Not Nothing Again! - A Lecture on Nihilism and Hope
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He who loves God cannot endeavor that God should love him in return.
Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part V, Proposition 19.[i]

It takes a little time to get used to the idea that you're the fly and not the wanton boy. It's my experience, anyway, that you go a little quiet for a while.
Howard Jacobson[ii]

My title intends to indicate that nihilism has become old news—which is a contradiction, of course.[iii] But nihilism always comes as news and it has been coming into cultural experience as news for a long time. A contradiction drawn out in time becomes a paradox. And a paradox, when resolved, becomes a self-referential circle. It is within that circle that we now live. Always already inside nihilism. Always already wanting out. Our topic here—nihilism and utopia, or if not utopia, at least hope—demands a struggle for meaning even while it experiences the loss of meaning in a constant seepage toward nothing.

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Writing, or speaking, about nihilism is always a struggle, since, when one is in the grip of nihilism, there is nothing to say. Saying something, even, and perhaps especially, saying something about nothing, is a struggle for meaning, and even the meaning of nothing. Struggling against nothing provokes meaning but it remains unclear whether nothing itself could have meaning, be enclosed and limited within a meaningful world, or whether it exists only in the dissolution of meaning. Is nothing the negation of meaning as such or is it a limited negation enclosed within a world of meaning? Both are possible, of course, so to speak about nihilism requires placing this nothing—fixing it within meaning or succumbing to dissolution. The word is a struggle against the nothing that dissolves meaning by attempting to make it a nothing within meaning. So what I have to say today is most fundamentally a reflection on negation—the meaning, place, and purpose (if there is one) of the "not."

And if this "not" can be successfully placed by the word, then this word is the inception of hope. Speaking itself, the act and the meaning, the acting out of meaning, would be the end of nihilism. Or not exactly the end, but the beginning of the end. Speaking implies and insists upon a common world. But even if the loss of meaning has meant the loss of a common world, so that it cannot be presupposed in speaking, still speaking is the desire for such a common world of meaning, a shared world. From the loss of meaning in nothing comes a cry of terror and despair from which language is born. Every word is full of hope. Not only *at* the beginning, but *beginning* itself, is hope. This is visible in every new baby. So that even with the loss of immanent hope, of any expectation that things will turn out all right, a less confident hope inhabits the first word, the breaking with silence, so that silence can later return to redeem

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language from madness, from an infinite play of signifiers that conjures the subject like a cloud of mosquitos. Hope is this spoken word from which a common world emerges. The "not" takes on meaning. One can speak about nihilism only by ceasing to be a nihilist.

We are born into meaning. Our name precedes us, our family, history, class, colour, sex, and so on. Everything that Heidegger calls "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*) by which one "falls prey to the *world* which itself belongs to its being."[iv] The world claims us as we fall into it, not as an external influence, but as what we are and might become. We enter into this world in which we discover who we are as innocents. As children, we watch, imitate, and follow in order to learn about this world that is what we are. We reproduce the world as the world reproduces us. The child's question "why?" asks for the rule of this world which guides action in order to fit into a seamless garment of meaning. Though, at some moment, this question pops free of its rootedness in everyday meaning. To every answer of the "why?" another "why?" can be added. The child has discovered or invented a hyperbolic "why?" of infinite extension that reaches toward the outside of its world and thus of whom one is. Thus begins both the struggle with nihilism and discovery of philosophy. Meaning lost and meaning discovered or reconstructed. The "not" becomes a privation and not a dissolution—that is, the not-having of an experienced meaning, not the loss of meaning as such.[v] From this point the meaning of the world as experienced in innocence has begun to crumble and the everyday world is revealed as not so self-enclosed as it first appeared. Thus the world is shown to be constituted by an *active refusal* to ask such infinite questions. The world renders itself immune to hyperbolic dissolution of meaning. Adults tire; their patience yields to others' demands; they have no answer, so must avoid the infinite question—a question which has no answer.

What is nihilism? What, first, is an "ism"? There is a subject and there is subjectivism. There is defeat and there is defeatism. There is the social and there is socialism. The "ism" elevates an experience to become a form, a trope, through which other experiences can be narrated and understood. For defeatism, any victory is a temporary surge before inevitable defeat. *Nihil*, nil, is nothing, neither more nor less. Nihilism is nothing taken as the trope for understanding meaning. Meaning awaiting the news of its loss. Nihilism is being impressed with, or stuck in, the moment of loss, unable to encounter meaning except as an illusion always *in principle* awaiting its dissolution.

So, then, meaning, loss of meaning—and if we do not accept the *in principle* form of nothing that nihilism proposes, perhaps recovery of meaning, and maybe even hope. Not necessarily immanent hope, that is to say, hope in the future of events: progress, theodicy, the "justification of the ways of god to man." Rather the incipient hope that stems nihilism which would be meaning that is not condemned in advance to loss. *Nihil* without the ism. Such incipient hope is a negation of the nothing by speech that is non-locatable within the world of meaning and its loss. An incipient hope without a definite place is utopia. Utopia is the speaking and specification of a messianic hope without definition, but definition begins whenever a word

is spoken. So speech both opens to undefined hope in the act of speaking itself and closes it down through the definition that accompanies the specification of the spoken. Nihilism and messianic hope are the extremes of the loss of definition, of specification, of a common world. If, as Walter Benjamin said, the Messiah might enter at any moment,[vi] it is perhaps also true that messianic hope may leave at any moment, disappear through the loss of meaning that turns the world into a sum of facts. Entry and exit of hope is not within time, since time is orientation according to meaning, and is thus a passage dependent on the extremes of nihilism and hope. Our question occurs within time suspended.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, in a fragment from 1887: "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer."[vii] Lack, or loss, is the primary thought here. It must be originary, as I have already suggested, for an aim, end or goal to be given, so that its lack is a discovery and experience.[viii] More important is to notice that the highest values are the actors here; they devalue *themselves* (*sich entwerthen*). They are not devalued by Nietzsche or by anybody else. The highest values turn against themselves and prove themselves not to be the highest. We must understand this auto-destruction.

It is not the Good, Justice, or Being that devalue themselves. These would have been the "highest values" of which Nietzsche speaks, though he does not speak of Justice but of justice as a value, indeed, a highest value. For the devaluation to take place, the "ultimates" of previous philosophy and religion must first have been reinterpreted as "values." What is a "value"? Nietzsche seems to have been the first to use the term "value" in the non-economic sense that has become ubiquitous in our time. In any case, his name is attached to the diffusion of the language of value that today seems to us obvious. It can be clarified somewhat by looking back to the prior use of value and forward to its significance for contemporary social science.

The economic sense of value depends upon a distinction between the thing itself and the value of the thing, between, say, a coat and the $199.99 that might buy the coat. The coat is a thing that is valued at $199.99. Consider 18th century classical political economy, the emergent science of capitalism, which was then seen as a branch of moral philosophy. Francis Hutcheson argued in 1755 that "the natural ground of all value or price is some sort of use which goods afford in life … In settling the values of goods for commerce, they must be reduced to some common measure on both sides."[ix] Already some distinction between use-value and exchange-value. When Adam Smith articulated his labour theory of value in 1766 it was to account for the exchange price of a thing, the price through which it became subject to a common measure. Since the exchange price is not the thing itself, it must be accounted for, not by the characteristics of the thing, but by something else that is in some sense equivalent to that thing. He said, "the value of any commodity, therefore, to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal

to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command."[x] The value, or price, of a thing is therefore an equivalence to some quantity of some other thing, or activity, by virtue of a common measure. The common measure is dollars, so the coat has the value of something else that also has a value in dollars. Smith claimed that this other activity that can be measured in dollars was labour. The question of how the value of a thing was determined was one of the central issues of classical political economy. What is important here is to see that this question could arise only if the qualities of the coat did not determine directly its price. Or, to say the same thing in another way, the value of the coat is not a characteristic of the coat itself but of a system of value in which the coat is situated.

One might think that Marx preceded Nietzsche in the use of "value" for devalued ultimates since his thought is a continued meditation on the difference between concrete characteristics of use inherent in the thing itself and the common measure without determinate characteristics that gives exchange-value. But for Marx the key distinction is between "wealth" and "value." Wealth is understood as the totality of useful things and developed human capacities brought about by labour, and their "value" is their measurement through an abstract system of exchange. He uses "value" in a specific sense for the exchange system organized by capital and reserves "wealth" as an ultimate to cover the traditional ultimates of the good, the true, and the beautiful as they are developed through human labour—which is a new ultimate that can explain the old ones and displace the temporary hegemony of economic value as an abstract and ubiquitous measure. In this sense, Marx is a thinker of wealth and a critic of the regime of value.

While a commitment to an ultimate remains in Marx's thinking, it is not so with the auto-destruction of ultimates of which Nietzsche speaks. The extension of the distinction between value and thing becomes indeterminate when it is applied to those things which Nietzsche calls "the highest values." In being the highest, they are precisely incomparable—there is no common measure either between the good, the true, and the beautiful, or between these and any less-than-ultimates. How are justice and the value of justice distinct? Is it not part of the meaning of justice that it is a good, perhaps the highest good, which we must respect and further? What would it mean to say that "it is just" but that it doesn't matter? Surely that would be incoherent. But I could say that something is just but that it doesn't matter to me or to you. This "to me" or "to you" makes all the difference. I can recognize justice but not care about justice. I may say, for example, that piety is more important than justice. Or beauty, or family, or tradition, or whatever. A value is only a value if I can conceive of other people "valuing" it—believing in it and acting upon it—and simultaneously conceive of myself not doing so. Or, vice versa, I may believe in it and see that other people do not. So, unlike in the case of political economy, where money is the common measure, there is no common measure when one speaks about the highest things as values. A common measure pertains only to exchangeable values, equivalences; it cannot pertain to the highest values, whose "highness" is precisely that they have no equivalents. To say that justice is a value is to say, implicitly at least,

that it is some person or group's value, and simultaneously that it is not another person or group's value, and furthermore that these are incomparable. The values-language that Nietzsche initiated indicated a plurality of value systems without common measure and it became ubiquitous because he described a situation in which we still live.

One of the most important ways in which Nietzsche's values-language was disseminated was through Max Weber's sociology. For Weber, the legitimacy of political institutions means nothing more nor less than the extent to which they *are seen to be legitimate* by relevant actors.[xi] As such, legitimation is not distinct from domination; there is no, as we would say, "value-judgment" of whether what is seen as legitimate really is legitimate. One can distinguish certain types of legitimation—traditional, charismatic, legal; one can describe their methods, procedures and effects, but one cannot ask whether a form of government that is seen by its citizens as legitimate, or illegitimate for that matter, is *really* legitimate according to a higher standard of human good. The setting-aside of the philosophical question is precisely the condition for the emergence of sociology. Similarly, the sociology of religions can ask what belief-structure the religions contain, how belief affects practical action, how institutions rely upon or repress religious belief, etc.[xii] But it cannot ask, *it must not ask,* which of the religions is the true religion. The question of truth is set aside. Practices and beliefs, when shorn of their claim to truth, become values. Such values are facts in the sense that some group or individual in fact holds such a belief. Social science operates on the Nietzschean remnant of philosophy and religion by which their ultimates are interpreted as values so that they can be seen solely as the fact of holding to such values. While the purely sociological approach might at the present time leave an open space for philosophy and religion to ask in a different way about the truth of such ultimates, the Nietzschean reinterpretation of the ultimates of religion and philosophy as values does not leave such a separate space undisturbed. Even more, the sociological description of values *depends upon* the Nietzschean remnant. This is why Weber is an epigone of Nietzsche and the sociological tolerance of a philosophical approach *depends upon* Nietzsche's reinterpretation and dissolution of it. Sociology is most philosophical when it denies the possibility of philosophy. Nietzsche addresses the philosophical and religious question of truth in order to counter it with its reinterpretation as value. Once the space for the investigation of values has been opened up, one may recognize another space of religious commitment or philosophical inquiry, but that other space has already ceded its claim to a common, public truth to become an individually chosen value among others.

Even truth, seen sociologically, becomes a value. Weber was consistent enough to acknowledge that his commitment to science had no rational foundation and was in that sense similar to a religious commitment. As he said, "no science is free from presuppositions, and no science can prove its fundamental value to the man who rejects these presuppositions."[xiii] But if science has no rational foundation, it becomes a value-commitment alongside others. Reason becomes an irrational commitment or "choice." This is precisely the condition of modernity for Weber. It is a plurality of value-spheres—science, religion, politics, art, etc.—that cannot be

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ranked due to the lack of an overarching unity. Science consists of specialized disciplines confined to facts—and, of course, the study of values understood to be facts about someone's belief. In his words, sociology "is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe."[xiv] Sciences are severed from the connection to religion and/or philosophy by which they might provide meaning for human life while religion and philosophy become posited value-spheres without an inherent connection to reason.

While the reference to Weber, to sociology, and even to the culture of value-relativism, may illustrate the human condition when its ultimates are understood as values, it goes no distance at all toward explaining the auto-destruction of highest values referred to by Nietzsche. The ultimate values "devalue themselves." Indeed, the human world understood through values leaves no other alternative than to see values as *posited*, or "chosen," by humans either individually or in groups. Nietzsche could not do so because he still understood that human identities, collective or individual, are *made by* their ultimates. While his epigones take the human identities as given and attribute to them the power to choose their ultimates, Nietzsche still addressed philosophy and religion through the power of their ultimates and felt the claim of the world upon human identities. He opened the door, but those who have walked through have not needed to address the ultimates as he did. The self-devaluation of the highest values produces epigones. The epigones do not understand self-devaluation or auto-destruction. They think that it was Nietzsche, or someone else, who devalued the ultimates.

Devaluation of ultimates to values is a subtraction of their truth. It is a particular privative kind of negation that negates the truth of the ultimate while leaving the ultimate in place as a value. This subtraction, which is only possible because of the classical conviction that truth extends to ultimates, is not itself a relative but an absolute truth. Indeed, to reinterpret ultimates as values, truth must be excessive, hyperbolic, must grind all other ultimates under itself. The tragic turn is that such subtraction will end in grinding itself under as well. A hyperbolic demand for proof of the truth of ultimates results in the subtraction of that claim to truth, leaving only "values" to which the question of truth is irrelevant.

In the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche confronts this question. The first aphorism describes his cheerfulness at the news that God is dead, because "the horizon appears free to us again."[xv] The second begins with the phrase "How, we, too, are still pious."[xvi] Many years before Weber, he affirmed that "science also rests on a faith" which he diagnoses as the advance affirmation of truth to such a degree that "nothing is needed more than truth." And this is the important part, which I will quote at length:

> The unconditional will to truth—what is it? Is it the will *not to allow oneself to be deceived*? Or is it the will *not* to be deceived? … there is no alternative—"I will not deceive, not even myself"; *and with that we stand on moral ground*. … Thus the

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question "Why science?" leads back to the moral problem: *Why have morality at all when life, nature, and history are "not moral"? …* But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine. –But what if this should become more and more incredible, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie—if God himself should prove our most enduring lie?

Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God relies upon a metaphysical faith. What if there were no longer any metaphysical faith? Without the hyperbolic belief in truth there is motive neither to perceive nor announce the death of God. Gods might well proliferate as "values" whose unmasking is any longer neither necessary nor possible. Nietzsche needed the faith that he denounced, as he well knew, but his epigones simply describe values as facts. They do not know the self-reflective paradox that the reinterpretation of ultimates as values and the announcement of the death of ultimates requires. Nietzsche still knew that he was made by the ultimates that ruled his world; his epigones think that values are simply chosen.

Plato said that the finest thing about us is that we are the playthings of the gods (*Laws* 803). Shakespeare added that "as flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods. They kill us for their sport" (King Lear, Act 4, Scene 1, 32-7). The play of the gods has given us nothing and made us nothing. Our play with values may remain as nothing or one may hope that it may intensify toward the forgotten region of the gods.

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Let us then quickly map the responses in the nihilistic world that we inhabit, eschewing the sociological description that would certainly clarify them in detail, in order to pursue the post-Nietzschean question of whether, and how, some values might demand to become new ultimates—such that they might converse on equal terms with the old ultimates, and we might be made in their image by listening well to their conversation.

The first response is simply to accept the re-description of ultimates as values and values as facts—values factually held by some individual or group that the sociological reduction implies. There is no justification for values, so they must be simply chosen, or posited. All values are relative to the chooser. So all values and all choosers are equally legitimate. When it is discovered that values conflict, and the world heats up with this conflict, the lukewarm response is that one chooser shouldn't encroach upon another, that all should choose for themselves. But why not? Only if peace is a super-value of some sort and this itself would fall into mere fact by the same sociological reduction. The culture of choosing values implodes upon its own incoherence and survives only to the extent that fortuitous external

circumstances do not escalate the conflict of values into real social conflict. A complacent world that once could keep difficult questions at a distance, perhaps especially in the peaceful kingdom of Canada. But those times are gone for good.

Then there is the angry response to the reduction of one's ultimates to values. The counter-assertion that there is nothing relative about them, that they are true for all times and places. The desire for a coherent system of true ultimates is indeed a persistent problem for the culture of values, so that a Fundamentalist assertion inhabits the remnants of all value-systems. The internal difficulty with Fundamentalism is that some state of the tradition that safeguarded the ultimates is taken as definitive, often in an anachronistic manner, so that the Fundamentalist also comes into conflict with other members of the same tradition. But even more important is the fact that such a coherent system of meaning can only be posited in the form of a value—that is to say, chosen by an individual or group—and thus succumbs to the very situation that it attempts to escape. The attempt to re-assert a fundamental, unsutured belonging necessarily implies that the actual fractures of the value-world are imposed upon it from the outside: outside agitator, Jew, Muslim, and so on. But these issues do not bother the Fundamentalist any more than the incoherence of Relativism bothers the Relativist.

It certainly seems as if the conflict of our times is between Fundamentalism and Relativism and the problem only that of choosing sides. But this alternative remains within the value-world. The only chance of gaining a perspective on nihilism that does not repeat the nihilism of the epigones is to regain the perspective of the diagnosis. Here is the underlying, fundamental problem: loss of an overarching system of meaning leads to a superficial alternative between arbitrarily asserted values (Relativism) and frantic assertion of unjustified absolutes (Fundamentalism). Both alternatives are epigones of the great diagnosticians of nihilism.

Even great diagnosticians often see the only alternative as the return to a previous system of ultimates: *either* an all-inclusive, rigorous system of belief *or* its destruction. Indeed, it is often such thinkers who have made the most profound analyses of the loss experienced as a loss. In my view, this applies to Dostoyevsky, though I will not try to prove it now. And also to Hermann Broch, who said that "whether one calls it cynicism or not, never before, at least not in Western European history, has the world so candidly and openly admitted that words mean nothing and, moreover, that any attempt at mutual understanding and agreement is not even worth the effort. Never before has it been resigned so openly to thinking that the only means it could, or should, use is power, the power of strong over weak."[xvii] My argument is not with the diagnosis, which seems as apt today as when it came out in 1934. It is rather with the "never before" and its implicit placing of meaning exclusively in the past, whereas I do agree with what Nietzsche whispered to Conservatives – "a *reversion*, a turning back in any sense and to any degree, is quite impossible."[xviii]

Nietzsche recognized the problem and attempted to surmount the perspective of loss. He

attempted to escape from, or master, the value-world through the distinction between passive and active nihilism, between remaining stuck within the decadent weakness of loss and the strength of asserting new values. Nihilism, he said, "represents a pathological transitional stage."[xix] Without re-asserting the hyperbolic commitment to truth, and using as a principle "goal-lessness as such," the active nihilist asserts values "as a sign of the increased power of the spirit."[xx] But in what sense is this a transition? Values are still posited by individuals without reference to any truth or ethic; they are not ultimates that structure a world. It may well be a higher manner of inhabiting the value-world but it neither proposes nor discovers any exit. We are still stuck with the base-line positor of values, even that of his sociological epigones, where he seems to have forgotten that the ultimate values have *devalued themselves* and come to rest his hopes upon a choice. What does it matter with what energy he posits? When only weakness versus strength distinguishes the two, it will become difficult, or even impossible, to distinguish the strength of the creator from the fanatical adherence to supposed absolutes in Fundamentalism. But, I will suggest, there may be something in the acceptance of the language of values as a starting-point for the discovery of hope.

To the contrary, many thinkers who have come to this pass opt for a rejection of the language of values as such. Their grand-daddy is Heidegger:

> Thought in terms of the *essence* of nihilism, Nietzsche's overcoming is merely the *fulfilment* of nihilism. In it the full essence of nihilism is enunciated for us more clearly than in any other fundamental position of metaphysics. What is authentically its own is the default of Being itself. … The omission of the default of Being as such appears in the shape of an explanation of Being as value. Reduced to a value, Being is derived from the being as a condition for it as such.[xxi]

The language of values must be rejected because it reduces Being to the single beings, reduces ontology to existents. Nihilism is the default of Being. George Grant adapted Heidegger to say, "the corrosions of nihilism occur in all parts of the community," adding that "it is not a conception we are fitted for."[xxii] There is no doubt that the language of values, embedded as it is in what I have called the value-world, cannot itself leap into meaning and hope. But the problem is the problem of all conservatism: that rejecting the language may become a merely fanciful rejection of the phenomenon that the language describes. How, then, may we work with the language of values without succumbing to its inherent nihilism, so that, if we cannot yet exit, may at least provide sufficient electricity to the exit sign? How does one learn to change from a decadent, to a creative affirmer of values, toward a recognition of ultimates, and then to discovery of the play of worlds?

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The problem with the value-world is that it appears as an aggregate totality of individual beings to which are attached values. There appears no Being structured by its ultimates as a

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meaningful whole capable of giving meaning to individual beings. I would like at this point to sketch a phenomenological description of the essence of a value condensed into three main elements which can, I think, begin to show a way out of the value-world starting from an analysis of value.[xxiii]

A thing is perceived as useful, beautiful, or worthy of respect within one's practical attachments in the experienced lifeworld when it stands out as not only such a thing itself but also a structuring force within such practical attachments. A judgment of value operates within practical attachments as one of a plurality of values that, taken as a whole, structure the meaningful world of a given individual or group. Such values are always *for a person* acting within the social group. It takes a person to perceive a value, and to take that value personally, even though values are not created by persons but inhere in things. If I love a certain landscape, it is because I see that landscape itself as beautiful. In being for a person, though existent within a community, a value takes on significance for both person and community by the degree of personal attachment that may be measured by the willingness to sacrifice one value for another. In short, there is a *meaningful thing* whose value is part of its essence, a *purpose* situated within the structured order of values, and an *intensity* determined by the individual's attachment as a personal value which locates both the value and the person within the community's structured order of values. A value has meaning, purpose and intensity. The meaning and quality of the value is in the *thing*, whereas its intensity is for *someone* and registered through an emotional *intensity*—that is to say, what one will do, or cannot avoid doing, to maintain the value as efficacious in the world. A situation that requires a choice between values cannot be settled rationally. Edmund Husserl described this as *sacrifice* precisely because there is no order of rank between personal values. As he said, "an individual value, a value which exclusively concerns the individuality of the person and the individuality of what is valued, can by no means be absorbed, but only sacrificed." [xxiv] One may say that in making such sacrifices the individual becomes the individual person by settling the lived relation between personal values and thus makes a unique contribution to community.

The same value can be perceived as a value by different persons but its intensity varies according to its role in the scale of personal values for someone. It is this intensity that locates the role of the person in the maintenance of community. I am borrowing the term "intensity" from Gregory Bateson to designate "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end."[xxv] It is not a teleological orientation but a logic whose progression is without climax, a logic of the middle rather than beginning or end, whose modifications of intensity are determined by the formal relations that constitute its logic.[xxvi]

Values are rooted in practical activities and given in immediate intuition with an intensity experienced by a person. The willingness of that person to sacrifice competing values registers that intensity socially. Such decisions register both the irreducible irrationality—that is to say,

non-universality or singularity—of that intensity and its rationality, by making it socially significant and open to universal accounting. The social representation of value, through the individual or social group, at which the rationalization of such valuations given in intuition aim, is thus constituted by a non-homogenous totality of values determined by the character of the individual or social group. Valuations given in this form are the ground for a concrete integration of individual and community in which the role of the individual is not to take on the social form as such but to emphasize a certain aspect, from a certain direction, based in a personal intensity. This integration of person and community defines the form of a world.

Notice that in this description there is no one who chooses or posits values. Such positing strikes me as a mis-description of the sociological epigones into which Nietzsche himself fell when he tried to find a way out. One's character, determined and explicated by one's participation in a community, asserts the intensity of a value without in the first place passing through the will of the individual. This is not to suggest that intensity itself becomes the measure of value—like Nietzsche's active nihilism—but rather that the recognition of intensity overcomes the false problem of choosing values. To the extent that this already-given prior commitment becomes conscious, it can be articulated, revised and altered, and thereby pursued more effectively. This is not a process of choosing but of learning and growth. For this reason, we must reject Nietzsche's other assertion that becoming-conscious is a sign of decadence and recognize the small-t truth in consciousness of one's acts.[xxvii] Small-t truth, associated with small-v values, connected to small-b beings. Thus, all of this occurs within the value-world. But the intensity of the adherence, which initially *passes through* one but can become conscious, is the basis for a universalization that struggles to present such small-letter commitments to the community and to press for their acceptance. Through this process, the decadent individual learns to become an active carrier, but not creator, of values and to press forward from this proposal toward an encounter with the ultimates of Being. This is a description, not of loss of traditional ultimates, but of the discovery of ultimate commitments from within the value-world.

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If I were to pursue this thought further I would go on to consider two implications of this description of the recovery of meaning through the intensity of value-commitment. First, to argue that there is only one god, Truth, the encounter with whom is the basis for the education of intensity into the form of a world. The first daughter of Truth is Justice, whereby intensity strives toward the formation of community. So, in the end, the intensity is not my possession— not my will, nor my self, but only my *path*: the whistling of the gods as they pass through me. Second, and this is really indistinguishable from the first, I would need to disambiguate Nietzsche's description of traditional gods as a compaction of Greek philosophy and Christianity. These two ultimates are not, in my view, compatible. Indeed, to go further and show that it is not Plato but Socrates who genuinely articulates the role of truth in intensity. This is precisely because his inquiry terminates not in positive knowledge but in a critical

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relation to the intensities of the community as they pass through his own struggle for Truth.[xxviii] But not here. At present, I want to suggest that if we have the strength to affirm the intensities that pass through us, then the gods may find us again. We may rediscover the ecstasy of becoming the playthings of the gods by finding our own role in their auto-reconstruction.

[i] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992) Part V, Proposition 19, p. 211.

[ii] Howard Jacobson, *Peeping Tom* (London: Vintage, 2003) p. 260.

[iii] Arne Naess introduced the use of an exclamation mark to indicate an ethical imperative. When the imperative is stated at a high level of generalization it must be filled in by ever more concrete statements that show the course of action, or form of living, that the imperative demands. My use here is intended to indicate that discussion of nihilism can only occur from a standpoint which rejects nihilism so that the rejection requires filling in. See Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 197.

[iv] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) section 38, p. 164; see Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986) section 38, p. 176.

[v] "Not" a "dis"solution, that is to say, not-not begat a privative in the word.

[vi] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1973) thesis XVIIIB, p. 264.

[vii] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967) p. 9. Translation modified.

[viii] The German original can be checked from any edition. This is one easily available source: http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/der-wille-zur-macht-i-6029/1.

[ix] Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (Glasgow: R. & A. Foulis, 1755) pp. 53, 55.

[x] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) p. 133 (Book 1, Chapter 5, first paragraph.)

[xi] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press: 1976) pp. 78-9, 294-8.

[xii] Ibid, pp. 267-301.

[xiii] Ibid, p. 153.

[xiv] Ibid, p. 152.

[xv] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974) p. 280, #343.

[xvi] Ibid, p. 280, #344.

[xvii] Hermann Broch, "The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age" in *Geist and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual* Age, trans. John Hargraves (New York: Counterpoint, 2002) p. 42.

[xviii] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," aphorism 43, p. 96.

[xix] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #13, p. 14.

[xx] Ibid., #13, p. 14; #25, p. 18; #22, p. 17.

[xxi] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Vol. 3 and 4*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) volume 4, pp. 219-20.

[xxii] George Grant, "In Defence of North America" in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969) p. 40 and George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: CBC, 1969) p. 45.

[xxiii] This analysis of value has been presented in more detail in my "Critique of Reason and the Theory of Value: Groundwork of a Phenomenological Marxism," *Husserl Studies*, XXXXX.

[xxiv] Edmund Husserl, Manuscript E III 9, 33a of the Husserl-Archives in Leuven as quoted by Ullrich Melle in "The Development of Husserl's Ethics," *Études Phénoménologiques*, No. 13-4, 1991, p. 132.

[xxv] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988) pp. 21-2.

[xxvi] Gregory Bateson, "Bali: The Value System of a Steady State" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Toronto: Random House, 1972) p. 113.

[xxvii] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #423, p. 228. I have analyzed the crucial role of "becoming-conscious" in Marx and Nietzsche in Ian Angus, *(Dis)figurations* (London: Verso, 2000) pp. 11-4.

[xxviii] See my essay "Socrates and the Critique of Metaphysics" *The European Legacy*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2005.