

Nietzsche, Stevens, and Derrida*

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Oh, these Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial —out of profundity.

—Preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*

Pilate saith unto him [Jesus], What is truth?

—John xviii. 38

—Do I still have to add that in the entire New Testament there is only *one* solitary figure one is obliged to respect? Pilate, the roman governor.... ‘What is truth?’

—*The Anti-Christ*, 46

Why couldn’t the world *that concerns us*—be a fiction?

—*Beyond Good and Evil*, 34

Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction.

—*Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy”, 2

The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being

* The codes in the text are:

BT [Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967)]

GS [Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974)]

TSZ [Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin, 1969)]

BGE [Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966)]

TI/AC [Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin, 1968)]

EH [Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, tr. C.P. Fadiman (New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 1954)]

The numbers following the titles and the subtitles of Nietzsche’s works are section numbers, not page numbers.

CP [Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954)]

LWS [Wallace Stevens, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966)]

OP [Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957)]

NA [Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1942)]

ED [Jacque Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967)]

DG [Jacque Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967)]

EP [Jacque Derrida, *Éperons* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978)]

The numbers following the titles of these two authors’ works are page numbers.

nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.

—Adagia, *Opus Posthumous*, 163.

1

What is philosophy? Rather, let's put it this way: What should be the aim of philosophy? My answer to the question is that it should be the ultimate aim of philosophy to help human beings live their lives more fully, namely, to teach them how to live. Viewed from this standpoint, Nietzsche, *the* philosopher after Kant and Hegel, and the true inheritor of the Greeks, comes closest to the aim. For what but the aim of ministering his teachings to the "common people" does Zarathustra "go down," despite the contempt and mistrust of the rabble (hence, Nietzsche's refutation of "herd animal morality" and of political and social institutions or organizations like democracy or socialism—see BGE, 202 and 203; "The loathing of mankind, of the rabble, was always my greatest danger", says Nietzsche in EH, "Why I Am Wise," 2) and his recognition that his down-going is too early for them (Nietzsche calls himself "untimely", "posthumous", and his philosophy a "Philosophy of the Future")?

Nietzsche is at first a pessimist under the influence of Schopenhauer. He nauseates like Hamlet and Roquentin, facing the purposelessness and absurdity of existence, looking at the dark abyss of life. All Nietzsche does try to do can be interpreted as the will to transcend this desperate state. He is so eager "to stay cheerful" (the very first phrase of TI) and so eager to fly like a bird. Nietzsche's flight absolutely corresponds to Freud's trope of defense—flight from Thanatos to Eros. Nietzsche says, "There are heights of the soul from which even tragedy ceases to look tragic" (BGE, 30). *The Birth of Tragedy* is his first sermon on the heights.

Nietzsche finds an exit from the Schopenhauerian pessimism through the Greek tragic artists. In 1886, fourteen years after the first publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche added a subtitle, "Hellenism and Pessimism". "One must first of all deny Schopenhauer" (TI, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man", 36). How could Nietzsche *clinamen* from his precursor and set himself up as the first voice of a new thinking? By interpreting Greek tragedy as the extreme antipodes of pessimism. Nietzsche explains pessimism, "Conscious of the truth he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence" (BT, 7). What is the truth man has seen? It is that "No one is accountable for existing at all,He is *not* the result of a special design, a will, a purpose" (TI, "The Four Great Errors", 8). (Here Nietzsche stands against teleology as Spinoza does.) But this horrible recognition is, really paradoxically, the final step for a great rebirth. At that point, "art approaches as a saving sorceress" (BT, 7). Tragedy is an affirmation "of all that is questionable and strange in existence" (EH, "The

Birth of Tragedy", 2). This crucial phrase is once more found in *Twilight of the Idols*: "The tragic artist is *not* a pessimist —it is precisely he who *affirms* all that is questionable and terrible in existence, he is *Dionysian*" ("Reason" in Philosophy", 6). ("Dionysian" here signifies the union of the "Apollinian" and "Dionysian" of *The Birth of Tragedy*).

Nietzsche contrasts such tragic thinking and attitude with Socratic optimism which "drives *music* out of tragedy with the scourge of its syllogisms; that is, it destroys the essence of tragedy, which can be interpreted only as a manifestation and projection into images of Dionysian states, as the visible symbolizing of music, as the dream-world of a Dionysian intoxication" (BT, 14). Socratic optimism is "the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of *correcting* it" (BT, 15) and that "reason equals virtue equals happiness" (TI "The Problem of Socrates", 4). But this is a "profound" and "sublime" metaphysical *illusion*. Nietzsche says, "the way of this world is anything but divine; even by human standards it is not rational, merciful, or just. We know it well, the world in which we live is ungodly, immoral, 'inhuman'" (GS, 346). No one is accountable for the way of the world as well as his existing at all. Reason is helpless before the irrationality, inhumanity, purposelessness, designlessness of our existence in the world. Socratic optimistic belief in reason is really a "sublime" illusion. (How good would it be if everything could be accounted for by reason?) As we shall see later, this *clinamen* of Nietzsche's from Socrates is reflected in Jacques Derrida's critique of *logocentrism* and Wallace Stevens' aphorism, "Poetry must be irrational" (OP, 162).

This line of Nietzsche's thought can be labeled as pessimistic and Schopenhauerian. But as we have noted above, he swerves from Schopenhauer whose philosophy, he thinks, is *décadent* and life-negating, and finds his consolation in Greek tragedy. So, he divides pessimism into two: Dionysian pessimism and Christian pessimism (see GS, 370). Schopenhauer's philosophy is a kind of Christian pessimism which, *décadent*, is nihilistic and hostile to life (see esp. BGE, 56 and AC, 7). (It is really amusing to think of the fact that Nietzsche calls Christianity nihilistic and some critics of Nietzsche call him nihilistic). On the contrary, Dionysian pessimism is the tragic philosophy which affirms life and embraces all the unaccountable (hence, his *amor fati*). (Some people, who are puzzled by the phrase "Dionysian pessimism" because Nietzsche says, "The tragic artist is *not* a pessimist", will think him inconsistent. But the sentence must be read as: The tragic artist is not a *Christian* pessimist).

It is a well-known fact that Nietzsche rebels against Christianity. In sum, there are three interrelated reasons for his opposition to Christianity. One is that Christianity is nihilistic and life-negating. Christianity is a *denial of the possibility of brilliant life on this earth*. Nietzsche's curt aphorism, as usual, sums up the whole: "The Christian resolve to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad" (GS, 130). Another reason is connected with "the will to power" which Nietzsche believes is the

single basic *psychological* force causing all human behaviours. Christianity is a mendacity of the weak people who cannot fulfil their will to power on this earth and hope to fulfil it on the purely imaginary world. The Last Judgment, like the socialist revolution, is the weak's *ressentiment* (Nietzsche's favorite French word together with *décadent*).

The other reason is associated with Nietzsche's attack on one of the "human, all-too-human" foibles, the tendency toward idealism—the tendency to fabricate purely imaginary beings and things. Plato's philosophy which presupposes the world of Idea is a typical case in point. Nietzsche asserts, "the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatist's error—namely, Plato's invention of the pure spirit and the good as such" and goes on to say, "Christianity is Platonism for 'the people'" (BGE, "Preface"). Here is Nietzsche at his most forceful: "In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point. Nothing but imaginary *causes* ('God,' 'soul,' 'ego,' 'spirit,' 'freewill,'—or 'unfree will'): nothing but imaginary *effects* ('sin,' 'redemption,' 'grace,' 'punishment,' 'forgiveness of sins'). A traffic between imaginary *beings* ('God,' 'spirits,' 'souls'); an imaginary *natural science* (anthropocentric; complete lack of the concept of natural causes); an imaginary *psychology* (nothing but self-misunderstandings, interpretations of pleasant or unpleasant general feelings, for example the condition of the *nervus sympathicus*, with the aid of the sign-language of religio-moral idiosyncrasy—'repentance,' 'sting of conscience,' 'temptation by the Devil,' 'the proximity of God'); an imaginary *teleology* ('the kingdom of God,' 'the Last Judgment,' 'eternal life')" (AC, 15).

Now it has become clear for Nietzsche what he has to do. He has to preach the possibility of brilliant life on this earth. His teachings ought to be those of joy and happiness. "Life has not disappointed me" says Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, 324. "I am the reverse of a negative spirit. I am a joyful herald..." (EH, "Why I Am a Fatality," 1); "to share not suffering but joy" (GS, 338); "some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer" (GS, 276); "bring light to the earth, be 'the light of the earth'!" (GS, 293). And in one of the unforgettable phrases he says, "Pardon me, my friends, I have ventured to paint my *happiness* on the wall" (GS, 56).

To know joy and happiness man should be the free spirit beyond all human errors and prejudices. The free spirit is the opposite of the spirit of gravity. Nietzsche prefers flying like a bird to delving like a mole. He says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "And especially bird-like is that I am enemy to the Spirit of Gravity: and truly, mortal enemy, arch-enemy, born enemy!" ("Of the Spirit of Gravity," 1). While the spirit of gravity is quasi-serious, solemn, and quasi-profound, the free spirit is flighty, dancing, and playful. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche declares, "I should believe only in a God who understood how to dance" ("Of Reading and Writing"). "A man's maturity—consists in having found again the seriousness one had as a child, at play" (BGE, 94). And he calls play "a sign of greatness" (EH, "Why I Am So Clever," 10).

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche says, "I would much rather be a clown. Perhaps I am a clown.... I am the voice of truth" (*Why I Am a Fatality*, 1). Nietzsche's ultimate paradox is that truth is there is no ultimate truth. So he supposes truth is a woman. "What then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman's heart?" (BGE, "Preface") The free spirit, who recognizes the non-existence of the ultimate truth and perceives the clumsiness and uselessness of would-be serious and profound efforts to delve and find it, stops at the surface to dance and play. This is the meaning of "superficial—out of profundity." (Some people call Nietzsche's thought that there is no ultimate truth nihilistic. As is shown, it is Nietzsche's power to turn this *prima facie* nihilism to his advantage.)

The final lesson of the free spirit is learn to laugh—laughter as a symbol of joyous affirmation of life. What does kill the Spirit of Gravity is not anger but laughter. Nietzsche says of the Higher Man, "This laughter's crown, this rose-wreath crown: to you, my brothers, do I throw this crown! I have canonized laughter; you Higher Men, learn—to laugh!" (TSZ, "Of the Higher Man," 20) (This phrase is quoted by Nietzsche himself in "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" which was added to the new edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*.) And in one of his maxims he writes, "he who laughs best today will also laugh last" (TI, "Maxims and Arrows," 43).

As we have seen above, the surface and appearance are the only reality for Nietzsche. One of the human errors so far is that they have tried to penetrate the surface and find the essence or reality which they think is hidden below the surface. But this is not only a human error but a human vanity and arrogance. Nietzsche says, "It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than mere appearance" (BGE, 24). In *Twilight of the Idols* he summarizes: "To divide the world into a 'real' and an 'apparent' world, whether in the manner of Christianity or in the manner of Kant [...] is only a suggestion of *décadence*—a symptom of *declining* life....That the artist places a higher value on appearance than on reality constitutes no objection to this proposition. For 'appearance' here signifies reality *once more*, only selected, strengthened, corrected" ("Reason' in Philosophy," 6). Dance on the surface—this is Nietzsche's figure of the free spirit. Here is a rime by Nietzsche:

Smooth ice
is paradise
for those who dance with expertise.

(GS, "Joke, Cunning, and Revenge," 13)

Nietzsche's recognition of there being no ultimate truth or essence and his presentation

of dancing on the surface leads to the crucial thinking that *what can be thought by human beings must be fiction*. The world, the object of our perception and thinking, must be fiction and our being in the world—that is, our life—must be fiction, too. It is just like a dream experience. And as dreams are very free and very arbitrary interpretations of an unknown text, so all of our so-called truths and knowledges are interpretations added to a fictitious text to our wishes and needs (cf. GS, 54). The following long and important passages are from the 119th section of *The Dawn*.

Our dreams have this very value and meaning to *compensate* to a certain degree this accidental lack of “nourishment” during the day. Why was the dream of yesterday full of tenderness and tears, that of the day before jocular and exuberant, a former one adventurous...? Why do I enjoy in this one indescribable beauties of music, why do I float and fly in another with the rapture of an eagle up toward distant mountain peaks? These fictions, which give play to and permit the discharge of, our drives of tenderness or jocularly or adventurousness, or our demand for music and mountains—and everybody will have his own better examples at hand—are interpretations of our nerve stimulations during dreams, *very free*, very arbitrary interpretations.... That this text, which remains after all generally much the same in one night as in another, is yet annotated so variously; that the inventing reason *imagines* such various *causes* for the same nerve stimulations today and yesterday—that is due to the fact that the prompter of this reason was a different one today than yesterday: another *drive* wanted to satisfy, exert, exercise, refresh, and discharge itself—today one drive is at its high tide, and yesterday it was another one. Waking life does not have this same *freedom* of interpretation as in dreams... but need I elaborate that our drives, when we are awake, also do nothing else than interpret nerve stimulations and posit “causes” according to their requirements? That between waking and dreaming there is no *essential* difference?... That even our moral judgments and valuations are only pictures and phantasies about a physiological process which is unknown to us...? That all our so-called consciousness is a more or less phantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text?

So, if all is interpretation which can be in no way considered the truth and that’s the most human beings can do, the more varied and lively its style the better. “To communicate a state, an inner tension of pathos by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs—this is the meaning of every style;...all rhetoric is merely the art of gesture,” says Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo* (“Why I Write Such Excellent Books?” 4). And he makes it clear that the higher man is one who uses signs *gangasrotagati* (which means “as the current of the Ganges moves”) (BGE, 27) and presents “the most serious matters in a boisterous *allegriissimo* [the meaning of “extremely brisk and lively manner”]” (BGE, 28). In *The Gay Science* he puts forward like this: “One thing is needful—To ‘give style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art!” (290) Think, act, and live in a bold, lively, and rapid tempo and enjoy living your life—this is one of Nietzsche’s final teachings. Become

an artistic philosopher! Become dancing Socrates!

2

I have found that Nietzsche's thoughts are without any significant change echoed in those of Wallace Stevens and Jacques Derrida, though I must admit that I am more likely to misunderstand Stevens and Derrida than Nietzsche.

Stevens wrote in one of his letters as if nonchalantly, "About Nietzsche: I haven't read him since I was a young man" (LWS, 409). When someone compared his poetry to that of French symbolists, especially Mallarmé, he denied the influence of Mallarmé. (See especially Stevens' letter to Bernard Heringman, dated May 3, 1949.) Every poet likes to assume to be born full-blown from Zeus's head. This is Bloom's anxiety of strong poets.

Take a glance at the phrases Stevens used when referring to Nietzsche: "the epatant," "a little bit too much to drink" (LWS, 432); "the sharp edges and intensity of speech" (LWS, 462); "formidable poetry" ("A Collect of Philosophy," OP, 187). His interest in Nietzsche manifests itself in his order for a complete set of Nietzsche which consisted of over 20 volumes.

Stevens, I do think, is the poet who was very concerned with how to live on this earth bereft of God, that is, bereft of what can be considered to be the ultimate truth. He wrote, "I took a look at *Ideas of Order* the other night to see whether there was any single poem in it that I preferred to all the others. If there is, it seems to be 'How to Live. What to Do.' I like it most, I suppose, because it so definitely represents my way of thinking" (LWS, 293). Aren't "the great height of the rock" and "heroic sound/Joyous and jubilant and sure" nothing but Stevens' metaphors for Nietzsche's flight and joyous music?

For Stevens, "the theory/Of poetry is the theory of life" ("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," CP, 486) and the poet's role is "to help people to live their lives" ("The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," NA, 30), but not in a social, sociological, or political sense. He is a metaphysical poet. If not an artistic philosopher, he is a philosophic artist.

"The great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written" says Stevens ("Imagination as Value," NA, 142). Stevens' points are summed up like these: how we should live our lives on this earth which is the one and only field offered us (Nietzsche's turn of thought after destroying Christianity); "Death is the mother of beauty" ("Sunday Morning," CP, 68, 69) because it, by being there, paradoxically makes people embrace life more fully (Nietzsche's tragic, life-affirming thinking); but the world as the ground of living is unconnected, disorderly, routine, and disillusioned, and thus, the necessity of creative imagination for making the world orderly, luxuriant, and colorful (Nietzsche's emphasis on style); poetry comes to our final rescue

so that we can live our lives more joyfully and happily (Nietzsche's urging to be artistic and his claim to the philosophy of joy and happiness)— in short, like Nietzsche's flow of thinking, (in words which ring like Nietzsche's own) "After the final no there comes a yes" ("The Well-Dressed Man with a Beard," CP, 247). Stevens' own sayings serve to our purpose: "The highest pursuit of happiness on earth"; "The purpose of poetry is to contribute to man's happiness"; poetry "is itself a search for happiness"; "Poetry is the gaiety of language" ("Adagia," OP, 157, 168, 171, 174).

And like Nietzsche, Stevens thinks that what can be thought by men must be fiction. Religion, philosophy, and poetry are all fictions. When the sayings and systems of religion and philosophy which are believed to be true turn out false, they give us great despair. But poetry, by declaring at the beginning its fictitiousness, gives us pleasure to go on living. Stevens speaks, "In the long run the truth does not matter" ("Adagia," OP, 180). Poetry, as "an illumination of a surface," is a supreme fiction when it is suprarational and suprahuman and dances on the surface in various manners and gives joy. (I replace Stevens' three notes by Nietzschean terms.)

Stevens mentions Nietzsche in one of his poems called "Description without Place." This is a poem good for inquiring into Stevens' thoughts on poetry. But from now on I will focus my attention on interpreting *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (CP, 380~408) as a variation of Nietzschean themes.

Here is the prologue of the poem:

And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
Close to me, hidden in me day and night?
In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,
Equal in living changingness to the light
In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,
For a moment in the central of our being,
The vivid transparence that you bring is peace.

Who is "you"? Which book is "the extremest book of the wisest man"? I am strongly tempted to suppose that "you" is Nietzsche and that book Nietzsche's work.

The poem springs from our wish to go back to and know the first idea. By trying to fulfil the wish, we can

see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it.

But

Phoebus was

A name for something that never could be named.

And

The first idea was not our own.

The first idea is simply *either* a thing which is not *or* beyond human reach. So

the first idea becomes
The hermit in a poet's metaphors,
Who comes and goes and comes and goes all day.

In Nietzschean terms, the first idea is only a fiction and our desire for reaching it reveals itself in our endless interpretations which have transitory ("For a moment") effects. And our being is only a fictional abyss.

We are the mimics...
.....
Abysmal instruments make sounds like pips
Of the sweeping meanings that we add to them.

So the poets become "the heroic children" (an echo of Vico?) who "decreate" the first idea [Nietzsche's advice: "destroy only as creators" (GS, 58)]. The poet is a major man,

an expedient,
Logos and logic, crystal hypothesis,
Incipit and a form to speak the word
And every latent double in the word,
Beau linguist.

It is he who "plainly" (without the arrogance to speak or minister truth) propounds.

Like Heraclitus and Nietzsche, Stevens thinks this universe ever changing. The sound of the bee is "Booming and booming of the new-come bee" and "Nothing had happened because nothing had changed."

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined
On the real. This is the origin of change.

The planter could not twang the banjo because he was "unaffected" and the sound of the

birds "will end" because it is monotonous and "never changes." Nanzia Nunzio [the name reminding one of both Annunciation and *nuncio* (the Italian for "messenger")], the poetess of Western spirit, hears Ozymandias saying to her as if to Shahrazad of *The Thousand and One Nights*,

A fictive covering
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind.

This is a praise for the ever-changing fictional surface. (But I think we should not miss the tone of reservation in it.) In the final section of the second part, Stevens says of "a will to change" and writes,

The freshness of transformation is
The freshness of a world. It is our own,
It is ours elves, the freshness of ourselves,
And that necessity and that presentation
Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer.

Now at last, what poetry must do is

On the image of what we see, to catch from that
Irrational moment its unreasoning

as when

A dead shepherd brought tremendous chords from hell and bade the sheep carouse.

What could this refer to but Orphic dance?

There is an event that can be called an overture of Canon Aspirin's "amassing harmony." The captain and Bawda married in Catawba which "was neither heaven nor hell" at noon. Great noon-tide is Nietzsche's trope of supreme self-knowledge, and this can partly explain why the sun is so important a figure in Stevens' poetry. I interpret "an hour/Filled with expressible bliss" in which "I have not but I am and as I am, I am" as the hour of supreme self-knowledge in which one can be happy and gay. In the end, Stevens talks of a stage that is akin to the *amor fati*, the affirmation of the necessity, the eternal recurrence:

One of the vast repetitions final in
Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round
And round and round, the merely going round,
Until merely going round is a final good,

The way wine comes at a table in a wood.

And we enjoy like men, the way a leaf
Above the table spins its constant spin,
So that we look at it with pleasure, look

At it spinning its eccentric measure. Perhaps,
The man-hero is not the exceptional monster,
But he that of repetition is most master.

It is the voice of the man who transforms the fictional reality into plentiful reality and sings "Night's hymn of the rock, as in a vivid sleep" ("The Rock," CP, 528).

3

James Joyce, in "The Dead," the last piece of *Dubliners*, describes Gabriel feeling inner joy when he saw his wife on the staircase and imagining a picture entitled *Distant Music*. As we saw above, Nietzsche supposes truth is a woman and questions whether dogmatic attitude of philosophers is appropriate for dealing with a woman. To deal with a woman properly *distance* is required and then, you can move over the surface and enjoy the dance.

Jacque Derrida, the joyful metaphysical dancer of our own time, puts forth in his recent work, *Éperons*, "Le titre retenu pour cette séance aura été *la question du style*. Mais la femme sera mon sujet" (EP, 27). And he refers to the sixtieth section of *The Gay Science*. I quote the section in full because it expresses Nietzsche's own attitude in the most beautiful style.

Women and their action at a distance.—Do I still have ears? Am I all ears and nothing else? Here I stand in the flaming surf whose white tongues are licking at my feet; from all sides I hear howling, threats, screaming, roaring coming at me, while the old earth-shaker sings his aria in the lowest depths, deep as a bellowing bull, while pounding such an earth-shaking beat that the hearts of even these weather-beaten rocky monsters are trembling in their bodies. Then, suddenly, as if born out of nothing, there appears before the gate of this hellish labyrinth, only a few fathoms away—a large sailboat, gliding along as silently as a ghost. Oh, what ghostly beauty! How magically it touches me! Has all the calm and taciturnity of the world embarked on it? Does my happiness itself sit in this quiet place—my happier ego, my second, departed self? Not to be dead and yet no longer alive? A spiritlike intermediate being: quietly observing, gliding, floating? *As the boat that with its white sails moves like an immense butterfly over the dark sea. Yes! To move over existence! That's it!* [my italics] That would be something!

It seems as if the noise here had led me into fantasies. All great noise leads us to move happiness into some quiet distance. When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of his plans and projects, then he is apt also to see quiet, magical beings gliding past him and to long for their happiness and seclusion: *women*. He almost thinks that

his better self dwells there among the women, and that in these quiet regions even the loudest surf turns into deadly quiet, and life itself into a dream about life. Yet! Yet! Noble enthusiast, even on the most beautiful sailboat there is a lot of noise, and unfortunately much small and petty noise. The magic and the most powerful effect of women is, in philosophical language, action at a distance, *actio in distans*; but this requires first of all and above all —*distance*.

Éperon is a foremost part of the prow which plows the waves.

Derrida effused his thoughts in 1967 through *L'écriture et la différence*, *La voix et le phénomène*, and *De la grammatologie*. His central task is to critique what he calls "phonocentrisme" or "logocentrisme", which is at the core of Western philosophy. Phonocentrism presupposes "proximité absolu de la voix et de l'être, de la voix et du sens de l'être, de la voix et de l'idéalité du sens" (DG, 23). In short, phonocentrism is idealism that believes in *presence* of the absolute being or truth (signified) which is expressed through and corresponds with the signs of voice (signifier), and it is a kind of superficial optimism that believes in the centering of human reason between signifier and signified (this is significantly revealed in the Greek word, *logos*, which means at once reason and word). On this basic philosophical ground can the concepts such as substance, essence, existence, subject, consciousness, intersubjectivity build their houses. But its disruption begins with Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, the critique "des concepts d'être et de vérité auxquels sont substitués les concepts de jeu, d'interprétation et de signe (de signe sans vérité présente)" (ED, 412). "Dès lors on a dû sans doute commencer à penser qu'il n'y avait pas de centre, que le centre ne pouvait être pensé dans la forme d'un étant-présent, que le centre n'avait pas de lieu naturel, qu'il n'était pas un lieu fixe mais une fonction, une sorte de non-lieu dans lequel se jouaient à l'infini des substitutions de signe", says Derrida and goes on to declare, "L'absence de signifié transcendantal étend à l'infini le champ et le jeu de la signification" (ED, 411).

Phonocentrism or logocentrism, by its idealistic nature, thinks of an absolute being, namely, God, and by its own kind of optimism, believes in its being-present. So Derrida can say, "Le signe et la divinité ont le même lieu et le même temps de naissance. L'époque du signe est essentiellement théologique" (DG, 25). Here too, Nietzsche comes as a deconstructive force by liberating "le signifiant de sa dépendance ou de sa dérivation par rapport au logos" (DG, 31). The effect of the liberation is the intrusion of *play* in the field of signification. Derrida puts forth in a powerful apothegm, "le jeu du monde précède Dieu" (ED, 158). Play is the joyous affirmation of life and the world ("l'affirmation nietzschéenne"—ED, 427), the affirmation of non-center.

The thoughts that there is no absolute being, truth, or center and that it is an illusion that the existence of a word (or a sign) assures the existence of whatever the word refers to are essential to both Nietzsche and Derrida. The views on life are similar, too. For Nietzsche, life is an abyss and is likened to a dream; for Derrida, life is an aspect of

death (or death is an aspect of life) and is also likened to a dream. But as we have seen in Nietzsche, this *prima facie* pessimism or nihilism is turned into the steppingstone for the higher affirmation of life. For Stevens, too, death is the mother of beauty. For Derrida as for Nietzsche, play comes as a saving force, and dream is the ground on the surface of which plays of interpretation can be done *ad infinitum*. For Derrida, writing is just that space, that playground. In an important essay on Freud, he concludes, "L'écriture est ici la *τέχνη* comme rapport entre la vie et la mort, entre le présent et la représentation, entre les deux appareils... En ce sens l'écriture est la scène de l'histoire et le jeu du monde" (ED, 337).

The notion *différance* (difference, deferment) is crucial in Derrida's thinking. This is an apodeictic consequence, because play is the play of differences which defers meaning. The term can be traced back to Freud's notion of *Aufschub* (postponement) and *Verspätung* (delay) by which Freud designates the inhibitory function of secondary process in the psychical apparatus. But we can find something similar in Nietzsche, too. Nietzsche sets the three tasks, one of which is learning to see, "learning to defer judgement.... the essence of it is precisely not to 'will', the *ability* to defer decision" (TI, "What the Germans Lack", 6). In Freud, it functions as a defense of the psyche (against death). In Nietzsche, it is the ability to defer decision, stand at a distance and be joyful and free on that deferment, on that infinite weavings of differences. These teachings Derrida now enriches and extends. Have your own style and live dangerously!

In the beginning of the essay I said it should be the aim of philosophy to help people live their lives more fully. I chose three men—a nineteenth-century German philosopher, an early twentieth-century American poet, and a contemporary French philosopher—who, I think, have taught us how to live in the postnihilistic world, not in the physical aspect—for example, diet, jogging, or entire sex—but in the spiritual, say, intellectual aspect, as Spinoza thinks the intellectual emancipation of neighbors to be the task of free man in society.

