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The Truth of Extinction

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history', but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. – One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened.

(Nietzsche 1873)¹

Let us guard against saying death is the opposite of life; the living creature is simply a kind of dead creature, and a very rare kind.

(Nietzsche 1882)²

7.1 Nietzsche's fable

Nothing will have happened: Nietzsche's 'fable' perfectly distils nihilism's most disquieting suggestion: that from the original emergence of organic sentience to the ultimate extinction of human sapience 'nothing will have happened'. Neither knowing nor feeling, neither living nor dying, amounts to a difference that makes a difference – 'becoming aims

at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*'.³ Yet Nietzsche's entire philosophy is dedicated to overcoming this nihilistic conjecture. It is nihilism understood as the triumph of indeterminate negation, as assertion of the ultimate indifference or convertibility of being and becoming, truth and lie, reality and appearance, that Nietzsche seeks to vanquish by affirming the coincidence of being (identity) and becoming (difference) in a gesture that would simultaneously overthrow both their metaphysical distinction and their nihilistic indistinction. The instrument of this overturning and the focus of this affirmation are provided by the hypothesis of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche's 'thought of thoughts',⁴ which is poised at that 'mid-point'⁵ of (Western) history marking not only the culmination of European nihilism, but also the possibility of its overcoming.

According to Nietzsche, nihilism reaches its apogee in the pivotal moment when truth, hitherto the supreme value, turns against itself – for it is 'truthfulness' itself that calls the value of 'truth' into question, thereby subverting all known and knowable values, specifically the valuing of reality over appearance and knowledge over life.⁶ But truth, the venerable guarantor of value, is also the patron of belief, since for Nietzsche every form of belief is a 'holding-something-true'.⁷ Consequently, the self-undermining of truth calls the very possibility of belief into question: 'The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that *every* belief, every holding-something-true is necessarily false because there is no *true world*' (1968: §15). Yet as Nietzsche recognized, the collapse of belief in the true world also entails the dissolution of belief in the apparent world, since the latter was defined in contradistinction to the former.⁸ Disbelief in any reality beyond appearance cannot be converted into belief in the reality of appearance. Since the collapse of the reality–appearance distinction undermines the intrinsic connection between belief and truth, it is not something that can be straightforwardly endorsed or 'believed in'. Thus nihilism appears to undermine itself because it is incompatible with any belief – it seems that it cannot be believed in, for if nothing is true, then neither is the claim that 'nothing is true'. As a self-proclaimed 'perfect nihilist',⁹ Nietzsche refuses to retreat from this aporia and insists that it must be traversed, for nihilism can only be overcome from within. How then are we to think the apparently unthinkable thought that nothing is true, which, for Nietzsche, looms at the nadir of nihilism, yet also harbours the key to its overcoming?

For Nietzsche, this aporia of nihilism is simultaneously crystallized and dissolved in the thought of eternal recurrence.¹⁰ The thought of

recurrence is at once the ultimate nihilistic conjecture – ‘existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness’¹¹ – and what vanquishes nihilism by turning momentary transience into an object of unconditional affirmation and thereby into a locus of absolute worth:

Becoming must be explained without recourse to final intentions; becoming must appear justified at every moment (or incapable of being evaluated, which comes to the same thing); the present must not be justified by reference to the future, nor the past by reference to the present. [...] Becoming is of equivalent value at every moment; the sum of its values always remains the same; in other words, it has no value at all, for anything against which to measure it, and in relation to which the word ‘value’ would have meaning, is lacking. *The total value of the world cannot be evaluated* [...]

(1968: §708)

Accordingly, the affirmation of recurrence coincides with the *transvaluation* of all existing values. Transvaluation should not be understood as an operation of inversion, the substitution of the lowest and least valued for the highest and most valued and vice versa. Rather, as Deleuze points out in his ingenious (although controversial) *Nietzsche and Philosophy*,¹² transvaluation points to a fundamental *qualitative* transformation in the will to power – the ‘differential genetic element’ which produces values. Since all known (and knowable) values consecrated by Judeo-Christian culture are a function of those reactive forces animated by the negative will to nothingness, whose evaluations are governed by the norm of truth, the affirmation of eternal recurrence is at once the annihilation of all known values and the creation of unknown values. It exterminates all known values because it is the assertion of absolute eternal indifference, without even a ‘finale of nothingness’ to punctuate the sequence or to distinguish between beginning and end. In this regard, eternal recurrence is a ‘demonic’ hypothesis precisely insofar as it entails the evacuation of all meaning and purpose from existence, and hence the recognition of its ultimate valuelessness.¹³ Yet at the same time it also marks the discovery of a previously inconceivable kind of value because it asserts the absolute, invaluable worth of every moment of existence as such – it is no longer possible to separate one moment from another or to subordinate the value of the vanishing present to that of a cherished past or longed-for future. The transitoriness of the instant which was considered worthless in the old mode of valuation,

where becoming was deemed deficient with regard to the transcendent value of eternal being, becomes the focus of ultimate worth in the new one – transcendence is revoked and with it the possibility of appraising the worth or worthlessness of existence from some external vantage point.

Accordingly, nihilism is overcome through a transvaluation whereby the pointlessness of becoming is embraced beyond its opposition to the supposed purposefulness of true being – aimlessness is affirmed in and for itself, without appeal to extrinsic justification. Thus the affirmation of eternal recurrence marks the coincidence of ‘midday and midnight’¹⁴: it is at once the apex of affirmativeness – the eternalization of transience – and the nadir of negativity – the negation of all purposefulness. Yet as Deleuze and Heidegger both underline, despite their otherwise incompatible interpretations of Nietzsche, this is a conjunction of opposites which refuses the conciliatory mediation of dialectical negativity: rather, it affirms the immediate, irreconcilable coincidence of absolute value and valuelessness, affirmation and negation, immanence and transcendence. Moreover, this discordant conjunction of opposites finds expression in the antinomy inherent in the attempt to believe in recurrence, or ‘hold-it-as-true’. For the assertion of recurrence claims that the world is nothing but ceaseless becoming, without rest or fixity, and hence that there is no cognizable being underlying becoming, no final truth upon which belief could find a secure footing. Since Nietzsche identifies truth with permanence, and permanence with being, it follows for him that to believe that the world is nothing but becoming, without ever becoming something, is to believe that there is no truth and therefore to ‘hold-it-as-true’ that nothing is true. It is in fact a contradictory belief, one that cancels itself out, and as such is equivalent to the *unbelief* which refuses to hold anything as true. This is why the thought of eternal recurrence is an expression of what Nietzsche himself calls ‘the most extreme form of nihilism’. Belief in eternal recurrence provides the definitive expression of the nihilistic belief that nothing is true; more precisely, it is the only way of holding-it-as-true that nothing is true. The paradoxical structure of this belief in the impossibility of belief betrays a fault-line in the folk-psychological construal of rationality; one which already prefigures the paradox of eliminativism we encountered in Chapter 1. We saw there how the apparent contradiction inherent in the ‘belief’ that there are no beliefs vanishes once it is understood that belief is neither the substrate nor the vehicle of this assertion. Moreover, it is precisely insofar as the critique of FP introduces a reality–appearance distinction into the phenomenal

realm that it becomes possible to distinguish the phenomenological experience of belief from its psychological reality. In this regard, although Nietzsche anticipated, as no one else did, the depth of the crisis of the manifest image, the scanty resources provided by nineteenth-century psychology prompted him to transpose what he correctly identified as the impasse in the folk-psychological conception of rationality into a metaphysical register which merely recapitulated the specious categories of the psychology it was supposed to supplant. Thus while Nietzsche's penetrating critiques of pseudo-psychological categories such as that of 'intention'¹⁵ prefigure the critique of FP, his antipathy towards 'positivism' (combined with his debt to Schopenhauer) encourages him to replace it with a metaphysical surrogate – the 'will to power' – which exacerbates rather than palliates the poverty of the psychological register which it was called upon to supersede. As a result, the cognitive dilemma engendered by the collapse of the folk-psychological conception of truth is transcoded by Nietzsche into an axiological predicament necessitating a metaphysical transfiguration in the quality of the will whose symptom belief is supposed to be. In willing eternal recurrence, the will casts off the yoke of truth, which bridled it to those transcendent values that depreciated becoming, and is transformed into a will capable of embracing illusion: 'the lie – and *not* the truth – is divine!'¹⁶

Deleuze provides a particularly subtle account of this transformation in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. In Deleuze's reading, the thought of recurrence is the focal point for the transmutation of the will to power. Deleuze distinguishes that aspect of the will according to which it is knowable – its *ratio cognoscendi* – from that aspect through which the will exists as 'the innermost essence of being' (Nietzsche 1968: §693) – its *ratio essendi*. The negative will to power, which underlies the will to nothingness, whose symptom is the ascetic ideal, is simply the will's *ratio cognoscendi*, the knowable aspect of the will from which all hitherto *known* values derive. Nihilism – including Nietzsche's own active nihilism, insofar as it proceeds by unmasking existing values the better to expose the will to power which produced them – renders the will to power knowable to us, but only in its negative aspect as will to nothingness. This is why for Deleuze's Nietzsche, the history of human consciousness (and a fortiori, of philosophy) is the history of nihilism understood as the triumph of *ressentiment*, bad conscience, and the ascetic ideal. But the decisive juncture in this history occurs when the negative will to nothingness, which is also the philosophical will to truth, turns against truth itself and forces thought to break its alliance with knowing, and a

fortiori with those reactive forces which enforced the rule of knowledge and the norm of truth. In the thought of recurrence, the will which animates knowing is obliged to confront itself no longer according to its knowable aspect, but rather according to that aspect through which it *is*. But since, for Nietzsche, 'will to power' is a synonym for the world interpreted as a chaotic multiplicity of conflicting forces – 'This world is will to power – and nothing besides!'¹⁷ – which is to say, a synonym for 'becoming', then to think the will in its being is to think the being of becoming in its essentially dissimulatory, inherently self-differentiating 'essence' as a flux of perpetual transformation. Thus, the affirmation of recurrence marks the moment when the will comes to know that it cannot know itself in itself because its knowable aspect necessarily corresponds to nothing – since there is nothing, no aspect of the will 'in-itself', for it to correspond *to* or adequately represent.¹⁸ This is Deleuze's dexterous resolution of a latent dichotomy that threatened to undermine the minimal conceptual coherence which even Nietzsche's denunciation of rationality cannot do without – the dichotomy between the will's phenomenal aspect, understood as the evaluable and interpretable dimension of becoming, and its noumenal aspect, understood as the chaos of becoming 'in-itself', beyond evaluation and interpretation, to which Nietzsche often, but incoherently, alludes.¹⁹ This dichotomy can be avoided, Deleuze suggests, once it is understood that the will which affirms recurrence does not affirm becoming as something 'in itself', subsisting independently of that affirmation; rather, in affirming becoming without goal or aim, the will affirms itself.

For who else is capable of willing this annihilation of transcendent meaning and purposefulness and of endowing every vanishing instant with absolute worth as an end in itself if not the will to power as such? The 'overman' whom Nietzsche proclaims as alone capable of affirming eternal recurrence would no longer be a species of the genus 'man' but rather a placeholder for that perpetual self-overcoming which characterizes the will to power. Thus – and contrary to what Nietzsche himself often seems to suggest – the selection effected by the test of eternal recurrence would not be between types of human individual – noble versus base, strong versus weak, etc. – but rather between the will subordinated to extrinsic ends, and the will whose only end is itself. Only the will itself is devoid of all those interests and purposes whose satisfaction requires the utilitarian subordination of present means to future ends. Unconditional affirmation of the present is not only incommensurable with human consciousness, it is incompatible with organic

functioning, which is indissociable from the utilitarian trade-off between pleasure and pain, gratification and survival. Only the will to power, which wants nothing other than itself – which is to say, its own expansion, intensification, and self-overcoming – only this will which wants itself eternally is capable of willing the eternal recurrence of everything that is, without regard for the proportion of pleasure to pain:

Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love; if ever you wanted one moment twice, if ever you said 'You please me happiness, instant, moment!' then you wanted *everything* to return! [...] *For all joy wants – eternity!*

(Nietzsche 1969: 332)

Thus the scope of the transvaluation required by the affirmation of recurrence is as profound as it is uncompromising: it entails a will for which a moment of unadulterated joy, no matter how brief, is worth aeons of torment, no matter how excruciating. But two difficulties arise here. First, it is far from clear whether it is possible to commensurate joy and woe in such a way that the former, no matter how fleeting, will always outweigh the latter, no matter how prolonged. Second, there seems to be a latent indeterminacy in the normative claim that the will capable of affirming 'all woe' is nobler than the will that is not.

With regard to the first difficulty, Nietzsche seems to disregard a basic asymmetry in the relationship between joy and woe. For however multifaceted our experience of joy may seem to us, hampered as we are by the rather meagre descriptive resources available within the manifest image, our possibilities for physical pleasure, as well as for psychological enjoyment, can be demarcated within boundaries determined by a set of physiological and psychological constraints which, however complex the interplay between neurophysiological and psychosocial dynamisms, cannot be assumed to be limitless. Yet when compared with our relatively restricted capacity for experiencing physical and/or psychological 'joy', the sheer depth and breadth of our capacity for 'woe', both in terms of our vulnerability to physical pain and our susceptibility to psychological suffering, appears nigh-on unlimited. This discrepancy has been given a particularly striking formulation by the writer Jesús Ignacio Aldapuerta:

Consider the capacity of the human body for pleasure. Sometimes it is pleasant to eat, to drink, to see, to touch, to smell, to hear, to make love. The mouth. The eyes. The fingertips. The nose. The ears. The

genitals. Our voluptific capacities (if you will forgive me the coinage) are not exclusively concentrated in these places, but it is undeniable that they are concentrated here. The whole body is susceptible to pleasure, but in places there are wells from which it may be drawn up in greater quantity. But not inexhaustibly. How long is it possible to know pleasure? Rich Romans ate to satiety and then purged their overburdened bellies and ate again. But they could not eat for ever. A rose is sweet, but the nose becomes habituated to its scent. And what of the most intense pleasures, the personality-annihilating ecstasies of sex? [...] Even if I were a woman and could string orgasm upon orgasm like beads upon a necklace, in time I should sicken of it. [...] Yet consider. Consider pain. Give me a cubic centimeter of your flesh and I could give you pain that would swallow you as the ocean swallows a grain of salt. And you would always be ripe for it, from before the time of your birth to the moment of your death. We are always in season for the embrace of pain. To experience pain requires no intelligence, no maturity, no wisdom, no slow workings of the hormones in the moist midnight of our innards. We are always ripe for it. All life is ripe for it. Always. [...] Consider the ways in which we may gain pleasure. [...] Consider the ways in which we may be given pain. The one is to the other as the moon is to the sun.

(Aldapuerta 1995: 52–3)

This fundamental deficit between our susceptibility to pleasure and our vulnerability to pain vitiates the attempt to commensurate them. Indeed, the assumption that humans possess a limitless sensitivity to physical pleasure, or an inexhaustible capacity for psychological enjoyment, is an unfounded spiritualist conceit. In this regard, Nietzsche's insistence that 'joy is deeper than heart's agony' (1969: 331) implies that in affirming the recurrence of any moment of joy, the finite human organism transcends its own determinate psychophysical constitution. Thus, the affirmation of recurrence is the moment when finite lunar joy eclipses boundless solar pain. Yet Nietzsche provides no explanation of what makes this transcendence possible, other than saying that it is a function of some sort of 'strength' and/or 'power', while leaving the source of this 'strength' or 'power' completely indeterminate, apart from attributing it to an inherent 'superiority' in the character of the will. But given that the capacity for withstanding and surmounting pain is part of Nietzsche's definition of 'superiority of will' – a 'will' whose psychophysical basis remains wholly indeterminate – it is difficult to see

how this superiority, which is cashed out in terms of wholly traditional virtues such as fortitude, resilience, and resourcefulness, differs from the venerable definition of *spiritual* superiority: 'The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – you do not know that it is *this* discipline alone which has created every elevation of mankind hitherto?' (1990b: §225). This is simply to endorse, rather than undermine, the spiritualization of suffering; indeed it is difficult to see how it differs from familiar Judaeo-Christian paeans to the spiritually edifying virtues of suffering. Either one ascribes a redemptive function to suffering itself, as does Christian dolorism, or one reintroduces a spiritual economy of means and ends, where the experience of woe is compensated for by some past remembrance or future expectation of bliss. Neither option can be reconciled with the stated aim of Nietzsche's transvaluation, which was to overthrow the Judaeo-Christian register of evaluation altogether.

Moreover, to insist that the human organism is always capable of transcending suffering in principle, even if it does not do so in fact, is to stipulate an ethical norm which implicitly assumes the 'soul-superstition' according to which humans have been endowed with an infinite reservoir of spiritual energy which furnishes them with an inexhaustible capacity for physical resilience. Ultimately, it is difficult to divorce the positive evaluation of suffering from the claim that suffering *means* something, in accordance with the strictures which the manifest image imposes upon our understanding of meaning. But to invest suffering with the varieties of 'meaning' concomitant with the manifest image is to automatically reinscribe woe into a spiritual calculus which subordinates present suffering to some recollected or longed-for happiness. By way of contrast, to acknowledge the meaninglessness of suffering is already to challenge the authority of the manifest image, since it is precisely its senselessness that renders woe resistant to redemptive valuation.²⁰ Once the senselessness of suffering has been acknowledged, it becomes more apposite to insist that 'woe is deeper than heart's ecstasy'. This of course would be contrary to the explicitly stated goal of Nietzsche's transvaluation, viz., that suffering no longer be counted as an objection to life. Nevertheless, unlike its affirmative antithesis, to which, as we shall see below, Nietzsche attributes a redemptive function vis-à-vis suffering, it is precisely the refusal to affirm or redeem woe that challenges the authority of the manifest image.

The second difficulty in Nietzsche's attempted transvaluation of joy and woe follows on from the first. For whether woe is eclipsed by joy, or joy outweighed by woe, the question remains: whose joy; whose woe – mine or others? Construed as a test designed to effect the selection

between noble and ignoble varieties of individual will, the hypothesis of eternal recurrence is fatally underdetermined. If the selection is confined to the individual level, then it has to be acknowledged that any able-bodied, materially privileged epicure who has successfully maximized pleasure over displeasure in his or her existence will be eager to embrace eternal recurrence. Even the 'last man',²¹ whose 'miserable ease' ensures the preponderance of pleasure over displeasure in existence, might prove as likely to opt for eternal recurrence as the overman, whose affirmation of the entwining of joy and woe is ostensibly an act of self-overcoming. Nietzsche seems not to have envisaged the possibility that the noble individual might not be the only one capable of welcoming the 'demonic' hypothesis of recurrence; he did not anticipate its potential appeal to the bovine hedonist, whose coarseness effectively inures him or her to the demonic aspect of the thought. Accordingly, the ethical-psychological interpretation of recurrence as selective hypothesis is only viable if it is the individual's acceptance of his or her own allotment of suffering that the affirmation of recurrence invites, rather than the suffering of others – otherwise sadists and sociopaths would be as eager to embrace it as the noble types supposedly envisaged by Nietzsche. Yet even if we specify that only the individual is qualified to affirm his or her own suffering, ambiguity persists. For who is to say what proportion of joy and woe affirmed in an individual life constitutes the appropriate measure of magnanimity and courage required in order to distinguish the noble from the ignoble? How much suffering, and of what kind, should an individual be capable of enduring, without rancour or resentment, in order to qualify as courageous, rather than merely hardened? How much joy should an individual be capable of experiencing, and under what circumstances, for his or her delight in existence to be deemed a sign of spiritual munificence, rather than a symptom of indulgent libertinism? So long as the selection effected by the thought of recurrence is construed ethically and/or psychologically, and confined to the individual level, then its selectiveness remains vitiated by indeterminacy. Ultimately, the scope of the affirmation required by the thought of recurrence cannot be commensurated with any apportioning of joy and woe concomitant with the realm of individual human existence. For even when construed as a reformulated categorical imperative, as it is by Deleuze – *whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return*²² – the doctrine of recurrence furnishes no criterion that would allow us to discriminate between the ignoble will of the privileged libertine, whose affirmation of 'all woe' is a symptom of insouciance, and the noble will

of the spiritual aristocrat, whose affirmation of 'all woe' is a sign of munificence.

This is why Deleuze and Heidegger are right to insist that the differentiation operated by the affirmation of recurrence is epistemological and ontological, rather than psychological and anthropological. It does not select between noble and ignoble varieties of human will, but between the willing that is subordinated as a means for the fulfilment of ends, and the willing which abjures the economy of means and ends and has no other object than itself. The will that wills the recurrence of the instant is the will that wills the recurrence of everything, but in willing the recurrence of everything, the will simply wills itself: '[W]hat does joy not want! It is thirstier, warmer, hungrier, more fearful, more secret than all woe, it wants itself; it bites into itself, the will of the ring nestles within it' (Nietzsche 1969: 332).²³

Accordingly if, as Nietzsche claims, 'knowledge in-itself in a world of becoming is impossible' (1968: §617), then the will that evaluates and interprets becoming in the thought of eternal recurrence is no longer evaluating and interpreting under the aegis of truth and knowledge, but rather affirming the intrinsically dissimulatory character of its own *ratio essendi* – the fact that it has no cognizable essence – and thereby creating itself by overcoming its own will to know. In so doing, the quality of the will undergoes a transformation from negative to affirmative – by willing becoming as creativity,²⁴ the will wills itself and thereby becomes positive. It usurps truth and becomes autonomous or *causa sui*. Thus the only aspect according to which the will (becoming) *is* is that of affirmation. Consequently, for Deleuze's Nietzsche, it is no longer a matter of affirming what is (in the manner of Zarathustra's braying ass),²⁵ but rather of creating what is affirmed. Or as Deleuze puts it, it is not being that is affirmed via eternal recurrence, but the affirmation of eternal recurrence that constitutes being.²⁶

7.2 The turning point

Ultimately, nihilism's consummation in the affirmation of eternal recurrence rescinds the privilege traditionally ascribed to knowing in favour of a premium on creative affirmation. For only the will that affirms indifference (recurrence as meaningless iteration of the 'in vain') is capable of making a difference by producing being, not as an object of representation, but as a creative power worthy of affirmation.²⁷ But as we have seen, the will that affirms being as a creative principle rather than as an object of knowing is the will that wills itself. Thus, in a curiously

Hegelian denouement, the point of transmutation through which nihilism overcomes itself corresponds to that moment wherein, by asserting the being of becoming, the will to power shifts from being 'in-itself' to being 'in-and-for-itself'. By affirming itself and undergoing the metamorphosis from negation to affirmation, becoming expels the negative will to nothingness whose symptomatic manifestation was the 'knowing' which fuelled the logic of nihilism that eventually undermined the authority of knowing as such. Accordingly, for Nietzsche, it is the self-affirmation of the will that produces the difference between difference and indifference, affirmation and negation, intensification and disintensification; and it is this difference in turn that validates the creative power of affirmation by engendering the active life that distinguishes itself from reactive death. For as Nietzsche famously insists, it is precisely because life remains the precondition for all evaluation, that the value of life cannot be evaluated.²⁸ Once we recognize that there are no transcendent cognitive criteria in terms of which we could find life wanting, we must concede that it is always life itself that appraises life; or more precisely, that every evaluation of life is symptomatic of the type of life that evaluates: either healthy or sick, strong or weak. Accordingly, for Nietzsche, nihilism, along with every variety of negative judgement of life, is overcome when the affirmation of life becomes *causa sui*: the negative will to knowledge, which led to the depreciation of life, eventually turns against itself and is converted into an affirmative will which produces itself by affirming the invaluableness of meaningless life as an end in itself. Thus the life that affirms being is itself the locus of being, and the affirmation of self-differentiating life (will to power) expels everything that constrained life (reactivity, *ressentiment*, bad conscience) in what effectively amounts to an autocatalysis of vital difference.²⁹

But as Nietzsche recognized, nihilism is perceived as debilitating precisely insofar as it threatens to collapse those distinctions and categories through which we make sense of existence; not only the difference between meaning and meaninglessness, but also (and perhaps more menacingly) the difference between life and death. Unlike those conservatives who presume to excoriate nihilism from without in the name of supposedly indubitable values, Nietzsche's audacious philosophical gambit is the suggestion that the poison is also the cure, that untrammelled negativity harbours the seed of its own metamorphosis into an unprecedented power of affirmation and creativity: when pushed to its ultimate extremity, the destruction of difference unleashed by the will to nothingness turns against itself and yields a hitherto inconceivable

variety of difference. Accordingly, Nietzsche's alleged 'overcoming' of nihilism hinges on his claim to have exhausted this logic of indifferenciation from within, and to have converted it into a productive logic of differentiation which does not rehabilitate some traditionally sanctified (or 'metaphysical') difference. The question then is whether the power of creative affirmation celebrated by Nietzsche (as well as by Deleuze, arguably his most influential philosophical disciple) is in fact a new variety of difference or merely an old kind in a new guise. In what sense precisely does Nietzsche's affirmative embrace of the meaninglessness of becoming amount to a difference that really makes a difference?

Central to Nietzsche's narrative about the overcoming of nihilism is the claim that this moment of affirmation marks a pivotal point which 'breaks the history of mankind in two'.³⁰ Thus, Nietzsche ascribes to it the power of *redeeming* past time, for by willing the recurrence of what is and shall be, the wills also wills the recurrence of everything that has been, and therefore of the entire temporal series that conditioned this moment of affirmation. In so doing, it effectively wills backward, transforming resentment towards the past's '*it was*' into a positive '*thus I willed it*'. Accordingly, redemption is no longer projected into the future but rather retrojected into the past: it is the dissolution of the will's vengefulness towards the ineradicable persistence of what *has been*.³¹ We cannot hope to undo the past; we can only embrace it. But in redeeming the past through this embrace, the present has already redeemed itself as well as its future. Thus, redemption is a function of the power of unconditional affirmation. So long as affirmation remains conditional – 'I will recurrence *if...*' – then it is the spirit of revenge that continues to motivate the will. When faced with the prospect of eternal recurrence, it is the negative will that seeks to affirm joy over woe, good over evil – it affirms selectively, separating joy from woe, good from evil. It presumes to be able to split becoming into good and evil. However, in so doing, it fails the test, because it reveals itself to be incapable of affirming becoming *unconditionally*, or as an indivisible whole. The negative will's conditional affirmation seeks to operate a selection between good and evil on the basis of interests wherein becoming is reinscribed in an economy of means and ends: 'I will recurrence *if ...*' It is not selected by the affirmation of recurrence precisely because it wills a conditional selection. By way of contrast, the affirmative will successfully separates active from reactive forces by unconditionally affirming *all* of becoming. It operates the selection between active and reactive, difference and indifferenciation, by refusing to select joy at the expense of woe.

Yet there is an underlying difficulty in ascribing this pivotal *redemptive* function to the affirmation of recurrence. For if the latter marks the focal point of becoming, the moment in which activity is prized free from reactivity, and affirmation released from negativity, then how are we to reconcile this axial role allotted to a particular moment of becoming, with the claim that this is also the moment that evacuates history of sense, *telos*, direction? How can the affirmation which is supposed to render every moment of becoming absolutely equivalent to every other, also be invested with the redemptive power capable of cleaving history in two and transforming the relation between all past and future moments? The affirmation of recurrence is supposed to be the lightning rod for the affirmative will through which all other moments are redeemed, and as we saw above, only the will itself is capable of affirming becoming unconditionally. But since Nietzsche has eliminated the hypothesis of the *an sich*, the notion of the 'will itself' remains empty, just as the idea of 'becoming-in-itself' is vacuous, until the will's *ratio essendi* is realized in the act that affirms it. For the 'will itself' is nothing independently of its realization in this affirmative act. But since the will to power is a synonym for becoming, this implies that becoming only *is* (in its *ratio essendi*) insofar as it is *reflected* into itself through this act – a claim which, as we have already noted, is uncannily reminiscent of the Hegelian thesis according to which *essential* being is coextensive with the act of its own reflexive self-positing.³² However, if becoming *is* only insofar as it is posited in this act, then the whole of becoming is condensed in this affirmative instant – indeed, this is precisely why it is this act that *eternalizes* becoming. Accordingly, it is time as a whole or eternity as such that is *reflected* into itself through this affirmative instant. But if eternity is compressed and its being is *expressed* in and through this affirmation (in conformity with the Deleuzean logic of expression discussed in Chapter 6), this is to say that the whole of becoming is redeemed by thought. Thus, and despite having acknowledged 'how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature', Nietzsche effectively renders the being of becoming dependent upon the existence of creatures capable of evaluating it. But to construe being as a function of affirmation, rather than an object of representation, is merely another way of making the world dependent upon thought. Since Nietzsche cannot acknowledge the reality of becoming-in-itself, he makes becoming orbit around affirmation, which is to say, evaluation. (The reverse, which would consist in making affirmation orbit around becoming, is not an option for Nietzsche since it would require the sort of metaphysical realism which he has abjured.)³³

It is this insistence that becoming is not an object of knowledge, but rather a libidinal motor of evaluation, that encourages Nietzsche to translate the epistemological conundrum generated by the inadequacy of the manifest image of truth – a conundrum which Nietzsche himself correctly identifies as a consequence of the Enlightenment will to truth – into an axiological crisis inviting a transvaluation of values. Through this transvaluation, which deposes truth, the enlightened premium on disinterested knowing is diagnosed as a symptom of the will to nothingness, and supplanted by a symptomatology of forces which abrogates the privileging of knowledge – insofar as the latter invoked a world-in-itself indifferent to evaluation – in the name of a genealogy of values. Genealogy proceeds by positing the will to power as guarantor of the correlation between evaluation and a world that *is* only insofar as it is evaluated: the will is at once *evaluating* and *evaluated*, the *agent* of evaluation as well as its *patient*. Accordingly, for Nietzsche, the pivotal moment in the history of nihilism occurs at that juncture when the will's drive to eradicate value from the world in the name of truth exposes truth itself as just another value. This is the point at which the negative will to truth converts itself into the affirmative and evaluative *will to lie*; into a will which is willing to fabricate the value it bestows upon becoming:

Our 'new world': we have to realize to what degree we are the creators of our value feelings – and thus capable of projecting 'meaning' into history. This faith in truth attains its ultimate conclusion in us – you know what that is: that if there is anything that is to be worshipped it is *appearance* that must be worshipped, that the lie – and *not* the truth – is divine!

(Nietzsche 1968: §1011)

Ultimately then, Nietzsche's axiological transcoding of the cognitive crisis generated by the untrammelled potency of the will to truth, and the ensuing suggestion that transvaluation is the key to 'twisting free' (*Herausdrehen*) from nihilism, are predicated upon a generalized irrealism that denies autonomy to becoming as well as to being. Thus, Nietzsche's defusing of the will to nothingness depends upon his irrealism about becoming: since becoming is nothing in-itself, an act of evaluation suffices to transform it into something worthy of affirmation. But why should the thought that becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing make a difference in the becoming that it affirms, effectively splitting it into a 'before' and an 'after'? Nietzsche's response

is: because becoming is reflected into itself through this affirmation – since the will to power is at once evaluating and evaluated, becoming *evaluates itself* through the act that affirms its recurrence and bestows being upon it. This provides the conceptual underpinning for the claim that the eradication of value concomitant with the will to truth can be converted into a will capable of creating new values.

However, whether it is interpreted as the affirmation of identity, or as the affirmation of difference, Nietzsche's attempt to characterize the affirmation of recurrence as focal point of becoming faces insuperable difficulties. First, Nietzsche's irrealism about becoming threatens to restrict eternal recurrence understood as repetition of the same to the repetition of the present, for if the being of becoming orbits around its affirmation then it makes no sense to invoke a past or future dimension of becoming subsisting in-itself independently of the moment of its affirmation. The only sense in which the past and future of becoming recur is as fixed correlates of the *nunc stans*, the eternal now, of affirmation. Consequently, the affirmation of recurrence would render all the moments of becoming equivalent only insofar as it reduced them to *this* perpetually subsisting moment of affirmation. Second, the thought of eternal recurrence implies that becoming has never started or stopped; it is always repeating itself as what has already recurred an infinity of times. How then can history still harbour the possibility of a decisive turning point which divides the 'before' from the 'after' if every moment, and therefore *this* moment in which we are invited to affirm the repetition of the entire series of moments, has already recurred, and is already repeating itself, an infinity of times? What possible difference can affirmation make if it has already recurred an infinity of times? No doubt these and other difficulties attendant upon the interpretation of recurrence as repetition of the same tend to encourage the Deleuzian interpretation of the doctrine as repetition of difference. However, aside from the fact that there seems to be little support for it in Nietzsche's own texts, Deleuze's interpretation is vitiated by conceptual inconsistencies of its own – inconsistencies which are not just peculiar to Deleuze's Nietzsche, but inherent in any philosophy that would privilege becoming over stasis and creative affirmation over representation. Thus, third and finally, if recurrence is construed as the repetition of difference, then being must be inherently self-differentiating. But if being is essentially active, affirmative, creative, and productive, then why does it ever become alienated from itself in reactivity, negation, sterility, and representation? The claim that the history of nihilism pivots around truth's turning against itself invites the obvious retort: why

should the affirmative will to illusion require the negative will to truth to come into its own and attain its maximal potentiation? Moreover, why does affirmation need to make a difference between identity and difference if being as such is nothing but differentiation? The answer to both questions, as we have already suggested, is a direct corollary of Nietzsche's irrealism: becoming requires affirmation because it is nothing until it is reflected into itself via the intercession of an affirmative act. In this regard, Deleuze's characterization of Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism amounts to an inverted Hegelianism, which pits the power of the positive against the labour of the negative only in order to convert difference-in-itself into difference-for-itself. Even so, a fundamental difficulty persists, for though affirmation distinguishes itself from negation, and difference from indifference, it was the *hybridization* of activity and reactivity that provided the precondition for the necessity of this distinction. Yet once affirmation has successfully separated itself from negation, and activity from reactivity, not only does it become impossible to account for the necessity of their intrication, this separation cancels its own precondition, since the very difference through which eternal recurrence affirms the unity of becoming obviates the recurrence of this very unity. Thus the affirmation of recurrence retroactively negates the indivisibility of becoming which was supposed to provide its motivation. For it was precisely the premise of the indivisibility of good and evil, noble and base, activity and reactivity, that provided the condition for the affirmative redemption of becoming.

Ultimately, the claim that the affirmation of recurrence marks the turning point in the history of nihilism generates more difficulties than it can possibly resolve. The conclusion to be drawn here is that being is no more susceptible to affirmation than to negation: there is no more reason to opt for its differentiation through affirmation than its identification through negation. Being-in-itself – which we characterized in Chapter 5 in terms of a degree-zero of being (being-nothing) – cannot be construed as an object of representation, but this is no reason to try to construe it as a power of affirmation instead. Once we have jettisoned Nietzsche's irrealist postulate that being can be the correlate of an affirmative act, it is clear that the becoming that 'aims at nothing and achieves nothing' is as heedless of affirmation as it is of negation. It is precisely the realist commitment to the truth of the in-itself, and the concomitant extension of the appearance–reality distinction into the phenomenal realm carried out by the science of cognition (cf. Chapter 1), which countermands the legitimacy of the axiological register with

which Nietzsche would disarm the will to nothingness. In this regard, Nietzsche's claim that life cannot but be privileged over knowing, since it remains its precondition, underestimates the profundity of the challenge posed to life by the will to know. For as Nietzsche himself recognized, the allegedly absolute difference between life and death is among the metaphysical absolutes shaken by the untrammelled will to truth. Yet Nietzsche sides with vitalism in seeking to incorporate death into life, even going so far as to identify living and being: 'Being – we have no idea of it apart from the idea of "living." – How can anything dead "be"?' (Nietzsche 1968: §582).

However, if knowing undercuts the difference between life and death, it is not by reducing the former to the latter, or by privileging entropy over negentropy – a metaphysical gesture as arbitrary as its vitalist antithesis – but by identifying difference and indifference, life and death, without synthesizing them ontologically, as Heidegger and Deleuze do through finite transcendence and psychic individuation respectively. As we saw in Chapter 5, the knowing that is determined by its object can be characterized as a structure of *adequation without correspondence*; one which does not seek to make a difference in becoming, as Nietzsche sought to via affirmation, but rather to identify the objective matrix of order and disorder while unbinding the ontological syntheses which would reduce the latter to correlates of thought. Thus, there is a knowing *of* the real (objective genitive) which repudiates the subordination of knowledge to vital and/or organic interests, but also the need to redeem or otherwise *justify* reality in order to render it compatible with the putative interests of reason – or 'rationality' – as construed within the bounds of the manifest image.

We saw in the previous chapter how vitalism – specifically Deleuze's vitalism – characterizes the relation between death and time as a locus for the production of temporal difference: death is not the cancellation of vital difference, but rather its expressive intensification. For Deleuze, intensive death is a gateway onto a virtual realm of creative individuation suffused with pre-individual singularities. Ultimately then, vitalism pits the ineradicable difference of creative time against the physical erasure of annihilating space, which, as we saw in Chapters 2 and 6, is perceived as a threat to the life of the mind. In this regard, the privileging of time over space goes hand in hand with the spiritualization of death as a more rarefied form of life. Against this vitalist sublation of physical death, it is necessary to insist on the indivisibility of space and time and the ineradicability of physical annihilation. These provide the speculative markers for an objectification of thought that can be identified with a

figure of death which is not the cancellation of difference but rather the non-dialectical identity of difference and indifference, of negentropy and entropy. We begin to broach the latter through questions such as: *How does thought think a world without thought?* Or more urgently: *How does thought think the death of thinking?*

7.3 Solar catastrophe: Lyotard

This latter question lies at the heart of Jean-François Lyotard's 'Can Thought go on Without a Body?', the opening chapter from his 1991 collection *The Inhuman*.³⁴ Lyotard invites us to ponder philosophy's relationship to the terrestrial horizon which, in the wake of the collapse of the metaphysical horizon called 'God' – whose dissolution spurred the Nietzschean injunction '*remain true to the earth!*' (Nietzsche 1969: 42) – has been endowed with a quasi-transcendental status, whether as the 'originary ark' (Husserl), the 'self-secluding' (Heidegger), or 'the deterritorialized' (Deleuze).³⁵ But as Lyotard points out, this terrestrial horizon will also be wiped away, when, roughly 4.5 billion years from now, the sun is extinguished, incinerating the 'originary ark', obliterating the 'self-secluding', and vaporizing 'the deterritorialized'. The extinction of the sun is a catastrophe, a mis-turning or over-turning (*kata-strophe*), because it blots out the terrestrial horizon of future possibility relative to which human existence, and hence philosophical questioning, have hitherto oriented themselves. Or as Lyotard himself puts it: '[E]verything's dead already if this infinite reserve from which you now draw energy to defer answers, if in short thought as quest, dies out with the sun' (Lyotard 1991: 9). *Everything is dead already*. Solar death is catastrophic because it vitiates ontological temporality as configured in terms of philosophical questioning's constitutive horizontal relationship to the future. But far from lying in wait in for us in the far distant future, on the other side of the terrestrial horizon, the solar catastrophe needs to be grasped as something that *has already happened*; as the aboriginal trauma driving the history of terrestrial life as an elaborately circuitous detour from stellar death. Terrestrial history occurs between the simultaneous strophes of a death which is at once *earlier* than the birth of the first unicellular organism, and *later* than the extinction of the last multicellular animal. Paraphrasing a remark Freud makes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we could say: 'In the last resort, what has left its mark on the development of thought must be the history of the earth we live on and its relation to the sun.'³⁶ This mark imprinted upon thought by its relation to the sun is the trace of stellar death, which precedes and

succeeds, initiates and terminates, the life and death with which philosophers reckon.

Lyotard juxtaposes two antithetical perspectives on the relation between thought and embodiment prompted by the prospect of solar extinction: one for which the *inseparability* between thought and its material substrate necessitates *separating* thought from its rootedness in organic life in general, and the human organism in particular; another according to which it is the irreducible *separation* of the sexes that renders thought *inseparable* from organic embodiment, and human embodiment specifically. Although the prospect of solar death is in some sense little more than a pretext for Lyotard's ingenious dramatization of the *differend* between the extropian functionalism endorsed in the first perspective, and the phenomenological feminism espoused in the second perspective – a *differend* which Lyotard refuses to adjudicate – it is the former which is most significant for our purposes, for it suggests that the extinction of the sun challenges the prevalent philosophical understanding of death – more specifically, it shatters the existential conception of death codified in Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of 'dying', so that the latter can no longer be held up as what sets human existence apart by endowing it with a privileged relationship to the future. If the extinction of the sun cannot be construed in terms of any existential possibility concomitant with the human relationship to death, this is not so much because the sun is not the kind of entity that dies, so that to speak of its 'death' would constitute an illegitimate anthropomorphism, but on the contrary, because humans can no longer be described as the kinds of entities privileged by the relationship to their own inexistence: the sun is *dying* precisely to the same extent as human existence is bounded by *extinction*. Extinction is not to be understood here as the termination of a biological species, but rather as that which *levels* the transcendence ascribed to the human, whether it be that of consciousness or *Dasein*, stripping the latter of its privilege as the locus of correlation (cf. Chapter 3). Thus, if the extinction of the sun is catastrophic, this is because it *disarticulates* the correlation. Unlike the model of death which, at least since Hegel, has functioned as the motor of philosophical speculation, it does not constitute an internal limit for thought, providing the necessary spur for thought to overstep its own bounds and thereby incorporating what was supposed to be exterior to it. Thought is perfectly capable of transcending the limits it has posited for itself. But the extinction of the sun is not a limit *of* or *for* thought. In this regard, it

annuls the relationship to death from which philosophical thought drew sustenance. Or as Lyotard puts it:

With the disappearance of earth, thought will have stopped – leaving that disappearance absolutely unthought of. It's the horizon itself that will be abolished and, with its disappearance, [the phenomenologist's] transcendence in immanence as well. If, as a limit, death really is what escapes and is deferred and as a result what thought has to deal with, right from the beginning – this death is still only the life of our minds. But the death of the sun is a death of mind, because it is the death of death as the life of the mind.

(Lyotard 1991: 10)

The only way of rendering this death conceivable, and hence of turning the death of death into a death like any other, is by separating the future of thought from the fate of the human body:

Thought without a body is the prerequisite for thinking of the death of all bodies, solar or terrestrial, and of the death of thoughts that are inseparable from those bodies. But 'without a body' in this exact sense: without the complex living terrestrial organism known as the human body. Not without hardware, obviously.

(Lyotard 1991: 14)

Accordingly, thought must be weaned from its organic habitat and transplanted to some alternative support system in order to ensure its survival after the destruction of its terrestrial shelter. Lyotard's protagonist suggests that this weaning process, which would provide cognitive software with a hardware that could continue to operate independently of the conditions of life on earth – ensuring the survival of morphological complexity by replacing its material substrate – has been underway ever since life emerged on earth. Thus, the contention is that the history of technology overlaps with the history of life understood as originary synthesis of *techné* and *physis*. There is no 'natural' realm subsisting in contradistinction to the domain of technological artifice because matter – whether organic or inorganic – already possesses an intrinsic propensity to self-organization. 'Technology' names the set of evolutionary strategies bent on ensuring that the negentropic momentum underway on earth these last few billion years will not be eradicated by the imminent entropic tidal wave of extinction.

This narration of terrestrial history in terms of a trajectory of ever-increasing complexification is a now-familiar trope of vitalist eschatology, and one which remains vulnerable to Stephen Jay Gould's criticism of the 'fallacy of reified variation': the privileging of an idealized average at the expense of the full range of variations in a whole system. This is the fallacy that underlies the widely prevalent 'progressivist' interpretation of evolutionary history. In trying to gauge the underlying tendency of evolutionary variation we must distinguish between the *mean*, *median*, and *modal* values of variation. The mean or average value is obtained by adding all the values and dividing by the number of cases. The median is the halfway point in a graded array of values. But the mode is the most common value. In symmetrical distributions (as exemplified by the idealized figure of the 'bell curve'), all three values coincide. But many actual distributions – and the distribution of evolutionary complexity is among them – are asymmetrical because they are limited in the extent of potential spread in one direction by some fundamental constraint or 'wall', which may be logical or empirical in nature, while remaining much freer to develop in the other direction. In the case of life, this wall is a function of the basic constraints of physics and chemistry: life can only begin at some minimal degree of complexity determined by the workings of physics and chemistry. Variations are subject to a left or right skew depending on the direction in which potential development is less constrained. But in skewed distributions, the values of the mean, the median, and the modal no longer coincide. Thus, the distribution of complexity over the course of evolutionary history can be charted by measuring the degree of complexity against its frequency of occurrence. Given a vertical axis measuring frequency of occurrence, and a horizontal axis measuring degree of complexity, the left wall of minimal complexity represented by the point of origin entails that the only direction open for the development of life is along the right axis of increasing complexity. But although the frequency distribution for life's complexity becomes increasingly right skewed over time, with complexity becoming ever more preponderant as the *mean* value represented by the continually expanding right tail of the distribution, the *modal* value remains more or less constant very close to the left wall of minimal complexity. Thus, Gould argues, although life's mean complexity may have increased, as represented by the development of increasingly sophisticated multicellular organisms, its modal complexity, as exemplified by bacteria, has remained more or less constant. Yet the latter outstrip the former not only in terms of frequency of occurrence – total

bacterial biomass continues to exceed that of all other life combined – but also in terms of variation. Thus, out of the three most fundamental evolutionary domains, *Bacteria*, *Archea*, and *Eucarya*, two consist entirely of prokaryotes, which are the simplest unicellular organisms, devoid of nuclei, mitochondria, and chloroplasts. Moreover, the third domain, which is that of the eukaryotes (cells that *do* possess nuclei, chromosomes, etc.) comprises 13 kingdoms, among which are the three kingdoms that include all multicellular life – fungi, plants, and animals. More significantly, the extent of genetic diversity exhibited within the unicellular domains simply dwarfs that exhibited in the multicellular realm. Thus, the former comprises 23 kingdoms in all, while the latter consists of only 3; yet there is as much genetic distance between a *cynobacteria* and a *flavobacteria* as between a carrot and a zebra.

The ‘progressivist’ interpretation of evolutionary history assumes that the expanding ‘right tail’ of increasing complexity can be taken to be representative of the tendency exhibited by the continuum of variation considered as a whole. But this is a fallacy, for not only does the right tail merely represent a minuscule fraction of the total number of species, those species occupying the tip of the tail do not even form a continuous evolutionary lineage: thus, trilobites, dinosaurs, and *Homo sapiens* are completely different species which have stumbled into this position one after the other, and since no genetic continuity links these successive occupants of the tip of the tail, occupancy should not be attributed to any particular variety of adaptive prowess, but should rather be understood to be a consequence of the blind vagaries of evolutionary history. Ultimately then, as Gould puts it: ‘The vaunted progress of life is really random motion away from simple beginnings, not directed impetus towards inherently advantageous complexity’ (Gould 1996: 173).³⁷

Thus, like the dialectical eschatology which is its principal rival (even if the latter codes its horizon of ultimate reconciliation as ‘negative’, and hence as a necessarily unattainable, perpetually deferred ‘hope’ – cf. Chapter 2), vitalist eschatology continues to evade the levelling force of extinction. For if the latter implies that ‘everything is dead already’, this is not only because extinction obliterates the earth construed as an inexhaustible reservoir of becoming, but also because, as Nietzsche provocatively suggested, the will to *know*, in its antagonism with the so-called will to live, is driven by the will to nothingness, understood as the compunction to become equal to the in-itself. Vitalism wants to have done with the will to nothingness, but

believes it can do so by placing its faith in creative evolution, and by insisting that solar extinction is merely a local and temporary setback, which life will overcome by transforming its conditions of embodiment, whether by shifting from a carbon to a silicon-based substrate, or through some other, as yet unenvisioned strategy. But this is only to postpone the day of reckoning, because sooner or later both life and mind will have to reckon with the disintegration of the ultimate horizon, when, roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion (10^{1728}) years from now, the accelerating expansion of the universe will have disintegrated the fabric of matter itself, terminating the possibility of embodiment. Every star in the universe will have burnt out, plunging the cosmos into a state of absolute darkness and leaving behind nothing but spent husks of collapsed matter. All free matter, whether on planetary surfaces or in interstellar space, will have decayed, eradicating any remnants of life based in protons and chemistry, and erasing every vestige of sentience – irrespective of its physical basis. Finally, in a state cosmologists call ‘asymptopia’, the stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles. Atoms themselves will cease to exist. Only the implacable gravitational expansion will continue, driven by the currently inexplicable force called ‘dark energy’, which will keep pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper into an eternal and unfathomable blackness.³⁸

Vitalism would restrict the scope of extinction by relocating the infinite horizontal reserve that fuels philosophical questioning from the local, terrestrial scale, to the global, cosmic scale. But given the aforementioned prospect of universal annihilation, this attempt to evade the levelling power of extinction – understood as the corollary of the claim that ‘everything is dead already’ – by expanding the horizon of creative becoming from a terrestrial to a cosmic habitat, reveals the spiritualist rationale behind the vitalist’s denial of the possibility of physical annihilation – for what else is the assertion that the termination of physical existence *as such* presents no obstacle to the continuing evolution of life, if not a spiritualist declaration? Since cosmic extinction is just as much of an irrecusable factum for philosophy as biological death – although curiously, philosophers seem to assume that the latter is somehow more relevant than the former, as though familiarity were a criterion of philosophical relevance – every horizontal reserve upon which embodied thought draws to fuel its quest will be necessarily finite. Why then should thought continue investing in an account whose dwindling reserves are circumscribed by the temporary parameters

of embodiment? Why keep playing for time? A change of body is just a way of postponing thought's inevitable encounter with the death that drives it in the form of the will to know. And a change of horizon is just a means of occluding the *transcendental* scope of extinction, precisely insofar as it levels the difference between life and death, time and space, revoking the ontological potency attributed to temporalizing thought in its alleged invulnerability to physical death.

Extinction portends a physical annihilation which negates the difference between mind and world, but which can no longer be construed as a limit internal to the transcendence of mind – an internalized exteriority, as death is for *Geist* or *Dasein* – because it implies an exteriority which *unfolds* or *externalizes* the internalization of exteriority concomitant with consciousness and its surrogates, whether *Geist* or *Dasein*. Extinction turns thinking inside out, objectifying it as a perishable thing in the world like any other (and no longer the imperishable condition of perishing). This is an externalization that cannot be appropriated by thought – not because it harbours some sort of transcendence that defies rational comprehension, but, on the contrary, because it indexes the autonomy of the object in its capacity to transform thought itself into a thing.

In this regard, extinction is a symptom of the *posteriority* which is the direct counterpart to the ancestry discussed in Chapter 3. But we saw there how the premise of ancestry alone does not suffice to disqualify the pretensions of correlationism, since the alleged incommensurability between ancestral and anthropomorphic time continues to assume a chronological framework which can be appropriated by the correlationist. Thus, ancestral anteriority can too easily be converted into anteriority *for us*. By way of contrast, the posteriority of extinction indexes a physical annihilation which no amount of chronological tinkering can transform into a correlate 'for us', because no matter how proximal or how distal the position allocated to it in space-time, it has *already* cancelled the sufficiency of the correlation. What defies correlation is the thought that 'after the sun's death, there will be no thought left to know its death took place' (Lyotard 1991: 9). Thus the thought of extinction undoes the correlation while avoiding any resort to intellectual intuition because it turns the absence of correlation – rather than ancestral reality – into an object of thought, but one which transforms thought itself into an object. There is no intellectual intuition of posteriority, since extinction does not index posterior reality – if it did, it would be necessary to account for this indicative relation, and this would reintroduce the dichotomy between correlation and intuition, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, threatens to remain intractable. Rather, extinction indexes the thought of the absence of

thought. This is why it represents an objectification of thought, but one wherein the thought of the object is reversed by the object itself, rather than by the thought of the object. For the difference between the thought of the object and the object itself is no longer a function of thought, which is to say, of transcendence, but of the object understood as immanent *identity*, which, as we saw in Chapter 5, must be understood as the non-dialectical identity of the distinction between relation and non-relation. Thus, the object's difference from the concept is given ('without-giveness', which is to say, without-correlation) in such a way as to obviate the need for an account of the nature or genesis of this difference – something which neither intuitionism nor representationalism can do without turning this difference into a function of thought.

Consequently, there is a basic asymmetry in the relation between anteriority and posteriority: whereas the disjunction between ancestral time and anthropomorphic time was construed as a function of chronology – on the basis of the empirical assumption that the former preceded and will succeed the latter – there is an absolute disjunction between correlational time and the time of extinction, precisely insofar as the latter is not just a localizable spatiotemporal occurrence, and hence something that could be chronologically manipulated (although it is certainly *also* this), but rather *the extinction of space-time*. Thus, it is not so much that extinction *will* terminate the correlation, but that it *has already* retroactively terminated it. Extinction seizes the present of the correlation between the double pincers of a future that *has always already been*, and a past that is *perpetually yet to be*. Accordingly, there can be no 'afterwards' of extinction, since it already corrodes the efficacy of the projection through which correlational synthesis would assimilate its reality to that of a phenomenon dependent upon conditions of manifestation. Extinction has a transcendental efficacy precisely insofar as it tokens an annihilation which is neither a possibility towards which actual existence could orient itself, nor a given datum from which future existence could proceed. It retroactively disables projection, just as it pre-emptively abolishes retention. In this regard, extinction unfolds in an 'anterior posteriority' which usurps the 'future anteriority' of human existence.

7.4 The seizure of phenomenology: Levinas

The former is of course a key trope in Levinas's phenomenology of absolute alterity, wherein the radical passivity associated with the immemorial trace of the 'other in me' is associated with an 'impossibility of possibility' which disables intentional apprehension and *ekstatic* projection.

And in fact, Lyotard's 'solar catastrophe' effectively *transposes* Levinas's theologically inflected 'impossibility of possibility' into a natural-scientific register, so that it is no longer the death of the Other that usurps the sovereignty of consciousness, but the extinction of the sun. Significantly, this transposition occurs at the historical juncture wherein elements of the scientific image have begun to bleed into those philosophical discourses probing the extremities of the manifest image – which is to say, the discourses of post-Kantian continental philosophy – generating increasingly complex patterns of dissonance within the latter. For just as the phenomenon of death indexes an anomalous zone in the conceptual fabric of the manifest image – the point at which our everyday concepts and categories begin to break down, which is why it remains a privileged topic for philosophers exploring the outer limits of the manifest image – so, by the same token, the concept of extinction represents an aberration for the phenomenological discourse which sought to transcendentalize the infrastructure of the manifest image precisely in order to safeguard the latter from the incursions of positivism and naturalism. Yet it is precisely insofar as the concept of extinction expresses a dissonance resulting from the interference between the manifest and scientific images that it could not have been generated from within the latter; it is manufactured by deploying the manifest image's most sophisticated conceptual resources (in conjunction with elements of scientific discourse) against that image's own phenomenological self-understanding. At this particular historical juncture, philosophy should resist the temptation to install itself within one of the rival images, just as it should refuse the forced choice between the reactionary authoritarianism of manifest normativism, and the metaphysical conservatism of scientific naturalism. Rather, it should exploit the mobility that is one of the rare advantages of abstraction in order to shuttle back and forth between images, establishing conditions of transposition, rather than synthesis, between the speculative anomalies thrown up within the order of phenomenal manifestation, and the metaphysical quandaries generated by the sciences' challenge to the manifest order. In this regard, the concept of extinction is necessarily equivocal precisely insofar as it crystallizes the interference between the two discourses. Thus, the equivalence that obtained between the existential-phenomenological characterization of death, and the natural-scientific phenomenon of extinction, is reiterated in the reversibility between the phenomenology of trauma and the extinction of phenomenology, so that the catastrophic nature of extinction, its overturning of origin and end, empirical and transcendental, follows directly from its being at once a *naturalization of eschatology* and a *theologization of*

cosmology. Fittingly, it is precisely the discourse of phenomenology that is best suited to registering the trauma that portends the disintegration of the manifest image.

In this regard, Levinas's hyperbolic phenomenology provides the perfect lexicon with which to describe extinction as a traumatic *seizure* of phenomenology. The hyperbolic emphasis of Levinas's discourse is the result of his attempt to excavate the meta-ontological and meta-categorical significance of a transcendence beyond being. Levinas proposes to decipher the latter via a set of signifying tropes, which, he claims, already animate the pre-ontological understanding of being sought for by the early Heidegger:

Emphasis means both a rhetorical figure, a means of self-exaggeration, and a way of showing oneself. The word is a good one, as is the word 'hyperbole': there are hyperboles wherein notions transmute themselves. To describe this transmutation is also a way of doing phenomenology. Exasperation as philosophical method!

(Levinas 1992: 142)³⁹

Thus, Levinas's phenomenological method is one of *emphatic exasperation*, and he insists that it alone is capable of articulating the enigmatic and epiphenomenal 'sense of sense' harboured by the radically non-ontological transcendence he ascribes to the 'wholly other'. But the only register of phenomenological sense commensurate with the punishing alterity of this infinite transcendence is that of violation. More precisely, Levinas engages in an emphatic exasperation of phenomenology the better to describe the ordinary ethical sense proper to the phenomenon of trauma. Accordingly, infinite alterity is characterized as a 'wounding' and 'haemorrhaging' of subjectivity, just as the ethical subject is described as a 'hostage' who is 'traumatized' and 'persecuted' by the Other (indeed, for Levinas, excruciation seems to be the ethical trope *par excellence*).⁴⁰ The 'impossibility of possibility', which is the signature of the wholly other in Levinas's work, is both an impossibility of being and an impossibility *in* being. Dying as the impossibility of death is an impossibility of being, insofar as the latter is conceived as the interminable and anonymous rumble of the 'il y a' – Levinas's mischievous subreption of Heidegger's *Es gibt* ('there is') – from which there is no escape.⁴¹ But it is simultaneously an impossibility *in* being, insofar as it points to the intolerable excess of passive suffering whereby the self is accused in responsibility by the infinitely Other. It is this traumatic accusation that prevents the self from being able to persist in its own

being. For Levinas, the two senses of impossibility – the impossibility of ceasing to be and the impossibility of beginning to be – are absolutely different yet indissociable. Thus absolute alterity is traumatic precisely insofar as it combines the horror of sense and the horror of non-sense: it means at once the horror of non-sense as eternal persistence in being, with no possibility of escape (the *il y a*); and the horror of sense, understood as the infinite ethical interruption of being, which indefinitely postpones our ability to be (the wounding transcendence of *illegality*). As a result, the anterior posteriority concomitant with the impossibility of possibility gives rise to a traumatic double bind: we can neither begin to be, nor cease to be. Subjectivity is paralysed by an alterity that has ‘always already’ dispossessed it of its own substance, an alterity embedded ‘in its skin’, but which thereby renders it ‘ill at ease in its own skin’:

as though encumbered and blocked by itself, suffocating beneath itself, insufficiently open, forced to unburden itself of itself, to breathe in more deeply, to the limit of its breath; forced to dis-possess itself until it loses itself. Does this loss have the void, the zero-point and quiet of the grave, as its term, as if the subjectivity of the subject signified nothing?

(1990: 175)

Levinas’s question is supposed to highlight the enigmatic character of the meaning of alterity. Were we in possession of a criterion allowing us to distinguish the ethical sense of our dispossession ‘for the Other’ from the ontological non-sense of our dispossession ‘for nothing’ (insofar as we remain trapped by the anonymous persistence of the *il y a*), then the ‘anarchy’ which Levinas ascribes to ethical significance – the enigma of the trace – would be betrayed. The ethical meaning of the ‘for the Other’ is kept open precisely insofar as it remains *ontologically* indistinguishable from the ‘for nothing’: the non-sense of being. Without this ambiguity, the excess which Levinas ascribes to ethical sense vis-à-vis the ontological economy of meaning would be cancelled and its alterity reinscribed within the theodicy of the logos. Consequently, the difference between the ‘for the other’ and the ‘for nothing’, or between the Other and the Same, must ‘come to the same’ (*revenir au même*) within being precisely in order to ensure the possibility – or what Levinas calls ‘chance’ – that the difference between ethical sense and ontological non-sense may not ‘return to the Same’, but rather point *beyond* being.

However, given that Levinas’s entire project proceeds from the prior stipulation that the transcendence of the infinitely Other *means* the

'good beyond being', it is difficult to see how this purported ambiguity could be anything more than a sham. Levinas has already answered his own question in the negative: subjectivity will not have the zero-point and quiet of the grave as its term, precisely because the subjectivity of the subject *does* mean something, and that something is 'the good beyond being'. Contra Levinas then, it is necessary to insist that the phenomenology of trauma also entails a trauma for phenomenology: subjectivity as understood by the latter has already been terminated, it already means nothing. The necessary obverse of Levinas's insistence on the inherently equivocal sense of trauma is the claim that the latter itself entails the extinction of phenomenological sense (and *a fortiori* of the ethical sense to which Levinas would subordinate it). It is in this regard that extinction is a transcendental trauma: it is the conceptual transposition of a physical phenomenon which undoes the phenomenological resources through which the manifest image would *make sense* of it. Moreover, by overturning the hierarchy of empirical and a priori, along with the phenomenological complicity between sense and non-sense, the catastrophe of extinction reiterates the trauma at the origin of life, which Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* construes in terms of the scission between the organic and inorganic.

7.5 The trauma of life: Freud

The phenomenon that motivates Freud's investigation in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that of traumatic neurosis. The latter gives rise to a 'compulsion to repeat', wherein the sufferer compulsively relives the traumatic incident in his or her dreams. Yet if the function of dreams is primarily that of wish-fulfilment, in conformity with the pleasure principle, which strives to maximize pleasure – where pleasure is defined as a diminution of excitation – and to minimize displeasure – where displeasure is defined as an increase in excitation – then traumatic neurosis poses a problem for psychoanalysis because it resists explanation in terms of the pleasure principle: why is the patient compelled to relive a shatteringly unpleasurable experience? Freud's answer is that through this repetition, the psyche is striving to muster the anxiety required in order to achieve a successful *binding* (*Besetzung*) of the excess of excitation released by the traumatic breaching of its defences. It is this binding that lies 'beyond the pleasure principle'. The compulsion to repeat consists in an attempt on the part of the unconscious to relive the traumatic incident in a condition of anxious anticipation that will allow it to buffer the shock, thereby compensating for the impotent terror that

disabled the organism and staunching the excessive influx of excitations brought about by a massive psychic wound.

Moreover, insofar as the manifestations of the compulsion to repeat 'give the appearance of some "daemonic" force at work' (Freud 1991: 307), this is due to their inherently 'instinctual' (*Triebhaft*) character. In this regard, says Freud, the compulsion to repeat harbours the key to understanding the nature of the 'drive' (*Trieb*) as such:

It seems then that a drive is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life. [...] It is possible to specify this final goal of all organic striving. It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never been yet attained. On the contrary, it must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or another departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of all life is death*' and looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones*'.

(Freud 1991: 309–11)

Thus, the fundamental tendency of the 'drive' or 'instinct' is the primordial pull back towards the inorganic. Although life diverges from the inorganic in ever more circuitous detours, these are no more than temporary extensions of the latter, which will eventually contract back to their original inorganic condition, understood as the zero-degree of contraction, or *decontraction*. But if death constitutes the 'aim of all life', an aim which, according to Freud, is in some sense 'internal' to living organisms, this cannot simply be understood in Aristotelian terms as a *telos*, an intrinsic purpose orienting the development of the entity from within. A *telos* has no reality independently of the entities whose existence it governs; thus, if the inorganic were merely the *telos* of the organic in this conventional sense, it could not possibly have existed before it. Yet Freud maintains the realist thesis according to which 'inanimate things existed *before* living ones' (my emphasis), and uses it to underwrite the reality of the death-drive. Consequently, the inorganic as 'initial state' and 'aim' of life cannot simply be understood as a

condition internal to the development of life, whether as the *essence* that life has been, or the *telos* which it will be. Just as the reality of the inorganic is not merely a function of the existence of the organic, so the reality of death is not merely a function of life's past, or of its future. Death, understood as the principle of decontraction driving the contractions of organic life is not a past or future state towards which life tends, but rather the originary *purposelessness* which compels all purposefulness, whether organic or psychological.

With the thesis that 'the aim of all life is death', Freud defuses Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will: the life that wills power is merely a contraction of the death that wants nothing. The will to nothingness is not an avatar of the will to power; rather, the will to power is merely a mask of the will to nothingness. But this 'nothingness' cannot be retrojected into the past or projected into the future; the only temporality commensurate with it is that of the 'anterior posteriority' proper to physical death as that which seizes organic temporality, but which cannot be seized by it. Thus, the repetition which is driven by death does not repeat the latter as though it were an earlier state of affairs experienced by life or consciousness, for the trauma which drives repetition is precisely what cannot be lived or consciously apprehended. Though trauma is real, its reality cannot be calibrated by the life of the organism, just as it cannot be commensurated with the resources of consciousness. It can only be registered as a dysfunctioning of the organism, or as an interruption of consciousness, and it is this dysfunction and this interruption that is repeated. Accordingly, it is because the 'originary' traumatic occurrence was only ever registered in the unconscious, rather than experienced, that there is a compulsion to (re-)experience it. But it can only be re-experienced as something that was neither lived nor experienced, since trauma marks the obliteration of life and experience. Nevertheless, the fact that experience cannot obliterate itself points to the reality of trauma, which cannot simply be construed as a function of experience.

The reality of trauma is registered as an unconscious wound, which continues to resonate in the psychic economy as an unresolved disturbance, an un-dampened excess of excitation. And it is because it indexes an influx of excitation vastly in excess of the binding capacities exercised by what Freud calls 'the perception-consciousness system' that trauma leaves behind this permanent imprint in the unconscious, since consciousness always arises *instead of* a memory trace.⁴² Thus, it is not the traumatic experience (which never occurred), but rather this unconscious trace whose demand to be renegotiated gives rise to compulsive

repetition. Trauma is constitutively unconscious: it only exists as a trace. Yet this traumatic trace persists as a permanent and indelible imprint in the unconscious because it testifies to something unmanageable for the filtering apparatus of the perception-consciousness system: a haemorrhaging of the psyche.

Freud then proposes a remarkable speculative hypothesis linking the origins of this filtering apparatus to the genesis of organic individuation. A primitive organic vesicle (that is, a small bladder, cell, bubble or hollow structure) becomes capable of filtering the continuous and potentially lethal torrent of external stimuli by sacrificing part of itself in order to erect a protective shield against excessive influxes of excitation. In doing so, it effects a definitive separation between organic interiority and inorganic exteriority:

[The vesicle] acquires the shield in this way: its outermost surface ceases to have the structure proper to living matter, becomes to some degree inorganic and thenceforth functions as a special envelope or membrane resistant to stimuli. In consequence, the energies of the external world are able to pass into the next underlying layers, which have remained living, with only a fragment of their original intensity [...] By its death the outer layer has saved all the deeper ones from a similar fate – unless, that is to say, stimuli reach it which are so strong that they break through the protective shield. *Protection against stimuli* is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of stimuli* [...] In highly developed organisms the receptive cortical layers of the former vesicle has long been withdrawn into the depths of the interior of the body, though portions of it have been left behind on the surface immediately beneath the shield against stimuli.

(Freud 1991: 299)

Accordingly, the separation between organic interiority and inorganic exteriority is won at the cost of the death of part of the primitive organism itself, and it is this death that gives rise to the protective shield filtering out the potentially lethal influxes of external energy. Thus, individuated organic life is won at the cost of this aboriginal death whereby the organism first becomes capable of separating itself from the inorganic outside (cf. Chapter 2). This death, which gives birth to organic individuation, thereby conditions the possibility of organic phylogenesis, as well as of sexual reproduction. Consequently, not only does this death precede the organism, it is the precondition for the

organism's ability to reproduce and die. If the death-drive qua compulsion to repeat is the originary, primordial motive force driving organic life, this is because the motor of repetition – the repeating instance – is this trace of the aboriginal trauma of organic individuation. The death-drive understood as repetition of the inorganic is the repetition of the death which gave birth to the organism – a death that cannot be satisfactorily repeated, not only because the organism which bears its trace did not yet exist to experience it, but also because that trace is the marker of an exorbitant death, one that even in dying, the organism cannot successfully repeat. Thus, the trace of aboriginal death harbours an impossible demand for organic life: it is the trace of a trauma that demands to be integrated into the psychic economy of the organism, but which cannot because it expresses the originary traumatic scission between organic and inorganic. The organism cannot live the death that gives rise to the difference between life and death. The death-drive is the trace of this scission: a scission that will never be successfully *bound* (invested) because it remains the *unbindable* excess that makes binding possible. It is as the bearer of this scission and this excess that physical death cannot be located either at the origin or end of life. Decontraction is not a negentropic starting point to which one could return, or an entropic terminus towards which one could hasten. Its reality is that of the 'being-nothing' whose anterior posteriority expresses the identity of entropic indifference and negentropic difference, an identity which is given to thought as the objective reality that already determines it. This determination occurs through philosophy's binding of the trauma of extinction, which persists as an un-conscious and un-bound disturbance of phenomenal consciousness, fuelling the will to know.

7.6 Binding extinction

Extinction is real yet not empirical, since it is not of the order of experience. It is transcendental yet not ideal, since it coincides with the external objectification of thought unfolding at a specific historical juncture when the resources of intelligibility, and hence the lexicon of ideality, are being renegotiated. In this regard, it is precisely the extinction of meaning that clears the way for the intelligibility of extinction. Senselessness and purposelessness are not merely privative; they represent a gain in intelligibility. The cancellation of sense, purpose, and possibility marks the point at which the 'horror' concomitant with the impossibility of either being or not-being becomes intelligible. Thus, if

everything is dead already, this is not only because extinction disables those possibilities which were taken to be constitutive of life and existence, but also because the will to know is driven by the traumatic reality of extinction, and strives to become equal to the trauma of the in-itself whose trace it bears. In becoming equal to it, philosophy achieves a binding of extinction, through which the will to know is finally rendered commensurate with the in-itself. This binding coincides with the objectification of thinking understood as the *adequation without correspondence* between the objective reality of extinction and the subjective knowledge of the trauma to which it gives rise. It is this adequation that constitutes the truth of extinction. But to acknowledge this truth, the subject of philosophy must also recognize that he or she is already dead, and that philosophy is neither a medium of affirmation nor a source of justification, but rather the organon of extinction.

by structural elements which have no sense in themselves, while constituting the sense of everything it produces (structure and genesis)' (Deleuze 1968: 200, 1994: 154 tm).

7 The Truth of Extinction

1. F. Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense' in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, ed. and tr. D. Breazeale, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979a, 79.
2. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufman, New York: Vintage, 1974, §109.
3. F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. W. Kaufman, New York: Vintage, 1968, §12.
4. *Grossoktavausgabe*, Leipzig, 1905, XII, 64; cited in Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Vol. II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, ed. D. F. Krell, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990, 23.
5. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §1057.
6. Cf. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §5.
7. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §15; cf. Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Vol. II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 121–32.
8. 'We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent one perhaps? ... But no! *With the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!* (Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; zenith of mankind; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.' *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, 'How the "Real World" at Last Became a Myth', 51.
9. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Preface, 3.
10. As is well known, there are only three explicit mentions of 'eternal recurrence' in Nietzsche's published works: *The Gay Science*, IV, §341, 'The Heaviest Burden'; *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, III, 'Of the Vision and the Riddle' and 'The Convalescent'; and *Beyond Good and Evil*, III, §56. However, some inkling of its importance for Nietzsche is given by the frequency with which it is invoked in his unpublished notebooks. Thus *The Will to Power* contains not only numerous references but also several explicit discussions of the idea: specifically, in sections 617, 708, 1057, 1058, 1059, 1060, 1062, and 1066. Despite their sometimes controversial interpretations, it is to the credit of the 'strong' readings of Nietzsche proposed by Heidegger and Deleuze that they position the doctrine of eternal recurrence (along with the concept of will to power) at the very heart of Nietzsche's philosophy.
11. Nietzsche, 1968: §54, cf. also §708 and §1062.
12. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson, London: Athlone, 1983. Deleuze's famous (not to say notorious) interpretation of eternal recurrence in this book insists that it is not identity – the world as yoked beneath the iron collar of representation – that returns, but rather difference – the world as dynamic flux of pre-individual singularities and impersonal individuations. The trouble with this audacious proposal is that it flies in the face of Nietzsche's own understanding of the nature of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche insists that it is precisely the moment as apprehended from the perspective of the individuated self that will be eternally repeated, not the world as experienced by Deleuze's anonymous, intensive individual, who cannot be confined by the form of the I or the matter of the self (cf. Chapter 6). Zarathustra could not

be more explicit: 'I shall return, with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent – not to a new life or a better life or a similar life: I shall return eternally to this identical and self-same life, in the greatest things and in the smallest, to teach once more the eternal recurrence of things.' (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, 237–8.) Elsewhere Nietzsche explicitly evokes the 'infinite recurrence of *identical* cases' (1968: §1066, emphasis added) – just as he insists that the hypothesis proceeds on the assumption that the world comprises 'a certain *definite quantity* of force and a certain *definite number* of certain *centers* of force' (*ibid.*, emphasis added) – in other words, individuated loci of will to power, and not the process of intensive individuation privileged by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. Here we may detect a tension between Deleuze's anti-mechanistic conception of will to power in terms of quanta of force which are inherently unequalizable and hence beyond the reach of scientific quantification (cf. Deleuze 1983: 42–6), and Nietzsche's own blunt avowal that he wishes to reconcile mechanism and Platonism (cf. 1968: §1061) – precisely the arch-representatives of identitarian thinking to which Deleuze's Nietzsche is supposed to be opposed. Moreover, for Nietzsche, it is the *finitude* of force in conjunction with the *infinity* of time that necessitates the hypothesis of eternal recurrence (cf. 1968: §1066). Thus, in §1062 of *Will to Power*, Nietzsche warns against the temptation to conclude from the disqualification of teleology that becoming harbours a 'miraculous power of infinite novelty in its form and states'. In what effectively amounts to a pre-emptive critique of Deleuze's subsequent attempt to align the notion of will to power with Spinoza's *natura naturans* and Bergson's *élan vital*, Nietzsche writes: '[This] is still the old religious way of thinking and desiring, a kind of longing to believe that *in some way* the world is like the old beloved, infinite, boundlessly creative God – that in some way, "the old God still lives" – that longing of Spinoza's was expressed in the words "*deus sive natura*" (he even felt "*natura sive deus*")' (1968: §1062). Keith Ansell-Pearson provides a critically nuanced appraisal of Deleuze's Nietzsche, specifically with regard to the topic of eternal recurrence, in his *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*, London: Routledge, 1997, esp. 42–7. However, elsewhere in the same book, Ansell-Pearson seems to endorse the Deleuzian interpretation of recurrence: 'The repetition implicated in the eternal return is not the repeating of an original model since there is no original moment which can be subjected to a law of repetition. Eternal return already takes place within the element of difference and simulacra' (Ansell-Pearson 1997: 62). It is precisely this Deleuzian characterization of eternal recurrence – as the repetition of difference rather than identity – which we believe to be incompatible with Nietzsche's own understanding of the doctrine.

13. This is undoubtedly why it is a demon who first broaches the idea under the heading 'The Heaviest Burden' in *The Gay Science*, IV, §341.
14. '[M]y world has just become perfect, midnight is also midday, pain is also a joy, a curse is also a blessing, the night is also a sun' *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, IV, 'The Intoxicated Song' (1969: 331).
15. Nietzsche 1968: §664–7.
16. Nietzsche 1968: §1011.
17. Nietzsche 1968: §1067.

18. Cf. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 171–5.
19. '[T]he world of "phenomena" is the adapted world which we feel to be real. The "reality" lies in the continual recurrence of identical, familiar, related things in their logicized character, in the belief that here we are able to reckon and calculate. [...] The antithesis of this phenomenal world is not "the true world", but the formless, unformulable world of the chaos of sensations – another kind of phenomenal world, a kind "unknowable" for us; [...] [Q]uestions, what things in themselves may be like, apart from our sense receptivity and the activity of our understanding, must be rebutted with the question: how could we know that things exist? "Thingness" was first created by us' (Nietzsche 1968: §569). Such remarks provoke an obvious rejoinder: if, as Nietzsche so often insists, it makes no sense to talk about what the world is like independently of our relation to it, and ergo in abstraction from those things with which our senses and understanding reckon and calculate, then why even suppose there to be a 'formless, unformulable' and hence unknowable world beyond the world of identical, familiar, related, logicized things? Why suppose that a 'chaos' of sensations prior to their logicization as things exists? Moreover, the premise that this 'chaos' must be assumed to be the cause of our orderly, logicized sensations is insupportable given Nietzsche's critiques of causality and his restriction of the notion of cause to the realm of logicized sensation.
20. Nietzsche himself seems to have been perfectly aware of this: 'What actually arouses indignation over suffering is not the suffering itself but the *senselessness* of suffering: but neither for the Christian, who saw in suffering a whole hidden machinery of salvation, nor for naïve man in ancient times, who saw all suffering in relation to spectators or to instigators of suffering, was there any such *senseless* suffering. [...] "All evil is justified if a God takes pleasure in it": so ran the primitive logic of feeling – and was this logic really restricted to primitive times? The gods viewed as the friends of *cruel* spectacles – how deeply this primeval concept still penetrates into our European civilization!' (Nietzsche 1994: 48).
21. Cf. Nietzsche 1969: 45–7.
22. Cf. Deleuze 1983: 68.
23. On the will to power as 'will to will' cf. Heidegger (1990c) *Nietzsche. Vol. III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, ed. D. F. Krell, HarperSanFrancisco, 1990, 196.
24. Cf. Nietzsche 1968, §617, 330–1.
25. Cf. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, IV, 'The Ass-Festival', 321–6.
26. Cf. Deleuze 1983: 186.
27. For a trenchant critique of this Nietzschean–Deleuzean motif, cf. Peter Hallward's *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London: Verso, 2006.
28. 'Judgements, value judgements concerning life, for or against, can in the last resort never be true: they possess value only as symptoms, they come into consideration only as symptoms – in themselves such judgements are stupidities. One must reach out and try to reach this astonishing finesse, that the value of life cannot be estimated. Not by a living man, because he is a party to the dispute, indeed its object, and not the judge of it; not by a dead one, for another reason. For a philosopher to see a problem in the value of

life thus even constitutes an objection to him, a question mark as to his wisdom, a piece of un-wisdom.' 'The Problem of Socrates' in *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, 40.

29. Cf. Deleuze 1983: 171–94.
30. F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1979b XV, §8.
31. 'To redeem the past and transform every "it was" into an "I wanted it thus" – that alone do I call redemption!' (Nietzsche 1969: 161).
32. Cf. Hegel 1989: 390–408.
33. Realism of any sort never seems to have been a serious option for Nietzsche, even after his break with Schopenhauer. As he himself puts it in a remark from 1872: 'Time in itself is nonsense: time exists only for a sensate creature. The same is true for space. Every structure appertains to the subject' (Nietzsche 1995: 46). In many regards, Nietzsche's perspectivism is simply an exacerbation of his mentor's transcendental idealism: just as the will to life subtends the relation between knowing subject and known object for Schopenhauer, the will to power is at once the agent and patient of evaluation for Nietzsche.
34. J-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.
35. Cf. Edmund Husserl, 'The Originary Ark: The Earth Does Not Move' in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, ed. L. Lawlor with B. Bergo, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002; Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell, HarperSanFrancisco, 1977b; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. B. Massumi, London: Athlone, 1988.
36. S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 11: On Metapsychology*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1991: 310.
37. Stephen Jay Gould, *Life's Grandeur: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1996, 173.
38. Cf. S. Odenwald, *Patterns in the Void: Why Nothing is Important*, S. F. Odenwald, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2002, 163; and L. Krauss and G. Starkman, 'Life, The Universe, and Nothing: Life and Death in an Ever Expanding Universe' in *The Astrophysical Journal* Vol. 531, No. 1 (2000), 22–30.
39. E. Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Paris: Vrin, 1992.
40. Cf. E. Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Folio/Livre de Poche, 1990; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, tr. A. Lingis, Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998.
41. Cf. E. Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, Paris: Vrin, 1993.
42. Cf. S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Penguin Freud Library. Vol. 11: On Metapsychology*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1991, 296, and "The 'Mystic Writing-Pad'", op. cit., 430.

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