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A Cultural Approach to Environmental Ethics: Milton, Nietzsche, and Indian Philosophy

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MASTER'S PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

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A CULTURAL APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

MILTON, NIETZSCHE, AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

The aim of this M.A. thesis is to explore the way in which cultural factors have influenced humankind's relationship with the natural world, including plant life, animal life, and the ecology of planet Earth as a whole. While quantitative, scientific analysis provides objective evidence of global climate change that is being propelled by human activity, I argue that the religious and philosophical beliefs of individuals and societies has played, continues to play, and will continue to play an indelible role in the way in which humans consider other humans and the natural world at large. I focus primarily on Western culture and the ways that Christianity and Western Philosophy have promoted anthropocentric valuations which have resulted in ecologically unsustainable practices that continue to threaten the habitability of the Earth in this epoch dubbed the Anthropocene. In chapter 1, I engage with Christianity through the work of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which is an epic poem from the Renaissance age that was intended to promote Christian Reformation, and which provides poetic and philosophic insight into the mythos and ideology of Christianity. Then, in chapter 2, I focus on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche in order to expound upon his critiques of Christianity and to explore his tragic, existential philosophy. Ultimately, I will show that both worldviews, being thoroughly anthropocentric, fail to promote normative values that adequately encourage us to embrace an ethical relationship with non-human life which is necessary if we hope to improve our ecological trajectory that is leading toward climate catastrophe. However, in chapter 3, I conclude that a phenomenological approach to and engagement with other worldviews, along with an intentional imperative for transvaluation, can help us to find an ethical way forward. Only by expanding our conceptual and cultural horizons beyond hemispherical ways of thinking can we develop a global approach

to the global problem of climate change and the realities of the Anthropocene. As such, I present Indian Philosophy as an example of an Eastern worldview that embodies philosophical concepts which promote a more ethical concern for life itself, of all forms, rather than just the lives of human beings. Though these different worldviews are at odds in many ways, there are common threads that allow us to weave a conceptual tapestry of ethical unity, in the name of a common cause.

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Introduction: A Contextual Grounding

"To-day, a young man is not satisfied with mere theories. He wants a rational reply. The Bible cannot be questioned. To question it becomes blasphemy. The west cannot understand the logic and so the West is unhappy. Until the war came, they were satisfied with their material advancements and the general hoarding, maintained and expanded by bombs and superbombs. Now Materialism has broken down. There is plenty of wealth but there is no peace. Achievement is there, but there is no delight in these joys. Wars have come and gone, but peace has not come. The war-mongers are more happy than the peace lovers."

-Swami Chinmayananda 27

As a phenomenologically oriented practitioner in philosophy, I find that I am no longer a novice in the world of ideas, but rather, have become like a journeyman at sail amongst a sea of conceptual concatenations and derivative notions that attempt to define the substantial reality upon—and within—which we live a life of constant becoming. While the surrounding circumstances constantly change, and as do the demands of necessity continuously change; must we change, as well. Voices and words contribute and contend in varied tenors; some flow together like steady, strong winds, yet many result in dialectical clashing, denouncement, and detestation. When heard all together, the noise is a culmination of calamity—deafening disagreement and distortion crowds the air in waves of subjective or relativistic frequencies and objectionable, totalizing objectives—a reference to which we read in the above quotation from Swami Chinmayananda which I take to be keenly and correctly critical of capitalism and the current-day military-industrial-complex that dominates the state of the USA and the trajectory of our shared world. The Information Age in which we live is rife with perspectival potential, yet a

collective aim of public opinion remains discordant and amiss. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, whom I will focus on as a primary focal point in my second chapter: "We modern men are the heirs of the conscience-vivisection and self-torture of millennia." (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 24) Through the advancement of multi-media communication, we now enjoy a privileged vantage point from which we can observe and evaluate the progression of humanity through history. We have more concrete knowledge about the overall amalgamation of human civilization that has come to pass than the people of any era we know of, yet discord remains a problem for the whole of society that threatens the future of all our progeny.

   To myself, the demands of such a complexity calls for recourse to both the phenomenological method and the method of midrash which will help to ground our hermeneutics in the pressing significance of present reality that is founded upon an objective past and is unequivocally projected upon a potential—yet immanent—future. In evoking Heidegger's phenomenology of ontology and historicity, *we* must always begin from our own being which is primordially temporal in existential essence. Heidegger's phenomenological method helps us to 'see' the moment as a transcendent present that is grounded in its own objective past and is projected upon its own future which is fundamentally fated to one-day die. As for the Midrashic method, Franz Rosenzweig champions the practice as an ethical method of interpretation that allows the individual reader to engage with works of art, which embody the historical, cultural, and personal context in which they were produced, as they relate specifically to the attunement of one's present context. In *Art and Responsibility: A Phenomenology of the Diverging Paths of Rosenzweig and Heidegger,* Jules Simon elucidates that, for Rosenzweig, midrash is "his specific interpretive purpose of reading and translating … [the] … 'then' … [of] … a specific text written from his perspective … [on] … the past, in order that it resounds for a 'tomorrow' that could

only uniquely originate from how the factuality of that past was renewed by how it was dealt with in the present." (85) As such, within the phenomenological scheme of factically-grounded intentionality, the seemingly finite form of actuality assumes a concrete quality for living beings, which I argue, theoretically rivals the logically abstract infinity that primordially—if qualitatively—defines the essence of pure possibility. Anything and everything is theoretically possible within the fundamentally speculative scheme of eternity and infinity, yet that which actually occurs *matters more,* in that it takes an efficacious *form* that causally delimits and determines the future course of possible outcomes, from the very instant it actually happens. While the future seems to inexorably pull us forward as we embrace this or that possibility, the heavier force is the present that pushes actualized reality forward, which, along with the additional weight of the past, co-determines our choosing this or that particular possibility. The presence and free-will of each and every individual being becomes a distinctly determinative variable that also embodies an undeniable factor of chaos. No-thing (including nothing) remains inculpable in the world of theoretical physics, where conscious observation itself has become an enigmatic—if, determinative—factor within the theoretical framework of quantum mechanics. The very words we hear and stories we share—as impression—take on an indubitable weight of significance when we understand that the resultant effect of every embodied, intentional being is grounded in the sedimented reality of their historicity, which is unintentionally, yet importantly, rooted in the world's infinitely complex ground of actuality and which continues to be shaped, according to the new science of quantum mechanics, by one's status as an observer—even of oneself. As such, knowledge or ignorance of oneself becomes a matter of world-shaping significance and will be central to my focus throughout this thesis.

"Language is the phenomenon which bridges interiority and exteriority such that, what we hear from the other is what we *intuitively* say from our own hearts." (Simon 78)

To elaborate upon this innate, determinative power of the individual, let us direct our focus and consideration to a few real-world examples of world-shaping influence, as provided by history. Many-a-contemporary-philosopher will facetiously quip, as famously expressed by Alfred North Whitehead in *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* "All of Western Philosophy is essentially a series of footnotes to Plato." (39) When taken at face value, the reductive intention here is obviously a gross over-generalization, yet perhaps there is a deeper, darker truth that motivates this sort of self-deprecatory humor. When evoking Plato, the shadow of Socrates is never far behind—nor, in this case, is his symbolic death sentence after receiving a guilty verdict from a jury of his peers. Just a sip of hemlock–prescribed and poured by the State– and our ancient ancestor was transformed from an arguably venerable, philosophic progenitor into a tragically fated—if veritable—martyr of the dialectic method. The quintessential, questioning, living *signifier* was ultimately rendered into a mysterious, tautologically significant symbol; a living being, literarily *signified*. The State sought to silence the voice of Socrates, yet his struggle, method, and persona live on—derivatively—in the words and works of his students (his *believers*) and critics alike. The unfolding of history, subsequent to Socrates' death, splendidly displays the influence he originated. Most famously, the core of his direct intellectual lineage is historically inscribed as being conducted through the success of his student Plato, who mentored Aristotle, and whom subsequently tutored Alexander III of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great; touchstones in the historic mythos of the West, which define the historical reality that has led to our own present situation. Now, I establish this conception of Socrates in

order to align his essence and influence with that of another, younger martyr—namely, Jesus Christ of Nazareth: the proclaimed messiah of Christianity.

In conspicuous similarity to Socrates' *modus operandi*, Jesus preferred to engage directly with the people he encountered in the world by asking questions, posing riddles, and preaching morality, rather than writing down his thoughts for dissemination or monetary profit. There is no little irony in the fact that neither Socrates, nor Jesus ever put pen to paper (or stylus to tablet) in order to publish any works of their own; yet their names, words, and deeds are amongst the most famously cited and commonly debated in the history of the world. Each simply lived an exemplary life of sincerity and perseverance that profoundly inspired and influenced the reasoning, actions, and spirituality of millions; each in their own due course of free-will and intentionality. They were individuals who not only *talked the talk*, but also *walked the proverbial walk*, as is most ostensibly observable in their economically modest lifestyles and public practices which intentionally reflected their ethical, philosophical disillusionment with material wealth. Each recognized and emphasized the spiritual snares and inherent vice that lay within the power-driven yearning for superficial, economic gain. Yet, however similar the two may be, I want to again draw specific attention to the fact that each was effectively—if murderously— rendered into a literally-lifeless, literary signifier. Each became a symbolic figure that embodies specific, originative beliefs and intentions which have since been subjected to a sort of postmortem reification where their words and deeds are evoked, reiterated, translated, and reformed for the purposes of dialectical exchange or propagandistic persuasion. The effects of their lived lives continue to resonate throughout society, influencing the morality and reasoning of countless individuals and affecting the dynamics of countless relationships. Just as Plato puts his call for philosopher kings into the hyper-reasonable, literary mouth of his rationalist

progenitor, Socrates, so too does Paul use the words of Jesus in his epistles *in order to* encourage religious conversion to Christianity.

Today, more than 2,000 years later, the influences of Jesus and Socrates continue to permeate Western culture, serving as they have in the phenomenological sedimentation of our historicity. Philosophy has continued to evolve as society has continued to *progress* through the last couple millennia, and according to the Pew Research Center's publication "The Changing Global Religious Landscape," Christianity is currently the largest monotheistic religion in the world (nearly a third (31%) of Earth's population). Such a large demographic warrants serious consideration and deliberate reevaluation if we hope to keep our society metaphorically afloat— or, more unambiguously: alive. We now know that our species is facing an impending, globally existential threat in the form of climate change that includes rising sea levels, increased desertification, and unstable weather conditions. These consequences are the direct result of society's habits and intentional efforts throughout history. Particularly, agriculture, hunting, resource mining, cutting down trees, and converting wilderness into cities have been the intentional efforts which have brought us to the point of economic instability we face today. The environmental crisis is not one that I intend to directly argue but instead serves as the stimulating premise from which this project, this MA thesis, will indirectly but fundamentally proceed. As my thesis will show, global society has reached a tipping point regarding its unsustainable, albeit indirect or unintentional, practices of natural resource consumption and depletion that threatens not only the lives of billions of humans, but the survival of countless species and the habitable harmony of the Earth's ecosystem itself.

Chapter 1: Christianity as Poeticized by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*

Part 1

In *Paradise Lost*, prodigy-poet John Milton takes an intentionally direct and authoritative stance for the cause of Christian Reformation in the 17th century which, as I argue, has had an indirect consequence of assisting the propagation of the modern practice of using the natural elements of the earth unsustainably. At this point, I will proceed to explain the kind of Protestant Christianity that is expressed in Milton's poetical, polemical, and political works. An emphatically outspoken enemy of *idolatrous popery,* Milton's religious tenacity and political impetus elicits a heavily iconoclastic rhetoric in justifying the *"ways of God to men."* (I.26) In translating the multitudes of human history's deities into the *fallen idols of Hell*, John Milton wages historiographic war with a plentitude of past peoples, their cultures, their beliefs, and their philosophies.

> Through God's high sufferance for the trial of man,
> …
> Glory of him that made them, to transform
> Oft to the image of a brute, adorne'd
> With gay religions full of pomp and gold,
> And devils to adore for deities:
> Then were they known to men by various names,
> And various idols through the heathen world. (I.366-375)

In effect, the intention of his ideologically inspired words goes much further than merely critiquing past cultures and religions. The political aspirations expressed in Milton's philosophy, while firstly concerned with persuading his contemporaries (people of a postlapsarian present) of their own divine past, also reach toward the future for further justification. His ideal ultimately seeks to attain the power of *political perpetuity* where historical completion is prophesied in

Armageddon and the Rapture; the dramatic, teleological premises which define the metaethical

foundations upon which orthodox, Christian theology and doctrine has been built. However,

while he does emphatically profess his loyalty to the Reformation of Protestant Christianity,

Milton's ethics and theological arguments do not always promote purely orthodox stances. As

will be shown, such heterodoxic leanings highlight the nuance of Milton's Protestantism, and

betray the deeper roots of his literary aesthetics. Though his loyalties are toward Reformation,

his engagement with ancient mythos and style reveals his unique character as a full-fledged *child

of the Renaissance*.

Alfred W. Benn supports this point. In his work *Milton's Ethics,* Benn suggests that

within Milton's philosophy we can see "the power of the New Learning to emancipate from all

that was evil and to cooperate with all that was good in the Middle Ages becomes truly

conscious of itself." (423) In the same vein, liberalism and progressive philosophy present

undercurrents within Milton's prose and poetry that create distinct tensions in juxtaposition to his

ultimate recourse to the traditional authority of the Bible and its profoundly patriarchal,

inherently authoritarian overtones that were being used to support the supposed *divine right of

kings*, which he politically propounded at the time. In his work *The Tenure of Kings and

Magistrates*, Milton explicitly defends the *people's right* to not only overthrow an unjust king,

but to participate in regicide which he justifies as a societal form of self-defense[1]. Yet, in

Paradise Lost, Milton clearly aligns liberalism and democracy with the *anti-hero*, Satan, and his

cohort of familiars, the demonic denizens of Pandemonium. Where the monarchical government

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[1] Milton opens this work by clearly stating his aim and intent: "PROVING, That it is Lawfull, and hath been held so through all Ages, for any, who have the Power, to call to account a Tyrant, or wicket KING, and after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death; if the ordinary MAGISTRATE have neglected, or deny'd to doe it." (*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* 385)

of God is thematically held to highest esteem, democracy is positioned as the political system of preference among the damned.

Within this context and in the Hellenic spirit of Milton's ideology, it is important to note that Natural Law plays a crucial role in his ethical argumentation, which includes the goal and motivation of founding a *second Eden* by creating a *Paradise-within*. So, in what sense is Natural Law interchangeable with the Law of God? From the perspective of Thomas Hobbes, natural law is most firmly rooted in self-preservation and propagation of the species, which effectively renders murder into an amoral—if sometimes necessary—and inevitable occurrence[2]. Author Alfred W. Benn notes, "The assumed Law of Nature, the right of every individual, thing or person, to persist in its own state of being." (442) Christianity, too, has historically embraced violence as an unavoidable, ethically justifiable, means to attain the *kingdom of God*, yet how does this pragmatic perspective figure under the unambiguous, divine interdiction of the first commandment which specifically demands that *Thou shalt not kill?* It would appear that doctrinal Christianity ultimately undermines the first commandment through profoundly disingenuous omission. Rather, as history has shown, when religion demands conversion, domination takes precedence over kindness and violence becomes an acceptable tool in the name of salvation. Such notions of conversion-based salvation have been historically manifested in proselytizing fervor and crude demands for cultural homogenization.

The homogenizing agenda of early Christian proselytism culminated in the blatantly imperialist phenomenon that is formally known as the Crusades. Through a merciless campaign

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[2] In his work, *Leviathan,* Thomas Hobbes argues, "Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man." (141) Furthermore, he concludes that men live in "continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (142)

of book burning and bloodshed, the destruction of this so-called *holy war* effectively drove

Europe into the socio-epistemological crisis which is known as the Dark Ages. In regard to this

notion, Milton takes a clearly intentional stance against such *dark* destruction of intellectual and

artistic works which had been produced through the work of humankind. "Who destroys a good

Booke' destroys 'the Image of God," Milton wrote in Areopagitica, "a good Booke is the

pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life"

(341) Proleptically, this idea of 'The Image of God', is one we will revisit throughout this thesis,

but here, I draw specific attention to Milton's clear call for preserving the literary works of other

cultures. Thus, Milton's work of ideological and iconographical significance promotes a

complexity beyond the crude misunderstandings of Scripture which time and again have resulted

in destructive and sometimes iconoclastic perversities of the Church. By perversities, in this case,

I specifically mean those historic campaigns that have wrought death, destruction, and terror in

the name of a divine calling. Campaigns such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Salem

Witch Trials, have proven time and again to produce the suffering and loss of humanity itself,

whereas recognition and respect for an innate humanity that is shared between all is able to beget

an uplifting effect on both individual and community wellbeing. A more inclusive approach

toward the relationship between disparate peoples and cultures seems to promote the peace of

harmonious equilibrium—an equilibrium which ultimately continues to evade the attainment of

humanity-as-we-know it, age after age. However, it is clear that one of the main causes of the

constant conflict that confronts society and civilization is partly—if fundamentally—due to the

heterogeneous nature of humanity's inherently pluralistic composition, which seemingly,

unavoidably, always produces variable beliefs regarding the nature and essence of God as can be

seen in the myriad superstitions, spiritualities, and religions that have emerged throughout the history of humanity.

Concerning the inherent variability that has defined the progression of human society throughout the ages, Milton attributes a distinctly wayward quality. Luke Taylor expands in his work *Milton and the Romance of History*, "A startling vision of history—from primeval fall until future apocalypse—as perpetual wandering. For Milton, history is not an epic with an overarching telos but a romance concatenation of errors." (301-302) These errors can be seen throughout history as inhumanity has proven to occur again and again in various times, places, and cultural contexts. War, exploitation, and oppression seem to have always haunted the struggling people of each society, whether it be directly observable, or as a means of production that is held apart-from-view and significantly—if strategically—*elsewhere*. Our *time in the sun*, which is part of an organic continuity that must consume and metabolize—of necessity—takes from the world of resource and nutrition that surrounds. As Hannah Arendt emphasizes in her exposition of the "*Vita Activa*" in her work *The Human Condition*, labor is a primordial aspect of our existence which can be most viscerally viewed in the natural process of physiological natality. To give birth and perpetuate life, it is required of the organism to feed and provide for that life which is to come. Yet, to what extreme extents of excess have we seen humanity consume from the natural world in which it dwells?

In his book, *A Short History of Progress*, Ronald Wright provides a lucid, provocative exposition of humanity's historical progress through the advancement of *civilization* which he metaphorically likens to a "ship steaming at speed into the future." (3) While he elucidates the historiography of humanity's *special* evolution—along secular axes that specifically trace the technological advances that humankind has undergone throughout its many generations, which is

punctuated by technological *revolutions*—he takes particular notice of our food consumption tendencies, ominously noting that "A bad smell of extinction follows *Homo sapiens* around the world." (37) Particularly striking is his example of Easter Island, whose history serves as a grim warning for the rest of the world when we realize its significance in being a microcosm that reflects our global situation. The island was historically discovered by Captain Cook on Easter Day of 1772 and described as *desolate* and riddled with megalith cult statues known as *"moai, the stone giants"* which they had erected as spiritual idols. (57-60) At the time of Cook's "discovery", the island remained a mystery, but now, pollen studies have revealed a hauntingly tragic past. The sixty-four-mile area of the island was originally bounteous in vegetation and wildlife, allowing the small, Polynesian society to thrive and grow to about 10,000 people within 5 or 6 centuries. As the population grew, their collective hunger grew beyond the bounty the land could sustainably provide and they continued to consume at unsustainable rates. Native species grew extinct and natural resources were felled and depleted. "The people who felled the last tree could *see* it was the last … And they felled it anyway. … They ate all their dogs and nearly all the nesting birds, and the unbearable stillness of the place deepened with animal silences. There was nothing left now but the *moai ...* more than a thousand *moai."* (60-61) Richard Wright does well to define the cause of such a phenomenon of societal-suicide as "a mania, an 'ideological pathology," which is a conceptual prognosis that simply cannot be ignored today–and furthermore, must be deeply considered and well understood–when climate change and over-population are threats that sharply *rap-tap-tap* at our existential, chamber door. Presently, we—as a situated people—can circumspectly boast both the benefits of retrospective wisdom and those of modern science as we contemplate human history's relative triumphs and tragedies that have come to create the world we live in today and the personal identity of each; lest we

ignorantly ignore those various signs that beg our attention and define prudent foresight. As such, the tragedy that befell the civilization of Easter Island serves as a perfect example of the disastrous ends to which ecological unsustainability can avoidably lead. As we continue our path into the future, we must look to interpret our past and ethically respond to the world around us, *if* we are to promote and preserve justice within the reality of the underlying crisis of systemic injustice that has—and continues to—pave the way of civilization's wandering progress, or *concatenation of errors.*

Part 2

Now, in returning to my main focus from slight digression, I have chosen to explore this theme of consuming the natural world, in regard to the structure and function of Christianity, through John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* particularly due to his literary method and aesthetic choices that have resonated within my own poetically inclined, philosophically inspired mind, and due to his place in the historical evolution of Christian belief that has played an unequivocal role in defining our own present situation and related ecological crises[3]. Being keenly precocious, Milton grew up as a "child of the Renaissance," (Benn 423) yet his explicitly political religiosity always remained staunchly loyal to Protestant Christianity. Being politically active and literarily prolific, Milton grew to personally embrace the cause for Reformation against the perceived perversity of Roman Catholic *popery* and undertook to produce the epic

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[3] In his work *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Lynn White, Jr. provides a provocative analysis of the distinct role Christianity has played in Western attitudes towards science, technology, and the natural world. He concisely posits: "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about nature and destiny—that is, by religion." (White 1205)

poem *Paradise Lost* (followed by the mini-epic *Paradise Regained*) as a way of reaching the

imaginations and hearts—or, more specifically, the assumed *souls*—of the people of England. In

order to clarify Milton's intentionally liberal—and thus, political—position, it does well to note

his prose works such as *Areopagitica*, in which he clearly argues against the violently

homogenizing agenda of book burning. To reiterate and expand:

> "Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good
> book kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a
> burden to the earth, but a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit,
> embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. 'Tis true, no age can restore
> a life, whereof perhaps there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover
> the loss of a rejected truth." (*Areopagitica* 341)

Thus, we can deduce an ethical imperative to search within literary traditions other than just that

of the Bible for the ways that they may genuinely embody such truth. Note again the particular

focus on the idea of the "Image of God," upon which we will conceptually expand below, after

we further explore the key formal and historiographical aspects of *Paradise Lost*.

The literary form of epic generically evokes the ancient works of Homer and Virgil (*The

Iliad, The Odyssey, The Aeneid)* which have been shown to unite societies through history as

textual monuments to their cultural, religious, and political identities. Within the genre of epic,

we witness the existential struggle of men within a hostile world, and we glimpse the gods in

whom they believe. As Simon comments on the literary form of epic, "The peculiar aesthetic

form of that narrative is epic, its grammar is indicative, and its key words are *knowledge and

faith* and its culminating thesis is the phenomenon of death." (*Art and Responsibility* 88) Epic

also serves as a peculiar sort of historical testament that preserves and promotes the poet's

devotion to ideas and aesthetics that define the cultural and philosophical *spirit* of the times. In

his work *Milton and the Romance of History,* Luke Taylor's analysis of Milton's use of literary

genre, in this case the epic, which helps us to better understand the poetic/philosophic complexity that underlies Milton's method and aim: "He reminds the generically sensitive reader that Satan's quest, however splendid, and however far he may wander, is from the beginning a romance contained within God's epic; in the end, it is doomed to failure." (302) For Milton, the result is the loss of speech, and the possibility of communication as can be seen in his poetic rendition of the punishment Satan endures at the end of *Paradise Lost*, wherein he and his likes are transformed into an infernal, tangled mass of serpents whose very communication is reduced to a cacophonous din of ambiguous, serpentine hiss that metaphorically defies meaningful expression and interpretation. "A dismal universal hiss … Alike, to serpents all, as accessories / To his bold riot; dreadful was the din / Of hissing through the hail, thick swarming now…" (X.508-522) For Simon, and his interpretation of Rosenzweig's midrash on the Creation epic, this romantic interlude by Satan is equivalent to the metaethical isolation and tragic speechlessness of the solitary human.

In addressing the facticity of many of the ways that humans have engaged with nature, this tragic speechlessness and commitment to solitary, individual justifications of one's beliefs about how humans have and should treat other humans and nature, have led to phenomena such as desertification and the Easter Island phenomena referred to earlier. Therefore, it is instructive to turn more deeply to Milton's premise —that human history is unfolding as a "concatenation of errors," which then takes on an aspect of fatal—if, consequential—truth. Injustice, in hydralike fashion, without critical/ethical intervention, continues to prey upon the people of each successive age and inhumanity periodically continues to destroy any prospect of lasting peace as it is destroying the very environment upon which humans depend for survival and flourishing.

One's judgment and conscience depend upon the phenomenological ground of factical historicity

that is defined by what Heidegger presents as Dasein's specific place—or ontological dwelling—

as it has developed spatially and temporally[4]. The world into which we are born serves as an

influential resistance and encouragement that challenges and shapes each of us through the ways

in which we respond to the–sometimes predictable, sometimes random–demands and obstacles

that we each inevitably face day-to-day. Luke Taylor also points out an important aspect of

Milton's own presentation of the way human beings fundamentally experience history for, and

in, themselves: "The young poet reaches toward a concept or image of history as a whole, toward

the universal plot of *Paradise Lost*. Yet, he realizes that history is only *experienced* in parts,

sequentially, from within, during the brief span of human life." (304) Additionally, as history has

shown[5], we (as humans) have almost always *done* before we've *understood*, caught in between

the sometimes-tempestuous tides of Zeitgeist—or spirit of the times—and the never distant

insistence of Necessity. No empire yet to have appeared on the face of the Earth has managed to

withstand the figurative *test-of-time,* or socially existential challenges that have perennially—if

pestilential-ly—continued to arise in contention against the survival of both the lone individual

and the collective species who singularly and intersubjectively compose the corpus of humanity.

Geographical and cultural distances have always separated diverse peoples throughout the

history of humanity, which can be intuitively expressed by the phenomenon of simple language

barriers and more profoundly in the multifarious cultural clashings of war, enslavement,

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[4] Martin Heidegger ontological exploration of "being [Sein]" in *Being and Time,* he defines the beingness of the individual human: "This being [Seiende], which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its being, we formulate terminologically as *Dasein*." (7)
[5] In addition to the previously mentioned Easter Island civilization, history provides example after example, such as the Holocaust, the American slave trade, The American Civil War, the nuclear tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Native American Genocide, The Crusades, The Spanish Inquisition, The French Reign of Terror, The ongoing conflicts in Jerusalem, the Genocide of Pol Pot–and many more.

exploitation, etc. that have punctuated the history of human civilization, as expressed above. As Jules Simon does well to point out,

> What characterizes the peoples of our linguistically diversified world is precisely that we struggle to understand each other and so frequently fall into such grievous misunderstandings that there is never a time that is free from some kind of war or injustice in our human relations. (50)

However, verbal language need not always be necessary to express fundamental commonalities of the human condition—for instance, eye contact and facial expression alone can quickly remove equivocation about another person who is *visibly* in anguish, fear, anger, jubilee, or ambiguous detachment. Yet, the potential for such primordial, empathetic communication relies entirely upon one being willing to look at and consider the other, while allowing the other to know that they are seen[6], to look back, and to make their own considerations or judgments.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton highlights the importance of intersubjective responsibility through the relationships he expresses through the figures of Adam and Eve. He not only presents archetypal contextualization for the negative ways humans treat each other and nature, but, for my thesis, I want to emphasize how he presents them as partners, or complimentary companions. I will expand upon their fundamental relationship later. He also goes further, to express the contentious fate of mankind as being defined by warfare, oppression, and degeneration through the literary device of retrospective prophecy[7]. While much of this tragic history is specifically drawn from the Bible, a propensity for injustice has clearly persisted through the various lived experiments of civilization which constitute the course of human

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[6] As opposed to the immoral hypothetical situation that is expressed by Plato in his 'Ring of Gyges' thought experiment in Book II of his *Republic*.

[7] See Bruce Louden's work *Retrospective Prophecy and the Vision in Aeneid 6 and the Book of Revelation:* Literary technique in which the author "presents it as a prophecy … [which] has already happened, as the original external audience of the poem knows." (2)

history and the consequential effects that that trajectory has inflicted on planet Earth. As such, I argue that our current environmental crisis, *the now* point in this historical trajectory, can only be ethically dealt with by realizing a globally social and ecological remedy through the refinement of our understanding of how our accumulated—and differentiated—historic, scientific, and cultural knowledge is the ontological burden of humankind in the Information Age and within the world-changing throes of the Anthropocene[8]. This is the *existential nexus* to which our history as a species has brought us, and its implications are harrowing.

Significant to note is the ethical equivocation that lies at the center of Milton's metahistorical premise which is ultimately grounded in divine messianism. Taylor notes, of Milton's presentation of humanity's position within history: "Since the meaning of history is only visible when history is viewed as an entirety, the status of any human judgment or action whatever is uncertain and reversible." (307) In other words, the ineffability of God's omnipotent omniscience becomes a figurative loophole for the inherent ignorance of the quintessential human. All folly, whether venial or mortal, is ultimately downplayed to a forgivable trespass that merely exhibits the grandeur of divine clemency—or, as Taylor articulates: "The poet tells us at the outset that Satan only acts through God's forbearance, and that his evil will result in further good." (312) While this divine justification can be ameliorative in effect, for the anxiety of a troubled individual who balks at the idea of a benevolent God that allows for clearly definable suffering and injustice to plague humankind, perhaps such rational is more harmful, than helpful, in a world that requires deliberate action to fix and prevent worldly ailment and injustice.

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[8] Clive Hamilton expounds on the global epoch termed the Anthropocene in his work *Defiant Earth.*

In the context of Milton, I draw our discussion back to the specific role of ecological ethics within the eschatological teleology of God's supposed plan where "History spirals downward." (Taylor 321) Here, I would like to note Rosenzweig's phenomenological examination of the primordiality of the constelled ideas of "human world god," each of which represents fundamental truths which humans have sought to define, yet which constantly elude comprehensive understanding. As such, human, world and god are logically represented as three distinct *Nothings* of knowledge, or epistemological uncertainties. As Jules Simon expounds in his work *Art and Responsibility*, "These particular Nothings are the Somethings of which historically conditioned branches of philosophy have claimed to possess complete knowledge, namely, 'positive' knowledge of god, world, or human, while others have denied that knowledge of these Somethings is at all even possible." (24) I find this trifold separation to be intuitively and analytically helpful in examining the history of philosophical and theological inquiry and focus. Though Milton does not specifically examine the same constellation of ideas, he does take a similar approach in defining the elements of divinity (God), humanity, and perversity (world). Where Milton presents the *human* aspect through Adam and Eve (which is world for Rosenzweig), he establishes his understanding of *god* through the orthodox trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and the Garden of Eden serves to symbolically represent the state of the *world* within the grand scheme (or divine plan). Right off the bat, it seems that God and world are distinctly delineated in that the Father is timeless, omnipotent, and impervious, whereas the final scene of *Paradise Lost* tragically, and iconically concludes with the image of archangel Uriel's flaming sword setting fire to the Garden of Eden, attesting to the fragility and mortal essence that defines the world:

> The brandish'd sword of God before them blaz'd
> Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,

And vapour as the Libyan air adust,
To parch that temprate clime; whereat
In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to th'eastern gate
Led them direct … (XII 633-39)

Some natural tears they dropp'd, but wip'd them soon.
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.
They, hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow
Through Eden took their solitary way. (XII 645-49)

In conjunction with the eschatological premise of Judgement Day (Armageddon / The Rapture) it is clear that there is little literary hope provided in terms of Earth's wellness without the will of God. As such, mankind's will is clearly defined as fatally and mortally limited, in stark contrast to God's omnipotence, or as Simon expresses in his analysis of Rosenzweig's philosophy of religion: "Human freedom, designated as free will, is what characterizes the human because it is finite, as opposed to god's infinite freedom … it is directional and strives for holistic completion." (41) For further contrast, Milton decides to define Satan's particular power as "plenipotent," which suggests a divine preference for harmonious homogeneity over a cacophonous accumulation of rebellious voices—or heterogeneity—that seem to necessarily result in an ethical/epistemological destabilization of entropic remiss. In this way, the 'universal hiss of Pandemonium' serves as the negative end of a metaphysical spectrum that juxtaposes the positive-extreme of God's sublime resonance of choral victory. As such, the earth simply serves as a stage that is doomed to house perpetual bloodshed, death and the eventual sterilization of a total, *cleansing* conflagration. Milton's Father in *Paradise Lost* foretells " The world shall burn, and from her ashes spring / New heaven and earth, wherein the just shall dwell" (III.333-335) and archangel Michael reiterates that one day will "fire purge all things new" (XI.900) The Earth—along with all of its life forms—seems to be explicitly subject to the same doomed fate,

and today we can actually logically legitimize the truth of such a fate when we accept the

astronomical science that insists upon the finite nature of stars' lifespans. The immanent

maturation of our Sun—Sol—which has been the source of life on Earth will certainly,

eventually, render the planet completely inhospitable to life. Furthermore, it is theorized that

there will eventually be a time when the protons which compose all atoms will effectively

decay[9], negating the very fabric of the physical cosmos into an unrecognizable state of entropic

disintegration. Yet, does this theoretical certainty demand that we should deny responsibility for

the state and health of our shared world, as it is today and as we can assume it will become

tomorrow? It is certain that—as Heidegger ontologically argues—we are beings that live toward

death, but that does not mean that we *ought* to live *for* death. Rather, there is clear potential for

us to live for the sake of life—furthermore, there is reason to live for the sake of *the good life*.

However, such motivation is undermined by the insistent Christian premise of living for *heaven*.

While Milton is clearly loyal to the teleological metaphysics of orthodox Christianity, his poetic

presentation includes heterodoxic elements that establish an argument which promotes a more

phenomenologically ethical possibility for the individual to attain heaven or hell while living on

Earth; for the kingdom of God is to be found *within.* Harkening back to *Areopagitica*, we can

importantly expand Milton's ethical/epistemological stance through the following:

> "Vision sent from God … *Read any books whatever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright and to examine each matter. … Prove all things, hold fast that which is good. …* the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled." (348)

As romantically inspiring as the notion of liberal idealism may be, we can see how ethically and

pragmatically detrimental an over-emphasis on the individual's interiority can be when we

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[9] Pran Nath and Pavel Fileviez Perez, "Proton Stability in Grand Unified Theories, in Strings and in Branes", Appendix H; 23 April 2007

consider the needs[10] of the basic intersubjective nature of the individual and the demands of our

species' social fabric. Nonetheless, Milton's depiction of humanity clearly suggests an innate

potential for attaining a state of attunement with the divine, especially when we consider the

implications of man being created in God's image.

Part 3

The term 'image' raises questions regarding origination, representation, and reality. As

Simon suggests, "The human, as self, is 'created in the image' of god, because of its equivalence

(*Gleichheit*) of form, but it also stands in contrast to god, because of its opposition of content."

(Simon 44) In the context of the social revolution known as the Renaissance, the idea of the

Kantian *thing-in-itself,* as epistemological delimitation, can be intuitively recognized within the

essence of Rosenzweig's trifold *Nothings of god's, world's, and human's respective, knowable*

essences–at least from the human perspective. Despite the insuperable, epistemological

limitations we face in regard to achievable knowledge of god, humanity, and the world, we

would be mistaken to take our limitations as a reason *not* to embrace responsibility in our actions

that clearly have consequences of objective measure. Here, both Kant's categorical imperative

and John Stuart Mill's consequentialist ethics can play a pivotal role in determining our personal

and collective paths of action into the future. Such philosophical frameworks are crucial in

making up for the shortcomings of the purely teleological and metaphysical imperatives denoted

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[10] In his prolific work, *Toward a Psychology of Being,* Abraham H. Maslow presents an empirical argument that
delineates the needs of human beings in a hierarchical model, from the most fundamental to more advanced,
fulfilling necessities as such: (1. Physiological Needs 2. Safety Needs 3. Belonging and Love Needs 4. Esteem
Needs 5. Cognitive Needs 6. Aesthetic Needs 7. Self Actualization 8. Transcendence)

in Christian eschatology and messianism. As such, I suggest that the orthodox Christian ethics propounded by John Milton are dangerous when taken in themselves as sufficient justification for social/political action. As I will show in my next chapter, Nietzsche sharply critiques Christianity as a nihilistic philosophy that devalues the life and world in which we live for the sake of an *afterlife*, that is epistemologically unknowable and unprovable. Likewise, the ideology of liberalism is problematic in its radical glorification of the individual. In terms of *Paradise Lost*, we can consider the extreme case of Satan as a representative for the ego and inherent, indomitable will. In the words of Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven," (I.245-255) which brings him to his infernal, logical conclusion that it is "Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven." (I.263) Considering that Milton's choice of speaker always helps to distinguish the deeper meaning of that which is said, Satan's argument is one that represents a detrimental unwillingness to accept any limitation to one's own power and agency, even in the face of insurmountable evidence to the contrary. Within the context of Christian ethos, the individual who recognizes no 'greater power' above their own individual and particular being is fundamentally sinister, or *perverse*, in their ways. However, it is crucial to note that in Christianity, the individual human is *only* regarded as inferior to and responsible to God, whereas the rest of *creation* is proclaimed to be at the arbitrary mercy of mankind. "The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands." (Genesis 9:2)[11] Therein lies a vital, ethical enigma for the authentic, discriminative reader to consider: In what way might all of the Earth's creatures be

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[11] Lynn White Jr. also highlights this problematic postulation: "Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes." (1205)

given into our hands? Must dread and fear always define the reactions we beget through our presence and assumed danger? Or might we perhaps be able to one day recover a semblance of the fellowship and kindness that existed in the prelapsarian paradise that Adam and Eve briefly enjoyed, in which they lived in peaceful coexistence with all creatures?

In Milton's intentionally edifying hermeneutic and poetic expression of Adam and Eve, we can see the roots of some problematically paradoxical elements that are of critical importance for my thesis. Paradoxically, on the one hand, we are asked to comprehend the way in which God can conceive of *the Fall,* which Christian dogma teaches about humanity's fallible, earthly existence, as a way to *allow for* the propagation of sin, error, and suffering, yet still allows Him (God the Father) to remain forever unstained in his benevolent essence. How can God ultimately experience–through his definitive omnipresence–the innumerable treks that humans take through the muck and the mire of their mortal existences, yet remain inculpable? According to further Christian dogma, which Milton adopts, God's gift of *free-will* to humans allows the progeny of Adam and Eve to take whichever self-propelled path that they *choose,* while God remains self-limited to an *innocent* status of observant witness. These are at the crux of logical inconsistencies which critics and opponents of Christianity often highlight, and which I will attempt to interpret below. This is also a theme which I will return to in Chapter 3, in which Indian philosophy may prove to provide conceptualizations of God, as Brahman/Atman, that are able to reconcile these perceived flaws within the Christian notion of God.

As I interpret, through the incarnation of Jesus as Christ, we are taught that humans were created in God's *image* that entails a form of self-perpetuation. What that means is that each individual human's trial through their relative pain and questionable pleasure of life-marred-by-original-sin plays out a similar dynamic of self-chosen limitation–or free-will. As such, this

image of humanity indeed removes God from the responsibility of deeds freely chosen by those myriad, created human beings. The *Originator* (The Father) technically stands separated in Will by embracing the role of witness and objectively *beholds what is experienced* by all those souls of quintessential representation who are self-perpetuated through creating their own *chosen* reality from the world in which they live. In my interpretation, actuality unfolds from the infinite potential that essentially defines the innate, Providential-Spark-of-Origination that is God the Father. As such, the power of God's imagination is seen as that which infuses the Universe with the light and life-force of the Holy Spirit, through which He enjoys Omniscience, through every eye of blessed awareness, and also, within the demise of those in the throes of well deservéd, self-damnation. The Father experiences the incredible, indelible spectrum of feeling that mortal beings suffer and enjoy, and which would be impossible within a perfectly *good* singularity. By unceasingly refraining from the allowance of wickedness to work through his own Will, the Father maintains a loophole-like innocence and purity in his Absolute Being:

> Evil into the mind of God or man
> May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
> No spot or blame behind; which gives me hope,
> That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,
> Waking thou never wilt consent to do (V.117-121)

It is crucial to note that here, Milton suggests that not only God, but humans, as well, are capable of allowing evil to enter the mind, yet refrain from enacting that evil. Such a claim would suggest that human beings are able to live a perfectly moral existence, despite the temptations of Satan. However, Milton's teleological premise of Armageddon, an inevitable conflagration that will cleanse the world of evil and plunge the wicked into eternal damnation, denies any real agency to the whole of humanity or hope for saving the rest of the world in which, and with which, we dwell. In specifying that this worldly drama, which will end in total

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conflagration of the world and the incineration of all forms of life, as a drama reduced to only the

play of God and human, there is a glaring omission of the rest of creation which includes

countless lifeforms, to which we cannot deny the capacity for feeling pain and pleasure in their

own living experiences. In ignoring the innate value of virtually all other lifeforms, apart from

humans, the anthropocentrism of Christian ideology falls perilously short in its ethical

consideration and negligently justifies the reduction of the earth and its non-human creatures

(flora and fauna, alike) to resources and means for the sake of whatever ends any human may

desire. As such, the problematic ethical paradoxicality that Milton ultimately presents must be

clearly highlighted as a moral crux that needs to be rectified if we are to responsibly deal with

the existential challenges of our present ecological crisis[12].

      With these critical and conceptual points in mind, let us examine Milton's presentation of

the image of God, that with which the Holy Spirit has engendered all of existence, through the

Will "Of Godhead, fixt forever firm and sure … Invisible, yet stay'd, (such privilege / Hath

Omnipresence,) and the work ordain'd / Author and end of all things." (VII.586-91) In similar

straights, William G. Madsen, in *The Fortunate Fall in Paradise Lost*, examines this

perpetuation of life through the physical bounds of Man, in which the Soul is endowed with a

fundamental Will, that allows for the spiritual refinement and metaphysical transcendence of

Being: "the Incarnation involves not the lowering of Christ's nature to the level of human nature,

but the exaltation of human nature to the mystical union with God." (104).

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[12] In *Time and Eternity: Paradox and Structure in* Paradise Lost*,* Rosalie L. Colie explores the way Milton navigates these paradoxes, noting "It is in the medium of His eternity that God has foreknowledge: because He 'is' all things and thus knows all things, God is beyond time and outside it, as well as in it." (128) She also notes that, "Man must exercise his free till within that history [the retrospective, biblically grounded prophesy that Milton portrays Adam to have received], and except it in very general terms he cannot foreknow the world's end and his own." (132)

Part 4

Throughout *Paradise* Lost, we encounter the image of God from many different angles of mediation and metaphor. Some of the representations are more directly expressive of His essence as seen in the radiant power of the Son and in the immaculate abidance of the angels while others express God's essence through the contrast and stark juxtaposition they manifest in their *antithetical elements* (as depicted in the characters/essences of Satan, Sin, Death, and the various fallen angels/idols that accompany the *Archfiend*). As we proceed to peruse these intentionally representational facets, let us first consider the way in which Milton presents *the Will* as a particularly important and special essence that animates the agency of beings. The will is portrayed as a quality with which every soul is endowed, that remains unfalteringly divine and unassailable from without, though subject to degradation or enhancement from within. For instance, we can see, even in the self-chosen, perverse state of Milton's Satan that "All is not lost; the unconquerable will … And courage never to submit or yield; … That glory never shall his wrath or might / Extort from me, to bow and sue for grace" (I.106-111). Though defeated, odious, and detested in the eye of the Father, the will of Satan remains intact, though through His (God's) "permissive will". (III.683) This is a detail that warrants close consideration: That the soul, for Milton and his interpretation of Christianity, even under the most severe damnation of God, maintains *the free-will to choose how to abide within the confines of their individual existence and intentionality*. The Will proves to be a self-propellant essence in the metaphysical conception of *Paradise Lost*, with–as I will argue in my third chapter–the eternal purpose and function of realizing Truth in God. While the states of angels and demons are represented as somewhat rigidly defined in their stations of divine obedience or *essence-perverse*, in Milton's

depiction of Humanity, we can better view the existential role of the personal will within the

Father's grand scheme of creation:

> O Adam, one almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not deprav'd from good, created all
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,
> Endued with various forms various degrees,
> Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
> But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
> As nearer to him plac'd, or nearer tending,
> Each in their several active spheres assign'd
> Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
> Proportion'd to each kind. So from the root (5.469-479)

As related in *Paradise Lost* by archangel Raphael, we are provided with Milton's

interpretation of what he considers to be the ultimate design of God's plan: the Fall of Satan and

the Fall of man generates an infinitely variable existence, which provides the necessary resources

and means through which to propagate and transcend our limited existentiality, as fallen human

beings, through the refinement of our spirit/soul which can epistemologically learn that the

ultimate purpose for humans is to ethically earn—through merit—metaphysical ascension that

allows us to reside nearer *His—The Father's*—sphere of Being. Here we also get a glimpse of the

torus-like totality of God "from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return," which

correlates with an idea that I will argue in my last chapter–on the Eastern Philosophy of Brahman

and Atman–that all of manifestation is not only God's creation, but God's Self-creation.

While Milton does not completely spell out these ideas, it seems to me that the above and

remainder of this section can be speculatively inferred from what he does say and which I claim

can be understood as an extension of his underlying metaphysics. God's plan for mankind,

including the thematic fall-from-grace, must be one of omniscient intention. Then, such a plan

can be said to entail a way for God's infinite potential to be actualized through the ultimate

conception of infinite–and infinitesimal–existence. To clarify this notion, God's creative/redemptive plan develops through the actions of an abundance of individual actors, intertwined in incessant, intersubjective interplay of what can be understood as the actualized cosmological and chaotic unfolding of the universe that has resulted in our own existence, which is not only conscious, but self-conscious, as well. This interweaving intersubjectivity of free agents allows for an unbounded propagation/interplay of will and realization through the conflux of both individual and collective intentionalities which simultaneously internalize and project the profoundly enigmatic 'Image of God' for all of those *with eyes to see.* This (self)consciousness of ours captures the light and dark of the world; the underlying chaos and reason of the cosmos—each from its very own vantage-point in space and time. Thus, the quintessential Image of God can be *seen* from innumerable subjective perspectives which, taken together, reveal a non-solipsistic objectivity that is intersubjectively shared and hence, objectively unifying. Another Christian way to put this, is to say that the Holy Spirit is that which exists *between* the seemingly disparate aspects of mortal and immortal existences.

To advance my interpretation further–what I understand to be a crucial part of the Christian mythos–is how the Holy Spirit can be considered as that counterpart of the Holy Trinity which metaphysically connects—by way of *conducting*—the being of the Father with that of the Son and ultimately, *is* that very substance that connects all life forms including the ipseity and existentiality of each and every human being. As the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, humanity is fundamentally—if metaphorically—akin to an extended family, and the twisting, tangled branches of that family tree represent the phenomenological conflux of countless paths that meanderingly intersect and intersubjectively co-influence one another. Where the intentional and unintentional actuality of willful individuals meet, ethos, pathos and

logos necessarily interact, effectively interweaving a web-like tapestry of meaning that defies the limits of positivist logic. As I discuss below, introducing the Holy Spirit in a more general Christian context enables me to assess the conceptual depths of human purpose that culminates into an infinitely–if infinitesimally–complex, fundamentally chaotic, yet fortuitously harmonizing, intrinsically mathematical, fractal, living, breathing, aesthetically sublime and flowing dynamic that can otherwise be said to be the ongoing work that is God's creation. Such would counteract the logical threat of nihilistic reduction. This is my conceptual extension of Simon's position on the necessity of including the phenomenon of chaos as an essential part of how we envision creation in order to avoid being "reduced to insignificance in either a totally fragmented or totally determined world." (21) Both sorts of reduction are avoided by introducing the purposive nature of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Having evoked Adam as Milton's prime example of *man*kind—*made in the image of God*—let us now turn our gaze to *his reflection in Eve*, Milton's prime example of *woman*kind, whom Adam defines: "Best image of myself and dearer half" (V.69) "The link of nature draw me; flesh of flesh, / Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe." (IX.914-16). The structure of this fundamental, primordial relationship, *directly intuited by Adam though the Providence of his prelapsarian state*, suggests that Milton is highlighting what he sees to be a divine essence of compassion and loyalty that is thematically and virtually identical to that of the Father towards Man, as we see manifest through the Son. The words of the Father and Son are of prime importance in their ideological roles for Milton, and as such, the Son pronounces his purposeful aim: "Behold me then, me for him, life for life / I offer; on me let thine anger fall; / Account me man; I for his sake will leave … and for him lastly die." (III.236-40) He declares, "Behold me", so that we look at this moment ever closely—this

instance is presented as a glimpse of an ideologically pure quality of God. God the Father communes with human suffering through the acceptance of the sacrifice of his Son who is literally a metaphysical part of his own Self. As testament to his deep, boundless love for humankind, God does not remain impassive in his imperviousness, but rather opens himself up to the pathos of suffering. *Even in death, the Father communes with the experience of Man, though that death is necessarily mediated through the being of the Son.* In comparison to this enactment of divine devotion–of Jesus as the Son of God, expressing his devotion to God the Father in the face of his suffering and death–similarly, Adam expresses a willful decision to remain with Eve, thereby uniting with her in their mutual *fallen* state in Paradise:

> However I with thee have fixt my lot,
> Certain to undergo like doom; if death
> Consort with thee, death is to me as life,
> So forcible within my heart I feel
> The bond of nature draw me to my own
> …
> One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself. (IX.952-959)

Thus, he exhibits a selflessness that is placed at the root of divine morality within the context of the Christian mythos. Maintaining the notion of divine compassion with regard to Milton's prelapsarian players, it logically follows that the *image of Eve—being the best image of Adam—qua the image of God—*is also quintessentially endowed with divine love and thus, always deserving of ethical regard through which we can conceptually consider her feminine form as embodying a significant refinement of feeling, function, and aesthetic beauty that, in her specific purposiveness, is beyond the rougher grace of Adam's masculine form and purpose. The essence of Eve, as an intentional creation of God from love, cannot be ethically reduced to the diminutive status of accidental, mistaken creation but, rather, is perfectly shaped and placed, as purposefully willful: Herself, being inseparable from the intentional and ineffable plan of God.

Part 5

While Milton's poetic depictions of Adam and Eve serve to present his interpretation of the

Protestant Christian mythos, which I would argue does ultimately, promote an unethical,

hierarchical dynamic (as seen in the patriarchal politics of the Church,) my interpretation departs

from his with the help of philosophers Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. To begin, the

relational character of Adam and Eve and their participation in the work of the Holy Spirit–as I

just sketched out–can be described in Heideggerian terms. The ontological/existential character

of the two, each as an independent *Dasein*, unfolds to reveal a deeper condition of *Mitsein*[13]*,*

which translates to "*being-with*," or "*togetherness*," or "companionship". Nonetheless,

Heidegger's philosophy exhibits ontological limitations that necessarily prioritize Dasein's

individuality, selfhood and authenticity. On the other hand, Levinas' phenomenological ethics

allows for a transcendence of Heidegger's preoccupation with the phenomenon of individuality

in how he presents phenomena like subjective obsession in its role in the process of what he calls

infinition of the other (as object). The relation that Levinas identifies with infinity reveals itself

when one looks beyond one's own self and sees the self of another. In *Totality and* Infinity,

Levinas himself presents his ethics as an *optics,* or a specific way of *seeing,* which I suggest,

evokes the image motif I have been emphasizing in *Paradise Lost.*

In Levinas' words, "infinity is produced in the relationship of the same with the other" …

"The idea of infinity is the mode of being, the i*nfinition,* of infinity. Infinity does not first exist,

and *then* reveal itself. Its infinition is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in *me*." (26)

Along with deeper philosophical rumination upon the idea of beholding/being-beheld and

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[13] The world of Dasein is a with-world [*Mitwelt].* Being-in is *being-with* [*Mitsein*] others. The innerworldly being-in-itself of others is *Dasein-with* [*Mitdasein*]. (*Being and Time* 116)

lover/beloved, intentionally embracing intersubjectivity is revealed to be imperative to one's ontological/existential/ethical development. While there is an innate paradoxicality behind the idea of being able to *contain* infinity within one's being, the trifold ontological dynamic that is created through intersubjective existence—being, seeing, and being seen—actualizes, (through conceptual revelation and reflection) the inherent infinity that we both *existentielle*-ly and existentially alight upon through our consciousness as embodied, living, perceiving beings. In comparison, Samuel Fallon[14] highlights Gordon Teskey's interpretation in *Allegory and Violence* of God's infinite essence: "As a concept, God's body is not a body at all but a substance that extends to infinity; infinite substance is something you can grasp with your mind, by logic, but it is not something you can see in your mind's eye." (40). With these examples, it is clear that there is more insight to be gleaned from the portrayed combination of the primordial two (Adam and Eve). Through philosophically critical considerations and logical analysis, we can better interpret the lessons that the Christian mythos has to teach us.

With these conceptions as a ground, I envision a way in which we can *see* Adam and Eve*: Unstained by Sin in Paradise. As I began to argue above, they are not hierarchically positioned but are merely presented in natural, masculine, and feminine proportions that allows for the conception of an ideally pragmatic and functionally symbiotic relationship. This allows us to *see* an innately ethical, intersubjective relationship that produces infinite significations of mutual regard which are expressions of responsibility toward and with one another. In my interpretation, Adam and Eve are not equal in form but are *symbiotic in function*, that is, of equal importance and supplementary significance. Such symbiosis reveals itself to be existentially crucial to the *ethical* and *physiological* fulfillment of each in their own measure. In this way, we

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[14] *Milton's Strange God: Theology and Narrative Form in 'Paradise Lost*

can re-imagine Adam and Eve, not in demeaning, patriarchal terms, but in open-minded, egalitarian, and *just* terms: Each can be, and I maintain should be, seen as whole in their own being, yet part of a larger whole that can only be revealed through how their ethical and pragmatic co-creativity leads to the foundation of community itself. Together they poetically serve to present an anthropocentric, meaningful manifestation of God's abstract qualities in feminine and masculine forms that combine to create the foundational basis of organic and conceptual fecundity; literally by having babies and forming a family. Through their essential combination, ethical communication, and effective consummation, the inherent meaning of human existence is born. Without the *other*, the meaning of either individual is naught. And so, to return to the conceptual Image of God, as being embodied in the significant essences of Adam and Eve, we can reflect on the various qualities and perspectives that have been poetically presented in order to combine them into a conceptually unified personality that allows us to see that the metaphor of the image is essentially consummated in a state of enamored completion through the relationship of Adam and Eve which reveals the semblance of an infinite depth; similar, but not identical to the infinitesimally deepening image that is produced by the phenomena of two perfectly parallel mirrors that reflect one another *ad infinitum*.

To return to Milton, Theresa DiPasquale comments that, "Milton underscores Eve's dignity and helps to define the ways in which she, like her spouse, embodies God-like qualities: "for in their looks Divine/ The image of their Glorious Maker shone, / Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude." (PL, 4:291-93)" (46). What I take this to mean is that, in Milton's Reformationist interpretation, humans are the intentional creations of an omniscient God. That is, as believing Christians, since humans are created in the image of God, we are likewise intended to understand that God is not only dominance and might, but also submission and caress; not only strength and

hardness, but also fragility and flexibility which are recognizable human qualities that can then be understood as divine, as well.

Moreover, amongst the various virtuous qualities that Milton presents in *Paradise Lost* which can be categorized as masculine or feminine, we are also presented with the concept of *innocence* which invokes a distinctly *neuter* quality. *This essence of innocence is a crux in the framework of Christianity which posits a God who is supposed to be ideologically and unequivocally perfect (Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Good), yet allows for "evil" to plague and pain the universe.* For instance, when Eve reasons with Adam about working apart from his side, our faculty of reason is specifically aligned with their prelapsarian state of innocence:

> Against his will he can receive no harm.
> But God left free the will; for what obeys
> Reason is free, and reason he made right,
> But bid her well beware, and still erect
> …
> Seek not temptation then, which to avoid
> Were better, and most likely if from me
> Thou sever not: trial will come unsought.
> …
> Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more;
> Go in thy native innocence, rely
> On what thou hast of virtue, summon all,
> For God tow'rds thee hath done his part, do thine. (IX 351-375)

As mentioned above, this tension and seeming paradoxicality between the premise of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God that allows for the tragic outcome of the Fall penetrates the logic of the Holy Trinity and rationally undermines the ethical premises that underlie Christian dogma and doctrine. Upon critical examination, it is apparent that Milton's position is that we can only continue to *believe* in a simultaneously omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God by accepting that humanity itself is fully responsible for its own suffering due to the sin we choose through free-will. Milton's Father further elucidates this notion of

responsibility: "I told ye then … man should be seduc'd … believing lies / Against his Maker; no decree of mine / Concurring to necessitate his fall … His free-will, to her own inclining left / In even scale." (X.40-47) *Ultimately, due to the innocence of prelapsarian humankind, the Fall happens through an act of free-will, namely, the exercise of natural curiosity[15].* For Milton, this act appears to be inherently amoral—which makes the Fall inevitable. But then, humans are destined to assume the burden of suffering and mortality along with the responsibility of determining how to act in being able to choose between the good, which is obedience to God, or evil inclinations, which are the temptations of Satan. As such, curiosity itself is presented in a negative light, which has much to do with the strictness and intolerance that has defined the Christian Church and driven the aforementioned religious campaigns of death and destruction such as the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the witch-burnings in Salem, Massachusetts.

However, coming back to the theme of *innocence,* through the fall of man, born of natural curiosity, God's essence became manifest in the physical realm, and through that manifestation, counterbalance was conceived—if, only for *the moment[16]. The eternal, unassailable Godhead is thus represented through the glasslike fragility of its reflection: a universe of mortality that reveals the enigmatic essence of eternity.*

Part 6

The universe of mortality, after the fall—after the mirror of Heaven in Eden has shattered— brings us back to the image of God, now fragmented throughout the entirety of Humanity. Here

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[15] As John Gillies highlights in his work *Space and Place in* Paradise Lost*,* curiosity, or *the spirit of free inquiry* is specifically mentioned as a quality that is not negative in nature: "Raphael begins by applauding the spirit of free inquiry: 'To ask or search I blame thee not … whether heaven move earth, / Imports not, if though reckon right' (8.66,70-71)." (35)
[16] The specious present.

the divine design is brought into question for all the pain, sin, death, and suffering that is multiplied to lamentable proportions of *hell-on-earth*. But we must remember the will; that essence of the Holy Spirit that *may forever choose*. With this freedom of choice, the Father implores Man to redeem himself "Not by destroying Satan, but his works / In thee and in thy seed." (XII.394). In this divine imperative lies the glorious aim of His Grand Scheme: "By faith and faithful works, to second life, / Wak'd in the renovation of the just" (XI.62) "His knowledge of good lost and evil got; Happier had it suffic'd him to have known / Good by itself, and evil not at all." (XI.87). Here we see the potential of the will in each human being to convert the negativity within and around itself into a goodness by abiding in the dictate of God (timshel: thou mayest), which Satan is emphatically *unwilling* to submit to, through his unbending will. (Genesis 4:7) In fact, the very idea of submission in the original rebellion of Satan, takes on a sense of tragi-comic irony, in that the possibility of successful rebellion is all but literally null in the face of the reality[17] portrayed in Christian mythos that presents God as emphatically *omnipotent*. The idea of submission, from the perspective of Satan, is simply unacceptable ("Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven" (I.263)) but from the perspective of God, is unavoidable. *The reality of existence, within the eternal, ineffable engine of God—that is, within the metaphysical movement of all within and without the physical realm—is inexorably inevitable and perennially incessant.* In order to coexist with the divine and to refine one's own state of existence and personal *soul*, acceptance of the truth of one's factical station in the universe is an absolute necessity. This idea reveals a stance of *active abidance*, rather than the Satanic notion of shame-ridden submission. And so, having considered the metaphysical

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[17] As Nietzsche might interject, "As a matter of fact, every man is himself a piece of fate. When he thinks that he is struggling against fate in this way, fate is accomplishing its ends in even that struggle. The combat is a fantasy, but so is the resignation in fate–all these fantasies are included in fate." (*Human, All Too Human* 27)

postulation of Christian dogma poeticized by Milton, let us turn our gaze towards the notion of

the *Just Man* who, in Milton's eschatological vision resists temptation and enjoys the fruits of

Providence, after being proven in deeds of humility, kindness, fortitude, patience, and justice:

> Then, all thy saints assembled, thou shalt judge
> Bad men and angels; they arraign'd shall sink
> Beneath thy sentence; hell, her numbers full,
> Thenceforth shall be forever shut. Meanwhile
> The world shall burn, and from her ashes spring
> New heaven and earth, wherein the just shall dwell; (III.330-35)
> …
> In glory of the Father, to dissolve
> Satan with his perverted world, then raise
> From the conflagrant mass, purg'd and refin'd,
> New heavens, new earth, ages of endless date,
> Founded in righteousness, and peace, and love,
> To bring forth fruits, joy and eternal bliss." (XII.546)

And so, according to the plan of God for the End Times, the *Just Man*–embodied by

Christ resisting Satan and thus redeeming humankind from hell–plays an essential role, namely,

to manifest infinite individual perceptions of each and every *Just Man* who, with their *existential*

sight relates directly to the Father through what I contend is the unifying essence of the Holy

Spirit. Now, lest we resemble those demons transfixed and confounded by the tautological and

paradoxical ideas that define the ineffable Logos of God, "in wand'ring mazes lost" (II.558), let

us bring our focus back home by way of Milton's passages:

> O earth, how like to heaven, if not preferr'd
> More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built
> With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
> For what God after better worse would build?
> …
> Of sacred influence! As God in heaven
> Is centre, yet extends to all, so thou
> Centering receiv'st from all those orbs; in thee, (IX.99-109)

In her work, *John Milton's Beehive, from Polemic to Epic*, Nicole A. Jacobs points out how **"**Ultimately, Milton draws a distinction between a heavenly and divine, paternalistic monarchy and a demonic, self-serving one." (812) To express the ethical difference delineated between self-serving intentionality and intersubjectively sensitive intentionality, it can be noted in a demonstrable way how the more obsessed an individual becomes in their own importance and devices, the more consideration for others dwindles in comparison. Such is observable in the product of capitalist ideology where the individual's enterprising ability takes paramount precedence over one's theoretical responsibility for the welfare of others, which creates a clear, ethical impasse. However, when concern for community wellness takes precedence over egotistical motivations, we see that space opens for ethical interaction and responsibility. As Simon elucidates in his reading of Rosenzweig: "The less the individual, the more the self: 'There is no greater loneliness than in the eyes of a dying one, and there is no more defiant, proud isolation than that which is painted on the paralyzed countenance of the dead one." (45) What Simon is getting at in this passage correlates with my analysis of Milton's Satan, who was originally the most dignified angel devoted to loving the God which created him as one individual among many, but who definitively rebels once he becomes aware that Christ the Son will take his place at the right hand of God the Father. Satan rejects his ordained place as one among many creations, albeit elevated to the honor of being at the right hand of God, and by doing so becomes isolated and comparatively impotent–paralyzed and condemned to Pandemonium.

Although Milton, and Christian eschatology in general, provides hope for the salvation of humans, the fate of the earth in those visions is less ambiguous: Earth is condemned to burn, along with the rest of living nature and all of the other species that dwell within her bounds.

While there is some call for ethical stewardship in the Bible, such an imperative dwindles in comparison to the New Testament's focus on personal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and the implacable coming of the Apocalypse. Faith in Jesus, acceptance of original sin, and submission to Christian law/judgment supersedes any need to embrace a proactive environmental ethics. The agency of human beings is reduced to a waiting for the Rapture of Armageddon when the Just Man will pass His final Judgment (A sort of *Waiting for Godot*[18]). Milton's God-the-Father expounds in poetic English:

> Easy it may be seen that I intend
> Mercy colleague with justice, sending thee [The Son, Jesus Christ]
> Man's friend, his mediator, his design'd
> Both ransom and redeemer voluntary,
> And destin'd man himself to judge man fallen. (X.58-62)

In accepting our fallen state as part of the Christian gospel, we accept that we are destined to die and that we are fated to embody a necessary tragedy within the ineffable epic of God until, or more importantly unless we are granted personal salvation through the divine grace and mediation of Jesus Christ. As I mentioned earlier in my thesis, cosmological science now provides support for the idea that the Earth's hospitability for life is effectively tied to the state of our sun which, in a way, lends a peculiar kind of credence to the eschatological premise that the world will one day be purged through cosmic conflagration. However, the state we find ourselves in today is not one that is defined by an impending doom from without–because such an end could be millions of years away, but one from within–which could be merely decades away[19]. The climate crisis at hand is one that is the consequence of relatively recent human

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[18] Where there is "Nothing to be done." (Beckett 1))

[19] "Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man." (White 1207)

action and irresponsibility, arguably tied to modern industrial capitalism. As such, the Earth sciences recognize that desertification as a phenomenon is driven by the unsustainability of human resource consumption in the past 100 years which has accelerated a process that, for my thesis, finds its moral justification in at least one way of reading Christian dogma. (Genesis 9:2) Earth System science now recognizes a geological epoch that has been dubbed the Anthropocene, which has clarified for us the inherent unsustainability of idealized progressivism, a phenomenon which is critically evaluated in post-modern philosophy that recognizes the logical untenability of infinite growth that an ideology of progressivism requires for fulfillment. In accepting the reality of the Anthropocene, we understand humanity to be in a critical, pivotal position: one that needs to be better understood through existential, ethical self-reflection and scientific integrity. Here we encounter an ontological imperative which Clive Hamilton contends in *Defiant Earth* "invites us to think about the Earth in a new way, an Earth in which it is possible for humankind to participate directly in its evolution by influencing the constantly changing processes that constitute it." (21)

However, within the epic of God which Milton poeticizes, an untimely demise of the Earth and humanity by its own hand would appear to be a thoroughly anti-climactic resolution to our meta-narrative. In its avoidableness, the end of humanity through unsustainable ecological practices is tragic and pathetic in comparison to one in which we survive to see the inevitable end of Earth that cosmological forces have in store. Perhaps that day of revelation would be one in which we realize that the eschatological prophecy of the bible indeed came to metaphorical fruition in which the Earth is burned up by the truth of the Sun, yet humankind has found a new home in the heavens beyond, which could be realized through science-fiction-inspired technological advances we have yet to develop. Currently, the United States, at least, with its

Mission to Mars is actively working on the potential seeds for such advances. However, the current ecological crisis is an impending one that puts not only the human species but countless other flora and fauna in danger of premature extinction. Given the inevitable trajectory of climate change and the best predictions of current climate scientists, humans may not have the freedom to pursue such science fiction scenarios in the very near future. As Levinas points out, "Freedom consists in knowing that freedom is in peril. But to know or to be conscious is to have time to avoid and forestall the instant of inhumanity." (35)

As a bridge to the next chapter, my analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost* turns towards a double critique that entails bringing to bear the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche in order to respond to the ethical and ultimately, environmentally problematic consequences of Milton's Christian epic and the priorities I have highlighted which are at the root of Christian values. What Nietzsche foresaw was that the time is now to begin rethinking and re-envisioning our role as humans on this earth.

Chapter 2: A Critique of Christianity through the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

Part 1

"The challenge of every great philosophy, which as a whole always says only: this is the picture of all life, and learn from it the meaning of your own life. And the reverse: only read your own life and comprehend from it the hieroglyphics of universal life." (*Untimely Meditations* 141)

"In the mountains the shortest way is from peak to peak: but for that one must have long legs. Proverbs should be peaks, and those spoken should be big and tall." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 40)

"We have no wish whatever to enter into the kingdom of heaven: we have become men– so we want the earth." (*Zarathustra* 316)

In transitioning into this next chapter, the few quotes above are intended to express the sharp break that Friedrich Nietzsche means to make with his hammeresque philosophy that strikes out in echoing opposition against the ideology and institution of Christianity which, to reiterate, is expressly founded in the dogmatic belief that simple faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to the law of God (as delineated in the Bible and dictated through doctrine) are the only way (the *narrow path*) to attain heavenly redemption, forgiveness of sins, and salvation from the torturous flames of an eternal Hell. This is what Nietzsche terms: *a hangman's metaphysics*[20]. In this sense, one can see the way in which *original sin* allows for the Church to cleverly extort the individual (for the sake of his *immortal soul),* by exploiting humankind's

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[20] From *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche further expresses "He ejects from himself all his denial of himself, of his nature, naturalness, and actuality, in the form of an affirmation, as something existent, corporeal, real, as God, as the holiness of God, as God the Judge, as God the Hangman, as the beyond, as eternity, as torment without end, as hell, as the immeasurability of punishment and guilt." (528)

innate fear of death and visceral aversion to pain and suffering. Being infamously known as the philosopher who proclaimed the *Death of God*, Friedrich Nietzsche undertook to painstakingly *revaluate* our *common*–or, *uncritical*–understanding of Christianity itself by arguing against its historiological validity and origins. Using critical and philological methods, Nietzsche makes a compelling argument that reveals Christianity's origin and moral structure as being rooted in the culture and tradition of Judea. Jewish *ressentiment,* he argues, naturally resulted in reaction to generations of forced oppression, exploitation, and tragic exile that was imposed upon them by the ruling classes of ancient Egypt and the Roman empire. Eventually the sublimation of this *ressentiment* found outlet in that cultural-spiritual revolution which ultimately brought the empire of Rome to infamous collapse and ruin. Sparked by the pre-battle revelation of Emperor Constantine, the flame of Christianity that burned through the souls of the masses burned brightly as the Roman empire was laid to utter waste. Nietzsche goes to the indignant extent of arguing that "I call Christianity one great curse … I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind…" (*The Antichrist* 134) As such, he sees the devouring flame of Christian ideology as a type of spiritual disease that is degenerative to a terminal extent and he warns us of impending doom if that flame, as disease, is allowed to spread as it please. Historiographically speaking, Nietzsche stands as a kind of Hegelian hero whom I evoke, in order to conceptually, and meta-ethically contend with the theological power and influence of Christianity, which as I mentioned above, currently comprises the self-identifying demographic of nearly a third (31%) of Earth's population.

In stark juxtaposition to Christian ideology, Nietzsche expounds a philosophy of tragic existentialism that emphatically rejects all metaphysical and fantastical propositions, especially those which serve as foundational premises of the Christian religion. His existentialism grounds

itself in an egocentrism that betrays an intentionally blasphemous arrogance, specifically against

the Christian God, and reserves a defiant attitude of hubris against those entities that have been

pronounced 'gods' throughout history. For instance, in his seminal work, *Thus Spoke

Zarathustra,* his protagonist, Zarathustra, who embodies Nietzsche's ideal-esque persona[21],

exclaims: "If there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god! Hence there are no gods.

Though I drew this conclusion, now it draws me." (86) This is one example of the explicit,

intentional way in which Nietzsche clarifies his philosophic aim that seeks to deny that the

meaning of humankind is defined by anything extraneous to or inaccessible to natural life,

including gods, demons, heaven, or hell. Rather, he wants humankind to recognize and embrace

the importance of the earthly world and visceral life of each individual within the greater project

of human evolution which, for Nietzsche, must strive, above all things, to produce what he calls

the *Übermensch:* "The word 'overman,' as the designation of a type of supreme achievement, as

opposed to 'modern' men, to 'good' men, to Christians and other nihilists–a word that in the

mouth of a Zarathustra, the annihilator of morality…" (*Ecce Homo* 717)

Some translate the term *Übermensch* as meaning 'superman', however, the more

etymologically accurate translation of *Übermensch* is the 'overman'. This distinction helps us to

understand that the *Übermensch* is not to be understood as a *supernatural* being, but as one that

metaphorically embodies a capacity that is evolutionarily *above* and *beyond* that of the modern

human. Analogously speaking: the current state of the evolved human (Homosapien sapien) is to

Homo Erectus and Neanderthal, as the *Übermensch* is to the current status of the evolving human

being. Bernard Magnus argues and elucidates in his work *Perfectibility and Attitude in*

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[21] "Zarathustra … This book, with a voice bridging centuries, is not only the highest book there is, the book that is truly characterized by the air of the heights–the whole fact of man lies beneath it at a tremendous distance–it is also the deepest, born out of the innermost wealth of truth, an inexhaustible well to which no pail descends without coming up again filled with gold and goodness." (*Human, All Too Human* 4)

Nietzsche's Übermensch: "Übermenschlichkeit–the antithesis of 'the last man'--does not baptize specific virtues, specific attributes of persons; rather what it captures instead is a certain attitude toward life and world–one which finds them worthy of infinite repetition." (635) Here the term last-man is one that Nietzsche critically employs to designate human beings who allow themselves to thoroughly succumb to the opiate-like, metaphysical comforts of idealistic thought–especially, as he sees to be at the core of Christian ethics–and thus, to stagnate within the confinements of life-denying morals. Instead, as is alluded to here, Nietzsche calls for us to embrace this life in a way that would be worth infinite repetition, or *eternal recurrence.* As such, we see that part of Nietzsche's self-styled *categorical imperative* is uncompromisingly rooted in the science of natural evolution and a natural instinct that delights in health and power, while detesting weakness and degradation in all forms. Furthermore, as I will discuss in the passage below, Nietzsche presents us with the conception of what he terms the *grand emancipation*, which is integral to the pursuance of the Übermensch. This grand emancipation is emphatically aligned with the restoration of what he calls *the innocence of becoming.* Implicit within this notion is the moral imperative that mankind must move beyond the Christian premise of Original Sin. Rather, we are born to become who we will, out of an original state of *innocence.*

> "It is absurd to try to *shunt off* man's nature towards some goal. *We* have invented the notion of a 'goal:' in reality a goal is lacking … We are necessary, we are part of destiny, we belong to the whole, we *exist* in the whole,--there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare, or condemn our being, for that would be to judge, measure, compare, and condemn the whole…But there is nothing outside of the whole!—This only is the grand emancipation: that no one be made responsible any longer … it is only thereby that the *innocence* of becoming is again restored … The concept of 'God' has hitherto been the greatest *objection* to existence … We [Nietzsche and his kindred free-spirits] deny responsibility by denying God: it is only *thereby* that we save the world." (*Twilight of the Idols* 26)

This primordial innocence of becoming that Nietzsche evokes is grounded upon the inexorable omnipresence of *Necessity* which is closely aligned with notions of Fate and which Nietzsche embraced from classical mythology; emphatically unlike the premise of intelligent design that is integral to the Christian mythos. As such, the concept of *Amor fati*, or 'love of fate,' is key to deciphering the enigmatic intricacies of Nietzsche's tragic-existentialist philosophy. In one of his later works, *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche offers the reader a candid proclamation of his matured wisdom: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it–all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary–but *love* it." (10) Within the tragically nullifying expanses of eternity, Nietzsche's voice resonates in heavily stoical cadences as he calls for the free-spirit to courageously confront the tragic realities that undeniably define the primal context and veritable history of humanity, life, and nature itself. Speaking of Stoic philosophy, Marcus Aurelius had strongly foreshadowed Nietzsche's affectations about fate in his *Meditations*: "Strive to be simple. It is well; all that falls to you from the whole was ordained for you from the beginning and spun to be your fate." … **"When the ruling power within us is in harmony with nature, it confronts what comes to pass in such a way that it always adapts itself with ease."** (Aurelius) Confronting and reckoning with the dictates of Fate, which include our mortality and embodied reality is promoted in both Marcus Aurelius' and Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophies. A sober, tragically inclined mind lies at the bottom of classic morality and remains prerequisite to Nietzsche's post-modern, existentialist thought. He calls for each of us to exercise and increase the strength of our *will* by defiantly refusing the opiate-like comforts of fantasy, self-deception, and self-denial. You and I are called to become genuine in ourselves by becoming capable of self-love, i.e., by actively

loving ourselves, which ultimately demands one to lovingly embrace the complexities of existence and the ubiquitous bedrock of necessity–the *fate* of our momentary existence–that is *beyond good and evil.* We will come back to the notion of *amor fati* later in this chapter when discussing Nietzsche's teaching of *eternal recurrence*, but for the moment, it helps us begin to bring the humanist characteristics of his tragic existentialism to illumination.

In contrast to the bleakness that pessimistic and nihilistic philosophies bring us, Nietzsche's tragic, Dionysian wisdom wills one to metaphorically harbor and emanate the light-matter of the universe itself. The actual unfolding of all existence, from the unfathomable depths of cosmological phenomena to the infinite interactions between innumerable species and generations of life–immanent material for a truly transcendent, divine history par excellence–results in the birth of each fated self: each individual alighted with the energy of life. As such, the eternal flux of light, within the abyss of eternity and infinity, to which each of us is witness, epitomizes the Heraclitan antecedent that lends ground to Nietzsche's stance on the active pre-eminence of Becoming, over that of static Being. As from the lips of his Zarathustra: "Light am I; ah, that I were night! … But I live in my own light; I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 105) Now, lest we wander too far ahead on too long a stride, let us take a step back to further examine Nietzsche's critical stance against the institutional rule of the Christian religion.

Part 2

In his work *The Antichrist,* Nietzsche highlights in simple, unequivocal terms: "What is good?—All that increases the feeling of power, will to power, power itself, in man. .. What is bad?—All

that proceeds from weakness." (78) Firstly, this quote presents us with some further postulations of Nietzsche's self-centric philosophy, particularly when considering his conception of the *will to power*. Life may very well have no *true* aim in its chaotically positioned multifariousness. But, generally and primordially speaking, is it not ostensibly perceptible to the naturally scientific mind that even the most rudimentary forms of life exhibit what could be understood as a *will to power*, by the very course of its *survival* against the multitudinous elements of the *natural other* that constantly presses or pulls upon the vulnerability of each mortal organism? Metabolism itself manifests the will to power within every moment of living existence, whether that living organism happens to be plant, animal, or of unicellular biology. As a phenomenon, life itself reveals an innate, primordial strife to survive that fundamentally requires a utilization of energy– or *power*–in order to accomplish and advance that survival. For these reasons, *nutrition*, too, becomes key to our concern which will become more conceptually clear as we continue to engage with the elements of Nietzsche's philosophy that are particularly sensitive to the ubiquitous presence and influence of *nature*. Nature, in the scientific sense, and in the psychological sense becomes a ground upon which fate enjoys its agentless play, a ground that constantly shifts as ceaseless becoming. As such, the polemical way in which Nietzsche uses the notions of *fate* and *nature* to challenge the value and viability of the Christian God (as professed in the Bible and by the Church) becomes more clear.

Drawing attention back to the quotation above, I would like to draw special attention to the infamous title of his work, *The Antichrist*, which here specifically serves to express the reason I chose him as a juxtapositional representative against the devout, Christian ethics which John Milton politically professed and poetically propounded. Where Milton utilizes the character of Satan to express complex elements and character flaws in a typological human that are

essentially antithetical to the divine will of God, Nietzsche unequivocally aligns himself with the egocentric, transvaluative rebellion that Satan represents, and he imperiously declares himself to be the Antichrist. Such a level of hubris and intentional perversity against Christianity is perhaps unrivaled in the world of literature, yet his scholastic influence may also rival that of any moralist philosopher or religious author to-date. Nietzsche sets himself apart from many (*the herd*) by defining himself as an *immoralist*[22]. However, in a world of definitive intersubjectivity, I would argue that ethics and morality are inseparably ingrained in the very *fact of our coexistence* with other humans and non-human animals. As such, I would further argue that unless one would reduce their existence to a dogmatic, unprovable solipsism, the intentions and consequences of one's actions are primordially *right or wrong*–perhaps not necessarily good or *evil*, but definitely good or *bad*[23]–if they affect the life of any other sensitive, sensible, or sentient being. However, Nietzsche's philosophy does not go as far as to posit such solipsism, so his *immorality* is a defining characteristic that warrants critical consideration. When Nietzsche uses the term *immoralist,* he is not exactly condoning immoral action in the sense of doing what one knows is morally reprehensible, but rather, he uses the term to reject dogmatic insistence on universal moral codes or laws. "[W]e immoralists have the suspicion that the decisive value of an action lies precisely in what is *unintentional* in it, while everything about it that is intentional, everything about it that can be seen, known, 'conscious,' still belongs to its surface and its

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[22] "We immoralists ourselves are the answer…" (*Twilight of the Idols* 22)
"IMMORALISTS–Unfortunately, men still think that every moralist in his every action must be a pattern for others to imitate." (Human, All Too Human 369)
[23] 'Ignorance of what is good and bad for us, in the arrangement of our mode of life, the division of our day, the selection of our friends and the time we devote to them, in business and leisure, commanding and obeying, our feeling for nature and for art, our eating, sleeping, and meditation; ignorance and lack of keen perceptions in the smallest ordinary details–this it is what makes the world 'a vale of tears' for so many.' (*Human, All Too Human* 362)

skin—which, like every skin, betrays something but *conceals* even more." (*Beyond Good and Evil* 234)

In *Twilight of the Idols*, he embraces an existentialist mission to wage war against cultural ideals and idols which he perceives to be unacceptably detrimental to the evolution of humanity, whose purpose he always argues is the pursuance of the *Übermensch*. He keenly posits that, "Morality is only an interpretation of certain phenomena, or, more definitely, a *misinterpretation* of them." (*Twilight of the Idols* 30) Now, I would like to stress Nietzsche's position that morality, throughout history, is *always* considered to be a misinterpretation of certain phenomena, by drawing our attention back to the motif of Milton's theological definition of human history as being a *concatenation of errors.* Errors and misinterpretations, or misjudgments are synonymous to the extent that aligning these separate interpretations of the same motif is beneficial to expanding our phenomenological understanding of the two minds. To summarize, Milton explicitly argues that the tragic propagation of suffering and vanity that defines the unfolding of humanity's (sym)pathetic legacy is ultimately the work of an ineffable, inescapable, fatalistically unstoppable, and divine Will. As such, humanity for Milton has been metaphysically determined by the overarching will of God and, in effect, subjected to a tragi-comic concatenation of inevitable missteps that will inexorably lead to the final Judgment and which ultimately places each human character of this divine comedy into a final state of eternal afterlife, either with *the good* in heaven or with *the evil* in hell. In contradistinction, Nietzsche dismisses such dramatic postulations as being the product of *Romanticism*[24], mere fantasy or, at best, as being the metaphorical expression of mythical and aesthetic representation that indicates

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[24] Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's stance toward romanticism in his lectures as documented in the book *Nietzsche*: "'A romantic is an artist whose great dissatisfaction with himself makes him creative—one who averts his glance from himself and his fellows and looks back." (132)

the manifestation of the *will to power* through the mode of creation. As such, Nietzsche's

declaration that "God is dead!" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) is founded in the progression of

cultural and philosophical dialectics in the West which has thus far resulted in the formal

refutation of God the good as defined by Christian doctrine (especially in terms of

fundamentalist arguments that rely far too heavily on the authority of the Bible as the absolute

word of God, as the *book par excellence*[25]. In terms of the Reformation, it is orienting to note the

little fact that the Bible–the Gutenberg Bible (1455 AD), to be precise–was literally the first book

to be printed and, thus, enjoyed the enterprising benefits of being the *only* book in public

circulation for a significant moment in history. Ironically, the technological revolution that

occurred through the Renaissance resulted in the very machine of its undoing: The Guttenberg

press, to be precise. The mechanical replication and dissemination of the Bible was tantamount

to a strategic, highly efficient, proselytizing campaign that sook to resist and counteract the

Renaissance movement which signaled the socio-political re-ascension of ancient, noble, anti-

Christian sentiments and which looked favorably upon philosophy, science, and the aesthetics of

mythology. In his earliest work, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, Nietzsche

precociously posits that:

> "...this is the way in which religions are wont to die out: under the stern, intelligent eyes
> of an orthodox dogmatism, the mythical premises of a religion are systematized as a sum
> total of historical events; one begins apprehensively to defend the credibility of the
> myths, while at the same time one opposes any continuation of their natural vitality and
> growth; the feeling for myth perishes, and its place is taken by the claim of religion to
> historical foundations. (75)"

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[25] Nietzsche points out the philological evolution that resulted in the Christian bible in Beyond Good and Evil: "To
have glued this New Testament, a kind of rococo of taste in every respect, to the Old Testament to make one book,
as the 'Bible,' as 'the book par excellence'—that is perhaps the greatest audacity and 'sin against the spirit' that
literary Europe has on its conscience." (*Beyond Good and Evil* 52)

Within these lines of insight, the orientation of Nietzsche's critical philosophy becomes fundamentally apparent: religious dogmatism brazenly and detrimentally undermines the aesthetically edifying potential that mythological interpretations can provide for the intellectual and experiential growth of humanity, both individually, and en masse.

Part 3

"All naturalism in morality, i.e. all healthy morality, is ruled by an instinct of life." (*Twilight of the Idols* 21)

In this section, let us explore the critiques that Nietzsche makes of Christianity's *orthodox dogmatism* which he calls "one great curse … the one immortal blemish of mankind" (*The Antichrist* 134). To begin, it does well to explicate the meaning of what Nietzsche terms *master/slave morality*. He uses these terms to critically delineate between opposing types of people who he sees as either representing a stronger, ruling-class of people, or a weaker, ruled-class. In particular, the entire Jewish people is defined as a slave class in relation to the Romans, or the Egyptians. However, as will be seen, the complexity of Nietzsche's theory establishes room for gradation of rank within both the 'master' and 'slave' classes. For instance, within the confines of ancient Jewish culture, Nietzsche specifically distinguishes the priest from the common slave according to the former's proclivity for political action and organization that is rooted in their own will to power. As such, he argues that each *class/type* of people develop their own moral valuations based on their visceral experience. Experiences of existential strength, triumph, and fulfillment or those of weakness, defeat and oppression impress the individual through a penetrating affectation which can motivate, challenge, demean, or deter the efforts and esteem of one's will. In the case of Christianity, he presents us with an analysis of how Christian

ethics essentially evolved from the tradition, culture, and mythos of Judaism in response to the

generational subjection that ultimately crescendoed in their moral revolt against the Roman

empire in the form of Jesus' exemplary life and teaching[26]. This morality of the Gospel that

preached salvation for the meek is fundamentally juxtaposed against the original, *noble* morality

of the Romans which, to Nietzsche, was superior in its glorification of pride, strength, war, and

stoicism. Essentially, Nietzsche uses the terms *noble* morality and *master* morality

interchangeably, and the following quote serves to ground his conception of such master/noble

morality:

> Self-glorification … the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the
> happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the
> noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but
> prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power. The noble human being honors
> himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself, who knows
> how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and
> respects all severity and hardness. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 395)

Tying into our discussion above, note the focus Nietzsche brings to the importance of

power, and particularly, power over oneself. He carefully aligns the internal source of such

power with one's aptitude for affectation, or sensibility toward experience. The supremely

subjective *feeling* and *consciousness* of oneself reveals the willpower one commands while

simultaneously factoring in the various resistances and limitations the world imposes upon the

problematized *free-will* of the individual self. As Heidegger expands in his lectures on Nietzsche,

"In feeling, a state opens up, and stays open, in which we stand related to things, to ourselves,

and to the people around us, always simultaneously." (*Nietzsche* 51) However, despite the

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[26] In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, expounding upon Christianity's hangman's metaphysics, Nietzsche dissects the core mythos of the crucifixion, "that stroke of genius on the part of Christianity: God himself sacrifices himself for the guilt of mankind, God himself makes payment to himself, God as the only being who can redeem man from what has become unredeemable for man himself. (528)

aversions and difficulties that present themselves to an individual, Nietzsche calls for us–those who genuinely will to *become* themselves–to develop the virtue of *hardness*, the strength of mental fortitude over the suffering we endure and observe. On the other hand, Nietzsche juxtapositionally represents Christian morality as a manifestation of *slave morality* that arose in reaction and resistance to the externally imposed state of exile, exploitation, and dehumanization. Jewish experiences of exile and exploitation are well documented in the Old Testament and continued during the reign of the Roman Empire after their diaspora when the Romans conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. For Nietzsche, the Christian ethic was born through the life and heritage of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jew who became Jesus Christ for Christians, but *from* the Jewish expectation of the Messiah who would politically save them. As such, for Nietzsche, Jesus represents the link that perpetuated the master-slave relationship out of Judaism and into/through the new religion of Christianity. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche asks the reader to consider: "This Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this 'Redeemer' who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, the sick, and the sinners—was he not this seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form, a seduction, and a bypath to precisely those *Jewish* values and new ideals?" (471) Where *master* morality exhibits itself as naturally emanating from a state of strength, self-affirmation, and self-assurance, *slave* morality emerges as a psychological reaction that serves to alleviate existential suffering, dread, and hopelessness. To expand these notions, let us first examine some of Nietzsche's thoughts in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and peruse a few of Nietzsche's other lifeworks.

To expound on the movement of cultural evolution that occurs in western society through the natural contention of ruling/ruled classes, Nietzsche presents us with the vital notion of *ressentiment*, which is key to his critical, transvaluative philosophy: "Renaissance … but Judea

immediately triumphed again, thanks to that thoroughly plebeian (German and English) *ressentiment* movement called the Reformation." (*Genealogy* 489 - 490) In *On the Genealogy of Morals,* he argues that "The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values." (472)*:* In *Beyond Good and Evil,* he defines slave morality: *"*A pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man that will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition. … Which serve[s] to ease existence for those who suffer … Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility." (397) Then, in *The Antichrist,* he aligns this slave morality with the ethics of Christianity and explicitly presents the teachings of Jesus Christ as a *fateful* manifestation of morality that effectively served to counter the master morality of the Roman Empire. In Nietzsche's terms: "We alone are divine…Christianity was a victory, [but] a *nobler* type of character was destroyed by it,--Christianity has been the greatest misfortune hitherto of mankind.—" (120)

Expanding upon Nietzsche's conceptualization of the phenomenon of *ressentiment* will help us to better understand the dynamic that he insists occurred within the transvaluative progression of Western society. Firstly, this *ressentiment* is to be understood as an internal state, mode, or attunement in which the innate *will to power* is afflicted by the overbearing adversity of oppressive circumstances. As we've been discussing the *master/slave* dialectic, the notion of *ressentiment* can be intuitively grasped as an affectual resentfulness that arises within the slave's moral psyche in reaction to the callous cruelty of the ruling class. However, *ressentiment* is more than mere contempt for an enemy. *Ressentiment* is a prolonged, psychological state that involves the restructuring of one's values by means of self-deception and is driven by the defiant will to power. As Nietzsche's Zarathustra philosophizes, "Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master." (*Thus Spoke*

Zarathustra 114) Bernard Reginster does an excellent job of exploring this notion of

ressentiment in his work *Nietzsche on Ressentiment and Valuation*, especially in regard to the

moral slave revolt that resulted in the Christian religion. His work particularly explicates this

dynamic by highlighting the role of the *priest* who Nietzsche explicitly designates as a *noble*

type of individual in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*. These priests are classified as *noble* by

virtue of the fact that they exhibit a will to power and are *creators of values*. Bernard explicates:

"*Ressentiment revaluation* cannot be the work of the slaves, for, as Nietzsche repeatedly insists,

the slave does not create values, a privilege which belongs exclusively to the masters." (289) He

then critically concludes that "*Ressentiment* revaluation is a 'slave revolt' not because it was

fomented by the slaves, but because it consists in negating 'noble values'" (289) Crucial to note,

the will to power of these ancient priests is defined as fundamentally *corrupted* by their

underlying state of political defeat and social subjection. As such, the priests find their political

nemeses in the class of ancient *knights*–the noble warriors of antiquity– who enjoyed the

advantages and fruits of physical superiority, along with political power. Bernard further

develops the interplay of this power struggle by arguing that "The important fact [for Nietzsche]

is that the priests, who are physically 'weak' and 'unhealthy,' have their political aspirations

thwarted by the 'powerful physicality' and 'overflowing health' of the knights, and consequently

develop a pervasive sense of 'impotence'" (285)

In terms of Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols*: "The Gospels … represents the *movement*

counter to every morality of breeding, of race, and of privilege: it is *anti-Aryan* religion *par*

excellence." (32) Here, we see one of Nietzsche's radical stances in which contemporary

philosophers problematize his ethics as promoting a kind of a *neo-Platonic* elitism that can

support a racist ideology. As rationale for his position, Nietzsche argues that in order to

understand the self-defined values of a person or people, we should always consider the health and ailments that serve to determine their particular perspective. Foreshadowing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ethics[27], Nietzsche's tragic existentialism is grounded upon the idea that primordial embodiment is foundationally determinative of the human experience, perspective, and morality. The press and pull of pleasure and pain are as indisputable as our need for nutriment and nurture.

Some define Nietzsche's philosophy as *tragic realism* which, I feel, is a penetrating definition for not only his philosophy, but the factical, actualized truth of his life, as well. All individual instances of life are necessarily born to one-day die, which, minus the premise or hope for an *afterlife*, qualifies such a life as inherently tragic. However, Nietzsche does not leave us with hopelessness for meaning but rather restores agency to the individual after the *death of God*. He establishes that "One is never destroyed by anyone but oneself." (*Twilight of the Idols* 56) As such, one can no longer blame one's choices and consequential experiences on the supernatural will of some god or demon but rather, must accept the full burden of agency in one's life. Herein lays the positive component that is at the core of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. As a hypothetical imperative that posits the idea of reliving each moment of our life an infinite number of times, the possibility of eternal recurrence impels us toward and attitude of making mindful decisions that can allow for the self-affirmation of each and every one of our choices. Yet, this does not suggest that there are no external factors that may limit the freedom of one's will. These external factors are emphatically not predetermined by an unprovable god. On the

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[27] In *The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology,* Merleau-Ponty postulates "I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except so far as I am a body which rises towards the world." (*The Phenomenology Reader* 428) Then, in *The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences:* "The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence" (437) and "The perceived … it is rather a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question." (439)

contrary, our necessarily-limited-free-agency is crucially recognized as being thoroughly

tempered, conditioned, and determined by the immanent reality of past and present that has

always influenced and continues to impress an external form of existential truth upon our being.

Nietzsche goes as far as to say that:

> "The desire for the 'freedom of the will' in the superlative metaphysical sense, which still
> holds sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire
> and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world,
> ancestors, chance, and society involves nothing less than to be precisely this *causa sui*
> and, with more than Munchhausen's audacity, to pull oneself up into existence by the
> hair, out of the swamps of nothingness." (*Beyond Good and Evil* 218)

Rather, the factical reality we find ourselves within is the product of both history and

chance—of both accident and choice. Fate and Fortuna reign hand-in-hand with the Chaos of

Eternity and Self-determination. Earth itself is an improbable example of a planet that is

hospitable to life, and yet here we exist to live and die. Though tragically inclined, Nietzsche

defiantly professes that: "The overman is the meaning of the earth." (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 13)

Plain and simple: the human phenomenon not only exists within us, but is at the mercy, or

grateful behest of every individual's impact and influence. Much akin to democratic rationale,

we see that majority rule is not to be underestimated. Each human being harbors incredible

potential to not only enhance and realize their self but takes part in the legacy of future human

beings who will eventually stand upon the ground our previous generations have sown. Whether

those grounds are bountiful, or barren is within our hands. "Man is a rope, tied between beast and

overman—a rope over an abyss." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 14) To expand this allegory, we can

think of all the generations of humans walking their own tightropes across that abyss in a sort of

Olympic torch, relay-fashion. Countless torches that spark the light-fire of subsequent torches

that sometimes burn the rope upon which they brave the demands of mortal life. Generations of

families constellate across tens of thousands of years and intermingle to create the tapestry of humankind's tragic, existential legacy: a legacy which is vulnerable and utterly dependent upon the individual lives of those who carry the torch, for those ropes are flammable themselves, and exceedingly vulnerable to the ambitious reach of humans as lives continue to further intertwine across the globe. As such, this web of ropes, which metaphorically depicts the actuality of humankind's metahistorical legacy through time, hangs in suspense of its own actualization and future fate which remains to be actualized: Either demise at the negligence of innumerable *last men*, or improvement and furtherance through intentional existentiality that pursues health, strength, and the potentiality of actualizing the aesthetic triumph of the ever improving and improvable *Übermensch*.

Part 4

"Your words, your actions should continually make the bible superfluous, in fact, through you a new Bible should continually come into being." (*Human, All Too Human* 278)

To conclude this chapter on Friedrich Nietzsche's existentialist philosophy as a counterargument to the socio-political influences of Christianity, I bring our attention to his theory of the *transvaluation of all values* which is integral to pursuing the *Übermensch*. I have already expanded on the way in which Nietzsche explains the advent of Christianity from the slave revolt that emerged from Judaism, yet to consider transvaluation as an inherently negative, or harmful, phenomenon would be to miss the positive aspects of Nietzsche's thought that seeks to take us beyond the strictures of good and evil, and which intends to steer the course of our species' evolution away from the terminal threat he terms the last man.

While Nietzsche's theory of critique of Christian values focuses on the transvaluation of noble values when "*ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values," (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 472) his call for a transvaluation of *all* values is explicitly defined by the logical quantifier *all*. No value whatsoever enjoys privilege when *all* are subject to critical examination. Thus, transvaluation becomes a methodological imperative that demands a radical and perpetual, existential integrity that ought to be embraced by every individual who recognizes the danger defined by the last man. Nietzsche's Zarathustra presents us with an allegory that metaphorically expresses the way in which one undergoes the transformative task of transvaluation in the section entitled 'On the Three Metamorphoses.' In the first stage, the spirit must become a camel. In the second, the camel must become a lion. And in the third stage, that lion must become a child. The first two stages involve embracing reality and responsibility, while the final stage allows one to realize a state of innocence and creation. Now, how this relates to transvaluation is that the camel represents "the spirit that would bear much" and accepts the burden of all values that have come to be carried upon one's back. Values imposed by family, educators, religions, society, and ultimately, history itself are a burden that beg to be borne. Rather than ignore the gravity of all these realities, Nietzsche calls for us to courageously accept the weight of it all in order to prove the strength of our resolve. One cannot ignore reality but must instead carry it upon one's back and speed into the figurative desert so that one may begin to understand the massive truths that unconfronted would pull the meek spirit into careless (or, as Heidegger would term: inauthentic) orbit. Nietzsche would agree that we are thrown into this world yet insists that the will must realize its own power by embracing its factical historicity as an existential challenge of the utmost importance. In the West, this particularly means taking on the burden of examining the values and consequences of Christianity, democracy, capitalism,

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civil rights, and the plethora of cultural influences that arrive from abroad; particularly, as I will emphasize in the next chapter: Eastern philosophy. To evoke Nietzsche's words in *Beyond Good and Evil* which iterate similar notions*:* "With the strength of his spiritual eye and insight grows distance and, as it were, the space around man: his world becomes more profound; ever new stars, ever new riddles and images become visible for him." (258)

The next movement in Nietzsche's metamorphoses involves the action of passing judgment on all those inherited values which have been borne by the individual in the camel stage. Where the camel indiscriminately accepts the burden of understanding all external values that have been imposed from without, by what Heidegger terms, the *They*, the metaphorical animal one must become in the second stage is *the lion*. This lion is named "I will," and must go to transvaluative war with a great dragon named "Thou shalt." To the discerning philosopher, it becomes clear that Nietzsche means to specifically evoke his notions of the will to power in contention against life denying systems such as Christianity which is fundamentally defined by the *Thou shalts* of the 10 Commandments. Zarathustra describes this dragon named 'Thou shalt': "Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: 'All value of all things shines on me. All value has long been created, and I am all created value." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 27) As such, 'I will,' this lion of Nietzsche's, represents radical self-affirmation in the colossal face of looming, self-denying, rule-imposing, external authority. In order to vanquish the dragon, one must have the courage to pass existential judgment upon all values. Such judgment is simplistically defined by the proclamations of what Nietzsche terms a *sacred 'No'* and a *sacred 'Yes*.' That is, one must defiantly reject those values which do not serve to strengthen the self, and at the same time, one must affirm and uplift the self by declaring 'Yes!' to those values which ring true to the betterment of one's will to power.

To better guide our understanding of what these values might be, we can return to Nietzsche's thoughts in *The Antichrist*, in which he simplifies: "What is good?—All that increases the feeling of power, will to power, power itself, in man. What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness." (78) The lion is representative of strength and pride while being clearly antithetical to the meekness of slave morality which Nietzsche detests. The lion has no place within a herd but rather lives to lead by determining value for itself. This stage of the metamorphoses does promote a potentially problematic, warlike attitude, yet the next stage–beyond the violent struggle of existential transvaluation–brings us to a place of peace and innocence. After the burdensome journey through the desert as a camel, and after the battle of 'I will' against 'Thou shalt,' one must become "finally, a child."

> "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes.' For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 27)

And thus, for Nietzsche, so it goes. The self who embraces their own will to power and undertakes the task to transvaluate all values ultimately enjoys the fruits of victory: that taste of innocence and freedom from bondage. The spirit is no longer conquered by the imposition of countless authorities, but rather, is self-liberated and intimately attuned with one's own ethicality. Ethicality indeed remains yet refined from the crudity of external authority. This is what Nietzsche means by calling for us to move beyond good and evil: Not that we reject morality itself, but that we reject the idolatrous contrivances that social and religious authorities have placed before us. Life is not so simple as fitting each and every unique individual into a predefined mold, but rather is so multifaceted in its complexity that each individual must contend with their own dragon of authoritative oppression in order that they might free themselves of

inauthentic determination and enjoy the nectars of authentic, existential existence. Only by doing

so do we stand a chance of defending our progeny from the degeneration of humanity that

defines Nietzsche's *last man*. Only by questioning, challenging, and judging the morass of

influences which threaten to predetermine our purpose and reality do we hope to find fulfillment

and proffer a fighting chance for the advent of the *Übermensch*. As Nietzsche's Zarathustra

professes and asks of us: "All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do

you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome

man?" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 12) For the sake of humanity and each individual self that

composes it, we must passionately proclaim that we reject becoming that ebb and will further

ourselves in pursuance of creating the overman! As Bernd Magnus argues in his work

Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche's Übermensch, "The attitude portrayed is supposed to be

that of affirmation, overfullness; the attitude which expresses ascending life, life in and as

celebration." (635) In contradistinction to the nihilism Nietzsche recognizes at the heart of

Christianity which denies the value of this life in favor of an after-life, Nietzsche's existentialism

"expresses [the value of] ascending life" and thus implicitly demands that we reevaluate and

transvaluate our relationship to the earth itself. For, the earth is the ground from which we were

born, the place in which we procreate and dwell, and it is currently the single source of necessary

nutriment through which we survive and are able to thrive. As such, Zarathustra prophesizes in

somewhat enigmatic terms: "he will rebaptize the earth–'the light one.'" (*Thus Spoke*

Zarathustra 192)

To rebaptize suggests a divine valuation that once existed and must be reestablished. It

becomes clear through Nietzsche's continual critique of Christian values that human valuation of

the earth itself has been destructively perverted by the seductive promise of heaven, which he

terms a "phantasmagoria of anticipated future bliss." (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 484) Where

this fantasy holds sway, the fantasizer loses his or her grasp of the importance of the earth and

our responsibility to future generations. All earthly value dwindles in comparison to the eternal,

infinite reward that is promised in heaven. However, such dangerous distraction must be

revealed as the phantasmagoric siren's call that it is, if we are to steer clear of impending

disaster.

The irresponsibility of humankind has proven to be increasingly destructive towards the

earth's biosphere and her hospitableness to life grows weaker by the day. Each day of

unsustainable resource depletion threatens the balance of the Holocene[28] and brings the global

security of our species closer to the brink of catastrophe. As discussed above, spreading

desertification and the increasing probability of catastrophic climate crisis can no longer be

ignored and demand our will power through collective action. The imperative of Nietzsche's

existentialism is invaluable to conceptualizing this necessary transvaluation. We cannot stand

idly by while our species' survival draws closer to annihilation by means of our own

irresponsible, unsustainable, environmental practices. "Rather must we boldly face the great task

of preparing the earth for a plant of the most ample and joyous fruitfulness–a task set by reason

to reason." (*Human, All Too Human* 424) For the sake of each self, and for the sake of creating

the Übermensch, we must care for the earth and restore her to bounteous health. To do this

requires the willpower of humanity across the globe, and as such, we in the West must embrace

and support our brothers and sisters in the East, and more so, all forms of life that we share the

earth with. And so, I end this chapter to begin the next which aims to bridge the divide between

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[28] Clive Hamilton defines the Holocene in *Defiant Earth* as "the 10,000-year epoch of mild and constant climate that permitted civilization to flourish." (4)

East and West that, I hope, convinces my readers of the benefit of rethinking the religious,

literary, and philosophical roots of our current ecological crisis.

CHAPTER 3: Potential for creating a more holistic and global Environmental Ethics through the engagement of ulterior perspectives, for example, Indian Philosophy

"They live in freedom who have gone beyond the dualities of life." (*Bhagavad Gita* 25)

As it stands today, and as it has been conceptualized for much of our history, the world is imagined as divided into spatial hemispheres. The East and the West designate two halves of the whole which is planet Earth, but this distinction divides rather than unifies the disparate cultures of the people who live in separate hemispheres. While language and cultural differences seem to be natural barriers that prevent humans of either hemisphere from understanding and properly valuing humans from the other hemisphere, these barriers, I maintain, are merely appearances and the sedimented result of unexamined beliefs. Instead, it would be better to consider ourselves as living within an interconnected, interdependent world and ecosystem which concerns us all. Within this context of global concern, all claims to totalizing authority or fragmenting, pride-driven polemics are unhelpful in addressing the very real dangers of anthropocentric-driven, environmental disasters.

Up until now, I have been working at understanding just one example of these kinds of polemic. My first chapter lays out a way of thinking about the role that a Miltonian, poeticizing treatment of Christianity has played in bringing us to the brink of this disaster and in my second chapter on Nietzsche, I interpret his powerful critique of that treatment and the history of Christianity.

The truth is that we are all in this together, fated to dwell and flourish or dwell and one day perish on this island-of-a-planet we call Earth. While fear and hatred drive individuals into caves of ignorance and self-armament, the life-sustaining Earth system upon which we all rely

continues to be compromised and corrupted by unconscientious mishandling. We cannot remain

transfixed within these vicious cycles, but rather, we must realign our words and deeds if we

hope to steer humanity away from the brink of calamity. It is time to unite the world in common

cause: embracing responsibility toward future generations, non-human life in general, and the

ecological health of the planet Earth. This last chapter of my thesis introduces some possible

ways to move us towards this task of uniting humans the world over in this common cause.

This ethical task of uniting disparate cultures for the sake of a common cause involves

building a conceptual bridge and network of empathetic understanding. Without *caring* about

others, any effort to struggle for another is essentially groundless. To re-evoke the

phenomenological ethics which I discussed at the beginning of this thesis, it is important to

consider contextual notions of *sedimentation*. Every single experience incurred through one's

existence forms the ground of one's lived-world perspective. As such, our potential for empathy

relies upon the actuality of our embodied, lived experiences, including, but not limited to, our

interactions with people and perspectives that are conceptually foreign to our own. While it may

be physically infeasible for many to directly interact with other cultures through face-to-face

interaction, literature, music, and artwork allow for us to indirectly commune with the ideational

voice of others—especially in the Information Age. Many stubbornly insist upon ignoring the

works of foreign people based solely upon their bias for their own familiar aesthetics and

spirituality. In Christianity, for instance, holy writings of other religions are seen as explicit

heresies that serve as temptations that can only lead to eternal damnation. Milton's portrayal of

pagan gods as being idolatrous demons in Satan's legion serves to emphasize this point. Such

religious bias clearly promotes xenophobia which invariably undermines an aim for ethical

unification against a common existential threat. As such, I argue that a phenomenological

approach to understanding our own biases behooves our mission to confront the current and impending climate crisis. Using Husserl's *epoché*[29] is also an invaluable tool that can be used to intentionally engage with the spiritual and philosophical beliefs of other cultures. By putting conceptual worlds *in parentheses*, even the most devout Christian, Muslim, or atheist can consider the aesthetic and ethical ideas that are being portrayed in the religious mythologies of other cultures and peoples. Religious texts can be intellectually engaged with, firstly, as art, rather than as heresy, propaganda, or nonsense. In this way, we can begin to create a ground of intentional empathy and begin to build a conceptual bridge between disparate worlds of spiritual belief. In this way, I call on my readers to expand their ethical horizons and answer the call of *Kairos*: firstly, by opening their minds to the inherent human condition, and secondly by intentionally endeavoring to engage with works of literature and philosophy which *other* cultures value and proffer.

While the world outside of Western culture includes far too many works of spirituality and philosophy to even begin a comprehensive gloss in this thesis, I will draw attention to some poignant ideas within Indian philosophy that I feel provide for a more holistically ethical approach to our relationship with other peoples, non-human animals, non-animal life, and Earth-as-a-whole. Including these ideas from Indian philosophy is important for how they provide essential elements that could constitute an alternative to the kind of anthropocentric ecological crisis which I have outlined in my first two chapters. In particular, I chose to highlight Hindu

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[29] Deemed the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl utilizes and promotes the use of the epoché as a methodological tool for examining phenomena in their own essence and apart from extraneous contexts or manipulations. In *Noesis and Noema*, he highlights the method: "Let us now go to the <transcendental> phenomenological attitude. The transcendent world receives its 'parenthesis,' we exercise the [*epoché*] in relation to <positing> its actual being." (Husserl 136) He also refers to this parenthesizing method of the epoché in *Pure Phenomenology*: "the Objective world is as if it were placed in brackets." (Husserl 130)

philosophy and spirituality specifically due to its unique contrast with the anthropocentric monotheism of Christianity and the anthropocentric egoism of Nietzsche's existentialism.

Though my thesis does aim to surpass the self-defeating limitations of both institutional Christianity and Nietzsche's Dionysian-inspired-tragically-inclined existentialism, by no means do I think we should *scrap* either worldview *in toto.* Instead, the only path over-and-beyond the ecological and sociopolitical impasse we face–the advent of the last man as situated within the existential implications of the Anthropocene–is to *transvaluate* the content and consequences of each by recognizing each as embodying historical, cultural perspectives that are pertinent to the lived-world-experience of not only our shared-world but that of each and every individual *subject of a life* that shares this planet as *home.* Cultural perspectives become cultural norms which lead to certain kinds of actual words and deeds. As my study shows, such norms become religious myths–like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and/or philosophical theories–such as Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. These myths and theories, in turn, serve to make sense of the universe for the masses which are necessarily composed of individuals (both scholars and laymen) as they raise questions that are central to the quintessential human condition: Am I alone? Am I real? Am I free? What happens after death? Is there a God? What is the purpose of life? Is there hope? If there is hope–what does that hope mean, and how do I do what that hope requires or demands? What does all this mean? What does meaning matter? But perhaps most importantly, for my thesis, what does this mean for our future and a healthy, sustainable, ethically nurtured environment?

Hesiod had tragi-comic feelings about the notion of hope, which deserve a brief gloss in order to further found the aim of ethical orientation through what I term *phenomenological transvaluation*. In Hesiod's *Work and Days*, hope is characterized as being an insidious *curse* by

being placed within the set of curses that Pandora let loose from her titillatingly-tempting, gift of a box (61-62). She was gifted that box by Prometheus' titanic brother Epimetheus, whose nomenclature denotes 'after-thought' (in thematic juxtaposition of Prometheus' name which means 'fore-thought'.) After the fact, Pandora closes her fated box, trapping *hope* within. As such, not only is hope classified as a *curse* in ancient Greek mythos, but it is also metaphorically recognized as something of which humanity is left bereft. Influentially, this conceptualization is too conspicuous to ignore when considering the *nihilistic* tendencies which Nietzsche criticizes western society as invariably veering toward. Ancient humans seemed to temporarily accede to a tragically inclined spirituality which portrayed the afterlife as a transient, bereft affair expressed by the phrase, *shades of Hades*. However, the ancient Greek religion faded into history as human society redefined its spiritual faith in favor of eternal life which conquers death. As such, hope found a place in the notion of heaven and an omnibenevolent God. I agree with Nietzsche in his argument against the misstep of placing inherent value in this *phantasmagoria of bliss*, and adopting *opiate virtues* in the process. Masses of devout Christians are indoctrinated so as to turn a blind eye to the ails of the physical world and to look, rather, to a beacon beyond the fog of death. This internalization of experience has proven to have detrimental consequences, as we consider the results society has reaped through viewing the rest of the lived-world as mere resources. Hope need not be held aloft in some metaphysical realm, beyond the veil. We need to find hope here, where we live and within hands' reach. Only then, through the work of our hands, can we begin to actualize a way of attaining that hope.

Levinas would take this analogy further and say that we ought to find hope in intersubjectivity itself which is epitomized in the face-to-face encounter. Here, before this digression becomes unnecessarily tangential, I draw our attention back to Eastern modes of

thought. However, for conceptual continuity, we will transition with the face-to-face phenomena at the front of our mind as we consider the face of Krishna as revealed in chapter 11 of *The Bhagavad Gita*, which is titled "The Cosmic Vision". The aspect we are invited to view with the mind's eye is that of the infinite Godhead of Indian philosophy. Where we speculated in chapter 1 upon the *image of God* within the context of Christianity, here, again, we turn our imaginative faculty toward the *image* of God as manifestly attested to through the mystical, Hindu perspective: "There, within the body of the God of gods, Arjuna saw all the manifold forms of the universe united as one." (*Bhagavad Gita* 59)

To better grasp the significance of the Cosmic Vision, we must first clarify the characters of Krishna and Arjuna within the epic narrative. To begin with, Arjuna is primarily to be understood as a human being, though he is specifically part of the warrior caste within the context of ancient Indian society. Krishna, on the other hand is first believed to merely be Arjuna's chariot-driver, but in due course, as Arjuna supplicates himself and asks for his guidance, Krishna is revealed to be an avatar of Vishnu, the preserver god of Indian mythology. As Bina Gupta explains in *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy (Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom)*, "The principal speaker is Krsna [Krishna], who, according to the *Gita*, is an incarnation of the lord Vishnu in human form. Hence, the title 'The Song (*Gita*) of the Lord (*Bhagavad)*." (278) Within this mythical context, specifically, in relation to Krishna, Arjuna is intended to represent not only a certain type of person, but the quintessential human being. As I will be showing through this chapter, Arjuna embodies the fundamental human condition and the ontological potential of each individual therein. The title of the first chapter (The War Within) establishes the argument that, as we follow the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, we are meant to interpret the conversation as an allegory for the internal dialogue of the

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conscious *self.* In his preface to his translation of *The Bhagavad Gita*, Eknath Easwaran

highlights the importance of metaphorical/allegorical interpretation:

> Arjuna and Krishna are then no longer merely characters in a literary masterpiece. Arjuna becomes Everyman, asking the Lord himself, Sri Krishna, the personal questions about life and death–not as a philosopher but as the quintessential man of action. Thus read, the Gita is not an external dialogue but an internal one: between the ordinary human personality, full of questions about the meaning of life, and our deepest Self, which is divine." (*Bhagavad Gita* xix)

As such, contrary to Christianity which defines divine truth as being confined to the

pages of the bible, communion with the *divine* in Indian thought is to be understood as innately

accessible to everyone who learns to simply listen to the *Self* through the practice of meditation. I

draw particular attention to the capitalization of "Self" and "self" within the last few sentences,

as the distinction is intentional and will be further clarified as we consider the ontological

importance of the Brahman/brahman and Atman/atman distinctions within Indian thought. To

simplify, the lower-case versions designate individual selves in the sense of nouns, while the

upper-case indicates the metaphysical essence of each idea as the proper pronoun for each. A *self*

is a sentient being, while the Self is the *sentience* of being. The latter is a universal which is the

primordial ground from which the infinite manifestations of the former are endowed with

existence and sentience, or ontological being and epistemological ability, respectively. The

vision Arjuna receives shows the awesome splendor of a God that is not confined to

anthropomorphic qualities, but that truly embodies an infinite, eternal, transcendental

immanence. Arjuna vocalizes in wonder and amazement:

> "Oh Lord, I see within your body all the gods and every kind of living creature. I see Brahma, the Creator, seated on a lotus; I see the ancient sages and the celestial serpents. I see infinite mouths and arms, stomachs and eyes, and you are embodied in every form. I see you everywhere, without beginning, middle, or end. You are the Lord of all creation, and the cosmos is your body.

…

> You are the supreme, changeless Reality, the one thing to be known. You are the refuge of all creation, the immortal spirit, the eternal guardian of eternal dharma." (60)

Here, the repeated use of the universal quantifier "*all*" is intended to be absolutely inclusive in each case, which presents us with a divinity that is *beyond good and evil*. However, this does not go to say that there is no sense of *right and/or wrong* to be found in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Rather, the concept of *dharma* evokes notions of proper function and purpose that underlies the incredible complexity of both the natural universe and the internal experience of all beings. As Bina Gupta elucidates, "The term *'dharma'* … signifies the harmonious course of things; at times, it refers to a necessary attribute (the *dharma* of water is to flow, of the sun to shine); at other times, to religion; and, still at other times, it refers to duty in its normative aspect. *Dharma* in the last sense … means the rules and laws which individuals should follow." (12) Every individual has their own unique duty[30] (*dharma*) to themselves and the world they touch upon, but there is also *eternal dharma,* as noted above. In the last words of chapter 11, Krishna punctuates the significance of the Cosmic Vision by focusing upon the core of this *eternal dharma*: "Arjuna, you can know me, see me, and attain union with me. Whoever makes me the supreme goal of all his work and acts without selfish attachment, who devotes himself to me completely and is free from ill will for any creature, enters into me." (*Bhagavad Gita* 65) As such, in an important sense, personal dharma boils down to the intentionality of one's disposition in terms of alignment with eternal dharma–in particular, ill will (toward *any* creature) is adverse to the proper attunement of one's dharma. Much akin to Levinas' phenomenological ethics, the face of the other calls out to me, but not only from the eyes of suffering humanity, but from the

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[30] "In short, dharma is the Hindu counterpart of Western 'moral duty.'" (Gupta 12)

eyes of all life which suffers at the hands of fate, mortality, and human vice. Each of us is called to recognize the significance of our actions/inactions, and to understand the difference between acting through mindfulness as opposed to ignorance. As such, the Indian term *karma* is invaluable to our interpretation.

Karma is most easily understood in terms of cause and effect. For every cause (or action) there will always arise, in turn, consequential effects. Sometimes the resultant effects of an action are instantly ostensible, but at other times, the consequences of an action can take more time to become fully manifest. Eknath Easwaran supports this definition in his preface: "Literally, *karma* means 'something that is done.' Often it can be translated as 'deed' or 'action.' The law of karma states simply that every event is both a cause and an effect. … every act, every karma, is also the consequence of some previous karma." (*Bhagavad Gita* xxvii) To deepen our understanding of the concept, we should know that karma is not only manifest as physical phenomena, but perhaps more importantly, as internalized (mental) phenomena, as well. Our act of harming another individual not only results in the pain of the other, but will also likely create a sense of anger, fear, or resentment within the other's mind. On the other hand, the one who inflicted the harm may become more easily disposed to harming again, or may internalize a sense of guilt, shame, and regret–or a mental repression of these negative self-perceptions. The bottom-line is: repercussions are inevitable when actions are actualized; life does not take place within a vacuum–no tree that falls in the forest goes unheard, so long as there is even a single insect to witness the happening. While these ideas might intimidate one into a fearful state of inaction, the Gita establishes the position that "[t]he wise see that there is action in the midst of inaction and inaction in the midst of action." (25) This wisdom can be quite easily intuited when reflected upon and grounds the vital imperative of the Gita which calls for the renunciation of selfish

motives along with an attitude of selfless mindfulness that recognizes the inherent value of all life. As such, *karma* can be either a boon to the spiritual aspirant, or a viciously cyclical inclination that has been fostered by the egotistical selfishness of the ignorant. "They live in wisdom who see themselves in all and all in them, who have renounced every selfish desire and sense craving tormenting the heart." (*Bhagavad Gita* 14) Again, the quantifier *all* is intentionally–and radically–inclusive, here. There is no hierarchy of ethical importance when it comes to sentient beings; shape, size, and complexity are merely incidental in a universe where life itself is considered divine, and as such, kindness towards *all* becomes our ultimate aim.

To return to this thesis' central concern with the climate crisis–which the majority of the global scientific community agrees upon and calls our attention to–expanding our ethical responsibility beyond humankind alone is essential to our confrontation with the Anthropocene. The frameworks put forth in Christian doctrine and Nietzsche's tragic existentialism, as I have argued above, fall short of providing sufficient motivation for their theoretical devotees to expand their moral considerations/commitments beyond human beings alone, and this is where an open mindedness toward other perspectives becomes invaluable. Viewing an object, a problem, or the world from just one angle limits our perspective in a stifling way, but when we take the effort to view things from all angles, our comprehension becomes more informed and useful, especially in the context of problem solving. That being said, *The Bhagavad Gita* is not the only work that contains wisdom and perspective that can help readers to break free of detrimental "mind-forg'd manacles[31]" (William Blake 302) and to better understand the wondrous complexity of the world and of themselves. This task remains one which each

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[31] In his short poem *London,* in his collection *Songs of Experience*, William Blake expresses the contradictions between mankind's actions and their preaching of Christian ethics and their claims on salvation.

individual needs to embrace and strive for through their own will power, however, there is certainly support to be found in others, as long as one seeks to find that support. This brings us to an imperative proclaimed by Krishna: "Reshape yourself through the power of your will; never let yourself be degraded by self-will. The will is the only friend of the Self, and the will is the only enemy of the Self." (*Bhagavad Gita* 33) Here, Nietzsche would staunchly agree, and to direct his listeners toward the ultimate goal of self-discovery, his Zarathustra declares this unequivocal imperative: "Now I bid you lose me and find *yourselves* [my emphasis]; and only *when you have all denied me* will I return to you." (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 78) True purpose and personal meaning dwells within the beating breast of each living being who has the will to seek that truth.

And to conclude this final chapter, which is of an intentionally prospective nature, I turn to a prolific advocate of non-violence and devout proponent of the Bhagavad Gita–Mahatma Gandhi. In his work *The Bhagavad According to Gandhi*, he graciously expresses: "The Gita is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meaning you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching." (242) The potential of meaning to be found within the Gita defies any claim to a monopolization of knowledge as is seen when religions claim doctrinal authority. Rather, it invites any and all aspirants to engage and interpret its meaning on a personal level, through the inherent capability which it recognizes as residing at the core of the human experience. The integral purpose and meaning of the Bhagavad Gita does not disguise ulterior motives of domination or nihilistic debasement, but rather, it seeks to show us the

interconnectedness and kinship of all life. The way I interpret these notions is that life itself is revealed as being tantamount to the divine, as the essence of God resides within the phenomenon of consciousness itself. As emphasized in the wisdom expounded by Krishna: "the Self can never be tainted though it dwells in every creature" (*Bhagavad Gita* 72) and "I am the goal of life, the Lord and support of all, the inner witness, the abode of all." (*Bhagavad Gita* 49) This ethical teaching can be understood in conjunction with Nietzsche's exquisite conception of eternal recurrence, where "In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The center is everywhere" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 218), value and meaning transcends the strictures of egocentric and anthropocentric morality and extends to include all subjects of life.

This is not to say that there is no value in the ideas of Milton either. Inspiration can still be found, yet transvaluation of detrimental sedimentation is an imperative of existential proportion. Evocative of my heterodoxic interpretation and intimations of the Christian Holy Spirit in chapter 1, God does not merely exist externally removed from the experiences of humanity–rather, God sees, hears, tastes, touches, and smells through each of us. Pain, pleasure, love, and despair alike, may seem to us as isolated experiences, but this notion of inherent separation and alienation is to our detriment. The world–as put forth by the scientific concept of the Anthropocene–is in our hands. The reality of climate change, desertification, and mass extinction is an ongoing problem and only by uniting on a global level, can we hope to change that trajectory. With a phenomenological approach to our lives and by embracing a positive relationship towards others, perhaps we stand a chance.

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Curriculum Vitae

A somewhat well-read, decently traveled, indelibly inspired student of Literature, Philosophy, Music, and the world in which I live.

I currently hold a B.A. in English American Literature from the University of Texas at El Paso and have recently completed my Master of Arts degree in Philosophy at the same UTEP.

Today I work full-time as a Web Specialist in Business Services at NBCUniversal, where I have been working for 10 years. While I plan on pursuing advancement within NBC at the moment, I also have an undying love for education which may lead me to become a teacher, lecturer, or counselor. However, for the time-being, I plan to focus on creative writing aspirations, along with striving to improve family and community relationships.

I may pursue a Ph.D. in Literature in three years, or so, but look forward to a brief reprieve from the demands of academia while I work on tending to more intimate matters of heart and soul.

Environmental ethics will remain an active influence on the plans I choose to pursue and I look forward to amassing experience and refining an expertise in agricultural methods which I feel is fundamental to creating a more sustainable future.