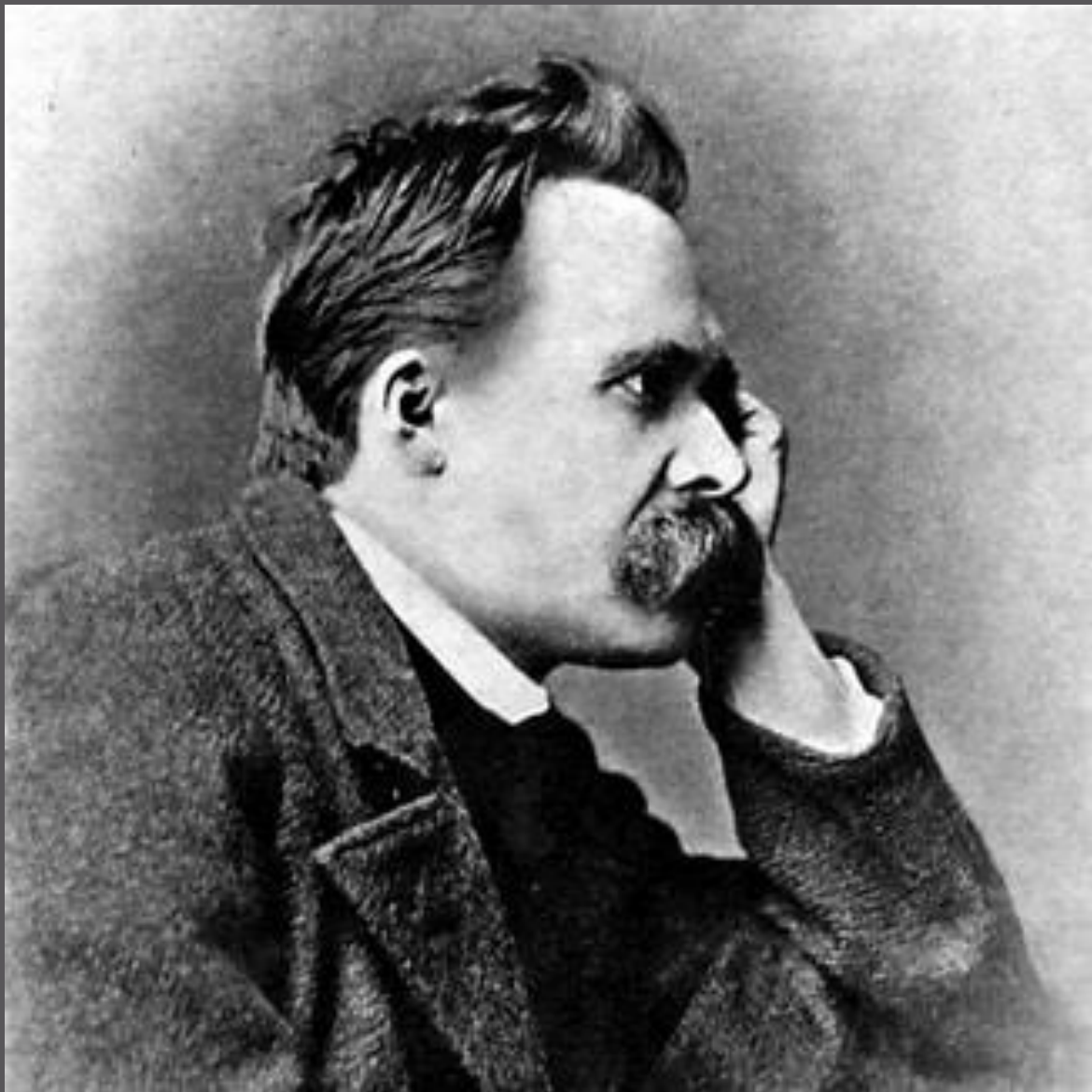




An examination of Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of dreaming with comparisons to current theories

Mark Blagrove
&
Julia Lockheart

Swansea University &
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

43rd annual conference of the
International Association for the Study of
Dreams, Ashland, Oregon

- Nietzsche's wide range of thinking
- Individual differences, 'rank' / status
- Psychodynamics, psychoanalysis and the unconscious
- Evolutionary psychology
- Social psychology, including cognitive dissonance
- Political psychology
- Moral psychology
- With caveats, what is now called self-actualisation
- Aesthetics

NIETZSCHE



AND DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY

Edited by
Jacob Golomb,
Weaver Santaniello,
and Ronald Lehrer

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‘That from my writings there speaks a peerless *psychologist* is perhaps the first insight achieved by a good reader — a good reader such as I deserve’.

‘Who before me was a *psychologist* at all among philosophers ... Before me there was no psychology.’

(Ecce Homo, 1888/1995, p.253 & p.310.)



Friedrich Nietzsche
Ecce Homo

A new translation by Duncan Large

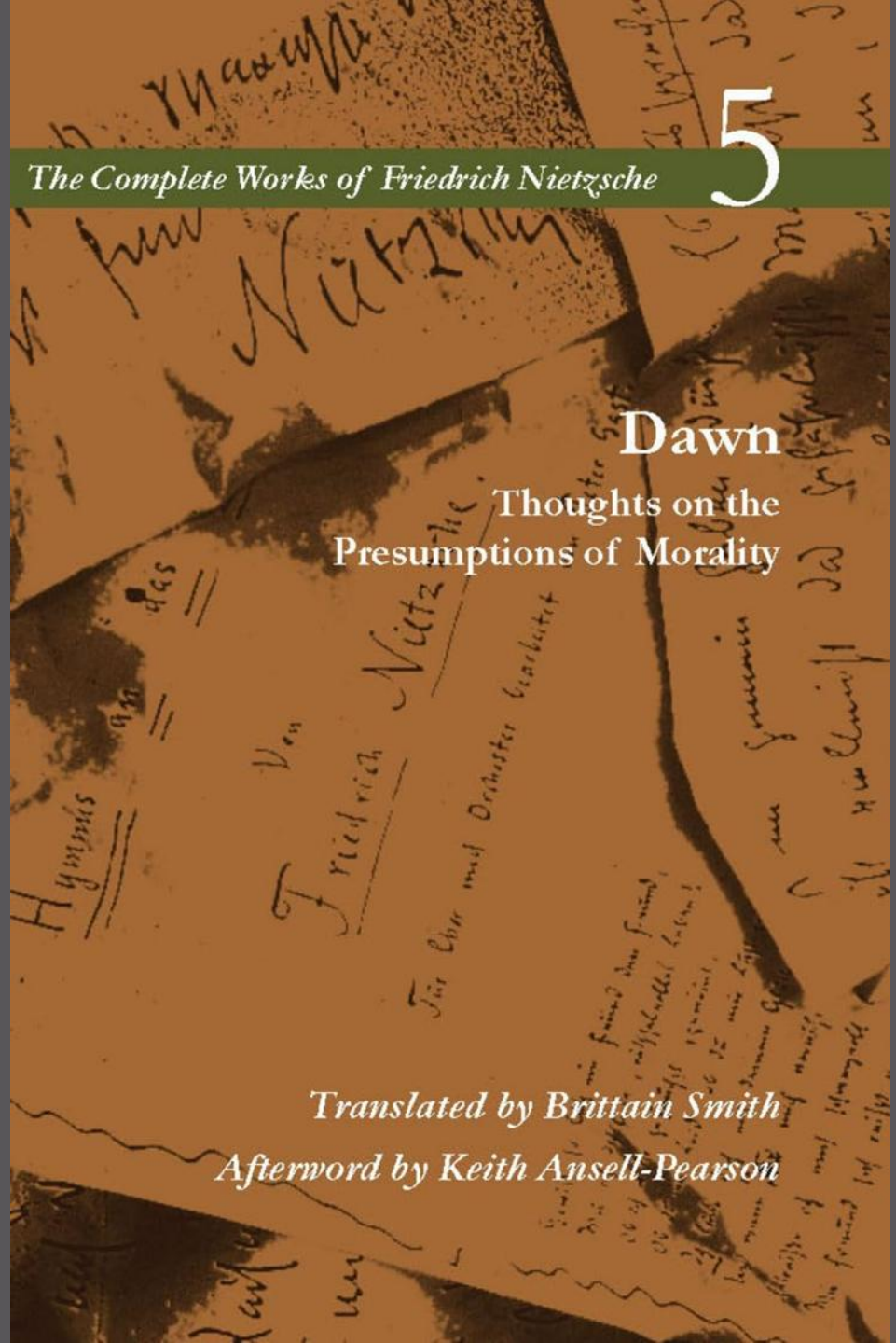
OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



Dreams are theoretically and personally important

‘Nothing is *more* your own than your dreams. Nothing more *your* work! Content, form, duration, actor, spectator—in these comedies you yourselves are everything!’

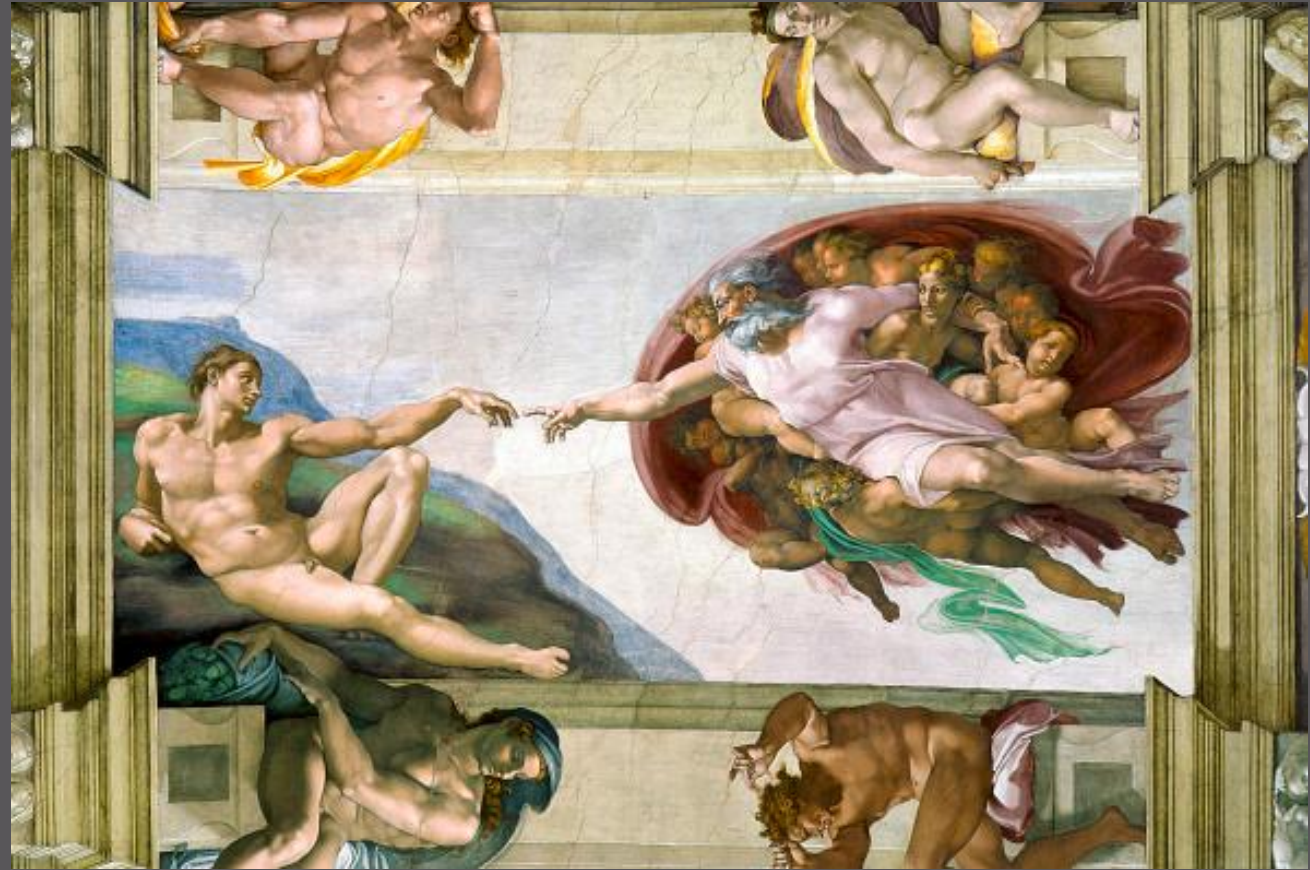
(Dawn, 1881/1995, p.94, aphorism 128, *Dream and responsibility*.)



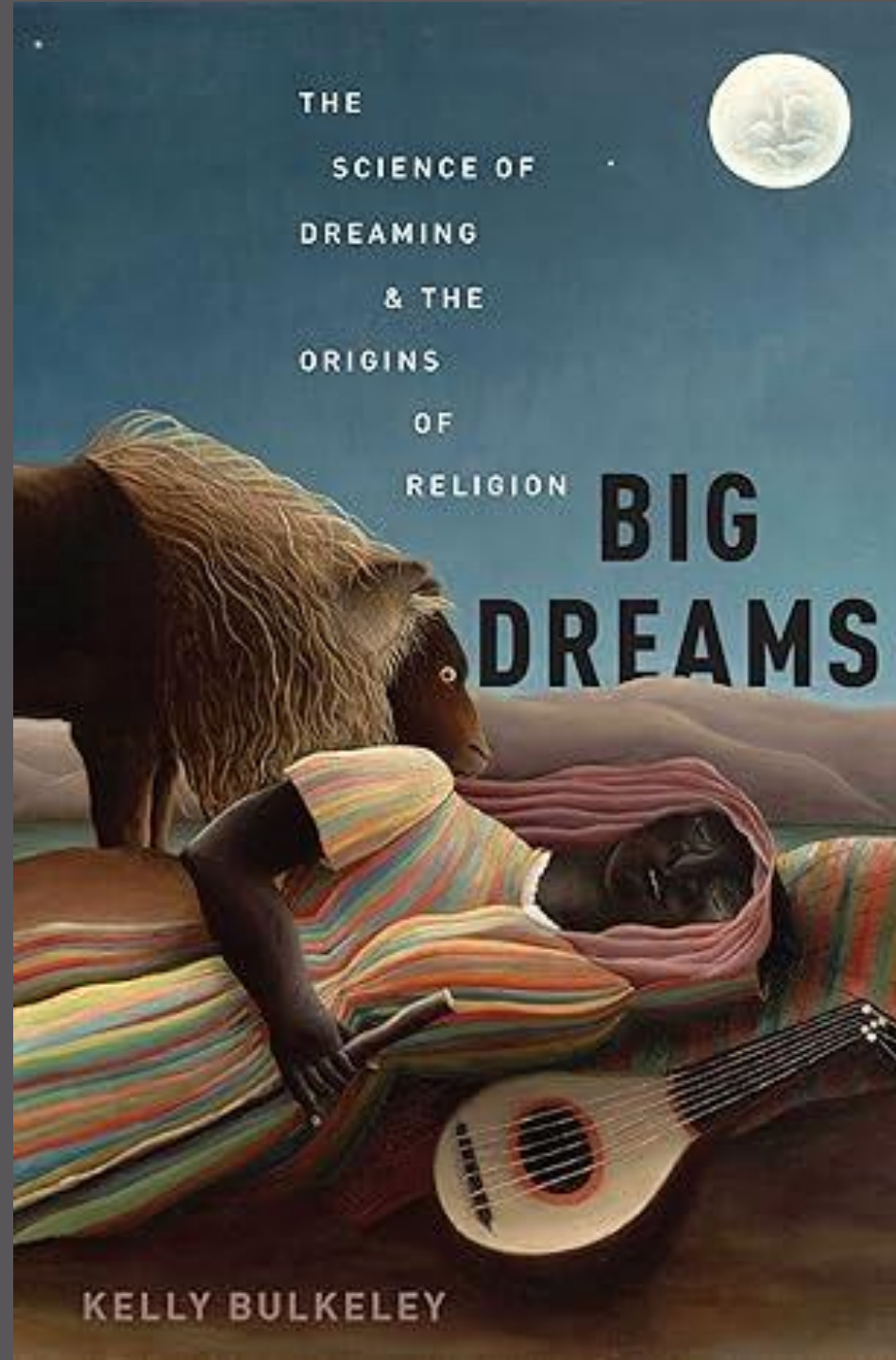
Dreams as the basis for religious belief

‘In the ages of raw, primordial culture, people believed that in dreams they came to know a *second real world*; here is the origin of all metaphysics. Without dreams, there would have been no reason to divide the world. The separation into soul and body is also connected to the oldest view of dreams, just like the assumption that the soul can appear in bodily form, hence the origin of all belief in ghosts, and probably also the belief in gods. “The dead live on; for they appear to the living in dreams”: that was the conclusion one previously drew, throughout many millennia.’

(Nietzsche, 1878/1995, *Human, All Too Human* 1, p.18, aphorism 5, *Misunderstanding of Dreams*.)



For an
examination
of this
theory, see
Bulkeley
(2016).



Nietzsche, like Freud, held that dreams are a response to the nervous system's 'continual state of excitation' and to the many physical and psychical stimuli affecting us during sleep. For Nietzsche, dreams are a guess, a hypothesis, at what is causing these sensations and nervous excitations: 'dreams are the searching for and representing of the causes for those aroused sensations, that is, for the supposed causes'.

(Human, All Too Human 1, 1878/1995, pp.23-25; aphorism 13, *Logic of Dreams*).

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

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**Human,
All Too Human**

(I)

*Translated, with an Afterword,
by Gary Handwerk*

‘For example, anyone who was to bind his feet with two straps might well dream that two snakes are encircling his feet: this is at first a hypothesis, then a belief with an accompanying pictorial representation and elaboration: “these snakes must be the causa of the sensation that I, the sleeper, have” – so judges the mind of the sleeper.’

...

‘The poet and the artist also *foist* causes upon their moods and mental states that is simply not the true ones...’

(Human, All Too Human 1, 1878/1995, pp.23-25;
aphorism 13, *Logic of Dreams*).

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

3

**Human,
All Too Human
(I)**

*Translated, with an Afterword,
by Gary Handwerk*

He gives examples of different types of dreams and says that they are interpretations of the ebb and flow of the different competing drives during the night. He says that our waking life similarly imagines causes for our nerve impulses, but that

‘Waking life doesn't have the same freedom of interpretation as dreaming does, it is less poetic and unbridled’ but that ‘between waking and dreaming no essential difference exists’.

(Dawn, 1881/1995, p.90; aphorism 119, *Experience and make-believe*.)

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

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Dawn

Thoughts on the
Presumptions of Morality

Translated by Brittain Smith
Afterword by Keith Ansell-Pearson

Why would dreams be inventing causes, inventing fictions?

Because that is what consciousness is / does.

‘No matter how hard a person struggles for self-knowledge, nothing can be more incomplete than the image of all the drives taken together that constitute his being. ... the laws of their alimentation remain completely unknown to him. ... If you will permit my suspicion that our dreams have precisely the value and meaning of compensating to certain degree for that contingent absence of “nourishment” during the day.’

(Dawn, 1881/1995, p.88-91, aphorism 119, *Experience and make-believe*).

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

5

Dawn

Thoughts on the
Presumptions of Morality

Translated by Brittain Smith

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Three dreams

Dream 1

The church at
Röcken, where
Nietzsche's
father was the
pastor.



Nietzsche's
birthplace,
next to the
church.





From My Life
The Years of My Youth
1844-1858

Friedrich Nietzsche

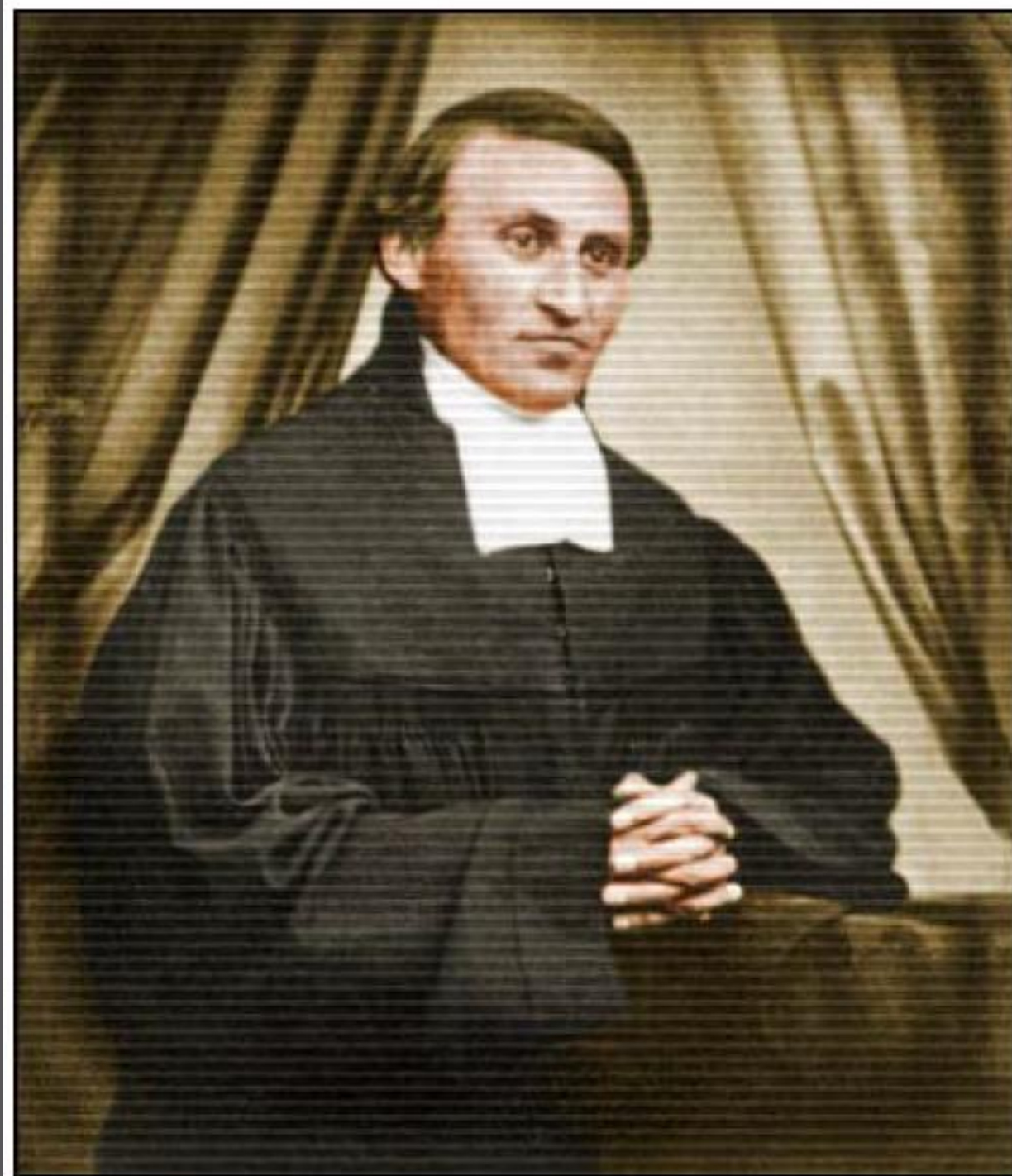
Translation © 2012 The Nietzsche Channel.

Cover image: Franziska Nietzsche (1826-1897).

Ca. 1843, as a 17-year-old bride.

Painting by unknown artist.

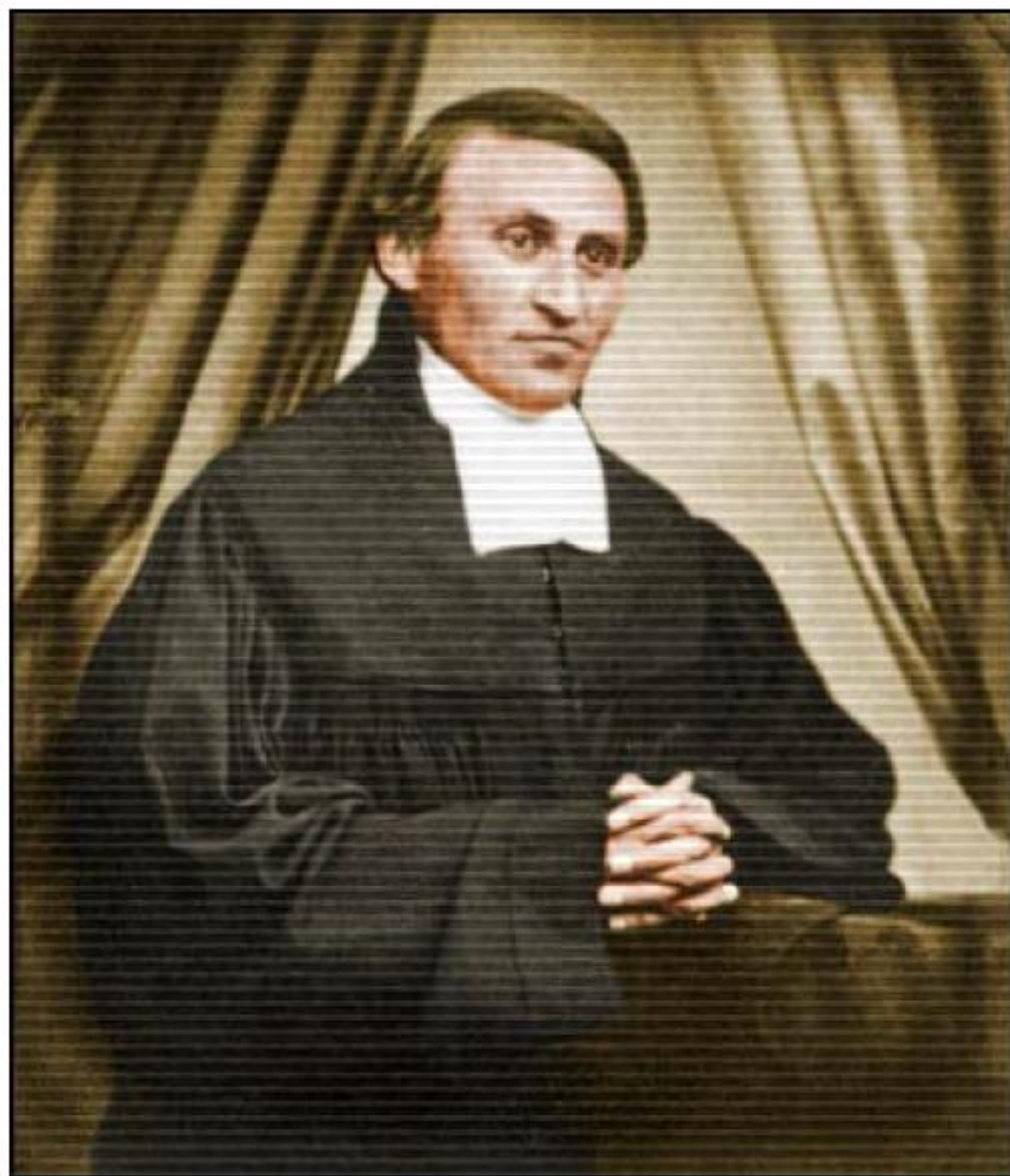
Colorized and enhanced image © 2012 The Nietzsche Channel.



Nietzsche (1858/2012, p.5)
reports a childhood dream,
which occurred soon after the
death of his father.

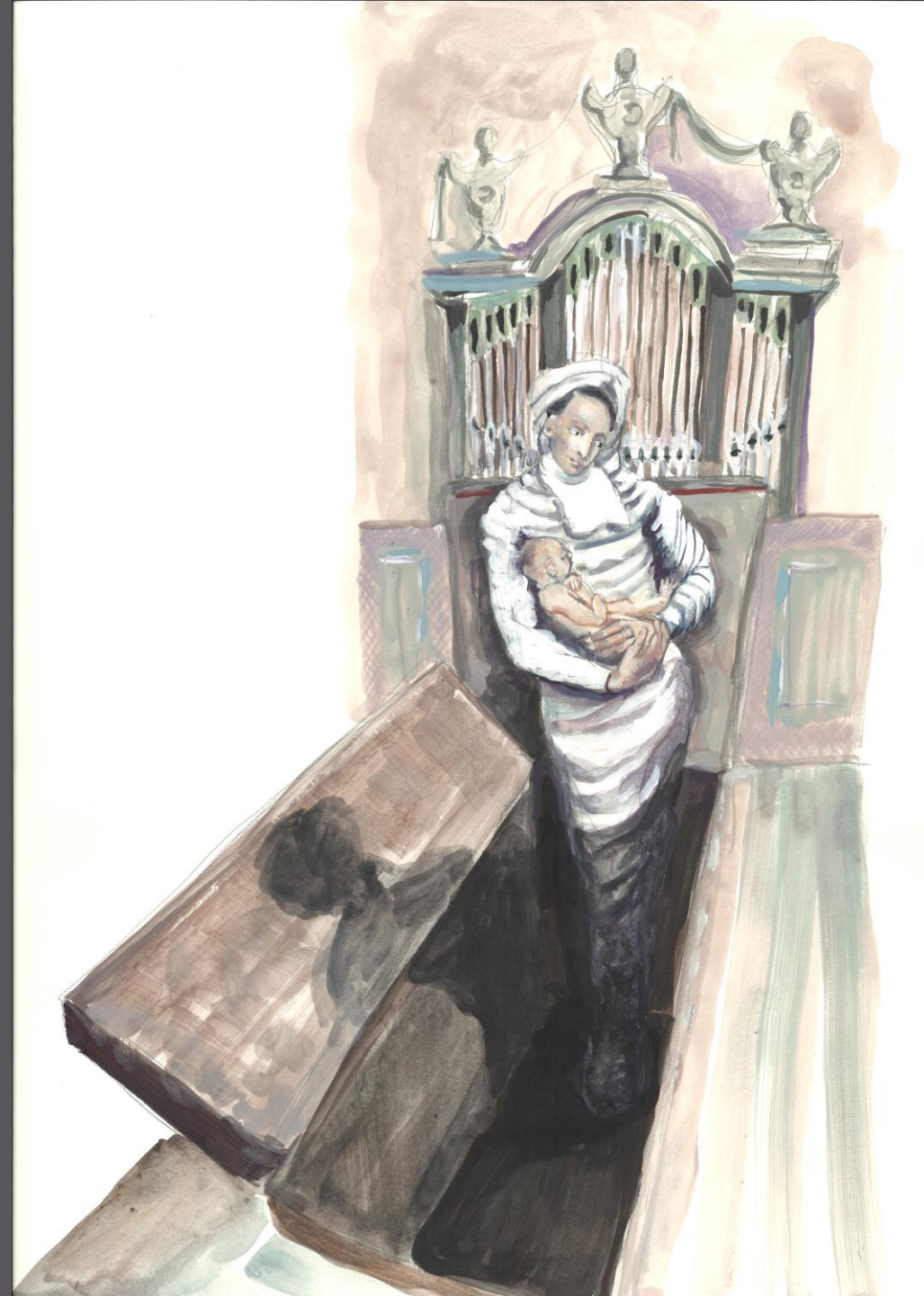
Background to the dream

‘If one strips a tree of its crown it becomes withered and leafless and the little birds abandon its branches. Our family was deprived of its head, all joy vanished from our hearts and profound sorrow held sway in us. Yet scarcely were the wounds somewhat healed when they were painfully torn open again.’



Childhood dream

‘I heard organ music in the church, like at the funeral. When I looked for what was causing it, a grave suddenly rose and my father in his winding-sheet emerged from it. He hurried into the church and soon returned with a tiny child in his arms. The grave opened, he climbed inside and the slab closed over the opening. All at once the roaring sound of the organs stopped and I awoke. — On the day after this night, little Joseph suddenly got sick, had convulsions and in a few hours, died. Our grief was enormous. My dream had been completely fulfilled. The tiny corpse was also laid in his father's arms. — God in heaven was our sole consolation and refuge from this double misfortune. This happened at the end of January 1850.’





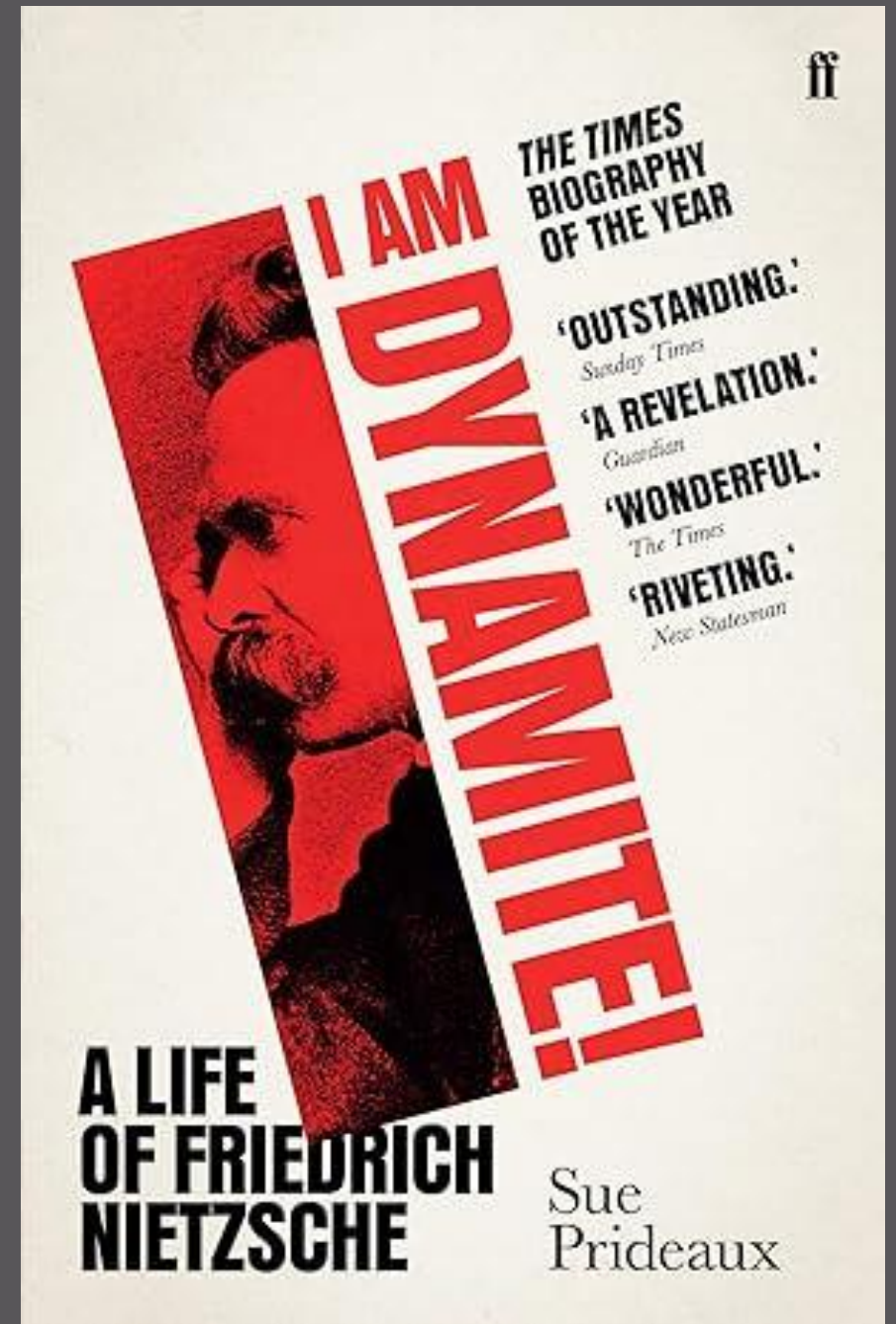


Hier ruht in Gott
Franziska Mielzsche
geb. Oehler
geb. 2. Februar 1836
gest. 30. April 1897

Hier ruht in Gott
Carl Ludwig
Mielzsche
Pfarrer zu Röcken,
Miehlitz und Bothfeld.
geboren 11. October 1813
gest. 30. Juli 1849
Leit nach

‘Here reposeth in God, Carl Ludwig Nietzsche, Pastor of Rocken, Michlitz and Bothfeld, born 11 October 1813, died 30 July 1849 Whereupon followed him into Eternity his younger son Ludwig Joseph, born 27 February 1848, died 4 January 1850. Charity never faileth. 1 Cor. 13.8.’

(Translation of inscription, Prideaux, 2019, p.255).



‘The question of whether they were simple febrile seizures or whether Joseph, like his father, was epileptic, remains unanswered.’

(Monroy, 2023, pp.73-80)

Neuropsychiatric disease in the Nietzsche family: the poiesis of Dionysus

E. Ochoa Monroy

Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico.

ABSTRACT

Introduction. Friedrich Nietzsche is one of the greatest thinkers in history. His original style and vision of the transformation of Western culture were not born of a purely rational mind, but rather of one that much of the time was grappling with health issues, mainly neuropsychiatric problems. Numerous members of his family also struggled with mental illness. Were their conditions in some way linked? How did this influence Nietzsche's thought?

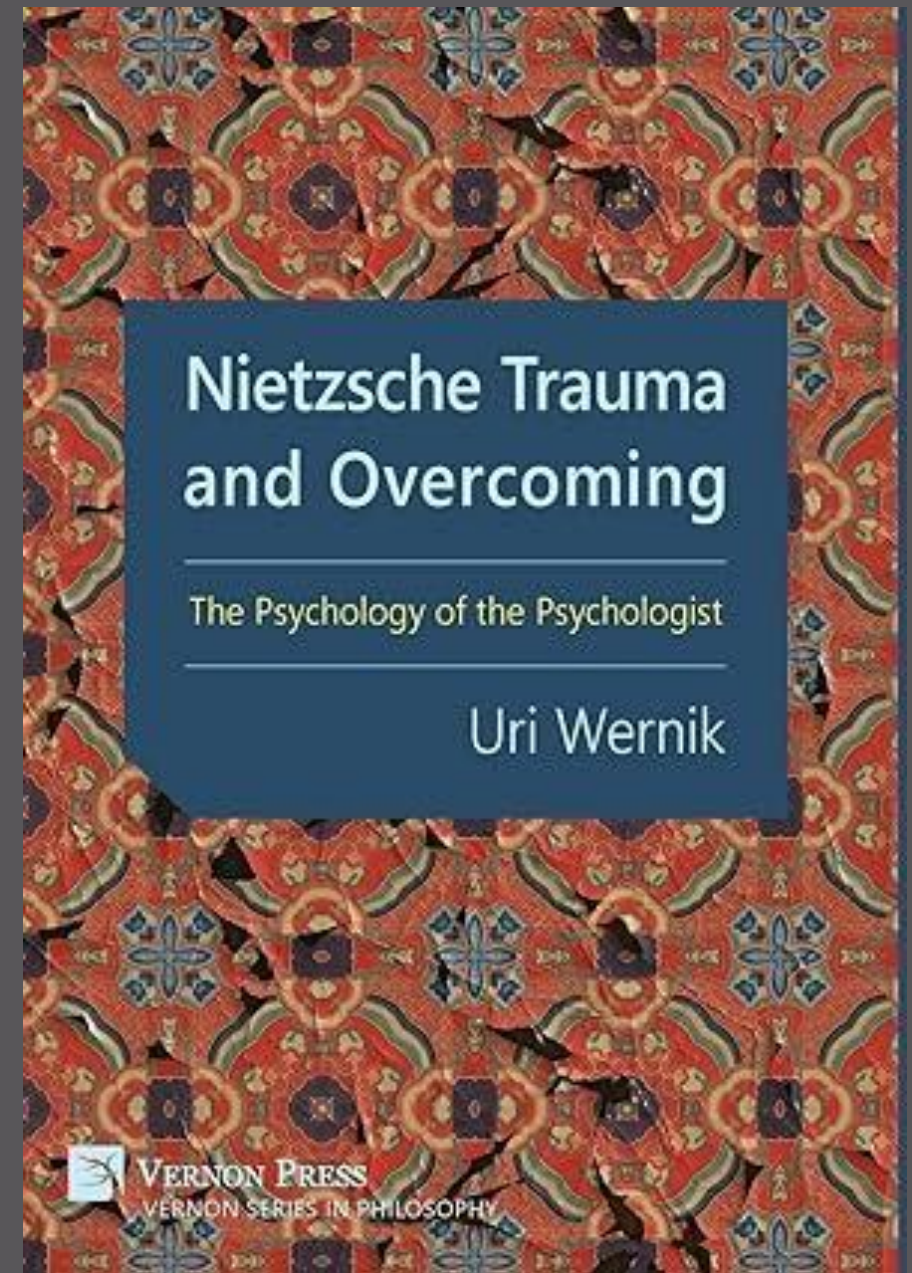
Development. Nietzsche's health problems began at an early age. Other members of his family, and particularly his father, had previously presented similar mental illnesses. He suffered with early migraines and myopia verging on blindness, periods of extreme mood swings and personality changes, and finally the neurosyphilis that eventually caused his death. This was the backdrop against which Nietzsche lived his life and in which the full force of his philosophy was admirably developed. This philosophy would shape nearly every aspect of 20th-century thought.

Conclusions. Contrary to the nearly axiomatic pejorative connotations attached to illness, Nietzsche teaches us that disease does not necessarily entail the destructive force with which it is associated; rather, in some individuals it may constitute part of the impetus driving the creation of some of the greatest works of their lives.

KEYWORDS

Friedrich Nietzsche, philosophy, neurosyphilis, migraine, dementia, neuropsychiatry

Regarding the dream, Wernik (2018, p.14) suggests that, towards the father, ‘the son’s love is not self-evident’.



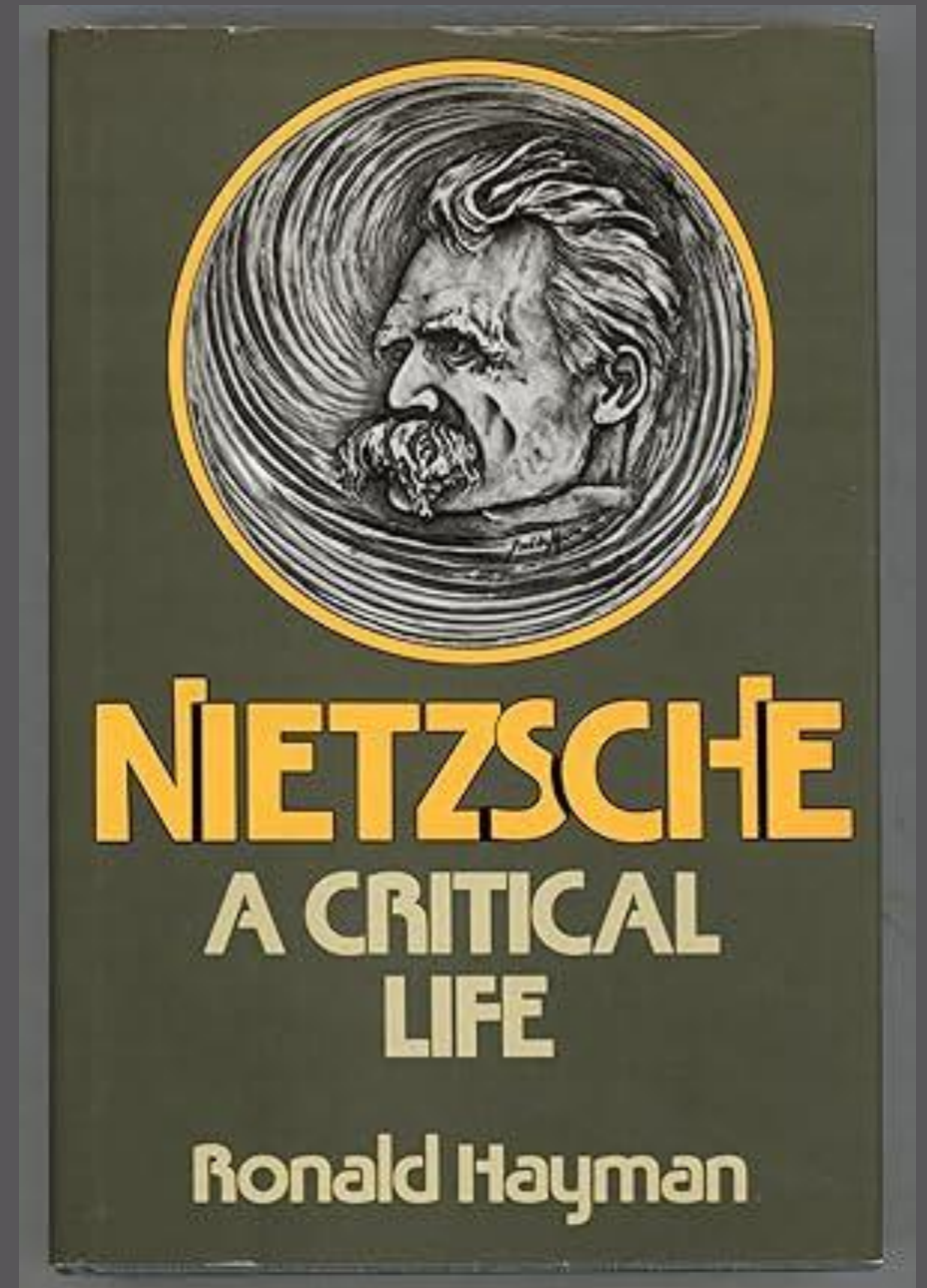
Dream 2

Dreamt at 14 years old after a large family reunion for the 70th birthday of his grandfather, a Lutheran pastor like his father.

‘He saw the parsonage lying in ruins and his grandmother sitting alone among the debris. Waking up in tears, he was unable to sleep any more. In the morning he told Elisabeth and his mother, who said neither of them must talk about the dream. Always robust, their grandfather was still in good health.’ His grandfather died later that year.

(Hayman, 1980, p.32).

Note that at 14 years old, Nietzsche had not yet rejected religion. It was at Easter 1865, aged 21, that he first refused Communion (Prideaux, 2019, p.42).

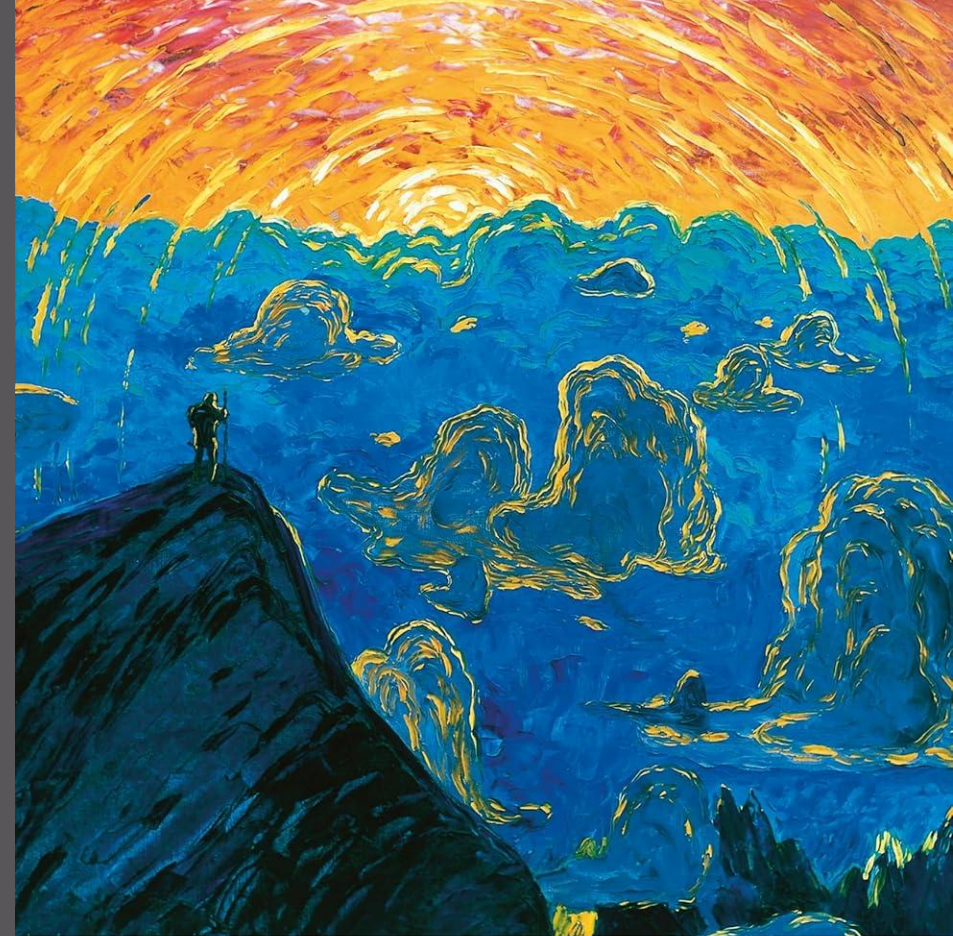


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Dream 3

In Part 2 of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, chapter titled The Prophet, a great sadness has come over mankind. A teacher is teaching that ‘Everything is empty, everything is one, everything is passed!’ And the teacher says we've all become dry, the wells have dried up, ‘we have grown too weary even to die; see now we are still awake and we live on — in sepulchres!’

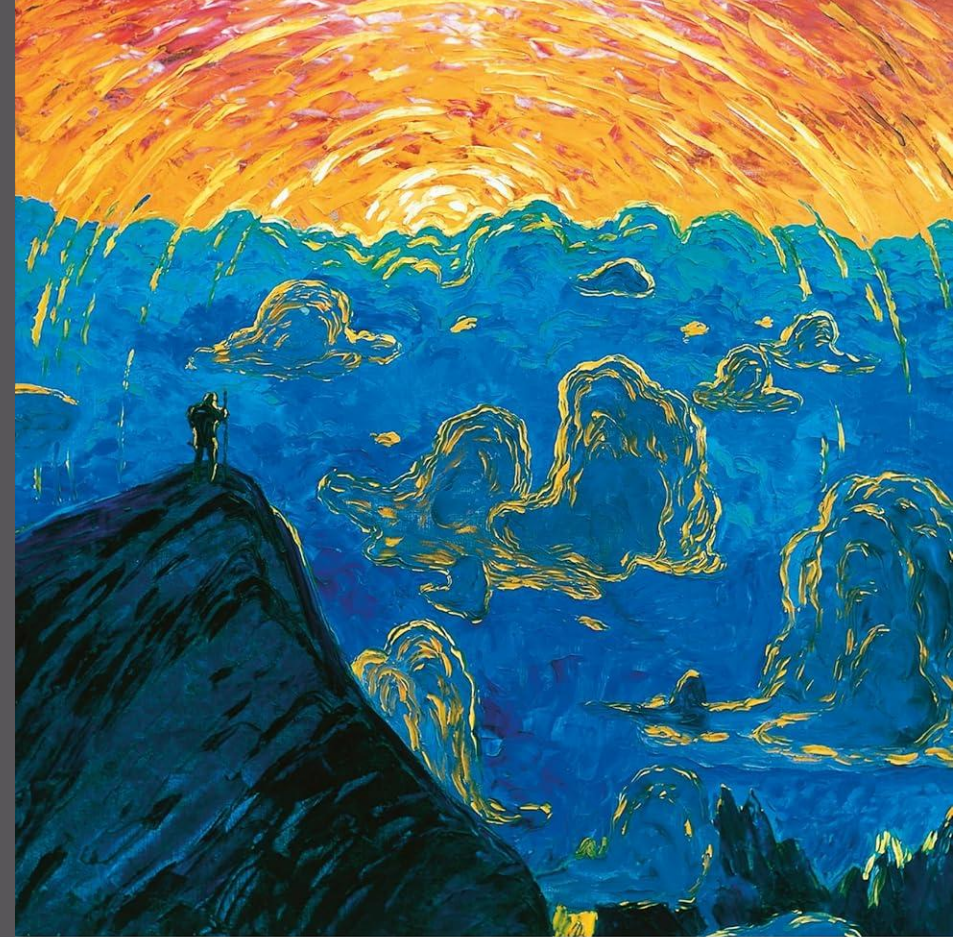


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THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

Zarathustra was so troubled by the teaching's sadness that 'He went about sad and weary; and he became like those of whom the prophet had spoken.' He fell asleep and dreamt 'he had become a night-watchman and grave-watchman' who guards death's coffins in musty vaults, with a sultry and dust-covered soul.

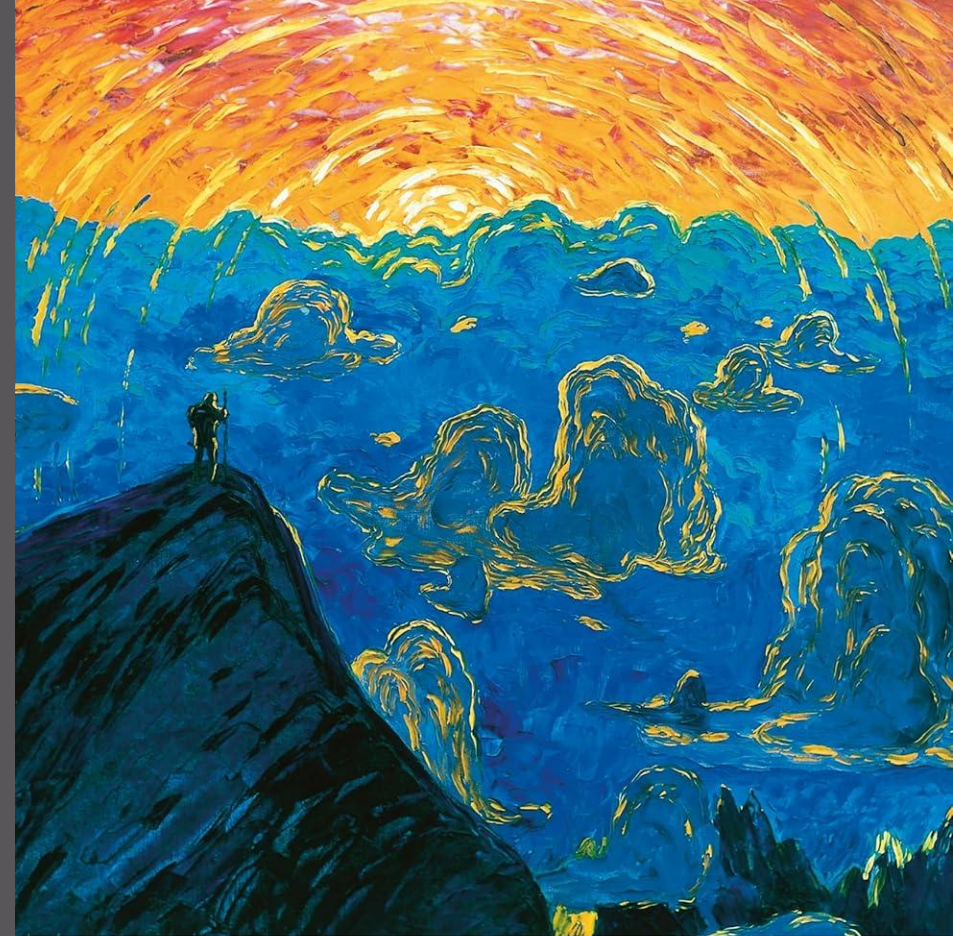


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THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

In the dream there are many poetic and poignant images of decay but then Zarathustra sees a coffin being brought towards him. He next hears a roaring and whistling wind, the coffin bursts asunder, and there are peals of laughter: out come masks of children, angels, owls, fools, and child-sized butterflies. And Zarathustra shrieks and wakes up.

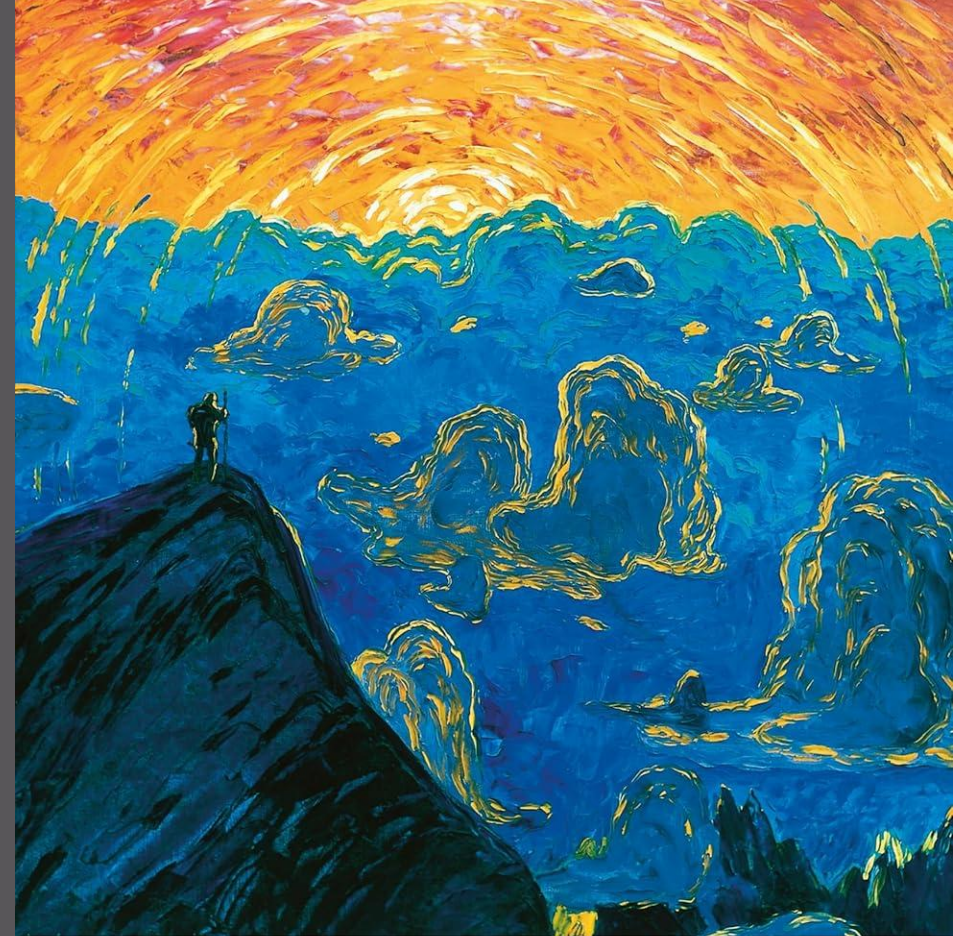


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THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

His dream is interpreted by 'the disciple whom he loved most'. The disciple says that Zarathustra has dreamed his enemies: 'that was your most oppressive dream!' He says that Zarathustra has dreamt he will overthrow them with laughter, and asks are you not yourself the coffin full of angel-masks of life? The disciple concludes that just as Zarathustra awoke from the enemies, they shall awake from themselves and come to him. It was thus a dream of deathly oppression that became life affirming.



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THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

The Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872/1995)
Nietzsche distinguishes the Apollonian and
Dionysian tendencies, which are in
constant struggle, with periodic
reconciliation, in art and life.



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The Birth of Tragedy

The Apollonian is logical, rational and orderly. It is the basis for painting and sculpture.

The Dionysian is emotional, chaotic, group-based, intoxicating. It is the basis for music.

They combine in Greek tragedy, with characters and plot being Apollonian, and the music and combined voices of the chorus being Dionysian.

The film Harold and Maude is often cited as showing this distinction and combination.



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The Birth of Tragedy

But counter-intuitively to many of us, Nietzsche saw dreams as Apollonian. They are part of making sense of the world, just as poetry and the plastic arts are.

The plastic arts, and dreams, copy the world, beautify it, make sense of it. Dreams are thus not chaotically Dionysian.



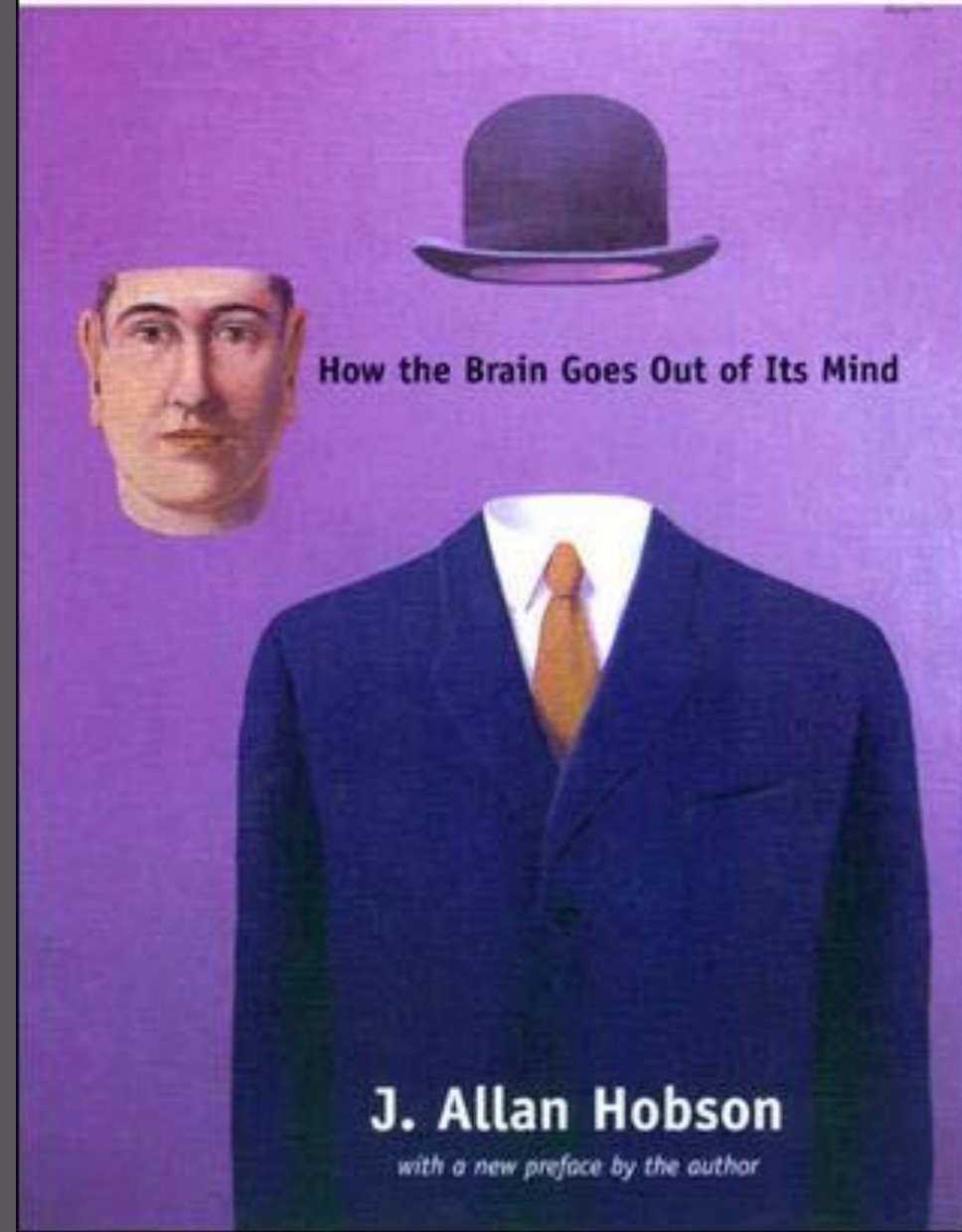
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The Birth of Tragedy

This is very different to Hobson's view that dreaming is a delirium, where 'the brain goes out of its mind'.

Dreaming as Delirium



Likewise, as Freud said to Dalí, ‘In classic paintings I look for the subconscious—in a surrealist painting I look for the conscious.’ (Auer et al., 2022, p.160)

(Cf Bergius (1979, 1999) on whether surrealism is more Apollonian than Dada, which is more Dionysian. Dada emphasised chance and communal events.)

DALÍ – FREUD



AN OBSESSION

Comparison to other dream theories

- There are commonalities between Nietzsche's approach to dreams and theories of Freud and Jung.
- Compensation for unrequited drives.
- Wish fulfilment.
- Making sense of the external and psychic stimuli during sleep.
- Nietzsche provides a basis for the making of metaphors during our sleep.
- Akin to pareidolia, the finding of patterns in random stimuli. He gives the example of this occurring when our eyes are closed.



But, in contrast with Freud's 'Where Id was Ego shall be', in *Dawn* (aphorism 119) he asks whether dreams, moral judgements and evaluations are 'mere images and fantasies stemming from a physiological process we know nothing of, a kind of acquired language for denoting various nerve impulses? That all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastical commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, yet felt text?'

This points to scepticism regarding dream interpretations. Note here that of the three dreams above, it is the fictional dream that has a clear meaning.

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

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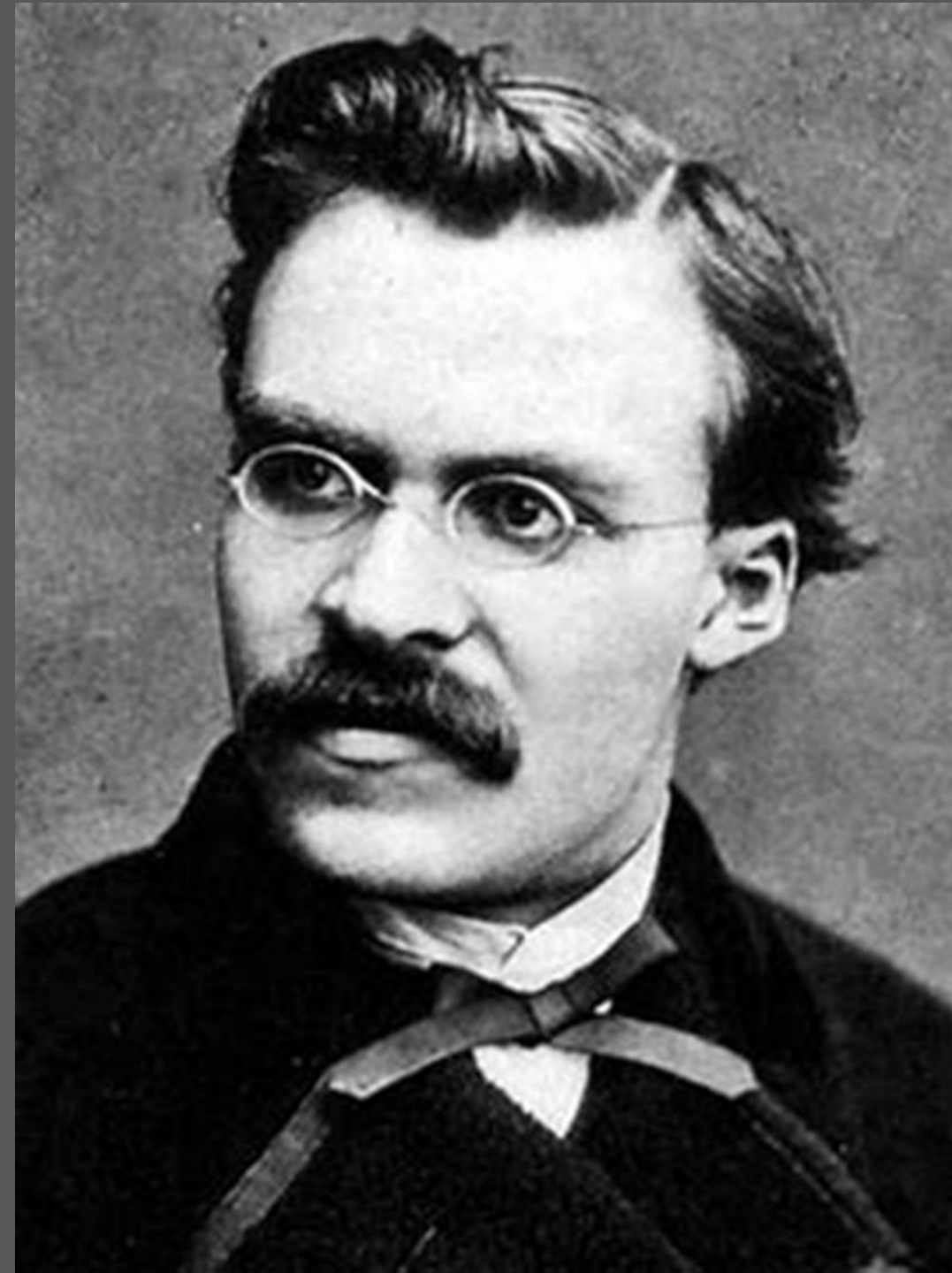
Dawn

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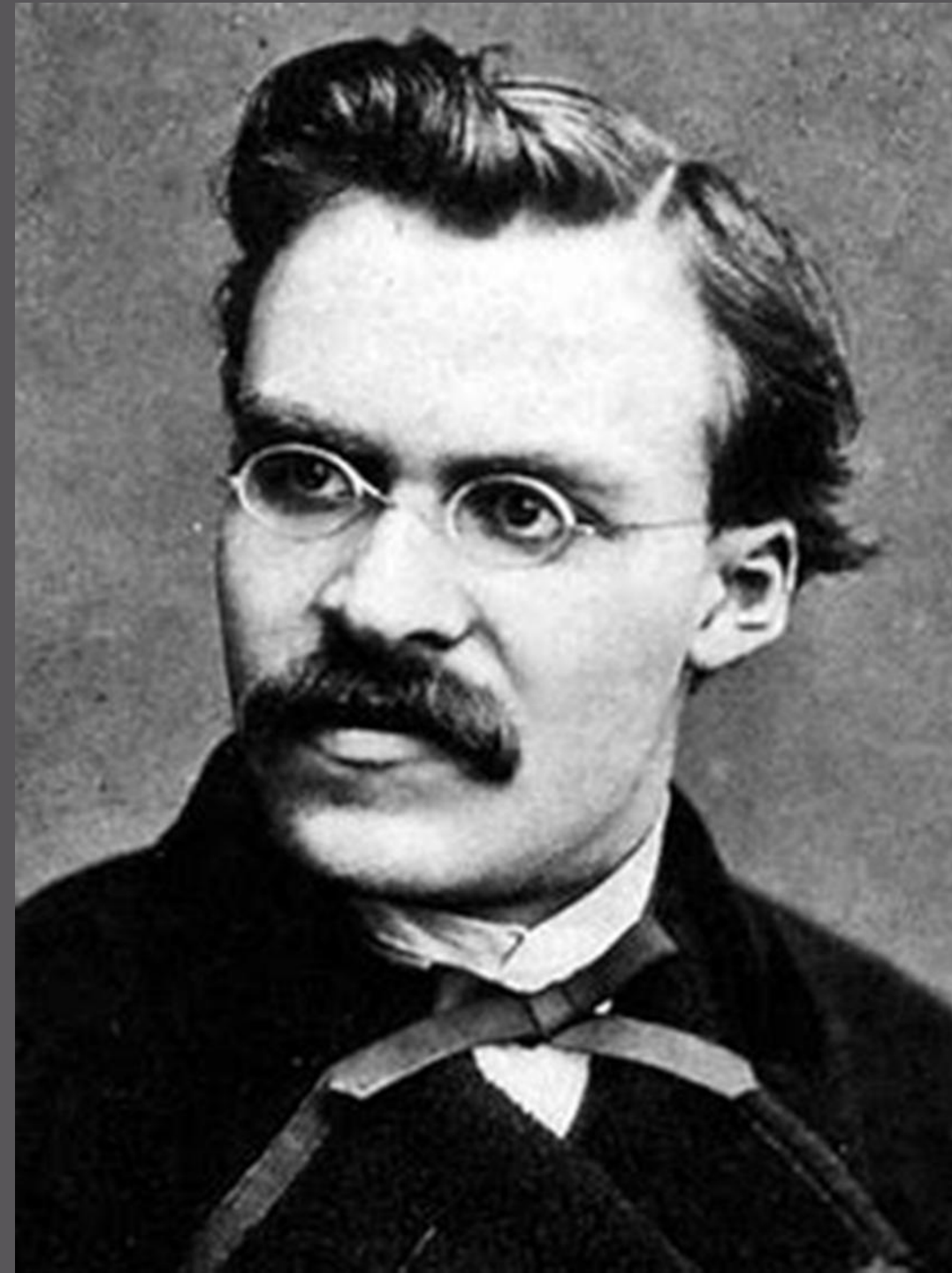
For Nietzsche, consciousness is often delusional, and with primarily having a function of communicating with others, such as between rulers and ruled, adults and children. He says that language reduces us to the average, to the herd, rather than allowing us introspective access to the unconscious.



This is very much a downplaying of consciousness, we cannot know our unconscious, and for Nietzsche dreams would thus not be the royal road to the knowledge of unconscious processes.

“Everyone is farthest from himself” — this is known by all diagnosticians, to their consternation, and the saying “know thyself!” on the lips of a god and spoken to humans is practically malicious!’

(The Joyful Science, 1882/1995, p.196, aphorism 335,
Long live physics!)



Wernik's (2016) section Nietzsche Contra Freud (pp.167-176) cites Nietzsche's *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, where Nietzsche writes of the importance to life of forgetting. Similarly, strength is measured by how much of the truth one can endure (1886/1995, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p.41, aphorism 39).

‘Gaining insight into the origin of things is generally not a productive activity ... it distracts from the appreciation and understanding of immediate factors.’
(Wernik, 2016, p.171)



Nietzschean Psychology and Psychotherapy

The New Doctors of the Soul

Uri Wernik

‘With insight into origin comes increasing insignificance of origin: whereas the immediate, the around-us and in-us, begins gradually to display colors and beauties and enigmas and riches of significance’.

(Nietzsche, 1881/1995, Dawn, p.37, aphorism 44, *Origin and significance*.)

In contrast to psychoanalysis and the search for unconscious origins, this approach emphasizes interpretation of experiences, re-interpretation and action, which Wernik links to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.



Nietzschean Psychology and Psychotherapy

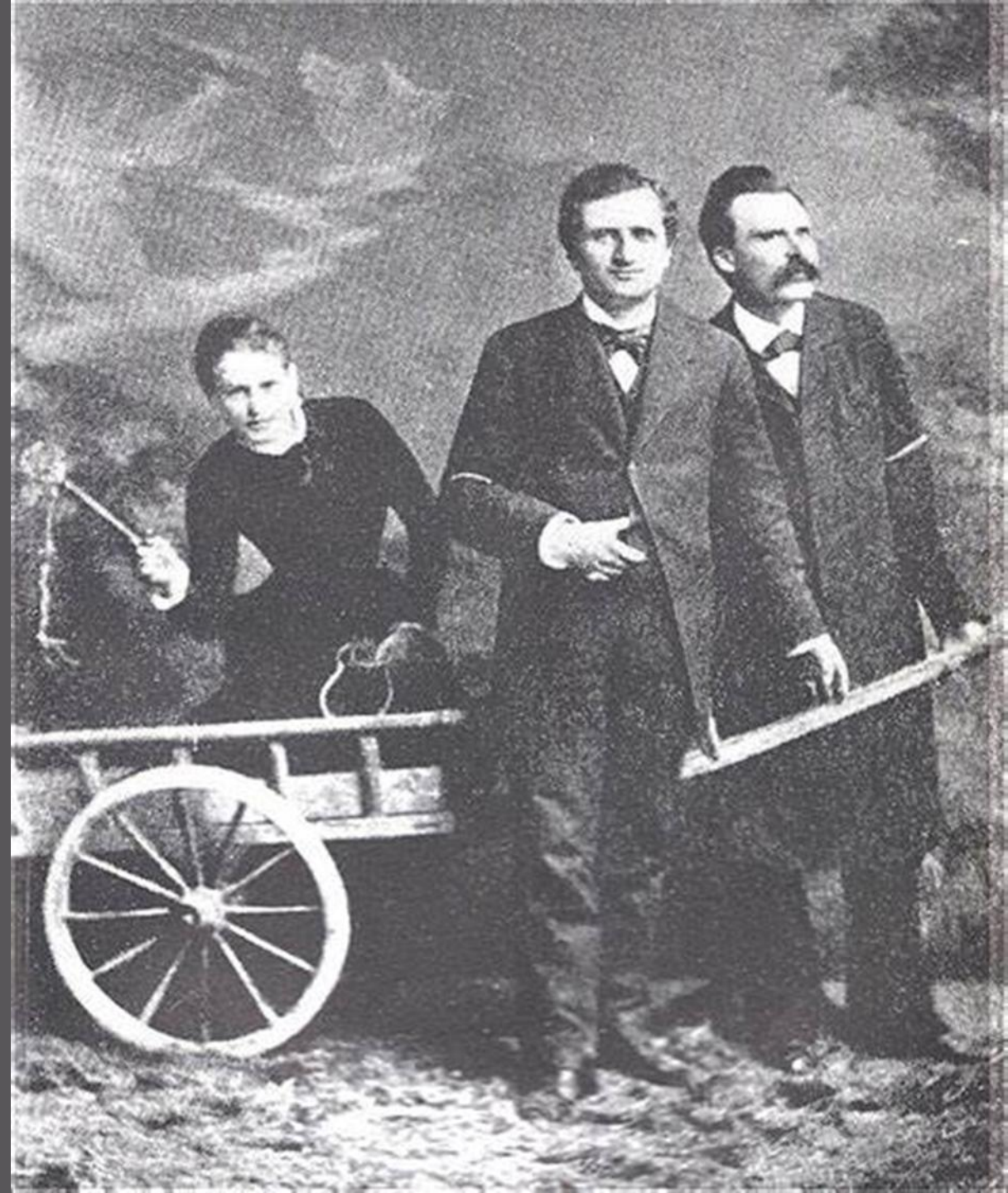
The New Doctors of the Soul

Uri Wernik

Conclusions

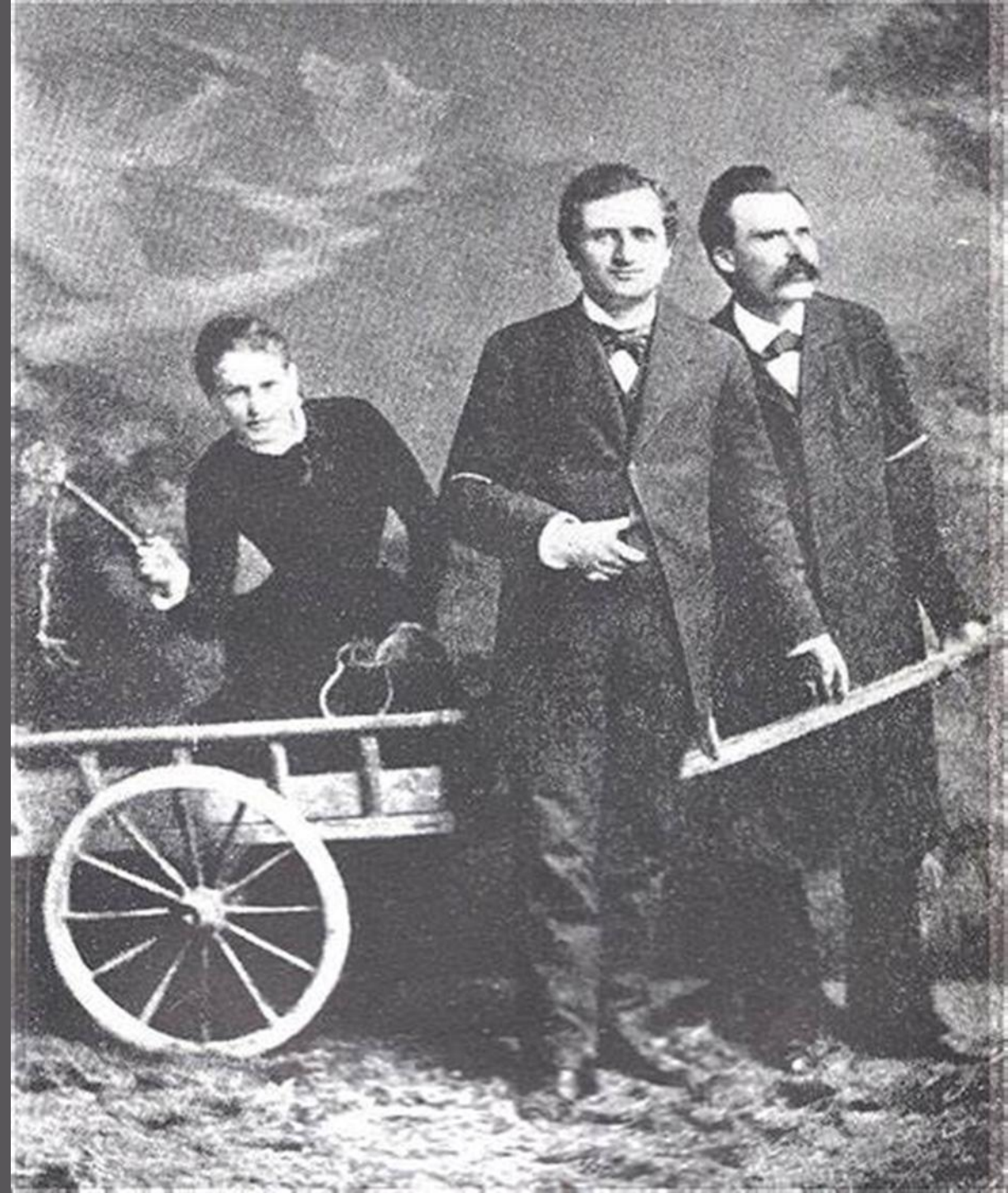
Nietzsche's ideas about dreams emphasize recent/immediate causes/interpretations of dreams.

This accords with Montague Ullman's approach to appreciating dreams, which prioritises recent experiences of the dreamer in interpreting or understanding the dream.



Nietzsche's ideas overlap with much of current theorizing about dreams, but with dreams seen also as pareidolia-like sense-making and hypothesizing re drives and memories that are active in sleep. But a sense-making that might only result in 'supposed causes'.

Thus the dream, like consciousness, might misinterpret ourselves and the world.



Thank you!