

BENJAMIN BIEBUYCK / DANNY PRAET / ISABELLE VANDEN POEL

## THE ETERNAL DIONYSUS

The Influence of Orphism, Pythagoreanism and the Dionysian  
Mysteries on Nietzsche's Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence\*

Nietzsche's eccentric autobiography *Ecce Homo* is in more than one way a strange book. It describes in its peculiar hyperboréan tone ("Das Eis ist nahe"<sup>1</sup>) the many circumstances that have influenced the course of his life, as well as the impulses the philosopher believes to have given to the history of humankind himself. As such, the private and the philosophical, the past and the present, the thinker and the thoughts become ingeniously intertwined. The most obvious example of this connection is the Greek deity Dionysus. In the second section of "Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe", Nietzsche characterises himself as the first having understood the Dionysian (KSA 6: 311), and explains it as a surplus of power, the eagerness and lust of destroying. Yet, whereas in the foreword he sees himself as the pupil of Dionysus (KSA 6: 258), he gradually tends to emphasise the "Dionysian nature" in himself (KSA 6: 311 and 366). Meticulous investigations carried out by people such as Mazzino Montinari, have shown that despite a discovery in the archives of Heinrich Köselitz in 1969, at least two pages of the text have been destroyed by Nietzsche's mother or his sister Elisabeth<sup>2</sup>. From her Nietzsche-hagiography, however, – in most cases a dubious source – we may infer that in that very same book Nietzsche also explicitly identified himself with the torn god. In the last but one chapter of her *Der einsame Nietzsche*, entitled "Die Erkrankung", she discredited the entire *Ecce Homo* as a symptom of Nietzsche's "pathological delirium" and thus legitimised the decision to annihilate "these curious phantasms", not to protect herself and her mother against the harsh criticism her brother expressed, but to spare both his ethical and aesthetic sensibilities in case he would later be confronted with these pages:

In jener Zeit beschrieb er auch einige Blätter mit seltsamen Phantasien, in denen sich die Sage des Dionysos-Zagreus mit der Leidensgeschichte der Evangelien und den ihm nächststehenden Persönlichkeiten der Gegenwart vermischte: der von seinen Feinden zerrissene Gott wandelt neu erstanden an

\* The following article is part of the outcome of a research programme of the Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders (Belgium; FWO-grant nr. G.0145.02).

<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Nietzsche's texts were taken from the standard critical editions of Colli and Montinari (Nietzsche 1967ff. and 1988), abbreviated as 'KGW', followed by the section number, the volume and the page indication, and 'KSA', followed by the volume and the page indication. Here: KSA 6: 258.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Montinari (1972).

den Ufern des Po und sieht nun alles, was er jemals geliebt hat, seine Ideale, die Ideale der Gegenwart überhaupt, weit unter sich. Seine Freunde und Nächsten sind ihm zu Feinden geworden, die ihn zerrissen haben. Diese 3 Blätter, die er an die Adresse meines Mannes nach Paraguay und an unsre Mutter schickte, wenden sich gegen Richard Wagner, Schopenhauer, Bismarck, den Kaiser, Professor Overbeck, Peter Gast, Frau Cosima, meinen Mann, meine Mutter und mich. Während dieser Zeit unterzeichnete er alle Briefe mit 'Dionysos' oder 'Der Gekreuzigte'. Auch in diesen Aufzeichnungen sind noch Stellen von hinreißender Schönheit, aber im Ganzen charakterisieren sie sich als krankhafter Fieberwahn. In den ersten Jahren nach meines Bruders Erkrankung, als wir noch die falsche Hoffnung hegten, daß er wieder gesund werden könnte, sind diese Blätter von unsrer lieben Mutter zum größten Teil vernichtet worden. Sie glaubte, daß es das liebevolle Herz und den guten Geschmack meines Bruders auf das Tiefste verletzen würde, wenn ihm solche Niederschriften späterhin zu Gesicht kämen. Von einem Blatt machte ich mir eine Abschrift (Förster-Nietzsche 522f.).

This episode belongs to the well-known vicissitudes of Nietzsche-editing. The issue that interests us here the most is the following. When the main themes of his philosophy had become part of his own life, as a delusional acting-out<sup>3</sup>, Nietzsche chose the myth of Dionysus Zagreus as a model and a mask, prefiguring his own destiny in a dialectics of annihilation and resurrection. Obviously, this explains his references to the Crucified ("Leidensgeschichte der Evangelien"), as much as it elucidates 'eternal recurrence' as an instrument for the immediate intensification of his own existence ("mein eigentlicher abgründlichster Gedanke"). But it also hints at the prolonged meaning of his early confrontations with classical thinking and at the processes of transposition to contemporary situations Nietzsche considered to be adequate: particular self-transformations inspired by the cultural exchanges in ancient times.

As far as eternal recurrence is concerned, Nietzsche restricts his genealogy to Heraclitus and the Stoics:

Die Lehre von der 'ewigen Wiederkunft', das heisst vom unbedingten und unendlich wiederholten Kreislauf aller Dinge – diese Lehre Zarathustra's könnte zuletzt auch schon von Heraklit gelehrt worden sein. Zum Mindesten hat die Stoa, die fast alle ihre grundsätzlichen Vorstellungen von Heraklit geerbt hat, Spuren davon (KSA 6: 313).

Still, he refers to the afflictions of Dionysus Zagreus, with which he must have been familiar through the account of what he called the 'fourth' Orphic *Theogony* and numerous other writings<sup>4</sup>. This concurrence is somewhat bizarre, since the figure of Dionysus must have been directly associated by Nietzsche with the religious-philosophical cluster consisting of the Orphic anthropology of metempsychosis, its most prominent advocate Pythagoras, and Pythagorean cosmology of the 'circle of necessity'. Yet he does not say a word about this background, even though he had discussed the Pythagorean concept of recurrence in the second *Untimely Meditation*,

<sup>3</sup> The same process can be witnessed with respect to his concept of eternal recurrence; see for instance, also in *Ecce Homo*: "Aber ich bekenne, dass der tiefste Einwand gegen die 'ewige Wiederkunft', mein eigentlicher abgründlichster Gedanke, immer Mutter und Schwester sind" (KSA 6: 268).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance: KGW II, 4: 222; Wohlfart (1999) 38ff. suggests Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus* as a "very probable" intermediary source.

in what is now considered as one of the earliest explorations of this 'eternalist' theorem (KSA 1: 261 f.). In the following, we will try to explain this 'loud' silence in Nietzsche's discourse; we will try to detect how his Dionysus relates to the Orphic traditions, what Orphism means for him, and why he persistently dismisses Pythagoreanism up to the point that he eventually keeps silent about it – for more than one year<sup>5</sup>.

### Orphic zealotry

In the course of time, the debate on what Orphism really was, has been extremely lively. Nowadays, scholars agree that there has never been a coherent and homogeneous Orphic community nor a specific, normative religious life-style or doctrine, but that it rather was the designation of a very diverse religious-philosophical movement that came into being as a result of a shift in religious consciousness in the second half of the sixth century<sup>6</sup>. The most important unifying factor of Orphism is its sacred writings – traditionally ascribed to the eponymical musician Orpheus –, some of which were known to Nietzsche, especially those collected in Lobeck's *Aglaophamus sive de theologiae mysticae graecorum causis*, published in 1829<sup>7</sup>. At the heart of Orphic tradition lies a number of theogonies, displaying a narrative multiplicity turning around the myth of the murder of Dionysus. From the viewpoint of the history of religions, this Dionysus-figure is a syncretism tracing back to various Mediterranean traditions (Thracian, Phrygian, Cretan and continental Greek), in which he represents both the atrocity and the fertility of nature. As such, he is often identified with Zagreus and Sabazius, but also with Hades, or even Zeus<sup>8</sup>. In one of the most influential Orphic theogonies, Dionysus is killed and torn into pieces by the

<sup>5</sup> Apart from some brief references in the Spring of 1885 (KSA 11: 449), one longer reference in the third (published in 1882), and one marginal hint in the fifth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (published in 1887; KSA 3: 588), Nietzsche stopped writing about Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism in the fourth book of *Morgenröthe* (§ 347), in which he – as it happens – recommends the beneficial effects of silence for those who want to learn to speak: "Wenn man ein Jahr lang schweigt, so verlernt man das Schwätzen und lernt das Reden" (KSA 3: 238). The same problem was raised by Patrick Moroney (1986) 70ff., who does not dwell upon the meaning of Orphism and confines his argument to the topics of remembrance and anthropological dualism as incompatible with Nietzsche's philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> As to the historical phenomenon of Orphism, see A. Bernabé (2002) 205: "En effet, nos connaissances sur l'orphisme sont très limitées et, par conséquent, non seulement il n'existe pas, il s'en faut de beaucoup, d'accord arrêté parmi les érudits concernant la portée du terme 'orphisme'"; see also Bernabé (205–207) for a short survey of the 20th Century research on Orphism and (239–247) for bibliographical references.

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche borrowed this book from the University library in Basel on November 7, 1869; see: Crescenzi (1999) 392; cf. also Oehler (1942) 46.

<sup>8</sup> In correspondence with Preller (1860) 696ff., whose *Griechische Mythologie* he knew very well (see: KGW II, 3: 410), Nietzsche repeatedly depicts Dionysos as a chthonic god, lord of the underworld, and found confirmation of this interpretation in the etymology of the name (KSA 7: 82), which he reads as a lesbian-aeolian equivalent of "zonnuxos" (translated by Nietzsche as "der todte" or "der tödtende Zeus") and traces to the root "nek" (or "nekus", "nekros", all referring to death); cf. also Nietzsche's reference to the Heraclitus-fragment DK B 15, 3: "Hades and Dionysus are one and the same" (ibidem).

Titans<sup>9</sup>. After having devoured their victim, the Titans are punished by Zeus and struck by his lightning. Out of the ashes of their bodies the human race emerges: a mixture of double origin, partly divine, partly mortal. Dionysus himself, however, is miraculously saved by his father and enjoys the opportunity of rebirth. In the Orphic accounts, all this is interpreted as the point of departure for an anthropology based on the dialectics of primeval violence and resurrection, on the heritability of an original sin and on the necessity of purification and asceticism. Humankind was believed to be rooted in a cycle of *metempsychosis* or *metensomatosis*; after death, the immortal soul would go down to the underworld in order to be judged. The reward for a 'good' life would be its incarnation in a higher form of life, and for those who could reach purity, this would eventually lead to the soul's transcending of the 'circle of return'. Those who would not comply with an ascetic lifestyle, were degraded into lower forms of life, such as animals. In this sense, Orphism relied on a primarily moral evaluation of human existence.

Unlike contemporary scholars, Nietzsche was convinced that Orphism was one of the oldest traditions in Greek thought. In his *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur*<sup>10</sup> he referred to Orphic *Theogonies* as a well-known example of "eine halbphilosophische Litteratur, Mischung von Mythischem und Abstraktem" (KGW II, 5: 181) that preceded the activities of Anaximander, the first Greek philosopher known to have put his theories into writing. According to Nietzsche, Orphic *Theogonies* also predated Pherecydes of Syros, the best known example of this pre-philosophical literature. He even disagreed with the common view that Orphism was post-Homeric, based on the observation that there are no references to Orpheus and Orphism in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*<sup>11</sup>. Homer's silence on the topic had, in Nietzsche's view, nothing to do with the sequence of historical events, but with a deliberate strategy tracing back to manifest discrepancies between Orphic thought and the spirit of Homeric poetry. Obviously, he could not deny that Orphism is only documented from the sixth century onwards, but he interpreted this as a historical coincidence. As is well known, the sixth century was central to Nietzsche's concept of a classical age, and we submit that he refused to believe that Orphism was in fact a constructive part of this Greek revolution. He emphatically repeated that Orphism did, as he put it, 'emerge from the dark' in the beginning of the sixth century and stepped into the light of our historical sources, but then again he remonstrated that certain hymns and an age-old Orphic *Theogony* predated our documentation<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lobeck (1829) 483: "majus et quasi canonicum opus".

<sup>10</sup> KGW II, 5: 1–353, here especially: § 11: "Die philosophische Litteratur" (180–224).

<sup>11</sup> KGW II, 5: 181: "Die gewöhnl. Lehre, dass die orphischen Geheimlehren erst nach Homer auftraten, ist ganz unsicher. Das Schweigen Homers lässt sich gut aus dem Widerspruch erklären, in dem die orphische Richtung zu dem Geiste Homers steht."

<sup>12</sup> KGW II, 5: 181: "Seit dem Anfang des 6t. Jhd., das religiös bewegt war, tritt die orphische Lehre aus dem Dunkel hervor, vorher gab es *hymnoi* und eine uralte orphische *theogonia*." *Idem verbatim* in KGW II, 4: 207–362: "Die vorplatonischen Philosophen" (220, note 9).

It is of primary importance to acknowledge Nietzsche's inclination to read Orphism as a pre-Homeric phenomenon. The time, in which he situates its origins, is a time of barbarianism and cruelty, when human interaction was hardly or not at all disciplined by forms of cultural negotiation, and violence would pop up at any instance. From *Die Geburt der Tragödie* we can infer that for Nietzsche this period is symbolised by Dionysus. In the second part, he claims that traces of such Dionysian 'civilisations' were present in the entire ancient world and were gradually translated into cultic celebrations consisting of "superabundant sexual unruliness" and expressing as a safety valve "a horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty" (KSA 1: 32)<sup>13</sup>. Although this 'lifestyle' may seem an anthropological universalism, not every one responded to it in the same manner. The Orphic movement, Nietzsche claimed, found its origin exactly in the anxiety for the unmitigated savagery of the pre-Homeric world and therefore performed the characteristic gesture of turning away from it:

Hinter jenem blutigen Zeitalter her zieht sich eine Wellenfurche tief hinein in die hellenische Geschichte. Die Namen des Orpheus, des Musäus und ihrer Kulte verrathen, zu welchen Folgerungen der unausgesetzte Anblick einer Welt des Kampfes und der Grausamkeit drängte – zum Ekel am Dasein, zur Auffassung dieses Daseins als einer abzubüßenden Strafe, zum Glauben an die Identität von Dasein und Verschuldetheit (KSA 1: 785).

It is important to notice that it is not so much the existence of horror and conflict that urges the Orphics to change their ways, but rather the visual immediacy of it. This is the basis of Nietzsche's objections against Orphism: even if they can only express themselves in the form of allegories, they possess – or should we say: are limited to – the 'ability to think abstractly and unplastically' (KSA 1: 815: "die Fähigkeit, Abstractionen zu fassen und unplastisch zu denken"). The colourful plasticity of life has such a frightening effect on them, that they withdraw the centre of their existence from earthly reality. Gods are no longer understood as living persons, but rather as conceptualisations – a tendency Nietzsche considers to be illustrated also by the prose cosmology written by Pherecydes of Syros, the 6th-century teacher of Pythagoras, which he describes as a much more conceptual account than its older, Hesiodic counterpart<sup>14</sup>. Humans in their turn are abstracted into bodiless souls, mi-

<sup>13</sup> See also: Reibnitz (1992) 105. Compare: KSA 1: 583f., where Nietzsche characterises pre-Homeric feasts as a "Naturkult, der bei den Asiaten die wildeste Entfesselung aller rohen und niederen Triebe bedeutet, ein panhetärisches Thierleben, das für eine bestimmte Zeit alle Schranken der Menschlichkeit übersprang." See also his remarks on the possible degradation of the Hellene: "Er wird böse und grausam, er wird rachsüchtig und gottlos, kurz, er wird 'vorhomerisch'." (KSA 1: 792). An important source of inspiration with respect to the pre-Homeric world undoubtedly was Johann Jakob Bachofen; Nietzsche visited him a number of times in the early 1870s and was familiar with his work (cf. Frank, 1988, 37, Baumeier, 1977, 151ff. and Cancik, 2002, 25ff.). Barbara von Reibnitz doubts whether there are influences of Bachofen's *Mutterrecht* (Reibnitz, 1992, 102); referring to Meuli, she indicates that Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (1837–43) was a common source and may explain some manifest correspondences.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. KGW II, 4: 222. Rohde defends a similar view in *Psyche*: "Diese Götter sind freilich nicht mehr Götter von altgriechischem Typus. Nicht nur die von orphischer Phantastik neu erschaffenen, unter symbolisch bedeutendem Beiwerk deutlicher sinnlicher Vorstellung fast entzogenen Götterwesen, auch die aus

grating from one 'physical prison' into the other, but never fully implementing their individual essence in the material circumstances of daily life. On the contrary: the cause of their suffering lies in a past that precedes this life, and the reward to be gained will not be attainable until after death. Ultimately, the cruel and conflictual nature of earthly existence makes life as such from the Orphic viewpoint completely worthless: "nicht lebenswerth" (KSA 1: 786).

But Nietzsche does not stop here: the Orphics' "disgust for life" ("Ekel am Dasein", KSA 1: 785) can be traced back to their view that life is nothing more than a "penalty", an "indebtedness". Even though this penalty is transmitted at birth and as such inescapable, it still forms the basis upon which life itself is morally valued. Humans can only free themselves from "old sins" (KGW II, 4: 255) by doing penance, i.e. by moderating their sensual experiences and cleansing oneself by leading an ascetic life<sup>15</sup>. This total negation of earthly existence, which is nothing more than a futile intermission between sin and salvation – Nietzsche calls this in the context of Plato a "lebenverleumdendes, lebenverneinendes Prinzip" (KSA 12: 297) –, runs in as many ways as possible counter to the basic intuitions of Nietzschean philosophy: the affirmation of the body, the rejection of any metaphysical dualisms, and the recognition of the fullness of life<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, his interpretation of the death and rebirth of Dionysus differs fundamentally from the views of the Orphics. As we can read in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, the laceration of Dionysus proves for Nietzsche that the true nature of suffering lies in the fact that one is torn loose from "das Ur-Eine", the originary unity between humans and nature – put into philosophical terms: the *principium individuationis*. This alienation prevails over the actual pain one might experience under the acts of violence committed. For the Orphics, however, exactly this pain is the trigger to bring human individualisation to its extremes: to them salvation is a strictly personal reward for a strictly personalised, purified way of life. This option makes individuation – a temporary form of being for Nietzsche's Dionysus – into a permanent state of being and thus the reunification of humans with the encompassing dynamics of life impossible.

griechischer Götterwelt entlehnten Gestalten sind hier wenig mehr als personifizierte Begriffe. Wer könnte den Gott Homers wiedererkennen in dem orphischen Zeus, der, nachdem er den Allgott verschlungen und 'in sich gefasst hat die Kraft des Erikipaios' nun selbst das All der Welt ist: 'Anfang Zeus, Zeus Mitte, in Zeus ist alles vollender'. Der Begriff erweitert hier die Person so sehr, dass sie zu zersprengen droht; er löst die Umrisse der einzelnen Gestalten auf und lässt sie in bewusster 'Göttermischung' zusammenfließen'." (1894, 405f.)

<sup>15</sup> Compare KSA 7: 403: "Die grauenhaften theogonischen Sagen sind ein Beispiel der althellenischen, an das Gräßliche gewöhnten Phantasie. Welche irdische Existenz spiegeln sie wieder! Eine Strömung geht von dorthin aus, die zur Askese, zur Reinigung treibt (Orpheus, Pythagoras)".

<sup>16</sup> An interesting 'cognitive' consequence of Orphic asceticism is the reversal of the traditional, Homeric dialectics of remembrance and forgetting; for Homeric heroes, death is associated with the total effacement of personal history, exemplified by the gesture of drinking from the river Lethe. Orphics, however, (and with them: Pythagoreans and Platonists) perceived reversely life as a forgetting – cf. also: the warnings not to drink from the Lethe on Orphic gold leaves (cf. Parker, 1995, 496f.).

## Pythagoreanism

The reaction of the Orphics to barbaric violence and suffering, their reluctance to look it in the eye, and their subsequent reversing of the ontological importance of the *Jenseits* and the *Diesseits* were to Nietzsche obvious symptoms of their weakness and reactivity. Nonetheless, he admits that it was a long-lived movement, which in later ages presented itself on the public forum as well, a sign of which was its recordings in sixth- and fifth-century BCE documents<sup>17</sup>. Nietzsche interpreted this proliferation as a development towards further degradation. This was, for instance, the case with Onomacritus' attempt to adapt Orphism to popular belief<sup>18</sup>. He submitted that this process of degeneration triggered a much more important reformation of Orphic tradition, which was said to be initiated by Pythagoras of Samos, philosopher and religious leader from the sixth century<sup>19</sup>. Nietzsche's view on Pythagoras as a historical figure is somewhat peculiar and quite idiosyncratic. In his survey of pre-Platonic philosophy, there is no room for Pythagoras, for he did not partake in the ontological debate between Parmenides and Heraclitus, started by Anaximander's theory of the *apeiron*. Nietzsche concludes:

<sup>17</sup> In his *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, Nietzsche refers to the list of Orphic writings in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and the article in the *Suda*, s.v. Orpheus. In the section on epic literature, he discusses the date of the Orphic *Argonautica* and tentatively situates it in the 4th century CE (cf. KGW II, 5: 35 and 181f.).

<sup>18</sup> KGW II, 4: 220, note 9: "Onomacritos u. Orpheus von Croton suchen dann die orphische Lehre u. den Volksglauben in Übereinstimmung zu bringen." The Onomacritus-scandal, reported by Herodotus (VII, 6), refers to an Attic poet who was (ca. 485) expelled from Athens for having corrupted the oracles of Musaeus.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. KSA I: 841: "umwälzende Persönlichkeit wie Pythagoras"; in fragment 6 [30] Nietzsche attributes to Pythagoras an attempt to break through the local power structures of the *poleis* by means of a "Reformation des Geistes" (KSA 8: 110). In his *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* he wrote: "Zeitiges Eingreifen der Pythagoreer. Sie wollten eine Rückkehr zu der alten reinen Lehre des Orpheus, gegenüber dem willkür. Treiben der Orphiker ihrer Zeit. Heraklit [sic] sagt, daß in dem Heiligtum des Dionysos auf dem Haemus sich alte Aufzeichnungen unter dem Namen des Orpheus fanden und daß Pythagoras sie benützt habe (er soll in Leibethra durch den Orphiker Aglaophamos eingeweiht sein.) Dann beteiligten sich wieder [Orphiker] Pythagoreer an der orphischen Poesie." (KGW II, 5: 182; the reference to Heraclitus is erratic; Nietzsche deals here with Heraclides Ponticus, cf. KGW II, 4: 220, note 9). The close connection between Orphism and Pythagoras can be found in any history of Greek philosophy; the most obvious ancient source is the chapter on Pythagoras in Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae Philosophorum* (VIII, 8; p. 576), where Ion of Chios is quoted saying that some of the Orphic poems were actually written by Pythagoras himself. In Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* there is little or nothing on Orphism, but Jamblichus dwells on the subject for several chapters in his *On the Pythagorean Life* (28, 145–151; pp. 146–155). Here, Pythagoras is seen as a syncretic follower of Orphism, who had been initiated by Aglaophamos, a pupil of Orpheus, and created a synthesis between Orphic teachings and the wisdom traditions of the Egyptian priests, the Chaldaeans, the Magi, the Celts, the Iberians and the mystery cults. According to Jamblichus, Orphism was the source of the central Pythagorean teaching that All is Number. A central text like the *Hieros Logos* (Sacred Discourse), also known as *Peri theōn Logos* (Discourse on the Gods), however, is said to have been actually written by Pythagoras himself, as is proven by the opening lines still known to Jamblichus. Rohde (1872) 46 remarks that "diese sonst ganz unbekannte Schrift überhaupt nirgends anderswo genannt [wird]."

Ganz allein steht dagegen Pythagoras. [...] Zu den älteren Philosophen steht er deshalb in gar keinem Verhältnis, weil er gar kein Philosoph war, sondern etwas Anderes. Streng genommen könnte man ihn selbst aus einer Geschichte der Philosophie ausschließen (KGW II, 4: 252).

With the vague characterisation as 'something else' Nietzsche refers to his role as religious reformer, deeply embedded in Orphic tradition. Yet, there was quite some discussion about the exact doctrine this reformer propounded, since it was unclear which tenets were derived from Pythagoras himself and which should be ascribed to his religious followers. Porphyry, for instance, had argued in his *Vita Pythagorae* that three aspects of Pythagorean doctrine go back to the historical person with reasonable certainty: the immortality of the soul, the transmigration of the soul, and the cyclic return of all historical events<sup>20</sup>. Many of Nietzsche's contemporaries, such as Erwin Rohde, accepted Porphyry's account of Pythagoras' three-partite doctrine as *minima historica* because of its 'intelligent caution' ("verständige Vorsicht"), but Nietzsche himself rejected their view. He was convinced of an elementary distinction between the religious and the 'scientific' aspects of Pythagoreanism. As to the historical Pythagoras, Nietzsche argued that his teachings were exclusively concerned with religious salvation (very much in line with those of the Orphic doctrine): it contained instructions and regulations, by means of which humans could do penance for earlier transgressions, in order to allow them to escape the cycle of rebirths. With the same intention, Pythagoras also set up secret cultic ceremonies, revealing 'sacred customs' to the believers. Nietzsche was convinced that the cosmology of eternal recurrence, based on astrological and mathematical insights, however, was the result of later developments in Pythagoreanism, especially from 450 BCE onwards. An influential factor in these developments was, according to Nietzsche, Philolaos, a somewhat older contemporary of Socrates, who in traditional accounts was accused of disclosing the age-old mathematical philosophy of Pythagoras. Nietzsche dismissed this representation as a fable, actually constructed by Philolaos himself or someone from his entourage, with the intention of giving their own new scientific and mathematical insights the sanctity of 'true Pythagorean wisdom'<sup>21</sup>. The ruse was, so Nietzsche thought, later taken up by the authors of the doxographical tradition to rationalise the split in the school of Pythagoras – somewhere in the middle of the 5th century – between a religious (*akousmatikoi*) and a scientific-mathematical group (*mathematikoi*). From his notes on Rohde's study on Jamblichus (published in *Rheinisches Museum*) emerges that for Nietzsche Pythagorean tenets predating the 5th century exclusively deal with religious contents. As such, it is necessary to make a distinction between a religious doctrine of eternal recurrence, based on Pythagoras' teachings on the transmutations of the immortal soul, and its astrological counterpart of the 'circle

<sup>20</sup> Cf. concerning the historical Pythagoras and the historicity of his teachings: KGW II, 4: 254 ff.; cf. also Porphyry's *Vita* (§ 19, p. 44, r. 20–24; p. 45, r. 1).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. KGW II, 4: 258: "Jene alte Fabel von Philolaos beweist dass die Lehre und Schrift des Philolaos der Anfang der Zahlenphilosophie ist."

of necessity' (*kuklos anangkēs*), going back to later mathematical fabrications in Pythagoreanism<sup>22</sup>.

From Nietzsche's writings we get an ambiguous picture of Pythagoras. On the one hand, Nietzsche seems to appreciate the status of demi-god he attributed to himself – for this makes us amenable for forms of intellectual self-confidence and greatness that would never emerge from our own imagination:

Es ist wichtig von solchen Menschen zu erfahren, daß sie einmal gelebt haben. Nie würde man, als müßige Möglichkeit, den Stolz des weisen Heraklit, der unser Beispiel sein mag, imaginieren können. An sich scheint ja jedes Streben nach Erkenntniß, seinem Wesen nach, unbefriedigt und unbefriedigend; deshalb wird Niemand, wenn er nicht durch die Historie belehrt ist, an eine so königliche Selbstachtung, an eine so unbegrenzte Überzeugtheit, der einzige beglückte Freier der Wahrheit zu sein, glauben mögen. Solche Menschen leben in ihrem eignen Sonnensystem; darin muß man sie aufsuchen. Auch ein Pythagoras, ein Empedokles behandelten sich selbst mit einer übermenschlichen Schätzung, ja mit fast religiöser Scheu (KSA 1: 757f.; cf. also: KSA 1: 834)<sup>23</sup>.

As such, Nietzsche celebrates Pythagoras – amongst others – as 'one-sided', pure thinkers ("die Einseitigen", KSA 1: 810), in contrast to the 'many-sided', mixed characters such as Plato ("die Vielseitigen" and "Mischcharaktere", *ibid.*).

This recognition, however, is somewhat misleading. Whereas he characterises Pythagoras in *Menschliches Allzumenschliches I* as one of the "Tyrannen des Geistes" and legislator (KSA 2: 214), he repeatedly associates Pythagoreanism with the life-negating principles of Orphism, such as asceticism and self-purification (e.g. KSA 7: 399, 403; KSA 8: 101). Very much like it was with Orphism, Nietzsche tries to avoid classifying Pythagoras in 'his' classical sixth century; in this case, he does not move the philosopher up in time, but he displaces him out of the Greek atmosphere. Already in his early scribbles, Nietzsche ironically links Pythagoras with the Chinese (KSA 1: 806: "unter den Chinesen") and connects him with an Indian world view<sup>24</sup>. The latter link may explain why Nietzsche suspects Buddhist influence in Pythagorean thinking (KSA 11: 449). Unlike Buddhism, however, Pythagoras did not

<sup>22</sup> Rohde was convinced that the life and teaching of Pythagoras had contained at least the seeds of a scientific interest, alongside the soteriological doctrine of the Orphics and their ritual prescriptions (cf. Rohde 1872; cf. KGW II, 4: 255). Nietzsche particularly disagreed with his interpretation of Heraclitus' fragments on Pythagoras (in Diogenes Laertius VIII, 6; p. 575 and IX, 1.2; p. 632f.), and linked them with the passage in Herodotus II, 81 (p. 187) and II, 123 (p. 216f.), which he believed to substantiate his own thesis. A third indication was, according to Nietzsche, the fact that Empedocles, who supposedly had divulged the secrets of the Pythagorean school as well, only talked about religious regulations and metempsychosis, yet seems to have had no knowledge of any scientific or mathematical Pythagorean tenets.

<sup>23</sup> See also: KSA 11: 166: "Pythagoras gründet einen Orden für Vornehme, eine Art Tempelherrn-Orden."

<sup>24</sup> KSA 1: 845: "Das Denken des Parmenides trägt gar nichts von dem berausenden dunklen Duft des Indischen an sich, der vielleicht an Pythagoras und Empedokles nicht gänzlich unwahrnehmbar ist". The same holds for Orphism, which Nietzsche labelled as "nicht spezifisch hellenisch" (KSA 1: 785). Nonetheless, we have to stress that he did not take part in the typically 19th-century 'orientalising' revolution in classical philology (such as Gladisch's *Die Pythagoreer und die Chinesen* (Posen 1841), *Die Eleaten und die Indier* (Posen 1844), *Empedokles und die Ägypter* (Leipzig 1858), *Herakleitos und Zoroaster* (Leipzig 1859) and *Anaxagoras und die Israeliten* (Leipzig 1864)), which he made fun of at numerous instances.

want to suppress or deny the will (by means of the will itself), but rather attempted to turn the will against life, instead of celebrating life with it: the will is besmirched by asceticism and used as a means to kill<sup>25</sup>. This perversion of the will is compatible with Pythagoras' opposition to the typically Greek aversion for weakness and sentimentality: he represents a counter-movement against a 'certain violence against weak, mild feelings'<sup>26</sup>. Its notions of recurrence and metempsychosis are in line with those of its spiritual precursors, the Orphics, and illustrate Pythagorean mentality, which eventually turns out to be equally life-denying and gregarious<sup>27</sup>. In the end, Nietzsche concludes that Pythagoreanism is guided by pity and weakness – Pythagoras himself is typified as "melancholisch mitleidsvoll" (KSA 1: 810); as such, it is a necessary precedent to Platonism. For it is Pythagoreanism that has corrupted Plato (cf. KSA 7: 438 and KSA 11: 449); not Socrates, but Pythagoras was Plato's "geheim neidisch angeschaut[s] Ideal" (KSA 9: 171). In this sense, Nietzsche can discredit Pythagoreanism as one of the two 'anti-Hellenic' decadent movements, which have taken over after the decline of classical Greek culture (KSA 13: 169). It was not until the second half of the 1880s, however, that Nietzsche explicitly connected this "décadence-Bewegung" based on the depreciation of the senses ("Entsinnlichung", KSA 11: 449) with Christianity.

The other decadent movement is the one for which life was nothing more than an opportunity for aesthetic and erotic complacency: "die üppige, lebenswürdig-boshafte, prunk- und kunstliebende décadence" (KSA 13: 169), which seeks solace in a "weibische Flucht vor dem Ernst und dem Schrecken" and a "feige[s] Sichgenügen lassen am bequemen Genuss" (KSA 1: 78). For this 'post-classical' culture, Dionysus is not the god of the cruel and the fertile anymore, but the exponent of unleashed sexual activity. Nietzsche explains that it was responsible for the "blassrothe Heiterkeitsfarbe" associated with Greek civilisation that was seen by the early churches as the real "anti-Christian" strand. Nonetheless, it went hand in hand with the religious-philosophical movements that have turned out to be the real breeding-grounds of Christianity<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> KSA 7: 527: "Pythagoras. Der Wille in seinen asketischen Absichten. Der Wille tödend".

<sup>26</sup> KSA 11: 59: "Die Frau bei den Griechen von Homer bis Pericles immer mehr zurückgedrängt: dies gehört zur Cultur der Griechen – eine gewisse Gewalt gegen die weichen milden Gefühle. Ausbrechen einer Gegenströmung z. B. Pythagoras und die Thiere."

<sup>27</sup> Compare its characterisation as one of the "demokratisch-demagogische" tendencies (KSA 7: 544); see also Murray (1999) 17ff.

<sup>28</sup> In a fragment dated around the end of 1887 and the beginning of 1888 (KSA 13: 108f.; see also: KSA 13: 116), Nietzsche explains that the real genius of Paul appeared from the way in which he managed to reconcile a pagan mystic tradition with the institutional requirements of state organisation; to do this, he cultivated one of the most symbolic events in the cultic narrative ("eine blutige Phantasmagorie") and linked it with a normative religious behaviour based on penance and sin. For Paul, the connection between dismemberment and rebirth of the mystic godhead (e.g. Dionysus) was not merely temporal, but causal – in other words: the sacrifice was interpreted as the precondition for salvation. The mystery traditions Nietzsche here refers to (Dionysus, Mithras, Osiris), are the typically degenerate forms of the post-classical age; that even in these cases he indiscriminately uses the name of Dionysus, makes the discussion more confused.

## Modes of migration

Both in case of the Orphics and of Pythagoreanism, the (temporal or spatial) dislocation can be seen as a symptom of Nietzsche's disapproval, but it would be wrong to conclude that it was also a ground for his aversion. His writings do not suggest that Nietzsche defended the traditional image of a 'pure' Greek culture or civilisation, in which negative aspects of Hellenism would be interpreted as the result of contaminating external cultural influx. Aphorism 149 in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, entitled "Misslingen der Reformationen", shows that quite the contrary is true – not the internal homogeneity of a civilisation, but its cultural multiplicity is the most effective defence mechanism against the herd instinct used as a tool by religious reformers:

Es spricht für die höhere Cultur der Griechen selbst in ziemlich frühen Zeiten, dass mehrere Male die Versuche, neue griechische Religionen zu gründen, gescheitert sind; es spricht dafür, dass es schon früh eine Menge verschiedenartiger Individuen in Griechenland gegeben haben muss, deren verschiedenartige Noth nicht mit einem einzigen Recepte des Glaubens und Hoffens abzuthun war. Pythagoras und Plato, vielleicht auch Empedokles, und bereits viel früher die orphischen Schwarmgeister, waren darauf aus, neue Religionen zu gründen; und die beiden Erstgenannten hatten so ächte Religionsstifter-Seelen und -Taleute, dass man sich über ihr Misslingen nicht genug verwundern kann: sie brachten es aber nur zu Secten. Jedes Mal, wo die Reformation eines ganzen Volkes misslingt und nur Secten ihr Haupt emporheben, darf man schliessen, dass das Volk schon sehr vielartig in sich ist und sich von den groben Heerdeninstincten und der Sittlichkeit der Sitte loszulösen beginnt: ein bedeutungsvoller Schwebestand, den man als Sittenverfall und Corruption zu verunglimpfen gewohnt ist: während er das Reifwerden des Eies und das nahe Zerbrechen der Eierschale ankündigt (KSA 3: 493).

For Nietzsche, it is a crucial historical observation that neither the Orphic nor the Pythagorean movements – both relying on the believers' turning away from the cruel and savage reality of earthly, material existence – turned out to be massive attractors in Greek social and religious self-understanding. The cause of this was the 'higher culture' of the Greeks at that time, or rather: the fact that they were in themselves 'too multifarious'. In other words: as opposed to the marginalised sects of their time – bearing witness in their cultural life-style to a fundamental weakness –, the Greeks owed their strength to the complex composition of their cultural identity. This complexity is in Nietzsche's view the result of their specific mode of intercultural negotiation, which comes to the fore both in the structure of their public life, the organisation of the state, and in the ways in which they maintained their cultic conventions.

In order to trace the origins of Greek cultural identity, Nietzsche goes back to those times immemorial that were characterised by barbarianism and atrocity. He elaborated on the contrasts between Orphic 'resignationism'<sup>29</sup> and the 'Hellenic genius' in the last of the five "Vorreden zu fünf ungeschriebenen Büchern": *Homer's Wettkampf*. The central theme of this text is the connection between culture on the one hand and the dualistic aspects of nature – its destructive and its productive power –

<sup>29</sup> With the neologism "Resignationismus" (KSA 1: 20) Nietzsche criticizes the concept of Greek tragedy in Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.

on the other. The traditional view was that humanity raises people above their natural state and separates them from their spontaneous and natural impulses. Yet Nietzsche does not agree with this view and emphasises the nobility of nature: "Der Mensch, in seinen höchsten und edelsten Kräften, ist ganz Natur und trägt ihren unheimlichen Doppelcharakter an sich" (KSA 1: 783). Precisely because they acknowledged the duality of human culture, Nietzsche continues, the Greeks were "die humansten Menschen der alten Zeit". Obviously, this does not mean that they renounced any form of violence, but rather that they in one way or the other cherished cruelty, and have always kept "einen Zug von Grausamkeit, von tigerartiger Vernichtungslust". When confronted with atrocity and savagery – symbolised by Dionysus –, the Greeks did not look away as the Orphics would do; rather, they would attempt to discipline this primordial violence into new forms of cultural behaviour<sup>30</sup>. Exactly this manner of structuring intercultural exchange is the recipe for the tragic 'boom' in the sixth century – even more so than the famous duplicity of the Apollinian and the Dionysian. Before going into this matter, it is important to observe that the figure of Dionysus Nietzsche is focussing on here, *Dionysus Zagreus*, is indeed the god conferred to us by Orphic accounts and traditions, but that for Nietzsche he is in no way an Orphic deity<sup>31</sup>. This claim is reinforced by the fact that he stages Dionysus not only as a suffering, but in similar contexts also as a glorious, triumphant god. This emerges, for instance, from the description of Dionysian feasts in *Die dionysische Weltanschauung* and the symbolic prominence of 'violent' nature it displays:

Die Dionysus-Feste schließen nicht nur den Bund zwischen Mensch und Mensch, sie versöhnen auch Mensch und Natur. Freiwillig bringt die Erde ihre Gaben, die wildesten Thiere nahen sich friedfertig: von Panther und Tigern wird der blumenbekränzte Wagen des Dionysus gezogen (KSA 1: 555; compare KSA 1: 29: "unter seinem Joche Panther und Tiger").<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. KSA 1: 785f.: "Um sie zu verstehen, müssen wir davon ausgehen, daß der griechische Genius den einmal so furchtbar vorhandenen Trieb gelten ließ und als *berechtigt* crachtete".

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Kerslake (2000) 154: "Is it possible that throughout his life Nietzsche had really been talking about the *Orphic Dionysos*?"; Murray (1999) 16: "the Orphic myth of *Zagreus*"; Wohlfart (1999) 40: "Es bleibt festzuhalten: Der orphische Mythos vom Dionysos-Zagreus ist für Nietzsche die Mysterienlehre der Tragödie, der tragische Mythos." Another element that might indicate that Nietzsche's Dionysus Zagreus should not be identified with its Orphic counterpart is of philological nature: investigation has shown that already in antiquity mythic narratives circulated that had very much in common with the Orphic versions (e.g. the dismemberment by the Titans, the infant ruling the world), yet did not correspond to the Orphic world view. That Nietzsche was well acquainted with these findings, emerges for instance from KGW II, 3: 70f., where he paraphrases from the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnos of Panopolis: "Bevor er [Cadmos] zur Semele der Mutter des Dionysos übergeht, erzählt er die Geschichte vom älteren Dionysos *Zagreus* V 566ff. Persephone gebiert dies gehörnte Kind dem Zeus: es bestieg allein den Thron des Zeus und führt die Blitze. Die Titanen zerreißen es als es in einem Spiegel sich sieht. Zeus schleudert die Titanen in den Tartarus und verheert die Erde mit Feuer; auf Bitten des Okeanos löscht er dies wieder durch eine ungeheure Wasserfluth. Nur Deukalion wird in seiner *larnax* erhalten. Die Lage der neuen Menschen ist sehr traurig." See in this context also Chuvin's remark: "Une fois de plus, il [Nonnos] rejoint la tradition courante et il s'écarte de la version orphique" (Nonnos 32).

<sup>32</sup> Although Nietzsche does not refer to 'Dionysus Zagreus' explicitly in this extract, we find very similar observations on Dionysian feasts in his unpublished notes, in which he does – yet without naming either

The fact that the two animal representations of natural cruelty are present, yet in the first place to play their (subservient) role in the cultic event of the procession, shows that the Greek answer to the ominous question "was will ein Leben des Kampfes und des Sieges?" (KSA 1: 785) is not merely to participate in the barbarian violence, but rather to exploit their confrontation with it as an instrument to conjure up more active forms of existing from within themselves. Thus, it becomes clear that Nietzsche draws a radical line between the (Orphic) source on the one hand and the (Dionysian) phenomenon that is transferred by it.

Many striking examples of the way in which the 'Hellenic genius' treats the violent and cruel impulses it receives from the outside, can be found in the lasting and pan-Hellenic popularity of the battle-scenes in the *Iliad*. They proved for Nietzsche that the Greeks were aware of the dire necessity of an outlet for their hatred. Homeric accounts, however, do not testify anymore of the typically barbarian "grausame und tigerartige Phantasie! Dabei wollüstig und finster!" (KSA 7: 403; cf. KSA 1: 785), of its unbounded instinctiveness aimed at nothing more than mere self-preservation; in contrast, they evoke the yearning of humans, deprived of any opportunity to ever cross the line between mortals and immortals, to outgrow their personal limitations by means of a never-ending rivalry with other human beings. In this manner, the Greeks succeeded in channelling their aggression and appetite for destruction and to mitigate their animal cruelty. Therefore, Homer represents the earliest phase of a process of cleansing the primeval atrocity and disciplining human instincts – a process referred to by Nietzsche as the 'Apollinian', here symbolically alluded to by the association between Homer and Delphi<sup>35</sup>. Whereas the Orphics had paralysed themselves through their radical repugnance against the 'Dionysian barbarians', who – for them – were nothing more than an external menace, the 'Dionysian Greeks' looked them in the eyes and tried to benefit from them. The visual calibre of this gesture reminds us of the contemplative nature of the Apollinian as a whole. The immediacy of the confrontation between Greeks and barbarians does not mean that there was some kind of recognition or identification between the two: Nietzsche emphasises that between both there was a huge abyss ("eine ungeheure Kluft", KSA 1: 31)<sup>36</sup>. To elucidate this sharp contrast, he appealed to the theory of the two *Erides* formulated in the

panther or tiger: "In diesen Bildern aber erkennen wir alle jene excentrischen Stimmungen und Erkenntnisse wieder, die der Orgiasmus der dionysischen Frühlingsfeste fast auf einmal und neben einander erregte: die Vernichtung der Individuation, das Entsetzen über die zerbrochene Einheit, die Hoffnung einer neuen Welt-schöpfung, kurz die Empfindung eines wonnervollen Schauders, in dem die Knoten der Lust und des Schreckens zusammengehangen sind." (KSA 7: 178; the reference to "Dionysos-Zagreus": cf. KSA 7: 177) With respect to importance of the image of the tiger: see Aichele (2000) 115 and Reibnitz (1992) 84f.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. KSA 1: 785: "die Milderungen und Reinigungen, welche, von Delphi und von zahlreichen Göttersitzen aus, über Hellas hinströmten"; KSA 7: 401: "Die zu Grunde liegende delphische Lösung"; KSA 3: 441: "die Griechen sagten, der Hexameter sei in Delphi erfunden".

<sup>36</sup> See: Reibnitz (1992) 96 ff.

prooemium of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (vv. 11–26; p. 95 f.)<sup>37</sup>. One incarnation of the goddess Eris stimulates the barbarian drive to kill and annihilate, linked here with the pre-Homeric state of affairs. The confrontation between two opponents is in this case reduced to the question of who will kill and who will be killed; at stake here is to maintain one's physical integrity as it is and to eliminate that for which one's contestant stands. Nietzsche claims that this 'interaction' is irreconcilable with the 'Hellenic genius', because it does not offer any opportunity to change oneself. This possibility is indeed provided for by the second incarnation of Eris, the 'kinder one', to be translated as "Neid", envy, yet not to be judged as a moral value or defect: the 'meeting' with one's opponent in this case should be seen as a vital phase of self-renewal, of bringing oneself on a higher level<sup>38</sup>. But what should be done with the contestant – taking into account the obvious guideline that he should not be annihilated (as the barbarians would have done)? Here, we should have a look at Nietzsche's views on intercultural transaction.

In his genealogy of the tragic civilisation of the Greeks, Nietzsche repeatedly alludes to migratory movements recorded by 19th-century *Altertumswissenschaft*, which were said to have introduced foreign religious and cultic habits into the Greek world. Dionysus, for instance, was marked as an originally Phrygian or Thracian deity<sup>39</sup>. The mobility of cults associated with this barbarian, uncultivated ("fratzenhaft ungeschlacht") Dionysus were to Nietzsche exactly the impulse that triggered a process of civilisation culminating in the tragic era:

Gegen die fieberhaften Regungen jener Feste, deren Kenntniss auf allen Land- und Seewegen zu den Griechen drang, waren sie, scheint es, eine Zeit lang völlig gesichert und geschützt durch den hier in seinem ganzen Stolz sich aufrichtenden Apollo, der das Medusenhaupt keiner gefährlicheren Macht entgegenhalten konnte als dieser fratzenhaft ungeschlacht Dionysischen. Es ist die dorische Kunst, in der sich jene majestätisch-ablehnende Haltung des Apollo verewigt hat. Bedenklicher und sogar unmöglich wurde dieser Widerstand, als endlich aus der tiefsten Wurzel des Hellenischen heraus sich ähnliche Triebe Bahn brachen: jetzt beschränkte sich das Wirken des delphischen Gottes darauf, den gewaltigen Gegner durch eine zur rechten Zeit abgeschlossene Versöhnung die vernichtenden Waffen aus der Hand zu nehmen (KSA 1: 32).

The first thing to be noted here is the protection offered by Apollo, which is absolute, yet limited in time. The Greek civilisation can only defend itself by proceeding

<sup>35</sup> Even though Nietzsche suspects possible Orphic influence in Hesiod's works (cf. KGW II, 4: 220, note 9 and KGW II, 5: 181: "Bei Hesiod Anklänge"), it is clear that the digressions on the two Erides are utterly non- and even anti-Orphic.

<sup>36</sup> See: KSA 1: 787: "Der Grieche ist neidisch und empfindet diese Eigenschaft nicht als Makel, sondern als Wirkung einer wohlthätigen Gottheit: welche Kluft des ethischen Urteils zwischen uns und ihm!" The influence of Burckhardt's characterisation of Greek culture as agonal is clearly visible; cf. also Porter (2002a) 276, Burckhardt (2002) 129 f.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. e.g. Welcker (1857) 425. Mythological accounts on Dionysus are impregnated with the idea of resistance against this new, to the Greeks unknown god (cf. Euripides: *Bacchae* 219–220; p. 11: *ton neósti daimona Dionyson*, Pentheus, Perseus, etc.). The concept of Dionysus as a foreign, imported god is, for instance, confirmed by Herodotus (II, 49; p. 170 f.); he thought the Bacchic cult was actually brought from Egypt to Greece by Melampus.

to a total mobilisation of its most characteristic cultural forces at this time: the Delphic god, straightened up in his full pride. As Herman Siemens noted with respect to the verb "entgegenschauen" (2000: 57), we have to note that "entgegenhalten" has a strong connotation of mutual equality between both contestants. The total mobilisation of the Apollinian at the borders of the Greek world, however, seems to have caused a cultural vacuity in the centre of this world, conjuring up from within – "aus der tiefsten Wurzel des Hellenischen heraus" – analogical impulses. This makes clear that the Dionysian drives bubbling up within Greek civilisation are not identical with the barbarian Dionysus. One of the reasons for this must be that the former ones do not constitute a (external) menace for the security of the existing cultural identity, but rather complete it to its full tragic magnitude. This emerges for instance from Nietzsche's observation that the quality of the Apollinian is directly connected to that of the Dionysian. Yet, his characterisation of the actual intercultural encounter remains relatively vague here; but what does it mean, to 'negotiate a reconciliation' ("eine Versöhnung abschließen"), which is the 'most important moment in the history of Greek cults' ("Diese Versöhnung ist der wichtigste Moment in der Geschichte des griechischen Kultus: wohin man blickt, sind die Umwälzungen dieses Ereignisses sichtbar", KSA 1: 32)?

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche scarcely elaborates on the personifying imagery of the two gods, who behave as if they were Homeric opponents:

Es war die Versöhnung zweier Gegner, mit scharfer Bestimmung ihrer von jetzt ab einzuhaltenden Grenzlinien und mit periodischer Uebersendung von Ehrengeschenken; im Grunde war die Kluft nicht überbrückt (KSA 1: 32).

The strong liminal sensitivity of the contestants is understandable, yet somewhat bizarre – an impression that is reinforced by the curious modal extension "im Grunde". Does Nietzsche mean that the borders are not crossed only in principle or not at all? To get a more specific picture of the transaction, we have to consult the descriptions Nietzsche made at other instances. Both in *Die dionysische Weltanschauung* and in *Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens*, he uses the (military) image of the 'onrushing god' ("den [aus Asien] heranstürmenden Dionysus", KSA 1: 556 and 583) to circumscribe the interaction between the two cultural identities. The rush, however, is not experienced by Apollo as a threat, but as a means to expand his personal glory:

Dafür war auch das apollinische Hellenenthum niemals in einer grösseren Gefahr als bei dem stürmischen Heranzug des neuen Gottes. Niemals wiederum zeigte sich die Weisheit des delphischen Gottes in schönerem Lichte. Zuerst widerstrebend, umspann er den gewaltigen Gegner mit dem feinsten Gespinnst, so dass dieser kaum merken konnte, wie er bald in halber Gefangenschaft einherwandle. [...] Je kräftiger aber der apollinische Kunstgeist heranwuchs, um so freier durfte auch der Brudergott Dionysus seine Glieder lösen (KSA 1: 584; compare: KSA 1: 556).

From this wording we can derive much more than from the preceding. Nietzsche makes clear that the 'Brudergott', the Greek Dionysus, is not the same as the one who invaded Greece from Asia, and that his transformation is the effect of Apollo's inter-

vention. For Apollo's radiance does not reach its summit until he gets the opportunity to enwrap the barbarian Dionysus into a cocoon.

The biaxial imagery of "umspinnen" is intriguing. Nietzsche's use of the verb "umspinnen", here supplemented by the noun "Gespinnst", usually alludes to the 'spinning' of spiders – not however to their spinning a web, but rather to their encapsulating a victim, before consuming its blood as food. An interesting example of a slightly different verbal construction ("spinnen um") can be found in the fourth part of Zarathustra's 'Nachtwandler-Lied', in which the protagonist evokes the mood of midnight: "Nun starb ich schon. Es ist dahin. Spinne, was spinnst du um mich? Willst du Blut?" (KSA 4: 398; see also: KSA 1: 311). Interestingly enough, Nietzsche also uses "umspinnen" in the context of the silkworm moth (*Seidenwurm*), where it refers literally to the caterpillars enwrapping themselves as a preparation for their physical metamorphosis (cf. KSA 2: 545, KSA 8: 593 or KSA 9: 99); here it functions as the transitive equivalent of the reflexive verb 'sich einspinnen'<sup>38</sup>. The semantic coherence of this double image is loose, except for the possibility that it illustrates the transformation Dionysus undergoes during his negotiation with Apollo – the barbarian godhead does not turn into a pillar of tragic civilisation merely by grace of himself, but also as a result of the both overpowering and sheltering gesture of his Delphic counterpart. Yet, at the same time Apollo is suggested to be enwrapping himself, at least figuratively, which underlines the cultural concrescence between both godheads. This exchange, this interaction must be seen as the secret of the intercultural transaction described by Nietzsche; a fragment from the Spring of 1888 shows clearly how reductive this process becomes when one of the imagistic components lacks. Under the heading "Zur Geschichte des Gottesbegriffs", he describes how the Christian god lends himself to be translated into the most divergent theological discourses, because he himself is so weak and sick:

Selbst die Schwächsten der Schwachen, die Metaphysiker und Scholastiker werden über ihn noch Herr, – sie spinnen um ihn herum, in ihn hinein, bis er ihr Abbild, eine Spinne wird. Nunmehr spinnt er die ganze Welt aus sich heraus (KSA 13: 523).

Here, the exchange does not lead up to a mutual elevation, but to uniformity and *stasis*. Another beautiful, yet less explicit image is used in *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*; here Nietzsche refers to Greek intercultural negotiation with a combination of biological and military terms:

Nichts ist thörichter als den Griechen eine autochthone Bildung nachzusagen, sie haben vielmehr alle bei anderen Völkern lebende Bildung in sich eingesogen, sie kamen gerade deshalb so weit, weil sie es verstanden den Speer von dort weiter zu schleudern, wo ihn ein anderes Volk liegen ließ (KSA 1: 806).

<sup>38</sup> Although it would most definitely take us too far to pursue this any further, we might also consider in this context another butterfly that Nietzsche may have observed in Switzerland and wonderfully fits into the figurative logic of the 'spinning'-imagery: the *parnassius apollo* or "Apollofalter", a large and colourful butterfly, living in mountainous and rocky habitats in southern Germany and the Alps, but now almost extinct.

The hint at the spider ("ingesogen") is obvious; with respect to the spear, Nietzsche seems to explore the fundamental functional difference between the weapon thrown to an object and the invitation it contains for being used anew ("weiter zu schleudern"). The image of the spear, nonetheless, proves that the external input is an actual and even indispensable precondition for the process he describes, and not a peripheral circumstance.

In his confrontation with the barbarian Dionysus, Nietzsche suggests, Apollo behaves as if he were a spider, subtly, yet carefully imprisoning its victim into its spinings. But the spinning is of very high quality, which not only demonstrates the reverence the Delphic god has for his opponent, but also ensures that the latter does not feel degraded. The contrary turns out to be true: for Dionysus the enwrapping holds out the promise of an intrinsic renewal, like a butterfly that comes out of its cocoon. This explains why the strength of Apollo is interrelated with Dionysus' freedom, represented by the image of 'limbering up his limbs' ("seine Glieder lösen"), which not only refers to the unbending effects of Dionysos on others (cf. his epicleses *Lysios*: "releasing, delivering", *Lysimelès*: "limb-relaxing"), but – since Dionysos himself unwinds – may also allude to insects or other animals directly after they get out of e.g. their egg<sup>39</sup>. The picture Nietzsche draws here shows that Dionysus is indeed of foreign origin, but that the role he has to play in Greek tragic culture can be realised if and only if he is reinvented as a god from autochthonous descent. The intercultural negotiation does not urge the Greeks to annihilate their opponent (the barbarian mode) nor to remove him out of their scope (the Orphic option): in both cases the ultimate objective is the disappearance of the other, the reinstallation of the original cultural homogeneity. Yet, as we have already seen, Nietzsche particularly appreciates the multifarious composition of cultural identities, so we can imagine that the way in which such diversity can come into being is related to the manner in which Apollo absorbs the foreign Dionysus. At this point, it is crucial to notice that Apollo does not only enrich himself and obtains his ultimate glory, but at the same time saves Dionysus from final destruction: "Dies ist das Bild des durch Apollo neugeschaffenen, aus seiner asiatischen Zerreiung geretteten Dionysus" (KSA 1: 559). As such, Nietzsche's model of intercultural negotiation is in the end in line with mythological tradition, which had attributed to Apollo not only the role of Dionysus' opponent, but also of his rescuer.

Particularly thanks to their transactional model, which was based on the creative Eris, at once yearning for victory and spying for opportunities to transform both its contestant and itself, the tragic Greek culture was able to benefit from the many types of cultural interaction that existed in the ancient Mediterranean. After he had resigned his professorship in Basel and had stopped seeing himself as a classical philologist, Nietzsche continued to use this model in his philosophical discourse, specifically

<sup>39</sup> S. v. *Lysimeles* and *Lysios* in Roscher c. 2211f. With respect to Dionysus as liberator-god: see also Reibnitz (1992) 83.

when he dealt with the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same. From the early 1880s on, he referred to it as "Einverleibung", the human capacity to turn a (philosophical) insight into an instinct by repeated, or even continuous rational appropriation: "Wir lehren die Lehre – es ist das stärkste Mittel, sie uns selber einzuverleiben" (KSA 9: 494). Without going into the matter more thoroughly, we might suggest that this concept of transaction is the driving force behind the many metamorphoses, personae and masks the Nietzsche of the late 1880s can be associated with. Once again, we can observe to what extent the philosophical and the private in Nietzsche's world converge.

### Nietzschean Mysteries

The reconciliation negotiated between Apollo and Dionysus, and the divine brotherhood that emerges from it – in the final texts re-conceptualised as a temporary sexual union between lovers –, is the breeding soil for the entire political and religious system of the tragic Greeks. As for Apollo, god of light, Nietzsche submits that, even though he operates since the (Homeric) beginnings of Greek culture, he does not remain the same, yet is absorbed in a sequence of further transformations himself. We already saw that Homer was an early representation of Apollinian order, and the same holds for Pythia, the Delphic oracle, Pythagoras, whose partly positive evaluation is affirmed here, and even the Thracian king Lycurgus, whose name alludes to Apollo Lukeios<sup>40</sup>. The multiplicity of these transformational sequences indicates just how much Apollo has found rapprochement with the Dionysian 'spirit', symbol of constant change. In a fragment from the early 1870s, Nietzsche investigates the possibility of interpreting the many metamorphoses of the Delphic god and the ways in which he presents himself as 'preparative', 'inductive' and 'solitary' deity ("als vorbereitende und wegebahnende Gottheit", "als 'Einzelner' selbst", KSA 7: 175), as symptoms of what he calls an 'Apollinian mystery order' ("Mysterienordnung"): "Alle diese apollinischen Zurüstungen haben etwas vom Charakter der Mysterien an sich" (KSA 7: 175). This 'mystery order' relies on the deeper historical patterns which underlie all that happens, yet remain unseen for ordinary humans who even do not know whether they are "Mitspielende" or "Zuschauer". Yet precisely because of the fact that all humans are unaware of these patterns, that this knowledge is both sacred and secret, this mystic tradition can be seen as an integrating part of society and nation building, connected to Apollo as "heilender, sühnender, warnender Staatengott, der den Staat immer auf der Bahn erhält" (KSA 7: 175). Insofar as it protects

<sup>40</sup> KSA 7: 175: "In ihr offenbart sich Apollo, noch nicht als Kunstgott, aber als heilender sühnender warnender Staatengott, der den Staat immer auf der Bahn erhält, wo er sich mit dem Genius begegnen muß. Aber nicht nur als Pythia, als vorbereitende und wegebahnende Gottheit offenbart er sich. In andern Gestalten tritt er hier und da auf, als 'Einzelner' selbst, als Homer, Lykurgus, Pythagoras"; with respect to the wolf-like nature of Apollo: cf. Sophocles' *Electra* (vv. 6–7; p. 61); see also Burkert (1985) 144f.

humans against the "entsetzliche [...] Erkenntniß", the unbearable "schrecklichen Glanz" (KSA 7: 175 f.) of the 'truth' that strife and suffering have a deeper meaning and function, the role of the Apollinian mystery is to safeguard the social and political balances that mitigate natural instincts. The mystical counterpart to the Apollinian version is evidently the revolutionary Dionysian mystery cult – "Und so läuft neben jener durchaus verschleierte apollinischen Mysterienordnung eine dionysische einher" (KSA 7: 176) –, which consists of the total revelation of mystical knowledge to a select group of initiates – knowledge that, however, can only be presented to the wider masses in veiled, metaphorical language: "von der aber doch vor Vielen durch eine Bildersprache gesprochen werden konnte" (KSA 7: 176). The profanation of cultic knowledge can hence be seen as an act of social and political destabilisation. To describe the evolution of cultic modes, Nietzsche once again falls back to the imagery of spinning; now, the Dionysian itself has turned into the active drive behind (and not merely the object of) transformational processes – represented by the metaphor of 'spinning'. In this manner, old Dionysian cults renew existing mystery practices: "Jener Verzückerungsrausch der dionysischen Orgien hat sich in den Mysterien gleichsam eingesponnen" (KSA 7: 176). The mysteries unveil the ambivalent nature of Dionysus himself too, not only because he is the one "thrice born"<sup>41</sup>, but he also combines 'mild dominance' with violent exigencies: "In jenem Zustand hat Dionysos die Doppelnatur eines grausamen, verwilderten Dämons und eines milden Herrschers (als ag[rionios] und om[phētēs] und meil[ichios])" (KSA 7: 177). Only the *epopteis* have access to the annihilating insight into the meaning of Dionysus' suffering; they long for a divine rebirth opening the doors for a new reunification of humankind with all that is, for an absolute des-individuation. Here again, Nietzsche demonstrates the importance of the interaction between both gods; the mere presence of the "Staatengott" Apollo does not suffice for the process of nation building in tragic Greece; it is only the combination of the two mystery traditions that can lead to the required social and political equilibrium (cf. KSA 7: 178). We suspect that the most important amalgam of these traditions is the Eleusinian mystery cult; we will briefly come back to this issue further on<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche's references to the 'third birth' of Dionysus are somewhat ambiguous (KSA 7: 178: "diesem kommenden dritten Dionysos erscholl der brausende Jubelsang der Epopten"). Most mythic accounts stage two godheads – one before and one after the dismemberment by the Titans. As for the third one, he can either have meant the archetypal god Phanes (see also: KGW II, 2: 381), who was identified in some theogonies with Dionysus (cf. Guthrie, 1952, 82), or the divine child born from Demeter or Persephone in the Eleusinian mysteries (cf. Burkert, 1985, 288). In view of our line of argument, the latter option seems to us the more plausible one (cf. also Murray, 1999, 7: "The belief in a life of self-creation, which Nietzsche finds exemplified in the role of the 'third Dionysus' which is associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries, is considered to be based in the belief in the universality of the movement towards others associated with *Lust*"). Finally, it could be argued that a distinction should be made between the phoerus in Semele's womb, when she was incinerated by the sight of Zeus and the child subsequently born from his father's thigh. Cf. also: Reibnitz (1992) 269.

<sup>42</sup> For a critical and historicising discussion on Nietzsche's "Mysterienlehre": see Cancik/Cancik-Linde-maier (1999) 35–47.

It is not surprising to see that Nietzsche returns to his central representations when he wants to explain how the degradation of tragic Greece was initiated. When typifying the impact of Socrates on tragic civilisation in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche calls him the 'new Orpheus', hereby alluding to the laceration of the famous singer by the Bassarides, worshippers of Dionysus, after he had betrayed their god and started worshipping Apollo, and to Lycurgus<sup>43</sup>, whom we already met as an Apollinian metamorphosis:

Wenn an diesem [Euripides] die ältere Tragödie zu Grunde ging, so ist also der aesthetische Sokratismus das mörderische Prinzip; insofern aber der Kampf gegen das Dionysische der älteren Kunst gerichtet war, erkennen wir in Sokrates den Gegner des Dionysus, den neuen Orpheus, der sich gegen Dionysus erhebt und, obschon bestimmt, von den Mänaden des athenischen Gerichtshofes zerrissen zu werden, doch den übermächtigen Gott selbst zur Flucht nöthigt: welcher, wie damals, als er vor dem Edonerkönig Lykurg floh, sich in die Tiefen des Meeres rettete, nämlich in die mystischen Fluthen eines die ganze Welt allmählich überziehenden Geheimeultus (KSA 1: 87 f.).

Even though the Dionysian was in many ways superior in force and violence to the rationalising opponent who challenged him – and who was destined to subside –, it chose to continue its action not as part of public society, but as an underground and secretive phenomenon. Nietzsche stresses that this was not the end of the Dionysian: therefore, it had manifested itself too clearly as an expert in (self-)transformation. On the contrary: it became part of a secret cult that gradually conquered the whole (classical) world. It is not very clear what Nietzsche meant with this cryptic wording; he might be hinting at the success of degenerate forms of Dionysian mysteries flourishing in the post-tragic era, yet these have always negative connotations for him, whereas the fragment just quoted does not betray any of these. We can only suspect that he alluded to cultic practices of ecstasy and des-individuation that have been constant, yet illicit undercurrents of Western civilisation: mysteries focussing on orgiastic corporeality and the productivity of life<sup>44</sup>. We think it is probable that it were exactly these issues Nietzsche ultimately wanted to address with his theorem of 'eternal recurrence'.

### Nietzsche's concept of time

It is neither the ambition nor the task of this paper to discuss the entire 'eternalist' philosophy Nietzsche developed in the early 1880s – this would exceed the volume of

<sup>43</sup> Concerning Lycurgus: see *Iliad* VI, 128–140 (p. 185); as to the Bassarides: Kern T 113; cf. Nauck 9f. and Reibnitz (1992) 338 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Compare Nietzsche's references to "S. Johann und Veittänzer" as medieval manifestations of this tradition (e.g. KSA 1: 29 and 521; KSA 7: 10 and 19); later, his opinion on these carnivalesque processions was much more negative: in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* he discredited it as epidemic manifestations of mental illness resulting from the ascetic prescriptions for penance and salvation (KSA 5: 391; see also KSA 8: 406 and KSA 9: 482).

more than one paper. Nevertheless, we may pay some attention to the controversial positions Nietzsche takes in the famous last but one part of *Götzen-Dämmerung*: "Was ich den Alten verdanke". It is one of the instances at which the philosopher most distinctly explains his concept of mysteries in the light of his "psychology of orgasm" (KSA 6: 160):

Denn erst in den dionysischen Mysterien, in der Psychologie des dionysischen Zustands spricht sich die *Grundthatsache* des hellenischen Instinkts aus – sein 'Wille zum Leben'. Was verbürgte sich der Helle mit diesen Mysterien? Das ewige Leben, die ewige Wiederkehr des Lebens; die Zukunft in der Vergangenheit verheissen und geweiht; das triumphirende Ja zum Leben über Tod und Wandel hinaus; das *wahre* Leben als das Gesamt-Fortleben durch die Zeugung, durch die Mysterien der Geschlechtlichkeit. [...] Alles Einzelne im Akte der Zeugung, der Schwangerschaft, der Geburt erweckte die höchsten und feierlichsten Gefühle. In der Mysterienlehre ist der Schmerz heilig gesprochen: die 'Wehen der Gebälerin' heiligen den Schmerz überhaupt, – alles Werden und Wachsen, alles Zukunfts-Verbürgende *bedingt* den Schmerz ... (KSA 6: 159).

In *Nietzsches Antike*, Hubert Cancik argues that Nietzsche projects his own phantasms onto ancient mysteries, since there is no evidence whatsoever that might substantiate this picture of 'mysteries of sexuality'<sup>45</sup>. The preceding, however, shows how important corporeality, pregnancy, deliverance, birth and rebirth were for Nietzsche's ideas of tragic culture. This gives rise to the supposition that the aim of Nietzsche's philosophy of eternal recurrence is not so much to question the linearity or circularity of time, but to – once again – overcome the suffering of individuation and to cherish violence and pain as preconditions for human's participation in the encompassing dynamics of life. When we look at Nietzsche's writings on time and recurrence, we cannot get around the observation that many mystic elements re-emerge. First, references to eternal return almost exclusively appear in manifestly narrative contexts, such as *Also sprach Zarathustra* or aphorism 341 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, which reminds us of the mythical nature of the Dionysian revelation – is it a coincidence that exactly in these contexts the figure of the spider reappears<sup>46</sup>? Secondly, the teaching of eternal recurrence is not the object of public discussion, but requires more intimate and secretive forms of communication, by means of which the communicants obtain the aura of initiates or *epopteis* (cf. the second part of "Das andere Tanzlied" in *Zarathustra*, KSA 4: 285: "Du weisst Das, oh Zarathustra? Das weiss Niemand. –"). Thirdly, the networks of imagery at work in *Zarathustra* give cause for the suspicion that the belief in eternal recurrence not only promises the

<sup>45</sup> See: Cancik (2002, 156 f.) and Cancik/Cancik-Lindemaier (1999) 41.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. note 39; see KSA 3: 570: "Dieses Leben, wie du es jetzt lebst und gelebt hast, wirst du noch einmal und noch unzählige Male leben müssen; und es wird nichts Neues daran sein, sondern jeder Schmerz und jede Lust und jeder Gedanke und Seufzer und alles unsäglich Kleine und Grosse deines Lebens muss dir wiederkommen, und Alles in der selben Reihe und Folge – und ebenso diese Spinne und dieses Mondlicht zwischen den Bäumen, und ebenso dieser Augenblick und ich selber"; KSA 4: 200: "Und diese langsame Spinne, die im Mondschein kriecht, und dieser Mondschein selber, und ich und du im Thorwege, zusammen flüsternd, von ewigen Dingen flüsternd – müssen wir nicht Alle schon dagewesen sein?"

believers "healing" from their present state of being, but also to become 'Genesende', those who give delivery. In "Das Nachtwandler-Lied", Zarathustra describes the yearning of life as follows:

"Ich will Erben, so spricht Alles, was leidet, ich will Kinder, ich will nicht mich," – Lust aber will nicht Erben, nicht Kinder, – Lust will sich selber, will Ewigkeit, will Wiederkunft, will Alles-sich-ewig-gleich (KSA 4: 401 f.).

Obviously, this matter needs much more investigation, but the metaphors of recurrence indicate that those who not only accept, but affirm the circle of being, will be fathers and mothers and children at once. Between them, a trans-generational, supra-individual community will come into being, which holds the promise of restoring the unity between humans and nature, of re-enacting the originary "Ur-Eine".

As we know, Nietzsche does not expect his readers to be convinced by the scientific correctness of eternal recurrence; much more, he asks them to believe in it, and more particularly: to want it. This volitive aspect of his concept of time is a crucial link with his Dionysian mysteries. He does not care about the eventuality that events might be repeated or have happened before; what is at stake, is an experiential frame of reference which may allow him to absorb both past and future into an absolute present – a present that offers time and again the opportunity to change radically what was and will come. This is the reason why he rejected the Pythagorean account of eternal recurrence paraphrased in *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*: he refers both in the notes and in the final text to the determining impact of purely astrological or mathematical principles, which are in no way related to the human will – "bei gleicher Constellation der himmlischen Körper" (KSA 1: 261) and "wenn die Sterne die gleiche Stellung haben" (KSA 7: 637)<sup>47</sup>. In this context, it seems clear that Nietzsche does not appeal to any Orphic notion of metempsychosis, as Christian Kerslake recently suggested, according to which something that is outside ourselves, yet still belongs to us, imposes itself on our existence<sup>48</sup>. As much as Nietz-

<sup>47</sup> Hence, we cannot but disagree with the remark in Zeller et al. (550, note 3): "Auf diese pythagoreische Lehre wurde Nietzsche frühe aufmerksam (Unzeitg. Betr. II 2 W. I 298 f. Philologica II (W. XVIII) 117, III W. XIX, 222 f.) und hat sie sich später selbst angeeignet (W. XV 85. VII 233)". The pythagorean view was entirely based on numbers, which Nietzsche dismissed as "kalte Abstraktion" (KSA 8: 101); cf. KSA 7: 83: "Pythagoreer. Das Maaß und die Zahl bei den Hellenen"; cf. also KSA 7: 422, 457 and 462. The indiscriminate use of 'Pythagoras' and 'Pythagoreans' should be ascribed to the interim nature of these notes – preliminary thoughts and sketches – and should not be interpreted as contradictions of his well-argued view that there is a wide gap between the historical Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism from the 5th Century onwards; with respect to cyclical world-views in antiquity: see Cancik (1998).

<sup>48</sup> See: Kerslake (2000) 153 ff. His intriguing article may give us a deeper insight into Klossowski's understanding of Nietzsche's eternalist concepts, emphasizing the multiplicity of the self and the constitutive importance of alterity in Nietzsche's notion of identity. Nietzsche indeed accepts and appreciates the multifarious composition of the self, but even as such, the subject is only 'conceivable', let alone 'imaginable', from the perspective of the dominant will. Hence, he seems to be much closer to a typically 'modern' understanding of the self than to the post-modern vision Klossowski propounded.

sche may acknowledge the dynamics of the external world, his main philosophical concern is to re-establish the supremacy of the (dominant) will, not only as it moulds its own existence, but also as it dictates and orchestrates its surroundings.

But does this concept of mystical understanding, supposedly tracing back to ancient Dionysian and Eleusinian models, have anything to do with *altertums-wissenschaftlichen* accounts? Most probably not, except for the way in which he appropriates ancient phenomena in order to weave a web of the finest threads around them and to release them after an intense and interactive metamorphosis. We would have to conclude that Nietzsche indeed transformed Dionysus into an instrument for personal self-understanding, but that Dionysus as well has forced himself as a interpretive model onto Nietzsche.

### Conclusions

Summarising, we can say that in his investigations into the emergence of tragic Greek culture Nietzsche made a distinction between at least two Dionysus-figures. The first was the barbarian Dionysus, symbolising unmitigated violence and suffering; the second was the god who emerged from the intercultural negotiation with the Delphic god Apollo: "In Wahrheit aber ist jener Held der leidende Dionysus der Mysterien" (KSA 1: 72). When dealing with Dionysus, Nietzsche also persistently refers to the godhead handed down to us by Orphic sources, yet this does not mean that he is for Nietzsche an Orphic god. Quite the contrary is true: his design of the tragic Dionysian is manifestly anti-Orphic. This leads us to the conclusion that – as to his historical speculations – there is no intrinsic connection for Nietzsche between the source conveying information and the information conveyed. The same procedure is at work with Pythagoras, who is for Nietzsche a religious reformer trying to rehabilitate age-old Orphic customs and beliefs. Yet, there is a wide gap between the religious leader and his followers, who to some extent corrupted his heritage. For Nietzsche, this does not open the door for a renewed inspiration by Orphism or Pythagoreanism, even though they demonstrate points of belief that (at first sight) come close to his own philosophical contentions. The models he discovered here were not viable, because they did not affirm life as it is, but subjected it to the logic of transmigration; because they denied the body and proclaimed asceticism; and finally, because they stood for a type of transactionality and negotiation that was incompatible with his lasting concern to surpass the human.

So the conclusion urges itself upon us that Nietzsche discovered during his early research into classical thinking a tradition he could henceforth use as a model, or rather: a counter-model, a test dummy, for the construction of a mystery tradition that reconciled the institutional and the revolutionary, the autochthonous and the foreign, the cultic and the ecstatic – his Dionysian-Eleusinian mystery, which glorifies the naturalness of life, the violence and the fertility of the body, the cruelty and

frenzy of sexuality<sup>49</sup>. And at the end of the day, Nietzsche did not speak about his own construct either; the reason for this was not that he was unsure or reluctant about it, but rather that he re-enacted the secrecy of the mystic revelation and concealed his 'most abysmal thoughts' with care:

Diese ganze lange ungeheure Licht- und Farbenleiter des Glücks nannte der Grieche, nicht ohne die dankbaren Schauer dessen, der in ein Geheimniß eingeweiht ist, nicht ohne viele Vorsicht und fromme Schweigsamkeit – mit dem Götternamen: Dionysos (KSA 11: 680f.).

### Selective bibliography

- Nietzsche, Friedrich, Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (KGW). Ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin/New York 1967ff.
- , Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA) in 15 Einzelbänden. Ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin/New York 1988<sup>2</sup>.
- Diels, Hermann and Walther Kranz (eds), Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Zürich 1951.
- Diogenes Laertius, Diogenis Laertii Vitae philosophorum. Vol. 1. Ed. M. Marcovich. Stuttgart/Leipzig, Teubner 2001.
- Euripides, Bacchae. Ed. E. Christian Kopff. Leipzig 1982.
- Herodotus, Historiae. Vol. 1. Ed. H. B. Rosén. Leipzig 1987.
- Hesiodus, Works and Days. Ed. with prolegomena and commentary by M. L. West. Oxford 1980<sup>2</sup>.
- Homerus, Ilias. Vol. 1. Ed. M. L. West. Stuttgart/Leipzig 1998.
- Jamblichus, De Vita Pythagorica liber. Ed. M. Von Albrecht. Zürich/Stuttgart 1963.
- Kern, Otto (ed.), Orphicorum Fragmenta. Berlin 1922.
- Nauck, August (ed.), Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta. Leipzig 1939<sup>2</sup>.
- Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques. Tome 3, Chants VI–VIII. Ed. Pierre Chuvin. Paris 1992.
- Porphyrius, Vita Pythagorae. Ed. E. des Places (Vie de Pythagore. Lettre à Marcella). Paris 1982.
- Sophocles, Electra. In: Sophoclis Tragoediae. Vol. 1. Ed. R. D. Dawe. Leipzig 1975.
- Abel, Günter, Nietzsche. Die Dynamik der Willen zur Macht und die ewige Wiederkehr. Berlin 1984.
- Aichele, Alexander, Philosophie als Spiel. Platon – Kant – Nietzsche. Berlin 2000.
- Alderink, Larry J., Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism. Chico, CA 1981.
- Bachofen, Johann Jakob, Das Mutterrecht. Gesammelte Werke, vol. II and III. Basel/Stuttgart 1966.
- Baeumer, Max L., Das moderne Phänomen des Dionysischen und seine 'Entdeckung' durch Nietzsche. In: Nietzsche-Studien 6 (1977) 123–153.
- Bernabé, Alberto, Orphisme et Présocratiques: bilan et perspectives d'un dialogue complexe. In: Qu'est-ce que la philosophie présocratique? Ed. A. Laks and C. Louguet. Villeneuve d'Ascq (Nord) 2002, 205–247.
- Bremmer, Jan, The Early Greek Concept of the Soul. Princeton 1983.
- , Götter, Mythen und Heiligtümer im antiken Griechenland. Darmstadt 1996.
- Brisson, Luc, Orphée et l'Orphisme dans l'Antiquité Gréco-Romaine. Aldershot 1995.
- Burckhardt, Leonhard A., Das Bild der Griechen in Jacob Burckhardts Griechische Culturgeschichte.

<sup>49</sup> Compare fragment 7[56]: "Orpheus, antimythologisch, buddhistisch. Pythagoras, wie Heraklit, verwirft die dionysischen Orgien" (KSA 7: 151).

- In: "Mehr Dionysos als Apoll". Antiklassizistische Antike-Rezeption um 1900. Ed. A. Aurnhammer and T. Pittrof. Frankfurt am Main 2002, 113–134.
- Burkert, Walter, Greek religion. Archaic and classical. Oxford 1985. (German original: Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche. Stuttgart 1977).
- Cancik, Hubert, Nietzsches Antike. Vorlesung. Stuttgart/Weimar 2002<sup>2</sup>.
- , The end of the world, of history, and of the individual in Greek and Roman Antiquity. In: The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism. Vol. 1: The origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity. Ed. John J. Collins e.a. New York 1998, 84–125.
- Cancik, Hubert and Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier, Philolog und Kultfigur. Friedrich Nietzsche und seine Antike in Deutschland. Stuttgart/Weimar 1999.
- Crescenzi, Luca, Verzeichnis der von Nietzsche aus der Universitätsbibliothek in Basel entliehenen Bücher (1869–1879). In: Nietzsche-Studien 23 (1994): 388–442.
- Frank, Manfred, Gott im Exil. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie. Frankfurt am Main 1988.
- Förster-Nietzsche, Elisabeth, Der einsame Nietzsche. Leipzig 1922.
- Giebel, Marion, Das Geheimnis der Mysterien. Antike Kulte in Griechenland, Rom und Ägypten. München 1990.
- Guthrie, William K. C., Orpheus and Greek Religion. A Study of the Orphic Movement. London 1952<sup>2</sup>.
- Henrichs, Albert, Loss of self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard. In: Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 88 (1984): 139–158.
- Kalogerakos, Ioannis, Seele und Unsterblichkeit. Untersuchungen zur Vorsokratik bis Empedokles. Stuttgart 1996.
- Kerényi, Karl, Pythagoras und Orpheus. Präludien zu einer zukünftigen Geschichte der Orphik und des Pythagoreismus. Zürich 1950.
- Kerslake, Christian, Nietzsche and the doctrine of metempsychosis. In: Nietzsche and the Divine. Ed. J. Lippitt and J. Urpeth. Manchester 2000, 137–161.
- Klossowski, Pierre, Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux. Paris 1969.
- Lobeck, August, Aglaophamus sive de Theologiae Mysticae Graecorum Causis. Königsberg 1829.
- Montinari, Mazzino, Ein neuer Abschnitt in Nietzsches *Ecce Homo*. In: Nietzsche-Studien: 1 (1972), 380–418.
- Moroney, Patrick, Nietzsche's Dionysian Aristocratic Culture. The Influence of Ancient Greco-Roman Thought on Nietzsche's Philosophy. Maynooth (Ireland) 1986.
- Murray, Peter Durno, Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality. A Revaluation Based in the Dionysian World-View. Berlin 1999 (= Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche Forschung 42).
- Oehler, Max, Nietzsches Bibliothek. Weimar 1942.
- Parker, Robert, Early Orphism. In: The Greek World. Ed. A. Powell. London/New York 1995, 483–510.
- Porter, James, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future. Stanford 2000.
- , The Invention of Dionysos. An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy. Stanford 2000.
- Preller, Ludwig, Griechische Mythologie. Erster Band. Theogonie und Götter. Berlin 1860.
- Reibnitz, Barbara von, Ein Kommentar zu Friedrich Nietzsche „Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik“ (Kapitel 1–12). Stuttgart/Weimar 1992.
- Roscher, W. H., Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie. Vol. II. 2 (Laas-Myton). Hildesheim 1965, 221 f.
- Rohde, Erwin, Die Quellen des Jamblichus in seiner Biographie des Pythagoras. In: Rheinisches Museum für Philologie NF 26 (1871): 554–576 and NF 27 (1872) 23–61.
- , Psyche. Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen. Leipzig 1894.
- Siemens, Herman, Agonale configuraties in de Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Duiters, Grieken en de Übertragung van culturen in het vroege denken van Nietzsche. In: Nietzsches cultuurkritiek in de Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Ed. G. Visser. Leiden 2000, 55–84.
- Vivarelli, Vivetta, Metaphern des Dionysischen bei Nietzsche. In: Nietzsche und die antike Philosophie. Ed. D. Conway and R. Rehn. Trier 1992, 153–171.
- Wohlfart, Günter, Das spielende Kind. Nietzsche: Postvorsokratiker – Vorpostmoderner. Essen 1999.

Welcker, Friedrich, Griechische Götterlehre. Göttingen 1857.

Zeller, Eduard, Franz Lortzing and Wilhelm Nestle, Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung. Vol. 1.1 Leipzig 1923<sup>2</sup>.

Universiteit Gent  
Blandijnberg 2  
B - 9000 Gent

### Abstract

As professor in Greek philology, Friedrich Nietzsche more than once lectured on religious-philosophical doctrines in classical antiquity revolving around the idea of recurrence. Two eminent examples were Orphism and Pythagoreanism. In *Ecce homo*, however, Nietzsche stated that only Heraclitus and the Stoics had influenced his own philosophy of eternal recurrence. Still, the philosopher unremittently brought Dionysus Zagreus to the fore, a deity associated with orphic-pythagorean discourse. The article tries to find out how Nietzsche conceived of Orphism and Pythagoreanism and why he later kept silent about them, in order to demonstrate how he designed – using the figure of Dionysus – forms of intercultural transaction, from which a conception of human existence emerged described by Nietzsche with the mystic nomenclature of eternal recurrence.