

dedicated to Greg,
in teaching & jest.

APO LOGIA
EPI LOGUE

Some might reproach me for my facetiousness. I reproach “such ‘serious animals’” for their “prejudice against all ‘froliche Wissenschaft’; let us show that this is prejudice!” To attack the Musician of the Future with such a dour creaking machine of the intellect in ‘ernst,’ would be a heinous blasphemy. (Nietzsche, ernst nehmen)

The Madman Shoots Lasers From his Eyes: Heliocentrism and the Marketplace

‘No, because Nietzsche wasn’t a time traveller...’
—Herr Doktor Doktor Polakoff, pers. comm.

Heliocentrism: clearly an important part of Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* as the earth-orbits-sun model of “Copper Nickles,”¹ it also plays a significant role in Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* as the Western thought’s underlying basis on the violent hierarchy of light and darkness. In this ‘light,’ I contend that the eponymous Madman of aphorism 125 shot lasers out of his eyes, but Galileo did so better, by *actually* affecting the marketplace.

First, the anachronism: how could a 19th century philosopher know of lasers? Here, I must ask you: what is the most telling characteristic of a time traveler? Is it not an accurate knowledge of the future? Indeed, what other explanation can be given for his knowing, decades in advance, that his “name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous” (*Ecce Homo*, “Why I am a Destiny” sect. 1)? Improbable as it seems, bearing in mind his concept of Eternal Recurrence, in which we are bound to relive our lives “once more and innumerable times more,” we are left with no other possibilities but acknowledging him as a time traveler (*The Gay Science* aph. 341). Galileo, likewise, similarly predicts, with eerie precision, that “astronomy will

¹ Copernicus

be discussed in the marketplace”—and just yesterday I heard someone talking about their astrological signs in the supermarket!

Next: what is a laser? Our boring dictionary merely defines it as “a monochromatic beam of light,” but Nietzsche consistently uses light as a metaphor for knowledge (need I point out that these *same* metaphorical lasers are today the very basis of our networked communications, our knowledge-transference?) The Madman is said to have “pierced [the people] with his eyes”; eyes that do not fire lasers could not possibly pierce anyone. Moreover, Nietzsche credits blindness, man’s “seeing himself incompletely” as the first ‘error’ that leads to humanity and humanness (aph. 155). Thus, in shining a violent beam of the “[philosophical justification of ... a way of thinking] that shines as a sun”—that is, for Nietzsche, an epistemic basis—the Madman can truly be said to “pierced” those in the market (aph. 289). It is quite probable that the lantern he lights in the “bright morning hours” is an auxiliary to his firing of lasers (aph. 125). Further evidence that there is more to this Madman’s eyes than meets the eye is that, since those with mental illnesses are often “homeless,” this particular Madman is among those homeless “whose eyes—the suspicion in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough” (and thus entirely the manner of person to tell us that it becomes “difficult to remain serious when we look at the worthiest hopes and dreams,” e.g. sober essays (aph. 343; *Ecce Homo*)).

Galileo’s telescope seems entirely analogous to the Madman’s eyes, and Galileo himself is doubtless among those who “are endowed with a useful blindness of spirit ... the skeptic inside them” (aph 284), as evidenced by his remark that “I understand nothing,” leading him, like the Madman, to create sources of illumination in the “early morning of beginnings” (aph 284; Brecht 19; 10).

Functionally, telescope and eyes accomplish much the same realization: “[God is] nowhere!”; “God is dead” (28; Nietzsche aph 125). Likewise, their respective heliocentrisms of “we unchained the earth from the sun!”, “the earth is rolling cheerfully around the sun” would suggest that this Madman is the same who elsewhere says “the universe ... has countless centers”—or was it Galileo’s “the center is everywhere?” (aph 125; Brecht 8; Nietzsche *Zarathustra* 273)

However, though the Madman throws down his lantern and Galileo recants, there is a marked difference between the two—their effect on the marketplace. The former admits defeat, “I have come too early” but the latter’s doctrine explicitly “spreads among the common people,” with both the support of the tradesman and the lauding of the minstrels (*The Gay Science* aph 125; Brecht 82). Perhaps this is because of Galileo’s reliance on the “gentle tyranny of reason over people” while the Madman seems likelier to scorn reason and gentleness altogether (29).

Thus, while both seek to convey a heliocentrism to the marketplace through what I refer to as lasers, Galileo’s belief in empiricism as an epistemic basis makes him more appealing to the marketplace, while the Madman—and through him, Nietzsche—relies primarily on the outcasts, the intelligentsia, those “poised on the mountains, in the contradiction between today and tomorrow” to carry his ideas—which, perhaps, is a better choice, looking at their respective popularity today (aph. 343).

Works Cited

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974. Print.

Brecht, Bertolt. *The Life of Galileo*. London: Methuen, 1963. Print.