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## Duality and Dissolution in the Post-Apocalypse: Nietzsche's Cycle of Morality in AMC's The Walking Dead

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DUALITY AND DISSOLUTION IN THE POST-APOCALYPSE: NIETZSCHE'S CYCLE  
OF MORALITY IN AMC'S *THE WALKING DEAD*

A Thesis

by

ROY JOHN GONZALES, JR.

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

Major Subject: English Language and Literature

Duality and Dissolution in the Post-Apocalypse: Nietzsche's Cycle of Morality in AMC's

*The Walking Dead*

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Approved as to style and content by:

Chair of Committee,	Jonathan Murphy
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	John Dean
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## ABSTRACT

Duality and Dissolution in the Post-Apocalypse: Nietzsche's Cycle of Morality in  
AMC'S *The Walking Dead* (May 2016)

Roy John Gonzales, Jr., B. A., Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Jonathan Murphy

Throughout his body of work, especially in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), and *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche details Western civilization's slow movement towards nihilism. Nietzsche explains that this nihilism is the result of a so-called "slave morality," a system of inhibitive values that suppress egoistic desires for the sake of the collective. Democracy, Christian charity, and even mass consumerism are all indicative of slave morality. But because this value system relies on absolute morals supported by a "true world" (God, a heavenly afterlife, etc.), the collapse of these systems will result in mass disillusionment. This disillusionment, however, will allow for the strongest of society, previously repressed by guilt and social obligation, to create new values. These new values will find their animating principle in the sensual desires of the ego. They will resemble "master morality," which predated slave morality and was defined by the outward expression of what Nietzsche calls the "will to power." The implication of this ongoing dialectical interplay between master morality and slave morality is that the two systems of values will regulate each other based on the changing needs and demands of human society.

AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010- ), through its long-term depiction of post-apocalyptic life, demonstrates this cycle of morality in action. The characters are robbed of their old values in a world dominated by a life-denying "herd" of zombies. As the series progresses, the characters overcome their reliance upon pre-apocalyptic values and embrace egoistic self-sufficiency. Once their efforts move past survival into civilization-construction, however, they must re-learn how to moderate themselves for the sake of sustaining communities. *The Walking Dead's* thematically fluid narrative therefore reflects not only the complementary nature of Nietzsche's cycle of morality, but also Western history's troubled relationship with metaphysical ideas it alternates between rejecting and embracing. Although an examination of *The Walking Dead* through a Nietzschean lens cannot wholly resolve this conundrum, such an analysis can provide insight into the changing power dynamics of society and illuminate ways of mitigating the trauma of shifts between value systems.

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## INTRODUCTION

The end of the world seems to be in vogue these days. Recent years have seen a glut of post-apocalyptic media, including literature, films, and television shows, portraying fictionalized worlds where society has crumbled and the rule of law has expired. Post-apocalyptic media expresses and confronts anxieties about a contemporary world that claims to be safer than ever before despite all evidence pointing to the contrary. Environmental and economic concerns, coupled with increasingly fragile international relations, have drawn attention to the possibility of societal collapse. In addition to the threat of nuclear annihilation, most palpable during the Cold War, the fear of unstoppable epidemics and brutal, guerilla-style terrorism have begun to haunt the minds of first-world citizens. This is to say nothing of developing countries across the globe embroiled in seemingly endless war and political strife. But this is not to suggest that anxieties about apocalyptic scenarios are exclusive to the twenty-first century. Every culture has inevitably confronted the prospect of its own dissolution and destruction. The Christian Last Judgment and the Nordic Ragnarok are two commonly known examples of mythological apocalypses, and both depict destruction on an incomprehensible scale.

This fascination with the apocalypse and what comes afterwards suggests a growing disillusionment with the progress of history and culture up to and including the twenty-first century. In his influential text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard provides a thorough examination of contemporary society's changing approaches towards classifying and legitimating knowledge. According to Lyotard, contemporary society, in part due to increasingly sophisticated technologies, is experiencing

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This thesis follows the style of the *Arizona Quarterly*.

a shift from traditional forms of knowledge to more clinical, performance-oriented science. Science, in fact, is a “subset of learning,” and learning itself is “the set of statements which, to the exclusion of all other statements, denote or describe objects and may be declared true or false” (18). In other words, science concerns itself chiefly with true-false binaries. Its goal is the description and explanation of the world and its processes based on consistent, provable objective validity. Knowledge, says Lyotard, contrary to science, “goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of true,” as it deals with the “criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), [and] of the beauty of a sound or color (auditory and visual sensibility),” among others (18). Science seeks to establish universal rules and laws that describe the natural world. As such, science is one narrative in competition with more traditional narratives, the object of the competition being the legitimization of human life. Science attempts objectivity, but knowledge, and the narratives that have historically conveyed it, are necessarily subjective, functioning as guidelines for cultures in regards to social conduct and ideology. Narratives “either bestow legitimacy upon social institutions (the function of myths), or represent positive or negative models (the successful or unsuccessful hero) of integration into established institutions (legends and tales)” (20). Put simply, narratives provide cultural and social structures within which individuals and their communities can operate. Narratives define the “rules of the game,” so to speak. Without these rules, existence would be undefined and reality uncharted. Life would be like a blank canvas, free of traditional forms of projection, but nonetheless daunting in its size and grandiosity.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, Lyotard argues for the existence of so-called “grand narratives” that have defined the attitudes of social institutions towards the people they govern. Lyotard discusses two examples of grand narratives in *The Postmodern Condition*: first, the increase of a society’s

knowledge through speculative education and second, the emancipation of the working class.

The former refers to one of the major aims of German Idealism, as articulated by thinkers such as Hegel, and the latter refers most specifically to the communist philosophy of Karl Marx. Within the bounds of the speculative grand narrative, “knowledge first finds legitimacy within itself” (34), meaning that knowledge for its own sake becomes the guiding principle of a society.

Education, specifically university education, seeks knowledge as its own end. The pursuit of knowledge thus becomes speculative as opposed to utilitarian. The loftiness of this goal, freed from base functionalism or materialism, results in the moral and intellectual advancement of the society as a whole. The second of the two grand narratives discussed, that of emancipation, takes on a more political bent, but its motivating principle is just as idealistic. In this narrative, the accumulation of knowledge is no longer for its own sake, but for the sake of the people.

“Knowledge is no longer the subject,” Lyotard writes, “but in the service of the subject: its only legitimacy (though it is formidable) is the fact that it allows morality to become reality” (36).

The idealistic, moral vision of a people liberated from the chains of corrupt government or social hierarchy animates the grand narrative of emancipation. While these grand narratives are not the only examples—Christianity is another, culminating in the revelatory appearance of Jesus Christ—they both project a goal of some sort that transcends the empirical. They function not only by framing historical, cultural, and educational discourses, but also by inspiring a nation or state to continually “improve” itself, and in doing so, they define what constitutes improvement in the first place. They lend a justness to a people’s character. They imbue a righteousness that fosters dignity, pride, and meaning.

If the Western world is developing a more positivistic, truth-oriented attitude towards knowledge, then this would imply, as Lyotard notes, the gradual displacement and even

effacement of traditional narratives and grand narratives, such as faith in the Judeo-Christian God or the Enlightenment belief in a coming moral age dominated by reason. The problem is one of legitimacy: how legitimate can narratives be if they have no objective correlative, no proof that they exist independent of human thought? The credibility of myths and moral idealism alike are no longer taken very seriously, not after a twentieth century washed repeatedly in blood and exposed to unprecedented scientific insights. The high-spirited, romantic hopes of the Enlightenment seem almost naive in comparison to the contemporary philosophical and cultural climate. The current age is most certainly a postmodern one, unimpressed with and even skeptical of old customs. The traditional narratives have failed, and even the function of narratives altogether finds itself under scrutiny. Teresa Heffernan addresses this state of affairs in her text, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (2008). Heffernan acknowledges that ideas of “man” and “history,” themselves “modern narratives,” have typically “come to satisfy the desire for continuity, truth, transcendence, and a sense of purpose” (5). For most of its duration, Western history has been considered as a literal narrative: the chronicle of a society developing and refining itself, heading for an end that will justify all that has come before it. This thinking relies on a “positive understanding of the end and apocalypse as culmination and resolution” (5). There *is* a plan, in other words, and an end is coming. Like any proper story, there is a beginning, middle, and end—a rising action, a climax, and a resolution. But, according to Heffernan, twentieth-century postmodern narratives have contested this idea of an end to history. She writes, “The present world is portrayed as exhausted, but there is no better world that replaces it—these narratives refuse to offer up a new beginning or any hope of rebirth or renewal; the end is instead senseless and arbitrary” (5). Heffernan sees the twentieth century as having cast off its faith in narratives, whether religious, political, or

otherwise. Western society lost its faith in any sort of providential plan or design. Existence revealed itself to be, apparently, senseless and meaningless. The idea of a chaotic, meaningless existence, one that only ever *appeared* ordered, is a significant cause of contemporary despair. The old traditions and old idols have lost their animating force. Attempts to find alternative idols in art and science have come up short. Lyotard's "postmodern condition" is certainly a reality to some extent, for better or worse.

Friedrich Nietzsche had already anticipated this spreading, pervasive despair and nihilism in the late nineteenth century, mere decades before the first World War. The infamous proclamation of Nietzsche's Zarathustra that "God is dead" is the result of the "will to truth" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 33) pulling aside the curtain and revealing that, as far as science can tell, there is no evidence for the existence of God—even if there is no evidence against it, either. The search for truth, as Lyotard discussed, has displaced the traditional faith in metaphysical ideas. The strict materialism of science, obsessed with discovering the "truth," has engendered a spirit of ever-growing skepticism not only towards the Judeo-Christian conception of God but also metaphysics as a whole. And what has followed this skepticism is naturally nihilism. With value systems expired and beliefs dashed, all that remains is a confrontation with the apparent meaninglessness of the world. Accompanying this nihilism is disillusionment and despair. But though nihilism signifies an intimidating obstacle for Western culture, Nietzsche considers it a necessary stepping stone on the path towards establishing stronger, more enduring values: "For why has the advent of nihilism become *necessary*? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these 'values' really had.—We require, sometime, *new values*" (*The Will to Power* 2). The

legitimacy of Western culture's values, as well as that of its narratives, myths, and idols, has been taken for granted. A confrontation with nihilism, however traumatic, necessitates the examination of the usefulness of values altogether. Like the existentialists and postmodernists that succeeded him, Nietzsche recognized the social conditions around him as ideological constructs, imaginary pillars that supported his society's framing narratives. But he also saw an opportunity following their inevitable collapse: the potential for a *self-awareness* of narratives and, perhaps, the creation of new narratives and values that would emphasize the physical, sensible world and thereby better guide the development of Western society.

The contemporary popularity of post-apocalyptic media is arguably a response to the disillusionment of the twentieth century. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche was already aware of Western culture heading towards a collapse in values, its grand narratives to be replaced by a bout with nihilism. But why? What about these value systems, and the narratives that supported them, oriented them towards collapse? For Nietzsche, the critical issue is fundamentally related to health. He argues that the moral values of his time, which are still prominent today, incline people to turn away from the needs of the physical body and the concerns of the earthly world. People are instead encouraged to desire and idealize a supersensible world that may or may not exist. Such a world could be a heavenly afterlife, for example. Regardless of its form, this two-pronged attack against physical life—the demonization of the ego and the want for a fantasy to mitigate the pain of existence—has been gradually enfeebling and eroding Western culture over time, priming it for self-destruction. Contemporary Western culture *wants* to die, in other words, and the failure of its metaphysical grand narrative—one that ironically promises an end in the form of salvation or justification—is exactly what will facilitate this death. Despite this turn of events, Nietzsche is confident a new

table of values will emerge afterwards and restore emphasis on the physical, sensible world. The current idealistic version of Western culture may end, but a new, more sensual one will take its place, and it will promote physical life and thus stave off spiritual death.

The surge of post-apocalyptic media in the twenty-first century is a testament to Nietzsche's prediction, at least partially. There is a Nietzschean optimism at work in post-apocalyptic media, however small, that contests the despair of the previous century. These various novels and films make no attempts to mask or disguise the brutal nature of their respective worlds, nor do they usually suggest faith in any supersensible idea or metaphysical concept. The struggle to reconcile the loss of meaning in these works is constant, yet, life continues, however altered its form. The AMC television show *The Walking Dead* (2010- ) is one prominent example of post-apocalyptic media, and it illustrates this ongoing struggle to live from the apocalypse onwards. The characters confront the despair of a world that has been stripped of its meaning, and they either succumb to that despair and perish or find new meaning and survive. In Nietzsche's terms, the characters must embrace their wills to power and become life-affirming instead of life-denying. They must find cause to live in the sensible world—a world that is, of course, vicious, dangerous, and virtually inhospitable. But, although *The Walking Dead* may feature scenarios that seem exceedingly bleak and hopeless, and although its characters may suffer greatly, life goes on for them. Just as the characters refuse to die in the show, the show itself refuses to *allow* them to die. In fact, Robert Kirkman, the creator of the original comic book and one of the executive producers of the television show, views *The Walking Dead*, in either iteration, as a “zombie movie that never ends” (*Late Night*). *The Walking Dead* is obviously indebted to a legacy of “zombie movies” that first rose to prominence with George Romero's original *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and its numerous sequels and

spin-offs. Zombie movies have since become a popular staple of the horror genre. However, the critical difference between the typical zombie movie and *The Walking Dead* is that while the former ends after a brief episode in the apocalypse or post-apocalypse, the latter is designed to go on indefinitely. And while this may invite questions about the storytelling quality of *The Walking Dead*, it establishes both the comic book and television show as works less interested in traditional narratives and more interested in simply persevering for the sake of persevering.

Kirkman has also stated that *The Walking Dead* is optimistic, a fact that will only become evident when the television show and comic book are considered from a more remote, distanced perspective: “People talk about how *The Walking Dead*’s very bleak, and if you take a certain cross-section of the story, yeah, it’s horrible. People [are] getting their loved ones eaten, and they’re having a horrible time. But I see the story from beginning to end, over many, many years, so I think it’s a very hopeful story about humanity overcoming this insurmountable, apocalyptic situation. . . . It’s just going to take them a long time to do it” (qtd. in Prudom). Kirkman’s sentiments reveal *The Walking Dead* as a fundamentally optimistic narrative despite its apparent bleakness. Both the comic book and television show are committed to portraying the long, arduous process of society recuperating from the loss of its idols and myths. This tendency to portray the aftermath of devastation is becoming increasingly characteristic of post-apocalyptic fiction as a whole. No longer is the focus on the end of civilization; more and more, the focus has shifted to restoration and rebirth. One narrative may have ended, but that does not mean *all* narratives have ended, or have even begun—and this idea is at the heart of this thesis. Nietzsche anticipated nihilism, but he also anticipated a renewal and transformation of moral values that would succeed those of the modern era. By drawing upon Nietzsche’s thought, this thesis will showcase *The Walking Dead* television show as a prime example of post-apocalyptic fiction that

does not wallow in the despair of its ravaged world, but rather moves toward the restoration of civilization and culture.

Most analysis of *The Walking Dead* television show has so far focused on the early seasons or certain episodes and characters in isolation. Scholarship for *The Walking Dead* can be found in many anthologies focused on the study of the horror genre as expressed in film, television, and literature. These anthologies include, among others, *The Walking Dead and Philosophy: Zombie Apocalypse Now* (2012), *Undead in the West: Vampires, Zombies, Mummies, and Ghosts on the Cinematic Frontier* (2012), and *Monster Culture in the 21st Century* (2013). This thesis will draw and expand upon the scholarship already dedicated to *The Walking Dead*, with a particular emphasis on the philosophical implications of the show's proceedings. For example, essays in *The Walking Dead and Philosophy*, such as Brandon Kemper's "The Optimism of *The Walking Dead*" and Elizabeth Rard's "Dead Ends," provide critical analyses of the original comic and television adaptation through the philosophies of Sartre and Nietzsche, respectively. Kemper's and Rard's essays allow for entry into a discourse where *The Walking Dead* as a franchise—particularly its most popular and accessible iteration, the television show—can be more thoroughly explored from a philosophical perspective, especially as the television show continues to develop and revise itself narratively and thematically. By examining parallels between the show's thematic arc and Nietzsche's theories regarding the development of Western moral values, this thesis will demonstrate that *The Walking Dead* is a profoundly optimistic, future-oriented work, one that calls for a greater, more expansive understanding of contemporary morality and the need for that morality to be flexible and proactive in order to account for constantly changing environmental and social factors.

The first chapter of this thesis will be dedicated entirely to an explication of Nietzsche's philosophy, specifically his ideas concerning "master" morality and "slave" morality. Attention will be paid to several of Nietzsche's works, with significant emphasis placed upon his texts *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *On The Genealogy of Morality* (1887), and *Twilight of the Idols* (1889). Supplemental material that will help flesh out the essential duality of the master-slave relationship will be drawn from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-89). The analysis of this supplemental material will focus on an explication and analysis of the Apollonian-Dionysian binary and the "Superman," respectively. Secondary criticism of Nietzsche, specifically Martin Heidegger's *The Will to Power as Art* (1961) and Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985), will help to clarify Nietzsche's theory on the so-called "will to power." The main goal of this chapter is to elucidate the cycle of life and morality that is implicit in Nietzsche's texts. The dualistic interplay between relatively aggressive, egoistic cultures and more stable, inhibitive cultures will provide the theoretical bulwark for my analysis of *The Walking Dead*.

The second chapter will begin the analysis of *The Walking Dead*, with a heavy focus being placed upon its characters, especially the show's protagonist, Rick Grimes. The aim of this chapter will be to depict and analyze Rick's transformation from a defender of slave morality to a hardened survivor who accepts his capacity for violence as necessary for his group's survival. His newfound capacity for violence is an expression of Rick's ego and thus of his newly-awakened will to power. Rather than constantly attack himself internally for the behavior he must undertake to survive, which is the design of slave morality, Rick eventually overcomes his guilt. He does not abandon morality entirely, but he sees the necessity of reinventing morality in a world that renders the application of conventional, pre-apocalyptic slave morality impossible.

The suppression of the ego may have been beneficial in a functional, civilized society, but it only threatens one's life in the post-apocalypse. The model of Rick's metamorphosis throughout the early seasons of the show will provide a template by which to compare and contrast the similar transformations of other major characters, including Shane Walsh, Carol Peletier, Michonne, Morgan Jones, and Philip Blake, the Governor. Each of these characters changes radically as a result of the post-apocalypse, and each embraces egoism in his or her own way. Alongside Rick, they occupy different places on the egoistic spectrum, and the group as a whole reflects a broad shift away from the slave morality of the pre-apocalypse.

The final chapter will elaborate on this transition from pre-apocalyptic morality by analyzing the portrayal of Alexandria, the central locale of the fifth and sixth seasons of the show. When Rick's group arrives at Alexandria, it almost entirely resembles a pre-apocalyptic community. Thanks to a nearby crevasse that has gathered most of the zombies that congregate around Alexandria's walls, the community has avoided any major catastrophe. As a result, life behind the walls has remained peaceful. The lack of any danger has allowed the Alexandrians, under the leadership of former Congresswoman Deanna Monroe, to continue living for the most part as though the apocalypse had never occurred. This means that their morality has not had to change in any significant way. Subsequently, the presence of Rick's group creates a hierarchy within the community, and the gulf between the more naive Alexandrians and the more hardened survivors only grows with time. The inclusion of Rick's group destabilizes the status quo of Alexandria, and instead of Alexandria assimilating Rick's group, it is Rick's group that assimilates Alexandria. The strong overpower and then, in a sense, oppress the weaker. While this change may weaken Alexandria in the short term, it ultimately leads to a stronger, more secure community. The appropriation of a weaker culture by a stronger, more egoistic culture is

indicative of Nietzsche's master morality. Master morality is characterized by the competition of wills, after which the will left standing—the most powerful, in other words—oppresses the rest and exerts its own particular set of values over them. Aristocracy, Nietzsche contends, is the result of master morality, while more egalitarian social and political models developed in response to it. In essence, master morality gave rise to slave morality, and if the cycle implicit in Nietzsche's thinking is credible, the fall of slave morality would herald a way of life more in keeping with master morality. Rick's appropriation of Alexandria suggests that the cycle is at work in *The Walking Dead*, and while Alexandria may later stabilize under a reinvented, revised slave morality, thanks to a synthesis and reconciliation between Rick's group and the Alexandrians, as of the end of the sixth season, Alexandria is still in conflict with rival communities seeking dominance.

*The Walking Dead* chronicles a series of transitions between slave and master moralities. As the series progresses, slave morality gives way to a new master morality, and that new master morality later fluctuates and stabilizes into revised forms of slave morality. In addition, the development of *The Walking Dead*'s major characters not only showcases the adoption of new values, but also the shedding of old ones. Each character who survives must negotiate with the tension between protecting the remnants of slave morality and revising them in favor of something better suited to the new order. This new order is one in which the excesses of slave morality have taken on a horrific, almost literal form: the ever-growing herds of the undead, which do not just kill their victims but also depersonalize them and render them part of a massive, stagnant collective. With contemporary slave morality having reached the pinnacle of its life-denying character, the cast of *The Walking Dead* must therefore protect life itself in their struggles to survive and maintain their individuality. They are forced by nature to approximate

the model of Nietzsche's masters. Once they have done so, they have no choice but to compete with other master-like groups in a bid to dictate the new values of whatever communities are left intact. But upon entering into communities, the characters must also temper themselves so as to coexist harmoniously with their fellow survivors. *The Walking Dead* thus highlights the ways in which master morality and slave morality check each other. Out in the wilderness, the characters must be more assertive and individualistic, but upon transitioning into a stable community, they must subject themselves to the fulfillment of some sort of regulative metaphysical idea. Like the idea of life itself put forth by Nietzsche, constantly changing and evolving, *The Walking Dead* similarly fluctuates in terms of theme and narrative, thus making it a powerful example of Nietzsche's philosophy as expressed through a modern work of art.

## CHAPTER I

## NIETZSCHE'S CYCLE OF MORALITY

Nietzsche maintains that the decay of modern values has been in effect for centuries. The foundation upon which Western culture stands has presumably been rotting since its inception, growing less sturdy with each passing generation. Yet this would not be the first time cultural values have been poised to metamorphose. Values are relative, subject to shifting environmental demands and changing technologies. They are constantly transforming from the moment they are created, constantly becoming, and evidence of this is apparent in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche seeks to understand how Western values of good and evil have developed over time. He posits the existence of two opposing systems of morality: "master" morality and "slave" morality. Although this chapter will delve into these ideas in more detail in the following pages, a brief explanation of these two systems will help to anchor the explication and subsequent analysis. Nietzsche holds that the first of these systems to develop is master morality, which is defined by the cultivation of the individual at the expense of others in a community. An order of rank is typical of a master morality culture; an elite upper class—an aristocracy, as Nietzsche says—presides over and sometimes even oppresses lower social classes. The Roman Empire serves as a useful example. In addition to actively practicing expansionism, thereby quashing and subjugating other cultures, the Romans created spaces in their society for their elite citizens—wealthy, property-owning men—to pursue personal excellence in a variety of different disciplines. Slave morality, on the other hand, arose with Judeo-Christianity, and rather than champion the success of the individual, it lobbies for the welfare of the many, especially the less able or sickly. Nietzsche maintains that slave morality has won the battle, so to speak, over its predecessor, and this is evident given the widespread

influence and popularity of Christianity well into the modern era. For Nietzsche, these systems of morality are respectively “life-affirming” and “life-denying,” which may seem strange at first glance. For example, how can master morality, ostensibly so oppressive, be life-affirming? For that matter, what does Nietzsche even mean by “life”? Understanding these ideas will be critical in order to grasp the undercurrent implicit in the *Genealogy* and some of Nietzsche’s other texts: the co-dependency and complementary nature of master morality and slave morality. For his part, Nietzsche clearly favors master morality and sees it as the antidote to what he considers a deficient slave morality. Indeed, he frames the relationship between the two systems of morality as openly hostile, calling their interplay a “dreadful, thousand-year fight” (*GM* 31). But while the two may “fight” and suppress each other, their battle is more a constant, ongoing recalibration. Within and between individuals, as well as within and between communities, Nietzsche’s life-affirming and life-denying tendencies regulate each other, opposing each other only insofar as they are “correcting” each other. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter—and the purpose of this thesis at large—will be to expose this cyclical, complementary dynamic. Ultimately, this chapter will prove that both tendencies are necessary in order for Nietzsche’s definition of “life” to exist.

Once again, what does “life” mean in this context? Nietzsche’s conception of life is directly tied to one of his central theories, that of the will to power. Nietzsche makes the connection between life and the will to power explicit in this late passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*: “[. . .] life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation.” He adds that every “living and not a decaying body [. . .] will want to grow, expand, draw to itself, gain ascendancy—not out of any morality or immorality, but because it *lives*, and because life *is* will to power” (194). Power, and thus life, therefore

necessitate appropriation. Examples are many and obvious. All biological organisms require sustenance, and so they eat. They appropriate other plants and animals to sustain and perpetuate their own lives. Plants grow, spread roots, and expand canopies; in the process, they compete with other plants. Parasites attach to hosts and manipulate them in the interest of reproduction. Human beings tear down wood and rock and mold those materials into homes. In each case, a living being prospers at the expense of something else. But the will to power is not limited to the realm of biology. Political systems, governmental bodies, philosophical ideologies, and even works of art are all manifestations of the will to power, only far more sophisticated. The humans that profit from their propagation grow more powerful by proxy; their influence becomes more prominent, and their lives benefit as a result. All life is thus interested in establishing and making itself more secure. Hence why master morality is “life-affirming”: the strongest individuals in a hierarchical society, such as the elite Romans, are able to realize their respective potentials. The lower classes are unable to develop themselves, but this is not problematic in Nietzsche’s scheme. The weak serve the strong, and the strongest continue their appropriation. The most powerful wills overcome the others, and life evolves as a result.

In *The Will to Power as Art*, Heidegger elaborates on the nature of the will to power. According to Heidegger, “the fundamental character of beings is will to power, willing, and thus Becoming” (19). “Becoming,” rather than “being,” implies a state of change. The will to power is not static; it is characterized by perpetual ascendance and ongoing appropriation. Heidegger describes “will” as “resolute openness to oneself,” which in turn is “always a willing out beyond oneself” (41). Willing is not a blind striving but a decisive expansion out and above the self. A being that exercises its will to power does so deliberately with the intent of expanding itself beyond itself. All beings that expand themselves outward perpetually ascend, appropriating more

and more, stopping only when a stronger will to power overwhelms their own. If a will to power were to somehow stop expanding and appropriating, it would no longer be a will to power.

Heidegger observes:

Every willing is a willing to be more. Power itself only *is* inasmuch as, and so long as, it remains a willing to be more power. As soon as such will disappears, power is no longer power . . . In will, as willing to be more, as will to power, enhancement and heightening are essentially implied. For only by means of perpetual heightening can what is elevated be held aloft. Only a more powerful heightening can counter the tendency to sink back; simply holding onto the position already attained will not do, because the inevitable consequence is ultimate exhaustion. (60)

In *The Anti-Christ* (1895), Nietzsche equates life with the “instinct for growth, for continuance, for accumulation of forces, for power: where the will to power is lacking there is decline” (AC 129). The will to power demands a continual projection beyond the initial self, and to cease this momentum is to risk retrogression. This sense of power in activity, not idleness, implies creation. But this sense of creation does not conform to the narrow production of something material. Rather, it refers to what Heidegger describes as the “taking up and transforming” of something’s essence, an act which inevitably necessitates destruction (61). To create is to reassemble and re-purpose. Nothing is born of nothing; destruction enables creation. This is the nature of the will to power and, moreover, the nature of life.

Alexander Nehamas, in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985), supports this reading of the will to power. He writes that the will to power “is an activity that consists in expanding a particular sphere of influence, physical or mental, as far as it can possibly go” (80). Willing has no inherent goal besides its increase, and it can manifest itself in all variety of ways. Nehamas goes on, saying, “Willing as an activity does not have an aim that is distinct from it; if it can be said to aim at anything at all, that can only be its own continuation. [. . .] and this tendency to the perpetuation of activity [. . .] may sometimes result in the actual destruction of the subject that

manifests it” (79). If the will to power is characterized by perpetual ascendance and expansion, then a collision between opposing wills is inevitable. If a will is overcome, it will be oppressed, if not altogether destroyed. Pushed too far, against too much resistance, the will to power can therefore actually be self-destructive. The will to power, as Nehamas remarks, is “the tendency to produce more and more effects upon the world; it is a tendency in connection with which there is no question of choice” (79). Any action performed by a living, animate being, or even an inanimate one, is a manifestation of the will to power. Every action influences the world and causes a change; every force is met with a reactive force. The entirety of the world is in a state of constant change and composed of competing wills. Thus, the will to power “affects and in fact constitutes the character of everything in the world and that is itself the result of such effects” (Nehamas 80). So long as something acts in the world—so long as there is change—the will to power will continue its expansion and produce a ripple effect of wills that will compete for dominance. Life emerges from this competition, ever-changing and fluid, broadening and developing into multifarious shapes and forms. Already, philosophy, art, science, and technology have spun out of life’s continual evolution. What will emerge next?

The will to power animates change and enables the perpetuation of life, which itself demands constant, fluid change. Yet the lack of change is not death, for death would only be the cessation of one life state in anticipation of another. The opposite of life in this case would be the will to power not expanding outward but shrinking *inward*, suppressing itself into a state of degeneration. If a will is constantly in action, and can only be neutralized by an equal or stronger will, then the will to power will always be active. The most effective way to counter the will to power is thus to redirect itself. If the will to power is turned upon itself, the process of change will slow. For Nietzsche, the threat of nihilism lies in the life-denying quality of cultural and

social values that suppress the will to power and hinder the expansion and growth of life. But life-denying values, because they are life-denying, cannot sustain themselves. They must eventually give way to life-affirming values. In fact, they are essential for those life-affirming values to develop at all. Nietzsche may use negative rhetoric in regards to the suppression of the will to power, but that suppression is only life-denying in the short term. The will to power has already been proven to be self-destructive if allowed to continually project itself without a counterbalance. The fundamental dualism of Nietzsche's definition of life hence becomes clear: life flourishes when opposing wills fluctuate in a push-and-pull dynamic, never entirely dominating each other, but instead prompting each other to become more powerful as a result of their competition. Two soldiers on a battlefield may kill each other, putting a permanent end to their conflict. Two fencers, within the structured limits of a competition, will both live to fight another day and further perfect their skills. Without resistance, life-denying values can be degenerative, but without a check, life-affirming values can be self-destructive. The will to power cannot be allowed to run rampant, nor can it be completely suppressed.

Nietzsche actually articulated a configuration of this dualistic opposition and interdependency quite early in his academic career. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), he describes a duality between the Apollonian art of sculpture and the Dionysian art of music: "These two distinct tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance, and they continually incite each other to new and more powerful births, which perpetuate an antagonism, only superficially reconciled by the common term 'Art'" (*BT* 1). According to this Apollonian-Dionysian model, art is the product of two opposing forces that repeatedly clash with one another. The creation of art can be likened to the unending development of life and the will to power. Life demands confrontation and collision; it cannot sustain itself otherwise. But if life is

unregulated, it will spin out of control. The opposition between the Apollonian and Dionysian styles reflects the wax and wane of life. The art of sculpture, which involves the creation of static statues, is embodied by Apollo, who is “ruler over the fair appearance of the inner world of fantasy” (*BT 3*). Apollo presides over the realm of ideals and dreams; he provides standards towards which to build and approximate. Apollo is furthermore characterized by “that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that philosophical calm of the sculptor-god” (*BT 3*). With his “sunlike” eye, Apollo illuminates the world of appearances, which demarcates and imposes order onto the world. Apollonian culture is therefore responsible for manipulating and ordering life into societies, works of art, and even individuals. Apollonian culture is life-denying, as Nietzsche would say, insofar as it constrains life into sustainable forms by imposing limits on the will to power. As a result, every organized body that exists in some relatively static form is a product of the Apollonian impulse.

Dionysian culture, embodied by the god of revelry, provides the other half of the equation. The nature of the Dionysian, Nietzsche says, is analogous to drunkenness (*BT 3*). Dionysian art and culture unleash the suppressed emotions of the individual, leading to a state of intoxication. This intoxication is so powerful that the individual actually disappears; the very ego is swallowed up in “complete self-forgetfulness” (*BT 3-4*). Indeed, the ego is allowed such expression that it dissolves the self in a maelstrom of powerful emotions. In the midst of the drunken revelry of a Dionysian festival, the individuals fade away, swept up into an amalgamation of collapsed egos. Nietzsche writes, “Now the slave is free; now all the stubborn, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice or ‘shameless fashion’ have erected between man and man, are broken down. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbor, but as one with him” (*BT 4*). The Dionysian

spirit breaks down the order of the Apollonian, returning nature—and therefore life—to its original free-flux state. This applies to every organized body, including cultures, cities, and the individuals within them. Every person is an ordered being. When influenced by the Dionysian spirit, the ego breaks free from its confines, escaping even its sense of self-identity. All of the barriers separating the units of life from each other are destroyed. The Dionysian thus returns life to its original form, and the Apollonian afterwards resumes shaping and ordering that life into new units and appearances. The Dionysian destroys, and the Apollonian rebuilds.

These two spirits and approaches to art are representative of broader inclinations: the inclination to change and the inclination to remain the same. The Dionysian is life-affirming in that it encourages the spread of the will to power; the Apollonian is life-denying in that it restrains the will to power. However, again, this restraint upon the will to power is necessary to prolong and preserve a *specific* state of life. Culture is no different. If the individual represents an Apollonian-Dionysian model on a micro-scale, then cultures represent that same model on a macro-scale. Without the Apollonian preserving a semblance of order, art, politics, and even history would be swept away in the constant excess of the Dionysian. Human culture can exist only so long as these two tendencies clash with each other, and this is the basis of the cycle of morality revealed in the *Genealogy of Morals*: the dualism of what Nietzsche deems “master” morality and “slave” morality.

The intent of the *Genealogy* is to critically assess the worth of society’s values. Nietzsche suggests that modern moral values are oriented towards nihilism because of some extreme life-denying property. In the “unegoistic” instincts that animate contemporary values of good and evil, he claims to see “the beginning of the end, stability, the exhaustion that gazes backwards, [and] the will turning *against* Life” (*GM* 5). The values resist the will to power to such an extent

that they threaten to render life impotent and immobile. Furthermore, the very existence of deficient values would hint that they were, at some point, sufficient. Presumably, Western values have thus decayed and been replaced at least once, if not many times. Nietzsche suggests that the assessment of values must therefore be ongoing in order to revise and replace them as necessary. The will to power must be allowed more freedom, in other words, so that values can naturally rise, fall, and then rise again as the situation demands it. In order for human life to continue, it must be supported by values that help it adapt to environmental and cultural changes and challenges. The inability to recognize deficient values is what leaves a culture vulnerable to nihilism. If a culture stubbornly clings to values out of fear of change—or, worse, deems those values absolute and refuses even the possibility of change—then life itself is put at risk.

In an effort to illuminate these concerns, Nietzsche posits the existence of two diametrically opposed systems of values that have defined Western culture over time. The first of these is “master” morality (otherwise known as “aristocratic” or “noble” morality), which has its origins in pre-Socratic times. However, it may be more accurate to conceive of master morality as the *absence* of morality, as it is not characterized by rigid value judgments. Rather, master morality is defined by action, and its manifestation in classical antiquity was largely physical. The powerful, almost brutish strength of ancient warriors—such as the Homeric, Roman, and Teutonic, for example—allowed them to dominate their enemies and, once victorious, assert values that served themselves. These “jubilant monsters” of the old aristocratic races, Nietzsche says, are responsible for the very idea of the “barbarian” (*GM 23*). They engaged in vicious, bloody warfare, establishing supremacy for themselves at the expense of all those they defeated or subjugated. But while physical strength may be one of the most recognizable manifestations of the master, political strength is just as formidable, if not more. If the will to power can, after

all, manifest in any way, then the masters have an unlimited range of expression. In fact, it is precisely the exercise of the will to power that is the master's defining trait. He or she overcomes others, defeats them, and thereby earns the right to assert values. The master revels in the expansion and development of his or her own ego and life, which must, of course, grow at the expense of other competing egos. But this is not to suggest that the master is an unchecked explosion of aggression. On the contrary, the master exhibits a high level of mastery over his or her own drives and impulses. If there is no control, the will to power runs amok; it consumes and ravages to the point of implosion. Without control, the master would self-destruct.

As such, controlled expression of the will to power—which is nonetheless directed outward—is the hallmark of the master. Heidegger emphasizes the importance of control in regards to willing when he writes, “In such decisiveness of willing, which reaches out beyond itself, lies mastery over . . . [whatever is being influenced], having power over what is revealed in the willing and in what is held fast in the grips of resoluteness” (41). Willing includes a decisive seizing and encompassing of something beyond the self. The master, as a result, does not fall victim to a rampant, uncontrollable ego, nor does the master suppress the ego to the point of exhaustion or even death. The master channels the ego in deliberate, controlled, creative expression. The creative aspect is important, as the master inevitably changes that with which he or she comes into contact. With every appropriation or subjugation, the master is actively changing the environment and expanding over it a larger sphere of control. Nietzsche conceives of the archetypal artist in just such a masterly fashion:

For art to exist [. . .] a certain physiological condition is indispensable: *intoxication*. [. . .] The essence of intoxication is the feeling of plenitude and increased energy. From out of this feeling one gives to things, one *compels* them to take, one rapes them – one calls this procedure *idealizing*. [. . .] In this condition one enriches everything out of one's own abundance: what one sees, what one desires, one sees swollen, pressing, strong, overladen with energy. The man in this condition

transforms things until they mirror his power—until they are reflections of his perfection. This *compulsion* to transform into the perfect is—art. (*TI* 83)

This discussion of the artist evokes the Apollonian-Dionysian model. The artist creates in the interest of producing something exceptional, something that approximates an ideal of perfection. He or she is the Apollonian, imposing order onto the Dionysian chaos. But since such an ideal is unattainable, the artist is never satisfied; he or she keeps creating. This artistic process encapsulates the ascendant quality of life and the will to power. The master, in turn, is also an artist. He or she gathers up the wild, intoxicated power of the instincts, condenses it, and then wills it outwards. Such a process necessarily demands control in order for the subject to remain intact. The master at his or her most powerful therefore embodies an equilibrium between the Apollonian and Dionysian, the life-denying and life-affirming impulses. There is enough control exerted over one's own ego to keep it intact, but there is control thrown outwards as well, seeking to shape other beings in the master's image. This is, again, the defining characteristic of the will to power: constant change and revision. The master cannot exist in a static world. By his or her very nature, the master must change and fight.

The masters exert themselves against the world in the interest of spreading their influence and power. If they are successful in overcoming what they confront, they appropriate it and transform it into their likeness. In turn, the masters themselves are transformed and made stronger. They spread their values, their sense of “good,” and in the process become more and more powerful by proxy. Thus, according to Nietzsche, the concept of “good” first originated with the masters themselves: the “aristocratic, the powerful, the high-stationed, [and] the high-minded” (*GM* 11). The elites of any given society were the ones responsible for the creation of “good.” Whatever benefited them or was like them came to be known as good. By controlling their communities and societies, the aristocrats won the right to establish their own values as the

most powerful and compelling. The very nature of an aristocracy furthermore implies social hierarchy, and for that reason the aristocrats and their values were opposed to what Nietzsche deems “the low, the low-minded, the vulgar, and the plebeian” (*GM 11*). The aristocrats, being masters, overcame and subjugated other peoples and cultures. If those peoples and cultures were not destroyed, they were dominated by the victorious aristocrats. The values of these subjugated cultures, since they did not align with the values of the aristocrats, were considered inferior. Nietzsche claims that from this confrontation between the aristocratic and the plebeian, a “higher dominant race coming into association with a meaner race,” the antithesis between good and bad first developed (*GM 11*). “Bad,” then, as that which is not good, emerged from the disparity between the social extremes. The upper class embodied the good; the lower classes embodied the bad. In this way, the masters created value. They named what was good, and, by extension, also named what was bad. These senses of good and bad, dependent upon the actions of the masters, were always changing. As the masters changed, as they became more powerful or defeated each other, the values of good and bad subsequently shifted. The masters themselves, in constant action, never stagnant, could never give rise to static, rigid values. Their morality, or lack thereof, was always fluid. They were chiefly amoral, existing freely while the social classes beneath them labored under their yoke.

The fluidity of master morality is its greatest strength and greatest weakness. If the masters are constantly appropriating and subjugating the forces around them, it is inevitable that they will eventually encounter a reactive force that will strike them down. But this violence between wills is life-affirming; in fact, it is the will to power itself. Does Nietzsche, then, seek a return to this dynamic absence of morality? Does he wish for a return to a more barbaric state of civilization? He does emphasize that human life requires violence, particularly of the aristocratic

kind: “Every elevation of the type ‘man’ has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society—and so it will always be: a society which believes in a long scale of orders of rank and differences of worth between man and man and needs slavery in some sense or other.” He recognizes, moreover, that every “noble caste was in the beginning always the barbarian caste” (*BGE* 192). Violence has *always* been necessary for the development of new classes and cultures. Weaker cultures have also always been destroyed, dissolved, or oppressed. Even if violence between humans is avoided, the natural environment will sooner or later press its own weight down upon a culture. On this topic, Nehamas suggests that Nietzsche does not necessarily advocate an explosion of violence like that which characterized the “barbarian nobles,” but rather that Nietzsche admires the masters’ “lack of absolutism” (215). Master morality is life-affirming; it supports the ever-constant, ever-ascendant flux of the will to power. Life resists absolutism, which dictates that certain values are static and cannot—or should not—change. Absolutism’s tendency to stagnation is what makes it the precursor to nihilism; it can be thought of as the Apollonian impulse refusing to budge, cementing a certain style or order to such an extent that life cannot reformulate itself. Nonetheless, absolutism and nihilism are both successive stages in the morality cycle. With every creative exertion of the ancient masters came a destructive blow. Each expression of their power strengthened them but also generated collateral damage in every sense of the term. The peoples they oppressed, the “slaves,” out of resentment and fear, came to hate the masters and the values that motivated them. As the violence-doing of the masters intensified, so did the resentment of the slaves. This resentment eventually gave birth to slave morality, what Nietzsche considers the vehicle for the life-denying values of his own era.

Nietzsche argues that slave morality found its most successful vectors in Judaism and, later, Christianity. As these religions spread and became more prominent, they facilitated a

“radical transvaluation of values,” whereby the aristocrats, once good, became evil: “It was the Jews who, in opposition to the aristocratic equation (good = aristocratic = beautiful = happy = loved by the gods), dared with a terrifying logic to suggest the contrary equation [. . .] namely, ‘the wretched are alone the good; the poor, the weak, the lowly, are alone the good; the suffering, the needy, the sick, the loathsome, are the only ones who are pious, the only ones who are blessed, for them alone is salvation’” (*GM* 17). Slave morality imposes a new order of value onto master morality. The traits of the master, which collectively constitute an assertive egoism, become evil. The traits of the slave, generally pacifistic and weak, become good. In other words, the group or collective assumes priority over the individual. The outward expression of the will to power—which is inherently egoistic and in the service of life—is therefore made to be socially unacceptable. As a result, the former good becomes evil, and the former bad becomes good. Slave morality thus denigrates the values of the masters and renders the masters powerless. Under slave morality, the will to power is turned inward. The masters found enjoyment and release in expressing their wills to power outwardly, but the slaves, unable to overpower the masters, could only find a similar release in a subtler, more insidious way. By imposing values that repress the expression of the will to power, the slaves paradoxically satisfy their *own* wills to power. They dominate their resented masters at last, not through physical battle or political maneuvering, but long-term cultural and social engineering. Ultimately, the will to power is no less active under slave morality than it is under master morality. The only difference lies in the forms by which it manifests.

Slave morality establishes an absolutist system of values by locking the values of good and evil into rigid roles. Remarking on why Nietzsche disdains this moral binary, Nehamas writes, “The moral absolutism Nietzsche attacks [. . .] insists that, wherever the distinction is

made, good and evil belong to two clearly distinct categories, the boundaries of which cannot be crossed” (209). Nietzsche himself remarks that to “talk of intrinsic right and intrinsic wrong is absolutely nonsensical” because “life is *essentially* [. . .] something which functions by injuring, oppressing, exploiting, and annihilating” (*GM* 49). In a society with absolutist values, the good is obviously emphasized while the evil is scorned. But the “evil” in this case is simply the other side of life’s essential dualism. If life is inherently violent, to label that violence as morally evil is to also label *life itself* as morally evil. For Nietzsche, the danger of absolutism lies in a culture preventing itself from doing or undergoing violence. Without violence, change, and instability, improvement and growth are difficult for a society, if not impossible.

By vilifying the aristocratic values of the masters, slave morality embraces the values that define the herd. The “herd” is the majority, the laypeople. Anyone unable to rise up to the status of master—anyone unable to exert enough power to dominate his or her fellows—is a member of the herd. The happiness of the herd, Nietzsche says, consists in an “enervation of the mind and relaxation of the limbs” (*GM* 21). The herd turns away from activity and competition because these qualities suggest an uneven distribution of power and, therefore, the possibility of a hierarchy. Hierarchy threatens the herd, which is designed to remain homogenous. The various examples of slave morality, including Christianity, democracy, and socialism, all fundamentally advocate a leveling of the social classes. Their motive is the abolishment of any and all castes, allowing for the erstwhile masters and slaves to be on the same social level. Again, this serves the function of keeping potentially stronger individuals in check. Nonetheless, Nietzsche says this social model, which treats “every will as equal with every other will,” is “*hostile to life*, a destroyer and dissolver of man, an outrage on the future of man, [and] a symptom of fatigue” (*GM* 50). The inclination towards sameness and safety, moreover, does not just stall life; it

actually *pushes it back*: “[I]n the dwarfing and levelling of the European man lurks *our* greatest peril, for it is this outlook which fatigues—we see to-day nothing which wishes to be greater, we surmise that the process is always still backwards, still backwards towards something more attenuated, more inoffensive, more cunning, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent” (*GM* 25). Slave morality prevents the violence and competition that is inherent to life. By discouraging competitive individualism, slave morality works to preserve a safe, stable status quo, but it also creates a tendency towards inactivity. There is no drive in slave morality to be better, Nietzsche asserts, or at least there is no drive that would satisfy him. Even if slave morality allows for certain forms of limited competition, the priority is always the safety of the collective above all else.

Nietzsche holds that slave morality’s predominance is due to the predominance of Christian values. The mechanisms by which Christianity suppresses the herd, he contends, are the concepts of guilt and free will: “We know only too well what [free will] is—the most infamous of all the arts of the theologian for making mankind ‘accountable’ in his sense of the word, that is to say for *making mankind dependent on him*” (*TI* 64). Free will, Nietzsche argues, is only a construction designed to enable accountability for human actions. This is a critical aspect of an absolutist system of values. If humans are not considered free—if their actions and activities are considered the result of natural causality—then their actions cannot be judged as either good or evil. Slave morality, dependent upon absolute good and absolute evil, could therefore not sustain itself without free will. Free will implies intention and motive; it suggests that humans deliberately choose between good and evil. If humans are egoistic by nature and thereby inclined to indulge in behavior considered evil, then they are ready-made to feel the guilt that accompanies their misdeeds. “Everywhere accountability is sought,” Nietzsche writes, “it is

usually the instinct for *punishing and judging* which seeks it. One has deprived becoming of its innocence if being in this or that state is traced back to will, to intentions, to accountable acts: the doctrine of will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is of *finding guilty*” (*TI* 64). The invention of absolute values of good and evil makes humans accountable for their actions. When they feel the inclination to indulge their egos—such as the masters would do—they feel guilt. In a Christian model, this guilt is no different from sin, which is only useful insofar as it keeps individuals unwilling to break from the conformity of the collective. If slave morality seeks the preservation of the herd as its highest priority, discouraging individualism and egoism via guilt is its greatest method of control.

Guilt works by turning the outward expression of the will to power inward; it makes the internal ego its enemy. The “constructive and tyrannous” nature of the will to power is directed towards “man himself, his whole old animal self—and *not* as in the case of that more grandiose and sensational phenomenon, the *other* man, *other* men” (*GM* 59). The masters exercised their egos and fought other masters; in the process, they became stronger. The slaves shun their egos; in doing so, they become weaker. As an example, Nietzsche refers to the condition of the Germanic Teutons after their confrontation with an overpowering Christianity: “But what did such a Teuton afterwards look like when he had been “improved” and led into a monastery? Like a caricature of a human being, like an abortion: he had become a “sinner,” he was in a cage, one had imprisoned him behind nothing but sheer terrifying concepts. [ . . . ] There he lay now, sick, miserable, filled with ill-will towards himself; full of hatred for the impulses towards life, full of suspicion of all that was still strong and happy” (*TI* 67). Guilt makes the master lament his or her own strength. This self-loathing is directly proportional to the feelings of individualism, strength, and creativity a person feels. If there is no great inclination to be individualistic, if there is no

great compulsion to be creative, then a person is safe and secure within the trappings of slave morality. Those individuals, however, who feel their instincts bubble and mount are made to feel sickly and low. They are assaulted by their guilt; if they do physically break the law, they are punished, perhaps even killed. Their inclinations towards difference cannot be tolerated.<sup>2</sup>

Christianity's use of guilt to enforce its absolute morals is evident enough. But what animates these absolute morals? What serves as their correlative object? Religion remains toothless without the power of belief animating it—and belief, specifically in a “true world,” according to Nietzsche, is what animates absolute morals. This “true world” validates the denial of the masters' egoistic strength by divesting the apparent, sensible world—in which the disparity between strength and weakness exists—of its worth. The true world, conceived of as a heavenly afterlife by Christianity, is a world of eternal, unchanging bliss, characterized by a distinct lack of violence or suffering. If nothing changes in the true world, then there is no growth, and thus there is no life. Fittingly, the true world can only be reached through death; hence why the values animated by it demand a rejection of the ego and an embrace of a selfless *life-giving*. The most faithful adherent of Christianity's slave morality would willingly cast aside his or her own “sinful” physical life in the hope of gaining entrance into a perfect spiritual afterlife. Nietzsche disdains this death-oriented asceticism, but he also recognizes it as slave morality's fatal flaw. If belief in the true world were to be dispelled—if the true world itself were to be exposed as an illusion—then nihilism would naturally follow in its wake.

The idea of a true world can be traced back to Plato, the founder of Western philosophical idealism. Plato's conception of the Ideas—supersensible essences that animate the existence of everything experienced in the sensible world—led to the creation of the aforementioned “true world.” Such a conception suggests the sensible world is only a mediated

interpretation of something genuinely authentic beyond it.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche writes that the idea of a true world does much to mitigate the pain of those who are unable to cope with the physical world's violent and fluctuating nature:

Death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth, are for them objections—refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not. . . . Now they all believe, even to the point of despair, in that which is. But since they cannot get hold of it, they look for reasons why it is being withheld from them. “It must be an illusion, a deception which prevents us from perceiving that which is: where is the deceiver to be found?”—“We’ve got it,” they cry in delight, “it is the senses! These senses, *which are so immoral as well*, it is they which deceive us about the *real* world.” (TI 45)

The true world, whether it is the Platonic Ideas, the Christian Heaven, or some other variant, provides a safety net for those who are oppressed either by those stronger than them or by nature itself.<sup>4</sup> What Plato developed is the quintessential model of slave morality: one that justifies the rejection of the sensible in favor of the supersensible. The sensible, with all of its change and uncertainty, demands an ongoing negotiation and constant creative exertion. The masters succeed in the sensible world because they are able to constantly adapt, reinvent themselves, and make themselves stronger. They are motivated by the challenge of a world in flux; they thrive off the ongoing growth they experience. The slaves, on the other hand, are never secure in a world that seems designed to oppress and destroy them. Their resentment and fear of the masters finds its perfect parallel in the dichotomy of the true world and the apparent world. The world of the senses, which caters to and enables the flourishing of the instincts and strength, can be rejected as inauthentic and illusory. The supersensible world, on the other hand, can be the sanctuary for the slave because it is eternal and unchanging, a realm of being rather than becoming. The supersensible world provides comfort and security because it is predictable and is believed to be guaranteed. More than anything else, it alleviates the tension between strength and weakness and, in some formulations, actually rewards weakness.

By robbing the sensible world of its value, the supersensible world also robs the masters of their strength. This is the function of the myth of the true world. By positing and then appealing to a supersensible authority—such as God—slave morality can render strength and egoism as absolutely wrong. But despite the effectiveness of slave morality, it remains oriented away from life and towards nothingness and nihilism. Only this nihilism remains masked by an alluring promise of eternal security. Nietzsche remarks, “One does not say ‘nothingness’: one says ‘the Beyond’; or ‘God’; or ‘*true* life’; or Nirvana, redemption, blessedness” (AC 130). In every case, the true world enables the easy rejection of the sensible world. Free of life, the true world represents the ultimate ideal of slave morality: peaceful, eternal inaction.

Nonetheless, as dangerous as Nietzsche finds the life-denying character of slave morality, he also recognizes its indelible presence in the development of human culture. Modern slave morality may be exceedingly repressive, but it is only the natural evolution of an Apollonian impulse that has become too powerful. Every community that establishes itself is a product of the Apollonian impulse to create and define. Given enough time, it follows that these communities would increasingly scorn any Dionysian, egoistic instincts that may threaten them. Nietzsche acknowledges this tendency in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

There are certain strong and dangerous drives, such as enterprisingness, foolhardiness, revengefulness, craft, rapacity, ambition, which hitherto had not only to be honoured from the point of view of their social utility [. . .] but also mightily developed and cultivated (because they were constantly needed to protect the community as a whole against the enemies of the community as a whole); these drives are now felt to be doubly dangerous—now that the diversionary outlets for them are lacking—and are gradually branded as immoral and given over to calumny. (123)

Once a community has managed to defeat its enemies, it no longer has enemies upon which to direct its will to power. Naturally, without enemies against whom they can unite, the people within a community will turn their wills to power against one another, and the community will

collapse as a result. Morality redirects the will to power inward, making its target the internal ego instead of other people. So, rather than destroy each other, the citizens of a community render themselves impotent and sickly. Their guilt prevents them, in general, from attacking one another. Communal stability is protected as a result, but the suppression does not stop simply because safety has been secured. Consider Newton's first law: an object in motion will remain in motion unless acted upon by another force. Without a force to counteract it, the suppression of a community continues until it reaches a breaking point. Eventually, the people become so weak and complacent that they cringe at the thought of violence altogether. They wither away as individuals, alienating and debilitating themselves, indulging in despair. Indeed, it stands to reason they eventually would want to die.

If slave morality is destined to dissolve into nihilism and despair, what would come afterwards? Would not a new master morality emerge, free from the old myths and strictures? Following this scheme, new masters would war against each other, eventually creating a new social hierarchy. This new hierarchy would eventually dissolve into a new slave morality, and that new slave morality would create new myths, idols, and narratives with which to regulate itself. The pattern is clear: the will to power twists and turns, motivating human life and culture to re-develop itself through a cycle of morality. Nehamas writes that communities "are established by revolting against former masters, by eliminating external dangers, by overpowering internal opposition, by war and injustice in the name of justice and peace, in short by what [Nietzsche] calls 'fear of the neighbor'" (211). So, a community must exert its will to power and indulge in some form of violence if it is to become a community at all. By defeating rival communities and quelling internal strife, a community earns the right to exist. But once that community is established, it must redirect the will to power in order to preserve itself. The

community must quell internal strife; otherwise, the members of the community, without a target for their wills to power, will oppose each other. Subsequently, a community must become life-denying and prevent its members from expressing fully their wills to power. Life thus regulates itself, waxing and waning between life-affirming and life-denying cultural systems as necessary. Communities arise only as a result of being violent and life-affirming, in order to grow and defend themselves, but they last a longer period of time only by inhibiting themselves and becoming life-denying. Given enough time, that life-denying tendency erodes the communities, and once the communities collapse, the survivors renew the cycle and begin warring with each other again. The cycle repeats itself indefinitely until human civilization dissolves altogether or somehow evolves into a new state of existence entirely.

With the cycle between master morality and slave morality established, it bears mentioning that there exists, apart from the Apollonian-Dionysian model, another significant form of the master-slave configuration in Nietzsche's works. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the titular prophet anticipates two future states of humankind: the "Superman"—otherwise known as the "overman" or *Übermensch*—and the "Ultimate Man." The Superman is a notoriously vague concept, never fully defined by Nietzsche and perhaps impossible to fully define. Zarathustra remarks that the Superman is the "meaning of the earth" and that humankind is a rope "fastened between animal and Superman" (42-3). Indeed, Zarathustra says time and time again that the Superman is, for the moment, beyond the scope of humankind. At best, human history and culture can only prepare for his appearance. However, the Superman is not an inconceivable goal; he is distinct from God in that he *can* appear in the physical, sensible world. Zarathustra proclaims, "But may the will to truth mean this to you: that everything shall be transformed into the humanly-conceivable, the humanly-evident, the humanly-palpable! You should follow your

own senses to the end!” (110). The “will to truth”—the drive to prove, legitimate, and discover—will inevitably dispel belief in the supersensible, Zarathustra says. After all, the supersensible can never be objectively validated through the senses. But this change in beliefs and values does not need to be something to lament. On the contrary, it should enable a renaissance of the senses. The Superman is therefore the “meaning of the earth,” a product of the earthly and the sensible. The Superman re-orientes the will to power outwards and restores reverence for the sensible world. Thus the Superman is a life-affirming figure. When Zarathustra heralds a “change in the creators of values” (85), he heralds the Superman, a future figure who will do away with the life-denying values of slave morality and create new life-affirming values to take their place. The Superman therefore overcomes nihilism, as stated in the *Genealogy*: “This man of the future, who in this wise will redeem us from the old ideal, as he will from that ideal’s necessary corollary of great nausea, will to nothingness, and Nihilism; this tocsin [alarm bell] of noon and of the great verdict, which renders the will again free, who gives back to the world its goal and to man his hope, this Antichrist and Antinihilist, this conqueror of God and of Nothingness—*he must one day come*” (66). The Superman is both an “Antichrist” and “Antinihilist,” overcoming not only the conventional morality of Western, Christian culture but also meaningless altogether. The Superman is the definitive, amoral master, who levels what has come before in order to provide a new, affirmative standard of meaning. The Superman embodies the violent but healthy egoism of life and the will to power. He brings with him a new morality centered around respect for the physical, sensible, immediate world. In doing so, he fulfills the Apollonian function of providing a new mold by which to regulate and order human life.

The “Ultimate Man,” in contrast, sees humankind pursue slave morality to its most extreme end. The Ultimate Men have discovered happiness, according to Zarathustra, but their

happiness equates to a safe, comfortable idleness bordering on inaction. “They still work,” says Zarathustra, “for work is entertainment. But they take care the entertainment does not exhaust them” (46). Furthermore, they do not grow rich or poor, nor do they rule or obey each other, for all options “are too much of a burden” (46). They are all “one herd,” wherein everyone “wants the same thing” and “everyone is the same” (46). The Ultimate Man thus reflects a perfected slave morality. Conformity eliminates individuality, and adherence to the law for the sake of comfort becomes the standard. Most notably, the Ultimate Man does not risk safety in the interest of growth or change. His state is one of perpetual sameness, which obviously comes at the expense of the will to power. The Ultimate Man is the antithesis of the Superman, drifting ever-closer to a state of entirely suspended activity. Like the Superman, the Ultimate Man is an extreme, a caricature designed by Nietzsche to vilify better the herd he detests so strongly. But his celebrated Superman is just as much a caricature, a problematic ideal who may restore emphasis on the sensible, but nonetheless remains apart from civilization. Both extremes help to reinforce Nietzsche’s ideas and attitudes regarding the life-affirming and life-denying tendencies, but they also provide examples of cautionary states from which a society should steer away. The appearance of either the ultimate dictator or the ultimate herd would suggest the cycle of morality is flailing unstably—and such a state does not bode well for any civilization experiencing the instability.

The time has come to revisit some of the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. Nietzsche equates life with the will to power, and the will to power is the drive for an entity to constantly become stronger, which must come at the expense of other entities also vying for power. Between human individuals, this conflict manifests in any number of ways, including political subterfuge and military combat. The individuals fight each other, defeat each other, rule,

and thereby develop communities. These communities then do battle, either through outright war or political machinations, and the communities eventually establish a status quo that inevitably demands regulation via morality of some kind. Master morality upsets the status quo and allows life to once again develop through the free expression of the will to power; slave morality moderates the will to power and crystallizes life once it reaches its new form, allowing for that specific life state to mature. Slave morality is only truly life-denying once that crystallization comes at the expense of the life state it is meant to sustain. At that point, when values lose their potency and despair invades, life bursts forth again in a new master morality. This is the crux of Nietzsche's anticipated revolution of values. If the "true" world is vanquished—and, with it, the "apparent" world as well—then all that remains is *the* world: the sensible. To embrace the sensible is to once again embrace the instincts of life, including the artistic creativity of the will to power. A resurgent master morality will rise from the remains of slave morality. The order of rank will return. Hierarchy will impose itself yet again. But given enough violent creation and oppression, the slaves will find an outlet for their next revolt. The cycle will continue. And should life skew too far in either direction of the morality spectrum, the results are catastrophic for communities caught in the interim. If communities wage war against each other indefinitely, they will all inevitably be destroyed. If they suppress themselves to the point of exhaustion, they will waste away. The challenge for any community is to keep a healthy balance between the two opposing poles for as long as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Master morality and slave morality thus represent opposing ends on a continuum, and the moral values of a society, or lack thereof, depend on that society's position on the continuum. When master morality reaches its most extreme point, threatening the unbridled rampage of the will to power, slave morality corrects this fault, and then it overcorrects, suppressing the will to

power and making people increasingly inactive. Master morality then responds in kind, allowing for new values to usurp and rectify the deficient values of slave morality. Both systems of morality oppress each other in turn, building new forms of life, culture, and art in the process. Each system manifests its will to power: master morality throws its will to power outwards, but slave morality turn its will to power inwards. Nietzsche supports unabashedly what he anticipates to be a revival of master morality, but the cycle of morality implicit in his writing suggests that slave morality, which he de-emphasizes, is nonetheless vital in its own right. The two systems of morality, and the tendencies towards life they represent, exist in a perpetual interplay, allowing for life to exist at all. Nonetheless, the existence of the cycle means that modern slave morality is destined to end, and the post-apocalyptic future promised by much twenty-first-century media may indeed come to pass. In the case of *The Walking Dead* television show, the collapse comes very quickly, and the individual characters are forced by necessity to begin their transformations (or reversions, if one would prefer) to a state of master morality. This process entails a “de-programming” of most social conditioning, including guilt and conscience, which in a civil society prevent crime and more general violence. But a full embrace of one’s will to power brings with it the threat of self-destruction. For the cast of *The Walking Dead*, survival in the post-apocalypse demands ultimately *control* of the will to power, not indulgence or repression.

## CHAPTER II

### OVERCOMING GUILT

What form would society take during the transition from one moral system to another? Nietzsche's cycle of morality is gradual, with the erosion of each master morality and slave morality occurring over many generations. Political changes, such as the collapse of dictatorships or the instatement of democracies, are perhaps the most obvious manifestations of the moral cycle. But revolutions in theory, art, and lifestyle, among others, can also change the dynamic between the individual and his or her larger community. For instance, humanism emphasizes the improvement of humankind through art and education, in line with the ancient Greeks. Postmodernism, as noted in the introduction's discussion of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, is skeptical of the conventions and narratives typically employed to legitimate daily life. These movements both represent and inspire shifts towards and away from life.

Regardless, it is difficult to imagine any theoretical, political, or cultural trend leading to the absolute end of society. Transitions may be turbulent, but even the most anarchic of revolutions eventually stabilize. What often causes the most damage are environmental crises that are outside human control. The Black Death is perhaps the most famous example. A similar plague has devastated the world of *The Walking Dead*, only it has not just killed its victims, but also brought them back. The zombies on the show, nicknamed "walkers" by the characters, are not far from the definition of Nietzsche's Ultimate Man. They are stagnant, impersonal entities, lacking motivation or desire beyond the mechanical impulse to feed. Alone, they are weak and fragile, little more than nuisances. In a group, they are overwhelmingly dangerous. Their herds are a potent visual signifier of the state of the world of *The Walking Dead*: barren and destitute, robbed of its meaning. The post-apocalypse in general is, apropos, beyond good and evil. No

government exists to enforce laws. No church upholds any myths. The Christian “true world” Nietzsche disdains in his writing has lost its power, leaving despair in its wake. For Nietzsche, nihilism is a slow death, but the wasteland featured at the beginning of *The Walking Dead* is only months old. The transition from a civilized world to a Hobbesian state of nature is virtually instantaneous. The zombie apocalypse accelerated the downfall of slave morality and pushed it into its end stage: the literal rise of the Ultimate Man.

As mentioned at the end of the last chapter, the characters of *The Walking Dead* struggle with this new reality in different ways, but they all must choose fundamentally between surrendering their old moral codes (and living) or clinging to those old moral codes (and dying). To survive in the post-apocalypse requires them to revise their worldviews, but physical survival necessarily entails moral death. No character on the show better understands this fact than its main protagonist Rick Grimes. A deputy sheriff, he suffers a gunshot at the beginning of the series and falls into a coma. When he awakens, he finds the world has changed. Like all of the characters, Rick’s subsequent evolution sees him grappling with the reality that he must revise his morals or abandon them entirely in order to survive. As the central character, his transformation is given the most prominence throughout the show, and as Rick changes in response to his environment, so does the thematic message of *The Walking Dead* as a whole. Rick’s evolution, which is often cyclical, moving between inhibited and uninhibited as the situation demands it, mirrors the evolution of the world around him. By charting his general growth from paragon of slave morality to proponent of violent egoism and then, finally, to a more homeostatic place between those extremes, one can establish a template for the rest of the core characters on the show. Such an analysis will be the purview of this second chapter. Attention will be paid to Rick’s development, and the struggle he experiences reconciling his

life-affirming and life-denying tendencies will help to illuminate the struggles of the other major characters, including Shane Walsh, Carol Peletier, Michonne, Morgan Jones, and Philip Blake, the Governor. All of these characters find themselves caught between repressing themselves or allowing themselves to express fully their wills to power, and depending on where they land on the egoistic spectrum, some survive while others perish.

Rick begins *The Walking Dead* as an upstanding, humane, and, most importantly, moral individual. His position as a no-nonsense deputy exemplifies this. It is telling that for almost the entirety of the pilot episode, he wears his uniform, fully equipped with badge, ten-gallon hat, and holster. Wearing the uniform, despite the lack of any social order necessitating it, belies Rick's own attachment to the symbol of the sheriff. The significance lies not in the fact that the audience recognizes Rick as an authority figure, but rather that Rick himself does. He *chooses* to assume the role of sheriff even though there is no longer any society to validate that role. In her article, "Frontier Values Meet Big-City Zombies: The Old West in AMC's *The Walking Dead*" (2012), Shelley Rees examines Rick's apparent fixation with the lawman archetype. She writes, "Rick's insistence upon maintaining his sheriff's deputy uniform in this lawless world emphasizes his function as the text's threshold between the ordered past and a (re)ordered future; his visual signification projects law and justice standing tall among the rubble of a devastated civilization" (81-82). Rick believes that what the symbol of the sheriff represents—the order of law and civilization—will solve the crisis of the post-apocalypse. He believes that the application of conventional, old-world morality will restore definition to the world. "He persists in constructing himself," Shelley goes on, "sartorially and otherwise, as the mythical lawman who will rescue the beleaguered town that has fallen into lawlessness and anarchy" (82). Rick is an adherent to the myth of the sheriff and, by extension, the myth of civilization. He is an adherent

to modern slave morality, in other words, and of course he would be—he is a product of his culture as much as anyone else. But Rick’s faith in the morality that has hitherto ordered his life goes beyond mere attachment to the status quo. Rick *believes* in civilization, perhaps all the more desperately now that it has left him. He is the defender of the herd, the protector of permanence. When he proclaims to Daryl Dixon, “We don’t kill the living” (“Wildfire”), he is demonstrating a fealty to morality that surpasses that of any of the other characters. Yet it is Rick’s stubborn attachment to pre-apocalyptic morality that threatens the safety of his group time and again. Not surprisingly, Rees considers Rick’s system of values to be “outdated” (80). The world has moved on, but Rick refuses to move with it.

The first season of *The Walking Dead* busies itself with making this fact abundantly clear. Rick’s forays into the overrun Atlanta, first in search of his family and later to retrieve Merle Dixon, both end in failure. His group’s camp is attacked in his absence, resulting in a number of casualties. Rick is distraught after the slaughter, but he finds purpose in a new mission: finding help for the bitten Jim at the nearby Centers for Disease Control. “If there’s any government left,” he says, “any structure at all, they’d protect the CDC at all costs, wouldn’t they?” (“Wildfire”). Rick places his faith in the government, even though the government has very clearly failed to contain the outbreak of the zombie virus and maintain social order. Rick understands that traveling to the CDC is a risky endeavor, but his desperate need to validate his moral actions takes priority over pragmatism. Jim becomes a project for Rick, who hopes to redeem his perceived failures through helping an ailing man. Jim himself recognizes this when he tells Rick he would rather be left behind than continue suffering through the trip to the CDC. “Now that’s on me,” he says, “Okay? My decision. Not your failure” (“Wildfire”). Rick, however, is unable to see the situation any other way. His conditioning is too powerful, his

attachment to slave morality too strong. *Any* inability to apply his morality to the new order wears on him. His rigid character, firm and steady in the pre-apocalypse, cannot bend. Rick has to abide by his ingrained morality. If he does not, the guilt, the brand of slave morality, weakens him and leaves him sickly.

The CDC, of course, reveals itself to be a lost cause. Manned only by the half-mad Dr. Jenner, the Atlanta branch is in disrepair when Rick's group arrives in the first season finale. Jenner informs the group that the rest of the scientists either fled or "opted out," meaning they committed suicide. Jenner intends to do the same by remaining in the facility as it self-destructs, and he elects to take the other characters with him. "You know what's out there," he says, "A short, brutal life and an agonizing death," but suicide, he argues, brings with it an "end to sorrow, grief . . . regret. Everything" ("TS-19"). Jenner represents an extreme form of nihilism, one that renounces life in favor of death. Jenner's despair has paralyzed him. In his view, human life is ending rather than transitioning. He understands life as *being* and not *becoming*. His attachment to the former world is so great, his trauma so severe, that the only solution to the post-apocalypse is to surrender entirely. His sentiments echo those of Andrea, who earlier in the episode remarks that "everything's gone" and "nothing's left." Both characters, instead of facing a difficult existence for no apparent reason, would rather choose a quick and painless death.

Christopher Robichaud, in his essay "Opting Out: The Ethics of Suicide in *The Walking Dead*" (2012), argues that Jenner and Andrea's rationale involves more than just the fear of a vicious death. In addition to that, there is the fear of what he deems "moral disintegration." Robichaud writes, "In the world of *The Walking Dead*, moral disintegration amounts not to the survivors losing this sort of [animal] reasoning but rather to its transformation into something unrecognizable to them and to us. It is a complete change of moral norms—a completely new

table of values, as the famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche [. . .] would describe it. And this new set of norms, the values that must be embraced, are understandably viewed by many of us as savage and grotesque” (par. 45). Robichaud rightly anticipates the forthcoming “moral disintegration” of the characters and even explicitly refers to Nietzsche in this context. For Robichaud, the worth of moral values equals even that of life; if those values are threatened, then life itself may not be worth living. He writes, “The prospect of undergoing a long, tragic process of having our moral norms beaten out of us and abandoned, only to be replaced by ones that we consider, from our current perspective, to be monstrous, is absolutely terrifying” (par. 47). Certainly, from the perspective of slave morality, the dissolution of slave morality is the ultimate loss. Nietzsche, a self-proclaimed “immoralist,” would, in theory, relish the destruction of these generally ascetic values, but the characters, at this early juncture, are not Nietzsche. Jenner and Andrea are products of slave morality. They understandably want to protect—and potentially even die with—the values that have shaped them. Even Rick, as demonstrated by his insistence on remaining as humane and selfless as possible, seeks to maintain the morals of the pre-apocalypse. Hence the existential despair: the characters cannot envision a world without morality. They know nothing else. Surrendering their morality would involve, necessarily, a surrendering of their own identities. They would need to become, as Robichaud puts it, “savage and grotesque.” Certainly, *The Walking Dead* is sympathetic to this reality. The frequent focus on Rick, both literally, in terms of cinematography, and thematically, underscores how heavily the show wants to sway audiences to his side. Rick, increasingly tortured and self-loathing as he slowly gives up his morals, is meant to capture the audience’s attention. In contrast, the more pragmatic, survival-oriented Shane is portrayed as much more violent and volatile. Shane’s willingness to abandon his morality is scorned by the show while Rick’s persistence in

maintaining his values is celebrated. But *The Walking Dead*, as sympathetic as it is, cannot coddle Rick indefinitely. Although he persuades Jenner to let his group escape, the lingering dilemma remains: if Rick continues to maintain his morality, a morality of the literally dead and dying, he will soon join them.

Over the course of the next thirteen episodes, the second season confronts this conflict directly, systematically dismantling Rick's moral persona until little is left. In the premiere alone, "What Lies Ahead," Rick suffers two more major failures: the loss of the young Sophia and the shooting of his son, Carl. Sophia's disappearance, especially painful since Rick was the one to lose track of her, causes him to actually turn to God. In an abandoned church, he appeals to the visage of the crucified Jesus Christ. "I could use a little something to keep us going," he says. "Some kind of acknowledgement. Some indication I'm doing the right thing" ("What Lies Ahead"). Although he admits he is not a religious man—demonstrated in the pilot by his reluctance to partake in prayer with Morgan Jones and his son—Rick's faith in his morality is shaken. With the destruction of the CDC, governmental authority has proven unreliable. Can God, then, intercede on behalf of Rick's morals and make them meaningful again? Indeed, Rick receives his sign: the accidental shooting of his son. Carl survives, but Rick is left even more cynical and disillusioned. In one of the following episodes, "Cherokee Rose," when Hershel Greene attempts to console him, remaining optimistic that a cure will be found and that God is still at work, Rick dismisses him: "Last time I asked God for a favor and stopped to admire a view, my son got shot. I try not to mix it up with the Almighty anymore. Best we stay out of each other's way." Rick rejects the help of any divinity, embittered as he is by the state of the world. His cherished morality, given form by the lawman archetype, has also failed. People have died under Rick's watch, and every attempt on his part to do right by his group has only made their

situation worse. At the end of the episode, Rick removes his badges and sheds his uniform. “Are you putting them away?” asks his wife Lori. Rick says nothing, but his haggard, sullen face, clearly defeated, says it all: the lawman archetype, at least as it was known in the pre-apocalypse, has no place anymore.

Nonetheless, Rick insists on finding the lost Sophia, more for his sake than hers. “This means something, finding her,” he tells Shane (“What Lies Ahead”), and he later adds, “I had her in my hand, Shane. She looked in my eyes and trusted me. I failed her” (“Chupacabra”). Like with Jim, saving Sophia becomes a goal for Rick to achieve. If he finds her, he will, in his mind, redeem himself and the validity of his moral code. More importantly, he will abate the guilt that increasingly tortures him. Shane, of course, is ready to dismiss the girl altogether. “It’s math, man,” he tells Rick. “Alive or not, Sophia, she only matters to the degree in which she don’t drag the rest of us down” (“Chupacabra”). Shane has already begun the process of shedding his pre-apocalyptic morality, but, again, despite the pragmatism of Shane’s words, Rick is the sympathetic character in this instance. Shane’s survivalist philosophy rings false; his inclination to rank the members of the group in terms of competence and utility, clinically judging them from a distance, is meant to offend not only Rick but the audience as well. Rick’s belief in the inherent dignity and equality of all human life—something Nietzsche would certainly question—is what *The Walking Dead* would like to support, even as the evidence mounts that Rick’s position is simply unsustainable. Shane, on the other hand, is interested in discarding his guilt and empathy entirely. He considers them nuisances that impede survival. Rick, however, wants to maintain the status quo of the past, and that means putting the needs of the many, even the weakest, before the strongest few. He recognizes, too, the future that awaits him if he allows his moral compass to break: his devolution into something, from his perspective, that is less than

human. Such a bleak future seems inevitable if his group is forced to leave the sanctuary of Hershel's farm.

The farm, isolated from the larger world, remains untouched by the atrocities of the apocalypse. The zombies that do encroach on the land are quietly stowed away in the nearby barn, maintaining the illusion of safety and stability. Elizabeth Rard, in her essay, "Dead Ends," featured in *The Walking Dead and Philosophy* (2012), argues that Hershel and his farm embody slave morality. In his delusion, Hershel believes the zombies are actually just people who have lost their minds. He uses them, Rard says, as "means of control" in his interactions with Rick's group: "Hershel, the old, kindly, southern gentleman is able to keep Rick and Shane in check by imposing his will to power on them, forcing Rick and company to re-evaluate how they view walkers" (225). Since the farm is relatively untouched by the chaos surrounding it, slave morality can still function on its grounds. This enables Hershel to curtail the more destructive impulses of Rick's group through the imposition of typical moral values, but it also allows Rick himself to stave off the gradual moral degradation he is experiencing. His morality can still operate on the farm, as long as the threats of the outside remain contained or warded off. If the farm loses this quality, Rick fears either the literal death or moral death he will inevitably experience, a dilemma he expresses to Hershel: "It [the world] is much, much worse, and it changes you. Either into one of them or something a lot less than the person you were" ("Pretty Much Dead Already"). Rick understands the stakes. In order to protect himself and his people, he will have to indulge in his will to power, and that will change him. This turns out to be unavoidable. When Shane unleashes the zombies trapped in the barn, revealing the undead, reanimated Sophia, Rick shoots her down—and with her, he shoots down his last, best hope for

redemption. From that point onwards, the second season burns down the rest of his pre-apocalyptic self almost entirely.<sup>6</sup>

The introduction of the prisoner Randall poses Rick's group with a significant problem, one that challenges their sense of morality more directly than ever before. Following a firefight with another group, Rick rescues the wounded Randall and brings him back to the farm. Unfortunately, this poses a dilemma: allow Randall to live and risk him leading his group to the farm, or execute him and eliminate the potential threat. This decision occupies all of the eleventh episode, "Judge, Jury, Executioner," in which the sage-like Dale tries his best to argue for Randall's life. If any character up until this point represents slave morality, it is Dale, and his lobbying for the old way is as much a final stand for slave morality as it is for Dale himself. "If we do this," he says, "the people that we were, the world that we knew, is dead. And this new world is ugly. It's [. . .] survival of the fittest" ("Judge, Jury, Executioner"). What Dale fails to realize is that the old world *is* already dead, and if the group denies this reality, they will soon be dead, too. When Dale perishes at the end of the episode, his demise marks the end of any chance for modern slave morality to continue, at least on the part of Rick's group.

The next episode, "Better Angels," sees Rick grapple with this moral death when Shane attempts to murder him. Rick kills Shane, and he later admits to Lori that he *wanted* to do it. He had become so fatigued by Shane's harassment that he allowed the confrontation to escalate to the point of murder. But by killing Shane, his erstwhile best friend, Rick eliminates ties with his own personal history.<sup>7</sup> His self-identity, now without a morality or history on which to rely, threatens to collapse. The altercation between the two men also heralds an attack from a large herd of zombies. In the season finale, "Beside the Dying Fire," the group has no choice but to abandon the farm and, with it, the sanctuary that protected whatever remained of their pre-

apocalyptic morality. Bloody and bitter, Rick lets out his frustration. “There’s got to be a place not just where we hole up,” he snarls, “but that we fortify, hunker down, pull ourselves together, build a life for each other” (“Beside the Dying Fire”). Rick is angry, and rightfully so—the government has failed him; religion has failed him; morality has failed him. The post-apocalypse has worn down everything he was, including his cherished status as lawman and moral authority that it endowed. While his group is weary and despairing, Rick instead turns to fury and indignation. He renounces slave morality, proclaiming that the group “isn’t a democracy anymore” (“Beside the Dying Fire”). Rick is done trying to maintain the egalitarian status quo of the past, and he will no longer tolerate challenges to his authority. But is this sudden shift in his behavior a sign of the sincere, guilt-free egoism of master morality, or is it the angry, miserable bewailing of a man who feels himself betrayed and abandoned?

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche’s prophet outlines a three-step transformation on the way towards the Superman. The first stage of the process is represented by the camel, which bears the weight of pre-made values. These pre-made values include all of a society’s conventional morality. Rick, in being saddled down by his pre-apocalyptic morality, most closely resembles the camel during the first two seasons of *The Walking Dead*. However, the second stage of the process, the lion, refuses the “Thou shalt” of morality and instead embraces the “I will.” The lion is thus able to “create itself freedom for new creation” through the use of a “sacred No” (55). This “sacred No” is the rejection of all accepted values; it is the destructive act that precedes the creation of a new system of values. The third and final stage, the child, encompasses a new, innocent, guiltless state of being. “The child is innocence and forgetfulness,” Zarathustra says, “a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes” (55). The child is what remains after the previous ego, entitled and

miserable, sloughs off. Most importantly, the child “wills its own will” (55). Freed from despair and pre-made values, the child can create his or her own values and take responsibility for any and all decisions made. The child sees potential in life for new ways of thinking and living, and, through its innocence, it picks up the pieces of the idols and myths destroyed by the lion and reassembles them.

It is tempting to say that with the furious renunciation of his morality, Rick has reached the state of the child at the beginning of the third season, but his mental instability and increasingly distraught nature suggest he is actually still caught within the trappings of slave morality. He may have turned away from the morality that defined him, but its hooks still dig into him. The stress of rejecting those values but not overcoming the accompanying guilt has left Rick cold and unstable by the time the season opens, months after the fall of the farm. He projects an air of detachment throughout the early episodes of the season, seemingly a far cry from the embattled, tortured deputy who wrestled with each and every decision. Here, hardened by an exhausting struggle against the elements, he barks orders and viciously slaughters any zombie in his way. Rick’s new attitude is demonstrated most prominently in the second episode of the season, “Sick.” After clearing out an overrun prison, Rick’s group is confronted by a group of prisoners who survived by remaining holed up within the cafeteria. Rick coolly lays out the new status quo to them: “There’s no government, no hospitals, no police. It’s all gone” (“Sick”). Clearly, Rick has accepted the loss of pre-apocalyptic society, but a more profound change is evident when he explicitly threatens the prisoners with a swift death should they cross him. And when Rick does kill one of the prisoners and leaves his accomplice to die, there is no mistaking the significant change in his approach to morality. But his toughness comes at the cost

of his relationship with his wife, Lori, whom he keeps at a distance. When Lori dies early in the season, Rick's tough exterior quickly crumbles, revealing his fragile interior.

With Shane gone, Lori remained Rick's most powerful connection to his past. Lori also served an absolving function for Rick, even with the distance between them. "I need you to know, not for one second do I think there's malice in your heart," she tells him, "You're not a killer, and I know that" ("Sick"). Lori kept Rick tethered to his old self and its accompanying morality, no matter how much he denied that connection. Following her death, he loses his composure, falling into a grief-induced stupor that he battles throughout the rest of the season. Rick's monumental guilt over how he treated Lori and their relationship manifests most powerfully in the episode "Hounded." During the episode, Rick receives hallucinatory phone calls from a group claiming to have found absolute sanctuary from the post-apocalypse. When it is revealed that these voices are actually those of Amy, Jim, Jacqui—all significant characters who perished in the first season—and, finally, Lori, the sanctuary they have found reveals itself to be no sanctuary at all; it is death, only safe, like Nietzsche's "true world," because of its removal from life. These phantoms are manifestations of Rick's immense guilt, and they confront him with the murders he has committed as well as his negligence which led to Lori's death. The manifestation of these particular voices, all belonging to deceased people who Rick considered his responsibility, prove that he is still heavily burdened with guilt at the beginning of the third season. These deaths still haunt Rick and expose the defectiveness of his slave morality.

The rest of the season finds Rick grappling with his guilt and struggling to maintain his frail sanity. His ego has finally been demolished by the stresses of the new world, and it is only in the season's last two episodes that Rick manages to find a steady place for himself, both mentally and emotionally. Faced with the inefficiency of his dictatorial leadership, he cedes

power to the rest of his group and takes on an inclusionary approach to other survivors. At the end of the finale, “Welcome to the Tombs,” Rick brings the remaining residents of the nearby Woodbury to stay at the prison. He reflects on his sheriff’s badge—its first reappearance since he put it away in the second season—and also realizes that the ghost of Lori has finally left him. The implication is clear: Rick cannot abandon the tenets of slave morality entirely, even if the violence he indulges in is necessary for survival. As deputy sheriff, although he cannot restore the infrastructure of the old world, he can nonetheless negotiate a new standard of order and civilization, one adapted to the needs of the post-apocalypse. But this will be an ongoing struggle, one that sees him pulled in both directions by his destructive and creative impulses.

The fourth season, especially its first half, is expressly about Rick’s decision to suppress his capability for violence. Under the guidance of Hershel, Rick has surrendered his gun in favor of farming. This change is meant to rehabilitate both him and his son, Carl. But in addition to refusing to engage in violence, Rick has also renounced the responsibility of leadership. The prison, now a self-sustaining, stable community, is run by a multi-member council and not a single individual. This shift from autocracy to oligarchy and, obviously, the relative “peace time” following the repulsion of the Governor, the villain of the third season, signify a more democratic leaning to the prison as a community. This is further reflected in the aesthetic of the prison itself, no longer blood-spattered and grime-covered but clean, well-kept, and even colorful. With external threats mitigated for the time being, life has been allowed to flourish at the prison. The council, as well as the three questions asked to prospective members, represent a new iteration of slave morality, not one copied from the pre-apocalypse but expressly suited to the post-apocalypse.<sup>8</sup> Rick and his group, having successfully secured the prison, must necessarily now allow the formation of new laws in order for the prison to sustain itself. This is

Nietzsche's cycle in macrocosmic form and microcosmic form—the broader pre-apocalyptic values have shifted towards egoism, but the values of the communities existing in the post-apocalypse must qualify that egoism appropriately in order to survive. The prison does not resemble a pre-apocalyptic, Western community—it was, ironically, a prison—but it functions under relatively repressive laws that enable its continued existence.

Despite the prison's security, the danger of the post-apocalypse remains ever-present. Rick's insistence on avoiding violence in the early part of the season defies this reality, but not for the sake of any actual system of values. Rick has no interest in protecting conventional notions of good and evil anymore; rather, he wants to protect his humanity and that of his son. In the second episode, "Infection," he tells Daryl, "I screwed up too many times. Those calls you got to make, I start down that road . . . I almost lost my boy—who he was." If anything, Rick wants to defend the idea of morality in general, not for any other reason than to heal himself and his family. His prolonged flirtation with violence after the fall of the farm frightened him. Violence, although necessary in some instances, has a habit of quickly escalating. Rick hardened, but so did those around him, and especially Carl. Violence won them the prison, but now it must be repressed in order for the community to be stable. As the fourth season progresses, the pressures mounting against the prison increase. Although the zombies may be held at bay with the fences, a lethal flu infiltrates the prison, quickly throwing it into chaos. Reluctantly, Rick takes up his gun again. As much as he wants to turn his back on violence, either for his family or for morality in general, the post-apocalypse demands violence and brutality in exchange for survival. In the episode "Indifference," Carol confronts Rick with this fact: "It always comes for us, and over and over again, we face it so that we can live. [. . .] You can be a farmer, Rick. You can't just be a farmer." Rick cannot operate in only one mode regarding violence; he cannot

entirely inhabit it or entirely ignore it. The will to power, and the violence that embodies it, must be expressed and inhibited in tandem so that life can exist. This duality defines life as a force constantly changing and evolving. Rick must accept violence as necessary for the continued survival of his group.

Not long after, the Governor reappears, and the prison collapses in the ensuing battle. With its fall, the remaining survivors are scattered. A badly beaten Rick begins a slow healing process in the subsequent episodes, gradually restoring the power he had previously wielded. Like a child, he has to re-learn what it means to survive in the wilderness, and that includes harnessing his will to power and his capacity for violence. Ever since Lori's death, Rick has been in a transitional state, shying away from violence and aggression. The lawman of the early seasons has dissolved and left behind a fragile, fragmented ego. As the fourth season winds down, Rick finally reassembles himself. Here, he at last begins to resemble Zarathustra's child. This transformation reaches its bloody climax in the season finale, "A," in which Rick slaughters a group of marauders in order to protect his group. Afterwards, as he sits covered in blood, he seems to undergo a rebirth. "It ain't all of it, but that's me," he says to Daryl, "That's why I'm here now. That's why Carl is. I want to keep him safe. That's all that matters" ("A"). In this moment, Rick accepts his violent instincts as part of himself, just as essential as his leanings towards law and order. Executive producer Scott Gimple elaborates: "The morning after that Rick kills Joe [the marauder leader], Rick isn't sitting there wringing his hands. Rick isn't consumed with guilt or questioning himself" ("Inside Episode 416: *The Walking Dead: A*"). Rick is finally able to commit an act of violence—extreme violence, even—without a hint of guilt. He accepts his ego as necessary for the survival of his group, and this acceptance implies an understanding of violence as also necessary for life on the whole. Rick must be violent when the

world is violent; he must match the violence of nature and humans alike with his own. That will to power must also be controlled, however, for civilization to continue to exist. In the wilderness, Rick is free to express his will to power without inhibitions. But in a community, as seen later on in the fifth and sixth seasons, he struggles to adapt. “The rules keep changing,” he tells Michonne in the fifth season (“The Distance”), and, indeed, they do.

Rick’s arc throughout the first four seasons follows his transformation from a lawman committed to rigid values of good and evil to a survivor interested in morality insofar as it can frame a stable community for his people. Along the way, Rick overcomes his guilt and embraces his will to power for the sake of his survival and that of his family and friends. His journey, a shift from absolutist morality to a malleable, survival-oriented will to power, provides the template for virtually all the other prominent characters on *The Walking Dead*. The aforementioned Shane is the most notable example in the early seasons. Unlike Rick, Shane does not experience much in the way of guilt; he wrestles briefly with the murder of Otis in the second season, but he is quick to disregard it. His guilt and, by extension, his morality become overshadowed by a clinical survivalist philosophy. Shane’s transformation is as much fueled by the decay of the familiar slave morality as by his own frustration with Rick’s leadership, however. His desire to supplant Rick as husband and father also accounts for his speedy transition to brutal pragmatism. Shane’s increasingly survivalist attitude echoes certain traits of Nietzsche’s masters, as well. He scorns weakness and prides strength, eventually growing disenchanted with Rick’s more humane, egalitarian efforts. Shane even openly admits that characters like Otis, Sophia, and Dale offer little to the survival of the group and therefore have no business being spared or saved. Eventually, Shane’s desire for Rick’s position as leader of the group (and his family) climaxes with an attempt on Rick’s life. This challenge, characteristic of

the egoistic master, forces Rick to respond in kind, resulting in Shane's death. Although *The Walking Dead* sides with Rick, more or less, throughout this conflict, Rick's survivalist mentality in the later seasons brings to mind Shane's character. Despite his own personal issues, Shane simply adapted faster than the other characters—as well as the audience—could tolerate.

The crafty Carol serves as another example of the broad shift away from morality to a more liberated egoism. In the early seasons, Carol is the victim of frequent and regular domestic abuse. This abuse has suppressed her ego and rendered her timid and submissive. She lives in the shadow of her husband Ed, who practically dictates when and how she can interact with the rest of the group. When Ed is dispatched midway through the first season, Carol gains more of a presence. She appears more comfortable and at ease in her dealings with the rest of the cast, even if she remains a secondary character who contributes little to the overall narrative. Her storyline throughout the second season is centered around her missing daughter Sophia, but even then Carol is still sidelined for the most part. At the peak of her impotence in “Judge, Jury, Executioner,” she balks at being involved in the decision to execute or spare the captive Randall.

By the time the group arrives at the prison, Carol, now entirely free of her attachments to the old world—and no longer grieving for her daughter—is able to emerge with a rehabilitated, restored ego. Merle refers to her as a “late bloomer” (“This Sorrowful Life”), which becomes more than evident in the fourth season and onwards. The Carol of the later seasons is a radical departure from the Carol of the early seasons. A capable survivor in her own right, she also stresses the importance of self-sufficiency and strength in order to survive. She expresses her new philosophy in abridged terms when talking to the young Lizzie: “You have to trust your gut and act fast every time. That's life and death. [. . .] But if you want to live, you have to become strong” (“Indifference”). Carol demonstrates this emphasis on strength and action time and

again, most immediately with her killing of the sick Karen and David, and later in her mercy-killing of Lizzie. She then single-handedly rescues the group from Terminus, throwing the compound into disarray and essentially destroying it. In the sixth-season episode “JSS,” Carol defends the community of Alexandria almost entirely on her own from the invading Wolves. “You don’t have to kill people,” the pacifist Morgan tells her, but Carol’s response is quick and curt: “Of course we do” (“JSS”). More than any of the other characters, even Rick, Carol has acclimated to the demands of the post-apocalypse with little guilt or reluctance, although as of the latter half of the sixth season, Carol is softening, both because of the influence of Morgan and the community of Alexandria. This recalibration of her character manifests most clearly in the episode “The Same Boat,” wherein Carol finds a counterpart in the character of Paula. A Savior who has endured the losses of her daughters and become merciless in her killing, Paula presents Carol with a future vision of herself. While Carol does ultimately kill Paula, she struggles with the possibility of her transformation into someone so damaged and compromised, to such an extent that she even leaves Alexandria in order to avoid the potential of having to kill again to protect the people she cares about. Like Rick, Carol must find a homeostatic middle ground between her inclination towards remaining strong and living a relatively normal, stable life in a peaceful community. Until she accomplishes this, she will be torn between the two desires.

Morgan faces the opposite conflict: he represses his potential for violence almost to a fault. Morgan is unique among the main cast in that his journey throughout the series has been scattered across only three episodes. He first appears in the pilot episode, wherein he introduces a newly-awakened Rick to the post-apocalyptic world. Having lost his wife, Morgan is alone with his son, Duane. Although he is levelheaded and honest, Morgan is unable to muster the

strength to put down his reanimated wife. This has dire consequences, for when Rick encounters Morgan again in the third-season episode “Clear,” it is revealed that Morgan’s undead wife murdered Duane. Completely alone and grief-stricken, Morgan is practically insane at this point. He is obsessed with “clearing” any human he comes across, whether dead or alive. At the height of his psychosis, Morgan represents a completely uninhibited will to power, appropriating—more accurately, destroying—everything in its way. Morgan only reclaims his sanity after a lengthy rehabilitation with the help of former forensic psychiatrist Eastman, as seen in the sixth-season episode “Here’s Not Here.” But his rehabilitation is not entirely successful. Morgan moves from one extreme to the other, trading indiscriminate murder for unshakable pacifism. This pacifism, however, seems less about upholding a moral code than it is about keeping Morgan from relapsing into uncontrollable brutality. Like an addict, he must maintain strict control over his impulses. He brings to mind Rick’s brief existence as farmer at the prison. Rick also took on pacifism out of fear of his own violent instincts, and eventually Rick was forced to utilize those same instincts he avoided. In much the same way, Morgan eventually has to kill in order to save Carol’s life in the sixth-season finale, “Last Day on Earth.” The two characters meet each other halfway, and their opposing influences ultimately converge. Whether or not Morgan will face any further mental instability is uncertain, but his quest to reconcile the dual, often opposing aspects of his personality will undoubtedly continue.

Michonne has achieved this reconciliation with far more success than either Rick, Morgan, or Carol. When Michonne first appears in the finale of the second season, she is a figure draped in shadow, flanked by two mangled, captive zombies and wielding, of all weapons, a Japanese katana. Michonne’s outlandish appearance compared to the rest of the relatively grounded cast says much about how quickly she immersed herself in *The Walking Dead*’s post-

apocalypse. For most of the third season, in fact, Michonne is stoic, reserved, and at times shockingly violent. She seems almost feral, foreshadowing the later conflict between Rick's group and the more civilized Alexandrians (a conflict, ironically, that a more well-adjusted Michonne tries to mediate precisely because she understands it so well). Michonne's animalistic individualism, fueled by her own personal trauma and so much time spent alone in the wilderness, makes it difficult for her to initially integrate into Rick's group at the prison. Over time, however, through bonding with the other characters, particularly Rick and Carl, she begins to stabilize. Michonne's rehabilitation via community is effective up until the eradication of that very community. In the episode "After," following the destruction of the prison, she relapses, taking on two more zombie "slaves" to mask her scent, just like she had previously. She then begins wandering again, reducing herself to the level of the persona-free zombie. But at the climax of the episode, Michonne, in the midst of a group of zombies, realizes that if she shuts herself off emotionally out of fear of pain, she is no better than the undead. She slaughters the zombies and then navigates her way to Rick and Carl. In doing so, she makes the conscious decision to connect with others, even if that means potentially suffering pain.

At the heart of her personal journey is the push-and-pull dynamic of life: if Michonne allows herself to shut down, she can indeed spare herself pain, but she will also deny herself the full breadth of the emotional spectrum. Being alive entails a complete range of experiences both pleasurable and painful. Being dead, however, means only cessation and inactivity. In other words, denying one aspect of life means denying *all* aspects of life, a fact Michonne recognizes. Later on, she tells Carl that she was "just another monster" prior to her finding the prison ("A"). She did not need to be killed to become a zombie; she only had to be stripped of human contact for a long-enough time. Being out in the wilderness turned Michonne into a monster, but the

fresh despair of losing a community almost did the same. Civilization and morality, then, can not only rehabilitate and constrain an ego but also, interestingly, engender a life-affirming attitude. The restraints placed upon the ego by morality may be repressive, but they help motivate and channel the ego into productive action. Recall Nietzsche's masters, who at their most self-controlled kept their wills in check despite being egoistic. They were always at risk of losing control, but by tempering their own impulses, they resisted self-destruction. Morality therefore provides similar definition and framing. Without morality or even just community, as seen with Michonne, the ego becomes overly destructive. But with *too much* morality, with too much repression, the ego becomes entirely passive and weak, no better than any zombie. Just like the other characters, Michonne struggles to maintain a healthy equilibrium between her ego and the communal morality that helps define it. Having experienced both ends of the spectrum, she is actually one of the characters on the show most well-equipped to keep herself in that healthy middle range between the extremes.

One character who does succumb to an overactive, self-destructive ego is the Governor. The major villain of the prison storyline, the Governor is easily the most egoistic and, in Nietzsche's terms, the most aristocratic character of the first four seasons. By the time the Governor is introduced in the third season, he has already established a thriving, defensible community in the town of Woodbury. Making use of his personal charisma and talent for rhetoric, the Governor—a title he claims to have been given by his people—presides over Woodbury, maintaining an image of himself as savior and the town as sanctuary. Although Woodbury appears to be an idyllic recreation of a pre-apocalyptic community, the Governor sustains it by parasitically attacking and raiding other groups and encampments. "We're going out there, we're taking back what's ours," he says of the expansion of the town ("Walk With

Me”), suggesting grandiose designs of rebuilding civilization, but other actions hint at more selfish, megalomaniacal motivations. In “Hounded,” the Governor admits to Andrea that he relishes in the violence of the post-apocalypse: “You don’t have to be ashamed about liking the fight. Or fighting the fight. I love it. It’s not the only thing, but nowadays, it’s part of being alive. Really alive. Most people don’t have it, what it takes to see the whole story. Being able to live with it, to use it. That’s why there’s a hell of a lot more of them than us.” The “them” to which the Governor refers are obviously the zombies, the multitude of dead who, when alive, failed to embrace their egos. They buckled under the weight of their collapsed values, the Governor suggests, and either committed suicide or became too paralyzed to act and ensure their survival. The relative few who have survived understand the “whole story,” which includes the need for violence. But whereas Rick bemoaned the fall of civilization and even Shane only adapted out of necessity, the Governor raises a toast to the new order. He finds enjoyment in finally being able to unleash his suppressed ego, and he has found his niche in lording over those looking for protection and security. “You were the kind of guy who waxed his car every weekend, right?” Andrea asks him. The Governor laughs and responds, “No, I wasn’t particularly proud of my car or my house or my job” (“Hounded”). The mundane, static world of American suburbia failed to placate the Governor, who secretly lusted for more. This is never more explicit than when he sits in the secrecy of his inner sanctum, staring dispassionately at his ever-growing collection of preserved, decapitated heads. The Governor is looking deep into the well of his own ego and will to power—perhaps to draw upon it to protect himself and his people, but also to immerse himself in the vicious reality of the post-apocalypse more fully. By doing so, he alienates his own capacity for empathy and compassion and makes himself a more efficient killer and ruler.

As the third season progresses and the Governor clashes with Rick's group at the prison, his ego becomes even more insatiable. His pursuit of vengeance for the death of his reanimated daughter takes on self-destructive tendencies, and it exposes the Governor's desire for domination and appropriation. In "Welcome to the Tombs," he reveals his infatuation with conquest to his aide, Milton: "I'm gonna tell you the secret. There's a threat, you end it. And you don't feel ashamed about enjoying it. You smell the gunpowder, and you see the blood—you know what that means? It means you're alive. You've won. You take the heads so that you don't ever forget. You kill or you die." The Governor's love of violence is evident; he fights not only for the sake of survival but also for the sake of his own ego. His frustration with being repelled by Rick's group at the prison causes him to snap, and he guns down his own townspeople as a result. The Governor does not reappear until midway through the fourth season, and, for a time, he actually does make an effort to deny his ego for the sake of protecting a new surrogate family. Coming off the catastrophic loss of Woodbury, the Governor acknowledges the danger of his own monstrous nature. When he and his family join another group, he actually refuses leadership, hoping instead to stay away from the responsibility he knows will draw the monster out of him again. Tragically, this fate is inevitable; paranoid about keeping his new family alive, he sees no other alternative than to resume his violent tendencies for their sakes.

Why the Governor defaults to a brutal, barbaric model of domination is revealed in the episode "Dead Weight." When talking to his subordinate, Mitch, the Governor reveals his distaste for heroic individuals who "always [do] the right thing, even at the cost of their own people." The Governor discloses that he and his brother were beaten by their father as children, and, despite his brother heroically taking the blame for a misdeed, both boys were beaten, regardless. This anecdote, though brief, signifies that for the Governor, life was always defined

by the aggressive, competitive egoism of the masters. The ideals of selflessness and charity proffered by slave morality never reflected the abusive reality he suffered at the hands of his father. Hence why the Governor deliberately crafts himself into the most monstrous of monsters. “I promise you, you will never have to worry about whether you were doing the right thing or the wrong thing,” he tells Mitch, “because we will do the only thing [to protect the camp]” (“Dead Weight”). There is no right or wrong for the Governor because he never believed in morality in the first place. He has only ever known violence and the will to power, and although he had to suppress his ego because of the law, he has found the perfect outlet for his philosophy in the post-apocalypse.

Every character still alive on *The Walking Dead* has had to shift his or her moral compass to some degree, if not discard it altogether. Of all the characters, Rick possessed the greatest attachment to pre-apocalyptic, Western slave morality, and his struggle to abandon some aspects of it and revise others has been difficult and protracted. He clearly maintains a belief in the myth of community and, with it, a belief in morality as an idea. An acceptable, sustainable form of post-apocalyptic morality remains elusive for the time being, however, especially as Rick continually struggles to establish a secure community from which to build something greater. But what certainly will not function is an aping of pre-apocalyptic slave morality, complete with its severe suppression of the ego. The world of *The Walking Dead* is one in which guilt cannot exist. The crippling paralysis of guilt, and the despair that accompanies it, constitute a lingering disease that will snuff out anyone unable to tolerate and eventually reject it. Carol, for example, ends the sixth season afflicted by the idea that her ruthlessness in the name of survival may be transforming her into something inhuman. She therefore actively throws herself out into the wilderness, apathetic at the thought of her own possible death. Others, like Shane and the

Governor, in aggressively expressing their wills to power, come into conflict with other powerful individuals, such as Rick, and the ensuing clashes end in their deaths. Being powerful is simply not enough, as doubly demonstrated by Michonne's and Morgan's respective struggles to regulate their egos. In order to properly survive and live, one must embrace all aspects of one's personality, including both the compassionate and violent. Neither can overpower the other. Nietzsche's competition of wills, therefore, while well underway in *The Walking Dead*, will ultimately benefit the will most suited to expressing itself *and* controlling itself. The victor, by necessity, will be a champion embodying the dynamism and dualism of life without losing ground to either extreme. He or she will have overcome the life-denying slave morality of the past while also embracing and taming the wild ego. If that champion is destined to be Rick, then the real battle still remains ahead: fighting back the hordes of the stagnant dead and establishing a new form of civilization. As the show demonstrates, the subsequent creation of new communities requires much the same ongoing recalibration demanded of the individual characters. As Rick's group moves from their prison sanctuary to the community of Alexandria in the fifth and sixth seasons, they discover that their newfound individualistic strength must be tempered in order for communal infrastructure to remain intact.

## CHAPTER III

## A NEW HIERARCHY AND SYNTHESIS

Clearly, survival in the post-apocalypse requires compromise: compromise of one's values, one's identity, and one's history. "Everything now just consumes you," Carol reflects to Daryl in the fifth season ("Consumed"), and, to an extent, she is correct. As Rick discovered in the early seasons, defending outdated moral norms will threaten one's life, if not extinguish it outright. Remaining rigidly moral in an unstable world without civil infrastructure is untenable. One *has* to change and burn away aspects of an identity—perhaps all of them—so that a new, healthier, more sufficient identity can emerge. The members of the main cast have each shed former identities and become virtually new people. Part of their transformations, as previously established, has been an acceptance of and reconciliation with the aspects of their personalities that are violent, competitive, and even selfish. As they have relaxed the restraints on their wills to power, they have naturally moved away from the designs of pre-apocalyptic morality. Guilt and conformity had been used in civilized society to cow the ego and redirect the will to power upon itself. Competition and hierarchy, which are the results of freely expressed wills to power, generate stronger, more resilient wills, and such a reality is on full display in *The Walking Dead's* fifth and sixth seasons. By the start of the fifth season, without their prison sanctuary, the characters quickly acclimate to the dire conditions of the post-apocalyptic wilderness. Carol considers her weak, pre-apocalyptic self reduced to ash. Carl and Michonne, calm and collected, have accepted that they must fight and even kill when the need arises. Rick, in particular, seems the most transformed. His behavior at this point in the series would lead one to take him, at a glance, as an entirely different character from the heroic sheriff's deputy who rode horseback into Atlanta in the pilot episode.

That these characters have survived for so long is a testament to Nietzsche's moral cycle—they have overcome the bindings placed upon their egos and become active participants in a potentially new master morality. The transformation of these characters is especially evident once they integrate into the sheltered community of Alexandria, where they gradually upend the power dynamics within the walls. A hierarchy develops between the members of Rick's group and the Alexandrians as the former continually demonstrate their competence compared to the latter, to such an extent that Rick essentially controls the community once the sixth season begins. But this hierarchy proves to be short-lived once the two groups are forced by necessity to work together and repel various threats. Rick comes to realize that although his group may be stronger than the Alexandrians initially, a community is better sustained through mutualistic cooperation rather than oppression and dominance. Thus, this chapter will chart the transition from a violent state of nature to more stable, functional societies. The broad post-apocalyptic environment may resemble master morality, especially given communities warring with and subjugating each other, but within those communities, oppressive hierarchical dynamics eventually give way to more egalitarian leanings. Slave morality thus corrects the faults of its more violent, self-assertive counterpart through the use of regulative ideals. In the case of Rick, this regulative ideal comes to be a newfound desire to rebuild civilization and create a richer quality of life for his people and those to come after them.

Some reconsideration of Nietzsche's thought bears mentioning at this point. The egoistic masters, who at their most extreme are brutish and almost without self-awareness, are, for Nietzsche, most exemplified by the warriors of ancient times. The masters, vicious, spontaneous, and forever in pursuit of honor and glory, are "in reference to what is outside their circle [. . .] not much better than beasts of prey" (*GM* 22). Driven by their wills to power and in constant

need of enemies to fight, the masters come into contact with and oppress weaker individuals and communities. But while the masters are high-spirited and flexible, this compulsion to throw themselves into conflict also inevitably leads to their own self-destruction. If they lack enemies to fight outside their respective circles—if they no longer have a “bad” to defeat or subjugate—they turn on themselves. They fight the others in their own camp, whether through physical battle, political rhetoric, or otherwise. At the height of a master’s egoistic, emotional, Dionysian frenzy, “Nature[,] which has become estranged, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man” (*BT* 4). The shackles of civilization fall away, and the human being returns to his or her most animalistic, literally selfless state. The powerful influences of these heightened emotions “cause the subjective to vanish into complete self-forgetfulness” (*BT* 3-4), such as when one is overtaken by immense anger, grief, or elation. The narcotic sway of these strong emotions for a prolonged period of time can lead not just to temporary loss of self but *permanent* loss of self.

That said, the masters do not exist in a perpetual state of anarchy. They do create communities, but only insofar as those communities better enable them to indulge their wills to power. Caste systems develop wherein the oppressed classes labor so that the masters can benefit from their work. Slave morality appears within these conditions. As a response to the oppression of the lower classes, slave morality attacks the hierarchy imposed by the masters. The focus of the community turns from the elevation of the masters to the preservation of the former slaves. Slave morality thus requires some sort of ideal to motivate cooperation and conformity as opposed to competition within the community. In the Judeo-Christian framework, this ideal is God, whose assumed authority legitimates the values put forth by the Judeo-Christian system. Marxist communism uses the emancipation and conservation of the labor class as its ideal. Even

the simple success of a business endeavor motivates partners, at least briefly, to put aside their own interests and work towards a common goal. An ideal, whatever its form, *unites* individuals into a greater whole. The will to power at its most pure is wholly individualistic, concerned only with the enhancement of the will in question. Slave morality applies the will to power towards the manifestation of whatever ideal is respected by a community. An ideal is therefore necessarily regulative; it serves the Apollonian function of structuring the Dionysian. And regarding ideals, human beings are distinctly unique. Of all life on the planet, humankind appears to be the only species able to create and maintain idols, myths, and narratives, the sundry ideals that orient and organize communities worldwide. Nietzsche himself admits that “without granting as true the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a continual falsification of the world by means of numbers, mankind could not live” (*BGE* 35). Indeed, he says, to “renounce false judgements [myths and narratives] would be to renounce life, would be to deny life” (*BGE* 36). Human beings need the interference of Apollonian structures and templates. They need order. Otherwise they would fall victim to rampant, insatiable egos, and communities would fall apart.

Hence the moral cycle established in the first chapter: the two systems of morality arise as necessary to regulate each other. Master morality, inherently volatile as a result of the will to power, cannot exist indefinitely. Such is the plight of Rick and his group in *The Walking Dead*. Without a community in which to nurture and organize themselves, they will either physically die off among the wilderness or degenerate into brutishness. Once again, of all the cast, Rick best exemplifies this conflict. Throughout the first season, Rick was selfless, a stoic champion of morality as he understood it. He made attempts to save and protect as many people as he could, and he latched onto missions and meanings. He searched for symbols and signs that would

validate his crusade. The Rick of the fifth season, by contrast, has no interest in missions or meanings, symbols or signs. No longer is he concerned with definitions of “right” and “wrong” or “good” and “evil.” His concern shifts entirely from the metaphysical to the personal, and every decision he makes is oriented around protecting *his* people, even at the cost of others. Rick kills anyone who threatens the security of his group, expressing a cold, clinical efficiency that is most evident when he slaughters the remaining residents of Terminus in the episode “Four Walls and a Roof.” Although Gareth, the Terminus leader, pleads for his life, Rick does not hesitate to mercilessly mutilate him. This level of brutality is a significant departure from his behavior earlier in the series. Whereas the Rick of the early seasons agonized over leaving Merle behind in Atlanta and dispatching the captive Randall, the Rick of the later seasons is vicious and uninhibited. He has absolutely no qualms with neutralizing any threats in his way, whether they be human or otherwise. He makes this brutal efficiency especially clear to the priest Gabriel in the episode “Secrets.” “These people are my family,” Rick tells him, “and if what you’re hiding somehow hurts them in any way, I’ll kill you.” For Rick, with the security of the prison gone and only the wilderness around them, the safety of his immediate, intimate group is his only worry. The group is Rick’s family, his own personal “good.” The “bad” is quite literally everything else, with Rick’s reactions to it ranging from cagey distrust to outright, unmediated hostility.

This attitude extends throughout the season, manifesting next during the attempt to rescue Beth and Carol from Grady Memorial Hospital. Rick’s initial proposal is to infiltrate the hospital and silently kill the officers inside, an efficient, practical plan that would keep his people safe but leave a staggeringly high body count. Tyreese and Daryl propose a more diplomatic strategy: the abduction of two officers in order to exchange them for Beth and Carol. Rick complies with the plan, but he is plainly without consideration for any lives besides those of his own group. His

lack of concern is even more evident after one of the captured officers, Lamson, tries to escape. Rick chases him down in one of the police cruisers and demands that he stop. When Lamson refuses, Rick runs him down without hesitation before finishing him with a bullet. Even if killing Lamson jeopardizes the proposed hostage exchange, Rick refuses to allow the officer to get away and possibly put the entire mission at risk. So long as Rick is in control, his impulse to violence is tempered, but he is swift to proactively snuff out *any* threat before it has the chance to escalate. This is admirable to a point, but Rick's nonchalance towards violence, especially in contrast to how guilt-ridden it left him previously, is worrisome. He may have accepted his egoism as necessary for survival, but the overzealousness with which he resorts to violence suggests that Rick may have slid too far towards the opposite end of the egoistic spectrum.

This overzealousness is never made more manifest than when Rick's group arrives at the sheltered community of Alexandria late in the season. Alexandria is something of an oasis in the proverbial desert, having avoided any major catastrophe or trauma since the post-apocalypse began. The people inside its walls have lived in relative peace and comfort. Up until the arrival of Rick and his group, they have not had any reason to revise their attitude towards living at all. The undead are a remote threat, kept out of sight by the walls and only encountered by the occasional group on a supply run. This lax attitude understandably grates Rick. He feels ill at ease without the proper safeguards in place, and he grows increasingly restless the longer he remains behind Alexandria's walls. Tensions escalate between Rick's group and the Alexandrians until they culminate in Rick's execution of local surgeon Pete in the fifth season finale, "Conquer." Following this, Rick takes almost complete control of Alexandria, subjugating the townspeople thanks both to displays of bravura on his part and the timidity of Deanna Monroe, the community's leader. But although the sixth season begins with Rick trying to make

the Alexandrians more resilient by engaging the entire community in corralling an enormous herd of zombies, his attitude towards them remains dismissive at best. His opinion of the Alexandrians in general is perhaps best expressed in his remarks about Carter, an Alexandrian who tries to rebel against Rick in the sixth season premiere: “I wanted to kill him. So it would be easier. So I wouldn’t have to worry about how he could screw up or what stupid thing he’d do next, because that’s who he is. Just somebody who shouldn’t be alive now. I wanted to kill him. But [. . .] I realized I didn’t have to do it. He doesn’t get it. Somebody like that—they’re gonna die no matter what” (“First Time Again”). Evidently, Rick has no regard for Carter as a human being. He has no concern for Carter’s dignity or even safety. Carter is only either an asset or a liability, a foreign body that can help Rick’s group survive or potentially jeopardize it. All of the Alexandrians are just as inconsequential in Rick’s view. There is, for Rick, a very explicit division between the strong of his group and the weak of Alexandria. There be may be fewer of the former, but they naturally come to overpower the Alexandrians and dictate how the community will function henceforth.

If Rick is representative of the individualistic, uninhibited, destructive will to power on Nietzsche’s egoistic scale, going so far as to shun the weak out of equal parts disgust and disregard, then the aforementioned Deanna Monroe is representative of the communal, inhibited, constructive will to power. First appearing in the fifth-season episode “Remember,” in which Rick’s group begins assimilation into Alexandria, Deanna immediately provides a stark contrast to the haggard, fiercely dour, physically imposing Rick. Deanna is short, wizened, and remarkably high-spirited. A former Congresswoman, Deanna possesses a powerful faith in government, one that inspires her vision of Alexandria as a new locus of civilization. “There’s gonna be a government here one day,” she says. “I see a vibrant community here with industry,

commerce, civilization” (“Forget”). Deanna is a visionary, and her vision far exceeds the mere survival of the people of Alexandria. She wants to cultivate Alexandria into something greater, something that necessarily demands the rule of law and communal agreement upon a social contract. To this end, Deanna assigns jobs to each of the Alexandrians. Everyone contributes in his or her own way, fulfilling some function of the community that is tailored to his or her talents. Rick and Michonne, for example, are made constables. Once again, Rick’s history as a sheriff’s deputy, as much as he would like to renounce it, re-emerges to define him. Rick may insist that what someone was before the apocalypse no longer matters. He may argue that people’s identities were lost with the collapse of civilization. Deanna, however, rejects this notion. She maintains that Rick’s training as a police officer is what has enabled him to survive for so long, and she believes her own training as a politician has enabled her to govern Alexandria and prime it for expansion and growth.

Deanna’s striking similarities to the character of Hershel merit discussion. Both initially appear as the leaders of locales largely sheltered from the effects of the post-apocalypse. Hershel’s farm is a bastion of safety and security for Rick’s group in the second season, and Alexandria is an obvious sanctuary for the group in the fifth season. Both of these locations allow for the application of new social and moral norms, which is further facilitated by the philosophies of their leaders. Hershel is originally convinced that a cure for the zombie virus will restore his afflicted family members. He is deluded in his thinking that the pre-apocalyptic status quo will reestablish itself. Deanna suffers no such delusions, but she nonetheless believes in the strength of civilization to bounce back. Hershel comes to share a very similar view once he corrects his perspective. He is the one who stresses the importance of transforming the prison from a simple stronghold into a thriving community. Hershel’s vision of a restored, reinvented

civilization is undoubtedly fueled by his longstanding belief in God just as much as Deanna's vision is fueled by an attachment to the order of law. The function of Nietzsche's previously mentioned "false judgements," the narratives and myths that provide regulative order for a society, are more than clear with regard to these two characters. Hershel and Deanna, motivated by metaphysical beliefs and ideas, are necessarily the strongest advocates of civilization. Indeed, these beliefs and ideas are what allow for civilization to be possible at all. Moreover, both characters serve as mentors to Rick. Hershel tempers Rick's ego by nurturing within him a pacifistic tendency expressed through farming. Deanna implores Rick to expand the scope of his vigilance and protection to all of Alexandria as opposed to only his immediate group. In both cases, Rick's powerful ego, in conjunction with the tempering, constructive guidance of a mentor, fosters growth and reinvention, first at the prison and later at Alexandria. As per the cycle of morality, the moderating influence of ideals facilitates communal construction.

However, Hershel's and Deanna's efforts on the behalf of civilization are not entirely selfless. Civilization is, again, the mark of slave morality; its main design is the subjugation of the ego through guilt. When Hershel encourages Rick to lay down his arms, he appeals to Rick's sensibilities as a father. He appeals, in another sense, to Rick's fear of failing his son. "He needs his father," Hershel says, speaking of Carl, "He needs his father to show him the way. What way are you [Rick] going to show him?" ("A"). Deanna uses a similar rhetorical tactic on her deathbed in an attempt to persuade Rick to look after her son and the rest of the Alexandrians: "They're all your people, Rick. They are. [. . .] I didn't run over to help you out there because I like you, or because I think you're a good man, a good father [. . .] I ran over to help because you are one of us" ("From Start to Finish"). Hershel appeals to Rick's role as father, and Deanna appeals to Rick's roles as fellow citizen and public defender. Rick is made to feel guilt; he is

asked to put aside his own good for the sake of others. Interestingly, both Deanna and Hershel also encourage Rick to let people into their respective communities. At the prison, Rick is exclusionary and isolationist until Hershel intervenes. At Alexandria, Rick is initially dismissive of the townspeople—looking at his own group as far superior—and later resistant against recruiters scouting for more people. While Rick’s default, egoistic position can protect his people in the short term, it is extremely stifling in the long term. Rick’s group lives and dies as a unit, but if it accepts, conditions, and trains others, it can go on for much longer.

One must consider, too, that Hershel is an elderly man and an amputee at the time that he pleads his case to Rick. Deanna is an older woman, and she lacks the physical strength and adroitness to keep up with the more able fighters of Alexandria. Both characters, despite their great wealth of experience, worldliness, and charity, would not last without the strength of others to buoy them. Therefore, they *must* exert their influence—their wills to power—upon other individuals who are more powerful than them. Rick is the obvious candidate, as he is physically powerful, morally inclined, and greatly charismatic. Hershel and Deanna both restrain Rick’s will to power through guilt-infused rhetoric (whether they recognize it or not) and channel it to fulfill their particular visions of moral communities. In the context of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, they provide the Apollonian definition that structures and regulates Rick’s more primal, Dionysian impulses. Left alone, Rick overcompensates, indulging in violence that threatens to undermine him and his group. The regulation of a moral advisor, such as Hershel or Deanna, provides a template to which Rick’s will can conform. This regulation keeps Rick’s will in check, allowing it to be redirected in more constructive ways.

That said, Rick should not be considered a mere puppet of others’ ideologies. He is an active participant in the synthesis of morals, whether it be as a sheriff’s deputy in the pre-

apocalypse, a farmer at the prison, or a leader at Alexandria. He makes morals *real* in the sense that he can unify individuals and enforce laws through his strength and charisma.<sup>9</sup> Without powerful executors like Rick to propagate morality, it would remain a rudimentary idea, whatever its form, overpowered by simplistic brutishness and war-mongering. While it may be harmful to Rick as an individual to have his ego suppressed, it is a necessary evil for the sake of a functioning society. This is, again, the interdependence of the master and slave at work. Prior to Rick's group arriving at Alexandria, the fear among characters such as Michonne and Glenn is that the group will lose themselves to the wilderness.<sup>10</sup> The ease with which Rick himself engages in violence is proof enough of the effects uncivilized nature can have over the individual. Sooner or later, without Alexandria or some other similar community, Rick's group was in danger of disintegrating under the pressure of its own violent impulses.

Nonetheless, as dangerous as unchecked egoism can be, the destructive power of the masters is necessary to reinvigorate stagnant communities. The inclusion of Rick's group into Alexandria destabilizes its foundation and introduces a hierarchy: a division forms between the strong and the weak. But this "pathos of distance," as Nietzsche puts it, is what leads to the "formation of ever higher, rarer, more remote, tenser, more comprehensive states, in short precisely the elevation of the type 'man'" (*BGE* 192). Had they remained separate, neither Rick's group nor Alexandria would have survived. The former would have eventually succumbed, as already mentioned, to their own violent tendencies. The latter would have, due to their weakness and rigidity, been consumed by the wilderness. Only through the confrontation between these two groups, one relatively barbaric and the other relatively civilized, does a synthesis take place. The tension between classes in an aristocratic system, Nietzsche says, is what compels those classes to become stronger. Their competition breeds excellence, and though the clash may be

bloody and violent, the resultant civilization is healthier and more vibrant and than the two that came before it. The clash between Rick's group and the Alexandrians is indeed bloody, and it almost brings both groups to the brink of destruction. Rick's plan to corral the enormous herd of zombies outside Alexandria dissolves over the first half of the sixth season, ending with the herd laying siege to Alexandria. While some lives are lost—particularly those of the Alexandrians, including Deanna and Jessie—it is only when *all* the residents of the community band together that the threat presented by the herd is finally overcome.

Ultimately, the Alexandrians are forced to become stronger in order to survive, but the “aristocracy” of Rick's group—and especially Rick himself—are also forced to accept the necessity of a larger community. The prison may have been destroyed, but Alexandria is sustainable and securable enough for the sake of a functioning, future society. At the bedside of his badly wounded son, Rick expresses a revived commitment to civilization, one motivated by both the wishes of Deanna and the almost miraculous victory of the community against the herd:

I thought, after living behind these walls for so long, that maybe they couldn't learn. But today, I saw what they could—what *we* could do, if we work together. We'll rebuild the walls. We'll expand the walls. There will be more. There's got to be more. Everything Deanna was talking about is possible. It's all possible. I see that now. When I was out there, with them . . . When it was over, when I knew we had this place again . . . I had this feeling. It took me a while to remember what it was because I haven't felt it since before I woke up in that hospital bed. I want to show you the new world, Carl. I want to make it a reality for you. (“No Way Out”)

After witnessing what the combined efforts of his group and the Alexandrians can accomplish, Rick is inspired by the occasion to build the community into something greater. He sees at last what Deanna—and Hershel, to a lesser extent—envisioned: a restored civilization, suited to withstand the new environment and, by that token, necessarily respectful of egoism. If survival in the post-apocalypse demands a healthy, but still moderated, will to power, then any successful community must focus on encouraging the growth of its individual members. For his part, Rick

is certainly no longer naive enough to believe that morality and egoism cannot coexist. In fact, they *must* coexist: strong individuals must band together under the umbrella of a shared belief—in this case, the belief in renewing civilization—especially in the face of the undead and rival communities. More broadly, the only way a new civilization can resist death and stagnation is if it asserts its collective will to power through healthy, controlled expression. The egoistic and inhibitive instincts of individuals and communities alike must come together harmoniously in order for life to reach its greatest potential.

If this chain of events seems circular, it is for good reason. The apocalypse leveled contemporary society and destroyed its moral values. Yet, life has not been extinguished; Rick's group has persevered, enduring losses and setbacks, continually growing stronger and more adaptable. In the state of nature of the post-apocalypse, they have been forced to revert to a more brutish attitude. They have fought against themselves and others. They have survived the “winnowing,” so to speak. And at each phase of their journey, they have expanded their scope of influence. Having successfully defended Alexandria and reconciled with its remaining residents, Rick and his group have earned their most significant area of influence yet. Finally, enough manpower, resources, and resolve have accumulated for Rick to rediscover his old, faded belief in civilization. Recall that Rick was never particularly religious or political. He put his faith in his job, in the symbol of the archetypal lawman. With the fortified strength of Alexandria behind him, it is possible to move beyond mere survival as a goal and aim for higher ambitions. In order to do this, of course, the nomadic egoism that was necessary to keep his group alive in the wilderness must be suppressed. The myth and narrative of civilization, stripped of its meaning by the post-apocalypse, must be revived—even if Rick and the others are well aware that it is a fabrication. The fact of its falsehood alone makes it all the more essential that they defend it. The

idea of civilization, in fact, is significant precisely *because* it is a fabrication. The drive to renew civilization provides a goal towards which Alexandria can grow and develop. With the community functioning as a defensible, expandable location, the characters of *The Walking Dead* can fully embrace the possibility of a new civilization and a new myth. Their hope is not delusional. They are no longer attached to a specific way of life out of blind faith. They are no longer powerless. They are no longer victims. They simply want to live, and they are aware of the struggles and sacrifices necessary to make that happen.

Together, the Alexandrians will presumably create a community in which to foster a healthy, productive life in the sensible world, not in any supposed “true” world awaiting them after death. Their value judgments of good and evil, just like Nietzsche envisioned, will necessarily have to change. Rather than being in opposition to life, the new values will need to encourage increases in strength while still preventing competition that could threaten communal stability. And although Alexandria may come to resemble a revised slave morality in time, the larger world of the post-apocalypse is still reminiscent of master morality, and populating that wilderness are powerful groups interested in oppressing and subjugating others. Already *The Walking Dead* is poised to launch Rick and the rest of Alexandria into another war, this time against the brutal Negan and his Saviors, who extort supplies from groups they subdue. The competition between wills is still very much underway and constantly escalating, and whatever group remains after all is settled will have earned the “right” to determine the values of the communities still standing. Whatever direction *The Walking Dead* takes in its future, the constant revision of its thematic points suggests an adherence to the central idea behind the morality cycle: life is not stagnant, and its constant change and evolution forces recalibration and reinvention for all parties involved, whether individual people or the communities they create.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of *The Walking Dead* in light of Nietzsche's positions regarding morality provide some insights. Throughout much of his work, Nietzsche champions a revision of moral values that emphasizes the sensible, immediate world and the physical and mental wellbeing of the human body overall. He most powerfully demonstrates this stance with the Superman, Nietzsche's ideal figure who is the "meaning of the earth" (*TSZ* 42). The Superman embodies Nietzsche's emphasis upon individualism and egoism; he abides by his own values and does not conform to the demands of the so-called herd. He is the culmination of the trends identified in Nietzsche's master morality, and he represents for Nietzsche the solution to Western society's longstanding flirtation with self-destructive, death-desiring nihilism. With the appearance of the Superman, Nietzsche maintains that a new master morality will arise and herald a new, prosperous age for Western culture. Nietzsche offers little beyond this, however, and what form or fashion this new master morality will take is difficult, if not impossible, to envision. *The Walking Dead* suggests that some sort of apocalyptic end to society will trigger the transition from modern slave morality to a new master morality, and history supports this suggestion. Seemingly apocalyptic scenarios have triggered changes in art, education, politics, and thought throughout history. The twentieth century, racked by the atrocity of the second World War, is one such example. Whether gradual or sudden, cultural and historical shifts are almost always the result of environmental and social cataclysms.

There are caveats to Nietzsche's philosophy, of course. Unchecked egos can cause destruction for others and themselves. Slave morality thus intervenes, restraining egoism through social conditioning. Nietzsche perceived the repressive tendencies of contemporary slave morality to be overpowering, which sparked his disdain for them, but restraints upon the ego are

necessary for the maintenance and longevity of human culture. Fine art, music, and literature, among other forms of cultural expression, flourish in the “peace time” afforded by the taming influences of slave morality. *The Walking Dead* provides instances of exactly this phenomenon, most notably with the prison, which is transformed from a decrepit, largely hollow fortress to a thriving pocket of civilization. Nietzsche may deemphasize slave morality, but its emphasis on communal development over the needs of the individual provides certain benefits to a degree that master morality cannot match. Nietzsche’s criticisms of slave morality as stagnating are still valid, however, and manifest frequently in the fields of business, education, healthcare, and politics, among many others. The push and pull between those with power and those without has existed for as long as humans have existed. No solution is all-inclusive and no political arrangement entirely satisfactory, but understanding the inherent nature of power dynamics between individuals and between communities can help to mitigate the trauma caused by shifts in the distribution of power. The cycle of morality in Nietzsche’s works contributes to this understanding. *The Walking Dead*, as a work of art that concretizes the cycle for modern audiences, contributes to this understanding as well.

As the show demonstrates, both modes of existence, egoistic and inhibitive, are necessary for functioning individuals and communities alike. The cyclical transitions between master morality and slave morality make evident the dualistic tendencies of life regulating each other as necessary. One must not be allowed to overpower the other, for catastrophe is the only result. Either rampant egoism causes life to destroy itself or severe stagnation prevents life from developing. Both tendencies engage in an ongoing negotiation, represented in all sizes by relationships ranging from those between the smallest microorganisms to those between the most advanced political and theoretical ideologies. Each new confrontation and subsequent synthesis

revise what came before them. The cultural, social, and historical conditions that appear as a result of this process may not reflect modern, conventionally moral sensibilities, but they will also inevitably give way to new conditions, however traumatic the transitions. And when this self-regulative process finally reaches its limit with humankind, as it must per the unstoppable drive of the will to power, it will simply adopt a new form. The process will continue until existence as a whole comes to an end.

This returns the discussion to Lyotard's analysis of the "postmodern condition" and his projected rise of a society more concerned with the efficient production of goods and processing of information than any belief in ideals or traditional narratives. Certainly, twenty-first-century Western society is still in the midst of this transformation, with scientific, medical, and engineering technologies improving exponentially every year. A general, growing disillusionment with idols and myths is to be expected in an age so dominated by an abundance of technological innovation and scientific inquiry. One would imagine that the artistic works of such an age would reflect despair or even apathy, and, to a degree, they do. There is concern that the world is heading, as Nietzsche predicted, into a nihilistic pit. Yet there is nothing despairing or apathetic about a work such as *The Walking Dead*, as much as critics may decry its sensationalist violence or occasionally cheap narrative gimmicks. Undoubtedly, *The Walking Dead* is a profit-driven television show designed to appeal to the widest demographic possible. By its very nature, it cannot be an entirely artistic work free of commercial interests. But the optimism inherent to its story, however violent or desolate that story may appear from episode to episode, overcomes most of these criticisms. The strength of *The Walking Dead* is not the quality of its storytelling or characterization but rather the powerful, affirmative thrust of its thematic direction. In an apparently meaningless and hopeless age, *The Walking Dead* presents the most

devastated and dangerous of post-apocalyptic hellscapes and yet refuses to turn away. Again and again, its characters must find reasons to continue enduring such an awful existence. Some may argue that the show is an exercise in despair, the epitome of a cynical culture, that tortures its characters for the vulgar amusement of its audience. But it could also be said that *The Walking Dead* is as realistic as it is optimistic, committed to showing the difficulty with which its victories are won. Nearly six seasons of arduous battles and setbacks for Rick and his companions are necessary for them to earn a sustainable, defensible community. *The Walking Dead* suggests that there *is* still hope and meaning to be found in this exhausted, war-torn world, but they will not be easily achieved, and the grip upon them will remain tenuous.

The popularity of *The Walking Dead* and other similar post-apocalyptic works attests to the public's dissatisfaction with meaninglessness, as well. Western culture is tired of being tired; it longs for a return to something more poignant. The novelty of unrelenting nihilism is waning. Nihilism may reflect an understanding of the fabricated nature of language, morality, and culture, but it fails to provide any sort of answer or guidance as a result. Fascination with meaninglessness has given way not only to a frustrated annoyance with meaninglessness itself but also to a hunger for practical, active engagement with the world and its affairs. Theoretical abstractions are similarly losing their luster. Their weighty, portentous ideas, however sophisticated or complex, fail to impress if they are not accompanied by practical applications or worldly, realistic considerations. The characters of *The Walking Dead* find that hopes, prayers, and lamentations are useless; only hard, diligent work and perseverance are rewarded. The function of postmodernity, it would seem, has been to produce a weariness of postmodernity itself. Nietzsche's vision may be coming to life after all: the Western world no longer brooks

arguments of meaninglessness or despair, and more and more it seeks productive ways to address its problems and move into the future.

However, the longing for new myths only reaffirms the idea of a society unable to break free from cyclical attitudes towards itself. A skeptical, cynical culture that secretly wishes for a narrative to justify its existence is a powerful example of the paradox of human meaning-making. Postmodernism may point an accusatory finger at convention or even ignore it altogether, but it fails to address the conundrum that humankind is reliant upon falsehoods in order to live, just as Nietzsche says. A cognitive dissonance lies at the heart of the problem of nihilism: Western culture may be convinced of its own fabricated nature, but it cannot accept a barren, meaningless world. Any new regulative ideal adopted by society, such as one of Lyotard's grand narratives, is just as fabricated, which means belief in it clashes with the knowledge that it is false. Even *The Walking Dead* at its most optimistic, promoting the creativity and resiliency of humankind in the face of nihilism, cannot overcome this eternal problem. The cycle of morality may, in fact, be representative of this more essential issue. A society rejects its regulative ideal while simultaneously mourning its departure, but any replacement turns out to be just as inadequate as the ideal that preceded it. This absurdity, so very existentialist, may be just another symptom of the will to power. Even ideas are in competition, decaying and developing in response to each other, all in the pursuit of some end that remains perpetually elusive. *The Walking Dead*, the plot-less, thematically fluid, never-ending zombie movie, developed by and for a culture caught between refusing its ideals and embracing them, may therefore be representative of life itself. The struggle of Rick Grimes and his group, replete with cyclical triumphs and downfalls, defies the conventional narrative call for an end while nonetheless determinedly marching towards one that will never come.

## NOTES

1. This stance is not dissimilar from that of most existentialists. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), one of the foremost French existentialists, formulated the motto of the philosophy in his work *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946). Sartre proclaims that “existence precedes essence,” meaning that no inherent value accompanies the existence of the human being. The human being is thus a *tabula rasa*, free to define himself or herself through conscious actions and behaviors. In the most idealistic sense of existentialism, an individual decides the type and degree of meaning his or her life has and accepts the responsibility that comes with making such consequential choices. The individual is, therefore, the painter before the canvas—although it should be noted that there are as many painters as there are individuals and institutions. Any given individual is already conditioned by pre-made values and narratives prior to any conscious awareness of this process. Hence Lyotard’s examination of narratives that define the “rules” of particular societies and cultures. A true existentialist would necessarily have to “see through” the invented nature of these narratives in order to then genuinely decide (or entirely create) his or her own meaning. This would imply, of course, a confrontation with meaninglessness: a dance with despair, as it were, and its subsequent resolution.

2. The discourse surrounding guilt and conformity as oppressive social mechanisms has taken on different forms throughout history. Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (1762) both comment explicitly on the tension between civilization and the individual. Some of Nietzsche’s German successors, including Sigmund Freud and Hannah Arendt—in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *The Human Condition* (1958), respectively—provide analyses and critiques similar in some respects to Nietzsche’s attack on slave morality. Freud addresses the illusory nature of religion in his book, while Arendt examines the potential drawbacks of a society more concerned with conformity than competition.

3. Like the master-slave model, Nietzsche’s “true world” has been an idea long debated in idealist and empiricist circles. The most famous example of a distrust of the senses is perhaps Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*. When Nietzsche specifically mentions the idea of the true world becoming “Königsbergian” (TI 50), he is referring to the dichotomy introduced by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), wherein Kant claims a distinction between sensible appearances (phenomena) and supersensible objects (noumena). Nietzsche attacks Kant’s reinforcement of the notion of the true world, as well as his categorical imperative, in *The Anti-Christ*, arguing that Kant is still essentially operating within the parameters of slave morality. In other words, as long as the sensible-supersensible dichotomy exists, the supersensible will by default render the sensible “less real” and therefore less legitimate.

4. To a point, the “true world” can be considered any sort of distraction that pulls attention away from the (often painful) immediacy of the physical world. If the twenty-first century is indeed a postmodern age, perhaps even a nihilistic age as Nietzsche anticipated, then it follows that the comfort of myths and narratives has given way to the comfort of bodily pleasures and hedonism. The modern slave may be one unable or unwilling to take responsibility for his or her own life.

5. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel discusses the “master-slave dialectic,” which he maintains is the process by which individuals—and, by extension, communities—develop. The dialectic consists of two opposing entities confronting each other and then reconciling their differences in the interest of a synthesis. Every individual, for example, is the “master” in relation to everything that is “other,” the “slave.” Only by recognizing in the other a commonality can the individual reconcile his relationship with the other and broaden his or her own perspective with attributes of the other. This is the same for communities, too, as they grow and develop typically through encountering other communities. Of course, the dialectic is not necessarily a harmonious process. The dialectic concedes a struggle between the master and slave so long as the two refuse convergence. However, convergence is an inevitability once the two *do* encounter each other. Like Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power, the dialectic is ongoing and constant between any and all entities in contact with each other. Convergence will occur eventually, whether through violent appropriation or peaceful alliance, and mutual transformation will be the result.

6. Apart from Hershel, Rard also provides treatments of both Shane and Rick. She suggests that during the second season, both men are on the way to abandoning their slave morality in favor of a value system better suited to the new world. However, although Shane is “creating a new morality forged by [the] post-apocalyptic world, his own drive to survive, and desire to exercise his power over others” (228), he “does not embrace the opportunity to create something stronger than what came before” (228-29). Rick, on the other hand, she says, seems to be better adjusting to the world because he is still finding reasons to live despite the horrific conditions of the post-apocalypse. While this is a fair reading, it could be argued that Rick’s almost desperate optimism is merely reflective of his own desire for slave morality to persist, a desire couched in his powerful conditioning and guilt. For Rick, to surrender to despair or anger would be to concede that his morality (and therefore his identity up until this point) have failed.

7. Nietzsche addresses history in his essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874). One aspect of his essay concerns the tension between living historically and ahistorically. The former constructs and defines existence, constraining the ego, but the latter eliminates context, allowing for periods of pure being in which individuals can strive for personal excellence without fear of consequence or reprisal. This would appear to be another example of Nietzsche’s dualism: the life-denying tendency is inhibited and constructive, while the life-affirming tendency is uninhibited and potentially destructive. Rick, in losing his pre-apocalyptic history over time, is moving towards a more egoistic, brutish existence.

8. The three questions (“How many walkers have you killed? How many people? Why?”) recur throughout the rest of the series, becoming something of a mantra for the main cast. The questions serve, in a sense, as a new moral standard, one intended to parse dangerous, unstable individuals apart from those better suited to live in a community. Perhaps fittingly, the questions punish the unrestrained or excessive expression of the will to power. Those who murder others for no reasons other than their own enjoyment or greed are excluded from joining the community.

9. Rick is also influenced by other characters throughout the series, although Hershel and Deanna remain the most pivotal in terms of pushing him towards moral positions. It is the death

of Andrea, for example, who was interested in brokering peace between the prison and Woodbury, that motivates Rick to take in the denizens of Woodbury at the end of the third season. It is Michonne who, when Rick is at his most unhinged at Alexandria, tempers him and brings him back to reason. And it is likely that Morgan's pacifistic bent throughout the sixth season will compel Rick once again to temper his egoism for the sake of community. In every case, Rick, in addition to being the central character of *The Walking Dead*, also serves as a composite of all the other characters, whether alive or dead. While other characters remain relatively static, Rick changes constantly, accommodating to shifts in the show's arcs and fluctuating along the egoistic spectrum.

10. This idea is discussed briefly in regards to Michonne and Morgan in the second chapter of this thesis. More dramatic examples can be found in the residents of Terminus and the Wolves. The people of Terminus turn to cannibalism, and the Wolves, true to their name, reveal themselves as animalistic and nomadic. Without a stable community and companionship, the demands of the wilderness can quash whatever conditioning civilization imposes upon an individual.

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