Nietzsche, Psychology, & Metaphysics

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SCENE 1: NIETZSCHE AS PSYCHOLOGIST

The "will" is an utterly obscure concept— thoughts are not "caused" by a spiritual agent, wrote Nietzsche, a position that has been much supported by research in brain physiology. "Thoughts" as they occur to us are the computer printout of the complex electrical activity of the brain.

The person who argues for either free will or determinism is arguing for a particular fictional construct that he thinks is the best one for adaptation and power. They are all perspectives and that explained for Nietzsche why one cannot resolve these arguments. In such age-old interminable philosophical debates, who is wrong and who is right? Both are wrong, because both are organizing experience through different perspectives, neither of which are "true." His philosophical psychology and his philosophical perspectivism fit each other and they are consistent.

Nietzsche is the first great psychologist who attacked the notion of consciousness. Until Nietzsche's time consciousness was considered something almost divine—the great separation between man and the animals. Descartes, of course, makes it the starting point of all philosophy. Nietzsche turned the whole discussion around. He asked, why is there consciousness at all? He reminded us that other species get along just fine without it!

If consciousness is not something divinely given as man's unique attribute, then where does it come from? He answered this in *The Gay Science*. It has power value, survival value, because it comes from the necessity to communicate; it has social origin. Man is a weak animal and he needs constant care by his fellows. In order to express our needs we have to know ourselves. This is a social and evolutionary theory of the origin of consciousness.

Language has to express "the perspective of the herd," as he called it. Easy communication is necessary for survival so we all have to know what we mean by certain basic words. A very important contrast appears here in philosophy between Nietzsche and the so-called British ordinary language philosophers. Philosophers like Strawson begin by *accepting* ordinary language. They would say our philosophical problems arise out of the incorrect use of language. Nietzsche was *far* more radical; he said,

whatever becomes conscious and said in language is already "shallow and stupid." All common language that the British philosophers are interested in represents nothing but "herd signs," signs that developed to enable easy communication for survival. He wanted to revise and overcome ordinary language, in contrast to the British philosophers who take it as a given starting point.

Furthermore, he said there is no certain knowledge of inner states, there are just familiar states. We constantly try to change the unfamiliar to the familiar. That was his rather simplistic theory of dreams. Dreams for Nietzsche represent a search in the imagination for "causes" of random physiological sensations. They are arbitrary interpretations of these stimuli—which are experienced *first*, before the explanations. His point was that in our waking state man "reasons" the same way—the representation a certain state *produces* is taken to be the *cause* of the state. All are fictions, useful in sleep and waking to give an apparent rational structure to the world. His dream theory is wrong because he left out the unconscious mind discovered by Freud, but it is a useful example of what he was talking about in his entire psychology. A person is asleep and has a sensation of the alarm going off. It is an unfamiliar noise going off in his head while he is asleep—so he dreams something that fits the noise into some context that makes it familiar. It is all aimed at comfort, not really providing understanding of anything. There is no capturing of Reality in either the mental or physical sciences. For Nietzsche, the inner and outer world are images of each other, projections and reflections.

Man is an animal with no separate soul, said Nietzsche, although he is not a behaviorist since he claimed that in psychology we use both introspection and sense perception. There are no facts of consciousness; everything is colored by wishes and especially the wish to be comfortable. He rejected all "mental faculties," all "pure thought," and the whole Cartesian notion of the mind as a "thinking substance." As a matter of fact, he viewed consciousness as a danger to the organism. He said that our most efficient acts were automatic acts—for instance, typing—we do that far more efficiently than thinking about a mathematical problem. Typing comes automatically—one needs no reflective consciousness while typing. This is a deliberate tremendous overturning of the role that consciousness has been given in philosophy up to this time, far more radical even than Freud.

The notion that passion and not reason controls and drives man was not Freud's discovery, it was Nietzsche's fundamental principle, but he always added that sublimations of these passions are best. He

was not an advocate of raw, crude passions but he insisted that the body and the mind, or passion and reason, are inseparable. He emphasized the plasticity of human nature. Even conflict can be good, because it generates growth. For Nietzsche, man is the only sick and unfinished animal.

He made a disastrous blunder in genetics. Like Freud he believed in the Lamarckian theory; this view underlies Nietzsche's hope that if we can produce his aristocratic overman it would then be inherited. This is now definitely proven biologically not possible. He wanted man not to peter out— genetics for Nietzsche is at the core of our being and our fate. Only man, he said, is yet not fixed in heredity. In contrast to other species, man is sick and unsettled. He claimed that man is stabilizing at a hereditary mediocrity; he was thinking mainly about the Victorian man, the bourgeois self-satisfied man. He wanted to elevate man . . . otherwise, "the last man!" He thought of himself as trying to save the entire human species from a disaster. It is a Messianic kind of philosophy and is very egotistical.

There is no thinking subject and there are no things-in-themselves for Nietzsche. Such agents cannot be truly separated from the process of appearance. He pointed out that scientists and artists create a second degree world out of the world of appearances— an arranged and simplified version. This, of course, can be done in innumerable ways, so obviously we can have many artistic versions of the world and many scientific versions of the world. They are perspectives and they all involve a simplification and a reduction and furthermore—a fascinating part of Nietzsche's psychology—a person's perspective changes as he moves through the phases of life from childhood to old age. This has been experimentally proven by research in developmental psychology--for example, a child from birth to adolescence undergoes substantial changes in his perspective of space, time, causation, and so on. Nietzsche would take it even further—he would say that all through our whole life we go through phases in which perspectives change; for example, the old jocular adage that a college student who is not a liberal has no heart and a middle-aged person who is not a conservative has no brains. Life compels us to these changes because they are required for adaptation; we live in a world of continual flux and conflict and as we get older we have different problems, therefore we require different perspectives ("truths") to provide power to resolve these problems.

SCENE 2: NIETZSCHE AND HEGEL

Hegel was one of the first philosophers to take the history of philosophy seriously. Hegel claimed that philosophy progressed by what he called dialectic to culmination and fulfillment, and that culmination and fulfillment happened to be the philosophy of Hegel. Nietzsche, as one might guess, could not agree with this because he did not believe in any possible moving towards any absolute truth; he insisted that there is no absolute truth. He said that one philosophy just corrects another, so the history of philosophy is simply one of power clashes. Philosophers are constantly fighting with each other but it does not lead anywhere; there is no truth and no fulfillment. No higher truth emerges from this clash—only continuous clashes of wills; sometimes one perspective temporarily predominates and sometimes another, explained Nietzsche.

A third obvious view would be that philosophy is going *backwards*, and that is the view of Heidegger (1968, Steiner 1979) who argued that philosophy is retrogressive—it has led away from the key question with which it began, namely, man's relationship to Being. According to Heidegger, philosophy has moved steadily to the "technical" and away from openness to Being. Heidegger borrowed from Nietzsche; also following Nietzsche, he made Socrates the turning point.

Hegel thought of himself at the close of an era and he thought of himself as the last great world historical philosopher who had finally reconciled Greek philosophy and Christian dogma, and who had produced a fulfillment of all philosophy. This is in great contrast to Nietzsche, who thought of himself as beginning a new era. Nietzsche maintained that he had uncovered the hypocrisy of Christian morality, a morality which depreciates this life, diminishes striving, and emphasizes other-worldly retribution and reward. He saw himself as the Messianic herald of the anti-Christian epoch.

He attacked Christian morality from another point of view, for he challenged the compulsion arising from Christian morality to run and help others rather than perfecting one's self first. Hiding behind the respectable facade of Christian virtue he called Tartuffery, after the character in Moliere's t famous play, *Tartuffe*. Above all he opposed those who profess Christianity but are unchristian in their practice.

For Nietzsche the weak will not find happiness through conformity. Only the man with self-

overcoming can find the good life here—not in dreams of the next life. Socrates and Goethe are offered as supreme examples of men who have attained this excellence— here again we see Nietzsche's curious ambivalence towards Socrates. He argued that if man would perfect himself first, then a lot of goodness would come automatically.

For Nietzsche there is no such thing as a finished system of anything. Nietzsche can be compared to Leonardo daVinci; in their work nothing is finished. Every work of art that Leonardo did he abandoned. He was never satisfied with anything he did, he was always asking questions—what Nietzsche calls fearless questioning—but he never found enough answers to satisfy himself.

Nietzsche distinguished among philosophers between the philosophical laborers, as he calls them in *Beyond Good and Evil*, who present systems that are nothing but wish fulfillment, and what he would call philosophers proper, who create new values and new truths. Therefore, according to Nietzsche, a philosophical system rests on basic assumptions which are nothing but the expression of the mental makeup of the philosopher.

For example, Nietzsche might say that the reason Whitehead developed his particular philosophy is that it occurred to Whitehead after a very significant event in Whitehead's life, the death of his only son in World War I, which was a disaster he never got over. All of Whitehead's philosophy can be thought of as an attempt to produce an interrelatedness of everything in this world and the next so that you are in a sense reunited with everyone who has died and who will come ahead of you. To get a little nasty about it, Nietzsche might also say that Whitehead's philosophy changed when Bertrand Russell made a pass at his wife —which led to a power struggle that was reflected in a clash between their subsequent philosophies. These are things not published in the professional journals of philosophical laborers, but they are documented in all the biographies of Russell and Whitehead.

So, according to Nietzsche, God, "the moral law within," Truth, and *all* premises must be questioned, must be under suspicion. He then proceeded to give us a metaphysics of his own as if he had not written anything at all up until then about the impossibility of attaining truth in philosophy!

SCENE 3: NIETZSCHE'S METAPHYSICS

The core of his thought and the key to his entire philosophy is the notion of the Will to Power. This has nothing to do with fascism or politics; it depends heavily on sublimation—the powers of self-control, the power expressed in the creation of art, the power in self-discipline and overcoming suffering. It has nothing to do primarily with the subjugation of other people. It is based, as everything in Nietzsche is based, on the Greeks—here he has in mind the Greek concept of a contest, for example, between Socrates and his judges in the *Apology*. The acme of power for Nietzsche is the self-possessed man who has no fear of himself, no fear of other men, no fear of death, and whose simple personality--unaided by any props—changes the lives of all who encounter him. In Socrates and Goethe he admired men of intelligence, passionate men who master their passions and who use these passions intelligently and creatively.

One can make what is known as a "hard interpretation" of Nietzsche or a "soft interpretation" of Nietzsche, because his language is ambiguous. There are plenty of passages in which the will to power seems to be described as two barbarians hitting each other over the head with clubs. If one is sympathetic to Nietzsche, then one likes to think of a more gentle intellectual or cultural type of contest. The reader must choose his own perspective in this deliberately ambiguous presentation by Nietzsche.

The key assumption is that the only thing wanted for its own sake is power. Even in the sex act, power for him is what counts—and clearly Nietzsche over-interprets everything with respect to this one doctrine. Furthermore it is objected that he is not a philosopher because he did not really give a systematic account or a scientific study of this. He did not study apparent exceptions to it, nor did he study alternative possibilities; this is poor professional philosophy.

Nietzsche did a lot of preaching rather than analyzing carefully of his own metaphysics; at times he even applied his one principle to the inanimate world. Why did he do this? He deliberately chose this unpleasant phrase "will to power" because he wanted to shock. He was trying to counteract Victorian prudery. "Will to power" was considered a very nasty phrase especially in those days; it would have horrified anyone who professed hypocritical Christian morality or "Tartuffery." In *Ecce Homo* one finds him worriedly saying; don't mistake me, above all don't misunderstand me! What he was really talking about was a course of thought, not action—a striving to transcend one's self (a soft interpretation of Nietzsche).

The Dionysian man who gives style to his own character and who can tolerate his passions because he is strong enough to control them was Nietzsche's ideal. This man, this overman, achieves joy—he wants nothing to be different than it is—in Nietzsche's famous phrase *amor fati*.

Amor fati is the direct negation of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Nietzsche's man overcomes himself, embraces the struggle of life with happiness, and rejoices in it. Schopenhauer's man is pessimistic —he withdraws from life into either music or asceticism. Here is a very important contrast between these two philosophers and it shows how far Nietzsche came since his early idealization of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Nietzsche's Will to Power is an absolute and therefore it contradicts Nietzsche's own philosophy. It forms a hypostasized metaphysical force. In other words, he has taken his observations of the will to power as manifest in various situations and has hypostasized it into an absolute force which exists *everywhere* . This is exactly what he complains that other philosophers do, and like them he starts to use it instead of divine design, for example, to explain evolution. It is clearly being used with the same explanatory function as divine plan; to say that man has evolved because God had a plan in His mind that man should reach a certain image or a certain peak, or to say man evolved because Will to Power is an action in everything, is still appealing to an organizing force—whether we call it divine or some other absolute. It is therefore an ontological concept and it places Nietzsche into the tradition of classical philosophy in spite of all his protest. It is an ontological concept just like "substance," a monistic philosophy in the ancient pre-Socratic tradition of monism, the ultimate explanatory principle of everything.

It is also an experimental idea, in that Nietzsche is somewhat different as he oscillates back and forth; sometimes he talks as if "this is it," and sometimes he talks as if it is an experimental idea he is toying with.

For Nietzsche pain becomes a normal ingredient of every organic event. We don't have to explain the presence of evil; evil is necessary, pain is necessary, suffering is necessary—all are part of conflict. The aim of life then becomes not happiness but power.

Happiness or pleasure or joy for Nietzsche is a side-effect of continual self-overcoming. This is a

very important idea, because for philosophers up to Nietzsche happiness consisted of peace and repose where one is not driven by one's passions and by one's needs. Aristotle, for example, says every man seeks *eudaemonia*, which in Greek does not mean happiness (a common mistranslation), it means freedom from being pursued by troubles, a sense of repose. Here Nietzsche was even ahead of the early Freud (Chessick 1980).

Let us turn next to the overman (*Übermensch*) and the last man (*der Letzte Mensch*). The term overman has been translated as "superman" by most translators. Kaufmann (1968) translated it as "overman," because superman today has a Nazi connotation (most translators still don't agree with him). It is important to know that the overman theoretically includes women—it isn't specifically a sexist idea. It is a term which comes from Goethe's *Faust*, a poem against the petrifaction of knowledge, against the sterile academician.

One of the important differences between the overman and the last man is that the last man is characterized by wishing to be like everyone else as much as possible. The last man wishes to be content and happy. The overman on the other hand, is a person who has organized the chaos of his passions, given style to his character, and has become creative. He is aware of life's terrors but he affirms life without resentment. He sees perfection as a task. Nietzsche again and again insisted on trying to give a meaning to one's own life without Christianity, for he claimed there is no such thing as supernatural dignity. For Nietzsche, man is not separated out in some divine fashion and the only dignity to man's life is the dignity we give it.

According to Nietzsche, to raise ourselves above the senseless flux of appearance, we must cease being human-all-too-human (to use his phrase); we must be hard against ourselves, overcome ourselves, and be "creators not creatures." He believed that if we could get some people to be that way it could then be inherited (which, as explained, is simply biologically wrong, since acquired characteristics cannot be inherited). Nietzsche appreciated great men not because they made history but because he saw them as embodying a state of being that all of us long for. For Nietzsche, this was the only ultimate value there is, the overman.

It gets to be quite an argument as to just what Nietzsche was talking about in this overcoming. For

instance, how much of this is a reflection of Nietzsche's attempt to overcome his own psychosomatic illnesses and headaches? It depends on whether we take a hard or a soft interpretation of Nietzsche. If we take a soft interpretation we see this more or less as a philosophical position, whereas a hard interpretation views Nietzsche as projecting his own personal struggle to stay afloat in his philosophy. As an example from recent studies, Stern (1979) disagreed with Kaufmann and claimed that Nietzsche's idea of the overman is a call to conquest and a call to enhancement of an elect percentage of mankind. Nietzsche is open to this kind of criticism because of the rhetorical and ambiguous terminology he deliberately used.

He is also open to criticism because Nietzsche does not ever explain how a person should become an overman. It is easy enough to tell somebody to be an overman but it is another trick to tell them how to become one. Nietzsche gave very little illustration of this throughout all his work. He offered us the idea that the overman is a joyous person and a guiltless person and a master of his drives who may even decide to turn these drives to produce science, art, or philosophy, but he did not really explain how to reach that point.

One of the most important differentiations between the overman and the last man is in that the last man is looking for peace and quiet, contentment and happiness. Nietzsche scorned this; he considered it to be degenerate, to be a sign of the exhaustion of the culture. The overman, on the other hand, is an adventurer who joyously affirms traveling to the moon in a spaceship, or creating a new scientific field, and so on, and as an adventurer the overman has to accept suffering and pain and overcome it, in contrast to the last man, whose happiness is perhaps the T.V. set and a can of beer.

The most difficult part of Nietzsche for students to understand is the concept of the eternal recurrence, "the eternal recurrence of the same." Commentators widely disagree even on the importance of this concept. Jaspers (1966) essentially ignored the eternal recurrence, whereas Heidegger (1979) considered it very important. The reason I am inclined to follow Heidegger is that Nietzsche himself considered his discovery of the eternal recurrence to be the most exciting of his concepts and to be the capstone that puts the hammerlock of authenticity on his philosophical system.

This doctrine is not as original as Nietzsche made it out to be. It was held in one form or another by

pre-Socratic philosophers, especially Pythagoras and Empedocles. It was also held by the German poet Heine. If it is true, it reinforces tremendously the importance of joyously affirming our present existence and giving style and meaning to life. Imagine if one is going to have to live this moment over again, eternally over again many many times, how important it is to make every moment the most joyous exciting creative moment one can make it. The concept of authenticity and making life meaningful is one of the fundamental tenets of existential philosophy. Existential psychotherapists also have this in common with Nietzsche, but like him they never give much explanation of how you are supposed to do it. Like Nietzsche, they tell you in the most powerful rhetoric possible it is very important, and certainly if the eternal recurrence is true it becomes infinitely more important.

This is a metaphysical theory, yet Nietzsche claimed that it was a scientific theory. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence is what surely makes Nietzsche a metaphysician in spite of himself. No scientist has ever held this doctrine, nor am I aware of any scientific argument that tries to establish through modern science any such doctrine.

At the essence of it is the concept of *amor fati*; the overman is characterized by making his life so exhilarating, so drunken with happiness and joy, that he loves the moment and he never wants it to be any different than it is. As Nietzsche put it, *amor fati* means: do not wish things to be otherwise—live so you desire to live again. It underlines the importance of the individual. The doctrine of eternal recurrence adds dignity to the individual because now he is dealing with something that is going to recur again and again eternally so he must come up now with something in life that is worth being permanent. After spending innumerable pages on throwing out the permanent world of Forms and Ideas of Plato, Nietzsche turned completely around and gave us something permanent and eternal—the timeless eternal recurrence of every moment.

Notice how different this is from the Victorian idea of progress. Nietzsche did not say that the world is progressing, improving, and getting better; he insisted that it is going around in a circle. Because of this, and because there is no possibility of any breakthrough to any higher reality as far as Nietzsche is concerned, the problem is to make the world as it is here and now more acceptable.

What happens if we believe this doctrine? This is another way to criticize any metaphysical system;

suppose I believe this system—what will the consequences be? First of all, it renders the world aimless and impersonal. Second, it indicates that man will live the same life countless times, so that the eternal recurrence then is a reward or punishment for one's success or failure in becoming an overman. It represents an extreme fatalism for the purpose of generating a maximum energy toward self-overcoming. If we believe in the eternal recurrence our becoming an overman becomes a matter of infinitely more importance, since we are going to have to go through this over and over and over again. *Amor fati* then becomes the love of the fate which returns everlasting.

T. S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets* wrote about "an eternally frozen mobility." It is a poetic doctrine and that is what Nietzsche had in mind—to find some way out of the chaotic world of appearances. Nietzsche said there is no way out, there are nothing but perspectives that each individual man imposes on the world of appearances. It is a dramatic plan for motivating authenticity.

Jaspers (1954, 1970) suggested another way out—there are "ciphers." Every religious system, every beautiful sunset, every attempt at philosophizing is a "cipher," which illuminates temporarily something he calls the "encompassing." One has to make a fundamental choice between Nietzsche and Jaspers here.

How do we decide which choice to make, how do we criticize a metaphysical system? The decision we make will have to be based on some criterion. If we want to criticize metaphysical systems on the basis of psychology, we can say the metaphysical system we choose will be a reflection of our particular character or psychology. For example an optimistic person may vote for "the transcendent" of Jaspers; if one is perhaps obsessive, one will be an "analytic" philosopher. Or we can take a psychoanalytic view and say the metaphysical system we have chosen will be dictated by our unconscious; it will be a form of wish-fulfillment. In the next scene this crucial age-old philosophical and psychological problem which so preoccupied Nietzsche will be investigated and explained in detail.

SCENE 4: METAPHYSICS OR AUTISTIC REVERIE?

Beginning with Thales in the sixth century B.C., the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers took a tremendous step forward from the chaotic and unpredictable theology of Homer and Hesiod (Chessick

1977). For these philosophers, the cosmic processes were not personified but rather conceived of impersonally and with emphasis on natural and necessary movements. They did not repeat ancient doctrine but instead reached their own conclusions, made of sweeping generalizations, often not carefully reasoned. Above all, they introduced the Greek notion of a well ordered harmony in the universe, a *kosmos*, the first principles of which were thought to exist eternally.

With the questions of whether there is anything orderly in, or anything that serves as the ground of the apparent world of chaotic appearances, we have the beginning of metaphysics. Metaphysics does not possess a method to reach truth either analogous to or the same as the method of experimental science, which has proven so powerful and efficient in our time toward the advancement of empirical knowledge of the universe. Indeed, we know that the answers to the crucial questions that all metaphysics asks cannot be found by the methods of experimental science. I have discussed this problem in a previous publication (Chessick 1982a) and will now review my views on a subject which constantly preoccupied Nietzsche, and which he never solved.

William James (1890) said, "Metaphysics means nothing but an unusually obstinate effort to think clearly." As Socrates explains in Plato's *Theatetus* (Passmore 1966): "We no longer seek for knowledge in perception at all, but in that other process, however called, in which the mind is alone and engaged with being." For the man of action involved in the world of everyday life, the questions metaphysics asks are profitless. On the other hand, man as a psyche or spirit, not totally immersed in the world, standing out from or observing the world, seems to be compelled to ask metaphysical questions—to seek a unity behind or underlying the curious but unavoidable subject-object situation of our apparently absurd existence. Kant called this the "regulative function" of reason.

In the history of philosophy there has been a waxing and waning of confidence in the capacity of reason to gain answers to metaphysical questions. During some periods, such as the pre-Socratic time or the era of the German idealists in the 19th century, it was believed that metaphysical questions could be answered by seeking within the mind, and elaborate theoretical structures were developed by various geniuses to answer them; we may call these the various "systems of the world" or, with Pepper (1942), "world hypotheses." At other more despairing times such as the era of the Sophists or our present era, there has been a reaction away from the investigation of *physics* or "the real nature of things" and a sense

of hopelessness about the discovery of the answers to metaphysical questions. This hopelessness usually followed the flowering of a series of conflicting metaphysical systems of the world, with no method to choose among them that is acceptable to all, leading to skepticism, confusion, disintegration, and an eventual cynical immoral ism or opportunism on the one hand, or a bad tempered irrational clinging to ancestral custom on the other.

In order to find the answers to metaphysical questions one either has to find a method that can be generally accepted, or admit that thinking on metaphysical issues cannot bring "truth" in the sense that the term is used in the sciences—a correspondence to experiential reality with predictability and testability through the manipulation of experimental variables. That is why numerous authors have insisted that thinking about metaphysical questions yields a different kind of information than scientific truth or knowledge in the empirical or cognitive sense.

Visionary thinkers like Plato who emphasize the "higher regions" of thought tend to reach a two-world theory in which a superior world of Eternal Being presides and is grasped through an inferior world of apparent experience and changing chaos, whereas "common sense" philosophers like Aristotle try to reduce the two worlds by making the productions of reason and the mind simply abstractions derived from sensory experiences, such as the laws of science. Yet even Aristotle insisted on the paradoxical (in his own system) concept of reason alone having a partly divine or eternal nature as an immaterial thinking substance. He did not escape the metaphysical question of the relationship of mentation to matter, and he floundered inconsistently on the metaphysical concept of substance. Like Plato he emphasized intuitive reason as an important procedure by which first principles are directly grasped, and separated this from deliberative reason, which aims at practical wisdom, and even from the process of inductive generalization, another function of the highest form of reason, according to Aristotle.

It is easy to see how metaphysical thinking conceived of as "intuitive grasping" can quickly lead to autism, mysticism, and ecstatic religious experiences. The extreme of this Greek view is of course embodied in the philosophy of Plotinus, in which the aim of metaphysical thinking is to eventually reach mystical union with the transcendent Good, a coming out of one's self in ecstasy. Thus Freud (1927) could write, "I not only have no talent for it (metaphysics) but no respect for it either. In secret—one cannot say such things aloud—I believe that one day metaphysics will be condemned as a nuisance, as an

abuse of thinking as a survival from the period of the religious *Weltanschauung*."

Although Freud repeatedly insisted that psychoanalysis was a natural science, numerous authors have demonstrated this to be a gross oversimplification. Whether or not they are correct, psychoanalysis, like any science, clearly contains important metaphysical and epistemological assumptions that are much debated today. Brann (1959) carried this even further by attempting to delineate a philosophical system implicit in Freud's "psychology," and he offered numerous references to others who have attempted to do the same; all this in spite of Freud's repeated denials of philosophy, and his flat rejection of metaphysics. In fact Slochower (1975) turned the process around and attempted to psychoanalyze Freud's attitude towards ontology! Perhaps this is some kind of ironic reply to Fenichel's (1923) most outspoken paper, in which an uncompromising denial that psychoanalysis harbors a metaphysics is coupled with an interpretation of all metaphysical thinking as a regression from adult reason to infantile thought and longings. In fairness to Fenichel, I think Freud would have entirely agreed with him.

After the Greeks in the history of metaphysical thinking we find an increasing preoccupation with the limitations of reason, culminating in the modern trend of claiming that metaphysical questions themselves are either spurious or represent, as Wittgenstein insisted, mistakes or unjustifiable aberrations in the use of language. This attitude is found already in St. Bonaventure, who insisted that purely rational knowledge or philosophy *must* fall into error and that faith is necessary for metaphysics. Thus for St. Bonaventure philosophical science as he calls it, is the way to other sciences, but he who wishes to stop there falls into darkness.

In the late middle ages William of Ockham made a major advance by providing a vital methodological principle. He insisted that reason must reach its own kind of truth in its own way. He thus ruled out hidden purposes, occult forces, and "divine love" that dominated the medieval (and Aristotelean) explanation of nature. In so doing he gave a much needed emphasis to logic, subjecting all proposed answers to metaphysical questions to the relentless rules of logic. Ockham was not an empirical scientist but he demanded that in our thinking about metaphysical questions, a) we try to answer with the fewest possible principles, b) we employ the fewest possible entities or theoretical constructs, and c) we choose the simplest hypotheses. These demands became known as Ockham's razor, and are clearly still quite relevant, as reflected in Passmore's (1966) recent insistence that "it is our job to subject the

audacious speculation of our great men to the most rigorous possible critical examination, the sort of examination to which, indeed, they subjected their own ideas in the process of formulating them . . . . For metaphysics, or so I have suggested, is speculation controlled by close critical reasoning."

The successful explosion of science beginning in the 17th century led to serious attempts to establish metaphysics as also amenable to scientific investigation, but as fast as various aspects of metaphysical questions were subjected to successful scientific investigation, new sciences were formed and the questions dropped out of the province of metaphysics. However, the great crucial metaphysical questions about our being in the world and the grounds of our knowledge, values, and freedom of choices remain stubbornly impermeable to any form of scientific investigation.

Thought begins with definitions and self-evident premises and by deduction reaches a series of conclusions based on the use of reason alone. Yet when man looks at nature or the world of experience he finds that these conclusions appear in sense experience also. *Why* should this be true? Kant attempted to answer by his famous "Copernican revolution," in which he hoped to demonstrate how the contributions of our mind to our experiences make it impossible for us to experience the world in any other way. This represented for Kant the limits of pure reason and made room for faith, but Kant also accepted man's constant innate compulsion to answer metaphysical questions, even though he demonstrated that the application of our empirically derived notions such as that of causality to metaphysical questions represented a confusion between the phenomenal world and what he called the noumenal world. Thus we cannot, according to Kant, attain further knowledge of reality in the scientific sense by metaphysical thought, although we are compelled to try to do so, leading to endless disputes and a disrepute of metaphysics.

Kant established the important distinction between *Verstand*, scientific understanding,[1] and *Vernunft*, which seeks out transcendental ideas of unity. He characterized this seeking as a natural tendency of the human mind to exercise what he called a regulative function. For Kant the only science of metaphysics possible is the investigation of the boundaries or limits of human reason, and speculative metaphysics, seeking out the transcendental, is similar to religious visions, which may either come from the spiritual world of theology or from psychopathology.[2] Kant did not deny the natural impulse of the reflective mind to strive after unified conceptual syntheses—to think obstinately beyond the limits of

reason—and indeed in his own lifetime there appeared the first of the great German idealist constructions, which rested on the fundamental error of claiming that metaphysical speculation could reach knowledge of a *cognitive* nature on a par with or even higher than the knowledge of science.

In reaction to the post-Kantian German idealists, Dilthey distinguished natural sciences, which study objects from without, from what he called *Geisteswissenschaften*, usually translated as "cultural sciences," such as history, literature, poetry, metaphysics, and psychology. In the latter group, getting in to the inward spiritual structure, from external phenomena to operative inward purposes and ideals which are expressed in them, a reliving or empathic identification, represents the crucial methodology. For the so-called inductive metaphysicians of the time, the scientific view of the world demanded completion through such metaphysical reflection. They explained how reflection on the world that is known to us through the sciences reasonably and inevitably leads to metaphysical theories.

The question of how to validate metaphysical theories remains a burning issue. Bradley insisted that the validation of metaphysical findings occurs through a kind of intuition or basic feeling-experience; thus his famous saying that metaphysics is "finding bad reasons for what we believe on instinct." Bradley's skepticism and ambivalence about the possibilities of reason in answering metaphysical questions represented a turning point away from attempts to grasp Reality, to the meticulous (shall we say obsessive?) analysis of appearance and ordinary language by British philosophers after the turn of this century.

The problems of metaphysics refuse to go away. Insisting that either logical reductive analysis or positivism is the only "sensible" approach to philosophy, is in itself a metaphysical principle which cannot be proven within the positivist system. Scientific investigation even in the laboratory could not go on without the assumption that the world has orderly intelligible characteristics for science to discover; this premise of the ordered intelligibility of Reality is a metaphysical proposition which cannot be established by the method of science. Thus Bachelard insisted that every science contains an "epistemological profile."

We are left with the inevitability of metaphysics and the establishment of metaphysical propositions by either "intuition" of various types such as described by Bradley or Bergson, or a form of

reason that one may call with Copleston (1966) "transcendental reflection." For example, we can know the mind empirically or scientifically in natural science only as a succession of introspectively experienced mental states in time that we might label the phenomenal self; yet we have a sense of self known indirectly through its absolute necessity to establish the transcendental unity of apperception—this is the transcendental or noumenal self of Kant. More recently we have the self known empathically—the self of Kohut's (1977) "psychology of the self in the broad sense." (For details see Chessick 1977a, 1981).

All this leaves unanswered the question of how man can establish the validity of metaphysical assertions. The translation of the answers achieved by metaphysical thinking into discursive speech is a necessity arising out of the normal human need for communication with others and the human wish for consensual validation. Without this translation metaphysical speculation runs the risk of becoming autistic reverie. This is the danger of Arendt's (1977) approach in *The Life Of The Mind*. How does one tell the difference between the privately experienced metaphysical solutions of a reasoning philosopher and the visions or reveries of a schizophrenic, a religious mystic, or someone on L.S.D. or mescaline? They can only be distinguished if we refer the conclusions of metaphysical thinking to the world of appearance, and use these conclusions as explanatory concepts subject to debate and verification by other humans.

For example, take the famous "paranoid crystallization" described by the psychiatrist H. S. Sullivan, in which the paranoid schizophrenic suddenly "understands" the phenomena around him in terms of what might be called a quasi-metaphysical enlightenment, that makes sense for him out of the shattered phenomena of his everyday life, and eases the burden of his fragmented sense of self. When his paranoid delusions are expressed to others however, this quasi-metaphysical system breaks down and is revealed as based on autistic reverie, part of an idiosyncratic attempt to restore a fragmented self.

The life of the mind *in solitude* as Heidegger and his pupil Arendt recommend runs the danger of degenerating into autistic reverie; one needs to come back into the world and engage in dialectic with other persons, not just one's self. It *is* true that metaphysical preoccupation causes one to live as a stranger in the darkness of the actual social here-and-now. The life of a person possessed by metaphysical questions requires no implements or special place to live, and engenders a cosmopolitan

spirit of tolerance. The presuppositions of every civilization and every science, which are metaphysical propositions, are so important to human history and the future of man that a continuing debate is unavoidable. For such a debate to occur, the intuitive grasp of metaphysical propositions *must* be translated into the common speech of mankind. Any metaphysical answers that cannot be so translated remain indistinguishable from autistic reverie or idiosyncratic quasi-religious visions that may be of enormous help to the individual but only as equivalent to a drug-induced trance as an escape from the world of reality.

Metaphysics represents an ongoing debate in the history of man regarding certain fundamental premises that have been grasped by transcendental reflection (*Vernunft*) and which, when generally accepted by a given culture, have led to the flowering of various civilizations and the explosion of science. Metaphysics differs from autism, religion, or mysticism, essentially because it demands the application of the rules of reason to its speculative findings and employs Ockham's razor whenever possible. Metaphysics differs from science because metaphysical propositions cannot be demonstrated by standard scientific methodology; in fact when certain metaphysical propositions become demonstrable by scientific methodology we have the establishment of a new science and the issues involved are no longer labelled as metaphysics.

The problem of methodology in metaphysics falls within the realm of Dilthey's *Geisteswissenschaften* as described above—the cultural sciences, getting into the inward spiritual structure, empathic identification, moving from the external phenomena to operative inward purposes and ideals which are expressed in them. This is consistent with the viewpoint presented by Bergson in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which opens with a contrast between the two ways of knowing anything. When the intellect approaches the thing externally from some point of view alien to it, we have Dilthey's "natural sciences," that study objects from without. The second way is a process Bergson calls intuition, whereby we "enter into" the thing and identify ourselves with it by a kind of "intellectual sympathy" or the art of "intellectual auscultation." This is compared to identifying ourselves with a figure in a novel we are reading, and results in a knowledge of Reality such as the method of empirical science can never yield. Similarly, existential psychiatrists have pointed out how this direct grasp of the patient at hand provides important complementary and vital information, most useful in psychotherapy.

Whitehead (1941) in *Process and Reality*, wrote,

> Speculative philosophy is the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted . . . . Philosophers can never hope finally to formulate these metaphysical first principles. Weakness of insight and deficiencies of language stand in the way inexorably. Words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap . . . .Thus one aim of philosophy is to challenge the half-truths constituting the scientific first principles (pp. 4-15).

In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead (1966) explained, "The great difficulty of philosophy is the failure of language . . . . Language halts behind intuition."

It is not true, as Arendt (1977) and Heidegger insisted, that no progress has been made in metaphysics since the time of the pre-Socratics, or that we have moved in a circle. The numerous metaphysical systems, influenced by each other, when translated into communicable words, have gradually yielded to the application of critical techniques for coherence and logic, leading to the refutation of a number of very attractive false starts, and making it harder and harder for any amateur (or obscure professional) to present an essentially autistic or esoteric metaphysical system as representing a satisfactory answer to the compelling problems of metaphysics.

Demonstrating a) the medieval confusion of metaphysics with theology, b) the mistake that metaphysical questions could be answered by science, and c) the fallacy of positivist disregard of metaphysics, are all examples of progress made through clarification and consensual validation, as pointed out in decisive detail by Blanshard (1966). Even those philosophers, such as certain neo-Hegelians, who argue that it is not self-evident that Ockham's razor is needed or even desirable[3] for metaphysics must face the necessity to find alternative methods to validate metaphysical propositions. If they can do so, it will represent further progress. Both science and metaphysics aim at the unfolding of man's knowledge of himself and the world around him; these disciplines complement each other and together represent "an unavoidable human enterprise" (Reck 1972). Let us turn more specifically to Nietzsche's view of it.

Notes

1 Here I am ignoring Arendt's idiosyncratic translation (1977) of Verstand as "intellect," and remain with the generally accepted

translation.

2 A subject of great interest to Kant the scientist, as in his pre-critical work Dreams of a Ghost-Seer.

3 For a recent discussion and defense of Ockham's razor, see Walsh (1979).