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Nietzsche and the Fascists

Georges Bataille

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Visions of Excess: A Bataille Reader

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existence, and it is the destiny of this free existence that is at stake.

in the solutions proposed by parties, who even see nothing more in the hope aroused by these parties than an occasion for wars lacking any fragrance but that of death, seek a faith that corresponds to the convulsions they undergo: the possibility of man's finding not a flag and the senseless butchery before which this flag advances, but everything in the universe that can be an object of laughter, of ecstasy, or of sacrifice ...

Our ancestors [wrote Nietzsche] were Christians who in their Christianity were uncompromisingly upright: for their faith they willingly sacrificed possessions and position, blood and fatherland. We—do the same. For what? For our unbelief? For every kind of unbelief? No, you know better than that, friends! The hidden Yes in you is stronger than all the Nos and Maybes that afflict you and your age like a disease; and when you have to embark on the sea, you emigrants, you too are compelled to this by—a faith!³²

Nietzsche's teachings elaborate the faith of the sect or the "order" whose dominating will creates a free human destiny, tearing it away from the rational enslavement of production, as well as from the irrational enslavement to the past. The revalued values must not be reduced to use value—this is a principle of such burning, vital importance that it rouses all that life provides of a stormy will to conquer. Outside of this well-defined resolution, these teachings only give rise to inconsequential things or to the betrayals of those who pretend to take them into account. Enslavement tends to spread throughout human

³² This is the conclusion of section 377 of *The Gay Science*, "We Who Are Homeless." This paragraph sums up more precisely than any other Nietzsche's attitude toward contemporary political reality.

Elisabeth Judas-Förster

The Jew Judas betrayed Jesus for a small sum of money—after that he hanged himself. The betrayal carried out by those close to Nietzsche does not have the brutal consequences of Judas's, but it sums up and makes intolerable all the betrayals that deform the teachings of Nietzsche (betrayals that put him on the level of the most shortsighted of current enthusiasms). The anti-Semitic falsifications of Frau Förster, Nietzsche's sister, and of Herr Richard Oehler, his cousin, are in some ways even more vulgar than Judas's deal—beyond all reckoning, they give the force of a whiplash to the maxim in which Nietzsche expressed his horror of anti-Semitism:

DO NOT BEFRIEND ANYONE INVOLVED IN THIS IMPUDENT HOAX, RACISM!¹

The name of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche,² who died on November 8, 1935, after living a life devoted to a very narrow and degrading form of family-worship, has not yet become an object of aversion ... On November 2, 1933 Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche had not forgotten the difficulties that came up between her and her brother over her marriage, in 1885, to the anti-Semite Bernhard Förster. A letter in which Nietzsche reminds her of his "repulsion"—"as pronounced as possible" for her husband's party—which he specifically mentions

¹ *Oeuvres Posthumes* (trans. Bolle) (Paris: Mercure de France, 1934), section 858, p. 309.

² On Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, see the obituary by W. F. Otto in *Kantstudien*, no. 4, 1935, p. v (two portraits); but better is Erich Podach's *L'Effondrement de Nietzsche* (French translation) (Paris: Gallimard, 1931); Podach confirms the truth of statements by Nietzsche about his sister ("people like my sister are inevitably irreconcilable adversaries of my manner of thinking and of my philosophy"—cited by Podach, p. 68): the disappearance of documents, the shameful omissions of the Nietzsche-Archiv can already be attributed to this singular "adversary."

with bitterness—was published through her own efforts.³ On November 2, 1933, receiving Adolf Hitler at Weimar, in the Nietzsche-Archiv, Elisabeth Förster testified to Nietzsche’s anti-Semitism by reading a text by Bernhard Förster.

“Before leaving Weimar to go to Essen [reports the Times of November 4, 1933], Chancellor Hitler went to visit Frau Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, the sister of the famous philosopher. The aged lady gave him a sword cane that had belonged to her brother. She led him on a tour of the Nietzsche archives.

Herr Hitler listened to a reading of a statement, addressed to Bismarck, written in 1879 by Dr. Förster, an anti-Semitic agitator, which protests against the “Jewish spirit’s invasion of Germany.” Holding Nietzsche’s cane, Herr Hitler walked through the cheering crowd and got back into his car in order to go to Erfurt, and from there to Essen.

Nietzsche, writing in 1887 a scolding letter to the anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch,⁴ ends it with these words:

BUT FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU THINK I FEEL WHEN ZARATHUSTRA’S NAME COMES OUT OF THE MOUTH OF AN ANTI-SEMITE!

³ Letter of 21 May 1887, published in French in *Lettres choisies* (Paris: Stock, 1931).

⁴ The second of two letters to Theodor Fritsch, published in French by Marius Paul Nicolas (*De Hitler à Nietzsche* [Paris: Fasquelle, 1936], pp. 131–34). We must note here the value of Nicolas’s work, whose purpose is, on the whole, analogous to our own, and which provides important documents. But we must regret that the author is preoccupied above all with showing M. Julien Benda that he should not be hostile to Nietzsche ... and hope that M. Benda remains faithful to himself.

sometimes appears to be carried along by political action—but that is only a matter of a brief illusion. Life’s movement can only be merged with the limited movements of political formations in clearly defined conditions;³⁰ in other conditions, it goes far beyond them, precisely into the region to which Nietzsche’s attention was drawn.

Far beyond, where the simplifications adopted for a little while and for a limited goal lose their meaning, existence and the universe that carries it again appear to be a labyrinth. Toward this labyrinth, which alone encompasses the numerous possibilities of life, and not toward immediate banalities, the contradictory thought of Nietzsche is headed, at the mercy of a skittish liberty.³¹ Alone, in the world as it now exists, it even seems to escape the pressing worries that make us refuse to open our eyes wide enough. Those who already see the void

³⁰ The Russian revolution perhaps shows what a revolution is capable of. The questioning of all human reality in a reversal of the material conditions of existence suddenly appears as a response to a pitiless demand, but it is not possible to foresee its consequences: revolutions thwart all intelligent predictions of their results. Life’s movement no doubt has little to do with the more or less depressing aftermath of a trauma. It is found in slowly active and creative obscure determinations, of which the masses are not at first aware. It is above all wretched to confuse it with the readjustments demanded by the conscious masses, carried out in the political sphere by more or less parliamentary specialists.

³¹ This interpretation of the “political thought” of Nietzsche, the only one possible, has been remarkably well expressed by Karl Jaspers. The reader is referred to the passage that we cite in our review of Jaspers’s book. [Bataille’s review of Jaspers’s *Nietzsche, Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1936), consists chiefly of a French translation (by Pierre Klossowski) of a long quote from Jaspers’s book, which may be found on pp. 252–53 of the book’s English translation: *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. C. F. Wallrath and F. J. Schmitz (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1965). The review itself may be found on pp. 474–76 of volume I of Bataille’s *Oeuvres Complètes*. Tr.]

and see chained to this patriotic misery the one who, among them, through his hatred of this misery, devoted himself to the LAND OF HIS CHILDREN? Zarathustra—when the gaze of others was fixed on the land of their fathers, on their fatherland—Zarathustra saw the LAND OF HIS CHILDREN.²⁹ Against this world covered with the past, covered with fatherlands like a man is covered with wounds, there is no greater, more paradoxical, more passionate expression.

“We Who Are Homeless”

There is something tragic in the simple fact that Lévinas’s error is possible (for it is no doubt a question in this case of an error, not of a prejudice). The contradictions that are killing men suddenly appear strangely insoluble. For if opposed parties, adopting opposed solutions, have in appearance resolved these contradictions, it is only through gross simplifications—and these apparent solutions only distance the possibility of escaping death. Those freed from the past are chained to reason; those who do not enslave reason are the slaves of the past. In order to constitute itself, the game of politics demands such false positions, and it seems impossible to change them. Transgressing with one’s life the laws of reason, answering even against reason the demands of life, is in practice, in politics, to give oneself, bound hand and foot, to the past. Nevertheless, life demands to be freed no less from the past than from a system of rational and administrative measurements.

The passionate and tumultuous movement that forms life, that responds to its demand for the strange, the new, the lost,

²⁹ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, second part, “On the Land of Education”: “and I am driven out of fatherlands and motherlands. Thus I now love only my children’s land... In my children I want to make up for being the child of my fathers...” [Trans. W. Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 233. Tr.]

The Second Judas of the Nietzsche-Archiv

Adolf Hitler, in Weimar, had himself photographed before a bust of Nietzsche. Herr Richard Oehler, Nietzsche’s cousin and a collaborator of Elisabeth Förster at the archives, had the photograph reproduced as the frontispiece of his book *Nietzsche and the Future of Germany*.⁵ In this work, he tried to show the profound kinship of Nietzsche’s teachings and those of *Mein Kampf*. He recognizes, it is true, the existence of passages in Nietzsche that are not hostile to the Jews, but he concludes:

Most important for us is this warning:

“Admit no more Jews! And especially close the doors to the east!” ... “That Germany has amply enough Jews, that the German stomach, the German blood has trouble (and will still have trouble for a long time) digesting even this quantum of ‘Jew’—as the Italians, French, and English have done, having a stronger digestive system— that is the clear testimony and language of a general instinct to which one must listen, in accordance with which one must act. ‘Admit no more Jews! And especially close the doors to the east (also to Austria!’ thus commands the instinct of a people whose type is still weak and indefinite, so it could easily be blurred or extinguished by a stronger race.”

It is not only a case here of an “impudent hoax,” but of a crudely and consciously fabricated falsehood. This text appears,

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche und die deutsche Zukunft (Leipzig, 1935). R. Oehler belongs to the family of Nietzsche’s mother. [We quote here from the Walter Kaufmann translation of *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 187. Tr.]

in fact, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (section 251), but the opinion it expresses is not that of Nietzsche, but that of the anti-Semites, taken up by Nietzsche in order to mock it.

I have not met a German yet who was well disposed toward the Jews; and however unconditionally all the cautious and politically minded repudiated real anti-Semitism, even this caution and policy are not directed against the species of this feeling itself but only against its dangerous immoderation, especially against the inspired and shameful expression of this immoderate feeling—about this, one should not deceive oneself. That Germany has amply enough Jews, etc.

After this comes the passage attributed by the fascist forger to Nietzsche! A little further on a practical conclusion is, moreover, given to these considerations: “it might be useful and fair to expel the anti-Semite screamers from the country.” This time Nietzsche speaks in his own name. The aphorism as a whole favors the assimilation of the Jews by the Germans.

Do Not Kill:
Reduce to Slavery

DOES MY LIFE MAKE IT LIKELY THAT I COULD ALLOW ANYONE AT ALL TO “CLIP MY WINGS”?⁶

The tone Nietzsche used during his lifetime to answer obnoxious anti-Semites excludes the possibility of treating the question lightly, and of considering the Weimar Judases’ treason to be venial: he appears there with “clipped wings.”

Nietzsche’s relatives have attempted nothing less base than the reduction to degrading slavery of the one who intended to

⁶ In the first of two letters to T. Fritsch—see above, note 3.

The blood-community²⁴ and the enslavement to the past are, in their connection, as distant as possible from the outlook of a man who demanded with great pride to be known as the “stateless one.” And the understanding of Nietzsche must be seen as closed to those who do not completely take into account the profound paradox of another name that he claimed with no less pride, that of the CHILD OF THE FUTURE.²⁵ The understanding of myth linked by Bäumler to an intense feeling for the past is countered by the Nietzschean myth of the future.²⁶ The future, the marvelous unknown of the future, is the only object of the Nietzschean celebration.²⁷ “Humanity [in the thought of Nietzsche] still has much more time before it than behind it—how, in a general way, could the ideal be found in the past?”²⁸ It is only the aggressive and gratuitous gift of oneself to the future—in opposition to reactionary avarice, bound to the past—that enables the figure of Zarathustra, who demanded to be disowned, to present such a strong image of Nietzsche. The “stateless ones,” those who live today, those who have unchained themselves from the past, how can they relax

²⁴ Nietzsche is generally interested in the beauty of the body and in the race, without this interest determining for him the privileging of a limited blood-community (whether fictive or not). The community ties that he foresees are without any doubt mystical ties; it is a matter of a “faith,” not of a fatherland.

²⁵ The *Gay Science*, section 377, entitled “We Who Are Homeless.” [Kaufmann translation, pp. 338–40. Tr.]

²⁶ *Den Mythus der Zukunft dichten!* writes Nietzsche in notes for Zarathustra (*Werke*, Grossoktavausgabe [Leipzig, 1901], vol. 12, p. 400).

²⁷ *Die Zukunft feiern nicht die Vergangenheit!* (from the same passage as the preceding quote); *Ich liebe die Unwissenheit um die Zukunft* (*The Gay Science*, #287).

²⁸ *Posthumous Works* (*Werke* [Leipzig, 1901], vol. 13, p. 362).

and that does not tie it down becomes suspect, as a denial or a betrayal... An inbred society immediately follows from this solidification of the spirit... Any rational assimilation or mystical communion between minds that is not based on a blood-community is suspect. Nevertheless, the new type of truth cannot be capable of renouncing the formal nature of truth and of ceasing to be universal. The truth can very well be my truth in the strangest sense of this possessive—it must still tend toward the creation of a new world. Zarathustra is not content with his own transfiguration; he comes down from his mountain and carries a gospel. How can universality be compatible with racism? There will be a fundamental modification of the very idea of universality. It must give way to the idea of expansion, for the expansion of a force presents a structure completely different from that of the propagation of an idea... Nietzsche's will to power, which modern Germany has rediscovered and glorified, is not only a new ideal, it is an ideal that brings, at the same time, its own form of universalization: war and conquest.

Lévinas, who introduces (without attempting to justify it) the identification of the Nietzschean attitude with the racist attitude, in fact limits himself to providing (without having attempted it) a striking demonstration of their incompatibility and even of their nature as opposites.

disprove servile morality. Is it possible that there is no gnashing of teeth in the world, and doesn't this absence become so obvious that, in the ever-growing confusion, it makes one silent and violent? How, when one is in a rage, could this not be blindingly clear: when all of humanity is rushing toward slavery, there exists something that must not be enslaved, that cannot be enslaved?

NIETZSCHE'S DOCTRINE CANNOT BE ENSLAVED.

It can only be followed. To place it behind or in the service of anything else is a betrayal deserving the kind of contempt that wolves have for dogs.

DOES NIETZSCHE'S LIFE MAKE IT SEEM LIKELY THAT HE CAN HAVE HIS "WINGS CLIPPED" BY ANYONE AT ALL?

Whether it be anti-Semitism, fascism—or socialism—there is only use. Nietzsche addressed free spirits, incapable of letting themselves be used.

The Nietzschean Left and Right

The very movement of Nietzsche's thought implies a destruction of the different possible foundations of current political positions. Groups of the right base their action on an emotional attachment to the past. Groups of the left on rational principles. Now attachment to the past and to rational principles (justice, social equality) are both rejected by Nietzsche. Thus it would have to be impossible to use his teachings in any given orientation.

But his teachings represent an incomparable seductive force, and consequently quite simple a "force," that politicians are tempted to enslave, or at the very least to agree with, in order to benefit their enterprises. The teachings of Nietzsche "mobilize" the will and the aggressive instincts; it was inevitable that existing activities would try to draw into their movement these now mobile and still unemployed wills and instincts.

The absence of all possible adaptation to one or the other of these political orientations has had, under these conditions, only one result. Since Nietzschean exaltation can be solicited only because of a misunderstanding of its nature, it has been solicited in both directions at once. To a certain extent, a Nietzschean left and right have appeared, just as, in the past, a Hegelian left and right appeared.⁷ But Hegel located himself in the political sphere, and his dialectical conceptions explain the formation of the two opposed tendencies of his doctrine that developed after his death. It is a question in one case of logical and well-thought-out developments, in the other of irrationality, of frivolity, or of betrayal. On the whole, the demands put forward by Nietzsche, far from being understood, have been treated like everything else in a world in which a servile attitude and use value alone appear admissible. On a

⁷ "Is there not a Hegelianism of left and right? There can be a Nietzscheanism of right and left. And it seems to me that already Stalin's Moscow and Rome, the latter consciously and the former unconsciously, pose these two Nietzscheanisms" (Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste* [Paris: Gallimard, 1934], p. 71). In the article from which these lines are taken (entitled "Nietzsche contre Marx"), Drieu, while recognizing that "there will never be anything but a residue of his thought that can be surrendered to a brutal exploitation by thugs," reduces Nietzsche to the will to initiative and to the negation of optimism concerning progress ...

In fact, if not in principle, the distinction between the two Nietzscheanisms is no less justified on the whole. Already in 1902, in an article entitled "Nietzsche malgré lui" (*Journal des Débats*, 3 September 1902), Bourdeau ironically spoke of left and right Nietzscheans.

Jean Jaurès (who, in a lecture in Geneva, identified the superman with the proletariat), Bracke (the translator of *Human, All too Human*), Georges Sorel, Felicien Challaye can be cited in France as men on the left who were interested in Nietzsche.

It is unfortunate that Jaurès's lecture has been lost.

It is important again to note that the principal work on Nietzsche is by Charles Andler, the sympathetic editor of the *Communist Manifesto*. [Bataille refers here to Andler's *Nietzsche, sa vie et sa pensée* (Paris: Bossard, 1920–31). Tr.]

Bäumler opposes the comprehension of Revolution with the comprehension of myth; the first, according to him, would be linked to the awareness of the future, the second to an intense feeling for the past.²² It goes without saying that nationalism implies an enslavement to the past. In an article in *Esprit* (November 1, 1934, pp. 199–208), Emmanuel Lévinas²³ has provided, on this point, a philosophical exposition of racism in particular that is more profound than that of its partisans. If we cite the essential part of the article here, the profound difference between the teachings of Nietzsche and their bondage will perhaps appear, this time in a fairly brutal way:

The importance [writes Lévinas] accorded to this feeling for the body, with which the Western spirit has never been content, is at the basis of a new biological conception of man. The biological, with all the fatality that it implies, becomes more than an object of spiritual life—it becomes its heart. The mysterious urgings of the blood, the call of heredity and of the past for which the body serves as an enigmatic vehicle, lose their status as problems submitted for solution to a Self that is free in a sovereign way. The Self brings to their resolution only the very unknowns of this problem. It is constituted by them. Man's essence is no longer in liberty, but in a kind of bondage...

From that point on, any social structure that announces a liberation in regard to the body

²² See Seillière, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

²³ [The title of Lévinas's article is "Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme." Tr.]

To understand exactly Nietzsche's attitude in regard to Christianity, one must never forget that the decisive expression "God is dead" has the meaning of a historical fact.

Describing what he experienced the first time the vision of the eternal return came to him, Nietzsche wrote: "The intensity of my feelings makes me both tremble and laugh ... these were not tears of tenderness, but tears of jubilation..."

In reality [states Bäumler], the idea of the eternal return is without importance from the point of view of Nietzsche's system. We must consider it the expression of a highly personal experience. It has no connection with the fundamental idea of the will to power and even, taken seriously, this idea would shatter the coherence of the will to power.

Of all the dramatic representations that have given Nietzsche's life the character of a laceration and of the breathless combat of human existence, the idea of the eternal return is certainly the most inaccessible. But to go from the inability to attain it to the resolution not to take it seriously is to follow the traitor's path. Mussolini recognized a long time ago that Nietzsche's doctrine could not be reduced to the idea of the will to power. In his way Herr Bäumler, on the path of the traitor, recognizes this with an incomparable éclat—emasculating in broad daylight ...

The "Land of My Children"

The pressing into service of Nietzsche requires, first of all, that all of his pathosladen experience be opposed by the system, and give way to the system. But its requirements go much further than this.

global scale, the transvaluation of values, even if it has been the object of real attempts at understanding, has remained so generally unintelligible that the treasonous and platitudinous interpretations of which it has been the object very nearly pass unnoticed.

"Remarks for Asses"

Nietzsche himself said that he felt only repugnance for the political parties of his day, but ambiguity remains on the subject of fascism, which only developed long after his death and which, in addition, is the only political movement that has consciously and systematically used Nietzschean criticism. According to the Hungarian Georg Lukacs (one of the few, it seems, among current Marxist theorists to have a profound awareness of the essence of Marxism—but ever since he has had to take refuge in Moscow he has been morally broken; he is now nothing more than a shadow of his former self)—according to Lukacs "the very clear difference between the ideological level of Nietzsche and that of his fascist successors cannot hide the fundamental historical fact that makes Nietzsche one of the principle ancestors of fascism" (*Littérature Internationale* 9, 1935, p. 79). The analysis on which Lukacs bases this conclusion is sometimes perhaps refined and clever, but it is only an analysis that dispenses with a consideration of the whole, in other words, of what alone is "existence." Fascism and Nietzscheanism are mutually exclusive, and are even violently mutually exclusive, as soon as each of them is considered in its totality: on one side life is tied down and stabilized in an endless servitude, on the other there is not only a circulation of free air, but the wind of a tempest; on one side the charm of human culture is broken in order to make room for vulgar force, on the other force and violence are tragically dedicated to this charm. How can one not see the abyss that

separates a Cesare Borgia, a Malatesta, from a Mussolini? The former were insolent scorers of tradition and of all morality, making use of bloody and complex events to benefit a greed for life that exceeded them; the latter has been slowly enslaved by everything he was able to set in motion only by paralyzing, little by little, his earliest impulses. Already, in Nietzsche's eyes, Napoleon appeared "corrupted by the means he had to employ"; Napoleon "lost noblesse of character."⁸ An infinitely more burdensome constraint no doubt weighs on modern dictators, reduced to finding their force by identifying themselves with all the impulses that Nietzsche scorned in the masses, in particular, "mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency."⁹ There is a corrosive derision in imagining a possible agreement between Nietzschean demands and a political organization which impoverishes existence at its summit, which imprisons, exiles, or kills everything that could constitute an aristocracy¹⁰ of "free spirits." As if it were not blindingly obvious that when Nietzsche demands a love corresponding to the sacrifice of life, it is for the "faith" that he communicates, for the values that his own existence makes real, and obviously not for a fatherland ...

"Remarks for asses" wrote Nietzsche himself, already fearing a confusion of the same type, and one just as wretched.¹¹

⁸ The Will to Power, section 1026. [Trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 531. Tr.]

⁹ The Gay Science. [Trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 340. Tr.]

¹⁰ Nietzsche speaks of aristocracy, he even speaks of slavery, but, expressing himself on the subject of "new masters," he speaks of "their new holiness," of their "capacity for renunciation." "They give," he writes, "to the lowest the right to happiness, and they renounce it for themselves."

¹¹ The Will to Power, section 942. [Kaufmann translation, p. 496—but we retain the French translation's "remarks for asses," whereas Kaufmann

and Politician,²¹ published by Reclam and widely disseminated, draws out of the labyrinth of Nietzschean contradictions the doctrine of a people united by a common will to power. Such a labor is in fact possible, and it was inevitable that someone would do it. It sets forth, on the whole, a precise, new, and remarkably artificial and logical figure. Imagine Nietzsche asking himself just once: "To what can my experiences and my perceptions be of use?"

That is in fact what Herr Bäumler has not failed to ask in Nietzsche's place. And as it is impossible to be of use to that which does not exist, Herr Bäumler necessarily invokes the existence that has thrust itself on him, that should have thrust itself on Nietzsche, that of the community to which both of them were destined by birth. Such considerations would be correct on the condition that the hypothesis formulated were capable of having a meaning in the spirit of Nietzsche. Another supposition remains possible: Nietzsche could not see his experiences and perceptions as useful; instead, he saw them as an end. Just as Hegel expected the Prussian state to realize Spirit, Nietzsche could have been able—after vituperating it—to wait obscurely for Germany to give a body and a real voice to Zarathustra ... But it seems that the intellect of Herr Bäumler, more exacting than that of a Bergmann or an Oehler, eliminates overly comical representations. He has thought it expedient to neglect those things that Nietzsche incontestably experienced as an end and not as a means, and he has neglected them overtly, through positive remarks.

Nietzsche, speaking of the death of God, used a disordered language that manifested the most excessive inner experience. Bäumler writes:

²¹ Nietzsche, *der Philosoph und Politiker* (Leipzig, 1931); the two passages cited are on pp. 98 and 80.

were unified in order to form the “Movement of the German Faith.”

But if it is true that the proselytes of the new religion do not confine romantic exaltation within Rosenberg’s narrow and totally military limits, they are no less in agreement on the point that, once anti-Christianity is proclaimed and life is divinized, the only religion will be race, in other words, Germany. The former Protestant missionary Hauer screams: “There is only one virtue—to be German!” And the extravagant Bergmann, enamored of psychoanalysis and of the “hygienic religion,” affirms that “if Jesus of Nazareth, doctor and benefactor of the people, came back today, he would come down from the cross on which a deceptive knowledge has kept him nailed; he would live again as the doctor of the people, as the authority on racial hygiene.”

National Socialism only escapes traditional and pietistic narrowness in order better to assure its mental poverty! The fact that adepts of the new faith have ceremonies in the course of which passages from Zarathustra are read definitively situates this comedy far from Nietzschean rigor; indeed it is nothing more than the commonest phraseology of buffoons, who assert themselves everywhere amid general weariness.

It is finally necessary to add that the leaders of the Reich do not appear inclined—appear less and less inclined—to support this unusual movement; the account of the role played in Hitler’s Germany by a free, anti-Christian enthusiasm, which gives itself a Nietzschean appearance, thus ends on a note of shame.

More Professorial ...

There remains—perhaps the most serious—the well-thought-out endeavor of Herr Alfred Bäumler, who uses real knowledge and a certain theoretical rigor to construct a political Nietzscheanism. Bäumler’s little book, *Nietzsche, the Philosopher*

The Nietzschean Mussolini

Insofar as fascism values a philosophical source, it is attached to Hegel and not to Nietzsche.¹² One should read the article, in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, that Mussolini himself devoted to the movement he created;¹³ the vocabulary, and even more than the vocabulary the spirit, are Hegelian and not Nietzschean. Mussolini twice is able to use the expression “will to power,” but it is no coincidence that this will is only an attribute of the idea that unifies the crowd ...¹⁴

The red agitator underwent the influence of Nietzsche; the unitarist dictator has remained aloof. The regime itself has spoken on the question. In an article in *Fascismo*, July 1933, Cimmino denies any ideological filiation linking Nietzsche and Mussolini. Only the will to power would connect their doctrines. But Mussolini’s will to power “is not selfish”; it is preached to all Italians, whom Il Duce “wants to make supermen.” For, affirms the author, “even if we were all supermen, we would still only be men... There is nothing more natural than the fact that, in other respects, Nietzsche pleases Mussolini: Nietzsche will always belong to all men of action and will ... The profound difference between Nietzsche and Mussolini lies in the fact that power, insofar as it is will, force,

has “parenthesis for asses.” Tr.]

¹² It is well known that Hegelianism, represented by Gentile, is practically the official philosophy of Fascist Italy.

¹³ Under “Fascismo.” The article has been translated as the first article of: Benito Mussolini, *Le Fascisme* (Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1933).

¹⁴ Mussolini writes with reference to the people: “It is a question neither of race nor of a definite geographical region, but of a group that endures through history, of a multitude unified by an idea that is a will to existence and to power” (Denoël et Steele edition, p. 22).

and action, is the product of instinct—I would say almost of physical nature. It can belong to the most incompatible people: one can use it for the most varied ends. On the other hand, ideology is a spiritual factor: it is ideology that really unites men... ” It is not useful to insist on the overt idealism of this text, which has the merit of being honest, if one compares it to the German writings. It is more remarkable to see Il Duce cleared of a possible accusation of Nietzschean selfishness. The ruling circles of Fascism seem to have stopped at the Stirnerian interpretation of Nietzsche, expressed around 1908 by Mussolini himself.¹⁵

For Stirner, for Nietzsche [the revolutionary wrote at the time], and for all those whom Turk, in his *Geniale Mensch*, calls the anti-sophists of selfishness, the State is oppression organized to the detriment of the individual. But nevertheless, even for animals of prey there exists a principle of solidarity... The instinct of sociability, according to Darwin, is inherent in man’s very nature. It is impossible to imagine a human being living outside the infinite chain of his fellow men. Nietzsche felt profoundly the “fatality” of this law of universal solidarity. The Nietzschean superman tries to escape the contradiction: he lets loose his will to power and directs it against the mob outside, and the tragic grandeur of his labors furnishes the poet—for yet a little while—with a subject worthy of being sung.

¹⁵ In an article published at the time in a newspaper in Romagna and reprinted by Marguerite G. Sarfatti (Mussolini, French translation [Paris: Albin Michel, 1927], pp. 117–21).

A “Hygienic and Pedagogical Religion”: German Neopaganism

It is German “neopaganism”¹⁹ that has introduced the legend of a poetic National Socialism. It is only insofar as racism leads to this eccentric religious form that it expresses a certain vitalist and anti-Christian current of German thought.

It is a fact that a somewhat chaotic but organized belief freely represents today in Germany the mystical current that first started during the period of high romanticism, and is expressed in writings such as those by Bachofen, Nietzsche, and more recently, Klages.²⁰ Such a current has never had the slightest unity, but it is characterized by the valuing of life over reason and by the opposition of primitive religious forms to Christianity. Within National Socialism, Rosenberg today represents its most moderate tendency. Much more adventurous theoreticians (Hauer, Bergmann), following Count Reventlow, have set themselves the task of establishing a cultural organization analogous to a Church. This endeavor is not new in Germany, where a “Community of the German Faith” existed in 1908, and where General Ludendorff himself wanted to become, after 1923, the head of a German Church. After Hitler took power the various existing organizations recognized, in a congress, the community of their goals, and

¹⁹ On German neopaganism, see the article by Albert Béguin in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 15 May 1935.

²⁰ We should note that, referring to the contemporary writer Ludwig Klages, famous above all for his work in characterology, Baron Ernest Seillière, (*De la déesse nature à la déesse vie* [Paris: Alcan, 1931], p. 133) uses the expression *acephalic* ... Klages is, moreover, the author of one of the most important books to have been devoted to Nietzsche, *Die psychologischen Errungenschaften Nietzsches*, second edition (Leipzig, 1930) (first edition: 1923).

world, the intelligible... The other—romantic—current was fed by the secondary movements indicated at the end of the Iliad by the feast of the dead, or in Aeschylus by the actions of the Erinyes. It was fortified by the chthonian gods, established against the Olympian Zeus. Speaking of death and its enigmas, it venerated the mother-goddesses, and first among them Demeter, and it finally blossomed in the god of the dead—Dionysos. It is in this sense that Welcker, Rohde, and Nietzsche made the Earth-mother a creator of life who, herself unformed, perpetually returns through the death in her womb. High German romanticism shuddered with adoration and, as always darker veils were placed before the sky-god's radiant face, it plunged ever more deeply into the instinctive, the unformed, the demonical, the sexual, the ecstatic, the chthonian—into the cult of the Mother.

There is good reason to recall here, first of all, that Rosenberg is not the official philosopher of the Third Reich, and that his anti-Christian stance has not been ratified. But when he expresses repulsion for the gods of the Earth and for the romantic tendencies that do not have as their immediate goal a constitution of force, he expresses beyond the shadow of a doubt the repulsion of National Socialism itself.

National Socialism is less romantic and more Maurrassian than is sometimes imagined, and one must not forget that Rosenberg is its ideological expression closest to Nietzsche; the jurist Carl Schmidt, who incarnates it just as much as does Rosenberg, is very close to Charles Maurras and, with a Catholic background, has always been alien to the influence of Nietzsche.

One can see, then, why Mussolini, stressing the non-Italian influences that helped form early Fascism, speaks of Sorel, Péguy, and Lagardelle, and not of Nietzsche. Official Fascism has been able to use invigorating Nietzschean maxims, displaying them on walls; its brutal simplifications must nevertheless be sheltered from the too-free, too-complex, and too-rending Nietzschean world. This prudence seems to be based, it is true, on an outmoded interpretation of Nietzsche's attitude, but this interpretation has been carried out, and it has been because the movement of Nietzsche's thought constitutes, without any hope of appeal, a labyrinth, in other words, the very opposite of the directives that current political systems demand from their sources of inspiration.

Alfred Rosenberg

Nevertheless the Hitlerian affirmation is opposed to the prudence of Italian Fascism. It is true that Nietzsche, in the racist pantheon, does not occupy an official place. Chamberlain, Paul de Lagarde, or Wagner are more solidly satisfying to the profound "admiration of oneself" practiced by the Germany of the Third Reich. But whatever the dangers of this operation, this new Germany had to recognize Nietzsche and use him. He represented too many mobile instincts, available for virtually any violent action—and the falsification was still too easy. The first fully developed ideology of National Socialism, as it has sprung out of Alfred Rosenberg's brain, accommodates Nietzsche.

Before anything else, the German chauvinists had to get rid of the individualistic Stirnerian interpretation. Alfred Rosenberg, making short work of left-wing Nietzscheanism, seems, with rage, bent on tearing Nietzsche out of the clutches of the young Mussolini and his comrades:

Friedrich Nietzsche [he says in his Myth of the Twentieth Century]¹⁶ represents the desperate cry of millions of oppressed people, his savage prediction of the superman was a powerful amplification of individual life, subjugated and annihilated by the material pressure of the epoch... But an epoch gagged for generations grasps, through its impotence, only the subjective side of Nietzsche's great will and vital experience. Nietzsche demanded, with passion, a strong personality; his falsified demand becomes an appeal, a letting loose of all the instincts. Around his banner rally the red battalions and the nomadic prophets of Marxism, the sort of men whose senseless doctrine has never been more ironically denounced than by Nietzsche. In his name, the contamination of the race by blacks and Syrians progressed, whereas he himself strictly submitted to the characteristic discipline of our race. Nietzsche fell into the dreams of colored gigolos, which is worse than falling into the hands of a gang of thieves. From this point on the German people only heard talk of the suppression of constraints, of subjectivism, of "personality," but it was no longer a question of discipline and of inner construction. Nietzsche's most beautiful expression—"From the future come winds with the strange beating of wings, and the good news resounds in his ears"—was nothing more than a nostalgic intuition in the

¹⁶ *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1932), p. 523. [An English translation of this work has very recently been published: *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (Torrance, Calif.: Noontide Press, 1982). Tr.]

midst of an insane world in which he was, along with Lagarde and Wagner, almost the only seer.

"If you knew how I laughed last spring while reading the works of this vain and sentimental, pigheaded character named Paul de Lagarde"—that is what Nietzsche said about the famous Pan-Germanist.¹⁷ Nietzsche's laugh could obviously be carried over from Lagarde to Rosenberg, the laughter of a man equally nauseated by the Social Democrats and by the racists. The attitude of a Rosenberg must not, moreover, be simply seen as a vulgar Nietzscheanism (as is sometimes supposed, for example, by Edmond Vermeil). The disciple is not only vulgar, but prudent: the very fact that a Rosenberg speaks of Nietzsche suffices to "clip his wings" but it seems to a man of this type that the wings are never clipped back far enough. According to Rosenberg, everything that is not Nordic must be rigorously pruned. But only the gods of the heavens are Nordic!

Whereas the Greek gods [he writes]¹⁸ were the heroes of light and of the heavens, the gods of non-Aryan Asia Minor assumed all the characteristics of the Earth... Dionysos (at least his non-Aryan side) is the god of ecstasy, of luxury, of the unfettered bacchanal... For two centuries, the interpretation of Greece has continued. From Winckelmann through the German classics to Voss, there was an insistence on light, the gaze turned to the

¹⁷ First letter to T. Fritsch, cited above, notes 3 and 6.

¹⁸ *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, p. 55. This hostility of fascism to the chthonian gods, to the gods of the Earth, is no doubt what locates it most accurately in the psychological or mythological world.