



*The Pious Antichrist:
Nietzsche as a Religious Thinker*

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Abstract

What are, according to Nietzsche, the aspects of religion that a society must preserve, and which must it abandon? Nietzsche has traditionally been characterised as an atheist, but this interpretation necessarily overlooks his far more ambiguous attitude to religion, as well as who Nietzsche's Death of God passage is addressed to. Following Nietzsche's own approach, an analysis of the ideas as well as of its author reveals that Nietzsche's entire project has been dominated by his religious preoccupation. From *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 to *Ecce Homo* in 1888, Nietzsche continuously focuses on religious individuals as a means to criticise, study, and validate abstract religious phenomena; Dionysus/Apollo becomes *Dionysus versus the Crucified*. A closer analysis reveals that the latter opposition must not be understood as Nietzsche's identification with the first at the expense of the latter, but rather equally with both. Despite his destructive criticism of religion, Nietzsche has the methodological means to constructively analyse religious phenomena, and he accordingly arrives at criteria for healthy religions.

* The cover image is my edit of "Nietzsche with a crown of thorns," made by an anonymous author in Germany in 1900, courtesy of Weimar Classic Foundation, Goethe-Schiller-Archive, Nietzsche Iconography No. 87.

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Foreword

In what follows, you will be finding the thesis “The Pious Antichrist: Nietzsche as a Religious Thinker,” which I have written as part of the final prerequisite course in the Philosophy Research Master Program at Utrecht University. While the topic has been on my mind for several years, I have been thoroughly researching and writing about it from December 2020 to June 2021.

My interest in Nietzsche’s ideas has been sparked during my bachelor’s by my first philosophy professor, prof. dr. David Aiken, whose classes and guidance have never failed to keep me engaged with philosophy in general. While I have originally doubted whether this somewhat esoteric interest in an even more esoteric thinker was the right fit for this Master Program, I was strongly motivated to keep pursuing the subject by my tutor, dr. Joel Anderson, and program coordinator, prof. dr. Mauro Bonazzi. My supervisor, prof. dr. Paul Ziche, has been exceptionally helpful in helping me organise my chaotic approach and ideas into a structured thesis plan, as well as providing me with several new ways to think about the topic. I would like to thank all of these individuals for inspiring and guiding me throughout the past few years.

I need to thank several other individuals outside of these academic institutions. My brothers, sisters, and parents have helped me become who I am today, and have always been supportive of my academic interests, regardless of the subject matter. I have had several conversations with my father, whose theological expertise always shed light on such topics in ways I otherwise would not have considered myself.

I should also thank my good friends Marnix Tamminga, Cas Visser, and Sam Whitcomb, whose conversations with me on these matters have always intensified my interests in them even further. Finally, whereas I surely thought my girlfriend Madelief Feenstra would by now be sick and tired of hearing me talk about Nietzsche, she has been of the kindest help throughout this process and also in continuously awakening my passion for it.

With delight, I can furthermore say that I feel I have gotten to know Nietzsche himself better through this project, and I am certainly thankful to him for his ideas and passion. I should note that throughout this thesis, I will always be referring to the number of his aphorisms rather than to specific page numbers, for all publications and translations of his works at least have this in common. I will sometimes refer to the usually applied abbreviated titles, which can be found in

the bibliography. I have been reading Nietzsche in Dutch, English, and German in preparation for this thesis, and have either given my own English translations, or selected those which I believe best communicate what Nietzsche meant to convey himself.

To all readers of this thesis, thank you for taking the time and interest in it. I am hopeful that my unorthodox approach to studying Nietzsche will not alienate any of you, but perhaps shine a new light on this marvellous thinker. Hopefully it challenges your own interpretation of him, and I very much welcome a challenge of you in return.

Aron

Leusden

July 1st, 2021

1. Introducing Nietzsche as a Religious Thinker

The Disguised Saint

Joy too great you are concealing,
 you engage in dev'lish dealing,
 devil's wit and devil's dress.
 But no use! Your eye's revealing
 piety and holiness!¹

1.1 *Why the focus on Nietzsche's attitude to religion?*

It seems to me that religion is perhaps one of the, if not, *the* most interesting subject to study within Nietzsche's philosophical project, for several reasons. First, it is not at all clear whether to categorise Nietzsche as a theist or atheist, as he continuously associates and dissociates himself from both categories throughout his writings. In believing Nietzsche to be a Christian theist, one would have to ignore his numerous fervent attacks against Christianity. In however considering Nietzsche first and foremost an atheist thinker, one *remains* puzzled by his incessant fixation on discussing religion to the extent of considering himself to be the Antichrist, as well as signing several final letters with "the Crucified."² Moreover, one would not know how to interpret Nietzsche's praise of—and, as I will argue, even *identification with*—Jesus and Christianity in several of his writings. If Nietzsche *was* a pious person or an atheist, he would have had to be considered an odd one in either case. If he was neither, then his obsession with religion remains unexplained.

1.2 *The Problem with the Traditional Interpretation of Nietzsche as an Atheist*

A second major reason for focusing on Nietzsche's attitude to religion is that despite of these complex problems, Nietzsche has traditionally more often been characterised as an atheist than as a profoundly religious thinker; perhaps unsurprisingly so, for an initial analysis of his attacks on Christianity can indeed lead a reader to conclude this. For instance, Roger Hazelton held that "Nietzsche has been most often treated as a philosophical radical, a romantic individualist with a touch of Thrasymachus, or an atheistic freethinker in the line of Voltaire" in 1942, which suggests that this was a broadly accepted conception of Nietzsche.³ Another

¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* [1882], edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, poems translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): "'Joke, Cunning, and Revenge' Prelude in German Rhymes," §31.

² Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* [1950], 4th Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974): 67.

³ Roger Hazelton, "Was Nietzsche an Anti-Christian?" in *The Journal of Religion*, 22, no. 1 (1942): 65.

early Nietzsche interpreter, George Allen Morgan, went so far as to state that “beyond question the major premise of Nietzsche’s philosophy is atheism,” and that “he never seriously doubts it.”⁴ Granted, this characterisation was not universally agreed upon. For instance, Hazelton argued for the opposite view, and Karl Löwith more specifically responded that “it is a pity that Morgan did not (...) develop a more constructive interpretation, by which the inconsistencies in Nietzsche’s thought would have appeared more clearly.”⁵ Morgan clearly had to leave out several important passages of Nietzsche in order to arrive at his conclusion about his supposedly unambiguous atheism. Still, the popular conception of Nietzsche as an atheist remained.

As is however the case with many of Nietzsche’s ideas, their common understanding changed after World War II, when Walter Kaufmann put forth an alternative interpretation of the ideas of the philosopher who had, on Kaufmann’s reading, been too closely associated with National Socialist ideology. Besides debunking his supposed proto-Nazism, Kaufmann was also critical of the common characterisation of Nietzsche as an atheist, stating that “labels as ‘atheism’ and ‘agnosticism’ are altogether simpleminded and inadequate,” and that Nietzsche’s tendency to interpret all phenomena in natural terms “does not require the premise that God does not exist.”⁶ While Kaufmann has accordingly added an important nuance to the short-sighted characterisation of Nietzsche as an atheist, Kaufmann does not go so far as to entertain the opposite possibility, i.e. that Nietzsche was perhaps motivated by a profoundly religious attitude.

Granted, Kaufmann is not unquestionably opposed to such an interpretation. Such a characterisation even appears sporadically in his own account, arguing that “in his keen appreciation of suffering and self-sacrifice as indispensable conditions of self-perfection, Nietzsche seems more ‘Christian’ than most philosophers,” and that Nietzsche “attacks only one kind of pity and neighbour-love and this is not the kind which is ‘Christian’ in the ideal sense of that word.”⁷ While it is possible that Kaufmann thus at least implicitly considers that Nietzsche’s attitude to religion was far more fundamental to his entire philosophical project, Kaufmann never explicitly confronts it or its implications. This is further illustrated by his criticism of Ernst Bertram’s work, *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology*. While Kaufmann does so for the right reasons, specifically that “Nietzsche’s philosophy, his development, and his basic intentions (...) are ignored by Bertram,” he consequently also dismisses one of its premises,

⁴ George Allen Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941): 36.

⁵ Karl Löwith, review of *What Nietzsche Means* by George Allen Morgan, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2, no. 2 (1941): 240-42.

⁶ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 102.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 271, 371.

namely that “Nietzsche, we are told, was in some ways more Christian than pagan although he attacked Christianity so bitterly.”⁸ While Kaufman had thus moved the tradition of Nietzsche-interpretation beyond viewing him as a mere atheist, interpreters now considered religion just one of several topics of interest to the German philosopher.

1.3 *How does my approach differ from Heidegger’s Nietzsche?*

Besides Bertram, a possible exception to this tradition is the famous critique of Martin Heidegger, who—similar to Kaufmann—problematizes the binary opposition between theism and atheism as means to characterise Nietzsche:

Nietzsche’s atheism is something altogether his own. Nietzsche must be liberated from the dubious society of those supercilious atheists who (...) replace the renounced God with their “God” of “Progress.” We dare not confuse Nietzsche with such “god-less” ones, who cannot really even be “god-less” because they have never struggled to find a god, and never can. Yet if Nietzsche is no atheist in the usual sense, we dare not falsify him as a “sentimental,” “romantic,” halfway-Christian “God seeker.” (...) Only the lame, only those who have wearied of their Christianity, look to Nietzsche’s statements for quick and easy confirmation of their own specious atheism.⁹

According to Heidegger, it was precisely the tension between Nietzsche’s godlessness and his struggle to find God that disallows a characterisation of Nietzsche as either Christian or atheist. Still, it is of no surprise that Heidegger’s account has not significantly altered the popular conception of Nietzsche as an atheist thinker. Besides the obvious difficulty that association with Heidegger’s ideas has become controversial following his National Socialist leanings, Heidegger’s analysis of Nietzsche does not so much focus on his attitude to religion, but rather on how Nietzsche’s *metaphysics* were at the centre of his philosophy. Heidegger takes an interest in Nietzsche’s characterisation of “his philosophy as inverted Platonism; yet the inversion does not eliminate the fundamentally Platonic position,” for whereas Plato prioritised Being over appearance, Nietzsche prioritises appearances at the expense of Being.¹⁰ Nietzsche never escapes Plato’s metaphysical paradigm, and Heidegger therefore feels justified in calling Nietzsche “the *last metaphysician* of the West.”¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art, and Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, translated by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991): 66-67.

¹⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹¹ Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics, Volume IV: Nihilism*, translated by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991): 8.

While Heidegger's metaphysical interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas certainly popularised a less common view, it considers Nietzsche's attitude to religion only secondarily. Moreover, even then Heidegger remains sceptical, which is why he rejects "the customary view that the doctrine of return must have been a personal confession of religious faith on Nietzsche's part," which was one of the few issues where Nietzsche's atheism was questioned by interpreters.¹² Furthermore, Heidegger's view was downright rejected by Kaufmann, who stated that Nietzsche's "conception of the will to power is not 'metaphysical' either in Heidegger's sense or in the positivists'; it is first and foremost the key concept of a psychological hypothesis."¹³ Where Kaufmann argues that the correct manner of understanding Nietzsche's ideas is primarily *psychological*, Heidegger holds that we must understand these ideas *metaphysically*. Methodologically, I agree with Kaufmann, for while I discuss Nietzsche's ideas through a close reading of his texts, I focus on their psychological utility for Nietzsche himself specifically, but also for individuals more generally. Intuitively, however, my thesis is closer to Heidegger's project, for similar to how Heidegger argues that Nietzsche is far more Platonic despite Nietzsche's several attacks on Plato, I will argue that Nietzsche is far more motivated by religious motives despite Nietzsche's constant attacks on religion.

These differences between Heidegger's project and my own are nevertheless greater than the commonalities. First, I arrive at my conclusions through a philosophical analysis which is grounded in a close reading of Nietzsche's texts, while converging on how Nietzsche's self-image mirrors or contrasts with the accounts of Nietzsche from people in his personal network. Second, while I accordingly also take a great interest in Nietzsche's unpublished fragments, I disagree with Heidegger that "what Nietzsche himself published during his creative life was always foreground," and that hence "his philosophy proper was left behind as posthumous, unpublished work."¹⁴ Only through this analysis Heidegger is able to conclude that a *metaphysical* reading of Nietzsche's ideas is far more appropriate than a psychological one.¹⁵ While I do often refer to his unpublished writings, I consider them when they better contextualise ideas already present in his main works, which is why my project takes a major interest in Nietzsche's early *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, as well as his later *Antichrist*, both of which are barely discussed by Heidegger. Finally, I will not further be referring to Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, for besides the fact that I do not prioritise a metaphysical interpretation of Nietzsche, I hold that the context within which it was created remains problematic, because and despite of

¹² Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 122.

¹³ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 204.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

Heidegger's characterisation of this project "as a critical confrontation in principle with National Socialism."¹⁶

1.4 *Nietzsche's motivations and the need to read between the lines*

In order to already give an impression of my own approach to studying Nietzsche's attitude to religion, I would like to refer to aphorism 106 in *The Gay Science*, which highlights a conversation between an innovator and his disciple. Besides demonstrating how I approach reading the passage, I further argue that the meaning of the aphorism strengthens my own approach in two important manners. First, it demonstrates something essential about Nietzsche's own approach to engaging with teachings he highly values, where Nietzsche assumes the place of the disciple. Second, since Nietzsche is also a creator of new values and ideas, he inversely also assumes the place of innovator, and consequently motivates his readers to assume a similar discipleship to him:

'For a teaching to become a tree, it has to be believed for a good while; for it to be believed, it has to be considered irrefutable. The tree needs storms, doubts, worms, and malice in order to reveal the nature and strength of its sprout; may it break if it is not strong enough!' (...) When [the innovator] had said that, his disciple cried impetuously: 'But I believe in your cause and consider it so strong that I will say everything, everything that I still have on my mind against it.' The innovator laughed to himself and wagged a finger at him. 'This kind of discipleship,' he said, 'is the best, but it is dangerous and not every kind of teaching can withstand it.'¹⁷

If one considers Nietzsche to be the innovator, then Nietzsche by writing this aphorism suggests that he wishes that his disciples—i.e. readers, interpreters, followers—heavily criticise his teaching in order that its strength may be revealed. It is in *this* sense that I agree with Heidegger and Löwith that Nietzsche's own statements should be severely challenged, perhaps far more than, for instance, Walter Kaufmann does. If one, in contrast, considers Nietzsche to be the disciple in this aphorism, one would have to conclude that precisely those teachings *against* which he argues the most are those he believes in most deeply. This then gives a potential reason for Nietzsche's continuous attack against those teachings that he clearly once greatly appreciated, but only later brutally criticised, of which—besides the Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian—perhaps the Christian teaching comes to mind most strongly.

¹⁶ Heidegger, letter to S. Zemach in Jerusalem in 1968, cited in Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics: Second Edition*, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014): 251.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §108.

While I will argue in the next chapter why interpreting Nietzsche's writings in light of who he was as a person is justified in general, I believe this is especially true when it comes to *The Gay Science*, since he called it "the most *personal* of all my books."¹⁸ Combine this with Nietzsche's later advice to his readers—i.e. to "*learn to read me well*"—one should know that not all of Nietzsche's writings are what they seem *prima facie*.¹⁹ At the same time, it remains unclear what learning to read Nietzsche well actually means. While I provide more general arguments for how I respond to this challenge later, in the case of discussing GS §106 I respond by considering the *personal* or biographical aspects in the aphorism. I argue there is consequently more ground to think of Nietzsche as the disciple in this aphorism, saying everything in his mind against the Christian teaching, perhaps not surprisingly closely preceding the first time Nietzsche proclaimed that "God is dead" in §108.²⁰ This reading is not inconsistent with the rest of *The Gay Science*, specifically GS §292:

To the preachers of morals (...) if you want eventually to deprive the best things and situations of all their worth, then keep talking about them the way you have been! (...) You should try a different prescription to avoid reaching the opposite of what you seek, as you have so far: deny these good things (...) say that morality is something forbidden! (...) Isn't it time to say of morality what Master Eckhart said: 'I ask God to rid me of God!'²¹

Here, similarly, the same idea repeats itself, namely that truly saving morality is precisely to take into account the strongest counterarguments against it. The reference to the mystic Master Eckhart is especially telling here, as this gives it a uniquely Christian twist. After all, Master Eckhart's motive behind the statement was not an *atheistic* denial of God's existence, but an acknowledgement that one's personal conception of God is most likely not representative of God's actual nature, which is why Eckhart prays to God to get rid of this. Translating this to the realm of morality, as Nietzsche suggests, would be to say that in order to arrive at a genuinely Christian morality would be to rid ourselves from our personal conceptions of Christian morality. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, *The Gay Science* is but one of several books full of passages that require reading between the lines.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, letter to Paul Rée, Naumburg, August 1882. My translation from the German: "Ist 'die fröhliche Wissenschaft' in ihren Händen, das Persönlichste aller meiner Bücher?"

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* [1881], edited by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): Preface, §5. The preface was added in 1886.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §106.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §292.

Does my analysis of this specific theme suggest that, as I have done here, I will interpret *everything* that Nietzsche wrote in a Christian manner? I want to make clear at this point that this is precisely *not* my objective, for I argue Nietzsche was certainly not solely motivated by Christianity. Although I argue that he was motivated *far more* by it than is often assumed, I then do not wish to jump to the extreme conclusion that this was the *sole* motivation. In what follows I am therefore not interested in presenting Nietzsche as less inspired by Greek tragedies than the Christian gospels, or vice versa, but rather to play close attention to the continuities of and unique tension between such opposing orientations. Accordingly, I intend to present an interpretation of Nietzsche's writings about religion that does not outright reject more common interpretations of Nietzsche as far more antichristian, individualistic, positivist and sceptical. All these readings of his work remain valid within my overall interpretation. I argue, however, that these characterisations need to be understood in relation to Nietzsche's *overall* philosophical project, and thus ultimately in relation to Nietzsche himself.

In preparation for this thesis, I have reviewed and analysed all of Nietzsche's published works while starting from the observation that religion plays a much more important role than the literature on Nietzsche often assumes. I moreover specifically focused on the continuities regarding religion within Nietzsche's writings, oriented around the following research question: What are, according to Nietzsche, the aspects of religion that a society must preserve, and which must it abandon? While religion has been defined by numerous thinkers before, I have been specifically interested in what it signifies for Nietzsche himself. I will therefore not define religion here, but rather approach it with reference to Nietzsche's engagement with the concept. Going through Nietzsche's writings with this research question in mind has revealed several important continuities, but also provided some instructions regarding how to interpret or arrive at hypotheses about Nietzsche's work. One important conclusion has been that Nietzsche's more positivist works—notably *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* and *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*—have to be considered as experiments which are not just inconsistent with Nietzsche's earlier and later works, but also which, in the end, Nietzsche himself discarded. It is for this reason that these works will be discussed to a lesser degree in this project. Similarly, while several *ideas* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are certainly consistent with his earlier and later works, the way they have been *presented* is far more idiosyncratic, and I accordingly more often refer to the less cryptic and better-argued passages in other writings to discuss the same ideas. In contrast, I *include* several of Nietzsche's unpublished writings when I believe they further contextualize the continuities in Nietzsche's philosophical project.

The first chapter therefore includes my justification for incorporating Nietzsche's unpublished writings, as well as several biographical accounts. Because I can comment on the unpublished writings philosophically in later chapters, I will specifically use this chapter to highlight the biographical details that appertain to Nietzsche's attitude to religion, and thus provide a basis against which to understand his published works. The second chapter focuses on the death of God, a problem Nietzsche first discusses in *The Gay Science*, but which has important implications for the rest of his philosophical project. I will focus on the meaning and expected consequences of the death of God, as well as the overall tone of the aphorism. Second, in considering how Nietzsche himself relates to both atheism and theism, I highlight who this passage is addressed to. This simultaneously sheds light on the extent to which the death of God has different consequences for atheists or theists.

The third chapter contains by far the lengthiest analysis, which concerns Nietzsche's continuous emphasis on the importance of religious ideals for societies. I outline the development from Nietzsche's opposition of Apollo and Dionysus at the beginning of his philosophy to his opposition of Dionysus and the Crucified at the very end of it. I discuss the problem of Socratism, the reasons for Nietzsche's continued interest in Dionysus, as well as why he contrasts him so strongly against Christ in the end. Unlike the traditional interpretation, I conclude that Nietzsche's Dionysus-Crucified opposition signifies not an identification with Dionysus victorious *against* the Crucified, but rather a deep identification with both Dionysus *and* the Crucified, as well as with the harmony and tension between them. Besides understanding the meaning of opposing these two religious individuals, I also argue that it sheds light on Nietzsche's approach. While I argue that Nietzsche constantly reaffirms the importance of religion, he never does so by focusing on supernatural phenomena. Instead, he always converges on religious individuals as specific incorporations of greater ways of thinking, and accordingly provides them with an instantaneous psychological and existential relevance. In the concluding chapter I therefore reflect on this approach with regard to specific religious themes, where I briefly consider the importance of a theodicy and myth as two case studies.

The sum of the content within these chapters amounts to a new perspective on Nietzsche's attitude to religion, one that strongly challenges the traditional interpretation of Nietzsche as an atheist while nonetheless not rejecting it completely. Its implications suggest a different approach to studying Nietzsche. It relates Nietzsche's ideas to who he was as a person, and pays close attention to Nietzsche's convergence on cultural or religious individuals as a means of analysing abstract phenomena. While testing whether this approach applies to other phenomena in my two case studies, I hope others are inspired to continue this line of research,

especially since the scope of this project can simply not cover everything in Nietzsche's works that is relevant to the research question. I am confident that my intuition regarding Nietzsche's discipleship to Christ the innovator is in principle correct, but if it is not, I hope to have served Nietzsche well with a 'discipleship' that strongly challenges the traditional interpretation of his teaching. After all, what does consequently *not* break must be strong enough.

2. Nietzsche's Life in Relation to his Writings

2.1 Methodology: Why include primary sources beyond Nietzsche's published works?

I expect that my incorporation of Nietzsche's unpublished writing requires some justification, as I will also be incorporating Nietzsche's unpublished fragments and personal letters. In this section, I will argue why I think incorporating these unpublished works, as well as biographical information, is a better means to understanding Nietzsche's project as opposed to when one only considers his published works.

The first question is; why does this require justification at all? One might argue that by including biographical details and unpublished writings as primary sources, one muddies the waters as to what Nietzsche consciously *decided* to convey. His published works, in this regard, have Nietzsche's 'stamp of approval' as texts for his readers which serve as a basis for understanding his ideas. In contrast, Nietzsche *rejected* the publication of the fragments that he did not unpublish, which is why we ought to reject these as well. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche even makes the difference between himself and his writings explicit, stating "I am one thing, my writings are another."²² I find Alexander Nehamas' observation useful here, who states that "Nietzsche (...) is a creature of his own texts," and stresses that this should then be understood as "his effort to offer a positive view without falling back into the dogmatic tradition he so distrusted and from which he may never have been sure he escaped."²³ In agreement with Nietzsche, Nehamas emphasises a need to carefully understand Nietzsche's literary creation in his works *apart from* who he was as a person. In addition to this, Nehamas suggests that this is related to the fact that Nietzsche himself might have been complicit in the same dogmatism he criticised in his works. Nehamas treats this problem admirably in his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, suggesting Nietzsche successfully achieved a relation to his own texts as "the Plato of his own Socrates," and accordingly also did not risk the same accusation of dogmatism had he *not* succeeded in achieving this.²⁴

Now that I have presented the reason not to consider Nietzsche's personal life in evaluating his philosophical ideas, I will now explain why I nevertheless remain in favour of incorporating Nietzsche's biographical information and his unpublished writings. I suggest a more psychological or 'Nietzschean' approach to understanding Nietzsche, precisely because

²² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is & The Antichrist: A Curse on Christianity* [1888], translated by Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004): "Why I Write Such Good Books," §1.

²³ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985): 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

Nietzsche engaged in such a practice himself in analysing other philosophers. Accordingly, he must have been aware that this fate just as likely could, perhaps even, *should* be bestowed upon himself. I first need to explain what I mean by this Nietzschean approach. Already in 1870, Nietzsche announced that he “will not shy away from naming *names*: one clarifies one’s argument faster if one demonstrates ad homines here and there.”²⁵ True to his word, Nietzsche became rather well-known for his several ad hominem arguments in his later writings, in which he called Socrates “ugly,” and Plato “boring,” to name a few instances of these.²⁶ One might object that, contrary to Nietzsche’s point, this does nothing to advance his argument more rapidly. Nietzsche however has a different view of what philosophical argumentation *is*, not believing it to be an entity separate from its author, but rather entirely connected with them. Nietzsche illustrates this in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

I have gradually come to realise what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author (...) it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is *he*—) getting at? (...) there is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is*...²⁷

In this sense, philosophical analysis has to consider the author when engaging with their philosophical ideas, changing the question from what their *arguments* signify to what they *themselves* are up to.

Nietzsche reminds his readers of this need to remember that philosophies are anything but impersonal, for “there are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena.”²⁸ Honest as he was, Nietzsche related this objection to his own ideas as well, stating of his own writing that “granted, this is only an interpretation too—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well then, so much the better.”²⁹ Nietzsche thus invites his own readers to continuously consider that there is nothing impersonal about his own ideas. For instance, in a letter to Franz Overbeck, Nietzsche states how this is the case with his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which cannot be understood without familiarizing oneself with his own life:

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 7, Nachgelasse Fragmente 1869-1874*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, republished by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988): 5[72]. My translation from the German: “Ich werde mich nicht scheuen, *Namen* zu nennen: man macht seinen Standpunkt schneller klar, wenn man ad homines hier und da demonstriert.”

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophise with a Hammer* [1888], translated by Richard Polt, introduction by Tracy Strong (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997): “The Problem of Socrates,” §3, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” §2.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* [1886], edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, translated by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): §6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §108.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, §22.

...my *Zarathustra*, which is an *unintelligible* book, because it is based on experiences which I share with nobody. If only I could give you an idea of my sense of *solitude*! Among the living, as among the *dead*, I have nobody with whom I have any affinity. It gives me the shudders—indecisibly.³⁰

In my view, this means that a proper investigation of Nietzsche's philosophical ideas should *necessarily* include his unpublished writings, in order to more fully appreciate the experiential and personal aspect—and with it the *motivations behind* the ideas in his published works.

This does not mean that I will not respect the differences between Nietzsche's published writings and the writings that reveal more about the person Nietzsche was, i.e. some of his unpublished writings, accounts of his personal network, and biographical information. For one, I began this section with Nietzsche's reminder to his readers to appreciate this distinction in *Ecce Homo*. Second, I believe this difference is evident immediately when comparing the aphoristic though polished appearance of the published works with the far more fragmentary and unfinished appearance of his unpublished writing. In his published writings, Nietzsche has polished the often bulleted sentences into full, harmoniously connected sentences. While Nietzsche would also employ his aphoristic style in his published writings, the flow—and with it arguably his readers' ability to understand him—greatly improves. It is for these reasons that I want to note that while I will cite from *The Will to Power*, I am aware and would like to remind readers that this work cannot be considered a finished product, nor can any of his other unpublished fragments be.

I furthermore should point out that I do not mean to equate Nietzsche the person with his unpublished writings or with biographical details, but only intend to cite these when they better contextualise—i.e. when they demonstrate the motivations *behind*—a claim that Nietzsche makes in his published works. I believe that including his unpublished fragments, *as well as* his personal letters, relevant biographical details and accounts of those intimately familiar with Nietzsche can only be of help in understanding Nietzsche's ideas *by* shedding light on his motivations. Moreover, Nietzsche stipulates such an accumulation of perspectives as means to better understand the object of interpretation, for “the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing,” and it is difficult to see how Nietzsche is not subject to this same requirement.³¹ Finally, I believe it not only to be consistent with Nietzsche's own

³⁰ Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, Sils Maria, August 5, 1886.

³¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): §12.

statements that I have just presented on the matter, it is also my own view that a creator cannot be separated from their creation. Accordingly, including these additional materials allows for a more profound and productive understanding of both Nietzsche and his works.

2.2 *How does this concretely influence my own approach?*

I first want to refer to one prominent Nietzsche scholar, who has also dedicated his thinking to this specific aspect, namely Robert C. Solomon. In the chapter “Nietzsche *Ad Hominem*: Perspectivism, Personality and *Ressentiment*,” Solomon underscores the importance of genealogy as a means of dealing with this difficulty. Solomon asserts that “genealogy is not mere history, a search for origins, verbal or material, but a kind of denuding, unmasking, stripping away pretensions of universality and merely self-serving claims to spirituality.”³² What Nietzsche accordingly does when he presents a genealogy of, for instance, morality, is not to show what the *right* morality is, but instead to demonstrate what the origins of and motivations behind our *current* morality are. Nietzsche holds that moral judgments—and philosophical ideas in general—are never something static and disconnected from those that conceptualise them. They are rather “from the start culturally constructed and cultivated and insofar as they have any meaning at all that meaning is first of all personal,” as Solomon points out.³³ The same has to go for Nietzsche himself, who relatedly states: “I distrust all systematisers and stay out of their way. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.”³⁴ After all, for Nietzsche philosophy is and has to be deeply *personal*, and his engagement with other philosophies demonstrates that his genealogical method exposes the universal and sheds light on the personal motivations behind them. I will for this reason not systematise Nietzsche’s ideas in his published works, but rather relate them as much as possible to why Nietzsche *himself* had an interest in conveying them in this manner.

For this reason, I will begin with providing relevant biographical information which sheds light on Nietzsche’s overall attitude to religion. By referencing biographical accounts of Nietzsche by his friends, as well as his own early letters, I intend to explore the possibility that his Christian upbringing is the motivational force behind his positivistic attitude in the 1870s, as well as his arguably more mystical approach in the 1880s, and even to his final period of insanity in the 1890s. Similar to Nietzsche’s genealogical method, this is not to undermine the value of these ideas in these respective periods, but rather to highlight what kind of person might

³² Robert C. Solomon, “Nietzsche *ad hominem*: Perspectivism, Personality and *Ressentiment*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (1996): 204.

³³ *Ibid.*, 217.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §26.

be motivated to present these ideas and present them in this form. After all, Nietzsche holds that informing after the personal gives us a clearer understanding of the ideas as well, and accordingly demonstrates how they ought to be understood in terms of relevance to the thinker.

Before discussing Nietzsche's biographical details, I want to make a brief comment about my use of Nietzsche's *Wahnbriefe*, i.e. madness letters, in this project. One could object to my incorporation of these, as we cannot be sure as to whether Nietzsche was still in full command of what he was writing at the time. I take this objection seriously to the extent that unlike his published works, these details are not backed up by philosophical argumentation by Nietzsche. At the same time, I reject the objection, because first, I am just as interested in Nietzsche's character and the personal motivations *behind* his philosophical ideas as in the consciously produced ideas themselves. It is as such of little interest to me to what extent Nietzsche was fully *consciously* signing his letters with Antichrist, Crucified, and Dionysus, for the very fact that these details nevertheless inform us about *who* Nietzsche was. Such recurring themes in his *Wahnbriefe* moreover still allow for philosophical argumentation to the extent that they stand in undeniable relation to his consciously produced works, as well as accounts of his personal network.

Second, whether or not these latter, perhaps unconscious remarks were of any value to Nietzsche, I hold they are nevertheless of value to us, and I find that Michel Foucault illustrates this particularly well in his *Madness and Civilization*:

Nietzsche's last cry, proclaiming himself both Christ and Dionysus, is (...) the very annihilation of the work of art, the point where it becomes impossible and where it must fall silent; the hammer has just fallen from the philosopher's hands. (...) It is of little importance on exactly which day in the autumn of 1888 Nietzsche went mad for good, and after which his texts no longer afford philosophy but psychiatry: all of them, including the postcard to Strindberg, belong to Nietzsche, and all are related to *The Birth of Tragedy*. But we must not think of this continuity in terms of a system (...) What made it impossible makes it immediate for us; what took it from Nietzsche offers it to us.³⁵

I should first note that there are far more differences than similarities between my own analysis and that of Foucault. Foucault focuses on the genealogy of madness, where Nietzsche is but a case study, while I focus on Nietzsche's project through the lens of his attitude to religion. Despite this, I believe Foucault understands something of essential importance here. Specifically, Foucault suggests that we cannot ascribe lesser importance to Nietzsche's works in

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988): 287-288.

which he was no longer consciously aware of his own ideas, i.e. when he had become mad. Accordingly, Foucault problematises the idea that there is an *a priori* difference between any of Nietzsche's writings in the first place, and therefore reconsiders the complexity with which we ought to analyse texts, as well as how they stand in relation to their author. On the one hand, this challenges my approach, for my implication that there are motivations behind Nietzsche's writings consequently becomes a problematic notion. On the other hand, Foucault's observation is liberating, for an *exclusive* focus on Nietzsche published or consciously produced writings is even more unfounded, because an *a priori* difference is unclear between the various texts and different subgroups that one might want to identify in Nietzsche's corpus. While I will continue to discuss Nietzsche's motivations—for such language is more consistent with Nietzsche's own approach to studying individuals—Foucault's observation is an important notion to keep in mind throughout, but also undergirds my use of a wide variety of primary sources. After all, while consciously reflecting on his likely unconscious writings was no longer possible for Nietzsche, it is possible for *us* to see the non-systematic continuity nevertheless present in his writing, and take our lessons from it.

2.3 *Nietzsche's religious life: The challenged faith of a pious young Lutheran*

In the following section, I will discuss the details of Nietzsche's own life which I believe to be relevant for understanding the different stages of his personal attitude to religion. While secondary sources are valuable perspectives on the matter, I intend to use as much of Nietzsche's own writing as possible, as it allows me to philosophically reflect on the personal motives behind his later ideas. In 1844 near Leipzig, Nietzsche was born—as is widely known—into a Lutheran household. Both his grandfathers and his own father were Lutheran ministers, and the latter died when Nietzsche was only five years old.³⁶ Eight years later, Nietzsche writes in his *Aus Meinem Leben* that this event caused him great sorrow, though it did not make him any less confident about the goodness of God:

I have already experienced so much—joy and sorrow, cheerful things and sad things—but in everything God has safely led me as a father leads his weak little child... I have firmly resolved within me to dedicate myself forever to His service. May the dear Lord give me strength and power to carry out my intention and protect me on my life's way. Like a child I trust in His grace: He will preserve us all, that no misfortune may befall us. But His holy will be done! All He gives I will joyfully accept: happiness and unhappiness, poverty and wealth, and boldly look even death

³⁶ Kauffman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 22.

in the face, which shall one day unite us all in eternal joy and bliss. Yes, dear Lord, let Thy face shine upon us forever! Amen!³⁷

Note that this prayer does not stand out as an unusually pious moment in the life of the young Nietzsche, but rather exemplifies his general attitude towards his Christian faith, as is well documented in several other letters he wrote during these years. His attitude towards Christianity changed later in his adolescence, though his admiration for it was still greater than his discontent. See, for instance, his letter to Wilhelm Pinder and Gustav Krug at age seventeen:

Only a Christian way of looking at things can produce such world-weariness (“*Weltschmerz*”); it is very far from a fatalistic one. It is nothing but a despair of one’s own strength, a pretext for weakness, to decisively create one’s own fate. When we first realise that we are only responsible for ourselves, that an accusation of a wrong life-determination can only apply to us, not to any higher powers, only then will the fundamental ideas of Christianity shed their outer garment and pass into marrow and blood. Christianity is essentially a matter of the heart; only when it has embodied itself in us, when it has become mind itself in us, is man a true Christian. The main teachings of Christianity speak only the fundamental truths of the human heart; they are symbols, just as the highest need only ever be a symbol of something still higher. To be saved through faith does not mean, as the old truth, that only the heart, not knowledge, can make one happy. The fact that God became man only indicates that man should not seek his happiness in the infinite but should ground his heaven on earth; the delusion of a supernatural world had put human spirits in a wrong position in relation to the earthly world: it was the product of a childhood of peoples. The glowing youthful soul of mankind accepts these ideas with enthusiasm and utters the secret, which at the same time is rooted in the past as well as into the future, that God became man. Under severe doubts and struggles, humanity becomes manly: it recognises in itself “the beginning, the middle, the end of religion.”³⁸

³⁷ Nietzsche in R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy* [1865] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 17.

³⁸ Nietzsche, letter to Wilhelm Pinder and Gustav Krug, Pforte, 27 April 1862. My translation from the German: “Nur christliche Anschauungsweise vermag derartigen Weltschmerz hervorzubringen, einer fatalistischen liegt er sehr fern. Es ist nichts als ein Verzagen an eigener Kraft, ein Vorwand der Schwäche, sich mit Entschiedenheit selbst sein Loos zu schaffen. Wenn wir erst erkennen, daß wir nur uns selbst verantwortlich sind, daß ein Vorwurf über verfehlte Lebensbestimmung nur uns, nicht irgend welchen höhern Mächten gelten kann, dann erst werden die Grundideen des Christentums ihr äußeres Gewand ablegen und in Mark und Blut übergehen. Das Christentum ist wesentlich Herzenssache; erst wenn es sich in uns verkörpert hat, wenn es Gemüth selbst in uns geworden ist, ist der Mensch wahrer Christ. Die Hauptlehren des Christentums sprechen nur die Grundwahrheiten des menschlichen Herzens aus; sie sind Symbole, wie das Höchste immer nur ein Symbol des noch Höhern sein muß. Durch den Glauben selig werden heißt nicht[s] als die alte Wahrheit, daß nur das Herz, nicht das Wissen, glücklich machen kann. Daß Gott Mensch geworden ist, weist nur darauf hin, daß der Mensch nicht im Unendlichen seine Seligkeit suchen soll, sondern auf der Erde seinen Himmel gründe; der Wahn einer überirdischen Welt hatte die Menschengeister in eine falsche Stellung zu der irdischen Welt gebracht: er war das Erzeugniß einer Kindheit der Völker. Die glühende Jünglingsseele der Menschheit nimmt diese Ideen mit Begeisterung hin und spricht ahnend das Geheimniß aus, das zugleich auf der Vergangenheit in die Zukunft hinein wurzelt, daß Gott Mensch geworden. Unter schweren Zweifeln und Kämpfen wird die Menschheit männlich: sie erkennt in sich ‘den Anfang, die Mitte, das Ende der Religion.’”

I have decided to cite this letter extensively for it demonstrates an inner conflict that arises in the young Nietzsche and seemed to have intensified further as he matured. First, this is the earliest of many instances in which Nietzsche demonstrates his *naturalism*, i.e. a preference for a *natural* as opposed to a *supernatural* affirmation of earthly existence. After all, we are *ourselves*—as opposed to any higher powers—responsible for our actions, and we ought to accordingly attune ourselves to the earthly world. Consequently, if Christianity does not emphasise this imperative, it causes world-weariness. On the other hand, Nietzsche clearly does not condemn the entirety of Christianity, for he believes that ‘true’ Christianity is all about realizing that what man had hitherto considered divine, i.e. the heavenly, is in fact attainable *on earth*, as opposed to in an *afterlife*. Nietzsche’s assertion that this attitude towards earthly existence is ‘youthful’ I take to be interpreted on an intergenerational, evolutionary scale; people further in the past simply did not have a notion of religion as developed as people in later millennia would. I would argue that the seventeen-year-old Nietzsche favours what he calls ‘the middle’ of religion, for ‘true’ Christianity purifies the hearts of its adherents. At the same time, the young Nietzsche alludes to ‘the end’ of religion, precisely as a consequence of the Christian idea that a *supernatural* God became a *natural* man shows an evolutionary progression from a meaningful focus on the *supernatural* to a focus on the *natural*. This would make human beings suspicious of the initial value of the divine in the first place. As such, Christianity is inherently connected to atheism, as the latter logically progresses out of the former.

Nietzsche’s break with Christianity became more pronounced after 1865, when he left his theological studies to great dismay of his family.³⁹ In a response to his sister, he wrote that “faith alone blesses, not the objective behind the faith,” and that while faith “achieves what the believing person in question hopes to find in it (...) it does not offer the slightest support for the grounding of an objective truth.”⁴⁰ Nietzsche thus had an *intellectual* reason to stop believing in God, for he became interested in truth, which he believed to be disconnected from faith. While I thus cannot simply distil what the specific cause was of Nietzsche’s break with Christianity, it seems clear to me that Nietzsche argumentatively could no longer support it, as his intellect matured in these years. This interpretation is moreover strengthened by the fact that he discovered the writings of several atheists, among which Schopenhauer, as his letters of the time

³⁹ Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 31.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche to Elisabeth Nietzsche, Bonn, 11 June 1865. My translation from the German: “...der Glaube allein segnet, nicht das Objektive, was hinter dem Glauben steht (...) Jeder wahre Glaube ist auch untrüglich, er leistet das, was die betreffende gläubige Person darin zu finden hofft, er bietet aber nicht den geringsten Anhalt zur Begründung einer objektiven Wahrheit.”

demonstrate, though his statement in *Ecce Homo* that “it was atheism that led me to Schopenhauer” suggests this relationship was causally inverse.⁴¹ Nonetheless, it seems nonsensical to suggest that his intellectual curiosity began *after* his atheism, and I instead endorse the view that this curiosity moved Nietzsche *towards* it.

Furthermore, in the same letter to Elisabeth, Nietzsche believed this to be a general crisis of the times, stating that “here the ways of people now diverge; if you want to strive for peace of mind and happiness, then believe, if you want to be a disciple of truth, then do research.”⁴² It is clear that Nietzsche sided with the latter, even if he would severely criticise the will to truth later. He however remained relatively silent about Christianity in this initial period of scepticism, though it is clear that when he did discuss it he did not vilify it entirely. Nietzsche’s then friend Paul Deussen also recounts this, stating that in 1865 “there was still no trace of an enmity toward Christianity and Christian morality such as Nietzsche later developed.”⁴³ In 1866, similarly, Nietzsche wrote that “if Christianity means ‘belief in a historical event or in a historical person’ then I have nothing to do with this Christianity. But if it, briefly put, means the need for redemption, then I can most highly appreciate it.”⁴⁴ Nietzsche thus distances himself from an increasingly popular interpretation of the Christian doctrine in his time, i.e. as a faith in propositions regarding whether or not an event actually happened or is true, such as a belief in the existence of resurrection of Jesus. As it appears to me, Nietzsche endorses a more redemption-focused view of the world as inherently ripe with suffering, which someone can only be redeemed from “provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering,” as Nietzsche would later formulate it.⁴⁵ Such a notion of redemption is after all not inconsistent with Nietzsche’s thesis in *The Birth of Tragedy* six years later, stating that “only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*,” which demonstrates that Nietzsche appreciated the religious need for redemption in a world that requires justification.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Nietzsche, letter to Franziska and Elisabeth Nietzsche, Leipzig, 9 December 1865; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “The Untimely Essays,” §2.

⁴² Nietzsche, letter to Franziska and Elisabeth Nietzsche, Leipzig, 9 December 1865. My translation from the German: “Hier scheiden sich nun die Wege der Menschen; willst Du Seelenruhe und Glück erstreben, nun so glaube, willst Du ein Jünger der Wahrheit sein, so forsche.”

⁴³ Paul Deussen in *Conversations with Nietzsche: A Life in the Words of His Contemporaries*, edited and with an introduction by Sander L. Gilman, translated by David J. Parent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 25.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, letter to Carl von Gersdorff, Naumburg, 7 April 1866. My translation from the German: “Heißt Christenthum „Glaube an ein geschichtliches Ereigniß oder an eine geschichtliche Person“ so habe ich mit diesem Christenthum nichts zu thun. Heißt es aber kurz Erlösungsbedürftigkeit, so kann ich es höchst schätzen...”

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III, §28.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872], translated with an introduction and notes by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): §5. In my final chapter I will argue that Nietzsche retained this theodicean view of life throughout his philosophical project.

2.4 Nietzsche's religious life: Wagner and Schopenhauer

It is clear that Nietzsche's atheism is not yet the positivistic atheism that interpreters often associate with his middle period (roughly 1878-1882), so how should we interpret the years of Nietzsche's life which preceded this, but also which follow his adherence to dogmatic Christianity?⁴⁷ Importantly, besides the already discussed discovery of Schopenhauer's work, this period coincides with his friendship with composer Richard Wagner, Nietzsche's professorship, as well as his writing of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876). The friendship with Wagner is of no trivial importance, with regard to both Nietzsche's well-being and his religious orientation, as well as Nietzsche's 'turn to positivism,' which coincided with his later break with Wagner. The account of Louise Elisabeth Bachofen—wife to Nietzsche's colleague and friend Jacob Burckhardt—is revealing with regard to these aspects:

I am always glad that I knew Nietzsche in this early period when he was still enthused with Wagner—and how enthusiastic he was! Every Sunday he travelled to Lucerne and returned from there each time filled with his God and told me of all the splendours he had seen and heard; I believe most firmly that the break with Wagner was a deathblow for Nietzsche, at any rate he was afterwards a completely changed man.⁴⁸

It should be obvious that Nietzsche did not literally worship Wagner as his God, but Bachofen nevertheless touches upon an interesting theme here. A subject on which I will expand in a later chapter will concern the mytho-religious cultural unification in Greece through their aesthetic worship of Apollo and Dionysus. This was something Nietzsche highly admired and of which he said: "I observe the only way of living among the Greeks: and regard Wagner as the most sublime step towards its rebirth in the German essence."⁴⁹ Thus, Nietzsche's relationship with Wagner satisfied Nietzsche's continued religiosity, even if this was no longer expressed in Christian terms. While Nietzsche would continue to hold Homeric Greece in high esteem, he would soon become much more pessimistic about Germany and Wagner, and the first sign comes in 1876 at the very end of his fourth *Untimely Meditation*, "Wagner in Bayreuth," concluding that Wagner cannot be "the seer of a future, as he would perhaps like to appear to us, but the interpreter and transfigurer of a past."⁵⁰ Thus, the break with Wagner is exemplary

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 242-244.

⁴⁸ Louise Elisabeth Bachofen in *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 50.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 7, Nachgelasse Fragmente 1869-1874*, 9[34]. My translation from the German: "Ich erkenne die einzige Lebensform in der griechischen: und betrachte Wagner als den erhabensten Schritt zu deren Wiedergeburt im deutschen Wesen."

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* [1873-1876], edited by Daniel Breazeale, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): IV, §11.

for Nietzsche's changing attitude to religion. At a young age, Nietzsche became sceptical of the Christian ideal as a viable cultural force for Germany, but now Nietzsche also seems to have become disillusioned with regard to a revival of the Attic Greek ideal in Germany. The following years thus show Nietzsche at his least religious; Nietzsche in favour of positivism; Nietzsche 'a completely changed man.'

2.5 *Nietzsche's positivist denial of a religious struggle*

Nietzsche, at the time heavily "influenced by Dr. Rée's strictly scientific, realistic way of seeing things which was almost something new to his previous work," as his friend Malwida von Meysenberg states, wanted less to do with either the Christian or the Schopenhauerian metaphysics that possessed his mind before. Paul Rée had his own approach to studying religious phenomena conceptualised in his *On the Origin of Moral Feelings*:

These moral phenomena are often considered to be something supersensible—the voice of God, as the theologians put it (...) moral phenomena can be traced back to natural causes just as much as physical phenomena: moral man stands no closer to the intelligible world than physical man.⁵¹

Rée's analysis of moral phenomena suggests one studies them similar to how one would study physical phenomena, namely through Darwinian theory, as opposed to a theological analysis of them. Nietzsche became very much interested in this approach, discussing it a great deal with Rée and partly citing the above quote in "The History of the Moral Sentiments" in his *Human, All Too Human*.⁵²

Von Meysenberg thought this new orientation was very much unlike the Nietzsche she admired. She illustrates this while relating an experience of hers in 1877, when Nietzsche shared some of his new writings with her which would eventually be published in *Human, All Too Human*. She reflected on this encounter, saying that "there were splendid thoughts among them, particularly such as related to his Greek studies; but there were also others that puzzled me, that did not at all fit Nietzsche as he had been till now and proved to me that the positivist tendency whose slight beginnings I had already observed during the past winter was starting to take root and to give his views a new form."⁵³ Nietzsche's once friend and love interest Lou Andreas-Salomé explains that Nietzsche's brief interest in positivism was deeply connected to his former

⁵¹ Paul Rée, *The Origin of the Moral Sensations* [1877] in *Paul Rée: Basic Writings*, translated and edited by Robin Small (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 87.

⁵² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* [1878], translated by R. J. Hollingdale with an introduction by Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): II, §37.

⁵³ Malwida von Meysenbug in *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 88.

interest in religion and morality, describing it as his “attempt to gain full insight into the nullity of his former ideals through insight into the history of their origins,” and that “in this way his whole philosophizing becomes an analysis and history of human prejudices and errors; the metaphysician becomes a psychologist and historian and stands on the ground of sober and consistent positivism.”⁵⁴

2.6 *Nietzsche's religious life: Dionysian mysticism*

Positivism, however, was no consistent interest of Nietzsche. It elevated reason over all the other affects, something Nietzsche would openly despise later, but it also in an important sense denied Nietzsche's *own* reality, as Salomé describes, saying that “in the need to think of the purely scientific thoughts that he took from positivism as embodied in a human form, he got caught in the image of a single, very specific personality who was entirely opposed to himself, and thus tortured himself.”⁵⁵ Therefore, Salomé argues that he became once again far more religious in nature, for “Nietzsche's last philosophy emerged from the urge to—instead of the positivistic theories contradicting him—build a worldview that would fully correspond to his innermost desires.”⁵⁶ This is not to say that Nietzsche once again becomes a Christian, a Schopenhauerian, or a Wagnerian, but rather that he now satisfies his religious impulses through a mystical interaction with his inner self: “What was to become scientifically proven truth now takes on the character of a mystical revelation, and from then on Nietzsche grounds his philosophy in general in, as opposed to the scientific basis, inner inspiration—his own personal inspiration.”⁵⁷ After a positivist denial of his religious struggle, Nietzsche returned to a more religious orientation, which is why, for instance, Dionysus became important for him once again.

⁵⁴ Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken: mit 3 Bildern Nietzsches und faksimilierten Briefen* (Vienna: C. Reissner, 1894): 103. My translation from the German: “...als den Versuch bezeichnen, zur vollen Einsicht in die Nichtigkeit seiner ehemaligen Ideale zu gelangen durch die Einsicht in ihre Entstehungsgeschichte. Auf diesem Wege wird sein gesamtes Philosophieren zu einer Analyse und Geschichte menschlicher Vorurtheile und Irrthümer; der Metaphysiker wird zum Psychologen und Historiker und stellt sich auf den Boden eines nüchternen und consequenten Positivismus.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 119. My translation from the German: “Im Bedürfniss, die rein wissenschaftlichen Gedanken, die er dem Positivismus entnahm, in einer menschlichen Form verkörpert zu denken, verfiel er sich im Bild einer einzelnen, ganz bestimmten Persönlichkeit, die ihm selbst durchaus entgegengesetzt war, und marterte sich damit...”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 145. My translation from the German: “...Nietzsches letzte Philosophie gerade aus dem Drange hervorgegangen ist, an Stelle der ihm widerstrebenden positivistischen Theorien eine Weltanschauung aufzubauen, die seinem innersten Verlangen völlig entspräche.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 225. My translation from the German: “Was wissenschaftlich erwiesene Wahrheit werden sollte, nimmt den Charakter einer mystischen Offenbarung an, und fernerhin giebt Nietzsche seiner Philosophie überhaupt als endgiltige Grundlage, anstatt der wissenschaftlichen Basis, die innere Eingebung—seine eigene persönliche Eingebung.”

Mysticism, as Salomé uses it, I take to refer to a spiritual activity of introspection as means to arrive at knowledge and sensations that is not available through empirical or rational study. She certainly was not incorrect in ascribing it to Nietzsche, who had opposed Dionysus and Apollo as “mysticism and science” multiple times before and described the Dionysian state as a “state of mystical self-abandonment and unity” in *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁵⁸ Besides his early work, Nietzsche would after his positivism praise the Dionysian state as one in which “the whole system of passions is stimulated and intensified,” where “the essential feature remains the facility in transforming,” and where “the instinct of comprehension and of divination in the highest degree” is stimulated.⁵⁹ Salomé therefore has reason to conclude that Nietzsche’s preoccupation with religion has in fact dominated his *entire* philosophy. It is especially the following passage that I find illuminating in this regard:

It is only at the beginning of Nietzsche’s last philosophy that it becomes completely clear to which degree it is the fundamental religious instinct that has always ruled his being and knowledge. His various philosophies are just as many God-surrogates for him, which are supposed to help him to be able to do without a mystical God-ideal other than himself. His final teachings now contain the admission that he cannot do this. And it is precisely for this reason that in his last works we encounter such a passionate fight against religion, belief in God and the need for redemption, because he approaches them so dangerously. Here speaks from him a hatred of fear and love, with which he wants to convince himself of his own strength in God, to talk out his human helplessness. For we shall see by what self-deception and secret cunning Nietzsche finally resolves the tragic conflict of his life—the conflict of needing God and yet having to deny God. First, with longing-drunken fantasy, in dreams and raptures, like visions, he creates the mystical *Übermensch* ideal, and then, in order to save himself from himself, he seeks, with a tremendous leap, to identify himself with it. In the end he becomes a double figure, half sick, suffering person, half redeemed, laughing superman. He is the one as a creature, the other as the creator, the one as reality, the other as a mystically conceived superreality.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 7, Nachgelasse Fragmente 1869-1874*, 6[11], 8[13]. My translation from the German: “Kampf der Mystik mit/und der Wissenschaft—Dionysos und Apollo”; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes in a War with the Age,” §10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 147. My translation from the German: “Erst am Eingang zu Nietzsches letzter Philosophie wird daher völlig klar, bis zu welchem Grade es der religiöse Grundtrieb ist, der sein Wesen und Erkennen stets beherrschte. Seine verschiedenen Philosophien sind ihm ebensoviele Gott-Surrogate, die ihm helfen sollen, ein mystisches Gott-Ideal ausser seiner selbst entbehren zu können. Seine letzten Lehren enthalten nun das Eingeständniss, dass er dies nicht vermag. Und gerade deshalb stossen wir in seinen letzten Werken wieder auf eine so leidenschaftliche Bekämpfung der Religion, des Gottesglaubens und des Erlösungsbedürfnisses, weil er sich ihnen so gefährlich nähert. Hier spricht aus ihm ein Hass der Angst und der Liebe, mit dem er sich seine eigene Gottesstärke einreden, seine menschliche Hilflosigkeit ausreden möchte. Denn wir werden sehen, kraft welcher Selbsttäuschung und geheimen List Nietzsche endlich den tragischen Conflict seines Lebens löst,—den Conflict, des Gottes zu bedürfen und dennoch den Gott leugnen zu müssen. Zuerst gestaltet er mit sehnsuchtstrunkener Phantasie, in Träumen und Verzückungen, visionengleich, das mystische Uebermensch-Ideal, und dann, um sich vor sich selbst zu retten, sucht er, mit einem ungeheuren Sprung, sich mit demselben zu identificiren. So

Nietzsche thus had an inner battle of both affirming and denying the Christian God he was once so familiar with. I take Salomé's account seriously, for Nietzsche once told her the following: "I had planned to take you step by step to the final consistency of my philosophy—you as the first person I thought fit."⁶¹ He thus believed she was the first one who understood something essential about his ideas. I should however also already point out that I take Salomé's account to be impressive psychoanalytically, but lacking in terms of sufficient philosophical argumentation. While I am not against treating Nietzsche's philosophy as personal to him, I do consider that discussing his ideas as if they are *exclusively* relevant to his psychological struggle does not do them justice. After all, they contain valid philosophical and cultural criticism, and I am thus more interested in an analysis that takes these latter dimensions into account. Specifically, Salomé altogether refrains from discussing the final opposition within Nietzsche's books, namely that of "*Dionysus versus the Crucified*."⁶² I will argue that precisely when considering Nietzsche's inner struggle with religion, this opposition is the most telling case study, and cannot be dismissed. It is, however, too rich in connotations and implications for understanding Nietzsche's philosophical project, which is why I will discuss it in a separate chapter.

2.7 Nietzsche's religious life: Christian elements

I maintain that Salomé's account, which is consistent with that of several other friends of Nietzsche's, remains useful for biographical reasons. The following accounts also contain those biographical details which I will not be able to discuss philosophically in later chapters, but which do shine yet another light on the same argument I have been making throughout this chapter, i.e. that Nietzsche's life was characterised by an inner struggle with religion. For instance, Nietzsche's friend Resa von Schirnhofer relates a story of a Mrs. Fynn, who is described as "a believing Catholic, for whom Nietzsche had a sincere respect":⁶³

Nietzsche had, with tears in his eyes, asked her not to read his books, since "there was so much in them that was bound to hurt her feelings." His statements about pity as his "inner enemy" are by no means empty phrases but the expression of his contradictory nature. His rationalistic frame

wird er zuletzt zu einer Doppelgestalt, halb kranker, leidender Mensch, halb erlöster, lachender Uebermensch. Das Eine ist er als Geschöpf, das Andere als Schöpfer, das Eine als Wirklichkeit, das Andere als mystisch gedachte Ueberwirklichkeit."

⁶¹ Nietzsche, letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, Rapallo, December 1882. My translation from the German: "...hatte ich bei mir in Aussicht genommen, Sie Schritt für Schritt bis zur letzten Konsequenz meiner Philosophie zu führen—Sie als den ersten Menschen, den ich dazu für tauglich hielt."

⁶² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am A Destiny," §9.

⁶³ Resa von Schirnhofer in *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 195.

of mind struggled with his feelings, which had grown out of and were still connected with Christian ethics.⁶⁴

A similar but more extensive account of this contradictory nature in Nietzsche, who simultaneously desired and rejected religion, is described by Ida Overbeck, who was married to his close friend Franz Overbeck and had several conversations with Nietzsche:

There was nothing comfortable in Nietzsche; there were unbearable tensions, which he felt a longing to express and for which he sought analogies in the Greek and Christian worlds. No wonder he found them much more in the Christian world. But he had studied the Greek world and lived in it. Yet he could not bear this world, though he had recognised its greatness and preferred its unconditional certainty to Christian halfheartedness and dullness. He often stated how very much the Christian way of thinking and feeling had really suited him, so much so that on hearing Parsifal he could believe he had made this kind of music in his youth. Nietzsche was later much more at home in the Old and New Testaments than with the Greeks, whom in the end he no longer understood at all, but always only in their relation to Christianity and their effect on his psychosomatic being—a very derivative approach which spoils the taste for what is genuinely Greek. (...) I always believed that Nietzsche, despite all opposition to Christianity, was not an enemy of religion, however aloof from it he stood, and that he was himself even capable of producing religious effects. (...) As my husband says, Nietzsche never ceased reflecting on the meaning and purpose of life; thanks to his artistic talent, which by its splendor and colour makes a deep impression on the senses, he may very well have replaced the sensory side of religion for some (...) Nietzsche, the condemner of pity, was continually experimenting with it. He bred it even more into himself, in order to vivisect it, to discover it like Christianity, and then to disrecommend it to mankind.⁶⁵

Both Von Schirnhöfer and Overbeck here mention that Christian pity was very much a characteristic of Nietzsche, and Salomé explains how Nietzsche could never live without a religious ideal. It is against this biographical background that I now wish to revisit Nietzsche's major statements on religion, and interpret these keeping the personal aspect in mind. I will suggest that in the aftermath of the death of God—which Nietzsche formulates at the end of his positivist phase—Nietzsche realises the need for a non-Christian but nevertheless religious ideal, and thus picks up what he left behind in *The Birth of Tragedy*. However, Nietzsche will not as easily as he hopes rid himself of his own Christian nature, which is why he will eventually counter the Dionysian non-Christian ideal with the Christian ideal, hoping that both will strengthen each other.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ida Overbeck in *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 107–109.

3. The Significance of the Death of God

3.1 *The death of God: Appearances of the phrase in Nietzsche's writing*

In this chapter, I will discuss Nietzsche's comments with regard to the death of God, and specifically focus on its alleged consequences for Western atheism and theism alike. The Nietzschean proclamation that "God is dead" is most often associated with aphorism 125 in *The Gay Science*.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the phrases "Gott ist todt" ("God is dead") and "Tod Gottes" ("the death of God") already occur in his unpublished fragments in 1881, a year before the publication of *The Gay Science*, and reoccur sporadically through Nietzsche's publications and notes until 1885.⁶⁷ In order to arrive at a more productive understanding of the central message in GS §125, I will provide the necessary background by first focusing on Nietzsche's earlier discussions of this topic. I will then discuss the contents and implications of GS §125, first in their own right and later intertextually with reference to Nietzsche's later discussions about the same topic.

Allow me to begin by discussing Nietzsche's earliest mention of the death of God in his published works, namely aphorism 108 which opens Book III in *The Gay Science*:

New battles.—After Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow.—And we—we must still defeat his shadow as well!⁶⁸

Nietzsche here already demonstrates, though he believes that God is dead, that the consequences of this event have as of yet not run their proper course. It is for this reason that Nietzsche sketches out two opposing forces that characterise the aftermath of the death of God. First, Nietzsche makes a descriptive statement, for he asserts that "given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow."⁶⁹ This suggests a continued reliance on the same fundamental axioms that had their origins in the dominantly held metaphysical belief in God, and—even though this belief is fading—the same axioms are nevertheless lived by. Hence, this descriptive remark is followed by the decisively prescriptive saying that "we must still defeat his shadow," which demonstrates the necessity for a thinking

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 9, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880–1882*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 12[77]; Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 12: Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–1887*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 2[129].

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §108.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

and living that is fundamentally removed from these axioms.⁷⁰ It remains unclear what is meant by God's shadow, though Nietzsche indicates this notion cannot be easily dismissed. In an unpublished note written prior to the publication of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche asserts that “this feeling of having killed *the most powerful and sacred thing that the world has ever possessed* has yet to dawn on people,” which suggests that the *act* of deicide, in some sense, is not commensurate with the initial *experience* of it.⁷¹ Hence, Nietzsche holds that “it is still too early now,” and—while God's shadow is experienced by some—common people lack the awareness that it is, in fact, God's shadow.⁷²

3.2 *The parable of the madman: Initial analysis*

Now that I have presented the few pieces of texts that precede GS §125, I will consider the aphorism in full:

The madman.—Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!' Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated?—Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! *We have killed him*—you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again? Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition?—Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed—and whoever is

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 9, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880–1882*, 14[26], emphasis added. My translation from the German: “dies Gefühl, das Mächtigste und Heiligste, was die Welt bisher besaß, getödtet zu haben, wird noch über die Menschen kommen,” my translation.

⁷² Ibid., 12[77]. From the German, “jetzt ist es noch zu früh!” my translation.

born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now!’ Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; they too were silent and looked at him disconcertedly. Finally he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. ‘I come too early,’ he then said; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars—and yet they have done it themselves!’ It is still recounted how on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there started singing his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but, ‘What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?’⁷³

Clearly, there is a great deal to unpack here, and in order to keep my analysis of this aphorism focused, I will continue to discuss it through the focus of the atheism/theism dichotomy which I have introduced earlier.

What I first aim to stress, is the narrative element to this aphorism, for it is basically a short story, which I will briefly summarise here. There is one central character, i.e. the madman, and he confronts several bystanders “who did not believe in God.”⁷⁴ It is unclear whether these bystanders are necessarily atheists or agnostics, but I have several reasons to presume they are the former. First, atheism is more closely associated with a stated *disbelief* in God, whereas agnosticism suspends judgment on either belief or disbelief, stating that God’s existence or non-existence is simply unknowable. Second, it is unclear whether Nietzsche was already familiar with the concept. While Thomas Huxley had coined the term agnosticism in 1869, the word began to be used widely only from the 1880s onwards.⁷⁵ The word only occurs in Nietzsche’s writing a total of four times from the year 1886 onwards, which was years after the publication of *The Gay Science*, while he had been referring to atheism dozens of times at this point.⁷⁶ Finally, the rest of this chapter considers Nietzsche’s statements about atheists elsewhere in his writing, and I argue these are thematically consistent with his perspective on the disbelieving bystanders here. The fact that they to a much greater extent than agnostics consciously reject the existence of God is an important differentiation, for Nietzsche perceives more ignorance and hypocrisy among them as a consequence. I will expand on this in a later section.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ See Bernard Lightman, “Huxley and Scientific Agnosticism: The Strange History of a Failed Rhetorical Strategy,” in *The British Journal for the History of Science* 35, no. 3 (2002): 278.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 12: Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–1887*, 5[50], 7[3], 9[43]; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III, §25.

The madman of the story does not self-evidently fit the current atheism/theism dichotomy, for the madman is at once evidently “looking for God,” while simultaneously exclaiming that “God remains dead.”⁷⁷ The dichotomy thus possibly exists within the madman himself, and—while it is hermeneutically complex to discern from whence Nietzsche might have found inspiration for his ‘tolle Mensch’—it seems clear that the madman incorporates at least a few important biographical elements of its own author.⁷⁸ First, the madman’s realisation that he comes too early to deliver the news of God’s death closely resembles Nietzsche’s remarks about himself in both *The Antichrist* as well as his *Ecce Homo* that “some people are born posthumously.”⁷⁹ Second, this is closely related to the narrative element of the aphorism, in which the madman is both ridiculed and ignored by the bystanders, an element which is closely reminiscent of Nietzsche’s own life.⁸⁰ Third, in an earlier draft of this aphorism, Nietzsche still held that “one day Zarathustra lit a lantern in the bright morning, ran around the marketplace and cried: ‘I seek God! I seek God!’” making the case for the madman being Nietzsche’s mouthpiece in this aphorism even stronger.⁸¹ Finally, I hope to have demonstrated in my first chapter that Nietzsche himself is characterised by an inner conflict of both looking for God, as well as looking to overcome God.

3.3 *Nietzsche’s attitude to modern atheism*

Besides my conclusion that the madman is Nietzsche’s mouthpiece in this aphorism, I also suggested that the bystanders are in fact the modern atheists of Nietzsche’s time, an interpretation which I will defend here. Prima facie, the madman arrives as the bearer of bad news solely for believers, for he demonstrates that the Biblical “seek, and ye shall find” does not find an easy answer anymore.⁸² The atheist bystanders do not respond sorrowfully, but with laughter, and thus demonstrate their ignorance of the seriousness of this predicament. While the label of atheism certainly was not alien to Nietzsche’s characterisation of himself, we thus see that Nietzsche’s relationship with modern atheism, is complex.⁸³ His comments about

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Charles Bambach, “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable: A Cynical Reading,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2010): 441-456. Bambach suggests that Diogenes as a “Socrates gone mad” was an important inspiration for the construction of the madman. I will elaborate on this interpretation at a later point in this chapter.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, “Preface”; *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” §1.

⁸⁰ At the end of the following chapter, I will refer to the passages in which Nietzsche demonstrates a clear sense of feeling ignored by his contemporaries.

⁸¹ Nietzsche in Bambach, “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable,” 445.

⁸² Matthew 7:7 [King James Version].

⁸³ For characterisations of himself as an atheist, see Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* [1883-1888], translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, edited with notes by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967): §132 as well as *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am So Wise,” §1

atheism in his other writings accordingly help to contextualise the later comments of the madman in the aphorism. For instance, in an aphorism entitled “*The German attitude to morality*” in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche clearly stated that—while laying out the potential advantages Germany held over other nations—he simultaneously did “not believe Schopenhauer was right when he said that the sole advantage the Germans had over other nations was that there were more atheists among them than elsewhere,” which suggests a scepticism to the extent in which contemporary atheism was fundamentally different.⁸⁴ Similarly, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche asserts that “these pale atheists (...) believe they are all as liberated as possible from the ascetic ideal (...) and yet, I will tell them what they themselves cannot see—because they are standing too close to themselves—this ideal is quite simply *their* ideal as well, they themselves represent it nowadays, and perhaps no one else, they themselves are its most intellectualised product (...) *because they still believe in truth.*”⁸⁵ According to Nietzsche, European contemporary atheism is not simply a logical *negation* of the belief in God, for it still *posits* the same morals that were rooted in that same belief.

I should clarify whether Nietzsche’s comments about atheists refer to specific people, as his writings often do, or whether he presents us with a broader analysis of the culture of his time. Briefly put, both are true, though I should explain why. The comments about atheism that Nietzsche presents more often than not do not mention a specific author, and yet specific authors are mentioned in some passages. In the sections hereafter I will demonstrate that such authors include Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer as major names, but here I wish to focus on one specific author, namely David Strauss. In the first of his *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche singled out Strauss’ “The Old and the New Faith: A Confession,” which Strauss used as a call to leave behind traditional Christianity and instead pursue a new faith in materialist science.

Nietzsche’s criticism was particularly harsh against Strauss’ dishonest atheism, for Strauss “announces with admirable frankness that he is no longer a Christian, but he does not wish to disturb anyone’s peace of mind,” the latter of which Nietzsche takes an issue with.⁸⁶ After all, for Nietzsche the logical conclusion of denying the existence—and with it the morality and epistemology—of the Christian God would surely yield different results, for what would a more honest confrontation with atheism be? Alternatively, what would disturbing his readers’ peace of mind look like? Indeed, according to Nietzsche, Strauss “does not dare to tell them honestly: I have liberated you from a helpful and merciful God, the universe is only a rigid

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §207.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, §24.

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, §7.

machine, take care you are not mangled in its wheels!”⁸⁷ Strauss never takes his atheism to this extent, he has not realised that the denial of the Christian God necessitates the denial of Christian morality as well. Strauss wishes to reject the former and keep the latter:

Strauss has not yet even learned that no idea can ever make men better or more moral, and that preaching morals is as easy as finding grounds for them is difficult; his task was much rather to take the phenomena of human goodness, compassion, love and self-abnegation, which do in fact exist, and derive and explain them from his Darwinist presuppositions: while he preferred by a leap into the imperative to flee from the task of *explanation*.⁸⁸

According to Nietzsche, Strauss continues to preach Christian moral values, but he does not ground these in anything. Instead, Strauss lives under the pretence that the same values might be grounded in science, but Nietzsche holds that morality and religion are not even in the realm of science, stating that “at bottom, then, the new religion is not a new faith but precisely on a par with modern science and thus not religion at all.”⁸⁹ Nietzsche suspects that Strauss necessarily derives his values from elsewhere, for “if Strauss nevertheless asserts that he does have a religion, the reasons for it lie outside the domain of contemporary science.”⁹⁰ Because Nietzsche thinks that these reasons are in fact derived from the same Christian faith which Strauss had come to reject, Nietzsche holds that Strauss “never ceased to be a Christian theologian.”⁹¹

Besides the content, the effect of Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditation* was quite remarkable as well. A correspondent of Nietzsche’s, the poet Carl Spitteler, relates his experience of visiting Basel right after the publication of Nietzsche’s polemic:

The new Professor Nietzsche, I was told, while being an unbeliever himself, had beaten old David Strauss to the ground to such an extent that he could no longer move. A Basel professor who, while being an unbeliever himself, served the pious of Basel, who were also the rulers, by completely destroying their most hated and lonely opponent, who has long since been abandoned by the world...⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., §9.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Carl Spitteler, *Meine Beziehungen zu Nietzsche* (Munich: Süddeutsche Monatshefte, 1908): 14. My translation from the German: “Der neue Professor Nietzsche, wurde mir erklärt, obschon selber ungläubig, habe den alten David Strauss dermassen zu Boden geschlagen, dass er sich nicht mehr rühren werde. Ein Basler Professor, der, obschon selber ungläubig, den Frommen Basels, also den Machthabern, den Dienst erweist, ihren gehassten und längst von aller Welt verlassenen, einsamen Gegner vollends umzubringen...”

First, this account demonstrates Nietzsche's complex attitude to theism and atheism, for Spitteler also noticed that in his disbelief, Nietzsche still criticised the atheists and accordingly provided a great service to the pious of Basel. Second, the fact that the polemic was closely followed by the unfortunate death of Strauss also sheds light on Nietzsche's dual nature as a ruthlessly critical writer and compassionate person. Writing to Carl von Gersdorff, Nietzsche said: "I very much hope that I didn't make the last days difficult for him and that he died without knowing anything about me."⁹³ His friend Peter Gast reported a similar astonishment upon meeting Nietzsche: "We had pictured the author of *Anti-Strauss* as having some degree of harshness, but were surprised precisely by his kindness. (...) Strict toward himself, strict in matters of principle, he was, however, extremely benevolent in his judgment of other people."⁹⁴ Already early on, Nietzsche demonstrated a complex relationship to both theism and compassion, criticizing these and yet not fully escaping both.

While Nietzsche thus has specific atheist thinkers in mind, he always considers it a wider cultural problem first and foremost, as he also explains in *Ecce Homo* later:

I never attack people—I make use of a person only as a kind of strong magnifying glass with which one can make visible some general but insidious and quite intangible exigency. This is how I attacked David Strauss, or more precisely the *success* of a decrepit book among the 'educated' in Germany—I caught this education red-handed.⁹⁵

It is accordingly that I now wish to return to Nietzsche's general comments about atheism, for it is now clear that while Nietzsche has specific individuals in mind, he really is more interested in a general cultural problem of his time.

His criticism of atheism becomes even more pronounced in the notes that Nietzsche did not publish in his own lifetime. In *The Will to Power*, for instance, Nietzsche holds that even though "one has become atheistic (...) the last metaphysicians still seek in it true 'reality,' the 'thing-in-itself' compared to which everything else is merely apparent."⁹⁶ Similarly, "we are atheists and immoralists, but for the present we support the religions and moralities of the herd instinct."⁹⁷ Nietzsche evidently has some disdain for 'popular' atheism, as he later posits that "religions are destroyed by belief in morality. The Christian moral God is not tenable: hence

⁹³ Nietzsche, letter to Carl von Gersdorff, Basel, 11 February 1874. My translation from the German: "Gestern hat man in Ludwigsburg David Strauss begraben. Ich hoffe sehr dass ich ihm die letzte Lebenszeit nicht erschwert habe und dass er ohne etwas von mir zu wissen gestorben ist.—Es greift mich etwas an."

⁹⁴ Peter Gast in *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 57.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Wise," §7.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, §132.

‘atheism’—as if there could be no other kinds of god.”⁹⁸ In other words, the conclusions of popular atheism are both too simplistic as well as too ignorant. Ignorant; for they do not realise that their axiomatic assumptions about reality remain decidedly Christian, but also because they fail to see that these axioms can henceforth not persist. Simplistic; for similar reasons, but also for the logical error that the dawn of the Judeo-Christian God also necessitates the impossibility of belief in any other god. It is in this context that Nietzsche’s following aphorism also has to be read:

And how many new gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say god-forming, instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time! So many strange things have passed before me in those timeless moments that fall into one’s life as if from the moon, when one no longer has any idea how old one is or how young one will yet be—I should not doubt that there are many kinds of gods—There are some one cannot imagine without a certain halcyon and frivolous quality in their make-up—Perhaps light feet are even an integral part of the concept “god”—Is it necessary to elaborate that a god prefers to stay beyond everything bourgeois and rational? and, between ourselves, also beyond good and evil? His prospect is *free*—in Goethe’s words.—And to call upon the inestimable authority of Zarathustra in this instance: Zarathustra goes so far as to confess: “I would believe only in a God who could *dance*”—To repeat: how many new gods are still possible!⁹⁹

It seems clear that Nietzsche thus dissociates himself from popular atheism on several fronts. While Nietzsche obviously spends the greater part of his writing criticising religion, it also becomes clear that on some fronts he is even *more* critical of popular atheism. Popular atheists are, in some sense, *more* prone to a moralistic interpretation of the world, for they are not aware of the extent in which they perform such an interpretation. Nietzsche clarifies this point in that “just as Descartes established the truth of sense perception out of the nature of *God*, one could reject Kant’s doctrine of reason” and that “to this extent, even epistemology is dependent on a *previous* decision about the moral character of existence (...) it is precisely atheists who are most biased in moral issues.”¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche furthermore believes that there are famous examples of the fact that “one finds less freedom of thought in moral matters among the atheists than among

⁹⁸ Ibid., §151.

⁹⁹ Ibid., §1083.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 12: Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–1887*, 5[50], 52. From the German, “wie Descartes die Wahrheit der Sinneswahrnehmung aus der Natur *Gottes* begründete, könnte man Kants Lehre von der Vernunft (...) ablehnen. Insofern ist selbst die Erkenntnistheorie abhängig von einer *vorherigen* Entscheidung über den moralischen Charakter des Daseins (...) Die Atheisten sind gerade in moralischen Fragen am befangensten,” my translation.

the pious and believers in God,” such as his observation that “Pascal is freer and more open-minded in moral questions than Schopenhauer.”¹⁰¹ I have presented some parallel passages and sources that inform Nietzsche’s attitude to dishonest atheism for I believe they better inform who Nietzsche’s madman is talking to in GS §125. It is with this context in mind that I now wish to return to the aphorism.

3.4 *The parable of the madman: cynicism or distress?*

There are a great many details to the aphorism that deserve close attention. First, it should be quite remarkable that the madman “in the bright morning lit a lantern.”¹⁰² Besides the fact that this can be explained by the obvious hint that the madman is in fact ‘mad,’ it should also be clear how close this is to an ancient description of Diogenes of Sinope, who “lit a lantern in broad daylight and gone about the marketplace crying: ‘I seek man.’”¹⁰³ Charles Bambach has discussed this connection extensively in his article “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable: A Cynical Reading.” Bambach connects Nietzsche and Diogenes by their shared *cynicism*, not understood in reference to resentment, but rather as a way of life and as a critical approach towards systematic philosophy.¹⁰⁴ It is accordingly that the madman’s “announcement of God’s death has less to do with atheism or the argument about the existence of God than it does with the existential concerns of the human being.”¹⁰⁵ This connects directly to Diogenes, for “much as Diogenes donned the mask of a ‘mad Socrates’ to caricature what he saw to be the madness of Plato’s philosophy, Nietzsche apes the madman in order to expose the madness of both Christian morality and the Enlightenment atheism that imagines itself to be free of the metaphysical presuppositions of Christian belief.”¹⁰⁶ Bambach thus emphasises that a *cynical* reading of GS §125 is most appropriate. While I agree that, undoubtedly, this is an essential part of interpreting the parable, I argue that it provides anything but an exhaustive account. For instance, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche was openly asking this question: “*The modern Diogenes.*—Before one seeks men one must have found the lantern. Will it have to be the lantern of the cynic?”¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche is evidently unsure about this course, for “the Cynic (...) hardens

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 7[68]. My translation from the German: “so daß man unter den Atheisten weniger Freisinnigkeit in moralischen Dingen findet als unter den Frommen und Gottgläubigen (z.B. Pascal ist in moralischen Fragen freier und freisinniger als Schopenhauer),” my translation.

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

¹⁰³ From Diogenes Laërtius’ *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, in Bambach, “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable,” 447.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 443.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 450.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, II, §18.

himself to the point of feeling nothing,” and it is not at all clear that this comes close to Nietzsche’s portrayal of the madman.¹⁰⁸ In what follows, I therefore argue that the madman is not merely cynical, for he also expresses great grief. I arrive at this conclusion not merely by considering the contents of GS §125, but also by looking at parallel passages in other writings that demonstrate similar grief or seriousness.

First, the madman screams ceaselessly (“unaufhörlich schrie”), which demonstrates the seriousness that is also characteristic within the text. This is also why, following the ridicule of the atheist bystanders, the madman “pierced them with his eyes.”¹⁰⁹ He deems it of utmost importance that announcing the death of God is not a matter of positing or negating God’s supposed existence. Rather, it is to stress that the belief in this ideal has been radically annihilated, and that hence, “God is dead! God remains dead!” is only part of the story; the notion that “*we have killed him!*” has instead been italicised in Nietzsche’s original writings.¹¹⁰ A discussion of God’s relation to contemporary society thus becomes not one of *logical*, but rather of *existential* relevance. After all, it concerns the psychological consequences in the lives of individuals rather than rational argumentation about the non-existence of God where a notion of assuming responsibility for deicide would never arise.

This also becomes evident from the great many questions that the madman asks the atheist bystanders, where he refers to God as an infinite sea, as the horizon beyond ourselves, and also as the sun. I believe Bambach correctly understands the reference to the sun, namely as an ideal “whose place in Platonic philosophy stands as the symbol of the Good and in Copernican astronomy as the centre of the cosmos that shapes both Western philosophy and science.”¹¹¹ Both aspects are important, for they demonstrate significant moral and epistemic consequences. Moral, for there is no longer an ultimate ‘Good,’ in which we can manifest our earthly instantiations of ‘good’ acts. Epistemic, for there is no longer an ultimate reference point in which to ground our knowledge, as nothing external seems to be able to grant it validation. Nietzsche will elaborate on this process in his outline for *The Will to Power*:

The end of Christianity—at the hands of its own morality (which cannot be replaced), which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and of history; rebound from “God is truth” to the fanatical faith “All is false” (...) the untenability

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., I §275.

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Bambach, “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable,” 452.

of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false.¹¹²

This passage clarifies why the madman realises the seriousness of this event, while the atheist bystanders evidently do not. If one central belief (i.e. God is alive) is rejected (i.e. God is dead), then all that has been related to that belief must consequently die with it. Nevertheless, this is not an *immediate* process, which explains the difference between the prophetism of the madman and the ignorance of the bystanders.

The fact that the madman feels misunderstood by the bystanders importantly connects with Nietzsche's autobiographical statement that he will be born posthumously, as well as with the madman's final realisation in GS §125, namely that he arrives too early. Nietzsche thus often *announces*, as he does elsewhere in *The Will to Power*: "What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism* (...) our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe."¹¹³ Given that Nietzsche's prophecy would supposedly span another two centuries, it makes sense that the madman realises that "this tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men."¹¹⁴ The atheist bystanders simply fail to grasp that the epistemic justification for their scientific endeavours, as well as for their morality, might be on the brink of collapse. While the atheist bystanders still experience the sun shining brightly in the morning, the madman realises that lanterns must nevertheless be lit from now onwards. It is for this reason that he expresses relativistic concerns, asking whether there is "still an up and a down," and whether we are falling or moving "backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions?"¹¹⁵ Nietzsche will add a final elaboration of the death of God in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, though it should be noted that this final book was added five years after its initial publication.¹¹⁶ From reading this aphorism, §343, it becomes clear that Nietzsche has now had a great deal of time to really consider the gravity of his writings years earlier.¹¹⁷ The interpretation that I distilled above is now also drawn out more systematically by Nietzsche himself, for he relates that "now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith (...) for example, our entire European morality."¹¹⁸ Epistemologically, Nietzsche explains in §344 that "it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests (...) the

¹¹² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Preface, §2.

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, xii, §343.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine... But what if this were to become more and more difficult to believe"?

In this chapter, I have argued that the death of God has a similar relevance for both Christians and atheists alike, but since Christians are at least aware that their morality and epistemology is rooted in their metaphysical beliefs, the announcement is specifically directed at atheists. I concluded that the madman is in fact Nietzsche's mouthpiece, and have demonstrated that Nietzsche's position within the atheism/theism dichotomy remains ambiguous. This is partly due to the fact that Nietzsche is not responding *logically*, but *existentially* to the life or death of God. While I agree with Bambach that a cynical reading of the aphorism is not inappropriate, I have also demonstrated that a cynical reading does not get at the complete and counterbalancing seriousness of it. After all, the madman is clearly not just sarcastic or mocking, he is also visibly disturbed by the event. I thus believe this aphorism to further demonstrate an inner conflict within Nietzsche, as someone who partly desperately wishes to overcome God, while at the same time evidently lamenting His death.

4. The Need for Opposing Religious Ideals

4.1 From Dionysus and Apollo to Dionysus and the Crucified: Overview of the argument

In this chapter, I aim to pinpoint the significance of Nietzsche's opposition of *Dionysus versus the Crucified*, and connect this specifically with his continued emphasis on the societal need to value opposing religious ideals. This is a point of contention that is both important in evaluating Nietzsche's main ideas in his published works, as well as in understanding which ideals Nietzsche struggled with in his own life. I have already demonstrated in the biographical chapter that an inner religious struggle motivated him deeply, and that this is necessarily reflected in his philosophy as well. The final aphorism of the last book that Nietzsche wrote, *Ecce Homo*, is as follows: "Have I made myself understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified*"¹¹⁹ While admittedly Nietzsche intended to write more books, he in this manner nevertheless ends his literary corpus with a remark to his readers about *his personal struggle*. Still, as of yet it is not at all obvious how this passage must be read. For instance, is Dionysus, or the Crucified victorious? Alternatively, are they merely opposed to one another? Is Nietzsche identifying with Dionysus, with the Crucified, or with the opposition between both figures? What do Dionysus and the Crucified respectively signify for Nietzsche? The aim for this chapter is to get clear on precisely these issues. I will suggest that this is the final element demonstrating Nietzsche's complex attitude towards religion, and the opposition between atheism and Christianity specifically.

I will begin by recounting both Nietzsche's position on the Greek god Dionysus, as well as on the Crucified, which Nietzsche both refers to in the plural and the singular. I will have to elaborate more on the latter, for Nietzsche's relationship to Jesus Christ vis-à-vis Christianity is complex. I will furthermore briefly restate Nietzsche's most elaborate comments on this opposition, which is found in *The Will to Power* §1052. I believe it is not a contentious issue to state that his interest in Dionysus chiefly refers to the fact that Dionysus provides Nietzsche with a religious ideal. Still, an analysis of this will help to demonstrate what Nietzsche believes to be the function that such a religious ideal fulfils within society, as well as whether the ideal of Dionysus alone suffices. I accordingly aim to arrive at criteria for what religion Nietzsche believes a society should aspire towards, which I will work out explicitly in my final chapter. More contentious, probably, is my suggestion that "*Dionysus versus the Crucified*" should be interpreted as Nietzsche's identification with the 'versus,' rather than the Dionysian, or with the Crucified.¹²⁰ I will argue that Nietzsche points to the need for multiple religious ideals

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am A Destiny," §9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

throughout his writing, but that he nevertheless overemphasises the Dionysian against a Socratic, Platonic and Christian environment, and does so to an extreme, indeed, unhealthy extent in his final years. At the same time, I argue that we cannot ignore the products of Nietzsche's mental instability, for while these are less carefully—if at all—argued for, they nevertheless inform us about Nietzsche *himself*, and thus about his entire philosophical project. An analysis of his early descent into madness demonstrates that Nietzsche's overemphasis of the Dionysian at the expense of all other religious ideals is in grave conflict with his original philosophical project, and that hence the Crucified reappeared as a religious ideal in this final period.

4.2 *Religious ideals in Ancient Greece: Dionysus and Apollo*

Nietzsche comments on the figure of Dionysus throughout his writings, but first deals with the Greek god and what he represents in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. When discussing Dionysus, however, Nietzsche does not solely focus on him, for he wishes to forward his thesis on “the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian” instead.¹²¹ In this section, I will briefly discuss Nietzsche's famous dichotomy between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. I will then move on to explain how Dionysus would later gain primacy over Apollo in Nietzsche's thinking. This will provide the necessary context for a fruitful understanding of his final aphorism in *Ecce Homo*.

Nietzsche opens *The Birth of Tragedy* with a clear explanation of the dichotomy:

Their two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysus, provide the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apollonian art of the image—maker or sculptor (*Bildner*) and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysus (...) they appear paired and, in this pairing, finally engender a work of art which is Dionysian and Apollonian in equal measure: Attic tragedy.¹²²

The Apollonian thus represents the art of image, i.e. that which grants form to the “orgiastic frenzy” of the Dionysian, for without the former, the latter would be *pure* chaos. In contrast, as Walter Kaufmann points out, without the Dionysian, the Apollonian cannot be comprehended, since it needs to *combat* chaos in order to exist.¹²³ Kaufmann even goes so far as to argue that while “in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche did not extol one at the expense of the other,” it is

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, §1.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, §5.

nevertheless clear that “if he favours one of the two gods, it is Apollo.”¹²⁴ Kaufmann clarifies this statement by asserting that Nietzsche “emphasises the Dionysian only because he feels that the Apollonian genius of the Greeks cannot be fully understood apart from it.”¹²⁵ I agree with Kaufmann’s characterisation, for it seems consistent that Nietzsche throughout his works rarely vouches for chaos in and of itself, but rather for a proper balance of order *and* chaos (i.e. Apollo *and* Dionysus), where the former is extracted out of the latter. Nietzsche explains this need for balance in multiple passages, sometimes promoting “the highest effect of the Apollonian culture, which in the first place has always to overthrow some Titanic empire and slay monsters,” or elsewhere stating that “thanks to that Apollonian oracle (...) the Greeks gradually learned *to organise the chaos*.”¹²⁶ At other times, he points to the shortcoming of the Apollonian and need for Dionysian, for “music and tragic myth both express, in the same way, the Dionysian capacity of a people, and they cannot be separated from one another,” emphasising that they “originate in an artistic realm which lies beyond the Apollonian.”¹²⁷ A sole focus on either the Apollonian or Dionysian is thus too one-sided, as they mutually reinforce each other within Attic tragedy.

4.3 *The Socratic Extermination of the Dionysian*

There ought to be an explanation for why Nietzsche would still, in his later works, emphasise the Dionysian while no longer emphasising the Apollonian. I will argue that the foundations for this are already present in *The Birth of Tragedy*, not because he here already proclaims himself to be the disciple of Dionysus, but because he describes the expulsion of the Dionysian here and accordingly suggests a need to revive it. In what follows, I will focus on parts of *The Birth of Tragedy* that highlight this expulsion and consequent need for reviving the Dionysian. For instance, while Attic tragedy perfectly balanced the Apollonian and Dionysian, Nietzsche holds that Euripidean tragedy intended “to expel the original and all-powerful Dionysian element from tragedy and to re-build tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysian art, morality, and view of the world.”¹²⁸ How could this have happened? What could have inspired Euripides to no longer emphasise the Dionysian in his tragedies? According to Nietzsche, “the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called *Socrates*,” and that henceforth we have a new

¹²⁴ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 128.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3; Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §9.

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §25.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, §12.

opposition: “The Dionysian versus the Socratic.”¹²⁹ Nietzsche explains how Socratism is a pervasive force in Euripidean tragedy:

Like Plato, Euripides undertook to show the world the opposite of the ‘unreasoning’ poet; as I have said, his aesthetic principle, ‘Everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful,’ is a parallel to Socrates’ assertion that, ‘Everything must be conscious in order to be good.’ Accordingly, we may regard Euripides as the poet of aesthetic Socratism.¹³⁰

Nietzsche asserts that in Euripidean tragedies and in Socratism one strives to make everything conscious, intelligible, or reasonable. However, *everything* would necessarily include the chaotic, unconscious, and Dionysian aspects that disallow such a process of making it intelligible. This means that the Dionysian needs to be ignored, as it simply cannot be considered good within Socratism or beautiful within Euripidean tragedies. Because the Dionysian extends *beyond* the Apollonian, this necessarily entails that there are Dionysian aspects which cannot stand out individually, for standing out individually is already an Apollonian feature. In the Socratic Euripidean tragedies, the Dionysian is thus dispensed with altogether, for everything must stand apart, as everything must be intelligible. Accordingly, Nietzsche argues, “it is certain that the first effect which the Socratic drive aimed to achieve was the disintegration of Dionysian tragedy.”¹³¹ Put even more strongly, Nietzsche states that “we may identify Socrates as the opponent of Dionysus.”¹³²

Nietzsche’s concern for the expulsion of the Dionysian and his criticism of Socratism in *The Birth of Tragedy* leads me to disagree with Kaufmann’s observation that Nietzsche clearly preferred Apollo over Dionysus. As I have pointed out, the same text also demonstrates Nietzsche’s reasons for emphasising Dionysus’ revival over that of Apollo. After all, it should be clear that, while Socratism represents a challenge to both the Dionysian as well as the Apollonian of the Attic tragedy, Socratism more clearly represents aspects from the Apollonian. This can also be seen in Nietzsche’s unpublished notes of the same time, where he characterises Socrates as an “Apollonian person,” as well as “science as an Apollonian instinct (Apollonian in the sense that it is contrary to art),” which is—not coincidentally—similar to “scientific Socratism,” “the knowledge-lusting Socratism of today” or “Socratism of science” in *The Birth of Tragedy*.¹³³ The rational principles of the Apollonian which enable individuation are precisely

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., §14.

¹³² Ibid., §12.

¹³³ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 1, Die Geburt der Tragödie, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I-IV, Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-1873*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, [84], [101]. My translation, from the German “Sokrates—der apollinische

the same principles which Socratism features in excess. Therefore, while I agree with Kaufmann that Nietzsche seemed to have preferred the Apollonian over the Dionysian in the Attic tragedies, it should also be clear why he simultaneously already announces his preference for the Dionysian. Socratism is in a relevant sense the Apollonian taken to an extreme, and thus represents a destructive antithesis to the Dionysian, for all that is unconscious and chaotic must be ignored or made intelligible.

Nonetheless, Nietzsche remains silent on the importance of the god Dionysus for his philosophy until the publication of his *Beyond Good and Evil* fourteen years later.¹³⁴ In fact, he makes his relative silence on the matter explicit: “Have I forgotten myself so much that I haven’t even told you his name (...) this questionable spirit and god (...) who wants to be *praised* in this way?” Moreover, he directly refers back to *The Birth of Tragedy* as his “firstborn” here:¹³⁵

The god *Dionysus*, that great ambiguity and tempter god, to whom, as you know, I once offered my firstborn in all secrecy and reverence. I seem to be the last one to have offered him a *sacrifice*: because I have not found anyone who understood what I was doing then. (...) I, the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus: and can I, at last, start to give you, my friends, a small taste of this philosophy, as far as I am permitted? (...) The fact that Dionysus is a philosopher and that, consequently, even gods philosophise, seems to me like something new and *not* without its dangers, something that might arouse mistrust precisely among philosophers,—among you, my friends, it has less opposition, unless it comes too late and at the wrong time: I have been told that you do not like believing in God and gods these days.¹³⁶

While it is possible that Nietzsche only conceived of offering his firstborn, *The Birth of Tragedy*, to Dionysus *retrospectively*, I believe it nevertheless poses a significant challenge to Kaufmann’s interpretation I mentioned above. After all, I emphasised that Nietzsche, after his discussion of Socratism in *The Birth of Tragedy*, very much came to the conclusion that it is not the Apollonian, but rather the Dionysian that has been systematically eradicated from Euripidean tragedies. As Nietzsche himself retrospectively argues with regard to *The Birth of Tragedy*, he has “not found anyone who understood what I was doing then,” indicating the importance of the work for the rest of his philosophical project.¹³⁷ This is, I believe, reinforced by the fact that Nietzsche wrote a paper, “The Dionysian World View,” two years *before* the initial publication of *The Birth of*

Einzelne,” as well as “Sokrates, der Gegner des Dionysus (...) Die Wissenschaft als apollinischer Trieb (als apollinisch im Gegensatz zur Kunst).”; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §19, §23.

¹³⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Tragedy, and the paper in no way suggests that the Dionysian was in any way secondary to the Apollonian.¹³⁸ Moreover, Nietzsche clearly wants his readers to also praise Dionysus, even if he makes it explicit that he is afraid that his readers are no longer in favour of belief in deities. First, I should note that this fear is well-grounded, for Nietzsche continuously emphasises that Christian epistemology, morality, and even grammar still immensely dominates minds. Consequently, while growing disbelief in the Judeo-Christian God could seemingly re-allow belief in other gods, the death of the Judeo-Christian God motivates the cessation of religious belief *itself*, which is why Nietzsche notes “that the religious instinct is indeed growing vigorously—but that it rejects any specifically theistic gratification with profound distrust.”¹³⁹ Second, this is an important point that demonstrates Nietzsche’s tendency to not easily characterise himself as an atheist, for he clearly dissociates himself from his contemporaries and contradistinctively *does* wish to continue believing in the divine himself. He hopes that among his readers “it has less opposition, unless it comes too late.”¹⁴⁰ While Nietzsche fears a more atheist future in several regards, he here specifically fears the impossibility of taking Dionysus seriously as an alternative deity.

From *BGE* §295 onwards, Dionysus reappears more and more in Nietzsche’s writing. I moreover believe that this continued discussion gives a great degree of insight into the reasoning behind Dionysus as a religious ideal. For instance, in the fifth section of *The Gay Science*—which unlike the first four sections was added after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*—Nietzsche reassesses some of the claims he made in *The Birth of Tragedy*, concluding that he misinterpreted German pessimism as Dionysian pessimism. The contrast between the two is useful:

There are two types of sufferers: first, those who suffer from a *superabundance of life*—they want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life; then, those who suffer from an *impoverishment of life* and seek quiet, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and insight, or else intoxication, paroxysm, numbness, madness. (...) He who is richest in fullness of life, the Dionysian god and man, can allow himself not only the sight of what is terrible and questionable but also the terrible deed and every luxury of destruction, decomposition, negation; in his case, what is evil, nonsensical, and ugly almost seems acceptable because of an overflow in procreating, fertilizing forces capable of turning any desert into bountiful farmland. Conversely, he who suffers most and is poorest in life would need mainly mildness, peacefulness, goodness in thought and indeed—if possible, also a god who truly would be a god for the sick, a ‘saviour’; as well as logic, the conceptual comprehensibility of existence—for logic soothes, gives

¹³⁸ Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World* [1870], translated by Ira J. Allen, introduction by Friedrich Ulfers (Minneapolis, Univocal, 2013): 29-48.

¹³⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §53.

¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295.

confidence—in short, a certain warm, fearrepelling narrowness and confinement to optimistic horizons. (...) Nowadays I avail myself of this primary distinction concerning all aesthetic values: in every case I ask, ‘Is it hunger or superabundance that have become creative here?’ (...) I see it coming!—*Dionysian* pessimism.¹⁴¹

The above segment suggests that there are several important elements for Nietzsche’s understanding of divine inspiration, for Nietzsche relates that which justifies earthly suffering. First, the problem with the religious orientations that Nietzsche was familiar with did *not* consist in their focus on suffering as being central to the human experience. Rather, it consists in the underlying ethos of the suffering; is this suffering a necessary by-product of a constant positive affirmation of life, or is it rather reflective of a life-denying world view? The former is what Nietzsche perceives as most important about the Dionysian attitude towards living, for suffering has a positive creative element. Dionysus, accordingly, is not seen as an unattainable ideal, or as a saviour. Rather, Dionysus represents a model which inspires *life-affirming* suffering, for while the suffering is a *necessary* epiphenomenon, it does not consequently *condemn* earthly existence. In contrast, what Nietzsche understands as Christian, Epicurean, Platonist, German, or even Buddhist suffering *does* inspire the latter. In all these cases, “an eternal justification above earthly matters” must be posited, or more specifically, “God as (...) the representative of eternal justice.”¹⁴² While earthly existence is accordingly ‘justified,’ it is done so *extrinsically* rather than *intrinsically*, and must thus be understood as less important than its transcendental justifying force.

4.4 *Dionysus in opposition to Christianity*

The opposition between the Dionysian and the Christian is not an accidental one, but rather fundamental to Nietzsche’s expanding philosophical project. I want to further contextualise and explore this opposition before making conclusions about the implications of understanding this opposition as fundamental to his entire project. For instance, in the preface that Nietzsche added to *The Birth of Tragedy* fourteen years later, he clarifies that Dionysus must be understood not, as he had emphasised in that book, in contradistinction to Apollo or even Socrates, but rather, to Christianity:

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §370.

¹⁴² Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 8, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1875-1879*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 9[1]. My translation from the German: “eine über den irdischen Dingen stehende ewige Gerechtigkeit (...) Gott als (...) der Vertreter der ewigen Gerechtigkeit.”

My instinct turned *against* morality at the time I wrote this questionable book; as an advocate of life my instinct invented for itself a fundamentally opposed doctrine and counter-evaluation of life, a purely artistic one, an *anti-Christian* one. What was it to be called? As a philologist and man of words I baptised it, not without a certain liberty—for who can know the true name of the Antichrist?—by the name of a Greek god: I called it *Dionysian*.¹⁴³

According to Nietzsche, it is thus possible to reread *The Birth of Tragedy* with the later Dionysus/Crucified opposition in mind, even equating Dionysus with the Antichrist, the latter of which has important biblical connotations as the one “that denieth the Father and the Son.”¹⁴⁴ Nietzsche’s preface continues with several vivid references to the Greek god, including “how differently Dionysus spoke to me!” and “that Dionysian monster who bears the name of *Zarathustra*.”¹⁴⁵ These references contain important connotations, indicating that Nietzsche meant to convey that he had a *personal* relationship with the god Dionysus, and that he considered his spokesperson Zarathustra to be Dionysian as well. For Nietzsche, Dionysus is thus not a mere conceptualisation to abstractly interpret culture, Dionysus has direct *existential* relevance.¹⁴⁶

Not only would Nietzsche later closely associate Dionysus with the “eternal recurrence,” he would also make the religious element in this appraisal explicit: “All this is meant by the word Dionysus: I know no higher symbolism than this *Greek* symbolism of the Dionysian festivals. Here the most profound instinct of life, that directed toward the future of life, the eternity of life, is experienced religiously—and the way to life, procreation, as the *holy way*.”¹⁴⁷ It is, furthermore, for this reason that I cannot as easily conclude as Kaufmann does that “the ‘Dionysus’ in the Dionysus versus Apollo of Nietzsche’s first book and the ‘*Dionysus versus the Crucified*’ in the last line of Nietzsche’s last book do not mean the same thing,” as Kaufmann argues that “the later Dionysus is the synthesis of the two forces represented by Dionysus and Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*.”¹⁴⁸ While I do not doubt that Nietzsche’s later use of the Dionysian also incorporates certain Apollonian aspects that he praised in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is also clear that the few discussions of the Dionysus/Apollo dichotomy that do postdate *The Birth of Tragedy*

¹⁴³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Preface, §5.

¹⁴⁴ 1 John 2:22, *King James Version*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, §6, §7.

¹⁴⁶ Already in 1870, Nietzsche labels Dionysus as the “existential objective” (“Dionysos: Ziel des Daseins”). See Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 7, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1869-1874*, 7 [54].

¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” §5. We can see in Nietzsche’s unpublished notes that, before succumbing to madness, he was planning to publish *The Will to Power: An Attempt at a Transvaluation of all Values*, only the first book of which he finished (*The Antichrist*), the fourth and last of which would be called *Dionysus: Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence*. Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 18[17], 19[8]; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” §4.

¹⁴⁸ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 129.

nevertheless still emphasise the Dionysian far more than the Apollonian, suggesting an increasing preference for the former and growing disregard for the latter.¹⁴⁹ The opposition in *The Will to Power* §1049 is perhaps most telling in this regard, where Nietzsche even stresses “*Apollo’s* misapprehension: the eternity of beautiful forms, the aristocratic prescription, ‘*Thus shall it ever be!*’”¹⁵⁰ Thus, the Platonic notion of forms that are *eternal*, i.e. stable and ordered as opposed to in constant flux, is a misapprehension of the god Apollo. While it seems clear that while Nietzsche clearly prefers the Attic tragic ideal with both Apollonian and Dionysian elements, his first book nevertheless stresses that the new opposition is Socrates versus Dionysus. I have furthermore demonstrated that, according to Nietzsche, Socratism since Plato has become hegemonic, and Nietzsche consequently holds that not the Apollonian, but the Dionysian is in highest need of revitalisation. For this reason, he repeatedly emphasises that he is the *last* disciple of Dionysus, indicating that he is unique in this rare opposition to popular morality, i.e. Socratism, or Christianity as a “Platonism for the ‘people.’”¹⁵¹

4.5 *The Socratic in Plato, the Platonic in Christianity: The continued need to revive Dionysus*

Before I conclude this discussion of the Dionysian and move on to Nietzsche’s understanding of the Crucified, I briefly want to give attention to the grouping together of Platonism, Christianity and Socratism. Some might, after all, object to Nietzsche’s unwillingness to clearly dissociate the three, and I would therefore like to briefly provide some context and argumentation for it. Nietzsche often groups these together, for he repeatedly and clearly emphasises their close interrelatedness in the contemporary Western *understanding* of them. For instance, he states that Plato “had fallen victim to Socratism,” that he was “pressured by the demon Socrates,” and that regardless of differences between both men that “there is something in Plato’s moral philosophy that does not really belong to him, but is there in spite of him, as it were: namely, the Socratism that he was really too noble for.”¹⁵² Besides the just mentioned *BGE* aphorism which describes Christianity as a kind of folk-Platonism, Nietzsche elsewhere states that “without Platonism and Aristotelianism [there is] no Christian philosophy.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Raids of an Untimely Man,” §10, or Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1049, §1050.

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1049.

¹⁵¹ See, for instance, Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Preface,” §3, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” §5, *Ecce Homo*, “Preface,” §2; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Preface.”

¹⁵² Nietzsche, “Sokrates und die Tragödie” [1870], §[1]; “Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie” [1871], §[1], in *Kritische Studienausgabe 1, Die Geburt der Tragödie, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I–IV, Nachgelassene Schriften 1870–1873*. My translation from the German: “Plato ist in diesem Punkte dem Sokratismus zum Opfer gefallen” and “Plato unter dem Drucke des dämonischen Sokrates”; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §190

¹⁵³ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 10, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 25[257]. My translation from the German: “Ohne Platonismus und Aristotelismus keine christliche Philosophie.”

Indeed, “to interpret every event according to a Christian scheme and to rediscover and justify the Christian God in every chance event,” relied *methodologically* on “thinking within certain guidelines imposed by (...) Aristotelian presuppositions,” whereas it metaphysically relied on Platonism.¹⁵⁴ In *Twilight of the Idols, Or, How to Philosophise with the Hammer*, Nietzsche asserts that Plato was “such a Christian before his time—he already takes the concept ‘good’ to be the highest concept,” and that “Plato is that ambiguity and fascination called an ‘ideal’ which made it possible for the nobler natures of antiquity to misunderstand themselves and to step on the *bridge* that led to the ‘cross.’”¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche thus comments on a specific combination of a metaphysical scheme with a moral imperative. Plato differentiated between concepts hierarchically, but also grounded these concepts *metaphysically*. Thus, the concept at the top of this hierarchy, which Plato defines as the Good, is both more relevant than all the concepts beneath it, but also stands *above* earthly existence. Moreover, the Good carries earthly moral consequences, for “the divine dialectic, since it comes from the Good, leads to all the good.”¹⁵⁶ Not only is the metaphysical Good is construed as the highest concept within the hierarchy, everything lower than it can exclusively be made intelligible through its existence, meaning also that that what *cannot* be made intelligible is not good.¹⁵⁷ It thus holds consequences even for the physical manifestations of it, and with ‘good’ as a concept, these expressions must be, by inference, ethical.

With the Good as the highest value and source of intelligibility, Plato’s metaphysical doctrine maps on well to “a thoroughly Christian and moral attitude of mind, which includes a belief in a *good* God as the Creator of all things,” as Nietzsche describes in *The Will to Power*.¹⁵⁸ This doctrine is emphasised in Plato and thus continues in Christianity. On the other hand, it originates in Socrates, for while “Greek thought during the *tragic age* is *pessimistic* or *artistically optimistic*,” containing a “deep distrust of reality: nobody assumes a good god, who has made everything *optime*,” Nietzsche observes that “with Socrates *Optimism* begins, an optimism no longer artistic, with teleology and faith in the good god; faith in the enlightened good man.”¹⁵⁹ Socratism, Platonism and Christianity share the underlying metaphysical presupposition that

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §188.

¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients,” §2.

¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 12, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885-1887*, 2[93]. My translation from the German: “Die göttliche Dialektik, als aus dem Guten stammend, führt zu allem Guten.”

¹⁵⁷ Consider what Plato writes in *The Republic* VI (373 BC/1998: 508c): “As goodness stands in the intelligible realm to intelligence and the things we know, so the sun stands in the visible realm to sight and the things we see.”

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §436.

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* in *Early Greek Philosophy & Other Essays*, edited by Oscar Lévy, translated by Maximilian A. Mugge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911): “Notes for a Continuation (Early Part of 1873),” Conclusion/§8.

the world is *ordered*, which overemphasises the Apollonian instinct, and disregards the Dionysian. All three moreover hold the axiom that our experience in this world can, and perhaps ought to, be justified, be it morally or rationally.

Nietzsche, by positing his Dionysus-ideal, intends to bypass this *moral* metaphysical justification for life, and instead poses an *aesthetic* metaphysical justification for life, meaning that suffering is not justified because it is *good*, but because it adds to the joy of an *aesthetic* experience:

The tragic myth has to convince us that even ugliness and disharmony is an artistic game which the will plays with itself in the eternal abundance of its joy (...) The pleasure produced by the tragic myth shares the same home as the pleasurable sensation of dissonance in music. The Dionysian, with its original joy perceived even in pain, is the shared maternal womb of music and of tragic myth.¹⁶⁰

It accordingly inspires strength rather than weakness in its adherents, for suffering is neither encouraged as granting moral status, nor discouraged as something to avoid. Rather, suffering is understood as endemic to existence, but because it is conceived as art—and thus as disharmony balanced against harmony—it produces joy.¹⁶¹ Its creative forces are thus primary, from ‘an overabundance of life,’ rather than secondary, from ‘hunger,’ as the latter’s object is always outside of oneself. At the same time, the Dionysian does not reject suffering as inherent to life. In contrast, it changes the meaning of this suffering, comparable to the meaning of suffering in Attic tragedy.

In this section, I have demonstrated that further within *The Birth of Tragedy* as well as from *Beyond Good and Evil* onwards, we find Nietzsche emphasising the Dionysian over the Apollonian. I have argued this shift occurs for the Dionysian is increasingly absent while the latter is found in excess in European culture since Socrates. Moreover, we see that Nietzsche’s Dionysus-Socrates opposition plausibly anticipates his later Dionysus-Crucified opposition, for there are several important metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological areas of causal influence from the Socratic to the Platonic and eventually to the Christian worldview. Nietzsche believes these three philosophies to elevate reason, deny the instincts, and moralise existence, through an external force. The Dionysian, in contrast, represents instead the unconscious, as well as the aesthetic understanding of life, through primary engagement with the world. In order to fully understand how Nietzsche moves from Dionysus and Apollo to the opposition between

¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §24.

¹⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §24.

Dionysus and the Crucified—which Nietzsche would only begin to conceptualise in his last pieces of writing—I will now evaluate Nietzsche’s stance towards Christ.

4.6 *Nietzsche’s Jesus in the Antichrist*

As is the case with many topics within his philosophy, I believe that Nietzsche’s attitude towards the historical Jesus is complex and thus demands to be understood in relation to but also separate from his attitude towards Christianity. John Charles Evans, Norman Winba, Eugen Biser as well as Thomas J. J. Altizer have all emphasised the importance of treating the two matters carefully. Evans emphasises how Nietzsche clearly admired Jesus “the free spirit” while severely criticising Jesus “the redeemer,” while Altizer differentiates the two as the “orthodox Jesus” and the “liberal Jesus.”¹⁶² Wirzba goes as far as to suggest that “if Nietzsche had understood this strong, pro-active love, (...) the inner struggle with Jesus which Nietzsche maintained throughout his life might have found relief,” which is an interesting suggestion but requires too much speculation in order to validate.¹⁶³ More nuanced, as well as an hypothesis to consider while evaluating Nietzsche’s ideas about Christ, is Biser’s statement that “when measured against his criticism of Christianity Nietzsche’s criticism of Jesus is much more reserved because in his rejection he is continually stumbling over the traces of a connection he has never totally given up.”¹⁶⁴ It is with these ideas in mind that I now want to turn to Nietzsche’s discussions of the historical Jesus Christ. I will primarily focus on Nietzsche’s *Antichrist*, for it has the most elaborate discussion of Christ in relation to but also in contradistinction to Christianity. Moreover, the writing of Nietzsche’s *Antichrist* was contemporaneous with *Dionysus versus the Crucified* opposition. The former might thus be fruitful for understanding the latter. Earlier discussions of Jesus in both Nietzsche’s published as well as unpublished writing will be consulted if it provides useful context.

While I have stated that I will focus on Nietzsche’s *Antichrist*, I first wish to comment on the title of this book, as well as what Nietzsche means when he employs the term to describe himself elsewhere. Writing to Meta von Salis, Nietzsche discusses his plans to publish his *Transvaluation of All Values*, but does so “not without great hesitation! For example, the first book

¹⁶² John Charles Evans, “Nietzsche on Christ vs. Christianity,” in *Soundings* 78 (1995): 587; Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Contemporary Jesus* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997): 28.

¹⁶³ Norman Wirzba, “The Needs of Thought and the Affirmation of Life: Friedrich Nietzsche and Jesus Christ,” in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1997): 401.

¹⁶⁴ Eugen Biser, “Nietzsche’s Relation to Jesus: A Literary and Psychological Comparison” in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, edited by Claude Geffre and Jean-Pierre Jossua (New York: Seabury, 1981): 63.

is called the *Antichrist*.”¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche was clearly aware of the provocative title of the book. As I stated earlier, *Antichrist* primarily carries important biblical and theological implications, and might, in German, be understood as meaning ‘antichristian.’ However, the second meaning is only derivative, and I therefore in large part agree with Kaufmann’s suggestion that an exclusive “translation of the title as ‘The Antichristian’ (...) overlooks that Nietzsche plainly means to be as provocative as possible,” with a minor reservation rooted in Nietzsche’s initial doubts about the name.¹⁶⁶ This is not to say that Nietzsche did not take some liberty in the title as a reference to himself. Six years before the publication of the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche already referred to the concept in his unpublished fragments, and a year later he would state in a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug that he considered himself to be the *Antichrist*.¹⁶⁷ After settling on the title, he wore the characterisation with a greater degree of confidence, as was for instance evident from the later added preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*. Even more notable is the fact that a total of four letters that Nietzsche sent in the year 1888, one of which to Otto von Bismarck, he signed with *Antichrist*, which suggests a close identification with the title.¹⁶⁸

It however remains unclear what Nietzsche specifically *means* when he employs the term, but I argue that Nietzsche’s early draft for an aphorism in *Ecce Homo* is useful here:

When I wage war on Christianity, I am entitled to do so only because I have never experienced gloom or sadness from this side—On the contrary, the most treasured people I know have been Christians (...) My ancestors were themselves Protestant clergymen: If I had not received a lofty and clean spirit from them, I would not know where my right to war with Christianity came from. My formula for this: The *Antichrist* itself is the necessary logic in the development of a true Christian, in me Christianity overcomes itself.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche, letter to Meta von Salis, Sils, 7 September 1888. My translation from the German: “Im nächsten Jahre werde ich mich dazu entschließen, meine *Umwerthung aller Werthe*, das unabhängigste Buch, das es giebt, in Druck zu geben... *Nicht* ohne große Bedenken! Das erste Buch heißt zum Beispiel der *Antichrist*.”

¹⁶⁶ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 7.

¹⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 3: Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880-1882*, in *Sämtliche Werke* 21 [3]; Nietzsche, letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, Genoa, 3/4 April 1883. Nietzsche’s words: “Do you want a new name for me? The church language has one: I am - - - - - the Antichrist. Let’s not forget to laugh!” My translation from the German: “Wollen Sie einen neuen Namen für mich? Die Kirchensprache hat einen: ich bin - - - - - der Antichrist. Verlernen wir doch ja das Lachen nicht!”

¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche, letters to Cosima Wagner, Peter Gast, August Strindberg, and Otto von Bismarck, all sent from Turin in November/December 1888.

¹⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, 24[1], §6. My translation from the German: “Wenn ich dem Christenthum den Krieg mache, so steht mir dies einzig deshalb zu, weil ich nie von dieser Seite aus Trübes oder Trauriges erlebt habe,—umgekehrt die schätzenswerthesten Menschen, die ich kenne, sind Christen ohne Falsch gewesen, ich trage es den Einzelnen am letzten nach, was das Verhängniß von Jahrtausenden ist. Meine Vorfahren selbst waren protestantische Geistliche: hätte ich nicht einen hohen und reinlichen Sinn von ihnen her mitbekommen, so wüßte ich nicht, woher mein Recht zum Kriege mit dem Christenthum stammte. Meine Formel dafür: der Antichrist ist selbst die nothwendige Logik in der Entwicklung eines echten Christen, in mir überwindet sich das Christenthum selbst.”

This aphorism suggests that it was not Nietzsche's commitment to atheism, but precisely his commitment to being a 'true Christian' that demanded he become the *Antichrist*. In order to understand why Nietzsche emphasises his positive experience with Christians, it is important to look at the final and published version of the same aphorism in *Ecce Homo*, in which Nietzsche states that "all growth makes itself manifest by searching out a more powerful opponent," and that "if you despise, you *cannot* wage war; if you command, if you look *down* on something, you do not *need* to wage war."¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche clarifies that he attacks "only causes that are victorious," but also "only when all personal disagreement is ruled out, when there is no background of bad experiences."¹⁷¹ It now makes sense why Nietzsche stresses his personal respect for both Christianity as well as Christians he was acquainted with, for it is precisely from this position that he feels it is appropriate to attack. Nietzsche's identification with the *Antichrist* springs forth from *within* this context, not outside of it. It is, moreover, in this context that I believe the preface to *The Will to Power*, written in the same year, should be read:

Of what is great one must either be silent or speak with greatness (...) He that speaks here, conversely, has done nothing so far but reflect (...) as the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism (...) Why has the advent of nihilism become *necessary*? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these "values" really had.¹⁷²

Just like nihilism epitomises the logical development of Christian values, the *Antichrist* or "first perfect nihilist" represents the logical consequence of being a true Christian. Moreover, in both aphorisms Nietzsche speaks respectfully about Christianity, admitting the 'greatness' of what has hitherto dominated his culture, but which demands an opposing force that springs forth from itself and assesses "what value these 'values' really had."¹⁷³ This is furthermore consistent with Nietzsche's foreword to *Twilight of the Idols*, in which he announces "a *great declaration of war*, and as for sounding out idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but *eternal* idols that are touched here with the hammer as with a tuning fork."¹⁷⁴

Relating this to Nietzsche's identification with the *Antichrist*, the objective is not simply to use a hammer in order to *destroy* these 'eternal' idols, but rather to hear what continues to

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, I, §7.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, "Preface," §§1-4.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Foreword.

resonate, and what does not. Nietzsche, in his unpublished notes, further explicates the necessity for the perfect nihilist, asking “*primary issue*; to what extent is *perfect nihilism* the necessary consequence of previous ideals”?¹⁷⁵ In answering this, Nietzsche carefully dissociates between the *perfect nihilism* that he wishes to promote, and “*incomplete nihilism* [and] its forms: we live in the middle of it,” which must be overcome.¹⁷⁶ How? Nietzsche ends the note with the conclusion that “the attempt to escape nihilism without revaluing those values produces the opposite [of escaping nihilism], aggravates the problem.”¹⁷⁷ As such, *perfect nihilism* is the only way to revalue the ‘eternal’ idols where appropriate. When Nietzsche states that “the *Antichrist* itself is the necessary logic in the development of a true Christian,” and that consequently in him “Christianity overcomes itself,” it thus remains to be seen what must and must not be overcome.¹⁷⁸

4.7 Nietzsche’s changed attitude to Jesus

As I have stated earlier, Nietzsche’s attitude towards Jesus is ambiguous. In the *Antichrist* alone, Nietzsche refers to Jesus both as an “idiot,” as well as a “free spirit.”¹⁷⁹ As such, I agree with Kaufmann that “Nietzsche’s repudiation of Christ cannot be understood (...) unless one distinguishes between contemporary Christianity and the original gospel; and Nietzsche further differentiates between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of the creeds.”¹⁸⁰ Thus, in this section, I aim to initially focus on Nietzsche’s discussion of the Jesus that *preceded* Christianity. I will mostly be focusing on *The Antichrist*, and include one important passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as well as Nietzsche’s personal letters and unpublished fragments. I will, moreover, be focusing on Nietzsche’s use of the term “idiot,” and evaluate to what extent an influence can be traced to Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*.

It is mostly in Nietzsche’s final writings that he begins to fully engage with Jesus, such as is apparent in the *Antichrist*. Nietzsche sometimes refers to Christ in his earlier writings, but does so, as per usual, with some mockery, such as is the case in *Human, All Too Human*: “If Christ really intended to redeem the world, must he not be said to have failed?”¹⁸¹ Similarly, Nietzsche notes that “Christ (...) promoted the stupidifying of man, placed himself on the side of the poor

¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, 10[42]. My translation from the German: “*Hauptsatz*. In wiefern der *vollkommene Nihilismus* die nothwendige Folge der bisherigen Ideale ist.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. My translation from the German: “der *unvollständige Nihilismus*, seine Formen: wir leben mitten drin.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. My translation from the German: “die Versuche, dem N[ihilismus] zu entgehn, ohne jene Werthe umzuwerthen: bringen das Gegentheile hervor, verschärfen das Problem.”

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, 24[1], §6.

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §29, §32

¹⁸⁰ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 337.

¹⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, II, §98.

in spirit and retarded the production of the supreme intellect: and in this he was consistent.”¹⁸² It is only after *Human, All Too Human*, in 1880, that Nietzsche begins to write a great deal more about Christ, and less contemptuously, though it remains unclear what brings about this change of attitude. For instance, Nietzsche now emphasises that it was Paul, not Christ, that was responsible for the latter’s misunderstanding, writing “at first the death of Christ fought against Messiahship: but [Paul’s] miracle at Damascus proved it,” and thus “what deep hatred Paul carries with him here!”¹⁸³ Nietzsche here refers to the revelatory appearance of Jesus which Paul experienced on the road to Damascus, and which converted him to become an active apostle of Christ. It is clear that Nietzsche was dissatisfied with the conclusions that Paul attached to this event, and how it was precisely this event that turned Jesus into a messiah.

In the *Antichrist*, published eight years later, Nietzsche would again emphasise this event, which furthermore gives some context to the ‘hatred’ of Paul that Nietzsche perceives. Nietzsche states that “this was his vision on the road to Damascus: he grasped that he *needed* the belief in immortality to devalue ‘the world,’ that the concept of ‘hell’ would be master even of Rome—that with the ‘beyond’ one kills life.”¹⁸⁴ Paul immortalised Jesus, and in doing this turned him into a messiah, and this is precisely the reason why Paul’s Christ inspired belief in another world, as opposed to acting in this world. It is hence no wonder that Nietzsche elsewhere notes the following:

The *dependence* of the inferior natures on the inventive is *unspeakably* great—it must be shown how much everything is imitation and incorporation of *handed down valuations* which proceed from great individuals. E.g. Plato and Christianity. Paul hardly knew *how much* everything in him reeks of Plato.¹⁸⁵

Not only does Nietzsche once again closely associate Platonism and Christianity, he also makes it clear how Paul—Nietzsche does not even mention Jesus here—demonstrates a close causal influence on Christianity. Elsewhere, Nietzsche similarly states how Jesus’ fate is easily misinterpreted, even if it would reoccur in his time:

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, §235.

¹⁸³ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 9, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880–1882*, 4[164]. My translation from the German: “Zunächst stritt der Tod Christi gegen die Messianität: aber das Wunder bei Damascus bewies sie (...) Welchen tiefen Haß trägt hier Paulus ihm nach!”

¹⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §58.

¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 10, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884*, 26[53]. My translation from the German: “Die *Abhängigkeit* der niederen Naturen von den erfinderischen ist *unsäglich* groß—einmal darzustellen, wie sehr alles Nachahmung und Einspielen der *angegebenen Werthschätzungen* ist, die von großen Einzelnen ausgehen. Z.B. Plato und das Christenthum. Paulus wußte schwerlich, *wie sehr* alles in ihm nach Plato riecht.”

I do not see what the rebellion, whose author is Jesus, was directed against: if it was not the rebellion against the Jewish church,—church understood exactly as we understand the word... It was a rebellion against the ‘Good and Righteous,’ against the ‘saints of Israel,’ against the hierarchy of society—*not* against their corruption, but against the tyranny of caste, custom, formula, order, privilege, spiritual pride, puritanism in the spiritual realm,—It was the unbelief in the ‘higher people,’ the word spiritually understood, which led to indignation here, an assassination attempt on everything that is priest and theologian. (...) There is no reason to assert, following Paul, that Jesus died ‘for the sin of others’... he died for his own ‘sin.’ If placed under different conditions, for example in the middle of today’s Europe, the same kind of person would live, teach and speak as a nihilist: and in this case too one would hear from his party that their master died for justice and love between people—not because of his guilt, but for the sake of *our* guilt.¹⁸⁶

Nietzsche thus takes Christ’s stance to be a *political* one, aimed against the religious organisation of his time. Nietzsche’s states that in his time, modern interpreters would make the same mistake that Paul did in his time, mistaking Christ for a messiah who died for the sins of others, absolving *them* of responsibility. Nietzsche even goes as far as to say that a nineteenth-century Jesus would have been a nihilist, which is noteworthy for Nietzsche precisely thought of himself as a ‘perfect’ nihilist who rebelled against the ‘good and the righteous.’

4.8 *The Influence of Pascal and Dostoevsky in Nietzsche’s thinking about Christ*

Before turning to the problems that Nietzsche, besides his admirations, certainly also had regarding the historical Jesus, it is first imperative to understand why Nietzsche’s attitude towards Christ became far less contemptuous as he was nearing the end of his writing. It is possible that the *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal—whom Nietzsche referred to as “the only logical Christian”—gave Nietzsche another perspective on Christ, or perhaps reminded him of a positive conception of Jesus that he used to have: “Pascal’s conversation with Jesus is more beautiful than anything in the New Testament! It is the most melancholy bliss that has ever

¹⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, 11[280]. My translation from the German: “Ich sehe nicht ab, wogegen der Aufstand gerichtet war, dessen Urheber Jesus ist: wenn er nicht der Aufstand gegen die jüdische Kirche war,—Kirche genau in dem Sinne verstanden, wie wir das Wort verstehn... Es war ein Aufstand gegen die „Guten und Gerechten,“ gegen die „Heiligen Israels,“ gegen die Hierarchie der Gesellschaft—*nicht* gegen deren Verderbniß, sondern gegen die Tyrannei der Kaste, der Sitte, der Formel, der Ordnung, des Privilegiums, des geistlichen Stolzes, des Puritanismus auf geistlichem Gebiete,—es war der Unglaube an die „höheren Menschen,“ das Wort geistlich verstanden, der hier zur Empörung führte, ein Attentat auf Alles, was Priester und Theologe ist. (...) Es fehlt jeder Grund, mit Paulus zu behaupten, daß Jesus ‘für die Sünde Anderer’ gestorben sei... er starb für seine eigene ‘Sünde.’ Unter andere Verhältnisse gestellt, zum Beispiel mitten in das heutige Europa hinein, würde dieselbe Art Mensch als Nihilist leben, lehren und reden: und auch in diesem Falle würde man seitens seiner Partei zu hören bekommen, ihr Meister sei für die Gerechtigkeit und die Liebe zwischen Mensch und Mensch gestorben—nicht um seiner Schuld willen, sondern um *unsrer* Schuld willen”

been put into words. Since then, no more poetry has been written about this Jesus, which is why (...) Christianity is in decline everywhere.”¹⁸⁷ It is noteworthy how Nietzsche praises Pascal’s work in that it is at once melancholic as well as blissful, which is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s positive attitude towards Dionysian pessimism.

Similarly, Nietzsche took inspiration from Fyodor Dostoevsky and the latter’s portrayal of Christ. Nietzsche makes the similarity between Pascal and Dostoevsky in their importance for his life explicit in his letter to Georg Brandes:

Dostoevsky, I value him (...) as the most valuable psychological material I know—I am in a strange way grateful to him, however much he goes against my lowest instincts. Similarly, my relationship to Pascal, whom I almost love because he taught me endlessly: the only logical Christian...¹⁸⁸

Thus, Dostoevsky and Pascal are two Christian thinkers who taught Nietzsche something that strongly went against his presuppositions. I have already suggested that Pascal might have influenced or reminded Nietzsche with regard to the latter’s opinion of Jesus, and it seems that Dostoevsky served a similar function in his thinking. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche certainly says as much, though he does not specify whether it was specifically Dostoevsky’s account of Jesus that Nietzsche found intriguing: “Dostoevsky, the only psychologist, by the way, from whom I had something to learn: he is one of the finest strokes of luck in my life, even more than my discovery of Stendhal.”¹⁸⁹ Besides the label ‘psychologist,’ Nietzsche elsewhere speaks of his “greatest respect for the *artist* Dostoevsky.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, Dostoevsky both deeply understood individuals, but also knew how to consequently incorporate this ability within great works of art, and hence similarly approximates Dionysian pessimism.

I believe the latter claim is further substantiated if we look at *Will to Power* §821 on “*Pessimism in art*,” in which Nietzsche briefly mentions Dostoevsky, and thus more explicitly connects him to Dionysian pessimism.¹⁹¹ He explains that “the effect of works of art is to excite

¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 9, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880–1882*, 7[29]. My translation from the German: “Pascal’s Gespräch mit Jesus ist schöner als irgend etwas im neuen Testament! Es ist die schwermüthigste Holdseligkeit, die je zu Worte gekommen ist. An diesem Jesus ist seitdem nicht mehr fortgedichtet worden, deshalb ist (...) das Christenthum überall im Verfall.”

¹⁸⁸ Nietzsche, letter to Georg Brandes, Turin, 20 November 1888. My translation from the German: “Dostoiowsky (...); ich schätze ihn (...) als das werthvollste psychologische Material, das ich kenne,—ich bin ihm auf eine merkwürdige Weise, dankbar, wie sehr er auch immer meinen untersten Instinkten zuwidergeht. Ungefähr mein Verhältniß zu Pascal, den ich beinahe liebe, weil er mich unendlich belehrt hat: der einzige logische Christ...”

¹⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §45.

¹⁹⁰ Nietzsche, letter to Heinrich Köselitz, Nice, 7 March 1887. My translation from the German: “dem größten Respekt vor dem *Künstler* Dostoiowsky.”

¹⁹¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §821.

the state that creates art—intoxication,” as well as that “art is essentially *affirmation, blessing, deification of existence*.”¹⁹² Deified affirmation and intoxication remind strongly of Nietzsche’s discussion of the frenzied god of wine. Nietzsche even connects this to tragedy, for he argues that “tragedy does not teach ‘resignation’—to represent terrible and questionable things is in itself an instinct for power and magnificence in an artist: he does not fear them (...)—How liberating is Dostoevsky!”¹⁹³ Apparently, Dostoevsky’s use of pessimism in art is in fact life-affirming, and it should thus come to no surprise that the Russian author was able to remind Nietzsche of the figure of Christ which he *did* find admirable.

I believe that this provides the necessary context for reading one of Nietzsche’s unpublished fragments about Dostoevsky and Jesus:

Jesus: Dostoevsky

I only know one psychologist who has lived in the world where Christianity is possible, where a Christ can arise at any moment... That is Dostoevsky. He has *guessed* Christ:—and instinctively he has been guarded above all from imagining this type with Renan’s vulgarity (...) can there be any worse error than making a genius out of Christ, who was an idiot? What if one lies a hero out of Christ, who represents the opposite of a heroic feeling?¹⁹⁴

Nietzsche contrasts Dostoevsky’s portrayal of Christ with Ernest Renan’s, who published *Life of Jesus* in 1863, an interpretation of Jesus that Nietzsche clearly did not appreciate. As he also states in the *Antichrist*, “Renan, that buffoon *in psychologics*, has introduced the two most *improper* concepts possible into his explanation of the Jesus type: the concept of the *genius* and the concept of the *hero*,” whereas Nietzsche believes that “an entirely different word would rather be in place here: the word idiot.”¹⁹⁵ The choice for the word “idiot” in both text-selections is telling for it strongly brings to mind Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*, in which the admirable main character, Prince Myshkin, clearly represents an imitation of Christ. Despite this, most characters continue to think of him as an idiot. I am aware that there is some scholarly debate about whether or not Nietzsche had actually read Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*, but I do not find this criticism substantial enough to alter my interpretation. First, Nietzsche employs the term ‘idiot’ approximately forty times

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, 15[9]. My translation from the German: “Jesus: Dostoiiewsky—Ich kenne nur Einen Psychologen, der in der Welt gelebt hat, wo das Christenthum möglich ist, wo ein Christus jeden Augenblick entstehen kann... Das ist Dostoiiewsky. Er hat Christus *errathen*:—und instinktiv ist er vor allem behütet geblieben diesen Typus sich mit der Vulgarität Renans vorzustellen (...) kann man ärger fehlgreifen, als wenn man aus Christus, der ein Idiot war, ein Genie macht? Wenn man aus Christus, der den Gegensatz eines heroischen Gefühls darstellt, einen Helden herauslügt?”

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §29.

throughout his writing, of which only four cases occur *before* 1886, the year he discovered Dostoevsky. All other uses of the word ‘idiot’ occur *after* this discovery, and are thus used in the span of three years, up to and including 1888, before Nietzsche went mad. Second, the unpublished fragment that I have cited above demonstrates that Nietzsche was at least aware of its existence and general message, given that Dostoevsky has correctly estimated Christ as an ‘idiot.’ In sum, Dostoevsky was likely highly influential on Nietzsche’s understanding of Jesus, or—as was the case with Pascal—reminded Nietzsche of the Jesus he knew himself.

4.9 *Jesus, the free spirit and pure Christian ideal*

Bearing this connection in mind, I now wish to look at other passages from the *Antichrist* that demonstrate the manners in which Nietzsche believes the Christian tradition to have distorted Jesus, for it helps to further comprehend Nietzsche’s understanding of Jesus in isolation from his conception of Christianity:

The type of the redeemer is preserved for us only in a strongly distorted form (...) The milieu in which this strange figure moved must have left its mark upon him (...) That strange and sick world to which the Gospels introduce us—a world like that of a Russian novel in which the dregs of society, nervous disorder, and “childlike” idiocy seem to be making a rendezvous—, must, in any event, have *coarsened* the type: the first disciples, in particular, had to translate a being completely immersed in symbols and incomprehensibilities into their own crudity in order to get anything out of it at all,—only after shaping it into more recognisable forms was the type *existent* for them... The prophet, the Messiah, the future judge, the moral teacher, the miracle man, John the Baptist—just so many opportunities for misjudging the type (...) One has to regret that no Dostoyevsky lived in the neighborhood of this most interesting *décadent*, I mean someone who had just the right feel for the touching appeal of such a mixture of the sublime, the sick, and the child-like.¹⁹⁶

At this point careful interpretation is important, for initially it can seem that the fragment is somewhat paradoxical in nature. Nietzsche *both* condemns the milieu that is described in the Gospels, likening it to similar settings Russian novels, but *also* wishes that a Dostoevsky would have written the Gospels. It is thus unclear how Dostoevsky’s version of the Gospels would have resulted in a different version of the Gospels, given that both render their settings similarly. While it seems possible that Nietzsche was referring to other Russian novels, he states in the epilogue to *The Case of Wagner* that, regarding adherents of Christian morality, “the gospels

¹⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §31.

present us with the same physiological types, as do the novels of Dostoevsky.”¹⁹⁷ Therefore, it is clear that it is *not* the difference in settings that distinguishes Dostoevsky’s writing from the Gospels. *Rather*, it is Dostoevsky’s ability to acknowledge the sick and strange world while—in spite of this settings—nevertheless portraying a plausible version of Jesus that stands apart from this setting. Whereas the disciples could not translate Jesus’ immense symbolism and incomprehensibility, Nietzsche believes that Dostoevsky might have been up to the task. I should note that it does remain somewhat paradoxical that Nietzsche admits to being able to interpret from Scripture who Jesus really was, while simultaneously claiming that everything that is written about Christ in the Gospels very much distorts his personality, but this might be a case of Nietzsche’s ability to read between the lines.

Nietzsche thus criticises the tradition that has overemphasised the sublime, in that it has pointed to heroic or genius qualities in Christ. It was, according to Nietzsche, precisely Christ’s sickness and child-like qualities that made the sublime stand out, and Dostoevsky has a keen eye for portraying this unique combination. While Nietzsche sounds contemptuous in his use of ‘the sick’ and ‘décadent’ to refer to Christ, these matters just as much applied to himself. The two elements are closely intertwined, as Nietzsche states the following in *Ecce Homo*: “Apart from the fact that I am a *décadent*, I am also the opposite of it. My proof of this, among other things, that I have always chosen the *right* means against bad conditions.”¹⁹⁸ He follows this up by arguing that “for a typically healthy person being sick can even be an energetic *stimulus* to life, to more life.”¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Nietzsche elsewhere states that “the phenomenon of decadence is as necessary as any increase and advance of life: one is in no position to abolish it,” but that “reason demands, on the contrary, that we do justice to it.”²⁰⁰ Therefore, it is not the sickness nor the decadence—i.e. the process of culture decay through the advent of nihilism—that is deserving of contempt, it is rather the *response* to both of these that shows one’s strength of character. While some might be inclined to interpret Nietzsche’s use of ‘childlike’ as contemptuous as well—especially when its presented in the context of “childlike idiocy”—I believe they would do well to consider it in the context of Dostoevsky’s use of the term ‘idiot,’ as well as in the context of Nietzsche’s use of ‘innocence.’ Not only does Nietzsche equate innocence with idiocy in *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche also praises childlike qualities over the warrior-type qualities in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* [1888], in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Lévy, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924): “Epilogue.”

¹⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am So Wise,” §2.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §40.

Three metamorphoses of the spirit I name for you: how the spirit becomes a camel, and the camel a lion, and finally the lion a child (...) To create new values—not even the lion is capable of that (...) of what is the child capable that even the lion is not? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying.²⁰¹

According to Nietzsche, the truly innocent and childlike qualities are precisely necessary to become healthy in an era of cultural decay, but Dostoevsky proved to him that cultivating such qualities is still possible today, and Nietzsche acknowledges as much in *Antichrist* §36:

In reality there has only been one Christian, and he died on the cross (...) only Christian practice, a life such as he who died on the cross *lived*, is Christian... *Such* a life is possible still today, for *certain* men even necessary: the true, the original Christianity will be possible at all times... *Not* a believing but a doing, a *not-doing-much* above all, another kind of *being* (...) To reduce being a Christian, Christianness, to a holding-something-for-true, to a mere phenomenalism of consciousness, means to negate Christianness.²⁰²

Living a life such as Christ *lived* is therefore possible and admirable, and per definition *life-affirming*, but merely *believing* negates precisely this life. Earlier in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche emphasises precisely this, and it again demonstrates how Jesus responded to the cultural conditions of sickness and *décadence* in his time:

He knows how it is only with the *practice* of life that one feels “divine,” “blessed,” “evangelical,” at all times a “child of God.” *Not* “repentance,” not “prayer for the sake of forgiveness”—they are not ways to God; the *evangelical practice alone* leads to God, it precisely is “God”! (...) The profound instinct for how one would have to live in order to feel “in heaven,” in order to feel “eternal,” while in every other situation one feels oneself absolutely *not* “in heaven”: this alone is the psychological reality of “redemption.”—A new way of living, *not* a new faith...²⁰³

Nietzsche points out that Jesus greatly emphasised practice and life-affirming instinct over life-denying rationality and faith, which Nietzsche would have undoubtedly found an admirable quality, reminiscent of *Beyond Good and Evil* §191, in which Nietzsche discusses the ancient problem of “instinct and reason,” where Socrates overemphasised the latter.²⁰⁴ Christ’s instinct,

²⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* [1883], edited by Adrian del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, translated by Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): I, “On the Three Metamorphoses.”

²⁰² Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §39.

²⁰³ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §33.

²⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §191.

on the other hand, is life-affirming because its object is a ‘divine’ yet earthly practice. It is hence that Nietzsche is able to refer to Christ as a “free spirit,” for he represents “a spirit that has become free, that has once again taken possession of itself,” and because “Jesus (...) cares nothing for all things fixed.”²⁰⁵ Christ evidently embodies a spirit of Becoming far closer than that of static Being, and he was free in this regard.

4.10 *The difference between Christ’s practice and Christian practice*

How is Christ’s practice then fundamentally different from a doctrinal Christian practice? Nietzsche best explains his issues with a doctrinal Christian practice in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, where he contrasts master-morality with slave-morality, the latter of which he believes Christianity is symptomatic.²⁰⁶ Nietzsche explains that partly because master-morality precedes slave-morality, the latter is reactionary, secondary, and *ressentiment*-driven. Unlike nobles, adherents of slave-morality cannot consider themselves ‘good’ without first projecting a powerful and ‘evil’ opposition. Christian morality appropriates this morality and further denies life through a focus on an *afterlife* instead, and this is precisely what Nietzsche does not detect in Christ, for “this great symbolist (...) took only *inner* realities as realities, as ‘truths,’” and that hence “the ‘kingdom of heaven’ is a condition of the heart—not something that comes ‘over the earth’ or ‘after death.’”²⁰⁷ Accordingly, Christ’s motivations were pure and primary, for he looked *within*, rather than *outside* of him for imperatives to act; not driven by *ressentiment*, but by a love of life. Consequently, he “died as he had lived, as he had *taught*—not to ‘save mankind,’ but to show how one ought to live (...) it is the *practice* which he bequeathed to mankind.”²⁰⁸ In an important sense, Nietzsche very much mourned the fact that people have not understood this, as he writes in his unpublished notebooks: “‘Christianity’ has become something fundamentally different from what its founder did and wanted (...) it is the rise of pessimism, whereas Jesus wanted to bring peace and the happiness of lambs.”²⁰⁹ We can now better understand Jesus’ fundamentally different attitude to life in contrast to a Christian one, and accordingly why Nietzsche admired the project of the Nazarene. While Nietzsche never called Jesus an *Übermensch*, it is nevertheless clear that he thought that Jesus lived ‘*übermenschlich*,’ precisely because “Jesus had certainly abolished the very concept of “guilt”—he had denied any

²⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Human, All-Too-Human,” §1; Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §32.

²⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I, §10.

²⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §34.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, §35.

²⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 13, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889*, 11[294]. My translation from the German: “Das „Christenthum“ ist etwas Grundverschiedenes von dem geworden, was sein Stifter that und wollte (...) es ist die Heraufkunft des Pessimismus, während Jesus den Frieden und das Glück der Lämmer bringen wollte.”

gap between God and man, he had lived this unity of God and man.”²¹⁰ In sum, Nietzsche praises Christ’s life for teaching a divine life *on* earth, as opposed to the divine *at the expense of* life on earth.

4.11 *The ambiguous meaning of the Crucified*

While Nietzsche’s understanding of Jesus has now become clearer, it remains to be seen how this relates to his understanding of the Crucified at the end of *Ecce Homo*. It is clear that Nietzsche is substantially critical of how the crucifixion has been interpreted, as he argues that “the history of Christianity—and that beginning in fact with the death on the cross—is the history of the step by step, ever cruder misunderstanding of an *original* symbolism.”²¹¹ Nietzsche elaborates on this idea in *The Will to Power*, stating that “Christianity has from the outset transformed the symbolic into crudities,” and that consequently “‘Christ on the cross’ had to be interpreted anew (...) *not to defend oneself*—That had been the lesson.”²¹² Thus, Nietzsche favoured the original symbolism, but despised the reinterpretation of it. This also comes to the forefront in Zarathustra’s prologue: “Is pity not the cross on which he is nailed who loves humans?”²¹³ Christ represents *love* for man, the cross represents *pity* for man. At the same time, Nietzsche finds it difficult to dispense with it altogether, stating that “‘Christ on the cross’ is the most sublime symbol— even today.”²¹⁴ Nietzsche explains the meaning of this symbol in the *Antichrist*:

God on the cross—does anyone still not understand the frightful hidden-thinking behind this symbol?—All that suffers, all that hangs on the cross, is *divine*... We all hang on the cross, therefore *we* are divine... We alone are divine.²¹⁵

Nietzsche has a profound problem with the notion that suffering in and of itself has become divine, especially the notion that *exclusively* those who suffer are divine, and *not*, for instance, those who inflict suffering upon others. Simultaneously, Nietzsche cannot stop from identifying himself with the fate of Jesus to a certain extent, stating in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to “beware of the good and the just” for “they like to crucify those who invent their own virtue.”²¹⁶ The idea

²¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §41.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, §37.

²¹² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §170.

²¹³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §3.

²¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §219.

²¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §51.

²¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On the Way of the Creator.”

of inventing one's own virtue, after all, applies to both Christ and Nietzsche. Later in the book, Nietzsche repeats this with great emphasis:

The good *must* crucify the one who invents his own virtue! This *is* the truth! (...) They crucify the one who writes new values on new tablets, they sacrifice the future to *themselves*—they crucify all future humanity!²¹⁷

Nietzsche held this specific passage in high esteem, for he would quote it again in *Ecce Homo*, in the section “Why I Am A Destiny,” before ending the same section with the final question of his entire bibliography: “Have I made myself understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified*...”²¹⁸ Already in his published works, there are thus good reasons to conclude that Nietzsche was identifying with *both* Dionysus and the Crucified. Not only did Nietzsche greatly admire Jesus, he also felt that a similar fate had been bestowed unto him, as in both cases a creator of new values has been nailed to the cross—or at least, profoundly misunderstood—by the people around him.²¹⁹

4.12 *Dionysus versus the Crucified: Dionysus victorious?*

I believe we have the necessary context to now look at Nietzsche's most extensive discussion of the Dionysus-Crucified opposition, at the very end of *The Will to Power*. I consider this aphorism to be a possible objection against the reading of Nietzsche's Dionysus-Crucified reading I have thus far presented, i.e. that Nietzsche does not clearly value the Dionysian *at the expense of* Jesus. It is left fairly unambiguous in this passage that Nietzsche favours the Dionysian religious affirmation of life over the Christian denial of life. Nonetheless, I believe that the specific similarities and differences that Nietzsche draws between the death of Christ and that of Dionysus are particularly informative, which is why I will discuss these before considering whether it indeed implies that Nietzsche has lost all appreciation for the Christian ideal:

The two types: Dionysus and the Crucified.—To determine: whether the typical religious man [is] a form of decadence (the great innovators are one and all morbid and epileptic); but are we not here omitting one type of religious man, the *pagan*? Is the pagan cult not a form of thanksgiving and affirmation of life? Must its highest representative not be an apology for and deification of life? The type of a well-constituted and ecstatically overflowing spirit! The type of a spirit that takes into itself and *redeems* the contradictions and questionable aspects of existence! It is here I

²¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On Old and New Tablets,” §26.

²¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am A Destiny,” §4, §9.

²¹⁹ See, for instance, Nietzsche's letters at the end of this chapter.

set the *Dionysus* of the Greeks: the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied or in part; (typical—that the sexual act arouses profundity, mystery, reverence). Dionysus versus the “Crucified”: there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom—it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering—the “Crucified as the innocent one”—counts as an objection to this life, as a formula for its condemnation.—One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so. The Christian denies even the happiest lot on earth: he is sufficiently weak, poor, disinherited to suffer from life in whatever form he meets it. The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction.²²⁰

The aphorism describes several important issues that I have touched upon earlier. First, it briefly restates Nietzsche’s positive understanding of religion, in which religion allows for a “deification of life,” and is hence life-affirming as opposed to life-denying.²²¹ Second, it brings the deaths of Dionysus and Christ in contrast, and thus also underlines Nietzsche’s negative attitude towards religion. After all, Nietzsche emphasises that he takes issue with the *interpretation* of the death of Christ, i.e. the Crucified, not with Christ’s own life, or even with his death stripped from its popular interpretation. Chronologically, it is important to keep in mind that the aphorism was written at the start of 1888, whereas the final aphorism of *Ecce Homo* was written at the end of the same year. Thus, both coincided with Nietzsche’s loss of mental sanity, and since these themes recur in his *Wahnbriefe*, it is important to pay close attention to his conscious argumentation behind his presentation of them. I will argue that Nietzsche cannot be seen as separate from his identification with either Dionysus or with the Crucified in the final analysis. I want to go over all of these points, but primarily focus on the nature of the opposition.

First, Nietzsche clarifies that even though the typical religious individual represents a degree of cultural decline, he does not mean to imply that this applies to *all* types of religious individuals, such as the pagan or Dionysian. Second, while Nietzsche began his philosophical project with a dichotomous division of the Apollonian and Dionysian types, he now suggests a binary opposition of Dionysus and the Crucified instead. Third, he directly connects this opposition to the religious influence both deaths exert over their respective adherents. Nietzsche

²²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1052.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

perceives both Christ and Dionysus to be martyrs, but holds that the meaning ascribed to their martyrdom is what most profoundly distinguishes them. After all, Christ is known to be innocent, whereas this is, clearly, not unambiguously the case with Dionysus. The former consequently fits a Christian narrative, leading to the conclusion that life is unfair for he who is *innocent* is being sacrificed. Life, accordingly, is rejected, and redemption must be sought *from* it. In contrast, Dionysus' death fits a tragic narrative, and affirms that this suffering is inherent to the life that he lived.

It seems that this analysis fits perfectly with the understanding of Nietzsche that is most common, namely, that Nietzsche relates the importance of the eternal return, Attic tragedy, and Dionysus *at the expense of* all that is Christian. In the following, however, I aim to connect this contrast with Nietzsche's repetition of the opposition in his final words in *Ecce Homo*, as well as Nietzsche's personal letters. I will argue that it seems that Nietzsche, in overemphasising Dionysus at the expense of the Crucified, lost sight of his original objective, specifically to present an equally powerful "counter-ideal," not a monolithic alternative *at the expense of* Christianity.²²² I will present what I believe to be the dominant motive behind Nietzsche's renewed obsession with Dionysus *besides*—not *at the expense of*—the Crucified. First, however, I wish to present Nietzsche's *Wahnbriefe* of 1889 that in fact demonstrate this balance, as well as what becomes apparent in his friends' remarks about him at this time.

4.13 Nietzsche struggle and identification with the Crucified: *The Wahnbriefe*

It is precisely Nietzsche's identification with the Crucified that makes his correspondence with Georg Brandes quite difficult to decipher, and yet an insightful case study for the purposes of this project. Brandes was a Danish atheist historian and cultural critic who had become enthusiastic about Nietzsche's ideas to the extent of lecturing about them himself at the University of Copenhagen, labelling Nietzsche "the most interesting writer in German literature at the present time."²²³ It is in reply to Brandes, who called Dostoevsky an "abominable creature, quite Christian in his emotions and at the same time quite *sadique*," and even added that "his whole morality is what you have baptised slave-morality," that Nietzsche *defended* Dostoevsky.²²⁴ In that same letter that he sent in response to Brandes' criticism, Nietzsche also announces the intent of his *Ecce Homo*:

²²² "Gegen-Ideal," as Nietzsche uses it in *Ecce Homo*, "Genealogy of Morals."

²²³ R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, 195; Georg Brandes, "An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism," in his *Friedrich Nietzsche*, translated by A. G. Chater (London: William Heinemann, 1914): 5.

²²⁴ Georg Brandes, letter to Nietzsche, Copenhagen, 16 November, 1888, in *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 93.

Curious things are now happening in my life, things that are without precedent. First the day before yesterday; now again (...) With a cynicism that will become famous in the world's history, I have now related myself. The book is called *Ecce Homo*, and is an *attack on the Crucified* without the slightest reservation; it ends in thunders and lightnings against everything that is Christian or *infected* with Christianity, till one is blinded and deafened. I am in fact the first psychologist of Christianity and, as an old artilleryman, can bring heavy guns into action, the existence of which no opponent of Christianity has even suspected.—The whole is the prelude to the *Transvaluation of all Values*, the work that lies ready before me: I swear to you that in two years we shall have the whole world in convulsions. I am a fate. (...)

Your Nietzsche, now a monster.²²⁵

The letter was written one and a half months before his mental breakdown in Turin, and the first signs of mental unrest or even megalomania seem to already be present, seeing that Nietzsche refers to himself as “a fate,” as well as “a monster.”²²⁶ Nietzsche emphasises the greatness of his writing, holding that both *Ecce Homo* as well as the *Transvaluation of all Values* have a world-historical importance. He even specifies the former as an *attack on the Crucified*. I take this to signify a range of possible meanings. In the smallest sense, Nietzsche attacks only Jesus, given that the latter has famously been crucified. In a larger sense, Nietzsche does indeed attack “everything that is Christian or *infected* with Christianity,” which could signify the institutionalised form of Christianity.²²⁷ In the greatest scope, Nietzsche also attacks himself with this statement, which would be consistent with my interpretation of Nietzsche as someone who deeply *identified with* the Crucified, in the *fatalistic* sense present in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and repeated in *Ecce Homo*—predicting he will be crucified for creating new values—but also in the *cultural* sense in that Nietzsche admits to both being a *décadent* as well as its opposite. I find it improbable that Nietzsche is referring to the historical Jesus, not only because of his laudatory account of the latter in the *Antichrist*, but also because Jesus is not actually discussed in *Ecce Homo*. The larger sense, in which the Crucified merely represents institutionalised Christianity, *prima facie* seems plausible, given that Nietzsche is critical of Christianity throughout the book. On the other hand, this conclusion overlooks the fact that at least two of the three times that Nietzsche uses the term ‘crucified’ in *Ecce Homo*, he is most certainly referring to himself, and that only in the last use—i.e. “*Dionysus versus the Crucified*”—the same conclusion is less certain.²²⁸

If one continues reading the Nietzsche-Brandes correspondence, it is noteworthy that Brandes continues attacking Dostoevsky, for “his heroes are not only poor and pitiable

²²⁵ Nietzsche, letter to Georg Brandes, Turin, 20 November, 1888, in *ibid.*, 93-94.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am A Destiny,” §4, §9.

creatures, but simple-minded sensitive ones, noble strumpets, often victims of hallucination, gifted epileptics, enthusiastic candidates for martyrdom—just those types which we should suspect in the apostles and disciples of the early days of Christianity.”²²⁹ Not only do some of the latter characteristics apply to Nietzsche himself, it is in Nietzsche’s response—after the latter’s mental collapse—that he writes:

To the friend Georg

When once you had discovered me, it was easy enough to find me: the difficulty now is to get rid of me...

The Crucified.²³⁰

While it becomes difficult to decipher this message for obvious reasons, it is clear that by signing his letter with the Crucified, he now identifies with the latter, which is odd when brought into contrast with his proclamation of an *attack on the Crucified* in an earlier letter. Granted, Nietzsche was clearly far more lucid at the time of writing the earlier letter, but it also becomes apparent that this letter already demonstrated significant signs of mental instability. Moreover, the letter to Brandes was but one of the several letters that Nietzsche signed with the Crucified, and he signed an equal number of letters with Dionysus, both following his mental collapse in January. Some of these references were more explicit, specifically “I am the Christ, Christ himself, Christ crucified,” in a letter to Jean Bourdeau.²³¹ When Nietzsche thus writes in his other letters that “I too have hanged on the cross,” or that he signs his letters with the Crucified, I can now more confidently suggest that this expresses a close identification with Christ.²³² It is furthermore worthy of note that Nietzsche also began to identify with God in these same letters, ranging from “it is a prejudice that I am human,” or “I actually created the world,” to “the world is transfigured because God is on earth (...) all the heavens rejoice (...) I have just taken possession of my kingdom.”²³³ His most extensive letter in the *Wahnbriefe* collection, to historian Jacob Burckhardt, expresses these sentiments perhaps most completely:

²²⁹ Brandes, letter to Nietzsche, Copenhagen, 23 November, 1888, in *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 97.

²³⁰ Nietzsche, letter to Brandes, Turin, 4 January, 1889, in *ibid.*

²³¹ Nietzsche, letter to Jean Bourdeau, Turin, January 1889. I have translated from what Henri Lichtenberger writes in his letter to Elisabeth Förster Nietzsche, Nancy, 31 December 1899: “Le seconde [lettre] était en italien et ne contenait que qq. mots: ‘Je suis le Christ, le Christ lui-même, le Christ crucifié.’” See also Sandro Barbera, “Un Biglietto Smarrito di Friedrich Nietzsche: A Jean Bourdeau, Gennaio 1889,” in *Belfagor*, 54(1) (1999): 74-78. Barbera rightfully points out that it is the *only* document of this period which explicitly confirms Christ’s identity with the Crucified.

²³² Nietzsche, letter to Cosima Wagner, Turin, 3 January 1889. My translation from the German: “Ich habe auch am Kreuze gehangen...”

²³³ *Ibid.* My translation from the German: “Es ist ein Vorurtheil, daß ich ein Mensch bin.”; Nietzsche, letter to Paul Deussen, Turin, 4 January 1889. My translation from the German: “...ich eigentlich die Welt geschaffen habe...”; Nietzsche, letter to Meta von Salis, Turin, 3 January 1889. My translation from the German: “Die

I would much rather be a Basel professor than God; but I did not dare to push my selfishness so far as to refrain from creating the world (...) What is unpleasant and upset my modesty is that I am basically every name in history; also with the children whom I have brought into the world, it is the case that I consider with some distrust whether not all who come into the “kingdom of God” also come *from* God (...) I am God, I have created this caricature.²³⁴

Nietzsche, following his mental breakdown in Turin, is thus struggling between attachments to a few different identities, namely Dionysus, Christ, Nietzsche, and the (Judeo-Christian) God. Nietzsche’s identification with the latter even goes as far as stating that he, Nietzsche, is but a caricature. This final connection to specifically the biblical God is less explicit, but given the references to ‘kingdom,’ ‘heavens,’ and ‘creation,’ I find it difficult to imagine a different deity. Perhaps most interesting is to consider Nietzsche’s unfortunately incomplete letter to Carl Spitteler, commenting on something which “belongs to my divinity: I will have the honour of taking *revenge* on myself for it.”²³⁵ In isolation, this statement could be, for instance, Dionysus avenging the Crucified, or vice versa. However, my aim thus far has been to as well as I can make sense of Nietzsche’s *Wahnbriefe* through relating them to what Nietzsche wrote *before* his mental breakdown, for I believe these remarks border on meaninglessness if they cannot be related to the meaningful ideas of his consciously produced writing. Therefore, it is in this case firstly noteworthy that Nietzsche, *only before* his mental breakdown, still signed his letters with Antichrist, and *only after* has begun signing them with the Crucified (Christ). This potentially suggests that it is the Crucified that avenges the Antichrist. Second, Nietzsche refrains from criticizing Christianity in these letters altogether. In my view, Nietzsche’s overemphasis on the Dionysian at the end of his life *at the expense* of the Crucified greatly complicated Nietzsche’s mental sanity, which is why we see his identification with the Crucified reappear *after* his mental breakdown. A similar conclusion is reached in a letter from Peter Gast to Carl Fuchs, both Nietzsche’s long-time friends, right after Nietzsche’s mental breakdown. While these were, obviously, not Nietzsche’s own words, these were the opinions of someone who intimately knew him and his project, and thus remain worthwhile to consider:

Welt ist verklärt, denn Gott ist auf der Erde. Sehen Sie nicht, wie alle Himmel sich freuen? Ich habe eben Besitz ergriffen von meinem Reich...”

²³⁴ Nietzsche, letter to Jacob Burckhardt, Turin, 6 January 1889. My translation from the German: and Italian: “zuletzt wäre ich sehr viel lieber Basler Professor als Gott; aber ich habe es nicht gewagt, meinen Privat-Egoismus so weit zu treiben, um seinetwegen die Schaffung der Welt zu unterlassen (...) Was unangenehm ist und meiner Bescheidenheit zusetzt, ist, daß im Grunde jeder Name in der Geschichte ich bin; auch mit den Kindern, die ich in die Welt gesetzt habe, steht es so, daß ich mit einigem Mißtrauen erwäge, ob nicht Alle, die in das „Reich Gottes” kommen, auch *aus* Gott kommen (...) son dio, ho fatto questa caricatura.”

²³⁵ Nietzsche, letter to Carl Spitteler, Turin, 4 January 1889. My translation from the German: “...meiner Göttlichkeit gehört: ich werde die Ehre haben, dafür an mir *Rache* zu nehmen...”

In Nietzsche the two types Christ and Dionysus came together in *one* incarnation. A psychology of the Christian, of the Christian priest, as given in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, could only be written by Nietzsche. In the end, of course, the two types clashed. Dionysus is the god of becoming; through Zarathustra and the whole of Nietzsche there is a constant fighting spirit against everything that is called being, substance, matter and so on—against everything that wants to have duration, timelessness, indestructibility and so on. Nietzsche finds the dear God again in all this unchangeability. The same need that created God also created what is permanent in the physical. Do you hear how Nietzsche takes Heraclitus upon himself?—But such a man finally found himself in a world in which everything fluctuates, except himself! In the meantime, humanity does not seem to be ripe for a cognition which only knows forces (our senses can only be affected by forces) and which refrains from setting substrates. Nietzsche, this incredibly powerful spirit ultimately perished even from this kind of knowledge. If carried out consistently, the Dionysian man will probably end up with madness.²³⁶

Peter Gast's interpretation of the event is, in principle, consistent with my assessment. It incorporates a number of important elements that I have argued for in this chapter. First, Nietzsche's opposition of Dionysus and the Crucified must be interpreted with a focus on the opposition, not on just Dionysus, or just the Crucified. As Gast states, both were balanced in Nietzsche. Moreover, it was only when Nietzsche began to emphasise Dionysus *at the expense of* the Crucified through the Antichrist that Nietzsche became increasingly mentally unstable. Nietzsche had recognised the need to oppose the Dionysian with the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but his entire philosophical project since then has been to instead emphasise the Dionysian as an antidote against the Socratic. After all, the Socratic represented an excess of the Apollonian and an antidote to the Dionysian. I have furthermore demonstrated that Nietzsche held that the Socratic has been taken up by the Platonic, and the Platonic by the Christian. *Dionysus versus the Crucified* must thus be understood as the new balance that Nietzsche

²³⁶ Peter Gast, letter to Carl Fuchs, Berlin, 14 February, 1889, in "Friedrich Nietzsches Jünger der letzten Stunde Briefe Peter Gasts an Carl Fuchs," in *Ostdeutsche Monatshefte. Kulturzeitschrift für den Osten*, nr. 6 (Berlin, 1924): 480-494. My translation from the German: "In Nietzsche kamen die zwei Typen Christus und Dionysus in *einer* Incarnation zusammen. Eine Psychologie des Christen, des christlichen Priesters, wie sie die "Genealogie der Moral" giebt, konnte nur Nietzsche schreiben. Zuletzt freilich prallten die zwei Typen aufeinander. Dionysus ist der Gott des Werdens: durch den Zarathustra und den ganzen Nietzsche geht eine fortwährende Kampflust gegen Alles, was Sein, Substanz, Materie und so fort heißt,—gegen Alles, was Dauer, Zeitlosigkeit, Unzerstörbarkeit u. s. w. haben will. Nietzsche findet in all diesen Unveränderlichkeiten den lieben Gott wieder. Dasselbe Bedürfnis, das den Gott schuf, schuf auch im Physischen das Bleibende. Hören Sie, wie Nietzsche sich Heraklits annimmt?—Ein solcher Mann fand sich aber zuletzt in einer Welt, in der Alles schwankt, außer er selber! Einstweilen scheint die Menschheit noch nicht reif zu sein für ein Erkennen, welches nur Kräfte kennt (unsere Sinne können nur durch Kräfte affiziert werden) und welches sich des Setzens von Substraten enthält. Nietzsche, dieser unglaublich machtvolle Geist ging schließlich selbst an dieser Art Erkenntnis zu Grunde. Consequent durchgeführt langt der dionysische Mensch wahrscheinlich schließlich beim Wahnsinn an."

conceptualises at the end of his life, and is consistent with his remark about Christianity in *The Will to Power*:

I have declared war on the anaemic Christian ideal (together with what is closely related to it), not with the aim of destroying it but only of putting an end to its tyranny and clearing the way for new ideals, for *more robust* ideals—The continuance of the Christian ideal is one of the most desirable things there are—even for the sake of the ideals that want to stand beside it and perhaps above it—they must have opponents, strong opponents, if they are to become *strong*.²³⁷

This was consistent with other notes Nietzsche made that ended up in *The Will to Power*, such as proclaiming that “Christianity (...) has only now attained to approximately the state of culture in which it can fulfil its original vocation— a level to which it belongs—in which it can show itself *pure*,” or that “we have recovered the Christian ideal: it remains to determine its value.”²³⁸ Christianity is then not *without* its values, rather, its *pure values* are currently hidden underneath its tyranny and thus require a Dionysian counter-ideal. *Purity* is, after all, what Nietzsche is looking for in his own ideals, as he states that “the whole of my *Zarathustra* is a dithyramb to solitude, or, if I have been understood, to *purity*.”²³⁹ It is for this reason that Nietzsche is elsewhere correct when he earlier stated that “Dionysus is a *judge!*—Have I been understood?”²⁴⁰ Both passages moreover anticipates the same “Have I been understood?” in the final Dionysus-Christ opposition. In fact, the issue of Nietzsche being understood remains a central issue throughout *Ecce Homo*, for with regard to his own writings, he wishes to “touch on the question of their being understood or *not* understood,” and clarifies the following: “I am one thing, my writings are another.”²⁴¹ Nietzsche uses these last words to begin the chapter on “Why I Write Such Good Books,” which at least implicitly entails that his own life was not as good as his own writings.

In my view, this is a relevant detail to keep in mind when considering the opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified that Nietzsche was formulating in the same year. My main point in this chapter has been to demonstrate that there are certainly enough passages in Nietzsche’s writings that suggest that he was aiming for a balance between a Christian and a Dionysian ideal so that both challenge each other to present themselves in their purest form. If one looks at Nietzsche’s own life, as well as his friends’ commentary about him, it becomes clear

²³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §361.

²³⁸ Ibid., §§220-221.

²³⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am So Wise,” §8.

²⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1051.

²⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” §1.

that Nietzsche himself deeply appreciates both the values within the Dionysian as well as the pure values within the Christian. Nietzsche's writing are, however, different from himself, and we see that his means to achieve this balance of ideals is to emphasise the Dionysian *at the expense of* what threatens it. This is explained in *The Birth of Tragedy*, when the Socratic excess of the Apollonian threatens it, but remains relevant today, "for the Christian doctrine was the counterdoctrine to the Dionysian."²⁴² It is for this reason that I found Peter Gast's comments about Nietzsche's insanity useful, for he emphasises, first, that Christ and Dionysus *both* incarnated in Nietzsche, and that nevertheless, Nietzsche tried to become a Dionysian man, ending up in insanity.

4.14 Nietzsche and sacrifice

What Gast does *not* do, is *account* for this seeming ambiguity, as Nietzsche cannot simultaneously be a balanced individual with Christian and Dionysian ideals, as well as a Dionysian in excess. Therefore, there must have been a progression from the first to the latter state, after which remnants of the former, i.e. the Crucified, reappear in his *Wahnbriefe*. One could argue that Nietzsche psychoanalytically repressed the Crucified after which it came back vengefully, which certainly seems credible when reading the letter to Carl Spitteler. However, it seems to me that there was a *conscious* element in play, something Nietzsche realised when opposing Dionysus with the Crucified. Before introducing my own view, I believe that René Girard's analysis in his "Dionysus versus the Crucified" is informative here, for Girard expands on the essential difference Nietzsche perceived between the two figures.²⁴³ In his analysis, Girard combines Nietzsche's focus and disdain for *ressentiment* with the Death of God parable, as well as the Christ-Dionysus opposition. Girard argues that "Nietzsche saw clearly that Jesus died not as a sacrificial victim of the Dionysian type, but against all such sacrifices," which Nietzsche perceived as "a hidden act of *ressentiment* because it reveals the injustice of all such deaths."²⁴⁴ While it was not uncommon to interpret the Gospels as simply another myth among many, Nietzsche pinpointed the *essential* difference. The Gospels exposed our human tendency to sacrifice innocent victims, precisely by telling the story from the perspective of the victim: "Nietzsche drew attention to the irreconcilable opposition between a mythological vision grounded in the perspective of the victimisers and a biblical inspiration that from the beginning

²⁴² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1051.

²⁴³ René Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified," in *MLN* 99, no. 4 (1984): 816-835.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 822.

tends to side with the victims.”²⁴⁵ Finally, Nietzsche himself was intimately familiar with the realisation of how brutal a collective murder is, as we have seen in his Death of God parable.

In my view, Girard interprets this parable correctly, for he argues that “instead of that gradual fading away of God, with no particular violence or drama, Nietzsche sees the disappearance of God as a horrible murder in which every man is involved.”²⁴⁶ I however believe Girard overstates the extent to which Nietzsche gladly accepted the responsibility for this murder from his Dionysian viewpoint. After all, we have seen that Nietzsche’s madman was in great distress when realizing the collective murder. Somewhat ironically, the parable is for this reason symbolically far more Christian than Dionysian, for there is no *rejoicing* in the collective murder, rather, Nietzsche *exposes* the fact that it was a murder in the first place. Nietzsche does not *reinforce* the perspective of the powerful victimisers, and—while he does not necessarily suggest that the victim was innocent—he clearly emphasises that they collectively murdered a *divine* entity. It is hence that I do not, as Girard suggests, believe that Nietzsche accepted the murder of God as “a gift,” as it seems to me that Nietzsche rather felt the necessity to point it out, as it would go unnoticed otherwise.²⁴⁷

Finally, one must not forget that there is, at all times, an important motive to continue to identify with Christ’s self-sacrifice present in the Gospels. Nietzsche was intimately familiar with its result, namely that “through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed.”²⁴⁸ Nietzsche however clarified that ending this cycle of sacrifice was not at all desirable for a society, for “the species endures only through human sacrifice,” and that “all that remains, according to the Christian scheme of values, is to sacrifice oneself,” but “prosperity of the species is unaffected by the self-sacrifice of: this or that individual.”²⁴⁹ Nietzsche thus suggests that Christian self-sacrifice *weakens* the collective, but this is not to say that it does not remain an appealing option for individuals. After all, while Nietzsche condemns “morality as an illusion of the species, designed to motivate the individual to sacrifice himself to the future,” these are simultaneously precisely the words one could use to describe Nietzsche.²⁵⁰ Especially when reading his *Ecce Homo*, where Nietzsche explains he is born

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 824.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 830.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 833.

²⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §246. This idea must be understood in contrast and relation to his discussion of slave-morality in his *Genealogy of Morals*. Specifically, self-sacrifice can be conceived of as a symptom of slave-morality, if *ressentiment* is aimed inwards and thus functions as an impetus to self-sacrifice, but it can also be seen as a heroic, individuum-centered act, if it is free of such *ressentiment*. I will not further discuss this tension here, but simply point out a potential tension in Nietzsche’s own relationship to self-sacrifice.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., §404.

posthumously as well as that he will be crucified for creating new values, it becomes clear that Nietzsche positions *himself* as a martyr. Still, this is not self-evidently inconsistent with Nietzsche's preference for Dionysus in the Dionysus-Crucified opposition, for the difference consisted *not* in their martyrdom. Nietzsche specifically condemns the "Crucified as the innocent one," but has difficulty escaping this fate himself. Nietzsche's letter to his sister, one year prior to his mental breakdown, is particularly telling in this regard:

Almost all people that I know and am friends with have turned into the most estranged group of people (e.g. Wagner as well, whose last 6 years I have experienced as an outrageous degeneration) (...) In fact, I do not even feel an opposition between us, just complete estrangement (—because opposites would be something very nice and simple—I love opposites.) (...) The very inner and painfully lonely life that I have lived up to now has almost generated a loneliness against which there is no longer any remedy. My dearest consolation is still that of remembering the few who have endured it under similar circumstances without breaking, and who have preserved a lofty and kind soul.²⁵¹

I should note that Nietzsche sent the exact same final two sentences to Jacob Burckhardt a few months earlier already, which demonstrates the consistent endurance of Nietzsche's suffering.²⁵² Moreover, notice how solitude and loneliness (*Einsamkeit*) are relevant themes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as well. Zarathustra, after all, descends down for he wishes to no longer live in solitude, or put stronger, "Zarathustra wants to become human again."²⁵³ While Nietzsche certainly also praises solitude in the book, he does realise that *complete* solitude is quite dangerous: "For the hermit the friend is always a third: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths. Oh, there are too many depths for all hermits. That is why they long so for a friend and his height."²⁵⁴ For Nietzsche, the hermit, such as himself, always already has an inner conversation between two subjects, spiralling downwards, in need of a third interlocutor. At the end of the book, the conclusion rightly follows that "whatever one brings into solitude grows in it, even the inner beast," and that "on this score, solitude is ill-

²⁵¹ Nietzsche, letter to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Nice, January 1888. My translation from the German: ... fast alle mir bekannten und befreundeten M[enschen] nachgerade in das mir fremdeste Parteilager abgeschwenkt sind (z. B. auch W[agner] dessen letzte 6 Jahre ich als eine ungeheuerliche Entartung empfunden habe) (...) Tatsächlich empfinde ich zwischen uns nicht einmal einen Gegensatz sondern bloß die vollkommene Fremdheit (—denn Gegensätzlichkeit wäre etwas ganz Artiges und Einfaches—ich liebe Gegensätzlichkeit.) (...) Das sehr innerliche und schmerzhaft-vereinsamte Leben, das ich bisher gelebt habe, hat nachgerade eine Vereinsamung mit sich gebracht, gegen die es kein Heilmittel mehr giebt. Mein liebster Trost ist immer noch der, der Wenigen zu gedenken, die es unter ähnlichen Verhältnissen ausgehalten haben, ohne zu zerbrechen und eine hohe und gütige Seele dabei sich bewahrt haben.

²⁵² Nietzsche, letter to Jacob Burckhardt, Nice, 14 November 1887.

²⁵³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I, "Zarathustra's Prologue," §1.

²⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I, "On the Friend."

advised for many.”²⁵⁵ Nietzsche’s poetry published in *Dithyrambs of Dionysus* attests to this same discomfort he felt in encountering himself in his loneliness:

Solitary!

But who would dare
to visit here,
to visit *you*?...
A bird of prey perhaps,
he might hang,
with crazy laughter,
a bird of prey’s laughter,
malicious (...)

he cruelly mocks:
if you love abysses you must have wings...
and not just hang there,
as you do, hanged man!—

O Zarathustra,
cruellest Nimrod!
Lately God’s huntsman,
net to net all virtue,
arrow of the wicked!—
Now—
hunted down by yourself,
your own booty, burrowed into yourself...

Now—
alone with yourself,
twofold in self-knowledge
(...)
choked in your own net,
selfknower!
self-hangman!

Why did you trap
yourself in your wisdom?
(...)

²⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, IV, “On The Higher Man,” §13.

awkward,
 stiff,
 a corpse—
 overtowered by a hundred burdens,
 overburdened with yourself,
a man of knowledge
 who *knows himself!*
 the *wise* Zarathustra!...

You sought the heaviest burden
 and you found *yourself*—
 it is a burden you cannot throw off
 (...)

And lately still so proud,
 still on the stilts of your pride!
 Lately still the godless hermit,
 the dweller with the devil,
 the high haughty scarlet prince!...

Now—
 contorted
 between two nothings,
 a question-mark,
 a weary riddle—
 a riddle for *birds of prey*...
 —they will soon “resolve” you,
 already they thirst for your “resolution,”
 already they flutter about you, their riddle,
 about you, hanged man!...
 O Zarathustra!
Self-knower!...
Self-hangman!...²⁵⁶

Before commenting on the content of this poem, it is first important to point out that the precise dating of this poem is unclear, and second to consider to the connotations of its title. The poems in *Dithyrambs of Dionysus* were first assembled by Nietzsche at the end of 1888, but the initial

²⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Dithyrambs of Dionysus (Dionysos-Dithyramben)* [1888], translated with an introduction and notes by R. J. Hollingdale (Anvil Press Poetry: London, 1984): 41-46.

formulation of several poems certainly date back to at least 1883. There is, however, no mention of this specific poem before 1888, but the title and subject matter “Amid Birds of Prey” reminds one of the analogy Nietzsche uses in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, contrasting birds of prey with lambs. Birds of prey represent adherents of noble master morality whereas the lambs represent adherents of Judeo-Christian slave morality. Granted, while Nietzsche first referred to birds of prey in his unpublished notes in 1883—“May my eagle after all be a danger to little white sheep and be called a bird of prey!”—he first expands this analogy and works it out systematically in 1887 in *On the Genealogy of Morality*.²⁵⁷ It should be interesting then that, in this poem, Nietzsche places his Zarathustra *amid* birds of prey, which implies he is not one himself, for he lacks the wings to fly above the abyss. While it is not immediately clear whether Nietzsche contradistinctively characterises himself as a lamb, he does refer to himself as a “hanged man” and even “self-hangman,” which appears—not coincidentally—similar to Christian self-sacrifice, as well as his statement that “Christianity is a metaphysics of the hangman” in *Twilight of the Idols*, written in 1888.²⁵⁸

This is not to say that Nietzsche solely identifies with Christian symbolism here, as indeed the statement that he’s twofold in self-knowledge is precisely consistent with his identification with both Dionysus *and* the Crucified. This is why he on the one hand characterises himself as “God’s huntsman,” as a “godless hermit,” and as “proud,” and on the other hand as the *lonely victim* of birds of prey, a burden he cannot get rid of. Ideally, Nietzsche’s Dionysian fate of suffering in the form of estranging people in his life would have been due to an *overabundance of life*, which many of Nietzsche’s writings certainly speak of. His own life, however, seems more characteristic of suffering as a consequence of *hunger*, in this case *hunger* for comradeship, for love. It is consequently not surprising that Nietzsche often struggled with the identification with Dionysus, and this must have become painfully confronting in formulating the opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified.

4.15 *Dionysus versus the Crucified, and vice versa*

It is nevertheless no secret that Dionysian suffering remained an ideal for Nietzsche. For instance, he wrote in *Ecce Homo*, after citing one of his dithyrambs from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that “nothing like this has ever been composed, ever been felt, ever been *suffered*: this is how a

²⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 10, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884*, 9[24]. My translation from the German: “Mag immerhin mein Adler eine Gefahr für kleine weiße Schafe sein und Raubvogel heißen!”; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I, §13.

²⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*, 45; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Four Great Errors,” §7.

god suffers, a Dionysus.”²⁵⁹ This is what Nietzsche was striving for, but the Christian element in him remained strong. After all, his life was in many ways not too different of his description of Jesus in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which he argues that “within the holy disguise and fable of Jesus’ life there lies concealed one of the most painful cases of the martyrdom of knowledge about love.”²⁶⁰ Nietzsche’s life project consisted of providing humanity with a way to properly come to terms with the death of God, but he never felt understood in this and hence felt he was crucified by the people around him. I acknowledge that particularly in his *writing*, Nietzsche fulfilled the Dionysian ideal, but his own *life* was often characteristic of the innocent self-sacrifice of Christ. In some ways, Christianity’s ending the cycle of sacrificing innocent victims was desirable for Nietzsche *as an individual*, even if he simultaneously held in his writings that *societally* such a development was highly undesirable. An identification as the Crucified was Nietzsche’s means of holding on to an archetype that his own life experience confirmed to him, i.e. of the innocent yet divine victim, even if he simultaneously wishes to escape that same predicament through identifying with the powerful Dionysian bird of prey.

With regard to the “*Dionysus versus the Crucified*” opposition, I find myself in agreement with Jacques Derrida, who as far as I am aware has been the only one to argue for the same conclusion, albeit through different means. Derrida asserts that the focus must not be placed on “Christ, nor even Dionysus, but rather the name of the versus, the adverse or countername, the combat called between the two names.”²⁶¹ I have been arguing for the same interpretation. I suggest that Nietzsche both personally and in his written philosophy deeply advocates for *multiple* religious ideals. Moreover, I hold this to be consistent with what I just presented in Nietzsche’s letter to Elisabeth, in which Nietzsche states that he greatly enjoys oppositions. After all, “*Dionysus versus the Crucified*” was but one of many, consider also “*Buddha versus the Crucified*,” “*Plato versus Homer*,” and “‘Reason’ *versus* Instinct,” to name a few, where it should be noted that Nietzsche himself either italicises the entire opposition or just the *versus*.²⁶² I have demonstrated that while Nietzsche takes great issue with Christianity, he nevertheless praises Jesus and shows signs that he wishes that the counter-ideal of Zarathustra and Dionysus might, in fact, inspire a resurgence of *pure* Christianity, close to what Nietzsche admired in Jesus. He

²⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” §8.

²⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §269.

²⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, “Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name,” in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, translated by Avital Ronell (New York: Schocken Books, 1985): 11.

²⁶² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Am A Destiny,” §9; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §154; *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III, §25; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “The Birth of Tragedy,” §1.

sees glimpses of this possibility in Pascal and especially Dostoevsky, and hence defends the latter against the criticism of Georg Brandes.

To recap what I have stated thus far, I first related the societal importance of competing religious ideals, such as the Dionysian and the Christian. Similar to a *single* religious ideal, *competing* religious ideals would inspire social cohesion, but in addition to it, they inspire great individuals in multiple domains, because external validation is found in multiple ideals which mutually challenge and consequently improve one another. Besides Nietzsche's cultural project, I have secondly demonstrated why it was of interest for Nietzsche *personally* to not completely identify with the Dionysian at the expense of the Christian. The motive behind this identification is precisely the former cultural motive, for the Dionysian ideal was close to extinct in Nietzsche's environment and thus demanded Nietzsche's overemphasis. For Nietzsche personally, it ultimately proved untenable. I suggest for this reason that Nietzsche *explicitly* identified with the Crucified again *after* his mental collapse, i.e. *after* the sole identification with Dionysus and the Antichrist which was no longer sustainable.

Nietzsche accordingly returned *personally* to what he believed to be healthy *societally*, i.e. the existence of competing ideals such as the Dionysian and Apollonian in Attic tragedies to the existence of competing ideals such as the Dionysian and the Crucified. The remark to Franz Overbeck is illuminating as far as the difficulty Nietzsche experienced in balancing such ideals correctly is concerned:

With regard to Christianity, you will probably believe one thing: I have never been mean to it in my heart, and have since childhood offered much inner effort on behalf of its ideals, in the end, of course, always with the result of pure impossibility (...) I absolutely no longer know with which views I still do good, with which I hurt.²⁶³

Nietzsche's letter to Peter Gast has to be regarded similarly, where Nietzsche reflects on how he still, deep down, positively values Christianity, as it is deep down part of himself:

It occurred to me, dear friend, that in my book the constant inner confrontation with *Christianity* must be strange and even embarrassing to you; but it is the best piece of ideal life that I have really got to know, from childhood I followed it, in many corners, and I think I have never been

²⁶³ Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, Sils-Maria, 23 July, 1881. My translation from the German: "Was das Christenthum betrifft, so wirst Du mir wohl das Eine glauben: ich bin in meinem Herzen nie gegen dasselbe gemein gewesen und habe mir von Kindesbeinen an manche innerliche Mühe um seine Ideale gegeben, zuletzt freilich immer mit dem Ergebniß der puren Unmöglichkeit. (...) Ich weiß absolut nicht mehr, mit welchen Ansichten ich noch wohlthue, mit welchen ich wehe thue."

mean in my heart to it. Ultimately, I am the *descendant* of entire generations of Christian clergymen.²⁶⁴

While Nietzsche certainly did not want to absolutise Christianity, he clearly did not wish to destroy it either. Although he admits to seriously doubting whether his approach was the right one to Overbeck, he nevertheless consciously formulated a competing counter-ideal in his published writings. After all, the tyranny of Christian values at the expense of all other values weakened society, whereas the competition or ‘versus’ of strong ideals brings out the best in them, and consequently in its adherents; Dionysus *versus* the Crucified. As becomes clear in *The Birth of Tragedy*, this competition was lost with the advent of Socratism, and Nietzsche believed that the death of God provided ample opportunity for reintroducing it. While my decision to include Nietzsche’s *Wahnbriefe* in this analysis might have raised some eyebrows, I believe that their omission would have done greater harm. The fact that Nietzsche’s identification with the Crucified reappeared demonstrates that we cannot dismiss it. And as Foucault points out, while one can argue as to whether Nietzsche made this final realisation lucidly or not, it nevertheless tells *us* something important about his philosophy. I have suggested that such an evaluation is possible, and believe it continues to help us understand what Nietzsche’s philosophy of religion entailed in, indeed, the very final analysis.

²⁶⁴ Nietzsche, letter to Peter Gast, Sils-Maria, 21 July, 1881. Nietzsche is referring to his book *Daybreak*, published in 1881. My translation from the German: “Mir fiel ein, lieber Freund, daß Ihnen an meinem Buche die beständige innerliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem *Christenthume* fremd, ja peinlich sein muß; es ist aber doch das beste Stück idealen Lebens, welches ich wirklich kennen gelernt habe, von Kindesbeinen an bin ich ihm nachgegangen, in viele Winkel, und ich glaube, ich bin nie in meinem Herzen gegen dasselbe gemein gewesen. Zuletzt bin ich der *Nachkomme* ganzer Geschlechter von christlichen Geistlichen.”

5. From Religious Individuals to Abstract Criteria for Religions

5.1 *Nietzsche as a religious thinker*

In the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated that Nietzsche's inner struggle with his attitude to religion is fundamental to his entire philosophical project, especially when these texts are understood in relation to who Nietzsche was as a person. We have seen that the function of the death of God is twofold in Nietzsche's oeuvre. First, it highlights Nietzsche's motivation to revive a Dionysian counter-ideal, as means to counterbalance the apocalyptic consequences of the event. Second, it underscores how deeply fascinated Nietzsche nevertheless remained by the Christian ideal, as his madman is deeply concerned that others are not aware that they are participating in a collective murder, reminiscent of the "they know not what they do" from the crucified Christ to his Father.²⁶⁵ In the previous chapter, I argued that *Dionysus versus the Crucified* therefore, among other reasons, must be understood as Nietzsche's identification with both religious individuals.

I want to use this final chapter not to further summarise what I have already discussed in previous chapters, but rather to consider the implications of my research in two distinct ways. First, how can we understand Nietzsche's attitude to theodicy and myth, and second, how is Nietzsche's convergence on religious individuals relevant to his analysis? The first question requires that I briefly discuss and explicate the most salient aspects that characterise Nietzsche's positive conception of religion, which appear throughout the preceding chapters but which I can discuss separately here. The second question is related to the first, but is more connected to Nietzsche's own methodology, and permits me to consider why Nietzsche, in analysing religious phenomena, constantly returns to discussing religious individuals, such as Christ, Dionysus, Apollo, and Zarathustra. I do not want to digress too much in discussing both these questions, but instead to work these out in two case studies, namely Nietzsche's attitude to theodicy and to myth. Accordingly, I hope to demonstrate that an approach similar to what I have employed in previous chapters can be used to understand what Nietzsche's attitude would be to other religious phenomena, and that Nietzsche therefore—despite his continuous criticism of religion—has the methodological means to analyse it. These case studies can however only be suggestive, for the scope of this project does not allow me to discuss them in-depth. The reason I briefly consider these phenomena is rather to demonstrate that the insights in this thesis can be used for further research of similar interest in Nietzsche's work.

²⁶⁵ Luke 23:34, *King James Version*.

5.2 Nietzsche's criteria for a healthy religion

First, I want to explicate the criteria that underlie Nietzsche's understanding of religions to which he is positively disposed. Criteria should not be understood as a checklist of sorts, for this would be a systematisation of properties that defy such systematisation, or—in Nietzschean terminology—the Socratic attempt to understand Dionysian properties which are founded in a radically anti-rationalist context. Rather, criteria here should be understood as an *inexhaustive* account of those characteristics that Nietzsche highlights and frequently returns to in his understanding of the positive value of religions. I stress that this is not a complete list. Rather, I observe that these criteria remain continuous motifs in Nietzsche's positive discussions of religion.

Briefly put, healthy religions function by being *life-affirming* and *art-* and *genius-inspiring*. They simultaneously strengthen the social cohesion in their *unity*, but also defy rigidification through their inherent *differentiation*, which I have identified as the need for multiple religious ideals. Consequently, they motivate a continuous inner confrontation to draw inspiration from the *purest* forms of these religious ideals. As opposed to a systematic notion of God, they ought to feature religious individuals which are *psychologically appealing*, proving that hence divine self-affirmation *within this life* is attainable. Finally, it motivates enjoyment just as much in the *unknowns and unintelligible* as in the *known and intelligible*. In what follows, I want to first relate these criteria to my discussion in the previous chapters, and later to theodicy and myth.

Beginning with *The Birth of Tragedy*, we see that religious value is firstly cultural and only by extension relevant to individuals, and that it relates to a more complete experience of life. It was precisely the religious experience of two opposing religious ideals that was at the basis of a flourishing culture among the ancient Greeks, one that was endangered only when one of two religious ideals was to be totalised at the complete expense of the other. After all, the Socratic need to render everything comprehensible necessarily entails an escape or denial of those aspects of life that defy such intelligibility. Before then, the Greeks were still able to relate their experiences to aspects of existence that could not be made intelligible. These were not yet looked upon as unfounded.

Besides this first experiential aspect of religion, there was also an important artistic component to it. Attic Greek religion manifested itself in tragedies, which featured a balance of precisely the unintelligible and the intelligible, and pleasure was experienced equally in both. Tragic art directly *affirmed* life, and did not distract *from* it, unlike Socratic art's totalising tendency to render everything intelligible. A third important aspect is that it unifies a culture, it inspires rituals that constantly remind individuals of how their lived experience affirms life and

connects them to each other. In counterbalancing contrast, a fourth aspect was the ethical. Attic Greek religion did not yet deify each individual to the same extent as, according to Nietzsche, the Christian story would, and by virtue of this still thrived on violence and suffering. However, such suffering was neither its main motive nor an objection against life, but must rather be understood as a symptom of overabundant life.

We have seen that Nietzsche initially hoped for a revival of Attic Greek tragedy in Germany through artists such as Wagner, but later became much more pessimistic about this Romantic movement. After a positivist denial of his religious struggle, Nietzsche once again returned to a more religious orientation, in which Dionysus once again became important for him. Nietzsche now opposed Dionysus not to Apollo or Socrates, but to the Crucified. *Prima facie* these writings suggest a complete condemnation of Christianity and exclusive praise for the Dionysian. However, a closer analysis of his personal life, unpublished writings as well as his praise for Jesus in the *Antichrist* suggest that Nietzsche was not ill-disposed to *pure* Christianity. Throughout his consciously produced works, Nietzsche emphasises how he wishes for the Dionysian and Christian ideal to co-exist, but overemphasises the Dionysian in its opposition against an already Christian environment. An analysis of his life as well as his *Wahnbriefe* demonstrates that Nietzsche himself also balanced both ideals, embodying the victorious tragic Dionysian victim, as well as the innocently condemned but divine Christian victim.

The criterium that is implicit in the above explanation of Nietzsche's religious struggle is precisely the need for multiple religious ideals. Nietzsche noticed in his time that the Christian ideal was merely being challenged by itself, namely through the Socratism that was entwined with it. The Socratic will to truth was both the consequence and the cause of its flourishing through almost two millennia of Christian societal dominance before, by which everything needed to be interpreted in a single scheme. Eventually, Christianity denied itself and led to its own form of atheist rationalism, which—has not yet, but—is bound to find out that it needs to be denied as well. Nietzsche, being in favour of both the Dionysian ideal, as well as the *pure* Christian ideal of divine innocence, tried to change the very *terms* by which Christianity was being annihilated. In his works, Nietzsche, too, annihilated Christianity, but specifically attacked those forms of which were life-denying, and used his Dionysian counter-ideal to revive those which were life-affirming. He similarly praised Dostoevsky's account of Christ, which reminded him of the same Christ he still held close to his heart himself. The Dionysian does not just pose a different *ethical* ideal compared to Christian morality, it also does not suffer from the Socratism by which one strives to make everything intelligible, and thus also provides the necessary unconscious chaotic counterpart to the conscious and ordered Christian ideal.

5.3 Nietzsche's convergence on religious individuals

Having explicated what Nietzsche considered to be life-promoting characteristics for a religion in his own time, I now wish to continue this last point in also considering why Nietzsche focuses on religious individuals to arrive at abstract criteria for religion. It has become clear that within a culture, different individuals—but even single individuals at different times of their lives, such as Nietzsche—require inspiration of different religious individuals. According to Nietzsche, the sole focus on Christ has led to a grave misunderstanding of Christ, but a vivid opposition of Christ and Dionysus will lead to a constant balance of two strong ideals. Conversely, Dionysus was a wonderful inspiration for Nietzsche, and yet Dionysus at the expense of Christ denied Nietzsche his relation to who he was. A healthy culture requires a religion that thrives, but a religion that thrives needs to account for the whole of life, and not the half of it, especially if that half ends up denying itself.

While this religion should not deny the metaphysical, it should not be its major focus either, but rather emphasise *several* individuals so unique that they could not be seen as either just God or merely human, but as individuals who blur this very distinction. After all, the pride of Dionysus and the innocence of Christ were both humanly possible, but also *divine*, for they were free of *ressentiment* of others and directly affirmed their own actions. Whereas many theologians might be more interested in a systematic notion of God than in any individual, Nietzsche is as a psychologist uniquely interested in individuals, and he finds only pure and life-affirming motives in those individuals he considers divine. Purity, as a lack of conflict of interest, allows such individuals to blur the line between the human and the divine, and proves that *Übermenschlichkeit* remains an attainable aim *within this life*, and *not* in another. Accordingly, Nietzsche finds great comfort in living up to these ideals, for he knows they do not distract from this life, but regard the very essence of it. Secondly, being an individual is a criterion—and therefore, individual persons can become incarnations of the religion itself; only if they successfully embody the *pure* form of their religion, then that also informs a culture about the usefulness of that religion. For Nietzsche, individuals are thus measured by their divinity, as much as religions are thus measured by its most valued individuals. In an era where the future of religions is more uncertain than ever, it thus makes a great deal of sense that Nietzsche would point our attention back to these individuals. What were they up to, and what are we up to?

5.4 *First case study: A Nietzschean approach to studying theodicy*

One implication of my research is that Nietzsche's attitude to religion stipulates that he was actively preoccupied with traditional religious issues and phenomena as well. In this first of two case studies, I will argue that Nietzsche's attitude with reference to religion has important implications for the age-old problem of theodicy. I will first provide a definition for theodicy, both in the traditional theological as well as the psychological sense, after which I will discuss Nietzsche's own writing on the matter. I will then use the above criteria to discuss how Nietzsche, while denying a preoccupation with theodicy after *The Birth of Tragedy*, in fact retains it throughout his writing.

The term theodicy, first coined in 1710 by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his *Théodicée*, refers to the difficulty "to reconcile reason with faith in regard to the existence of evil."²⁶⁶ After all, how could a benevolent God that is omnipotent allow for evil to exist? Theodicy is accordingly traditionally construed as a theological problem, but this is not to say that it does not have a deeper psychological aspect that is of interest to Nietzsche. Indeed, a psychological theodicy does not stipulate a belief in a good God. It does require an experience of the suffering in the world as *unjust*, for it contradistinctively implies that one has a sense of how existence instead *ought to be*, which makes little psychological difference to the function of a benevolent God. The question of how a benevolent omnipotent God can allow for the existence of evil psychologically becomes; how does one justify all the suffering in the world, given that one has a sense life could be better? If it is true that Nietzsche retains this sense of theodicy throughout his works, then it is an indication that my findings thus far extend beyond their current analysis. Specifically, it would suggest that this is yet another issue in which Nietzsche retains his Christian presuppositions while also posing a counterbalancing solution to them.

Before arguing that Nietzsche implicitly retained a preoccupation with theodicy throughout his entire project, it is first important to consider what Nietzsche explicitly stated on the matter, the majority of which is in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche argued that the Greeks were already in need of a justification of life, and that they created their Olympian gods for this reason:

In order to be able to live, the Greeks were obliged to create these gods, out of the deepest necessity (...) How else could that people, so sensitive in its emotions, so impetuous in its desires, so uniquely equipped for *suffering*, have tolerated existence, if the very same existence had not

²⁶⁶ Freiherr von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* [1710], edited with an introduction by Austin Farrer, translated by E.M. Huggard (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007): 68.

been shown to it surrounded by a higher glory in its gods (...) the gods justify the life of men by living it themselves—the only adequate theodicy! Existence under the bright sunlight of such gods will be felt to be in itself worth striving for...²⁶⁷

Nietzsche thus admits to the presupposition that existence, at least for the Greeks, was so ripe with suffering that it required a justification. Second, Nietzsche already alludes to the importance of religious individuals for his project, since such individuals blur the line between the divine and the human. The Olympians lived *human* lives, and provided an adequate theodicy by accordingly demonstrating that dealing with the suffering of existence can be achieved by individuals. They proved that, despite their epiphenomenal suffering, the purest and most life-affirming practice is possible within this life, and thus offered an attainable religious ideal. Notice, as well, how “existence” is described negatively, in contradistinction to “the bright sunlight of such gods,” which demonstrates that all psychological properties of a theodicy are present in Nietzsche’s assessment.²⁶⁸

One might object that Nietzsche is merely making a descriptive claim about how the Greeks viewed existence, but the opposite is the case, for the rest of *The Birth of Tragedy* repeats the idea that “only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world justified to eternity.”²⁶⁹ Nietzsche, in the later preface to the book, even admitted that this aesthetic phenomenon is a substitute for the God within the problem of theodicy:

In the book itself the suggestive proposition that the existence of the world is only *justified* as an aesthetic phenomenon recurs several times. In fact, the whole book recognises only an ulterior artistic meaning hidden behind everything which happens—a ‘god,’ if you like (...) The world envisaged in that moment as the *achieved* redemption of god, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the greatest suffering.²⁷⁰

Nietzsche acknowledges that what he uses to justify the world is a substitute for God, so how is his perspective different from the traditional Christian perspective? According to Nietzsche, it is precisely the fact that his theodicean view does not stipulate a *benevolent* God, but rather “a completely thoughtless and amoral artist-god.”²⁷¹ He elaborates on this important distinction:

²⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., §5. The same words are repeated in §24.

²⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Preface,” §5.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

One may call this whole artistic metaphysics arbitrary, idle, fantastic—what is essential is that it already betrays a spirit which will regardless of the danger oppose the *moral* interpretation and meaningfulness of existence. It is here, perhaps, for the first time that a pessimism ‘beyond good and evil’ announces itself.²⁷²

While Nietzsche intends to interpret the world as an aesthetic phenomenon, as opposed to a moral one, I will argue that he never wholly achieves it. After all, Nietzsche does not realise that the very fact that life requires a justification implies it is fundamentally *unjust*. In this sense he shares this moral presupposition of existence with Christian theodicy. Nietzsche might argue that what he poses against such an unjust life is amoral, but if it *justifies* such existence, then the opposing overarching value or ‘God’ is necessarily just. In his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche proclaims this same sentiment, namely the need “to recreate all ‘it was’ into ‘thus I willed it!’—only that would I call redemption!” This is, moreover, similar to his prescriptive claim to love one’s fate in 1888:

The kind of *experimental philosophy* which I am living, even anticipates the possibility of the most fundamental Nihilism, on principle: but by this I do not mean that it remains standing at a negation, at a no, or at a will to negation. It would rather attain to the very reverse—to a *Dionysian affirmation* of the world (...)—my formula for this is *amor fati*. To this end we must not only consider those aspects of life which have been denied hitherto, as: *necessary*, but as desirable, and not only desirable to those aspects which have been affirmed hitherto (as complements or first prerequisites, so to speak), but for their own sake (...) Thus I divined to what extent a stronger kind of man must necessarily imagine—the elevation and enhancement of man in another direction: *higher creatures*, beyond good and evil, beyond those values which bear the stamp of their origin in the sphere of suffering, of the herd, and of the greater number—I searched for the data of this topsy-turvy formation of ideals in history (the concepts “pagan,” “classical,” “noble,” have been discovered afresh and brought forward).²⁷³

Nietzsche states openly that his philosophy anticipates a nihilism, by which he aims to resolve a preoccupation with theodicy, but this is doubtful. After all, a complete nihilism would entail that all moral evaluations are essentially false, according to which suffering would never be assigned a negative value in the first place. Nietzsche, however, remains complicit in assigning a negative value to life. Otherwise, he would not so desperately *need to* affirm existence that, let alone *need to* consider it necessary and desirable. Hence, the problem of theodicy continues to remain an issue for him.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1041.

Second, Nietzsche claims that he searched for historical ideals, i.e. adherents of a self-affirmative noble morality, in which a conception of life as in need of redemption never occurs, but including this claim does not resolve the problem. I do not dispute that it is possible that such figures have existed—according to Nietzsche in the “late-born” Napoleon “the *noble ideal itself* was made flesh”—but it does seem clear that Nietzsche himself believes that a return to such a mindset is at best unlikely and at worst no longer possible.²⁷⁴ After all, Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis of a slave morality arising out of a noble morality simultaneously implied a development of the individual who, as centuries progressed, developed a conscience. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche argued that this development brought about that “man first became an *interesting animal*,” and “the human soul became *deep* in the higher sense and turned evil for the first time.”²⁷⁵ Today, “we moderns have inherited millennia of conscience-vivisection and animal-torture inflicted on ourselves,” and thus, a view of life that is not in some manner unjust seems to be something of the past.²⁷⁶

Nietzsche nevertheless hopes that a *future* generation might allow a return to such a mindset, but in exclaiming this he continues to demonstrate how much he fails to escape a theodicean view, condemning the world as it is, in need of justification. Nietzsche states that he hopes for “a man who justifies man *himself*, a stroke of luck, an instance of a man who makes up for and redeems man.”²⁷⁷ Not just from humanity, but Nietzsche anticipates that this future “*redeeming* man of great love and contempt (...) can return with the *redemption* of this reality.”²⁷⁸ The view remains that Nietzsche’s reality is in desperate need for redemption by a future redeemer. While Nietzsche does not pretend to be such an individual himself, he also does not consciously acknowledge to what extent he remains complicit in a theodicean view of existence by continuously calling for the coming of such an individual.

Nietzsche’s own sense of theodicy is similar to his general attitude to religious phenomena. He reveals that he partly adheres to Christianity, while also seriously challenging it. After all, Nietzsche hopes to transvalue the suffering itself as a suffering that is a consequence of overabundance of life, rather than a hunger for life. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s project is one in which his benevolent god of *The Birth of Tragedy*—or future individual from *On the Genealogy of Morality*—is different from the Christian God in an important way. Nietzsche’s god or future individual does not *condemn* the suffering and seeks redemption for it elsewhere. Instead,

²⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I, §16.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I, §6.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II, §24.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I, §12.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II, §24.

Nietzsche emphasises the “*achieved* redemption” of his god, who affirms the suffering as inherent to an overabundance of life.²⁷⁹ This however does not exempt him from the moral presupposition of existence as unjust, against which such a process of transvaluation is necessary in the first place. Finally, Nietzsche’s own life—which must be seen as a motivation behind his philosophy—speaks of abundant suffering. He alternates between valuing this suffering as caused by a hunger for life or by overabundant life, but he does not escape ascribing it either of these values in order to justify it in some manner. Accordingly, while challenging a need for a theodicy, Nietzsche himself remains preoccupied with theodicy throughout his life. In this sense, his attitude with respect to theodicy precisely mirrors the way in which he deals with religion more generally.

5.5 *Second case study: A Nietzschean approach to studying myth*

Theodicy is not often explicitly discussed by Nietzsche, but, as I have argued, instead appears implicitly as fundamental to his philosophical project. In contrast, Nietzsche *explicitly* discusses myth in his writing rather frequently. When he positively discusses myth, Nietzsche refers to a foundational narrative of a culture which is often fictional or religious in nature, and which has an important societal function by virtue of it being widely lived by. Nietzsche discusses this especially in his early works, which is why myth is not often stressed as an important theme in his overall philosophical project. I want to suggest that one of the key results of studying Nietzsche’s attitude to religion—namely that these attitudes characterise Nietzsche’s thought far beyond *The Birth of Tragedy*—is also applicable to myth. Taken together, this indicates that myth remains an important theme for Nietzsche throughout his philosophical project, in a way that bears similarity to the development of Nietzsche’s early opposition between Dionysus and Apollo develops into that of Dionysus and the Crucified.

In this section, I will examine the criteria for a post-Nietzschean religion with specific regard to myth, by considering to what extent myth is life-affirming. I first consider Nietzsche’s remarks vis-à-vis myth as being of central importance to a healthy and life-affirming religion in ancient Greece, and I will conclude that Nietzsche argues for the need to revive myth in modernity. Therefore, before I systematically relate myth to the criteria that I have assembled above, I will focus on what Nietzsche has said himself about myth. First, I want to explain why Nietzsche believes myth to be a necessary part of a life-affirming religion. I then demonstrate how this view is not specific to his early works, but is in line with the arguments in his later

²⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Preface,” §5.

writing. In my conclusion, I consider whether Nietzsche merely argues for the need to revive myth, or whether he also poses a counter-myth himself, in a similar way to his Dionysian counter-ideal.

With regard to the supposed necessity of myth for religion, it is clear that Nietzsche initially makes this argument negatively, by stating that the death of myth implies the death of religion:

It is the sure sign of the death of a religion when its mythic presuppositions become systematised, under the severe, rational eyes of an orthodox dogmatism, into a ready sum of historical events, and when people begin timidly defending the veracity of myth but at the same time resist its natural continuance—when the feeling for myth withers and its place is taken by a religion claiming historical foundations.²⁸⁰

It should be clear how this argument is consistent with Nietzsche's disdain for systematisers in *Beyond Good and Evil*, as well as his praise for Jesus who taught a new *practice* rather than a new *faith* in the *Antichrist*. He believes such systematisation to be caused by a religion which rather focuses on propositional *faith*, i.e. belief in facts or historical events, but simultaneously holds that it causes the death of religion. This means that Nietzsche also understands religion as existing *before* "its mythic presuppositions become systematised," whereas the religion *after* this development is fated to die.²⁸¹ Elsewhere in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche describes myth as "the necessary prerequisite of any religion."²⁸² If religions function only with myth as a necessary prerequisite, then the very existence of religion is *conditioned by* the flourishing of myth.

It is furthermore clear that, according to Nietzsche, modernity faces significant problems for the continuance of myth—and by extension, the continuance for religion—for several reasons. First, it seems clear that while myth has been disappearing, Nietzsche stresses that people have not ceased to be mythological, in the sense that they have not stopped living by cultural narratives. Nietzsche argues that "the mythological instinct does not disappear; it becomes expressed in the systems of philosophers or theologians," and it has become clear that Nietzsche clearly opposes such systematisation.²⁸³ Second, and related to the first, Nietzsche has no faith in the Christian capacity to revive myths, for "Christianity is not creative in myths."²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §10.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*, §18.

²⁸³ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 7, Nachgelasse Fragmente 1869-1874*, 3[64]. My translation from the German: "Der mythologische Trieb schwindet nicht: er spricht sich in den Systemen der Philosophen oder Theologen usw. aus."

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 16[10]. My translation from the German: "Das Christenthum ist nicht schöpferisch in Mythen."

This is not purely related to Christianity however, but also to the Socratism that is deeply entwined with it. According to Nietzsche, the Socratic extermination of the Dionysian was at the same time an annihilation of myth, for he states in *The Birth of Tragedy* that “the cheerfulness of the theoretical man (...) seeks to dissolve myth,” as well as that “the weakening of the myth really expresses a weakening of the Dionysian capacity.”²⁸⁵

Nietzsche obviously wishes to revive the Dionysian capacity, and accordingly he has to revive myth. The most elaborate statement in which Nietzsche discusses the utility of myth can be found in *The Birth of Tragedy* §23, in which Nietzsche first describes a healthy culture with myth:

Without myth every culture loses the healthy natural power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement. Myth alone saves all the powers of the imagination and of the Apollonian dream from their aimless wanderings. The images of the myth have to be the unnoticed omnipresent demonic guardians, under whose care the young soul grows to maturity and whose signs help the man to interpret his life and struggles. Even the state knows no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with religion and its growth from mythical notions.²⁸⁶

Myth thus serves several functions. First, it stimulates creativity. Second, it unifies a culture. Third, it provides meaning to the lives of individuals, meaning not understood semantically, but in the existential sense; one can interpret one’s life not by connecting it to historical facts or a system, but by connecting it to *story*. Finally, the passage suggests that myth is the ethical underpinning of a society which connects a state with religion. Nietzsche goes on by contrasting this to his own age:

By way of comparison let us now picture the abstract man, untutored by myth; abstract education; abstract morality; abstract law; abstract state; let us imagine the lawless roving of the artistic imagination, unchecked by any native myth; let us think of a culture that has no fixed and sacred primordial site but is doomed to exhaust all possibilities and to nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures—there we have the present age, the result of that Socratism which is bent on the destruction of myth. And now the mythless man stands eternally hungry, surrounded by all past ages, and digs and grubs for roots, even if he has to dig for them among the remotest antiquities. The tremendous historical need of our unsatisfied modern culture, the assembling around one of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge—what

²⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17, §24.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, §23.

does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home, the mythical maternal womb?²⁸⁷

Nietzsche is very clear on the problem of mythless societies, asserting that they remain nevertheless bound to define themselves by myths, but that they lack these and must turn to other cultures to give meaning to their own. The tyrannical Socratic will to truth, which seeks to systematise everything, is inherently related to the destruction of myth, for myth cannot be systematised. After all, for something to be systematised, one needs to be able to examine it separately so that it can be categorised. Myth firstly defies such systematisation through its unique combination of art, culture, meaning and ethics, that cannot be understood separately from one another. Second, myth functions largely subconsciously, and since the will to truth necessarily entails a process by which it makes that which is unconscious conscious, will necessarily endanger the function of myth. The Apollonian, which should exist in concert with the Dionysian, should not Socratically exist *at the expense* of the Dionysian. When the Greeks related “all their experiences immediately to their myths, indeed to understand them only in this relation,” the accompanying art, culture, meaning and ethics were life-affirming in that they directly informed lived experienced and properly balanced Dionysian and Apollonian forces.²⁸⁸ Consequently, Nietzsche concludes that “Greek art and pre-eminently Greek tragedy delayed above all the destruction of myth.”²⁸⁹ While Nietzsche believes that the four functions of myth can exist without myth, he argues they then become life-denying, for “in the abstract character of our mythless existence, in an art degenerated to mere entertainment as well as in a life guided by concepts, the inartistic as well as life-consuming nature of Socratic optimism had revealed itself to us.”²⁹⁰ Indeed, Socratism consumes life rather than affirming or providing it, and this is evident in that life itself is guided by concepts, rather than concepts guided by life.

Similarly, Socratic art serves as entertainment to distract *from* life, rather than to *affirm* it. Myth and art are no longer inherently connected to how life is experienced, for “because of the way that myth takes it for granted that miracles are always happening, the waking life of a mythically inspired people—the ancient Greeks, for instance—more closely resembles a dream than it does the waking world of a scientifically disenchanting thinker.”²⁹¹ It is clear that when writing *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche still strongly believed that German artists, Wagner most

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., §24.

²⁹¹ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,” [1873] in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, edited and translated, with an introduction and notes, by Daniel Breazeale (London: Humanities Press International, 1979): §2.

specifically, might have been able to revive myth. While “myth had been sadly debased and usurped by idle tales and stories; completely divested of its earnest and sacred virility,” Nietzsche states that “the artist distinctly heard the command that concerned him alone—to recast myth and make it virile.”²⁹² As we have seen in the biographical chapter, Nietzsche’s break with Wagner was partly cultural, for he no longer believed that Wagner was up to the task of reviving the Attic tragic myth. This raises the following question: Did Nietzsche entirely stop believing in the capacity to revive myth?

While it is unclear whether Nietzsche believes we can return to the dreamlike experience of the mythical described above, Nietzsche certainly holds that the extermination of myths or religion in no manner means the extermination of the mythological or religious instinct. We have seen that to a certain degree this motivated him to attempt reviving the Dionysian religious ideal, as a means of competing against the Christian religious ideal. Nietzsche knew that the death of God was *not* the death of the religious instinct. Indeed, this religious instinct is still visible in, for example, the reliance on science and reason by contemporary atheists. While Nietzsche was confident that the instinct that drove this belief would remain, Nietzsche feared that this specific *belief* in science and reason could nevertheless not last. The Socratic will to truth had first concluded that belief in God is unfounded, and it will eventually discover that reliance on science and reason is in fact rooted in this same belief. Because Nietzsche knew that there was no awareness of this fate among his peers, he spent his efforts warning about it in his books and coming up with solutions to counterbalance it. It is therefore understandable that, reflecting on his ideas in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche in 1878 stated that he “had hoped that through art the Germans would become thoroughly disgusted with *decaying* Christianity,” and in 1885 that the book expressed his “desire for tragic myth (for ‘religion,’ namely pessimistic religion).”²⁹³ On the one hand, Nietzsche took specific issue with those who were not deeply disturbed by the fact that Christianity was dying, and hoped art would have made them realise that this death ought to be confronted through reviving tragic religion. On the other hand, we know from Nietzsche’s later writing that Nietzsche was, deep down, not ill-disposed to *pure* Christianity, and hoped the competition with his Dionysian ideal would inspire this purity in both ideals to thrive.

²⁹² Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth,” VIII.

²⁹³ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 8, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1875–1879*, 30[77]. My translation from the German: “Ich hatte gehofft, durch die Kunst könne den Deutschen das *abgestandene* Christenthum völlig verleidet werden.”; Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe 12, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–1887*, 2[110]. My translation from the German: “Ein Verlangen nach dem tragischen Mythos (nach „Religion“ und zwar pessimistischer Religion.”

It is in this manner that I argue Nietzsche continued to strongly value myth. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, he stated that Socratism had caused the death of myth and the death of religion, and he wanted to revive the Dionysian ideal in response. Nietzsche believes that tragic myth was best facilitated through the existence of multiple religious ideals, i.e. the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Because Socratism exterminated the Dionysian, and continued to do so during Christianity's reign, Nietzsche over-emphasised the Dionysian in an attempt to make it a valuable equal to the *pure* Christian ideal, by which both ideals would inspire the best in each other. Thus, *Dionysus versus the Crucified* must also be understood to be an impetus to myth, by which the religious or mythological instinct would once again be directed towards a life-affirming experience. Consequently, individuals will not be bound to relate their own experience to but one of such religious ideals.

Nietzsche's life is a prime example of this, as he related himself both to the myth of the tragic life-affirming victim Dionysus, as well as to the myth of the divine and innocent Christian victim. The former inspired Nietzsche to not condemn his suffering *prima facie*—as well as to shamelessly praise himself to bliss—whereas the latter inspired Nietzsche to remain honest, to help him realise that he deeply needed love and companionship, as well as that his innocent suffering was of divine nature. In his discussion of the death of God, Nietzsche's identification with the Christian myth allows him to deeply *mourn* over the decay of this beloved ideal of his, emphasising the collective murder, perhaps even to hope for a resurrection. His identification with the Dionysian myth motivates him to *rejoice* in the fact that God's death might pave the way for new religious ideals. The acknowledgement that different individuals, different cultures, and different stages of life require sensemaking through different, sometimes various religious ideals does not imply a relativism on Nietzsche's part. After all, if Nietzsche were a relativist, he would not have deemed the *decayed* Christian ideal problematic. In contrast, he states repeatedly that he wants these ideals to *compete* with one another, in order that both grow stronger.

While my analysis thus far suggests that Nietzsche formulated such a religious counter-ideal, it is unclear whether he has also accordingly formulated a counter-myth, or perhaps merely intended to inspire one. I would say that, by and large, Nietzsche's reference to Apollo, Dionysus and the Crucified implies that he was more interested in past myths than in new myths, and was hoping to inspire a new myth by opposing the two. On the other hand, consider that Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is itself a mytho-poetic work, where the metamorphosis of the camel into the lion into the child is but one example. It is not accidental that Nietzsche

said his “Zarathustra will be read like the Bible,” and hence called it “the Bible of the future.”²⁹⁴ This reinforces the view that Nietzsche’s attitude to religious myths was not antithetical nor indifferent, as against those who think of him as an individualist with no interest in cultural narratives. In contrast, Nietzsche both created and hoped to inspire new myths, to the extent that these reinforced a life-affirming existence for individuals and their culture.

5.6 *In Sum*

These case studies reveal that my analysis in previous chapters can be used to approach several issues in the philosophy of religion, theology, as well as religious studies in relation to Nietzsche’s philosophical project. I have undoubtedly not succeeded in working these case studies out in the detail they deserve, but I do hope they can serve as inspiration for continuing this line of research. They moreover help to elucidate Nietzsche’s own methodology, shifting from a focus on abstract religious phenomena to focusing on individuals. In this manner, both his preoccupation with theodicy as well as with religious myths reveals the need to consider these phenomena *psychologically* as well as in reference to what is attainable and affirmative in *this life*. This has moreover from the beginning influenced my own approach to studying Nietzsche, with a focus on his own psychology, and understanding how the balance of the Christian ideal and counter-ideals influenced him. Combining a psychological reading of Nietzsche as a person with a philosophical analysis of his works suggests that his main preoccupation was with properly balancing such religious orientations. Elevating one at the complete expense of the other does not just risk exterminating the opposing ideal, but it also puts its own *purity* at increasing risk. This had happened to the Christian ideal in Nietzsche’s time on a societal scale, and on a personal level to the Dionysian ideal at the end of Nietzsche’s own life. If no longer for Nietzsche, then—following Foucault—*Dionysus versus the Crucified* remains an ongoing source of meaning and confrontation for us.

²⁹⁴ Nietzsche, letter to Paul Deussen, Turin, 26 November 1888. My translation from the German: “mein Zarathustra wird wie die Bibel gelesen werden,” and “die Bibel der Zukunft.”

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- AC *The Antichrist*
- BGE *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*
- BT *The Birth of Tragedy: or Hellenism and Pessimism*
- D *Daybreak*
- EH *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*
- GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*
- GS *The Gay Science*
- HH *Human, All too Human*
- TI *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*
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