



Friedrich Nietzsche on the Greek Mysteries

Carlotta Santini

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Nietzsche's Gods

Critical and Constructive Perspectives

**Edited by
Russell Re Manning and Carlotta Santini**

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Foreword

The contributions in this book originate in presentations delivered at the 23rd International Conference of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society, held at Bath Spa University in September 2017 on the theme 'Nietzsche's God(s): Theism, Pantheism, and Atheism'. The conference was convened by Sarah Flavel (Bath Spa University), Katrina Mitcheson (University of the West of England) and Russell Re Manning (Bath Spa University).

The conference sought to explore the place (or absence) of God in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God is one of the most famous (and parodied) slogans in modern philosophy, seeming to encapsulate the nineteenth-century loss of religious faith in the affirmation that God has 'turned out to be our oldest lie' (GM III 24, KSA 5, p. 401) and yet the nature of Nietzsche's own 'theology' is far from clear. The conference engaged with Nietzsche's arguments about God, theology and religion. It also extended discussion to an engagement of Nietzsche with alternative models of God (notably pantheism), with non-Christian religions, and with discussions of diversity (race, class, gender, sex) in dis/conjunction with religion. Papers examined Nietzsche's genealogy of religion and his claims about the place of God and theology in the history of western thought ('that faith of the Christians, which was also Plato's faith' [GM III 24, KSA 5, p. 401]), as well as his engagements with alternative conceptions of God. The conference considered the historical and contemporary reception of Nietzsche's arguments about God by religious and non-religious thinkers, asking to what extent Nietzsche's philosophy of God speaks to the challenges and opportunities of thinking about God in today's situation of globalised religion and philosophy and of the consequences of Nietzsche's thought for work at the interface of religion and the sciences.

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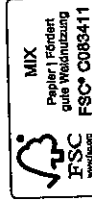


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Russell Re Manning Introduction

The place (or absence) of God and the gods is central in Friedrich Nietzsche's thought and it remains a significant topic in Nietzsche-scholarship. Nonetheless, whilst routinely co-opted into a genealogy of atheists, thanks to his (in)famous proclamation of the death of God and his biting critique of Christianity, the truth of Nietzsche's engagements with theological questions of myth, divinity, salvation and ultimate reality remains obscure. With Nietzsche little is certain; and never more so than when it comes to Nietzsche's gods.

The contributions in this volume do not presume to give a comprehensive account of Nietzsche's engagement with (and transformation of) religious and theological themes, but instead seek to explore some of the complexities of his (ir)religious thought. The book is divided into four parts that take us from Nietzsche's seminal encounters with the gods and religious phenomena of ancient Greece to considerations of the import of Nietzsche's analyses for today's situation of globalised religion and nonreligion.

Part I, Nietzsche's Greek Gods, collects together three chapters focussing on Nietzsche's encounters with the figures of the god Apollo, the philosopher Epicurus and the spirituality of the Greek mystery cults. In Part II, Nietzsche's Christianity, four chapters explore some central themes in Nietzsche's sustained critique of Christianity by identifying and analysing four central concepts—*sárx* (flesh), grace, disgust and Antichrist—that show up the subtleties and complexities of Nietzsche's engagement with Christianity. In Part III, Nietzsche's Theologies, the contributors seek to move beyond an analysis of Nietzsche's critiques of Christian religion and theology to engage the complex and often under-developed ways in which Nietzsche might nonetheless be thought of as some sort of a constructive theologian. Of course, there is no suggestion here that Nietzsche harboured some kind of subterranean fidelity to the religion that he so resolutely rejected; and yet, as reflection on the theme of the Antichrist makes clear, Nietzsche is not without his own constructive—speculative—engagements with questions of ultimate reality; in other words, Nietzsche's theologies. Whilst all the chapters are conscious of the significance of Nietzsche's writings on religion and theology for our contemporary situation, those in Part IV, Nietzsche's Future Gods, have a particular focus on the afterlives of Nietzsche's gods. The four chapters develop interpretations of Nietzsche's engagements with religion and theology that bring him into dialogue with more recent and contemporary figures—Foucault, Vattimo, Bataille and Sloterdijk—who all also, in their own ways, draw on Nietzsche's work to rethink theological futures.

Carlotta Santini

Friedrich Nietzsche on the Greek Mysteries

Abstract: The Greek Mysteries are one of the most original and significant expressions of ancient spirituality. During his life, Nietzsche devoted much attention to the Mysteries with the curiosity of a philologist and an ethnologist, but also with the speculative eye of the philosopher. What we designate as mysteries are secret cults, open only to initiates, and whose religious content was protected by the obligation of silence. They were parallel and more democratic cults in comparison with the official ones of the polis, and they turned to the spirituality of the individual, with eschatological promises of a life after death. Mysteries thus constitute a subversive cell within pagan spirituality, which was on the contrary firmly anchored to the political identity and structures of the secular life. Christianity, so Nietzsche, was originally one of these late-Hellenistic mysteries, also a sectarian religion. What made of this local Palestinian cult an ecumenical religion was the Pauline reform. Saint Paul had the intuition of exploiting the heritage of pagan spirituality to give a (Greek) ecumenical voice to Christianity. In this chapter, I reconstruct Nietzsche's historical analysis of the phenomenon of mysteries and the semantic transformations that this concept experiences in the economy of its work.

Introduction

Among the many interesting issues concerning Nietzsche's complex and rich relationship with ancient Greek religion, one of the most controversial is that of his relationship with the mysteries. This enigmatic religious phenomenon, a 'world of mysterious states' (*Welt geheimnisvoller Zustände*) (GD 10 4, KSA 6, p. 158, my translation), and its notoriously elusive nature are still questioned by historians of religion. Specialists in Nietzsche's work have shown only minimal interest in this theme, with the exception of a few significant studies.¹ The limitation of most of these studies is that they tend to link, and thereby to reduce, the question of the mysteries to the Dionysian cults. In reality, reflections on the mysteries can be found across the breadth of Nietzsche's work, revealing a complex development that can only partially be traced back to a single discourse. If, on the

¹ The most relevant are Cancik and Cancik-Lindemaier 1998, pp. 59–73; and Biebuyck, Praet, and Vanden Poel 2004, pp. 151–169.

one hand, the mysteries are seen to express the tragic and Dionysian essence of the Greek spirit, they are also, on the other hand, repeatedly framed by Nietzsche as expressions of mysticism and as forerunners of Christianity. Far from being exhaustive, my chapter seeks to contribute to an understanding of how these complex issues are articulated in Nietzsche's thought, and to look at the implications they elicit.

Before examining Nietzsche's work, however, it is necessary to ascertain not only how the mysteries are defined in contemporary studies but, above all, how they were conceived by scholars during Nietzsche's time. As a subject addressed by poets and philosophers such as Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling, the mysteries made a rather belated entrance into the sphere of scholarly studies. Some of the most important specialised texts on the subject emerged during Nietzsche's lifetime. Among the most interesting are Friedrich Creuzer's *Symbolik* (1810), Christian August Lobeck's *Aglaophamus* (1829), strongly criticised by Nietzsche, and the *Gräbersymbolik* of Johann Jacob Bachofen (1859).² The most important, Erwin Rohde's *Psyche* (1894), still a stronghold of the discipline, was published between 1890 and 1894 and Nietzsche was unable to read it. In addition to these specialised texts, there are many generic works that Nietzsche consulted, which contain important sections devoted to the mysteries; notably two works of Jacob Burckhardt—the lectures on the *Culturgeschichte der Griechen*³ and *Die Zeit Constantin's des Großen* (1853)—the *Griechische Mythologie* of Ludwig Preller (1854), with its section of the chthonian deities, the *Griechische Götterlehre* of Friedrich Welcker (1857–1862), the *Culturgeschichte* of Karl Friedrich Hermann (1857–1858) and the important *Nach homerische Theologie* of Karl Friedrich Nägelsbach (1857). Nietzsche's interest in the mystery cults arose out of this plethora of studies.

What we commonly designate as mysteries are actually a conglomeration of religious phenomena essentially different in nature and origin; some of them native to Greece, others imported, often absolutely independent of each other. Leading historians of religion tend to distinguish as much as possible between individual religious phenomena;⁴ they are quite reluctant to assign the common term mysteries indiscriminately. Nietzsche, on the contrary, seems to employ the term mysteries to denote a large number of cults. A prime example of this con-

² As for Bachofen's masterpiece, *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), we do not know that Nietzsche read it, although we do know for certain that he borrowed the book from the Basel library.

³ Jacob Burckhardt held these lectures over several years in Basel, which were only later collected together by his nephew in the work we now know. Nietzsche knew the content of these lectures because in 1875 he received the very detailed notes of his young student Louis Kelterborn, who attended Burckhardt's course (Kelterborn 2021).

⁴ See Burckert 1987 and Pettazzoni 1924.

fusion is the fact that Nietzsche tends to consider all Dionysian cults, regardless of whether they are public cults related with the religious life of the city or regional spring celebrations, or real sectarian and secret cults like the Orphic mysteries, as part of a broadly conceived Dionysian phenomenon. Unlike Nietzsche, scholars both past and present consider these phenomena to be substantially different.

The presence of some shared factors made it possible to give a common name to this heterogeneous panorama of cults and religious practices. The first common element is the secrecy of some of the rituals, which could only be accessed by initiates. The level of participation in these cults is a subject that has greatly divided scholars. During Nietzsche's time, it was widely thought that these were parallel cults that figured in some ways as alternatives to the official cults of the city; for this reason, participation in the mysteries was to be considered as open to all without distinction—slaves, women and foreigners included—via the path of initiation.⁵ The ritualistic and doctrinal content of mystery ceremonies is the most difficult element to determine, precisely because of their secrecy. Purification rituals were part of the initiatory route and dramatic or symbolic representations (pantomimes) of the sacred myths took place.⁶ Almost all scholars agree that the symbolic content of these myths would have been very ancient, and linked to agrarian and sexual symbolism, that is, to the life and death cycles of vegetation and to the mystery of generation. Erwin Rohde's thesis, namely, that a real eschatological doctrine, a doctrine of the survival of the soul after death, was associated with these cults, is highly questionable, even if it has been sufficiently proven, at least with regard to more recent cults, that ritual practices were thought to affect in some way the destiny after death of the initiates.

Regarding the great mass of proper mystery religions, which also show these common elements, one of the macroscopic distinctions that Nietzsche instead seems to focus on is the difference between 1) the oldest, pretended pre-Homeric

⁵ Contemporary scholars tend to be more cautious about the actual 'democratic' nature of these cults and their independence from established social structures. Especially in the imperial age, we have good evidence that initiation to some mystery cults was a path reserved for the highest class of society.

⁶ See Nietzsche's lectures on *Der Gottesdienst der Griechen*: 'The imitative Action. Almost all cults had a drama, the representation of a piece of the myth, which was related to the foundation of the cult' (GDG, KGW, II/5, p. 374, my translation). These practices would have been similar to medieval ones regarding the sacred representations of the Easter Mysteries, the so-called *Moralitäten*, which were, according to Nietzsche, the direct heirs of the mystery pantomimes (GMD, KSA 1, p. 515). On the pantomimes of the Easter Time during the Middle Ages and their origin in the old cults, see Reich 1903.

ones, 2) those that developed during the sixth century and 3) the later ones, which developed or were at least diffused thanks to the cultural syncretism of the age of the Alexandrian and Greek-Roman κοινή. Scholarly discussion at Nietzsche's time focused on whether or not these mystery cults could be traced back to a pre-Homeric age or whether they came after. Nietzsche, like Schelling and Rohde, was convinced of their antiquity. Rohde argued that Homer consciously removed any references to cults or doctrines relating to the fate of the soul after death in order to eliminate (in an almost enlightened fashion) superstitious fears in Greek religion about the bearing of dead souls on the living. This process of removal would have been one of the most important steps towards the construction of an authentic Greek religiosity, purified from Eastern and barbarian influences.

In order to orient us within the great mass of mystery cults, I will look closer at these three groups that Nietzsche speaks about: 1) the pre-Homeric group includes the most ancient mysteries, the Athenian Eleusinian mysteries in honour of Demeter and Persephone, the mysteries of the Cabeiri of Samothrace, those of Cybele and the agrarian mysteries in various parts of Greece; 2) the sixth century group includes the mystery cults related to the Orphic and Pythagorean schools; 3) the final group, the Hellenistic and late antique one, includes the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Serapis, the mysteries of the Great Frisian Mother and Attis, the Persian mysteries of Mithra and the Semitic mysteries of Tamuz and Sabatius.

1 Dionysus and the Mysteries

From the outset, Nietzsche associates the question of the mysteries with tragedy, which was an unprecedented move given the learned tradition of his time.⁷ The link between the two phenomena is the figure of Dionysus and his myth. What Nietzsche classes as the Dionysian myth has, in fact, at least three dimensions, which historians of religion tend to see as distinct: the Orphic myth of Dionysus Zagreus, the Theban myth of Semele's son and the Eleusinian myth of Iacchus and Demeter. Contrary to what one would expect, the myth of the Theban Dionysus, the tragic theme par excellence and the subject of Euripides's *The Bac-*

chae,⁸ is not fundamental to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy; instead he focuses on the Orphic myth of Zagreus.⁹ Nietzsche's Fragment 7 [123] from the period 1870–71 offers a summary of the Orphic myth, according to which the young Dionysus Zagreus, son of Zeus and Persephone, is deceived by the Titans, who then dismember and devour him (NL 1870–71, KSA 7, [123], p. 176). In revenge, Zeus incinerates the Titans and, according to some versions of the myth, the human lineage was born from their ashes. In a bold move, Nietzsche links this myth to that of Eleusis, identifying in Iacchus or Brimo—evoked in the Eleusinian Mysteries as the son of Demeter—that third Dionysus of which even Schelling speaks, who was born again from the heart of Zagreus, which Athena rescued from the voracious Titans. According to a myth recounted in Pseudo-Aeschylus's *Prometheus*, this third Dionysus, coming after the Theban one and after Zagreus, was set to inherit the world after Zeus.¹⁰ Following another of Nietzsche's more original arguments, the myth of Dionysus Zagreus is the original nucleus of the tragic drama, and each tragic hero, with his sufferings and undeserved atonement, is one of the dying Dionysus's masks (GT 10, KSA, 1, p. 72).

For the author of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the spiritual nature of the mysteries, the secrecy surrounding their practices and their undisputable antiquity meant that they were well positioned to convey the natural and original knowledge that he rediscovered in the Greek world via tragedy, what Nietzsche called the *Mysterienlehre der Tragödie* ('doctrine of the mysteries of tragedy') (GT 10, KSA 1, p. 73, my translation). In the mysteries, according to Nietzsche, the Dionysian element appeared as the most authentic foundation of Greek religiosity. Even the mythical content of the Orphic and Dionysian myth lends itself to a philosophical interpretation. In the ritual cry (*Mysterienruf*) of Eleusis,¹¹ Nietzsche hears the Schopenhauerian call to original unity: Dionysus's cry of exultation (*Jubelruf*), which opens the way to the 'Mothers of being' (GT 16, KSA 1,

⁸ Nietzsche rarely references Euripides' Dionysus. If, during his teaching years he ran a seminar on the subject at Basel Paedagogium (SS 1870), no notes for such lessons have been found and the issue does not seem to have had any particular impact on his work.

⁹ The most important texts for the Orphic tradition of the myth of Dionysus are the *Orphic Hymns* and *Cosmogonies*, and the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus of Panopolis.

¹⁰ For the possible identification of Iacchus with Zagreus, the most important sources are the following: Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, III, 4; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, II, 17–18; Proclus, *Theology*, 35a. For the Orphic fragments related to this question, see the reference edition Kern 1922, fr. 34–35. For more information about the role of this myth in Nietzsche's philosophy, see Santini 2009.

¹¹ The ritual cry of Eleusis was proclaimed by initiates towards the end of the ceremony, announcing the birth of Brimo, the son of Zeus and Demeter.

⁷ One of the most important sources for assessing Nietzsche's interest in the mysteries during the years of *The Birth of Tragedy* is the UI 2b notebook from late 1870/early 1871 (NL 1870–1871, KSA 7, [1–204], pp. 137–216).

p. 103, my translation), according to Goethe's famous expression.¹² The sacred representations of the secret ceremonies, as well as the symbolic content of the tragedy, likely represented the suffering of the *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation) embodied by the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, who was dismembered by the Titans. A philosophical interpretation of this myth was, however, authorised already in antiquity. In his *De E apud Delphos*, Plutarch had already interpreted the Dionysian myth as a symbolic representation of the struggle between the unity of the cosmos and its elements:

If, then, anyone should ask, What has this to do with Apollo? We reply: It has to do not only with him, but with Dionysus, who has no less property in Delphi than Apollo himself. We therefore hear theologians, partly in verse, partly in prose, setting forth and chanting how that the god, though by nature incorruptible and eternal, yet, as they tell, through some decree of fate, submitted to changes of condition, at one time set all Nature on fire, making all things like to all; at another time he was metamorphosed and turned into various shapes, states, and powers, in the same way as the universe now exists – but is called by the best-known of all his names. The wiser sort, cloaking their meaning from the vulgar, call the change into Fire 'Apollo', on account of the reduction to one state, and also 'Phoebus' on account of its freedom from defilement and purity; but the condition and change of his turning and subdivision into air and water and earth, and the production of animals and plants, they enigmatically term 'Exile' and 'Dismemberment'. They name him 'Dionysos and 'Zagreus' and 'Nycteleos' and 'Isodetes'; they also tell of certain destructions and disappearances and diseases and new births, which are riddles and fables pertaining to the aforesaid transformations: and they sing the dithyrambic song, filled with sufferings, and allusions to some change of state that brought with it wandering about and dispersion. (Plutarch, *De E*, IX)¹³

2 Mysteries and Mysticism

Nietzsche's insistence on the philosophical content of the mysteries is indicative of the historical criticism typical of the scholarship of his time, which tended to attribute a higher spirituality to the mystery religions than it did to the secular and material spirituality of the religious practices of the *poleis*.¹⁴ The attribution

¹² The reference is Goethe, *Faust*, II, 6216 and 6427. See also NL 1870–1871, KSA 7, 5[2], 9[106], pp. 93 and 313.

¹³ Online edition provided by Chicago University: this online edition adopts the translation of Plutarch by A.O. Prickard (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1918) with a few minor changes and some additional notes taken from the translation of C.W. King (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889). I also made some minor changes to the translation.

¹⁴ The hypothesis that Greek mysteries, especially the Eleusinian cult, represented a more advanced religion than Greek polytheism, or even that they could embrace a monotheistic form of

of a mystical dimension to these rites was an important factor in such idealising interpretations. The mysticism Nietzsche speaks of is a tension towards transcendence, in the sense of what transcends human beings, expressed in the search for unity above and beyond the individual, and in a cognitive drive that is drawn towards the essence of the world. Nietzsche scholars have rightly recognized this tension as metaphysical. References to mysticism multiply in Nietzsche's writings of 1870–71, first of all in reference to the orgiastic Dionysian cults and the intoxication and state of ecstasy (*außer sich sein*) that ensue. Nietzsche speaks of the 'mystical feeling of unity' (*mystische Einheitsempfindung*) that 'redeems' (*Erlösen*) the individual through 'mystical self-denial' (*mystische Selbstenttäußerung*) (GT 2, KSA 1, pp. 30–31, my translation); this allows humans to relinquish their individuality and to lose themselves in God or else to recognise themselves in God's semi-divine retinue (GG, KGW II/5, p. 374).

Now, according to Nietzsche, the sixth century saw a great rise in mysticism in Greece. Such a movement also gave rise to the birth of Greek philosophy, which developed via the first philosophers' search for archetypal unity, via the metaphysical leap of Anaximander, who conceived the unity of the *ἀνείπον* (PHG, KSA 1, p. 822), and via the 'frozen chill of Parmenides's abstraction' (*jener eisige Abstraktions-Schauer*) (PHG, KSA 1, p. 836, my translation), which represents for Nietzsche 'a metaphysical conviction [*metaphysischer Glaubenssatz*] which had its origin [*Ursprung*] in a mystic intuition [*in einer mystischen Intuition*]' (PHG, KSA 1, p. 813, my translation). For Nietzsche, other figures embody for Nietzsche the mystical attitude of this particular century. This is the case for the poet Xenophanes of Colophon, 'the singer of a mystical deification of Nature' (*Der Sänger einer mystischen Naturvergötterung*) (PHG, KSA 1, p. 840, my translation),¹⁵ and, later, Pindar, whom Plato called *ὁ σοφώτατος* ('the wisest') by vir-

spirituality, has long been dominant among scholars. The idea that monotheistic religions are chronologically and axiologically advanced with regard to polytheistic ones has on the contrary been countered by recent studies that have highlighted the polytheistic origins of the first monotheistic religion, ancient Judaism. See, among others, Gnuse (1997).

¹⁵ The text goes further: 'Throughout an extraordinary lifetime, Xenophanes lived as a travelling poet and through his travels became a widely informed and widely informative person who understood how to ask questions and tell stories. ... Whence and when he picked up the mystical tendency toward the one, and the "one forever at rest", no one can now reconstruct. Perhaps it was the concept of an old man finally settled down, one before whose soul there appeared, after all the mobility of his wanderings and after all his restless learning and looking, the highest and greatest thing of all, a vision of divine rest, of the permanence of all things within a pantheistic archetypal peace' (PHG, KSA 1, p. 840, Nietzsche 1996b, p. 75).

tue of the almost mystical-philosophical intonation of his nature.¹⁶ This panorama is completed by figures such as Pythagoras and Empedocles, with their doctrines on 'metempsychosis' (*Seelenwanderung*) and the 'immortality of the soul' (*Unsterblichkeitsglaube*) (CV, KSA 1, p. 758, my translation).

This emphasis on mysticism and eschatological theory marks a shift in Nietzsche's approach to the mysteries, particularly evident in the years immediately following *The Birth of Tragedy*. What emerges is an explicitly negative attitude towards the mysteries and mystic spirituality, with Nietzsche relying, once again, on the ancient tradition, particularly the writings of Epicurus and Heraclitus, who stigmatised practices related to the cult of Dionysus and, more generally, to all superstitious belief in the afterlife.¹⁷ Criticism of mystical cults and sectarian practices in antiquity was generally levelled at the intoxication and lewdness that was part and parcel of them, as well as at their subversive potential: as parastatal cults they posed a threat to the customs and the social and political systems of ancient societies. The scandal of the Bacchanalia, as evidenced by the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, was infamous, and Nietzsche studied it in his lectures on Latin Grammar (KGW II/2, p. 302). The document clearly reveals the Roman anxiety over the development of potentially subversive parastatal cells within its realm.¹⁸ Organised according to internal hierarchies and an alternative economy, such factions were considered as states within the state, which were contrary not only to Roman customs, but they threatened the very foundations of Roman power.

While aware of this tradition, Nietzsche's critique of the mystery cults is more concerned with their mystical elements. Several factors contributed to this shift in Nietzschean thought: his early refusal of Schopenhauerian ideas and his growing distrust of Oriental spirituality, which was once a model for him; the outline of his first criticism of Christianity; and, moreover, his reflection on the crisis of the Greek world. If we look more closely at Nietzsche's texts from this period, in particular those that condemn the phenomenon of mysteries, it

¹⁶ Pindar is, according to Nietzsche, the only singer to have been inspired in his Hymns (which Nietzsche defines as true 'mysteries of thought' [*Gedankennysterien*] (NL 1871, KSA, 7, 12 [1], p. 369, my translation) by the content of the mysteries.

¹⁷ See Bernays 1869, which is Nietzsche's source for Heraclitus's criticism of the Dionysian cults.

¹⁸ 'Sacerdōs nēquis vir esset; magister neque vir neque mulier quisquam esset. / Nēve pecūniā am quisquam eōrum commūne[m] hābuisse vellet; nēve magistrātum, / nēve prō magistrātū, neque virum [neque mulierem] qu[is]quam fecisse vellet, / nēve posthāc inter sē coniūrā[re] nēve convōvisse nēve cōspōdisse / nēve compromīsisse vellet, nēve quisquam fidem inter sē dedisse vellet' (*Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, vv. 10–14).

becomes clear that his targets have changed. He is no longer concerned with Eleusis or the Dionysian cult per se. Nietzsche's attention moves further ahead on the timescale to the conventions of followers of Pythagoras and the Orphics;¹⁹ he looks in particular at the new sectarian, secret and exalted cults that flourished amid the great melting pot of the Hellenistic *koinē*, arising out of encounters with Oriental influences and new spiritual trends.

Another very telling element is the emergence of a specific metaphorical vocabulary related to the mysteries in Nietzsche's texts on Richard Wagner, which suggests, especially in the *Nachlass*, a clear polemical intent. There is talk of 'hidden soul Mysteries' (*verborgene Seelen-Mysterien*) (NL 1875, KSA 8, 12[33], p. 209, my translation), he speaks of the 'mysteries' of the composer, of his 'purifications' (*Reinigungen*) and 'commotions' (*Erschütterungen*) (RWB 6, KSA 1, p. 464, my translation). Here we can already see an emergent criticism of the mysticism of Wagner, which, during the 1880s, with *Parsifal*, becomes much more explicit in tone.

3 Towards a Phenomenology of the Mysterium

Nietzsche's real attack against the mysteries occurs in *Human, All Too Human*. Like many other cultural, social, political and religious phenomena, the mysteries are subjected to what we might term a proto-genealogical, or even proto-phenomenological analysis in order to highlight their roots and fundamental elements before criticising their claims to a true value. In the case of the mysteries, Nietzsche's analysis is particularly refined and intelligent. He dismantles them until he reaches what he believes to be their essential factor, the concept of 'shame' (*Scham*):

Shame – Shame exists wherever there exists a 'mystery' [Mysterium]; this, however, is a religious concept [ein religiöser Begriff], which in earlier ages of human culture was of wide compass. Everywhere there were enclosed domains [umgränzte Gebiete] to which divine right [göttliche Recht] denied entry except under certain conditions: in the first instance, these were simply areas of ground, inasmuch as certain places were not to be stepped upon by the feet of the uninitiated, who were seized with fear and trembling [Schauder

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic* 364e, anticipated these phenomena, directing his criticism not so much at the Orphic religion or the Pythagorean doctrine of the soul as such, but rather to those braggarts who claimed to follow the teachings of these ancient masters and who in reality profited from them to scare the fearful and the foolish.

und Angst empfanden] when they approached them. (MA I 100, KSA 2, p. 97, Nietzsche 1996a, p. 53)²⁰

Here we find hints of the ethnological studies that were of interest to Nietzsche at the editing of his lecture on the *Gottesdienst der Griechen*, in which, for example, he analyses the Greek temple and the levels of sacredness within its space.²¹ Inclusion/exclusion, inviolability of sacred space—whether physical or spiritual—fear and reverence are all characteristics that make up a 'mystery'.

But what causes shame within western culture? Sexuality and generational secrets are some of the traditional elements of the Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries, evoked by Nietzsche in Aphorism 112 of *Human, All Too Human*. On Viewing Certain Antique Sacrificial Implements (*Beim Anblick gewisser antiker Opfergeräthschaften*),²² as a mixture of sacred and obscene components.²³ We find something very singular in the famous mention of Baubo, the old and obscene woman servant of Demeter, who plays a central role in the Eleusinian rituals.²⁴ In the second introduction to *The Gay Science*, the absence of shame in showing directly what is considered obscene becomes a metaphor for the truth, which can no more be hidden behind the voile of shame and wants to be declared in all its obscenity: 'One should have more respect [*in Ehren halten*]

for the bashfulness [*Scham*] with which nature has hidden behind riddles [*Räthsel*] and iridescent uncertainties [*bunte Ungewissheiten*]. Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is-to speak Greek-Baubo?' (FW Vorrede 4, KSA 3, p. 352, Nietzsche 1974, p. 38). In addition to life and sex, Nietzsche mentions other phenomena deserving of the status of mysteries, before which people cannot but react in a helpless and remissive manner. One is royalty: the dignity of power. In a fragment of the period 1876–1877 (KSA 8, 23[6], p. 405), Nietzsche argues that the source of the power is obscure, and no reason can be given to explain it and it is exactly this lack of justification, this arbitrariness, that goes back to the beginning of times, that is the real source of the power.

Another modern mystery is that of the soul, the interior of man: ~~the~~ most remote, intimate, and secret of places: 'The whole world of interior states, the so-called "soul", is likewise still a mystery to all non-philosophers; through endless ages it has been believed that the 'soul' was of divine origin and worthy of traffic with the gods: consequently it is an *adytum* and evokes shame. (MA I 100, KSA 2, p. 97, Nietzsche 1996a, p. 54).²⁵ The question of the human soul, its integrity and destiny after death, was at the centre of the spirituality of the mysteries from at least the sixth century onwards. The Orphic religion in particular based its beliefs concerning the immortality of the soul on the already mentioned element of the myth of Zagreus, according to which humans were born from the ashes of the Titans, who were incinerated by Zeus for having devoured Dionysus. Human beings were thus composed of the same matter of the Titans but enriched by the assimilated body of Dionysus Zagreus. In this way, they were seen to have a dual nature, at once divine and Titanic; hence the belief that a divine spark exists in humanity that cannot be extinguished when an individual dies. Such a conception, and its resulting body/soul dualism, foreign to the oldest Greek religions, was present in various forms throughout late antiquity. It was, for instance, pertinent to Plato (*Cratylus* 400), to the entire Neoplatonic tradition, and to the later millennial Christian tradition. Here, we are faced with a dual transcendent tendency, eschatological and metaphysical, that concerns, on the one hand, the question of the very essence of humanity and, on the other hand, its destiny after death. Nietzsche's criticism of what he considered to be the last great historical mystery, the Christian religion, focused precisely on this two-headed question.

25 'Ebenso ist die ganze Welt innerer Zustände, die sogenannte "Seele", auch jetzt noch für alle Nicht-Philosophen ein Mysterium, nachdem diese, endlose Zeit hindurch, als göttlichen Ursprungs, als göttlichen Verkehrs würdig geglaubt wurde: sie ist demnach ein *Adyton* und erweckt Scham'.

20 See also NL 1876–1877, KSA 8, 23[79], p. 429 and NL 1877, KSA 8, 24[4], p. 479.

21 GDG, KGW II/5, pp. 423–431, *Verschiedene Grade der Heiligkeit von Ort und Besitz*. Around 1875–1878, Nietzsche consulted several ethnological texts, such as Wilhelm Mannhardt 1875–1877 and Edward Burnett Tylor 1873 (For the German translation of the original English text see Burnett Tylor 1871).

22 'How many sensations have been lost for us can be seen, for example, in the union of the farical even the obscene, with the religious feeling: our sense of the possibility of this combination dwindles, we comprehend that it existed only historically, in the festivals of Demeter and Dionysus, in the Christian Easter and mystery plays; but we too still know the sublime in concert with the burlesque and the like, the moving blended with the ludicrous: which a later age will in turn perhaps no longer comprehend'. (MA I 112, KSA 2, p. 116, Nietzsche 1996a, p. 65).

23 We should not forget that this contamination between sublime and comedy, sacred and profane, shame and obscenity, has always been part of the Christian tradition, before the Council of Trent, especially during the Middle Ages. It is enough to recall the presence of the obscene *Roxiffe*, the automaton in the Cathedral of Strasbourg, who was made to cry vulgarities during the divine service of the Easter.

24 'Baubo, having received Demeter as a guest, offers her a draught of wine and meal. She declines to take it, being unwilling to drink on account of her mourning. Baubo is deeply hurt, thinking she has been slighted, and thereupon uncovers her secret parts and exhibits them to the goddess. Demeter is pleased at the sight, and now at least receives the draught,—delighted by the spectacle! These are the secret mysteries of the Athenians! These are also the subjects of Orpheus' poems' (Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, II, 21, Clement of Alexandria 1919, p. 43).

4 The Last of the Mysteries: Christianity

In Fragment 7 [134] of 1871 (NL 1871, KSA 7, 7[134], p. 193), Nietzsche suggests that the surviving latent elements of ancient mystical cults resulted in Christianity. In his lectures on the *Encyclopedia of Classical Philology*, he summarises this belief as follows: 'Religions do not die. They simply transfigure themselves' (*Religionen sterben nicht, sie transfigurieren sich bloss*) (EKP, KGW II/3, p. 348, my translation). The hypothesis that Christianity derived from ancient mysteries or, at the very least, that mystical and gnostic elements typical of the latest mysteries can be found in the Christian religion, has long been a *leitmotiv* of modern German culture, particularly in the fields of history, theology and philosophy, and it was stressed particularly by Rudolf Bultmann (Bultmann 1949).²⁶ Nietzsche develops these theories in an original way. The particular strand of mysticism that survived in the mysteries found fertile ground in the Hellenistic world, in which the political unity of the polis was superseded by an expansion of, or lack of, boundaries. The needs of the individual became more important than the civic values of the community, and this subversive move was also reflected on a spiritual level: a religion that protected the common values and the established order of Greek society was replaced by one that sought to preserve the individual and to attain personal salvation and immortality. The private sphere replaced that of the citizen and the individual replaced the community; countless mystery cults, eminently sectarian and characterised by syncretic cultural elements,²⁷ both cosmopolitan and local, gave a voice to the social demands and spiritual ambitions of individuals across the great cosmos of the Alexandrine world. To this long list of cults, including the Egyptian cult of Isis and Serapis, the Persian cult of Mithra, the Semitic cult of Adonis, Tamuz and Sabatius, Nietzsche does not hesitate to add Christianity.

How did Christianity, a small popular movement born out of Judaism in the farthest Roman province, succeed in conquering this widespread, complex and culturally sophisticated world? The great peace of the Roman Empire, the strongest political structure of all time, replaced the Alexandrine κοινὴ. It was by conquering the Roman Empire and adopting its unifying and centralizing structures that Christianity was able to distinguish itself from other cults and to interpret the unrest and claims of the plebeians of the empire. The θεός-κράσις, the assim-

ilation of various local deities to a single state religion, first established by Alexander the Great and then replicated by the Romans, had certainly been a great political force, but it no longer had a hold over the masses, amongst whom a sense of latent disbelief had arisen. Christianity inherited all those disgruntled and fearful individuals, who flocked to the secret cults, seeking in them spiritual responses to their fears and aspirations.

To meet their needs, however, Christianity had to develop a language that made it capable of such universal representation. According to Nietzsche, two elements in particular were key to Christianity's long-term success, elevating it from a sect to a world religion: first, the choice of the Greek language and, second, the adoption of the formal Greek model to structure its doctrine and liturgy. 'It is subtle that God learned Greek when he wanted to become a writer—and that he did not learn it better'. (JGB 121, KSA 5, p. 94, my translation). Aside from being a joke, this famous aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil* is a fine philological observation. The choice of Greek—in a poor and grammatically more egolitarian form than the sophisticated Alexandrine κοινὴ—for the transmission of the Gospels was, in fact, a strategic move, much like the adoption of commercial English would be today: it was an artificial *lingua franca* accessible to individuals of all regions and all social ranks.

As regards the adoption of the formal Greek model to structure the doctrinal system of the new religion, the author of this manoeuvre was, according to Nietzsche (who was not particularly original on this point),²⁸ Saul of Tarsus, Saint Paul:

But then Paulus came into the picture. ... Paul, Chandalia hatred of Rome, against the world, become flesh, become genius; the Jew, the wandering Jew par excellence [*der Fleisch-, der Genie-gewordne Tschandala-Hass gegen Rom, gegen "die Welt", der Jude, der ewige Jude par excellence*]. ... What he guessed was how you can use the small, sectarian Christian movement outside Judaism to kindle a world fire [*Weltbrand*], how you can use the symbol of 'God on the cross' to take everything lying below, everything filled with secret rebellion, the whole inheritance of anarchistic activities in the empire, and unite them into an incredible power [*Macht*] 'Salvation comes from the Jews'. (A 58, KSA 6, p. 247, Nietzsche 2005, p. 61)

²⁸ The idea that Saint Paul is the actual founder of a universal form of Christianity is a traditional one in theological studies and was popular during Nietzsche's lifetime. Scholarly contributions to this issue, with which Nietzsche would surely have been familiar, include Strauss 1835–1836 and 1872, Hausrath 1872 and 1868–1874, Lüdemann 1872 and, last but not least, Overbeck 1873.

²⁶ This hypothesis was developed in the first decades of the twentieth century in particular. See also Losy 1919 and Clemen 1913.

²⁷ On religious and cultural syncretism in the mystery cults in late antiquity see Reitzenstein 1921, Reitzenstein and Schaefer 1926 and Reitzenstein 1927.

Paul's 'Damascene moment' (*Augenblick von Damaskus*) (A 58, KSA 6, p. 247, Nietzsche 2005, p. 62), his illumination, was his capacity to recognise the needs of the empire's plebeians and to give them a universal voice. He was able to exercise a productive *κρῶσις* (assimilation) between a provincial and sectarian movement, the centuries-old Jewish tradition, the cosmopolitan and syncretistic instances of the Greek Hellenistic and Roman world, and the most original religious sense of the Greeks:

The Christian church is an encyclopaedia [*Enzyklopädie*] of prehistoric cults and conceptions of the most diverse origin, and that is why it is so capable of proselytizing [*Missionstätigkeit*]: it always could, and it can still go wherever it pleases and it always found, and always finds something similar to itself to which it can adapt itself and gradually impose upon it a Christian meaning. It is not what is Christian in it; but the universally heathen character [*Universal-Heidnische*] of its usages, which has favored the spread of this world-religion [*Weltreligion*]. (M 70, KSA 3, p. 68, Nietzsche 1997, p. 69)

Paul systematically translated the symbols and rituals of the primitive Christian movement into a modern and universal language, thus exploiting the patrimony of pagan spirituality that had spread throughout the *oecumene*. And in order to designate the universal contents of this new religion, Paul deliberately chose the Greek term *μυστήριον* (mysterium).²⁹

The strength of Paul's model of Christianity lays in its mimetic capacity, which made it a universal interpreter of the needs of a specific historical moment, all the while maintaining the typical characteristics of a pagan cult. In this instance, Nietzsche's important Fragment 11[295] of 1887 is worth a closer look (NL 1887, KSA 13, 11[295], p. 115). Indeed, it contains several lists of issues and statements about those elements that have been transplanted from ancient mystery cults to Christianity. Such a fragment allows us better to understand the implications of Nietzsche's definition of Christianity as the last of the mystery cults. This is, however, not the place for a complete examination of this decisive fragment. I will limit my discussion to some key points, which allow me to observe how Nietzsche determines some important differences between the original mystical content of Christianity at its origin and the dogmatic structure of the theological doctrine of the Church.

Paul's Jesus, the Son of God, would have been very familiar to the worshippers of Mithra, Dionysus, Tamuz, Adon and Attis, gods whose death and resurrection

²⁹ 1 Cor. 2:6; Col. 1:26; Eph. 5:32; 1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 3:4; and Col. 4:4.

were guarantors of humanity's destiny after death.³⁰ They would also have recognized the Christians' faith in the afterlife, and their fear of punishment after death, which, in the mystery cults, was closely linked to the distinction between the initiates and the uninitiated. First, however, it is interesting to recall how the oldest version of Christianity did not stress these eschatological fears and hopes at all. According to Nietzsche and many other theologians of his time, the early Christians were waiting for the advent of the kingdom of God on this earth; they were waiting for God, and they followed the promise of deliverance from death to the letter. Only when it became evident that this advent would not occur in their lifetime did it become necessary to set the doctrine in such a way as to guarantee a long-term eschatological perspective.³¹ The Jews themselves were not much concerned with their posthumous fate; they were waiting for a Messiah on earth and considered death as a long, unconscious process of waiting, which preceded the resurrection of bodies.

Another interesting element of fragment 11 [295] is Nietzsche's mention of 'cathartic practice' (*Reinigung*),³² purification rituals common to all ancient cults, and their comparison with the expiatory system of Christianity. Purification, as understood by the ancient cults, freed individuals from an almost contagious condition (*μιάσμα*) that occurred when one had been in contact with an impure substance, that is, something external that changed the integrity of the person. The causes of *μιάσμα*—sexual acts, the violation of a sacred space (*ἄβυσσος*), the violation of the hierarchy of power—were the same as those that triggered shame: even murder causes impurity, even without the addition of moral consideration or blame. Those who committed a crime were contaminated through contact with blood; simple proximity to a dead body rendered impure those who approached it. Purification practices therefore served to remove exterior impurities that altered the integrity of the individual, regardless of their culpability. Nietzsche focuses upon this aspect of ancient cathartic practices in the chapter dedicated to *Die Reinigung: katharsis, lustratio (suffimentum, expiatio, purgatio)* in his lectures on *Der Gottesdienst der Griechen* (KGW II/5, pp. 504–514). It is no coincidence that the means through which purification was achieved

³⁰ This similarity was already observed by the first Christian Apologetic and was rejected as a devilish betrayal.

³¹ 'The "after death" - ... To the first Christians the idea of eternal torment was very remote: they thought they were redeemed "from death" and from day to day expected a transformation and not that they would die' (M 72, KSA 3, p. 70, Nietzsche 1997, p. 72).

³² It is not a question here of the tragic catharsis of Aristotle's *Poetics*, referenced by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* and commonly translated as *Entladung* in order to distinguish it from *Reinigung*.

ieved in these practices were elementary: water, fire and ashes were used, the most common cleaning materials. But Jacob Burckhardt in his *Culturgeschichte* had already noted that, if exteriority characterised the common purification practices necessary for the initiation of the mysteries, the Orphics in particular assigned a deeper meaning to these purifications, that of the power to engender internal metamorphoses. In any case, according to Nietzsche, the transformation of ancient purification into expiation only took place once a primitive concept of guilt—indispensable in order to justify the reward / punishment system inherent to mystery sects—was incorporated into Greek spirituality (EKP, KGW II/3, p. 413).

A final, rather important point to mention from this fragment 11[295] is what Nietzsche describes as *das Mysterium par excellence*: 'the bloody phantasmagoria of the sacrificial animal' (*die blutige Phantasmagorie des Opferthiers 'das Mysterium'*) (NL 1887, KSA 13, 11[295], p. 116, my translation). In *Beyond Good and Evil* 55 (KSA 5, p. 74), Nietzsche defines three types of sacrifice: human sacrifice, the sacrifice of instincts and the sacrifice of God. Leaving the second one aside (which would take me too far from my topic), I consider the remaining two types. When discussing human sacrifice in antiquity, Nietzsche always has two very specific episodes in mind. The first is the well-known episode, dealt with by Plutarch in *The Life of Themistocles* (13),³³ of the three young nephews of Xerxes, who were offered up as a sacrifice to Dionysus Agrionios. The second episode and most relevant for the present discussion is that of the human sacrifice that is said having been offered to the solar god Mithra by the Emperor Tiberius in a sacred cave in the island of Capri during the ritual of the mysteries. A whole series of fragments from the period 1878–79 reference more or less explicitly this event and mention this cave where the sacrifice Nietzsche refers to as 'that most gruesome of all Roman anachronisms' took place (JGB 55, KSA 5, p. 74, my translation).³⁴ According to Nietzsche, Tiberius' act is an aberration not simply because he kills a man, but because such an act by the hand of a Roman emperor belies the fact that Rome is a rational, civic, earth- and life-oriented insti-

tution.³⁵ The sacrificing of the slave Ipatos marked the end of Rome itself, of its respect for life, and its capitulation to the mystical and nihilistic currents that blighted it from inside:

This organization [Organisation] was stable enough to hold up under bad emperors: the accident of personalities cannot make any difference with things like this, — first principle of all great architecture. But it was not stable enough to withstand the most corrupt type of corruption, to withstand Christians. ... The priggish creeping [Mucker-Schleicherei] around, the conventicle secrecy [Conventikel-Heimlichkeit], dismal ideas like hell, like the sacrifice of the innocent, like the *unio mystica* in the drinking of blood. (A 58, KSA 6, p. 246, Nietzsche 2005, p. 61)

Blood sacrifice was at the basis of all ancient cults, but for the mysteries it was the founding event: the myth of the god who died as a sacrificial victim was in fact repeated in rituals and formed the content of sacred doctrine. Of course, Christianity also celebrates the sacrifice of God during the Eucharist,³⁶ but in a more substantial way via its own symbol of the paradox or the foolishness of the cross (1 Cor. 18–31):

Something to equal the enticing, intoxicating, benumbing, corrupting power [an verlockender, berausender, betäubender, verderbender Kraft] of that symbol of the 'holy cross', to equal that horrible paradox of a 'God on the cross', to equal that mystery of an unthinkable final act of extreme cruelty and self-crucifixion of God for the salvation of mankind? (GM I 8, KSA 5, p. 269, Nietzsche 2006, p. 18).

But the most fully developed form of this blood sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who takes upon himself the punishment and leaves to humanity the horrible burden of the guilt of his innocent death (GM II 23, KSA, 5, pp. 334–335), is not the end of the story. What Nietzsche now refers to is something further: the nihilistic sacrifice of the deity as such: the sacrifice of the ultimate goodness to

35 The words that Nietzsche would like to put in Tiberius's mouth at the moment of what he calls his 'double death' are very telling: 'But Tiberius died silently, this most tormented of all self-tormentors — he was genuine and no actor! What might have passed through his mind at the end? Maybe this: "Life — that is a long death. What a fool I was to shorten so many lives! Was I made to be benefactor? I should have given them eternal life: that way, I could have seen them die forever. That's why I had such good eyes: *qualis spectator pereat*!" When after a long death-struggle he seemed to recover his strength, it was considered advisable to smother him with pillows — he died a double death' (GS 36, KSA 3, p. 405, Nietzsche 1974, p. 105). 'Qualis spectator pereat' is a parody of the last words of another emperor, Nero, according to Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, 44: 'qualis artifex pereo'.

36 On the Eucharist as a bloody sacrifice, Nietzsche makes reference to Julius Wellhausen 1878, particularly in NL 1887, KSA 13, 11[292–293], pp. 113–114.

33 From this episode comes the epithet *agriorios* for Dionysus, often recalled by Nietzsche in KSA 7, 7[61, 81, 123], pp. 152, 157, and 178.

34 NL 1873, KSA 8, 28[17, 22, 24–25, 34, and 39], pp. 506–509. The source of these fragments is Ferdinand Gregorovius 1856, pp. 360. The cave in Capri where the sacrifice is said to have taken place was also visited by Nietzsche during his stay in Sorrento. Gregorovius provides an etymological hypothesis for the cave's strange name (spelled by the locals as 'Grotta del matrimonio'), linking it to the mystical cult of the god Mithra or that of the great Mother (hence *Mitromania* or *Matromania*).

nothingness. Nietzsche's figure of the last man is the officiant of this extreme sacrificial ritual, which, according to Nietzsche, marks the supreme cruelty of humanity vis-à-vis itself: 'To sacrifice God for nothingness [*Für das Nichts Gott opfern*]—that paradoxical mystery [*paradoxe Mysterium*] of the final cruelty has been reserved for the race [*Geschlecht*] that is now approaching: by now we all know something about this' (JGB 55, KSA 5, p. 74, Nietzsche 2000, p. 50). In stark contrast to the *Jubelruf* of the Eleusinian mysteries—the cry of joy announcing the birth of God—Nietzsche attributes to the Christian mystery a cry of suffering: 'Mehr Schmerz! Mehr Schmerz!' (GM III 20, KSA 5, p. 390). The sadistic asceticism that scorns both life and body is at odds with the mysticism of envy and fullness, the sense of ecstasy, which characterised the early Dionysian cults.

Conclusion: Why Suffering?

As we can see, the pretended affinity between Christianity and the mysteries is not unproblematic and certainly it hardly works for the oldest mysteries. Nietzsche mentions in his early writings. Indeed, also regarding one of the most controversial points, namely, the centrality of suffering, which could rightly be attributed to both Christianity and the mysteries (the suffering of God on the Cross and the *pathe* of the Orphic Dionysus, for instance), Nietzsche concedes a marked difference between the Christian religion and the most ancient mysteries. According to Nietzsche, Christianity is the last attempt to devalue life in favour of the afterlife. Christian atonement seeks redemption (*Erlösung*) through pain via *askesis* and the denial of materiality, the body, and the secular life. In their turn, the mysteries had their own doctrine of pain too. The object of the most ancient Orphic doctrine, namely, the suffering of Dionysus/Zagreus, is recalled as more than a remnant in the pains of the tragic heroes. Furthermore, the cry of the Eleusinian mysteries was certainly a cry of jubilation for the birth of the last Dionysus, but also a cry of suffering of Demeter, who gives birth to him:

In the doctrines of the mysteries [*Mysterienlehre*], pain is pronounced holy: the 'woes of a woman in labour' [*Wehen der Gebärenden*] sanctify pain in general, – all becoming and growth, everything that guarantees the future involves pain. ... There has to be an eternal 'agony of the woman in labour' so that there can be an eternal joy of creation [*Lust des Schaffens*], so that the will to life [*Wille zum Leben*] can eternally affirm itself. (GD Ancients 4, KSA 6, p. 159, Nietzsche 2005, p. 228)

Both Christianity and the ancient mystery cults pronounce suffering holy. But the end goal differed. The Greeks' love of life led them to celebrate their mysteries.

They made life holy, and any eventual eschatological perspective can be understood as a desire to make life eternal. Their mystery cults guaranteed them eternal life. At the base of the eschatological perspective of Christianity is instead a deep devaluation of this life in favour of the afterlife. According to the later Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*, the thought of the eternal recurrence could be evoked to understand the mysteries as celebrations of life that affirms itself. Instead of negating life in favour of claims for a fully accomplished life in the afterlife, what the Greeks wanted to guarantee to themselves through the mysteries was the eternal return of life as such: the future life which is already promised and consecrated in the past, the fullness of life that is both pain and death, and which is eternally able to produce life anew (EH, KSA 13, p. 628).

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