Section I

Then and Now

Chapter 1

The Death of God

"Towards no one is mankind so ungrateful as it is towards God, just because people have the sluggish notion that one can always have Him – why, He cannot even die some day, to let people feel what they have lost" – Søren Kierkegaard (1848)

THE MADMAN
Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" -- As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? -- Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him* -- you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us -- for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars -- *and yet they have done it themselves*.

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882, 1887) para. 125; Walter Kaufmann ed. (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp.181-82.

I

This chapter and the next will present a narrative description of the development of Europe's culture into our time. It will not, however, describe that development in the way philosophical histories of Europe did in the past. It will not narrate the kind of epic adventure that memorialises Europe's "modernity", describing its world-historical break into "a new human epoch" (CES, p. 274), or its unrivalled advance to global "pre-eminence in all fields" (HP, p. 31). It is not because such a thing has become forbidden. It is simply no longer possible. As Ludwig Wittgenstein put it in the 1930s, "the development of this culture…just is no longer an epic" (CV, p. 11). At the end of this book, and in company with Jacques Derrida, I will look for something like a new "epic gesture" to help give strength to a more subterranean European memory which perhaps still has a future, or a fighting chance. It is there, it is "*taking place now*", but it is not "*presently* given" (OH, p. 30, italics in original). Faithful to that barely accessible memory, this new epic gesture will take us beyond – and no doubt in some respects betray – the epic narratives that have dominated Europe's self-understanding hitherto (OH, p. 31). At this point, however, as we begin, I will be giving a narrative description only of the becoming-unbelievable of those old epic narratives, the classic narratives of Europe's modernity. "Only a *novel* could result from such premises", we would likely now say – as, in fact, Kant had already anxiously worried in the 1780s when he wrote one, a worry he felt confident that he could dismiss (Kant, p. 52).

The classic epic narratives of European philosophical history – those presented by Kant, and after Kant by Hegel, Marx, and Husserl, for example – recount the deeds, misdeeds, adventures and misadventures of Europe's history in a way that conceives them as belonging to an extraordinary drama of human self-realization: describing the antagonisms, impulses and revolutions that will one day bring about a life proper to Man as Man. These will have been philosophical (hi)stories of the movement towards a universal cosmopolitan existence, or the progress of spirit, or the emancipation of the working subject as universal subject, or the *entelechy* of rational animality. One and all concerned with the history of Man, and with Europe's centrality to that history. None of this seems remotely plausible today. As Lyotard put it in the 1970s, philosophical history is "losing its functors, its great heroes, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goals" (PC, p. xxiv).

Wittgenstein thought the time had likely past in which a philosopher might elaborate an epic narrative of Europe's cultural development. His judgement hesitated, however: in Nietzsche he saw a philosopher who perhaps "passed close" to what he called the "problems of the intellectual world of the West [*Probleme der abendländischen Gedankenwelt*]" (CV, p. 11). I don't know what Wittgenstein had in mind, but it is probably uncontroversial to say that Nietzsche addressed problems inherent in Europe's modern self-understanding in a still recognisably "epic" way. Nietzsche's European story does not relate an ongoing process of the emancipation or progress of Man, it is not a story of the "heroism of reason" in a titanic struggle with its own deformations (as Husserl put it), but he wrote, as we shall see, with a certain hope for the future of Europe, and he has what he calls a "tremendous event" in view that prepares for it: "the greatest recent event", which is, he says, "already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe" (GS, §343). Nietzsche will tell a long-run European story in its terms, and it is one that opens onto what he saw as a still-promising future for Europe, for a Europe beyond its modern ideas and modern politics.

I will not follow Nietzsche all the way on his voyage towards a new European horizon. Wanting to stick with an attainable but still-unattained promise of democracy that he also attests to, I will stop short of the hopes for Europe's future that were his. Nevertheless, in this chapter and the next I will attempt to relate the tremendous event that Nietzsche invites us to see underway, and to affirm his effort as a great first attempt to do so.

What I want to bring into view with the description of this event is less a change in the world (a geopolitical development, for example) as much as a world-change: a radical changeover in our understanding of the world and the significance of our lives. It is a change that will be marked most profoundly by what the British philosopher David Wiggins calls a "formidable" difference between times (TIML, p.89): a difference between *what it was like to be alive* in Europe's not so distant past (when an epic description of Europe's cultural development was still possible in classic terms), and *what it is like to be alive* in Europe's more recent present (when, "unless we are Marxists", it is not). It is in terms of that difference between then and now, indeed as an effort to come to terms with that difference, that I will narrate the cultural development of Europe into our time. It is also, I will suggest in this chapter, the central concern of Nietzsche's little story "The Madman", the extraordinary text in which the "tremendous event" is first announced.

Nietzsche's madman will say that the event he is concerned with is "still on its way, still wandering": it is not only ongoing and not over, it has barely even arrived: "it has not yet reached the ears of men". As we set out to read Nietzsche's text, we should note first of all that the words Nietzsche finds to announce the event were themselves already making their way, wandering already, in the European world. For example, while they were not, first, Hegel's words, they were already among Hegel's first words. In revolt against Kant's finding it "necessary" to deny *knowledge* of God "to make room for *faith*" (CPR, Bxxx), the young Hegel (taking words already to hand) famously-but-not-as-famously-as-Nietzsche expressed the feeling that, with the rising domination of Kant's philosophy in Europe, "God himself is dead" (HFK, p. 67). Kant's ruling out the possibility of genuine knowledge of God was not experienced by Hegel as a mere theoretical shortcoming of Kant's philosophy but a profoundly irreligious contamination of European life. Seeking God, one should strive not only for faith but – as scripture insists, says Hegel – knowledge of God, or all is lost. Hegel's own life-long effort to displace Kant's hold on our time, to usher in a new time in which this threat not just to philosophy but to European culture in general is overcome, may well have been felt by him to have fallen on deaf ears.

I am not saying that Nietzsche's madman is Hegel. Indeed, I do not want to suggest that we need to work out any (or every) particular historical person that Nietzsche might have had in mind with his astonishing announcer of the death of God. But the fact that Nietzsche effectively quotes Hegel in staging the madman's presence in our midst should not be entirely overlooked. It is fair to say that the ears of men today are pretty sure about what they have heard in Nietzsche's telling of the announcement: it is most often heard as *a critique of Christianity*. And perhaps it is also that or can belong to that. But what reaches the ear so loudly today seems to me to obscure the more intriguing thought – one that we can begin to think via Hegel's response to Kant, and one affirmed, as we shall see, by Heidegger in his reading of Nietzsche – that the one who is called "the madman" is himself *a defender of Christianity*. That's the reading that I will develop here, as we begin to make our journey between then and now.

II

Look again at the very first words of Nietzsche's text: "Have you not heard of that madman…". Well, by now many of us have. But when the story-teller tells us that what is recounted are the exploits of a madman, are we supposed simply to take that as read? Most readers seem content to take the narrator at his word, and don't raise the question of the madman's presumed madness at all. Stephen Mulhall – who is untypical of most commentators in being himself a defender of Christianity – takes the madman's madness seriously, wondering whether Nietzsche gives the announcement to a madman because it is not obvious that anyone could mean what he says (PMF, p. 20). Mad people can't be held entirely responsible for what issues from their mouth, and whatever issues from it might not make much sense either. And the point is compelling once it is pointed out: an atheist just as much as a theist would know enough about what we mean by God to accept that the one thing

one cannot say is that He can die some day. So we might well wonder with Mulhall "how far Nietzsche himself thinks that one might succeed in meaning what the claim appears to say and still remain recognizable as a potential interlocutor?" (PMF, p. 20).

I will continue to follow Mulhall's pointers throughout this chapter, and I think he is right to question the status of the madman as "a potential interlocutor" with those he addresses. But how would things look if the madman were not supposed mad at all? The anonymous narrator has no doubts about it, and those he meets in the story seem to receive him as such too. But what if the one called (out as) "the madman" is attesting to a reality that the people he addresses are not yet prepared to recognise? Perhaps they can "understand him" as an interlocutor only in a transposed form that renders him merely mad.

In what follows I will argue that what makes the relation between the one called the madman and those he addresses so disjointed is that the whole set-up of the fable is staged in a "time out of joint": what is conjured up by Nietzsche is the juxtaposition of two times (then and now) in one time (now), creating an impossible happening "once upon a time". The times of these two times might be specified by the gloss that Nietzsche later gives to the situation of our time when he himself quotes the words of the madman: "The greatest recent event – that 'God is dead,' that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe" (GS, §343). Our time is the time of the first shadows of the becoming unbelievable of belief in the Christian God – someone might want to bring a lantern to such a darkening world – and the other time is the time before that time, the time in which being-able-to-believe in the Christian God was still possible for Europeans. In other words, what Nietzsche compresses in his Once Upon a Time fable is a scene which enacts the difference between then and now through events taking place during a single day in one place and in one time, which is our place and our time. The one who speaks these now famous and familiar words has (as one should normally never say) literally "jumped into their midst" from that earlier time.

However, this midst that we in our time are amidst is also a time in which that other time is *still there* in the very language of our language – and is so even as the world of those words has, according to the madman, been sundered, the whole horizon of our lives wiped away. This is a world-change event rendered in the fable as a murder-event so extraordinary to the one who has jumped time and jumped right into our midst that he can only wonder what "atonement" those who have committed it might be able to conjure up to be "worthy" of it, and hence to have recognised its magnitude. It is not beyond exaggeration, and Nietzsche's fable certainly exaggerates it, but a changeover is afoot whose significance is immense.

Here, in summary, is how I want to read the fable. The *visitation*, for that is what it is, is from a faithfully Christian religious figure of our past. And while he is not or no longer, for that reason, simply "one of us" he remains in our time as a figure still haunting us in our here and now. In a visitation from the past, our past, the one who comes back speaks to our time – but cannot be heard, and so belongs as a non-mad interlocutor for us (since we can't go back) only to our future – when, presumably, it will not be a visitation anyway. His home-time has already gone – or is yet to come. For us he is the madman, and yet we still, in some sense, inhabit the world of his words, but a world in ruins.

III

Nietzsche appends a little title for his fable: "*Der tolle Mensch*", translated in English as "The Madman". Reading this text, and writing in the language of Nietzsche's language, Heidegger asks the question of the madman's madness: "*Inwiefern ist diseser Mensch toll*'? In what ways or in which respects is this man "*toll*"? – whatever "*toll*" means here, which is exactly what Heidegger is asking. And he answers, translating within German, "*Er ist* 'ver-rückt'", which the English translator nicely

renders as "He is 'de-ranged'" (WN, p. 111). *Verrückt*, unhyphenated, means mad, crazy, or insane. Heidegger's hyphen does not altogether dismiss that sense but holds off the psychological reduction to mere madness that belongs to those who hear him in the fable. Heidegger wants to stress rather that *der tolle Mensch* is the one who is thrown out of place, he is "dis-lodged" (NW, p. 111). He is not out of his mind but, I want to say, out of his time.

And what did *der tolle Mensch* say? Note his first words: "*I seek God! I seek God!*"["*Ich suche Gott! Ich suche Gott*!] Who says things like this? In the translation of this text that Mulhall uses for his commentary on the madman the speaker of these words says "*I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!*" Perhaps nearly everything that transpires in the rather too well-known scene that is anonymously related in this fable is visible in this re-arrangement of de-ranged words: "*I seek God!*", on the one hand, and "*I'm looking for God!*", on the other. Are these words different? On the face of it not so very different, and the latter can pass for the former. But there is a difference nonetheless. For the first is the typical expression of those who believe in God; the second, by contrast, is a typical expression of rearrangement of that religious expression by those who do not believe in God, concerning what they hear when they hear that typical expression of faith. As Mulhall notes (and we'll come back to this), the atheist's tendency to rearrange Christian words typically belongs with "an underlying assumption that God is an entity of some kind (even if a supernatural one)"; something on the list of what potentially "there is", something that one might, at a pinch, look for, and find, or not find, like a sock (PMF, p. 21). The translation of "*Ich suche Gott! Ich suche Gott*!" as the expression of looking for something or someone is just such a transposition. A re-arranged format, and a transposing into a more acceptable domesticity of the words of the one who is de-ranged into the language of an atheist interlocutor. It is perhaps "well-known", but even so you should remind yourself that when the de-ranged one jumped into the marketplace those he found "standing around just then" were precisely "those who do not believe in God" – the English-language translator transposing the words of the one who seeks God into the familiar pitch of the ungodly marketplace atheists, already, along with them, rearranging his speech.

The "news" of the death of God will be brought, first, to atheists. Isn't that a very striking fact? Moreover, they are marketplace atheists, merchants and traders, people confident in the monetisable equivalence of differences. Doubtless they can trade beliefs in the same way: "You believe *p*, and I contradict you, I believe the exact opposite, I recommend the exact opposite, I believe not-*p*". (I will come back to this particular construal in Chapter 8). We are altogether in a scene of translation, of supposed equivalences of difference, whether between languages or within one language.

And we are all ourselves somewhere in this scene. Mulhall adverts to this when he notes that "critical commentary has tended to concentrate" on the first part of the story, the part that takes place in the marketplace (PMF, p. 20). The text is well-known but haven't you heard, Mulhall asks, that it finishes with *der tolle Menche* visiting "several churches"? When considering this concentration of commentary on the marketplace, Mulhall suggests that it may be due to the fact that "most such commentators would regard themselves as members of that first [marketplace] audience" (PMF, p. 20). Yet they often will have done so without even noticing that *der tolle Mensch* announces the death of God to atheists, to those who do not seek God, which is to say, *to them*.

We might say that "we" (mostly) more or less pass by the last words of the fable. Only we tend also to pass over the madman's first words too. Not coming to terms with what he says seems utterly pre-programmed in the thing; it is the very story of the story. Perhaps we can concentrate on that. We? All of us.

Thinking of that inclusive "we", Mulhall takes Nietzsche's text to divide over two different unhearing audiences: the atheists (in the marketplace) and the theists (in the various churches), and he conceives Nietzsche's aim as being to "reinterpret the self-understanding of both of them" (PMF, p.

21). There certainly are two events on the same day: in the marketplace and in several churches. But they are not only on the same day. They are also in the same place – a place both secular and religious. A characteristically European place, we might say. So let's not separate too quickly the self-understanding of those who are addressed more than we need to. Mulhall is right about Nietzsche's aim, but we should remember that it means that he aims to re-interpret all those who are implicated in the death of God, and that is all of us – "we, the Europeans", atheist or theist, who stand around in the "first shadows" of the tremendous event that is on its way.

Who is *der tolle Mensch*? Into the heart of modern European everydayness, he arrives as a fool ("he caused great laughter") and a noisy intruder ("led out and quieted"). But I think Heidegger is right to ask in what respects is *der tolle Mensch* "*toll*", and I think his answer is compelling: in our time "he is '*ver-rückt*'".

IV

Heidegger puts the word "*ver-rückt*" in quotation marks, and for that reason one might wonder if it was one of Nietzsche's words. But it is not. It is, however, one of Heidegger's, and in an online video you can hear him say it (see, HS). In the clip, Heidegger suggests that many atheists today, "for example communists", can be said to "have a religion" too; namely, their unconditional belief in modern science. This is not an individual affair, something had by each singly, but is something that exceeds any individual and binds them together, and "therefore", Heidegger rapidly concludes, is a "religion". ("*Religio*", we should recall, probably derives, in part, from "*ligare*" to tie, to bind). And then rushing on faster still he adds that no man is without a religion, and every man is transcending himself, concluding: "and that means: *ver-rückt*."

We are all a bit *ver-rückt* . The English language translator of Heidegger's essay on Nietzsche's fable notes other related words in the two sentences following Heidegger's specification of *der tolle Mensche* as "*ver-rückt"* that bears on this understanding: "he is dislodged" [*ausgerückt*], and he is "carried out beyond" [*hinausgerückt*]. Heidegger had always contrasted Man (as such) from all mere (pure) animal life with the thought that the latter "are lodged in their environment" (LH, p. 230), while Man "ek-sists", meaning that Man *is* at all only as "standing outside" or "dis-lodged" from animal immersion, as "Being-in-the-world" (LH, pp. 230-1). In this respect there is, that is to say, an uncanny likeness of *der tolle Mensch* with every other. But, Heidegger will lodge a formidable difference between the visitor and the visited in Nietzsche's story, and first of all with respect to the marketplace atheists: the one who is *ver-rückt* as *der tolle Mensch*, because he seeks God, has "nothing in common with the kind of men standing about in the market place" who, Heidegger says, "are no longer able to seek God" – not because "*God* has become unworthy of belief" but because "*they* have given up the possibility of belief" (WN, p. 112). It is, first of all, from that presently attained "level of Man" that *der tolle Mensch* is dis-lodged (WN, p. 112).

Since he is not happily lodged in our time the one who has arrived in this visitation is, Heidegger says, "carried out beyond" the condition of Man attained in our time (WN, pp. 111-2). However, *der tolle Mensch* can be in that relation to us, he stresses, only because he is "drawn utterly" into the essential possibilities of being belonging to Man as that has been understood throughout the epoch in which Europe has made its way (WN, p. 112). This is the epoch of a self-understanding in which Man has been interpreted, first, from the Greeks, as the *zoon logon echon* (the living thing with the capacity for the *logos*) and subsequently (as that was fatefully translated into Latin) as the *animal rationale*, coming down to us as the idea of Man as the rational animal. *Der tolle Mensch* represents possibilities of being for Man thus understood which Heidegger thinks that the innermost direction of European history (as attested by the very translation of the Greek into Latin just noted) has increasingly tended to occlude, and from which it leads us "off the track" (BT, p. 74). As we shall see in the next chapter, the Greeks lived with an unshakeable conviction that whatever happened in the world was the work of the gods, and Christians too saw Divine direction and control everywhere. But

this is a conception of God that we, "we, the Europeans", are increasingly lost to. Our sense of ourselves has increasingly "glorified reason" (WN, p. 112) in terms of science and techno-scientific progress – about nature and about ourselves as natural creatures – and this has profoundly limited if not altogether erased any sense of our inhabiting a world made with Man in mind or with God or gods at its centre. In this visitation we are haunted by something from our own past, something which, as we shall see more directly in the next chapter, opened the very path that leads us off the track.

Who is *der tolle Mensch*? Heidegger concludes, correctly I think, that he "is clearly, according to the first, and more clearly still according to the last sentences of the passage, for him who can hear, *the one who seeks God*" (WN, p. 112). And in the fable we find that he does not belong comfortably in our time: he is just a madman. But: he *is* our past, he *remains* somehow in our present, and his words still lie before us, ahead of us, carried out beyond us, yet to be heard.

V

Does the fact that *der tolle Mensch* is the one who seeks God make him closer then to the "level of Man" that belongs to the ones who "led him out and took him to task" [*hinausgeführt und zur Rede gesetzt*] when he went to "several churches" later that same day? Not really. The people in the churches clearly didn't want to hear the words intoned in his *Requiem aeternam deo* either. A requiem is a mass intoned for the souls of the dead, in this case intoned for the Christian "God eternal". This is not such an unfamiliar idea to Christians. After all, it is the Christian God who, as incarnate, was indeed murdered, and whose crucified body hangs heavily in every church, making of each one already something of a tomb or sepulchre of the dead God.

This is the incarnate God, as Mulhall notes, "whose time is both already gone and yet to come" (PMF, p. 28). In other words, the Christians *already* live in the time of the death of God. "God is dead" – this is not just an Hegelian expression of grief and grievance but already a strictly Christian proposition, a fundamental part of Christian creed, right from the start. Mulhall wonders whether the Christians in the various churches (mis)heard the intoned version of those same words as an insult; that they would be understood to "blaspheme against Christianity" rather than "recall believers to an aspect of their faith that is absolutely essential" (PMF, p. 31). At the end of the fable we are told that the visitation to the churches was felt as a penetration [*eingedrungen*] of their places of worship, an invasive entry, and that he was escorted out and given a bit of a talking to. It was, perhaps, not so much felt as an attack on their faith as an intrusion on the good order of their good orders.

And perhaps for good reason. While the words of *der tolle Mensch* are Christian words they do not do normal Christian service, they do not follow the normal Christian order. In terms of that order the once upon a time of this fable can be thought of as taking place, eternally, on Holy Saturday. In the order of normal Christian orders, that day is a day of pause, of waiting, a day between days, a day when (various) Christian churches have no services at all, and people might well want to "quieten" someone who is not suitably quiet on that day. In the fable, however, that day is unslung from being the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, hence unslung too from the incessant cycle of Christian memorialization: murder-death-resurrection. Indeed, also unslung from the staging of that cycle that takes place in the waves of Christian revivalism. Revival of the life of the church, restoration of vitality, this belongs to the life of the Church: its own death and renewal central to the staging of Christian life. But the madman sees in our time a decisive interruption of that cycle: "God is dead, God remains dead". And "now" – Nietzsche here marks the time as a new time, insisting *from now on* that we register a formidable difference between then and now – the life of the Church seems to him beyond revival, the churches now becoming tombs and sepulchres of the faith that had hitherto belonged to those who sought God.

The madman, coming from the time before our time, feels what we have lost, without our feeling it. Our churches may still be places of assembly (*ecclesia*), prayer and worship, but are they still, as institutions, houses of God (*kuriakos*)? Can you not see the churches emptying, hear the death-rattle? Smell the decomposition?

Of course, since the news of this tremendous event has barely arrived, Nietzsche's rupture-marking does not exclude ongoing calls for revival, even now. Indeed, if the event is nevertheless (in some sense) happening one might even expect growing calls for renewal, more intense recollection of fundamentals, new fundamentalisms. But the world of the words of those who seek God, and the submission to that world which held it in its sway, has, the madman feels, been wiped away: we live increasingly without the profound trust that whatever happens, indeed everything that happens, is God's handiwork, and this leaves all of us only with the more "stodgy notion" that, whatever else, God "cannot die some day" – and that anyone who would think otherwise is...a madman.

Mulhall's conclusion to his discussion of the last sentences of the fable is that the song of *der tolle Mensch* can be understood to "confront Christendom in the name of Christianity" (PMF, p. 31). This seems to me exactly right. But in the end it should not be restricted to the last sentences. The visitation of *der tolle Mensch* in our midst, his invasive penetration into one of our places, to its marketplace and its various churches, simply shows up such places – our places, European places, the *remains* of Christendom – as peopled by Christians (theists or not) in a time of the first shadows of becoming no longer able to seek God. When Nietzsche later summarises the situation in Europe as he finds it as one in which increasingly "the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable" – this is about everyone, whether they are theistic or atheistic Christians.

VI

Atheistic Christians? What? Don't they already find belief in the Christian God unbelievable? And why call them Christians, if they are atheists? In what ways or in what respects are they atheists? I will come back to this in greater detail in Chapter 8. But the basic thought here is fairly straightforward: in a European world in which Christianity has not been a mere walk on part but for nearly two thousand years the playwright, set designer, lead actor and critic, it is not obvious how Europe's atheists could be other than Christian in their formation. Jean-Paul Sartre understood his existentialism as an atheist philosophy, but he had no illusions about the Christian historicity to which it belonged. In his biography of Gustave Flaubert, published in 1971-72, Sartre sketched the historical situation in the West as follows (TFI, p. 346):

> Flaubert writes for a Western world which is Christian. And we are all still Christians, even today; the most radical disbelief is still Christian atheism. In other words it retains, in spite of its destructive power, schemata which are controlling – very slightly for our thinking, more for our imagination, above all for our sensibility. And the origins of these schemata are to be sought in the centuries of Christianity of which we are the heirs, whether we like it or not.

Sartre's existentialism does not try to present any kind of refutation of religious beliefs. Rather it calls the religious theist back to his or her own responsibility for freely cleaving, with profound trust, to religious creeds. However, as we shall see in Chapter 8, Modern atheists do not see things existentially but epistemologically. For the modern atheist, religious theist beliefs are like, say, beliefs in an unobservable planet, or some other unobservable entity – but involve believing in their existence on ridiculously poor grounds. For modern atheists, that is to say – and we have indicated that this is staged in Nietzsche's fable too – God is conceived as a being of some (weird) kind, an item in the entity-count of what one might take to be or to exist, and an item which, if we reason rightly, we would do better to cross off any rationally respectable list. Indeed, the modern atheist will suppose that, if we reason rightly, we are all likely, eventually, to come to agree that believing in God – which they hear only in the transposed form of "belief in the existence of God" as a being – is

a childish superstition, something that has no place whatever in a mature life shaped by modern advances in our rational understanding of nature and ourselves as natural creatures. Seeking God – which they hear only in the transposed form of "looking for God" as a being – is, on this view, deeply irrational, simply mad. This is exactly how Nietzsche represents the thinking of those "who do not believe in God" in his fable.

VII

The marketplace atheists hear the one who seeks God as someone who is looking for someone or something, and they thus betray an understanding of belief in God as belief in an existent being. But when the madman responds to the marketplace atheists by speaking of God as having died, having been finally lost to us, he does not invoke the decline in belief in the existence of a thing, however significant or sacred a thing that might have been, but speaks to a loss that is the loss of significance itself: "the whole horizon" of our life has been "wiped away". How should we understand this?

Attempting to articulate a radical sense of our thrownness into the whereabouts of an historically specific time and place, Heidegger speaks of every Dasein as having "factically submitted to a definite 'world' – its 'world'" (BT, p. 344). Heidegger conceives this "world" as a whereabouts of sense, the home-land of a life, a meaning-world. But perhaps this "submission" to such a world is not entirely independent of, or at least has not always been entirely independent of, submission to God. Nietzsche puts it as follows (BGE, p. 84):

> Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy, around the demi-god a satyr-play; and around God everything becomes – what? Perhaps a "world"? –

As it is reproduced here, this remark is a self-standing aphorism in Nietzsche's text, belonging to a collection of short aphoristic remarks in a chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled "Maxims and Interludes". The remark may be self-standing but it only just stands up, and the long dash at the end, beyond the questioning "perhaps" (which may be all we have left to work with in our time) stands even more defiantly as a moment of incompleteness, perhaps pressing us on to wonder what is "around" when God… is dead; whether, for example, we are, as Heidegger also put it, increasingly surrounded by "a world that is no world" (MA, p. 48). ("God" and "the world" are "correlates", says Kant in the *Opus Postumum* (OP, p. 211).)

The "tremendous event" of the death of God, cannot be understood simply like the death of something or someone within the world, or an event within the domain of everything that is. Rather, it relates to something befalling the world within which all worldly events have their significant taking place, including the worldly crucifixion event which, we can now say, took place within the very world it came to open up. This world too has a history, a world-history – and, Nietzsche claims, it is altogether unravelling in our time. This greatest recent event – the death of God – is a deed done by "we, the Europeans" to our world – all of us are caught up in its happening. And yet today we (still) do not know what we have done. We live in our time in the becoming-shadow of the light of the Greco-Biblical world of Man. The theists are upstanding figures of European Christendom, and the atheists of the marketplace are through and through Christian atheists, not its radical overcomers. Indeed, if there is a "critique of Christianity" in Nietzsche's fable it is aimed just as squarely, perhaps more continuously, and certainly at greater length, with those Europeans "standing about just then" who do not believe in God. But: we are all in the shadow of this event. Nietzsche too can only conceive of a development of European culture beyond this shadow from under it. All available concepts are caught up in the closure he is trying to think beyond, and we have no others.

And yet, for Nietzsche, this condition of world-darkening, this old-world-exhaustion, this ruined world, is still promising. Indeed, while it might last for ages, for centuries to come, it is not, for

Nietzsche, Europe's final fate. Speaking now in his own name, and quoting the words of *der tolle Mensch,* Nietzsche gives his reasons to be cheerful, and outlines the opening of a new European epic. In our floundering condition he sees the chance for something new for Europe ("the sea, *our* sea, lies open again")?

> **The meaning of our cheerfulness.** – The greatest recent event – that "God is dead," that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. For the few at least whose eyes – the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt; to them our old world must appear daily more like evening, more mistrustful, stranger, "older." But in the main one may say: The event itself is far too great, too distant, too remote from the multitude's capacity for comprehension even for the tidings of it to be thought of as having *arrived* as yet. Much less may one suppose that many people know as yet *what* this event really means – and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality. This long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm that is now impending – who could guess enough of it today to be compelled to play the teacher and advance proclaimer of this monstrous logic of terror, the prophet of a gloom and an eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth?
>
> Even we born guessers of riddles who are, as it were, waiting on the mountains, posted between today and tomorrow, stretched in the contradiction between today and tomorrow, we firstlings and premature births of the coming century, to whom the shadows that must soon envelop Europe really *should* have appeared by now –why is it that even we look forward to the approaching gloom without any real sense of involvement and above all without any worry and fear for *ourselves*? Are we perhaps still too much under the impression of the *initial* consequences of this event – and these initial consequences, the consequences for *ourselves*, are quite the opposite of what one might perhaps expect: they are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn.
>
> Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea." – (GS, §343)

We will return to Nietzsche later in this book when we consider his anticipation, his *teleo-auto-poetic* projection or conjuration, of a newly epic movement for Europe beyond its present condition. As we shall see, Nietzsche conceived this as a movement that is likely to be mediated by a process of European political integration already nascent within the current processes of democratization. And while we will not follow Nietzsche to the end of his vision of what might become of the culture of this new supranational European culture, stopping short of that, we will draw on his radically decentered understanding of Man – a conception of humanity cut to the cloth of the death of God – when we draw our own conclusions.

VIII

"God is dead". The madman's words may not do normal Christian service but the whole visitation is still framed within a Christian conceptuality. The whole telling of the fable shines in and only in a

Christian light, the light of a world – but a world which, we are given to understand, is darkening, a world in ruins.

And yet: we don't see it, hear it, smell it. As Robert Pippin nicely puts it, the culture of the places Nietzsche has in mind as undergoing the event described by *der tolle Mensch* is "the modern civilization [Nietzsche] describes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the 'city of the many coloured cow' [and it] is as stolidly contented as that bovine characterisation implies" (MPP, p. 86). Nietzsche had a thing about cows, and lines up women, the English, "and other democrats" with them – indeed, the "many coloured" character of this place recalls precisely Plato's image of a democracy as a distinctively female and many coloured kind of thing, a thing which is now, in the Europe of our time, dominated, Nietzsche says, by an "English" spirit, with its "profound averageness" (BGE, p. 156). This "democratic taste" and its "'modern ideas'" are at large right across Europe (BGE, p. 54). Moreover, as we shall see as this book develops, the primary vehicle for the unravelling of the times between then and now is precisely this general culture – rational, scientific, progressive – that belongs to "the whole democratic movement" in Europe.

Of course, as Pippin's description highlights, the most astonishing characteristic of the "tremendous event" that Nietzsche wagers to have happened is that it is simply *not happening* for those who are in it. Nietzsche, what a madman! He's not even describing how things are. The horizon of the world has, we are told, been wiped away – and apparently we ourselves have wiped it. But, really? However "convinced" Nietzsche had become about it, Pippin finds it implausible to suppose that it can be straightforwardly described as an event that "we" are going through or responsible for. Indeed, in Nietzsche's own lifetime "among almost all of his contemporaries" there really is nothing to suggest it: "there is very little sense of any great moral crisis, or even any disaffection with modern ideals" (MPP, p. 87). One might well wonder, with Pippin, whether a condition of our existence that we do not attest to can be a condition of ours at all.

Pippin regards this as an objection to Nietzsche's interpretation of our time. But for Nietzsche this non-awareness of our situation is clearly part of the event, belongs to its description. This greatest recent event in Europe has (apparently) both already happened and is yet to arrive. How are we to understand this? Pippin finds it far-fetched. Nietzsche, however, invites us to find our condition of bovine solidity as structurally uncanny: complete disorientation is, he is suggesting, both our closest condition, the most near, and yet remains also the most distant, the most far.

Who and what to believe? Nietzsche himself says that he is guessing. On the other hand, one cannot give the casting vote to those who live without any great "disaffection with modern ideals" just because they feel stolidly contented. Isaiah Berlin will not be alone in wanting to "acknowledge the insight of Rousseau" that "to know one's chains for what they are is better than to deck them with flowers" (FEL, p. xxxix). And the same goes for life in a Christian world in ruins. The "strong and subtle" suspicion in the eyes of one exceptional thinker can make the scales fall from the eyes of others: suddenly the aspect of things that had been familiar can altogether change. And perhaps *since Nietzsche* the world-change he marks in our time is something becoming available for us to apprehend. Are we not in Nietzsche's wake? Hasn't he made a compelling thought about our condition available to us? Do we not live in a time marked by an ongoing loss of a sense or meaning or truth of human history, a loss which leaves us "straying, as though through an infinite nothing"? Are we not more alive in our today, as Wittgenstein seems already to have been in the 1930s, to the fact that Europe's old modern epic narratives for making sense of the world and the significance of our lives are weakening? Isn't it becoming plainer by the day that we no longer know where we are heading, or whether we are heading anywhere at all? Wasn't Jean-François Lyotard right to see a rising "incredulity towards metanarratives" (PC, p. xxiv)? Wasn't Bernard Williams right to see a widespread "scepticism" about "*les grands récits*" through which, in an earlier time, we had made sense of our modern lives, our lives as "modern" (IBWD, p. 47)? No?

If someone is determined to remain stolidly contented, no fabulous argument will convince them that Nietzsche's word on our time is its best first word. On the other hand, I do think the picture he gives us of the difference between then and now that I have followed in this chapter can be filled out in a more or less straight historical way too. I say "more or less" in part out of a strong sympathy with Bernard Williams, who, when accepting that he wanted to recognize "the significant role of Christianity in understanding modern moral consciousness", admitted that his "historical commitments" gave rise to a certain nervousness about whether he was writing "irresponsible history" (IBWD, p. 54). Nevertheless, and nervousness apart, in the next chapter I want to attempt an approach to the difference between then and now in a less fabulous and more historical way. Not as a historian might, in relation to the fate of peoples and fatherlands, but as a philosopher, and in relation to the fate of the narratives where, above all, the distinctively "modern" European self-understanding is most explicitly encountered: the epic philosophical narratives of Man and his history.