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The Phenomenology of Affirmation in Nietzsche and R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica

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Abstract: Nietzsche is the world's most (in)famous atheist, bearer of the monumental tiding of the Death of God. His works contain biting critiques of Christianity and, to a lesser degree, of Judaism as well. Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica [=RMY] (1800–1854) was a leading Hasidic master in 19th century Poland. Despite their seemingly incongruent world views and backgrounds, bringing the German philosopher and the Polish Rebbe into conversation bears significant fruit. The significance of my study is two-fold. First, based upon similar philosophical moves by both Nietzsche and RMY, I aim to establish a philosophical foundation upon which to create a secular religious space which, beyond the local discussion around Nietzsche and RMY themselves, is of vital importance in a world continuously divided along inter-religious and secular-religious grounds. In addition, I will sharpen what we mean when we discuss the "religiosity" of Nietzsche and how this religiosity may confront nihilism. I believe that Nietzsche's orienting insight that God is dead can serve as an inspiration to create a phenomenologically religious "space" devoid of metaphysical and transcendental assertions and that there is a Hasidic master willing to meet him there. The quest of RMY was to reveal a Torah bereft of "*Levushim*", that is to say, bereft of the familiar Jewish and kabbalistic mythical trappings. When the traditional Christian and Jewish myths which refer to a transcendent reality are discarded, the search for meaning is relocated onto the immanent stage of human ("All too Human") phenomenology.

Keywords: Jewish Philosophy; Hasidism; Nihilism; Nietzsche

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1. Introduction

This paper is a phenomenological study which will explore responses to the challenge of nihilism and possibilities of affirmation of life in the thought and phenomenology of Friedrich Nietzsche and R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbica.

Friedrich Nietzsche, for the purposes of this volume, is seemingly in no need of an introduction. He is the world's most (in)famous atheist, bearer of the monumental tiding of the Death of God. Yet the following observation by Lou Salome about Nietzsche is particularly germane for this paper and will help me to convey the context in which I understand him.

> His [Nietzsche's] entire development, as it were, derived from his loss of belief and therefor from his emotions that attend the death of God…*The possibility of finding some substitutions for the lost God by means of the most varied forms of self-idolization* constituted the story of his mind, his works, and his illness. … Nietzsche's story involves the "continuing effect of a religious drive within the thinker", which remains powerful even after the God to whom he had related was smashed… (Salome 2001, pp. 26–27)

Far from being a cold-hearted atheist, Salome understood Nietzsche as a passionate spiritual seeker.

In any case, a few words of introduction of Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica [=RMY] (1800–1854) are certainly in order.

RMY was a leading Hasidic master in nineteenth century Poland. He was a disciple of Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Przysucha and the famed Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk. The circle with which he was associated was part of the Polish revolution within the Hasidic movement which underwent a transformation from a popular folklorist movement to one which became more intellectually rigorous.[1]

RMY's homilies were recorded and collected by two of his grandsons. The *Mei Hashiloah* Volume I [=MH I] was published in Vienna by his grandson R. Gershon Henech of Radzin in 1860. MH Volume II [=MH II] was published by the brother of Gershon Henech, R. Mordechai Yosef of Lublin in 1922.

RMY has been characterized as a religious anarchist and radical individualist seeking to shed the shackles of the Halakha, and adhering to a determinist doctrine which undermines the significance and meaning of religious service.[2]

In this paper, I will show that RMY and Nietzsche, though metaphysically far apart, shared a common phenomenology which could be described as a disquieting conviction that the accepted myths and symbols of their respective religions/cultures and civilizations do not express ultimate reality. This haunting skepticism in turn begot a quest to find the meaning which was lost along with the naïve belief in the literality of those myths and symbols. Both Nietzsche and RMY anchored meaning in the affirmation of self through analogous phenomenological labor.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part will attempt, based upon the teachings of Nietzsche and RMY themselves, to outline a secular/religious landscape in which a meaningful conversation between them can occur. The second section will fill the space delineated in the first section with a discussion which rests at the heart of Nietzsche's project; nihilism and the possibility of affirmation of life.

I believe that Nietzsche and RMY together can serve as an inspiration to create a phenomenologically religious "space" devoid of metaphysical and transcendental assertions in which significant and otherwise impossible encounters can ensue.

For Nietzsche, the death of God meant that the familiar Christian myth which gave meaning to people's lives had lost its potency.[3] The quest of RMY was to reveal a Torah bereft of "*Levushim*", that is to say, bereft of the familiar Jewish and kabbalistic mythical trappings. When the traditional Christian and Jewish myths which refer to a transcendent reality are discarded, the search for meaning is relocated onto the immanent stage of human ("All too Human") phenomenology.

2. Neutral Sacred Space in Nietzsche

First, let us explore how Nietzsche experienced the death of God. In the sources which follow we find a range of different feelings.

The Madman

> . . ."Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him,—you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forewards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker?. . . (GS 125)

In the above well-known aphorism of The Madman, the death of God leaves a gaping black hole in Nietzsche's (or the madman's) consciousness. He is seized by feelings of panic and uprootedness. He finds himself disoriented, flung in all directions and peering into an abyss of nothingness. There is also concern for society which has yet to absorb the monumental event.

> . . .who will wipe the blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent?. . . 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 to the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early", he said then; "my time is not yet. . ."

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, however, the emotional tenor around the death of God is much more subdued. As a matter of fact, the event is portrayed as being taken for granted. Zarathustra is actually surprised that the old hermit has not yet heard of the death of God.

> But when Zarathustra was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: "Could it then be possible! The old saint in his forest has not yet heard of it, that *God is dead*?" (Prologue 2)

Zarathustra, it seems, represents for Nietzsche the attitude and experience of having already assimilated the monumental news. Consequently, the question is no longer how we are to survive the calamity of the death of God, but rather how we can productively navigate the new reality. This attitude is also conveyed in GS 122.

Christianity, Nietzsche writes in this aphorism, has taught us to be skeptical of the "paragons of virtue" of antiquity. Nietzsche calls upon us to preserve that Christian attitude of skepticism and apply it back to religion itself. Though the religious have died out (namely that God is dead), their knowledge may be preserved.

> In the end, however, we have applied this same skepticism also to all *religious* states and procedures, such as sin, repentance, grace, sanctification; and we have all allowed the worm to dig so deeply that even when reading Christian books we now have the same feeling of refined superiority and insight: we also know the religious feelings better! And it is time to know them well and to describe them well, for even the pious of the old faith are dying out: let us save their image and their type at least for knowledge!

This shift in how we may characterize Nietzsche's stance visa vis the death of God is very significant. It means that the vacuum created by God's death can be filled not only by dread and foreboding, but by knowledge bereft of metaphysical baggage. This attitude, in turn begets an optimistic posture. In GS 343, Nietzsche, even while being aware of the ominous aspects of the death of God, speaks of cheerfulness, excited expectation, and promise that the new post-'death of God' era may herald for humanity.

> *How to understand our cheerfulness.*—The greatest recent event—that 'God is dead'; that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable—is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe. To those few at least whose eyes—or the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some kind of sun seems to have set;. . . the consequences for *ourselves,* are the opposite of what one might expect—not at all sad and gloomy, but much more like a new and barely describable type of light, happiness, relief, amusement, encouragement, dawn. . . Indeed, at hearing the news that 'the old god is dead', we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation—finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an 'open sea'.

In summary, we see that for Nietzsche, the death of God nurtures courage and opens new possibilities of knowledge and experience. In the absence of a metaphysical God, humanity can now assert itself with a confidence which actually allows it to retain the positive knowledge and profound experience that the old faith had offered.

3. Neutral Sacred Space in RMY

RMY viewed himself as a messianic personality whose mission was to reveal a Torah for messianic times.[4] This Torah is characterized by the undisguised revelation of God

bereft of the garments [*levushim*] usually required for humans to grasp that revelation; that is to say, bereft of the familiar Jewish and Kabbalistic mythical trappings. The family memoir, published in 1925 by RMY's grandson, attests to this:

> He commenced to reveal the correct meanings of the Torah using the **language of the Torah** based upon the foundations of Truth and Faith [namely, Kabbalistic teachings—HH]. He clarified his disciples' questions and elucidated the words of the sages which are enveloped and enshrouded [***levushim***] in a way which obscures their light. He expounded the Torah for the masses so that they could understand the words of R. Simeon bar Yohai and R. Isaac Luria as one understands straightforward renderings of the Halakha. (*Dor yesharim* p. 12)

RMY set out to reveal the esoteric *meanings* of the Torah in the *language of the Torah*. That is to say that RMY strove to reveal the messianic Torah which is characterized by the revelation of the essential light (that is the spiritual content) bereft of the traditional Kabbalistic garments employed by R. Shimon B. Yohai in the Zohar and in the writings of the Ari. He wished to engender direct experience by transcending the conventional language.

RMY's own homilies, recorded in the *Mei Hashiloah*, communicate directly what his family biographer states in *Dor Yesharim*.

> In the Future, God will reveal His glory to Israel bereft of garments [*levushim*]. In the Present time this life is found in the depths of Israel but is obscure and enshrouded. These garments are the Torah and the commandments without which one could not arrive at the depths of the Will of God. (MH I *Hukat* s.v. *Veyikhu*)

In the above aphorism, RMY identifies the "garments" which are to be discarded in the Future time as the Torah and its commandments. This is a very significant move, since the Torah and its commandments lie at the foundation of Jewish commitment, belief, and lifestyle.

RMY's movement to go beyond "garments" also includes shedding foundational Kabbalistic myths which were generally viewed by his predecessors and contemporaries as metaphysical realities. One example is the use of the term, "*Tzimtzum*" in the *Mei Hashiloah*. *Tzimtzum* is the Kabbalistic doctrine of divine withdrawal or contraction at the time of creation. The term is mentioned twenty-nine times[5] in the MH but referring to the withdrawal of God only twice. Rather, RMY applies the term to human beings, exhorting them to delimit *themselves* in order to become open to others and/or the divine effluence. We have here a crucial de-mythification of the idea of *Tzimtzum*; a shedding of the garment and with it the attendant metaphysical claims in favor of an interiorized phenomenological version of the concept.

Hence, from a phenomenological perspective, we can see that Nietzsche and RMY made analogous moves which free them to engage in a metaphysically "neutral" space, which we characterize as secular and religious. Secular, in the sense that within the boundaries of this space, one need not accept the metaphysical reality of God nor the ultimate nature of Christian and Jewish symbols, myths, and rituals. Nonetheless, this space may also be characterized as religious, since the knowledge and experience which it holds speaks to deep religious sensibilities.

In the following section of this paper, we shall bring Nietzsche and RMY into conversation around the question which arguably lies at the core of Nietzsche's project as well as at the center of RMY's concern: nihilism and the quest for affirmation of life. This question is acute for both Nietzsche as well as RMY but for different reasons. For Nietzsche, the search for meaning is engendered by the death of God. RMY struggles with nihilism as a consequence of his belief in the ubiquitous nature of the divine will which threatens human agency, integrity, and responsibility.

This common struggle with nihilism and the affirmative valuation of life through struggle and a phenomenology of overcoming is saturated with religious feeling without necessitating belief in this doctrine or that dogma.

4. Nihilism—Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

Before we bring Nietzsche and RMY together around their common search for a solid basis upon which to affirm life, it will be helpful to juxtapose Nietzsche with the thought of his teacher, Schopenhauer. This will flesh out possible attitudes toward the principle of individuation before we turn to the paradoxical position of RMY.

It could be said that according to Schopenhauer (1969), human beings are uniquely unsuited to living life. This is because the Will to life which is objectified in every individual is the cause of relentless suffering. The will always strives and is never satisfied and the fulfillment of one desire invariably begets many more.

> It always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such thriving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction; it can be checked only by hindrance, but in itself goes on forever. (WW p. 308)

That willing perpetually begets human suffering, can be attributed to one fundamental human error according to Schopenhauer: The illusion of individuation.

> . . .that veil of *maya*, the *principium individuationis*, is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egoistical distinction between himself and the person of others. . . (WW p. 378)[6]

Since it is the curse of perceived individuation which precipitates suffering, Schopenhauer seeks a consciousness of "complete willessness" in which the illusion of individuation is overcome.

> Thus, whoever is still involved in the *principium individuationis,* in egoism, knows only particular things and their relation to his own person, and these then become ever renewed *motives* of his willing. . . .We would like to deprive desires of their sting, close the entry to all suffering, purify and sanctify ourselves by complete and final resignation. . . . (WW p. 379)

Schopenhauer pretends to a transformed state of human consciousness in which the Will is negated and extinguished in the person themselves. The annihilation of the Will can be accomplished through sustained ascetic practices and mortification.

> . . . in most cases the will must be broken by the greatest personal suffering before its self-denial appears. We then see the man suddenly retire into himself, after he is brought to the verge of despair through all the stages of increasing affliction with the most violent resistance. We see him know himself and the world, change his whole nature, rise above himself and above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity, willingly renounce everything he formerly desired with the greatest vehemence, and gladly welcome death. It is the gleam of silver that suddenly appears from the purifying flame of suffering, the gleam of the denial of the will-to-live, of salvation. (WW pp. 392–93)

Thus, Schopenhauer maintains a profoundly pessimistic—Nietzsche would say nihilistic—posture toward life which is deeply embedded in his understanding of the metaphysics of the Will. The solution lies in overcoming the illusion of individuation and the annihilation of the Will.

Nietzsche accepted Schopenhauer's grave description of reality, amplified by the realization of the death of God, but responded very differently both in evaluation and method. Nietzsche, rather than seeking to annihilate the Will, which he saw as tantamount to negating life itself, sought to affirm life. Furthermore, his method of affirmation lay, in direct contradistinction to Schopenhauer, in human construction and embrace of illusion rather than transcending it.

> What, after all, did Schopenhauer think about tragedy? This is what he says in The World as Will and Representation, II, p. 495: 'What gives to everything tragic, whatever the form in which it appears, the characteristic tendency to the sublime,

> is the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them. In this the tragic spirit consists; accordingly, it leads to resignation'. How differently Dionysos spoke to me! How alien to me at that time was precisely this whole philosophy of resignation! (ASC 6)

Schopenhauer looks to tragedy as penetrating the veil of the illusion of individuation leading to a posture of resignation and annihilation of the *principium individuationis*. Nietzsche here, *contra* Schopenhauer, looks to art and tragedy as a way of shielding us from the merciless reality and allowing us to actually reinforce the consciousness of the *principium individuationis* and affirm life.

Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche struggle with the problem of meaning; Schopenhauer, in the face of the "unspeakable sufferings of mankind"[7] and Nietzsche in the face of the death of God. Schopenhauer seeks the annihilation of the *principium individuationis* while Nietzsche calls for mustering the courage to affirm life and the PI.

Now let us turn to RMY, his struggle with meaning, and paradoxical attitude toward the PI.

5. Nihilism and RMY

RMY, for reasons differing from the German philosophers, also grapples with questions of meaning. Whereas for Nietzsche and Schopenhauer the problem emerges from the death of God, for the Hassidic master, the problem is the Kabbalistic belief that there is no place devoid of the presence of God. This belief is interpreted by RMY to refer to the ubiquitous nature of the *Will* of God which leaves no room for human agency and freedom.

> In truth the will of God is that this world should be one of appearance. . .the deep truth is that all is in the hands of Heaven and the freedom of choice is as the peel of garlic, only from the human perspective. This is because God has hidden his way from human beings because He desires human service and if all was revealed before man then no service would be possible. (MH I *Korah* s.v. *VaYikah*)

In the above aphorism, RMY maintains that the divine will is all-encompassing and that the perception that human beings have of themselves as possessing free will is an illusion. This reality is devastating to any sense of human value and meaning.

Thus, we find in the MH II, commenting on Qohelet 3: 9, "What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?"

> Since all the labors that a person labors for God is all from the Will of God which flows through him and is not attributed to the person, "What profit has the worker?" To this question the verse responds, "from that in which he labors". This is the profit, the fact that the person exerts themselves from his perspective in order to fulfil the Will of God. That will remain for him everlasting. Through this God agrees that all the person's actions should be attributed to them.

For RMY the ultimate meaning of human labor is called into question given the all-penetrating will of God which denies the possibility of free will. Meaning can be found—and this is RMY's response to nihilism—in human labor and struggle themselves which are transformative by virtue of the imprint they make upon human consciousness.

In the following piece, RMY is acutely aware of the possibility that a nihilistic outlook may emerge from his deterministic approach. For RMY the question of free will versus the ubiquitous divine will is subject to an existential paradox, dependent on whether we adopt a human or a divine perspective. To doggedly adhere one-sidedly to the determinist position denies human responsibility and meaning. RMY identifies the nihilist approach to the arch-villain nation in the Hebrew Bible, *'Amalek*.

> *'Amalek* . . . attributes all of their actions to God, claiming that all the evil deeds which they commit are in accordance with the Will of God because without the Will of God they would be incapable of acting. To them the response must be to

> demonstrate that fear of Heaven is in human hands [namely that human beings enjoy free will—HH] and humans require service and prayer. (MH I *Beshalah*)

In the above aphorisms, RMY has condemned nihilism and insisted on meaning which is generated by humanity through spiritual labor.

Finally, in the following selection, RMY frames the search for the "meaning of life" in Schopenhauerean terms before he moves in a Nietzschean direction. Fleshing out what he understands as Abraham's spiritual quest, we find in the MH:

> When Abraham began to investigate and seek after the source of his life, for he realized that it is inconceivable that all the lusts of this world could be called true life, for all worldly desires and lusts only serve to remove the numerous anxieties and obstacles we face. Then once all anxieties are negated, what will be the true core of life upon which the world was created? Concerning this God said to him, "*Lekh L'kha*", move yourself forward, meaning ***to yourself***, for truly all the matters of this world cannot be termed "life", and the essence of life you shall find within yourself.

RMY's point of departure is similar to that of Schopenhauer; fundamentally, life seems to involve the eternal attempt to alleviate pain, and as such it has no inherent meaning. Schopenhauer's response of course is that humans must strive to negate the world and its attendant suffering through the erasure of the principle of individuation. RMY (as Nietzsche) directs the search for meaning inward. "The essence of life you shall find within yourself".

6. Affirmation in Nietzsche

When we juxtaposed Schopenhauer and Nietzsche we showed that Nietzsche, contra Schopenhauer, sought to affirm and intensify the PI. From a phenomenological perspective, Nietzsche proposes a dynamic which is very reminiscent of RMY as we understood him above.

Nietzsche sought to intensify the consciousness of the PI by imprinting upon memory experiences which were torturous; "super-charged with emotion and self-sacrifice".

Lou Salome, based on GM II 1–3 sums up Nietzsche on this point.

> The idea of a humanity that had become super-charged with emotion and self-sacrifice became in Nietzsche's retrospective review an idea which makes the entire process of human development intelligible. For that development, the long and painful taming of innate animal spiritedness was necessary, . . .The meaning of it all was to enrich every human with the fullness of an inner life and to make him master of that richness and of himself. That could only occur through long and hard discipline by which his will, like that of an adolescent, was brought to maturity with a teacher's rod and punishments. And so, humans learned to acquire a more durable and deep-seated will than the fleeting will to which the animal's impulse is subjugated. He learned to stand up for his demands; he became the animal that *can promise.* **All of human education is basically a kind of mnemonic technique: it solves the labor of how to *incorporate* memory into the unpredictable will.** [emphasis mine—HH] (Lou Salome 2001, p. 105)

The subjugation of human will through discipline, pain, and suffering, far from extinguishing the will as Schopenhauer would claim, is precisely what molds human will into something more enduring and profound. This process imprints upon memory; it is "a kind of mnemonic technique" which transforms humans into beings which transcend the animal.

Nietzsche asserts this regarding human development generally. In the aphorisms below, he finds meaning for individuals in the active acceptance of life as it is, *amor fati*.

> I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them—thus I will be one of those who makes things beautiful. *Amor*

> *fati*: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer! (GS 276)

Nietzsche seeks to affirm life as an act of will, the Will to Power, to see the beautiful in what is necessary. This is not a final state but a transformative quest. "Someday" indicates that the achievement of loving fate is not (perhaps never) in the present. Nietzsche's avowed goal is to become a "Yes-sayer;" not someone who merely says yes but a "Yes-sayer", that is a transformed human being who is characterized as a "Yes-sayer", someone who has affirmed life as a whole.

In the following aphorism, Nietzsche urges that we should view our lives as an aesthetic phenomenon which we fashion ourselves. This too, is an expression of the Will to Power.

> *What one should learn from artists.*—What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are! Here we have something to learn from physicians, when for example they dilute something bitter or add wine and sugar to the mixing bowl; but even more from artists, who are really constantly out to invent new artistic *tours de 'force* of this kind. To distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add *in order to see them at all*, . . . or to look at them through coloured glass or in the light or the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent: all this we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins; ***we*, however, want to be poets of our lives**, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details. (GS 299)

In the following aphorism Nietzsche reiterates the assertion that humans must take possession of the power to create themselves.

> We, however, want to become who we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves! (GS 335)

There is an additional nuance here which is significant in our conversation with RMY. "We . . . want to become who we are. . ." This paradoxical sentence plays on the continuum of Free Will vs. determinism. "Want to become" assumes agency, power, and open-endedness. "Who we are", however, suggests that there is already an immutable self which only needs to be revealed. Nehamas (1985) provides us with a penetrating summary of Nietzsche's paradoxical position.

> Nietzsche seems to think that to lead a perfect life is to come to know what the self is that is already there and to live according to that knowledge. But to live according to that knowledge will invariably include new actions which must be integrated with what has already occurred and the reinterpretation of which will result in the creation or discovery of a self that could not have been there already. This paradoxical interplay between creation and discovery, knowledge and action, literature and life is at the center of Nietzsche's conception of the self.[8]

7. Self-Authorship and Affirmation in the MH

This paradoxical point is very important because it goes to the core of the project of self-affirmation as a hermeneutical enterprise.

Let us now pick up on this very same paradoxical proposition in the *Mei Hashiloah*:

> All the affairs of this world are as a dream which begs interpretation. And according to the interpretation which man offers so shall the outcome be for him.[9]

RMY advances two opposite assertions here. First, he likens the world to a dream which begs interpretation. This assumes that there is a meaning to the world *in* the world

which awaits *discovery* through interpretation.[10] Second, in the continuation of that very sentence, RMY goes on to say that the reality which will be experienced will be an *outcome* of the interpretation. This implies, of course, that there is no embedded meaning in reality and that interpretation *creates* reality rather than merely uncovers it.

In any case, RMY calls for one to interpret one's life and invests that interpretation with the power to either discover or actually create the nature of that life. With that call he encounters the same paradox implicit in Nietzsche's call for us to "become who we are".

The following section powerfully illustrates how hermeneutics can be harnessed by the Will to Power to reinterpret life. Commenting on the Sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, RMY, with a hermeneutical bisection of the exegete's scalpel, radically transforms the meaning of the biblical text and along with it, our understanding of human history.

> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. . .
>
> In the Future time when the sin of Adam will be repaired, the verse will be read be as follows: " And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat ***and*** of the tree of the knowledge of good". Only after that it will read, "from the evil you shall not eat". That is to say that Adam had eaten was only the good fruit and not the evil fruit. And God will clarify that Adam only consumed the good and that the sin was only according to Adam's [limited] understanding, like the peel of a garlic and nothing more. (MH I Genesis 2: 16–17)

The unambiguous meaning of the biblical text is that Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed God's command which enjoined them from partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good *and* Evil. By introducing a break in the verse, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat and of the tree of the knowledge of good'. _ 'from the evil you shall not eat'," RMY changes the meaning of the biblical narrative entirely. Man has never eaten from the evil fruit.

The son of RMY, R. Ya'akov Leiner of Radzyn (1814–1878) expands upon his father's commentary and makes the hermeneutical nature of the teaching much more explicit.

> Every letter in the Torah alludes to a life and soul from Israel. This is why there are different combinations of letters—according to the differing souls. . . . God rendered the letter combinations to Man making their meaning dependent upon his clarifications. Proof of this is that in truth God did not actually decide whether Adam ate that which was forbidden. God only communicated with him in the form of a question: "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (Genesis 3: 11) This indicates that the answer depends ***entirely*** (emphasis in the original) upon man and it is possible that he only partook of the fruit of Good and not the fruit of Evil. . . (BY *Bereishit* 60)

This breathtaking and novel interpretation of the MH (along with the clarifying commentary of his son) offers a radical reevaluation of human history utilizing the hermeneutical power which rests in human hands. Whereas the original meaning of the text casts humanity as sinners, bearing the burden and guilt of Sin, the new reading embraces the past in a way which liberates humanity. The following aphorism from the WTP captures the ethos of RMY's reading and intensifies it.

> That the value of the world lies in our interpretation (——that other interpretations than merely human ones are perhaps somewhere possible——); that previous interpretations have been perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life, i.e., in the will to power, for the growth of power; that every elevation of man brings with it the overcoming of narrower interpretations; that every strengthening and increase of power opens up new perspectives and means believing in new horizons". (WTP 616)

A Nietzschean reading of the MH based upon this text from the WTP could be described as follows: The straightforward meaning—the narrower interpretation—of the biblical text has been overcome, precipitating new horizons of meaning and a fuller expression of human power as it becomes liberated from the hitherto negative valuation of history.

The following piece from the MH can also be enlightened by such a Nietzschean reading. RMY is commentating upon the biblical prohibition enjoining the priestly cast from contact with the dead.

> It is written in the Midrash, "a parable about a king who said to his cook, 'I request that you not so much as look at the dead all the days of your life. Thus you will not defile my palace'". The cook is, so to speak, responsible for the pleasure of the king, so therefore the king warned him, "Since your job is to see to my pleasure, be careful not to cause me sadness". Seeing death is the opposite of joy.

This selection could be read as a call to piety which would involve a repressive avoidance of the phenomenon of death so as not to "spoil" the atmosphere of the Holy Sanctuary. This seemingly apologetic text can be read more as a positive assertion in light of GS 276 cited above.

Amor fati, affirming life as it is, finding beauty in what is necessary, is achieved by "looking away". "Let *looking away* be my only negation!" The "looking away" from death, according to this reading, is not a call to repressive piety. It is an active application of the Will to Power which transforms the ugly into the beautiful and the sadness into joy.

8. The Protection of the *Principium Individuationis* in RMY through the Imprint of Self-Sacrifice

When I discussed Nietzsche's affirmation of self, above, I cited Lou Salome's summary of Nietzsche that human development requires a labor of self-sacrifice in order to "incorporate memory into the unpredictable will". This "mnemonic device" preserves and reinforces the consciousness of the *principium individuationis*.

This is precisely the dynamic described by RMY in his commentary concerning the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years. Biblical law dictates that during the Sabbatical year, Israelites must refrain from working the land and facilitate giving the fruits of the land to the needy. This occurs every seven years. Following seven cycles of seven years, in the fiftieth year, we have the Jubilee Year. In that year, there is a general return of property back to the original owners, all return to their original birthrights and the preexisting harmony is reestablished.[11]

For RMY, these two time periods symbolize different states of consciousness with regard to self and God and the bridge between them. In the Sabbatical Year, God commands the people to relinquish that which is rightfully theirs; refrain from the labors, and deny themselves the fruits of their own lands. This consciousness is characterized by an acute awareness of self which must choose obedience and submission to the Divine Will. Thus, the "Sabbatical Year consciousness" is symbolic of all spiritual labor and service to God. The function of this process is to edify and elevate human consciousness in order to comprehend and survive the Jubilee Year consciousness. The Jubilee Year consciousness, according to RMY, is a unitive experience with God in which the sense of individuation is eliminated in favor of absorption into the primordial reality in which all Will is the Will of God.

> . . . in the Sabbatical year he returns the land to God. At this time, he chooses to cease from toil and working according to God's will, keeping His ordinances. . .
>
> Once every fifty years, in the Jubilee year, slaves are freed, and acquired property returns to its original owners.
>
> But what of that which came to him from the actions of man? Even though there was a purchase and sale effecting a change in domain for the moment, still it does not belong to the other one in its essence. It must be returned to the original

> owner. This is God's illumination in the Jubilee, that everyone can return to his place, that everything has its own place. **This recognition and understanding can come only after fulfilling the commandment of the Sabbatical year. . .[emphasis added- HH]**

Here, the submission and self-sacrifice impact upon the individual so that she may comprehend a more refined reality; a reality in which the disparate elements all have their proper place and are part of a harmonious whole. In the continuation of the same section, the submission to God's Will offers a "slight protection" to the individual who willfully withdrew behind his boundary during the Sabbatical Year.

> The knowledge that ownership is temporary and that nothing ultimately remains of one's toil, would make one passive.. . .
>
> Nonetheless one is rewarded for their toil in this way; when the time comes for all property to return to the original place, everyone returns to his inheritance and everything to return to its place, he will restore to the other only the physical measure of what is allotted him. However, the **boundary** that God fixed in order to distinguish between one man's portion and the other will be added to his portion. This is because initially he had extended his border into the other's. From his very efforts to expand, he will gain a **slight protection** from the portion of his comrade that will be returned. This is the meaning of all human striving in this world and it is this awareness which will remain forever.

Here again, RMY asks the nihilism question. What is the meaning and value of toil in the face of the all-enveloping Divine Will? The answer which he provides is that by overcoming oneself and withdrawing behind one's boundary in the Sabbatical cycle, one gains "protection". This protection is an awareness of the boundaries of the self—the *principium individuationis*—in the face of the ubiquitous nature of the Will of God.

Paradoxically, labor and self-sacrifice propel human consciousness beyond its' limited boundaries while protecting the awareness of those very boundaries.

This insight brings us to the final section of this paper, without which we would be remiss. We claim to forge a religious secular space, but if that space makes no metaphysical assertions (including the existence of God) in what sense can it be considered religious? And can that sense be applied to RMY and Nietzsche successfully?

9. Conclusions: What Is "Religiosity?"

Barbara Holdcroft (2006) attempts to navigate through the complexity of finding a definition of religiosity. She discusses various aspects of religious life: the sociological, personal, cognitive, psychological, experiential, and ritualistic. The fundamental distinction may be summarized as between interior and exterior religion. Exterior characteristics include ritualistic behavior which encompasses worship within a community, knowledge of their particular religion and accepting its creed. Interior dimensions of religion look toward the person's feelings and experiences. This distinction goes back to William James' distinction between the institutions of religion and religion itself which he views as intensely personal.

Ron Margolin (2021) accentuates the distinction between exterior and interior religion, emphasizing the interior aspect. This interior aspect holds various experiences which he considers part of the family of religious phenomenology such as feelings of gratitude, awe, unity with the divine, intentionality and interiorization[12] of myth and ritual.[13]

To claim that Nietzsche was a religious man would clearly be preposterous if we looked toward exterior definitions of religiosity. However, if we look to the heart rather than dogma or behavior, emphasize the interior aspects of religion, we may contend confidently that Nietzsche was indeed a religious man.

I will now endeavor to sharpen what we mean when we speak of religiosity in this context. Initially, we can speak of the religious impulse as a drive toward meaning in the transcendent. However, for Nietzsche as well as RMY we conclude that the experience of

the transcendent is ultimately an immanent one. Thus, we could characterize religiosity for Nietzsche and RMY phenomenologically as a quest for immanent transcendence.

From the discussion above, we may discern the elements of religious phenomenology which constitute the salient aspects of Nietzsche's thought despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the death of God.

In the aphorism of the Madman, the death of God has left a metaphysical vacuum which is filled with complete disorientation and existential terror. Prior to God's demise, humans were rooted in a perceived transcendent reality in which morality was justified and life was affirmed. From this pit of despair, Nietzsche moves on to acceptance of God's death and accommodation with the new reality, seeing it as opening the opportunity for genuine human growth and acquisition of knowledge. Nonetheless, the shadow of God continues to animate Nietzsche's quest for meaning.

> God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow.—And we—we must defeat his shadow as well! (GS 108)

I believe that for Nietzsche the struggle with the shadow of God is not limited to an exterior challenge but indicates an interior struggle for him as well. The Madman seeks some ritual atonement for the murder of God. Lou Salome, cited above, claims that Nietzsche's whole philosophy is a sublimated search for God.[14] The religious nature of Nietzsche's quest for meaning is apparent from WTP 1038 (1888):

> And how many new gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say god-forming, instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time!

In WTP 1052 (1888) the affirmation of life is experienced as begotten by this divine revelation.

> *The two types: Dionysus and the Crucified*.—To determine: whether the typical *religious* man is a form of decadence (the great innovators are one and all morbid and epileptic) but are we not here omitting one type of religious man, the *pagan*? Is the pagan cult not a form of thanksgiving and affirmation of life?. . . It is here I set the Dionysus of the Greeks: the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied in part. . .

As opposed to the Crucified who represents affirmation in the transcendent (which expresses decadence), the Dionysian affirms life immanently, "life whole".

Yet, affirmation is more complex than merely drawing the distinction between immanence and transcendence. It is here that we harvest the fruits of our juxtaposition of RMY and Nietzsche. It is true that if we deny or willfully ignore the possibility of actual transcendence then we can only speak of affirmation in the immanent. However, that does not mean that the *experience* of affirmation is not one of transcendence. In truth then we are talking about an experience of the transcendent in the immanent.

How is this "immanent transcendence" precipitated phenomenologically?

The "religious, God-forming instinct" is a drive toward the transcendent—there to find affirmation and meaning. This, according to Nietzsche, is of course metaphysically impossible and according to RMY not really the goal of the religious quest. Therefore, the emphasis is removed from the transcendent as a metaphysical objective per se but may be achieved by way of experience, the only way possible, through an expansion of the principle of individuation beyond its' boundaries; laboring within the self in order to overcome the self. For Nietzsche, this is the perpetual loving of fate and the never-ending striving to become a "Yes-sayer" "someday" and the propulsion toward the Übermensch. RMY's commentary on the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years is crucial here. Actual expansion beyond the boundaries of the Self has proven to be illusory. The only path forward requires self-delimitation (symbolized by the relinquishing property rights over the land in the

Sabbatical year) which reinforces the consciousness of the PI which is an experience of immanence and along with that precipitates an acute awareness of the boundary—the closest we can get to the transcendence.

We equate the concept of *avoda*, service to the divine, of the MH with Nietzsche's perpetual struggle to overcome the self. *Avoda* is characterized by the experience of being commanded by an external authority, God, to perform or refrain from actions contrary to one's own desires. The "correct" response to God's command is to bend one's personal will to the Will of God and obey. The experience of bending one's will ***is*** the edifying intention of the process. Paradoxically, while the bending of the individual will in deference to divine command may seem (and at times actually be) detrimental to the individual's sense of self, when the bending of the will is an expression of the will to power and self-overcoming, it actually reinforces the sense of the PI. Thus, we have come to understand *avoda* in the MH through a Nietzschean lens.

On the other hand, we find the consequences of the death of God in Nietzsche's experience to be analogous to the effects of the MH's project to herald a messianic Torah bereft of its traditional garments. Both paradoxically engender a crisis of meaning while simultaneously opening possibilities of freedom, cheerfulness, and affirmation of the human. These significant moves, away from metaphysical dogma and the exteriority of myths by Nietzsche and RMY, respectively, are ***religious*** moves that unavoidably propel them toward a paradoxical religious interiority, responding to the common quest of the German philosopher and the Hasidic *rebbe* for affirmation and meaning.

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Notes

1 See Dynner (2006).

2 See, for example, Faierstein (1989), Elior (1993), and Magid (2003)

3 See Cole (2008). He refers to this interpretation of the death of God as the "secularization thesis".

4 We agree with Rivka Shatz-Oppenheimer (Shatz 1993) that RMY did indeed view himself as ushering in a Torah for the messianic age.

5 MH I: *Noah, Lekh Lekha, Vayera, Toladot (3x), Beshalah (3x), Mishpatim (3x), Ki Tisa (3x), Tazria', Metzora' (2x), Aharei Mot, Kedoshim (2x) Behukotai, Bamidbar (2x) Shoftim, Ruth (2x), Rosh Hashanah, 'Uktzin.* Only in *Kedoshim* and *Rosh Hashanah* does the term refer to God rather than humans.

6 See also WW pp. 390, 391–393. Regarding the fear of death, see WW2 pp. 500–1.

7 WW p. 326.

8 Nehamas (1985, p. 168).

9 MH I *Miketz*.

10 Freud in the first section of his *The Interpretation of Dreams* spells out this assumption explicitly.

11 Leviticus 25.

12 An example of the interiorization of a myth would be the approach of the MH concerning *tzimtzum* which I cited above. See note 3.

13 As we shall see, Margolin's move is fortified by our analysis of RMY and Nietzsche.

14 Salome (Salome 2001, pp. 26–27); Diethe (2000, p. 83).

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