity and change; *ad hoc* interpretations invent unity and permanence.

Nietzsche is clearly siding with Heraclitus as he sees him favoring becoming over the fixity of Being. The testimony of the senses that shows multiplicity and change are seen as more "true" than the added "lies" of permanence, unity, substance, thinghood, etc. The testimony of the senses seems to be Nietzsche's "basis" — he goes no further in providing a deeper foundation for existence — and it is not quite accurate to think of the senses as a basis so much as the only means we have to understand the world. Our senses are thus the framework of our perspective, and immediate sensations that give rise to our apprehension of the passing of things are not fundamentally untrustworthy insofar as they show things to be passing, changing, and so on. In this way Nietzsche deliberately keeps his perspective "superficial" in the literal sense that it does not go *beyond* what appears to our senses (not presupposing there is something "behind" the appearance, etc.). He takes sense appearance to simply be the case, and any attempt by Reason to deny the testimony of the senses and import concepts on to the change and passing is, for Nietzsche, as an additive "lie".

Typically the perspective of Reason supposes that the *truth* of something lies *behind* what appears to us via sense perception. First there is the sense perception, then there is the task of Reason to uncover what principles are fundamentally at work to cause the perception before us. There is the additional function of rationally "fixing" that which has already come to pass, rendering the flux of phenomena *static* in order to plumb the depths of appearance. This perspective only works on the basis that there are metaphysical, ontological, and / or logical principles operative in the very occurrence of phenomena, that the world is *ordered* according to some cosmological or theological order. Universal Reason is the secularized will of God, though

the former can be known to the human being while the latter is considered largely inaccessible to human understanding.

Taken from another perspective, the rational explanations of apparent phenomena by way of fundamental principles, causes, and the like are useful narratives that help account for the flux of phenomena, but they never go *behind* phenomena to a "truer" (i.e. unchanging, eternal) knowledge thereof. Such narratives, in this view, are *ad hoc* rationalizations that attempt to narrowly focus on certain, particular processes in the larger flux from which it abstracts. These *ad hoc* rationalizations aim at epistemological or theoretical utility insofar as they simplify and generalize the irreducible flux of phenomena to reliably consistent rules of thumb. However, as soon as these abstract, probabilistic, and highly approximate narratives, formulae, and rules of thumb are *hypostatized* and thus treated as *real in themselves*, we fall back into the perspective of Reason which sees itself as somehow getting at the fundamental nature of reality rather than abstractly approximating becoming for human purposes.

Mathematical Platonism, painted with a broad brush, may serve as a fruitful example regarding the perspective of Reason and the perspective of becoming. The former perspective might take the existence of numbers to be an ontological fact, such that numbers are *real* albeit abstract entities. The latter perspective might see numbers as a way of grouping abstracted things from their life and movement under forms which are general enough to perform mathematical operations with the abstracted data in order to reach further conclusions about the initial life and movement in question. Let us take a slightly more concrete example from classical mechanics: a law of physics, say F=ma, would thus be interpreted quite differently depending on the perspective taken up. On the former view, F=ma perhaps expresses something *fundamentally,*

always true about the very nature of Force, insofar as it is the product of mass and acceleration and these three variables are taken to be entities in their own right. On the latter view, force is a placeholder for the relationship between the mass of some object and its acceleration in some context of movement relating to other factors that are abstracted from in order to generate such a formula in the first place. The former view takes F=ma as *physical law* (which necessarily comes with the metaphysical import of Reason, or God, or some other ultimate source capable of ordering the cosmos by rational principles, etc.) while the latter takes F=ma as a highly generalized account of an abstracted feature of movement (force) which relies on further abstractions (mass and acceleration) to consistently describe an aspect of movement. The variables themselves are useful but not in and of themselves true. First and foremost, the movement which the formula is meant to describe is an "actual" phenomenon while the formula is a markedly succinct way to account for a relationship within that phenomenon. Either way the formula stands, but whether it describes some fundamental ordering principle of reality or is a useful *ad hoc* description of a phenomenon that occurs in a repeatable and reliable way marks a striking difference in perspective regarding the interpretation of appearances (and the interpretation of said interpretation, etc.).

On the matter of the perspective of Reason in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche says, "[Philosophers] put… the 'highest concepts', the last fumes of evaporating reality, at the beginning *as* the beginning. It is again only the expression of their way of doing reverence: the higher must not be *allowed* to grow out of the lower must not be *allowed* to have grown at all… Moral: everything of the first rank must be *causa sui*. Origin in something else counts as an objection, as casting a doubt on value" (Nietzsche 47). Nietzsche speaks directly to the point

made above — that the "highest concepts" of Reason are in fact what is created out of the "lower" aspects of reality: namely, all that is of *becoming*. Of course this is not how the highest concepts are understood from the perspective of Reason. They are, in fact, seen as the *most real* and *true* while all that comes to pass is lower. Let us note that these abstractions are *valued* higher than the aesthetic, sensory phenomena of experience. It will become clear later that such abstractions of rationality are also an abstracted *morality* with implicit value judgments on what is fixed and what is fluid, and that this rationalistic morality does the same violence on becoming that Reason does in the epistemological and metaphysical aspects of our discourse.

Nietzsche continues: "All supreme values are of the first rank, all the supreme concepts — that which is, the unconditioned, the good, the true, the perfect — all that cannot have become, *must* therefore be *causa sui*. But neither can these supreme concepts be incommensurate with one another… Thus they acquired their stupendous concept 'God'... The last, thinnest, emptiest is placed as the first, as cause in itself, as *ens realissimum*" (47). Supreme concepts are the most supremely valued, are analogous to supreme values, and are therefore the most *moral*. *What* is most highly valued in these supreme concepts gives us a good idea of the psychological wants that are to be met by the supreme concepts of Reason: they are all self-caused and thus unconditioned; they are *perfect*, *good*, and *true*. In a word: they are eternally reliable. Hence the father figure of the omnipotent, omnipresent, and everloving God of Christianity. From the perspective of Reason (if it be coupled with religious belief) or faith as such, God, *ens realissimum*, is the "most real" being. However, insofar as God is, for Nietzsche, the most supreme concept and value, in this very supremeness he is therefore also the most empty concept, i.e. the most devoid of life, becoming, and so on.

The life of all that becomes is devalued and replaced with empty concepts that are valued as "higher" than all that lives[3]. This is a morality of the unconditioned, of *death*, for death is the only unconditional fact of creatures that are born, grown, decay, and pass away. This devaluation of life is one aspect of what Nietzsche calls *nihilism*. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says, "The faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism. We have measured the value of the world according to categories *that refer to a purely fictitious world*… All the values by means of which we have tried so far render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world—these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things. What we find here is still the *hyperbolic naiveté* of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things" (Nietzsche 13-14). The value of utility is perhaps the main psychological origins of the categories of Reason and their subsequent imposition on the world of becoming. Becoming is uncertain, precarious, subject to frequent and often unpredictable change. To be able to invent a world wherein this flux is tamed, known, and made to follow certain laws, and thus ultimately made to be predictable according to those laws, would quell anxiety and uncertainty around the initial onslaught of change and variety. However, insofar as this utility is imposed on life to the point that it is seen as the *most true*, such categories of Reason are no longer solely expedient. They instead confuse use-value for the operations of the world itself, and thus conform the world in terms of a rationalistic utility (even certain theories of evolution,

[3] Life is juxtaposed with the dead concepts that abstractly represent it throughout this thesis in order to show how the "becoming" of life (in its birth, growth, decay, and death) is a robust process that exceeds rigid conceptions thereof.

ever mindful of the becoming of life, see life's aim as maximizing utility — what does it mean to be the "fittest" if not to be the most efficient in one's environment? Is this all that the process of evolution aims toward? *Does it even have a telos in this manner*?). The imposition of rationalistic categories on the world that does not even recognize this very imposition confuses it with *how the world really is*. The categories thus obscure anything which does not conform to them and, while this may be convenient in some cases, it, on the whole, sacrifices the novel movement of life for the predictable, rigid, and fixed categories of Reason.

This is all the consequence of Reason. In the following chapter we will see how logic, the basis of "reason" itself, leads to this error of reification (A=A, etc.) The *content* of rational thought are its concepts; logic is the *form* of rational thought. The denial of life in the form of abstracting from *becoming* results not only in metaphysico-epistemological errors, but also leads to *unethical* consequences, though much of this is brought about by theological and / or rationalistic morality. Out of a fear of finitude, the fact that anything living will indeed pass away, it is easy to take solace in that which seems eternal and undying (be it religious doctrine, universal philosophical truth, Reason, God, etc.). Abstract concepts and the imposition of stability on flux can be *useful*, but without a keen awareness that such concepts and stability are *merely* useful, we run the risk of hiding behind concepts and missing out on life itself. In the last analysis, *life is all that we have*. Our fear of finitude thus deprives us of that which is most precious. In this manner, the rationalistic mind that creates concept mummies and treats birth and decay as objections, as falsities, falsifies its own existence and dulls its senses to the movement of life, of becoming, altogether, sensing only a *problem* in the uncertainty of life instead of

finding its heart therein. In the following chapter we shall look at the process of reification as it relates to this struggle with accepting becoming.

Chapter Two: Vicious Abstraction

> "With many a science the endeavor to discover a universal principle is perhaps often just as fruitless as would be the endeavor of a mineralogist to discover a primal universal substance out of which all the minerals had arisen. Nature creates, not genera and species, but individua, and our shortsightedness has to seek out similarities so as to be able to retain in mind many things at the same time. These conceptions become more and more inaccurate the larger the families we invent for ourselves are."
>
> (Lichtenberg 21)

> "What is particular is eternally defeated by what is general; the general has eternally to fit in with the particular."
>
> (Goethe 23)

In the foregoing chapter I introduced a way of thinking about becoming that partially escapes from merely reiterating a conception of becoming as Being (insofar as becoming is posited as the ultimate principle of existence), but in terms of genesis, birth, living movement, etc. The opposition between Being and becoming, then, is marked by certainty, fixity, completeness and eternity on the one hand; on the other, uncertainty, flux, incompleteness, and temporality. Reification *as a fallacy* can best be understood as a distortion of that which belongs to becoming (i.e. all that is living or "in process"). It can only be an issue from the perspective of

becoming — from the perspective of Reason, reification is closer to finding the fundamental truth of some process. Nietzsche shows how the rational concepts of "the philosophers" are derived from metaphorically "killing, stuffing, preserving," and thus rendering eternal, that which was once alive and necessarily temporary.

There is, of course, a trade off in this process which cannot be ignored: when taken to an extreme, reification leads to this "mummification" or "deadening" of the living that is reified. However, reification is not inherently an (epistemological or moral) evil—it is often practically expedient to think in terms of *objects*. It is only when what is reified is objectified to the point that we no longer see the original living movement from which the fallaciously concretized abstraction. Reification grants us a proximate certainty in our everyday dealings and thus helps us navigate the myriad sensations, ideas, impulses, and the like. We need not worry what everything we encounter might be because we can easily dismiss it as a material object, for example. Hypostatization can go too far, however, to the point that we miss what is right before us, insofar as our understanding is conditioned to conceptualize what is immediately present before our eyes. In *Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense*, Nietzsche says,

> "Every concept arises by means of the equating of the unequal. Just as certain as it is that no one leaf is exactly the same as any other, so, too, it is certain that the concept *leaf* is formed by arbitrarily ignoring these individual differences, by forgetting what distinguishes one from the other, thus giving rise to the notion that there is in nature something other than leaves, something like 'The Leaf,' a kind of prototype according to which all leaves were woven, drawn, delineated,

> colored, crimped, painted, but by unskilled hands, so that no specimen turned out correctly or reliably as a true copy of the prototype." (Nietzsche 28)

The individual differences between leaves on the same plant may be subtle or obvious, but they are both equally a "leaf" inasmuch as we have a concept for "leaf." "The Leaf", as a prototype of which our two leaves are an example, follows the same line of thinking as Mathematical Platonism, in its most simple form, for in this scenario of two leaves we could just as well describe the two individuals as an instantiation of the number "2", which itself is the true prototype and of which the two particular leaves are only a crude copy.

However, this rational perspective is only possible if the many differences between these individuals are not taken into account. The equality of a concept comes at the cost of abridge, eliding, and leveling out any differences between the individuals made to conform to the overarching concept. Nietzsche continues: "Overlooking the individual and the actual yields concepts, just as it yields forms, whereas nature knows neither forms nor concepts, hence no species, but only what remains for us an inaccessible and indefinable X. For even the distinction we draw between the individual and the species is anthropomorphic and does not stem from the essence of things, thought neither can we sat that it does not correspond to the essence of things, for that would be a dogmatic assertion and as such just as indemonstrable as its counterpart" (29). Nietzsche comes close to a kind of mysticism in this passage, for the "indefinable X" suggests the "thing" we seek to "define" is always out of reach and thus ultimately unknowable (at least in a complete, comprehensive, rational manner). It is apt to refer to it as an indefinable X, for even conceiving of this X as an *individual* is itself an abstraction from the interconnected networks of processes, lives, and the like, cutting out from this fluid web

of becoming discrete and individual "objects" or "things." The use of the variable X is a fitting placeholder for what Nietzsche is describing as indescribable, for it gestures toward some unknown. If we were to take this position to its most extreme conclusion, discourse about any matter, insofar as it relies and words and concepts that define the necessarily indefinable (and thereby contradict the very nature of what is being discoursed about), would be impossible and ill-advised. This route would lead to an abrupt halt in our path, and we would fall into an absolute quietism.

While this is the most epistemically *humble* conclusion, it is simply not useful, so the indefinable X is fit into some haphazard definition and dealt with conceptually. This process of abstraction, of "mummifying" that which slips from our conceptual grasps in its very life movement, is perhaps most succinctly described by William James in the following passage on what he calls "vicious abstractionism":

> Let me give the name of 'vicious abstractionism' to a way of using concepts which may be thus described: We conceive a concrete situation by singling out some salient or important feature in it, and classing it under that; then, instead of adding to its previous characters all the positive consequences which the new way of conceiving it may bring, we proceed to use our concept privatively; reducing the originally rich phenomenon to the naked suggestions of that name abstractly taken, treating it as a case of 'nothing but' that concept, and acting as if all the other characters from out of which the concept is abstracted were expunged. (James 135)

Vicious abstractionism is the use of concepts partially described above (rendering definable, constant, and useful that which is indefinable and variable), though James adds very useful additions to the matter at hand. It is not inherently mistaken to simplify or extract a certain character out of becoming in order to name it and aid our understanding—the error is to do so *privativtely*. A concrete situation with a whole plethora of features would be too challenging to parse through if there were not some features that were considered more relevant than others, at least in order that one may find footing in the midst of the rich phenomena before them. When a concept is developed to refer to some relevant feature in this generic concrete situation, it grants an intellectual shortcut through the noise of sense experience to something more relevant to it. It *reduces* in order to have any understanding of the situation at all. This is a way in which such abstract concepts may be genuinely beneficial in order to highlight a certain feature of a situation and then subsequently plunge back into the sense data with a newfound footing. Vicious abstractionism does no such thing. The rest of the phenomena from which the concept highlighting a salient feature is abstracted is thrown out instead, depriving the concept of its living context, and depriving our understanding of the concrete meaning of the concept. In this way the particular situation from which the concept is derived is snuffed out in favor of the generality of the concept itself.

William James continues: "Abstraction, functioning in this way, becomes a means of arrest far more than a means of advance in thought. It mutilates things; it creates difficulties and finds impossibilities; and more than half the trouble that metaphysicians and logicians give themselves over the paradoxes and dialectic puzzles of the universe may, I am convinced, be traced to this relatively simple source. *The viciously privative employment of abstract characters*

and class names is, I am persuaded, one of the great original sins of the rationalistic mind" (136). When abstract characters and class names become reified and treated as "real objects", what is "shared" or "common" in such concepts becomes what is "real," and all otherness and difference, i.e. all uniqueness is lost. Heterogeneous experience becomes flat and homogenous. This newly leveled experience is easy to navigate and interpret, but also severely lacking in phenomenal depth. It is essentially *an act of violence*, and James is right to describe this process as a mutilation of things. Though it may be of use to *us* for initially gaining some footing in an ambiguous concrete situation, the process of vicious abstractionism ultimately leads to far more confusion than enlightenment, for we throw out becoming in favor of the "last vapors of reality" in the same manner that Nietzsche described in the previous chapter. At its worst, the perspective of Reason that favors the hypostatization of concepts (to the detriment of living phenomena) either kills what it abstracts from, or it disregards that which is of no immediate use to it.

We must also remember how anthropomorphic the distinction between the individual and the species is, for usefulness only pertains to what simplifies our engagement with the world, and this very simplicity is based on what is simple to this particular perspective. In his essay "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" from *From a Logical Point of View*, Willard Van Orman Quine speaks to this issue in regard to the abstract concept of a "physical object": "Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer . . . in point of epistemological footing, the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conceptions only as cultural posits" (Quine 44). Not only are our concepts based on our parochial sense of usefulness, they

are also provincially reliant upon our culture and its tacit mythos, a mythos that enters into our "reason" under the guise of common sense and shapes what become our cultural posits. Contextualizing concepts, in an *additive* rather than privative fashion, helps us to open them up from their reified state back into the concrete situations from which they were invented.

We see how abstraction comes to form dead concepts from live situations, and we see how the use of such concepts to the privation of their source leads to vicious abstractionism. What, at present, remains a mystery is exactly *how* such conceptions come to be hypostatized in the first place. Why might concepts deduced from Reason be treated as *real*? While the belief in fixity as being *more real* than that which changes is a given, what else might motivate a faith in what is unchanging to the degree that the faithful might deny their very senses and the becoming which their senses show? It is interesting that such confusion between concepts and their processual roots in becoming emerges at all. The source of this confusion might be found in both language and logic. Regarding the former, Quine's essay "Identity, Ostension, Hypostasis" speaks on the treatment of general terms as proper names and how such treatment might have resulted in the belief in *abstract entities*: "I attach much importance to the traditional distinction between general terms and abstract singular terms, 'square' versus 'squareness', because of the ontological point: use of the general term does not of itself commit us to the admission of a corresponding abstract entity into our ontology" (76). Quine's understanding of an ontology is less that of the study of Being as such and more the study of *relative* ontology upon which some theory is fundamentally based and cannot do without. Mathematics, for example, cannot do without some notion of numbers (even if they are ultimately reducible to sets, etc.), therefore mathematics requires some belief in (or, in technical terms, some *ontological commitment*) to

numbers as actual, albeit abstract entities. Whether concepts be hypostatized into such abstract entities in the first place is a question of the use of language. General terms and abstract singular terms signify very different kinds of meaning, yet their usage often looks grammatically identical. A general term, square, simply refers to something shaped like a square, much like recognizing a circle, or a rectangle, or a duck, and so on. These are all general terms that refer to particular cases, e.g. *that* duck, *this* square — they never imply that what they describe in general terms is also essentially imbued with that general quality. When a child identifies a duck at the park, their ostensive identification does not mean, "That entity there partakes in *duckness*, and as an instantiation of that universal it may be described as a *duck*." A general term is a singular term used to describe many different cases; it is never *the* case itself.

Quine continues: "...the use of an abstract singular term, subject to the standard behavior of singular terms such as the law of putting equals for equals, flatly commits us to an abstract entity named by the term… It is readily conceivable that it was precisely because of failure to observe this distinction that abstract entities gained their hold upon our imaginations in the first place" (76). The distinction between abstract singular terms and general terms is not apparent in the term itself. Let us recall Nietzsche's example of The Leaf from *Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*: there are individual leaves of potentially infinite variety, and then there is the form Leaf of which they are all a pale imitation. When stated in this manner, it is clear that "leaf" or "leaves" refers to things named leaves — the general term names an array of possible entities under one blanket term and functions as a defining boundary for what may or may not fall under the scope of its purview, but it is only a name. The Leaf, as an abstract singular term, names an entity: namely, the form or essence, of the Leaf. The matter becomes more ambiguous when dealing

with something already general or abstract like numbers or shapes. In phenomenal experience we never directly encounter the number "2" or "squareness" as such, but we do encounter pairs of shoes, a romantic couple, two eyes on a rabbit or a cat, a painting framed by four equivalent lengths, a square-shaped window, etc. Describing these particulars' *number* and *shape*, with comparative reference to the respective number or shape terms, seems to compare one realm of particulars with another realm of particulars. This results in an apparent leveling of the singular abstract term to the particular it is used to describe, as if squareness and square-shaped window are ontologically (in the Quinean sense) equivalent.

Further along Quine says, "This tendency is no doubt encouraged by the fact that it is often convenient for purely syntactical reasons, reasons, for example, of word order or cross-reference, to handle a general term like a proper name" (77). In the above case of cross-reference, the syntactical treatment of the general term "square" as a proper name gives it the singular abstract entity status "Square," though this is only a consequence of grammatical accident and semantic ambiguity. It is likely that, for this reason, Nietzsche says (in *Twilight of the Idols*), "I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar" (Nietszche 48). God as the supreme concept, the greatest abstraction, could only be devised and invented through an ambiguous grammar. As long as the ambiguity of grammar imbues a confused sense of *being* into the general terms that it uses in manners identical to the use of proper names (which are meant to really have being, at least insofar as they name one particular thing), the name God will seem to be a name with a content or referent. The general term "square" does not have one sole referent; the name Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche does indeed have such a singular referent. If "square" is treated in the same syntactical manner as "Nietzsche", it may look like the general

term “square” is actually a singular abstract term with a sole referent *squareness*. This is precisely the confusion on which both Quine and Nietzsche speak.

Are reified concepts a consequence of treating abstract, general terms as proper names that refer to real entities (either confusedly or deliberately)? Or are concepts themselves already based on some prior reification of “becoming” into things from which the hypostatization of abstract concepts into abstract things inevitably follows? Nietzsche speaks in favor of the latter in *Will to Power* when he touches on the “origin of logic”, our second potential source of the reified concept of vicious abstraction. The reification of concepts is already presupposed in the very logic of a concept, even if the concept itself is not yet reified, for the act of abstracting out from becoming and seeing equal things *at all* already reifies processes into things. Treating concepts as things takes this basic move one step further, but would not be possible if the very notion of a *thing* was not already invented and at work in the very logic which makes use of concepts. Nietzsche gives a psychological account of what qualifies this inclination to posit things as equal: “The fundamental inclination to posit as equal, to see things as equal, is modified, held in check, by consideration of usefulness and harmfulness, by considerations of success: it adapts itself to a milder degree in which it can be satisfied without at the same time denying and endangering life” (Nietzsche 276). Nietzsche shows that positing different things as equal (or, more technically put, *subsuming different things under a sign that values them as the same, that forces difference into the sameness of abstract equivalence*) is not necessarily a value in itself (though it may well be a psychological tendency). It is rather guided by the relative successes or failures of such equalizing posits, namely whether they are useful or harmful to us. This inclination adapts to these different outcomes and does not run rampant (to the point of life

denial). This sounds much like a repeat of what we found above with Wiliam James' points on the beginning of vicious abstraction: focusing on some salient feature of a concrete situation may aid our engagement and understanding of it. In this sense abstraction and positing things as equal is *useful* for us. We might be able to readily recognize danger after having encountered it once before, for example. In such a recognition of a repeated pattern, we are treating the new seemingly dangerous situation as equivalent to the previous one experienced in order to reduce harm. Medical science may serve as another example, wherein certain diseases are found to be cured best by certain medicines — a cure to a disease can, at first, only be discovered through much trial and error. However, once it has been discovered, a doctor may treat varying symptomatic presentations of the same illness as the same if enough of the symptoms are shared. When the inclination to posit as equal is kept in check by such considerations, it generally helps us get along in the world and is thus not an inherent evil.

Let us note that *positing things as equal is the sole condition of logic*. Nietzsche says, "Logic is bound to the condition: assume there are identical cases. In fact, to make possible logical thinking and inferences, this condition must first be treated fictitiously as fulfilled. That is: the will to logical truth can be carried through only after a fundamental *falsification* of all events is assumed. From which it follows that a drive rules here that is capable of employing both means, firstly falsification, then the implementation of its own point of view: logic does not spring from will to truth" (277). The will to logical truth is not the will to truth. Logical truth is conditioned by the assumption of identical cases, of equating the unequal. The will to logical truth is guided by considerations of use value, *not* epistemological value, for the fictitious fulfillment of the condition that assumes identical cases already leaves out a great majority of the

unique, novel, and unrepeatable aspects of becoming in favor of what can be plucked out and gathered together under sameness. Along with the perspective of Reason discussed in the previous chapter, we see that logic falsifies life and then implements its own perspective in place of life. Logic and the perspective of Reason are thus one and the same in this regard. In this sense the violence of logic and Reason is marked by the *imposition* of logical, conceptual, and ultimately rational sense of equality on originally unequal things.[4]

The will to logical truth, predicated on the act of positing things as equal (initially for the benefit of our survival), is the source of the categories of Reason. Nietzsche says, "The inventive force that invented categories labored in the service of our needs, namely of our need for security, for quick understanding on the basis of signs and sounds, for means of abbreviation: "substance," "subject," "object," "being," "becoming" have nothing to do with metaphysical truths. — It is the powerful who made the names of things into law, and among the powerful it is the greatest artists in abstraction who created the categories" (277). The will to logical truth is ultimately an inventive, artistic force of the "artists of abstraction" among the powerful. It creates useful abbreviations that satisfy our needs for security, shortcuts through signs and sounds to aid our understanding, and generally helps to render one's thinking more concise. Even the phrase "will to logical truth" is one such category of abbreviation invented by Nietzsche himself. On this view, the ubiquity of these categories of Reason in Western thought is not due to their inherent truth, but is instead a function of *power*. It is therefore a matter of cultural contingency that the names of things we receive in our metaphysical tradition have been codified as truths. The source of vicious abstraction may, therefore, be found in a grammatical confusion

[4] I take "unequal" here to mean *different* or *unique*, not necessarily in a valuative hierarchy that holds one as more valuable than another.

(metaphorically using a general term in the same syntactic way as a proper name and consequently treating that general term itself as a proper name) and, more deeply, in the most fundamental assumption of logic: *that there are identical cases.* When the abstraction of logic is predicated on the denial of difference insofar as it only gathers what is the same by cutting out what does not fit into its logical equality, we are already missing out on a whole slew of novel, unique, and hitherto unknown features of becoming. The scope of our understanding is severely narrowed through this rationalistic lens of abstraction. It is only worsened when the general terms that name concepts (which are pale metaphors for the reality which they are meant only to abridge and describe as easily comprehensible symbols) are themselves imbued with a metaphysical reality over and against that of which they are mere abstractions. In this twofold process becoming is utterly lost and, at its most extreme, the reification of concepts results in an utter denial of the senses, of the flow of life itself. Life is reduced to mere living objects and the rule of law (be it physical, moral, or governmental) enforces this reduction to the point that it simply seems to be the case. If everyone partakes in such an illusion and treats it as *real* despite it being a clear fiction, it becomes a *social fact*, conditioned by and contingent upon the historical factors that brought it about and perpetuated by those who uphold it unquestioningly.

Chapter Three: Prescriptive Morality

> "Morality is only an interpretation of certain phenomena, more precisely a *mis*interpretation."
>
> (Nietzsche 55)

Let us begin with a distinction between morality and ethics: morality, in the following passages, is understood as a rational or theoretical means to determine what is right and wrong *in advance* and in such a manner that moral quandaries can be settled by making recourse to morality. For example, one can settle a matter by making recourse to utilitarianism, theology, deontology, etc. Ethics differs from morality in that it is not a theory so much as it is a *comportment* toward situations that are undetermined and thus problematic. I think of ethics as a matter of what attitude one brings to any given situation that calls for *action*, which are perhaps mostly situations which have no clear sense of right or wrong and require further deliberation and reflection on what one ought to do. In this kind of ethics one may make recourse to moral theories as guiding *rules of thumb*, but to dogmatically take on the perspective of any such moral theory and interpret all ethical problems according to the logic of the moral theory alone abandons the very ethical task of engaging a problematic situation for one's self as it arises. In this manner I think ethics is more akin to a musical improvisation than logic — it requires that one be ready to act and respond no matter what comes its way; it requires a fundamental *responsibility to an "unknown" beyond ourselves*.

The *moral laws* of a *rational morality* are analogues to the reified concepts of Reason. As such, they are hypostatizations of *solutions to ethical conundrums*, taken out of their particular context (and therefore killed, mummified, and stuffed), universalized, and imposed in many places where they do not apply neatly, leading to the messiness of casuistry or, in less subtle cases, the violent imposition of ill-fitting rules on vulnerable persons in the name of Morality. This is particularly the case in prescriptive moralities composed of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt nots" and other presuppositions about what is good and evil. The rationalistic conception of the universal human (found in versions of Deontology and Utilitarianism, among other places) and the necessary exclusion of those who are "other" than that "universal human" marks an immediately glaring limit to such a morality. It proceeds in the same manner as logic by *assuming there are identical cases*, and, by identifying like cases, it also excludes what is *unlike* such cases. What happens when a rationalistic morality fundamentally assumes, as a criterion of one's own "humanness", that the universal human partakes in Reason (a highly contextual and ever-shifting notion depending on interpretation, culture, historical period and other conditions)? Is the "irrational" human that does not meet this "rational" criterion (as the reasoner understands it) thus not human if they failed to partake in Reason? Or is this not risking *bigotry* against an invented "irrational" group in the name of Morality?

A moral theory with such inflexible laws may be one of Reason, but it may also be a theological morality. In either case, such a moral theory purports to know, in advance, what would be *right* or *wrong* courses of action in cases of ethical uncertainty, without exception. In this sense, moral law offers a rigid, reliable, and eternal sense of what is good or bad, but it does so at the cost of genuine ethical engagement. It sacrifices ethics for the comfort of certainty.

The casuistic application of abstract, rational moral principles that morality claims ought to guide how one lives precludes spontaneous, living ethical engagement with one another and the world at large, for the ambiguity and uncertainty of ethics is already *decided* by such rational, universal moralities. Yet problems of ethics emerge in uncertain, as-yet-undetermined situations. While substituting the uneasiness of an ethically problematic situation for a pre-given moral solution is certainly more expedient than sitting with unresolved ethical tension, it also closes off engagement with the actual concrete situation before one's eyes. Such a solution is determined in advance by abstracting from particular, past ethical problems, and resolved by treating moral principles (rules of thumb) as reified, fixed truths. Prescriptive morality, therefore, already decides what should be done in any ethically problematic situation before it has even occurred, precluding the possibility of ethics and settling ethical issues with principles that are easy to blindly uphold. For example, the law sets a precedent for what is and is not allowed and it is enforced by police. While social contract theorists may say we are obliged to follow the law insofar as we willingly aim to remain citizens of the county whose laws we uphold, the violent imposition of the law by the police suggests this is not a matter of debate, but of following the law or becoming a criminal. There is a compulsory element that leaves out certain ethical considerations, for not every citizen democratically decides the laws amongst themselves; there is, instead, a precedent already set which we must follow. Let us look to another example: during wartime, when the "enemy" is othered and treated as less than human, and a duty to one's home country is appealed to as the moral ground for going to war and killing the other, one's "service" is seen as morally righteous by those who buy into the morality that sent them off to war—yet fulfilling one's "moral duty" in this regard may often involve committing horrifically unethical

acts against other people in the name of some moral cause. Ethics is impossible in war if people are unwilling to budge in the moral views that sent them to war in the first place. These are both very simplistic examples meant to gesture toward what is meant by the imposition of morality that pre-determines the "right" action and thus forecloses any possibility of deliberating over *what* might be "right" in some novel context. It soothes the ethical ache that comes with not yet knowing how to proceed in a "right" manner in some problematic situation, but in so doing it only *apparently* resolves the ethical questions at hand when it, instead, glosses right over them because the moral answer is already supposed to be known and thus no further ethical considerations are deemed necessary.

A more concrete example from the history of philosophy is Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. He formulates this imperative in the following way: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 30). Kant's deontology is caricatured by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ* in order to juxtapose Kantian moral theory with Nietzsche's own sense of ethics. Nietzsche speaks directly against Kant's vision of morality: "What does not condition our life *harms* it: a virtue merely from a feeling of respect for the concept 'virtue', as Kant desired it, is harmful. 'Virtue', 'duty', 'good in itself', impersonal and universal — phantoms, expressions of decline, of the final exhaustion of life" (Nietzsche 131-132). He states plainly that a virtue upheld merely for its own sake, as the "concept" of virtue, is harmful to life and indicative of exhaustion. These concepts (virtue, duty, the good in-itself) are much like the hypostatized abstractions we spoke of earlier, just under a moralistic hue. There are surely virtues, goods, and duties one may develop in the course of one's own life or recognize in others, in the rich diversity of human life, but virtue as such, duty as

such, good in-itself, as universalized abstractions, are given a misplaced weight when they are valued for their own sake and not for the role they play in the larger context of the life and movement of an interdependent social network. Abstracted from the movement of life itself and upheld by the perspective of Reason, the moral concepts of virtue, duty, and the good in-itself seem to be supreme values, but like the supreme *concepts*, the abstract virtues, too, are the "last fumes of an evaporating reality" (Nietzsche, 47).

Nietzsche continues: "The profoundest laws of preservation and growth demand the reverse of this: that each one of us should devise *his own* virtue, *his own* categorical imperative… Kant's categorical imperative should have been felt as mortally *dangerous*! … An action compelled by the instinct of life has in the joy of performing it the proof it is a *right* action: and that nihilist with Christian-dogmatic bowels understands joy as an *objection*" (132). When Nietzsche speaks of devising one's own virtue, one's own categorical imperative, this seems in line with the task of ethics briefly described at the beginning of this chapter: to determine the most ethical choice in some ambiguous situation by one's own lights, by being personally responsible and invested in how one acts or ought to act in an ethically tumultuous quandary. The instinct of life that compels an action is proven "right" by the joy it produces in the actor. While this is certainly not an exhaustive account of what constitutes an ethically "right action", the fact that some sense of an expression of one's own life can be felt in an action gives it a life affirming quality that flies in the face of the nihilistic denial of life in the phantasmagoric impersonal virtues in themselves that we have a universal duty to uphold. The former is more natural insofar as it is an expression of life itself; the latter anti-nature in its denial of life (though it is nonetheless *of* nature, for only a living, natural being can invent such a morality).

Let us turn to Nietzsche's chapter on the "Morality as Anti-Nature" in *Twilight of the Idols*, where he says, "All naturalism in morality, that is all *healthy* morality, is dominated by an instinct of life — some commandment of life is fulfilled through a certain canon of 'shall' and 'shall not', some hindrance and hostile element on life's road is thereby removed" (Nietzsche 55). Nietzsche's sense of a healthy morality looks somewhat akin to the psychological motivation behind the inclination to posit things as equal: both are checked by considerations of what may benefit life and what may be harmful to it with an aim to remove what is harmful. In positing things as equal, near identical cases of danger can be avoided if they can be recognized in the future before the danger becomes fatal; in a naturalistic morality, that which is hostile to life is removed by a shall not (e.g. "thou shall not neglect one's physical health") in order to uphold and affirm life as the ultimate value. Contrarily, anti-natural moralities put other values above and beyond life. Nietzsche says, "*Anti-natural* morality, that is virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, reverenced and preached, turns on the contrary precisely *against* the *instincts* of life – it is a… *condemnation* of these instincts. By saying, 'God sees into the heart' it denies the deepest and the highest desires of life and takes God for the *enemy of life*" (55). God is the highest concept that takes life's place as the highest value in naturalistic moralities. Not only is life lowered as a value, its very instincts are condemned and made "evil", denying life itself in favor of the abstract values derived from it.

Nietzsche juxtaposes the aforementioned moral perspective with the perspective of becoming in the following:

> Let us consider what naïvety it is to say 'man *ought* to be thus and thus!' Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the luxuriance of a prodigal play and

> change of forms: and does not some pitiful journeyman moralist say at the sight of it: 'No! Man ought to be *different*'? … He even knows *how* man ought to be, this bigoted wretch; he paints himself on the wall and says '*ecce homo*'! … And there have indeed been consistent moralists who wanted man to be different, namely virtuous, who wanted him in their own likeness, namely that of a bigot: to that end they *denied* the world! (56)

From the perspective of becoming, the world is abundant with myriad types of people and forms of life (let us not forget the ethics and epistemologies of animals!) ever changing and growing, developing into novel forms, reverting into previous shapes, etc. To reduce all of this variety to how the moralist thinks *everything ought to be* goes one step further than vicious abstraction (for vicious abstraction stops at the salient features it abstracts out and then simply discards the rest). The moralist not only treats that which does not fit under their moral framework as morally wrong and privatively discards other ways of life; the moralist, further, *denies those other ways of life as valuable and wishes to impose his moral vision on everyone in place of their own ways of life*. This is the tyranny of the categorical imperative, of the rational moralism that touts only the abstracted concept of values in themselves by denying life. This is, to a degree, the very same bigotry of colonialism, of religious hatred, of sexism, racism, xenophobia, and the like. When another form of life differs from the moralist's own, the moralist cannot simply turn their head and leave the other in peace (or, god forbid, *learn* from the other by engaging them and responding to their otherness in an open manner); instead, this other is a heretic or a heathen, a threat to the moralist's way and must be converted or destroyed. Both options are an act of violence, and this is the most direct form of violence that has its root in rationalistic thinking.

The denial of ways of life (and the very living movement of becoming) in hypostatized concepts and virtues is not solely a philosophical concern: it is a concern with the violence that such rational thinking enacts on other forms of life simply because they differ and are deemed morally "wrong".

Chapter Four: Nihilism and Affirmation

> "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown, —And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too."
>
> (Nietzsche 167)

> "*Amor Fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse… *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish only to be a Yes-sayer."
>
> (223)

Nietzsche introduces an *affirmative* response to the life-denying moralist he caricatures in the last quoted passage from *Twilight of the Idols*. He concludes that very same aphorism with the following: "In so far as morality *condemns* as morality and *not* with regard to the aims and objects of life, it is a specific error with which one should show no sympathy… We others, we immoralists, have on the contrary opened wide our hearts to every kind of understanding, comprehension, *approval*. We do not readily deny, we seek our honor in *affirming*" (Nietzsche 56). We see Nietzsche contrast the bigotry and life denial of moralism with his own brand of *immoralism*. Immoralism is meant to contrast the imposing violence of moralism by *affirming* things as they are instead of willing things to be other than what they are. This involves open-hearted understanding, comprehension, and approval instead of denial and disapproval. In this sense, Nietzsche's immoralism may strike us as more *ethical* than the bigoted moralism he

depicts. In this passage we also see a microcosmic representation of Nietzsche's twofold process of reevaluation of values: first he severely critiques and undermines an old, questionable value, then he replaces it with a new interpretation, a new valuation in place of the old value.

Nietzsche's revaluation of values is ultimately an ethical project, for the purpose of clearing away old values is to be able to posit *new* values. His immoralism is a first step in overcoming the life denying values that he critiques. For example, the life denial of morality is *nihilistic* in a similar manner that the categories of Reason deny life, though this may not be apparent to those who still cling to the abstract concepts and values of Reason. Both are comprised of the last fumes of the reality from which they emerged and signify nothing when they are only understood as signifying themselves (a signifier with no signified). In this context nihilism means that "*the highest values devaluate themselves*. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (Nietzsche 11). A high value comes to hollow itself out when it becomes apparent that it has little to do with life itself and is instead an invented fiction. When it becomes apparent that certain forms of social etiquette, for example, are not practiced for any good reason other than that it is "tradition", the value of a cultural ritual may come to devalue itself as a merely unbroken habit sustained for generations. The "Why?" of the value is without aim. It is not done for the good of the people, for the improvement of one's health, etc., it is simply done because it is done (much like Nietzsche's portrayal of Kant respecting the concept of virtue for virtue's sake instead of a particular virtue for a particular way of life). This is all a symptom of *passive* nihilism, the nihilism of decay and purposelessness.

Nietzsche diagnoses the etiological root of nihilism in the "categories of Reason": "The faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism. We have measured the value of the

world according to categories *that refer to a purely fictitious world*" (13). The categories of Reason are abstracted fictions that became articles of faith for interpreting the world. Not only were they useful means for understanding the world, they came to be the "true" world themselves. The categories of Reason, thus hypostatized, become the laws of nature and so on. When these categories are shown to be fictitious and their reified state fractures, they return to their original role of serving a merely pragmatic role in human life. Yet it is rare for such a de-reification of the categories of Reason to occur without the value of the world being put into question. If what "made" the world valuable was the categories of Reason we thought we had uncovered *in* the world, then the very criteria grounding the world's value are put into question, and so too is the world's value turned into a question mark.

A similar phenomenon occurs in people who have doubted or lost their faith in Christianity, for example: when the source of the world's value and meaning (the most supreme concept "God") is put into question or discarded as fiction, the guarantor of the world's meaning, value, and, crucially, of a world *beyond*, ceases to fulfill that role as guarantor, and so the world's meaning and value appear to be lost. In the most severe cases, the world seems *deprived of meaning*. The world, however, was always alive and present during these crises of faith. Only the *interpretation* of the world has changed. *Passive* nihilism is a felt lack of meaning when an interpretation (held to faithfully to the point that it simply felt like *the absolute truth about reality* and came to replace the world itself) falls away and the meaning it provided is provided no longer. The lingering shadow on the cave wall after the death of God is the lingering sense of meaning which can no longer be found but is still sought. The move from theological to rational categories (the latter often being secularized versions of the former, "godless" but reliant on the

logic of God) suggests that the death of God perhaps happened long ago, and the categories of Reason are one of presumably many cases of God's lingering shadow on the cave wall.

What induces this crisis of faith? What ruffles the feathers of the hegemonic perspective of a culture to the point that it collapses? Passionate, philosophical inquiry (or skepticism), with its capacity to see what is questionable in that which is taken for granted, puts articles of faith into question and acts as the trigger for such a crisis: "Skepticism regarding morality is what is decisive. The end of the moral interpretation of the world, which no longer has any sanction after it has tried to escape into some beyond, leads to nihilism" (7). When morality is the source of the world's value, and this source is fatally questioned, nihilism inevitably follows. The activity of skepticism and its lack of faith in what it scrutinizes brings out what is *questionable* in dogmatically held articles of faith. Insofar as it renders these articles of faith questionable, it opens them up to *reinterpretation*. The need for reinterpretation may occur to those who are dissatisfied with the meaning that old values provide. Nietzsche says, "Nihilism… can be a sign of strength: the spirit may have grown so strong that previous goals ('convictions,' articles of faith) have become incommensurate (for a faith generally expresses the constraint of conditions of existence, submission to the authority of circumstances under which one flourishes, grows, gains power)" (17-18). The consequent nihilism of such a crisis of faith in which one might become passive and enervated from a lost sense of meaning and value differs from an *active* nihilism, the kind that is the sign of increased strength or power in spirit that needs to set new goals for itself because faith restricts this spirit's capacity to fully flourish. Active nihilism is much like Nietzsche's "epistemological evil" in *The Gay Science*: "What is new… is always *evil*, being that which wants to conquer and overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pieties;

and only what is good is old" (Nietzsche 79). The "evil" of the *new* (e.g. Nietzsche's immoralism) intends to overthrow the "good" old values in order to replace them with more fitting values. The epistemological "good" of the old values lies in their solidity, their constancy, and in the fact that they do not induce uncertainty and crisis — one can have faith in them and leave them unexamined. Yet when old values overstay their welcome, they bring about passive nihilism insofar as they devaluate themselves as they restrain the conditions of existence for the flourishing of life, which, like a growing animal trapped in a small cage, hinders the flourishing of life itself. The conservation of the "good" values for their own sake forgets to tend to life, and the "evil", destructive forces move the boundary stones in order to recondition human existence in favor of its continued growth and flourishing.

While active nihilism is, in part, a *destructive* force of an empowered and lively spirit (by way of skepticism, founding new moralities and religions, and unsettling the old pieties) it also can become a creative and life-affirming force. The following questions must be asked: Would a newly founded morality repeat the same mistakes as those of old? Would the active nihilist assert himself in the same fashion as the bigoted moralist and expect everyone to obey his command? Or would the moved boundary stones open up possibilities for new ways of living unhindered by the unethical strictures of the life-denying, predetermining, dead moralities of old? The latter direction is made possible by the intense force of active nihilism. In fact, active nihilism may be the first condition of an *open comportment* toward the world, a manner in which one holds oneself out toward life. In an open comportment, one cares, loves, and tends to life directly, thereby affirming it as it is and bearing responsibility for it rather than judging and evaluating life according to the rules of the lifeless logic and morality to which a closed comportment is

bound. Active nihilism shatters ossified conceptions and opens us back into indeterminacy, allowing us to ethically engage the world in a fresh light.[5]

Nietzsche puts a value on *learning to see* and *learning to love* in *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Gay Science* respectively. Seeing and loving in the ways that he outlines strike me as preconditions for the kind of open comportment I wish to gesture toward, particularly in how they convey an attitude that is patient with what is unknown. Let us first look at what he says on learning to see in *Twilight of the Idols*: "Learning to *see* — habituating the eye to repose, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgment, to investigate and comprehend the individual case in all its aspects… *not* to react immediately to a stimulus, but to have the restraining, stock-taking instincts in one's control" (Nietzsche 75). Nietzsche's sense of learning to see has a cautious and keen skeptical quality that *defers* judgment in trying to understand some individual case in its multiple aspects, taking stock of its features and, by way of restraint, seeing it in its very life before arriving at any conclusions. The rationalistic approach to morality and logic in general does the exact opposite of this, for it already abstracts from the individual case and explains it by means of general concepts. In the latter mode of engagement the individual case is already mostly settled before anything novel or contrary to the abstract suppositions imposed on it have had the chance to show themselves. While useful as an intellectual shortcut to quickly gather information about some concrete scenario, the subsumption of the individual

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[5] *Active nihilism* is, in this sense, a precondition for what I am calling an "open comportment" insofar as it helps us break away from traditional values that may have ossified to the point of seeming to simply be "objectively true", thereby closing off a certain openness toward things (because ossified values give us predetermined answers and do not call us to think and act anew in the face of indeterminacy). While this could lead to *passive nihilism* (a nihilism marked by the feeling of a yawning abyss and utter meaninglessness), *active nihilism* is marked by the strength of spirit which seems to destroy in order to create — much like an artist twisting conventions in order to invent a new style.

under the general blinds one to the individual, for all one has learned to see in this way of thinking is the *general*.

If the patience and repose of Nietzsche's conception of seeing makes it possible to observe the life of some individual without immediately judging it partially and incompletely, with the necessary blindness that comes with seeing only a general term in place of a particular, this may help inform how one can comport oneself more *openly* toward the other. The moralistic approach jumps on the slightest indeterminate stimulus and immediately settles the case before it has given it room to breathe; at the first sign of life other than it, it immediately strangles it back into something recognizable and familiar (generally in the form of an *ad hoc* rationalization) and does not concern itself with the stimulus beyond that point. More than anything, this moralizing approach is completely at odds with *love*, for it cannot grasp an other unless it subsumes that other under its own image — it is the bigoted moralist demanding that people be *different*, painting himself on the wall and exclaiming "Ecce homo!" Love, as Nietzsche describes it in *The Gay Science*, is a learned process that, at first, involves being generous with what is *other*:

> *One must learn to love*. — This is what happens to us in music: First one has to *learn to hear* a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to *tolerate* it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kind hearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are *use* to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we

> have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. (Nietzsche 262)

The *aesthetic* analogy made with music is crucial to understanding what Nietzsche means by "learning to love", for the moralism he speaks against is a highly *rational* and conceptually-based perspective, a manner of seeing *according to the structures of general concepts*, not a matter of *feeling*. His immoralism, as an inversion of the aforementioned "rationalistic" moralism, is an open-hearted, affirming, arguably *loving* immoralism. When hearing a piece of music, our senses are directly engaged in such a manner that it pulls our affective, embodied existence into the aesthetic experience of the music. This aesthetic experience is a matter of hearing particularities such as a melody, an unusual polyrhythm, or the tone of the singer's voice, and accepting these as having their own life separate from our own. The effort and patience required to engage it as something strange and not fully known to ourselves is perhaps the most challenging moment in this process, for it involves an acceptance of uncertainty, of foreignness in the listener yet still requires the listener to meet the piece of music on the aural site of its very otherness *as it presents itself and reaches out to the listener*. Eventually we are able to meet it on its own terms and our patience will have rewarded us with an understanding far more comprehensive (but open-ended and always subject to further revision and complication) of the piece of music than we ever would have achieved if we heard it once, labeled it "Jazz", and carried on to the next piece of music without a second thought for what rich life is to be found in the minute and obscure idiosyncrasies quietly present in the music.

This aesthetic process of coming to appreciate and love a piece of music, of course, extends to the process of loving in other contexts. Nietzsche continues: "That is how we have

learned to love all things that we now love. In the end we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience, fair mindedness, and gentleness with what is strange; gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its *thanks* for our hospitality… Love, too, has to be learned" (262). Good will, patience, fair mindedness, and gentleness toward what is strange or *other* is perhaps the best characterization of what dispositions would make an ethics of understanding and openness possible. At no point is the other reduced to the conceptual understanding of the observer, nor is it taken out of the context of its own life; the other is instead affirmed as another independent life and its strangeness is accepted as a fact before it is slowly understood according to its own terms. The moralistic view enforces conformity to its own hermetically sealed law to the degree that anything other to it is heretical. Otherness is consequently *forced* to conform or to be condemned as an evil. Nietzsche's immoralism *affirms* the other with a wide-open heart in an attempt to understand and comprehend the rich tapestry of life in its actual living movement, *without prejudice about how forms of life ought to be.*[6]

[6] This is not to say Nietzsche's immoralism is without *any prejudice whatsoever*, but that it is without the particular moralizing prejudice that declares for others what is and is not a morally legitimate form of life.

Chapter Five: Open Comportment and The Infinite

> "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."
>
> (Blake xxii)

> "There is a great difference whether a poet is looking for the particular that goes with the general, or sees the general in the particular… the latter in fact constitutes the nature of poetry, expressing something without any thought of the general, and without indicating it. Now whoever has this living grasp of the particular is at the same time in possession of the general without realizing it."
>
> (Goethe 33-34)

When we previously considered the errors that follow from replacing the phenomena of becoming with hypostatized abstractions, one of the most crucial problems that emerged was the privative manner in which rationalistic abstractions reduce myriad processes to a few key aspects that are then taken as accounting for the whole. The privative function of vicious abstractionism deprives life of its wealth of details and variety — in short, of its infinite diversity — and thus denies the passing of life as unreliable, untrue, and inconsistent in favor of the timeless, deathless abstractions it derives from the passing of life, for these abstractions are consistent, reliable, and unchanging. The infinite, however, poses a unique problem for the conceptual mummification of

Reason, for it cannot be reduced or delimited to anything more than an incomplete definition that only gestures to what it might be. The infinite is necessarily incomplete and, as such, cuts straight through rationalistic conceptions that narrowly circumscribes phenomena to its barest essentials. If vicious abstraction deprives becoming of its irreducible variety, the notion of the infinite helps to re-introduce that irreducible variety in an *additive* fashion. On the one hand, there is Nietzsche's *new perspectival infinity*: "the world has become 'infinite' for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*" (Nietzsche 336). If infinite interpretations are possible, the horizon of human understanding may be endless. Thus the purported "theories of everything" or "universal theories" cannot have the last say on what reality is like, for insofar as they are *theories* they are elaborate *interpretations* of endlessly interpretable phenomena. There is always therefore an air of incompleteness lurking behind any theory which attempts to account for all of reality, or even for the full scope of one particular.

The "nature of poetry", according to Goethe, is to see the general in the particular. This is a radical inversion of the rationalistic tendency to understand the particular in terms of the general. The reified concept is the general treated as particular, "thingified" and treated according to this misplaced status. Reified concepts are the consequence of an inversion of the poetic perspective as Goethe describes it. For this reason it is not a wholly artificial distinction to treat these perspectives as *antipodes*. If we found the reification of concepts to be the source of a great deal of error, perhaps the poetic emphasis on the *particular* will provide us some sense of how to undo the trouble caused by reification. A conceptual representation of some living movement can at best only give an external, limited, and incomplete picture of the life it tries to

encapsulate. However, with the logical tendency that assumes the existence of identical cases, a conceptual representation rarely has such humility. It is often treated as complete, or at least as accounting for the wide range of *normal* patterns of life to the degree that anything that contradicts or falls outside of the general account is simply regarded as an anomalous curiosity, not a serious objection to the upheld norm or a suggestion of the general conception's own incompleteness.

In his essay entitled *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Henri Bergson gives an account of two kinds of knowledge: "The first implies that we move round the object; the second, that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol" (Bergson 21). The first kind of knowledge that Bergson describes is *relative* knowledge, for it grasps a thing from without, and its external perspective, symbology, and whatever other tools of interpretation at its disposal inform and frame it in a highly contextual and conditioned manner. The second kind of knowledge is, for Bergson, *absolute* and metaphysical, for it understands an object "from within", without recourse to other means of interpretation.

With Bergson's two kinds of knowledge, we also have two kinds of infinity: the perspectival infinity of Nietzsche is closely akin to the infinite points of view possible in Bergson's relative knowledge; the second infinity in absolute knowledge is closer to that of the nature of poetry à la Goethe. Bergson says,

> But the absolute, which is the object and not its representation, the original and not its translation, is perfect, by being perfectly what it is. It is doubtless for this reason that the *absolute* has often been identified with the *infinite*. Suppose that I

> wished to communicate to someone who did not know Greek the extraordinarily simple impression that a passage of Homer makes upon me; I should first give a translation of the lines, I should then comment on my translation, and then develop the commentary; in this way, by piling up explanation on explanation, I might approach nearer and nearer to what I wanted to express; but I should never quite reach it… Viewed from the inside, then, an absolute is a simple thing; but looked at from the outside, that is to say, relatively to other things, it becomes, in relation to these signs which express it, the gold coin for which we never seem able to finish giving small change. Now, that which lends itself at the same time both to an indivisible apprehension and to an inexhaustible enumeration is, by the very definition of the word, an infinite. (23)

An object, according to Bergson, is capable of both an indivisible apprehension and an inexhaustible enumeration, making it an *infinite*. How could one consider a particular object as infinite at all? Is it not finite insofar as it is an object? This seems like a contradiction in the meaning of the terms presented. But this would be a shortsighted resistance to Bergson's insight, as he is using these terms in novel ways to express something *beyond* them — he is attempting to perform the very task about which he speaks by way of a poetically and metaphorically evocative use of language.[7] The infinite is indivisible insofar as it is simply not reducible to any interpretation, no matter the kind. The infinite is also inexhaustible (it is etymologically derived

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[7] While the term "infinity" may evoke traditional conceptions of a *totalizing* infinity, Bergson's meaning is quite different from such notions and, consequently, has a notably different meaning. This is not the infinity of God, but an infinite *qualified* by being both *indivisible* and *inexhaustible*. Bergson's experience reading Homer in the Greek is an example of this infinite. Bergson can have a simple, "absolute" apprehension of Homer as he reads him, but he can neither give an exhaustive external account nor experience a simpler apprehension, divisible into constituent parts, than he already experiences in Homer. On this view there is not, therefore, one all-encompassing Infinity, but infinitely many sites of the infinite.

from the Latin *in-finitus* literally meaning "not finite, finished"). However, relative accounts may pile on one another to get asymptotically closer to the infinite which one attempts to describe, yet such compounded attempts at description, of course, never fully grasp the infinite as such. There is always a remainder, an utter excess that cannot be accounted for.

Let us also note how Bergson's example of a simple perception of an absolute is an *aesthetic* example (i.e. reading Homer in the original Greek). This is another version of what Nietzsche says on learning to hear a piece of music and growing to love it in its uniqueness. The aesthetic experience of art is the site of *intellectual sympathy*, a key notion which Bergson introduces in the following passage: "It follows from this that an absolute could only be given in an *intuition*… By intuition is meant a kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (23-24). Intellectual sympathy is the means by which one can intuit an absolute from within itself. The sympathetic means of this intuition evokes Nietzsche's sense of love that is learned inasmuch as it is an affective, open-hearted comportment toward that with which one sympathizes or loved that results in the beauty unveiled by what was once strange, in the simple and immediate comprehension of its life and meaning. Intellectual sympathy, too, requires discipline and patience in its active need to reverse the habitual role of rational thought to conceptualize its object.

Intellectual sympathy may be the third precondition for an open ethical comportment along with learning to see and love. Bergson directly describes the process and aim of intuition by means of intellectual sympathy: "[Intuition by means of intellectual sympathy] is extremely difficult. The mind has to do violence to itself, has to reverse the direction of the operation by

which it habitually thinks, has perpetually to revise, or rather recast, all its categories. But in this way it will attain to fluid concepts, capable of following reality in all its sinuosities and of adopting the very movement of the inward life of things" (51). Bergson's optimism regarding what intuition can ultimately obtain sets a noble goal for our concerns with cultivating an open comportment. The difficulty of achieving intuition requires the self-discipline (or violence turned toward one's habitual modes of thinking) to refrain from letting categories ossify and become dogmatically believed facts. One, along with Nietzsche, must be willing to constantly reevaluate, revise, and recast those values in order that the novel *fluid concept* may be attained — a concept that can gesture toward a fluid entity and that itself is fluid in that it adapts to change and evolves with the flow of life. This creates an openness to the very fluidity of becoming and perpetually resists reification, for the concept itself can never fully settle in order that it may keep up with what it represents. Beyond the fluid concept, intuition itself seems to be the achievement of an open comportment, the actualization of an open-hearted attunement with what is sympathized and loved in order that it may understand what is ultimately inexpressible in it. It is, in the last analysis, a deep *feeling* for another with love and sympathy for that other's otherness is related to one's own mysterious depths.

What are the ethical implications of this perspective on the cultivation of an open comportment? To see infinity in the particular, to be sensitive to what is overlooked, to be in tune with the life of another beyond caricature — to form an open comportment of this sort in order to more ethically engage with what we encounter. This comportment is more ethical insofar as it is more open (i.e. responsible) and more sensitive to the uncertainty, uniqueness, and ever renewing flow of becoming in which any undecided situation between any forms of life may emerge. It

does not typify, nor does it reduce to formulae; *it opens itself to the infinity of possibilities and arrangements of different relations and the temporal lives of those with whom we are concerned.* It also does not preclude any one life from a universal conception, but rather approaches each life with a sensitivity to its own infinity, its irreducibility, its ultimately ineffable, dynamic or fluid "essence", not fixed and ever true (for this would only gather what makes it common and universalize this into a static essence), but what makes its it uniquely itself, distinct and worthy of ethical engagement insofar as it exists, breathes, and has a life wholly of its own.

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