

Article

Miracle in Myth: Nietzsche on *Wunder*

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Abstract: This paper considers the experience of miracle through the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Although he is often considered an anti-religious thinker, I argue that Nietzsche actually puts forth a positive conception of miracle because of its indispensable role in the creation of myth. I walk through Nietzsche's texts to describe his account of miracle (*Wunder*) and to demonstrate how it reveals a phenomenological perspective on miracle by placing it and rooting it in human life. Despite his rejection of traditional religion, Nietzsche reminds us that miracles are not an anomaly to human experience, but rather they are the way in which humans are able to embrace and affirm life through participation in myth.

Keywords: Nietzsche; miracle; *Wunder*; myth; religion; phenomenology

1. Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche is known as one of the fiercest critics of religion, particularly the Christian religion, due to his scathing attacks on God, the institution of the church, the Bible and Christian morality. He does not hide the fact that he aims to destroy the very foundations on which Christianity rests. With his infamous declaration that, "God is dead", he heralds the end of the old religion and asks us to turn to something new. Surprisingly, as becomes increasingly clear in his writings, Nietzsche is still a profoundly religious thinker; after destroying the old religion, he does not move past religion itself, but rather advocates the building of a new one. Nietzsche writes in *On the Genealogy of Morality*: "If a shrine is to be set up, a shrine has to be destroyed: that is the law—show me an example where this does not apply!" (Nietzsche 2007a, 2:24, pp. 65–66, italics his).¹ This new shrine will be of a different kind; it will be formed through the creation of new myths drawn from the spirit of Greek paganism and a "healthy" approach to life.

Recently, more scholars are recognizing the importance Nietzsche's positive religious emphasis (Auweele 2020; Benson 2007; Caro 2004, pp. 153–200; Roberts 1998; Young 2006) such that now he can be considered, as one scholar puts it, the "most religious atheist" (Noda 2006, p. 1).² Even with this acknowledgement of Nietzsche's religious contributions, scholars have missed the importance of miracle in his new account of religion. In this paper, I argue that Nietzsche actually puts forth a positive conception of miracle (*Wunder*) because of its indispensable role in the creation of myth. I will walk through Nietzsche's texts to describe his account of miracle and to demonstrate how it reveals a phenomenological perspective on miracle by placing it and rooting it in human life. In his account, I will detail both the new kind of miracle that Nietzsche affirms along with the old conception that he criticizes and rejects. Throughout his texts, Nietzsche reminds us that miracles are not an anomaly to human experience, but rather the way in which humans are able to embrace and affirm life through participation in myth.

2. Setting Up the Shrine: The New Kind of Miracle

Nietzsche demonstrates his interest in miracle by his abundant use of the German *Wunder* throughout his writings. Although the primary translation for *Wunder* in Nietzsche is the English "miracle", it is also translated as "wonder" or "surprise" in Nietzsche's works.³ In his published writings and authorized manuscripts, Nietzsche uses the term



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Wunder over one hundred and fifteen times and seventy-two of them are translated “miracle”, usually due to the religious context.⁴ When it is translated just as “wonder”, it is often in the expression “*Was Wunder*”, that Nietzsche was particular fond of, in order to exclaim “Is it any wonder that . . . ?” or “No wonder that . . .” Of the seventy-two uses of *Wunder* as miracle, about thirty-five have an overtly critical purpose where Nietzsche discusses miracle in order to reject the conception. However, among the other slightly more than half uses of *Wunder* as miracle, he points to a new kind of miracle, a miracle that is necessary for the human’s affirmation of life through myth. The chart below (Table 1) gives a report of Nietzsche’s use of *Wunder* in his writings.⁵

Table 1. Nietzsche’s Use of *Wunder*.

German Title	English Title	Translation	Miracle Word Count	Wonder Word Count	Other Word Count	References
<i>Die Geburt der Tragödie</i>	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> (Nietzsche 1999)	miracle	5			1, p. 14 (<i>Wunderakt</i>); 20, p. 98; 23, pp. 108–9
<i>Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne</i>	<i>On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense</i> (Nietzsche 1999)	miracle	1			2, p. 151
<i>David Strauss</i>	<i>David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer</i> (Nietzsche 1995a)	miracle	8			7, p. 39; p. 43 (<i>wunderthätigen</i>); 12, pp. 80–81 (<i>wunderbarer</i>)
<i>Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben</i>	<i>On the Utility and Liability of History for Life</i> (Nietzsche 1995a)	miracle	2			9, p. 147
		wonder		1		1, p. 87
		other			1	9, p. 153
<i>Schopenhauer als Erzieher</i>	<i>Schopenhauer as Educator</i> (Nietzsche 1995a)	miracle	5			1, p. 171; 3, p. 184, p. 191; 4, p. 207; 5, p. 214
		wonder		2		3, p. 185; 7, p. 239
		other			1	8, p. 249
<i>Richard Wagner in Bayreuth</i>	<i>Richard Wagner in Bayreuth</i> (Nietzsche 1995a)	miracle	2			5, p. 285; 7, p. 295
		wonder		2		6, p. 291; 9, p. 313
<i>Menschliches Allzumenschliches I</i>	<i>Human, All Too Human I</i> (Nietzsche 1995b)	miracle	14			1:1, p. 15 (<i>Wunder-Ursprung</i>); 2:57, p. 59; 3:130, p. 99; 4:156, p. 119; 162, p. 123 (<i>Wunder-Augenglas</i>); 5:243, p. 167; 6:366, p. 212
		wonder		1		5:250, p. 171
		other			1	2:71, p. 64
<i>Menschliches Allzumenschliches II</i>	<i>Human, All Too Human II</i> (Nietzsche 2012)	miracle	2			2:12, p. 158 (<i>Wunderthäter</i>); 23, p. 167
		wonder		2		Preface 1, p. 5; 1:174, p. 76
		other			1	1:300, p. 116
<i>Morgenröthe</i>	<i>Daybreak</i> (Nietzsche 1997)	miracle	12			I:87, pp. 50–51; 89, p. 52; IV:216, p. 135; 255, p. 145 (<i>Wunder-thema</i>); 325, p. 161 (<i>Wundermann</i>); V:532, p. 210
		wonder		4		I:66, p. 39; 81, p. 48; V:496, p. 202; 550, p. 221
		other			2	II:131, p. 82
<i>Die fröhliche Wissenschaft</i>	<i>The Gay Science</i> (Nietzsche 2001)	miracle	6			3:112, p. 113; 137, p. 126; 239, p. 147; 4, p. 155; 319, p. 180; 5:358, p. 222
		wonder		2		Preface, 1, p. 3; p. 253

Table 1. Cont.

German Title	English Title	Translation	Miracle Word Count	Wonder Word Count	Other Word Count	References
<i>Also sprach Zarathustra</i>	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> (Nietzsche 2006)	miracle	2			IV, p. 201, p. 209 (Wunderthäter)
		wonder		7		II, p. 86; II, p. 113; III, p. 180; IV, p. 253
		other			1	IV, p. 196
<i>Jenseits von Gut und Böse</i>	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (Nietzsche 2002)	miracle	2			3:47, p. 46
		wonder		6		1:1, p. 5; 2:24, p. 25; 44, p. 41; 7:239, p. 128; 9:262, p. 158; 296, p. 177
		other			1	7:224, p. 116
<i>Zur Genealogie der Moral</i>	<i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> (Nietzsche 2007a)	wonder		1		I:13, p. 26
		other			5	II:23, p. 65; III:5, p. 73; 9, p. 81; 11, p. 85
<i>Der Antichrist</i>	<i>The Anti-Christ</i> (Nietzsche 2005)	miracle	7			25, p. 32 (Wunderwerk); 31, p. 28 (Wundermann); 32, p. 29; 37, p. 33 (Wunderthäter); 52, p. 52; 57, p. 58
<i>Ecce Homo</i>	<i>Ecce Homo</i> (Nietzsche 2005)	miracle	3			p. 119, p. 140; p. 64 (Nietzsche 2007b)
<i>Götzen-Dämmerung</i>	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i> (Nietzsche 2005)	wonder		2		3, p. 178; 40, p. 216
<i>Der Fall Wagner</i>	<i>The Case of Wagner</i> (Nietzsche 2005)	miracle	1			9, p. 251
		wonder		1		Epilogue, p. 262
Totals			72	31	13	116

In looking at each of these uses of *Wunder* in Nietzsche's texts, it becomes clear that miracles play a critical part in the myth that will be used to construct the new shrine. The old shrine is being destroyed because we no longer believe in its myths. We must realize that God is dead "and we have killed him", as Nietzsche famously writes in *The Gay Science*, and with his murder, we are dismantling and tearing down the old shrine (Nietzsche 2001, 3:125, p. 120). In this section, we will first consider Nietzsche's understanding of myth in general and then build his conception of miracle in myth, which must include intersubjectivity, inner transformation and a love of fate.

2.1. The Need for Myth

Nietzsche's idea of myth entails a kind of narrative, containing themes, characters, and events that are profoundly rooted in the human condition. A culture can take hold of these elements, and make them part of its identity, which in turn unifies them as community. In Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he draws on Ancient Greek tragedies to frame his understanding of myth as something dynamic, not static, that is continually shaped and molded by human, rather than divine, creators. Myth is not something over and above us but something arising out of ourselves; this process of participatory creation of myth is what gives us renewal and strength as humans. In particular, it is the music of the chorus found in Greek tragedies that allows people to be caught up in myth, for "myth is certainly not objectified adequately in the spoken word" but goes beyond language due to the "overpowering effect of the music" (Nietzsche 1999, 17, p. 81). In ancient tragedy, the audience can identify with the musical chorus on the stage, as they are both witnesses and participants of the action, and through the experience, feel as though they play a role in the story too.

Even in his later work, *Human, All Too Human*, during his supposed positivist period where he experiments with only justifying claims by science and reason, he still sees the importance of myth that arises out of Greek culture. He states, “Only where the ray of myth falls does the life of the Greeks light up; elsewhere it is gloomy” (Nietzsche 1995b, 5:261, p. 176). It is the light of myth that provides life to a culture or else it will fall into darkness. With sadness, he writes that the Greeks threw off the weight of myth in order to pursue absolute truth, but once they believed that they possessed truth, they turned into tyrants and thus entered into the gloom. In search of the truth in reality, they abandoned the primary way that humans can make sense of the world, which is through myth. Benjamin Bennett, in his excellent article defining Nietzsche’s idea of myth, offers this helpful commentary:

The function of myth . . . is to place us in an active or artistic relation even to reality . . . We must relate to myth not as believers but as conscious creators . . . The state of belonging to a mythical culture and understanding existence in terms of one’s myths is not really a *state* at all but, rather, a *constantly renewed act* of artistic creation. (Bennett 1979, p. 423, italics his)

Taking part in this myth-creation is critical for individuals because of how it helps them relate to reality and to each other. Reality is not something “out there” but something that we interact with and make sense of through our communal myths.

Just as it happened in Greek culture, Nietzsche laments in *The Birth of Tragedy* how the belief in myth has also waned in modernity as the participation in myth-creation has ceased:

For this is usually how religions die. It happens when the mythical presuppositions of a religion become systematized as a finished sum of historical events under the severe, intellectual gaze of orthodox dogmatism, and people begin to defend anxiously the credibility of the myths while resisting every natural tendency within them to go on living and to throw out new shoots—in other words, when the feeling for myth dies and is replaced by the claim of religion to have historical foundations. (Nietzsche 1999, 10, pp. 53–54)

When the desire for myth fades, people rely on systems and sets of facts to justify their religion, but a religion without myth is doomed, for it is the spirit of myth that breathes life into it. In fact, myth is “the necessary precondition of every religion” meaning that myth is a necessary element for any religion to form (Nietzsche 1999, 18, p. 87). This is because it is myth that allows people to personally relate to the religion, to see themselves as part of a story, rather than just adhering to verifiable principles. We can see a phenomenological emphasis here in his depiction of myth by turning it away from a set of cognitive beliefs and toward a shared experience of community.

To counter this modern rejection of myth, Nietzsche creates a new myth in his philosophical novel, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The character Zarathustra wanders about giving speeches to those whom he meets. By spreading his message, Zarathustra hopes to encourage these creatures to accept both the pleasurable as well as the painful parts to life—to affirm human life no matter what. In the prologue, he writes, “Behold! This cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 3). In addition to his poems and use of literary devices, it is also Zarathustra, at the “center of his corpus”, as Tyler Roberts argues, who reveals Nietzsche’s support for a religious mysticism, a mysticism that is exemplified by a narrative focused on the here and now, “an immanent transcendence” (Roberts 1998, pp. 139, 161). The central place of Zarathustra also demonstrates Nietzsche’s coupling of aesthetic creation with religious experiences: Zarathustra is both a poet and a prophet. Robert Megill demonstrates this by pointing to how Nietzsche views Jesus and Zarathustra as both having “myth-making projects”. Megill concludes, “The creation of myth is . . . an essentially aesthetic task—the task in which the ‘artist-philosopher’ of Zarathustra finds his highest endeavor” (Megill 1981, p. 222, italics his). As seen in all of Nietzsche’s works, both philosophical and artistic,

aesthetic–religious myth-making characterizes the highest endeavor of the human and is necessary to make sense of existence.

In addition to Bennett, Roberts, and Megill, many other scholars recognize Nietzsche's unmistakable emphasis on the human need for myth. Julian Young comments that while Nietzsche is speaking of myth in terms of Greek tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is clear toward the end of the work that he sees the "importance of myth in general" (Young 2006, p. 26). Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins find his description of myth fundamental enough to include it in their short introduction to Nietzsche: "Nietzsche's enthusiasm for culture and the arts reflects his opposition to scientism, as does his insistence that we still have a psychological need for myth, for imaginative accounts that address our spiritual needs" (Solomon and Higgins 2000, p. 226). Overlooked by these scholars, however, is that folded into his account of myth is the crucial ingredient of miracle.⁶ It is only by each individual performing a miracle that a new myth can be created, that a new community can be born and that a new shrine can be built.

2.2. *Miracle as Indispensable to Myth*

If a myth that arises out of human creation contains miracles, then we know that these miracles also originate from humanity and, more personally, from oneself, as an individual. To offer a preliminary sketch, a "miracle" for Nietzsche cannot be something that is done to me: it is not a divine intervention in my life but is found in the way that I take up my life in defiance of what is considered normal and rational, and in the way that I love my life despite all its sorrows and challenges. Miracle originates in the human's response to and embrace of life, rather than as an explanation for a moral or divine act. Aligning with phenomenology, Nietzsche begins his conception of miracle by starting with the subject's experience, but what this encounter will entail must take us beyond just one person's experience because of its location in myth.

To further illustrate Nietzsche's definition of miracle, we will turn again to his introduction to myth in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where we find Nietzsche's first placement of miracle in myth. In the opening to the book, he claims that there is a miracle that can be found on the Greek stage due to the coming together of two opposing drives, the Dionysiac and Apolline, in a work of art:

These two very different drives exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them, an opposition only apparently bridged by the common term 'art'—until eventually, *by a metaphysical miracle [Wunderakt] of the Hellenic 'Will'*, they appear paired and, in this pairing, finally engender a work of art which is Dionysiac and Apolline in equal measure: Attic tragedy. (Nietzsche 1999, 1, p. 14, italics mine)

As Nietzsche describes throughout the rest of the book, the Dionysiac, which represents the frenzied, intoxicated, musical, communal drive, is opposed to the Apolline, which represents the calm, dreamy, illusional, individualistic drive, and yet, the miracle of the work of art is when these two drives balance each other, producing a full aesthetic experience for the human.⁷ Although both sides woven together are necessary for the presence of the miracle, it is through the Dionysiac, in particular, that the miracle will come. Dionysos is a god of miracles because he is torn to pieces but is then born again, and so it is he who provides the power for the miracle on the stage (Nietzsche 1999, 10, pp. 51–52). Nietzsche exhorts us, "Put on your armor for a hard fight, but believe in the miracles of your god [Dionysos]!" (Nietzsche 1999, 20, p. 98) Nietzsche invites us to take part in the aesthetic–religious experience of myth and believe in the miracles that arise.

To experience the miracle on stage, we must reflect on what kind of audience we are when we attend the play, as Nietzsche argues later on in the book. (Although this is a lengthy quote, I believe that this text forms the basis for Nietzsche's positive construction of miracle across all his works, as I will demonstrate.)

Anyone who wishes to examine just how closely he is related to the true aesthetic listener, or whether he belongs to the community of Socratic, critical human beings, should ask himself honestly what he feels when he receives the *miracle* presented on stage: whether he feels an affront to his sense of history and his attention to strict psychological causality, whether he makes a benevolent concession to the *miracle*, as it were, admitting it as a phenomenon which was understandable in childhood but from which he is now alienated, or whether he suffers anything else at this moment. This will enable him to estimate the extent to which he is at all equipped to understand *myth*, the contracted image of the world, which, as an abbreviation of appearances, *cannot dispense with the miracle*. (Nietzsche 1999, 23, p. 108, italics mine and his)

“Are you,” he seems to ask, “a true aesthetic listener, who opens yourself up to the performance and allows the art to come inside you, or are you a critic, who places yourself at a distance from the performance and finds such emotional experiences childish?” If one remains the latter, a detached critic, one cannot experience the miracle on the stage. Here, through the coming together of these two drives, the performance is able to portray the myth as if it were true, allowing the audience to become participants in the myth, caught up in the power of the narrative. I, as an aesthetic listener, can be captured by the myth, feel the power of the unity of the Apolline and Dionysiac and let the truth of the art transform me. I do not make a “benevolent concession to the miracle” of the aesthetic experience, but embrace it and believe in it. The miracle is letting the narrative on the stage become my narrative, not as a representation or a symbol of my life, but as actually my life. My own particularity as an individual fades away so that I can be caught up in the myth, and here, in the embrace of the miracle, I can truly understand and encounter myth.⁸

As seen in the last sentence of the quote, miracles are essential to the making of any myth; “the text’s definition of myth”, as Oppel puts it, “includes miracles” for Nietzsche (Oppel 2005, p. 79). This is because myth acts as the mediator between us and the world, and it is through a miracle that we can participate in its creation: this miraculous participation in myth makes the appearances of the world intelligible and palatable. In the year after *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche continues to express the need for miracle in myth in his “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”. He writes that it is a miracle that transforms reality through myth, turning waking day to dream-like day: “Thanks to the constantly effective miracle assumed by myth, the waking day of a people who are stimulated by myth, as the ancient Greeks were, does indeed resemble dream more than it does the day of a thinker whose mind has been sobered by science” (Nietzsche 1999, 2, p. 151). There is a human drive for myth that cannot be satisfied by science, but in order to be part of it, a miracle is necessary. If we do not perform the miracle of throwing ourselves fully into the narrative, then we cannot be part of the myth; the miracle of full participation—a true lived experience, to think phenomenologically—is absolutely necessary for the sustaining of myth. We must remember that religions die when their myths become sets of historical facts for people to learn rather than true stories for people to live out.

Along with modernity’s rejection of myth, there is also a rejection of miracle due to the preference for rationalism, the security of knowing only things that can be proven by reason. Nietzsche speaks critically of the rationalist David Strauss who decrees that miracles are “going out of style” these days, because we can now trust in the power of reason (Nietzsche 1995a, 12, p. 80). To make God fit into the rational universe, Strauss and his followers (those philistines, as Nietzsche calls them) prefer the idea of a God who makes errors as opposed to a “God who performs miracles”, which means, according to Nietzsche, they no longer believe in God and should stop pretending as if they do (Nietzsche 1995a, 7, p. 43).⁹ They also hate “the person of genius”, writes Nietzsche, “for it is genius that is rightly reputed to be able to perform miracles” (Nietzsche 1995a, 7, p. 43). Strauss has comforted himself with his metaphysics of rationalism, but is unwilling to see how this precludes belief in God or even belief in great humans. Nietzsche will not let us forget about those humans—whether geniuses, saints or miracle-workers, as we will discuss

later—who perform the true miracle of self-transformation. Nietzsche may agree with Strauss that a rejection of a certain kind of miracle is needed, but we must be aware of the destruction that it will entail and be willing to create, in its aftermath, a new type of myth full of new kinds of miracles.¹⁰

2.3. *Miracle as Intersubjective*

By placing miracle in myth, a miracle by its essence must be a communal experience because a myth is a narrative that arises out of a particular community. Miracle signifies the connection and integration of an individual into community so that the individual is no longer alone. Outside of myth, individuals become separated and disconnected from one another, which results in an annihilation of true community. Nietzsche describes this in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Without myth . . . all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement” (Nietzsche 1999, 23, p. 108). Cultures lack creativity and vitality when myth has vanished, and it is only through myth that a culture can be miraculously united by its common events.

This loss leads to homelessness, where people can no longer identify with a place of belonging. Nietzsche asks, “The enormous historical need of dissatisfied modern culture, the accumulation of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge—what does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth, loss of a mythical home, a mythical maternal womb?” (Nietzsche 1999, 23, p. 109) The modern obsession with gaining knowledge leaves us dissatisfied, because we have forgotten our own story of origin. We need to know where we have come from and who we belong to. This deep desire is what Nietzsche sees as the Dionysiac drive. When we succumb to a Dionysiac experience, we give up our individual identity and become as one with the community. Here we see Nietzsche taking a step beyond a narrow view of phenomenological experience; for it is in this miracle that a person must shed individuality in order to be part of a communal whole. This then is the paradoxical aspect of miracle: the individual experience of miracle becomes, in a sense, a loss of individual experience.

To illustrate miracle in a communal myth, we can think of the tragedy of *Antigone* by Sophocles; here, the heroine, Antigone, defies the king by attempting a respectful burial for her brother: “I will go and heap the earth upon the brother whom I love,” she proclaims (Sophocles 1994, p. 5, l. 80).¹¹ When watching the play, the sorrow that she feels over her brother’s death and lack of burial is no longer just her sorrow, but becomes our sorrow. We feel angst with the chorus over the decisions that the characters need to make and are not always sure of the right course for them to take. The chorus demonstrates the intersubjective nature of this experience: it is not just me that is partaking in the story, but others surrounding me in the audience and on the stage; we become as one caught up in the myth. Toward the end of the play, the anger that Haemon, fiancé of Antigone, feels at the king when he finds Antigone dead is no longer just his anger, but becomes our anger. For a true aesthetic listener, the emotions of sorrow, angst and anger are not ones arising out of pity or sympathy for others, but from our own hearts as a demonstration of the miracle that we have taken the narrative of a myth and made it our own. This is never done alone, however, but always in the environment with others.

The experience of oneness, unexplainable by reason, is seen not only in the miracle on the stage, but also in the miracle of a relationship between lovers. In a break from some of his more positivistic explorations in *Daybreak*, he writes about the unity between two people in love. At the beginning of the aphorism, however, he mocks lovers because they desire to be united in love so badly that they put up the “pretense of similarity” (Nietzsche 1997, 5:532, p. 210). It happens so easily that people (especially women, says Nietzsche) deny that there is any pretense, but that their similarity is from love: they claim that “love makes the same” and “performs a miracle” by uniting the lovers as one (Nietzsche 1997, 5:532, p. 210). In these one-sided cases, Nietzsche finds this a farce, but he concludes the aphorism by arguing that when this desire for sameness is mutual, it actually does function as a miracle: “but there is no more confused or impenetrable spectacle than that which

arises when both parties are passionately in love with one another and both consequently abandon themselves and want to be the same as one another . . . The beautiful madness is too good for this world and too subtle for human eyes" (Nietzsche 1997, 5:532, p. 211). There is a beautiful miracle that takes place when two people are intensely in love and desire to be one with one another. Oppel points out the link between the miraculous unity found in the play and found in the lovers: "Daybreak 532 describes the sort of union where love 'makes the same' as a 'miracle'—which recalls the miracle of the Hellenic will that united the Dionysian and Apollonian art drives in *The Birth of Tragedy*" (Oppel 2005, p. 101). In a play, the audience takes on the narrative of the myth and makes it their own story. In a relationship, the lover makes room for the beloved inside oneself. To stretch the text a bit here, it seems that this beautiful miracle is not one person becoming another person, but two people creating a new "other".

2.4. Miracle as Inner Transformation

This intersubjective miracle, however, can only take place due to an inner transformation of the self. Here we are taking one step closer to the heart of Nietzsche's understanding of miracle: miracle must be something that occurs at the very core of the individual. Although we often think of miracles as outward signs or external proofs of something (as we will discuss further in his critique), the real miracle is when a person has a change of heart.

In his essay "Schopenhauer as Educator", Nietzsche argues that the miracle of a saint (from any religious tradition) is not from acts of morality or an ability to heal, but from an inner transformation:

And hence nature ultimately needs the saint, whose ego has entirely melted away and whose life of suffering is no longer—or almost no longer—felt individually, but only as the deepest feeling of equality, communion, and oneness with all living things; [it is] the saint, in whom that miracle of transformation occurs . . . There can be no doubt that all of us are related and connected to this saint, just as we are related to the philosopher and the artist. (Nietzsche 1995a, 5, pp. 213–14)

In order to become great like Schopenhauer, whose nature and development as a person is also a "miracle", we need to become part of a great culture, where we are surrounded and connected to artists, philosophers and saints (see Nietzsche 1995a, 3, p. 184, p. 191 for references to Schopenhauer as miracle). Like the artist and philosopher, the saint, as described above, is someone who is united to the rest of the community and to the earth. No longer experiencing the suffering of individuality, the saint has undergone the miracle of transformation by becoming one with nature. Here, the Dionysiac drive is revealed again: the deep longing for connection, sameness and unity with all living things can only be satisfied by a miracle. We all relate to this saint because we desire this miracle of inward transformation for ourselves, ridding ourselves of the loneliness of individuality.

Like a "saint", Nietzsche also points to a "miracle-worker" (*Wundermann*) as person who signifies the power of inner renewal as opposed to external change. In the *Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche describes Jesus as a prime example of a miracle-worker whom we would expect to prove himself by performing miracles. In fact, the disciples themselves try to fit Jesus into a "type" of "miracle worker", believing that it was his outward signs that verified his divinity (Nietzsche 2005, 31, p. 28). But Jesus is a "free spirit", writes Nietzsche, who "spoke only what was inside him most deeply: 'life' or 'truth' or 'light' are his words for the innermost" (Nietzsche 2005, 31, p. 29). With this focus on the "innermost", Nietzsche believes that Jesus's "proofs" as a miracle-worker are found, not in his external healings, but in the "inner 'lights', inner feelings of pleasure and self-affirmations, pure 'proofs of strength'" (Nietzsche 2005, 31, p. 30). The real miracle of Jesus is the internal change in the heart of an individual who dispels darkness, takes up joy and self-confidence and grows strong. To illustrate this, we might think of the story in the gospel where Jesus first tells a paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven, and after doing so, the Pharisees question his authority to forgive sins. Jesus responds with the question: "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" (Matthew 9:5) At that point, Jesus heals

the man and the man is able to walk home. But with Nietzsche, we might ask: which is the real miracle here?

In speaking of Christ as a miracle-worker, perhaps Nietzsche has in mind his humorous aphorism about miracle-workers in *Daybreak*. The key to “becoming the prophet and miracle-worker (*Wundermann*)” is living apart from others “with little knowledge, a few ideas and a very great deal of arrogance” and then finally, people cannot but believe in us (Nietzsche 1997, 4:325, pp. 160–61). At first, it seems that he is mocking those who claim to have been miracle-workers, but upon closer inspection, we realize that these are the same characteristics of Zarathustra, and even Nietzsche himself. Nietzsche may be making fun of himself here, as he often does. In *Ecce Homo*, he speaks of his isolation during his sickness in the section of “Why I am so wise”, which references these kinds of practices: “I discovered life anew . . . I tasted all good and even small things in ways that other people cannot easily do, —I created my philosophy from out of my will to health, to life” (Nietzsche 2005, Why I am so wise, 2, p. 76).¹² Nietzsche does not always speak of miracle-workers in a positive light. In *Human All Too Human II*, he writes of the vanity of humans who consider themselves “eternal miracle-workers” (*Wunderthäter*) and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra at first criticizes the character known as the “last pope” for being a “dark miracle worker” (*Wunderthäter*) (Nietzsche 2012, 2:12, p. 158; 2006, 4, p. 209). There is then a negative type of miracle worker who is subject to a corrupt view of miracles that we will outline in part three. But if we consider miracles in this new way, then perhaps we can better understand such authentic myth-makers and miracle-workers as Jesus, Zarathustra, and maybe even Nietzsche himself.¹³

2.5. The Ultimate Miracle: *Amor Fati*

Miracle as inner transformation is captured most fully in a specific act of the individual, which Nietzsche calls *amor fati* (love of fate) or the “doctrine” of eternal recurrence or eternal return first introduced in *The Gay Science*. Although it can be easily overlooked, it is the idea of *miracle* which sets the stage for Nietzsche’s most famous philosophical idea. In the opening to the fourth book of *The Gay Science*, which is titled “St. Januarius”, Nietzsche writes this poem:

You who with your lances burning
Melt the ice sheets of my soul,
Speed it toward the ocean yearning
For its highest hope and goal:
Ever healthier it rises,
Free in fate most amorous: —
Thus your miracle it prizes
Fairest Januarius! (Nietzsche 2001, p. 155)

The miracle of St. Januarius, who is a Christian martyr from the third century, is that during special feast days a vial of his dried blood turns to liquid again (see Nietzsche 2001, p. 155n).¹⁴ Nietzsche is asking for this same miracle for himself: he wants his blood to become liquid through the practice of his gay science. Written in January, there is a metaphor between the melting of the snow and melting of his blood (“melt the ice sheets of my soul”). As Young puts it in his biography on Nietzsche: “With the melting of the winter ice, Nietzsche feels his own blood began to flow again” and it is this warmth that sparks the idea of *amor fati* (Nietzsche 2012, p. 322). This will be the miracle that sets us free to love fate: “Free in fate most amorous”. When Nietzsche reflects back on his works in one of his final books, *Ecce Homo*, it is this poem from *The Gay Science* that he repeats because he believes that it expresses the heart of this whole book. Thus, this notion of the *miraculous* eternal return should be remembered.¹⁵

This poem foreshadows the famous section that follows in this same fourth book of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche describes the *amor fati*. Here he begins by asking the

reader what one would say if a demon spoke the following words: “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 . . . must return to you” (Nietzsche 2001, 4:341, p. 194). Could you, Nietzsche asks, become so well disposed “to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?” (Nietzsche 2001, 4:341, p. 195, italics his). In other words, could we not only accept the events of our lives again over and over, but also fervently desire them to be repeated again and again? If our answer is yes, then we will experience the true miracle of self-affirmation. Fate cannot be changed, but what if we decide that we would choose exactly what fate has decreed? In this way, we throw ourselves into our lives completely without looking back and without regret. Here in this “tremendous moment” we encounter what underlies all experiences of miracle: the ultimate miracle of *amor fati* (Nietzsche 2001, 4:341, p. 194). By saying, “YES” to life, a person accomplishes the most amazing miracle, surpassing all other miracles. Such a person will embrace life with all its details and would will it all again in the exact same way.

Nietzsche hopes that loving fate will produce the profound sense of gaiety that he is seeking. An honest look at the world will usually result in the opposite reaction: a deep sense of despair. For a person to have joy in any circumstances of this life, it takes a miracle, as he comments earlier in the book: “A single joyless person is enough to create discouragement and cloudy skies for a whole household, and it is a miracle if there is not one person like that” (Nietzsche 1974, 3:239, p. 214).¹⁶ We might think that this new miracle is disconnected from myth: perhaps Nietzsche saw miracle as connected to myth in his earlier works, but now it is up to the power and will of the individual. But this is countered in the way that Nietzsche ultimately portrays this miracle best in his own myth, the myth of Zarathustra.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the miracle of *amor fati* is represented over and over again by the actions of Zarathustra and his friends. The word *Wunder*, on its own, is only used as “miracle” one time, but its placement presents a scene that vividly captures the miracle that Zarathustra is attempting to perform throughout the novel.¹⁷ In the section “The Leech”, Zarathustra accidentally steps on a man who is lying on the ground in a swamp. When the trodden one realizes that it was Zarathustra who stepped on him, he cries, “Oh happiness! Oh miracle! Praised be this day that lured me to this swamp! Praised by the best liveliest cupping glass living today, praised be the great conscience-leech Zarathustra!” (Nietzsche 2006, 4, p. 201).¹⁸ The trodden man celebrates the coincidence of Zarathustra, the “even more beautiful leech”, coming and stepping on him, while he is laying in the swamp allowing leeches to suck on his arm (Nietzsche 2006, 4, p. 201). Although the circumstances of this scene may sound strange to us, as many of the events in the novel do, the key point is that this man, who is called the “conscientious of spirit”, performs the miracle of *amor fati* by embracing the pain with the pleasure: the pain of being sucked by leeches and trampled on by Zarathustra and the pleasure of meeting Zarathustra and later being invited to visit his cave (Nietzsche 2006, 4, pp. 202–3). Zarathustra also performs the miracle by doing something “wrong” (stepping on the man), but then laughing “at the folly that he had just committed” as though whatever he does, intentional or unintentional, and whatever happens to him, will be welcomed with joy (Nietzsche 2006, 4, p. 200).

It is difficult to understand how a repetition of meaningless actions can bring about meaning. As Erich Heller puts it: “The endless repetition of a senseless life is assumed to yield an immensity of spiritual significance, as if one could arrive at an overwhelming positive sum by fanatically multiplying zero” (Heller 1988, p. 185). And yet, this is precisely the point; in the moment of accepting the repetition, the miracle takes place; “it is”, as Heller writes, “the ‘tremendous moment’ that is assumed to work the miracle” (Heller 1988, p. 185). To speak phenomenologically, we know that experiences cannot be reduced to a mathematical equation; in this way, Nietzsche is reminding us that human experiences of miracles are primarily known by our relation to them rather than by a theoretical explanation.

Thinking back to *Antigone*, let us sit with king Creon, at the end of the play, who is faced with the terrible hand that fate has dealt him, partially due to his own actions: his wife, son and future daughter-in-law are all dead. He mourns, “Alas! Here is a sorrow that redoubles sorrow. Where will it end? What else can Fate hold in store?” (Sophocles 1994, p. 44, l. 1295). Can Creon make it a “tremendous moment”? Can he welcome the beauty of the terrible story of his life? The miracle that Creon requires represents for us Nietzsche’s “new kind of miracle”: a miracle that takes place in the context of the story of the myth (Section 2.2), that includes the community of others, such as the chorus (Section 2.3), that starts with self-transformation (Section 2.4) and that loves all circumstances of life, both the hard and the good (Section 2.5). The questions that we may ask Creon are the same questions that are asked of any life. For Nietzsche, our lives are take part in a tragic myth, which demands a miracle deep in our hearts to live out with joy; this is the way to build the new shrine.

3. Destroying the Shrine: Critique of Miracle

The construction of the new shrine is only possible when the old one has been eliminated; this is the “law” everywhere, Nietzsche claims (Nietzsche 2007a, 2:24, p. 66). The old shrine represents the Christian religion, which Nietzsche blames as the corruption of humanity, the source for slave morality and the rejection of life. In this context, Nietzsche finds the conception of miracle particularly abhorrent in the following three ways: miracles are used to explain away changes in morality, justify ignorance and “prove” religion.

3.1. Miracle as Change in Morality

Nietzsche first criticizes the Christian notion of miracle, because it is used to explain a moral shift in a person. In this book, *Human, All Too Human*, he argues that people think that the moral act is a miracle, because it is done for the love of another person; they ask, “Are these acts of morality miracles because they . . . are ‘impossible and yet real’?” (Nietzsche 1995b, 2:57, p. 59). Nietzsche replies that the acts are still egotistical because love for the other is actually love for “some part of himself” (Nietzsche 1995b, 2:57, p. 59). Selfless acts are when a person gives up one part of himself in order to gain another part of himself: he “sacrifices one part to the other” (Nietzsche 1995b, 2:57, p. 59). Nietzsche gives examples of an author wanting his subject to be known more than himself, a girl in love wishing to prove her faithfulness, a soldier desiring to die to fulfill his desire of victory, and a mother giving of herself to care for her child. In each of these cases, he claims that the actions are not miraculously altruistic, but rather done for the sake of fulfilling the person’s own “wish, drive, desire” (Nietzsche 1995b, 2:57, p. 59).

In *Daybreak*, published right after *Human, All too Human*, in his section “The Moral Miracle”, he writes, “In the sphere of morality, Christianity knows only the miracle: the sudden change in all value-judgments, the sudden abandonment of all customary modes of behavior, the sudden irresistible inclination for new persons and objects” (Nietzsche 1997, 1:87, p. 50). Due to the abrupt alteration in a person’s identity, Christians mistakenly call the change a “work of God”, a “rebirth” with “unique, incomparable value” (Nietzsche 1997, 1:87, p. 50). They find the shift so amazing that they assume that it must be the work of the divine. And yet, Nietzsche sees this as a natural part of the human development, for, as he argues, “psychiatrists . . . have indeed plenty of occasion to observe similar ‘miracles’ (in the form of homicidal mania . . . suicide mania)” (Nietzsche 1997, 1:87, p. 51). Nietzsche’s point is that the human condition contains within itself the capacity to undergo such drastic shifts in any direction toward moral behavior or toward murder; such a change, however, is not divine, but “human, all too human”.

Another example of this so-called “moral miracle” is found in *Beyond Good and Evil*; he writes, “But if someone asks what it really was in the whole phenomenon of the saint that caused such inordinate interest . . . it was undoubtedly the aura of miracle that clung to it . . . here was a ‘bad man’ turning suddenly into a good man, a ‘saint’” (Nietzsche 2002, 47, p. 46). Unlike the saint with the inner transformation that Nietzsche described in his

essay on Schopenhauer (as we discussed in Section 2.4), this saint's miracle is found in the outward change of moral behavior. Such a change, argues Nietzsche, only makes sense if you conceive of the opposites of "good" and "bad" as actual facts; thus, when someone somehow crosses from one set of moral principles to the exact opposite ones, their change has no other explanation but a miracle. But if the distinctions between "good" and "bad" are only differences in definitions, then would someone who changes to "good" just have been suffering from a mistaken judgment? Nietzsche ends this section with: "So 'miracles' are just errors of interpretation? A lack of philology?" (Nietzsche 2002, 47, p. 46) A change due to a switch in vocabulary, perhaps from studying the origin of the words (through philology), does not seem like the radical transformation of a "miracle" anymore.¹⁹

3.2. Miracle as Justifying Ignorance

In addition to the false connection between moral acts and miracle, Nietzsche also dislikes using miracle as an excuse for ignorance. In his essay, "The Utility and Liability of History", he criticizes the way people see "progress in history" as a miracle, because they do not understand human development. Some people, he writes, look with amazement "on the miracle of the immense distance that that the human being has already traveled", and are further in awe at the "even more amazing miracle, the modern human being himself" (Nietzsche 1995a, p. 147). Nietzsche cites the "overproud European" who is "stark raving mad" for promulgating this false view of miracle (Nietzsche 1995a, p. 147).

In the opening to *Human, All Too Human*, he directs his critique toward philosophers who attribute a "miraculous origin [*Wunder-Ursprung*]" to higher values (Nietzsche 1995b, 1:1, p. 15). By doing so, they hope to accord greater validity to their philosophy, but in reality, they call the roots of these values "miraculous" to cover up their ignorance of where they actually come from. Positive values do not have a miraculous origin, nor do great philosophers have a miraculous eyeglass with which to see these origins. Nietzsche writes in a later section of *Human, All Too Human*:

Every human activity is astonishingly complicated, not only that of the genius: but none is a "miracle". —Whence, then, the belief that there is genius only in the artist, orator, and philosopher? . . . (In believing this, we attribute to them a kind of miraculous eyeglass [*Wunder-Augenglas*] with which they see directly into "being"!.) (Nietzsche 1995b, 4:162, p. 123)

Although the achievements of humans are wonderfully complex, we cannot assume that their greatness—whether in philosophy, art or rhetoric—comes from a divine origin. If we were to see how the philosopher crafted her thoughts or how the artist created his artwork or how the speakers practiced their speeches, we would no longer be ignorant of the "process of becoming" and no longer consider it miraculous (Nietzsche 1995b, 4:162, p. 123).

This is true for philosophical concepts as well: the idea of "being" as the source for all reality can be properly understood not by giving philosophers superpowers, but by tracing the development of human thought from the pre-Socratics to today. Nietzsche also gives the example of the concept of "free will" in *Human, All Too Human II*: we do not know how to make sense of why people choose what they choose, so we just call it the "miracle" of "free will" (Nietzsche 2012, 2:23, p. 167). In this way, we claim that we can "explain" people's actions and, most importantly, justify punishment for wrongdoing.

If we stop using "miracle" to conceal our lack of knowledge, we can have the proper view of education and allow it to flourish, as he discusses in sections 242 and 243 of *Human, All Too Human I*. We may think that education can work miracles, because we see people coming out of rough circumstances be educated and then become successful; but, Nietzsche writes, "we will never discover miracles there" because many people have received the same education and have only perished (Nietzsche 1995b, 5:242, p. 166). Rather than seeing education as the miracle, Nietzsche finds a miracle present in the individual: there is an "indestructible innate strength" behind a well-educated person—"thus is the miracle to be explained" (Nietzsche 1995b, 5:242, p. 166). Here he gestures to the idea that he makes

more explicit elsewhere of miracle being an “inner strength” or “inner transformation” of a person, as we discussed earlier.

In the following section 243, he gives the example of how medicine has flourished due to a rejection of miracle. When the belief in miraculous cures ceased, he argues, the art of medicine progressed and the position of the physician was greatly elevated; even though he has taken on some of the responsibilities of the “spiritual physicians” of the past, the doctor “does not need to do any miracles” presumably due to the social respect for his medical knowledge and training (Nietzsche 1995b, 5:243, pp. 166–67). Young comments on these passages, “Nietzsche observes that education (he is thinking here of technical education) will be taken seriously only after belief in God has disappeared, just as medicine can only flourish as a science when one gives up belief in miracles” (Young 2010, p. 258). While Nietzsche may be leaving room for miracle to enter into non-practical forms of education, perhaps through the arts, here, he clearly disparages the use of miracles in education to cover up ignorance and impotence.

3.3. Miracle as “Proof” of Religion

Nietzsche also objects to religions using miracles as a proof for their validity. In *The Gay Science*, he writes that the reason Jesus’s coming to earth seemed like a “miracle” to his followers is because their view of God was only as a “wrathful Jehovah” (Nietzsche 2001, 3:137, p. 126). He states, “Here alone was the rare and sudden piercing of a single sunbeam through the gruesome general and perpetual day-night experienced as a ‘miracle’ of love . . . everywhere else good weather and sunshine were too much of a rule and everyday occurrence” (Nietzsche 2001, 3:137, p. 126). Jesus’s presence appeared as a sunbeam piercing through the night sky because he was such a contrast to a God of anger and judgment. But in other places, such actions would be seen not as miracles, but as everyday occurrences. This “miracle” of Jesus coming does not prove their religion, but reveals the way that his early followers viewed the divine.

In fact, he argues in the *Anti-Christ* that miracles were not even needed in primitive Christianity, but were added in later as a corruption:

[Faith in primitive Christianity] does not prove itself with miracles, rewards, or promises, certainly not “through scriptures:” at every moment it is its own miracle, its own reward, its own proof, its own “kingdom of God”. This faith does not formulate itself either—it *lives*, it resists formulas. (Nietzsche 2005, 32, p. 29, italics his)

The traditional miracles found in Christianity, such as healings and transubstantiation, are falsely used to prove that it is true, but this does not mean that there is no miracle at all in faith. For the faith itself, Nietzsche writes, is at “every moment its own miracle”; in other words, there is no need to add miracles to augment the religion when the simple faith itself is a miracle. Here we find both the positive and negative conceptions of miracle—negative in that the traditional miracles should not be used as proofs, but positive in that religious faith as a personal act can be seen as a kind of miracle itself.

Neither acts of miracles in the past nor acts in the present should be used to establish a religion. Nietzsche ridicules those who turn everyday coincidences into miracles that prove God exists: they take their “everyday, humdrum, miserable little lives and, using the ‘hand of God’, fashion them into miracles of ‘grace’” (Nietzsche 2005, 52, p. 52). He questions what kind of God these people actually believe in: is he a God that just gives into our whims and desires? He concludes: “It would take only the tiniest bit of piety to see that a God who cures our cold at just the right moment or who tells us to climb into the coach just when it starts to rain is so absurd that we would have to get rid of him even if he *did* exist. God . . . basically a term for all the most stupid coincidences” (Nietzsche 2005, 52, p. 52). Nietzsche is gesturing at something phenomenological here: for something to be real in a lived sense, it must be comprehensive and holistic such that if there was an all-powerful Being, he would impact all of life, the big and the small.

It must be noted that many of his critiques of miracle are written primarily during Nietzsche's so-called positivist period (roughly 1878–1881), especially those in *Daybreak* and *Human, All Too Human*, where he places a greater emphasis on providing a scientifically verified set of beliefs and rejecting any supernatural explanations. And yet, even amidst this exploration, we still find evidence of him laying the groundwork for something religious later on, as seen in his continued affirmation for a different kind of miracle, such as the miracle found in the inner strength of a person and in the act of faith itself.

4. Placement in Nietzsche Scholarship

Before we conclude, I will place my argument for Nietzsche's positive construction of religion, as exemplified in his conception of miracle, in the wider scholarship of Nietzsche studies. To do so, I must first offer a brief historical sketch of the various interpretations given for Nietzsche's view of religion. Initially, the German people viewed Nietzsche as more of a reformer than a destroyer of religion (Aschheim 1992, p. 203). But since 1945, most philosophers have focused on Nietzsche's negative reaction to religion (Auweele 2020, p. 262). There are various reasons for this due to the many "radically different interpretations" of Nietzsche's philosophy that have arisen (Woodward 2011, p. 11). Two prominent interpretations from the past fifty years, as presented by Brian Leiter, are the naturalist, focusing on Nietzsche's interest in scientific truth, and the postmodern, focusing on Nietzsche's idea of contingent truth (Leiter 2015, pp. 1–2).²⁰

Taking the naturalist interpretation, Leiter argues that Nietzsche seeks after "continuity" with the sciences and rejects religious explanations because he sees no "explanatory role for God in an account of the world" and repudiates "supernaturalism" (Leiter 2015, p. 4, p. 9). The naturalist interpretation relies on at least two important aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy in its approach. First, it points to Nietzsche's dramatic shift from loving the arts, during his friendship with Richard Wagner, to a disillusionment of the arts, after his break with Wagner. As a result, Nietzsche laments the superficiality of romanticism and seeks to discover what certainty the sciences can offer. Second, the naturalist approach points to Nietzsche's attack on religion due to it being the corrupt source for all values, especially moral values. Nietzsche finds that it is in rejecting the religious root of morality that we can be free.

This paper is not the place to offer a full justification for a particular interpretation of Nietzsche, but I will respond to the naturalistic interpretation specifically in light of our study on miracle. Here we have found that both emphases are true in Nietzsche's critique on miracle: he wants people to rely on science over ignorance and he criticizes spiritualizing morality. The problem is not in the naturalistic interpretation on its own, but that it does not tell the full story because, in addition to the critique of miracle, we also found positive religious themes arising above what scientific answers could provide. Young offers a robust argument for how Nietzsche's positivism still leaves the door open for a new kind of religious thought to emerge in his later works (Young 2006, pp. 58–87). Even while trying out the scientific worldview, Young points out how Nietzsche maintains a continued respect for Greek mythology and also introduces the theme of life as a literary story (Young 2006, p. 61, pp. 71–72). Nietzsche may try out a positivistic naturalism, but in the end, it is a different sort of naturalism that Nietzsche finds (Young 2006, p. 86). This leads him to perspectives that go beyond a mere "continuity" with the sciences, and include religious ideas. For example, embracing one's death as a natural process on earth gives one more comfort than simply knowing the scientific account of bodily decay. Both are true: but it is the perspective on death, where one accepts it with joy, that is needed to truly live. Thus, to reply to the naturalistic interpretation, I would say that naturalism is an important perspective of Nietzsche's, but we must understand *why* he entertains it; for it is in deep naturalism, which contains a "love of earth" foreign to positivism, that we find a religious perspective, arising out of themes such as miracle.

For different reasons, the postmodern interpretation has also focused on Nietzsche's rejection of religion; heirs of this school, such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and

Michel Foucault, all see themselves as atheists walking in the aftermath of the death of God²¹. The traditional postmodern interpretation primarily focuses on the *authenticity* required for philosophy. If philosophers rely on ideas of religion, such as the comfort of a loving and good God, they are not genuinely facing the world; they are masking the reality, ignoring the real emptiness and pain that is present. It is not an easy task to see the world without divine intervention, but this is the strength that Nietzsche's calls for in his works, and to sneak religious ideas back in might be seen as a betrayal.

Again, this is not the place for a thorough exposition of a particular Nietzschean interpretation, but drawing on our study of miracle, we find confirmation of this postmodern approach in the way miracles must represent a genuine internal change as opposed to any outward pretense; this places authenticity at the heart of any new religion that Nietzsche may espouse. While we should be wary of using religion as a crutch, Nietzsche also recognizes the reality that humans have a desperate need to worship and to practice religion. This is why, in the last couple of decades probably arising out of this postmodern interpretation, there is a minority group of scholars who have become increasingly interested in Nietzsche's positive construction of religion (see again [Auweele 2020](#); [Benson 2007](#); [Caro 2004](#), pp. 153–200; [Roberts 1998](#); [Young 2006](#)). My approach in this paper shares this minority postmodern approach, because I believe that it best represents Nietzsche's account of miracle.

Regardless of method, however, my hope is that Nietzsche scholars will find this article helpful because I offer a deep textual analysis on miracle that can aid many different interpretations. For the purposes of this article, I am demonstrating how his description of miracle informs a phenomenological approach to religion, as I will summarize for us below.

5. Toward a Basis for a Phenomenological Account of Miracle

In conclusion, I have presented a comprehensive look at Nietzsche's account of miracle. As we have seen, he puts forth a conception of miracle for a new kind of religion while also dismissing the old inadequate view. We have found that his new conception complements a phenomenology of religion by establishing miracle as a phenomenon of human experience. This phenomenon of miracle opens us up to something beyond one individual's experience and points to a shared encounter among many, where individuality loses its significance in a larger mythical story.

As we close, I foresee two primary objections to my argument put forward here. Related to the question of interpretation as discussed above, the first objection, most likely from my Nietzsche scholars, is that I am glossing over the real change in his opinions about miracles as seen in his different writings, especially those during his positivist period. This paper does not mean to make light of Nietzsche's clear philosophical shifts, but I do argue that there is a certain continuity in his understanding of miracle throughout his work. Yes, there may be times that he is more critical of miracle and places wherein he seems to reject miracle to a certain degree. But even in this rejection, he still leaves room for a *different* conception of miracle to arise. He certainly moves past what he deems the "traditional Christian understanding of miracle", but he never moves beyond the idea of miracle itself. As mentioned previously, at least half of his references to miracle gesture to a more positive rather than negative idea of miracle, so he clearly has a concern for this new sense of miracle. Plus, his love for Zarathustra, who exemplifies the miracle of loving fate, demonstrates his repeated emphasis on the need for myth, and thus, the need for miracle in his philosophy.

The second objection, most likely from my theologians, will be that Nietzsche's new description of miracle is not really a conception of "miracle" at all: how can we call it a miracle if it is human in origin and not divine? Colloquially, we use miracle to signify a divine intervention in an event, but if Nietzsche's miracle is found in the action of the human, is there not something at odds with miracle itself? This is a valid concern and cannot be quickly dismissed. Let us look again at the descriptions of miracle that Nietzsche

rejects. Miracle is not something external, it is not something separate from us, it is not a change in behavior, it is not a name for something that we do not understand, and it is not a proof to demonstrate something as true. Now, perhaps those who still want to hold onto traditional religion will argue that some of these things *do* characterize a miracle, but certainly most would agree that this *cannot* be all that a miracle is.

What if, instead, we want to understand miracle, not from an abstract perspective, but from the perspective of how we actually experience it? Here we find that Nietzsche's account is excellent in giving us a description of how we might understand the phenomena of a miracle from a human's perspective. As I have demonstrated throughout this textual analysis, this human perspective on miracle is what lays the groundwork for a phenomenology of miracle. Let us consider again what he does attribute to miracle. Miracle always takes place in a communal narrative larger than myself, miracle always impacts my relationships with others around me, miracle always refers to an alteration of something on the inside of me and miracle always supports life in all of its forms. Perhaps some of the external truths of miracles are still valid, but how can we make sense of them without this human experience of miracle? Can a miracle be real if it takes place separately from a community? Does it have meaning if it only changes something external, but not the heart?

While it is legitimate to argue that Nietzsche does not give us a complete account of miracle, he certainly provides a phenomenological perspective, capturing the significance of what a radical change actually feels like for someone. Nietzsche warns us of the pitfalls in a narrow view of miracle, but also reminds us of critical elements of miracle that can be easily overlooked. His "prophetic" voice calls us away from theoretical dogmatism back to a religion of life.²²

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Notes

- ¹ All of Nietzsche's texts will be cited in this following way: Section/Part:Chapter/Aphorism, Page Numbers.
- ² Please see part 4 for a detailed explanation of this interpretation of Nietzsche in light of other more traditional interpretations of Nietzsche.
- ³ The chart (Table 1) will primarily use the Stanford and Cambridge translations of Nietzsche's texts, but it should be noted that there are not major differences between these translations and Walter Kaufmann's translations on this term. In other words, the context makes it fairly clear when *Wunder* should be translated as "miracle" and when it should be seen as something less religious, such as "wonder".
- ⁴ This also includes a small number of forms of *Wunder* as noted on the chart.
- ⁵ My research was conducted through the use of the invaluable online database, which contains the German texts of all Nietzsche's writings (<http://www.nietzschesource.org/> (accessed on 16 August 2023)). For each reference, I noted the context and translation of the German *Wunder* in the English translations.
- ⁶ The only scholar that I have found who recognizes the important connection between miracle and myth for Nietzsche is Frances Nesbitt Oppel, a literary critic writing on Nietzsche on gender. See her insights on myth and miracle in relation to gender here (Oppel 2005, pp. 78–79, 101). I should add that Erich Heller also gestures toward the role of myth in miracle, particularly in relation to the eternal recurrence, as we will discuss later see (Heller 1988).
- ⁷ Oppel argues that part of the miracle is seen in the fact that two *male* gods, Apollo and Dionysos, are coming together and somehow able to give birth to art (Oppel 2005, p. 68).
- ⁸ We might wonder whether we are dealing with one or two miracles taking place here. We have the miracle of the union of the Apolline and the Dionysiac, which gives birth to the work of art, but we also have the miracle of the individual participating in the reality of the action on the stage. Although slightly unclear, I would argue that there is just one miracle, the "metaphysical miracle" of the united work of art, which the individual can choose to "receive" as one's own miracle, or keep at a distance.

- ⁹ We might refer to Kant's statement here, which says the exact opposite of Nietzsche—that miracles *are* dispensable to religion: rational religion “must render faith in miracles in general dispensable” (Kant 1996, p. 124).
- ¹⁰ Although Nietzsche is critical of Strauss, Strauss most likely did have an influence on Nietzsche's own rejection of Christianity. See (Young 2006, p. 34).
- ¹¹ Antigone probably represents a tragic character of the Apolline drive, but Nietzsche believes that Sophocles offers both Dionysiac and Apolline elements in his plays. See (Nietzsche 1999, 4, p. 28) for Antigone reference and (Nietzsche 1999, 9, pp. 46–48) for discussion on Sophocles's other play, *Oedipus*).
- ¹² As an aside, Nietzsche discusses with irony in *Ecce Homo* a “miracle” that happened to himself: the break of his friendship with Richard Wagner was sealed by the “miraculous coincidence” of his book *Human, All too Human*, which countered Wagner's views, crossing in the mail with Wagner's opera *Parsifal*, which Nietzsche subsequently despised (Nietzsche 2005, p. 119). (Although, as Erich Heller points out, there were actually four months in between the mailings (Heller 1988, p. 57)).
- ¹³ See again Megill's discussion of Jesus and Zarathustra as both being “myth-makers” (Megill 1981, p. 222).
- ¹⁴ Nietzsche had actually visited the Cathedral in Naples that contains a vial of Januarius's blood. See (Young 2010, p. 322).
- ¹⁵ The German text of the poem here in *Ecce Homo* is the same as the one in *The Gay Science*, but there are variations in the English translations: (Nietzsche 2007b, p. 64) with *Wunder* as “miracles”; (Nietzsche 2005, p. 123) with *Wunder* as “beauties”; (Nietzsche 2000, p. 749) with *Wunder* as “wonders”. The German text is printed in this last translation (Nietzsche 2000, p. 749).
- ¹⁶ I cite the Kaufmann translation here, because there is a typo in the Cambridge edition of this section.
- ¹⁷ There is also the use of “*Wunderthäter*” in reference to the last pope mentioned above.
- ¹⁸ A cupping glass is a heated glass cup that creates a suction on the skin used in an alternative medical therapy. Clearly, there is a relation here between the “healing powers” of leeches and cupping glasses.
- ¹⁹ Nietzsche is certainly being ironic here, as he was first and foremost by training a philologist.
- ²⁰ Leiter sees the postmodern view as dominating the 1960s–1990s (Leiter 2015, pp. 2, 233).
- ²¹ See reflections on this in (Young 2003), especially chapters 9, 13, 14 and 15.
- ²² I would like to thank Mark Allen, Debra Romanick Baldwin, Judith Norman, Philipp Rosemann and Angelika Wimmer for their invaluable feedback on this article.

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