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James Magrini College of DuPage, magrini@cod.edu

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# Philosophically Thinking Through Nihilism: The Reclamation of Embodied Thought For Enhancing Cultural Practices

James M. Magrini College of Dupage

#### Introducing Empedocles, Nietzsche, and Nihilism

"So much depends on the development of the Greek culture because our entire occidental world has received its initial stimuli from it [...] There are very many possibilities which have not yet been discovered because the Greeks did not discover them. And others have discovered the Greeks and later covered them up again." ~ Nietzsche

In his introduction to Heidegger's *Early Greek Thinking*, David Krell talks about the history of philosophy in terms of a "nightmare from which we, Dedalus-like, are trying to awake," unfortunately, as he observes, "indignant refusal and consignment to oblivion are hardly signs of wakefulness" (7). What follows is not however, an interpretation of Heidegger's engagement with Pre-Socratic thought, if it were, we would be looking at the fragments of Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. Rather, I choose to focus on Empedocles, perhaps for one of the reasons Nietzsche found so appealing, namely, Empedocles attempts to "lead humanity across [the bridge] to the universal friendship (*koina ton philon*) of the Pythagoreans and thus to social reform" (113).¹ Although the issue of social reform on a grand scale is beyond the modest scope of these thoughts, I examine Empedocles' thought as it moves through Nietzsche's modern philosophy with the hope of reawakening and reinvigorating the authentic need and drive to *philosophize* by attempting to understand more clearly what the ancient Greek's relationship to his world, and by extension, others, might have been like. I want to consider the value and potential in the thought of Empedocles and Nietzsche for inspiring thinking in other directions beyond our contemporary nihilistic condition as Hubert Dreyfus outlines, which might offer a new understanding of who we are in relation to the way in which we inhabit the world.

Daniela Vallega-Neu focuses on the issue of the bodily dimension in thought, but she does not incorporate the Pre-Socratics. However, what she writes about Nietzsche and the loss and the subsequent attempt in modernity to reinstate the exiled body to a prominent place in philosophy relates directly to Empedocles. Vallega-Neu traces the moment in the history of philosophy when a sharp distinction occurs between the sensible and the intelligible to Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, which presents us with a limit to thinking the bodily dimension in thought: "This limit is two fold," she argues, "since it delimits both the arising of thought as a bodily event and the loss of the event in the differentiation of the sensible and intelligible" (21). We might think of this in terms of the split between soul (*psyche*) and body (*soma*). As this dichotomy progresses into modernity, there is a shift from soul to consciousness and body to matter – two separate and unique substances, one immaterial and the other material. "Body shifts away from its connection with soul and comes to stand in opposition to thought, while the question of soul is replaced by the exploration of human consciousness" (Ibid., 22). She cites Descartes' second Meditation and states that here, Descartes "rearranges nutrition, movement, sense perception under what belongs to the body" and opposes it to thought, which becomes an attribute of the transcendental subject, the "I."

<sup>1</sup> Iain Thompson points out, Nietzsche finds a kindred spirit in Empedocles, for within Nietzsche's book, *The Pre-*

Tain Thompson points out, Nietzsche finds a kindred spirit in Empedocles, for within Nietzsche's book, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, his "fascinating treatment of Empedocles supports the idea that Empedocles was one of the great inspirations for Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," a wandering, peripatetic prophet (315).

Consciousness replaces soul, and with "the disappearing of the soul the lived body is exiled" (Ibid., 22). What she states next has radical implications for the contemporary direction of philosophy as described at the outset by Krell:

[The soul] has no place in consciousness, since the feelings and bodily motions of which I am conscious become thought contents that are immaterial and therefore distinct from bodies. The lived body has no place in the material world either, since bodies in the world are accessed objectively as that which can be scientifically (quantitatively) measured. Basically, bodies are not different from corpses (Ibid., 22).

Vallega-Neu's analysis begins with Nietzsche and the task of overturning Platonism, and I will certainly have more to say about Nietzsche's attempt to return the reality of the body-in-thought to philosophy, but first I look to Empedocles by returning to a time before classical antiquity, a time prior to Plato's entrance onto the philosophical scene. "With Plato," claims Nietzsche, "something entirely new has its beginning. Or it might be said with equal justice, from Plato on there is something essentially amiss with philosophers" (34). I begin with Empedocles' On Nature focused on his "embodied" conception of sensation, knowledge, and cognition as it appears in the scholarly literature. I then move to consider Nietzsche's pivotal role in attempting to reinstate the type of "embodied relationship" to the world present to the philosophy of Empedocles, which was lost with Socratic and Platonic philosophy. Finally, I hope to draw inspiration from this scholarly literature in order to speculate on the legitimate potential this thought has for our contemporary confrontation with nihilism as it described by Hubert Dreyfus. This speculative moment represents the move to engage Empedocles and Nietzsche by demonstrating a willingness, as David Jacobs suggests, "to carry interpretation beyond the limits" of purely scholarly, academic debates (1). Philosophical activity, reminds Jacobs, should not be content to "remain at a safe distance form what is to be thought, by accurately depicting principles and logical arguments," rather authentic interpretation should seek a "thoughtful connection to the matter of philosophy itself" (Ibid. 11).

#### The Inception of *Embodied Thought* in Empedocles

Empedocles shared a unique relationship to the world that has been lost to us, and, as some believe, to our detriment, irretrievably lost. Indeed, the ancient Greek's relationship to his world is not easily understood from our contemporary perspective, which is shaped in great part by Plato's and Descartes' philosophy, wherein we understand truth as a proper function of propositional knowledge, stressing hard distinctions between facts and values, subjects and objects, and the like. The Cartesian notion of knowledge consisting of the conscious mind reflecting on the world as an objective and disconnected fact, as something radically other, was incomprehensible to the early Greeks. This is because the Greeks were immersed in their world in such a way that the human was always already in the world, and to see and experience life in a pre-reflexive manner was, in an important sense for the Greeks, already a form of knowledge of the world.

It is possible to begin to understand the manner in which Empedocles experienced the world by turning to William Barrett's rich description of Being as found in the philosophy of Heidegger, not so much because it provides a wholly accurate description of what the phenomenon of Being was for Heidegger, but rather because it vividly suggests the manner in which Empedocles viewed, experienced, and knew his world: "Being is not an empty abstraction but something in which all of us are immersed up to our necks, and indeed over our heads" (213). Jean-Pierre Vernant clarifies Barrett's description of Being and suggests the following about the uniquely Greek experience of the world: "For the ancient Greek man, the world was not that objectified external universe, cut off from man by the impassable barrier that separates matter from mind, the physical from the psychic. Man was in a relationship of

intimate community with the animate universe to which everything connected him [...] From the start man's being was being-in-the-world" (12).

Plato, in the *Timaeus* (45b f.), offers a rather sophisticated description of vision, which was already philosophized by Empedocles within his poem, *On Nature*. Vision is conceived in terms of the eyes as "light bearing," or light projecting organs (*phosphora-ommata*). In short, the eyes projected effluences ("arms" or "tentacles") in the form of light rays, but the eyes were only one component in the phenomenon of vision. Objects, which were bathed in the light of the all-seeing sun, also projected effluences – vision resembled something of a triangulated process: The two base angles represented the human and object of vision and the apex represented the sun, which the eye resembled in that it radiated light of a similar nature. Below, Vernant describes the notion of being immersed in the world, and here we experience the obliteration of the lines between the physical and psychic:

By reason of the kinship between the three phenomena, which all consisted equally of a very pure fire giving light without burning, the optical arm combined with the light of day and with the rays emitted by objects. Blending with them, it formed a single body (*soma*), perfectly continuous and homogenous, which belonged as a whole both to oneself and to the physical world (Ibid., 13-14).

Empedocles understood both sensation and knowledge in terms of what the Greeks named, "homoios," which might be expressed in the dictum: "Like is known by like," or in terms of a sensory assimilation in which "things give off effluences and knowledge results when these fit into the corresponding passages in the senses" (Peters, 87). For example, as Helle Lambridis points out, Empedocles notion of vision was grounded in the belief, as presented above, that the eye gives of effluences in the form of "flames," or rays of light, and his model for the physical organ of the eye and its function resembles a lantern. The sides of the lantern enclosing the flame, like "fine tissues" surrounding the pupil of the eye, prevent wind and rain from penetrating inside, but do not prevent either the lantern or the eye from radiating light from the inside outwards" (76). In addition, the sides of the lantern are transparent (actually translucent, for the Greeks would have used thinly shaven plates of horn to form the sides) in order to allow the luminescent rays from objects to enter without obstruction.

Indeed all sensation was viewed in terms of the notion of emanating "effluences" and corresponding, diffuse "passages," or pores, located throughout the human body that were each formed in such a way as to be potentially receptive to specific emanations, which consisted of minute particles of matter that were imperceptible to the naked eye. "These produce sensation by striking the appropriate sense-organs which are perforated by equally invisible 'passages'"(Ibid., 73). The entire process of sense perception might be envisioned in a three-fold model: (1) Invisible emanations from all things penetrate invisible passages moving into the body. The passages are of different shapes and sizes and the emanations corresponding to one sense-organ have no affect on another sense-organ; (2) We are constructed of the same elements that compose the universe, namely the four imperishable "roots" (stoicheia), earth, water, fire, and aether, and we recognize these elements by way of the senses because the like in us recognizes the like in them; and (3) The idea of like attracting and coalescing with like extends from sensations to knowledge to human feelings and emotions (Ibid., 80-81).

On Nature reconciles the methods of Ionian philosophy with the Eleatic thought of Parmenides, attempting to give a reasoned account of the world, which relies on observation, sensory perception, and rational explanation. Kirk, Raven and Schofield state that it was Empedocles' response to Parmenides "radical epistemological challenge to cosmology" that made it necessary to stake out his position on knowledge at the outset of the epic poem (285). Empedocles "bewails the very limited understanding of things most men achieve through their senses but he promises that an intelligent use of sensory evidence available to mortals" will make things clear to the understanding (Ibid., 285). In what follows I attempt to understand not only what Empedocles called knowledge but as well speculate on what he might have meant when using the term "understanding." The senses, according to Lambridis, "convey reliable

evidence, if we know how to delimit their bounds," which for Empedocles meant to "understand each thing in the way that it is best revealed" (81).

For Empedocles, the goal of knowledge was to move from and through the sensible to the understanding of the elements and the process of their combination and re-combination as inspired by the two cosmic motive forces Friendship (*Philias*) and Strife (*Neikos*). It is crucial to give an intellectual account of the world that can be substantiated in light of the sensory data we receive. The senses indeed provide us with knowledge, "if one knows how to sift through the evidence. For this sifting, something more than the senses is needed," namely, "intellect or intuition or *Nous*" (Ibid., 82). When Empedocles gives an account of thought, or cognition, he refers to it as *noema*, and even if it might be implied, with respect to the question of thought, that Empedocles seems to be "moving toward a distinction between it and sensation, it is still on a quantitative level. For him and the atomists, it is a special type of sensation that occurs in the blood (here the heart as seat of thought) since the blood appears to be the most perfect blend of the (Elements)" *stoicheia* (Peters, 10). As Empedocles poetized, "The heart, dwelling in a sea of blood which surges back and forth, where especially is what is called thought (*noema*) by men; for the blood around men's hearts is their thought (*noema*)" (DK 31B fr. 105).<sup>2</sup>

Lambridis is rightfully critical of Empedocles' belief that human cognition occurs within the breast, as a direct product of the blood pumping in and around the heart. However, although this account cannot be squared with our current neurological-scientific-cognitive understanding of the human, I think there's something here in Empedocles' account of cognition that is of great value, which if overlooked or dismissed, fails to do justice to the unique and thoroughly primordial conception of the human being that later emerges in Nietzsche. Namely, we already find in Empedocles a conception of the mind that is clearly dependent on the material-physiological processes of, first and foremost, sense perception, as against the notion of mind as disembodied phenomenon. An analogous understanding of mind, I believe, might be found in Susanne Langer. The language she employs in her description of thinking shares marked similarities with Empedocles' conception of thought as an embodied activity, that is, neither reducing it to a single material source, say the physical organ of the brain (or heart muscle), nor explaining it terms of a mysterious immaterial substance (ousia). For Langer, thinking is a dynamic process: "The nervous system is the organ of the mind; its center is the brain, in its extremities the senseorgans; and any characteristic function it may possess must govern the work of all its parts" (84). Importantly, she adds that "the activity of our senses is 'mental' not only when it reaches the brain, but in its very inception," whenever our senses are aroused and stimulated; "All sensitivity," she claims, "bears the stamp of mentality" (Ibid., 84).

As Vernant points out, vision, and indeed all sensation, in varying degrees, was for the ancients linked to knowledge, for to "to see and to know were as one; if *idein*, 'to see,' and *eidenai*, 'to know,' are two verbal forms of the same term, if *eidos*, 'appearance, visible aspect,' also means 'the specific character of the intelligible form,' this is because knowledge was interpreted and expressed through one's way of seeing" (12). Vision was always already a form of knowledge and vice versa. Vernant's account stresses the intimate reciprocity between the seer and the object of his vision. However, rather than referencing the object of one's vision, it is perhaps best to state that what is seen is wholly encompassed and immersed within the process of vision, which is irreducible to a subjective

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This is directly related to what Aristotle observed in *De Anima* when thinking the difference between *noesis* (psychic) and *aiesthesis* (physical): "Thinking, both speculative and practical, is regarded as akin to a form of perceiving; for in the one as well as the other the soul discriminates and is cognizant of something which *is*. Indeed the ancients go so far as to identify thinking and perceiving" (427a). And again, in the testimony of Theophrastis in *de sensu*: "And he [Empedocles] has the same theory about thought and ignorance. Thinking is of the like, ignorance of unlike by unlike, thought being either identical with or closely akin to perception. For having enumerated how we know each thing by its equivalent, he added at the end that "out of these things are all things fitted together and constructed, and by these things do they think and feel pleasure or pain." So it is especially with the blood that they think; for in the blood above all other parts the elements are blended" (DK 31B A86).

phenomenon, "conveying if not a complete identity between the two, then at least a very close kinship" (Ibid., 13). Within the "embodied thought" of Empedocles there is always an intimate link and communion between the world and the human, and thus we return to the important notion of *homoios* that began the section on sensation in Empedocles. "Knower," states Peters, "cannot know an object without some sort of identity of elements between them," and in knowing there is an indissoluble relationship wherein a metamorphosis occurs, for in knowing something "we also, at the same time, become more like it" (87). If we read the following fragment of Empedocles in light of the observations of both Vernant and Peters, the understanding of sensation and knowledge occurring as an embodied phenomenon in terms of a unique way of being situated in the world, becomes clear:

We see (*know*) Earth by means of Earth, Water by means of Water, divine air by means of Air, and destructive Fire by means of Fire; Affection by means of Affection, Hate by means of baneful Hate (DK 31B fr. 109, trans, Freeman).

#### The Reclamation of *Embodied Thought* in Nietzsche

"What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; 'Why?' Finds no answer." ~Nietzsche

Nihilism, the catastrophic devaluation of our highest values, which is linked to the event of the collapse of the "two-world" metaphysical schema as outlined by Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols*, "is the loss of meaning and seriousness" (Dreyfus, 502). In *Will to Power* Nietzsche states that nihilism is the realization that "the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' or the concept 'truth," for that which formerly projected value into the world has been *pulled out*, "so the world looks *valueless*" (13). Nietzsche defines two forms of nihilism: (1) *active nihilism*, which is highlighted by the "increased power of spirit," and (2) *passive nihilism*, which represents a "decline and recession of the power of the spirit" (Ibid., 22). Although *active nihilism* appears to represent the active overcoming of the situation, it is actually the philosophical movement, as related to Dreyfus' thought, wherein we search out ways in which to lessen the problem by ceasing to further contribute to its development and spread. Thus, nihilism cannot necessarily be overcome, there's nothing resembling a "twisting free" from nihilism, because as Dreyfus states, "We cannot do anything to prevent or cure nihilism – it is much too wide and deep for that – one thing we can do is to develop the deepest possible understanding of our nihilistic situation so that we do not inadvertently contribute to the problem" (502).

Nihilism is related to the exile of the body from Platonic, Christian, and later secular positivism, an event highlighted by the secularization of Christian thought, or what I term the "deification of reason," occurring during the enlightenment and continuing through the rise of positivism. Even without God, as Vallega-Nue argues, the belief in the truth of primary principles through reason persists; in short, "Kant's principle of reason still lives in the shadow of the dead God" (24). In Christianity the body is the locus of sin and is to be rejected for the reason that it impedes the soul achieving its ultimate *teleological* purpose, which is the return to God in a purified state in a glorious afterlife removed from the material constraints of the physical world. The situation with the body in positivist terms might be likened to the body impeding both rational and moral thought of a pure nature. We find this nihilistic tendency, according to Dreyfus, already present in Socratic philosophy. For example, in the *Pheado* Socrates talks of the most efficient manner in which to grasp the thing-itself in knowledge, and, as is evident, there is no room for the detrimental influence of the body in Socrates' idealized epistemic criterion for knowledge: The man who most perfectly acquires knowledge

approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone (theoria),

tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears, and in a word, from the whole body (65e-66a).

Dreyfus links this view with technology and the positivistic empirical sciences, which explain things in terms of thematizing the world within an objective and removed form of theoretical knowledge that alone provides us with the "systematic order of all reality," and this is the nihilistic view already implicit in the ancient Greeks' belief that "the theoretical, detached attitude was our fundamental access to reality" (510). Dreyfus is highly critical of this mode of world-disclosure that favors "theory" and calculative thought (modes of objectification) above other practical forms of world-disclosure. Theory, thus conceived, is responsible in great part for our current nihilistic situation, and Dreyfus highlights five features of theory that work as an ensemble to contribute to the devaluation of the role of the body, senses, and the emotions in our factical lived world of experience: (1) The drive to objectify the world in thought, wherein the subject is separated off from the ideas he contemplates;3 (2) The drive to make all things explicit through propositional explanation; (3) The resulting de-contextualization of all things contemplated; (4) The re-contextualizing of the things contemplated into an abstracted system of objective ideas; and (5) The formation of a "world picture" that is linked with a specific historical "mindset," and in the end, "the subject stands outside of and over against whatever it is he knows, and sees it as objective, explicit, context-free, total picture" (Ibid., 511). According to Dreyfus, this leads to the false view that the mind is not only superior to the physical world, it also suggests that people primarily live and comport themselves through the use of their minds, and once a context-free world picture is formed at a remove from factical experience, our worldly, embodied, experiential practices lose "meaning and authority" (Ibid., 512). Prior to addressing Dreyfus' suggestions for approaching science and technology in an authentic manner, for it is not a problem inherent within either of these two modes of worlddisclosure that is the problem, rather it is the way we in fact view them, and ultimately, empower them that is at issue, I look at Nietzsche's philosophy as it relates to both the bodily dimension in thought and the recovery of the body from philosophical exile.

Nietzsche is the first philosopher, ushering in modernity, to return to the form of embodied thought that was earlier described in Empedocles, a thinker prior to the Socratic-Platonic move to privilege of form of world-disclosure grounded in detached, disembodied theorizing as described. Both Empedocles and Nietzsche adopt a similar view of the human's being-in-the-world as an embodied phenomenon, stressing the intimate connection between thought and body and human and world. Unique to both these thinkers is a view that eschews consciousness as the seat of reason, a detached, immaterial mind that thinks, wills, judges, and imagines, serving as the eternal and transcendental locus of selfidentity. In The Will to Power Nietzsche describes consciousness as a surface, as the "last and latest development of the organic and hence also what is most unfinished and unstrong" (184). Consciousness is the residue, the vapor of lived, embodied experience, where dynamic emotions, drives, passions, and affects congeal and are codified in language. In The Will to Power Nietzsche claims, in terms that are reminiscent of Hume, that the idea of consciousness as the hub around which the entire construction of our "inner world" rotates is fallacious, for "everything of which we become conscious is arranged, simplified, schematized, interpreted through and through – the actual process of inner 'perception,' the causal connection between thoughts, feelings, desires, between subject and object, are absolutely hidden from us – and are perhaps purely imaginary" (Ibid., 263-264).

As Vallega-Neu points out, for Nietzsche, thinking is irreducible to our conscious activity because it occurs on a much deeper level, at the level of the body, and this she calls the "bodily dimension in thinking," which manifests in "those occurrences that remain covered up when we focus primarily on the object of thinking: sensations, feelings, affects, tensions, plays of forces" (29). In short,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dreyfus writes the following about "objectification": "Objectification starts when Plato posits ideas as ideal objects over and against a knower who, while not yet understood as subject, is already understood as something other than the ideas that he contemplates" (510). Here we have the move to de-center and devaluate the bodily aspects of the human's Being-in-the-world.

the bodily dimension of the human being is thought, i.e., the body thinks, for what "enters our consciousness in the form of perceptions and representations is the surface of this bodily dimension" (Ibid., 30). Rather than privileging consciousness or the existence and function of the mind, Nietzsche views the body as "the richer, clearer, more tangible phenomenon" (The Will to Power, 489). The bodily dimension of Nietzsche's thought intimates those aspects of life's unfolding that are perhaps best described and experienced through the rich language of the experiential and emotional collections of metaphors that he employs. Vallega-Neu suggests that if we are seeking the bodily dimension in Nietzsche's philosophy, we should seek it in the "performative character" of his writing, which poetizes embodied existence in "the moods and plays of forces that it discloses," and yet this performative aspect of his thought refuses full disclosure of the body, refusing "objectifying considerations about the body, be it in inner or outer perception" (28). 4

The body, far from being explicitly cognized and objectified, remains in great part a mystery, all that we are privy to via consciousness are the traces of its existence, power, and movement. Any and all attempts to give an accurate and objective account of the body are ultimately doomed, for it is beyond a categorical understanding. In fact, as Vallega-Neu points out, any and all attempts at absolute epistemological clarity would "reduce its richness to an interpretation that rests on a principle of understanding," thus we should allow the meaning of the body to "remain in suspense as we take the phenomenon of the body – that is, bodily manifestations – as mere indicators" (Ibid., 27). In Nietzsche's first move to overturn Platonism he reminds us, with respect to the body, that we should resist "determining anything about its ultimate meaning," and this is one way in which Nietzsche resists and undermines the objectifying, totalizing tendency in traditional metaphysics, which Dreyfus so convincingly links to nihilism (WTP, 489). Here, Nietzsche puts in question the traditional epistemological model, which adopts the view that categorical knowledge is possible if the correct view of the world is adopted and the appropriate methodology is applied. Nietzsche expresses his unique view of knowledge through a form of epistemological perspectivism, embracing a multiplicity of ways to interpret, understand, and discourse about the world:

Nietzsche makes us aware of this performative character by putting into question and ungrouding radically the object of any act of consciousness. Thereby what he ungrounds is not this or that object. But objectivity as a whole, that is, the objective horizon in which objects find a specific determination and meaning in correlation to a thinking subject (Vallega-Neu, 28-29).<sup>5</sup>

According to scholars who resist Heidegger's metaphysical reading of Nietzsche, the will to power is not "simply another name for Schopenhauer's metaphysical will but rather designates ways in

<sup>4</sup> The bodily dimension of thought still requires communication, and as Vallega-Neu points out, "the "suspicion of objectivity does not mean its elimination, but that its 'consistency', its value is transformed," in Nietzsche "objectivity loses a great deal of its binding force, it fluidifies, so to speak, into a stream of different bodily motions, feelings, and affects; it becomes transparent for the invisible and lets resonate in what is said the unheard"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> As Lambridis points out, it is interesting to note that Empedocles convinces us that he did not believe in a "higher than human source of knowledge" (85). Empedocles actually demonstrates a moderate form of skepticism, or what is perhaps more accurately described as epistemological modesty toward ultimate claims to truth. Lambridis argues that Empedocles "feels that even what he has to say about the higher level (of truths) is inconceivable and almost to express by the available linguistic means. As far as I know, he is the only philosopher (pre- or post - Socratic) to have acknowledged himself baffled by the gap between what he ha conceived, and what it is possible to express adequately" (ibid., 86). This epistemological modesty displayed by Empedocles, which is undoubtedly relatable to Nietzsche's view of truth and the limited "human" ability to acquire it, is for Lambridis, "the sign of a truly philosophical mind" (86).

which life occurs. Thus it is always particularized and includes an impenetrable complexity," and so according to such an interpretation, the body for Nietzsche is not the essential ground or locus of will to power as an essence, or metaphysical ground of the world (34).6 Rather, will to power represents the "how" of life's unfolding, "the play of forces that animate life, and withdraw for the most part from our consciousness" (Ibid., 28). Here is Nietzsche's second move to overturn traditional metaphysics by philosophizing an anti-foundational view of the human and world, wherein he does not simply reverse the dualistic hierarchy of Platonism, elevating the physical body to the status of "true Being" while devaluating the conscious mind to the status of non-Being. Rather there occurs the radical obliteration of the two-world schema and with the real world the apparent world is also abolished, and so the "end of the longest error" comes to pass with the single world of which its total character "is in all eternity chaos - in the sense not of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms" (WTP, 168). We are set within this world, immersed up to our necks, and indeed over our heads, and this world simultaneously surges through us, in a manner similar to that of Empedocles, and so there is here too, in Nietzsche, a similar sense of the Greek understanding of homoios. For according to Nietzsche, in order to give a creative and authentic aesthetic and stylized form to one's existence, one must recognize and acknowledge the worldly "chaos in oneself," and this notion brings us to the notion of the will-to-power in Nietzsche.

Will to power manifests in the struggle with the creative and chaotic forces of life, life as such is will to power, and it is not merely an external phenomenon it is at once, and indeed indistinguishable from, an internal happening. "Chaos is not simply opposed to will to power," as Vallega-Neu writes, will to power is discharged in the effort to temporarily give form and bring the flux and flow of existence to stand in works of art, and thus chaos is "constitutive for the will to power" (34). Life is conceived in terms of the consistent drive and processes of self-overcoming that occurs in moments culminating in "the downfall or destruction (*Untergang*) of what is consistent," that which has temporality been brought to stand (Ibid., 34). This implies the utter lack of ground, and hence the anti-foundationalism that challenges and undermines traditional metaphysics, and in this move we find the "devaluation of objectivity," and this "indicates a continuous, and groundless re-creation in the decline of what is in its consistency" (Ibid., 34). Engaging chaos through the discharge of will to power, in terms of what has been described as active nihilism, represents the life-affirming movement, which "may be sought in that turning point where what was established is devaluated or loses its power," and this represents, as related to the theme of this meditation, "the moment of suspension of objectivity by a radical questioning of fundamental values and principles that constitute the objective horizon of our relation to objects. In this moment appears the bodily dimension of our lives" (Ibid., 35).

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It must be noted that I incorporate Vallega-Neu's anti-metaphysical reading of Nietzsche, i.e., a reading that runs counter to Heidegger's now famous interpretation of Nietzsche as the last metaphysical thinker who remained trapped within the linguistic-conceptual schema of traditional metaphysics, which led him to endorse the Being of beings and the unfolding of Being in terms that are *foundational*, in terms that indicate an *ontotheological* view of the world. As Thomson argues, and this is a position I have endorsed in print, Nietzsche "clearly conceives of entities *as such* as will-to-power and also of the way that the *totality* exists as eternal recurrence" (148). With that being stated, for my purpose, whether or not Vallega-Neu's interpretation of Nietzsche is wholly correct is at issue. I state this because of what Julian Young presciently observed about Heidegger's highly questionable interpretation of the ancient Greeks, specifically as it appears in "The Question Concerning Technology." In short, although Heidegger's interpretation of the Greeks does not square with historical reality, it does hold the philosophical potential to offer a "possible world" as food for thought from which we might draw legitimate inspiration for improving our world. "What is really important about Heidegger's Greeks," Young argues, "is that they represent a possible *future*, not that they represent an actual past" (201). The same thing might be stated in this case about Vallega-Neu's reading of Nietzsche, and in addition, my reading of Empedocles, namely that the value lies in their potential to inspire thinking in other directions beyond the nihilistic condition.

#### **Philosophically Thinking Through Nihilism**

The crucial question for those concerned with nihilism thus becomes: Is there still left in our practices some remnant of the nonobjectifying practices that were presumably extant in fifth-century Athens before the cultural collapse that is expressed and furthered by Socrates and Plato?" ~ Dreyfus

In response to this pressing question I now attempt to explicate what Dreyfus terms "nonobjectifying" practices as an *active* response to the nihilistic condition within which now find ourselves. This final section focuses on two aspects of our lived world and the values, which are inextricably bound up within our worldly existence: (1) the practices and "forms of life" we share that demand the rethinking of our privileged modes of epistemological links to the earth and others, which includes rethinking philosophy's role in elucidating and contributing to the development and sustaining of our cultural practices, and (2) the attitude we adopt in relation to science and technology that is the crux of nihilism, and how that relationship might, and indeed, needs to be rethought and recast in terms other than a relationship of divine reverence and servitude. According to Dreyfus, as long as we continue to think in terms of explicit views of truth and objectifying models for values over implicit shared concerns, we will not "find anything that has authority for us and elicits our commitment" (512).

For Dreyfus, nihilism manifests on two fronts: the epistemological front and axiological front, as related to values of a transcendent and transcendental nature, and, as he states, such a belief in objective values represents "the last stage of a tradition that begins with theory and ends with nihilism" (Ibid., 512). To build on what was introduced earlier, when we place our undying, unequivocal trust in scientific explanation, science becomes our religion "in the very important sense that we think science tells us what reality is" (Ibid., 519). By means of scientific objectification, when reconceptualizing and recontextualizing entities, we produce a "reality independent of our interests and concerns, independent of our everyday, and therefore intrinsically and necessarily meaningless" (Ibid., 519). When we grant this view, or mode of world-disclosure, a place of absolute privilege, we lose sight of the importance of practices, factical lived world experiences, which neither require nor admit of objective verification, as products of reason and rationalization. The absolutist drive for objective epistemological certainty draws us beyond modes of embodied dwelling, beyond our authentic communal experience of the world. Dreyfus terms the structures organizing our embodied communal experiences cultural paradigms, and claims that they resist all attempts at objectification, for we cannot understand these structures, which are implicit and contextual, in the same manner as we understand a "world picture" or historical "mindset." This is because a "mindset" is a "table of values or a belief system," it is an objective and abstract conceptualized schema that "suggests that somehow what people live in terms of is in their minds" (Ibid., 512).

Wittgenstein will be helpful when thinking about human practices that resist being understood in categorical terms because they unfold in terms of *language games*. As Wittgenstein contends, the speaking of a language, while requiring and possessing rules and a grammar, is more importantly "part of an activity or a form of life" (23). The meaning that depends on agreement of usage is not explicit or objective, which can be pointed out in terms of transcendent truth residing outside the unfolding of the activity of communication itself. Rather agreement is for Wittgenstein always already expressive of a *form of life*, where meanings are present but are often times implicit, difficult, and ambiguous because the *language games* that give us a form of life resemble an ancient city, with its "maze of alleys and plazas, old and new houses, and houses with additions from various periods; all this surrounded by a number of new suburbs with straight, regular streets and uniform houses" (18). In this example there is no single "blue-print" or zoning map that might produce one overarching (and correct) view of the landscape and architecture, and beyond, there is no zoning map, no matter how thorough and detailed, that provides reasons as to why the city functions as a fecund value-laden place of dwelling.

A *language game* is not merely composed of propositions expressing veritable certainties. There are countless types of sentences for Wittgenstein, with "countless different kinds of use of what we call

'symbols'. 'words,' 'sentences.' And this multiplicity isn't something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten" (21). Against discourse that expresses exclusively matter-of-fact knowledge, language can also be non-propositional in nature, hypothetical in nature – expressing moral, aesthetic, and emotional truths, because it is really about the way in which various locutions function within the form of life and work together, thus, to reiterate, there is a resistance in Wittgenstein's philosophy, as Schulte points out, to the

philosophical practice of seeking the characteristics common to everything that might be called a language "game." According to Wittgenstein, this striving to formulate the "essence" of a thing – that is, common characteristics deemed to be necessary and sufficient for its existence- has led us astray again and again. Also misleading is the uniform and homogeneous appearance of the written word, which disguises the fact that words cannot all be understood according to some one schema (111).

This notion of cultural paradigms of meaning might be understood in terms of what I have previously highlighted in both Empedocles and Nietzsche, namely, that the human is always already immersed in the world of her experience, and she comes to understand, interpret, and discourse about her existence through a multi-perspectival view of the world that is fluid and nonobjectifying, wherein science is but one (albeit indispensable) mode of seeing and knowing. Following Nietzsche, this turn from objectifying the world must not be thought in terms of the passive nihilistic move to look inward in the effort to make the subjective realm of consciousness the solipsistic gold standard for true Being, for such a reverse of the metaphysical binary simply furthers "the nihilistic dichotomy between the inner and the outer" (Dreyfus, 518). In attempting to renew "our heritage and nonobjectifying practices," we should avoid making our "saving practices explicit in our attempt to preserve them," i.e., we must resist the Platonic temptation to "make a list of our values, since that would just turn whatever still has a grip on us into mere meaningless objects" (Ibid., 514). One way to grasp this notion of nonobjectifying practices is through the image of the forms of life expressed specifically in great participatory cultural founding works of art. Following Heidegger's lead, Dreyfus references the now-famous example of the Greek temple, which opened the world and earth for the ancients when they came to worship at the site of the god, as a paradigmatic work of art the temple

first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being (Heidegger, *Poetry*, *Language*, *Thought*, 42).

Dreyfus, drawing on Heidegger, also employs an example of Greek tragedy as serving a similar function for the Greeks in the fifth century. For example, in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, as opposed to conceptualizing an objective truth for the Greeks, which was given in terms of a mode of disclosure that gave the spectators actual truth about their existence, showing truth as explicit, as actual, i.e., already worked out in advance, the tragedy revealed implicitly the understanding of the Greeks' various cultural practices by organizing and capturing them, and through a process of re-presentation, showed them as potential truth, which was communal and dynamically in transition, in the process of developing and evolving. Aeschylus did not want to "state propositions or justify their beliefs," rather he produced a "drama in which they were participants," which represented a "paradigm of their way of life," and thus the tragic poet "helped them focus and preserve the practices of his age" (517). Tragedy served up cogent possibilities for acting in terms of the Greeks' common experience of life, and this was not scant entertainment as the theater is today, conceived in its most vile and pernicious form as an exercise in rote escapism, rather the tragedies of the Greeks represented the aesthetic spectacle *par excellence* wherein

the battle of the new gods against the old gods is fought. The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people, does not refer to this battle; it transforms the people's saying so that now every living word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what is unholy, what is great and what small, what brave and what cowardly, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave (Heidegger, *PLT*, 43).

The communal linguistic practices of the Greeks formed a complex mode of dwelling where meaning was furthered and shared without the drive to make it explicit, which would have destroyed their factical and lived cultural value, and this relates to what was stated earlier about Nietzsche and the drive to understand objectivity in terms that are fluid and malleable, which speaks authentically to the ambiguous nature of human existence. Clearly, dwelling in the state of perpetual questioning with respect to the human's finite and limited access to knowledge presupposes the tragic consciousness. This is what Vernant refers to as "tension and ambiguity" in Greek tragedy and this might be directly related to Dreyfus' notion of *nonobjectifying* practices, wherein our philosophical inquires produce more questions than answers. There is, Vernant argues, an essential ambiguity inherent to the extant practices in fifth century Athens, for "man's relationship to the world was at once social, natural, divine, and ambiguous, rent with contradictions in which no rule appears definitively established, one God fights another, one law against another and in which, even in the contents of the play's action, justice itself shifts, twists, and is transformed into its contrary" (32). For the most part, meanings in tragedy unfold in such a way that the main player is unaware of what is happening. The tragic reversal and downfall is "unsuspected by even those who initiated them and take responsibility for them, is only revealed when it becomes a part of an order that is beyond man and escapes man" (Ibid., 17).

If we take seriously what both Benjamin and Heidegger say about art and its potential to inspire new paradigms, we find that in the modern era art has lost its power, its aura, in the first instance, through the process of mechanical reproduction; while in the latter instance, art has lost its power to disclose cultural founding truth for appropriation (*Ereignis*) because modernity is the only era to be disclosed through the "enframing" mood of the *Ge-stell* of technology, and not through the truth-founding activity of great art. If great art is no longer, where might we turn to find inspiration to awake us from the nightmare of nihilism? Perhaps there is a way to envision philosophy in terms of an artistic endeavor, and this is what both Vallega-Neu and Alexander Nehamas propose. Vallega-Neu suggests that philosophy should "learn to understand itself as an art, as a creative activity that does not fabricate inventions but that draws its creative force from a life that remains its origin" (121). When practicing philosophy as a form of aesthetics, or poetics, we draw inspiration from the bodily dimension of thought, and move beyond the antiquated and disingenuous conception of philosophy as a science or purely analytic discipline. Philosophy holds the potential to be *as* art only when ceasing its attempt to complete with science for epistemological relevance.

Alexander Nehamas also views philosophy in terms of aesthetic activity, e.g., he writes that in Nietzsche we find philosophy as an art of living, which is termed an "aestheticist model" of philosophy. Within this model the "individual finds its central place," however, this is not an individualist notion that is "egoistic or oblivious to others," for its is focused on revealing and interpreting the social network structured by the *cultural paradigms* of meaning as related to contributing to the individual's development, which unfolds as the individual shapes cultural practices as they in turn shape and inspire creative philosophical rejoinders from the individual (10-12). A form of philosophy that eschews conceptual certainty and embraces the flux, flow, and dynamic unfolding of human being, resembles a work of art in that

as in the acknowledged arts, there is no best work – no best life – by which all others can be judged. As in the acknowledged arts, that does not imply that judgment is impossible, that every work is as good as every other. As in the acknowledged arts, the aim is to produce as many new and different types of works – as many different modes of life – as possible, since the

proliferation of aesthetic difference and multiplicity, even though it is not often in the service of morality, enriches and improves human life (Ibid., 10)

Moving beyond Dreyfus, although this is certainly intimated within and inspired by his work, it is possible to state that philosophy represents a legitimate cultural form of what we might call a nonobjectifying practice, and it functions is such a way when understood in terms of a living and embodied aesthetic model. Such a conception and practice of philosophy would avoid limiting or binding its reflexive thought to the transcendental subject of the tradition in metaphysics, and should seek inspiration from "other fields of knowledge as well as from practices that are not only practices of thought (arts, physical activities)" (Vallega-Neu, 128). Thought that is sensitive to certain modes of being, immersed in our lived cultural practices, approaches these modes of being in a manner that is wholly consistent with the ontological unfolding of said practices. We must be clear about what Vallega-Neu means when employing the term "ontological," for here she moves beyond the tradition in rendering the term. Vallega-Neu locates the ontological aspect of philosophy in the bodily dimension of our existence, which situates us within cultural practices in such a way that an intimate connection with being is established.

However, as she is careful to point out, this ontological notion of being is not to be conflated with the notion of "Being with a capital B," rather she references "being as an event that is singular and multiple at once and that always occurs bodily" (Ibid., 122). For this ontological aspect of philosophy to be at once singular and plural it means that being manifests within singular, finite moments that are unique and unrepeatable; it also manifests in its plurality when human events are considered in terms of their interconnectedness. If we recall the example of tragedy these two aspects of being might be understood: The tragedy portrays its spectacle in terms of particular, distinct events, e.g., the tragic reworking of the myth of Orestes (and the house of Atreus), and at once it portrays the multiple and various strands of the cultural web within which Orestes' story gathers meaning and makes sense. Indeed the tragedy itself (as art) functions in this manner, for although it is a particular work of art, as Vernant reminds us, "it is not only an art form, it is also a social institution," and this indicates that tragedy is the loci of a variety of cultural forces, e.g., political, legal, civic, and aesthetic (32).

If philosophy is to move beyond both the objectivism of science and technology and the subjectivism of *passive* nihilism's retreat into the interiority of the consciousness, philosophy needs to embrace the human's holistic immersion in its world and the embodied nature of its thought in order to find "openings through certain attunements to the world in which it arises, and it needs to find again an original commonality with other living and nonliving things' (121). Eschewing the ontological difference, Vallega-Neu embraces an ontology of bodily being that is "fundamental and regional" in the following two senses: (1) it draws its thought from the attunement to concrete, factical ways of being, and (2) with respect to contemporary science, it neither claims to substitute the sciences nor explain them, nor provide ground for their operations. However, as she states,

[philosophy] may explore the ways of bodily being peculiar to difference sciences and it may infuse the practice of science with certain sensibilities to issues of being. However, I must add that the moral value of these the moral value of these sensibilities would have to remain in

Vallega-Neu offers a poignant illustration of this notion of the duplicity of being, here focused on the "singularity" and "plurality" of being, in the following manner: "Being is plural when we consider different things and events in their singularity and interconnectedness. A tree is, and in that being of the tree there is a leaf that shivers in the wind. There also is the human being that watches the tree and shares the wind that blows through it. There is also a caterpillar moving along a leaf that remains unseen by the human, as well as the distant noise of a nearby highway, hardly perceived. The thinking at play in this description also is, it hap[pens as the movement of the caterpillar happens and the blowing of the wind. But, in distinction to these events, thinking moves toward an articulation of what comes to awareness in sharing the space of being with other things and events" (122).

question if we do not want to transform this ontology into an ideology that closes off the possibilities that ontological thought can open (Ibid., 128).

In conclusion, there is indeed a necessity for conceptual thought in our world, moments wherein we "say" what life is through propositional discourse, arguing for and demonstrating instances of truth that have been thought out in advance. There is also a need for modes of thought, as is consistent with literature, poetry, and the arts, wherein forms of perceptual and intuitive knowledge emerge, fluid ways of understanding wherein we attempt to "show," through poetic interpretive gestures, what life is like and at once intimate what it might become when our world as a system of meanings and practices is illumed by the practice of philosophy. We should adopt a resolute attitude toward truth-as-potential, to be worked out through collaborative engagements and discourse of a heuristic nature within the ever developing constellation of nonobjectifying cultural practices. When philosophy approaches the world and the human being in terms of a work of art, a multiplicity of interpretations emerge, but only through our participation in and dialogue with the work. In such activities, meaning (as truth) is released from its penal servitude to objective epistemological truth with a capital "T." Philosophy, understood as an ontological and artistic nonobjectifying practice, represents a perspective onto the world highlighted by a "bodily openness and closure of our lives to beings and events in their multiple and encroaching rhythms" (Vallega-Neu, 128). This view of philosophy has been expressed by Liminal Analytics researcher David Metcalfe in terms that relate to Krell's insights that began this meditation, namely, that there is a pressing need in this day and age to bring philosophy "back out of the academy and into reality," for as Metcalfe argues, and quite correctly, philosophy should not propose "isolated theories that can merely distinguish folks for tenure," but rather philosophy, if it is authentic, should seek to foster the growth of ideas "that can be used by everyone."

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