

Chapter 25:

Philosophy After Nietzsche: The Challenge of Thinking both Becoming under a Cross and an Other Becoming towards Flight?

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In the first chapter of this anthology, I developed the idea that Zarathustra's being in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* can be made sense of philosophically, in terms of a post-Hegelian form of logic which is capable of embodying a form of becoming containing being-nothing. In this becoming, which takes place over four parts in the actual text, we find a mediation of a metamorphosis offering an "other type of becoming" after the objective spiritual decline of Christianity and its symptom: the Death of God.⁵²⁰

In the First Part, Zarathustra is capable of teaching about the becoming of being-nothing in propositions ("The Speeches of Zarathustra"), but struggles with the problem of his followers turning him into a static-abstract idol. In the Second Part, Zarathustra struggles to find his inner courage to actually lead his children but meets unconscious resistances that prove he is not yet ready to sacrifice himself. In the Third Part, he goes deeper into nothingness and finds an intimate conflict with life that leads him to a metaphysical dimension which he describes as an eternal woman who will help him give birth to spirit children. In the Fourth Part, he finally finds in himself, not only the capacity to self-sacrifice, but even the *sacrifice of sacrifice as sacrifice*. Thus, he instead frames his sacrifice as a bestowing of what was given to him. From this

⁵²⁰ This is true irrespective of personal identification/metaphysical beliefs.

bestowing, he not only finds the higher men who could potentially function as bridges to the Overman in the future, but he himself undergoes a final metamorphosis, described in terms of a timeless cloud of love from above, opening him to the spirit child.

In this conclusion I would like to explore what is at stake in Nietzsche's mythological offering in the story of Zarathustra. I interpret that what is really at stake here, is an "other type of becoming," a becoming that can *traverse the fantasy of the cross, and open to a becoming that we might describe as flight*. This approach is founded on a principle that we should pay more attention to the real of Nietzsche's fantasmatic mediation in the character of Zarathustra, than we should pay attention to the real of Nietzsche's embodied life. When we focus on the real of Nietzsche's embodied life, we inevitably stumble into the problems that Nietzsche encountered in his personal struggles and failings, as well as his destructive ending in mental collapse.⁵²¹ There is no doubt an importance to this dimension, but Nietzsche himself was not a man looking for a happy ending, and his aims as a spirit did not function to guarantee him an end surrounded by loving family and peaceful quiet in old age. Nietzsche did not live for these ends.

What Nietzsche did live for, was the pure mediation of bodily thought, and offers to us an unprecedented historical explosion of striving for the Overman. Here we may be aided with a principle that grounds the philosophy of Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytically informed work.⁵²²

⁵²¹ As mentioned in "Nietzsche's Zarathustra as a Model for Hegel's Essence" (Chapter 11), what is at stake in abyssal mediation (qua tight rope walking between the animal and the overman), is the difference between destructive madness and birth of the flying concept.

⁵²² Žižek, S. 2012. *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso. p. 4.

“Beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of fiction”

If we focus on the fiction of reality, of course we will be staring at a philosopher who ended up spiralling into madness. But if we focus on the reality of fiction, we will be staring at a philosopher with an unparalleled capacity to intervene into the mythological substructure of Western and even Global civilisation.⁵²³ This paper aims to open up some important threads that may help us see the way Nietzsche’s mythological intervention can help us extend his tradition into the deep future.

Let us start with the high stakes tension in Nietzsche’s work, that of the tension between the form of becoming that had dominated Western civilisation, that being a Christian becoming under the cross, and the form of becoming that Nietzsche himself attempts to develop a mythology for, that being a becoming towards flight.

If we start with the idea of Western civilisation becoming under the cross, we have to take the double meaning of the cross, which is both a symbol of Jesus Christ, Son of God’s, crucifixion *and* resurrection.⁵²⁴ In this way the cross represents a paradoxical double significance, where the most precious being in the universe, God’s child, sacrifices himself to a tremendous and unbearable suffering, only to emerge on the other side of this suffering, redeemed, risen (to heaven), and back in God’s embrace as the truest and realist unified real. We might be so bold to speculate that the symbol of the cross and its relation to Jesus, represents the paradox of accepting being a finite limited mortal suffering in the world (the opposite of the pleasure principle which Freud suggests regulates our psychic motion), as the

⁵²³ The global is an underappreciated and underexplored potential in Nietzsche’s work.

⁵²⁴ This double meaning was also expressed well in this anthology by Andrew Sweeny re: Hanged Man as about both crucifixion and unreasonable joy (Chapter 24).

only path towards connection with an eternal, divine, and immortal-infinite element in the universe. In other words, if we do not truly accept our existential coordinates as finite, limited, mortal and so forth, and we constantly attempt to overcome this condition in pleasure-seeking temporal worldly satisfactions (sex, career, finance etc.), then we doom ourselves to “hell.” In psychoanalysis this may be compared to the acceptance of symbolic castration which can be mediated by self-relating negativity.⁵²⁵

From this interpretation, we can say that Christianity is a religion of prohibition, renunciation, and restriction as it relates to worldly temptation (equal to sin, and our fallen nature). Through strict disciplinary adherence to prohibition, renunciation and restriction, and consequently channelling the flow of our energy towards God, an other-worldly and eternally divine immortal-infinite source of forgiveness and compassion, we release ourselves from the bondage of sin, and elevate our spirit to what persists when we and everything we have known, has been lost. Such an ethic of action and repetition, certainly exerted a tremendously meaningful effect on human history, and cannot be disconnected from the way Western civilisation has grown and reproduced itself for the past 2000 years.

Nietzsche steps onto the scene and develops his philosophical career when the foundations of Christianity were not only being deeply questioned, but also at a time when the very existential expression of Western spirit seemed to have lost its intimate connection with basic Christian beliefs. As I’m sure we are all aware, this deep questioning and existential expression is connected to the emergence of modern science as practice and worldview, and the materialist mode of being mediated by capital,

⁵²⁵ As Hegel emphasises in the conclusion of the *Science of Logic*: “the negative moment of absolute mediation is the unity which is subjectivity and soul.”

which challenged the faith that many had in the reality of Jesus's death and resurrection (i.e. the meaning of the symbol of the cross). If Jesus did not suffer for redemption in eternal life, then what was the point or meaning of the suffering? Consequently, where do I find belonging, in an increasingly complex and chaotic world, without this point of orientation? Why should we accept prohibition, renunciation, and restriction of our basic (sinful) instincts when the pay off for this limitation is not going to be repaid in full (on the Other side)?

The equation is something like: if my self-sacrifice for the Other is not repaid in the Other becoming for my-self, then why engage in the whole twisted Christian song and dance qua metaphysical logic?

The way Nietzsche expresses his central mythological challenge to Christianity, is by proposing that Christianity, and the symbol of the cross, were fantasies that need to be traversed through confronting one's own desire for death, and conversely, one's own hatred of life and this world. The basic instincts were perceived as sinful because the spirit did not want to traverse the contradictions and negativities involved in learning about the true nature of the self (i.e. engage the abyssal mediation or tight-rope walk of abyssal mediation of drive). Thus, for Nietzsche, the ethic of prohibition, renunciation, and restriction should not be adopted from this existential starting point of sin, but rather investigated without moral presupposition for a metamorphosis that would pay off (so to speak) on this side, the only side, in this life.⁵²⁶ In other words, there is no Other to sacrifice for, one must lose (grieve) this very loss

⁵²⁶ Peter Rollins is perhaps the best example of someone who has not only developed theory in this tradition of Death of God theology, but also developed embodied action in this tradition, see: Rollins, P. 2009. *The Orthodox Heretic*. Paraclete Press.

(of the Other) and become in the space of the non-other.⁵²⁷ What was possible here was an overcoming of what we are now, for what we might become in-and-as time, which entails maturing to the loss of present human identity for an Other-alien identity.⁵²⁸

Here we may speculate that Nietzsche through Zarathustra explores the mysterious Other side of becoming which Christianity traditionally places on the level of reuniting with a supernatural God in heaven after passing through the brutal limitations of our mortal finite being. What seems to be at stake in Nietzsche's Zarathustra, as a scientist of logic, is that once one has united being-nothing, there is an other-becoming on this side that he describes with the signifier of "flight" against the "spirit of gravity" that is responsible for the "fall." The fall in Christian terms is related to Adam and Eve's mythological fall from the Garden of Eden, where they have to confront all of the vicissitudes of human beings, at the ground of sexuation and desire. Instead of assuming that this fall can only be rectified in Heaven with God in the afterlife, Nietzsche's Zarathustra seems to suggest that this fantasy can be traversed in this world and opened to a different becoming.

What is clear is that Nietzsche still does offer an ethic that aims to transmute the energy of our instincts, but as mentioned, this transmutation is not done under a moral presupposition of original sin. Nietzsche's ethic of the drive thus takes what is all-too-often perceived in moralistic terms, sometimes to protect a young subject, and sometimes something to weaponize against curious subjectivity in general, rather as an ontological clue to

⁵²⁷ There may be a connection here with Thomas Winn's letting and "The Inversion" (Chapter 23).

⁵²⁸ Which is also at stake in working through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as expressed in the community work: Last, C. & Garner, D. (Ed.) 2022. *Enter the Alien: Thinking as 21st Century Hegel*. Independently Published, Philosophy Portal Books.

investigate: *that Being is Nothing* (and conversely, *that Nothing is Being*).⁵²⁹ Our drive qua becoming must contain this ontological fact on the level of the sexual and the political. Moreover, Nietzsche suggests that once this transmutation has been accomplished, the thing that we really want (often signified with words like eternity, immortality, perfection, infinity and so forth), can emerge on this side of being (that we can really live or even fly after we die to the fantasy of the fall). Here he reverses the Christian idea of the Son of God, and instead offers us the idea of the Child that has emerged after a long and arduous path of disciplinary struggle with heavy weights (the camel) and passionate drives for freedom (the lion). The child is represented as a light being that dances, sings and flies into the heights of being as if it is always-already being re-born. Like the infant child, Nietzsche's Child is capable of seeing the present with fresh eyes and a yea-saying will, but unlike the infant child, Nietzsche's Child is the result of its own arduous labour, and can only be as a result (as opposed to an immediate identification by a restless child or last man).

What is clear in Nietzsche's Zarathustra is that he is framing his self-sacrifice in relation to the dying Christian world. The abyssal fish in the human sea gather around his mountain. He hosts a last supper and tells these higher men that they are *bridges* to the future Overman. Thus while these higher men will not themselves be the Overman, his true children are close, and that they will be the heirs to a new empire that may last for 1000 or even 1000s of years. Here he seems to be setting himself up as a myth that offers a different story for a new time, in relation to the Christian story of Jesus's death and resurrection.

⁵²⁹ What is at stake in Alenka Zupančič's *What Is Sex?* is to think this Hegelian logic of being-nothing at the level of the sexual qua sexual as an irreducible lack/negativity in Nature that makes it an insufficient Other, and consequently, mediating its becoming in the political (human civilisation itself).

What really separates the Zarathustrian story from the Christian story? Some of the salient points of differentiation include:

- While Jesus was within human civilisation, Zarathustra is outside of human civilisation
- While Jesus was 33 years old, Zarathustra is much older, by my estimation, perhaps as old as his 60s or 70s
- Jesus organises a last supper with his disciples and is eventually betrayed by Judas to the Roman Empire, while Zarathustra organises a last supper with higher men as potential bridges to the Overman in the mountains, and is never betrayed
- While Jesus was executed by the state (Roman Empire) for blasphemy after explicitly praying to God to be crucified for humanity's sins, Zarathustra attempts to sacrifice himself for a new empire while the old Christian empire is dying and crying out in distress all around him (and Zarathustra never actually dies, or better: the narrative of his actual death is left shrouded in mystery)

What is perhaps important to add is that both do undergo a mysterious spiritual metamorphosis:

- Jesus is resurrected after his death by God to Heaven, while Zarathustra undergoes a metamorphosis to an Other type of becoming which we never end up learning about (since there is no Fifth Part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), however it seems to

be mediated by a “cloud of love” from above

Here I will claim that there is a way in which the story offered by Nietzsche through Zarathustra offers us a new myth and sacrifice for a new empire and world that has yet to be formally born (but should not be restricted to “the West” but thought on a global level). In this we find that Zarathustra does not identify in any way with God as a big Other (he fully accepts its inexistence), and the proof of this lack of identification can be found in the fact that he does not live in human society as such. Zarathustra does not secretly identify with God, looking to subvert/transgress it from within. He has rather totally withdrawn from it, and waits for those in distress to come to him, beneath his mountain cave.⁵³⁰

Moreover, Zarathustra is much older than Jesus (by as much as three decades), giving us a perspective on the process of spiritual becoming after our most sexually active age, and in a method of sublating Christianity (internalising its negativity while raising it to a higher level), as opposed to establishing it (as Jesus did). Here, throughout the text, Zarathustra offers us many important wisdoms about sexual difference and marriage, and also sacrifices himself from a much “riper” standpoint of knowing. Indeed, he had been reflectively cultivating his spiritual essence for at least three more decades than Jesus did (could). As Hegel notes at the opening of the *Science of Logic*, there is a dimension of the transformation of the universal (being) through particularity (essence) to singularity (concept),

⁵³⁰ This position in relation to the signifier can be perceived as a “feminine” position insofar as Zarathustra is not “proselytising” or actively forcing his view on others (as he does at the opening of the book). Here we could say that, one of the significant differences in Zarathustra’s performance from the First Part to the Fourth and Final Part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, involves traversing the (masculine) fantasy that his speech can function as the cause of the transformation in the other.

which births new universal (being), which cannot be intellectually comprehended without extended experiential mediation (what we are blessed with in the actual text of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*).

Zarathustra also avoids betrayal by disciples (i.e. followers) at his “last supper” because, properly speaking, Zarathustra doesn’t have disciples, he has *potential children*. Zarathustra is not looking for followers, but rather, explicitly tells all of the men at his “last supper,” to courageously strive in the abyss, and sacrifice themselves as bridges to the Overman. While Zarathustra does not offer a “Ten Commandments,” his speech to the higher men, could be roughly categorised in a list as follows:⁵³¹

1. God is Dead, you must learn to confront the abyss
2. From the abyss we yearn for the Overman to exist
3. Climb great heights and become a lightning strike from above
4. The higher you climb the greater the possibility of mistakes
5. We should not preserve humanity, but overcome it
6. Only through the deepest evil can we reach the highest good
7. Learn to laugh and dance beyond yourself on a difficult road

In this way, there is no way to really betray him, unless they betray themselves by not sacrificing themselves for the Overman. In other words, because his “sacrifice” is itself sacrificed as sacrifice, any form of “betrayal” would itself not function as “betrayal” since there is nothing to “betray” but your own self-overcoming.

⁵³¹ This list is not exhaustive of Zarathustra’s speeches to the higher men, but rather a guide to the style of ethics on display.

Finally, Zarathustra's final metamorphosis is not mediated by a supernatural entity (God) into a supernatural world (Heaven), but is rather a metamorphosis here on Earth. This metamorphosis opens him to a new prophet with a new myth and a sacrifice that is already disconnected from God, coming from a place of much deeper spiritual growth, organised towards giving birth to children (not followers), and undergoing a metamorphosis related to perfection and eternity in this world, and opening to an "other type of becoming" (*mediated by ever-greater eternal perfecting in the dissolution of human being qua identity?*). As already mentioned, this other type of becoming, is not under an image of a cross, but under the image of a camel (discipline), and a lion (passion). At the end of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* we do not have a prophet covered in his own blood after being brutally slaughtered, but a child-like prophet dedicated to his future spirit work (camel), and with his deepest passions faithfully serving him (lion).⁵³²

In this way, if Christianity leaves us with the Holy Spirit as the community of believers whose love bonds are God qua resurrected Jesus, Nietzsche's Zarathustra shows us that there is a gap in this picture (*already self-evident from the sociohistorical real of spiritual disenchantment in the scientific universe*), where an atheist true believer can retroactively transform the coordinates of myth and

⁵³² As these three symbols must be thought together, perhaps from a Lacanian perspective, tied together in a Borromean knot, we may call the camel, lion and child, the "Nietzschean trinity."

sacrifice itself.⁵³³ In this way, does not Nietzsche's fantasy truly bestow onto us, his spiritual children, something of a new beginning towards a new becoming, by traversing the fantasy of the cross for flight? In Lacanese, the traversing of the fantasy involves, not an abandonment of fantasy, but rather a closer and more intimate connection with the real core of fantasy that transcends images.⁵³⁴ Thus, there is a deepening of our experience of the in-itself or reality, which we only had contact with in our previous state of mind, as mediated by perfect images that prove deceptive after sceptical self-investigation which leads to discovery of their contradictory truth or truth as contradiction.⁵³⁵

The question before us now is: if this is true, what are the signs that, after Nietzsche, the West or as I have been emphasising, Global culture in general, is really pointing beyond the cross for flight? Perhaps the clearest sign of this pointing beyond the cross and the fall for the overman and flight, can be perceived in the emergence and

⁵³³ This is the meaning of God that Hegel points towards in the gap between the chapter on Religion and the chapter on Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The reason that Religion falls apart into Absolute Knowing is precisely because *there is a negativity in the religious community itself*. This is also why I focused so intensely on "Absolute Knowing" in my contribution to *Enter the Alien*, see: Last, C. 2022. Necessity of Absolute Knowing. In: *Enter the Alien: Thinking as 21st Century Hegel*. Garner, D. & Last, C. (Eds.). Independently Published, Philosophy Portal Books. In the move from Religion to Absolute Knowing, Hegel does something fantastic: he opens up space for us to think a true spirit science of self-differentiation that at once sublates the scientific universe, and makes it impossible for any reduction of spirit to a religious denomination.

⁵³⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Richard Boothby for this observation. Here we should follow his work: Boothby, R. 2022. *Embracing the Void: Rethinking the Origin of the Sacred*. Northwestern University Press.

⁵³⁵ This is why Dr. Todd McGowan emphasises that the truth of freedom after Hegel is found in the positivising of contradiction itself, see: McGowan, T. 2019. *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution*. Columbia University Press. As Hegel states at the end of the *Science of Logic* "contradiction is the essential moment of the concept." What we basically have at work in Hegel's logic is the negativity (of being), the contradiction (of essence) and the positive result (of concept). This logical formula, when seriously applied to the self as spirit science, appears to be of (truly) infinite value.

actualisation of science throughout the modern and now postmodern paradigms. There is little question that the metaphor of fight and fighting against the spirit of gravity makes a lot of sense when analysing the historicity of science. Throughout scientific history the idea of gravity as a universal force dominates its conceptual universe, and the greatest actual achievement of the scientific materialist paradigm is the extension and expansion of our civilisation into space. This is a very literal flight against the spirit of gravity.⁵³⁶

The main problem with science, however, has been that while it has been perfecting itself with impressive results under the banner of materialism, what this paradigm excludes and cannot include, is the thinking contents of subjective reflexivity.⁵³⁷ The clearest proof of this impossibility is the actual historical existence of psychoanalysis, which occupies the domain of subjective reflexivity and attempts to not only give it outlet, but to help it traverse its own fantasies for a “more real” discursive engagement with the world via the drives of voice and vision. Here we can say that, if we think a science that can include within itself subjective reflexivity from its own ground, would it not look a lot like a formalisation of the message given to us by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: that spirit should struggle with the spirit of gravity (its dragon?) towards flight? In very practical terms, this would lead to the emergence of a science that not only aimed towards technological extension and expansion in struggling with the universal force of gravity, but also aimed towards

⁵³⁶ For a creative meditation on this, see “Jump Man” (Interlude 3).

⁵³⁷ This is the basic meaning of the Prologue “On Scientific Reflection” of my latest book: Last, C. 2023. *Systems and Subjects: Thinking the Foundations of Science and Philosophy*. Independently Published, Philosophy Portal Books.

spiritual extension and expansion in struggling with the universal force of gravity.⁵³⁸

Here our guide should be double: not only the mytho-pathos of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, but also the logos-pathos of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.⁵³⁹ The practical consequence of combining Hegel's logic and Nietzsche's mythology, is that a *new religious layer for civilisation could emerge*. This new layer of religion would not be aimed towards bringing the human being to its knees, limiting the being by way of an eternal being (or Being qua Being), but rather *cultivating the human being for an orientation towards flight via the Real* (in body, in voice, etc.) (or Being qua Real (of the Concept)). In Hegelian terms, this would be an orientation towards Absolute Knowing (which, as mentioned, exists beyond the traversal of the religious layer). In an orientation towards flight we are opening the human spirit towards a radical and alien otherness. We are opening the human spirit towards the real core of fantasy that transcends imaging.

To repeat, and at the same time to bring this paper full circle, this is all possible only if we start by thinking Nietzsche, not in terms of his real embodied life, where his personal struggles and failings, and his destructive ending in mental collapse, leave us with the feeling that his project is an impossibility best avoiding, and rather start by thinking Nietzsche, in terms of his fantasmatic mediation: his

⁵³⁸ The highly speculative dimension of both Interludes I offer in this volume, on sports or athletics and on music or specifically hip hop, should be read as pointing towards ways in which both the voice and vision of the body struggle with the spirit of gravity, and succeed in flying in the void through abyssal self-mediation.

⁵³⁹ What is at stake in combining these two figures, is on the one hand, a new global mythos grounded in pathos (Nietzsche), and also a new logic grounded in pathos (Hegel). An underappreciated dimension of Nietzsche's work involves precisely this invention of a new mythos which bleeds in the cracks of the old; and an underappreciated dimension of Hegel's work involves precisely this invention of a new logic which bleeds in the crack as such (the instinctual qua drive-body).

unprecedented historical explosion of pure thought for the Overman. Such a starting point is completely in line with a Žižekian philosophy, where we flip our conventional understandings of reality and fiction.⁵⁴⁰

"Beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of
fiction."

Now one of the tasks for a post-Nietzschean philosophy, I would argue, is thinking how to understand this flight of fiction in the context of 20th and 21st century human spiritual development? In this anthology, as mentioned, I use examples of 20th and 21st century sports and music.⁵⁴¹ *These dimensions of human reality must be thought philosophically.* This is a question and a reflection that I will leave with you. But to conclude, I would like to emphasise that I am trying to push an idea here, that both Hegel's logos-pathos and Nietzsche's mythos-pathos allow us to think in a new way about the future of religion. Both the logical and mythical strivings of Hegel and Nietzsche retroactively open new conditions of possibility for both the religious idea as what should be cultivating godliness (flight), and the future of spiritual atheism (an Other becoming into the alien). Such a move is absolutely critical today, to avoid both regressive religious fundamentalisms that betray the Nietzschean legacy, and also to avoid progressive spiritual obfuscations, that do not tarry with the negative, or do not affirm flight in the unity of Being-Nothing. This horizon is totally actual and visible in post-Nietzschean interpretation, from Martin Heidegger, George Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Ray Brassier, Alenka Župančič, as well as central authors of this volume, for example: Daniel Garner, Layman Pascal, Thomas Hamelryck, Alex Ebert, Chetan Anand, Tim Adalin,

⁵⁴⁰ Žižek, S. 2012. *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso. p. 4.

⁵⁴¹ See: Interlude 3 and 8, respectively.

Jyoti Dalal, Carl Smith, Thomas Winn, Andrew Sweeny, as well as many emerging philosophical minds who will, I have little doubt, come to be known as defining figures of thought in the 21st century. Nietzsche's myth and sacrifice in Zarathustra, could open us to an other form of becoming, one that sublates the cross towards flight, for a becoming with relevance for, who knows, the next 1000 years.