

...And no Religion too:
Nihilism, Modernity and a concept
of Terrorism



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Table of content

Introduction	3
The Death of God	6
<i>The madman's problem</i>	7
<i>Life after the deicide</i>	12
The Modern Conditions	17
<i>Shadows of God and Modern Values</i>	18
<i>Modernity and Cruelty</i>	23
The Modern Drive and its Victims	29
<i>The modern drive: mastery, control, and knowledge</i>	30
<i>Modern cruelty: exclusion, expulsion, elimination</i>	33
Conclusion	39
Literature	41

Introduction

On the night of thirteen November 2015, a concert at the Bataclan Theatre in Paris turned into a bloodbath when guests suddenly heard the words '*Allahu Akbar*' being shouted from the mezzanine. Guns went off, people screamed. At the same time, attacks were being reported elsewhere in Paris. At the theatre, a mass shooting resulted in the deaths of 89 Parisians. Overall that night, 130 people were killed and another 368 were injured – a horrifying act of violence that left a scar on the Western world.

The next morning, as the atrocities were covered by the light of day, something fascinating took place. Davide Martello, a young pianist, had heard about the attacks the night before and drove his piano all through the night so he could be at the spot to honour the deceased and comfort the survivors. As he arrived in front of the Bataclan theatre, he took place behind his piano and started playing the calm, dark chords of John Lennon's '*Imagine*'. Slowly, a crowd gathered around him. People started singing the words together. Shock turned into mourning. The footage was recorded and broadcasted all over the world. In our hearts, all of Europe sang *Imagine* with them. It became an anthem¹. And the words became an answer to the violence and bloodshed that expired that night. Everything we feel, everything that's wrong with this incident; the song seems to embody it all.

Every king and president in the free world formulated a statement, sought the words to express dismay and inspire courage, but no one said it better than the song did. There are probably many who for the rest of their lives cannot listen to '*Imagine*' without thinking about that dark night in November of 2015. But why *this* song after *this* incident? Why '*Imagine*'? The music and lyrics seemed to express a certain sentiment that was sublimely relatable to the complex and deeply felt sentiments of that day. What, then, does John Lennon sing about?

'*Imagine*' seems to be a call or an invitation to a thought-experiment; Lennon asks us to imagine something. What it is he wants us to picture is a world that is different from ours. A world, he sings, with no heaven, no hell, 'and above us only sky'. It seems like he asks us to apply a worldview without any religious notions, a naturalistic worldview in which there is no God above, no devil below, just sky and earth and you and me.

The implications of a world like this become clear in another verse, when Lennon sings: '*Nothing to kill or die for, ...and no religion too*'. Lennon dreams about such a place. When he imagines it, he does not see any harm or violence. It is a perfect world, a paradise. A clear opposition can be identified within the words of '*Imagine*'. On the one side, there is religion and the harm and violence that goes along with it. On the other side, there is another world, a world that has yet to be realized; a world that can therefore only be *imagined*.

The new relevance and popularity of a song like this right after the terrorist attacks in Paris is typical. It seems that the song is being used to explain the situation, to make it somewhat apprehensible. The song tells us who we are, what we stand for, what we deem valuable. At the same time, the song posits our antithesis: the thing that forms a threat to us, the thing we need to overcome. Right after the brutal mass murder committed by Islamic extremists, we interpret the situation by singing about a world without murder, without violence, and without religion too. For that is who we are, that is what we stand for. 'You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one'.

The new relevance of '*Imagine*' is also typical for the way in which contemporary terrorism is commonly understood. 'Terrorism' is often used interchangeably with 'fundamentalism' or

¹ In the Netherlands, there is an annual tradition where at the end of the year, a (democratically established) list is formed of the best pop-songs ever made. It cannot be a coincidence that '*Imagine*' was voted as number 1 in December 2015. Especially when you take into account that it was only number 38 in 2014 and number 23 the year before that.

'extremism'. We tend to ascribe a crucial factor of religiosity to the recent rise of what is often referred to as 'Islamic terrorism'. This happens not only in the public discourse, in newspaper reports, columns, tv-debates, et cetera, but also in academic literature, where scholars attempt to penetrate the secrets of Islam in order to find out more about terrorism.²

The phenomenon of 'terrorism' is often explained in terms of *their* religiousness; the religiousness of the terrorist. In this thesis, I want to do it the other way around. The following chapters attempt to explain terrorism in terms of *our a-religiousness*. Instead of focussing on their excess of religion, I want to focus on our lack of it. Islam will not be the topic here. The modern west, the 'secular' society, the world without God, will be. The main question, therefore, is simple: *How can the concept of 'terrorism' be explained in terms of our absence of religion?*

A few things must be cleared out. First of all, by attempting to explain the *concept* of 'terrorism', I am not explaining terrorism. I am treating 'terrorism' as a concept that deserves to be an object of study; I do not take for granted that such a thing exists. When someone wants to find out what motivates a terrorist, one has already made a number of assumptions, for instance that there is something out there in the world that we can call 'terrorism', and that this is a thing we can ascribe motives to. I do not want to go in this direction, but instead I will try to explain the mechanisms that produced a *concept* of 'terrorism' and 'terrorists'.

Second, with 'the concept of terrorism', I am not referring to a fixed entity that is immune to time and changing circumstances. Instead, I am referring to a concept that exists in the public discourse, in books, in reports, in films, et cetera. It is quite a recent concept; it existed dimly at the start of this century, it grew into grotesque proportions after September 11, 2001, and it kept a strong presence up to this date. The concept is often used in close relations with the concept of 'fundamentalism', 'Islamic extremism' and 'Islamic terrorism', although, as a result of its grotesque proportions, the last two are widely regarded as pleonasm.

Thirdly, with 'our' in 'our absence of religion' I am referring to an equally unstable category. Generally, with this I mean the West, the modern world, Europe and North America, perhaps. The meaning of 'our' and 'absence' will get a more concrete formulation in the first chapter, however, when the topics of a-religiousness, the absence of God and related topics will be discussed.

The thesis will proceed as follows. In the first chapter, I will address the topic of the absence of God. I will do this by discussing an author who cannot be overlooked in this respect, an author who made it his life's work to find out what it means that God is gone from our world, and how we must proceed after this. Friedrich Nietzsche, his proclamation that 'God is dead', and his work *The Gay Science (Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft)* will be the centre of attention in the first chapter. I will try to answer the question of what it means when Nietzsche says that God is dead, and why he presents this as a *problem*.

The first chapter discusses a certain problem: the death of God. In the second chapter, I will discuss the implications of this problem. Again, Nietzsche can shed some light on this topic. For Nietzsche, it is clear that God is dead, but we are not nearly at the point where he is gone. Something called the 'shadows of God' will be discussed in the second chapter, and, furthermore, how these shadows characterize the modern world. How the death of God forms the conditions for modern life will be the main question here. As an extension of Nietzsche's ideas about this subject, a work by William E. Connolly will be used, as will the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno.

The second chapter ends with a certain characterization of the modern world. Certain

² The work of Bernard Lewis is a good example of these studies. See *What Went Wrong: the clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2002), or *The Crisis of Islam: holy war and unholy terror* (2003). The latter will be discussed briefly at the end of the third chapter.

conditions have been identified, certain tendencies have been elaborated; tendencies that characterize the modern world, the modern man. The concept of a 'modern drive' and a 'modern cruelty' have been introduced. In the third and final chapter, these tendencies, this 'modern drive' will be concretized with a clear case; imperialism. How can imperialism be seen as a manifestation of the modern drive? And, furthermore, who are the victims of this modern cruelty? Through a general discussion of imperialism, an elaboration of something Edward Said calls 'Orientalism', and an analysis of modern-day imperialism and its resistance, the last chapter will then end on the concept of 'terrorism'.

The Death of God

As a psychiatrist, my father used to work on call for several nights a week. On those nights, when the police picked someone off the streets and suspected a certain mental instability, they would call him in so he could examine the case and recommend a practical or pharmaceutical solution. I would wake up when his phone went off, a rare ringtone I never heard since, and I listened how my father went out to see about a madman in the night. The next day, I would ask how it went. Sometimes, technically against his oath of secrecy, he would fill me in on some anonymous details, like for instance, the things the madman screamed when they took him. These were fascinating things. Enigmatic, ramblings with a pattern. Like words form another world. I would ponder over them during the day but never reached a satisfying decryption. 'The man was sick' my father would conclude, and that was that.

The madman has an extremely hard time convincing people of his message. No matter how he screams, no matter how many times he repeats himself, he will inevitably be avoided, ignored, scorned or, perhaps the most humiliating of all, diagnosed. When Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed his message, his words to the world, he didn't make them the words of a prophet, a philosopher, an angel or any other bringer of truth; Nietzsche let a madman speak for him, because Nietzsche's words fall into the ears of the people like the screams of a madman would.

The parable of the 'The Madman' forms the 125th aphorism in Nietzsche's work *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science) (1882) and it is one of the most frequently quoted excerpts when it comes to the subject of 'the death of God'. The passage takes on the style of gossip, town-square small talk about something that happened the other day: 'Have you not heard of the madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, 'I seek God! I seek God!'.³ No sane being would light a lantern in broad daylight, and people responded accordingly. Especially the spectators who did not believe in God, thought the spectacle was rather amusing. 'Did he get lost?' they mocked, 'Did he lose his way like a child?'. The madman replied 'God is dead, and we have killed him!', leaving the atheists dumbfounded.

The purpose of this chapter is to comprehend what the nonbelievers in the square could not. And perhaps the best way to start would be to clear out a common misunderstanding about Nietzsche's phrase 'God is dead'. For despite how much the name 'Nietzsche' is associated with the wave of contemporary atheists – often when a 'typical atheist' is portrayed in a movie, a Nietzsche quote follows, usually paired with a deformed pronunciation of the name – can Nietzsche hardly be called the forefather of atheism, for 'God is dead' is not a theatrical way of saying 'God does not exist'. This we can conclude from the fact that the madman needs to convince even the atheists in the square. Apparently, in their holy conviction that God is a superstition, they failed to understand that God is dead. Either that or they do understand it, and fail to grasp the grandiosity of this knowledge. But what, then, would be the proper way to respond? And why? The madman himself seems to be distressed. Anxious even. He seems to be the only one with an attitude that fits the magnitude of the situation. Again a reflexion of Nietzsche's own solitude?

This chapter will be an attempt to interpret the words of the madman by using the context in which they are presented, that is, (mainly) the third book of *The Gay Science*. A special focus will be on the question of *why* this event is considered by Nietzsche as something *highly problematic*, for there are many ways one could react to the death of God (rejoice, sadness, apathy) but for Nietzsche, upset and perhaps even anguish seemed like the only appropriate responses. I want to find out why that is the case. After providing an interpretation of the problematics surrounding the

³ GS 125

death of God, I will introduce some of Nietzsche's thoughts on the solution to the problem. For this, the remaining books of *The Gay Science* will be my source, mainly the fourth and fifth.

The madman's problem

For as far as we know, Nietzsche is not (in the literal sense at least) a doctor of supreme beings who, regrettably, lost his only patient. What, then, does he mean when he says 'God is dead'? Better yet: in what sense can a being like God actually be dead? Nietzsche clarifies this when he talks about the immeasurable contrast between what he calls the ancient world and the current world: 'The lighting and colours of everything have changed! We no longer fully understand how the ancients experienced what was most familiar and frequent'.⁴ Nietzsche points out that our world, the way we live, differs significantly from the way 'the ancients', the ones before us, experienced their lives. We are not fully aware of this immense difference, because we can no longer apprehend the conditions of the world that came before us. What are the features that we lost? Nietzsche explicates the conditions of the ancient world later in the aphorism:

All experiences shone differently because a god glowed from them; all decisions and prospects concerning the distant future as well, for one had oracles and secret signs and believed in prophecy. 'Truth' was formerly experienced differently because the lunatic could be considered its mouthpiece - which makes us shudder and laugh. Every injustice affected feelings differently, for one feared divine retribution and not just a civil punishment and dishonour. What was joy in an age when one believed in devils and tempters! What was passion when one saw the demons lurking nearby! What was philosophy when doubt was felt as a sin of the most dangerous kind, as a sacrilege against eternal love, as mistrust of everything that is good, lofty, pure, and merciful!⁵

God lived in the ancient world. God no longer lives now. This aphorism, however, points out that the existence and inexistence of God is not some minor detail, like the extinction of a type of bird that lived in the amazon. It is not something that does not affect us or affects us in some manageable way. Rather, the death of God is the one thing that makes the ancient world completely different from ours, because God glowed through everything and all experiences. And now, while the shades have changed, we are still painting onward. We are still making sense of our world, the world after God, shaping it with lines and colours. However, to Nietzsche's regret, our work will not nearly compare to the '*splendour of colour* of that old master!'.⁶

With good reason, David B. Allison wonders about *who* it is exactly that Nietzsche declares dead. Who is this 'God' whose death we are concerned with? From the passage above, we can conclude that Nietzsche speaks of the God who, once upon a time, 'glowed' from every experience, which would be the central figure of our Judeo-Christian era; the God of the Bible. Allison confirms this: 'Such a God is the creator, the source of Being and of all things. He is the first cause, the material cause, the efficient cause, the formal cause and the final cause. This is what we have come to know as the God of Genesis'.⁷ In the first aphorism of the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche himself also connects the death of God to the Christian era: 'The greatest recent event - that 'God is dead'; that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable -'.⁸ The ancient world, then, would be the heydays of Christendom.

⁴ GS 152

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Allison, 2001, p.91

⁸ GS 343

What this means is that Nietzsche refers to Christianity, or the *Christian epoch*, as a 'splendour of colour'. This might sound strange coming from Nietzsche, especially when compared to his somewhat darker statements about Christianity, for instance, aphorism 130: 'The Christian decision to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad'. What happened here? Did Nietzsche change his mind during the course of 22 aphorisms? I don't think this is the case. I believe we are dealing with complexity rather than ambiguity; both utterances about Christianity must be considered in a different context. To see the 'splendour of colour', we clearly, as Nietzsche does in the concerning aphorism, need to contrast Christianity with our current world (the conditions of which will be discussed shortly). In what context, then, must we see Christianity as ugly and bad?

Nietzsche clarifies this when he presents Christianity as something that turned against itself. Christianity, Nietzsche argues 'has made a great contribution to enlightenment: it taught moral scepticism in an extremely trenchant and effective way, (...) it annihilated in every single man the faith in his 'virtues''.⁹ By teaching the power of scepticism, Christianity contributed to the general idea of the Enlightenment, where purity of knowledge was the norm. The problem however, Nietzsche continues, is that, eventually, this scepticism turned against religiosity itself: 'we have all allowed the worm to dig so deeply that even when reading Christian books we now have the same feeling of refined superiority and insight: we also know the religious feelings better!'¹⁰.

With this scepticism and the machinery of reason it fuelled, we discovered truths about Christianity that were unsettling. Certain inconsistencies came to light that we could not look past or go beyond, like, for instance, how 'a judge, even a merciful one, is no object of love'.¹¹ Or that the Christian God is 'a god who loves men provided that they believe in him and who casts evil gazes and threats at anyone who does not believe in this love'.¹² These and more became arguments against Christianity, so that we reasonably chose against it. And this reasonable consideration turned into something stronger, something more fundamental: 'What decides against Christianity now is our taste, not our reasons'.¹³ We are beyond the point where we fight faith with logic, for we have already done that to such an extent that we don't consider it within the realm of logic and reason anymore. So, in short, Christianity dug its own grave. It provided the tools for its own deconstruction. But how must we envision this process?

Johan Goudbloom shines some light on this development in his book *Nihilism and Culture* (1980). According to Goudbloom's interpretation of Nietzsche, the problematics are gathered around the concept of 'truth'. Originally, he argues, truths were intellectual devices, intended to make life more comfortable, easier to apprehend. Words then encapsulated truths, and words became the only means through which truths could be true. With this, truth became ever more abstract and began to live a life on its own. The abstraction of truth became more important than reality, like a coin stamped with a worn image becomes more valuable than the piece of metal it was before.¹⁴ To sum it up: in order to make sense of the world, to make it somewhat approachable, man constructed devices through which he could capture the world. These devices, however, became more important than the world itself when he called them 'truth'. We mapped the world to the maximum level of precision, but, in order to do so, our map became as large as the world itself and covered everything like a blanket.

For this reason, we could not see that the thing most important to us, our truths, were

⁹ GS 122

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ GS 140

¹² GS 141

¹³ GS 132

¹⁴ Goudbloom, 1980, p. 31

actually lies. The dubious basis of all of these truths, then, came to light through a Christian morality that imposed upon us 'the necessity for intellectual purity'.¹⁵ And so far the wretched tale goes:

Man conjures up a chimera and calls his creation truth; for centuries he believes in it, until ultimately enlightenment prompts recognition of the fact that 'we do not have the slightest right to posit a Beyond or a thing-in-itself which is allegedly "divine" or morality incarnate'. This insight, a product of radical veracity, is bound to initiate a process of dissolution.¹⁶

In this sense, according to Goudsblom's interpretation, it is the centrality of truth that turned against itself which is the problem. First of all, it created a world different from the one we lived in, that is, a world of abstract truths. Then, driven by the need to purify these truths to an absolute stainlessness, we discovered that they were lies, and that truth in fact does not exist, leaving us with nothing at all. The way Goudsblom reconstructs Nietzsche's ideas on the death of God therefore consists of three parts: first, Nietzsche's believe that truth does not exist and that the things we call 'truth' are fabrications; second, his view that Christian morality demands truth in its purest form and third, that this demand will slowly but surely lay bare the emptiness of the world.

In *Reading the New Nietzsche* (2001), David B. Allison provides a slightly more complex account of how the truth-motive destroyed the basis of the Christian faith. Allison first acknowledges Nietzsche's suggestion that God was locked out of the church by a different faith, namely, science and rationality (beginning with the Enlightenment). In this sense, scientific explanations seemed more appropriate than divine ones, our scepticism forced us to choose another God.¹⁷ However, a more extensive interpretation takes the problematic mechanism farther back in history, starting already at the birth of Christianity: '... by the time of the New Testament ... [the wind] blew from Athens: "Know the truth and the truth shall make you free." This is the God of Plato, the God that demands inspection and answers, for he is the source of all truth'.¹⁸ The truth-seeking nature of the Christian faith (inspired by the ancient Greek philosophers) together the idea that God embodies all truths – all concepts 'ultimately find their true referent in the *mind* of God'¹⁹ – provided an essential problem: God is held to be the source of universal intelligibility, but he himself is *unknowable*.²⁰ This forced medieval scholars, like Thomas Aquinas, to explain the divine elements of the rational universe by means of analogy: to know the world completely, we must first know God, but we can only know God analogically, through knowledge of the world. This meant that we had to know the finite through the infinite and then the infinite through the finite, which is circular and therefore impossible. Any attempt to break the circle gets fatally compromised by the fact that in order to know God, he needs to be reduced to the level of human understanding and finitude. To know God would mean to bring him down from his golden throne and place him amongst all things knowable and all things mortal. To know God, therefore, would be to kill God.²¹

This medieval impasse eventually resulted in the humanistic compromise from the Renaissance: the shift from a theocentric to a anthropocentric universe. The idea was simple: if God is what exceeds our knowledge, then it is sufficient for us to apprehend the greatest possible extend of our human knowledge. Or, to put it more bluntly: to be at the French frontier is to see Switzerland.²² With this credo, man was not only free but in fact *obligated* to go and look for this

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 28

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 29

¹⁷ Allison, 2001, p. 92

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 94

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 92

²⁰ Ibid., p. 94

²¹ Ibid., p. 95

²² Ibid., p. 96

extend of human knowledge. This, Allison argues, gave way for science and technology to effectively seal the coffin of God.²³

Although Goudsblom's centralization of 'truth' in the Death-of God narrative is intriguing, can we, for this thesis, benefit more from Allison's approach, mainly because it illustrates more clearly what exactly are the connections between 'God', 'truth' and 'Christianity'²⁴. Where Goudsblom merely points out a will for truth on the one hand and a metaphysic full of lies on the other, Allison lays bare a clear *inconsistency* within Christianity: it gospels the search for truth and, simultaneously, it provides a worldview that deprives man from its approximation. Christianity was therefore bound to dissolve itself, for an unknowable God that contained every truth in the world could never have a long and peaceful marriage with a doctrine that necessitates knowledge. Within this narrative, we can understand for which reasons Nietzsche calls the Christian *decisions*, and the world these decisions created, bad and ugly.

Besides that, Allison doesn't focus on merely one single historical development but acknowledges that Nietzsche allows for a multiplicity of factors in the advent of nihilism. Next to the Christian paradox of knowledge, he discussed Nietzsche's ideas on Luther and the Reformation as a second contributing facet to the *deicide*:

He [Luther] destroyed the concept of the 'Church' by throwing away the belief in the inspiration of the church councils; for the concept of the 'Church' retains power only under the condition that the inspiring spirit that founded the Church still lives in, builds, and continues to build its house.²⁵

With the Reform in the church, the practical and psychological functions of the priest became internalized under the doctrine of a personal conscience. Apparently, Luther saw that only under the impersonal office of an ecclesiastical institution that the church was able to impose itself as mediator, interpreter, judge and foremost, spiritual authority.²⁶ Scepticism, therefore, could never have turned fully against religiosity itself if it wasn't for Luther, Calvin, Knox and other reformers; they were the ones that stripped the ecclesiastical office of its authority to condemn heterodoxy as heresy. With an internalized authority, with personal conscience as the priest one confesses to, one could decide for himself who the heretic is. One became more free to search for knowledge and truth and one could answer to God by answering to oneself.

With this, the question of the *ugliness* and *badness* of Christianity is answered: Christianity dissolves itself. But still, it is not clear yet how this calls for anguish and distress. Many people today would rejoice the slowly fading of Christianity, or any form of religiosity for that matter. Why, then, does Nietzsche present it as a *problem*? The answer to this brings us back to the contrast between the ancient world and the world of today. For when Christianity dissolves into nothing, nothingness is what is left behind:

What, then, are man's truths ultimately? - They are the irrefutable errors of man.²⁷

²³ Ibid., p. 96

²⁴ Another reason would be the fact that Goudsblom uses Nietzsche's oeuvre in its entirety to support his interpretation while Allison limits himself to one work, that is, *The Gay Science*. This allows for a more cohesive, more plausible interpretation due to the fact that the full extent of Nietzsche's oeuvre isn't known for its coherence. The term 'nihilism' alone, for instance, is used by Nietzsche in at least seven seemingly different ways (Carr, 1992), p. 27).

²⁵ GS 358

²⁶ Allison, 2001, pp. 93-94

²⁷ GS 265

Man has been educated by his errors (...). If one discounts the effect of these four errors, one has also discounted humanity, humaneness, and 'human dignity'.²⁸

We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live - by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith no one could endure living! But that does not prove them. Life is not an argument.²⁹

According to Nietzsche, Christianity surely painted a colourful world. Colourful, especially compared to the world after the death of God. This, then, is why the madman panics: because God gave us everything but inherits us *nothing*. The world we used to live in turned out to be a lie. We discovered this lie, but we did not apprehend that we had no substitute; the world of truths, the 'true world' is all we had. When we leave it behind, we are left with nothingness. And this, Nietzsche foresees, is very dangerous. Christianity was a narcotic³⁰. And numbed by this narcotic, we were able to endure life: 'thanks to your drunkenness, you don't break your limbs in the process [of falling down a staircase]; your muscles are too slack and your head too dull for you to find the stones of these stairs as hard as the rest of us do!'.³¹ But once the drug is worn out and our high has fled, once every trace of Christianity is erased, then 'life is a greater danger: we are made of glass – woe unto us if we *bump* against something! And everything is lost if we *fall*!'.³²

At this point, following Nietzsche's prophecy of doom, one would panic like the madman does: 'are we not continually falling?'. But short after, one would have to wonder how it is possible that we are still here. God is dead, Nietzsche said, but if we inspect our surroundings, it seems that the horror of nothingness is not yet present. The explanation of this brings us to another key aphorism; one that looks a hundred-thousand year into the future and that Nietzsche put (ironically perhaps) at the very beginning of the third book of *The Gay Science*:

After Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries - a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. - And we - we must still def eat his shadow as well!³³

This is why we speak of the 'madman in the marketplace' instead of the 'preacher in the marketplace', or 'the prophet' or 'the philosopher'. God is dead, God stays dead, but we have yet to accept all the implications of this state of affairs – the madman has come too early to be rendered sane. Like I mentioned above, for Nietzsche the death of God is not like the extinction of some tropical bird. God shone through everything in the ancient world, and so everything will be lost when he is dead. The madman looks at the churches in the town and says 'What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?'.³⁴ The 'shadows' and ruins of God will endure for millennia to come and God will be present in our world, like a star is shining in the heavens for hundreds of years after it has fallen.

For this reason, Nietzsche can simultaneously refer to the Christian era as a splendour of colour and as bad and ugly, or even as the 'alcohol poisoning of Europe'.³⁵ Christianity was, in the end, a narcotic, a construction of lies. Compared to the state of affairs after the death of God, however, compared to an absolute emptiness, it was a bright and colourful world filled with value

²⁸ GS 115

²⁹ GS 121

³⁰ GS 147

³¹ GS 154

³² Ibid.

³³ GS 108

³⁴ GS 125

³⁵ GS 134

and meaning. According to Nietzsche, nothing from the old world can be used again in the new, because it had lost its basis. Therefore, Nietzsche, the madman, only believes in one thing: 'that the weight of all things must be determined anew'.³⁶ This brings us to the next question. The question of 'what now?'

Life after the deicide

After establishing the problem, a new theme in Nietzsche's thought emerges: the overcoming of the crisis. This look into the future, where Nietzsche prophesizes about new ways to live after the death of God, can be found throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre, all the way up to his posthumous (and therefore somewhat obscure) work *The Will to Power* (1901). Again, I want to restrict to a specific period and a specific book for the shaping of a clear interpretation. Therefore, I want to discuss Nietzsche's thoughts on the overcoming of the crisis that emerged after the death of God as they are presented in the remaining books of *The Gay Science*. David B. Allison's interpretation will be discussed again but this time compared to another commentator, Julian Young, who writes about the 'meaning of life' after the death of God.

In terms of colour and sunlight, Nietzsche has already contrasted the world after the death of God with the one before. The Christian era was a splendour of colour compared to the greyness and emptiness that comes after. God shone through the world like the sun, and when God died, the sun set and left the world in darkness. However, we are not doomed to live in the night for all eternity. In fact, Nietzsche states that some fortunate souls, including himself (since he uses 'we' instead of 'they'), do not even experience this darkness all that much. Those 'free spirits' see consequences that they can greet with optimism:

these immediate consequences, the consequences for ourselves, are the opposite of what one might expect - not at all sad and gloomy, but much more like a new and barely describable type of light, happiness, relief, amusement, encouragement, dawn . . . Indeed, at hearing the news that 'the old god is dead', we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation - finally the horizon seems clear again (...).³⁷

The horizon is clear; the death of God did not cause an absence, but created an opportunity. Nietzsche and his fellows in spirit do not mourn about the past but instead rejoice about the future. The old sun made way for something new, something better. But what would that be? A new sun? We remember the harsh words of the madman: 'God is dead, God *stays* dead'. So it would seem that the old sun could not just be replaced by a new but equal one, for it is *we* who lost faith in *it*, not the other way around. Nietzsche does speak of a new sun, but not one equal to the old:

If one considers how an overall philosophical justification of one's way of living and thinking affects each individual - namely, like a sun, warming, blessing, impregnating, shining especially for him; how it makes him independent of praise and blame, self-sufficient, rich, generous with happiness and good will (...) - one exclaims longingly, in the end: Oh, how I wish that many such new suns would yet be created! Even the evil man, the unhappy man, and the exceptional man should have their philosophy, their good right, their sunshine!³⁸

There are some great differences between the old sun and the new sun, or suns (plural). Julian Young clarifies this, summing up two major aspects of the old way in which the meaning of life

³⁶ GS 269

³⁷ GS 343

³⁸ GS 289

was provided, the old light that shone through every experience: first, it was *universal*, that is, the same for everyone, and second, the meaning it provided, it provided *independent of choice*.³⁹ New meaning, following Young's interpretation, should therefore come from something that rejects both of these qualities, for the old fashion of meaning-giving is no longer credible after the death of God. This might be the reason why Nietzsche speaks of 'many such new suns' and 'their sunshine' as it would be their *own* and nobody else's; one sun for all is replaced by one sun for each.

But this metaphor of the sun is a slippery one, for it suggests that it is something external, something outside of ourselves that would provide the meaning in our lives, and the rejection of an external entity is exactly what caused the terrifying realization of nothingness. The metaphor of the many suns must therefore perhaps be regarded as exactly that: a metaphor and nothing more. In fact, in order to paint the picture further of an undefined future, Nietzsche fumbles with some other imagery as well, like that of the open sea: 'We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! (...) we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean (...). ...there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity'.⁴⁰ And further up: 'Send your ships into uncharted seas'⁴¹; 'There is another new world to discover – and more than one! On board ship, philosophers!'.⁴² And then, finally, the sun and the open sea come together in one image when Nietzsche writes that without the sun, 'the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again, the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an 'open sea''.⁴³

Open sea or open horizon; the idea remains that, for some people at least, the death of God is not an occlusion but an opening. Nothingness for them is not a terrifying abyss in which one is 'continually falling'. Instead it is a sea of opportunity, an endless clean slate on which to draw, to write, to *create*. But there is not a colouring picture in front of them, not the ones children draw on, already filled with lines and patches; this is absolute whiteness, completely unspoiled, whiteness as incisively as the greyness is for those who don't see the opportunity. What, then, should be written on there?

It is a 'personal narrative' that should be written down according Young. A personal narrative that replaces the 'grand narrative' of the old days. What does he mean by this? The grand narratives, he argues, are exactly those narratives with the two above-mentioned characteristics, like for instance, Christianity or Platonism. They have a universal span and incorporate every human being in their story, hence the adjective 'grand'.⁴⁴ Personal narratives, then, are sufficient to replace the diseased grand narratives in their ability to provide meaning, but do so without the two characteristics of their predecessor.

However, the negation of the two characteristics of the grand narrative (or the old sun, or God if you will), brings about a problem. Assuming that one narrative for all can be replaced by a personal narrative for each, we are still bothered with the other characteristic: the factor of choice. For once we have killed God and rejected the grand narratives, a vast nothingness remains. This means first of all that a similar God, one also providing meaning independent of choice, cannot replace the old, because God stays dead. Therefore, the new narrative should come from ourselves, from our own choosing; it must be a narrative *dependant of our choice*. But nothingness after the death of God, nihilism, *per definition* points to a complete lack of basis for our choices: 'Is there any

³⁹ Young, 2003, p. 84

⁴⁰ GS 124

⁴¹ GS 283

⁴² GS 289

⁴³ GS 343

⁴⁴ Young, 2003, p. 1

up our down left?’ the madman cries. After the death of God, we have haven’t got any sense of direction left; this is exactly why it is problematic. How, then, are we to choose our own narratives? What gives us the motivation? Where do we get the criteria to choose one instead of the other?

Young addresses this question by pointing to an aphorism that Nietzsche considers as his most important idea⁴⁵:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. (...) Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.'⁴⁶

Young argues that Nietzsche presents us with a ‘what if’.⁴⁷ Since it is not a thesis about the nature of time, we must imagine the demon for ourselves. What if he came to me? What if he confronted me with the eternal recurrence? What would my reaction be? According to Young, we must construct our personal narrative in such a way that it will be something we *like*, that we *want* to be the hero of.⁴⁸ The way to do this is to love our fate, *amor fati* Nietzsche calls it⁴⁹; ‘since the whole of the past is necessary – it cannot be altered – to love fate is (not just to tolerate but rather) to love the *whole* of the past, *everything* that has happened. In other words, it is to will, to ‘crave nothing more fervently than the eternal recurrence of everything that has happened.’⁵⁰

However, despite using the eternal recurrence and *amor fati*, two important themes in Nietzsche’s thought, Young’s interpretation seems to be begging the question. Saying that the crisis of nothingness should be overcome by (strongly) willing a narrative that provides the necessary meaning in one’s life is basically saying that nihilism is merely a problem of motivation, a fatigue of the mind, the solution of which would be in the *choice to will* your new ‘sun’ fervently. What, then, would motivate *that* choice? It seems that this brings us back where we started.

For this reason, David B. Allison makes it an important part of his interpretation to highlight Nietzsche’s intentions when he writes about overcoming. For Allison, it is not the case that Nietzsche recommends a new way of living in order to pull ourselves from the swamp of nihilism by our own hair. With good reason, Allison asks himself: ‘Is Nietzsche simply following the structural pattern in turn – filling in the “old God” dictates, the litany of “thou shalt” – with the precepts, rules and moral exhortations of the “new man”? Is Nietzsche one more preacher, yet another didactic at best or

⁴⁵ Within the Nietzsche-debate, eternal recurrence is an object of great dispute. First of all, among commentators there is no clear consensus on whether Nietzsche is offering a metaphysical theory here or that the doctrine is merely a hypothesis, to facilitate his ideas on psychological health (Wicks, 2016). About this metaphysical interpretation, many scholarly opinions tend to reject the idea and concede with Georg Simmel’s summary dismissal in 1907, only 26 years after the idea was born from Nietzsche’s mind, calling it ‘insupportable, insignificant, and incoherent’ (Loeb, 2006, p. 171). For the sake of Young’s interpretation, which rejects the literal metaphysical reading of the doctrine, I want to jump the details of Simmel and other’s accounts and instead focus on how the doctrine fits within the notions of personal narrative and the creation of meaning after the death of God.

⁴⁶ GS 341

⁴⁷ Young, 2003, p. 89

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 90

⁴⁹ GS 276

⁵⁰ Young, 2003, p. 91

authority figure at worst? (...) Is he a zealot? Another Luther or Zwingli in atheist disguise?'.⁵¹

Allison believes that, next to the Munchausian problem, this way of reading Nietzsche would be profoundly wrong. He therefore urges not to read it as a post-Christian 'thou shalt', a new set of rules to conquer the horrors of nihilism, but instead as something addressed to a select few, a group of 'free spirits': Nietzsche writes for those who have already become matured.⁵² Like we read earlier, Nietzsche talks about the ones who already experience the death of God as something different, as an opportunity. To those few, his words seem to be addressed: 'Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who have a right to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honourable sense: it is to them in particular that I commend my secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*'.⁵³ But what about the others? Nietzsche does not seem interested in them at all: 'What can it matter to us what sequins the sick may use to cover up their weakness?'.⁵⁴ What, then, remains of the image of Nietzsche as a prophet? For isn't a prophet, traditionally at least, a saviour of souls? Committed to the weak, the less fortunate? Determined to gather a flock and look after his sheep? Nietzsche, however, seems to despise the sheep-like followers, the believers: 'oh, we know these hysterical little men and women well enough who today need just this religion as a veil and finery'.⁵⁵ He does not want to be a Shepperd for humankind. Allison pungently sums it up when he says that Nietzsche seems to be writing for those people who don't need to read him.⁵⁶

Surely, this interpretation does not relieve Allison from the problem of nihilism; even the 'free spirits' that Nietzsche addresses need to build something out of a vast nothingness. Even those who see opportunity need a supporting point to make something new, to create. Nietzsche's answer, according to Allison, can be found in nature: 'the human individual is no longer bound by his supposed divinely given essence (...). Rather, humanity is now to be conceived of in purely natural terms'.⁵⁷ What, then, is nature according to Nietzsche and how does one fall back on it? Evidently, nature is not a creation, watched over by a supreme being. Neither is it a rationalizable system, like the modern sciences would suggest. Nature, instead, consists of 'chaos and necessity', it is a 'finite but open economy' in the sense that it is fixed in its quantity of energy, matter and force, but simultaneously it continues to transform, mutate and operate dynamically in an infinite time.⁵⁸ In order to fall back on nature, one would therefore have to embrace nature and its structure of chaos and contingency, and therefore, one has to embrace the necessity of fate.

Intentionally, Nietzsche presents this, not as a lesson to the reader, not as a commandment, but, somewhat humbly, as something he intends for himself, like a new year's resolution: '[for the new year] I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them - thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*'.⁵⁹ Nietzsche writes that someone who understands this, would laugh at the phrase 'man *and* world'.⁶⁰ It is the little word 'and' that suggests a separation of man from the world. We must get rid of this idea, like we must get rid of all shadows from the past. 'Man and world' must become an absurdity, for man and nature are the same thing. Man, and the necessities and chaos of nature, are not distinguishable items and in this sense nature does not 'happen' to us. We are these necessities, we are the chaos, and embracing this fact is the only way to live. This embracement is, according to Allison, the way we should

⁵¹ Allison, 2001, p. 101

⁵² Ibid., p. 102

⁵³ GS 377

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Allison, 2001, p. 102

⁵⁷ Allison, 2001, p. 103

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp 103-104

⁵⁹ GS 276

⁶⁰ GS 346

interpret Nietzsche's call to will the eternal recurrence.⁶¹ Only by doing this is one true to the nature of things. But again, by saying this is Nietzsche not trying to inspire the yet uninspired. These words are not a new gospel, but merely a humble vision shared, and hopefully grasped by those who did not need him to grasp it.

So what does this make of the madman? What was he really looking for in that marketplace? For whom did he hold his lantern up? Clearly, he did not do it to preach, for a preacher wants to be heard, wants to be understood. A preacher wants to change the hearts and minds of the people, he wants them to follow him. The madman, instead, wasn't interested in inspiring or gathering a flock. Contrary to the Good Shepherd that Jesus speaks of, the madman isn't interested in the weak. What, then, is he interested in? The ones that *do* understand him perhaps? The ones who feel the magnitude of the situation, who comprehend when he cries 'we are all murderers'? But they don't need to hear it, for they have reached those conclusions for themselves. They felt it coming, like a machine that measures earthquakes from a hundred miles away, like the madman himself. So what, then, drives him out on the streets? What is going on in his head? It might just be plain madness after all.

⁶¹ Allison, 2001, p. 107

The Modern Conditions

In the first chapter, we learned that Nietzsche's concept of the death of God must be considered as something great, or, as Nietzsche puts it: 'the greatest recent event'.⁶² The reason for this is that God, that is, the God of Christianity, used to be completely interwoven in the experience of the world. When we looked at the birds and the trees, we saw God's creation. When we referred to the goodness or badness of an act, we measured it with the laws that God gave us. Furthermore, when we spoke about 'truth', we spoke about the world as it existed in the mind of God. But now, God no longer lives in our world.

For Nietzsche, this was, in the first place, a magnificent problem. He anticipated that nothing remains after everything divine is stripped from our world. The problem of 'nihilism' then, consists in the fact that we must continue to live on *after* the God that was in everything. Working towards a solution, Nietzsche didn't want to inspire the people to wrestle themselves out of the darkness and build a new way of life after the deicide. In fact, he does not even seem to write for a wide audience at all. The way he sketches the outlines for a life after God, a victory over the problem, would almost suggest that he is merely *describing* as opposed to instructing. He himself has no special hand in the death of God and the nihilism that follows, but merely comments on it, standing at the side-lines. He philosophizes about what life would look like for a being that is strong enough to outlive God and can bring meaning and purpose to his life without His divine light.

The previous chapter also made clear that, for Nietzsche, the death of God is not as abrupt as the metaphor of 'death' would suggest. 'God is dead', he proclaims, 'but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow'.⁶³ If Nietzsche envisions a time in which every person has come to grips with the death of God, then clearly, we are not there yet. 'I've come too early' the madman said. Because we are still surrounded by these shadows of God, God is not completely erased from our world. We are in an intermediate state, between a world in the past that we cannot return to, and a world in the future that has yet to be built. In this sense, God is like a fallen star that still lights up the nihilistic darkness, and probably will for a long time to come.

With this, we see that Nietzsche paints a picture of past, present and future. The past consists of a world with God in it. It is the ancient order of the world that was discussed in the previous chapter, where the Christian God 'shone through everything'. The future, also already discussed, we have not fully reached yet. It is a hypothetical order of things, wherein all shadows from the past are overcome and something new has taken their place. To reach that point, Nietzsche proclaims, 'the weight of all things must be determined anew'.⁶⁴ But the shadows of God are still surrounding us in our everyday existence. The weight of things is still decided by old standards. We have killed God, but we are still shaping our world with shapes borrowed from the past, shapes that used to find their basis in God, and now find their basis in nothing. With these conditions, then, Nietzsche characterizes the present; locked in between future and past.

In the following, the future Nietzsche speaks of will not be of much interest to us. Surely, it will serve as a background to which we can contrast the conditions of the present and why they are problematic, but the main focus will be on the conditions of the present. In the first chapter, an attempt was made to answer the following question: What does Nietzsche mean when he proclaims that God is dead and why is this event considered a problem? This chapter builds on everything that was said in the previous by answering the following: How does the death of God form the conditions for modern life?

⁶² GS 343

⁶³ GS 108

⁶⁴ GS 269

This chapter will be structured as follows. Firstly, a more extensive interpretation will be given regarding the concept 'shadows of God'. This term was already used in the first chapter, but given the weight of it in the discussion that follows, it requires some extra attention. From this (not exclusively Nietzschean) discussion of how 'shadows of God' should be understood, we move on to Nietzsche's characterization of modern times; the advent of nihilism. There is an epochal tension between the shadows of the past and the nihilism in the future that shapes the conditions of the present. Some of Nietzsche's ideas about this will be discussed, using parts of *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, supported by interpretations of Robert B. Pippin. At the end of this, it will be clear how Nietzsche maps our times and how he characterizes the problems of the modern conditions (and what this has to do with the death of God as presented in chapter 1). With this, the concept of 'modernity' is simultaneously introduced, so that we can discuss it further in a framework separate from the Nietzschean we used so far.

This I will do at the end of this chapter. Through Nietzsche, we will arrive at a concept of modernity, combined with a critique thereof, so that we have an approach from which to look at other critiques of modernity. William E. Connolly provides an interpretation of Nietzsche that, I will argue, does not turn out to be very Nietzschean. However, it does provide a way to get slightly detached from the Nietzschean framework, and focus on the issue of modernity without the context of past, present and future that Nietzsche describes.

Shadows of God and Modern Values

An important characterization of the state of the present was already given in the first chapter and in the introduction above: the lasting shadows of God. However, the point was not yet clearly explained other than that the shadows of God are 'ruins' from the ancient world, like the cathedrals the madman raves about. Let's start by looking at the idea a little closer.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche mentions some of these shadows of God when he talks about the way the universe is commonly approached:

Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being. (...) Let us beware even of believing that the universe is a machine (...). Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness or unreason or their opposites (...). Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature.⁶⁵

These false images of the universe Nietzsche calls 'anthropomorphisms'; they describe the world with the same characteristics we would describe ourselves with. This way of seeing the world comes from a time in which the world was thought of as being created just like we thought we ourselves were. Nietzsche points out that, even *long after* creation is rejected as explanatory theorem, one can still approach the world with the handles one has rejected in theory, like when one describes it as an organism, a being, or as a machine. It is possible to use these characteristics, even when the idea of a deistic universe is abandoned.

The way this is possible, the way one carries on using theoretic frameworks for which the basis is already rejected, becomes clear in the same aphorism, however implicitly:

The total character of the world, by contrast, is for all eternity chaos; (...) the unsuccessful attempts are by far the rule; the exceptions are not the secret aim, and the whole musical mechanism repeats eternally its tune, which must never be called a melody - and ultimately even the phrase 'unsuccessful attempt' is already an anthropomorphism bearing a reproach. (...) Once you know that there are no purposes, you also know that there is no accident; for only against a world of purposes does the word 'accident' have a reference.

⁶⁵ GS 109

Note how Nietzsche formulates these warnings: he seems to be long past the point of warning about thinking there is a God above. Instead, Nietzsche warns us about describing the universe with the use of *certain words*. Apparently, God lives on in our language in a profound and persistent way, so that words like ‘unsuccessful attempt’ and ‘accident’ or ‘accidentally’ are in fact inappropriate ways to describe the chaos of the universe. Shadows of God, therefore, are not just the contemporary Christians or Jews, the uncompromising believers of today’s world. They are not just the lasting traditions of religion, our interest for religious art, our sensibility for the colours of the ancient world. It goes deeper than that: shadows of God are present in our *language* and our *thinking*, in our preliminary assumptions, the tools we use to describe the world. Therefore, they should not be seen as a handful of objects that can be pinpointed, like the few cathedrals in an old city, but rather as *omnipresent*, surrounding us everywhere; they can be used by us without being fully aware.

To illustrate even further, let’s look at a good example of an omnipresent shadow that is uncovered by someone other than Nietzsche. Richard Rorty points one out when he talks about the way we seem to approach the concept of ‘truth’. An important distinction that we don’t seem to make is the distinction between the claim that world is out there and the claim that truth is out there.⁶⁶ To say that the world is out there, simply means that the human mind is not the creator of everything. It is to say that, if humans ceased to exist, there would still be a world left with everything in it. It disputes that I am a brain in a vat. To say that truth is *not* out there is to say that truth is always constructed out of sentences, and that sentences are always formed by human minds. Therefore, if there would be no human minds, then there would be no sentences and hence there would be no truth. Despite how self-evident this all sounds, ‘truth’ is still commonly approached as something that exists *out there* in the world; like the way in which scientists are out to *discover* it. ‘Search for truth’ leans on this conception, as do one-liners like ‘truth will prevail!’. The idea of truth in the world itself, Rorty argues, comes from a time when an omnipresent creator was believed to have a language of his own.⁶⁷ In a world governed by God, it would be possible for Him to utter sentences about the world and these sentences would be true always:

[But] if one clings to the notion of self-subsistent facts, it is easy to capitalize the word “truth” and treating it as something identical either with God or with the world as God’s project.⁶⁸

This excerpt comes from *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989), and in this particular work, Rorty maps out the consequences of embracing this ‘contingency of language’ and the contingency of truth. In a world that still commonly believes that there is an universal and unchanging truth out there, these consequences are not yet present. In our language and in our thinking, shadows like these are still lingering. Nietzsche asks: ‘When will all these shadows of god no longer darken us?’⁶⁹ These omnipresent linguistic examples show that it might be a while before we have reached that point.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Rorty, 1989, p. 4-5

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 5

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ GS 109

⁷⁰ To exemplify it even further: another shadow of God presented itself to me recently. In the Dutch reality soap called *Rot op met je Religie* (loosely translated: ‘sod off with your religion’), a Christian, a Muslim, a Jew and an atheist are placed in the same house so that dialogue and discussion may arise. Meeting and talking to some very friendly, rational and peace-loving Muslims kept the concerning atheist in a state of light confusion. On television, he had seen many images of angry and violent Muslims, burning flags or cutting throats, and now, for him, the question arose: which one represents the true Islam? The atheist couldn’t coincide the two opposing fashions in which Muslims had presented themselves to him; peaceful on the one hand and hateful on the other. Therefore, he searched for the core, the essence. Even in a religion with a demographic of 1.7

But, to take it even further, the shadows of God are not just minor usages of language, trivial reminders of the cultural conditions we came from. It would be wrong to see them merely as linguistic choices that Nietzsche would rather see replaced with stronger words. The language carries and maintains certain ideas, certain systematic beliefs whose roots go deep. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt in which Nietzsche praises his 'free spirits', the enlightened minds who, much like Nietzsche himself, see the consequences of the deicide and the new pathway it provides, and contrasts this select group of privileged with the ones who do not seem to see it:

The ice that still supports people today has already grown very thin; the wind that brings a thaw is blowing; we ourselves, we homeless ones, are something that breaks up the ice and other all too thin 'realities' ... We 'conserve' nothing; neither do we want to return to any past; we are by no means 'liberal'; we are not working for 'progress'; we don't need to plug our ears to the marketplace's sirens of the future: what they sing - 'equal rights', 'free society', 'no more masters and no servants' - has no allure for us.⁷¹

In this striking passage, Nietzsche sums up another few shadows from the past, things that need to be overcome in order to start anew. Apparently, his free spirits are not interested in the tendencies that characterize our modern society. Apparently, for them they seem them as 'the ice that supports people today'. This reminds us of another metaphor Nietzsche used, quoted in the first chapter, when he described Christianity as a narcotic: 'thanks to your drunkenness, you don't break your limbs in the process [of falling down a staircase]; your muscles are too slack and your head too dull for you to find the stones of these stairs as hard as the rest of us do!'.⁷² We learned from this that nihilism is described by Nietzsche as a painful falling down: 'are we not continually falling?' the madman cried. But there are ways to break the fall, soften the landing or even forgetting that you are falling in the first place; the ideals and prospects of Christianity. Another way, we have learned now, is to support oneself with comparable 'thin realities', that carry us like ice on a lake. With these, we can maintain ourselves a little while longer and postpone the icy waters of nihilism. These melting realities keep the people of today grounded while the free spirits take to sea.

What exactly are these 'thin realities'? In the above passage, Nietzsche mentions a few: liberalism, the idea of progress, political views on equal rights and free (democratic) societies. Later, he mentions that 'We [the free spirits] hold it absolutely undesirable that a realm of justice and concord should be established on earth'.⁷³ All the modern manifestations of these values, equality, justice, peace and harmony, seem completely insignificant to Nietzsche and his likes. Clearly, the values he targets in this are not an arbitrary set of aspirations, haphazardly struck by Nietzsche's hammer. Rather, they are bundled together for a reason; together they characterize an era, the people of *today*. Let's look at another text in which Nietzsche addresses the people of today.

In a certain light, Zarathustra, the protagonist of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1891), is much like the madman; he too chooses to enter the marketplace and proclaim a message to the people. He too finds that his words fall on deaf ears. In the book's prologue, Zarathustra comes down from his mountain and starts to roam the land. Soon he finds a town on the edge of a forest and on

billion adherents, the atheist looked for the heart, the true nature, 'islamism', if you will. It is remarkable that an atheist, who rejected God and everything that has to do with religion, would use religious concepts to map his world. For can there not only be an essence in things if it was put there by a creator? After all, if the universe is a random sequence of coincidences, and everything is in a constant state of evolution, wouldn't that mean that nothing has a vast and unchanging nature, nothing an essence? Nietzsche pierces this atheist with his eyes and cries: whither is God?

⁷¹ GS 377

⁷² GS 154

⁷³ GS 377

the square, he finds many people gathered because a tightrope walker was promised to perform. Zarathustra starts to speak to them about the *Übermensch*^{74, 75} He characterizes the *Übermensch* as something that comes *after* man, a look into the future, when man is overcome: 'What is the ape to a human? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And that is precisely what the human shall be to the overman [*Übermensch*]: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment'.⁷⁶ Further descriptions of the *Übermensch* are then given, but, however intriguingly, these don't need to be mentioned for now. What is more interesting for now is what happens when Zarathustra finds out that, not unlike the madman, he is not at all understood as he would want to be. "We have heard enough already about this tightrope walker" the people say to him, "now let's see him too!".⁷⁷ They mistake the heavy, profound message of Zarathustra for the announcement of a local spectacle and leave him crudely misunderstood and strongly disappointed.

Zarathustra then ponders over what just occurred. Why wouldn't they understand him? He finds that there is something between him and the people, something that refrains them from opening their hearts to his message: 'They have something of which they are proud. And what do they call that which makes them proud? Education [German: *Bildung*] they call it, it distinguishes them from goatherds'.⁷⁸ The people Zarathustra addresses are not keen on considering themselves as an unfinished project. They are too proud of their current achievements and are not ready to accept or even lend an ear to the narrative in which they are not even nearly accomplished beings.

Therefore, Zarathustra changes his strategy. If the people are not willing to look at themselves with contempt, then he will present them with the ultimate versions of themselves, the thing they will become if they continue in this fashion, the darkest hour of the night of which they now only live in the twilight: 'Thus I shall speak to them of the most contemptible person: but he is the last human being'.⁷⁹ It seems that for the last human beings, the pride for their *Bildung*, their civilization, is even stronger: "We invented happiness" – say the last human beings, blinking'.⁸⁰ And the further this last human being is described by Zarathustra, the more characteristics of the modern society come to the surface, the characteristics we learned Nietzsche looks down on. Like the modern ideal of concord or harmony between people:

They abandoned the regions where it was hard to live: for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs up against him: for one needs warmth.

Becoming ill and being mistrustful are considered sinful by them (...).⁸¹

Or the modern value of equality:

One no longer becomes poor and rich: both are too burdensome. Who wants to rule anymore? Who wants to obey anymore? Both are too burdensome.

No shepherd and one herd! Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the insane asylum.⁸²

⁷⁴ *Übermensch* is a key-concept throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre and it is translated in many different ways. I choose to use the original term, but for possible English translations and their justification, see the footnote on page 5 of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006), edited by A. Del Caro and R.B. Pippin.

⁷⁵ TSZ, p. 5

⁷⁶ TSZ, p. 6

⁷⁷ TSZ, p. 7

⁷⁸ TSZ, p. 9

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ TSZ, p. 10

⁸² Ibid.

Or the notion of civil progress, the idea that we are more advanced, more learned and more morally educated than our ancestors:

‘Formerly the whole world was insane’ – the finest ones say, blinking. One is clever and knows everything that has happened, and so there is no end to their mockery.⁸³

This is how Zarathustra characterizes the last human being; they clothe themselves with almost the same clothes as the ‘people of today’, the people of the modern world with their ‘thin realities’. What is Nietzsche’s problem with their attitude? Why does he look down on their values, their ideals and utopia’s? This also is answered by Zarathustra.

I say to you: one must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star. I say to you: you still have chaos in you.

Beware! The time approaches when human beings will no longer give birth to a dancing star. Beware! The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself.⁸⁴

Chaos must remain in oneself to create something new. A sense of control, a sense of self-accomplishment demolishes this prospect. Once one is convinced that he is on the right path, the possibility of radical change diminishes. All these modern projects, these achievements we run up the flagpole – economic equality, racial equality, democracy, scientific and humanistic progress – are the regulations of a necessary chaos. This is what Nietzsche is afraid of: that the people of today, the people of the present, the people who live *after the death of God*, fill their heads with his shadows, his surrogates in the form of these nihilistic values, the values that are based on a diseased divinity. Nietzsche fears that this stands in the way of the will to create something entirely new, the revaluation of all values, the *Übermensch*. With this, the term ‘last human being’ is also explained. He is last because he represents the end of the rope. Chaos is no longer in him; from him nothing new can grow. The last human being knows how to maintain himself: ‘His kind is ineradicable, like the flea beetle; the last human being lives longest’.⁸⁵

To Nietzsche’s regret, we hide away in our modern values, which are all shadows of God, because we are too afraid to face the consequences of God’s death. In his interpretation, Robert B. Pippin emphasizes the *comfort* these ‘modern’ ideals seem to bring according to Nietzsche. He points out that Nietzsche presents them as ‘a kind of permanent, peaceful, untroubled “sleep”’.⁸⁶ So, to be fair to one another, to be just, not to discriminate and to maintain a disposition of tolerance is not presented as a challenge, as something we have to work for. They are not presented as moral goals we fail to achieve if we don’t want to make an effort. Contrarily, the ‘people of today’ actually find shelter in the pursuit of these modern values; they are in no way challenging or dangerous to them, but rather they are the easy choice, a warm blanket. Perhaps it’s safe to say that, and this word is not used by Pippin, they bring the same comfortable numbness a *narcotic* would bring. These values are, in this sense, a narcotic just like Christianity was, and they are therefore nothing more than the shadows of a Christian past.

An interesting notion is added by Pippin when he points out another term Nietzsche seems to address modernity with. Since Nietzsche’s critique is primarily focussed on the modern *moral* values (like equality, liberty and so forth), the morality of modernity is regarded by Nietzsche as a

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ TSZ, p. 9

⁸⁵ TSZ, p. 10

⁸⁶ Pippin, 1991, pp. 89,90; see TSZ, pp. 17-19

herd animal morality.⁸⁷ The reason we take refuge in such values is that we fear to accept that the traditional basis for our values has disappeared. We affirm those ideals that the maximum number of people could affirm without conflict, the values that are the safest bet for beings within a herd, where no one is elevated above them. This all comes from an anxiety, created by doubts about divine authority. God, the 'good shepherd', is no longer there to keep the group together. We fear those who would take advantage of this situation, the strong independent creators of value. We feel safer, more untroubled when we protect ourselves with universally justifiable maxims, with imperatives that are the lowest common denominator. This, Pippin argues, all 'out of fear and a timid hesitation about the consequences of any full realization of the contingency and plurality of human ends'.⁸⁸

With this, we get an image of Nietzsche's problem with modern conditions and its connection with the event of the death of God. The terms 'Modernity', or 'the Enlightenment' (the term under which the modern values and ideals are sometimes brought), are itself not of central importance in Nietzsche's treatment of modern institutions.⁸⁹ Instead, we get to them when we look at Nietzsche's discussion of nihilism. In the broad Nietzschean idea of nihilism, a vast critique on the modern conditions is contained. Nietzsche attacks these values (liberal democracy, tolerance, harmony, equality, progress, and so on) as symptoms of a diseased culture. After God died, we filled a God-shaped hole with his surrogates. They are 'thin realities', Nietzsche argues; they are melting surfaces over the ice-cold waters of nihilism.

Because they have their basis in God, they are slowly fading from this world, just like the idea of God is. This is why Pippin talks about the both *repetitive* and *distinct* nature of the modern epoch.⁹⁰ Repetitive because they are repetitions from an ancient time, the shadows of God. Distinct because they are not *merely* a repetition of Platonism and Christianity; they represent an unique exhaustion, because only after the death of God, these values have come to their end. Modernity is therefore presented as the *advent of nihilism*; the last light of the ancient world forms a twilight before it goes completely dark.

Modernity and Cruelty

From the section above, we learned that Nietzsche's critique on modernity is to a large extent tied up with his notions of past, future and present. Nietzsche criticizes the modern values, not simply as what they are of themselves but rather as what they are in respect of their past and their future. With regard to their past, they are weak, unfunded reiterations of Christian values – persistent ingredients of an ancient way of life. With regard to their future, they are blockades or retardations to the true revaluation of all values. They slow down the process, cloud the minds of the people so that they don't see the real problem. They make sure people are convinced they are on the right path, so that they don't feel the need to change their direction.

In *Political Theory and Modernity* (1988), William E. Connolly adds an important problematic feature to the modern values Nietzsche attacks. Following Nietzsche, Connolly presents modernity as a means to fill a hole that God left behind: 'The pale atheist, seeking stability and control in his life, perhaps to compensate for the loss of eternal life, inflates truth as he deflates God'.⁹¹ Something needs to replace God, and it seems to be inflated; something large. This, Connolly adds,

is the *modern* faith that Nietzsche hunts down, as it lodges itself silently inside theories of truth, individuality, morality, language, sovereignty, community and the common good. Its

⁸⁷ Pippin, 1991, p. 91

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 92

⁸⁹ Pippin, 1996, p. 255

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 256

⁹¹ Connolly, 1988, p. 11

modernity resides in its ambiguous status as a demand for external guarantees inside a culture that has erased the ontological preconditions for them.⁹²

God is erased as a ontological precondition, and with that, we seem to have lost a sense of control. Since we used to map the world with God's existence, we need to map it with something different when he is gone. In order not to be overwhelmed by the natural and chaotic order of things, we want to cling onto external guarantees; something that gives us directions how to map the world. However, and this can be seen as a modern *paradox*: external guarantees cannot be of a *divine* nature, since God is dead and his existence is no longer credible. Nietzsche would like us to have the courage to fully face the nothingness God has left us and take the responsibility to create new meaning ourselves. To his regret, we rather seem to reuse old values. We inflate them as we deflate God, make them large enough so that we might not see that they lack a sound basis.

From this we can understand that these 'thin realities' as Nietzsche called them earlier, these substitutes for God, carry a very demanding criterium: in order to replace God, they must be as big as God. In the first chapter, we discussed how in the ancient world God 'shone through everything'. To use a different meteorological metaphor: the whole world was kept under God's umbrella. His substitutes, the objects of the modern faith, must therefore be able to be universal and all-encompassing like God was. If we want to ward off nihilism after the death of God, we need substitutes that *account for everything*.

Like we've discussed, Nietzsche invites us to see the world as a chaotic place. It does not contain a design, it is not governed by laws and order. Every shape we would like to mould it into is a creation of the human mind. When we strip the world of these abstractions, organizations and categorisations, a chaos remains in which 'no one could endure living'.⁹³ In these circumstances, Connolly argues, the quest for a perfectly ordered self and a perfectly ordered world, the quest for a proper candidate to fill the vacancy that God left, can be maintained only by defining everything that *does not* fit in these systems as 'otherness':

They become dirt, matter out of place, irrationality, abnormality, waste, sickness, perversity, incapacity, disorder, madness, unfreedom. They become material in need of rationalization, normalization, moralization, correction, punishment, discipline, disposal, realization, etc.⁹⁴

When we have found a viable candidate to shape our world, to tell us who we are, where we are and what we need to do, we are persistent to stick with it. The thin realities are not at our disposal to use them when they prove useful and to discard them when they don't. On the contrary: we *need* them. We need *them*. So desperately even, that anything that cannot be harmonized with it, anything that cuts against its grain and swims against its current, anything that thereby *threatens* to show its questionable nature, gets disqualified as an anomaly. Like a proud scientist, obsessively clinging on to his one great theory, stubbornly disregarding the falsifications of his hypotheses and placing them outside the realm of the meaningful, we shoo away the elements that don't fit the confines of our own great world.

Connolly presents an intriguing addition to the Nietzschean critique as discussed so far. In Connolly's interpretation did modernity not only produce large systems and ideals to compensate for the loss of God, it simultaneously produced their counterparts. Opposite to reason and enlightenment stands irrationality or madness. Opposite to freedom stands unfreedom. Opposite to democracy stands political oppression and the misuse of power. These opposites to the ideal are all framed as things that really don't deserve a place in the world; they are unwanted exceptions to the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ GS 121

⁹⁴ Connolly, 1988, p. 13

universality of our system. They are the sick parts that need healing; the barbaric parts that need civilization. These forms of irrationality, dirt and perversity, merely deserve their place in the world as 'unfinished' or 'not yet what they should be'. They are, in Connolly's words, 'in need of punishment, reform or destruction'.⁹⁵

With this, a large part of today's social, political, moral and legal terms and tendencies can be traced back to our society's loss of a Christian faith and, if we take Nietzsche's explanation of how God was murdered, perhaps all the way back to the beginning of our Christian values (which, remembered from the previous chapter, are self-dissolving and led to God's death). In this approach, modernity and its characterizations cannot be thought separately from nihilism and the death of God:

Modern denial of the advent of nihilism takes the form of organizing the self and the world into a tightly demarcated order (...) The more cleaner the ideal, the more dirt it discovers in need of cleansing; the more dirt eliminated, the more things left behind shine with the glow of organization and discipline.⁹⁶

Modernity can be seen as a large suitcase. We threw it onto the bed and we want to fit everything in it. We stuff it, sit on it to close the top and then, when it is closed, we find that the case might be insufficient: despite our effort, a few sleeves are still sticking out. So we grab a pair of scissors and cut along the edges.

It needs to be mentioned that this additional problematic, however insightful, does not fully correlate with our reading of Nietzsche's critique on modernity. Nietzsche seems to be more concerned with the future, and how the modern values are blocking the road leading there. First and foremost, Nietzsche does not believe that these values can be sufficient at all, given their nature as unfounded repetitions of a Christian value-system. This is their essential flaw, and with that comes the fact that they distract the modern mind, drug it if you will, so it does not feel the urge to look for new valuation. Connolly, in his interpretation, joins this idea by stating that the modern values are indeed insufficient shadows of God. He adds to this, however, that their insufficiency manifests itself in a whole other way, that is, a way of *cruelty*. This may not become explicit in Connolly's text – the term 'cruelty' is not used – but the way in which the modern tendency to eliminate, discriminate and appropriate is discussed, emphasizes the fact that there are victims to this endeavour. In so doing, it cannot be read without hearing accusation behind the words:

The [modern] drive to mastery intensifies the subordination of many, and recurrent encounters with the limits to mastery make even master feel constrained and confined. These experiences in turn accelerate drives to change, control, free, organize, produce, correct, order, empower, rationalize, liberate, improve, and revolutionize selves and institutions.⁹⁷

Is this Nietzsche talking? Connolly seems to believe it is: 'Does Nietzsche say this? Well, this message is contained in what he says'.⁹⁸ In our understanding, however, Nietzsche couldn't be further from this cry for compassion for those who are the victim of modern mastery. Wasn't Nietzsche completely uninterested in the weak, those who did not see the potential of God's death? 'What can it matter to us what sequins the sick may use to cover up their weakness?'.⁹⁹ Nietzsche addresses the free spirits, those who don't need shadows of God to feel at home in the world. The rest is not of

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 14

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 14

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 2

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 140

⁹⁹ GS 377

interest to him. To what extent, then, are these additional characteristics Nietzschean? Not at all, I would argue, but that does not mean they are not useful. I would like to follow this thread of cruelty to complete the chapter. I believe that this is a plausible way to reveal the limits of modernity, that is, by showing its hypocrisy. Connolly makes a sound point. The modern values preach freedom, unity and equality; it is important to show that this path does not lead to liberation for all. In doing this, we get slightly detached from the Nietzschean framework and focus on the victims of the modern discourse where Nietzsche perhaps wouldn't.

The best way to do this would be to, before concluding the chapter, briefly look at a paradigmatic work in which exactly this point is made; modernity's strife for peace, freedom and equality comes with horrifying cruelty. In the first words of Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), an essential accusation is made:

Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.¹⁰⁰

This book was written while its authors were in exile. Being of Jewish descent, they both fled from a Nazi-occupied Europe to the United States. Influenced by the threat of horror for which they had to leave their home, they asked themselves how it is possible that modernity, aimed on leaving the 'mythical' behind and replacing it with enlightenment, didn't bring liberation but genocide instead.

When some of the terminology is translated, the narrative of modernity that Horkheimer and Adorno provide is to a great extent comparable to that of Nietzsche. Where Nietzsche talks about (Christian) narcotics and thin ice-like structures that numb us and prevent us from falling into chaos and nihilistic despair, Horkheimer and Adorno speak about how *knowledge* employs a similar task: easing our fear of the unknown depths. Before Enlightenment, we sought to ease our fear with the divine, or the 'mythical' as Horkheimer and Adorno call it: 'It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known, permanently linking horror to holiness'.¹⁰¹ Fear is attacked by making the fearful known to us. That way, we have some sort of control over it. In the mythical world, every fearful object is connected to a deity: 'In Homer Zeus controls the daytime sky, Apollo guides the sun; Helios and Eos are already passing over into allegory. The gods detach themselves from substances to become their quintessence'.¹⁰² By knowing what the sun is, what the skies are, the weather they produce becomes less frightening. In the form of prayer, perhaps, the forces can even be controlled by the human hand. The unknown is terrifying; making it known and controllable eases the pain.

But at a certain point in the history of the Western world, there comes a break with the mythical, to which we usually refer with the term 'Enlightenment'. The divine is left behind and another form of knowledge is preferred over it. But is this really a change as radical as the word suggests; a change from darkness to light? Horkheimer and Adorno don't seem to think so, since it is still a means to combat a fear of the unknown: 'Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized'.¹⁰³ 'Demythologization' – when myths have become unbelievable – should therefore not be understood as a break with the ancient theological order of things. Instead, it is the extremity of it.

This reveals a second resemblance with the Nietzsche-narrative: the mythical did resolve in the Enlightenment just like Christianity did resolve in the death of God. Nietzsche and the authors of *The Dialectic* both refuse to see the unchaining from the divine (whether they refer to it as 'the death of God' or as 'demythologization') as some sort of triumph of the human race. Instead, they both

¹⁰⁰ DE p.1

¹⁰¹ DE, p. 11

¹⁰² DE, p. 5

¹⁰³ DE, p. 11

argue that the new situation that arises (whether they call it 'Enlightenment' or 'life after the deicide') is an extension of the situation it claims to have overcome; it is an even more problematic manifestation of it. Furthermore, they both condemn the pursuit of this new situation. However, and this is where they seem to part their ways, they condemn it for different reasons. Nietzsche condemns it because it obstructs the pursuit of a truly new order. Horkheimer and Adorno condemn it because it couldn't bring the liberation it promised; it brought cruelty instead.

How, then, did Enlightenment fail to achieve its goals and how did it make the world radiate with triumphant calamity? Horkheimer and Adorno provide an elaborate discussion of this mechanism with the use of a highly unusual combination of philosophical argument, sociological reflection and literary and cultural commentary. To do it justice, it would have to be discussed in full detail. In this paper, unfortunately, there is no room for that and therefore only the most important point needs to be mentioned: that Horkheimer and Adorno make explicit and concrete what Connolly only seems to suggest, that is, the cruelty that comes with modernity's drive for mastery and control. Lambert Zuidervaart (in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy) sums it up as follows:

In an unfree society whose culture pursues so-called progress no matter what the cost, that which is "other," whether human or nonhuman, gets shoved aside, exploited, or destroyed. The means of destruction may be more sophisticated in the modern West, and the exploitation may be less direct than outright slavery, but blind, fear-driven domination continues, with ever greater global consequences.¹⁰⁴

With this, the idea seems to be complete: the disappearing of the divine left a hole that needed to be filled with something that could account for it all. To account for it all, unaccountable parts become enemies. Horkheimer and Adorno address this cruel mechanism in the heat of the problem: while being on the run for fascism. The ideology of national-socialism is therefore not regarded by them as a barbaric exception, a rotten apple in the basket. Instead, they see it as the *prime example* of the modern problem. Antisemitism is a manifestation of it:

For the fascists the Jews are not a minority but the antirace, the negative principle as such; on their extermination the world's happiness depends.¹⁰⁵

When the whole world needs to be brought under one idea, one ideal or one perfect system, some parts need to be exterminated. These are the anomalies, the exceptions to the rule. Taking everything into account, they have no right to exist. Even seeing them as a 'minority' grants them too much of a status, for a minority is an essential condition to establish a majority. These are the sleeves that stick out of the suitcase. Their existence is only temporal; soon they will be cut off and the world will be as one.

This concludes the current chapter and answers its main question: how does the death of God form the conditions for modern life? We started with an extension to the first chapter: an elaboration of the concept 'shadows of God'. It became clear that these shadows are more than old cathedrals and hand placements during political oaths; they are deeply rooted linguistic structures that shape our thinking, our view of the world. From there, we arrived at some large shadows that Nietzsche attacks: the modern values. Nietzsche seems to regard them as 'thin realities', false ideas that obstruct the revaluation of all values. We saw that Connolly added something to Nietzsche's critique that wasn't essentially Nietzschean, but opened a door to another critique: how the modern aspiration to ward off nihilism has the cruel tendency to eliminate forms of 'otherness'. The discussion of Horkheimer and Adorno was nothing more than an addition to this point: how modern

¹⁰⁴ Zuidervaart, Winter 2015

¹⁰⁵ DE, p. 137

values led to the opposite of what they promised.

In the next chapter, the concepts of 'cruelty' and 'otherness' will play a significant role. It will become clear how they manifest themselves in a fully globalized world. Other forms of cruelty will be discussed; forms like the ones discussed by Horkheimer and Adorno, that can very well be explained in the narrative of the death of God, nihilism and modernity.

The Modern Drive and its Victims

The very first chapter set out to discover what the meaning is of something Nietzsche has called the 'death of God'. We saw that Nietzsche used the parable of the madman to show how the world has not fully realised – and is not ready to fully realize – the consequences of God's death, for they regard the person who addresses this deeply problematic state of affairs as someone who lost his mind. They label him a 'madman' and do not hear his words. The madman hangs his head: 'I must have come too early', he says.

In the second chapter, we saw another person anxious to address the crowd. Zarathustra walked onto the marketplace and started speaking about what he calls 'the last human being'. Zarathustra is concerned that the people will turn into this abominable human state, so he pictures it to them, trying to encourage their contempt. His words fall on deaf ears however and his strategy fails; they misunderstand him completely. At that point, he wonders why they are not susceptible to his message and concludes that something is in the way, something they are proud of: the modern values. Because they pride themselves with these banners – liberty, equality, progress – they cannot see themselves as a failing project, a downward spiral.

The modern man fails to see the problems of God's death. He fails to see the problematic state of nihilism that follows from this magnificent event. In the second chapter, we saw that, according to Nietzsche, the modern man clings onto 'thin' realities' instead of the reality of nihilism. These thin realities, his values, his pride, stand in the way of acceptance.

At the end of the second chapter, we saw that Connolly adds an interesting notion to the characterization of a modern denial: the notion of cruelty. The modern man wards off nihilism with modern values, which are 'thin realities'. We saw that these values need to be as big as God once was, they need to account for everything, just like God 'shone through everything' – they need to be inflated as God is deflated. But accounting for everything, unifying everything comes with a price. The drive for mastery and control has the cruel tendency to disqualify everything that does not fit the system. These forms of 'otherness' are cut off, eliminated, not accounted for. We envisioned this modern tendency as the packing of a suitcase. We stuff it completely and find out that not everything fits in. Adorno and Horkheimer showed that this can lead to cruel solutions: we grab a pair of scissors and cut along the edges.

The notion the last chapter ended on, the notion of cruelty, the suitcase and the scissors, will play a large role in the current chapter. This third and last chapter will discuss further manifestations of what we can call the 'modern cruelty'. Horkheimer and Adorno provided a poignant example; I will try to do so as well. This way, the idea gets some more concrete content. Connolly speaks about 'systems' and 'parts', he speaks about 'elimination' and 'exclusion'. In this chapter I will try to show how the systems and the parts can take shape and how the elimination and the exclusion can be executed. A new theme will be broached to do this; the theme of 'imperialism'. The main question will therefore be: what aspects of imperialism can be brought under the modern drive, or the modern cruelty, as discussed thus far?

Why imperialism, one might wonder. It is true that in the previous two chapters, the concept of 'imperialism' or 'colonialism' or 'globalization', or any other related theme, was hardly touched. Despite that, I believe that the conceptualization on which the previous chapter stranded, the idea of 'modern cruelty', can be exemplified to a great extent by discussing certain aspects of imperialism. Certainly, they might be exemplified just as well by other cases, but this is the one I chose for. Another reason might be the most recent rise of 'Islamic terrorism'¹⁰⁶, and the debate the attacks

¹⁰⁶ This term is put between quotes because I believe the label 'terrorist' itself can be explained within the framework of modern cruelty. But more on that later in the chapter.

encouraged. I believe these recent events are related to the modern drive, and to modern cruelty. I will argue for this later in this chapter.

In what follows, manifestations of the 'modern drive' and of 'modern cruelty' will be discussed in separate sections, although they are connected. The first section will introduce the concept of 'imperialism', and, while doing this, it will be connected to what we have called the modern drive. When a case is presented in which the modern drive is recognizable, we will start looking at who its victims are. This will be done in the second section of this chapter, when the cruel tendencies of the modern drive are discussed. With this last chapter, the narrative of this thesis will be closed – a narrative that started with the death of God, moved to the problems of modernity and, finally, ends with a clear manifestation of it.

The modern drive: mastery, control, and knowledge

The objective of this chapter is to connect the tenets of imperialism with what we have called the modern cruelty. Let's start by approaching the concept of 'imperialism' in the broadest sense, and look at some related concepts.

Imperialism proves to be as hard to pin down as roughly any 'ism' in the English language, and only a general definition can be given if one wants to avoid the danger of being selective. Most of the time, a certain global domination is signified when the term 'imperialism' is used, and in this context it is a synonym for 'colonialism'¹⁰⁷. Palmer et al. define imperialism and colonialism both as nothing more than 'the government of one people by another'.¹⁰⁸ I believe that if one wants to talk about imperialism in general, this is indeed as specific as it gets. Let's therefore deliberately choose to be selective and move onto an aspect of imperialism that would be of more interest to this study.

An aspect of imperialism that cannot be overlooked here, is how it relates to a certain ideology, a moral justification of colonial practices. This is commonly referred to as the idea of a 'civilizing mission'. Interestingly, around the same time when political philosophers started to defend modern ideals like 'universalism' and 'equality', the practices of colonialism and imperialism were also morally legitimized.¹⁰⁹ The idea of a civilizing mission is what reconciled these seemingly opposing principles, by stating that political domination was advantageous for the 'uncivilized', so that they may achieve the same level of cultural advancement. Needless to say, this rationale supposes a strong hierarchy between peoples or cultures, a gap between the ones who introduce civilization, and the ones who are in need of it. Also, it supposes that the concerning 'higher' civilization (the imperialist, so to speak) possesses over certain characteristics that need to be spread, certain traits that are so universal that they deserve to go global.

If we make a brief return to the previous chapter at this point, we see that Connolly describes the modern drive as a 'drives to change, control, free, organize, produce, correct, order, empower, rationalize, liberate, improve, and revolutionize'. Perhaps at this point an obvious comparison between this drive and the mission of civilization can already be made. However, I believe we need to dig deeper in order to make it more compelling.

To get a better idea of the drive to civilize, to spread a certain Western political ideal, it is perhaps best just to look at a clear example. Edward W. Said provides many in his works, one of them concerning a British politician in command of imperial affairs who speaks about Egypt in the early twentieth century. He lectures as follows:

I take up no attitude of superiority. (...) We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more

¹⁰⁷ Atkinson Hobson, 2010, p. 1; Kohn, 2014

¹⁰⁸ Palmer et al., 2007, p. 630

¹⁰⁹ Kohn, 2014, (introductory section)

intimately; we know more about it. It goes far beyond the petty span of the history of our race, which is lost in the prehistoric period at a time when the Egyptian civilisation had already passed its prime. Look at all the Oriental countries. Do not talk about superiority or inferiority.¹¹⁰

Despite the relation of superiority that the bureaucrat, his name is Arthur James Balfour, seems to deny, there is clearly a gap presupposed between the Egyptian civilization and the British. This is recognizable in the fact that Balfour believes they *know* the Egyptians, know them, in fact, better than they know themselves. Having this knowledge presupposes superiority, whether or not he explicitly denies it. 'Knowledge', Said argues, 'means surveying a civilization from its origins to its prime to its decline – and of course, it means *being able to do that*. (...) To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for "us" to deny autonomy to "it" – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it.'¹¹¹

This speech was given on June 13, 1910 in front of the House of Commons. It is an attempt by Balfour to convince the House of how much Egypt is in need of British government. The idea of '*knowledge*' in his lecture, the knowledge England has about Egypt and its people, its culture and civilization, is actually an important one. Let's keep it in mind while we read some more of Balfour's speech:

Is it a good thing for these great nations – I admit their greatness – that this absolute government should be exercised by us? I think it is a good thing. I think that experience shows that they have got under it far better government than in the whole history of the world they ever had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilised West.... We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake; we are there also for the sake of Europe at large.¹¹²

Here we see a clear manifestation of what we can call the mission of civilization. For Balfour, the Egyptians are a project, they are an unfinished product. A superior nation, a civilized people must help them to develop, to become complete, more like them. They must be reformed, raised up, assimilated, educated. They must be changed, controlled, organized. They are in need of improvement, liberation and rationalization. This would not only be a good thing for the ones that suffer from a lower form of cultural development, but also for 'Europe at large': the entire West will be advantaged when they can welcome Egypt in their midst. Note how in this excerpt, Balfour takes the status of the British civilization entirely for granted; it is one of the unspoken premises of his speech that Great Britain has arrived at a point of cultural sublimation, a point where it hardly needs to worry about its own progress and instead can start to benefit others by passing on its values. Balfour sees this as an obligation, a duty, or perhaps even a *burden*: 'I suppose a true Eastern sage would say that the working government which we have taken upon ourselves in Egypt and elsewhere is not a work worthy of a philosopher – that it is the dirty work, the inferior work, of carrying on the necessary labour.'¹¹³

Despite the persuasiveness of Balfour's lecture and the way he presents the obligation of a mission of civilization, there are other views that put these moral convictions in a different perspective. For instance, when Palmer et al. discuss the motives of imperialism, they focus primarily on economic factors, or the pursuit of economic advantage by the imperialist. Historians John

¹¹⁰ Said, 2003, p. 32

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 33

¹¹³ Ibid.

Gallagher and Ronald Robinson simply define imperialism as ‘a continuous reality of economic expansion in modern times’.¹¹⁴ It would almost seem inappropriate to overlook the fact that imperialist nations (Great Britain, France, The Netherlands, and others) benefitted greatly (and, some may argue, still benefit greatly) from the exploitation of the people and resources in their colonies. This raises some questions about the status of the mission of civilization, for instance, about how it relates to this economic pursuit of which the historical weight cannot be ignored.

John A. Hobson, in his hefty *Imperialism: a Study* (1902), addresses this question in an interesting way. He states that it is often believed that the imperial zeal in promoting foreign missions, putting down barbaric practices and spreading civilization, is a disguise, conveniently assumed to cover up national and economic self-assertion. Surely, this does not seem unlikely, given the fact that the possession of colonies has always been paired with the exploitation of resources and the economic benefits this resulted in. This would make some sort of a ‘higher ideal’ dubious to say the least. Hobson, however, disagrees with this characterization.¹¹⁵ He *does* believe that economic and political self-interests are the force behind imperialism, but he also believes that this does not directly mean that the mission of civilization is a farce, a disguise, deliberately and consciously worked up to mask selfish intentions. Instead, he argues, the imperialist ‘simply and instinctively’ attaches to himself any strong, genuine feeling which is of service, ‘fans it and feeds it until it assumes fervour, and utilises it for [his] ends’.¹¹⁶ To put it simply: the ‘selfish forces ... utilize the protective colours of disinterested movements’.¹¹⁷

Hobson seems to deny a crude characterization in which the imperialist *feigns* his moral standards. He seems to deny that, at the end of the day, the imperialist doesn’t believe one word of the mission of civilization and merely uses it to his own selfish purposes. Although I believe Hobson is right in denying this, I do not think his explanation, referring to ‘instincts’ and the ‘unconscious’, is satisfactory. For whether it is done consciously or unconsciously, instinctively or deliberately, still an opposition is posited between selfish forces on the one hand and unselfish ideals on the other – an opposition I believe does not exist. To illustrate this, we need to return to Belfour and Edward Said’s analysis of the lecture on Egypt.

I do not assume that Belfour secretly doesn’t mean it when he says that British government in Egypt is a good thing. Neither do I assume that he unconsciously works up this idea to pursue his selfish interest. Why not? Because, like we said, Belfour *knows* Egypt. England *knows* Egypt. They know that Egypt was once a great civilization, years ahead of Europe. They know that Egypt is now a nation in decline, fallen into barbarism. Most importantly, they *know* that Egypt is not able to govern themselves at this point, that they are desperately in need of British government. It’s no use to speak of feigned charity or disguised exploitation; for this one first needs to know there is an exploiter and a native that can be exploited. But Belfour does not know this, he only knows the Egyptians as a people that is advantaged by British interference. And for Belfour, Egypt only exists in the way he knows it. Said puts it perfectly when he says: ‘England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows’.¹¹⁸

This gives us an understanding of what Said has called ‘Orientalism’. This term, coined by Said and serving as the title and topic of his major work, is defined by himself as ‘the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’.¹¹⁹ In this definition, the two themes

¹¹⁴ Gallagher & Robinson, 1953, pp. 1-15; also see Magdoff, 2003, p. 11

¹¹⁵ Atkinson Hobson, 2010, p. 207

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Said, 2003, p. 34

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

of 'knowing' and 'dominating' melt together as one. Note how 'teaching' and 'describing' is mentioned in the same sequence as 'ruling'; for Said they mean the same thing. Orientalism, therefore, is *knowing* the Orient. Knowing it like Belfour knows Egypt. It is knowing it as a certain thing and acting upon this knowledge, treating it as this thing and forcing it to be this thing.

Knowing and dominating, knowing and controlling therefore become the same thing. Feeding the knowledge, feeding it by teaching it, describing it, reiterating it, is therefore establishing the control, the power. For this exact reason, in *Orientalism* (1978) but also in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said treats lectures from bureaucrats like Belfour equally with novels that take place in the Orient, educational literature that informs about the Orient, or any obscure, seemingly insignificant written word that makes statements about the Orient. For Said, they are all useful objects for studying Western domination, studying Orientalism. The power is not only exercised by statesman, kings, generals and ambassadors, who actually make decisions about the imperialized country and people, but the power exists in the *knowledge* of this country, it exists in language. Dealing with the Orient, dealing with it by knowing it, means dominating it, controlling it.

With this concept of knowledge and domination, it would be futile to distinguish between true selfish intentions and fake unselfish ones. In the eyes of the imperialist, the native is hugely benefitted by Imperial control because the imperialist knows him as someone who lacked behind, someone who could never self-govern, someone who doesn't even know what is best for himself. The imperialist also knows who he is himself, where he comes from, what his civilization has achieved; he knows what he can do for others that are not there yet. Within this framework of knowledge, there is no room for the notion of 'disguised exploitation'.

Now, when Connolly speaks of a modern drive that involves mastery and control, when he talks about 'organizing the world into tightly demarcated order', when he describes how this drive results in 'change', 'control', 'improvement' 'empowerment' and 'correction', I believe this is easily translated into the drive to civilize, to democratize, or to Westernize. The imperialist project to control the world, control it by knowing it, forcing it to be this thing, would serve as a clear manifestation of the modern drive, where 'truth is inflated'. Under the banners of his modern values, prided by his civilization, his *Bildung*, the imperialist takes on the world. He molds it into something he knows, something he controls. And it only exists as he knows it.

With this modern drive comes the modern cruelty: the exclusion, elimination and extermination of everything that is other, everything that doesn't fit the system; the sleeves that stick out of the suitcase. Now that we know what the suitcase is (Egypt, the Orient, the world, as we *know* it) let's find out what the sleeves are; the victims of the modern drive.

Modern cruelty: exclusion, expulsion, elimination

In the introduction of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said looks back on *Orientalism*, and the themes he addressed in this work. Said writes about how *Orientalism* addressed a relationship between ruling and knowing. The domination of a people coincides with an idea about them. Imperial aggression could therefore not have happened without certain notions, Said writes, like the notions about 'bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples,' or the notion that "'they" were not like "us," and for that reason deserved to be ruled.'¹²⁰ *Orientalism* addressed this by discussing numerous texts in which this idea, this knowledge, is contained.

A theme that stayed somewhat underexposed in *Orientalism*, however, is the theme of *native resistance* against imperial oppression. This is not a small theme; it can in all honesty not be overlooked when one addresses the tenets of imperialism, the domination of Europe or "The West" over indigenous peoples. Said writes: 'Yet it was the case nearly everywhere in the non-European

¹²⁰ Said, 1993, p. xi

world that the coming of the white man brought forth some sort of resistance.¹²¹ For this reason, *Culture and Imperialism*, the book that can more or less be seen as a continuation of *Orientalism*, addresses this theme of indigenous resistance extensively.

What does Said say about this? Let's first think back at Balfour and his mission. What Balfour was utterly convinced of, is the good the British were doing for Egypt. It was not only good for the Egyptians, Balfour argued, but good for 'Europe at large'. Said comments that Balfour produces no evidence that the Egyptians with which they deal appreciate or even understand the good that is being done them by colonial occupation: 'It does not occur to Balfour (...) to let the Egyptian speak for himself'.¹²² This is because Balfour seems to *know* the Egyptians: he knows them as a people that can be benefited without even realizing it. What, then, is native resistance for Balfour? What is the Egyptian who resists against imperial oppression, who fights British goodwill and charity, in Balfour's framework of knowledge?

Just as common as resistance against imperial oppression is the way it often manifests itself. Said argues that in many cases, one could see some sort of a cultural 'return'; an emphasis on a deeply rooted national or religious identity, one that is completely contrary to the values of the oppressor. Said writes: 'In the formerly colonized world, these "returns" have produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism.'¹²³ In the eyes of someone like Balfour, then, an imperialist who believes he benefits the natives with prosperity, morality and culture (without them even knowing it), what else could a movement of resistance be than an insignificant group of individuals who don't really know what is good for them? What else could they be than a gathering of *irrational* individuals, natives who don't seem to understand the benefit, natives that, perhaps, are confused by extreme religious notions?¹²⁴

If we briefly return to the second chapter, we'll see that Connolly talks about the victims of the modern drive as the parts that don't fit the system, as the sleeves that don't fit the suitcase, as otherness: 'They become dirt, matter out of place, irrationality, abnormality, waste, sickness, perversity, incapacity, disorder, madness, unfreedom'.¹²⁵ At this point, perhaps, we can already see an comparison between Connolly's description of otherness, and the place of the native who resists imperial oppression in the eyes of the imperialist: he is the part that does not fit the picture, he is the odd one out, the irrational, the disposable. Let's dig deeper to make the case more compelling.

We saw that Said addresses an interesting phenomena: the manifestation of resistance against oppression as a return to the *fundamental* roots of the native's identity. From this becomes clear that the native, in a sense, not only fights to regain land or political independence, but that he also battles for his identity, for a restoration of it, after it has been tarnished by a strange invader. Mark Juergensmeyer, in *Terror in the Mind of God* (2000), his extensive study on the global rise of religious violence, makes a similar point when he speaks about something he calls 'symbolic empowerment': 'the act of being involved in violence provides a sense of empowerment disproportionately greater than the violence actually achieved'.¹²⁶ The pursuit of a *sense* of empowerment shows that it is not only about the *actual* casualties caused by the violent act of resistance; they represent something larger, that is, a sense of power and independence, not being in control of the dominant force. The idea of pride is very important here. Pride, or, as Juergensmeyer puts it: 'a sense of importance and destiny to men who find the modern world to be stifling, chaotic

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii

¹²² Said, 2003, p. 33

¹²³ Said, 1993, p. xiii

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198

¹²⁵ Connolly, 1988, p. 13

¹²⁶ Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 191

and dangerously out of control'.¹²⁷

The word 'men' is picked here with special attention, because, Juergensmeyer argues, it is particularly young men who turn oppression into pride and anger. In many cases of religious violence, the perpetrators are young men who are marginalized in some form or another. Although economic marginalization is one of the most common provocations to re-establish a sense of pride in young men, this does not always have to be the case. Juergensmeyer argues that for the 19 activists responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Centre, who were mostly well educated middle-class professionals, a more personal form marginalization should be considered: the alienation from their homes in the Middle East.¹²⁸ But whether economic, personal or political, the trend is the same when you put it simply: a *lack* of power is turned into a *sense* of power; a gesture in a situation of marginalization, aimed at a powerful imperial oppressor.

The establishment of a certain *religious* identity, the emphasis that is put on religious symbols and narratives within movements of native resistance, is also something Juergensmeyer explains within the 'logic' of religious violence¹²⁹. A conflict is drenched in religious symbolism to elevate it from the earth, to make it into something higher, something holy; a 'cosmic war' Juergensmeyer calls it:

I call such images "cosmic" because they are larger than life. They evoke great battles of the legendary past, and they relate to metaphysical conflicts between good and evil. Notions of cosmic war are intimately personal but can also be translated to the social plane. Ultimately, though, they transcend human experience. What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle – cosmic war – in the service of worldly political battles. For this reason, acts of religious terror serve not only as tactics in a political strategy but also as evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation.¹³⁰

Juergensmeyer addresses the same 'return' that Said speaks about, but gives it more content. The return comes from a position of marginalization and involves strong dichotomous notions that turn an earthly, political conflict into something more honourable, more worth pursuing: a cosmic struggle. Young men, fighting for their pride and identity become 'soldiers' or 'warriors'. Enemies become 'heretics' or 'demons'. Religious nomenclature provides the perfect names, the perfect cloak in which a conflict can be wrapped. It contains narratives and symbols of a higher order, providing exactly that which Juergensmeyer calls 'symbolic empowerment'. Fuelled by oppression and humiliation that has taken place on earth, resistance takes the form of something that transcends global conflicts.

Said and Juergensmeyer identify a pattern here, a returning mechanism in which native resistance continuously seems to manifest itself. The native fights to regain land, political control, but also pride and identity. The identity he therefore emphasizes, is one that is opposite to the one of the oppressor. Fundamentalist religion often carries these movements of resistance, because it has the ability to provide identity, pride, and a strong, worthy goal.

This relationship between earthly causes and holy convictions is an interesting one, and it is recognizable in many statements made by religious warriors and terrorists. One of the most

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 193

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 197

¹²⁹ 'The logic of religious violence' is the title for the second part of Juergensmeyers book. After he discussed different specific 'cultures' of religious violence (cases of Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist and Sikhist terrorism) in the first part, the second part is focussed on an overall pattern, a structure or a 'logic' that is recognizable in most incidents of religious violence.

¹³⁰ Juergensmeyer, 2017, p. 184

prominent examples of this would perhaps be the post-9/11 statements that Osama bin Laden addressed to the American people. In these statements, an interesting mixture of earthly and cosmic conflict is often present. Almost always, they open with religious notions and references:

Praise be to Allah who created the creation for his worship and commanded them to be just and permitted the wronged one to retaliate against the oppressor in kind.¹³¹

...and also close with them:

And Allah is our Guardian and Helper, while you have no Guardian or Helper. All peace be upon he who follows the Guidance.

However, between these two pillars of religious contradistinction, the rest of the statement contains clear illustrations of a political battle:

This [American oppression] means the oppressing and embargoing to death of millions as Bush Sr did in Iraq in the greatest mass slaughter of children mankind has ever known, and it means the throwing of millions of pounds of bombs and explosives at millions of children.

Also, it contains justifications for violent acts that seem to appeal to common sense, rather than some sort of a divine approval:

I say to you that security is an indispensable pillar of human life and that free men do not forfeit their security...

...we fight because we are free men who don't sleep under oppression.

The situation [American led invasion of Lebanon in 1982] was like a crocodile meeting a helpless child, powerless except for his screams. Does the crocodile understand a conversation that doesn't include a weapon?

Although winged with religious identifications, bin Laden clearly seems to present himself and the movement he represents as something fighting for a just cause, freedom from oppression, something everyone could understand: 'We want to restore freedom to our nation, just as you lay waste to our nation.' These words, the words of Osama bin Laden, show how resistance from oppression can be cloaked with religious narratives and cosmic quarrels, but it also shows that one does not need to have great eyesight to recognize what the cloak seems to cover. The question, however, is: does the imperialist see it? Now that we have established that imperial oppression seldom goes without native resistance, and that native resistance often manifests itself in a certain way, we can start to answer the question of what the native aggressor is in the eyes of the oppressor.

On September the 20th 2001, George W. Bush declared war on Osama bin Laden, on al-Qaeda and on terrorism itself. In the speech he gave to Congress and to the American people, Bush was very clear about who it was they were in war with. Also, he was very clear what it was they were fighting over. Al-Qaeda, the organization responsible for the attack on the World Trade Centre, was addressed as a 'terrorist organization', but more importantly, as 'enemies of freedom'.¹³² Their motives are clear; they simply seem to hate us and everything we stand for:

¹³¹ Osama bin Laden in a video statement, broadcasted by Aljazeera. See: <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/11/200849163336457223.html>

¹³² George W. Bush, September 20, 2001. Transcript found at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13>

They hate our freedoms - our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

Although it is hard for us to fathom, these terrorists seem to nourish a deeply rooted hate against liberty and democracy. What inspires the resentment of everything valuable in the free modern world? Bush seems to blame religious aspirations, but in an extreme, rare and poisonous form:

The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics - a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam.

Clearly these men are different from us in a way that excludes every possibility of finding common ground. These men do not understand what it is we appreciate, just like we can never understand how they can choose force and violence over peace and freedom. With this, they resemble every sickness, every perversity and irrationality that we have challenged in the last couple of ages: '...they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism'.

For these fighters against freedom, for these celebrators of unfreedom, for these madman, these rarities, there is simply no place. They don't fit the project, they don't match the colours; elimination is their only destination. The only right way to deal with these forms of irrationality is to 'stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows.' And one must keep in mind that this course of action is not only for the benefit of the United States; this is not just some local interest. Eradicating this weed, exterminating these pests, is a way to cleanse the world in its entirety. This is a universal project, a defence of universal values: 'This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.'

Interestingly, the terrorist is not granted with a single quality that would make him anything like us; he is the antithesis of us, our culture, our values. In Bush's speech, there is a complete absence of the narrative in which the terrorist fights against oppression, in which he actually fights for freedom. Instead, the terrorist and his motives are labelled as *merely religious*. But not religious in an understandable way; they are religious to an extreme, irrational degree. This makes them a weirdness, an oddity; something that we do not understand and that does not deserve to be understood. The terrorist seems to hate freedom – a worldview that leaves us completely dumbfounded. Bush seems to *know* all this. He knows these men, where they come from, what they represent. Bush also seems to know who *we* are and what *we* stand for. Most importantly, he knows that there is absolutely no place for *them* in *our* world.

Just as strikingly as it was present in Belfour's view of the Egyptians, the aspect of knowledge is also present here. It is present in these speeches, but it is backed up by academic institutions that have studied Islam and gained knowledge about it. Bestselling books like Bernard Lewis's *The Crisis of Islam* (2003)¹³³ is an example of the knowledge we have about terrorists and their aspirations. Lewis knows, together with everyone who have read his book, that contemporary Islamic terrorism can only be explained within the long history of Islamic struggles. The medieval crusades and its Islamic defeats and victories are a relevant factor here¹³⁴, as are the (economic and literary) failures of Muslim nations during the age of Modernity.¹³⁵ Because we know this, we know who the terrorists are. We know that their practice of faith has nothing to do with the basic principles of Islam, and that

¹³³ Bernard Lewis is an Emeritus professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. His books are translated into more than twenty languages and have more than once appeared on the international bestseller list.

¹³⁴ Lewis, 2004, pp. 41-44

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99

they therefore don't seem to understand their own religion¹³⁶; we know them better than they know themselves. We know that they commonly position themselves and the world within a long chronology, and as a result of this, they regard America as "the Land of the Unbelievers" and its president as "the successor of a long line of rulers – the Byzantine emperors of Constantinople, the Holy Roman emperors in Vienna [etc.]"¹³⁷.

In Bush's speech, in Lewis's book, and in the knowledge about Islamic terrorists it produces, the narrative of resistance and oppressions is ignored and replaced by an obsessive focus on their (extreme) religiousness. Even when they claim their actions are a response to imperial oppression, even when they sum up concrete incidents of imperial aggression, their voices are not heard. Despite what they say, we know that their 'cries of "imperialism"' are a 'gross distortion of the nature and purpose of the U.S. presence in Arabia'.¹³⁸ In other words; when they claim they are oppressed, they actually don't know what they are talking about. Their irrationality and fundamentalist religion fogs their perception of what is best for them. This is why they hate us. They are the thing we know them to be.

Here, again, we see the modern drive at work, controlling the world, mastering it by knowing it. Now, we also see the victims of this modern drive; the ones that resist and fight to be acknowledged as something different than what we know them to be. Their fight, however, often is in vain; we know that they are not part of the great project of freedom, democracy and civilization for al. They are the waste, the abnormality, the things that need to be wiped out. With this, we have identified a global manifestation of the modern drive and we have seen who its victims can be. The modern cruelty exists in the exclusion of these victims, their execution, their insignificance within the story. They need to be cut off, so the suitcase can be closed.

Bernard Lewis concludes his book with the following words:

But there are others for whom America offers (...) the promise of human rights, free institutions, and a responsible and representative government. (...) We, in what we like to call the free world, could do much to help them, and have done little. In most other countries in the region, there are people who share our values, sympathize with us, and would like to share our way of life. They understand freedom and want to enjoy it at home. It is more difficult for us to help those people, but at least we should not hinder them. If they succeed, we shall have friends and allies in the true, not just the diplomatic, sense of the words.¹³⁹

It seems the suitcase is not nearly full; we can keep on packing.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 117-118

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 136

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. xxix

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 140

Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the following question: *How can the concept of 'terrorism' be explained in terms of our absence of religion?* In the first chapter, it became clear how 'our absence of religion' should be understood. We discussed Nietzsche, and his proclamation that God is dead. It became clear that for Nietzsche, this was a significant problem. God used to be everywhere in our world, Nietzsche argued, so after his death, nothing remains. This is a frightening problem, but also a potential; it gives way to the revaluation of all values, the recreation of everything. However, to Nietzsche's regret, hardly anybody seemed to acknowledge this crisis for what it is. Hardly anybody seemed to see the potential. Therefore, the one crying 'God is dead' is nothing more than a madman, saying mad things.

Instead of moving towards the 'revaluation of all values', people seem to cling onto the shadows of God; remains of a world in the past, for which the ontological preconditions are dead. In chapter two, Nietzsche characterizes the present as a state in which God is dead, but not nearly gone from the world. The modern man fights off the terrors of nothingness by embracing different realities. These 'thin' realities have no real ground and are merely shadows from an ancient world. They are banners with which the modern man prides himself, values he uses to convince himself he is moving forward and making progress. Connolly added something to Nietzsche's characterization of the modern realities; they need to replace God and therefore need to be as big as God once was. The modern man therefore inflates them, makes them universal, makes them everything. But by packing the world into a tightly demarcated order, some things are inevitably left out. These things are inevitably excluded from the realm of the meaningful.

The third chapter took the concepts of the modern drive to pack, control, and demarcate, and the inevitable modern cruelty of exclusion, expulsion, and elimination, and applied them to a case, concretized them in a certain way. The topic of 'imperialism' made an entrance here, and it became clear how the tenets of imperialism and Said's concept of 'Orientalism' are a manifestation of the modern drive. Furthermore, we saw that the native who resists imperial oppression is often the subject of expulsion, disqualification, and subjugation. How this can be seen as an act of modern cruelty became clear in the discussion of a more recent case of imperial oppression and indigenous response. In a contemporary discourse, in the global opposition between the West and the Middle East, the native aggressor is again excluded. The one who fights imperial oppression, resists the demarcated order and defines himself, gets expelled, disqualified and eventually exterminated. There is no place for him in the modern world; the world would be better off without him. In making the world a better place, he should be erased. *He is the terrorist.*

This thesis started by quoting the words of John Lennon and in a sense, they capture many of the themes discussed in the previous chapters. When Lennon sings 'Imagine there's no heaven', and 'no hell below us', he sings about a world wherein God is dead. The world and just the world is left over; no longer is it enclosed by the supernatural. Above us is only sky. And when he sings 'nothing to kill or die for ...and no religion too', Lennon in a way prides himself with the erasure of God from this world; it is a liberation. We should be proud to have come that far. It is a great step forward.

Then the song ends with the following words:

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

Lennon dreams about a paradise. A place with a blue sky, a place of peace. Also, he knows how to get there; by imagining away the religious, and all those other instigators of cruelty. Lennon knows he is on the right path here, and he is not the only one. Unfortunately, not everyone has seen the light yet. If we want to reach paradise, it is imperative that *they* should join *us*. Then, and only then, the world will live as one.

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