

This essay analyzes the connection between Nietzsche's philosophy and contemporary transhumanism, on the basis of his Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy and how it articulated in late-Romantic European culture. Nietzsche's personal insanity, and the morbidity of the Romantic Movement in general, can serve as a warning of what transhumanism might become if it overemphasizes individualism. Nietzsche's first great book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, stresses the importance of the classical-romantic debate in serious European music, links directly to Jewish intellectual traditions in sociology and psychoanalysis, and provides metaphors for understanding the Nazi Holocaust. The idea of the *Übermensch*, promoted in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, demands that transhumanists cross the abyss that separates traditional religious culture from some new form of culture yet to be discovered, or that must be created by the transhumanists themselves.

### **Burglarizing Nietzsche's tomb**

Poor Nietzsche! Rich Nietzsche! Never has a modern philosopher been so abused and used as he. I have done it myself, taking the title and the eleven chapter epigrams of my 2007 book, *Across the Secular Abyss*, from him. Decades ago, Walter Kaufmann (1974) rescued him from the Nazis, and today his ghost cries for salvation from the transhumanists. Or not, as the case may be. Perhaps Nietzsche himself was the first transhumanist (Sorgner 2009). Perhaps he really was a Nazi.

### **The real Nietzsche**

In the first of Wagner's *Ring* operas, *Das Rheingold*, the technologically advanced dwarf, Alberich, casts a spell to transform himself: "*Nacht und Nebel, Niemand gleich.*" ("Night and fog, unlike anyone.") He also uses a piece of hardware called the Tarnhelm, which can change a person's form and even teleport to a new location. Does this make him the first transhumanist, who used magical (or not yet existing) technology to transcend his dwarfish limitations?

In 1941, the Nazis used “*Nacht und Nebel*” as the code name for an operation to cause political opponents to disappear. Similarly, themes of transcendence and destruction run throughout the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, who began as a Wagnerian, became an anti-Wagnerian, and ended his life only after losing any sense of who he really was and what he had accomplished. Tellingly, the central visual metaphor in his masterwork, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, is *Mitternacht* – Midnight, the exact reverse of enlightenment, yet meaning the same thing. The Tarnhelm can render a person invisible, but at midnight everything is invisible.

A popular myth says that Nietzsche’s late-life insanity was the result of syphilis, thus either an accident or punishment from God for his irreligion. Perhaps he was always insane, merely progressively so. Alternatively, Nietzsche may have been a saint, whose suffering was the necessary result of his life’s work, which was using poetic philosophy to undercut the illusions on which ordinary life rests. In performing this self-sacrificial function, he has long been recognized as a precursor of the existentialists (Camus 1946, 1955; Beckett 1954, 1956; Frankl 1967), for whom a stable personal identity was problematic precisely because the social order had collapsed around them. Repeatedly, Nietzsche depicted his position as that of a being precariously but proudly perched above an abyss:

*Beyond Good and Evil*: And when you look for a long time into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.<sup>1</sup>

*Human, All Too Human*: When walking around the top of an abyss, or crossing a deep stream on a plank, we need a railing, not to hold onto (for it would collapse with us at once), but rather to achieve the visual image of security.<sup>2</sup>

*Thus Spake Zarathustra*: Ye are not eagles; thus have ye never experienced the happiness of the alarm of the spirit. And he who is not a bird should not camp above abysses.<sup>3</sup>

*Thus Spake Zarathustra*: Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman – a rope over an abyss.<sup>4</sup>

This last quotation from *Zarathustra* gave me the title of my book, because it concerns the transition from a traditional form of society that relied upon religion to provide coherent values, to a post-religious society that needed to invent a new fundamental principle. Much of my argument was sociological, assessing whether traditional religion did indeed reduce crime, suicide and other social ills, and whether it also encouraged sufficient fertility to sustain the human population. To the extent that the answers were affirmative, which they certainly were in the case of fertility, then a secular society would be a dying society. It is worth noting that Nietzsche died childless, while Wagner’s children and grandchildren were powerful supporters of his intellectual legacy. It is also worth noting, unless I am gravely mistaken, that transhumanists under-reproduce biologically.

The tenth chapter of *Across the Secular Abyss* focuses on technological transcendence, and presents transhumanism in rather glowing terms. It begins with this familiar quotation from *Zarathustra*: “I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man?”<sup>5</sup> This term, *superman*, became entangled in Nazi ideology, and gave birth to a comic book superhero. Ideally, this essay should be written in German, because Nietzsche (1872, 1885) wrote poetically in that language, and not always translatably. English-speaking Nietzscheans wishing to avoid the tragic or comic connotations of *superman* have used a neologism like *overman*, or returned to the original German, *Übermensch*. Some transhumanists refer to the people living on the far side of the abyss as *posthumans*, and those walking the tight-rope over the abyss are *transhumans*. Perhaps today we should call ourselves *abyssals*, but in *World of Warcraft* these are demonic creations similar to infernals! Nietzsche’s image of a successful abyss-walker combines intellectual skill with courage, and insight with balance. It is a temporary state that leads either to catastrophe or, just possibly, to successful attainment of a new state of being, beyond good and evil, as religions traditionally defined them.

Escaping this terminological tangle, and admitting that we cannot be clear on the nature of the *Übermensch*, we can ask whether Nietzsche's method of attaining that exalted state is at all similar to that promoted by transhumanists. Superficially, they are quite different. Nietzsche is often cited as a noteworthy pessimist, who doubted the possibility of progress (e.g. Gilman 2003: 7), yet his writings continually strove to achieve it. Transhumanists proclaim that human nature can and should be transformed by technology, whereas Nietzsche seemed to believe that refined and liberated aesthetic sensibilities, enhanced by an especially literary approach to philosophy, could achieve the transformation. However, this may not be so big a difference as it appears to be.

With a few notable exceptions, leading transhumanists are not scientists or engineers, but philosophers, ethicists, even artists. Their goal seems to be to establish the cultural preconditions for human transformation, not to accomplish the needed technical innovations themselves. Thus in their actual practice, many contemporary transhumanists are not that very different from Nietzsche, working in the humanities more than the sciences, more in tune with Romanticism than Technocracy (Elsner 1967). Furthermore, transhumanists face Nietzsche's greatest challenge, the one he demonstrably failed, about how to achieve transcendence without alienation.

At the risk of oversimplification, we can say that the sciences offer four potential routes across the abyss: biological, computational, psychotherapeutic, and utopian. The first two are most often discussed today in transhumanist publications, the third is closer to Nietzsche's approach, and the fourth deserves more attention than it currently receives.

*Biological transformation* assumes that new biomedical technologies will be able to extend human life indefinitely and augment our physical and mental abilities. A serious challenge for this perspective is the apparent deceleration in the progress of medical technologies in recent years, as reflected in the declining increase in the average life span, and the serious negative side effects of some drugs that appear to enhance abilities. In science fiction, nanites are invented that can enter the human body and change it at the cellular level, but this notion has no connection to real nanotechnology as it exists today (Roco and Bainbridge 2001, 2006a, 2006b). A more technically reasonable approach, engineering viruses to do this nanoscale repair work, is fraught with hazard – notably the problem of preventing the viruses from evolving to serve their own needs rather than ours – and seems unlikely on political and public health grounds quite apart from technical feasibility. This is not the place to evaluate the biotechnology approach, so I merely note that its success is uncertain, and thus we had better consider it as one method among four that can be more effective if used in combination.

*Computational transformation* assumes that computers will soon achieve the capabilities of the human brain, and that one or another method will be found for transferring human memories or personalities into information systems, perhaps continuing to act within the material world via teleoperation of robots (Moravec 1988; Kurzweil 1999). I have invested a good deal of research effort into this approach myself, and I remain optimistic (Bainbridge 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). However, here too there are warning signs (Bainbridge 2007b). The constant advance in computing capabilities, so-called Moore's Law, seems to have slowed (Cong *et al.* 2009; Palem *et al.* 2009), and the long-prophesied new molecular computing techniques are not developing at all fast. Progress in artificial intelligence remains frustratingly slow, and the field of AI remains fragmented. Computational techniques available today can emulate human personalities with low fidelity that undoubtedly can be improved, but many people would say that nothing short of perfect transfer from meat to machine would constitute success.

*Psychotherapeutic transformation* involves the use of training, interaction, or mental discipline techniques to improve the human mind, and these were very popular throughout the twentieth century. Clearly, such techniques can be valuable, if one counts education in the sciences among them, but the ability of methods like psychoanalysis, mind control, behavior modification, or Scientology to reshape human personalities is dubious (e.g. Salter 1952; Rachman 1971). It can even be argued that higher education in the humanities sold itself as one of these character-building techniques, but the idea that reading novels or poetry can

improve a person is at best unproven. This approach is especially salient here, because it is the one that Nietzsche himself chose and through which his work had significant impact.

*Utopian transformation* involves revolutionary reconstruction of society, on the assumption that the best way to make better people is to place them in a better social system. The most vigorous variant of this approach was Marxism, but the failure of the New Soviet Man to be any better than anybody else put the lie to its hopes. However, there is a certain logic to the utopian approach, in that humans are at least greatly the product of their social environments, and human behavior is largely oriented toward serving social demands. Most key dimensions of human action would be meaningless without social structures: economic exchange requires a market; communication requires a shared language; artistic creation takes place in relation to a particular culture even when it diverges from existing standards; erotic and reproductive behavior express themselves through families; even philosophy cannot survive without schools. Changing the nature of these institutions, therefore, should change the nature of the people inside them.

However, transhumanism, like Nietzsche, seems anti-social and disinclined to find new ways for people to cooperate intimately. In his seminal book, *Are You a Transhuman?*, FM-2030 argues that traditional social institutions like the family are obsolete and fluid, self-centered lifestyles will wash them away. One could just as well argue that new and more intensive forms of family, such as the group marriage systems of some of the communes I have studied (Bainbridge 1978, 2002) should be further developed by social scientists to become the futuristic norm. Let there be no doubt: This essay will argue that the individualistic quality of the current transhumanist movement is an arbitrary choice that has serious consequences. To the extent that Nietzsche is a prophet of transhumanism, then these consequences will be, on balance, negative.

### **The Birth of Tragedy**

Nietzsche's own personal tragedy can be said to have begun with crucial issues left unresolved in his first great book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which actually was influential in the development of the psychotherapeutic approach to personal transformation. The full original title was *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music (Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik)*, and in it Nietzsche was influenced by both Richard Wagner and Arthur Schopenhauer, both of whom he was later to reject, especially the former in *The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*.<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer (1883-1886) claimed that the world is embodied music, a seemingly crazy notion but one very much "in tune" with German idealism – the philosophical position originally enunciated by Plato that only the concepts in the mind are real. Wagner (1849) wrote emphatically about the need to reject the intellectualized style of music sometimes called *classicism* in favor of emotive *romanticism*, and he did so in the wake of the revolutions of 1848 in hopes that inspired artists could lead the people (the romanticized folk or Volk) to freedom from their masters (the classicist aristocrats).

Among the most familiar pieces of serious music today is precisely *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which was used as the leitmotif for the mysterious monolith in Stanley Kubrick's prophetic 1968 movie, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It is a tone poem based on Nietzsche's masterwork, by the best of the Wagnerians, Richard Strauss, whose other symphony-length tone poem, *Ein Heldenleben*, has a similar ethos. Less well known is *The Mass of Life* by Frederick Delius, also based on *Zarathustra*, as is the third movement of Gustav Mahler's third symphony. Half a century ago I was surprised to discover in the Yale music library scores of the songs Nietzsche himself composed, finding them remarkably bland. For those who want to delve into this aspect of his creativity, the Nietzsche Music Project was founded in 1990.<sup>8</sup> The point relevant here is that the debate over the direction that serious German music should take in the nineteenth century – romantic (Wagner) versus classical (Brahms) – is reflected in the fundamental conception of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which is based on a cultural typology.

Most influential for later writers is the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, which Nietzsche derives from his reading of ancient Greek history and culture. Named after the comparable but competing Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus, these two archetypes represent opposite modes of response to human existence. The *Apollonian* is cool, rational, classical, and when it does not speak in grammatical sentences expresses itself

through the visual arts. The *Dionysian* is hot, lustful, romantic, and when it does not roar with animal noises expresses itself through music and dance. From Schopenhauer, Nietzsche also took the idea that Apollonianism was the *principium individuationis* – the principle of individuation – which marked solitary philosophers who sought to understand the world through private contemplation or the exercise of their individual intellects. In contrast, Dionysianism is a form of extreme collective intoxication experienced in emotional group rituals and drunken festivals.

Nietzsche conflated two distinguishable dichotomies here, cold versus hot and individual versus collective. When she applied Nietzsche's concepts to anthropology in her book *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict (1934) was not convinced these dualities were connected in the same way he thought, and she suggested Dionysians could be individualistic. Consider one of the science-fiction expressions of the cold-hot dimension: logical Vulcans versus passionate Klingons in *Star Trek*. Both are collectivist. Although Klingons are expected to compete with each other for status, they do within their rather hidebound society.

Setting temperature of the temperament aside, consider the individualist versus collectivist dimension. Nietzsche actually hints at a third orientation toward life, the Buddhist, marked both by denial of individual will and the longing for nothingness. However, just as the Buddhist abjures personal feelings, he detaches himself from social sentiments. The Apollonian emphasizes the self and deemphasizes the collective. The Dionysian emphasizes the collective and deemphasizes the self. The Buddhist deemphasizes both self and society. Logically, there must be a fourth type, which emphasizes both.

Common in German intellectual circles in Nietzsche's day, and often perhaps erroneously attributed to Hegel (1830), was the triad: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Apollonian and Dionysian are thesis and antithesis to each other. A true synthesis of them would not involve each negating the other to produce a bland mixture, but some kind of transcendence that preserved both at full strength while resolving the conflict between them. It was Nietzsche's tragedy that he never was able to achieve that synthesis, which would be both logical and ecstatic, individualist and collectivist.

Later writers in roughly his tradition, if not explicitly basing their work on *The Birth of Tragedy*, have speculated about what the synthesis might be. On the positive side, Abraham Maslow (1954, 1970) wrote about the self-actualizing personality, who would be joyfully socially engaged rather than isolated. On the negative side, Karen Horney (1945) suggested a formulation that could describe the Nazis as the synthesis. Instead of Apollonian, she referred to *moving away from people* in search of autonomy. Instead of Dionysian she referred to *moving toward people* in search of affection and approval. The negative synthesis is *moving against people* in search of power and prestige, which in the extreme seems to typify the Nazis.

One would have hoped that the synthesis would be the Zarathustran mode, achieved by the *Übermensch*. However, Zarathustra has withdrawn from society, and after collecting a group of disciples, abandons them. Similarly, after his break with Wagner, Nietzsche seems never to have been able to develop strong bonds with other human beings, and his growing madness either expressed or exacerbated this social isolation.

Not surprisingly, something very much like the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy figures in classic psychoanalytic theory: the hysterical versus obsessive-compulsive dichotomy. Freud (1924) had much greater apparent success with Dionysian hysterics, who after all were histrionic personalities quite ready to play roles, including pretending to be cured. At the other extreme, obsessive-compulsives refused to form a proper transference relationship with the psychoanalyst, because their Apollonianism kept them at a distance from other people, and thus they refused to wear the mask of a satisfied customer. David Bakan (1965) says that Freud's system derived from Jewish mysticism, just as Nietzsche's thesis derived from Greek mysticism, and both were shaped by the German tendency to erect strict categories of thought. Interestingly, anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace (1959) says that primitive psychotherapies alternate between being control-oriented versus cathartic – Apollonian versus Dionysian – always offering the exact opposite of the emphasis in the wider society. Whether Freud could have cured Nietzsche seems doubtful. Equally likely would have been for Freud to contract Nietzsche's malady.

Three decades ago, I published *Satan's Power*, a book about The Process, a polytheistic, psychotherapeutic, communal cult that conceptualized its four deities as ideal personality types: Jehovah, Lucifer, Christ and Satan. I wrote, "The duality *Jehovah:Lucifer* described two alternate social approaches to human life, rather similar to the *Apollonian:Dionsyian* dichotomy of Nietzsche, or the familiar *cold:hot, rigid:flexible, conservative:liberal* dichotomies of common language" (Bainbridge 1978: 181). Christ, in this typology, was the unifier, whereas Satan was the separator. Christ sought to bring the stern female principle Jehovah together with the permissive male principle Lucifer, in a marriage to overcome the conflict between them. In so doing, Christ risked becoming the victim of their divine dispute. Satan, in contrast, sought to drive Jehovah and Lucifer further part, and to isolate Christ from the other divine principles. In so doing, Satan happily split herself into fragments.

The over-all conception of the system was that God had broken himself into innumerable fragments, the large chunks being the gods, and the small splinters being the people, in order to play a game. In a grand cycle of explosion and compression, the Christian principle of unification was in the process of resolving all conflicts in order to reassemble God. Later, God would fragment again, in the *eternal recurrence* of which Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*.<sup>9</sup> Calling The Process the "Power" in order (temporarily) to protect its members from journalistic scrutiny, I wrote:

To a great extent, the cultists did not *believe* their tenets in the conventional sense. For them, the Power culture was not a series of statements about a real, external world. Rather it was a collection of attractive and powerful symbols through which they could express themselves. The Power was a kind of living theater. A waking dream, a fantasy that made no apologies to reality. The Power enjoyed playing with itself. It was simultaneously real and fictitious, not a lie but a work of art. In the nineteenth century, Richard Wagner tried to create total works of art in his operas, unions of all forms of artistic creation in one. He only half succeeded. The true total work of art would be an artistically created human community with a distinctive lifestyle and culture. *The Power is a total work of art.* (Bainbridge 1978: 149.)

The central members of The Process were artists and architects who considered their creative work to be *religious engineering*. They saw nothing inappropriate or insincere about consciously scripting religious rituals, designing clerical garb, writing sacred texts, publishing surrealist tracts, composing hymns and chants, or re-inventing their own personalities. Historically, The Process was a sect that had split off from Scientology, and it adapted for its own use Scientology's communication training routines, past lives regression techniques, and E-meter processing routines, in an elaborate system of processes designed to transform the self (Bainbridge 2004). Indeed, the group got its name from the *processes* it inherited from Scientology.

If The Process was living theater, then Scientology is a game in which people climb a ladder of fictive social status, and the difference between them is that between Dionysus and Apollo. Members of The Process sought to transform themselves collectively. Scientology focused on the individual and is very weak in group activities. They both are relevant here, not merely because of the parallels with Nietzsche, but also because both are in a sense transhumanist, seeking to use psychotherapeutic technology to transcend the ordinary limits of human existence.

Googling "Scientology Transhumanism" reveals what one might expect, that some opponents of transhumanism view it as a cult comparable to Scientology, whereas transhumanists strictly distinguish themselves from Scientology. Much of the rhetoric revolves around the word *cult*, on the assumption that cults are disreputable, but I do not think that Nietzsche would have allowed his thinking to be distorted by the stigmatizing labels applied by journalists to unpopular groups. Perhaps unconsciously, cults are modern attempts to revive the original human social form of hunter-gather bands, and thus are quite natural phenomena. Put in terms relevant for culture and personality research: *Cult is culture writ small.*

Again, the form of culture most relevant to Nietzsche's tragedy thesis is classical music. We can think of Nietzsche's scheme in terms of *cultural genetics*, following his structuralist conceptual approach but thinking in terms of evolutionary alternatives. Equivalent elements of culture which may be substituted for each other in a cultural structure may be called *alleles* or *allelomorphs*, following the terminology of biological genetics. Alleles are alternative genes which play the same role and have the same place in the genetic structure but give discernibly different results. Thus, Apollonian, Dionysian, Buddhist and Zarathustran could be alternative alleles at the same site in the cultural genetic code.

Early in Western classical music, there developed a general assumption that musical tones must be chosen from fixed scales. Alleles of this high-level gene, each different from the others, were developed by Indian (raga) music, classical Greek (tetrad) music, and by African-American (sliding tones) singing, which do not involve fixed tones in a scale. But under the *musical scale* assumption are several alternatives. The West chose, first of all, septatonic (7-tone) scales, in contrast to the pentatonic (5-tone) scales of East Asia. As the Middle Ages consolidated the musical culture, a system of *modal septatonic scales* (in which the intervals across tones were largely the ratios of simple integers) emerged. Note the three genes, in order of descending generality: scales, septatonic, modal. And each of these three genes has alleles.

The years passed, and thousands of little innovations added up to great change. The most specific of the three genes, *modality*, was transformed by a gradual rationalizing process into a distinctly different allele, *tonality*. This shift necessitated an adjustment of the septatonic scales to permit modulation from one key (tonality) to another – so that, for example, intervals of fifths between tones were no longer perfect, but all the semitones were equal ratios. While no single innovator can claim credit for this gene substitution, the obvious culmination of the process is Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Over the century-and-a-half which followed Bach, the tonal system was modified further through acceptance of more and more complex harmonies until the notions of *key* and predictable modulations between keys became quite ambiguous while more attention was given to highly complex musical chords. Thus appeared a third allele, *chromatic* music.

The best well-known example is Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, the quintessential Romantic Dionysian work. Finally, before World War I, this evolution was taken to its logical extreme, *atonal* music, a fourth allele. In atonal music, the tones of the well-tempered scale became equal partners in a music which explicitly rejected the sense of a tonal home base. The tonality allele was linked (and such strong but partial linkage is well-known in biological genetics) to the original septatonic gene which was replaced by a dodecatonic gene – twelve equally-separated tones to the octave.

Two twentieth-century German-language composers, Arnold Schoenberg (Jewish) and Carl Orff (possibly Nazi), produced radically different schools of composition by making different allele substitutions in the existing structure, especially relevant to the present discussion because they drew upon competing cultural traditions, the Hebrew and the Greek, over which Nietzsche himself struggled. Schoenberg's early works, notably the Wagnerian *Gurre-Lieder*, were also chromatic and romantic. But in seeking to take Romanticism to its extreme, Schoenberg participated in the nihilistic but highly emotional artistic movement of Expressionism, and substituted atonality for the related allele of chromaticism. The result was such atonal pieces as *Pierrot Lunaire* or *Erwartung*. Although Schoenberg incorporated some intellectual innovations, he continued to write highly expressive rather than intellectual music. The result, for Schoenberg as for many listeners, was very disturbing but still rather Wagnerian.

It must be understood that the Romantic movement in European cultural history had a very pronounced morbidity, and both Wagner and Nietzsche were examples of it. Every German intellectual, and half the general literate population it seems, was depressed by Goethe's 1774 Sturm und Drang novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which Werther commits suicide because he cannot be united with the girl her loves.<sup>10</sup> Several of Wagner's operas end similarly. Tannhäuser weeps at the bier of Elizabeth at the end of *Tannhäuser*, and Lohengrin is forced to bid farewell to Elsa at the end of *Lohengrin*. Both *Tristan and Isolde* and *Götterdämmerung* end when a woman chooses to join her lover in death, supposedly achieving transcendence through love. Schoenberg's *Erwartung* is about a woman who wanders through a forest,

seeking her lover, and comes across his dead body. How beautiful are the drops of his blood! These stories would seem very remote from transhumanism, because love is not part of the transhumanist lexicon, but they stress the problematic nature of human attachment, which is central to Nietzsche's entire career and is the chief dilemma faced by transhumanists.

Many consider the greatest example of the atonal Expressionist style to be *Wozzeck*, by Schoenberg's student Alban Berg, an opera of madness, depravity, and death. Remarkably, it is based on the drama *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner who died in 1837, and thus reaches back to the early Romantic Movement. Perhaps more relevant for transhumanists, the protagonist, Wozzeck, is driven mad by scientific experiments designed to see how humans can be transformed, and he ultimately drowns himself. The exceedingly expressive music depicts Wozzeck's drowning, from his own perspective. If we were standing on the shore, watching him drown, we might expect musical tones to descend as his body sinks. Instead, the tones rush upward, expressing Wozzeck's own perception of the water rushing upward as he sinks downward. In such music, the emotions are riled up without there being any satisfaction of the tensions thus produced.

Schoenberg's aesthetic response to this challenge was essentially religious, a quest for meaning which eventually found God's Law in this chaotic modern world of atonal music. Originally, this sense of divine order had been achieved through modality in the service of liturgical text (Gregorian chant) or tonality made especially meaningful by classic structures (Bach). But in atonality there was madness. A new set of commandments from the Lord was required to tell the composer which combinations of tones were good and which were forbidden, since in atonality all laws from previous dispensations had been lost. And thus, Schoenberg discovered the Apollonian system of composition called *serial dodecaphony* or *12-tone*. This method of composition gained wide acceptance for a time among composers of serious music (if far from universal praise) in great measure because it provides coherent rules (norms) for composition, and it is attractive to composers who have rejected the older forms and who therefore may be suffering from alienation. The religious nature of the twelve-tone solution for Schoenberg is shown by his biblical opera, *Moses und Aron*, where God's law is represented by a single 12-tone row which provides the musical material for the entire long work.

Carl Orff went in a very different direction from that taken by Schoenberg. Orff's career began later than Schoenberg's, but in the same cultural place, the shadow of the late Wagnerians. There is some dispute to what extent he embraced Nazism, but he did write music for the regime. At the beginning of the 1930s, when all Germany hungered for a new rebirth, Orff renounced his early works and returned, as he saw it, to the beginnings of Western music. Orff's first great composition, among the most popular of twentieth-century vocal works, was *Carmina Burana*, based on an ancient text and actually incorporating hints of the music of the thirteenth century. Clearly, the style is modal and romantic. Orff, like Schoenberg, had found an essentially religious solution to the problems of modern life as reflected in the alienation of art music. But where Schoenberg had returned to the religion of the ancient Hebrews, Orff had returned to the Paganism of Greece and Rome.

Throughout his career, however, Orff repeatedly admitted his Nietzschean pessimism, his lack of faith that the Greeks and Romans could save us, for example in the sensuous but bitter *Catulli Carmina*. Near the end of his life, Orff abandoned all hope in his last great work, *De Temporum Fine Comoedia*, and his attempt to return from chromatic-romantic to modal-romantic led him to that brave but maladaptive genotype which drove Schoenberg to his own religious conversion, atonal-romantic. In this work, all of human history, even time itself, ends in an atheism so profound that no basis for any kind of meaning can survive.

## **The death of God**

Emile Durkheim, the great French sociologist who thought like a German – perhaps because he was Jewish and born in the borderland between the two countries – can help us unravel what the death of God means. God, Durkheim (1915) explained, is a personification of society. Religion is sacred because society must

protect the principles on which it is based. The afterlife is a metaphor for the living influence the dead person has through the effect of his or her past deeds and relationships upon society. Thus, to become an atheist is to resign from the community, and indeed my own empirical research has found that atheists (like myself I must admit) have an unusually weak sense of personal connection to other people, including weak social obligations (Bainbridge 2005). Of course there are different conceptions of what a community is, and Durkheim's contemporary, Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) distinguished community (*Gemeinschaft*) from society (*Gesellschaft*), so it is possible to have somewhat well-ordered social relations without community. However, Durkheim (1897) argued that excessive individuation was objectively pathological.

Thus when Nietzsche withdraws from society, God becomes unreal for him. So too, for Zarathustra and the existentialists. So too, for transhumanists. I cannot cite exact data, but I wager that transhumanists have less stable, less intense social bonds than the average person. My unsystematic experience in transhumanist meetings and groups is that they are a collection of very individualistic individuals, often unwilling to cooperate meaningfully with each other for more than a short time. This marks them as Apollonians, and many of them seem to get more passionate about logic than about anything else. These observations are not intended to be insults, but assessments of how transhumanism fits into Nietzsche's scheme.

Apollonian transhumanists would naturally be enthusiastic about the more apparently rational routes to transcendence, biotechnology and computer technology. Accordingly, they would be less enthusiastic about the psychotherapeutic and utopian routes – again Apollo versus Dionysus. Yet logic on the level of synthesis suggests that all four routes are equally necessary. Any essay about Nietzsche must be based on the fundamental concept of culture, and transhumanist culture appears to be Apollonian. However, cultures often are most creative when they fuse, or interact in a grand dialog that enriches them both.

That is the second tragedy of the Nazi-Jewish Holocaust! Yes, millions of innocent people were killed, and that primary tragedy was an incalculably great loss to them and to humanity. But the second tragedy was also a shame: the alienation of two cultures that had much to give each other: German and Jew. This is relevant to Nietzsche both because the Nazis treated him as one of their own, and because his philosophical system reveals much about the tragedy. It is relevant to the relationship between Nietzsche and transhumanism because it highlights the difficulty of distinguishing between the *Übermensch*, the posthuman, and the Master Race. The first section of chapter LXIII in *Zarathustra* contains two provocative references to Jews:

Populace-hodgepodge: therein is everything mixed with everything, saint and swindler, gentleman and Jew, and every beast out of Noah's ark.

...

Ne'er sank the world so low! Rome now hath turned harlot and harlot-stew, Rome's Caesar a beast, and God – hath turned Jew!<sup>11</sup>

The first of these raises the often unasked question: Why Zarathustra? Why would Nietzsche choose this character to write a book about? He was the historical figure and religion-founder commonly named Zoroaster in English. Zoroastrianism is dualist, conceptualizing the universe as a cosmic struggle between opposites. The first quotation from Zarathustra above decries the mixture of opposites, almost like the kosher pollution that occurs when meat and dairy products are mixed (Douglas 1966). The second quotation seems anti-Semitic but is actually rather more anti-Christian and laments the decline of Pagan deities like Apollo and Dionysus.

The Belgian-Jewish-French neo-Durkheimian structuralist anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss (1962, 1967, 1970) claimed that thinking in terms of dualities is a universal human habit, built into the structures of the mind. Yes, it is found everywhere, but it is not universally significant. Some cultures and minds rely more upon it than others. One of his book titles, *The Raw and the Cooked*, illustrates this style of thinking. Sometime when you are eating sashimi with Japanese people, ask them whether it is raw or cooked? Has a salad been cooked? If cooked means heated: no. If cooked means prepared: yes. If it means both: maybe.

The Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy actually incorporates two mental methodologies that may be more important in Jewish and German culture (or continental European culture, recalling that Nietzsche was ethnically Polish and “France” is named after a Germanic tribe) than for example in Anglo-Saxon culture. One is the *dichotomy*, and when The Process sought a cultural symbol for dualities it adopted the ancient Hebrew mysticism around the two pillars of the temple of Solomon, Jachin and Boaz. Had they been drawing more heavily upon Asian traditions, they might have used Yin and Yang. The other, related conceptual habit is *ideal types*, most forcefully enunciated by German sociologist Max Weber (1949; Stark and Bainbridge 1979) when he introduced the church-sect duality into the sociology of religion. An ideal type is like a self-conscious stereotype, as of German and Jew, used for intellectual analysis of possibly more complex realities.

Yes, stereotypes can have evil consequences, even if they are a necessary feature of human thought (Allport 1954; Bainbridge 1995). The injustice of German upon Jew in Europe was not very much more fierce than the injustice of White upon Black in the United States, although perhaps the latter spread its harm more thinly across a greater number of years and people. “Black and white” is the standard English metaphor for a dichotomy, although Anglo-Saxons prefer to think in terms of a spectrum, first studied systematically by that English genius, Isaac Newton, when he held a prism up to the light of the sun. Again, ideal-typical dualities may be more influential in some cultures, but they are found everywhere, often imported when a native culture is weak in them. For example, Germanic ideal-typical dualities were imported to American sociology by Talcott Parsons (1937), who studied in Germany, and by Robert K. Merton, a Jewish-American sociologist greatly influenced by Durkheim’s theory of *anomie*.

Prior to writing about how God was a personification of society, Durkheim had written two books discussing *anomie*, a concept very close to alienation in meaning that has been very influential in sociology, perhaps precisely because different sociologists have been able to give it different meanings for their own purposes. He introduces it near the end of his 1893 book *The Division of Labor in Society* and devotes extensive attention to it in his 1897 book, *Suicide*. Both books relate to Nietzsche’s thesis about the death of God, because they concern the development of cosmopolitan or fragmented societies that offer poor platforms for consensus about the sacred.

In *Suicide*, Durkheim sought to prove that sociology is important because it can explain variations in suicide rates when psychology cannot. He does so by presenting what amount to three ideal types that describe different factors that lead to self-murder. It is worth noting the irony that chapter XXI of *Zarathustra* begins with the admonition, “Die at the right time!,” yet Nietzsche himself failed to kill himself when he had his great mental breakdown, which would logically have been the right time for him. One of Durkheim’s forms of suicide would not have been appropriate, however, *altruistic suicide*, because it constituted the sacrifice of one’s life for the benefit of society. Both of the other main types could easily have applied to Nietzsche.

*Anomic suicide* resulted from the loss of cultural values, in Durkheim’s system, and *egoistic suicide* resulted from the loss of stable social bonds such as friendships and family ties. Later sociologists have had difficulty distinguishing the two, because each pathological condition seems to imply the other. Some of the virtues of Apollonialism may be seen as compensating for *anomie*, egoism, and alienation. Notably, the reliance upon logic to determine moral standards or reasonable courses of actions can substitute for merely doing what the ambient culture demands, for people who are estranged from that culture.

Merton’s (1938) formulation of *anomie* emphasizes two cross-cutting dualisms that both reflect the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, if we continue to stress the asocial-social definition of it that Nietzsche got from Schopenhauer. On a deep level, according to Merton, people may either accept or reject the values of society. On a more superficial level, they may accept or reject society’s norms. But the values of a society are the goals people are supposed to seek, and the norms are the means they are supposed to follow to achieve the goals. A conformist accepts both society’s value and norms. A ritualist rejects the values – perhaps because the individual is unable to achieve them because of incompetence or unfair discrimination, while still following the norms. A retreatist, like a hermit or street bum, rejects both, and this category

might include both Nietzsche and Zarathustra. The fourth category, innovation, involves seeking society's goals but without following the norms. Merton placed creative scientists and artists in this fourth category, but before we rush to place transhumanism there, we should know that the most numerous kind of people he called innovative in this sense were criminals.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1972) applied a similar kind of thinking to the question of what factors commit people to a society, using utopian communes as her example of extreme commitment. She identified six factors, which can be combined into three dimensions, each of which requires giving up an aspect of individualism and receiving the corresponding aspect of collectivism. First, people *sacrifice* individual material rewards such as money by making an *investment* in the collective. Second, *renunciation* of individual social relationships replaces them by group *communion*. Third, along the dimension of personal identity, *mortification* of the self leads to *transcendence* through the group. Each of the most successful communes, as measured by how many years the commune survived, was highly religious. This reinforces Durkheim's belief that high-solidarity societies must of necessity have a religious basis.

It is not safe to stop this analysis of dualism in Nietzsche's predicament without mentioning that dualism itself is only one of at least two alternatives. Recall this proverb: The lumpers and the splitters met on the street. The lumpers proclaimed, "There are two kinds of people, lumpers who place everything in a very small number of categories, and splitters who make many fine distinctions across many categories." The splitter disagreed, saying, "Two kinds of people is a gross underestimate." So, if we admit the possibility of just two categories, what is the second one, different from dualities?

The obvious alternative to static dualities is dynamic networks. As if to show that cultural stereotypes have their limits, perhaps the key person in the history of social network research was a Rumanian-Austrian-Jewish-American named Jacob Moreno, who competed with Freud by devising psychodrama group therapy, and who offered his new science of social networks to the world, calling it *sociometry*, in a marvelous 1934 book provocatively titled *Who Shall Survive?* Setting aside the fact that his grandiosity led him late in life to talk directly with God, his fundamental idea was actually quite reasonable. The First World War had demonstrated that humanity had reached the brink of collective madness – a diagnosis later confirmed by the Second World War – and a new science of society was required to cure this otherwise fatal malady. Sociometry analyzed society not in terms of mutually-exclusive ideal types arranged in dualities, but in terms of social network connections between individuals.

This mode of analysis was very well suited to Anglo-Saxon culture, which since the time of Adam Smith (1776) had preferred to think of social relations as economic markets or social systems based on millions of tiny interactions between individual people, rather than in terms of large categories (Iannaccone and Bainbridge in press). Continental Europeans are lumpers; the English and Americans are splitters, relatively speaking. A key concept of the Chicago School of Sociology was *social disorganization*, comparable to Durkheim's anomie-egoism but based in a much more concrete image of social instability in the relations surrounding the individual (Anderson 1923; Thrasher 1927; Faris and Dunham 1939). More recently, Mark Granovetter (1973) launched an entire new industry of social network research by focusing on how fine details in the shape of a network – especially its degree of interconnectivity – shaped the fates of individuals.

However, even as Moreno helps us escape dualities, he reminds us that there may be no alternative to utopian thinking, given that humanity continues to face horrendous social dangers of which a Third World War is only the most readily imaginable. Where, then do the Apollonian transhumanists stand in relation to the Dionysian routes across the Great Abyss? Is not crossing on a rope bridge composed of four strands better than trying to balance on just one or two, especially when the strands themselves are fraying and tempestuous winds are blowing?

## Transcendence or alienation?

Why does my title speak of Nietzsche's tomb? Nietzsche said God is dead. God said Nietzsche is dead. Both were correct. Why does my title speak of burglary? Because we take ideas from Nietzsche without permission, and use them in our own manner for our own purposes.

We cannot be certain what Nietzsche himself would have said about transhumanism or its connection to his own system, in great measure because much of what he wrote was gloriously incoherent, in the way that poetry can mean more than it says by leaving much to the imagination. Pro-Wagner or anti-Wagner, Apollonian or Dionysian, healthy or morbid, from moment to moment he was any combination of these. If we cannot translate his words exactly, but are influenced by them, do we distort or do we plagiarize? I suggest the best thing to do is draw upon Nietzsche's work as a resource, chiefly to identify issues that transhumanists must face, rather than as a guide for the direction we must go.

One organizing principle for Nietzsche was the *will to power*. A Wikipedia article on the subject describes this elegantly: "The will to power describes what Nietzsche believed to be the main driving force in man; achievement, ambition, the striving to reach the highest possible position in life, these are all manifestations of the will to power."<sup>12</sup> As the article notes, this idea was central to Alfred Adler's (1929) version of psychoanalysis, and (as it happens) Adlerian therapy combined with Scientology to form the initial self-transformative vision that motivated The Process described above. Both The Process and Scientology express the wills to power of their founders, through dominance of other people, but The Process had the flavor of Dionysianism, whereas Scientology was more Apollonian. The Buddhist mode of existence seeks power in retreat, and one might hope that the Zarathustran mode seeks power through mutual engagement, even though Nietzsche himself, and his character Zarathustra, failed in this. Is it possible for transhumanists to exercise their own will to power, without doing it at the expense of other people, through admirable accomplishments rather than domination?

The road to Hell is marked with many warning signs. Consider how the Nazis treated the Jews, not physically but conceptually (Bainbridge 1985). German society was fragmented by region and social class, and it underwent repeated shocks from the defeat in the First World War through the financial disasters of 1923 and 1929. Nazi ideology was actually a synthesis of right-wing and left-wing; "Nazi" is short for "National Socialist." Yes, the Nazis allied themselves with the more traditional right-wing political party, the Nationalists. But the form of society they created might be called *industrial feudalism*, in which people with political connections exercise individual power over major industries, and that is today the case in the two largest post-Marxist societies, Russia and China, the latter of which remains avowedly Maoist. Truth to tell, both wings of ideology use ideas cynically to control the masses.

The twentieth century was a great debate among three competing systems: Capitalism, Marxism, Fascism. Many people falsely believe that this was a moral contest, and the "right" faction won, western Capitalism under American hegemony. My own view is that while I vastly prefer living under the American system, it is no more moral than the other two. It won the contest simply because it began with more resources and territory. Both Marxism and Fascism have intellectual foundations – equally logical in my view – that their proponents cast in moral terms. Of course, Nietzsche would remind us that moral arguments are typically just rhetoric designed to give power to the moralizers, as he stated forcefully in *The Genealogy of Morals*.<sup>13</sup>

It is remarkable that contemporary intellectuals give far more credit to Marxist ideas than to Fascist ones. Partly this is the accidental result of the order in which the two systems were defeated by Capitalism; Marxism lived longer, so far more Marxist books were published. The two systems murdered comparable numbers of people, but the Nazis made the mistake of persecuting the Jews, whereas Marxism was founded by some of them. By killing many Jews, the Nazis drove the rest out of Europe and gave some of the brightest of them good motivation to propagandize against the Nazis even long after Hitler had committed suicide. The ironies are legion. Two of my Harvard mentors, Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell were sons of Jewish immigrants (as was Merton), deeply affected by the Holocaust. They began as socialists, published books against the political right wing (Bell 1963; Lipset and Raab 1970), and then morphed into

Neoconservatives whose disciples pushed America further in the direction of Fascism under George W. Bush. Nietzsche would have loved the tragic elements in their stories.

What, then, is the intellectual core of Nazism, if we can wash the blood off their small library of books to read them clearly? It begins with Spengler's (1926-1928) observation that, like Rome before it, European civilization seemed to be falling. Spengler was something of an idealist, in the philosophical rather than moral sense of the term, and he believed that every great civilization is founded on a single idea. The fundamental idea of western civilization, he suggested is *boundless space*. It is worth pointing out that one legacy of Nazism is the spaceflight movement, born in the V-2 rocket program of Wernher von Braun, who by and large was a good Nazi, despite being investigated by them for possible treason (Bainbridge 1976).

More to the point here, Nazi theoretician Alfred Rosenberg (1930) argued that the way to save Europe was to re-establish a strong cultural consensus, a myth for the twentieth century. Critics of Nazism have long noted that it sought to restore the old gods of totem and taboo (Viereck 1941), but German gods rather than Apollo and Dionysus.

Cultural revival is actually a reasonable strategy for a falling civilization. The Russian-American sociologist, Pitirm A. Sorokin (1937-1941), who fled Russia for his life when the Bolsheviks took over, expanded on this idea to suggest that great civilizations can go through multiple cycles of rise and decline. He did not use Nietzsche's terminology, but his ideas were quite similar. A civilization begins in a bloody period of conquest by one particular set of beliefs, what Sorokin called an *ideational period* but could just as easily been called Dionysian – except drinking blood rather than wine. As the civilization matures, it loses its passionate faith and gradually becomes cooler, more rational, even more scientific, what Sorokin called the *sensate period* but could have called Apollonian. Then the civilization falls, setting the stage for another ideational period.

This suggests the uncomfortable possibility that transhumanism might merely become a footnote in a future history comparable to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788). No transhumanist would want to follow the Nazi strategy for cultural renewal, because transhumanists are better prepared to plant the seeds of the civilization to follow the next Dark Age, than to harvest the corpses of the impending collapse, and because despite their heated debates they are actually rather non-violent by nature. How can we organize the New Civilization, bringing people together, without making the terrible mistakes of Fascism and Marxism?

Perhaps with cynical intent but very cleverly, the Nazis used their anti-Semitism to bring Germans together under their banner. Their stereotype (ideal type?) of Jews was a synthesis of both capitalist and communist, money-lender and rabble-rouser. Thus the stereotype combined the things both left-wing and right-wing Germans hated about each other, and encouraged them to hate the Jews instead. Jews after all were a German minority and thus both capable of representing the things the Germans hated about themselves, and dispensable because their numbers were relatively small.

This rhetorical tactic was facilitated by the fact that Jews have symbolic significance for Christians. Throughout history, this has led Christians to be either anti-Semitic (Glock and Stark 1966) or philo-Semitic (Edelstein 1982), but not to treat Jews as what they really are, namely people. To the extent that the Jews really thought of themselves as "the chosen people," they became a target for the Nazis, who claimed that title for themselves. If the Nazis had really been able to prove they were the Master Race, they would have defeated that enemy race that lived just off the European continent and spoke a mongrel Germanic language, which is to say the English. But, failing that, it was much easier for them to defeat the Jews instead. Thus, much of the claim to power by the Nazis really expressed their most profound weakness.

What does that tragedy have to do with transhumanism? First, transhumanists have already learned the lesson that they must not presume already to be posthumans, superior to everybody else, and should not

seek to rise up by climbing on top of others. Yes they must proclaim transcendence of the current human condition as their ideal, and this irritates people who do not share their hopes.

For many transhumanists, Christianity is a cop-out that pretends transcendence has already been achieved supernaturally, so there is no need to pursue it by means of science and technology. For their part, anti-transhumanists may find it useful to defame transhumanists as Nazis, and the ambiguities around Nietzsche merely cloud that issue. A war may be brewing, in which the Christian establishment seeks to suppress transhumanism, energized by the agonies of a falling civilization. As a tiny minority, the transhumanists would do well to remember the suffering of the Jews.

The best defense is knowledge. To the extent that transhumanists debate the tough issues, on the basis of close study of the evidence and logical discussion, they will be best prepared to communicate with and at times persuade people who are not – or not yet – transhumanists. Nietzsche helps here by raising some of the most thorny issues, and issues that are painful if fully grasped, as is generally the case for thorns. Thus it is entirely appropriate that the first generation of transhumanists have chiefly been philosophers. They deserve the greatest honor, and the movement will continue to benefit greatly from later generations of transhumanist philosophers.

It may be time to begin to transcend philosophy, however. Instead of merely standing on this side of the abyss and contemplating the other, we should step out on the ropes – all four of them – and begin our terrifying journey across to the other side. The ghost of Nietzsche would dance along beside us!

## Notes

\* Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part Four, Aphorisms and Interludes, Section 14, translated by Ian Johnston, <http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/beyondgoodandevil4.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Chapter IX, Paragraph 600, Translation by Helen Zimmern, Published 1909–1913.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part 30, translated by Thomas Common, online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1998>.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Prologue 4, <http://www.gla.ac.uk/~dc4w/laibach/nietzar.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Prologue 3, <http://www.gla.ac.uk/~dc4w/laibach/nietzar.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/wagner.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/ncw.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nietzsche\\_Music\\_Project](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nietzsche_Music_Project).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.textlog.de/21554.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2527>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998.txt>.

<sup>12</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will\\_to\\_power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will_to_power).

<sup>13</sup> <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/genealogytofc.htm>.

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