

**Conceptualizing Diversity:  
Miller On Nietzsche's Polytheism  
By Anthony David**

I. INTRODUCTION

Liberal religion values diversity. Historically, it has been the home of dissenters and freethinkers, and today it aspires to widen its circle of fellowship to encompass as many voices and visions as possible. Yet, with regard to any given liberal religious community, the achievement of diversity is not an automatic achievement. There is a great difference, in other words, between communities which amount to nothing more than a chaotic jumble of unrealized and indistinct (though very real) idiosyncrasies and communities in which differences realize themselves and learn how to dialogue with each other. There is a great difference between communities which simply claim to welcome differences and communities which actually do what they say--communities in which differences become organically related to each other, communities in which tensions and incongruities become creative. These latter communities are like mandalas, holding together different shapes and colors in a dynamic yet balanced designs. The former kind of communities, however, are more like rucksacks full of odds and ends.

Diversity is the heritage of liberal religion, yet its potential riches are not automatically passed down from generation to generation and must be fought for and earned. An essential phase in claiming and reclaiming the potential riches of diversity is formulating a creative way of theologizing about diversity, and this leads us to the main theme of this paper: polytheism. Polytheism is an undertheorized option in religion, but I believe that it holds promising insights for liberal religionists and can help in the task of deepening and enervating the quality of life in liberal religious congregations and communities today.

II. THE DEATH OF GOD

In "Perspectivism Without Nihilism" (1990), Debra Bergoffen reads Nietzsche's "death of God" as the withering away of any metaphysics which valorizes *the one* at the expense of *the many*. What *dies* is the conception of God as a supernatural hegemony of power and perspective; and though the loss of this venerable institution in metaphysics leads to temporary--though deeply felt--disorientation and confusion, ultimately the way is cleared to fulfill the Madman's injunction for humans to become gods themselves: "Must we not ourselves become gods simply to appear worthy of [killing God]?"<sup>1</sup> Echoing the Madman, Bergoffen says, "God, the singular perspective is dead, We--the many perspectives--shall have to become gods. The new history of which Nietzsche speaks is the history of polytheistic pluralism."<sup>2</sup>

Bergoffen then asks the questions which are central to this essay: "But who are the gods? What do they do? How do we become like them?"<sup>3</sup> God's death calls for a *reconceptualization* of the sacred, in other words, and it is interesting to speculate which attributes of the one God (if any) end up belonging to the new gods of this new age. Bergoffen says,

From the Greeks we learn that gods play. From the Jews and Christians we learn that they create. From Nietzsche we learn that they affirm life. Moving beyond the either/or of the Greek and Judeo/Christian alternative, Nietzsche teaches us that to be like gods is to create in the spirit of playfulness. Following Zarathustra's story of the laughing death of the gods (or death of the laughing gods) and the birth of God, we are tempted to suggest that ruminating on the conditions of the possibilities of laughter, creativity, and play may direct us toward fleshing out the configurations of the ways in which the desire for the absolute affirms itself in a philosophy and politics of perspectivism.<sup>4</sup>

Bergoffen reduces the Anselmian God—*that than which none greater can be conceived*—to a psychological drive, a "desire for the absolute" aiming for self-actualization. And whereas Anselm would understand God through reason, Bergoffen would become like a god (one among many) through laughter, creativity, and play. In short, it appears that in Bergoffen's analysis, theology becomes a branch of social science, albeit a very special branch dealing with a unique form of desire. A god no longer transcends history, society, and the individual; rather, a god is a function of human aspirations and needs and changes with developments in human self-understanding. Gods might be understood as metaphors for individuals' or societies' highest values--dramatized as situations and characters in sacred narratives, for instance--but never as existing in their own right as independent powers. We learn from them, but we do not actually *worship* them. The end of Bergoffen's humanization of the sacred, inspired by Nietzsche, is to create the opportunity for "affirming ourselves as individualized centers of meaning."<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, theologian H. Richard Niebuhr begins where Bergoffen ends and goes in reverse. Niebuhr admits that "our natural religion is polytheistic"<sup>6</sup> insofar as our individual projects are shaped by a multiplicity of social values like "Truth, Beauty, Justice, Peace, Love, Goodness, Pleasure, Patriotism."<sup>7</sup> But whereas Bergoffen might find in this humanistic polytheism a sufficient means for actualizing "desire for the absolute," Niebuhr does *not*. Our "natural religion," says Niebuhr, is incapable of truly satisfying our insatiable thirst for Being. Social causes *die*, and then "nothing is left to defend us against the void of meaninglessness."<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, Nietzsche's death of God turns out to be more a failure of vision--an idolatry of false gods--than an actual demise of deity. *God is not dead*: God is the "the principle of being itself"<sup>9</sup> which, as the primary center of value, "grips" the individual and is expressed "in the concreteness of communal and personal, of religious and moral existence."<sup>10</sup> When we lose touch with this center of value, and idolize a lesser value instead, tragedy is inevitable.

Following Nietzsche, then, Bergoffen would proclaim the death of the one God and propose, in exchange for monotheism, a humanistic polytheism. Niebuhr, on the other hand, argues that humanistic polytheism comes naturally to us, but if we truly wish to fulfill our desire for being itself and avoid the tragedy of pinning our hopes on social values ("gods") which can die, then we must transcend our natural religion and embrace radical monotheism. Of course, by investing ourselves in an undying and eternal value center—Niebuhr's "principle of being itself"—we fall into the trap which Nietzsche's and Bergoffen's polytheism are supposed to protect us from. Monotheism cultivates an intolerance for *difference*; people gripped by the thought of absolute being are more likely than not to condemn diversity and inject a "bad conscience" into anyone who dares to self-actualize. Gail Stenstad explains:

Monotheism, obviously, is oriented toward one god; historically, many monotheistic religions have also been very concerned with oneness in doctrine, with arriving at a doctrine that can be taken to be the only true or correct one. "One lord, one faith, one baptism." This sort of focus creates an in-group and an out-group: the saved and the damned. While none but the most rigid theorists would go so far in demarcating an in-group and an out-group, accusations of "incorrectness" have been used to silence disagreement. Further, in its very structure, any claim to possess *the* truth, or *the* correct account of reality or the good, creates an out-group, whether we like it or not. ... [But] polytheism has room to include a monotheistic perspective (though the reverse is not the case). A belief in many gods, or in many possibilities or sacred manifestations, can allow for an individual's preference for any one (or more) of those manifestations.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, Stenstad wants to identify the shortcomings of monotheism with masculine "theoretical thinking." Philosophically, masculine thinking designates certain areas of experience as off limits *a priori* and so artificially limits the field of acceptable inquiry. Politically, masculine thinking leads to in-groups and out-groups—the saved and the damned. On the other hand, feminist thinking, which she calls "anarchic thinking" embraces difference and diversity and so remains more faithful to experience.

The stakes are high in the monotheism-polytheism debate. At the least, Nietzsche's "death of God" announces that theology cannot continue into the future unchanged by modernity. But what shall the changes be? "Who are gods? What do they do? How do we become like them?" For the rest of this essay, I would like to examine psychologist of religion David L. Miller's reading of Nietzsche's death of God. In his book *The New Polytheism* (1974), Miller says, "The point Nietzsche is making is that our personal and social bondage has been a slavery to a specific kind of theological thinking and speaking, and therefore our new sensibility is also a theological breakthrough at base. ... The death of God gives rise to the rebirth of the Gods."<sup>12</sup> That is, Miller agrees with Bergoffen in viewing the death of God as the end of a supernatural hegemony of power and perspective. In this regard, he quotes Nietzsche's description of monotheism as "the rigid consequence of the doctrine of one normal human being--consequently the belief in a normal

God<sup>13</sup>; but, says Miller, with the death of God comes the death of the normal. Difference and diversity become the way of the future. And yet, Miller's polytheism is not humanistic; the plural gods are true Gods and Goddesses which are irreducible to the biographical features of individuals' lives or to social forces. The Gods and Goddesses cannot die, like Niebuhr's "gods"—and so they remain worthy of our worship and awe. In the end, I hope to show that that Miller articulates Nietzsche's intuitions about polytheism into a theology which is capable of satisfying our "desire for the absolute" without undermining a commitment to diversity and difference.

### III. REBIRTH OF THE GODS

#### A Bright New Future

Miller finds a "bright new future"<sup>14</sup> for theology where Nietzsche writes:

For the individual to set up his own ideal and derive from it his laws, his pleasures, and his rights--that has perhaps been hitherto regarded as the most monstrous of all human aberrations, and as idolatry in itself; in fact, the few who have ventured to do this have always needed to apologize .... It was in the marvelous art and capacity for creating Gods--in polytheism--that this impulse was permitted to discharge itself, it was here that it became purified, perfected, and ennobled .... Monotheism, on the contrary,... has perhaps been the greatest danger of mankind in the past .... In polytheism man's free-thinking and many-sided thinking has a prototype set up: the power to create for himself new and individual eyes, always newer and more individualized.<sup>15</sup>

Monotheism (like Niebuhr's) has a genealogy which runs parallel to that of traditional morality--both are powered by *ressentiment*. In both, denying life becomes creative but self-contradictory, too, such that to serve the monotheistic God (or to be strictly altruistic in morality) is simultaneously an expression of the will to power and a denial of this will in oneself *for oneself*. But with the death of monotheism, all theological justifications for *ressentiment* wither away. A path is cleared for the individual to "set up his own ideal" and for society to acknowledge and accept "man's free-thinking and many-sided thinking." Polytheism, says Nietzsche, is the "prototype" for both aims, the matrix in which they can occur.

Nietzsche's comments about polytheism reflect two of his main concerns: the *will to power* and *perspectivism*. These also are the concerns of Miller as he endeavors to articulate Nietzsche's intuitions about polytheism into a more full-bodied theology:

The announcement of the death of God was the obituary of a useless single-minded and one-dimensional norm of a civilization that has been predominantly monotheistic, not only in its religion, but also in its politics, its history, its social order, its ethics, and its psychology. When released from the tyrannical imperialism of monotheism by the death of

God, man has the opportunity of discovering new dimensions hidden in the depths of reality's history. He may discover a new freedom to acknowledge variousness and many-sidedness. He may find, as if for the first time, a new potency to create imaginatively his hopes and desires, his laws and pleasures.<sup>16</sup>

### The Immortals

Nietzsche describes man as creating gods: "... the individual [sets up] his own ideal and derive[s] from it his laws, his pleasures, and his rights." Polytheism is "marvelous" because it allows man freedom to individuate, a freedom so complete that one may even define one's own sacred narrative, one's own God horizon. But *to what degree* are gods created? Individuals write the sacred narratives, develop the rituals, and establish the institutions which together express and define gods. But is the initial impulse to create *itself* an invention and subject, then, to the charge of arbitrariness? Marx, for example, would say that the religious impulse is constituted by our suffering at the hands of economic injustice; in a situation of pure communism, the need for religion and gods ("opium of the people") would simply vanish. *Or*, is there something in the impulse *behind* or *underneath* religious creativity which escapes the charge of arbitrariness?

One might view religious creativity as responsive to the will to power, and this will is itself *not* a human invention but rather precedes and motivates invention.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, individual Gods and Goddesses could be viewed as particular dynamics or principles of the will to power which, as principles, would give direction and shape to invention. The *a priori* principle of Apollo, for example, would therefore inspire creativity in terms of characteristic forms and manners: static beauty, clear borders and boundaries, *order*.

Miller thus writes:

[The Gods and Goddesses are the names of powers, of forces, which have autonomy and are not conditioned or affected by social and historical events, by human will or reason, or by personal and individual factors. This is one meaning of our use of the word "Immortal" as it is applied to divinities. ... Insofar as they manifest themselves in life they are felt to be informing powers that give shape to social, intellectual, and personal behavior. The Gods and Goddesses are the names of the plural patterns of our existence.<sup>18</sup>

So the Gods and Goddesses, as Miller understands them, cannot be accounted for as merely "repressed biographical data," "rhetorical anecdotes and illustrations," "forgotten aspects of history," or "parts of a decayed civilization and a former institutional religion."<sup>19</sup> And they certainly do not belong to Niebuhr's pantheon of social values, historical in significance only. Rather, the Gods and the Goddesses are "an impersonal dimension in our psychology"<sup>20</sup> which, functionally, resemble Jungian archetypes or the Kantian synthetic *a priori*s.<sup>21</sup> "The Gods are powers. They are the potency in each of us, in societies, and in

nature."<sup>22</sup> Again, "The quality of a God or Goddess is that he or she is potent; he or she is a structure in reality in whose world of meaning and being I am constantly living, or rather, being lived."<sup>23</sup>

In short, Miller conceives of the divine as immortal and constitutive of humanity; but this is not a return to a Platonic two-worlds being/becoming metaphysics. The polytheistic sacred is *natural*, not supernatural. The gods indwell nature, as principles of the will to power; and possibly we might account for their foothold in human consciousness and life by looking to human physiology. But to explain the gods like this is not to explain them away. As long as we are embodied, their authority over us remains complete and inescapable: "[T]he Gods and Goddesses live through our psychic structures. They are given in the fundamental nature of our being, and they manifest themselves always in our behaviors. The Gods grab us, and we play out their stories."<sup>24</sup>

### Narrative Theology

A polytheistic theology such as Miller's--and hinted at by Nietzsche--accounts for the foundations of selfhood. As a *theology*, it grounds selfhood in something immortal and divine. Furthermore, it tells us that we come to know ourselves best--we achieve the deepest sense of reality and joy--when we view the vital powers at play in our dreams, moods, thoughts and thinking, relationships, artworks, enjoyments, and social institutions as *person-like*. The deep structures of human character and culture are like persons, not mathematical formulae; and so the sort of worship prescribed by polytheistic theology is *incarnational* in character: "What do the Gods and Goddesses want with us? Our task is to incarnate them, become aware of their presence, acknowledge and celebrate their forms...."<sup>25</sup>

That is, to worship the gods, we must regard them as having *faces*--so we dialogue with them, and we celebrate them by telling their stories. Insofar as science fails to do this, it represents false worship; though it seeks out the immortal structures of reality, like theology, it also drains them of anything personal. It *disinfects* them; and so in contemplating this miracle of our being, we become spectators instead of participants.

What is important about the polytheistic manner of worship? Insofar as it acknowledges plurality or multidirectionality in our desire for the absolute, it can help us to "account for," "express," and "celebrate" the plurality in contemporary society, philosophy, and psychology—"those multiple aspects of our reality that otherwise would seem fragmented and anarchic."<sup>26</sup> The problem is that though the monotheistic God has died, our manner of thinking continues to be monotheistic. We cannot *think* plurality effectively; and because we cannot conceptualize it, we despair.

[O]ur explanation systems, whether theological, sociological, political, historical, philosophical, or psychological, have in the main been monotheistic. That is, they have been operating according to fixed concepts and categories which were controlled by a logic that demanded a rigorous and decisive either/or: either true or false, either this or that, either beautiful or ugly, either good or evil. It is this monotheistic thinking that fails a people in a time when experience becomes self-consciously pluralistic, radically both/and.<sup>27</sup>

Monotheistic reason demands an absolute justification for the propositions it will assent to; and if life is such that absolute justifications are impossible, monotheistic reason would rather deny life than revise the logic underlying its epistemological standard. It would rather suspend the will--*put life on ice*--than compromise. Miller describes this sensibility as "Puritan" insofar as it "makes us feel that we must 'get it all together.'" However, realizing our fundamental polytheism can help us to see that "'keeping it all apart' is a safe, a realistic, and an exciting way to 'go on.'"<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately, polytheism is

a feeling for the deep, abiding urgent, and exciting tension that arises when, with a radical experience of the plurality of both social and psychological life, one discovers that a single story, a monovalent logic, a rigid theology, and a confining morality are not adequate to help to understanding the nature of real meaning.<sup>29</sup>

In particular, polytheism can help us understand the meaning of conflict and difference: "The powers that are fundamental to our very being are in contention."<sup>30</sup> Conflict cannot be psychologized away or remedied, in other words, by extinguishing socioeconomic classes under pure communism. Zeus will always chase after mortal maidens, to the eternal frustration of Hera. Some, like the presocratic Xenophanes, might hate this apparent anthropomorphism, along with the others purveyed by bards like Homer, but it is nevertheless true to life. "Life is a war of the Powers," says Miller. "Man--his self, his society, and his natural environment--is the arena of an eternal Trojan war."<sup>31</sup>

Something else at stake in the polytheistic manner of worship is the "liveliness" of the religious life. In order for the religious life to be attractive and meaningful to us--to be *alive*--it must be utterly concrete and passionate in character. It must be an opportunity for *dialogue* with the divine, not mere theorizing. Indeed, Miller says that "the Gods and Goddesses are forgotten when thinkers substitute abstract concepts for their names, and when the stories become transformed rationalistically into types of formal logic. Images become ideas; narrative becomes syllogism."<sup>32</sup> Here, Miller is referring to a trend in theology beginning with Xenophanes, one which seeks to de- anthropomorphize the divine or to remove every mask separating human and divine:

As soon as one asks for the essence, or substance, or principle of being behind the diversity and richness of what appears on the face of all life, the question itself leads to a kind of thinking and speaking that eventually will lose touch with reality. And if the Gods and Goddesses are spoken and thought of in this monotheistic, one-dimensional, univocal way, religion will not be able to comprehend itself in relation to everyday life, while life in turn will not be able to discover its deep religious dimensions.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, the ultimate result is an "irrelevant doctrinal theology which has abstracted itself out of life by managing to kill God."<sup>34</sup> The Gods and Goddesses, surfacing in our thoughts and moods, our customs and our literature, *are all there is*--nothing more basic exists; and should we nevertheless insist on looking for "the principle of being," thinking becomes so abstract that it cuts its own throat. To seek to transcend any viewpoint, as Nietzsche points out, is to be left with none at all.<sup>35</sup>

Nietzsche says that we ourselves have killed God, and Miller's explanation for this is that our worship has been deficient. It has built barriers, not bridges, to the divine. We have grown forgetful and complacent. This is not to say, however, that by revitalizing our worship we might resuscitate the dead monotheistic God; no--this supernatural oneness is irredeemably tied to the abstract manner of worship which Miller condemns. God is both created and destroyed by abstract theology.

But polytheistic theology aims to reintroduce passion and "thickness" into theology. Miller looks back to Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus as exemplars of his kind of theology, which he calls *narrative theology*<sup>36</sup>: "Their thought was systematic, but it was not theoretical. It was epic, narrative, drama, and song--each of which was utterly concrete in its imagery."<sup>37</sup> An important feature of this style of theology is that it mirrors the temporality of human existence. The rhythm of song or storytelling incorporates "dynamic elements of time, timing, and process"<sup>38</sup> which mirror life as it is lived. Thus the temporal can find a *home* in the eternal.

#### Individuation

God's death allows us to reconnect with the plural Gods and Goddesses indwelling nature and informing our social, intellectual, and personal behavior. We become aware of the Gods living through us--Zeus, Hestia, Athena, Apollo, Dionysus, Hera, Aphrodite, Hermes--and each is a force which shapes worth. Each is a principle of meaning which, for one thing, makes an individual foothold on life--a perspective--possible. In turn, we endeavor to establish a right relationship between human and divine through worship. These are among the insights we have so far explored in connection with Miller's polytheistic theology, and together they lead to one more: the issue of individuation.

Each God or Goddess is a specific principle of the will to power, and we experience them within and through our own individual wills. Only through such experience, in fact, do we come to have a unique



self. The Gods and Goddesses are each like a magnetic field which assembles our lives as if they were iron filings. Remove the magnet underneath the paper, and if Miller is correct, then only a trace of order remains which, in time, will slowly disintegrate into irreparable disorder. As individuals, then, we have no intrinsic order or nature; and our unique identity is shaped by our journeying from the precinct of one God/Goddess to the next. Life is a pilgrimage indeed: *homo viator*, as Marcel puts it.

In this context we might understand Miller's discussion of religious faith. Faith is "being gripped by a story."<sup>39</sup> To have faith is to be within the "magnetic field" of a single God or Goddess and to be inspired by His or Her story. But when inspiration turns into single-minded obsession, faith turns *bad*. One becomes so enamored of a God or Goddess that others are repressed or forgotten; and it's these others "who become curses of everyday life."<sup>40</sup> Miller mentions Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy as the classic illustration of bad faith. In their devotion to Apollo, Agamemnon and his son Orestes forget the power of the Fates; but Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus forget the power of Apollo. "The curse of this family called Atreus is that as long as a man or woman neglects the Furies on the one hand, or Apollo on the other, life is tragic."<sup>41</sup>

Western culture verges on bad faith in its devotion to Apollo.<sup>42</sup> Ours is "an age of increasing complexity in war and political life, an age of rapid urbanization and technology, an age of specialized knowledge and expertise, and an age of heightened philosophical self-consciousness and agonizing reflectivity."<sup>43</sup> But the tragedy of our one-sidedness may yet be averted. In the third play of the *Oresteia*, the *Eumenides*, the curse against the house of Atreus is ended with the judgment of Athena. Athena acknowledges Apollo and yet makes a place for the Furies, too. "The clue from Athena is to make a place for them all, when they wish to appear as resources of meaning."<sup>44</sup>

"Myths may change in a life, and the soul serves in its time many gods."<sup>45</sup> When a God or Goddess wishes to appear as a resource of meaning, we should allow His/Her story to inspire us--we should plumb the depths of the life perspective that He/She makes possible. Over time, then, our devotion may take many forms. Practically speaking, however, at any one time our devotion will probably be centered on only one God or Goddess. Consequently, Miller describes the religious life a series of "consecutive monotheisms."<sup>46</sup> Yet it is a polytheistic *theology* which *situates* this monotheistic religious practice and gives it intelligibility. In this way, polytheism does a better job than the "monotheistic theologizing of the Western tradition [which] is not helping us to understand the faith that in fact works through our lives."<sup>47</sup> With Goethe, we become able to say, "As a moralist I am a monotheist; as an artist I am a polytheist; and as a naturalist I am a pantheist."<sup>48</sup> Miller explains:

Goethe's sentiment points to the fact that when a man makes a moral decision, in that moment he is indeed operating from the standpoint of a single center of meaning. But that same man, in his daily life and through every moment of his behavior, while in the business of creating the meaning of his life makes use, willy-nilly, of all the structures of meaning and being symbolized by the stories of the whole pantheon of Gods and Goddesses.<sup>49</sup>

Earlier I mentioned that for humans, life is a pilgrimage: Our individuality consists of journeying from the precinct of one God/Goddess to the next and suffering "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Herein, indeed, lies our freedom—that our journey reflects our choices in life. But as for the Gods and Goddesses themselves--they are *not free*. They are immortal principles of order--*pure act*, as Aristotle might say. They are tied down to specific places, functions, and things. No possibilities exist for them; they have nothing potential to actualize. "They remain who they are, and their stories are constant, though they continually contend with each other."<sup>50</sup> This leads me to bring up what I take to be one of the most poignant doctrines in theology: The Doctrine of Specific Providence.<sup>51</sup> This doctrine states that divine reality takes an active interest and role in the lives of specific individuals. Divine reality is *personal* in nature and guarantees meaning and justice in life, to the extent that He or She might even directly intervene in our affairs (i.e., via miracles) when necessary. Our question here is, *Can we describe the Gods and Goddesses as anything beyond impersonal forces or desires? As they shape the lives of individuals, do they actively care about those lives?*

You and I are travelers, like Odysseus; and our individuation consists, as Nietzsche puts it, in living dangerously<sup>52</sup>--in wandering all over this world, into and then out of the precincts of Gods and Goddesses. *In trying out one perspective and then another*. So as I live dangerously through my wanderings, I naturally wonder: Am I cared for? Is there a meaning and a purpose to it all? If again we take the clue from Odysseus, the answer is, regrettably, no. Though life's journey is hallowed/harrowed by divine interventions--and why? Because the gods are whimsical? Because they quarrel? --ultimately the journey is *horizontal* in character, a temporal journey. Odysseus journeys from one god to another and discovers with each a universe of meaning and value. But the *purpose* of the journey--the promise of it--is only that Odysseus will reunite with "his faithful wife" Penelope. It is all for the sake of mortal, *not immortal*, love. *A goal that Odysseus himself chooses*. What's more, there is no guarantee that Odysseus will even make it home.... Murphy's Law is as operative then as it is now. In short, despite the fact that existence has a transcendent and sacred dimension to it, human individuation occurs against a background of ultimate risk and even absurdity. Suicide, indeed, remains the singular philosophical issue.<sup>53</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSION

In this world of change and difference, *oneness* would indeed be supernatural--a Logos which is an absolute all-encompassing perspective. A word, as the Gospel of John says, which was in the beginning with God, which *is* God. But with God's death, Nietzsche proclaims the death of the supernatural. His demon whispering *eternal recurrence* into our ears is a demon of earth.<sup>54</sup>

But the death of the supernatural one God does not necessarily lead to the death of the sacred or to theology as its main articulator. The sacred may be reconstructed as natural and viewed, as Nietzsche suggests, as the matrix in which perspectivism and self-overcoming may find full expression. *Polytheism* is this matrix; and it reveals to us the multiple Gods and Goddesses grounding our human selves. We are all the time affected by these divines--we experience them in our dreams and our complexes; in our moods, thoughts, and social instincts; and in our pleasures, arts, and literature. But awareness of the Gods--and intelligent dialogue with them--is what polytheism makes possible.

## V. NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, Trans. Thomas Common (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 168.
2. Debra Bergoffen, "Perspectivism without Nihilism," *In Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra*, ed. Clayton Koelb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 68.
3. Bergoffen, 71.
4. Bergoffen, 71.
5. Bergoffen, 68.
6. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Row Torchbook, 1970), 119.
7. Miller, 17.
8. Niebuhr, 122.
9. Niebuhr, 32.
10. Niebuhr, 33.
11. Gail Stenstad, "Anarchic Thinking: Breaking the Hold of Monotheistic Ideology on Feminist Philosophy," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 333.
12. David L. Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 4.
13. Nietzsche, 179.
14. Miller, 1.
15. Nietzsche, 178-180.
16. Miller, 3-4.
17. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says, "And do you know what 'the world' is to me? ... This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end ... a force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there: a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous

years of recurrence,... *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides.* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!" Quoted in *Existentialist Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. L. Nathan Oaklander (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 106.

18. Miller, 6-7.

19. Miller, 82.

20. Miller, 61.

21. Miller wants to argue that categories of number and logic, of science and theology, such as Kant's, can themselves be reduced to the Gods and Goddesses. They are "simply new names for the Gods" (Miller 34). In saying this, Miller cites Aristotle himself as the authority. Miller writes: "Aristotle acknowledged that his philosophical concept of 'the unmoved mover' ... was nothing more than an abstract name for what in popular religion had been called the Gods. He admitted, too, that the whole of school philosophy was just another vocabulary, formal and logical, for what Hesiod had told in mythopoetic form as the stories of the Gods" (Miller 34). See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* B 4, 1000@9.

22. Miller, 60.

23. Miller, 62.

24. Miller, 59.

25. Miller, 55.

26. Miller, 7.

27. Miller, 7.

28. Miller, 81.

29. Miller, 11,

30. Miller, 60.

31. Miller, 60.

32. Miller, 34.

33. Miller, 27-28.

34. Miller, 29.

35. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Section 34, Nietzsche says: "Let at least this much be admitted, there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances; and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and clumsiness of some philosophers, one wanted to abolish the 'apparent world' altogether--well, supposing you could do that, at least nothing would be left of your 'truth' either."

36. Miller, 29.

37. Miller, 26.

38. Miller, 47.

39. Miller, 43.

40. Miller, 32.

41. Miller, 32.

42. This, of course, is one of the main themes of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins summarize: "Contemporary culture's [apollonian] reliance on reason and its commitment to scientific optimism had rendered the modern individual largely oblivious to the Dionysian character of reality--a character which engulfed all individuals in the flow of life but which also rendered everyone subject to death and devastation. The repression of vulnerability was psychologically disastrous, in Nietzsche's view." See "Nietzsche's Works and Their Themes" in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, eds. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23-24.

43. Miller, 32.

44. Miller, 33.

45. James Hillman, "Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?" in *Spring*, 1971 (New York: Spring Publications, 1971), 201. Miller quotes extensively from Hillman in *The New Polytheism*; both

appear to be on the same wavelength with regard to the constitutive effect of the Gods and Goddesses on human experience.

46. Miller, 6.

47. Miller, 44.

48. Quoted in Miller, 24.

49. Miller, 24.

50. Miller, 63.

51. I am indebted to Prof. John J. McDermott for the name of this doctrine.

52. For Nietzsche, individuation or self-overcoming is a tireless process of self re-creation, "... the dangerous privilege of living experimentally," In *Human, All Too Human* (selections), in *Existentialist Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. L. Nathan Oaklander (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 105.

53. Cf. Albert Camus: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." In "An Absurd Reasoning," from *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Knopf, 1955).

54. Nietzsche says (in *Joyful Wisdom*, Section 341): "What if a demon crept after you one day or night in your loneliest solitude and said to you: 'This life, as you live it now and have lived it, you will have to live again and again, times without number; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and all the unspeakably small and great in your life must return to you, and everything in the same sequence--and in the same way this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and in the same way this moment and I myself. The eternal hour-glass of existence will be turned again and again--and you with it, you dust of dust!' -- Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who thus spoke? Or have you experienced a tremendous moment in which you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never did I hear anything more divine!'"