

## 7 Nietzsche's final ideal

What is Nietzsche's final ideal, as expressed in his last writings, when it comes to moods? This is the question that remains after the discussion of mood and ecstatic intoxication [*Rausch*] in *Z*, and examining it allows us to answer those who perceive a pronounced religiosity in Nietzsche's last writings, specifically in *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist* and *Ecce Homo*, as well as in the notes and letters from the period. Since Julian Young is undoubtedly the earliest and arguably the most sophisticated and influential of the "revisionists",<sup>1</sup> i.e. those Anglophone scholars who have in the last decades sought to revise the canonical view that Nietzsche's thinking is best described as atheistic to the core, I will here focus solely on his central claim about Nietzsche's late religiosity as a contrast against which I present evidence for what I take to be a more plausible interpretation that supports but also significantly expands the canonical view of Nietzsche's atheism. I will first introduce Young's thesis and then I will provide the foundations of an alternative perspective that builds on the opposition between the psychological types of Jesus and Zarathustra in Nietzsche's late works. Thereafter I will provide further evidence for my interpretation by examining 1) what Nietzsche writes about the interpretation of extraordinary experiences in the context of his late psychology of power, and 2) by establishing that Nietzsche's late thinking on power and experience does not lead him to abandon his striving for independence. Finally, I will shortly reflect on the end of Nietzsche's philosophical life; Nietzsche's very own God delusion.

To be absolutely clear, once more, I claim no radical novelty for most of the presentation insofar as it supports the canonical view, e.g. regarding the role of Jesus in the narrative of *A*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, what is new is to be found in the precise manner of the argumentation.

### 7.1 Young's thesis about Nietzsche's religiosity

Already in his early work on Nietzsche, Julian Young identifies ecstasy as the ideal state that Nietzsche personally strives for and glorifies in all his writings except

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<sup>1</sup> Besides Julian Young, the most prominent revisionists are Giles Fraser (cf. Fraser 2002) and Bruce Benson (cf. Benson 2008). More problematically than Young, both Fraser and Benson overestimate the formative influence of Lutheran piety and theology on Nietzsche's later thinking. For a critique of their central claims, see Saarinen 2016.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Andreas Sommer, who might be said to have taken historical-critical scholarship to a new level, has also done much to show the unfeasibility of treating the portrayal of Jesus in *A* as in some way expressive of Nietzsche's ideal (e.g. Sommer 2103, 146–148). Needless to say, if I do arrive at similar conclusions as Sommer I do so independently guided by a different approach to the texts. As in general with this study: paying attention to mood not only transforms the discussion of oft-interpreted passages, it also effectively brings new evidence to light.

for a brief positivistic phase to which only *HH* is testament. Furthermore, Young is keen to stress the religious nature of that ecstasy as this striking passage shows:

23. Why does Nietzsche believe ecstasy to be the ideal relationship to the world? Because, in a word, he wants something to *worship* and is aware once again, as he was in *The Birth of Tragedy* (see ch 2, sec 14), that a sense of the holy, of the sacred is a fundamental human need. If the old God is dead then nature herself must be made divine, "perfect" (Z IV, 19). The non-ecstatic affirmation of life holds no interest for Nietzsche since it has no bearing on *his* problem; the problem of proving that God, after all, exists. Less provocatively: the problem of achieving a state of mind, "feel[ing] oneself 'in heaven,' ... 'eternal'" (A 33), in which a naturalized object is the target of all those feelings and attitudes that used to be directed towards the (no longer believable) transcendent. (Young 1992, 115)

In his more recent work, Young has provided no corrective to this early picture. To the contrary, he still adamantly defends the view that Nietzsche's philosophy culminates in a "Dionysian pantheism", in which ecstasy [*Rausch*] is celebrated as this-worldly salvation (e.g. Young 2006, 110 – 111, 199, 201; cf. Young 2010, 562). Young's claim can fruitfully be compared to, and needs to be balanced by, the more traditional account of Eugen Fink. With *BT* in mind, Young's favourite reference, Fink writes:

Already at the start of his philosophical path the tragic pathos puts Nietzsche in an irresolvable conflict with Christianity. Christian dogma with its necessary idea of redemption does not only contradict Nietzsche's instincts, it contradicts his basic sentiment, the basic mood of his life and of his experience of reality. The tragic world does not know any redemption, any salvation of the finite being from its finitude. (Fink 2003, 10)

While it might seem that Fink's and Young's claims are irreconcilable, they are perhaps not fundamentally opposed. That they seem opposed follows from a difference in emphasis: whereas Young has a broad view of religiosity in mind, Fink speaks specifically about Christianity as being opposed to the basic mood of Nietzsche's life as expressed in his writings. Indeed, Young's argument is stronger than those of the other revisionists precisely because it does not necessarily rely on the idea that Nietzsche's supposed religiosity is Christianity in disguise, and instead allows it to be conceived of as a new religiosity; a genuine Dionysian pantheism. Admittedly, this is an advance compared to previous scholarship about Nietzsche's thinking on religion since Christianity and Christian conceptions of God have either explicitly or implicitly been the standard against which one has judged whether Nietzsche was an atheist. Already for this reason alone, Young's argument is worth considering carefully.

It should still not be overlooked that Young is at his weakest when making claims about the continuity of Nietzsche's religiosity. His biographical narrative connecting the Christian religiosity of Nietzsche's childhood with the late Dionysianism of the philosopher rests on an untenable foundation, and more specifically a conceptual confusion (cf. Young 2010). It is hard to understand how a Christian need for salvation could possibly turn into a Dionysian need for salvation, when one takes into

account that the concept of salvation differs drastically in the two cases; the crucial distinction being one between a salvation that requires a transcendent instance, or what Nietzsche would call another world, and a salvation that is wholly this-worldly. So if it is admissible to speak of the philosopher's striving for salvation, one must specify that this is not a striving for salvation from finitude, but for salvation in finitude, the striving for a god-like mood. Consequently, contra Young, it is not the case that Nietzsche's late Dionysianism would be concerned with simply redirecting "all those feelings and attitudes that used to be directed towards the (no longer believable) transcendent" (Young 1992, 115). Instead, Nietzsche has from *HH* onward been engaged in a task of purifying feeling, which not only includes leaving some feelings behind altogether but also creating new feelings. What he aims for, the resulting affective reorientation, is more profound than a mere redirection of feeling. It is much more about opening up significantly different moods. So on the basis of my readings of *HH*, *D*, *GS* and *Z* the thesis that there is some significant continuity, in the sense of similarity, between Christian religious feeling and those feeling states that Nietzsche associates with the Dionysian can be refuted. In other words, it is the case that insofar as there is continuity between Christian and Dionysian feeling, the Christian feeling has been purified beyond recognition. Likewise, and I will provide further evidence for this, Nietzsche cannot in his last writings in any meaningful sense be concerned with proving that God "after all" exists, since (the god) Dionysus signifies something quite different from the Christian God. The interesting question is whether Nietzsche's late thinking nevertheless amounts to pantheism; whether his final ideal is a kind of ecstasy that is best termed religious. Does not Nietzsche's striving for heights of feeling seem religious? Does not Nietzsche in his own way strive to be in heaven, as Young suggests? My answer, which I will elaborate on and argue for in what follows, is that Young does have a point, but that it needs to be rescued from a religionist reading.

## 7.2 The type of *Jesus* and the type of *Zarathustra*

Young is certainly right that Nietzsche aims for a high state of mind, and that this aim is one of his central concerns, as his abundant metaphorical invocations of the heights of the soul testify, but I also think it can be shown beyond reasonable doubt that this state should not be classified as religious and does not qualify as pantheistic. In this regard, there is no better place to start the sceptical investigation than the passage in the *Antichrist* that Young refers to, when claiming that Nietzsche's thinking culminates in a desire to be in heaven, to be eternal. The passage in question is not one in which Nietzsche directly speaks about himself, but one in which he speaks about Jesus. It is situated within a psychological discussion, in which he characterizes what he terms the type of the redeemer [*Typus des Erlösers*], though he is quick to specify that it is the type of Jesus [*Typus Jesus*] (A 29, KSA 6,

199) that concerns him; the redeemer *par excellence*. According to Nietzsche, Jesus had:

The deep instinct for how one must live, in order to feel oneself “in heaven,” to feel “eternal,” while in all other behavior one decidedly does not feel oneself “in heaven” – this alone is the psychological reality of “redemption.” A new way of life, not a new faith. (Kaufmann 1954, 607; A 33, KSA 6, 206)

Taken out of context the passage and the following elaborations can be read as if Nietzsche were only criticizing what he takes to be Christian and scholarly misinterpretations of Jesus, or even more radically as if he in fact were seeking to salvage the truth of Jesus’ life for himself and for the future. In a seemingly sympathetic manner, he describes Jesus as a great symbolist, for whom the only reality that counted was the inner reality of feeling. Thus, *pace* Nietzsche, all Jesus’ words are parables; they express the “truth” of his being, i.e. “being in heaven”. In this rather original view, Jesus does not promise heaven in an afterlife as a salvation from sin, and least of all as a reward of belief, but instead shows a way of living. The real evangelical practice (A 33, KSA 6, 205), is simply to always act in a way that produces the feeling of bliss. Put shortly: “The ‘kingdom of heaven’ is a state of the heart” (Kaufmann 1954, 608; A 34, KSA 6, 207), no more no less.

It is indeed tempting to interpret Nietzsche’s words as a projection: it is hard to avoid the impression that Nietzsche identifies with the Jesus he describes at least in so far as both privilege the inner life of feeling in the here and now over otherworldly or strictly moral concerns. One should, however, not overlook that the description of the psychology of Jesus is part of more general discussion of physiological degeneracy, which is after all the grand theme of *A*. Right at the beginning of his psychological dissection, Nietzsche rejects the scholarly use of terms such as hero or genius as applicable to Jesus and instead insists that if there is any one word that fits Jesus it is idiot<sup>3</sup> (A 29, KSA 6, 200). According to Nietzsche, two components mark out Jesus as a

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Renan, whom Nietzsche now and then targets as a moron in psychological matters and a prime example of a “secular” intellectual melancholically longing for religious moods (cf. BGE 48, KSA 5, 69–70), had used the terms hero and genius to describe Jesus (A 29, KSA 6, 199). Since Nietzsche explicitly refers to Dostoyevski in his discussion on the psychology of Jesus (A 31, KSA 6, 202) quite a few scholars have assumed that Nietzsche was directly influenced in his characterization by the Russian author and especially his novel *The Idiot*. Dostoyevski’s novel centres around Prince Myshkin, who returning to Russia from a mental institution in Switzerland causes trouble in the noble social circles through his naivety and goodness, which is too good for this world. While this coincidence allows for intriguing comparisons, there is not enough evidence to conclude with certainty that Nietzsche directly borrowed the idea of Jesus as idiot from his presumed reading of Dostoyevski’s novel (cf. Stellino 2007). Sommer contends that Nietzsche at least had second-hand knowledge of the content of that novel, but this is nothing more than speculation (cf. Sommer 2013, 9 and 162). Be that as it may, irrespective of the degree of his knowledge of the *The Idiot*, it is beyond doubt that Nietzsche was inspired by Dostoyevski’s example in his psychological elaborations about early Christianity (see Stellino 2007) although his revaluation is what matters.

decadent: An instinctive hatred of reality<sup>4</sup> and an instinctive avoidance of conflict,<sup>5</sup> that both ultimately derive from an acute sensitivity to external stimuli. As the only goal that makes sense for such a type is the maintenance of an agreeable feeling, Nietzsche dubs the resulting way of life a decadent development of hedonism (A 30, KSA 6, 201). That Nietzsche calls Jesus the most interesting decadent (A 31, KSA 6, 202), does not make Jesus any less decadent and any less dangerous as an example to follow. Nor does the fact that Nietzsche calls himself a *décadent* in *EH* change the picture in any way, as he is clear enough to specify that he considers himself that only in part [*als Winkel, als Specialität*] while being healthy as a whole [*als summa summarum*]. As proof of his health, he lists many a characteristic, but given his physiological description of Jesus it is of particular interest that he mentions what I think is best described as an instinctive scepticism: reacting slowly to all stimuli, providing resistance to them, testing them carefully, which he calls a result of a willed cultivation of pride. Unsurprisingly he concludes that he is the opposite of a *décadent* (KSA 6, 266–267; cf. Hödl 2009, 541–547). So without even taking the possible ironies of Nietzsche's confession of being a *décadent* into account, there is a big enough difference between his self-characterization and his description of Jesus to rule out that Nietzsche would be describing himself as a whole or his ruling instinct when describing Jesus.

Consequently, what little sympathy there is in Nietzsche's characterization is best read in the context of his polemic against Christianity. Nietzsche's seemingly sympathetic understanding of Jesus has the consequence that what he has to say about the religion founded in the name of Christ, above all as "the Church", is all the more damning. To me, Nietzsche's key point seems to be that not only have the followers of Jesus misinterpreted the teaching of their master who they call God; they have essentially failed to recognize that he was a thoroughly decadent type. That Nietzsche prides himself with understanding Jesus better than those in the "Church" who claim to be following him, does not imply that Jesus' way of living is Nietzsche's ideal. While Nietzsche recognizes that the way of life he has described is at all times possible, and adds that there are always some for whom it is the only option (A 39, KSA 6, 211), perhaps a physiological necessity, it is not the kind of life that he presents himself as living, nor does he hold it out as desirable in any of his writings. This

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4 "Der Instinkt-Hass gegen die Realität: Folge einer extremen Leid- und Reizfähigkeit, welche überhaupt nicht mehr 'berührt' werden will, weil sie jede Berührung zu tief empfindet." (A 30, KSA 6, 200)

5 "Die Instinkt-Ausschließung aller Abneigung, aller Feindschaft, aller Grenzen und Distanzen im Gefühl: Folge einer extremen Leid- und Reizfähigkeit, welche jedes Widerstreben, Widerstreben-müssen bereits als unerträgliche Unlust (das heißt als schädlich, als vom Selbsterhaltungs-Instinkte widerrathen) empfindet und die Seligkeit (die Lust) allein darin kennt, nicht mehr, Niemandem mehr, weder dem Übel noch dem Bösen, Widerstand zu leisten, – die Liebe als einzige, als letzte Lebens-Möglichkeit..." (A 30, KSA 6, 200–201) More succinctly, Nietzsche characterizes this as: "nicht sich wehren, nicht zürnen, nicht verantwortlich-machen" (A 35, KSA 6, 208).

is made abundantly clear in a rare passage of affirmation amidst all the destructive criticism.

In the midst of vehemently damning Christianity, Nietzsche suddenly introduces Zarathustra as a contrast. The key sentences ring thus: “One should not be deceived: great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic. Strength, freedom which is born of the strength and overstrength of the spirit, proves itself by scepticism.” (Kaufmann 1954, 638; A 54, KSA 6, 236) Nietzsche’s point is to be understood physiologically, and not as referring to any specific tradition of sceptical philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Scepticism, he here contends, is an expression of power and characteristic of great spirits. When he speaks of the great passion that reigns in such a spirit, that guides it, it is reasonable to assume that he speaks of an instinct that is fundamentally opposed to the instincts of Jesus as much as to the instincts of his followers. The textual evidence for such an interpretation is strong, as I will now show. Whereas Jesus’ actions follow from his inability to resist stimuli of a certain kind, which leads him to shut them out completely, Nietzsche associates health with finding joy in seeking out and overcoming resistance (cf. A 2, KSA 6, 170). Whereas Nietzsche’s Jesus seeks to maintain peace, an inner state of bliss, at all costs, Nietzsche himself in *EH* claims to find joy in what he at times (metaphorically) calls war (e.g. KSA 6, 274).<sup>7</sup> When it comes to the followers of Christ, Nietzsche opposes the independence, the freedom, of Zarathustra with the dependent state of the believer. Indeed, he goes as far as to write that believers of any kind are out of necessity dependent beings: “The man of faith, the ‘believer’ of every kind, is necessarily a dependent man – one who cannot posit himself as an end, one who cannot posit any end at all by himself.” (Kaufmann 1954, 638; A 54, KSA 6, 236) Thus, Nietzsche affirms his notion of doubt as a sign of inner strength, against the view of doubt as a lack (of faith). In *A*, this notion is the implicit background of Nietzsche’s notorious judgement of taste that the only decent character, the only character that deserves respect, in the New Testament is Pontius

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<sup>6</sup> In other words, Nietzsche’s philosophical point is completely independent of the fact that he enjoyed reading Victor Brochard’s *Les Sceptiques Grecs*, a historical work which he mentions with great approval in *EH* (KSA 6, 284). Nietzsche speaks of a general character-type, not of Ancient Greek sceptical philosophers. While great spirits “are” sceptics in this view, i.e. beings who find joy in what is problematic, not all those commonly labelled sceptics are necessarily great spirits. Nietzsche had valued what I have termed a sceptical mood, a mood of joyful doubt, without interruption, at least since *HH*, as should be clear from the evidence presented within this study. That he here explicitly uses the term sceptic is merely a matter of wording. For a radically opposed view, that takes philological obsession with single words ripped out of their philosophical context to a new height, see Sommer 2013, 253–254.

<sup>7</sup> The most clear expression of this sentiment, of the agonistic spirit, is without a doubt to be found in the 1887 foreword to *GS*: “Every philosophy that ranks peace above war, every ethic with a negative definition of happiness, every metaphysics and physics that knows some finale, some final state of some sort, every predominantly aesthetic or religious craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside, Above, permits the question whether it was not sickness that inspired the philosopher.” (Kaufmann 1974, 34; KSA 3, 348)

Pilatus, on account of his sceptical question: what is truth? (cf. A 46, KSA 6, 225). This same notion is also the key to understanding Nietzsche's words in *EH* about being atheistic in instinct, by which he precisely means an instinctive questioning resisting easy answers. Atheism, he writes, "is self-evident to me from instinct" (Large 2007, 19; KSA 6, 278), and once again he connects this instinct with an excess of pride, with being besides too curious also "too *dubious*, too high-spirited to content myself with a rough-and-ready answer" (Large 2007, 19; KSA 6, 278–279). Even if it does not follow directly from this association of health and strength with scepticism, one can at least cautiously surmise that Nietzsche's ideal mood in his last writings should be a mood that, whatever else characterizes it (pride, joy etc.), sustains doubt. Therefore, the remaining task of this chapter is firstly to present more conclusive evidence that to dwell in a Zarathustra-like mood is Nietzsche's final affective ideal and secondly to give a more detailed characterization of the foundations of this vision in Nietzsche's late writings.

To be absolutely clear, scholarship cannot settle the question, which character Nietzsche deep down in his (perhaps even to himself) unknown depths felt himself to be more related to and identified himself with. What is beyond doubt, and what I want to draw attention to here, is that his self-expression through his philosophy, including his last writings, is more akin with the type Zarathustra than with the type Jesus. In fact, they have little to do with the heavenly feeling he associates with Jesus as they show open hostility and contempt. As *A* is essentially about what type should be cultivated (Nietzsche uses the term to breed [*züchten*], cf. A 3, KSA 6, 170), Jesus should against that background be read as representing weakness and Zarathustra as representing strength. This characterization brings to the fore the framework through which Nietzsche thinks in his final works: will to power. In the next section, I will shortly show how this framework defines his late theory of religion and "religious" experience, whereafter I will in the following section examine what conclusions he draws for himself from his vision of power in the specific sense of how it shapes his own "ideal".

### 7.3 Nietzsche's late psychology of power and the interpretation of extraordinary experiences

In Nietzsche's late thinking, in his efforts to initiate a revaluation of all values, the concept of power, most infamously as will to power, takes central stage (cf. Reginster 2006, 203). This can not only be seen in his plans for a major work on will to power,<sup>8</sup> but also in a more general intensification of his concern with power. While the con-

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<sup>8</sup> Such a work is already announced in *GM*, and the title reveals the intimate relation between revaluation and will to power: *Der Wille zur Macht, Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe* (GM III 27, KSA 5, 409; cf. NL 1887–1888, 11[414], KSA 13, 192; NL1888, 14[78], KSA 13, 257).



cept is abundant in his published work as well as in the notes from the last productive years, there is one particular note from 1888 that is especially interesting for introducing his late thinking on religion and specifically on the religious interpretation of extraordinary experiences. On its own, this note should not be considered admissible evidence, but the fact is that it echoes longstanding concerns in his published work, and those concerns are arguably more clearly expressed here than anywhere else. What makes this note, in which Nietzsche attempts to think of religion in terms of experiences of power, so interesting, is that the target of Nietzsche's criticism is more than just Christianity. It concerns the psychological foundations of all religion. Having already discussed Nietzsche's fierce rejection of Christianity, this note provides a balancing perspective as it is as much a challenge to "pantheism" as to Christianity. Since the note entitled "On the Origin of Religion" [*Vom Ursprung der Religion*] is quite extensive, I will here only focus on the decisive final part of it.<sup>9</sup>

Already in *HH*, Nietzsche had tackled the problem of religious experience through a critique of the human tendency to (mis)interpret extraordinary experiences metaphysically (see chapter 4). There, he suggested that it was ultimately fear (of nature), the fear of an external power that led the intellect astray and gave rise to religious interpretations. Here, in the late note, he is more subtle: it is ultimately the fear of one's self, which gave and still gives birth to religious interpretations. When feelings of power suddenly overwhelm the primitive self, Nietzsche claims, the power is felt in the self, but not as one's own. Overwhelmed by the strength of feeling, one does not dare think of one's self as the cause of the feeling. While Nietzsche is describing the origin of religion, what he has to say is emphatically not limited to primitive man, but also applies to contemporary religiosity. Unsurprisingly, Christianity is the main target. Although he does not fail to single out the contemporary Christian as the most regressive type of human (NL 1888, 14[124], KSA 13, 305), it is clear that in this view all religion is bound to primitive reasoning. Ignoring the polemical touch, it is difficult to establish whether or not the note should be seen as a theoretical advance from his earlier thinking. In *HH*, Nietzsche drew heavily on Victorian anthropology when trying to explain the human tendency to interpret certain experiences religiously, but his treatment was very cursory. Here, as he adds his reflections about

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9 "Die psychologische Logik ist die: das Gefühl der Macht, wenn es plötzlich und überwältigend den Menschen überzieht – und das ist in allen großen Affekten der Fall –, erregt ihm einen Zweifel an seiner Person: er wagt sich nicht als Ursache dieses erstaunlichen Gefühls zu denken – und so setzt er eine stärkere Person, eine Gottheit für diesen Fall an. In summa: der Ursprung der Religion liegt in den extremen Gefühlen der Macht, welche, als fremd, den Menschen überraschen: und dem Kranken gleich, der ein Glied zu schwer und seltsam fühlt und zum Schlusse kommt, daß ein anderer Mensch über ihm liege, legt sich der naive homo religiosus in mehrere Personen auseinander. Die Religion ist ein Fall der 'altération de la personnalité'. Eine Art Furcht- und Schreckgefühl vor sich selbst ... Aber ebenso ein außerordentliches Glücks- und Höhengefühl... Unter Kranken genügt das Gesundheitsgefühl, um an Gott, an die Nähe Gottes zu glauben." (NL 1888, 14[124], KSA 13, 306)



power into the picture, it can be plausibly assumed that he also relies on his reading of the anthropological, psychological and physiological literature of his time and he still only has a rough sketch of an explanation.<sup>10</sup> This sketch, the central claim of which is that feelings of power can and often do impair causal reasoning, can however fruitfully be read in the light of what Nietzsche writes about experience and causality in *Twilight of the Idols*. There, Nietzsche describes what he takes to be a general human tendency to seek out a cause for whatever one is feeling; an inability to simply let experiences be (KSA 6, 92). He opines that giving an explanation to one's feeling can itself increase the feeling of power (KSA 6, 93). So even while Nietzsche confidently asserts that all of religion and morality should be subsumed under the concept of imaginary causes (KSA 6, 94), it follows that any alternative way of interpretation that he advances should be able to enhance power as much or preferably more than religious reasoning.

This leads us to appreciate that the main advance of Nietzsche's late thinking on religion is not theoretical but practical and that it relates to the possibility of owning one's highest and most disturbing experiences. When Nietzsche writes that religious persons do not dare think of themselves as the cause of their extraordinary experiences, does he not also mean to suggest that one should dare to own one's experiences? Since claiming ownership of one's experience can reasonably within this framework be thought to increase the feeling of power, the most plausible answer is a qualified yes. Owning one's experience, however, cannot mean positing the self as the ultimate cause of any given experience, since Nietzsche is very critical of such ideas (cf. KSA 6, 90). It must rather mean to maintain a sceptical sentiment of not jumping to conclusions regarding one's experiences even as one accepts them as truly one's own. That Nietzsche personally struggled with his experiences of sickness and health and that a philosophical scepticism was his answer is certainly suggested by his description of the philosopher in *BGE*. In any case, ignoring biographical speculation, it is worth paying attention to the presentation of the philosopher in that book, since it speaks volumes about his self-presentation. There he writes that a philosopher is the kind of human, who constantly has extraordinary experiences, and who therefore often "fears himself" [*vor sich Furcht hat*], but who nevertheless always regains his senses, and literally returns to himself, out of curiosity (BGE 292, KSA 5, 235). This passage, which it is hard not to think of as being among the most significant of Nietzsche's self-descriptions, shows that he thinks the philosopher and the religious person are intimately related in that both have extraordinary experiences, but it also shows that they are nevertheless distinct. Unlike the religious person, the philosopher does not think that his or her experience proves that God exists or that the universe is divine. Instead of making unwarranted assumptions, the philosopher always returns to sceptical questioning. This view also

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<sup>10</sup> On Nietzsche's reading in the psychology of causal reasoning, see Sommer 2012, 202 and 329–330.

finds expression in *EH*, in Nietzsche's description of his experiences of, as he puts it, what used to be called inspiration: an experience of not being in control, and of nevertheless having a distinct consciousness as well as a tremendous feeling of freedom, power and divinity (KSA 6, 339–340). There he explicitly writes that if one had even a bit of superstition left, when having such experiences as he has had, one would think that one were nothing more than the tool of higher powers.<sup>11</sup> However, far from encouraging such an interpretation, Nietzsche exemplifies his philosophical scepticism through his description. Indeed, the most plausible interpretation is that Nietzsche here presents himself as someone who has no superstition left; whose internalized, incorporated scepticism forbids interpreting his experiences religiously (cf. Hödl 2009, 546). In other words, Nietzsche's late thinking about "religious experiences" is in tune with his statements about his instinctive atheism (cf. KSA 6, 278).<sup>12</sup> Now that it has with reasonable certainty been established that Nietzsche even in his last writings thinks all religion relies on misinterpretation of experience and especially of experiences of power, it has become possible to approach Nietzsche's late philosophy of religion from a related perspective: that of Nietzsche's own striving for power or more accurately; the way he presents this striving in his writings.

## 7.4 Nietzsche's late psychology of power and his Dionysian ideal of independence

Already in *GS* and *GM*, one finds statements suggesting that all animals, perhaps all living beings, are animated by will to power.<sup>13</sup> There is nevertheless a notable development in his very late thinking, a shift in emphasis from "is" to "ought". Nietzsche no longer stops at describing the human animal as moved by will to power, he also praises what is perhaps best interpreted as a specific form of this striving. One example must suffice to illustrate this change. While he was in *GM* careful to point out that he speaks about an instinctive striving for power and explicitly not about a path to joy ([*Weg zum Glück*], *GM* III 7, KSA 5, 350), he takes a more radical approach in *A*. There, at the very beginning of the text, he first defines the good as that which in-

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11 "Mit dem geringsten Rest von Aberglauben in sich würde man in der That die Vorstellung, bloss Incarnation, bloss Mundstück, bloss medium übermächtiger Gewalten zu sein, kaum abzuweisen wissen." (KSA 6, 339)

12 An altogether different question is whether Nietzsche himself, as human being, was always able to maintain such a scepticism, and this question is especially relevant when it comes to the events in late 1888 and early 1891 that put an end to his independent philosophical life. I will return to this question in the final section of this chapter.

13 "Jedes Thier, somit auch la bête philosophe, strebt instinktiv nach einem Optimum von günstigen Bedingungen, unter denen es seine Kraft ganz herauslassen kann und sein Maximum im Machtgefühl erreicht" (*GM* III 7, KSA 5, 350; cf. *GS* 349, KSA 3, 585–586).

creases the feeling of power (in the human being) and then goes on to define joy [*Glück*] as the feeling that power grows, and specifies that he means the feeling of overcoming resistance (A 2, KSA 6, 170). In fact, Nietzsche goes as far as to define (the meaning of the term) life, for himself, as the instinct for power (A 6, KSA 6, 172). To put it simply: power equals joy in this vision.

As is to be expected, Nietzsche does not exempt himself from this picture. As a philosopher, it follows that he cannot speak of any generally desirable goals, because what way of life generates the greatest feeling of power differs from individual to individual. Nevertheless, the Nietzsche of the texts is not content to declare “to each his own”, but seeks instead to tempt his readers to cultivate specific experiences and a specific mood through his own example. So the crucial question is this: where, in what kind of experience, does Nietzsche, the way he presents himself in his writings, find his own maximum of power? Without losing the thread, and adding a significant layer of meaning, the question can also be formulated thus: Who or what is Nietzsche's Dionysus? What does the enigmatic name signify?

On the basis of the evidence provided by his last writings, I argue that Nietzsche finds his maximum of power in a ceaseless striving for independence within the world, and that the name Dionysus signifies his affirmation of his own way of life (and by extension: of all life, cf. Hödl 2009, 536). In other words, I argue that once again, as in *GS*, Nietzsche seeks to unite a sceptical spirit, a mood of doubt, with joy and laughter. The critical edge of my argument is that, contra Young, put in terms of a mental state Nietzsche's late “ideal” is a high mood that both requires and enhances individuation, not an ecstatic extinction of individuality (cf. Young 2010, 501–503). Furthermore I argue that as “personal” as Nietzsche's vision is, it is tied to his vision of new philosophers, i.e. that he considers it of importance to the practice of philosophy understood as free thinking, as the activity of free spirits. In other words, one can again assume that what Nietzsche presents as personal is quite revealing of what he sought to communicate.

#### 7.4.1 The philosopher's independence and Dionysus

To begin to provide a more specific characterization of this ideal, and to provide a better picture of its significance for philosophical practice, it is necessary to consult *GM* and Nietzsche's description of the independence that defines the philosopher's life. There, Nietzsche asks what the ascetic ideal means for a philosopher. In other words, he asks why it exerts such a magnetic pull on the thinker. Speaking at least as much for himself as for the great philosophers of history, Nietzsche contends that the philosopher sees in asceticism the means to an end, specifically the means to independence ([*Brücken zur Unabhängigkeit*], *GM* III 7, KSA 5, 351). An ascetic life provides the optimal conditions for free thinking: freedom from coercion, disturbances and duties to mention but a few of the benefits that Nietzsche associates with withdrawing from society. The true extent to which Nietzsche's list of the fruits prom-

ised to the philosopher by the ascetic ideal is personally coloured is revealed by the fact that he chooses to associate the ascetic ideal with the experience of the air of the heights.<sup>14</sup> So, *summa summarum*, for the philosopher asceticism is the opposite of a turning away from life, the opposite of life-denial; namely, it is the affirmation of the philosopher's life (GM III 7, KSA 5, 351). Nietzsche, too, understands himself as a philosopher, and there is every reason to think that his new philosophers are also in some minimal sense "ascetics", but as I will show next he is adamant that they will have to strive for a greater freedom from morality than their predecessors in order to reach a greater independence and with it an even higher mood of affirmation.

Nietzsche takes it upon himself to show the way, and it is in this context that the meaning of Dionysus emerges. It has been argued, and with good reason, that Dionysus signifies Nietzsche's philosophy, as a philosophy of affirmation (Hödl 2009, 534, 582 and 589). When Nietzsche for the first time calls himself a disciple of the god Dionysus, he also breaks the news that this god is a philosopher (cf. BGE 295, KSA 5, 238). Nietzsche himself is from the beginning acutely aware of the dissonance he creates by conjoining the words Dionysus and philosophy, as he notes that the idea of a god philosophizing is an idea that is apt to create suspicion precisely among philosophers (BGE 295, KSA 5, 238). To have grounds for suspicion, one need only remind oneself that Nietzsche's own early celebration of the Dionysian in *BT* was to a great degree a celebration of ecstasy, opposed to the spirit of rational inquiry. The question is whether Nietzsche in his late writings has anything substantial to offer to allay the suspicion that the two do not go together, beyond simply associating Dionysus and philosophy by insisting that he is to be known as a "disciple of the philosopher Dionysos" (KSA 6, 160; KSA 6, 258). While Nietzsche's self-characterizations seem cryptic on their own, any reader acquainted with Nietzsche's earlier texts is by now familiar with his ideas concerning new combinations of feeling and world-orientation. From *HH* onwards, Nietzsche's writings express the vision of a new kind of philosopher who draws on and in this sense unites the legacies of both science and art in order to make a yet higher way of being possible.<sup>15</sup> So when Nietzsche speaks of Dionysus as a philosopher there it is very reasonable to think he has this new union in mind, which he this time expresses as a synthesis that sums up his career, or the core of his efforts, from *BT* to *EH*.

This perspective has the advantage that one can make sense of Nietzsche's claim in *TI* that he now stands on the same ground as in *BT* (cf. KSA 6, 160). This is emphatically not a return to the project of creating a new religion to replace the old. Having during the years following the publication of *BT* abandoned the hope he

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14 "eine gute Luft, dünn, klar frei, trocken, wie die Luft auf Höhen ist, bei der alles animalische Sein geistiger wird und flügeln bekommt", which makes "das Herz fremd, jenseits, zukünftig, posthum" (GM III 8, KSA 5, 352).

15 Arguably, a related vision is already suggested in *BT* in the image of a music-making Sokrates [musiktreibenden Sokrates] (BT 17, KSA 1, 111).

had placed on Wagner, and with it all hope of an artistic or religious renewal, Nietzsche perhaps now understands himself as the one who will give birth to tragedy; not as an art form, nor as a religion, but as a philosophical way of life, as a philosophical mood. In any case, the two cannot be thought of as separated but only in tandem; the new way of life and the new mood. As a way of life it is one in which artistic creation and ascetic philosophical independence are united; as creation and destruction of values and thus of truth. As a mood, it is one in which an acute feeling of distance, of doubt, is united with a tragic, joyful feeling of affirmation. It is above all this union that he seeks to communicate in his late works.<sup>16</sup> To be absolutely clear, Nietzsche doesn't give up on philosophy despite his criticism of asceticism, nor does he give up on Dionysian affirmation, despite his rejection of ecstasy as in itself desirable. As Nietzsche "admits" in *TI*, it was after all sexual ecstasy (KSA 6, 160), which gave him the key to the concept of tragic feeling, as well as of the Dionysian. The metaphor of the key is worth reading carefully: The key to the concept is not the concept itself. Thus, Nietzsche suggests that tragic feeling, the Dionysian feeling of the joy of becoming, which is a joy even when becoming is terrible, is sublimated sexual ecstasy. The feeling that Nietzsche values as the highest as philosopher should then not be conceptualized as a raw experience of the Dionysian but as its sublimation into a high mood that is particularly fruitful for approaching philosophical problems.

#### 7.4.2 Interpreting Nietzsche's late Dionysian statements

Such a reading of Nietzsche's self-characterization as a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus, allows one to reread his late "Dionysian" statements, statements that can also be read as suggesting pantheism, as confirming instead of as challenging his commitment to atheism and philosophical independence. This is even the case with a *Nachlass*-note, which contains a sentence that at the surface seems to go most against my own interpretation: "Highest state that a philosopher can reach: to relate to Being in a Dionysian manner" (NL 1888, 16[32], KSA 13, 492).<sup>17</sup> The critic can point at the note and say, look, this note clearly states that the highest state is a

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. the concealed self-presentation in *Twilight of the Idols*: "Was theilt der tragische Künstler von sich mit? Ist es nicht gerade der Zustand ohne Furcht vor dem Furchtbaren und Fragwürdigen, das er zeigt? – Dieser Zustand selbst ist eine hohe Wünschbarkeit; wer ihn kennt, ehrt ihn mit den höchsten Ehren. Er theilt ihn mit, er muss ihn mittheilen, vorausgesetzt, dass er ein Künstler ist, ein Genie der Mittheilung." (KSA 6, 127–128) It is reasonable to assume that what Nietzsche here describes relates as much if not more to Nietzsche's own writings, as well as to the activity of the philosopher of the future and the problems he/she confronts without fear, as to the activity of the tragic artist of Ancient Greece.

<sup>17</sup> Own translation. Original: "Höchster Zustand, den ein Philosoph erreichen kann: dionysisch zum Dasein stehn" (NL 1888, 16[32], KSA 13, 492).

Dionysian (i.e. ecstatic) state, and this should be the end of the debate. However, the Dionysian state that the note speaks of is not best read as a state of ecstatic union with some mythic ground of being ([*Ur-Eine*], cf. BT 1, KSA 1, 30), or with a naturalized yet divine universe, but one of facing the world from a non-moral philosophical perspective in a mood of affirmation. There are both strong philological and philosophical reasons to support such an interpretation.

The note does speak of the striving of Nietzsche's experimental philosophy as a striving for Dionysian affirmation of the world as a whole (NL 1888, 16[32], KSA 13, 492), but from the context it is clear that this does not mean that the activity of experimental philosophy comes to an abrupt end when an ecstatic Dionysian state is reached. The Dionysian state is rather a state of heightened consciousness, as Nietzsche explicitly connects it to the activity of revaluation, of viewing the world from a non-moral perspective. Indeed, the note suggests that giving up moral feelings that have their origin in suffering and/or recognition and compassion for suffering is a prerequisite for dwelling in the Dionysian state (NL 1888, 16[32], KSA 13, 493), which implies that the Dionysian state is an at least potentially lasting perspective and the fruit of Nietzsche's efforts at affective reorientation. It would then seem that the world as a whole is not worshipped in the Dionysian state, but affirmed through self-affirmation; through a high mood attained by a distinct self that is affirmed in its individuality. The Dionysian state would consequently not simply be a goal, but a further development of the activity of experimental philosophy.

The reading sketched out here can be further supported by asking the philosophical question: Why would ecstasy, in the sense of ecstatic moments, be the goal of Nietzsche's philosophical striving? Imagine a philosopher who lives his everyday life, works, but gets drunk every weekend. This is a release from his everyday consciousness, which allows him to affirm the world and perhaps even to return to his life with new energy. Crucially, however, this experience does not necessarily have any impact on his philosophizing. By contrast, I am claiming that Nietzsche is not just advising philosophers to let go occasionally, but to incorporate a Dionysian perspective into their lives, in order to become even more daring and independent in their thinking.

The result would be a mood of affirmation or what Nietzsche himself on one occasion curiously calls a faith ([*Glaube*], KSA 6, 152); grounded in a perspective from which one can say yes to all of life, to all of existence as a whole. According to Nietzsche, this Dionysian faith<sup>18</sup> is the faith of Goethe, and while one might be tempted to think of the historical Goethe's sympathies for pantheism, Nietzsche does not describe his Goethe that way and instead calls him a realist. In fact, Nietzsche describes Goethe as the height of individuality; not as one who seeks either to extinguish or to transcend his self. Goethe, a name that here most probably stands as

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18 "ein solcher Glaube ist der höchste aller möglichen Glauben: ich habe ihn auf den Namen des Dionysos getauft" (KSA 6, 152).

much for Nietzsche, disciplined himself and thus created a whole out of himself.<sup>19</sup> Only through this disciplining and the resulting independence does the Dionysian mood of affirmation open itself, and there is no suggestion that it negates the independence that is its precondition. So whatever might be said about this Goethe's pantheism, he is not exactly a model for a person worshipping Dionysus in ecstatic states, nor is there any suggestion that the Dionysian state "can only be achieved through transcendence of the ego" in some less demanding sense (cf. Young 2010, 503).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, it follows, Nietzsche can be called a pantheist only as long as one specifies that his is a form of philosophical pantheism indistinguishable from atheism. In other words, it is definitely not a religious pantheism that seeks transcendence from finitude.

To conclude, I am willing to concede that in the late notes one can find statements critical of overvaluing conscious states, or more specifically states of "rational consciousness". One particularly striking example is a note in which Nietzsche explicitly speaks of philosophy as decadence and the false presupposition of the Greek philosophers that consciousness is the highest state (NL 1888, 14[129], KSA 13, 310–311). Yet this fact is only apt to show the huge problems involved in relying on single notes from the *Nachlass*, disconnected from the concerns of the published works, since there is no way of knowing what use Nietzsche would have made of them. Least of all can one conclude that Nietzsche values ecstatic or unconscious states higher than conscious ones. Indeed, one could equally well, and with stronger support from the published work, take ones cue from a late note which states that an overvaluation of unconscious states is a sign of decadence.<sup>21</sup> As the ambivalence of the *Nachlass* does not allow any definite interpretations, the most plausible interpretation is one that relies on the published work, and there the ideal of independence reigns.

## 7.5 The end: Nietzsche's final letters

With Nietzsche, the story always ends the same way. From his breakdown in Turin in January 1889 until his death in Weimar in 1900, he did not utter anything of philo-

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<sup>19</sup> "er disciplinierte sich zur Ganzheit, er schuf sich" and in his work he presented the "sich selbst im Zaume habenden, vor sich selber ehrfürchtigen Menschen" (KSA 6, 152).

<sup>20</sup> Arguably, such a denial of any need for transcendence is precisely the point of characterizing Goethe as someone who has shaped himself into a whole. Being a whole, he is more or less self-sufficient. Thus, there is no need for him to transcend the self into a higher whole. Of course, he can and does view the world as a whole and affirms it as such, but that happens through his individuality and not by transcending it.

<sup>21</sup> In this note, Nietzsche lists various symptoms of decadence, the fourth of which is that "man ersehnt einen Zustand, wo man nicht mehr leidet: das Leben wird tatsächlich als Grund zu Übeln empfunden, – man taxirt die bewußtlosen, gefühllosen Zustände (Schlaf, Ohnmacht) unvergleichlich werthvoller als die bewußten: daraus eine Methodik..." (NL1888, 17[6], KSA 13, 527–528)



sophical significance. I personally find that there are no better words to describe his state in that period than those of the wonderful German expression: *Geistige Umnachtung*. Although my study is not of a biographical nature, there is a need to address Nietzsche's final letters if not his descent into madness, since it has been suggested that they reveal the true nature of his thinking on religion, even if in a confused form (cf. Young 2010, 530). Instead of engaging in biographical speculation, I ask to what extent if any Nietzsche's mad identification of God with himself can be considered a logical development of his philosophical thinking on human possibilities (cf. Young 2010, 562).<sup>22</sup>

It is remarkable that the "return of God" to the centre of Nietzsche's concerns coincides with his last great experience of health, given that he in his late speculations on the psychology of religion claims that the experience of health can be enough for the sick person to feel the presence of God and to believe in God (NL 1888, 14[124], KSA 13, 306). Nietzsche's letters testify that he felt his ailments diminish significantly since his arrival in Turin on 20 September (KGB III/5, Bf. 1122) and that he consequently plunged into a frenzy of work (cf. KGB III/5, Bf. 1137). So on 13 November, amidst praising the Turin-weather, he can report that *Twilight of the Idols* is ready to be printed, that the manuscript of *Ecce Homo* is likewise finished, and that the first book of the re-evaluation [*Umwertung*] (i.e. *Antichrist*) is also completed (KGB III/5, Bf. 1143). Then, the following day, on 14 November, he writes what he himself calls a completely senseless letter [*völlig sinnlosen Brief*] (KGB III/5, Bf. 1144) to Meta von Salis, in which he jokingly suggests that the good weather is proof that the old God is still alive (KGB III/5, Bf. 1144). Already in December of the same year, in a sketch of a letter meant to accompany copies of *EH* to the same Meta von Salis, the old God has been abolished and Nietzsche is about to take his place.<sup>23</sup> What can and should the scholar make of this?

Firstly, it is worth noting that the description of that autumn in *EH* matches that of the letters to a great extent: Nietzsche opines that he never experienced such an autumn, never thought such a season possible and records that having finished the re-evaluation (i.e. *Antichrist*) he felt like a god. He specifically speaks of strolling as a God along the Po river (KSA 6, 356). Notably, however, one does not find the kind of self-divinization in *EH* as in letter Nr. 1177 or as one finds in the final letters (e.g. KGB III/5, Bf. 1239 and KGB III/5, Bf. 1246), where Nietzsche writes as if he had taken over the attributes of God as world-ruler and creator. What self-divinization

<sup>22</sup> However, I am explicitly not concerned with vain speculations about whether Nietzsche's philosophizing was destined to end thus. I also feel I have neither the right nor the competence to weigh in on the question whether Nietzsche's own way of living philosophy should be considered a contributing factor in his downfall. Such speculation started immediately after Nietzsche's mental breakdown, and has not abated to this day. One can ask if that is a scholarly endeavour at all, given the nature of the available evidence. Be that as it may, the question is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>23</sup> "ich sende Ihnen hiermit etwas Stupendes, aus dem Sie ungefähr errathen werden, daß der alte Gott abgeschafft ist, und daß ich selber alsbald die Welt regieren werde." (KGB III/5 Bf. 1177; cf. Bf. 1187)

there is in *EH* can instead be read as part of Nietzsche's play with all that is holy and as the representation of the possibility of a god-like mood of affirmation. In other words, there is a difference that is more than a difference of degree. Still, it is impossible to deny that there is some significant continuity in Nietzsche's thinking until the very end.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Young, who argues that the continuity is to be sought in the Dionysian content of the letters (cf. Young 2010, 530), I think it is more helpful to think of the continuity in question as one of style. Therefore, I will now pay attention to the crazed laughter that the letters exhibit. It cannot be established with any certainty, to what extent Nietzsche's final words on the matter (about being God) should also be read (as an elaborate joke?) in the context of the "world-historical laughter" that he mentions in one of the final letters (KGB III/5, Bf. 1232; cf. KGB III/5, Bf. 1240). There is no denying that Nietzsche became incapable of taking care of himself and that he became mad, to use a vulgar expression. Still, one can in retrospect conclude that he went into this madness with his characteristic style; turning tragedy into comedy. This is no more apparent than in the infamous letter to Burckhardt, from 4 January 1889, which he begins by proclaiming that he'd much rather be a Basel professor than God but has not dared to be such an egoist as to refrain from taking care of the creation of the world (KGB III/5, Bf. 1256).<sup>25</sup> While the letter contains "Dionysian" statements,<sup>26</sup> the mode of presentation itself is perhaps even more significant. Indeed, it is such that one need not be surprised that the letter found its way into André Breton's groundbreaking surrealist anthology of black humour (Breton 2001). There is a biting irony in it that defies the apparent madness of the message, yet one can do no more than to note that it is there. Of course, the possibilities of interpreting the letter from within Nietzsche's own philosophy are abundant.<sup>27</sup> Julian Young has suggested that one might interpret it as resulting from a "habitation of the

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<sup>24</sup> In this regard, I fully agree with Young's view of the letters when he writes: "All this of course is madness. Yet there is method in it, a vein of fragmented sanity that runs back to his best writings" (Young 2010, 529).

<sup>25</sup> "Lieber Herr Professor, zuletzt wäre ich sehr viel lieber Basler Professor als Gott; aber ich habe nicht gewagt, meinen Privat-Egoismus so weit zu treiben, um seinetwegen die Schaffung der Welt zu unterlassen." (KGB III/5, Bf. 1256)

<sup>26</sup> E. g. the identification of himself with all beings, in the sense that all persons are his incarnations: "Was unangenehm ist und meiner Bescheidenheit zusetzt, ist, daß im Grunde jeder Name in der Geschichte ich bin; auch mit den Kindern, die ich in die Welt gesetzt habe, steht es so, daß ich mit einigem Mißtrauen erwäge, ob nicht Alle, die in das 'Reich Gottes' kommen, auch aus Gott kommen." (KGB III/5, Bf. 1256)

<sup>27</sup> As is the case with Nietzsche's late philosophy in general. When Nietzsche writes his "autobiography" *EH*, and claims that he shall be known for having cut history in half (KSA 6, 373), does he not precisely do that, which he in *D* claims is a sign of impending death? In the aphorism *Der Philosoph und das Alter* he writes: "Indem er sich selber kanonisiert, hat er auch das Zeugnis des Todes über sich ausgestellt: von jetzt ab darf sein Geist sich nicht weiter entwickeln, die Zeit für ihn ist um, der Zeiger fällt. Wenn ein großer Denker aus sich eine bindende Institution für die zukünftige Menschheit machen will, darf man sicherlich annehmen, dass er über den Gipfel seiner Kraft gegangen und sehr müde, sehr nahe seinem Sonnenuntergange ist." (D 542, KSA 3, 312–313)

Dionysian state”, but in a sense that is more related to Nietzsche’s early understanding of a metaphysical primal unity that creates the world as an artist-god instead of what Young takes to be his later naturalistic interpretation of Dionysian ecstasy (cf. Young 2010, 530 and 562). Following this logic, one might even go as far as to claim that Nietzsche now had reached the goal of his philosophy, the Dionysian state, and no longer had any need of philosophy. Such an interpretation, however, presupposes that Nietzsche idealizes and strives for an ecstatic transcendence of the self, and I have shown that such interpretations are very problematic if not impossible. To me it seems far more plausible to deny that there is any significant continuity between Nietzsche’s philosophy and the “philosophical” content of the letters, as the letters are evidence of an inability to maintain the scepticism that characterizes the philosopher’s relation to extraordinary experiences. In other words, one can despite what seems like self-deconstructive irony in the letters detect in them an inability to distinguish an extreme feeling of power from actually being God.

## 7.6 Conclusion

In the last letters, in the inability to maintain what one might, following Jacob Golomb, call a mood of doubt, we witness the end of the philosophical Nietzsche, the end of Nietzsche as philosopher, not the (inevitable) end of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Despite the laughter with which this came to pass, it was a tragedy insofar as one can hardly claim Nietzsche was finished with his philosophizing, not to speak of claiming that he did not dream of still accomplishing quite a few things. It can of course be argued that I have downplayed the contradictoriness of Nietzsche’s work, i.e. the presence of disease (and/or metaphysical interpretation) in his earlier writings. That has not been my intention. Instead, I have sought to clarify what kind of striving, and what kind of ideal concerning moods, is the dominant force within Nietzsche’s writings until his final days of sanity. The interpretation of Nietzsche’s last works advanced here supports the contention that this striving is a by its nature atheistic questioning, and that his ideal mood is a mood of joy in doubt. Now it only remains to be specified, how best to describe this atheism, i.e. precisely what kind of an atheism his atheism is.