

# *Nietzsche's Monster of Energy*

## *The Self-Creation of the Great Man*

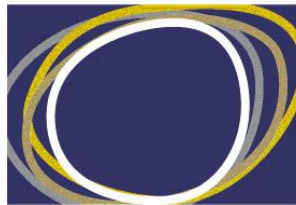
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## *Abstract*

In this thesis I develop an account of Nietzsche's great man framed around the idea that he is a 'monster of energy.' In the first part I establish that Nietzsche developed a criterion to assess the value of values, centred on whether they express abundance or exhaustion. Cultivating an abundance of energy is the key to how we should approach the problem of suffering, how we master *ressentiment*, and ultimately, how we experience authentic joy. We should thus use energy expenditure as the standard to evaluate the different narratives that we use to interpret ourselves and our existence. In the second part I use this criterion to establish the types of narratives most conducive to creating oneself as the monster of energy. I argue that the great man should desire to determine his own will, should cultivate strength of character, believe in the freedom of his will, and take responsibility for the self that he has created. Finally, I examine the attitude the great man should adopt towards his past, and argue that we should reject the idea that the eternal return plays an important role in the process of becoming a great man, since this process should emphasise the necessity of self-mastery, asceticism, and the cultivation of a unified and volitional self.

# *Contents*

Introduction	7
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## *Part I*

### *How to Evaluate Values*

I.	The Self and Exhaustion	19
II.	Responses to Exhaustion I: The Modern Artist	41
III.	Responses to Exhaustion II: The Ascetic Priest	66

## *Part II*

### *Creating Greatness*

I.	The Will to Self-Determination	87
II.	Free Will and Responsibility	109
III.	Conquering the Past and Rejecting the Eternal Return	127
Bibliography		150

## *Nietzsche Works Cited*

I have cited the following translations of Nietzsche's works in the text, using the title abbreviations.

- *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), trans. Ronald Speirs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
- *Daybreak* (D), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.
- *Human, All Too Human* (HH), trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, Penguin Books, London, 1994.
- *The Untimely Meditations* (UM), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.
- *The Gay Science* (GS), trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1974.
- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.
- *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, 1973.
- *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM), trans. Douglas Smith, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.
- *The Case of Wagner* (CW), *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (NCW) and *Selected Aphorisms, Third Edition*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, T. N. Foulis, London, 1911.
- *Twilight of the Idols*, (TI), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, 2003.
- *The Antichrist* (AC), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, 2003.
- *Ecce Homo* (EH), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, 1979.
- *The Will to Power* (WP), trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, New York, 1968.
- *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden* (KSA) ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1988.

*Oh if only you understood my words: "Go ahead and do whatever you will - but first be the kind of people who can will!" (Z, III, 5)*

*This man who had returned could not remember any time in his life when he had not been fired with the will to become a great man; it was a desire Ulrich seemed to have been born with. Such a dream may of course betray vanity and stupidity, but it is no less true that it is a fine and proper ambition without which there probably would not be very many great men in the world.*

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*<sup>1</sup>

*In the end there appears a man, a monster of energy, who demands a monster of a task. (WP 995/KSA 11:26 [409])*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert *Man Without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike, Picador, London, 1995, p. 31.

## *Introduction*

My goal is to pursue the heroic figure of Nietzsche's writings. He is not the noble barbarian of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, but the great man whose presence is felt throughout Nietzsche, and who he at various times names the philosophical "commander" (*BGE* 211), the "artist-tyrant" (*WP* 960/*KSA* 12:2[57]), and the "Übermensch" (*Z*, I. Prologue). I emphasise, above all, that the great man must *create himself* as the "monster of energy" (*WP* 995/*KSA* 11:26[409]). While Nietzsche sometimes speculates enthusiastically that society might take control of *breeding* great men, he is starkly ambiguous over how this might be achieved, at times suggesting that we must protect great men from the weak, that the "healthy should remain *segregated* from the sick," whilst at others he emphasises that great men tend to appear precisely under the harshest conditions, when they face the greatest resistance (*GM* III, 14).<sup>2</sup> He instead generally prioritises inward drive and expansion over external forming and shaping, and develops an account of the narratives that great men tend to create to interpret themselves and their existence. It is these narratives of self-interpretation that constitute Nietzsche's great man theory proper. It is by analysing the underlying narratives that the great man uses to interpret himself that we can bring together, and reconcile, apparently contradictory attributes that he often assigns to great historical figures. I will distinguish two strands of Nietzsche's thought about what is involved in achieving greatness: narratives about the mind, and narratives about the body. It is helpful to distinguish between these, because commentators addressing Nietzsche's writings on the self often neglect one of these strands, and sometimes both.

Nietzsche makes several prominent claims about the importance of physiology, arguing: that fluctuating physiological states affect thought more than we generally suppose; that we cannot readily separate consciousness from the drives or passions; that we can diagnose masses of individuals and great periods of history as suffering from exhaustion; that philosophers have been generally ignorant of the importance of physiology, especially when dealing with the problem of suffering; and that we must take the body seriously as an object of analysis.<sup>3</sup> We can divide Nietzsche scholars into two camps, based on how they respond to some or all of these claims. Firstly, significant numbers of Nietzsche scholars ignore all or most of these claims and

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *TI* IX, 38: "One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome."

<sup>3</sup> I will cover all of these themes in detail, but see, for instance: *WP* 54/*KSA* 13:15[13], *NCW* preface, *TI*, VI, 2-6.

fail to think through their repercussions, or at least fail to take them seriously. This leads them to reproduce something akin to the traditional image of the subject, ignoring the problems Nietzsche finds with it, and solving none of the problems related to physiology. Such studies can of course contribute valuably to the study of the Nietzschean great man (and have), but by avoiding the crucial arguments he makes about, for example, the link between expending energy and creating values, or the need to reconcile responsibility with his criticisms of the will as faculty, these studies inevitably fail to capture the richness and tensions in the figure of the great man. We could single out a work like Kaufmann's influential *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* as exemplifying this, but, truth be told, we could place a vast number of texts on Nietzsche in this strand: if we take just one of Nietzsche's preoccupations, *how one should respond to exhaustion*, then we will find very few texts that address this issue in any detail.<sup>4</sup> For most authors the issue of exhaustion just does not seem to be a problem worth considering, and thus I will have to demonstrate that energy expenditure is central to understanding Nietzsche's thought. For now we might note in passing that Nietzsche could hardly make less of a secret of the importance of exhaustion, and the importance of physiology more generally, such as in the following passage: "The race is corrupted - not by its vices but by its ignorance; it is corrupted because it did not recognise exhaustion as exhaustion: mistakes about physiological states are the source of all ills" (*WP* 54/KSA 13:15[13]).

Secondly, there is a strand of thought that is attentive to Nietzsche's emphasis on the body's importance, but takes his criticism of the subject *too seriously* in certain respects. By this I mean that, in emphasising Nietzsche's criticisms of the 'traditional' idea of the subject, these scholars reject concepts such as the unified 'I,' free will, volition, responsibility, and so on, invariably in favour of some kind of dispersed, decentred, or disunited idea of the self. In discussing this strand of thought I will consider such disparate authors as Georges Bataille, Alex McIntyre, William Connolly, Henry Miller, Antonin Artaud, and Alan Weiss. In forsaking the unity of the self, some authors in this strand contribute significantly towards understanding the arguments Nietzsche makes about physiology; for example, in *On Nietzsche* Bataille interprets Nietzsche experimentally, putting the idea of energy expenditure at the centre of his study, and this remains one of the only studies to take this issue seriously. Others merely 'trade' the unity of the self for a rather vague 'decentred' or 'dispersed' image of the self, and generally fail to take seriously questions of how one *should* think about oneself. What unites all these authors, however, is that they are sceptical towards, and/or reject, the idea of the unified self, and attempt

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, fourth edition, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1974.



to rethink the self in such a way that sidesteps traditional accounts of volition, free will, agency, responsibility, *etc.* I will argue, in contrast, that we cannot separate Nietzsche's great man from a version of the unified self, both volitional and responsible.

Both of these strands of thought contribute positively to interpreting Nietzsche's thought, and both are to some extent understandable, because there *is* a significant tension in Nietzsche's thought between these two sets of narratives, those that emphasise the mind and those that emphasise the body, and this, at times, makes him appear inconsistent. At times he lapses into a rather distasteful physiological reductionism, especially in his earlier works, particularly *Human All too Human* (1878), although as late as *The Gay Science* (1882) he feels comfortable describing the innovation of great men in the following terms: "The reason why these individuals have different feelings and tastes is usually to be found in some oddity of their life style, nutrition, or digestion, perhaps a deficit or excess of inorganic salts in their blood and brain; in brief, in their *physis*" (GS 39). On the contrary, at other times he seems to reproduce the same image of the subject that he criticises elsewhere, apparently relying on concepts such as the will, free will, responsibility, that he elsewhere declares are imaginary. It is thus understandable that many commentators assume that Nietzsche holds one position or the other, especially if one hopes to flatten out his thought's apparent contradictions forcibly. It is certainly logical to suppose that emphasising physiology will tend to weaken the coherence, strength, and unity of the mind, and it is equally logical to suppose that emphasising the unity of the mind and the self will tend to downplay physiology's influence. I think, however, that we can account for these tensions rather than eliminate them, account for both the narratives of the mind and the body, and only by doing so do we get a sense of the great man's identity. What we need is an account of the great man that fully develops Nietzsche's physiological arguments, but incorporates these into the types of self-narrative most conducive to greatness. I will demonstrate that it is impossible to understand what he wants to express in the idea of the great man unless we understand the apparently contrasting, but ultimately complimentary nature, of both of these sets of narratives, reconciling his writings on physiology and on the mind through the idea of the strong Will.

I construct the Nietzschean great man in two stages. In the first part I establish criteria that we can use to evaluate different narratives of interpreting oneself. This must be sufficiently flexible that it can account for all that Nietzsche praises and criticises about individuals, but also stable enough that it can provide a basis for future evaluating and to ground actual practices of self-creation. First, I consider the nature of his criticisms of traditional ideas about the self, arguing that they are united through condemning ignorance to the practice of falsely and

unhelpfully interpreting the causes of suffering. These both reflect and perpetuate widespread exhaustion. Second, having diagnosed the central role that suffering and exhaustion play when Nietzsche negatively characterises individuals, societies, values and theories of the self, I establish the primary role that the concept of *intoxication* plays in combating this exhaustion. I develop a hierarchical account of intoxication by identifying the weaknesses of the key Nietzschean figures of the modern artist and the ascetic priest, and subsequently I distinguish between inauthentic and authentic forms of intoxication, whereby I condemn the former as symptomatic of exhaustion, weakness, and a desire to lose oneself. Third, I develop an idea of authentic intoxication, and argue that it is the highest Nietzschean state, synonymous with joy, aesthetic perfection, increasing energy, a feeling of power and growth, and with a strong Will. It is this state that distinguishes the great man, and the possibility of this state that provides a way to assess different narratives of the self.

In the second part, I use this idea of abundance to draw Nietzsche's fragmented arguments about the great man into three narratives concerning how he should interpret his inner life and his relation with the world to enhance his possibility of greatness, *i.e.*, achieve authentic intoxication. These narratives are the constitutive parts of a wider narrative, that Nietzsche names the strong Will. First, I argue that the great man must cultivate a narrative of self-determination, which involves him cultivating character (being able to resist stimulus), autonomy and sovereignty; *willing* rather than *being willed*. Second, he must cultivate an attitude to himself and his Will that enables him to respond appropriately to his suffering, and achieve authentic joy. The main narrative to achieve this is believing that his Will is free, not just in the sense that he chooses his actions, but in the sense of taking responsibility for creating himself, and thus all that he is. Third, I discuss the attitude Nietzsche proposes that we take towards the past, and discuss the idea of the eternal return, so often thought to be Nietzsche's most important doctrine, and argue that it cannot work as a narrative to achieve greatness.

Anyone writing on Nietzsche must deal with the question of how to interpret him. The difficulties of interpreting his work are by now fairly extensively documented: many authors highlight the problems that his literary style causes, since he rejects the (more) traditional philosophical essay in favour of aphorisms, a full length tragic drama (*Zarathustra*) and even poems. Blondel argues that Nietzsche's style is "discontinuous and aphoristic, in contrast to the architectonic project of classical philosophy."<sup>5</sup> Detwiler argues that "Nietzsche's various literary styles lead to a highly digressive and disjointed mode of presentation," while White singles out both the "violence" of Nietzsche's rhetoric and his lack of "unitary, coherent essays" as

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<sup>5</sup> Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, trans. Sean Hand, Athlone, London, 1991.

obstacles to interpreting him.<sup>67</sup> If one hopes to in some way address Nietzsche's overall philosophy, rather than develop one or two specific, semi-isolated and perhaps unexplored aspects of his texts (his relationship to Heraclitus, or Napoleon, or suchlike), one must deal with at least two issues. Firstly, and most importantly, how one will choose which concepts or ideas to prioritise, how to arrange the material, how to structure and drive one's arguments, to what extent one wants to 'systemise' Nietzsche, and so on. Secondly, one must choose what one wants to do with Nietzsche's rhetoric, polemical style, and his literary excesses or brilliance (depending on who is interpreting it); in particular, whether or not to try to strip this away and reveal philosophical coherence (or incoherence) 'beneath,' or whether his style is in some way intrinsic to his thought, worthy of careful analysis.

There is something akin to an orthodox method of interpreting philosophers, consisting broadly of choosing and listing a philosopher's most important concepts, and then attempting to reconcile them into a system of thought. Although this methodology dominates interpretations of Nietzsche, I will argue that it is an unsuitable approach to his style. In contrast, I propose that a methodology that aims to capture the underlying spirit of his thought, including the excesses of his style, can better make sense of his apparent contradictions and nuances. Furthermore, we can complement such an approach by incorporating a method Henry Staten describes as "psychodialectical," which he exemplifies in his seminal *Nietzsche's Voice*, where he pays attention to the (often disparate) relationship between the force of Nietzsche's utterances and the logical structure of his texts.<sup>8</sup>

The most common approach to any philosopher's thought is to list his most important concepts, explain what they mean, examine to what extent they complement or contradict one another, and establish a hierarchy of importance between them to flatten out contradictions. Over time, orthodoxy has evolved over the central concepts of Nietzsche's work, that pushes the will to power, the eternal return, the *Übermensch*, and his criticisms of morality to the forefront, adorning these with a selection from the Dionysian, the revival of tragedy, noble and slave morality, the death of God, nihilism, and so on. There are two main problems with this most popular approach. Firstly, it is not always clear - and sometimes entirely unclear - why these concepts have been chosen. For example, the eternal return barely features outside of *Thus Spoke*

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1990, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Alan White, *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1990, p. 2.

*Zarathustra*, and never in any detail, as does the *Übermensch*.<sup>9</sup> It is popular to write something on *The Birth of Tragedy*, even though when an author structures his work conceptually, this tends to mean he rather loses track of the way that the meaning of its themes shift dramatically in Nietzsche's later work. Staten argues that he is "not convinced that the topics made *de rigueur* by the conventions of Nietzsche scholarship are necessarily the most important," and cites that, although the "the question of pity" appears throughout his texts, "yet this question plays no significant role in any of the commentaries on Nietzsche that I know."<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, beyond the issue of choosing *which* concepts are central lies a far greater problem: it is far from clear that this is a helpful way to treat any philosopher's work, even if we *are* clear on what his most important concepts are. It is even less clear that this is an appropriate way to treat Nietzsche, as we shall see. Commentators that attempt to address Nietzsche's philosophy rigorously and analytically tend to strip away both the way that he chose to present his thoughts and the way in which he chose to structure them, aiming to reveal the philosophical coherence buried beneath. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is Arthur Danto's approach in *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, where he argues that Nietzsche's "language would have been less colourful had he known what he was trying to say" and that the way in which he chose to structure his work was completely irrelevant:<sup>11</sup>

Any given aphorism or essay might as easily have been placed in one volume as in another without much affecting the unity or structure of either. And the books themselves, except for their chronological ordering, do not exhibit any special structure as a corpus. No one of them presupposes an acquaintance with any other. Although there undoubtedly was a development in Nietzsche's thought and in his style, his writings may be read in pretty much any order, without this greatly impeding the comprehension in his ideas.<sup>12</sup>

While most writers stop short of claiming that Nietzsche's style was due to him lacking clarity of thought and expression, most *are* content to develop his philosophy by examining what they take to be - or merely assume to be - his most important concepts. Whether or not we agree with Danto - and I am going to disagree with him substantially - at least he takes a clear methodological position, and attempts to justify it. Some take this methodology for granted,

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the well-known "demon" passage in *The Gay Science*, (GS 341), a few mentions in *Ecce Homo* (e.g., p. 69), and in the conclusion to *The Will to Power*, although the material was arranged posthumously. None of these are sustained discussions.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. xxv.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

such as David Owen, in *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, whose brief introduction merely states the order that he will cover themes in, apparently assuming that making sense of key Nietzschean themes will yield a coherent account of his philosophy that he can then compare to liberalism.<sup>13</sup> Others, such as Detwiler's *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, at least discuss some of the difficulties with interpreting Nietzsche, before he decides that he will take this orthodox approach anyway.<sup>14</sup> Whenever a commentator tries to take Nietzsche's thought and analyse it conceptually, reconcile apparent discrepancies, and form some kind of philosophical system, they adopt a certain stance towards his writings, often without explicitly acknowledging it. Nietzsche chose his style deliberately, and there is no reason not to assume that he wrote as he did to express ideas that he either: felt *he* could not express in a philosophical system; did not think it possible to express in a philosophical system; thought he could more easily express outside of a philosophical system. Occasionally a commentator takes a clear stance on these issues, such as when Danto asserts that Nietzsche was simply unable to express himself clearly enough to construct a philosophical system. More often, he merely assumes that we do not lose anything by stripping away Nietzsche's style and all of its excesses, or that what we lose is more than made up for by the coherence that we (apparently) gain. I think, however, that we trade too much of the meaning of Nietzsche's thought if we try to systemise it around a series of concepts. Nietzsche explicitly attempts to displace the traditional image of the philosopher, arguing that the philosopher has often been conflated with the "philosophical labourer" (*BGE* 211). The philosophical labourer's method, exemplified by Kant and Hegel, is organising the past and making prior value-creations intelligible, by reducing them to formulas. In contrast, Nietzsche identifies himself as an "actual philosopher," who builds upon the work of the philosophical labourer and establishes future values:

It is the duty of these scholars to take everything that has hitherto happened and been valued, and make it clear, distinct, intelligible and manageable, to abbreviate everything long, even 'time' itself, and to *subdue* the entire past: a tremendous and wonderful task in the service of which every subtle pride, every tenacious will can certainly find satisfaction. *Actual philosophers, however, are commanders and law-givers:* they say 'thus it *shall* be!', and is they who determine the Wherefore and Whither of mankind, and they possess for this task the preliminary work of all the philosophical labourers, of all those have who subdued the past - they reach for the future with a creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer.

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<sup>13</sup> David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics & Modernity*, Sage Publications, London, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Detwiler, p. 9-11.

It is crucial to understand the stress that Nietzsche places on the *normative* value of his thought, that is, his attempt to convey an image of how we *should* be, and what we *ought* to do. He deliberately collapses the distinction between truth-claims and normative statements in a way that most philosophy does not, or at least does not admit to. It is not just his flamboyant rhetoric, his aphoristic style, or his shifts in literary style that blurs this distinction: he does not concern himself with exhaustively defining any of the concepts that are often interpreted as central to his thought, nor explain how they are supposed to fit together. This is because the use of these ideas is bound up with the normative force Nietzsche designs them to express. Therefore, the problem is not just that it is difficult to systematise his thought, it is that when we strip away his literary style, we lose at least some of the content, and most of the *force*, of his normative claims. Of course, this is fine if our explicit aim is, as Danto's is, to measure Nietzsche by the standards of the philosophical labourer, and establish whether or not his thought is conceptually coherent (although I would dispute Danto's fundamental position, that essentially Nietzsche would be a philosophical labourer if only he could express himself more clearly). But if we actually want to understand the meaning of his thought as a whole, as he deliberately presented it, then we must approach it with a method that can capture its normative aspects.

There are two broad methodological approaches, often overlapping considerably, that underpin many of the best interpretations of Nietzsche, and promise to also yield the most promising results in the future. The first approach is isolating one theme or concept and using it to structure one's narrative about Nietzsche's project, bringing in other writings and concepts only where necessary or helpful. This can mean either establishing that one theme is of central importance or at least indispensable to the project, or establishing that a certain *spirit* underpins Nietzsche's texts, and that we can use this either to explain or animate the rest of his work. In both cases, this involves making some sort of claim about Nietzsche's motivation for writing, *i.e.*, putting forward a particular goal, idea or topic, and then explaining how he thought this could be enunciated through the style he chose, rather than a more traditional conceptual one (or at least how he might think it could best be enunciated in this way).

A notable example of such an approach is Bataille's *On Nietzsche*, where he argues that Nietzsche expresses an "extreme, unconditional human yearning for the first time," and that he "can't really define it, but it motivates him and it's what he unreservedly makes his own."<sup>15</sup> Bataille argues that Nietzsche constructs his thought around an essential experience, a "dazzling

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<sup>15</sup> Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone, Paragon House, St. Paul, 1992, p. xx.

dissolution into totality,” and that his thought can only be understood by experiencing this same sensation: “*I want to be very clear on this: not a word of Nietzsche’s work can be understood without experiencing that dazzling dissolution into totality, without living it out.*”<sup>16</sup> If we take Bataille’s contention seriously then the reasons behind Nietzsche’s methodological choices are clear: he is motivated by, and attempting to capture, an essential experience whose character he can only gesture towards. Bataille aims to capture this experience by mixing esoteric autobiographical material with philosophical abstraction, subordinating *theory* to actual examples of transgressive thoughts and practices: “In the helter-skelter of this book, I didn’t develop my views as theory. In fact, I even believe that efforts of that kind are tainted with ponderousness. Nietzsche wrote “with his blood,” and criticising or, better, *experiencing* him means pouring out one’s lifeblood.”<sup>17</sup> Bataille adopts a coherent methodological approach to interpret a thinker who writes as Nietzsche does. I agree with him that a joyful experience animates Nietzsche’s thought, and that we should place this at the centre of our interpretation. I disagree substantially, however, over what this joyful experience consists of, and will discuss this at length later.

The second methodological approach to interpreting Nietzsche that is worth highlighting is one Henry Staten exemplifies in *Nietzsche’s Voice*, one of the finest Nietzsche studies. His approach does not contradict the other, but can be used to complement and enrich just about any approach. Staten describes his approach as a “psychodialectical one”:

we pursue our psychodialectical investigation of what Nietzsche calls the “economy” of his soul (*GS* 338). Psychodialectical reading treats the interaction between the libidinal economy of a text and its logical and dialectical structures. It is a form of Nietzschean reading, as mediated by the thought of Freud, Derrida, and Lonnie Durham, thought I consider to be in the tradition of Nietzsche.<sup>18</sup>

This sounds rather obscure, but in what follows Staten develops a close reading of Nietzsche’s texts that is masterful, paying special “attention to dramatic context, tonal shifts, ambiguities, conflicts between what is said and the motivational forces inscribed within what is said, and the system of entrances, exits, and interactions of personae.”<sup>19</sup> Such a methodology provides Staten with a clear way to structure his text: he emphasises the aspects of Nietzsche’s text that “most revealingly manifest” its ‘psychodialectic.’<sup>20</sup> And because Staten looks for Nietzsche’s most

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiv

<sup>18</sup> Staten, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

dramatic pronouncements, his largest rhetorical flourishes, his most intense contradictions and his most deeply buried ambiguities, it transpires that the material he concentrates on is among Nietzsche's most interesting. Staten emphasises and explores precisely the tensions that other commentators try to collapse, and this leads him to a novel and rich interpretation.

Staten's approach could not be further from the one that I have been criticising, as he makes no attempt to force material into conceptual lists, or 'soften' Nietzsche's literary style. Staten's interest is in precisely the material that other authors often strip away under the guise that it is unhelpful or contradictory: "The 'frequent rhetorical excesses' and 'ill-considered shots... At various targets' which Richard Schacht dismisses as 'so much unfortunate static' are integral parts of the movement of Nietzsche's writings. To subtract them is to subtract Nietzsche's signature from his text, to be left with an anonymous patchwork of 'views.'<sup>21</sup> Of course, Staten's methodological approach does not preclude the one that Bataille employs. Staten's search for Nietzsche's richest tensions leads him to a central tension vis-à-vis the great man's expenditure, and he uses this to drive his narrative. His complex account belies any attempt to summarise it, although I will address it in part later.<sup>22</sup>

One of the only commentaries that rival Staten's is Klossowski's *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, which loosely incorporates both of the methodological approaches I am praising. Klossowski's investigation centres on the idea of the eternal return (the 'vicious circle'), but it becomes increasingly clear that its real importance is not as a philosophical concept, but as a "lived experience" that strikes at the centre of Nietzsche's disposition.<sup>23</sup> Klossowski's investigation places Nietzsche's preoccupations, his 'lived experience,' at its forefront, but he is nonetheless careful not to slide into the crude vulgarity that often goes hand in hand with speculating about psychological motivation. Like Staten, he tries to make sense of "the whisperings, the breathings, the bursts of anger and laughter" of Nietzsche's prose, arguing that the excesses to which he tends reveal that he is obsessed with maintaining the boundaries of his self (identity) against his attraction to Chaos and self-dissolution: "Now early on, Nietzsche was apprehensive about this propensity in himself, and his every effort was directed towards fighting the irresistible attraction that Chaos (or, more precisely, the 'chasm') exerted on him."<sup>24</sup> Klossowski gives a broadly chronological account of Nietzsche's thought, that centres on his experience of the eternal return and its effect on his thinking, and concludes with his breakdown in Turin, which in a sense 'resolves' this conflict, as Nietzsche loses his struggle for coherence.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>22</sup> I address his discussion of the ascetic philosopher on p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche & the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, Athlone, London, 1997, p. xv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv & xv.



I am choosing to focus on the question of the great man, because I think that it is the idea that animates all of Nietzsche's thought. He obsessively returns to questions surrounding great men: their thoughts, their attitudes, how they interpret themselves, their place in driving the society's development, as value creators and lawgivers, the necessity of protecting them from the weak and resentful, and their ability to *redeem* and *justify* entire ages and civilisations: "Let me be granted a glimpse, just *one* glimpse of something complete, wholly successful, happy, powerful, triumphant, something still capable of inspiring fear! A glimpse of a man who justifies *mankind*, of a compensatory, redeeming stroke of luck on the part of man, a reason to retain *faith in mankind*!" (GM I, 12). It overlaps with his personal quest for greatness, for turning his apparent weaknesses into strengths, for integrating his drives and desires into a coherent image of himself. In a stark admission in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche confides the role that imagining greatness plays in overcoming his weakest periods, "There are no such "free spirits," were none-but, as I said, I needed their company at the time, to be of good cheer in the midst of bad things (illness, isolation, foreignness, sloth, inactivity)" (HH 2). The question of the great man consistently plays a significant role in overcoming his disgust at the present and present man, and he details this (we might even say he parodies it) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I freely subordinate all of Nietzsche's 'concepts' to my attempt to sketch the figure of the great man, interpreting such ideas as the *Übermensch*, the eternal return, responsibility, freedom of the will and character as values to aspire to, as narratives for understanding oneself. For example, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, while the *Übermensch* is ostensibly a declaration designed to win over the marketplace, it is also a narrative that Zarathustra uses to structure his own existence, both in terms of his drives and passions, but also his relation to the herd. In fact, the whole of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is best read as an attempt to convey the kinds of narratives that a great man uses to interpret himself and his existence. This does not mean that Nietzsche does not make any truth-claims, or that all his ideas are arbitrary. It means that he chooses to structure and simplify complex cause and effect (Becoming) in such a way that achieves a certain set of effects, and these relate to the effect that values have on the possibility of developing great men. The more successfully we can describe the process by which the great man creates himself, the closer we get to understanding the underlying spirit of Nietzsche's thought. My aim is to capture the normative sense of his writings, and to do this we must pay attention to his style, which he designs to express this normative force. As I will establish shortly, Nietzsche could not just *describe* the great man, because part of this greatness is being able to determine and create oneself in a way that one chooses. Hence Nietzsche relies on rhetoric, assuming a style that he intends to seduce those who aspire to greatness. He intends his writings to be both inspirational and to impart

knowledge about the kind of ways it is most helpful to think about oneself. He begins with the idea that absolute self-knowledge is impossible, and this allows him to argue that man must *create himself*.

# I

## *The Self and Exhaustion*

*“And so we necessarily remain a mystery to ourselves, we fail to understand ourselves, we are bound to mistake ourselves.” (GM, I, 1)*

I will determine the nature of creating oneself by initially examining and establishing the grounds upon which Nietzsche’s criticism of narratives of the self, and value systems generally, rest. His attempt to reevaluate substantially the basis for thinking about the self is rooted in rejecting the possibility that a man can know or discern the ‘truth’ about his inner life. Broadly, he rejects the autonomy of consciousness from the drives or passions, arguing that multiple drives compose the self, seek to expand their domain, and therefore struggle for ascendancy. Consciousness or the intellect evolves from a particular relationship between drives that stabilises over time. Thought likewise does not appear independently of drives, but is affected by a momentary balance of power between drives: “We can rise or sink to no other 'reality' than the reality of our drives – for thinking is only the relationship of these drives to one another” (*BGE* 66). Nietzsche argue that consciousness exhibits certain tendencies; in particular, frequently referring to it as the “cause-creating drive,” because it simplifies and falsifies the drives’ activity to represent it to itself (*TI VI*, 4). It also acts similarly on the external world. It therefore posits a unity of origin onto the multiplicity of drives, and represents this unity as the *subject*: “The subject: this is the term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality: we understand this belief as the *effect* of one cause” (*WP* 485/*KSA* 12:10[19]). Believing in the subject is a simplification in that it involves projecting simple cause and effect onto complexity. “Everything that enters consciousness as “unity” is already tremendously complex: we always have only a semblance of unity” (*WP* 489/*KSA* 12:5[56]). One aspect of the limitations of self-knowledge is that language can only crudely designate nuanced and subtle states; language hinders us “when we want to explain inner processes and

drives,” because “words really only exist for *superlative* degrees of these processes and drives,” while the “lower degrees... elude us” (D 115). However, this is more than just a language problem; the wider problem is that consciousness lacks the means to uncover the causality of body accurately. As *one aspect* of the overall process, consciousness tends to interpret falsely, that is, *usefully*. It assumes that it both causes thoughts and actions, and that it truthfully represents events.

Alexander Nehamas argues that we tend to interpret “mental acts” as distinct:

We assume that each of them is an object in its own right: a thought, a desire, a wish, a belief. We separate them from one another, subordinate some to others, consider some causes and others effect. We therefore think that each has a character of its own, independent of its interrelations with other such events as well as with the events of which we are not aware in the first place... (instead, there is a) single continuum which we cannot see in its totality.<sup>25</sup>

Consciousness fails to conceive of itself as one agent in a wider process, and tends to impose its own regularity and uniformity onto complex cause and effect. In contrast, Nietzsche reinserts a complexity into the relation between thoughts, deeds, and the image of the deed: “But thought is one thing, and deed another, and the image of a deed yet another. The wheel of motive does not roll between them” (Z, I, 6). Consciousness’ unwillingness and inability to comprehend or represent the complex cause and effect of the inner life imposes limitations on the possibility of attaining self-knowledge: “We rub our ears *after the fact* and ask in complete surprise and embarrassment: ‘*What* was that we just experienced?’, or even ‘*Who are* we really?’ Then we count back over in retrospect, as I said, every one of the twelve trembling strokes of our experience, our life, our *being* – and alas! Lose our count in the process...” (GM I, 1). Denying absolute self-knowledge does not mean that all narratives and ideas about the self are equally true or false; it simply means that we require criteria to evaluate ideas about the self. Nehamas distinguishes neatly between simplifying and falsifying ideas about oneself, where the former are necessary, whilst the latter are superfluous and undesirable:

(Nietzsche) believes that all human practices - moral, religious, artistic, or cognitive - involve the sort of selection and simplification that I have been discussing. There can therefore always be alternatives to any given system. But he also believes that though we necessarily simplify whatever we are to deal with, it is also true that at least in many cases

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Harvard University Press, London, 1985, p. 77.

we think that we don't. And it is just here that falsification enters the picture: it is produced by the belief that the particular enterprise in which one is involved or which one values the most is exempt from simplification, that it is the only possible or correct mode of proceeding.<sup>26</sup>

Interpreting always involves simplifying, but it is only when we take an interpretation to be absolute that we are also falsifying. At the same time, Nehamas points out that we must take each simplification to be “a very good, perhaps the best” interpretation, rather than one “among equally good alternatives.”<sup>27</sup> But thinking that we are simplifying in the best way is not the same as thinking that it is absolutely true, and the only possible interpretation, and it is this last idea that Nietzsche denies in his claim of *perspectivism*. “What must be denied instead is the more fundamental claim that there could ever be a complete theory or interpretation of anything, a view that accounts for “all” the facts; we must deny the claim that the notion of “all the facts” is sensible in the first place.”<sup>28</sup> This perspectivist claim does not only hold for analysing oneself, but we should extend it to the world more generally. Nietzsche extends this distinction between simple and complex onto the external world, conceptualising it in the ideas of ‘Becoming’ and ‘Being.’ When we impose simple cause and effect, that is, *narratives* onto the world, we impose a theory of being: “Being is everywhere thought in, *foisted on*, as cause” (*TI* III, 5). Nietzsche develops a complex account of the interplay between Being and Becoming, and part of this is imposing narratives of simple causal relations onto the self.

The result of conceiving of self-interpretation in these terms, as consciousness imposing simple cause and effect onto complex, is that while Nietzsche imposes limits on the possibility of accurately designating the *processes* of the body, *within these limits* we must evaluate narrative and ideas according to a different criterion than merely that of truth. We must criticise the will to truth, because truth *cannot* function as the sole criterion for evaluating the different ways of interpreting oneself: “The will to truth requires critique – let us define our own task in this way – the value of truth must for once, by way of experiment, be *called into question...*” (*GM* III, 24). Since there is a threshold where *self-knowledge* becomes impossible, we require different methods to evaluate ideas about the self. This is the meaning of Nietzsche’s pronouncement: “Revaluation of all values!” (*AC* 62). While they generally recognise this, commentators rarely extend this approach to the realm of the self, where truth apparently remains the standard for both criticising the self, and the sparse attempts to articulate a positive vision of the self and its

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

relation to itself. The narratives concerning oneself should not, however, be immune from the criticisms of the will to truth. Nietzsche complicates this project by continuing to make apparent truth claims about the self, whilst he evaluates by different methods. In numerous places Nietzsche calls into question the idea of the ‘subject’, but this is a claim he designs to force us to reevaluate the self, and, on its own, does not require the ‘death of the subject.’<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, Nietzsche argues that *believing* in the subject is the cornerstone of man’s development, “habitual” and “indispensable” (*WP* 484/KSA 12:10[158]). For example, thought’s operation depends upon many of the narratives that produce the traditional idea of the self: “Here we come to a limit: our thinking itself involves this belief (with its distinction of substance, accident; deed, doer, etc.); to let it go means: being no longer able to think” (*WP* 487/KSA 12:7[63]). The basis for interpreting the self cannot be - and *should* not be – merely truth; criticising the subject on the grounds that it is false transpires not only to be no criticism at all, but also a self-defeating endeavour. Interpreting the inner life necessarily involves projecting simple cause and effect.

Once we acknowledge the limits of the project of self-knowledge, we strip the charge of falsity of any significant purchase. That is, once we accept that the depths of the inner life are *to some extent* incommunicable and impossible to signify with certainty, we must accordingly switch our focus to questioning the *value* of thinking about oneself in a certain way: “The falseness of a judgement is to us to not necessarily an objection to a judgement: it is here that our new language sounds strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding; and our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgements... Are the most indispensable to us” (*BGE* 35). The great man must decide the type of structure that he should impose on the complex phenomena of his inner life, to shape and develop himself as he pleases. While it is straightforward enough to imagine how we can evaluate ideas of the self because of their value, not their truth, it is less straightforward to determine of what this value should consist. While Nehamas, for instance, recognises that criticising the will to truth has important repercussions for the criticisms of the will to truth, I am not sure that he ever succeeds in making sense of how we should assess ways of interpreting oneself. Rather than truth *per se*, he argues that: “The will to truth turns out to be an effort to establish a world in which one’s best impulses and strongest needs can find expression, and in which perhaps, at least for a time, they can be satisfied.”<sup>30</sup> It is all very well to say that we should interpret the world in such a way that best enables our strongest needs to express themselves, but this does not give us any way to evaluate values on a wider scale. Nehamas later restates this

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *WP*, 481/ KSA 12:7[60], *GMI*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68-9.

criterion as “The free spirits see their creations as views that are best for them and for those like them, if there are any.”<sup>31</sup> But it is not at all clear what ‘best for them’ actually means. Presumably in some sense *everybody* thinks that they interpret the world in a way best for them, or that best satisfies their needs, and so the phrase is little more than a tautology. Nehamas seems to leave no room to criticise other tables of values, because we cannot say: ‘No, those views are not best for you at all, because they do not allow you do to X, or feel Y,’ because we never get a sense of what X or Y could possibly be.

Nehamas summarises Nietzsche’s writings on interpreting the world as *perspectivism*: “Perspectivism does not result in the relativism that holds that any view is as good as any other; it holds that one’s own views are the best for oneself without implying that they need be good for anyone else.”<sup>32</sup> While perspectivism successfully avoids relativism, it still offers little means to evaluate the narratives that different men use to understand themselves. Thus on its own it cannot function as a guide for interpreting oneself, beyond the self-evident ‘believe what is best for you.’ What we need is a criterion or criteria to evaluate different narratives; because Nietzsche *does* clearly believe that some are better than others. This is not to claim that there is one way to interpret the world and oneself that he recommends to all, but is to acknowledge a hierarchy of interpretations, and the need to determine of what this hierarchy consists as precisely as is possible. Nehamas admits, however, that he rejects the idea that there can be rules or principles to establish the kind of conduct that makes a man great. He grounds this rejection in the way he defines the great man, or ‘true individual.’ For Nehamas, it is nonsensical that we can specify *how* a man can come to create his own values, precisely because it is the way that the creative individual *differs* from the rest of the world that is all important. “A true individual is precisely one who is different from the rest of the world, and there is no formula, no set of rules, no code of conduct that can possibly capture in informative terms what it is to be like that. There are no principles that we can follow in order to become, as Nietzsche wants us to become, unique. On the contrary, it is by breaking rules that such a goal, if it is indeed a goal at all, can ever be reached.”<sup>33</sup> Nehamas does, however, admit that Nietzsche devotes considerable attention to suggesting how the great man creates himself; it is these suggestions that I will use to develop a criterion for assessing competing narratives about the self. Nehamas argues, however, that such an attempt is doomed to failure because of his contentions in the above passage, that the great man must be unique and that this uniqueness can only be achieved by breaking rules.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

The best that can be expected in this regard is a set of vague and banal guidelines, statements like, “Use all your abilities and deny none, for any denial will be guided by the values that rule your world, whether you want to or not, and so you will fail to be as a different after all” - statements of which Nietzsche’s writing is full... None of Nietzsche’s examples show how one can become like the individuals he admires, and it is not even clear that this is their intent.<sup>34</sup>

As *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* develops, Nehamas argues that Nietzsche’s central concern is with the unity and coherence of a man’s life. We should evaluate individual actions and traits relative to how they contribute to his life as a whole: “Given his general view that the character of everything is given only through its constantly changing interrelations, Nietzsche can now argue that traits of character and actions can be evaluated only in light of their contributions to a complete person, a complete life, or, as he would doubtless prefer to put it himself, a complete *work*.”<sup>35</sup> However, even if this superficially looks like a criterion to evaluate values, Nehamas makes it clear that it cannot function in this way, since there is no mechanism for evaluating a man’s *whole* life: “there also is no type of life that is in itself to be commended or damned.”<sup>36</sup> We are thus back where we started: unity and coherence might be praiseworthy principles in general, but they say little about what the actual life of the individual is like, and Nietzsche therefore apparently does not, and cannot, say anything interesting about the “true individual”: “Nietzsche cannot therefore have a general view of conduct that can apply to everyone and also be specific and interesting.”<sup>37</sup> All Nietzsche can do, for Nehamas, is construct himself, through his works, as a literary character; but his attempt to turn ‘life into literature’ ultimately leaves him requiring readers to judge whether his attempt has been successful: “every text is at the mercy of its readers.”<sup>38</sup> Since even if he does succeed in this it does not guarantee that he is either great or even praiseworthy in general, there does not appear to be a tremendous amount at stake. Incidentally, there is also something horribly reactive about Nehamas’ conclusion that creating oneself as a literary character leaves one requiring an audience to judge the success of our creation. Nehamas argues that this is necessary because of the absence of complete self-knowledge, which means that the question of whether we have successfully achieved unity of self must be “finally decided from the outside.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Nehamas asserts, no one can

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.



hope to write themselves into history on their own.<sup>40</sup> But there is an obvious retort to this: it is not at all clear why the feeling of unity and coherence should not be more important than some objective standard of it. Nehamas argues that “the distinction between the fact and the feeling of unity must be pressed and maintained,” but it is not especially clear *why* we should maintain it, unless objective unity is a goal in itself.<sup>41</sup> I will establish that it is the feeling of growth that is of paramount importance, and this depends only on the feeling of unity, not “public,” recognition of it, and thus it does not put one “at the mercy of one’s audience.”<sup>42</sup> I will focus, however, on objecting to Nehamas’ arguments, interesting and innovative as they are, in more fundamental ways.

The logic of Nehamas’ fundamental argument *seems* simple enough: to be a true individual is to be unique, no code of conduct can explain what it is to be unique, and therefore there is no point trying to extract a code of conduct from Nietzsche. Yet this account is both perplexing and troubling, since this logical move so poorly describes Nietzsche’s ‘positive philosophy.’ To start with, his goal is not explaining what it is actually like to be unique, or trying to help anyone imagine it. His goal is explaining the *process* through which the great man learns to create his own values. Creating one’s values makes one unique, but there is nothing necessarily unique (at least in any thick use of the idea) about the process through which one comes to acquire this ability. On the one hand, this seems so obvious that pointing it could almost be banal, but, on the other, Nehamas inexplicably seems not to distinguish between the process and its product. Nietzsche’s interest is in highlighting common themes in the process of becoming a great man. Of course, this is not a complete set of guidelines or a code of conduct, but this does not mean that they are not useful, and dismissing these guidelines as ‘vague and banal,’ as Nehamas does, merely seems bizarre. Nietzsche’s certainly does not intend his positive proposals to be entirely structured and coherent, but this just shows that he was not designing inflexible ‘rules’ for conduct, but rather identifying recurring themes in the way that great men tend to think about themselves and existence.

At least part of Nehamas’ problem is the way he sets up the ‘true individual.’ I will argue that, whilst creating values is *one* of the great man’s characteristics, it is not the only one. Other ideas are also crucial, and it is the presence of all these that establishes greatness. Whilst Nehamas highlights the one aspect of the great man - his creating values - that is unique and thus to some extent impossible to represent, he completely avoids the other aspects, that Nietzsche can, and does, sketch in some detail, albeit in his characteristically fragmented way.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Nehamas thus picks up on the end of the process, and misses the process itself. I want to suggest that the process is cultivating a certain type of way of thinking about oneself, which makes greatness possible. It is only once all the elements of greatness are in place that the final product will be unique and impossible to have specified in advance. To do so I will establish the grounds upon which Nietzsche criticises traditional narratives of the self, concentrating, in particular, on where his criticisms diverge from merely pointing out the contingency and falsehood of different narratives.

### *The Traditional Image of the Subject*

*But the sane man at least tries to strike a balance. The Christians, who weren't sane, told people that they'd got to throw half of themselves in the waste-paper basket. And now the scientists and business men come and tell us that we must throw away half of what the Christians have left us. But I don't want to be three-quarters dead. I prefer to be alive, entirely alive. It's time there was a revolt in favour of life and wholeness.* Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter-point*<sup>43</sup>

To establish Nietzschean narratives for thinking about oneself, we need to know what kinds of ideas about the self he criticises. He repeatedly sketches a traditional image of the self, and while he is rather prone to constructing a straw man, it matters little whether this image accurately represents any philosopher's thought, since my interest is establishing a *method* to evaluate narratives. In *On the Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche attacks the idea of will as a faculty: "At the beginning stands the great fateful error that the will is something which *produces an effect* – that will is a *faculty*...." (TI III, 5). And, again: "The 'inner world' is full of phantoms and false lights: the will is one of them. The will no longer moves anything, consequently no longer explain anything – it merely accompanies events, it can also be absent" (TI VI, 3). He goes as far as to claim that the idea of the will as faculty, as *causal*, is "the great fateful error" (TI III, 5), because it is the foundational assumption upon which many others stand; it suggests that there must be *something that wills*, and this reflects consciousness' desire for simple causality within the inner life, that it can represent and comprehend: "The conception of a consciousness ('mind') as cause and later still that of the ego (the 'subject') as cause are merely after-products after causality had, on the basis of will, been firmly established as a given fact, as *empiricism*" (TI VI, 3). This is the traditional idea of the self: a realm or domain (consciousness, ego, rationality) that produces thought and action. This is a narrative of simple cause and effect that we are imposing onto the

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<sup>43</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter-Point*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1955, p. 123.

body's complex cause and effect. To understand why Nietzsche criticises this idea, and what is at stake in this criticism, we must understand what is happening when we posit such an idea, what force we are expressing, and what kind of attitude to ourselves we are adopting. Before taking up this task, it is worth noting that we should not take his criticism of the idea of the will too seriously, in the sense of being a general criticism of will-theory. Later I will argue that an idiosyncratic notion of the Will is indeed the great man's central narrative.

Throughout sections of *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche appears to criticise the act of imposing causes itself; in other words, traditional ideas about the self are false *because* they posit false causes. In line with this, he entitles three of the "four great errors": "the error of confusing cause and consequence," "*the error of a false causality*," and "*the error of imaginary causes*" (TI VI, 1-3). In sum, initially it appears that the entire project of projecting *causes* onto the inner life is an error. Furthermore, if Being is nothing other than this positing of simple cause and effect, then Being itself appears to be an error; in the following passage he suggests that this might indeed be the case: "More strictly, one would admit nothing that has being - because then becoming would lose its value and actually appear meaningless and superfluous" (WP 708/KSA 13:11[72]). Since positing Being tends to lead us to lose the value of Becoming, Nietzsche goes as far here as suggesting that we should reject Being itself.

We might interpret Nietzsche's attack on the traditional unity and centrally organised self as advocating a disunited and disorganised self, composing of shifting arrangements of drives, beyond the reach of conscious control. But this need not be so. Ken Gemes argues that, while the 'postmodernists' use Nietzsche to "typically celebrate the death of the subject," we can interpret Nietzsche as "pointing to the conclusion that a creature with a genuine centre... Is something to be achieved rather than something to be taken for granted."<sup>44</sup> While the "herd man" is "a mere collection of ever fluctuating, competing drives," Nietzsche challenges us to make "a self of those competing drives."<sup>45</sup> Unity is not given, but we must create it. Nietzsche thus elsewhere strongly rejects the idea that we can simply do away with Being, offering several vindications of Being: rather importantly, human existence depends upon positing a degree of Being: "Life is founded upon the premise of a belief in enduring and regularly recurring things; the more powerful life is, the wider must be the knowable world to which we, as it were, attribute being. Logicalizing, rationalizing, systematizing as expedients of life" (WP 552/KSA 12:9[91]). Nietzsche regularly asserts that simplifying the world by positing constancy and regularity makes it possible to be the kind of being that we are. Not only is it necessary, but also, in the right

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<sup>44</sup> Ken Gemes, 'Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LXII, No. 2, March 2001, p. 339 & 342.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

forms, it is desirable - the ability to engender forms and to *will error* is the Dionysian ideal: “My Dionysus ideal – the perspective of all organic functions, all the strongest instincts of life: the force in all life that *wills error*; error as the precondition even of thought. Before there is “thought” there must have been “invention”; the *construction* of identical cases, of the appearance of sameness, is more primitive than the *knowledge* of sameness” (WP 544/KSA 12:10[159]). This raises several problems: first, once we accept that it is essential to posit at least *some* causes, we must turn our attention to the negative repercussions of positing *certain types* of causes, for only then can we understand why Nietzsche criticises certain ideas of the self. Second, when Nietzsche declares projecting Being to be the will to power’s ‘*supreme act*’ he implies a positive dimension to this process beyond its usefulness and necessity, and we must account for this. Third, we must understand how the ‘will to truth’ originates in this basic drive to simplify and falsify Becoming. In the following passage Nietzsche summarises the initial connection between the drive to posit causes and the ‘will to truth’: “The fictitious world of subject, substance, ‘reason,’ etc, is needed -: there is in us a power to order, simplify, falsify, artificially distinguish. ‘Truth’ is the will to be master over the multiplicity of sensations: - to classify phenomena into definite categories. In this we start from a belief in the ‘in-itself’ of things (we take phenomena as *real*)” (WP 517/KSA 12:9[89]). Truth’s origin is in simplifying a multiplicity of sensations; and is thus one method through which the will to power masters experience. At the stage of explaining the inner life – or better still, within the process making the inner life possible – will to truth and will to power are identical. A man imposes regularity when he designates phenomena as *real*, and he thinks that when he accesses this ‘reality,’ he is accessing truth. That this is false (in the sense that it involves *simplifying*) is of no importance at this stage, since believing in a certain amount of regularity and constancy – both in the inner life and the world – makes human existence possible.

Nietzsche (re) defines truth as a specific instance of the will to power, unveiling a deep complicity between the will to truth and the will to power. This means that we cannot criticise the will, consciousness and the ego merely because they involve a false causality; because false causality is a necessary precondition of human experience, we must find the grounds to criticise these ideas elsewhere. Nietzsche’s overwhelming emphasis on the falsity of these narratives is a rhetorical device, by which he intends to introduce contingency to what others frequently accept as certain. Simple causality may be necessary, but these particular instances of it are not. Furthermore, he not only argues that it is necessary to impose causality, but also contends that imposing Being onto Becoming is the *supreme will to power*: “To impose upon becoming the character of being - that is the supreme will to power” (WP 617/KSA 12:7[54]). I have

suggested, however, that imposing causes is desirable up to a certain point, where it then becomes an error that harms overall health. Nietzsche attempts to make sense of this ambivalence towards the project of positing causes by studying the will to power's multifaceted nature, in relation to the theme of *appropriating* new experience. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he summarises the will to power's positing of causes most succinctly: "That commanding something which the people calls 'spirit' wants to be master within itself and around itself and to feel itself master: out of multiplicity it has the will to simplicity, a will which binds together and tames, which is imperious and domineering" (BGE 230). Nietzsche contrasts two manifestations of the "fundamental will of the spirit," although he leaves their relation relatively ambiguous. First, incorporating new "experiences" produces a "feeling of growth." This includes "assimilating the old to the new," simplifying the "complex" and overlooking or repelling "what is wholly contradictory" (BGE 230). Second, there is an "apparently antithetical drive... For ignorance," for "shutting-out," and for "contentment with a closed horizon" (BGE 230). I can therefore achieve the feeling of growth, mastery, either by assimilating or by rejecting experience. My problem is establishing why I should carry out one or the other of these processes, and the relation between them. Nietzsche suggests that the first process takes priority as long as there is sufficient "power" for it to do so: "according to the degree of its power to appropriate, its 'digestive power,' to speak in a metaphor – and indeed 'the spirit' is more like a stomach than anything else" (BGE 230). In other words, the stronger the spirit's digestive power, the more it can appropriate experience. Nietzsche suggests that it is only when this digestive power fails that the process of arbitrary shutting out takes place. The first process therefore is in a hierarchical relation with the second: assimilating relates to strength, and closing horizons to weakness.

Nietzsche runs into two potential problems when he contends thus. The first problem stems from something I have already established, that the process of imposing Being onto Becoming becomes a problem when we take it to the point at which it devalues Becoming. This seems to run directly contrary to the argument that simplifying experience, reducing the new to the old, reflects strength. In the former case, we can diagnose imposing *too much* cause and effect as fleeing from Becoming, and therefore as weakness, but in the latter case assimilating relates to strength and blocking out to weakness. This apparent contradiction makes it obvious that we must solve the problem of how desirable it is to impose causality, and of closed horizons, because we have not yet established how they relate. If we are to resist the tendency to arrest all Becoming into an inert Being, then it is imperative to rethink assimilating, so that we do not praise it without reserve. The second problem concerns assimilation's apparently *conservative* tendency; assimilating is conservative in the sense that it involves reducing the new to the old,

and the unknown to the known. This movement founds the kind of being that can calculate, possess intentions, and make promises, because assimilating new experience means transforming it into something that we can think, schematize, and comprehend. A certain kind of “cause-ascription” often comes to “dominate the rest” and tends to “exclude” other explanations; “The banker thinks at once of ‘business,’ the Christian of ‘sin.’ The girl of her love” (*TI VI*, 5). The potential problem with this conservative tendency is that we know Nietzsche emphasises the importance of creating values, and it seems intuitively to run counter to this (*Z*, I, 17). This is only a problem, however, if we conceive of creation as experiencing ‘new’ types of forms of experience, and/or being outside of oneself, and/or going beyond one’s everyday existence, and so on. I will argue that many Nietzsche scholars (and it is certainly not restricted to this field) do conceive of creation in these terms, and for them assimilation’s conservative tendency, which Nietzsche is so clear about, is certainly a problem. I will argue in contrast that the conservative nature of assimilating is actually vital to Nietzsche’s idea of creation: the strong man possesses the ability to make experience conform to him and bend reality to his will. His strength allows him to fold new experience into his existing character, and this provides the basis for *aesthetically transforming* the world. Since this aesthetic transformation is the basis for creating, assimilation’s conservative tendency is vital. While this solves the potential problem of an apparent opposition between assimilating and creating, it does not help our need to determine the proper relation between assimilating and closing oneself off from experience. To solve this problem I must establish criteria that we can use to assess under what conditions we should impose causality, and to set boundaries at which it is undesirable to go beyond. At this stage, we can conclude that Nietzsche criticises certain ideas of causality not for their truthfulness or falsity, but elsewhere, for their lack of value.

One clue towards the *real* basis for Nietzsche’s criticisms is the connection that he draws out between this idea of the self and positing a ‘real’ or ‘true’ world. A man projects his interpretation of his inner life onto the external world, creating a “world of causes” and a “world of will” (*TI VI*, 3):

Man projected his three ‘inner facts,’ that in which he believed more firmly than in anything else, will, spirit, ego, outside himself – he derived the concept ‘being’ only from the concept ‘ego,’ he posited ‘things’ as possessing being according to his own image, according to his concept of the ego as cause. No wonder he later always discovered in things only *that which he had put into them!* (*TI VI*, 3)

The will to simplify is a general function and manifestation of the will to power; a man imposes Being onto Becoming both on the grounds of utility and because he desires to overcome and master it. The categories he imposes onto flux are certainly, to some extent, expedient falsifications, but we must focus on the point where he takes an expedient falsification for a truth. Imposing elements of Being can transmute into imposing an objective and universal theory of Being, yet the *necessity* of Becoming (change) renders the idea of a *totalising* Being impossible. Thus, although man imposes Being onto Becoming so that he can act, and to expand his capacity to act, at the point where he externalises and objectifies Being he loses the ability to account for Becoming's most self-evident manifestations. This leads him to deny and *resent* these elements of Becoming; Nietzsche's examples include the "irrational," the "arbitrary," "accidental," "sex," "change," and "transitoriness" (*WP* 576/KSA13:18[16]). The doctrine that "basically everything stands still" becomes a "good thing for sterile times" and a "comfort," but Nietzsche claims that it is both a lie and also unhelpful (*Z*, III, 12).

As I will determine, Nietzsche consistently criticises the practice of extending the world of inner necessities onto the world's character: "One should not understand this compulsion to construct concepts, species, forms, purposes, laws, ('a world of identical cases') as if they enabled us to fix the *real world*; but as a compulsion to arrange a world for ourselves in which our existence is made possible: - we thereby create a world which is calculable, simplified, comprehensible, etc., for us" (*WP* 521/KSA 12:9[144]). The problem is clear: one of the will to power's functions is making the world knowable, and this process extends further the "more powerful life is," until all Being is made conceivable and universalised under a fiction. Yet precisely this desire to fix Being is also a weakness because it involves fleeing from Becoming. Hence the paradox: I increase my power to act by making Being conceivable, but at a certain point in doing so I weaken and sicken myself and reduce my capacity to act. Nietzsche must therefore identify the point at which simplifying and falsifying become a problem, and this means he must discover the threshold where the process transmutes from an integral aspect of human existence into a regrettable practice. It is vital that a man assumes phenomena are 'real,' and this facilitates and enhances his existence, but he errs when he posits a world he can objectively know and comprehend. Distinguishing between these is crucial in making sense of why Nietzsche denounces certain ideas (*e.g.*, cause and effect, substance, purpose, the will), while at the same time he recognises variants of the same ideas as both necessary and desirable in certain contexts. Nietzsche therefore argues that when we posit a universally 'true' world we tend to devalue existence. On its own, this argument cannot provide suitable grounds for criticising a particular image of the self, because it is concerned with *extending* the use of certain ideas; *i.e.*, it

is extending the idea that is illegitimate and unhelpful, rather than the ideas and categories themselves.

### *The War on Becoming and the Senses*

*'I am suffering: someone must be to blame'—this is how all sickly sheep think. (GM III, 15)*

The real root of Nietzsche's criticism of the real world is not that it *causes resentment* against Becoming, but that it is already a *symptom of resentment*. Nietzsche identifies a common theme that the desire to posit a real and objective world expresses: *a certain response toward the problem of suffering*. He suggests that the sufferer tends to attempt to identify *causes* of his suffering, and he frequently thinks that these causes are elements of Becoming and change. Accordingly, Becoming and suffering tend to become psychologically inseparable in his mind, and he becomes increasingly averse to change. The will to truth, which we might initially understand as a drive to make Being conceivable, and to produce a being that can possess intentions and vouch for himself, is also a process that tends to devalue Becoming. The sufferer's desire for truth reflects his craving for consistency and stability: "Man seeks 'the truth': a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a *true* world – a world in which one does not suffer; contradiction, deception, change – cause of suffering!" When the will to truth extends into the world this suggests fleeing from Becoming towards an illusory state of stability and security - "a world of the constant": "Contempt, hatred for all that perishes, changes, varies – whence comes this valuation of that which remains constant? Obviously, the will to truth is here merely the desire for a world of the constant" (*WP* 585/KSA 12:9[60]). The metaphysics of the true world is a metaphysics of "timidity"; metaphysicians of this type strategically eliminate aspects of Becoming from the narratives they use to interpret the world by denying their reality, necessity and importance (*WP* 576/KSA 13:18[16]). They invent an account of happiness that embodies calmness, peacefulness, and freedom from change; this is the happiness of the *inert*. This approach embodies a certain attitude towards suffering, where the sufferer downplays or denies the reality and meaning of the elements that he assumes cause his suffering. Nietzsche's attempt to construct an *authentic* theory of happiness hinges on his challenge to two aspects of this process. First, the sufferer attempts to locate a source of suffering, since he assumes that there must be a specific reason why he suffers. Second, this attempt to locate causes for his suffering is *disingenuous*, because he identifies a cause just so that he can subsequently deny that it is real. Nietzsche criticises Being because he suspects that at a certain point a man's desire to



posit Being no longer relates to enhancing his life, but is co-opted by fear and mistrust of Becoming. “Belief in what has being is only a consequence: the real *primus mobile* is disbelief in becoming, mistrust of becoming, the low valuation of all that becomes” (WP 585/KSA 12:9[60]).

We can apply the grounds on which Nietzsche rejects the real world not only to the external world, because aspects of the inner life too are characterised by change, mutation and instability. He focuses particularly on the attitude that the sufferer adopts towards his *senses* and his *drives*, and it is here that we begin to understand why he criticises the traditional image of the self so consistently and emphatically. It is in articulating the idea of consciousness as a faculty (and will as consciously producing an effect) that we make it possible to oppose the body. Nietzsche suggests that the idea of the will as a faculty that produces an effect is bound up with a certain “metaphysical” position on the mind, and he traces an interpretation of the mind that elevates rationality at the expense of the body back to Socrates; “The absolute coldness and neutrality of the consciousness” (WP 434/KSA 13:14[92]). Interpreting the mind in this way misconstrues pleasure and its relation to overcoming resistance by falsely equating reason with happiness: “The highest rationality is a cold, clear state very far from giving that feeling of happiness that intoxication of any kind brings with it -” (WP 434/KSA 13:14[92] ). It is now possible to conceive of reason as a product of consciousness, and by default construe the senses as irrational, and this is a formula for *decadence*: “The fanaticism with which the whole of Greek thought throws itself at rationality betrays a state of emergency” (TI II, 10). Nietzsche analyses the inner life in the same terms as he analyses ontology: the sufferer tends to associate the universal (reason) with safety, stability, and the rational, and the contingent (the body) with unpredictability, change, and therefore suffering: “They have hated the irrational, the arbitrary, the accidental (as the causes of immeasurable physical suffering). As a consequence, they negated this element in being-of-itself and conceived it as absolute “rationality” and “purposiveness”” (WP 576/KSA 13:18[16]). Rejecting ‘external’ Becoming and rejecting the senses are therefore two aspects of one process, united through a similar type of *attitude* towards suffering. Nietzsche suggests that the more we come to see the will as the product of a faculty, the more this leads us to deny physiology’s importance. Furthermore this also suggests that we are already dissatisfied with the body in the first place. Ignoring physiology’s effect on suffering makes it impossible to deal with our suffering properly.

Developing a certain attitude to suffering is implicit in the cause-creating drive’s tendencies: the intellect tends to project simple causes onto the complex *feeling* of suffering. This reflects not just ignorance of the actual causes of suffering, but a desire for simplicity and

superficiality, *whatever the cost*. “we want to have a *reason* for feeling *as we do*” (TI VI, 4). This drive’s operation is therefore not intrinsically related with truth, but its principle is instead that: “any explanation is better than none” (TI, VI, 5). Nietzsche identifies a widespread tendency to mistake the *consequences* of a particular state to be its *cause*, and this underscores “*The Four Great Errors*” from *Twilight of the Idols* (TI VI, 1). A man in a particular mood (of any kind) has “no doubt” that he can discover the reason for it: “So he looks for the reason – In truth, he cannot find the reason, because he does even suspect where he ought to look for it” (WP 229/ KSA 13:14[179]). Consequently, he mistakes the product of the mood for its cause; for example, he misidentifies the “work” he undertakes whilst in a good mood as responsible *for* the mood, whereas he might actually undertake it *because* his good mood provides the “courage” for it (WP 229/KSA 13:14[179]). The same is true when a man interprets his suffering. He suffers, and wallows in the memory of “some worry, some scruple, some self-criticism,” that he then mistakenly identifies as the *cause* of his suffering (WP 229/KSA 13:14[179]). In doing thus, he completely overlooks a whole host of complex physiological conditions; for example, the physiological causes that make it possible for him to recall the memory, the causes that influence the way that he perceives and represents it, the context he places it into; in total, the influences that lead him to recall it in such a way that he *feels* it as suffering.

Rather than merely a simple case of mistaking the cause, the problem of mistaking consequence for cause is “reason’s intrinsic form of corruption” (TI VI, 1). The first aspect of this is that any causal explanation is better than none; this lack of discernment over the truth of a claim leads a man to favour simplistic and superficial causes over complex and unclear ones. Second, ascribing a cause produces a feeling of power, and of mastery: tracing “something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power” (TI VI, 5). He associates the “unknown” with “danger, disquiet, anxiety” and above all, this provokes a sensation of “fear” (TI VI, 5). Consequently, not only is any cause better than no cause, but this also combines with a desire to trace everything unknown back to something known and/or something already experienced. The greater a man’s susceptibility to fear and anxiety over the unknown, the greater his desire to alleviate and soothe this by positing causes to explain it. Exhaustion intensifies and exacerbates suffering. Consciousness experiences a feeling we might call pleasure, but is more properly just relief from suffering, by *momentarily anesthetising* suffering, by relating it back to a cause; the cause-creating drive’s priority is therefore predominantly *immediate utility*. The sufferer invokes “*most common* explanations” so that this “feeling of the strange, new, unexperienced” can be “more speedily and most frequently abolished” (TI VI, 5). The result is that it becomes increasingly unlikely that he will investigate

the actual complex of causes the create a particular state: “Thus there arises an *habituation* to a certain causal interpretation which in truth obstructs and even prohibits an *investigation* of the cause” (TI VI, 5).

As early as *Human all too Human* Nietzsche distinguishes between two ways of dealing with a misfortune, in a note he titles “*The twofold struggle against misfortune*”: “we can overcome it either by removing its cause or else by changing the effect it has on our feelings, that is, by reinterpreting the misfortune as a good, whose benefit may only later become clear” (HH 108). Two stark choices: either one removes the cause, or one tries to discover a way to reinterpret and justify it. Since Nietzsche wants to characterise the latter negatively, this distinction is too simple really to be credible, and he will later refine it heavily - there are clearly times when reinterpreting a misfortune is the only option, should the cause be impossible to remove, and therefore it is imperative to be able to distinguish between these times. Furthermore, not all reinterpretations are of equal value. For example, he will still criticise those who reinterpret a misfortune by positing a real world or afterlife, while the ability to interpret necessary misfortune as vital to human life will become a virtue.

Although Nietzsche perhaps expresses it rather badly at this stage, the important issue that he raises here is not so much opposing *removing* a cause with *reinterpreting* a cause, but is the one he raises in the next passage, where he opposes actually attempting in *good faith* to identify the cause of misfortune/suffering with *temporarily* alleviating suffering - this only defers the problem and makes it worse. Religion, art, and metaphysical philosophy are common examples of this second approach. The key ideas here are *narcotisation* and *anesthetising* suffering, rather than genuinely attempting to remove the problem and prevent it manifesting in the future:

The more a person tends to reinterpret and justify, the less will he confront the causes of the misfortune and eliminate them; a momentary palliation and narcotisation (as used, for example, for a toothache) is also enough for him in more serious suffering. The more the rule of religions and all narcotic arts decreases, the more squarely do men confront the real elimination of the misfortune - of course, this is bad for the tragic poets (there being less and less material for tragedy, because the realm of inexorable, invincible fate grows smaller) but it is even worse for the priests (for until now they fed on the narcotization of human misfortunes). (HH 108)

Nietzsche’s interpretation of the helpful and unhelpful approaches to suffering gradually gains more nuance, and he begins to develop the thesis that the sufferer often places an overwhelming and unjustified emphasis on the importance of spiritual and psychological factors to his

suffering, and pays a corresponding lack of attention to his physiology (*WP* 233/ *KSA* 13:14[155]). A sufferer desire a “noble interpretation of their condition,” and this tends to mean that he “must know as little as possible about physiology,” since this would reveal his *complicity* in his suffering (*WP* 423/ *KSA* 13:14[142]). Nietzsche rages particularly against Christian denial of the body: “they despised the body: they left it out of the account: more, they treated it as an enemy” (*WP* 226/ *KSA* 13:14[96]), arguing that they created “an imaginary *psychology*” based on “self-misunderstandings”: “‘repentance,’ ‘sting of conscience,’ ‘temptation by the Devil,’ ‘the proximity of God’” and so on (*AC* 15). Nietzsche’s attempt to combat this ignorance of, and inattentiveness to, physiology, is central to reevaluating values. He believes his insight into the physiological basis of values gives him a vantage point from which to reevaluate traditional values and modes of Being: “Through the long succession of millennia, man has not known himself physiologically: he does not know himself even today. To know, e.g., that one has a nervous system (-but no “soul”-) is still the privilege of the best informed” (*WP* 229/*KSA* 13:14[179]). The sufferer’s positing of false causes inevitably leads him to adopt false solutions; his “habituation” of certain causal interpretations leads him to fabricate an entire realm of “imaginary causes” (*TI* VI, 5-6). When he (mis-)interprets the causes of his suffering as spiritual and psychological ones, then he also looks to solve his problems in this realm.

Nietzsche switches his focus in *On the Twilight of the Idols* to demonstrating that morality and religion are examples of imaginary causes (*TI* VI, 6). He interprets Christianity as the product of imaginary causes, and purveyor of imaginary solutions, but this, however, is of secondary importance to his diagnosis of a widespread inability to understand and combat the actual causes of suffering - an inability apparently endemic to reason, which seeks causes. There are, then, a set of tendencies that lead a man to misdiagnose suffering. This is not, however, to say that this move is *necessary*, which would leave little scope for self-creation; rather, a man’s choices and attitudes condition whether suffering appears, and whether its effects intensify. Indeed, the great man’s self-creation is designed so that he forges a new relation with himself, cultivating a relationship with his suffering that avoids intensifying and perpetuating it. What I must determine, therefore, are the factors that condition the *frequency* with which a man resorts to misdiagnosing his suffering. We need to know not just *how* he interprets his suffering falsely, but *why* this occurs in his case and not others. The starting point is re-orientating attitudes towards suffering. The cause-creating drive’s positing of imaginary spiritual and psychological causes is not inevitable, but reflects a sufferer’s deficient attitude and ethos towards himself. Fundamentally, his drive to ignore physiology’s influence on his suffering in many cases reflects his desire to locate the *blame for suffering outside of his own responsibility*. Some examples are

straightforward: blaming existence for his suffering by identifying deficiencies in human existence; blaming man's 'state of sin,' and blaming others for causing his suffering. In these cases he projects responsibility for his suffering externally. The central aspect of this is downplaying his agency, for accepting this would require him to accept at least a degree of responsibility for his suffering. Instead he construes his (lack of) happiness and his suffering as conditions that are *imposed* upon him, and over which he has little to no control.

The immediate repercussion of the sufferer's failure to claim responsibility for his suffering and unhappiness is that he is ignorant of physiology's importance. Other cases seem less straightforward; we might object, for example, that the connection between denying physiology's importance and a desire not to take responsibility is broken in cases when the sufferer blames *aspects of himself*; in particular, his instincts, senses, or sexual drive, *etc.* This is, however, only a superficial incongruity. It is not his projecting blame externally that is important, but his failing to take responsibility for his role in, and complicity with, intensifying his suffering. It matters little whether he projects this blame onto the world generally, or onto a part of himself; *in both cases he assumes that factors outside of his control are at fault and to blame.* Furthermore, the line between denying existence and denying the senses is both unstable and untenable. To take one case: when the sufferer divides the world into an apparent and a real one, although this apparently concerns his external existence, the apparent world is really just the world that the senses produce. When we posit a real world, and thereby slander the apparent world, this signifies that we are mistrusting and devaluing the senses.

It would be a mistake to think a renewed emphasis on physiology signifies an emphasis on aspects of ourselves that we cannot control, or any other kind of self-defeating determinism. As we shall see, Nietzsche sets up the idea of the self so that the attitude we adopt toward ourselves has a vital role in improving ourselves. Paying new attention to one's physiology is a way to begin to adopt a new relationship with one's suffering. Since Nietzsche links inappropriate responses to suffering because they all fail to take seriously the extent to which one is responsible for one's own suffering, opposing this requires some variant of recognising one's *complicity* in experiencing suffering. This is not the same as claiming that *all* suffering is self-inflicted, but means recognising crucial ways that self-perception, habits and routines all affect both the likelihood of us suffering and the way that we experience this suffering. Thus even when suffering is clearly outside of our *immediate* control, this does not mean that our responsibility for it ceases. As far as one is able to create oneself one should take responsibility for the self that one has chosen to create. Failing to realise this responsibility fully and to act

accordingly is the consistent factor that Nietzsche uses to justify his criticisms of traditional values and narratives of the self.

I will further develop the specific meaning of responsibility later. First we must understand how physiology affects one's relationship with suffering. Only by demonstrating that physiology is crucial to Nietzsche's thought, especially with regards to suffering, can we truly make sense of his rejection of the idea of the will as faculty. In analysing this relation, I will concentrate particularly on the effects of *exhaustion*. I will address this problem from both ends, concentrating on both the physiological conditions that *influence* the failure to take responsibility for one's sufferings (and thus misdiagnose it), and on the *effects* that this misdiagnosis has on one's future experience of suffering. After achieving this we will be in a better position to determine the types of narratives that can combat these failings.

### *Exhaustion*

*If one has trained one's eye to detect the symptoms of decline, one also understands morality,—one understands what lies concealed beneath its boldest names and tables of values: e.g., impoverished life, the will to nonentity, great exhaustion. (NCW, preface)*

Nietzsche consistently diagnoses certain value systems as the effects of *exhaustion*. That is, dominant value systems often reflect widespread physiological exhaustion and weakness; at times he goes as far as to suggest that *all* the “supreme value judgments” that have come to “dominate mankind... can be derived from the judgments of the exhausted” (*WP* 54/KSA 12:5[71]). The exhausted, however, do not perceive themselves as such, and this fits with Nietzsche's earlier diagnosis that the enduring problem of man's history is that both individuals and collective groups have failed to recognise the physiological roots of their problems sufficiently, and that physiological inhibition tends to cause: “deep depression, leaden fatigue and black sadness” (*GM* III, 17). He singles out exhaustion as the fundamental aspect of this delusion: “The race is corrupted - not by its vices but by its ignorance; it is corrupted because it did not recognise exhaustion as exhaustion: mistakes about physiological states are the source of all ills” (*WP* 54/KSA 12:5[71]). Nietzsche's crucial claim is that exhaustion – and physiological states generally – tends to produce certain types of values, and this relies on the broader claim that we cannot separate thought from physiological conditions, because these conditions affect both the quality of thought and perception. His claim is not therefore simply that exhaustion *alters* perception in certain ways; rather, it is that there is no such thing as a pure state of

perception that exists outside of fluctuating physiological states. Just as thought misdiagnoses the causes of suffering, it also tends to mistake and misrepresent its own origins, and the conditions under which it functions. It represents itself as continuous and stable, and in doing so misrepresents the importance of physiological fluctuations.

Nietzschean scholarship tends to underestimate and ignore the role that exhaustion plays in his thought significantly. This is symptomatic of the general inability to recognise the extent to which Nietzsche emphasises the role of physiology when he analyses a whole host of problems. We can explain much of the apparent ambiguity in his oeuvre when we recognise this. For example, he apparently denies consciousness, the will, and freedom in places, whilst affirming them in others; in reality, however, he denies *one* interpretation of these ideas, whilst nonetheless retaining and refining the terminology. He consistently denies these ideas in the sense that they are, or depend on, *faculties* – *i.e.*, that we can oppose them to the body, and analyse them independently of it. He instead discusses them as intrinsically connected with the amount of energy one possesses. Since Nietzsche leads the categories of the mind back to the body as aspects of physiology, their functioning becomes susceptible to exhaustion. Emphasising exhaustion's role, however, is only one aspect of this movement back toward the body. A properly physiological criterion for evaluating value systems and narratives – including those a man uses to understand himself – requires that we produce a full-scale account of energy expenditure, and how it relates to thought.

The closest example of such an account of energy expenditure and exhaustion that exists is Bataille's *On Nietzsche*, where he develops criteria of “the decline” and “the summit” to designate exhaustion and its corollary.<sup>46</sup> This account is invaluable as a kind of ‘practical Nietzschean-ism,’ and details a life that oscillates between the extreme states of energy expenditure and exhaustion. However, for reasons that I will outline later, it is also insufficient. It refuses to acknowledge Nietzsche's hierarchy of types of states of expenditure, instead prioritising a transgressive experience that dissolves the boundaries of the self, and temporarily disperses the everyday image one has of oneself. This as much reflects Bataille's particular interest in violent acts of transgression as it does his misinterpretation of Nietzsche. However, my task here is to provide the basis for an entirely different account of energy expenditure that moves beyond opposing exhaustion to violent moments of transgression, and instead prioritises understanding one particular aspect of energy expenditure: *abundance*. I will use the term ‘abundance’ to designate a particular kind of intoxication, which Nietzsche gradually privileges above all other lesser or *inauthentic* forms of intoxication. He develops a relation between

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<sup>46</sup> Bataille, p. 17.

exhaustion and this specific type of abundance that provides a scale to assess values, and this in turn allows him to develop strategies and methods to evaluate the way one thinks about and interprets oneself.



## II

### *Responses to Exhaustion I: The Modern Artist*

*What are the Faustus and Manfreds of the theatre to anyone who is somewhat like Faust and Manfred? (GS 86)*

*What do I care about the theatre? What do I care about the spasms of its moral ecstasies in which the mob—and who is not the mob to-day?—rejoices? What do I care about the whole pantomimic hocus-pocus of the actor? You are beginning to see that I am essentially anti-theatrical at heart. For the stage, this mob art par excellence, my soul has that deepest scorn felt by every artist to-day. (NCW 'Wherein I Raise Objections')*

It is one thing to diagnose traditional notions of the self as products of exhaustion, and quite another to work out what Nietzsche opposes exhaustion to, and thus to establish a way to assess values. First, I argue that he contrasts exhaustion with the idea of intoxication, and that he gradually begins to distinguish a hierarchy of states of intoxication, whereby there are *authentic* and *inauthentic* forms. Second, I develop this contrast by examining an apparent paradox in his writings on intoxication: the Dionysian state involves losing the ability *not to react*, and yet, as we will see, elsewhere he criticises this inability as vulgar and as indicating a lack of character. On this basis, Nietzsche argues that the modern artist is similar in type to the *hysteric*. When he criticises the modern artist he points towards a deeper state of intoxication, towards a state that prioritises self-control and resisting stimulus. It is this authentic state of intoxication that I will refer to as *abundance*. Third, I develop this state by contrasting it with the apparent self-control of the *ascetic priest*. Nietzsche's criticisms of the ascetic highlight the possibility of a superior form of self-control, which maximises the amount of energy that a man produces. He brings this together under the idea of the *strong Will*, which becomes the central idea for assessing values and narratives of the self. Thus I establish the issue of cultivating a strong Will as the cornerstone for the entire project of creating oneself.

Nietzsche first discusses intoxication in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and never writes a more detailed account. I want to suggest, however, that: firstly, he alters his understanding of

intoxication substantially, and that the carefully laid out formulation in *The Birth of Tragedy* gives way to a strikingly different account, that he does not set down definitively, but which we can piece together from his later works; secondly, that substantial numbers of Nietzsche scholars fail to take into account this transformation, instead clinging to part or all of Nietzsche's early theories. This failure severely damages their ability to present a coherent reading of the desired Nietzschean self. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche discusses intoxication through the idea of the Dionysian experience, contrasting this with the Apollonian experience, and forming an account of Greek (and Wagnerian) tragic art. There are three aspects of the idea of the Dionysian that are particularly interesting, and I will argue that he later refutes either part or all of these three ideas. Firstly, the Dionysian involves experiencing 'oneness' and temporarily dissolving one's individuality, and all that that includes, volition, will, *etc.* Secondly, Nietzsche suggests little or no *hierarchy* of states of intoxication; he values states for the effect they produce, not the means used to acquire them. The Dionysian experience does not therefore presuppose that a man possess any particular qualities. Thirdly, the Dionysian experience is a temporary and unstable state that devalues everyday life, revealing its impoverishment by way of comparison with a higher state.

Both points one and two arise in the following passage, where Nietzsche summarises the Dionysian experience:

We catch a glimpse of the essence of the *Dionysiac*, which is best conveyed by the analogy of *intoxication*. These Dionysiac stirrings, which, as they grow in intensity, cause subjectivity to vanish to the point of complete self-forgetting, awaken either under the influence of narcotic drink, of which all human beings and peoples who are close to the origin of things speak in their hymns, or at the approach of spring when the whole of nature is pervaded by lust for life. (BT 1)

The Dionysian state is a kind of 'intoxication,' that does not depend upon an actual narcotic, but does not rule one out either. Whatever its source, it signifies intensifying emotions, and produces a state of self-forgetfulness that leads to the "breakdown of the *principium individuationis*" (BT 1). A man is immersed into a mystical 'oneness,' and the subjective collapses into the objective:

Now the slave is a freeman, now all the rigid, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice, or 'impudent fashion' have established between human beings, break asunder. Now, hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with this neighbour, but quite literally one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn apart, so that mere shreds of it flutter before the mysterious

primordial unity. (BT 1)

The man thus intoxicated is not an artist, but a “work of art”: “all nature’s artistic power reveals itself here, amidst shivers of intoxication, to the highest, most blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity” (BT 1). The willing, desiring everyday subject is here antithetical to aesthetics, which requires that this subject is collapsed into a state where desire and will no longer exist, a “mystical feeling of oneness” (BT 2). Art is only possible where a man is “already released and redeemed from the individual will and has become, as it were, a medium, the channel through which the one truly existing subject celebrates its release and redemption in semblance” (BT 5). The individual thus becomes little more than a conduit through which the Primordial Unity expresses itself, and in this experience he learns that individuation is “evil” and a barrier to ecstatic joy: “the fundamental recognition that everything which exists is a unity; the view that individuation is the primal source of all evil; and art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation can be broken, a premonition of unity restored” (BT 10). Since individuality matters so little in this state, it does not presuppose that one possess any qualities. ‘The slave’ is equally as susceptible to Dionysian intoxication as the master, and actual intoxication is as effective as metaphorical intoxication. The strength of one’s will is irrelevant, given that the state of willing is always an un-aesthetic condition, where the individual will is suspended. Nietzsche therefore posits little to no hierarchy in his account of intoxication. What one *is* has little impact on what one experiences. The aesthetic revelation is a state where one is laid bare to the truth and depth of existence, and is therefore a state where one in a sense becomes ‘like’ or ‘at one with’ the world.

In fact, Nietzsche seldom discusses the causes of intoxication in *The Birth of Tragedy*, taking it for granted that there are numerous ways that it is induced, and that there is no reason why anyone would want to resist it. His focus is on the ecstatic experience itself, and further, the effect this experience has on one’s everyday life. It is here that he justifies the third point; Dionysian experience devalues everyday experience and makes it into a problem that only art can resolve. Comparing Dionysian man to Hamlet, Nietzsche suggests that insight into the true character of things reveals the poverty of the everyday world of experience, and this threatens to make all willing and desiring seem superfluous, petty and unnecessary:

The reason for this is that the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed, contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences from the past are submerged. This gulf of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday life and Dionysiac experience. But as soon as daily

reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion; the fruit of those states is an ascetic, will-negating mood. In this sense Dionysian man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills actions; actions requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion – this is a lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysiac man. (BT 7)

It is the danger of this condition that justifies Nietzsche's projected revival of tragic art. Art consoles and makes everyday life bearable, allowing one to face "what is terrible or absurd in existence," and in doing so it saves the will: "Here, at this moment of supreme danger for the will, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress with the power to heal. Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live" (BT 7). Intoxication represents moments of 'blissful ecstasy,' where desire, will, and any individual action are suspended. When Nietzsche depicts intoxication as a state other than the 'everyday' one, this suggests that it is 'other' to oneself, that it does not reflect what one is, and that it is unaffected by one's everyday self. Later I will address commentators whose accounts of joy and intoxication repeat some or all of these three key points from *The Birth of Tragedy*. First, we need to look at intoxication in his later writings, and address the ways that it diverges from this early account.

Nietzsche's most substantial discussion of intoxication besides *The Birth of Tragedy* takes place in *Twilight of the Idols*, some sixteen years later. To begin with, it appears that he is still grouping together lots of different types of intoxication, all of which have the power to make art possible:

Intoxication must first have heightened the excitability of the entire machine: no art results before that happens. All kinds of intoxication, however different their origin, have the power to do this: above all, the intoxication of sexual excitement, the oldest and most primitive form of intoxication. Likewise the intoxication which comes in the train of all great desires, all strong emotions; the intoxication of feasting, of contest, of the brave deed, of victory, of all extreme agitation; the intoxication of cruelty; intoxication in destruction; intoxication under certain meteorological influences, for example, the

intoxication of spring; or under the influence of narcotics; finally, the intoxication of the will, the overloaded and distended will. (TI IX, 8)

Intoxication, then, still has multifarious forms, but Nietzsche replaces his metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where intoxication re-joins one with a Primordial Unity, with an account of intoxication that centres on expending energy: “the essence of intoxication is the feeling of plenitude and increased energy” (TI IX, 8). This *appears* to accord well with the thesis I have been developing, for if exhaustion designates a lack of energy, then intoxication might very well designate its opposite, a ‘plenitude’ or abundance of energy; and just as exhaustion affects perception in certain ways, so too does intoxication: “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” (TI IX, 8). Thus the feeling of one’s energy increasing influences one to view the world in a certain way. What Nietzsche describes here is a particular type of perception where one interprets the world as possessing overflowing energy: rich, full, 'swollen,' 'pressing.' This conditioning of perception is the essential reason that he describes the state of intoxication as an *aesthetic* state or condition, and it explains how he can interpret it as the foremost precursor to the possibility of genuine art. Nietzsche’s claim is that plenitude enhances the way that one perceives the world, and the highest form of perception is experiencing oneself as *perfect*, and, subsequently, transforming the world so that it mirrors this perfection: “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 IX, 8). Since perception is so closely tied to a spectrum of energy expenditure, exhaustion, on the other hand, tends to affect and condition perception in such a way that *impoverishes* existence, and it is thus a movement away from perfection; an: “antithetical condition – a specific anti-artisticality of instinct – a mode of being which impoverishes and attenuates things and makes them consumptive” (TI IX, 8). Nietzsche clearly implies that not everyone can create or enjoy genuine art; only those who are abundant can create it, and only who can relate to the aesthetic experience that it conveys can enjoy it: (It) “appears only in natures capable of that bestowing and overflowing fullness of bodily vigour... the sober, the weary, the exhausted, the dried-up (e.g. scholars) can receive absolutely nothing from art, because they do not possess the primary artistic force, the pressure of abundance: whoever cannot give, also receives nothing” (WP 801/KSA 12:9[102]). It is therefore clear that we can describe exhaustion as a creative state, in the sense that it conditions perception. The state of intoxication Nietzsche describes as the essential precondition for, and common root of, a range of artistic expressions, despite their

different manifestations. “The actor, the mime, the dancer, the musician, the lyric poet are fundamentally related in their instincts and essentially one, only gradually specialised and separated from one another – even to the point of opposition” (TI IX, 11).

Nietzsche apparently suggests a straightforward schema of two opposing physiological states: intoxication and exhaustion. This only holds, however, if we can legitimately conflate all intoxication with plenitude. If this is the case then we can use intoxication as the solitary measure to evaluate values; *i.e.*, we can simply evaluate positively anything that produces intoxication. But if this conflation is illegitimate, then we must determine which types of intoxication correspond to plenitude, and why. I will emphasise that this conflation is far from unusual, and has an enduring hold over large parts of Nietzschean scholarship, particularly that which takes the notion of energy expenditure seriously. It is central to my argument, however, to establish that as Nietzsche’s ideas progress he develops a *hierarchy* of states of intoxication. While he often merely alludes to this hierarchy, we can nonetheless piece his arguments together and distinguish between *authentic* and *inauthentic* states of intoxication. Authentic intoxication is the genuine Nietzschean state, and the one that we can most properly oppose to exhaustion; indeed, it is the possibility of this state (and general failure to reach it) that explains why he evaluates exhaustion negatively in the first place. Failing to distinguish authentic intoxication from inauthentic often leads commentators to misrepresent Nietzsche’s project, and misrepresent the aims and process of the project of self-creation.

As we have seen, substantial evidence in *The Birth of Tragedy* suggests that Nietzsche initially does not distinguish between different states of intoxication. However, as early as *The Gay Science* he has significantly altered his account of intoxication, with his optimism over the *effects* of intoxication shifting towards mistrusting certain forms of intoxication, that act as a substitute for genuine “higher moods” and merely “ape the high tide of the soul”:

*Of the theatre* - I had strong and elevated feelings again today, and if I could have music and art in the evening, I know very well what sort of music and art I do *not* want - namely, the kind that tries to intoxicate the audience and to force it to the height of a moment of strong and elevated feelings. This kind is designed for those everyday souls who in the evening are not like victors of their triumphal chariots but rather like tired mules who have been whipped too much by life. What would men of this type know of “higher moods” if there were no intoxicants and idealistic whips? Hence they have those who enthuse them even as they have their wines. But what are their drinks and their intoxication to me? Does he that *is* enthusiastic need wine? Rather he looks with some sort of nausea at the means and mediators that are trying to produce an effect without a

sufficient reason - aping the high tide of the soul! (GS 86)

Nietzsche increasingly criticises art that requires an over-wrought audience; Klossowski argues that this criticism mirrored his increasing alienation from Wagner and his circle of admirers: “He then revealed all the traits of false genius in Wagner, who relied on the nervous vulnerability of the listener. Intoxication, ecstasy, the tonality of the soul, excess, delirium, hallucination - these were what this *Cagliostro* seemed to look for in order to abuse the crowds and heighten the hysteria of his female listeners... Because of this he called Wagner a histrionic, and therefore the very symptom of decadence.”<sup>47</sup> In criticising Wagner Nietzsche indicates a *hierarchy* of states of intoxication. Less important than his attack on the composer is his attack on the *type of people* that he influences and moves; those who are susceptible to intoxication *in this way* tend to be tired and exhausted ‘everyday souls.’ Wagner’s music depends for its effect on the presence of the exhausted and their “tired nerves”:

Wagner is a great corrupter of music. With it, he found the means of stimulating tired nerves,—and in this way he made music ill. In the art of spurring exhausted creatures back into activity, and of recalling half-corpses to life, the inventiveness he shows is of no mean order. He is the master of hypnotic trickery, and he fells the strongest like bullocks. Wagner's *success*—his success with nerves, and therefore with women—converted the whole world of ambitious musicians into disciples of his secret art. (CW 5)

The crucial aspect is not that the ‘tired mules’ are *able* to gain a form of pleasure (in solace) from intoxication, but that different types of intoxication vary in quality and value. Nietzsche mocks men “whose lives are not an “action” but a business,” but who use music and art to inauthentically: “ape the high tide of the soul,” and refers disparagingly to both their exhausted character, and that they suffer from existence and seek to be consoled (GS 86). Nietzsche suggest here that there are states of intoxication that the ‘tired mules’ or ‘men of business’ cannot access; while they may think that they are accessing a similar experience, their experiences are qualitatively different. It is not just music and art that can be used to produce these inferior types of intoxication in the weak; Nietzsche also lists: “intoxication as cruelty in the tragic enjoyment of the destruction of the noblest; intoxication as blind enthusiasm for single human beings or ages (as hatred, etc). – Attempt to work blindly as an instrument of science... mysticism, the voluptuous enjoyment of eternal emptiness... or some stupid little fanaticism,”

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<sup>47</sup> Klossowski, p. 222.

and so on (*WP 29/KSA 10:24[26]*). These types of intoxication are all mistaken attempts to alleviate suffering, and, since they fail to address its real roots, they weaken the will (*WP 29/KSA 10:24[26]*). Not everyone can access the higher type of experiences, for they presuppose that a man possess certain qualities. It is the meaning of this ‘high tide of the soul’ that I will focus on, for it corresponds to the idea of *authentic intoxication*.

To develop criteria for assessing the authenticity of particular states, we need to establish a physiological difference in kind between different types of intoxication. To achieve this I will highlight, and interrogate, a tension in Nietzsche’s account of the state of intoxication, which he often refers to as the *Dionysian state*. This tension is a paradox in his observations on intoxication that concerns having the ability to *resist* a stimulus. By untangling this tension I will suggest that it is both possible, and desirable, to avoid conflating all types of intoxication with plenitude. We know that the Dionysian state is creative because it involves altering perception. Nietzsche frequently depicts this influence on perception, however, as synonymous with losing control; thus he explicitly links the Dionysian state with the inability “*not to react*”: “The essential thing remains the faculty of the metamorphosis, the incapacity *not to react*... It is impossible for the Dionysian man not to understand any suggestions of whatever kind, he ignores no signal from the emotions... (*TI IX, 10*). The Dionysian man’s emotional system intensifies, which means he is increasingly susceptible to his emotions and impulses, and thus to whim and caprice. His suggestibility stretches further than this: this heightening emotional state, this intensifying of his nervous system, also leaves him susceptible to external provocation; thoughts, feelings, and actions can be induced in him more easily. Of course, we could praise this susceptibility as a creative state, and at times Nietzsche praises it precisely in these terms. Nonetheless, these praises should puzzle the scholar of Nietzsche, because the inability to resist stimulus is also frequently criticised as incapacity, and as a *symptom of sickness*. Elsewhere in *Twilight of the Idols* he argues that precisely this inability to resist a stimulus often reflects exhaustion: “all unspirituality, all vulgarity, is due to the incapacity to resist a stimulus... in many instances, such a compulsion is already morbidity, decline, a symptom of exhaustion” (*TI VIII, 6*). He suspects that failing to resist external stimulus suggests an *inability* to resist. Being exhausted tends to leads one to prioritise a type of pleasure that does not require that one *resist* anything, but instead welcome the invasion of stimulus and the overwhelming of oneself.

*Instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all enmity, all feeling for limitation and distancing*: consequence of an extreme capacity for suffering and irritation which already feels all resisting, all need for resistance, as an unbearable *displeasure* (that is to say as *harmful*, as *deprecated* by the instinct of self-preservation) and knows blessedness (pleasure) only in no longer



resisting anyone or anything. (AC 30)

Therefore while Nietzsche initially presents the Dionysian state in such a way that he defines it by “a feeling of plenitude and increased energy,” he also suggests that it shares a central characteristic that he associates with exhaustion and weakness (*TI IX*, 8). This consequently threatens to destroy his attempt to posit a tangible link between energy and intoxication, and therefore undermines his attempt to make intoxication the basis for evaluating values. Indeed, if being susceptible to stimulus presupposes exhaustion, then we might expect abundance and intoxication to be mutually exclusive. Resolving these ideas, and therefore solving this paradox, is crucial to making sense of the basis for revaluing values. However, Nietzsche does not address this problem in any rigorous sense, despite it being crucial in making sense of aesthetics, his account of both creation and joy, and indeed his entire project of constructing a coherent philosophy centred on energy expenditure. I will devise a solution to this paradox, however, by considering Nietzsche’s writings on the *modern artist*, who in a certain form represents a pure Dionysian state; and the *ascetic priest*, whose condition manifests exhaustion in one form, and, overall, through Nietzsche’s idiosyncratic idea of the will.

Nietzsche’s discussion of the artist contains an ambiguity which we can use to draw out the meaning of authentic intoxication. Ideally, we would be able to distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic artist, so that this distinction maps onto the same distinction vis-à-vis intoxication. This is, however, problematic. In notes incorporated into *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche criticises a figure, which he identifies as the “modern artist,” because he has much in common with the “hysteric” or “hysterical female”: “The *modern artist*, in his physiology next-of-kin to the hysteric, is also distinguished by this morbidity as a character. The hysteric is false – he lies from love of lying, he is admirable in every art of dissimulation...” (*WP 813/KSA 13:16*[89]). The physiological basis for this “morbid” similarity between the artist and the hysteric is that they *lack enduring character*. Indeed, he lacks sufficient stability of self for us even to describe him as a “person”: “The absurd irritability of his system, which turns all experience into crises and introduces the “dramatic” into the smallest accidents of life, robs him of all calculability: he is no longer a person, at most a rendezvous of persons and now this one, now that one shoots forward with shameless assurance” (*WP 813/KSA 13:16*[89]). The hysteric’s lack of character is tied to the ‘irritability’ of his system, which means that he cannot resist stimulus; this lack of resistance signals a desire to *lose the feeling of self*. His self’s coherence and its ‘calculability’ are overwhelmed by external stimulus, by all the small accidents of life. This inability to resist is *vulgar*, because time and again he is stripped of his character, revealing his lack

of self-control and self-mastery.

Even if the artist tends to enter a physiological state similar to that of the hysteric, then we can still distinguish these the two figures by the *after-effects* that they experience from this condition; when Nietzsche discusses after-effects he reintroduces energy expenditure as important: “But the after-effect is not the same; the extreme exhaustion of all morbid natures after their nervous eccentricities has nothing in common with the states of the artist, who does not have to atone for his good periods – He is rich enough for them: he is able to squander without becoming poor” (*WP* 812/KSA 13:14[119]). The hysteric and the artist are therefore clearly separated by the quantity of energy that they possess; while the former is further exhausted by expending the energy that the state of intoxication requires (which is, after all, the feeling of increasing energy), the latter either staves off exhaustion by possessing deeper energy stores, and/or possesses the ability to recover more quickly. By distinguishing in this way, Nietzsche avoids bringing to bear a comprehensive criticism of the modern artist, in the terms of energy expenditure. He dismisses the hysteric as weak, exhausted, irritable; furthermore, since he is *not rich enough* to expend energy, he only intensifies his exhaustion. The hysteric’s case recalls that of the tired businessman, who, listening to music, imagines himself to be joyfully intoxicated, but is really only aping an ideal. His intoxication stems from weakness because its roots are in his complete inability to resist stimulus and provocation. Since the modern artist often possesses a degree of strength and energy, we cannot dismiss the modern artist on these same grounds, and therefore he represents a more complex case. We can at least partially explain this, however, by the fact that Nietzsche at times discusses ‘artists’ as one type, whilst at other times he distinguishes between different types, placing them on completely opposite ends of the spectrum of how much energy they possess. But we can also point to the idea that the modern artist makes *bad choices* about how to expend the energy and strength he possesses. Just because the artist possesses sufficient energy not to need to *atone* for the energy that he squanders, this does not necessarily mean that his intoxication issues from *strength* and *excess* energy. Just because he possesses *some* energy, this does not mean that his intoxication is not provoked by his impoverished physiology. Nietzsche suggests that the artist’s intoxication is vulgar when it involves temporarily losing his character, even when he uses up his strength and energy to pursue this state deliberately. The artist’s vulgarity is thus often due to the type of intoxication he chooses to pursue, rather than the type of intoxication he is currently physiologically capable of.

The upshot of this is that, while the category of the modern artist ultimately fails to provide a definitive account of the relation between intoxication and energy expenditure, the criticisms Nietzsche aims at this figure suggest that the Dionysian state is a troubling state of

intoxication, which has a great deal in common with weak and exhausted ones. Despite this, many commentators have assumed *this particular interpretation* of the Dionysian state to be Nietzsche's ideal. That is, they have misinterpreted the unquestionable praise he bestows on *some* types of intoxicated states by conflating all of these states. In *Nietzsche on Art*, Aaron Ridley argues that Nietzsche rather invited this conflation by continuing to use "Dionysian" to describe different ideas of intoxication. One of these is akin to the position I have been criticising here, and he calls this "the Dionysian art of 'becoming.'"<sup>48</sup> Ridley eloquently summarises the role of art in this idea of the Dionysian as: "There, the role of art is to supply a (dishonest) fantasy that is to replace a reality that one cannot face – it is, in effect, to hold out the prospect of becoming an impossible (non-)self, a (non-)self that is insulated, as nothing can be insulated, from the very conditions of its own existence."<sup>49</sup> In *this* idea of the Dionysian, a man tries to become *like* Becoming, which "represents a travesty of the intellectual conscience."<sup>50</sup> Ridley concludes that Nietzsche "should really have reserved the label 'Dionysian'" for his most positive articulations of the self, one that does not seek to deny existence, but instead to enhance and enrich it.<sup>51</sup>

The debate over the meaning of intoxication often crosses over into the question of how we should conceptualise the relationship of Being to Becoming. I highlighted earlier that Nietzsche at times appears to suggest that the highest state involves destroying Being and immersing oneself in Becoming, a project which involves temporarily dissolving the self as a mechanism for achieving closeness or 'oneness' with Becoming. This contributes to the interpretation that intoxication and joy are found in the self as it dissolves and disperses into Becoming. There are numerous notable interpretations of this kind, some direct interpretations of Nietzsche, and others that he influences more indirectly. We can further our understanding of the difference between authentic and inauthentic intoxication by considering some of these accounts.

In *On Nietzsche* Georges Bataille interprets Nietzsche's thought in terms of energy expenditure, and his study remains one of the foremost example of this approach.<sup>52</sup> While this makes it a valuable contribution to interpreting Nietzsche, it is of limited use, however, in identifying *authentic* intoxication, and by extension in pinpointing the nature of *authentic joy*, because Bataille fails to acknowledge a hierarchy of intoxication, leading him to overemphasise the inferior types. This overemphasis means he entirely misses key elements of Nietzsche's response to the problem of suffering. Bataille's target throughout is a state or feeling he calls the

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<sup>48</sup> Aaron Ridley, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Art*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 127

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>52</sup> The only study of comparable quality to make energy a central theme is Staten's *Nietzsche's Voice*.

“summit,” which corresponds to an “excess,” and an “exuberance of forces.”<sup>53</sup> He makes it clear from the outset, however, that the nature of this excess *overwhelms* and *violates* the self’s everyday barriers; it: “relates to measureless expenditures of energy and is a violation of the integrity of individual beings.”<sup>54</sup> This violation aims to destroy ‘transcendence,’ and its goal is “human entirety or totality.”<sup>55</sup> Bataille constantly emphasises this idea of the “violation” and “laceration” of the everyday self.<sup>56</sup> His work encapsulates the problems that arise if we subordinate the habits and routines of *everyday life* to pursuing *all* states of intoxication, no matter their origin or content. *On Nietzsche* reminds one inexorably of Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the modern artist/hysteric as suffering from an ‘absurd irritability of the system’; Bataille describes a continual state of *anguish*, and it becomes clear that it is precisely this anguish, this constant *irritability*, that opens him up towards intoxication: “Anguish and anxiety preoccupy me and gnaw at me. Anguish is present and hovering over possible depths... I hoist myself up to my summit and see the grounding of things opening up. Like an unwelcome knock at the door, anguish is present.”<sup>57</sup> Anguish is constantly expending nervous energy; he recklessly and deliberately expends energy, and this leads him to feverishly oscillate between states of ecstasy and complete exhaustion: “After this morning’s laceration, my nerves were shattered again (yet again).”<sup>58</sup> This is self-perpetuating because his exhaustion means a lack of ability to recover, a lack of plastic healing power: “My ability to bounce back seems gone for good.”<sup>59</sup> Yet Bataille welcomes the suffering that exhaustion brings, because it further opens him up to the loss of his everyday self and the intoxicating experience that accompanies this: “In every instance, I think, only suffering (devastating, exhausting your existence) opens such deep-seated wounds”<sup>60</sup> The following passage personifies this dramatic oscillation: suffering and unsatisfied desire produces constant nervous excitation of energy, and depleted energy stores subsequently provoke a descent to the “foundation of the world” – which he equates with “emptiness” and “absence”:

Lacerated this morning, my wound opening again with the slightest jostling. Once more, empty desire and inexhaustible suffering! A year ago in the heat of my decisiveness I distanced myself from the barest possibility of rest. For a year I’ve been thrashing about

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<sup>53</sup> Bataille, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17 & 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

like a fish out of water. I'm eager and laughing, becoming a fiery rush... Suddenly: emptiness and absence. And from now on I'm *at the foundation of the world*.<sup>61</sup>

This type of intoxication is characterised by losing firmness of character and the feeling of self. It is a condition provoked in a subject laid bare to the world, passively receiving stimulus. He interprets his inability to resist stimulus as strength, as totality, as openness to the world, and as plunging into Becoming.

There is great value in Bataille's work: first, he attempts to take seriously a Nietzschean philosophy of energy expenditure; second, he interprets intoxication as a creative state that transforms the world; third, he attempts to affirm suffering and redeem it through intoxication. We can therefore contrast this account favourably with many approaches to the problem of suffering; for example, it rejects the attempt to deny the reality of suffering by positing a true or real world; the slandering of the instincts and body; and the attempt to revenge oneself (an imaginary revenge or otherwise) on those who do not suffer from suffering. My observations intend, however, to counter Bataille's contention that the idea of the 'summit' is a desirable representation of Nietzsche's account of intoxication and joy.

Bataille's account, strange and esoteric though it is, greatly influences a significant number of Nietzsche's scholars, particularly the so-called 'continental' strand. In an interview with Trombadori, Foucault argues that the trio of Nietzsche, Bataille and Blanchot offered a philosophical escape route from an academic conformity around Hegel and phenomenology and a non-academic devotion to Sartrean existentialism: "Doing philosophy in those days (early fifties), and today as well in fact, mainly amounted to doing the history of philosophy - and the history of philosophy delimited, on the one hand, by Hegel's theory of systems and, on the other, by the philosophy of the subject, went on in the form of phenomenology and existentialism."<sup>62</sup> Foucault reads Nietzsche just as Bataille does, as pushing experience to a "maximum of intensity" that makes the traditional idea of the subject impossible.<sup>63</sup> As opposed to phenomenology and existentialism's focus on the subject of "everyday" experience, Foucault's Nietzsche prioritises the "limit-experience": "For Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, on the other hand, experience is trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close to possible to the "unlivable," to that which can't be lived through. What is required is the maximum of intensity

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>62</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Interview with Michel Foucault', *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984; Volume Three: Power*, Penguin Books, London, 1994, p. 246.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

and the maximum of impossibility at the same time.”<sup>64</sup> Where the phenomenological subject “recaptures the meaning of everyday experience,” the Nietzschean project is one of “desubjectification”: “experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution.”<sup>65</sup> For Foucault, as for Bataille, Nietzsche’s writings on energy point towards a state of maximum energy, where the subject is no longer himself, and feels other to his everyday state. He prioritises this state over the everyday state, and this gives everyday existence new meaning, but also devalues it. The subject does not actively produce meaning, but finds it in its temporary dissolution, and it is therefore stripped of its “foundational function” and “supremacy.”<sup>66</sup> While we should note that Foucault is primarily discussing the uses he found in Nietzsche, we can nonetheless isolate the same illegitimate moves vis-à-vis Nietzsche’s thought: conflating being intoxicated with losing oneself, with the decentering of meaning, with passively responding to experience, and with indifference to the source of intoxication.

Henry Miller’s semi-autobiographical work offers another profound example of Nietzsche’s figure of the modern artist. He underscores his work with a broadly Nietzschean emphasis on Becoming’s primacy: “chaos is the score upon which reality is written.”<sup>67</sup> He argues that, in contrast to the mediocre, who seeks “protection” and “safety” and cower behind inert Being, he embraces the elements of Becoming: “I love everything that flows, everything that has time in it and becoming,” for example: “rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences.”<sup>68</sup> Miller takes the figure of the modern artist to an extreme, by sacrificing the integrity of his everyday self to his creative urge: “a man who is intent on creation always dives beneath, to the open wound, to the festering obscene horror.”<sup>69</sup> This laceration involves imagining that he is identifying the ‘flows’ of his body with wider and more general ‘flows’: “and I join my slime, excrement, my madness, my ecstasy, to the great circuit which flows through the subterranean vaults of the flesh.”<sup>70</sup>

Miller prioritises creating art above all, including his mind’s immediate integrity and coherence. He describes the state of identifying with Becoming as the opening up of a “deep fissure” in his brain, and “a grand schizophrenic rush.”<sup>71</sup> For Miller authentic art requires that the artist lacerate himself in new ways, searching for extreme experiences, completely other than his

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, Harper Perennial, London, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

everyday experience, and those more mediocre; the artist must: “Stand up on the high place with gibberish in his mouth and rip out his entrails. It is right and just, because he must! And anything that falls short of this frightening spectacle, anything less shuddering, less terrifying, less mad, less intoxicated, less contaminating, is not art. The rest is counterfeit. The rest is human.”<sup>72</sup> Such arguments arise because Miller consistently identifies Being with inertia, and Becoming with change, in a way that tends to lack subtlety about how the two interact. Consequently, he suggests we achieve creation by forcefully rejecting everything that he perceives to cause inertia, “laws, codes, principles, ideals, totems, and taboos,” plunging into Becoming, and reforming Being in light of this exposure to change, flux, *etc.*<sup>73</sup> This is a transgressive practice he designs to violate the everyday self, and what he believes is its tendency towards protection and security. In lesser men this tendency triumphs and they cannot create or act originally, but are inert and reactive. Miller’s faith is that it is the stagnant structures of Being that act as a barrier to vitality, and to the creative impulse. His emphasis is therefore predominantly on removing the obstacles to joy, intoxication and creation, rather than on how he should develop himself. While some of his descriptions are undoubtedly just stunning literary excess, Miller is nonetheless extremely consistent in this understanding of the great man and creation, and this is also a very common interpretation, especially amongst Nietzsche scholars.

Like Bataille, Miller highlights the exhilarating energy expenditure that pursuing intoxication involves. He claims to be “Incurably healthy. No sorrows, no regrets. No past, no future,” and while he does frequently completely exhaust himself, which at times leads to extreme anguish and suffering, he nonetheless claims a remarkable resilience, regaining strength rapidly.<sup>74</sup> Thus we certainly cannot align Miller precisely with either the tired businessman or the hysteric; they react exhaustedly to stimulus, whereas he exhibits a degree of autonomy they do not have, living according to a code that he creates himself. Yet his method of creation, predicated upon violently oscillating between expending energy and complete exhaustion, and sacrificing his mind’s coherence, long-term plans, and the protracted will, to his creative urge, is also a long way from the theory of intoxication that I will privilege. Authors such as Bataille and Miller demonstrate that the modern artist is a nuanced and complex case: on the one hand his capacity for great expenditure marks him out from weaker figures, but on the other, his indiscriminate pursuit of intoxication betrays a desire to lose his everyday self, a desire for temporary incoherence, for dissolving the boundaries of his self. The issue then, with both of

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56-7. Of course, we should hardly be surprised if he were to exaggerate his health, and the material is only loosely biographical to begin with.

these authors, is that they believe that the moment of intoxication justifies and redeems the suffering that it costs them. This is certainly true to some extent, but only because we can surely prefer the creative existence of the intoxicated sufferer to the inert mediocrity that both Bataille and Miller oppose. Indeed, the violent oscillation between exhaustion and suffering that both Bataille and Miller depict is often taken to be the quintessential Nietzschean idea of intoxication. However, as I have established, Nietzsche is clearly concerned about the modern artist's similarity to the hysteric, and it is difficult to read his account of the modern artist in any way other than critical. My aim will be to take the best features of those great modern artists, Bataille and Miller, and maintain something like their creative intoxication, whilst avoiding their weakness. Nietzsche sketches a *higher* model of the artist and his creative experience, and we must carefully separate this figure from lower types.

Some commentators simply ignore this problem by refusing to acknowledge Nietzsche's writing on the importance of strength of character and maintaining a coherent self. Alex McIntyre's *The Sovereignty of Joy* is one such example of this approach. The central narrative he proposes for understanding oneself is to think of oneself as an "intermediary of becoming."<sup>75</sup> Whenever we have an idea, or perform a deed, we should not feel as if we own it, or that we create it, but that we are a vehicle for something that is being born through us: "towards every bringing forth, whether it is an idea or a deed, we have no other relationship than that of pregnancy; we are simply 'intermediaries' (*D*, 552) of becoming, of nature as *natura*: that which is about to be born."<sup>76</sup> This phrase is repeated *ad nauseum*, reinforcing its centrality in McIntyre's interpretation. "Nature as becoming" comes into being through man, who "always belongs as intermediary"; this is what Nietzsche "symbolises in the phrase "will to power."<sup>77</sup> Under such a schema it is impossible to feel pride or mastery over one's deeds or thoughts, since they are simply nature finding its expression in him (whether he like it nor not). There is therefore little point in him cultivating his abilities, creating himself in such and such a way, improving himself, *etc.* As I have identified, one of the central aspects of the will to power *is* imposing Being onto Becoming, but for Nietzsche it is the quality of this imposition that is all important. There is no sense that the quality matters at all in McIntyre, since after all, man is just an intermediary, and not responsible for what he creates - or, more accurately, what is created *through him*, it is not *his* will that is at stake, but nature's. It is hard to imagine a more passive interpretation of Nietzsche's great man, since the only active role he plays here is recognising that he should let go of the idea

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<sup>75</sup> Alex McIntyre, *The Sovereignty of Joy: Nietzsche's Vision of Grand Politics*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



that he has a coherent character, and embrace his role as the conduit of stimulus: “To be able to be a creator, according to Nietzsche, involves first overcoming all presumptuous talk of ‘creating’ and ‘willing,’ and thus presupposes that one belongs to nature in this newly discovered and newly redeemed sense of ‘will to power.’”<sup>78</sup>

For McIntyre the traditional image of the subject, including the will, free will, the idea of a doer, of a creator, is just a useless fiction. All we need to do is collapse these distinctions, and man will be ‘freed’ back into the ‘innocence of becoming,’ which does not seem to be anything other than ‘nature’: “In taking the doer back in the deed, Nietzsche places man into the continuous flow of becoming in which there is no absolute subject, but only intermediaries of nature who bring forth what is coming to be...”<sup>79</sup> McIntyre ‘solves’ the problem of the subject by simply getting rid of it, which seems neither profound nor particularly wise. McIntyre’s ‘solution’ actually has a lot in common with issues I have been discussing in relation to Bataille and Miller, though he lacks their style and their valuable contributions. McIntyre’s dissolving of the subject is underpinned (theoretically, not, one suspects, psychologically) by identifying joy with becoming. As the title of the work indicates, this joy is taken to be sovereign. While there is nothing wrong with putting joy at the forefront of Nietzsche’s thought, McIntyre falls into the same trap as Bataille and Miller in, firstly, thinking of joy as identical with *all* forms of intoxication, and, secondly, of conceiving of intoxication as synonymous with dissolving into, and identifying with, Becoming. He dismisses all that hinders this process as an obstacle to joy; it is as if Being in its entirety is just a trick of the priest.

Along these lines, McIntyre reinterprets Nietzsche’s most well-known concepts as really meaning nothing other than praising the value of Becoming: for instance, on the great man: “The really great soul is not stronger and more powerful in the narrow sense, but wider and more open”;<sup>80</sup> to be a creator means “bringing forth... that which is about to be born”;<sup>81</sup> and even the Overman is not the one who “rules over” Becoming, but “the one who releases himself into the joy of becoming.”<sup>82</sup> If this all seems a little repetitive, and to be putting a little *too much* faith in the ability of Becoming to solve all the issues in Nietzsche’s work, then things only get worse. In a bizarre move, he reinterprets the idea of freedom as nothing do with possessing autonomy or sovereignty, but “renouncing the mythology of absolute autonomy and sovereignty,” and again, the target for criticism is anything which sounds like it is “abstracted” from the world: “instead of interpreting freedom as absolute autonomy abstracted from the

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

world, Nietzsche attempts to take freedom back into nature by understanding it as the act of embracing one's limitedness - one's 'unfreedom.'<sup>83</sup> He confusingly reinterprets freedom as the freedom to be the passive intermediary of whatever nature 'desires' for us, and to embrace the innocence of Becoming. Finally, it becomes clear that any difficulty can be overcome simply by 'releasing oneself into becoming' when McIntyre deals with one of the central complexities of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the problem of the relation between the will and the past. Of course, since McIntyre wants to deny the will altogether, he simply changes the problem to the need to redeem past suffering. The outcome of his discussion is entirely predictable: the sufferer just releases his past into Becoming: "Taking the doer back into the deed implies that one releases oneself into becoming, that one releases the past into pure becoming by affirming it as the medium of one's present."<sup>84</sup>

In *The Aesthetics of Excess* Weiss argues that Bataille is able to avoid the problem of the coherence of the self by eliminating the idea of the will to power altogether, at least in any recognisable form.<sup>85</sup> Weiss acknowledges that the need for "dramatisation," exemplified by Bataille's rejection of everyday experience, betrays weakness, and, furthermore, he realises that Bataille's intoxication involves an openness to possession that positively *requires* a weakness of will: "Yet isn't such a weakness... at the very core of Bataille's project? And isn't a weak, passive will precisely a necessary precondition for the state of possession, of intoxication?"<sup>86</sup> This weakness of will is, however, not a problem for Bataille because he replaces the will to power with the will to chance, arguing that Nietzsche misunderstood the relation between sovereignty and power: "Sovereignty is rebellion; it is not the exercise of power. Authentic sovereignty refuses..."<sup>87</sup> Weiss describes this 'rebellion' from the everyday self with all the terminology that we have come to expect from so-called poststructuralist accounts of Nietzsche. And it is this specific idea of intoxication, *the loss of the feeling of self*, which underscores so many readings of Nietzsche in this tradition. Intoxication involves the "death of the subject" and the "renunciation of volition," and is the "the epidemic loss of self and transformation into alterity," where the "distinction between self and other is effaced," and so on.<sup>88</sup> This is the meaning of the Dionysian state, and is the basis for creating: "Clearly, the celebration of creativity and ecstasy beyond the limits of rational thought is founded upon *intoxiation* as demonic possession

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>85</sup> Allen S. Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Excess*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, quoting Bataille.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8 & 6.

by Dionysus.”<sup>89</sup> Nietzsche’s ideas about imposing the will to power onto oneself, and about imposing constraint, style, and coherence, have been completely lost here. For Weiss, Bataille builds on a problem in the development of Nietzsche’s work: the *Birth of Tragedy*’s dialectical relation between the Apollonian and the Dionysian breaks down and Nietzsche increasingly loses his grasp on the Apollonian aspect - this parallels his fall “into madness”: “Apollo forgotten, there remains only Dionysus the Crucified; there remains only the empty gestures of one we call mad, one who perhaps was only nostalgic for a different order of things, for the possibility of sacred sacrifice, for that different joy which marked the origin of our culture.”<sup>90</sup> Weiss suggests here that Nietzsche’s increasing preoccupation with Dionysian aspects of existence undermines and eventually destroys his coherence entirely. This seems to suggest that Nietzsche was somehow unaware of the dangers involved in pursuing Dionysian intoxication, but, on the contrary, I will argue precisely the opposite, that Nietzsche is acutely aware of both the advantages and dangers. He shares Bataille and Miller’s enthusiasm for certain effects of intoxication, particularly the effect it has on perception, but he is aware that certain types of intoxication both represents and perpetuate weakness and losing the feeling of self. As such, he does not devalue the experience of intoxication in itself, but his interest is in carefully separating types of intoxication from one another, and creating a hierarchy between them. Brief moments where we forget suffering, cannot compensate for the advantages we lose, by not cultivating a relationship with ourselves by which we do not desire to lose ourselves in the first place. Nietzsche suspects that desiring an experience completely other than our everyday life betrays a lack of contentment with one’s existence; constantly desiring the “fast, new, strange” betrays a lack of contentment, suggesting a “will to forget yourself,” lacking belief in the value of one’s existence: “If you believed more in life, you would hurl yourself less into the moment. But you do not have enough content in yourselves for waiting - not even for laziness!” (Z, I, 9).

These authors, who vary dramatically in quality, all share certain ideas of creation, which, while not completely identical, are unified by the idea that creation’s most important aspect is some kind of immersion into becoming, which the creator experiences as a blurring of the boundaries between the self and the world. Bataille and Miller prioritise this state not just because of its role in creation - although that is certainly part of it - but also as a joyful experience. In his recent work *A World of Becoming*, Connolly argues that, for Nietzsche, creation is intrinsically linked to the experience of Becoming, and that the one who wishes to create should therefore cultivate a relationship with the world where he is able to blur himself into the

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-8

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

world of Becoming, seeking inspiration and new ideas - he becomes “a Seer.”<sup>91</sup> These seers, of which he uses Nietzsche as a prominent example, cultivate “exquisite sensitivity to the accelerated pace in several zones of life” and sink: “into moments when sensitivity intensified and the action-oriented sense of chronology blurred.”<sup>92</sup> Connolly’s work is useful because he is not afraid to state as bluntly as possible the kind of arguments that authors like Bataille and Miller like to gesture at in literary and often mystical terms. The following passage summarises the attitude that Connolly believes one should take towards creation, and it is precisely this attitude that I oppose:

Today, however, it is important for more people to hone some of the capacities of a seer and to exercise them periodically. When a period of turbulence arises in a zone that had been relatively quiescent, you revisit a habitual pattern of thought by slipping into a creative suspension of action-oriented perception, doing so to allow a new insight or tactic to bubble forth if it will, as if from nowhere. You may then intervene in politics on the basis of that insight, ready to recoil back on the insight in the light of its actual effects. You soon launch another round as you maintain a relation of torsion between following a train of thought, dwelling in duration, and exploring a revised course that has just emerged, until your time runs out.<sup>93</sup>

Such an attitude towards creation is clearly extremely passive: one merely has to suspend one’s everyday thought (‘action-oriented perception’), ‘slip into’ Becoming, and creative impetus might strike one ‘as if from nowhere.’ We then apply this ‘insight,’ and we can repeat the process whenever we require. The only active part of the process of creation is the prior cultivating of the ability to be able to slip into this state (trance?). Creating, it turns out, does not require much effort at all; it is more the absence of effort and of will, which is replaced by the ability to tune oneself into Becoming, nature *etc.* In this conception, it is Becoming that is creative, not the actual individual himself, whose role appears to be channelling or conducting an inherently creative Becoming. It is thus not only a very similar attitude to McIntyre’s, but also (in some ways) to Miller and Bataille, in that it prioritises the experience of being outside the everyday self (intoxication) above all else.

There is certainly something to be said for the idea that creation involves interrupting habit, and I think this aspect is consistent with Nietzsche’s thought. But this is one aspect of a much larger project of self-creation that makes creativity possible; as I develop the meaning of

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<sup>91</sup> William Connolly, *A World of Becoming*, Duke University Press, London, 2011, 174.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

self-creation in Nietzsche's thought, it will become clear that the way in which these authors frame creation both misrepresents his thought and is also unhelpful, because it involves an overriding emphasis on Becoming that obscures the real processes involved in becoming a great man. Earlier I established that Nietzsche diagnoses hating Becoming as central to the tendency to misinterpret suffering's causes. All the authors I have discussed in this section agree with this explicitly, identifying hatred of Becoming as central to a whole host of problems. The problem is that they invariably take this approach too far by endorsing something akin to *hating Being*, identifying it variously as synonymous with inertia, lack of creativity, cowardice, weakness, exhaustion, and so on. In particular, they tend to disparage the everyday self, criticise any approach that includes a unity of the self, and praise some variation of a disorganised, chaotic, decentred self. They reject the will's primacy, the importance (or possibility) of intentionality, freedom of thought as bound up with an idea of the self which perpetuates guilt and punishment, deprives them of the "innocence of becoming," and stifles creativity, among other things. In terms of the self-creation of the great man, this indiscriminate hatred of Being is just as unhelpful as the hatred of Becoming. It is extremely rare for any author to discuss the Dionysian experience but also recognise Nietzsche's ambiguity towards this state. Henry Staten makes one such attempt in *Nietzsche's Voice*. He recognises the excesses towards which Nietzsche tends when describing the Dionysian state (it has) "The character of a pressure or impulsion and its effect in the most extreme case is to throw the self outside itself, into a state of self-forgetfulness, transport, ecstasy, "annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence," oblivion of the person memory constitutive of the identity of the individual as such."<sup>94</sup> However, Staten is also aware that Nietzsche does not glorify this state, and that it is one puts the "essence of the self as conscious and sensitive being" into doubt, and that: "Nietzsche fears this experience, this absolute and potentially irrecoverable expenditure of self."<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche desires a way to reconcile Being and Becoming, where neither is privileged and neither is despised. Whenever a commentator analyses intoxication *without referring to its source* he fails to understand its significance in Nietzsche's thought: all his writings on the Will, on abundance, and on energy, point towards a highest form of intoxication, *an authentic joy*, which, far from loss of self or *madness*, is predicated upon cultivating an enhanced sensation of self. To uncover Nietzsche's highest narratives of the self we must move beyond his predominantly critical writings on the modern artist, and develop a theory of authentic intoxication.

An illuminating account of creation's relation with losing oneself appears in the

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

correspondence between Antonin Artaud and Jacques Rivière. Rivière rejects Artaud's submission of his poems, on the grounds of their formal defects.<sup>96</sup> Artaud then discourses on the connection between these defects and his state of mind, which he characterises as lacking coherence and unity. This corresponds very well with the loss of the feeling self I have been identifying in Miller, Bataille and others. What is particularly notable is that Rivière is clear that Artaud's curious mental condition holds him back from expressing his creativity, and Artaud does not dispute this point. Rivière suggests potential solutions to the incoherence of the mind that Artaud feels, convinced that this incoherence is a defect and a constraint on his creativity, not its cause or prerequisite. It is thus a profound reflection on the question of whether we can correctly posit a link between the decentering of the individual and creativity.

The rejection of his poems provokes Artaud to speculate, in a dense and rich letter, on their "dispersiveness," attributing this to the "central collapse of the mind," and an "erosion" of his thinking: "This diffusion of my poems, these defective forms, this constant falling off in my ideas, must not be set down to lack either of practice or control of the instrument I was manipulating, of *intellectual development*. Rather to a focal collapse of my soul, a kind of essential and fugitive erosion in thought, to a transitory non-possession of physical gain to my development to the abnormal separation of the elements of thought."<sup>97</sup> Artaud describes this collapse of the mind in terms of a force that seems to attack him from without; a hollowing force that strips him of coherent sentences as they occur to him, and destroys his coherent thought just as it evolves.<sup>98</sup> The way he describes this condition closely resembles the way both Bataille and Miller's describe losing the everyday self, the levelling out of the individual, and the plunge into Becoming. Whilst they celebrate this state as both joyful and creative, Artaud discusses this state in the language of coherence, leading him to denounce it. He fears the dissipation often heralded as the prerequisite of the genuinely creative experience, interpreting it as the dispersal of his mind's forces: "Give my mind back its power of concentration, its missing cohesion, its uniform tenseness, the consistency of its own matter"<sup>99</sup>

In further letters, however, Artaud shows a degree of ambiguity towards this state, because of the suspicion that his creative inspiration relates directly to these apparent flaws in his mind, or at least the way he perceives his mind. For instance: "I am well aware of the stops and starts in my poems, jolts which are linked with the very essence of inspiration."<sup>100</sup> He admits that

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<sup>96</sup> Antonin Artaud, 'Correspondence with Jacques Rivière', *Artaud: Collected Works I*, trans. Victor Corti, Calder and Boyars, London, 1968, p. 27.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

his inspiration is perhaps linked to “physiological weakness,” and in particular “our nervous energy emanating.”<sup>101</sup> The problem, however, is that he lacks the coherence to translate inspiration and mental clarity into an expression; his mind is again too fragile, too incoherent for this process, although he still falls back on the idea of “higher vicious will” that attacks as if from without, making coherence impossible: “The moment the soul proposes to coordinate its riches, its discoveries, its revelations, unknowingly at the very minute the thing is about to emanate, a higher vicious will attacks the soul like vitriol, attacks the mass of words and imagery.”<sup>102</sup> Rivière responds by presciently analysing Artaud’s descriptions of his mental state, and this response, at least in part, parallels the position I will be developing here, which I take to be a genuinely Nietzschean one. What is most striking is that he develops a nuanced account, which recognises both the attractions and pitfalls of the chaotic experience of self-dissipation, arguing that the latter far outweigh the former. He also recognises that a mind of ‘servile imitation’ is not the only alternative to this experience, and that this represents a false and unhelpful opposition. Rivière recognises that “There is a whole body of literature” that concerns itself with the “animal operations of the mind,” where the mind abandons coherence, giving itself up to chance: “One might say that it is the clearest and most exact manifestation of the animal nature in all men, but which we usually instinctively try to shackle with the bonds of fact and experience.”<sup>103</sup> He describes the experiences of this ‘animal nature’ as an intoxication of “the wholly subjective impression of complete freedom.”<sup>104</sup> Far from praising this intoxication, he is wary of the effect that offering oneself up to chance has on the coherence of the mind, which cannot adequately represent this experience, and which therefore loses creative ability in trying to do so: “But the penalty for these soaring flights is at hand. Universal possibilities are transformed into concrete impossibilities. The impression, once captured, engenders twenty more in revenge which paralyse us and ravage the mind’s substance.”<sup>105</sup>

In his attempt to diagnose Artaud’s problem and offer constructive advice, he picks up on the question of Artaud’s attempt to blame external forces – a ‘vicious will’ - for the problems of his mind. Rejecting this as a strategy for interpreting the problem of the coherence of the mind, he proposes two broad solutions. The first is acknowledging the physiological influences on this incoherence: “There are obvious physiological reasons for these fadings out in the soul, which are often fairly easy to determine.”<sup>106</sup> He agrees with Artaud’s description of the soul as

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41-2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

“greatly dependent on the nervous system,” but argues that it is important to avoid the convenient “mystical explanation,” of a “vicious will” that attacks from “without.”<sup>107</sup> To avoid this positing of imaginary external causes means shifting the focus back onto the physiological influences on the kind of incoherence of the mind that Artaud describes; furthermore, making this shift means taking responsibility for the presence of this incoherence, and looking for the solution within the habits and routines that constitute a man’s character.

In addition to this renewed focus on real causes, rather than imaginary ones, Rivière proposes to Artaud that he consciously reevaluate the way that he understands himself: deliberately restricting the freedom of his mind to guard against its decomposition: “It seems to me that this mental “erosion,” this inner pilfering, this “destruction” of thought “within its own matter” affecting you, is caused solely by the excessive freedom you allow it.”<sup>108</sup> Thus he diagnoses Artaud’s mental rehabilitation as the product of the too great freedom he allows to his mind; his too ready submission to chance subsequently impairs his ability to bring his thought together coherently. Rivière opposes the passive-submission-to-chance mode of art with a more nuanced approach, where *choosing* an object is paramount, but without a “slavish imitation” to what exists: “We must choose what we wish to “express” which should always be not only something definite, not only the knowable, but the unknown as well.”<sup>109</sup> All “successful” thought, translated into art, is thus the result of a comprise between a “stream of intelligence flowing out of him and incomprehension he encounters, surprise, a mental block.”<sup>110</sup> Rivière argues that where the mind lacks an “obstacle” and is not deliberately prevented from wandering aimlessly, the creative impetus dissolves into abstraction: “But where the object or obstacle are entirely missing, the mind carries straight on, defective. And everything disintegrates in immense contingency.”<sup>111</sup> The aspect of this second strategy I consider most Nietzschean is the focus on the effort required to maintain the coherence of the mind. This recognises that there are certain *low* forms of intoxication, available to the passive and untrained mind, and destructive to the creative powers, rather than the source of them. While we might assume that Artaud’s creativity lies precisely in the incoherence of his mind and the disintegration of his everyday self, and his closeness to Becoming or chance, it seems likely, especially given Artaud’s description of his mental anxiety, that the inability to bring together thoughts coherently hinders him more than it helps. In relation to Nietzsche’s own writings, I will emphasise the importance of rejecting low forms of intoxication in favour of maintaining a coherent self. Not only is this coherence

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.



important with regards to achieving clarity of creative expression, it is also crucial in Nietzsche's work to cultivating a feeling of self, which is vital to the specific manifestation of the will to power as power over oneself; these feelings are vital to his account of authentic joy.

I have been searching for a way to conceptualise Nietzschean evaluation, and in doing so have shown two promising ideas to be insufficient. The first is employing the dichotomy of Being-Becoming to evaluate values. Although Nietzsche criticises traditional values as tending to elevate Being over Becoming because of dissatisfaction with existence, it is now clear that pursuing Becoming can express precisely the same roots: "The desire for *destruction*, change, and Becoming *can* be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, "Dionysian"); but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, *must* destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them" (GS 370). Thus the desire to destroy Being can stem not only from a desire to create more affirmative values, but also because of *ressentiment* against existence, and a desire to obliterate and destroy what exists. The second failed criterion is evaluating values according to whether they reflect exhaustion or intoxication. This is made impossible by the paradox of the inability not to resist stimulus. The case of the modern artist points towards the necessity of a hierarchy of intoxication, where we reserve the highest praise for a type of intoxication that does not stem from being unable to resist. Since inauthentic intoxication involves a movement where character is either lost or did not exist, we must determine whether it is possible to be intoxicated, but nonetheless possess and maintain character. Developing character depends on cultivating the ability to resist stimulus, discerning over what one allows to approach and what one takes in. This process of cultivation has its own difficulties, which I will demonstrate by considering the figure of the *ascetic priest* in Nietzsche's writings. He demonstrates that resistance too can stem from exhaustion, and is insufficient by itself for creating a great man. For a man to achieve a type of intoxication that relates to strong character, he must find a way to cultivate resistance *without* thereby exhausting himself.

### III

#### *Responses to Exhaustion II: The Ascetic Priest*

To understand the meaning of authentic intoxication we must understand what Nietzsche admires in the ascetic, but also why he ultimately rejects his approach. His attitude to the ascetic is simultaneously one of horror and one of admiration; the admiration is rooted in the idea that he embodies – or is seen to embody - a “*superior force*”:

Hitherto the mightiest men have still bowed down reverently before the saint as the enigma of self-constraint and voluntary final renunciation: why did they bow? They sensed in him – as it were behind the question-mark presented by his fragile and miserable appearance – the superior force that sought to prove itself through such a constraint, the strength of will in which they recognized and knew how to honour their own strength and joy in ruling: they honoured something in themselves when they honoured the saint. (*BGE* 51)

The superior force is clearly the will to power, but given Nietzsche’s flexible use of this idea, it is vital to determine which particular manifestation he refers to in the above passage. Earlier I established that he identifies imposing Being onto Becoming as the supreme will to power. The ascetic tyrannically imposes Being – *onto himself*. He appears to embody the extreme example of cultivating the ability to resist stimulus. The 'mightiest men' sense in the ascetic a supreme degree of self-control, a tyrannical rule over himself and his drives. If the hysteric suffers from being at most a ‘rendezvous of persons,’ then the ascetic appears in contrast to possess fixed and coherent selfhood; if the hysteric’s lack of ability to resist reflects a loss or absence of character, then the ascetic appears to possess supreme character. Both the admiration and the horror Nietzsche exhibits towards the ascetic are provoked by the cruelty with which his will turns inwards, both creating interiority but simultaneously imprisoning it by imposing an

unsympathetic order and structure onto his soul. Janaway argues that the ascetic is a paradoxical figure, because he grows in power over himself but at the expense of his “natural strength”:

Nietzsche calls the ascetic a paradox and a self-contradiction, meaning not that the ascetic is an impossibility, but that he genuinely grows in power (over himself) as he dissociates from and destroys his natural strength. The ascetic ideal gives its proponent a unity of purpose and strength of will, so that there is a real ‘triumph’ and ‘victory’, not a mere illusion of one. Yet this is a personality type—to which most of us belong in the modern world, according to Nietzsche—whose strength and unity consist in self-opposition and denial of one's own most natural functions. The complexity of the phenomena here is mirrored in Nietzsche's attitudes too: he admires the magnitude of the ascetic's achievement while lamenting its unhealthy devaluing of the natural self.<sup>112</sup>

Although the ascetic displays power over himself, and Nietzsche certainly finds this admirable, there are significant problems with holding him up as an example of ‘strength of will,’ as Janaway does here. While Janaway is clearly aware of the ascetic's shortcomings, I want to suggest that these shortcomings bar him from possessing a strong Will, once we conceive of it in Nietzsche's idiosyncratic fashion. Although it is certainly true that the ascetic does possess something *like* strength of will - particularly when we compare him to Nietzsche's sketch of the modern artist - I want to distinguish qualitatively between his strength and the great man's strength. I am going to develop an account of the strong will whereby power over oneself is a necessary but not sufficient aspect, and must be coupled with Nietzsche's theories of energy expenditure. Since the ascetic fails to cultivate abundant energy, this prevents him from experiencing the joy that only comes with exercising a strong Will.

Just as it transpires that intoxication reflects both exhaustion and strength, depending on its type, the same is also true for *self-control* and the ability to resist stimulus. This is the root of Nietzsche's criticisms of the ascetic. Understanding the physiological difference between what the ascetic expresses, and what the great man expresses, promises to refine and deepen our understanding of the basis for reevaluating values. The idea that the ascetic captures the supreme will to power and supreme character is guilty of mistakenly conflating two states: “- two totally different states confounded: e.g. the *calm of strength*, which is essentially forbearance from reaction (type of the gods whom nothing moves) - and the *calm of exhaustion*, rigidity to the point of anesthesia” (*WP* 447/KSA 13:14[194]). I have thus far emphasised that exhaustion can

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<sup>112</sup> Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness – Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 146.

manifest itself in constantly expending nervous energy, being unable to resist stimulus, desiring to lose the feeling of self, and desiring to lose the feeling of everyday reality; to this we can add another manifestation: *rigidity*. This state suggests a lack of reaction to stimulus that reflects inertia and unresponsiveness; it is a *passiveness* rooted in perpetual and habitual inactivity. Thus apparently opposite reactions, constant anxiety and apparent calmness, can both be symptoms of exhaustion.

Both the ascetic and the modern artist possess characteristics that appear valuable, but Nietzsche criticises both of their overall characters for prohibiting greatness. In a passage from *The Gay Science* he compares these two types, or close approximations of them, which he identifies as: “the weak and quasi feminine type of the dissatisfied” and “the strong and masculine type” (GS 24). The latter type corresponds more closely to the ascetic than he does to Nietzsche’s great man. When Nietzsche refers to the latter type as desiring to make life “safer” this immediately indicates that this account will not be a straightforward praise of the latter, given that I have already established that he frequently associates safety with fear of Becoming, an inability to deal properly with suffering, a desire to shut oneself off from the ‘questionable’ aspects of existence, and so on; often safety is merely a euphemism for denying existence (GS 24). In this passage too, Nietzsche associates the desire for making life “better and safer” with arresting chance and producing inertia; a “Chinese “happiness”” (GS 24). He suggests that this incarnation of strength produces nothing and cannot be creative.

In contrast, the weak and quasi feminine type corresponds rather precisely to the way he later describes the modern artist. This weak type desires “narcotic consolations” to produce intoxication, but this stems from his desire to deceive himself, rather than to enrich his existence (GS 24). Fittingly, this type links up nicely with my diagnosis that many men tend to take the wrong approach to suffering, and in doing so perpetuate their misery. The artist type he describes here seeks to be consoled even at the price of deceiving himself, and thus he “resents all who esteem physicians above priests”; in doing so he ensures “the *continuation* of real misery” (GS 24). Nietzsche does not characterise this type entirely negatively, however, and this brings us back to the modern artist’s positive characteristics. It is the “sicklier, tenderer, more feminine dissatisfaction and romanticism that at present are still superabundant here (Europe)” that produce the capacity for change (GS 24). Europe owes the “utmost gratitude” for these sicknesses, because whatever the faults this type exhibits, they make life “more beautiful and profound,” because they prevent it from becoming sterile and lifeless (GS 24). It is obvious, then, that when Nietzsche distinguishes between two figures who map accurately onto the modern artist and the ascetic, he places creation firmly on the artist’s side: Europe’s feminine sickness has

“generated an intellectual irritability that almost amounts to genius and is in any case the mother of all genius” (GS 24). He clearly implies here that genius falls firmly on the side of the “weak and quasi feminine type of the dissatisfied” because of his sensitivity and his powers of dissimulation (GS 24). I think we could coherently argue that these passages are a reasonable summary of Nietzsche’s thoughts on creation up until *The Gay Science*, but I want to suggest that this dichotomy completely breaks down once he properly conceives his great man theory: he then moves beyond the modern artist’s so-oft inauthentic intoxication, and beyond the ascetic’s sterility, and towards a figure that can truly reconcile all of the characteristics that he values most.

I will develop the idea of ‘The Will’ as the key narrative that orders Nietzsche’s idea of the self, but at this point it suffices to note that one of the primary ways he uses it is to designate the quality of the *relation between drives or instincts*. In particular, the drives’ precise interactions relates closely to possessing either a *strong* or a *weak* will:

*Weakness of the will:* that is a metaphor that can prove misleading. For there is no will, and consequently neither a strong or a weak will. The multitude and disgregation of impulses and the lack of any systematic order among them result in a “weak will”; their coordination under a single predominant impulse results in a “strong will”: in the first case it is the oscillation and the lack of gravity; in the latter, the precision and clarity of the direction. (WP 46/KSA13:14[219])

The strong Will designates *coherence* between drives, and the weak will correspondingly designates incoherence. I have already argued that, for Nietzsche, modern man’s central problem is exhaustion, and we must now complicate this condition by adding the problem concerning conflict between drives or instincts, and a corresponding uncertainty in the way they operate: “because we forget that valuation is always from a perspective, a single individual contains within him a vast confusion of contradictory valuations and consequently of contradictory drives. This is the expression of the diseased condition in man, in contrast to the animals in which all existing instincts answer to quite definite tasks...” (WP 259/KSA 11:26[119]). Since thought connects intrinsically to physiology and drive formation, incoherent thought tends to reflect incoherence between drives, as contradictory drives spark contradicting evaluations. The notion of incoherence here does not suggest that establishing coherence is simply a matter of establishing the essential function of particular drives. Nietzsche consistently asserts that man’s uniqueness stems from the interiority created by his drives as they turn back upon themselves. The particular conception of drives he employs suggests fluidity of meaning, and incoherence is concerned less with misinterpreting the meaning of a particular drive or set of drives, and more with

interpreting them in such a way as to establish a coherent *relation* between them. This involves reinterpreting the meaning of drives in the ‘whole’ that they produce – *the self*.

We must reconcile the problem of the desirable relationship between drives - which is also the meaning of achieving a strong Will - with the problem of exhaustion. It is far from clear, however, that these are even separate problems. I have not yet outlined the physiological conditions that condition and increase the likelihood of exhaustion, and Nietzsche suggests that it is the drives’ relation that is the most significant factor in this conditioning. Drives are “the great sources of strength,” and the “impetuous torrents of the soul”; it is not just that they make use of and direct energy: the level of coherence between drives also determines the extent to which energy converts efficiently into both thought and action, and, more fundamentally, conditions the amount of energy a man produces in the first place (*WP* 207/KSA 13:11[239]).

Nietzsche constructs a nuanced account of the drives’ relation, tracing a line between two positions he considers equally dangerous. The first mistake, that might be said in some cases to correspond to the modern artist, although it is certainly not confined to him, is to think that one merely has to rely on one’s drives or instincts, and that this will be sufficient. On the contrary, Nietzsche warns that instincts, left to their own device, tend to oppose and destroy one another: “In times like these, to have to rely on one’s instincts is one fatality more. These instincts contradict, disturb and destroy one another; I have already defined the *modern* as physiological self-contradiction” (*TI IX*, 41). Until he prunes his drives, a man is not a man at all, but merely a conduit of forces: “Today the only way of making the individual possible would be by *pruning* him: possible, that is to say *complete*...” (*TI IX*, 41). I shall return later to the theme of how much we can say that a man is free to cultivate himself in this manner, and how he should undertake this process. At this point it suffices to note that Nietzsche’s particular concern here is that we do not conflate freedom to relying on one’s instincts in some unmediated fashion (as if such a thing were possible). Ironically, the claim for “free development” and “independence” is often “advanced most heatedly by precisely those for whom no curb *could be too strong*” (*TI IX*, 41). Desiring to be free to pursue physiological self-contradiction, paradoxically, merely expresses degenerating instincts in the first place.

With that said, it should be clear that the proper approach to take to cultivate an optimum relationship with one’s drives cannot be merely to let oneself be controlled by them, or to allow all urges free rein, *etc.* On the other end of the spectrum, the second approach Nietzsche criticises is establishing coherence between drives *whatever the cost* - this is the ascetic’s position. *If* coherence meant simply establishing a clear and hierarchical relation between drives – and a corresponding clear outcome in thought and deed - then the ascetic might truthfully be

the very model of the strong Will. In actuality, however, it is precisely the strong Will that he lacks. The first conflation to avoid is confusing subjecting oneself to a single drive's tyranny with possessing a strong Will. Rather than totalising his drives under the rule of one in particular, the great man cultivates a host of "antithetical capacities" that he nonetheless prevents from extirpating one another. Given that the intellect reflects the state of drives' relations, possessing antithetical capacities tends to produce a more multifarious and therefore privileged perspective; Nietzsche credits antithetical capacities as vital to his adopting, and carrying out, the "task of a *revaluation of values*": "Order or rank among capacities; distance; the art of dividing without making inimical; mixing up nothing, 'reconciling' nothing; a tremendous multiplicity which is nonetheless the opposite of chaos – this has been the precondition, the protracted secret labour and artistic working of my instinct" (*EH II*, 9). This introspection highlights that coherence means ordering and ranking drives or capacities *without* reconciling them. The problem with 'reconciliation' is that it risks destroying the drives' potential to produce energy, just as disorder likewise does. In the ascetic's case, what appears to be a relationship between drives characterised by coherence and unity is actually rooted in weakness and the inability to press drives into service, to retain their energy. While Nietzsche praises a *tyrannical* approach to one's drives, this means putting them to use, not denying and/or attempting to destroy them: "*Overcoming of the affects?* – No, if what is implied is their weakening and extirpation. But putting them into service: which may also mean subjecting them to a protracted tyranny" (*WP 384/ KSA12:1[122]*). The ascetic lacks the strength to employ his own drives to his advantage, and so he attempts to weaken and destroy them. This is a familiar theme, since I have already suggested that the weak tend to associate Becoming and change with suffering, and then respond by trying to remove or downplay these contingent elements; the ascetic's struggle represents the struggle physiological weakness has to preserve itself: "*the ascetic ideal is derived from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life*, which seeks to preserve itself and fights for existence with any available means" (*GM III*, 13). He declares war on the body and on the passions by imposing an artificial and ultimately regressive order and stability onto himself. He recoils from that which is potentially 'dangerous' and 'overwhelming' by imposing a 'moral code' upon his body (or allowing a moral code to be *imposed upon him*): "Instead of taking into service the great sources of strength, those impetuous torrents of the soul that are so often dangerous and overwhelming, and economizing them, this most short-sighted and pernicious mode of thought, the moral code of thought, wants to make them dry up" (*WP 383/KSA 13:14[163]*). The ascetic priest does this by lowering his level of desire and will wherever possible, both from a specific conscious effort but also by removing himself from all circumstances where they might arise:

*In the first place*, this domineering listlessness is combated through means which reduce the feeling of life itself to its lowest point. Where possible, will and desire are eliminated entirely; everything which produces 'feeling,' which produces 'blood' is avoided (a salt-free diet: the hygiene of the fakir); no love; no hatred; equanimity; no revenge; no self-enrichment; no work; begging; where possible, no women, or as few as possible; with respect to the spiritual, Pascal's principle '*il faut s'abêtir*' is adopted. The result, expressed in terms of psychology and morality, is the 'loss of the self,' 'sanctification'; in physiological terms, hypnosis. (GM III, 17)

Aside from this explication of the *means* the ascetic employs to extinguish his drives - and in doing so, inadvertently to cut himself off from his sources of strength - we must note that while the ascetic is exercising self-control, and thus apparently increasing his self-mastery, Nietzsche suggests he is actually losing himself. It is therefore clear that self-mastery and the feeling of self are not the same thing; this is because the feeling of self relates closely to a feeling of increasing energy. As the ascetic destroys certain drives, he wastes their energy. Furthermore, his war against his desires leads to an incoherence that likewise hinders his ability to produce energy. Just like the modern artist, he is reacting to his lack of energy. The modern artist and the ascetic therefore represent two (self-defeating) responses to the same problem, that of "reduced vitality" (NCW 'We Antipodes'). The ascetic's apparent calmness and repose appears to be a completely opposite state to the modern artist's indiscriminate frenzy, but they express a similar fundamental physiological condition: ss

Every art and every philosophy may be regarded either as a cure or as a stimulant to ascending or declining life: they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers:—those that suffer from *overflowing vitality*, who need Dionysian art and require a tragic insight into, and a tragic outlook upon, the phenomenon life,—and there are those who suffer from *reduced vitality*, and who crave for repose, quietness, calm seas, or else the intoxication, the spasm, the bewilderment which art and philosophy provide. (NCW 'We Antipodes')

Consequently, like the modern artist, the ascetic knows nothing of authentic intoxication: the ascetic's "violent willing" makes "beauty" impossible, because his exhaustion precludes experiencing the aesthetic condition and transforming the world into perfection (Z, II, 13). 'Violent willing' refers to the fact that the ascetic constantly has to oppose his drives and inclinations; he experiences whatever "impels" him from "inside or outside" as a threat to his



self-control: “*Self-control*- Those moralists who command man first of all and above all to gain control of himself thus afflicts him with a peculiar disease; namely, a constant irritability in the face of all natural stirrings and inclinations - as it were, a kind of itching” (GS 305). The ascetic cannot “entrust” any instinct, but interprets with “sharp and mistrustful eyes” (GS 305). His will to power here finds a degree of satisfaction, but only in terms of the “dangerous thrills of cruelty directed *against himself*,” in the forms of “self-denial,” “contrition,” “spasm of repentance,” and so on (BGE 230). This is far beyond a feeling of restraint, of control, of imposing style and self-creation over oneself, all of which Nietzsche praises for producing the feeling of growth; it is instead the mind opposing the body and engaging in “self-mutilation” (BGE 230). This self-mutilation is a form of taking revenge on oneself, an “over-abundant enjoyment of one’s own suffering” (BGE 229).

More than just a war against his own body, the ascetic also declares war on external aspects of Becoming; thus he declares war on life itself, creating the paradox of a kind of life that turns upon life itself:

For an ascetic life is a contradiction in terms: a particular kind of *ressentiment* rules there, that of an unsatisfied instinct and will to power which seeks not to master some isolated aspect of life but rather life itself, its deepest, strongest, most fundamental conditions; an attempt is made to use strength to dam up the very source of strength; a green and cunning gaze is directed against thriving physiological growth, especially against its expression, beauty, joy; while a pleasure is felt and *sought* in failure, atrophy, pain, accident, ugliness, arbitrary atonements, self-denial, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice. All this is paradoxical to an extreme: we find ourselves confronted with a contradiction which wills itself as a contradiction, which derives *enjoyment* from this suffering and even becomes increasingly self-assured and triumphant in proportion as its own pre-condition, the physiological capacity for life, *diminishes*. (GM III, 11)

The problem with the structure of the ascetic’s drives is that they preclude the abundance of energy he requires to harmonize his drives and to overcome their oppositions; Graham Parkes argues that this renders a creative existence difficult or impossible: “The problem with such a regime, for Nietzsche, is that the balance of power in the psyche is too one-sided, overly top-heavy, for a fruitful and creative existence.”<sup>113</sup> While harmonizing the soul “under the rule of single-minded reason” might be sufficient to achieve a “life that is calm and serene,” a “richer

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<sup>113</sup> Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul; Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1994, p. 356.

life” requires “a more Dionysiac disposition of forces, one capable of sustaining changing rulers and the tensions of tyranny.”<sup>114</sup> This “richer” existence requires a productive tension between drives that maintains the energy of each: “In this case the vicious and violent drives whose growth Socrates wants to hinder would be - though restrained and trained - *retained* as indispensable sources of energy.”<sup>115</sup> Drives require tension and resistance to retain their power, hunger, and thus their energy; the presence of this energy harmonises the way one perceives the activity of one’s drives, so that one does not feel this tension as oppositional, and the self does not mistrust the drives that constitute it.

In many senses, the modern artist and the ascetic are opposite figures: the former has little control over his desires, while the latter tyrannises over them; the former expends his energy recklessly, while the latter channels his energy into a defensive war against the aspects of existence that he wants to deny; the former is unable not to react to any stimulus, while the latter cultivates self-control and even a type of self-mastery. Yet there is a certain point in the ascetic’s development when he opens himself up to experiences similar to those of the modern artist; in particular, apparent *mystical* experiences, characterised by a *loss of self*. For the ascetic too is exhausted, not from recklessly expending energy, but from his constant defensive war, struggling against himself. He becomes “angelic,” that is, a “pale, sickly, idiotically fanatical creature” (*WP* 226/KSA 13:14[96]), and while this is interpreted as “holiness” it is really the “symptom-syndrome of the impoverished, enervated, incurably corrupted body” (*AC* 51). Paradoxically, because he refuses to react to stimulus, and because his drives are incoherent, this eventually leaves him in a condition where he lacks the ability to resist stimulus entirely, and when Nietzsche describes this state it, remarkably, has much in common with the Dionysian experience of loss of self that he describes in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

But it certainly points the way to all sorts of mental disturbances, to ‘inner lights,’ for example, as in the case of the Hesychasts of Mount Athos, to aural and visual hallucinations, to lascivious outpourings and ecstasies of sensuality (the story of St Theresa)... The highest state, *redemption* itself, that finally achieved state of complete hypnosis and silence, continues to be regarded as *the* mystery as such, the mystery which even the highest symbols are inadequate to express, as the return and entry into the ground of things, as liberation from all madness, as ‘knowledge,’ as ‘truth,’ as ‘being,’ as escape from all goals, all desires, all action, as a domain beyond good and evil. (*GM* III. 17)

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

Just as Nietzsche formerly conceived the Dionysian experience, the exhausted ascetic is laid bare to the “ground of things,” and liberated from “all goals, all desires, all action” (*GM III*, 17). The experience may still contain “ecstasies,” but no longer is it a metaphysical one, no longer does it reveal the Primordial Unity of being - it is now a form of “mental disturbance” where the sufferer experiences “aural and visual hallucinations” (*GM III*, 17). Such is the derision with which the intoxication of the exhausted is now met.

The weak/strong Will criterion suggests the solution to the problem of what it is that Nietzsche opposes exhaustion to: a particular type of intoxication that he designates as abundance or superabundance. The states of intoxication he criticises are states that are passively provoked and induced from without. A particular type of exhaustion – constant nervous expenditure and the inability to resist – renders one susceptible to this intoxication. Desiring this intoxication - which he phenomenologically experiences as losing the feeling of self, and signifies losing character - is a sign of *insufficiency* and *dissatisfaction* with existence.

### *The Ascetic Philosopher*

While the ascetic priest is clearly not the great man, Nietzsche frequently makes it clear that the great man does incorporate elements of asceticism; he praises the strongest individuals for transforming asceticism into an *instinct*: “The most spiritual human beings, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others, in attempting; their joy lies in self-constraint: with them asceticism becomes nature, need, instinct” (*AC* 57). We must determine how the great man’s asceticism differs from that of the ascetic priest. In Henry Staten’s reading of the *Genealogy*, he argues that Nietzsche tends to overstate the distinctions between different forms of asceticism, most obviously when he compares the ascetic priest with the ascetic philosopher. Staten’s arguments are thus potentially significant for my attempt to distinguish clearly between the great man and the ascetic priest, and we must establish how the ascetic philosopher fits into this schema.

Staten argues that Nietzsche engages in a polemic designed to drive a wedge between the figures of the ascetic philosopher and the ascetic priest: “the former is a “cheerful” asceticism, the latter is “gloomy” and “serious,”” and unlike the priest, the philosopher’s asceticism “does *not*

deny 'existence,' rather he affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence."<sup>116</sup> The other difference Staten considers is that "the artist or philosopher brings forth a work, whereas the ascetic priest works only on his own being, he does not save his energy for the production of a work but uses it to shut down the springs out of which that energy flows."<sup>117</sup> Staten argues, however, that neither of these differences is necessarily fundamental and it is entirely possible that "the asceticism of the ascetic priest is the pure essence of the same will that drives the philosopher."<sup>118</sup> This will that Staten argues the two figures have in common is a form of mastery which preserves themselves at the expense of their relationship with the world: "It seems that both practice the same method of mastery, preserving their substance by keeping it from discharge into the world, other people, a woman."<sup>119</sup>

Staten suspects that Nietzsche overemphasises distinctions between the two figures to try to obscure that they are the same kind of ascetic will; *i.e.*, a desire not to squander or expend energy, a desire to preserve themselves, and so on. Nietzsche's references to the 'cheerfulness' of the philosopher cannot disguise that his values merely reproduce the priest's; (the philosopher's asceticism is): "the happy asceticism of a deified and fully fledged animal, an animal which does not so much remain at rest as hover of life. The three splendid slogans of the ascetic idea are well known: poverty, humility, chastity. Now take a close look at the life of all great, fruitful, inventive spirits – you will always find all three present to some extent" (GM III, 8). In particular, Nietzsche appears concerned to establish that the philosopher's optimal conditions exclude, or at least have thus far excluded, marriage: "the philosopher loathe marriage... Marriage as obstacle and disaster on the path to the optimum" (GM III. 7). When analysing these passages in the *Genealogy* one could be forgiven for thinking that the ascetic philosopher has killed God, but not vanquished his shadow (GS 108). Nietzsche, however, is apparently unconcerned here that the philosopher replicates many of the ascetic priest's important choices, instead emphasising that the philosopher's choices are rooted in a spirit of affirmation, rather than the denial of the priest. Staten is surely right to question whether we can believe Nietzsche's claim that there is "no resentment" and "no vengefulness" in the philosopher's practices, particularly his denial of women:

Does Nietzsche believe this? Do we? Do we believe one can say to someone else "Die, cease to exist, it makes no difference to me; on the contrary, I can get along much better

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<sup>116</sup> Staten, p. 62-3, quoting GM 87.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-4.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

without you - even if you still exist, I will act as though you don't - do we believe one can say this and do so *without any ill will*, without there being a certain spite in the sentiment behind the utterance, a certain satisfaction as of triumph over the one who is dispensed with because unnecessary?<sup>120</sup>

The concern is that Nietzsche is trying to brute-force distinctions between the ascetic philosopher and the ascetic priest that do not actually amount to much at all. But the issue here is not just women: Staten's arguments open up all kinds of problems when we consider that, in this context, women represents the *non-satisfaction of all desire*: when the philosopher rejects: "a woman who always goes away, or always *might* go away," it represents his desire to "triumph over a world that can never, will never, satisfy the absolute demand of its desire."<sup>121</sup> Staten believes that he has collapsed the most important distinctions between the philosopher and the priest, and concludes that, for Nietzsche, "the aim of the most spiritual will to power is solitude."<sup>122</sup> The absence and impossibility of "perfectly consummated desire" leads the philosopher to embrace solitude, weaving it into a narrative of independence, thus ensuring his own "self-preservation" and ensuring "that the ring of the self can close upon itself."<sup>123</sup>

This conclusion jars with many of the arguments I have been making about the great man, and we should not be content with it. Staten is certainly right to suggest that Nietzsche appears far too keen to praise the ascetic philosopher. I have made several arguments thus far that suggest we should be criticising this figure as weak. I have argued that precisely the desire for absolute safety, for totality, for absolute Being, reflects weakness and an inability to deal with suffering. The great man, on the other hand, has sufficient strength to confront, and even to seek out, the most terrifying and questionable aspects of existence, and there seems to be no reason why sensuality is not, *or should not be*, one of these aspects. Furthermore, I have criticised the ascetic priest primarily on the grounds that he destroys and denies his drives because he lacks the strength to deploy them to his advantage, and the ascetic philosopher appears to be doing exactly the same thing. The great man, when sufficiently great, should be able to allow himself the 'full wealth of naturalness,' as we saw in Nietzsche's praise of Goethe. It seems obvious that the ascetic philosopher cannot be the great man. No matter what Nietzsche says about his cheerfulness, his affirmation of life, his desire to channel all of his energy into his philosophy, and to maintain himself and his independence against all others, his descriptions suggest too

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67-8.

much residual *resentment* and vengefulness against life and its most basic conditions, too much distrust of his own senses, and too much of a desire for safety, security, and comfort.

What explanation can we give of Nietzsche's praise of the ascetic philosopher in the *Genealogy*? The most obvious explanation is one that Staten considers, that Nietzsche's sympathy for the ascetic philosopher is affected by his similarity to him: "Here Nietzsche is at his coyest, speaking in terms that could apply precisely to him, that do apply precisely to him, yet from which he keeps a certain ironic distance. It is, after all, of Schopenhauer that he is speaking, and we know that Nietzsche is not Schopenhauer, that Nietzsche says yes where Schopenhauer says no. But we have seen how complicated are Nietzsche's yesses and nos."<sup>124</sup> This might well be true, but it is not really an argument we can take very far or do much with. There is a far more important reason why Nietzsche exaggerates the differences between the ascetic priest and philosopher, one strangely absent from Staten's text, and that is the *role* these passages from the *Genealogy* play in the text and Nietzsche's thought as a whole. Staten remarks several times in his discussion that the ascetic priest is a complex figure, who transcends both the noble/slave and strong/weak oppositions. But what he does not talk about is that Nietzsche wants to set up the ascetic philosopher as a link between the ascetic priest and the great man. We gain a lot from making this clear. To begin with, it helps us understand why Nietzsche is so keen to distinguish between the priest and the philosopher: the philosopher is the figure that shows that it is possible to redeem elements of asceticism and place them in the service of life, by using these elements to *affirm* his existence. As we have seen, he does not always succeed in achieving this, especially over the question of sensuality, and this leaves the distinction between choosing asceticism to affirm existence, and choosing it to deny existence, looking rather clumsy at times. If Staten chose to include Nietzsche's discussions on sensuality in his later texts, it would be clear that he generally adopts a strong position against anybody that devalues the instincts and the passions. He praises the "*Dionysus* of the Greeks" as representing "life whole and not denied or in part," singling out the sexual act as an example of this affirmation: "typical - that the sexual act arouses profundity, mystery, and reverence" (*WP* 1052/KSA 13:14[89]). He praises the law book of Manu for its *serious* treatment of sensuality, in contrast to the Christians: "All the things upon which Christianity vents its abysmal vulgarity, procreation for example, woman, marriage, are here treated seriously, with reverence, with love and trust" (*AC* 56). Tellingly, he even singles out the philosopher's nonsensuality as nonsensical: "We want to hold fast to our senses and to our faith in them - and think their consequences through to the end! The nonsensuality of philosophy hitherto as the greatest nonsensicality of man" (*WP* 1046/KSA 11:25[438]). We can

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

happily dismiss Nietzsche's claims in the *Genealogy* about philosophy, marriage and sensuality. The important part of the argument is that the ascetic philosopher is the *beginning* of a movement that collapses the opposition between affirmation and asceticism. The great man thus descends not from the noble's unreflective and cruel affirming instincts, but ultimately from the ascetic priest, by way of the ascetic philosopher. The ascetic practices of the priest create autonomy and interiority for the price of opposing all that is most fundamental in life; he savages his own instincts, distrusts his own senses, and opposes all naturalness, *but he endures*. Likewise, the ascetic philosopher is able to emerge *disguised* as a "religious man," believing in this "role"; *this is how his existence is made possible* (GM III, 10). However, this means he has failed to shed many of the priest's characteristics:

The particular remoteness of the philosophers – with its negation of the world, its hostility to life, its scepticism towards the senses, its freedom from sensuality – which has survived until very recently, and in the process almost gained currency as *the philosophers' attitude* as such – this is above all a consequence of the critical situation in which philosophy first emerged and managed to endure. (GM III, 10)

The ascetic philosopher begins the slow process of reforming all that is best about the ascetic priest - his independence, his autonomy, his self-mastery, power over life - but detaches these virtues from the *resentment* and vengefulness from which they arose. How does he do this? The key is in a passage that Staten quotes, although he considers it relatively unimportant. Let us look at one of the stated differences between the figures again: "the artist or philosopher brings forth a work, whereas the ascetic priest works only on his own being, he does not save his energy for the production of a work but uses it to shut down the springs out of which that energy flows."<sup>125</sup> Staten thinks that the important part of this passage for Nietzsche is that the philosopher channels his energy and creates a work, and he undermines its importance by suggesting that the work is not a "real" expenditure, it is merely another way for the philosopher to eternalise his self, to relate his energy back to himself: "The work that grows from within is only the reflection of the philosopher's own being, not a real expenditure of his being into the outside, into the world, into time, but a way of avoiding such expenditure, of addressing a postcard to oneself."<sup>126</sup> It creates a "false outside" by which he leads his energy back to himself, just as the ascetic priest does with "an object called "God."<sup>127</sup> *But the work or object itself is not the important part of the*

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

*passage*. The crucial development that the ascetic philosopher represents is *accumulating* energy rather than shutting ‘down the springs.’ The ascetic philosopher is the figure that begins to use ascetic practices to increase his abundance, rather than to destroy his drives and his passions. He is thus different in kind to the priest. Nietzsche ends this section of the *Genealogy* wondering whether it is yet time for a *new species* of philosopher to appear and replace the ascetic philosopher; this figure corresponds precisely to the great man as I have been sketching him: “Is there enough pride, daring, boldness, self-assurance, spiritual will, will to assume responsibility, *freedom of will* available today for ‘the philosopher’ to be from now on really - *possible* on earth?...” (GM III, 10). He returns to his analysis of the ascetic priest, and the previous passage remains the closest he comes to describing the great man in the *Genealogy*, but it is enough to prove that Nietzsche sees the ascetic philosopher as a necessary intermediate stage to the great man, and this explains the contradictions and inconsistencies around this figure. Nietzsche’s great man is born at the point where he freely chooses asceticism, in the form of severity towards his drives, out of a desire to increase *all* of their strength.

Authentic intoxication is a nuanced state that we can contrast with both the modern artist’s indiscriminate intoxication and the ascetic’s misguided masochism. We should not superficially conflate it with either of these two states, especially since the weaknesses of each extreme can cause a susceptible man to overcompensate by lurching towards the other. For instance, the ascetic gives self-control a bad name, because he butchers his drives not from a desire to strengthen himself, but because he is too weak for his desires: “The best things have been slandered because the weak or the immoderate swine have cast a bad light on them” (WP 870/KSA 11:25[348]). Since the inability to act is often disingenuously interpreted as self-control and power over one’s desires, moderation is often conflated with *mediocrity*. In other words, those mediocre in ability preach the value of moderation, attempting to reinterpret their actions as rooted in strength; it does not follow, however, that we must reject moderation, or that we should pursue intoxication at any price; rather, we must carefully separate genuine moderation from mediocrity, to rediscover the crucial part that both play in an aesthetic condition that involves taking “delight” in *measure*: “The natural delight of aesthetic natures in measure, the enjoyment of the beauty of measure, was overlooked or denied” (WP 870/KSA 11:25[348]). One finds authentic intoxication not in ‘losing oneself,’ but precisely in maintaining one’s character and the feeling of self against the threat of its dissolution. The highest conditions exemplify a form of self-control which, unlike that of the aesthetic, is rooted in strength and superior forms of intoxication: “those miraculous moments when a great power voluntarily halted before the boundless and immeasurable – when a superfluity of subtle delight in sudden



restrain and petrification, in standing firm and fixing oneself, was enjoyed on a ground still trembling” (*BGE* 224). Authentic joy does not involve immersing oneself in Becoming, nor feeling 'other' to the everyday self, but in the feeling of maintaining the self in conditions that apparently threaten its cohesion. Joy is a heightened feeling of power over oneself that is not produced by removing dangerous elements, but by testing oneself against them. This suggests a nuanced account of the relationship between Becoming and Being in relation to joy, and the need for an account of joy transcending the pleasure/pain distinction.

### *Overcoming Pleasure and Pain*

It is *not* the satisfaction of the will that causes pleasure (I want to fight this superficial theory - the absurd psychological counterfeiting of the nearest things-), but rather the will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way. The feeling of pleasure lies precisely in the dissatisfaction of the will, in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance. - “The happy man”: a herd ideal. (*WP* 696/*KSA* 13:11[75])

Nietzsche describes two types of pleasure: “that of falling asleep and that of victory” (*WP* 703/*KSA* 13:14[174]). These two types correspond to the degree of energy present: “The exhausted want rest, relaxation, peace, calm – the happiness of the nihilistic religions and philosophies; the rich and living want victory, opponents overcome, the overflow of the feeling of power across wider domains than hitherto” (*WP* 703/*KSA* 13:14[174]). Only the exhausted and impoverished oppose pain and pleasure. The overfull and abundant dissolve the dichotomy, recognising pain and pleasure to be “epiphenomena”; they are “attendant” and “secondary phenomena,” which anyone who possesses creative powers “will look down on with derision” (*WP* 579/ *KSA* 12:8[2] & *BGE* 225). Both are the prerequisites of experiencing authentic joy, because joy depends on the presence of *resistance*. Pain, conceived of as “unpleasurable stimuli,” is the precondition of joy, which is constituted by a rhythmic movement where a constant stream of “unpleasurable stimuli” or “little hindrances” are overcome (*WP* 697/*KSA* 13:11[76] & 699). This “game of resistance and victory” produces a feeling of “superabundant, excessive power”: this feeling is authentic joy (*WP* 699/*KSA* 13:14[173]).

Nietzsche's theory of authentic joy dissolves the problem of suffering because the presence of suffering does not constitute an objection at all. Since joy depends on this rhythmic movement, it is found in a constant Becoming, or overcoming, and not in the will's *satisfaction* (a “superficial theory”) (*WP* 696/*KSA* 13:11[75]). Joy is found not in pain's absence, but in: “The

will's constant thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way" (WP 696/KSA 13:11[75]). The process of becoming master requires constantly feeling resistance; *dissatisfaction* is therefore the "the great stimulus to life"; it is therefore undesirable to aim to eliminate suffering or displeasure, since this makes it impossible to experience authentic joy (WP 697/KSA 13:11[76]). Consequently, interpreting the relationship between pleasure and pain as a problem to be *solved* reflects: "something weary and sick in metaphysicians and religious people," and is the "contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats" (WP 579/KSA 12:8[2] & TI IX, 38). This "morbid sensitivity and susceptibility to pain" is "*unmanliness*" which, through religion and philosophy, "would like to deck itself out as something higher" (BGE 293).

Nietzsche describes the preoccupation with eliminating pain, with soothing and anaesthetising, as a "cult of suffering," and the latest manifestation of this "bad taste" is "pity" (BGE 293). The irony is that the type of man who employs these strategies is the type that suffers the most from suffering; since he goes to any length to deny his deficiencies, and projects the blame for his suffering onto external or uncontrollable forces, he fails to cultivate strength of Will, and is thereby unable to partake in the feeling of growth that overcoming resistance produces, and experience the harmonising effect that abundant energy has on drives and perception. Not only is it inadvisable to seek to avoid all suffering, but these assertions suggest a new ethos, whereby we should actively seek out certain forms of suffering (unpleasant stimuli) because they provide the opportunity for venting strength. Zarathustra tells himself a narrative whereby he constantly defers happiness, understood as a resting state and repose, in favour of unhappiness, in the form of tests of strength and of will; "I must complete *myself*; therefore I now avoid my happiness and offer myself to all unhappiness - for *my* ultimate testing and knowledge" (Z, III, 3). This rhetorical sleight of hand is a means to induce himself to overcome resistance constantly, and thus to achieve authentic happiness. For it is counterproductive to *seek* a kind of happiness that depends on constantly overcoming unpleasant stimuli. Indeed, it becomes increasingly obviously throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that the final moment of bliss that Zarathustra claims to await is not a restful state that he will enjoy, but actually death, which will provide the final seal to his perfection.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, he strives to posit greater and greater challenges in the pursuit of the feeling of *triumph*: "When I have overcome that challenge, then I want to overcome one still greater; and a *triumph* shall be the seal of my completion!" (Z, III, 3). He suspiciously eyes the arrival of apparent bliss as a "treacherous beauty" seeking to lull him into repose. A key aspect of producing a coherent account of the great man is determining

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<sup>128</sup> I will discuss this idea, such as it is, when I discuss the eternal return.

under what conditions he should seek out suffering, and under what conditions he should guard against it and minimise its presence.

It has been a constant theme that rejecting Becoming is rooted in associating it with suffering, and that this rejection only serves to multiply and intensify suffering. My focus has been on the way that this rejection demonstrates an inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for suffering, and that this only serves to produce inappropriate or relevant responses to the problem of suffering. I have therefore criticised denying Becoming, because it often reflects denying the *necessity* of changing habits and attitude; the sufferer substitutes spiritual and psychological illusions for meaningful change. Having established a theory of authentic joy as the overcoming of resistance we can deepen our understanding of how the great man relates to Becoming. The feeling of growth requires waves of unpleasant stimulus to overcome, because this is how the self feels itself to be master. Elements of Becoming are perfect examples of this kind of stimulus, because assimilating change, mutation, and flux requires that the spirit *exerts itself* to master new conditions. Just as fleeing elements of Becoming is interpreted as demonstrating a lack of strength, and a weak will, lack of energy and plastic power, the great man seeks out these elements precisely because they offer an opportunity to test his will and to expend his energy against opposition; this produces the feeling of growth and the abundance that he desires.

Abundant energy is plastic power, “creative and rejuvenating power,” which conditions both one’s defensive and offensive capabilities (*NCW* ‘We Antipodes’). In both cases its presence ensures that the great man can assimilate and overcome unpleasant stimulus, ensuring that time does not intensify his suffering. Energy’s presence is the prerequisite for affirming the most contingent aspects of existence: “A creature overloaded and *playing* with force would call precisely the affects, irrationality, and change good in a eudaemonistic sense, together with their consequences: danger, contrast, perishing, etc” (*WP* 576/KSA 13:18[16]). Nietzsche therefore establishes a strict relationship between strength of will and the ability to confront elements of Becoming without needing to nullify them, deny them, or rationalise them: “It is a sign of one’s *feeling of power and well-being* how far one can acknowledge the terrifying and questionable character of things; and *whether* one needs some sort of “solution” at the end” (*WP* 852/KSA 12:10[168]).

Staten argues that Zarathustra’s project of affirmation is the attempt to “experience becoming not as a violation of the self but as its essential act.”<sup>129</sup> It is the experience of confronting and overcoming the experience of the “fearsome and questionable” that is captured

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<sup>129</sup> Staten, p. 142.

by the genuine “tragic artist,” whose art communicates his “fearlessness” in the face of these aspects of existence, and thus reflects the highest form of joy, which *seeks out suffering*:

Bravery and composure is in the fact of a powerful enemy, great hardship, a problem that arouses aversion - it is this *victorious* condition which the tragic artist singles out, which he glorifies. In the face of tragedy the warlike in our soul celebrates its Saturnalias; whoever is accustomed to suffering, whoever seeks out suffering, the *heroic* man extols his existence by means of tragedy - for him alone does the tragic poet pour this draught of sweetest cruelty. (*TIIX*, 24)

It is thus clear the extent to which the highest form of intoxication, which is also the experience that the highest art captures, links intrinsically with a certain approach to suffering, which affirms it because of the resistance it provides.

Experiencing displeasure deepens the capacity for joy; when those who suffer the most attempt to deny Becoming, and instead prioritise “mildness, peacefulness and goodness,” they decrease their capacity for joy by destroying their capacity to overcome resistance (*GS* 370). Nietzsche develops this theme as early as *The Gay Science*, where he interprets the pursuit of “painlessness” as a barrier to more “subtle pleasures and joy,” and establishes a link between pain and growth: “If you decide for the former (painlessness) and desire to diminish and lower the level of human pain, you also have to diminish and lower the level of their *capacity for joy*” (*GS* 12). At this stage he still conceives of displeasure negatively, as the “price” for “growth” (*GS* 12). He later drops this negative connotation entirely, as he further breaks down the distinction between pleasure and pain. This link will again be paramount when the issue of the appropriate response and attitude towards *sickness* arises. Rather than *diminish* suffering, the great man *disciplines* it, and it is this disciplining of suffering that has “created every elevation of man hitherto” (*BGE* 225). When the great man adopts the proper attitude towards suffering, when he *exploits* his suffering, this gives him the opportunity to cultivate strength, “inventiveness,” “bravery,” “cunning,” and, above all, “greatness” (*BGE* 225). Suffering creates interiority, but to take this advantage from it, one must cultivate the ability to know when it is desirable and undesirable.

### *A Theory of Authentic Joy*

Nietzsche creates a series of terms to express the highest experiences, but these are all aspects of one theory of authentic joy. His writings on the strong Will, on authentic intoxication, and on

energy expenditure all come together to form a criterion to assess values. I have discussed several forms of inauthentic intoxication, which tend to overlap in a rather complex manner. For example, the idea of the weak will stands in an ambiguous relationship with intoxication: the hysteric is constantly induced to intoxication, and while the ascetic tends to be disciplined, inert, and incapable of exhilaration, he can, paradoxically, end up so exhausted that he opens himself up to the nervous intoxication of the hysteric – though he calls it ‘mysticism.’ The modern artist complicates the relationship further, because in some cases he possesses an abundance of energy, but he deliberately expends this, pursuing extreme experiences, and once again, routinely exhausting himself. Inauthentic intoxication can thus refer to both the passive theatre experience of the tired businessman, the frenzy of the hysteric, or the drunken revelry of the artist. What links all of these states though, and truly defines inauthentic intoxication, is that the experiences of being intoxicated are like those Nietzsche describes in *The Birth of Tragedy*: they involve losing oneself, losing the feeling of self, a drunkenness, an otherness to the everyday self, a desire to obliterate reality, a will to forget oneself, to close oneself off from reality, and so on. In contrast, those that possess a strong Will cultivate the ability to produce energy and direct it so as to achieve a feeling of abundance. Thus their intoxication is one that arises from a feeling of increasing energy, a feeling of growth and power. Everything Nietzsche praises converge on this state: the strong Will is indistinguishable from abundant energy, and this is in turn synonymous with authentic intoxication, authentic beauty, authentic art, and, finally, authentic joy. States of energy condition perception to a high degree, and the defining characteristic of the values Nietzsche praises is that they are rooted in abundance, an overflowing plenitude of energy. This harmonises and coordinates drives, enhances perception and enriches the world. Its highest state is found in the experience of the self that feels itself to be perfect and transforms the world into a mirror of this perfection: “from a powerful soul to which the high body belongs, the beautiful, triumphant, invigorating body, around which every manner of thing becomes mirror” (Z, III, 2). This is not being passively immersed in the world, losing oneself, plunging into nothingness, or accessing a true world or reality; it is actively transforming the world according to one's will. As such, it is creating beauty, not uncovering it.

Authentic intoxication and joy are inaccessible to those who are exhausted. Thus, Nietzsche ultimately settles on the criterion of ‘want’ versus ‘abundance’ as the means to assess values. Although he uses a series of terms that express both the act of creating oneself as the great man, and the states which reflect his particular type of abundance, the decisive factor remains the presence of energy. Once he draws this link between increasing energy and increasing joy and affirming the world, then we can see why Nietzsche's concrete agenda for the

self is cultivating energy. Whilst it is clear to see that he consistently emphasises exhaustion when he *criticises* past and present values, Nietzsche's 'positive' writings on determining values fail to converge in an obvious way on the issue of abundance. This is, however, as much to do with the unsystematic way that he presents this 'positive' philosophy, than because he prioritises any other value or criterion. For example, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* style proves rather prohibitive in making strong or definitive claims about exactly how self-creation should take place, and on what grounds. I have suggested here that the idea of 'abundance' is central to grounding a reassessment of values, and by extension the process of self-creation. This occurs in two ways: we evaluate values first according to whether they reflect abundance, and second, whether they produce abundance. This yields a new criterion for evaluating values: whether they arise from: want or abundance; weak or strong will; desire to weaken or strengthen the feeling of self. Revaluating values is henceforth underpinned by whether a value represents, on the one side: exhaustion, want, and lack; or, on the other: abundance, superfluity, and excess; *a philosophy of energy*: "Regarding all æsthetic values, I now avail myself of this main distinction: I ask in every instance, "is it hunger or superabundance that has here become creative?" (GS 370). Greatness is rendered possible by creating oneself as the 'monster of energy.' With this determined, we have a new task: to assemble the set of narratives of the self that best actualise this idea.

## *Part II*

### *Creating Greatness*

*How do men attain great strength and a great task? All the virtues and efficiencies of body and soul are acquired laboriously and little by little, through much industry, self-constraint, limitation, through much obstinate, faithful repetition of the same labours, the same renunciations. (WP 995/KSA 11:26[409])*

# I

## *The Will to Self-Determination*

Interpreting oneself through a set of narratives means imposing accounts of simple cause and effect onto the complex cause and effect of the body. I have already criticised many such ideas of simple cause and effect while establishing criteria for assessing narratives of self-understanding. With this established, we can turn to the main narratives that Nietzsche constructs. The overarching aim of these narratives is cultivating a superabundance of energy, and thus creating oneself as a ‘monster of energy.’

The aim of these narratives is, then, predominantly physiological. It is here, in the second part, that I will fuse these ideas with narratives of the mind. For the process of creating oneself is about the *attitude* one takes towards oneself; believing oneself to be certain things, to possess certain attributes and capabilities, so as to achieve certain effects. Nietzsche emphasises not the necessity of understanding oneself in any one particular way, but the types of narrative of self-understanding that are most conducive to avoiding the problems I have been detailing and instead creating oneself as the monster of energy. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is pivotal in this project, because in it Nietzsche attempts to embody an account of greatness and how it relates to self-understanding. Zarathustra’s account of the narratives that structure his inner life reflect his evolving solution to his self-diagnosed problems. This is the key to the idea of self-creation: constructing a set of narratives about one’s inner life (and existence generally), to coordinate and shape the interaction of one’s drives and passions. Self-creation’s overarching goal is achieving the strong Will, the idea in which all of Nietzsche’s most prized narratives coincide: abundant energy, a feeling of growth and power, assuming responsibility, and an active and spontaneous joy corresponding to a feeling of aesthetic intoxication.

There are three main types of narratives of self-interpretation that run throughout Nietzsche’s work, all of which combine to form an overarching narrative, that of the *strong Will*. While they may be emphasised in varying quantities in different individuals, they all contribute valuably towards developing the great man. First, there is a strong emphasis on the importance



of self-determination; that one must *will* rather than *be willed*. This involves cultivating a resistance to stimulus to develop character. Second, a narrative of freedom runs throughout Nietzsche's work, which focuses on the importance of thinking of oneself as commanding oneself, and extends the common idea of being responsible for one's action to encompass all that one is and that one becomes. The great man learns to think of himself as indistinguishable from his entire will, conceived of not as a faculty, but as the totality of all that he is. Third, in Nietzsche's most obscure narratives, he proposes cultivating a new relationship whereby one can redeem the events of the past. Finally, I test Nietzsche's criterion for evaluating values against the idea of the eternal return, arguing that it has a detrimental effect on the process of becoming the great man.

When we create ourselves we should be aiming to achieve the experience of authentic joy - the *feeling* of abundance, and of overcoming resistance. Therefore, when we evaluate different narratives for thinking about ourselves it should be according to whether or not they contribute towards this. It has been coming increasingly clear that Nietzsche encapsulates the art of achieving authentic joy in the idea of a *strong Will*. Nietzsche's apparent ambiguity towards the concept of willing itself might make it appear complicated to pin down what he means by the strong Will. However, as Reginster argues, "he only repudiates certain conceptions, such as the conception of the will as an efficient (and uncaused) cause in its own right."<sup>130</sup> Understanding the difference between the idea of will as a faculty and Nietzsche's idea of the Will is therefore central to understanding the authentic self. The Will is an overarching narrative that expresses the sum of all of the narratives of the self that Nietzsche desires most. It is the central narrative that Zarathustra uses to interpret himself: "Yes, there is something invulnerable, unbearable in me, something that explodes boulders: it is called *my will*. Silently and unchanged it strides throughout the years" (Z, II, 11). It is an idiosyncratic account of willing, which Nietzsche sets up in such a way that authentic joy is the product of the strong Will expressing itself.

In order to understand properly what is at stake in this idea of the strong Will, I will discuss the most important narratives, the indispensable elements that form it. Since it is the narrative that expresses the highest Nietzschean state, my development of a criterion to assess values has set up several expectations of what it should look like. We know that it is imperative that thinking of oneself as cultivating a strong Will must encourage one to take responsibility for one's suffering, to correct all the errors that come from failing to do this. To do so it must involve correcting all the unhelpful errors which the will to faculty tends to produce; hating Becoming, elevating reason to the point of denying the senses, ignoring physiology, *etc.* We know

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<sup>130</sup> Bernard Reginster, *Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, Harvard University Press, London 2006, p. 56.

that it will involve structuring one's drives in such a way that incorporates elements of asceticism, but in the service of producing an abundance of energy, not of closing off its sources. Possessing a strong Will means possessing an abundance of energy, and this abundance is nothing other than the strong Will expressing itself. We know that the strong Will must be something that we *give* to ourselves, rather than something already given. We know that it will have to be an account of willing that produces a feeling of growth and mastery. And, finally, we know that it must be creative, since I have been rejecting the idea of creation as losing the self, as closeness to Becoming, and emphasising an account which only arises once we have achieved a strong Will.

This, then, is a basic sketch of Nietzsche's idea of the strong Will, or at least some of the elements that comprise it. These elements are all indispensable in some form, because they are key components of the way in which I have set up the idea of authentic joy. We still need to accomplish several things, however. We must understand the specific strategies and narratives that Nietzsche recommends to the great man to give himself a strong Will. We must also get a sense of what it means to think about oneself as possessing a strong Will. We already understand *why* we must create a strong Will, and have some idea of what it involves, but we do not yet have a sense of what it is to imagine oneself as, firstly, creating and secondly, possessing a strong Will. This normative element is crucial in making sense of Nietzsche's project, and in actually achieving the feeling of authentic joy that underscores his entire project. Since Nietzsche does intend his work to act as a stimulus to great men, it is not sufficient to imagine what they might look like, but imperative also to understand how they come to be what they are. In truth, the process is more important than trying to specify the result in advance, since we have already seen Nehamas note that the great man is, by definition, unique, since he creates himself.

### *Solitude*

As early as *Human all Too Human* Nietzsche offers an account of the stages through which the great man develops from herd animal to self-legislating and sovereign being. This account corresponds accurately to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* structure, and Nietzsche does not meaningfully contradict this account. The first stage in the process is the free spirit's "great separation" from "obligations": a "rebellious, despotic, volcanically jolting desire to roam abroad, to become alienated, cool, sober, icy" (*HH* 3). On the surface this stage involves that he rejects the herd and retreat into solitude:

To wait and to prepare oneself; to await the emergence of new sources; to prepare oneself in solitude for strange faces and voices; to wash one's soul ever cleaner from the marketplace, dust and noise of this age; to *overcome* everything Christian through something supra-Christian, and not merely to put it aside... to reconquer southern healthy and hidden powerfulness of soul... (*WP* 1051/ *KSA* 11:41[6])

Nietzsche places significant emphasis on this initial idea to detach and distance oneself. Zarathustra advises would-be creators to flee the “poisonous flies” and “invisible revenge” into solitude, since all “greatness takes place... Away from the market place” (*Z*, I, 12). He establishes the flight into solitude as the initial prerequisite for achieving authentic joy: “Truly, into the highest regions I had to fly in order to rediscover the wellspring of joy! Oh I found it, my brothers! Here in the highest regions the wellspring of joy gushes for me! And there is a life from which no rabble drinks!” (*Z*, II, 6). In Zarathustra's call for solitude there is a clear element of disgust at the vulgar activity of the many-too-many; one of the crucial aspects of his self-overcoming is overcoming his disgust at the present and present-day man. Zarathustra warns “the fool” against staying in one place and becoming increasingly resentful, advising instead that he flee into solitude:

At this point, however, Zarathustra interrupted the foaming fool and clapped his hand over the fool's mouth.

“Stop at last!” cried Zarathustra. “Your speech and your ways have nauseated me for a long time already!

Why have you lived so long near the swamp, that you yourself had to turn into a frog and a toad?

Doesn't tainted and frothy, decrepit swamp blood flow in your own veins now, since you have learned to croak and lambast this way?

Why didn't you go into the woods? Or plow the earth? Isn't the sea full of green islands?

I despise your despising; and if you warned me - why didn't you warn yourself? (*Z*, III, 7)

More is at work here, however, than the many-too-many simply repulsing one. Physical solitude is only one aspect of the desire for freedom, and only a superficial kind. Zarathustra does flee into absolute solitude, but finds this condition clearly insufficient, and as he creates himself it becomes obvious that this flight was necessary because of his own inabilities, especially his inability to maintain his character whilst among the populous (*Z*, II, 21). Initial solitude is one aspect of a broader movement away from the herd's mechanical routines and habits, and towards

determining oneself. It is the Will's desire to grow and expand, and this first takes the form of mastering oneself. The Will's desire for freedom is a desire to determine itself, to will rather than be willed. Zarathustra declares that "servility" before "human beings and stupid human opinions is on a parallel with being servile to "gods and god's kinds," and proclaims a "blessed selfishness" that rejects both of these equally (Z, III, 10). He sharply distinguishes between those who command themselves and those that obey, and emphasises that few learn to fulfil this capacity to command: "Whoever cannot command himself should obey. And though many a person *can* command himself, much is still missing before he also obeys himself!" (Z, III, 12). Being willed not only includes being subject to the will of others, but also subordinating oneself to impersonal forces and value systems. It is in this rejection of external *wills* that we find the meaning of Nietzsche's phrase 'the *innocence* of becoming,' so often misused (TI VI, 8).<sup>131</sup> We make Becoming innocent again when we refuse to project our responsibility outside of ourselves, either into nature or God; man "is not the result of a special design, a will, a purpose... it is absurd to want to *hand over* his nature to some purpose or another (TI VI, 8). While the weak believe that crude anthropomorphisms can play a consolatory role, Nietzsche suggests that, for the strong, it is a relief to destroy these representations, and reclaim responsibility for themselves: "One should not invent unreal persons, e.g., one should not say "nature is cruel." Precisely this insight that no such central responsible being exists is a relief!" (WP 403/KSA 12:5[62]). Once one reclaims one's power "over nature," "one can employ this power in the further free development of oneself," "for self-elevation and strengthening" (WP 403/KSA 12:5[62]). Believing that there is meaning inherent in things, and that a will runs through them, reflects an inability to put one's will *into things*: "He who does not know how to put his will into things at least puts a *meaning* into them: that is, he believes there is a will in them already (principle of belief)" (TI I, 18). Thus we restore the innocence of Becoming by cultivating our own Will, not projecting will into nature: "strong and domineering natures enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own" (GS 290). The will's desire to determine itself is the essential attribute of greatness: "Every superior human being will instinctively aspire after a secret citadel where he is *set free* from the crowd, the many, the majority" (BGE 26). It is also potentially a disease, because it opens man up to the possibility of destruction. Independence is the "privilege of the strong," and he who aspires to self-determination "ventures into a labyrinth, he multiplies by a thousand the dangers which life as such already brings with it" (BGE 29). Moreover, one must continually "test oneself to see

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<sup>131</sup> For example, we have already seen McIntyre use this phrase prominently in his project to suggest that we dissolve our individuality back into an inherently innocent and creative Becoming.

whether one is destined for independence and command,” even though these tests, which must be judged by one’s own standards, are “perhaps the most dangerous game one could play” (*BGE* 41). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in particular is full of warnings about the ways that attempting to live according to one’s own values and standards multiplies the dangers that one is exposed to:

Can you give yourself your own evil and good and hang your will above yourself like a law? Can you be the own judge and the avenger of your own law?

It is terrible to be alone with the judge and avenger of one's own law. Thus does a star get thrown out into desolate space and into the icy breath of solitary being. (*Z*, I, 17)

While the initial retreat into solitude certainly constitutes such a “test,” during a prolonged solitude it is relatively simple for the Will to determine itself, since it has little to compete with for mastery; thus Emerson suggests that just as “it is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own.”<sup>132</sup> A better test for the great man is whether he can maintain the “independence of solitude” in “the midst of the crowd.”<sup>133</sup> Re-joining the many-too-many is thus as dangerous for the great man as his initial flight into solitude, but these tests are crucial for him to develop into a sovereign individual. This is evident in Zarathustra’s development, where he always ultimately experiences solitude as insufficient. He initially experiences solitude as rejuvenating, but also as creating a tension and desire to bestow. He couches this feeling in various language - for example: sometimes he speaks of this tension as love that desires to overflow: “My impatient love floods over in torrents, downward, towards sunrise and sunset. From silent mountains and thunderheads of pain my soul roars into the valleys... And may my torrent of love plunge into impasses! How could a torrent not finally make its way to the sea!”; and sometimes as wisdom that demands to be imparted: “My wild wisdom wound up pregnant on lonely mountains; on naked stones she bore her young, her youngest” (*Z*, II, 1). In these cases, however, the root of the issue appears to be the presence of *abundant* energy demanding release. In solitude Zarathustra is not constantly forced to expend defensive energy, and he experiences accumulating energy as “over-fullness” that demands release (*Z*, III, 14). His problem at this point is that he has little to test his strength against, little to overcome, and thus yearns for “enemies” to exert himself against:

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<sup>132</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’, *Essays, First and Second Series*, Oxford University Press, London, 1901, p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

How I love everyone now, with whom I may simply speak! Even my enemies belong to my bliss..

The spear I hurl against my enemies! How I thank my enemies that at last I may hurl it!  
Too great was the tension of my cloud: between lightning peals of laughter I shall throw hail showers into the depth. (Z, II, 1)

When Nietzsche chronicles the violent outburst towards freedom, he is concerned that this desire for freedom often requires some form of external tyranny. Again he returns to the theme that even the “superior artists” are “perishing from a lack of discipline”; here adding that: “They are no longer tyrannized over from without by a church’s tables of absolute values or those of a court; thus they also no longer learn to develop their “inner tyrants,” their will” (WP 464/KSA 11:37[14]). However, even if the resoluteness that self-determining requires has often been provoked by tyranny from without, although there is no reason to think that this necessarily has to be the case. Zarathustra certainly does not seem to suffer any tyranny from externally imposed ‘absolute values,’ and his struggle is with himself, to take his will to self-determination to its conclusion. Whatever provokes a man’s “will to self-determination,” the important thing is that pursuing this path is the only way he can authentically oppose himself to the mechanical life of the herd; his initial outburst of strength is, therefore, the “will to *free* will” (HH 3).

### *Constructing Character or How not to React*

*Whether out of stored-up energy, “spontaneously,” or merely stimulated reactively, and provoked? (WP 1009/KSA 12:10[145])*

Solitude is only one manifestation of the Will’s desire to determine itself and to self-legislate. It is one aspect of a wider strategy aimed at becoming a sovereign man: *constructing character*. I have already argued that Nietzsche is ambiguous towards assimilating new experience, because the ability to assimilate characterises the strong Will, but assimilating experience also tends to arrest Becoming, in the sense that it reduces the new to the old, the different to the similar, *etc.* The question of developing character delves further into the nature of assimilating, and in doing so it offers a fresh perspective on the issue of when assimilating experience becomes a *problem*.

Hitherto I have made two points about the great man’s activity that appear to run in contradictory directions. The first point is that the greater his spirit’s ‘digestive’ power, the more experience he can assimilate. His digestive power corresponds to the degree of plastic, defensive, recuperative power that he possesses, and this relates closely to an abundance of energy. The

more energy a man possesses, the stronger his 'stomach'; this means that he can assimilate greater quantities of experience without provoking harmful and debilitating suffering in himself. The great man's strength to assimilate culminates in his ability to assimilate the 'terrifying' and 'questionable' aspects of existence, and so he does not need to deny their existence or validity, or blame them as causes of suffering. He actively seeks out elements of Becoming because they are suitable in providing *resistance*, interpreting these as opportunities for overcoming, and for producing a feeling of growth.

There is, however, a second point that appears to conflict with this idea of assimilating: I have established that it is crucial that the great man cultivates the ability to resist new stimulus. It is his ability *not* to react involuntarily that both signals his character and allows him to strengthen it (and by extension his strong Will and energy). The question of character is one of reacting or not reacting. Nietzsche diagnoses the modern artist as similar to the hysteric, in that he lacks the ability not to react to stimulus; his heightened artistic state produces sensitivity to stimulus that is instrumental in losing his character. Just as this 'artistic' state (diagnosed as an inauthentic state) represents losing the feeling of self, cultivating character is akin to enhancing the feeling of self. To be forced to react is to be subject to the whim of external forces; it is to lose oneself constantly, lose the feeling of self, and dissolve into Becoming. When this happens to a man involuntarily it negates his whole project of self-mastery, or self-determination, and thus he loses the possibility of authentic joy, which depends on him feeling his Will to be master.

These two capacities seem to contradict one another. The first implies that cultivating abundant energy and a strong Will produces the capacity to assimilate greater quantities of new experience, while the second suggests that possessing energy and a strong Will hinges precisely on cultivating the ability to resist stimulus. We can collapse this paradox by emphasising two things. Firstly, it is important to note that both cases, assimilating and resisting, should not be *necessary* relations with experience, but capacities that one can exercise. Possessing the capacity to assimilate does not mean that it is always desirable to exercise it. Thus striating and bending the indeterminate (Becoming) into the determined (Being), which involves relating new experience back to oneself, is neither a necessarily positive or negative movement, but depends upon the quality of the one who filters experience and who uses it to reconstruct himself. Secondly, Nietzsche distinguishes - albeit not always clearly - between *digesting* experience and *reacting* to it. The latter is always bad, displaying a lack of character. Digesting, on the other, is related to strength; it is the ability to assimilate experience by forcing it to conform to oneself. One masters the experience, and chooses the extent to which it is allowed to affect one. Nietzsche suggests that modern man tends to lack this ability to digest experience, and therefore he merely reacts. A

note from *The Will to Power* discusses this power to digest as relating strongly to the capacity to be able to act spontaneously.

Sensibility immensely more irritable (-dressed up moralistically: the increase in *pity*); the abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever: cosmopolitan in foods, literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even landscapes. The tempo of this influx *prestissimo*; the impression erase each other; one instinctively resists in anything, taking anything deeply, to “digest” anything; a weakening of the power to digest results from this. A kind of adaptation to this flood of impressions takes place: men unlearn spontaneous action, they merely react to stimuli from outside. They spend their strength partly in assimilating things, partly in defense, partly in opposition. *Profound weakening of spontaneity.* (WP 71/KSA 12:10[18])

Nietzsche sketches an image of a superficial multitude, who unlearn the ability to digest *deeply*, and therefore merely mirror the multiple and varied impressions that they receive. Since they mix little of themselves with these impressions, there is a mass conformity of *reactivity*. The multitude merely conforms to what they experience, whereas assimilating experience means making it conform to oneself. Nietzsche makes it clear elsewhere that it is the wealth of disparate impressions that modern man receives that make him so interesting, but it is equally clear that he worries that this ‘wealth’ often turns him into a mere conduit of experience. In contrast to this, the great man cultivates the ability not to react involuntarily to stimulus: “A strong nature manifests itself by waiting and postponing any reaction: it is as much characterised by a certain *adiaphoria* as weakness by an involuntary countermovement and the suddenness and inevitability of “action”” (WP 45/KSA 13:14[102]). It is vital that he is able to adopt a defensive attitude towards existence when he judges that not to do so would be harmful towards his character, goals, and desires. Judging in this way is the art of *taste* - the art of divining what is good for oneself. In particular, it is an intuition he carefully cultivates to be able to avoid situations that would force him to *react*. There is something of a paradox here: to be able not to react we must possess character, and yet we cultivate character precisely by refusing to let ourselves react. Knowing what is good for oneself relates closely to energy expenditure. Taste is “an instinct for *self-defence*” that accomplishes several things (EH II, 8). To be forced to react, to negate, to despise, is to expend energy constantly, and as such this *pettiness* puts one at the risk of becoming exhausted. As I have established, exhaustion links closely with losing oneself and with being unable to determine oneself.



Exhaustion increases susceptibility to suffering, and this increases the likelihood that the sufferer will interpret all resistance as unpleasant. The sufferer finds temporary release in not resisting anything, reaching a state where, temporarily, he experiences no displeasure, but is also incapable of “all feelings for limitation and distancing,” and with it, cuts himself off from all feelings of growth and power:

*Instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all enmity, all feeling for limitation and distancing: consequence of an extreme capacity for suffering and irritation which already feels all resisting, all need for resistance, as an unbearable displeasure (that is to say as harmful, as deprecated by the instinct of self-preservation) and knows blessedness (pleasure) only in no longer resisting anyone or anything, neither the evil nor the evil-doer - love as the sole, as the last possibility of life... (AC 30)*

This passage links up the desire for universal love with the desire to immerse oneself in Becoming, because both involve a feeling of pleasure that comes from no longer resisting anything. This type of pleasure is low and self-defeating because when a man no longer resists, he also gives up the possibility of creating character and the strong Will. He replaces the subtle pleasure he could discover in commanding himself, and the joy in overcoming resistance, with blessedness, love, and a feeling of ‘oneness.’ More than simply knowing what might exhaust one, it is an art of selecting: of filtering one’s experience to select that most relevant to one’s overall goals and aims: “He grows stronger through the accidents that threaten to destroy him; he instinctively gathers from all that he sees, hears, experiences, what advances his main concern – he follows a principle of selection – he allows much to fall through,” and: “He reacts with the slowness bred by a long caution and a deliberate pride - he tests a stimulus for its origin and its intention, he does not submit” (*WP* 1003/*KSA* 13:15[39]). This is a multifaceted strategy of self-defence; the great man sometimes avoids certain situations and places entirely, while at other times he applies a principle of selection over the various aspects of what he allows to approach him. His expedients are united by the fact that they are strategies he designs to conserve his energy, and protect his self’s cohesiveness. This is a careful process of cultivating character; as his Will becomes stronger, as he learns to legislate to himself, character hardens, abundance increases, and he is less susceptible to external forces overwhelming him; “Supreme rule of conduct: even when alone one must not ‘let oneself go.’ - Good things are costly beyond measure” (*TI*112).

*The Sickness unto Life*

*Health and sickness: one should be careful! The standard remains the efflorescence of the body, the agility, courage, and cheerfulness of the spirit – but also, of course, how much of the sickly it can take and overcome – how much it can make healthy. That of which more delicate men would perish belongs to the stimulant of great health. (WP 1013/KSA 12:2[97])*

*The great health - that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up.” (GS 382)*

Nietzsche frequently comments on the relation between sickness and health, and he does not merely describe the relation, but prescribes one: we need a "new health, stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious, and gayer than any previous health" (GS 382). The problem of sickness relates closely to the problem of exhaustion, and Nietzsche often discusses them interchangeably. The reason that his writings on sickness are so useful is that, while I have been addressing long-term strategies to prevent oneself becoming exhausted, in these sections Nietzsche deals with how one should deal with suffering when it does appear. This is important because exhaustion is not just an extreme state that we can avoid entirely; fluctuations in energy expenditure mean that at least some degree of exhaustion is likely, if not inevitable.

Nietzsche states that the exhausted man's priority should be choosing the "right means" to make himself healthy: "In combating my sick conditions I always instinctively chose the *right* means: while the *decadent* as such always chooses the means most harmful to him... A being who is typically morbid cannot become healthy, still less can he make himself healthy" (EHI, 2). The goal of becoming healthy encompasses two priorities: firstly, to ensure that exhaustion is not prolonged any more than it need be; secondly, to make sure that the exhausted state does not manifest itself in values and/or important actions or decisions. The key to both priorities is ensuring that one does not submit to *ressentiment*, and, at the last resort, that *ressentiment* is not allowed to become creative. The lack of defensive energy available in conditions of sickness and exhaustion means that the "curative instinct" becomes weak; becoming healthy again becomes a question of whether this instinct can endure, or whether it submits to *ressentiment*. Solutions to exhaustion are not as clear-cut as simply being aware of the danger of *resentment* and refusing it; because of the effect that physiological states have on the way that we think, there are limitations on our ability to gauge the quality of our thoughts at any given moment. There is no pure vantage point from which to judge the quality of thoughts; thoughts produced in conditions of weakness are not *felt* to be weak thoughts, but instead appear "reasonable" (GS 317). Nietzsche

develops this idea by distinguishing between *ethos* and *pathos*: “*Looking back* – the true *pathos* of every period of our life rarely becomes clear to us as long as we live in this period; then we always assume that it is the only state possible and reasonable to us... an *ethos* and not a *pathos*” (GS 317). Feelings and thoughts that seem to us *at the time* to be permanent or enduring, rooted in our character and disposition (*ethos*), later appear to be fleeting and even incomprehensible experiences (merely *pathos*). This process never ceases, since there is no fixed or unchanging standpoint from which to judge the ‘reasonableness’ of one’s own thoughts. The worst attitude that we can take in conditions of exhaustion and suffering is to submit to the *resentment* of conditions. As I have established, we maintain strength by conserving energy, and this involves preventing ourselves from expending energy superfluously. The problem of superfluous expenditure becomes more acute in the exhausted individual: “Vexation, morbid susceptibility, incapacity for revenge, the desire, the thirst for revenge, poison-brewing in any sense – for one who is exhausted this is certainly the most disadvantageous kind of reaction: it causes a rapid expenditure of nervous energy, a morbid accretion of excretions” (EH I, 6). The convalescent’s paramount concern should be restoring energy, and all petty expenditure hinders this. Nietzsche suggests a strategy he terms “*Russian Fatalism*,” which logically concludes the *refusal to react* that I have been highlighting: “That fatalism without rebellion with which a Russian soldier for whom the campaign has become too much at last lies down in the snow. No longer to take anything at all, to receive anything, to take anything *into* oneself – no longer to react at all” (EH I, 6). The man who adopts this attitude understands that every time he reacts, he expends energy. When he is sick he is most at risk from “men and things,” but it is precisely this time when it is most important that he not react to painful stimuli. Since he lacks the strength to react authentically, he must refuse to react at all. “Because one would use oneself up too quickly *if* one reacted at all, one no longer reacts: this is the logic” (EH I, 6). This ability not to react is the most difficult thing for the weak, because it requires the strength and abundance of energy that they lack. It is therefore clear that exhaustion *tends* to perpetuate itself, lending a sense of fatality to exhaustion; Nietzsche clearly implies this in the following note in *The Will to Power*: “*On the hygiene of the “weak,”* - Everything done in weakness fails. Moral: do nothing. Only there is the hitch that precisely the strength to suspend activity, *not* to react, is sickest of all under the influence of weakness: one never reacts more quickly and blindly than when one should not react at all.” (WP 45/KSA 13:14[102]). Thus the weak man tends to harm himself, because the one thing that he needs is the one thing that he lacks: “The will is weak - and the prescription to avoid stupidities would be to have a strong will and do *nothing* – *Contradictio* - A kind of self-

destruction; the instinct of preservation is compromised. - The weak harm themselves - That is the type of decadence.-” (WP 45/KSA 13:14[102]).

Nietzsche’s writings on sickness are instead a particularly acute example of the complex relationship between physiology and agency in his thought, which might, at times, seem to downplay responsibility for one’s thoughts and actions. Since the drives’ relation affects thought, at times he appears to reduce the quality of thought to the quality of physiology: “A thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want” (BGE 17). But all this does is provide some limitations on the conscious will’s ability to determine itself, not deny that it has the ability at all. The great man carefully cultivates an approach to exhaustion that allows him to reevaluate his condition consciously. Only the weak-willed man interprets his exhausted actions and thoughts as inevitable or imposed upon him; the great man, in contrast, cultivates as much control as he can possibly obtain over such conditions. This is the crucial point: he distinguishes his greatness not by being entirely unaffected by his physiology, but by the fact that he constantly emphasises everything that he *can* control, seeking greater and greater mastery of himself, rather than searching out anywhere he is constrained. He does not seek a total mastery, such as the desire we might find in the violent willing of the ascetic, but he extends the realm of his own mastery, whilst not only accepting, but welcoming contingent and fluctuating conditions that he must, in turn, master once more.

The great man retains as much ability to *intervene* in the process of translating physiology into value and actions as possible. He intervenes in two primary ways. The first is his ability to close himself off from what might harm him, to look away, to negate. This simply involves being able to recognise one’s own weak state, and limit exposure to that which is likely to produce *resentiment*: a “determined self-limitation to what was bitter, harsh, and hurtful to know” (GS preface 1).<sup>134</sup> The crux of this is being able to diagnose one’s own condition, to be aware of one’s body, energy levels, and the extent to which one’s “curative powers” are still strong. This intervention, then, is *preventive*: “We must learn to live with diminished energies, too; As soon as pain gives its safety signal the time has come to diminish them; some great danger or other, a storm is approaching, and we are well advised to “inflate” ourselves as little as possible” (GS 318). The second way he intervenes is limiting the extent that he allows the harm that *is* inflicted to produce values and actions:

Just as a traveller may resolve, before he calmly abandons himself to sleep, to wake up at a certain time, we philosophers, if we should become sick, surrender for a while to

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<sup>134</sup> All references to GS preface are to the second edition of *The Gay Science*.

sickness, body, and soul – and, as it were, shut our eyes to ourselves... something will leap forward then and catch the spirit in the act: I mean, in its weakness, or repentance or resignation or hardening or gloom. (*GS* preface 2))

The philosopher surprises his own body in the process of translating physiology into thought and action. This act is the ability to *diagnose* the roots of values and actions, and to prevent those rooted in weakness from being actualised, carried out, and/or endured. These two aspects of intervention help us to understand more fully why Nietzsche endorses this idea of ‘Russian Fatalism.’ The convalescent limits nonessential expenditure, both in a preventive way to limit *ressentiment*, and in the sense of preventing any residual *ressentiment* from manifesting itself in his values and actions.

In the state of weakness it is vital to break the affinity between sickness and *ressentiment*. In times of weakness conscious thought thus becomes an *imperative*: a way of conditioning oneself to be more than a conduit for one’s physiology. Conscious thought must perform a double operation. The great man diagnoses weakness in his thoughts and actions and prevents them from coming to fruition, but at the same time he ensures that while he feels weak he makes as few meaningful decisions as possible. Nietzsche describes the extent that he tries not to *change his circumstances* amidst sickness, for fear that this desire for change is itself rooted in *ressentiment*; “clinging tenaciously” to “almost intolerable situations, places, residences, company” because “to accept oneself as a fate, not to desire oneself ‘different’ – in such conditions this is *great rationality* itself” (*EH* I, 6). The intellect’s task in exhausted conditions is therefore predominantly the negative one of *refusing to react*.

All of this presupposes an attitude towards oneself by which one is confident of one’s strength and of one’s imminent recovery. When Nietzsche writes: “*The noble soul has reverence for itself*,” he means that the central characteristic that distinguishes the noble soul is that it possesses a “fundamental certainty” in “regard to itself” (*BGE* 287). This certainty is a type of “faith,” but it involves redeploing a religious formula in a “deeper sense” (*BGE* 287). The importance of possessing this faith is that it allows the noble soul to be relatively unaffected by events and circumstances. This fundamental certainty is therefore what I have been describing as character. It is important to note that this idea of a fundamental certainty cannot be taken to be absolute or it risks becoming an obstacle to meaningful change. Zarathustra offers an example of this when he analyses “the poets”: they tend to take reverence for themselves in an inappropriate direction, by believing that they have access to “a special, secret portal to knowledge” (*Z*, II, 17). They believe themselves to be exceptional, in the sense that “they always think that nature is in love with them,” and that “she creeps up to their ears to tell them secrets and enamoured flatteries”

(Z, II, 17). The effect of this belief is that it tends to make the poets “boastful and bloated before all mortals!” (Z, II, 17). This boastfulness alludes to a wider problem. Believing oneself to be a unique recipient of revelation can become a substitute for the self-creation that Nietzsche wants to promote. The reverence that the noble soul possesses must relate to his pride as a self-created being, rather than as having received anything. His faith in himself is therefore only useful to the extent that it refers to faith in the strength of his character, which gives him the ability to overcome changing events and circumstance. If instead of this he believes that he has been chosen to convey nature’s secrets then he deludes himself, and the result of this may well be that he eschews the habitual training and hard work that effective self-creation requires. The poets want “spectators” and their spirit is characterised by “vanity,” but they are only transformed when they turn “their gaze against themselves” (Z, II, 17). The great man’s essential attribute is revering himself, but he must also be aware that he creates himself, and is thus responsible for his works. He must avoid thinking of himself as the intermediary of higher forces, and forgo the temptation to believe that nature whispers secrets to him.

The final element of the great man’s attitude towards exhaustion is cultivating *gratitude* towards his weakest periods. This goes beyond merely *accepting* such periods, to affirming their value in his self-development as a whole: “You see that I do not want to take leave ungratefully from that time of severe sickness whose profits I have not yet exhausted even today. I am very conscious of the advantages that my fickle health gives me over all robust squares” (GS preface 3). He loosely divides this ‘gratitude’ into two guises: sickness’ effect on his attitude towards life, and the assertion that his investigations into his own sickness provide valuable insight into his project of revaluating values. Nietzsche interprets his sickness as stimulating new life: it provides (and requires) a constant rebirth: “From such abysses, from such severe sickness... one returns *newborn*, having shed one’s skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a tenderer tongue for all good things, with merrier senses” (GS preface 4). Experiencing sickness, then, provides for a new taste for joy - *sensitivity* towards pleasure. At its simplest level, it is the experience of *great contrast* that ensures that the convalescent appreciates his health in a new way. Nietzsche argues that experiencing sickness demonstrates that life itself is a problem, and this changes attitudes towards life. It is therefore a stimulus to investigate the conditions under which we undertake life: “One emerges as a different person, with a few more question marks – above all with the *will* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly and quietly than one had questioned heretofore” (GS preface 3). It is a mistake to think that such a change makes one “gloomy.” Rather, “one loves (life) differently” (GS preface 3). This love is antithetical to equilibrium, representing affirming change and Becoming. Above all, by

problematizing life, sickness makes one more *profound*. Cultivating the ability to question and interrogate oneself, to undertake a genealogy of one's own values, is projected outwards as Nietzsche's self-diagnosis becomes a *psychology*: "After such self-questioning, self-temptation, one acquires a subtler eye for all philosophizing to date... for now one knows whether the sick *body* and its needs unconsciously urge, push and lure the spirit – towards the sun, stillness, mildness, patience, medicine, balm in some sense (*GS* preface 2). Nietzsche believes that his philosophical method is underpinned by his ability to diagnose the force that values express. Furthermore, he believes that the relation between health and values is philosophy's great unexplored question: "All those bold insanities of metaphysics, especially answers to the question about the *value* of existence, may always be considered first of all as the symptoms of certain bodies" (*GS* preface 2). It is the extent of Nietzsche's experience with sickness, coupled with his extreme *distaste* for values which codify and institutionalise weakness, that provide him with what he considers a privileged standpoint from which to diagnose the forces that values express, and to judge their value. By calling into question the narratives of cause and effect that men use to interpret themselves, those "phantoms and false lights" of the inner life, Nietzsche confronts his own pathos, that his consciousness invariably tends to present as the only one reasonable (*TI* 60). By dissecting himself, experimenting with different ways of understanding himself, *creating* himself, he acquires the ability to judge and the perspective he requires to undertake a genealogy of values:

Every philosophy that ranks peace above war, every ethic with a negative definition of happiness, every metaphysics and physics that knows some *finale*, some final state of some sort, every predominantly aesthetic or religious craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside, Above, permits the question whether it was not sickness that inspired the philosopher. (*GS* preface 2)

Nietzsche is careful to distinguish between immediately disciplining one's thoughts and making a certain approach and way of acting habitual. The former is necessary but not sufficient to produce character: "For one must not mistake the method involved here: a mere disciplining of thoughts and feelings is virtually nothing; one must first convince the *body* (*AC* 47). This accurately represents Nietzsche's writings on the relationship between body and mind in general: one should not overlook the importance of the body, but it is up to one to "convince" the body of what one wants. Again he emphasises training and habit, in this case to "internalise" the ability to maintain a "significant and select demeanour" (*AC* 47).

This accounts for Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of an *initial* period of solitude. Abundant energy does not, however, negate the need to cultivate a strong sense of taste; he warns against "rich and noble souls" who "expend themselves prodigally, almost indifferently." While Zarathustra praises expenditure as the essence of *bestowing*, of an abundance that overflows, it is crucial not to take this to the "point where it becomes a vice"; independence demands that one retains the ability "*to conserve oneself*" (BGE 41). This is in line with my earlier assertion that the great man's aesthetic intoxication occurs along different lines than the modern artist's violent oscillation, between creative frenzy and nihilistic exhaustion. The power reflected here is "slow to answer," is "conscious of no witness around it," and lives "oblivious of the existence of any opposition": it "reposes" only in itself (TI IX, 11). It is therefore an aesthetic intoxication that is both spontaneous and active but nonetheless controlled. The importance of *conserving* energy is that one is then able to employ it spontaneously and offensively, rather than merely defensively. Wyndham Lewis argues that: "The average, worldly man does not.. Get beyond the conception of 'the struggle for existence.'"<sup>135</sup> Unlike the great man, "he has no creative surplus at all." His "war," his manifestation of the will to power, is: "a defensive war, and he is only aggressively cunning, not in the heroic 'dangerous' fashion suggested by Nietzsche. He disposes his forces very prudently and strategically. He is by nature what is called "pessimistic"; he sees nothing but *defeat*, in the sense of horror and struggle."<sup>136</sup> Lewis goes on to argue that both Nietzsche and the average man employ "falsification theory" and "will to illusion" for their various struggles, but the former engages in an offensive war, while the latter's war is defensive. However, Nietzsche lacks the success of the average man, testifying to the difficulty of the offensive war, and the need to appreciate the limits of one's capabilities.<sup>137</sup>

That is, if one lacks the energy for the offensive war, then attempting to live as a sovereign individual risks completely discharging one's energy, exhausting one entirely. Given that even the defensive war requires a constant series of small expenditure, this is a risk that threatens cohesion. We have already seen such a violent oscillation between extreme states at work in Bataille and Miller's work, among others. Nietzsche, on the other hand, becomes preoccupied with the idea of maintaining character by refusing to put himself in situations where one will be forced to react. He draws a "horizon" around himself, so to, first, retain "cheerfulness" and "confidence in the future" and second, so that his self-determination (freedom) cannot be overwhelmed (UM II, 1). One aspect of this horizon is wholly physical; preventing himself from being anywhere which would unduly exhaust his defensive powers: "Suppose I were to step out

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<sup>135</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Rosa, 1989, p. 118.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.



of my house and discover, instead of calm and aristocratic Turin, the German provincial town: my instinct would have to blockade itself so as to push back all that pressed upon it from this flat and cowardly world” (*EH* II, 8). More than just this physical removal, the horizon governs elements necessary to life in society. We must prioritise energy according to one’s task, and so good taste, when developed, governs when stimulus is allowed to approach one and when one should assimilate it: “I do not want to wage war against what is ugly... *Looking away* shall be my only negation” (*GS* 276). Emerson similarly argues that being affected by the trifling aspects of the world should always be interpreted as something that one *chooses*:

But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation. At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at once at thy closet door, and say, “Come out unto us’ But keep thy state; come not into their confusion. The power men possess to annoy me, I give them by a weak curiosity. No man can come near me but through my act.<sup>138</sup>

We can contrast both Nietzsche’s active restraint and the “average man’s” defensive war with the modern artist’s war, which involves exhausting his surplus energy by deliberately exposing himself to stimulus. Compare Nietzsche’s unwillingness to suspend his self-determination with Henry Miller’s account in *Black Spring*: “The slightest stir and the whole fabric falls apart. In the street I expose myself to the destructive, disintegrating elements that surround me. I let everything wreak its own havoc with me. I bend over to spy on the secret processes, *to obey* rather than to command.”<sup>139</sup> Miller embraces the temporary dissolving of his character to ‘spy on the secret processes’; actively consenting to a situation where he will have to *obey*, in the sense of responding to a host of stimulus. Nietzsche’s preoccupation, in contrast, is the danger that suspending his freedom would involve, even if it only temporarily; this constantly leads him to prioritise strong character and exercising volition over Miller’s form of creative interpretation: “sagacity and self-defence consists in *reacting as seldom as possible* and withdrawing from situations and relationships in which one would be condemned as it were to suspend one’s ‘freedom,’ one’s initiative, and becomes a mere reagent” (*EH* II, 8).

### *Positing a Goal*

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<sup>138</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’, *Essays*, p. 50.

<sup>139</sup> Henry Miller, *Black Spring*, Panther Books, St Albans, 1974, p. 28-9.

*I know not which way to turn; I am everything that knows not which way to turn' - sighs modern man. (AC 1)*

*We became gloomy, we were called fatalists. Our fatality - was the plenitude, the tension, the blocking-up of our forces. We thirsted for lightning and action, of all things we kept ourselves furthest from the happiness of the weaklings, from 'resignation...' (AC 1)*

Nietzsche argues that a philosophy based on energy expenditure must take seriously the need to posit a goal. The passage immediately above describes the adoption of a certain attitude towards the problem of the lack of release for abundance. Nietzsche extols the virtue of a *patience* that we must be careful to distinguish from 'resignation.' Resignation is a technique the weak employ to attempt to transform their inactivity into an (inert and submissive) idea of happiness. In contrast, patience is necessary because forces, if we are not to squander them recklessly, require a means and a direction so that we can discharge them. The great man requires a goal, and he must give this goal to himself. His 'tension' indicates strength and a 'thirst' for action. A note from *The Will to Power* again references a "tension of forces" that corresponds to the coupling of increasing force and a present lack of outlet for its discharge (*WP 1022/KSA 13:11[38]*). This passage crucially provides a new insight into the way that Nietzsche employs the idea of "commanding"; this idea occupies a central place in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, although it differs from what is commonly understood by commanding. The increasing tension of forces creates a condition which appears similar to "pessimism"; a "dark" condition (*WP 1022/KSA 13:11[38]*):

A doctrine that puts an end to such a condition by *commanding* something or other – a revaluation of values by virtue of which the accumulated forces are shown a way, a whither, so they explode into lightning flashes and deeds – certainly does not need to be a doctrine of happiness: by releasing force that had been compressed and dammed to the point of torment it *brings happiness*. (*WP 1022/KSA 13:11[38]*)

Several things are particularly notable: first, Nietzsche again identifies authentic happiness, the happiness of strength, as synonymous with discharging pent-up force; second, he associates commanding with the act of giving forces a direction. This direction is provided by the act of reevaluating, which creates the possibility of transforming accumulated forces into a deed. Zarathustra preoccupies himself with the question of whether his failure to command stems from cowardice and 'unripeness,' and this self-reflection, conveyed in the form of a discourse with his "*stillest hour*," who chastises him: "you are not ripe for your fruits!", provokes his return

to solitude (Z, III, 22). Although he leaves the meaning of commanding vague, he intimates in the passage above that commanding refers not merely to the act of imparting orders to others, but more generally to the process of revaluating values in such a way as to give direction to pent-up forces. Therefore, commanding oneself towards a goal or aim is as much an act of command as commanding others is. When Zarathustra scolds himself for not being ripe enough for his thoughts, for lacking the “lion’s voice” for commanding, this signifies that he is aware that he is failing to transform his revaluation of values into the release of his abundance (Z, II, 22).

In part four of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche introduces the figure of ‘the shadow,’ that represents an extreme example of a so-called free spirit who entirely lacks a goal. The shadow persuades himself that “Nothing is true, all is permitted,” unlearns “faith in words and values and great names,” and overthrows all “boundary stones.” (Z, IV, 9). But without a goal he is directionless and aimless, has “smashed anything” he ever honoured, and lost all sense of his identity - when he “shed his skin” his name fell off too (Z, IV, 9). The result of his lack of a goal is that he has “plunged into the coldest waters” without any sense of purpose or self, been “whirled by every wind, unsteady” and been left “thin, blackish, hollow and outdated” (Z, IV, 9). He finds it impossible to experience any pleasure, since he lacks any conception of the good life: “A good wind? Indeed, only the one who know *where* he’s sailing knows also which wind is good and which is his favourable wind. What did I have left? A heart weary and insolent; a restless will; fluttering wings; a broken backbone” (Z, IV, 9). The shadow is thus a free spirit in the sense of releasing himself from all of the chains of society, morality and obligations but he suffers from a nihilistic lack of meaning. Thus having a goal is important in pursuing freedom. Zarathustra warns him that he must be on the guard against an inevitable urge to enslave himself to the first “narrow belief” and “severe delusion,” because to the exhausted and restless “even a jails ends up looking like bliss” and captured criminals often “enjoy their new security” (Z, IV, 9).

Nietzsche’s emphasis on revaluation ensures that the act of positing a goal I am discussing here is not merely a question of choosing one direction over another, but is a genuinely creative act. Revaluation involves reinterpreting oneself and realigning perception, yielding a new goal and new priorities. This entire process restructures the drives’ relation. There is a complex relation between revaluating values, positing a goal, and expending energy. Although I have suggested that the former is the essential precondition of the latter, I have also suggested that expending energy is the essential precondition for precisely the transformation of the world that makes creation possible. There is, however, no necessary contradiction here; rather, there is a complex relation where expending abundant energy means that an initial creative act – a momentary revaluation, a realignment of forces - provides the release of the tension induced by

the build-up of forces. This release in turn produces a progressive intoxication whereby the world is transformed aesthetically. The genuine state of creation - transforming the world into perfection - therefore presupposes expenditure, but precisely this expenditure is nonetheless predicated upon the creative spark of revaluation and the act/art of commanding.

All of these interrelated elements – the creative spark, intoxication, and the ability to command – depend upon a prior cultivation of character. That is, they depend upon the long process of training and forming habits that we require to give ourselves character and become sovereign. That is, cultivating the ability not to react, and mastering oneself, is necessary to acquire the capacity to determine goals for oneself. While we can conceivably use any goal as a pretext to discharge energy, accumulating abundant energy presupposes defending against small expenditure, and therefore, again, possessing character. Since possessing abundance presupposes character, which entails creating oneself as self-legislating, positing a goal requires unleashing energy, ensuring that the goal must be one that we choose, rather than one imposed on us from without. What truly distinguishes creating a goal from merely deciding between pre-existing alternatives is therefore, ultimately, possessing character.

Positing a goal plays a role in shaping the strong Will by imposing uniformity and direction upon one's drives. The goal posited is, however, in a meaningful sense shaped by the drives' activity, since the Will determines it, and this is inseparable from the drives' activities (even if we cannot reduce it to them). The central aspect of positing a goal is the way in which it leads to a new interpretation of existence that shapes and controls drives and forces. The art of positing a goal depends on volition, in two senses: first, volition is responsible for cultivating a strong Will and abundant energy initially; second, it is responsible for imposing a direction on this produced energy.

A goal must reflect the drives' activity. It does not reveal interiority though, since we form it by interpreting this activity, not by discovering an essential relation. It is therefore subject to alteration by the continual strengthening of the Will, which subsequently reinterprets itself. This process is undoubtedly circular. A goal that succeeds in marshalling forces reflects the Will's activity, but is desirable precisely because it is instrumental in imposing uniformity and regularity upon the drives. In some sense, it is accurate to say that: on the one hand, being *able* to posit an individual goal for oneself presupposes that one has a strong Will, in that it requires a man *capable of Willing*, that is, of self-legislating; and on the other, the act of positing a goal is central to creating a strong Will. This is no objection however, since the strong Will always desires to increase its strength. A certain degree of strength is needed for the creative positing of a goal, and this goal is the means to *increase* strength.

## II

### *Free Will and Responsibility*

In developing the idea of character, I have suggested that the great man's development is characterised by an ever greater increase in his feeling of the unity of his self. We have seen that he learns not to react to stimulus, to develop the capacity to determine his own Will, and to master and integrate his drives and affects into a coherent and unified centre. This stands at odds with accounts of Nietzsche that emphasise a disorganised and/or decentred self, being close to Becoming, and so on. This process of increasing mastery is *how* one goes about giving oneself a strong Will. I am now going to delve deeper into the question of how the great man should think about the Will that he is creating, in particular, I am going to suggest that he must think of his Will as *free*, and assume responsibility for all that he is. Firstly, I want to consider an argument that Graham Parkes makes in *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology*, where he tries to complicate the idea of a linear movement towards a greater unity of the self. If we are to understand Nietzsche's ideas about the freedom of the will, we must be sure of the extent to which we think of ourselves as unified. Parkes suggests that there are two crucial stages in the way that the great man acts with regards to his drives. The first stage involves developing control over oneself by not reacting to stimulus. Parkes argues that this is the "same as in the Platonic-Socratic program"; where it differs is in the second stage, which justifies the first, which is "simply a preliminary strategy for the sake of an eventually greater freedom."<sup>140</sup> For Parkes, while the first stage aims at "self-control," this is a means and not an end in itself; it is in the second stage that the great man truly becomes great.<sup>141</sup> Parkes' account of this second stage is an interesting close-reading of Nietzsche's texts, and is worth recounting and considering at length, as it touches closely on the issues of self-mastery, the unity of the self, and the amount of control that rests with a central, organising force:

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<sup>140</sup> Parkes, p. 357.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

The will's "power of mastery" becomes such that it is now safe to "give back to the drives their freedom," in the confidence that they will now "go where our best inclines." By the end of this second phase, in which "the entire affective system is stimulated and intensified," one is able to react with total spontaneity - strangely but knowingly "unable *not* to react" - moved now by the mysterious power of Dionysus (*TI* 9.10)...

At some point in the practice of self-discipline it is possible to relax control of the "magnificent monsters" that are the drives, affects, and passions, and trust them to move us spontaneously in the appropriate ways..

The ideal state would be one in which as much power as possible is ultimately returned to the greatest variety of energetic drives, affects, and passions, in the expectation that all parties will spontaneously organize themselves to the optimal benefit of the "psychopolis" as a whole.<sup>142</sup>

Parkes thus identifies an initial movement towards self-mastery, the unity of the self, and conscious control over one's affects, but this is only a preliminary stage to a second movement, where one gives autonomy back to one's drives. This involves relinquishing central power, or at least temporarily delegating this power:

The will that would then hold gentle sway over the monstrosly powerful drives no longer operates only through the conscious ego, but rather works and plays as "will to power" - a configuration of the interpretive energies that constitute *life* in the widest sense...<sup>143</sup>

One's openness to the drives that flow in from the archaic (and more recent) past has to respond to the capacity to assimilate - yet without the help of an independent regulatory agency. If such an agency is retained, in the form of a separate unitary I, the consequent restriction of flow will inhibit the attainment of greatness.<sup>144</sup>

His key claim here is that it is necessary to relax control of a 'separate unity I' in order to take advantage of the maximum quantity of power and energy from the drives, and thus to attain greatness, or at least the possibility of greatness. It is certainly true that the great man must strike a balance between self-mastery, and allowing his drives and desires to express himself. In

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356-9.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

discussing the figure of the ascetic I have already made clear the limits involved in ‘mastering’ oneself at the expense of the drives’ energy; this kind of ‘violent willing’ precludes the possibility of greatness. What worries me about Parkes’ account is that he separates the great man’s development into two separate stages. I think it makes more sense to think of it as one fluid process, whereby one seeks to master one’s drives but is constantly aware that one must harness their power, rather than destroy them. If one mutilates one’s drives in the pursuit of self-control then one is left not with a strong Will, but merely exhausted; it seems difficult to imagine that one is then in a position to be able to give power back to one’s drives and take advantage of them. With respect to becoming a great man, self-mastery is therefore conditional upon maintaining the power of one’s drives, and thus there is no need to divide this into two stages at all. This is not just a semantic distinction, since it has repercussions for how one interprets oneself. From the point of view of the most expedient way to think about oneself so as to increase one’s abundance, I think it unhelpful to think of one’s will as holding only a ‘gentle sway’ and as deliberately not retaining a ‘separate unitary I,’ for several reasons. It seems to open up the possibility of abdicating responsibility for one’s actions and thoughts. If we think of ourselves as delegating power and control to a particular drive or set of drives, even if only temporarily, then we open up the possibility of blaming this particular drive for our thoughts or behaviour, which masks the extent to which we both could be and are responsible for it. In fact, I think the whole idea of allowing a drive to control or direct us is problematic. A complex and hierarchical relation of various drives affects all self-perception; whether or not we want to say that we are in control of one’s drives, in a Socratic-type ‘top-heavy’ formation, or that we are temporarily delegating one’s power of decision/direction to a particular drive, is unimportant compared to the crucial point that we must *feel* that we are commanding ourselves. The result of the hierarchy of drives, when one undertakes the process of self-creation fully, is that one *is* one’s will, and feels oneself to be in affinity with one’s drives. When Parkes suggests that there is a second stage of the process, where one imagines that one is delegating power and authority to this drive or that, he reproduces the same sort of distinction between what I imagine ‘myself’ to be and the drives, at the same time as he wants to point out that Nietzsche collapses this distinction. In other words, he suggests that the ‘separate unitary I’ grows more powerful in the first stage, then deliberately lessens its power in the second, while also suggesting that for Nietzsche there is no unitary I at all.

Contra Parkes, I do not think that we have to relax or relinquish central control of the unified ‘I’ to maximise the power of the monstrous drives fully; we ‘just’ need to integrate and control them properly in the first place, so that there is never a stage when we lose their power

and energy. When we properly appreciate the effect that increasing energy expenditure and abundance has on perception, we see that the effect of this increasing energy is an aesthetic state, where one feels oneself identical with the hierarchy of drives that one creates. This is not losing the feeling of self, losing the feeling of control, or being subservient to one or more of one's drives, but a state of *harmonization* where one integrates one's drives and passions into a feeling of unity and coherence. This is a state of the highest autonomy and sovereignty, where one's power to act reaches its highest point.

Having established that the movement of determining oneself is one of gaining mastery over oneself, and of lessening the extent to which one allows circumstances, and the external world in general, to influence one, we are in a good position to revisit the debate over free will in Nietzsche's thought, an area of scholarship characterised by wild divergence. Most worryingly, commentators often interpret Nietzsche as a critic of the idea of free will. I will argue that this attitude is a significant obstacle to constructing a coherent account of the great man. Given that I have emphasised that he *criticises* the idea that willing is the product of faculty - a position often taken to underpin the idea of free will - it is important to disentangle the ideas I am presenting here from the interpretation of him as an enemy of free will. Given the emphasis I am placing on the idea of responsibility, it is also crucial to clarify the relationship this idea has with free will, since the two are often taken to be complimentary ideas.

One common argument is that Nietzsche's theory of competing drives undermines the idea of free will; *i.e.*, since consciousness is not autonomous from the drives, this undermines the traditional domain of free will, and therefore refutes the idea. This is often taken to be rather a self-evident feature of Nietzsche's thought; in *Nietzsche and Machiavelli* Diego A. Von Vacano argues that "Nietzsche's idea of multiplicity negates the notion of the free will," since the will is not autonomous, but is merely "the strongest drive in each person."<sup>145</sup> Man's "capacity to alter the world is severely limited," as a man is neither autonomous nor sovereign, but "subject to the effect of his own competing drives."<sup>146</sup> Such arguments always rest on the idea that Nietzsche's theory of drives completely undermines the stable unity required to "order the person."<sup>147</sup> Instead, shifting arrangements of the multiplicity of drives ensure constant change and uncertainty: "The uncertain boundaries of the self, for Nietzsche, exist ultimately because there is no unifying, fixed entity that one could ascertain to always order the person. The process of

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<sup>145</sup> Diego A. von Vacano, *The Art of Power; Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and the Making of Aesthetic Political Theory*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2007, p. 80.

<sup>146</sup> "The forces of nature also circumscribe him." *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.



self-development and change is never-ending”<sup>148</sup> In this sort of account, introducing any sort of contingency into the ‘boundaries of the self’ is associated with completely undermining the possibility of free will. One’s consciousness merely expresses the relation between drives at any given moment, this arrangement is constantly shifting, and we apparently have little to no control over what our drives are expressing through us.

We find a similar move elsewhere. As I began to address earlier, in *Sovereignty of Joy* McIntyre characterises Nietzsche’s project as one of demolishing responsibility. He underpins this by suggesting that Nietzsche rejects the idea of free will, because it is intrinsically tied to an unhelpful metaphysical view of the self; separating the doer and deed is a device the priest uses to make free will inseparable from responsibility, with the aim of inflicting guilt.

For Nietzsche, to believe in free will is to accept a metaphysical conception of the self as an entity, as a faculty, and an unconditioned substance. Its very unconditioned nature makes it free, responsible, and self-knowing; it makes of humanity a *cause sui*... Hence, morality and the metaphysics of substance coincide; responsibility, guilt, and free will become synonymous though the separation of doer and deed.<sup>149</sup>

McIntyre extends this critique and suggests that Nietzsche rejects the idea of “will” entirely.<sup>150</sup> It must be difficult to believe sincerely in such a suggestion, given that it requires ignoring innumerable sections of Nietzsche’s writings - in particular, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in its entirety. McIntyre’s idea, which is far from unusual, is that once Nietzsche undermines the traditional ‘metaphysical conception of the self’ as a faculty, then this means we must give up on the idea of free will entirely. However, given the ambiguity that Nietzsche often exhibits towards concepts, criticising one form and reviving another, it hardly seems sensible to take a few passages as indicating the definitive truth of his thought. I want to tell a very different tale about the role of freedom in Nietzsche’s thought, one which is rooted in the overall spirit of his texts, the question of how the great man should think about himself.

If Nietzsche is ambivalent to the idea of free will, in the sense that its value depends on the reasons it is taken up and the uses to which it is put, then he is entirely clear when he characterises the type of man who imagines his will is *unfree*. Believing and feeling that one’s will is not free, but *determined*, is one of the key narratives of the *malaise* created by refusing to accept

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>149</sup> McIntyre, p. 31.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, see for example, p. 40, where McIntyre suggests we must put aside all “presumptuous” talk of “willing.”

responsibility. Attempting to identify aspects where one feels oneself to be unfree, controlled, or conditioned, reflects insufficient strength:

‘Unfree will’ is mythology: in real life it is only a question of *strong* and *weak* wills. - It is almost always a symptom of what is lacking in himself when a thinker detects in every ‘causal connection’ and ‘psychological necessity’ something of compulsion, exigency, constraint, pressure, unfreedom: such feelings are traitors, the person who has them gives himself away. (BGE 21)

Searching for constraint within oneself, for any evidence of compulsion, is a symptom of self-hatred and reflects a desire to avoid responsibility for what one is, and what one does. The man who refuses to be responsible betrays an “inner self-contempt,” blaming others for his suffering, and/or attributing it substantially to *misfortune* (BGE 21). This is the “fatalism of the weak-willed,” who imagine themselves to be at the mercy of both external forces and aspects of themselves that they claim they have no control over (BGE 21). Unfree will manifests a “weariness” that “no longer wants to will,” and instead desires to be *willed*; therefore it creates “gods and hinterworlds” (Z, I, 3). It is a desire to obey rather than to command.

We have seen from the emphasis Nietzsche places on cultivating character that the great man learns to determine himself, rather than merely react to stimulus. In a passage in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, he suggests that Wagner lacked free will, and thus merely translated his physiology into his work. This suggests that the weaker a man is, the less he is likely to have learnt to cultivate free will:

He was not the “defective,” “ill-fated,” “contradictory” genius that people have declared him to be. Wagner was something *complete*, he was a typical *décadent*, in whom every sign of “free will” was lacking, in whom every feature was necessary. If there is anything at all of interest in Wagner, it is the consistency with which a critical physiological condition may convert itself, step by step, conclusion after conclusion, into a method, a form of procedure, a reform of all principles, a crisis in taste. (CW 7)

In *On the Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche associates unfreedom with *ugliness*, and this in turn signifies “degeneration”: “Every token of exhaustion, of heaviness, of age, of weariness, every kind of unfreedom, whether convulsive or paralytic, above all the smell, colour and shape of dissolution, of decomposition, though it be attenuated to the point of being no more than a symbol - all this calls forth the same reaction, the value judgement ‘ugly’” (TI IX, 20). He closely

associates the appearance of unfreedom here with exhaustion since both are bound up with the inability to will and a lack of unity, reflecting ‘dissolution’ and ‘decomposition.’ Downplaying one’s freedom by emphasising “constraint,” “compulsion” *etc.* manifests the desire to project blame onto external persons or forces (BGE 21). It matters little whether he situates the blame in aspects of himself that he apparently cannot control (*i.e.*, genes or chemical processes) or in elements of himself that are ‘conditioned’ by circumstance. It is a question of what we choose to emphasise, and we should determine this by the effect it is likely to have on us. Submitting to external forces is the worst attitude to suffering and one’s insufficiencies possible, since it closes off the possibility of improving oneself. It is the willing victim’s *bad faith*, and he is likely to pay for the momentary anaesthetizing of his displeasure with future increase of his suffering. This increase is due to a number of related factors, all of which stem from him deceiving himself and refusing to admit his complicity in suffering: First, he does not address and deal with any problem as it appears; second, he does not develop any of the capacities central to achieving Nietzsche’s idea of joy, because of his failure to develop an authentic relation with his suffering; third, he tends to project an unbalanced relation between his character and event (especially since he possesses little character), whereby he comes to see himself defined, often negatively, by events that have simply ‘happened to him.’ He therefore suffers from the past in a way that the man of character does not - I will take up this theme of suffering from the past later.

To make sense of the ideal Nietzschean self, we must recognise the ambiguity in his texts that stems from his desire to criticise the traditional idea of the self, while nonetheless maintaining the aspects of this self which are still useful to his aims. We can resolve this ambiguity through our aim to highlight the normative aspect of his writings on the self. Several of the best Nietzsche commentators note and discuss this ambiguity, and criticise those who ignore one side of it. In discussing the status of the self, Henry Staten argues that Nietzsche attempts to engage in a radical project of undermining the unified self, while at the same time he recognises that the feeling of growth requires something akin to this self. On the one hand: “he wants utterly to undo the substantial or essential presence of a subject of any kind, wants there to be left only waves of will to power perpetually overflowing themselves,” and insists that the will to power is “an affect, a feeling pleasure, a pathos”; this appears to undermine completely the “notion of an *Einheit*, the unified self-identical singularity of the individual, (that) is the core of the substantialist metaphysics he criticizes.”<sup>151</sup> On the other, “he adds his “nonetheless””: opposition and overcoming require “relatively, encroaching *Einheiten*.”<sup>152</sup> Staten points out that

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<sup>151</sup> Staten, p. 124-6.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p 125. Staten is quoting WP 693.

the use of “relatively” here is a “conceptual obscurity,” since even a “purely relative *Einheit* can be thought only in terms of some boundary of identity,” and “if there is to be a sensation of growth, there must be a *substratum* of change.”<sup>153</sup> Staten’s discussion is extremely relevant to modern Nietzsche scholarship, because he correctly identifies that: “Nietzsche scholarship constantly repeats as a self-evident item of doctrine that there is no unified subject of will to power, that will to power has to do with the play of forces, that there is no relation between Nietzsche’s “will” and Schopenhauer’s, and so on.”<sup>154</sup> In particular, he singles out “poststructuralist writers... Who commonly take for granted that Nietzsche utterly shatters the unity of the self.”<sup>155</sup> We might also add that there is also a tendency that runs in the opposite direction, towards completely ignoring Nietzsche’s apparent criticisms of the unified self. Staten closes his illuminating discussion by concluding that he is not primarily interested in debating the cogency of Nietzsche’s doctrines,” and leaves it at that.<sup>156</sup> Staten is certainly correct to argue that: “Nietzsche wants to have it both ways”;<sup>157</sup> the idea of the Will is his attempt to construct a narrative for thinking about oneself that avoids the problems that he identifies with the traditional unity of the self, whilst retaining, and maximising, the feeling of self.

As we have already seen Staten point out, there are clear ambiguities in Nietzsche’s texts surrounding the unity or disunity of the self, and he echoes these in comments he makes about the Will’s freedom. He was surely aware of these ambiguities, but does little to reconcile them explicitly. In an excellent recent essay, Christopher Janaway clearly captures this ambiguity, by describing the tension that exists between what he calls Nietzsche’s “official position” - proclaiming that the unified subject is a fiction - and the assumptions that lie beneath many of Nietzsche’s positive appraisals of ideas.<sup>158</sup> For Janaway, Nietzsche claims an official position, that a multiplicity of drives and affects compose the self, and seize control of a consciousness that has little autonomy over them. However, as I have already noted, Nietzsche entirely undermines this when he discusses the creative man, who is able to work creatively *on* the structure of his drives. Janaway is right to suggest that when Nietzsche positively describes great men this completely fail to fit with his apparent criticisms of the unified self:

But I have to be, in my own self-conception, a sufficiently unified self that *I* can ‘take sides’ between the various drives that (though I did not originally will them) I find within

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>158</sup> Janaway, p. 55.

myself. Likewise, it is not just that each of the affects I find within myself has a goal of its own, but rather that *I* have a goal in pursuit of which I can flexibly use the affects I feel. When Nietzsche is thinking of his ideal, creatively evaluating, perspectively knowing individual, he freely imbues this individual with the status of a unified, self-conscious, autonomous subject, in a way that fails to mesh comfortably with his eliminativist description of what the individual amounts to 'in reality'.<sup>159</sup>

Janaway's clear account of the apparent discrepancies between these two positions is a useful one, which should have an extremely positive effect on Nietzsche scholarship, which has so often failed to account for *both* of these elements of his thought. It has significant implications for the debate over Nietzsche and freedom. Nietzsche designs his 'official position,' that a struggle between a multiplicity of drives and their affects comprises the self, to introduce contingency into the structure of the self, and to shatter what he interprets as the illusion of a mind detached from the body's operations, ignorant of physiology. Yet rather than weakening a man's freedom, he actually intends to increase his freedom, in that he now becomes responsible for the kind of narratives (simple cause and effect) that he imposes onto the complex cause and effect of his inner life. In Janaway's detailed analysis of the figure of the 'sovereign individual' of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, it is clear that the great man imagines himself as free, as possessing a powerful will, and as master of himself. It is worth quoting this passage at length, as it summarises concisely many of the aspects of the man to whom Nietzsche wants us to aspire:

Civilization begins with the proposition 'any custom is better than no custom', and tradition is a 'higher authority that one obeys [. . .] because it *commands*' (D 16, 9). Yet the end-product or 'fruit' of this whole constraining process is an individual 'resembling only himself', having the capacity to be 'free again from the morality of custom', to have an 'independent [. . .] will' and be 'autonomous'. Nietzsche says much in a short space here, perhaps grasping for a vocabulary that will capture his insights. The sovereign individual's will is 'free', 'his own', 'independent', 'long', and 'unbreakable'; and in virtue of this will the sovereign individual is permitted to promise, has 'mastery over himself', has his own standard of value, is permitted to say 'yes' to himself, and has a consciousness of his 'superiority' and 'completion'. To be *permitted* to make promises, one must not only be minimally capable of promising but have the power to fulfil one's promises and the integrity to promise only what one genuinely has the will to do. This suggests a kind of self-knowledge in which one is properly conscious of what it is that

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58-9.

one wills, and confident of the consistency with which one's will is going to maintain itself intact until the moment at which it can be delivered upon.<sup>160</sup>

Janaway suggest that Nietzsche offers a complex account that reflects his constant ambiguity, which eschews both the absolute free will of the metaphysical subject and the notion of a completely unfree will. He concludes that, contra many commentators, Nietzsche's writings cannot make sense without at least some notion of creative agency:

The latter step of becoming free from the inherited values of morality requires, I argue, the conception of oneself as deciding, choosing, and trying as a genuine agent. Such genuine agency does not require that one be a neutral subject of free will that has unlimited possibility of action unconstrained by character and the causal order. In that sense there is no free will. But it does require, as Nietzsche says, that we rid ourselves of the other myth, that of the total unfreedom of the will. So it is wrong to think that Nietzsche wishes to exclude creative agency from his picture of humanity, because without it his proposed critique of moral values and his project of learning to think and feel in healthier ways would make little sense.<sup>161</sup>

This is a limited conclusion, since I think it should be clear to anyone who reads Nietzsche clearly that he subscribes to something in between the neutral subject of free will and total unfreedom of the will. I want to go further than this and claim that we can distinguish between the roles played by the official position and Nietzsche's writings on how the great man thinks about himself, and submit the former to the latter. This relieves the tension between these positions. Firstly, we can explain Nietzsche's 'official position' as an attempt to illustrate that the inner life is comprised of a complex cause and effect which we lack the means (and should lack the desire) to designate accurately. Secondly, all of Nietzsche's writings that address how we *should* think about ourselves consistently emphasise the importance of the coherent, unified self that is encapsulated in the idea of the strong Will. I think it is implicit in Nietzsche's overall project that the idea of how one should think about oneself is far more important than truth claims about how free or unfree the will is. There is therefore no necessary tension between the official position and the assumed position, because the former is a way of bringing all established positions into question, whereas the latter concerns how the great man should interpret himself.

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Once we put this normative element at the centre of our analysis we must establish an idea of free will that can accomplish what Nietzsche desires, in terms of self-interpretation, while avoiding the negative repercussions of the will as faculty. Nietzsche comes up with an idea of the Will which he thinks expresses the most beneficial ways of thinking about oneself. The fundamental point is that the idea of the Will should include all aspects of the process of thinking and acting, not just the end result: “The old word ‘will’ only serves to designate a resultant, a kind of individual reaction which necessarily follows a host of partly contradictory, partly congruous stimuli - the will no longer ‘effects’ anything, no longer ‘moves anything..’” (*AC* 14). He intends his idea of the Will to be a more comprehensive account of the body’s relations, which goes further than the over-simplistic idea of the will as a faculty: “in all willing there is, first of all, a plurality of sensations, namely the sensation of the condition we *leave*, the sensation of the condition towards which we *go*, the sensation of the ‘leaving’ and ‘going’ itself, and then also an accompanying muscular sensation” (*BGE* 19). He collapses distinctions between mental acts into the manifestation of one grand will: the will to power is: “one will that is inherent in all events” (*WP* 675/*KSA* 13:11[96]). He reinterprets “Purposes, “aims,” and “meanings” as “modes of expression” and “metamorphoses” of this underlying will (*WP* 675/*KSA* 13:11[96]). This does not devalue purposes, aims and meanings; on the contrary, the ability to form and possess them – to create them – signals the presence of a powerful will. Their importance derives from their role as symbols of the force that they express. Nietzsche’s indicates his attitude towards the idea of a unity of the self when he discusses the ‘soul hypothesis’; he confides, “Between ourselves, it is not at all necessary... To get rid of ‘the soul’ itself and thus forgo one of the oldest and most venerable of hypotheses” (*BGE* 12). Rather than destroy a useful idea, he suggests experimenting with “new forms and refinements” (*BGE* 12). I think that exactly the same is true for the hypothesis of the unified self; just as he transfigures the formerly intact soul into “mortal soul,” “soul as multiplicity of the subject,” or “soul as social structure of the drives and emotions,” he makes the same kind of conceptual transformation on the unity of the self (*BGE* 12).

Sometimes he describes this Will as producing a unity of the self, and sometimes in opposition to the type of unity involved in the idea of will as a faculty; he is most content, however, to describe this multiplicity as a *regency*:

It all depends on the proper characterization of the unity that comprises thinking, willing, feeling and all the affects: clearly the intellect is only a *tool*, but in whose hands?

In the hands of the affects certainly: and these are a multiplicity behind which is not necessary to posit a unity: it suffices to conceive the multiplicity as a regency.<sup>162</sup>

In conceiving of the self thus, Nietzsche attempts to rid self-image of the worst excesses that he associates with the idea of the unity of the self, *wiz.*, rejecting and ignoring the body, projecting pseudo-psychological and spiritual accounts of suffering, and overemphasising rationality. This is what at stake when he denies the traditional notion of unity. In complicating the idea of unity of the self Nietzsche certainly emphasises that willing is complex, but this does not mean that he praises the disorganised self, a non-unified self, or chaos; it is, instead, his way of restating the image of the self in such a way that enhances the feeling of self, and the feeling of growth (since he believes that these two ideas are identical).

He links the feeling of growth to the feeling of commanding. Conceiving of the self as a ‘regency’ does not detract from this pathos of commanding, because interpreting the body as a “structure composed of many souls” enables the agent to add the “under-wills” of “under-souls” to the sensation of pleasure he feels as “commander.” “What happens here is what happens in every well-constructed and happy commonwealth: the ruling class identifies itself with the success of the commonwealth” (BGE 19). The important aspect is not determining exact relations between affects, but the *belief* that “a man who *wills* - commands something in himself which obeys or which he believes obeys” (BGE 19). Whether it obeys or whether he *believes* it obeys is immaterial; the sensation is all. A man believing in the Will as *multiplicity* believes that he commands himself *in all aspects*. Nietzsche prescribes this to express the complex interplay between drives and thoughts, where we cannot separate the two or oppose them to one another. If the traditional idea of the unity of the self involves feeling that one commands one’s *actions*, then Nietzsche’s idea of the self goes further so that one commands one’s *Will*, and thus identifies oneself with the success of *all* the body’s processes.

In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche identifies free will as a fundamentally *antireligious* idea, prior to religious forces misappropriating it: “The theory of “free will” is antireligious. It seeks to create the right for man to think of himself as cause of his exalted state and actions: it is a form of the growing *feeling of pride*” (WP 288/KSA 13:14[126]). At the outset of this theory, a man “feels his power,” and assumes that: “there must be “will” behind this state - otherwise it would not be his” (WP 288/KSA 13:14[126]). At the outset, he links believing in the freedom of his will to having pride over his actions, and a feeling of power over oneself as *cause*. Nietzschean scholarship consistently tends to underestimate the importance of this feeling of pride, which

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<sup>162</sup> Parkes, p. 354, quoting Nietzsche, *KSA (Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe)*, (Colli & Montinari), 11:40 (38).



relates closely to the feeling of growth, since they are both underscored by the idea that one is responsible for one's action or thought. Nietzsche's criticisms of the idea begin when the weak, and their moral leader, the priest, co-opt the idea and place it on the side of the will to punish and the desire to make men feel guilty. We can contrast this with the particular idea of the freedom of will he caricatures in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he discusses it as a tool the weak use to justify their weakness as *freely chosen*; this also conceals their urge to *punish* the "birds of prey" who fail to suffer from this inability to act. Nietzsche argues similarly when he apparently denounces the idea of free will in *Twilight of the Idols* titled "*The error of free will*." He unveils 'free will' as "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 VI, 7). He invents free will for the purpose of "finding guilty" and of thereby inflicting "punishment." "Men were thought of as 'free' so that they could become *guilty*: consequently, every action *had* to be thought of as willed, the origin of every action as lying in the consciousness" (TI VI, 7). While commentators frequently use these sections to try to demonstrate that Nietzsche objects to the idea of free will, the point of these passages is to criticise some of the uses that idea has been put to; in particular, its role in concealing the desire to punish and in transforming *ressentiment* into punishment. Given that he emphasises the *role* that free will plays in helping the priest and the herd achieve their goals, this does not constitute a criticism of free will *per se*. On the contrary, he suggests that believing in the freedom of one's will, at least in a certain form, is a crucial aspect of greatness. Addressing the "normative dimension" of Nietzsche's account of free will, Gemes argues that Nietzsche, like Kant, sees "something valuable" in the "actual imperative to exercise agency free will, to be an agent rather than a mere cog in the causal network."<sup>163</sup>

Nietzsche expresses the Will's most important aspects in the following passage:

Enough, he who wills believes with a tolerable degree of certainty that will and action are somehow one - he attributes the success, the carrying out of the willing, to the will itself, and thereby enjoys an increase of that sensation of power which all success brings with it. 'Freedom of will' - is the expression for that complex condition of pleasure of the person who wills, who commands and at the same time identifies himself with the executor of the command - who as such also enjoys the triumph over resistances involved but who thinks it was his will itself which overcame these resistances. (BGE 19)

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<sup>163</sup> Ken Gemes, 'Nietzsche on Free Will, Autonomy, and the Sovereign Individual', *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, edited by Ken Gemes and Simon May 2010, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 46-7.

Nietzsche here credits belief in the Will with enjoying the triumph over resistances that he identifies as the basis for experiencing authentic joy. As I have already discussed, the ascetic's 'top-heavy' structure strangles this resistance because he tyrannises over his drives, reinforcing a conflict between his mind and his body, between Being and Becoming, between reason and his drives, that destroys all hope of harmony. In contrast, the great man maintains nuanced layers of resistance, and identifies himself with mastery over a whole host of subtle tensions. He constantly harmonises powerful drives into a successful whole:

The free man is a *warrior*. - How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft*. One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the great resistance is constantly being overcome: five steps away from tyranny, near the threshold of the danger of servitude. (TIIX, 38)

The idea of 'freedom of will' in its most positive manifestation is identifying oneself as *the commander of oneself*. The will to power expresses itself most highly in the one who interprets his body as a hierarchical structure of commanding and obeying, which he cannot reduce to the idea of will as merely a faculty, but which includes the sensation of power accompanied by conceiving of himself as the ruler of his whole body. In some of Nietzsche's highest praise he suggests that Goethe cultivate the ability to conceive of himself as *totality*; his foremost strength is that he strives to overcome the separation of aspects of himself: "What he aspired to was *totality*; he strove against the separation of reason, sensuality, feeling, will... He disciplined himself to a whole, he *created* himself" (TI IX, 49). The other most striking part of his description of Goethe is that, while Nietzsche conceives of him as refusing to be severed from life - "he placed himself within it; nothing could discourage him and he took as much as possible upon himself, above himself, within himself" - this has nothing in common with the loss of self that the plunge into Becoming involves, but is predicated upon the fact that he "surrounded himself with nothing but closed horizons" (TI IX, 49). It is the strength of his self-created character, his "keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself," that enables him to dare "to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness" (TI IX, 49). It is his power over himself that increases his scope to assimilate more experience *without* being overwhelmed and allowing himself to be *willed*. It is the strong and powerful Will that permits one access to the strange and terrifying aspects of existence.

Apart from the issue of placing the idea of free will in the service of the will to punish, it is not clear that we can easily distinguish between the free will of the slave of the *Genealogy* and the free will of the great man. The slave's adoption of the idea of free will is not necessarily disingenuous (*i.e.*, concealing a desire to punish), since it can also be a strategy to engineer pride in himself. Accordingly, the arguments in favour of assuming the freedom of one's will - joy in commanding, pride in one's successes, ability to cultivate one's will and self-create - can very well apply equally to the slave's adoption of free will; in assuming the mantle (and rhetoric) of freedom of the will, the slave assumes the central narrative that underpins self-creation and overcoming. This is but one of the many nuances that destroy any attempt to bestow unreserved praise on the noble of the *Genealogy*, and unreserved condemnation on the slave.<sup>164</sup> Assuming free will is a pivotal moment in enhancing the feeling of self, and ultimately to achieving aesthetic enjoyment of oneself as perfection, a more refined and cultivated joy than that the noble of the *Genealogy* enjoys, whose will to power not only lacks subtlety, but is, as Nietzsche is keen to point out, rendered completely impossible by societal life. Nietzsche identifies a link between greatness and believing that one's Will is free, arguing that this link is consistently underestimated by those who desire to believe that greatness relates to "faith":

Systematic falsification of great human beings, the great creators, the great epochs; one desires that faith should be the distinguishing mark of the great: but slackness, scepticism, "immorality," the right to throw off a faith, belong to greatness (Caesar, also Homer, Aristophanes, Leonardo, Goethe). One always suppresses the main thing, their "freedom of will." (*WP* 380/KSA 12:9[157])

Now that we have an account of a fuller and more comprehensive account of the Will, we can better understand the specific notion of responsibility that Nietzsche employs. As with the idea of free will, Nietzsche's criticisms of the traditional idea of the self are often said to undermine the idea of *responsibility*. McIntyre, for example, makes denying responsibility central to his analysis of the Nietzschean self. In fact, in analysing Nietzsche's critique of morality, which he understands as the "denaturalisation of morality," or morality as a tool for revenging oneself on nature, criticising the subject derives from the need to deny responsibility: "first, the critique of morality as anti-nature is fundamentally the critique of the idea of responsibility;

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<sup>164</sup> While we cannot criticise the slave's adoption of the idea of free will out of hand, there are many other factors which separate him from the great man. Not least, he creates his values *reactively*, which clearly implies a lack of character and an inability to resist stimulus (*GM* 22).

second, it entails the critique of the subject presupposed by the idea of responsibility.”<sup>165</sup> For McIntyre, responsibility is Nietzsche’s real enemy, and since it “presupposes free will,” and this in turn presupposes “the transformation of every action into a deed and a doer who is the free author of the deed,” we can only criticise it by attacking this idea of the subject that it (apparently) depends on.<sup>166</sup> Instead of the traditional subject, McIntyre insists that we must have “the unconditional unfreedom of the will,” replacing morality with “necessity” by taking “the doer back into the deed.”<sup>167</sup> He picks up on Nietzsche’s phrase “the innocence of becoming,” and argues that we achieve this innocence through a “newly redeemed, wholly decentred, absolute difference” (which is apparently also the meaning of the will to power).<sup>168</sup> McIntyre often appeals to concepts in this way, using them in a vague way and leaving it entirely unclear what it actually means to think about oneself in this way. What can it possibly mean to imagine oneself as ‘absolute difference’ or ‘wholly decentred’? Arguments of this kind consistently fail to realise the extent that Nietzsche both criticises *one use* of an idea, but nonetheless recognises that this idea can be valuable for interpreting oneself. McIntyre completely misses the possibility that Nietzsche could be critical of some of the uses to which the idea of responsibility is put, and nonetheless retain it in another form. In fact, Nietzsche proposes a greater sphere of responsibility as one of the most important narratives for thinking about oneself.

Experiencing the feeling of growth and overcoming resistance depends upon identifying with one’s successes, and for this to be true, we must believe ourselves to be responsible for what we are and what we do. I have already suggested that responsibility is the *correct* approach to suffering: since a man’s suffering intensifies and multiples when he fails to take responsibility for his suffering, he can best correct this by assuming responsibility wherever possible. The idea is that the best attitude to adopt towards oneself is to refuse to project the blame onto either external forces, or onto aspects of the self that one believes that one cannot control. It is becoming clear how this functions through the idea of the Will: I identify with my Will, which includes the multiplicity of affects that make up thinking, feeling, *etc.*; I assume the role of a commander, a regent, who commands and assumes responsibility for the individual aspects of the body, wherever this is possible - Nietzsche thus summarises freedom as “the will to self-responsibility” (*TI IX*, 38).

The Will’s desire to determine itself is bound up with an ethos of assuming responsibility for what one is. The very idea of self-creation presupposes that one is responsible

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<sup>165</sup> McIntyre, p. 6.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

for what one does, but also that what one thinks and does meaningfully affects and shapes what one is. Establishing this point is crucial, because while commentators often take Nietzsche's apparent denial of the unity of the self to diminish the importance of responsibility, I have been arguing that taking responsibility by recognising one's complicity in suffering is the foremost remedy for the problems of exhaustion, *resentment*, and a host of others problems, both physiological and psychological. When we deny responsibility for our suffering, we strip ourselves of the means to combat it. Coherence, then, depends on reconciling the assumption of responsibility with the idea of the Will, the self's central narrative.

Nietzsche goes further than the idea that one is responsible for one's immediate actions, and interprets this as only one aspect of a wider project of becoming responsible. One assumes responsibility for the state and conditions of one's Will as a whole. In suggesting this Nietzsche radically extends the use of the idea of responsibility, rather than diminishing it. The problem with the way in which the concept of responsibility is used, when tied to the idea of the will as the product of a faculty, is that it is restricted by the "naive" belief that one *only* causes what one has intentionally willed: "The entire theory of responsibility depends upon the naive psychology that the only cause is will and that one must be aware of having willed in order to believe in *oneself* as cause" (*WP* 288/*KSA* 13:14[126]). Such a theory opens up the possibility that wherever one can claim one is not aware of having willed, then one cannot clearly identify oneself as the cause. Nietzsche suspects that, perhaps counter-intuitively, the weak can transform the will as a faculty into an excuse for blaming what they do on unconscious acts, or other forces that are expressed through one, and so on. Such a man only claims responsibility for that which he can clearly recall consciously willing (if even that). Nietzsche's move is to suggest that one should make oneself *into* one's will, becoming inseparable from it, by identifying oneself with it. This elides the problem of which actions and thoughts one is responsible for, since one takes responsibility for the whole process. On this point, as in many other places, Nietzsche is clearly influenced by Emerson, who wrote: "There can be no driving force except through the conversion of the man into his will, making him the will, and the will him... The one serious and formidable thing in nature is a will. Society is servile from want of will, and therefore the world wants saviours and religions."<sup>169</sup> Our Will is not given; we establish its relative strength or weakness through our habits, and thus we are responsible for cultivating it. Nietzsche interprets actions and thoughts as manifestations of the underlying Will. Both the act of *taking* responsibility and the *feeling* that it produces are central to the highest forms of self-development. It is a "sign of nobility: never to think of degrading our duties into duties for everybody; not to

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<sup>169</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Fate', *Essays and Poems*, Barnes & Noble Classics, New York, 2004, p. 380.

want to relinquish or share our own responsibilities; to count our privileges and the exercising of them among our *duties*” (BGE 272).

Responsibility constitutes a narrative in itself (*i.e.*, a specific way of conceptualising one’s relation to oneself), but it is also the narrative that underpins all other narratives, since a man cannot enter into self-creation without first assuming that the idea of the process itself is viable. Thus it is not only an act of self-creation, but the belief that makes the very process of self-creation possible. This is a more complex notion of responsibility, which eludes simple characterisation. For instance, I will establish that Nietzsche attempts to downplay the degree of power that any individual event is allowed to exert over a man, instead shifting his emphasis away from individual events and onto overall character.

We must understand all of this through Nietzsche’s fundamental contention that thought’s quality connects intrinsically with physiological states. When responsibility depends upon a strict idea of will as faculty, then every effect physiology has on thoughts seems to undermine the possibility of this responsibility. In other words, if we conceive of will as a faculty this makes it impossible to allow for physiological states to affect our perception, whilst still believing that we are responsible. It should be clear, however, that once a man believes in his Will in the all-encompassing Nietzschean sense, it is possible for him both to account for physiology’s effects while still believing that he is responsible. He is no longer merely responsible for what he *does*, but also for what he *is*, *including the fluctuating physiological states themselves*. For example, if we conceive of responsibility narrowly, then it might be objected that Nietzsche’s emphasis on exhaustion’s effects on thought undermines a man’s ability to be responsible for his actions; however once we accept that he is responsible for creating himself and developing as a whole, then it is obvious that he is always responsible for his exhaustion, and thus, once more, for each individual action. The great man takes responsibility for ensuring that he does not become exhausted, and, when this is unavoidable, he takes responsibility for making sure that he does not allow this exhaustion to manifest itself in values and actions.

### III

#### *Conquering the Past and Rejecting the Eternal Return*

*A full and powerful soul not only copes with painful, even terrible losses, deprivations, robberies, insults; it emerges from such hells with a greater fullness and powerfulness. (WP 1030/KSA 12:7[39])*

A central narrative of Nietzsche's great man concerns the attitude he adopts to the/his past. I noted in establishing the Will's primacy that the chapter "On Redemption" establishes that it is crucial to become the kind of being that *can* will. The rest of the chapter discusses the problem of the relationship between the Will and the past. The fundamental problem he identifies with will-theory generally is that the will is apparently powerless to alter the past. "It was": thus is called the will's gnashing of teeth and loneliest misery. Impotent against that which has been - it is an angry spectator of everything past. The will cannot will backward; that it cannot break time and time's greed - that is the will's loneliest misery" (Z, II, 20). The Will's antipathy towards time and the past, derived from its fixity, is the essence of "the spirit of revenge," which is the guise *ressentiment* appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Thus the will, the liberator, became a doer of harm; and on everything that is capable of suffering it avenges itself for not being able to go back" (Z, II, 20). We solve this formulation of the problem of the spirit of revenge by transforming the "It was" into "thus I willed it!" (Z, II, 20).

In discussing responsibility I made it clear that Nietzsche's focus is less on any individual thought or action's worth, and more on cultivating a feeling of responsibility for all that one is; in particular, creating oneself in such a way as to develop character. We do not define character by any one particular deed, but by the grand sum of all that one is; "that is to say... The order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relative to one another" (BGE 6). In identifying nobility, individual actions are unreliable indicators of possessing character: "It is not his actions which reveal him - actions are always ambiguous, always unfathomable -; neither is it his 'works'" (BGE 287). Nietzsche is again influenced by Emerson on the relationship between character and the event. The presence of character makes for "an overpowering present," which "dulls the

impression of particular events."<sup>170</sup> This occurs both from the outsider's perspective: "When we see the conqueror we do not think much of any one battle or success. We see that we had exaggerated the difficulty it was easy to him," and extends to the effects that events have on the self: "The great man is not convulsible or tormentable: events pass over to him without much impression."<sup>171</sup> This is entirely congruent with the idea that character develops by cultivating the ability not to react. No single event is allowed to overwhelm this kind of strength of character, because of the Will's supreme confidence in itself.

The great man holds himself responsible for all of his thoughts, for all of his deeds, and for his suffering. *Yet he does not take any one particular event too seriously.* Both of these aspects are vital: the former is essential to enable him to identify the causes of his suffering accurately and thus guard against it multiplying and intensifying; the latter is crucial so that he does not suffer from the past, or be paralyzed by former events, and in doing so avoids debilitating self-loathing. With the two aspects in place, he strikes a balance which makes a productive introspection possible, enhancing his future possibilities rather than limiting them. A man's character contextualises any deed that he performs. Zarathustra criticises the "pale criminal" for entering into a relationship with his deed whereby he allows the deed to define him "He was equal to his deed when he committed it, but he could not bear its image once he had done it. From then on he always saw himself as the doer of one deed. I call this madness: the exception reversed itself to the essence" (Z, I, 6). Nietzsche offers one explanation for this over-concentration on one deed when he argues that introspection tends to focus on the consequences of a particular action rather than its cause, because every deed with unusual consequences tends to produce a "spiritual disturbance," which gives the individual deed a significance to the doer which it should not actually possess: "the iniquitous interest that society may have in treating our entire existence from a single point of view, as if its meaning lay in bringing forth one single deed, should not infect the doer himself - unfortunately this happens almost all the time. This stems from the fact that spiritual disturbance follows every deed with unusual consequence, whether these consequences are good or ill" (WP 225/KSA 13:11[365]). The mistake, as always, is emphasising the consequences over the cause: exceptional consequences do not necessarily tell the doer anything about the causes of the deed, and thus very little about himself that he could not determine from other deeds with less dramatic consequences. When cowardice produces a man's everyday deeds, routines and habits, this should be far more of a problem than when one of his deeds produces novel consequences.

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<sup>170</sup> Emerson, 'Circles', *Essays*, p. 225.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.



Nietzsche identifies suffering from any particular aspect of the past as an “illness”: “This reopening of old wounds, this wallowing in self-contempt and contrition, is one more illness” (*WP* 233/KSA 13:14[155]). The spirit of revenge’s emergence is, however, rooted in assuming the stability of the deed and the past event. The limit that Nietzsche imposes on the possibility of self-knowledge – centred on recognising that the workings of the inner life are subject to complex cause and effect – effectively undermines precisely this stability. The great man forges a new relationship with his deed, empowering his Will to confront the inviolability of the past, and killing the spirit of revenge. Imposing Nietzsche’s idea of the Will onto complex cause and effect functions as a creative synthesis: a shaping, plastic, generative force. The meaning of the past is not given, but exists as “fragment”: “All ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a grisly accident - until the creating will says to it: ‘But I will it thus! I shall will it thus!’” (*Z*, II, 20). Recognising the complex cause and effect involved in every deed and thought means giving up on the idea of accurately reconstructing or remembering their causes. If we must *interpret* the details of the past then this means giving up on the idea of *consistency*. Nietzsche’s thought here again exhibits a striking parallel with Emerson’s, who wrote: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.”<sup>172</sup> Reinterpreting the past is not only necessary but also desirable: “It seems to be a rule of wisdom never to rely on your memory alone, scarcely even in acts of pure memory, but to bring the past for judgement into the thousand-eyed present, and live ever in a new day.”<sup>173</sup> Zarathustra rejects consistency in exactly the same way when a disciple asks his reasons for an opinion he (apparently) held:

“Why?” said Zarathustra. “You ask why? I do not belong to those whose Why may be questioned.

Is my experience of yesterday? It has been a long time since I experienced the reasons of my opinions.

Would I not have to be a keg of memory if I were also to have my reasons with me?

It is already too much for me to keep my own opinions, and many a bird flies away. (*Z*, II, 17)

True overcoming and health does not consist in being able to feel well *despite* the past, but occurs when the great man subsumes individual events into the personal narrative that constitutes his history; Emerson writes: “True conquest is the causing the calamity to fade and disappear as an

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<sup>172</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’, p. 39.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

early cloud of insignificant result in a history so large and advancing”<sup>174</sup> Nietzsche echoes these thoughts precisely: the stronger a man’s character and history, the less significant he tends to interpret any *particular* deed or event to be; “The stronger the innermost roots of a man’s nature, the more readily will he be able to assimilate and appropriate the things of the past” (*UM II*, 1). He concerns himself less with the outcome of a particular action and more with the process, because his interest lies in ensuring the strength of his character, and guarding against becoming a “mere reagent” (*EH II*, 8). His character is not *defined* by events, but they become *aspects* of his character. The great man’s priority is subjecting much to his own volition, rather than emphasising any aspect where he might be dependent on circumstance. When the decadent loses his power to resist stimuli, he “comes to be at the mercy of accidents” (*WP 44/KSA 13:17[6]*), but the great man, in contrast, cultivates his character so that he depends less and less on circumstances; Emerson argues: “The man must be so much, that he must make all circumstances indifferent.”<sup>175</sup> Nietzsche advocates a selective approach to events, where one still feels full pride over actions that succeed, but where one refuses to let oneself be defined by events and actions deemed less successful. Part of the story Nietzsche wants to tell about the attitude we should adopt to the past, then, follows logically from the process of developing character. The stronger our character, the more we become immune to individual events. Once we loosen the grip we allow specific events to hold over us, we are freer to shape the past into a narrative that spurs us on to greatness.

The second element, that completes this process of being redeemed from the past, is inscribed into the process of increasing energy itself, because Nietzsche interprets a plenitude of energy with a creative, healing power that allows one to overcome the insignificant, rather than suffer from it. In *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* Nietzsche describes this as a “plastic power,” the absence of which is directly related to suffering from the past:

I mean by plastic power the capacity to develop out of oneself in one’s own way, to transform and incorporate into one self what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds. There are people who possess so little of this power that they can perish from a single experience, from a single painful event, often and especially from a subtle piece of injustice, like a man bleeding to death from a scratch. (*UM II*, 1)

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<sup>174</sup> Emerson, ‘Circles’, *Essays*, p. 225.

<sup>175</sup> Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’, p. 42.

Because this power is synonymous with possessing surplus energy, Nietzsche is able to claim that: “The entire practice of psychological healing must be put back onto a *physiological* basis” (WP 233/KSA 13:14[155]). Taking individual past events too seriously is a symptom of weakness and exhaustion because it betrays a lack of the creative, plastic power vital to overcoming misfortune. The ability to redeem the events of the past is correspondingly a sign of health: “One is healthy when one can laugh at the earnestness and zeal with which one has been hypnotized by any single detail of our life, when one feels that the ‘bite’ of conscience is like a dog biting on a stone – when one is ashamed of one’s remorse” (WP 233/KSA 13:14[155]).

Thus the stronger we make our character, the better an approach we can take to the problems of the past, both because we turn our focus to character, rather than specific events, but also because our increasing energy enables us to heal more, rather than to dwell and fixate on minor painful memories. This process is slightly complicated by the argument I have already developed, that we must take responsibility for our suffering. This ensures that we must adopt at least a measure of truthfulness towards our past, we cannot simply forget it, ignore it, because we must honestly appraise the extent to which we were complicit in our suffering. But this does not contradict the process I have been describing. The great man appraises his suffering, recognises and even *emphasises* where he is complicit in it, and then, drawing upon his resources, his depth of character and his wealth of energy, of plastic healing power, he moves forward into the present.

Contra to most Nietzschean scholarship, I have not discussed the eternal return in an attempt to resolve the problem of the relationship between the will and the past. This commonly drawn link is undoubtedly because of the final lines of ‘*On Redemption*,’ where Zarathustra muses on the possibility of something higher than “reconciliation” with the past: “and who taught it (the will) reconciliation with time, and what is higher than any reconciliation? That will which is the will to power must will something higher than any reconciliation (Z, II, 20). Laurence Lampert, for instance, writes: “The conclusion implied, but not named, in Zarathustra’s formulation of the problem of redemption is that the will to power that wills the past, and hence wills what is higher than all reconciliation, wills eternal return.”<sup>176</sup> I am satisfied with the idea that Zarathustra is in fact alluding to the eternal return. The problem is that commentators tend to get so caught up with this (likely) allusion that they neglect the aspects I have been discussing. Lampert, for example, argues that it is the eternal return that cures a man of the desire to take revenge on the past: “The teaching of eternal return thus first comes to light as the teaching

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<sup>176</sup> Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Yale University Press, London, 1986, p. 147.

which solves the problem of revenge against the unwilling past.”<sup>177</sup> The importance of energy, of cultivating character, of strength of will even, all tend to get ignored because of the focus on the eternal return. My account has appealed to a long process of cultivating a strong Will, not a sudden transformation of our attitude to the past through the eternal return. Of course, if the idea of eternal return actually does solve problems such as the attitude of the will to the past, then this would at least be a consolation for all of Nietzsche’s valuable arguments that commentators tend to ignore. Unfortunately, the whole idea of the eternal return is inadequate, and it is to this that we now turn.

### *The Eternal Return of the Same*

Little to no consensus has been reached about the idea of the eternal return. One of the main reasons for this is that the idea is not only hugely underdeveloped in Nietzsche’s writings, but, when he did attempt to write about it, he suggested a number of different uses to which the idea could be put, without developing any of them substantially. Several of the best works on Nietzsche have chosen to ignore the eternal return almost entirely (Bataille’s *On Nietzsche*) or at least ‘slight’ it (Staten’s *Nietzsche’s Voice*).<sup>178</sup> Hardly anyone disputes that it is an important idea in Nietzsche’s thought.<sup>179</sup> David Owen for example claims that: “There seems to be little doubt that Nietzsche regarded the thought of the eternal recurrence as the linchpin of his mature thinking; however, there is considerable disagreement among Nietzsche’s scholars as to the form and function of this thought,” and that because of this “the need to situate the concept of eternal recurrence with respect to the concepts of will to power and the Overman becomes an important concern for any attempt to do justice to Nietzsche’s thought.”<sup>180</sup> Likewise Lampert’s *Nietzsche’s Teaching*, one of the few, and probably the most well-known, commentaries on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, argues that Zarathustra is a “guide to the interpretation of eternal return,” that the concept supersedes the *Übermensch*, and that it is the “most spiritual expression of the will to power.”<sup>181</sup> Deleuze likewise argues that the will to power finds its highest form in the eternal return: “The eternal return is the highest power, the synthesis of affirmation which finds its

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>178</sup> Despite explicitly slighting the eternal return, Staten does discuss it briefly in his final chapter, and, characteristically, provides one of the most meaningful contributions to be found in Nietzsche scholarship.

<sup>179</sup> I think we can probably put Bataille in this bracket (although he mentions it occasionally), but very few other authors.

<sup>180</sup> Owen, p. 111-2.

<sup>181</sup> Lampert, p. 260.

principle in the will.”<sup>182</sup> These are significant mistakes that impair many discussions. My main point will be that it is not such an important idea in Nietzsche’s thought as almost everybody seems to think: it is not a cosmological or ontological truth, it is not the key to his thought, it should not be central to his legacy, and we should not try to explain the whole of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a book designed to explicate the idea - this myth is particularly damaging. Why discuss it then? Establishing *why* it is not as important as prevailing wisdom seems to think takes us right to the centre of Nietzsche’s thought, and means I must bring together all the claims I have made about his project and its goals. I will show that, as a narrative, it runs counter to a lot of Nietzsche’s most important claims, fails to fit in with the underlying spirit of his thought, and that its true significance *to him* was as a personal thought that he never managed to elucidate properly or find a use for. I start by establishing the nature of the thought of the eternal return, following Klossowski’s arguments in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* that its significance is primarily as a *unique lived experience*, characterised by its *intensity*. I then move to evaluate Nietzsche’s attempts to explicate the thought and transform it into doctrine, concentrating in particular on the uses he puts it to in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, his only real attempt to elucidate it. I contrast this attempt negatively with the other narratives I have discussed, using the criterion I have established to reject its usefulness as a narrative for achieving greatness.

Of all of Nietzsche’s thought, the eternal return is the idea that is still subject to the most wide-ranging interpretation. Many essays have been written that speculate on the meaning of a few pages in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and still no one seems to agree on very much.<sup>183</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the recent collection of essays on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited by James Luchte. In *The Gateway-Augenblick*, Paul S. Loeb compares the “doctrine of recurrence” with “Plato’s doctrine of reincarnation in the *Phaedo*,” concluding that we can recollect aspects of our identical past lives, “Like Plato, Nietzsche argues for personal immortality, thinks that we may recollect our souls’ knowledge of our past lives, and emphasizes the significance of dreams and courageous philosophical encounters with the facts of our death.”<sup>184</sup> In contrast, Friedrich Ulfers and Mark Daniel Cohen develop an interpretation of the eternal return which has absolutely nothing in common with Loeb’s. In *Zarathustra, the Moment, and Eternal Recurrence of the Same: Nietzsche’s Ontology of Time*, they argue “that Nietzsche committed himself to the development of a coherent theory of ontology, one which finds much

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<sup>182</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Columbia University Press, New York, 1983, p. 197.

<sup>183</sup> As I will establish, part of the problem is authors often focus almost exclusively in part three of *Zarathustra*, rather than on the important revelations at the close of part four.

<sup>184</sup> Paul S. Loeb, ‘The Gateway-Augenblick’, in *Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited by James Luchte, Continuum, London, 2008, p. 108

of its inspiration in the mid-nineteenth century ideas of natural science and in *Naturphilosophie*.<sup>185</sup> Such is the divergence of interpretations, which hardly seem to be discussing the same idea.

Both of these authors agree, however, over its centrality and importance in Nietzsche's work. While nobody disputes that the idea of the eternal return rarely occurs outside of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the argument generally runs along the lines that Nietzsche considers this his central work, explicating his most significant ideas, and that is one of the most significant, or *the* most significant idea in this work. I agree with the first claim, and disagree strongly with the second. It certainly seems to occupy a privileged place in the text: Zarathustra alludes to its importance in several important sections, most notably *On Redemption* before discussing it (in a fashion) in two sections in part three, *On the Vision and the Riddle* and *The Convalescent*. He appears noticeably transformed after the latter section, apparently having resolved his problem of *disgust* at the small men of the present. Yet Nietzsche's accounts of the eternal return are incredibly problematic. These two explicit discussions are among Nietzsche's most obscure sections, and in every attempted explication he distances Zarathustra from the account given; Alan White argues that this distancing is the most "striking: aspect of *Zarathustra*:

Yet what is most striking about *Zarathustra*, in light of Nietzsche's retrospective description, is the extraordinarily problematic status of the thought of the eternal return within it... although it is the work's "fundamental conception," Zarathustra, rarely short of words, expresses it only in recounting a dream, and then only in a preliminary fashion, before he has directly confronted it. Following his confrontation with the thought, he seems to discuss it not at all; what we hear of it we hear not from him, but from his animals.<sup>186</sup>

If the eternal return is as central to his thought as many people think, then it is unclear why Nietzsche, apparent master of different literary and rhetorical styles, did not make more of an effort at least to try to make its meaning clear. Klossowski at least partially explains this in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, the most compelling, multifaceted, and complex interpretation of Nietzsche's relation to the eternal return. I do not imagine anyone is able to summarise this fascinating book satisfactorily, but there are several points, often overlooked (as the whole book seems to be in general), that help us understand the eternal return's *role* in Nietzsche's thought.

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<sup>185</sup> Friedrich Ulfers & Mark Daniel Cohen, 'Zarathustra, the Moment, and Eternal Recurrence of the Same: Nietzsche's Ontology of Time', in *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 75

<sup>186</sup> Alan White, *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 71.

Klossowski uses Nietzsche's correspondence and published works to demonstrate that the eternal return struck Nietzsche as a moment of personal revelation, rather than a clearly defined concept: "The thought of the Eternal Return of the Same came to Nietzsche as an *abrupt awakening* in the midst of a *Stimmung*, a certain tonality of the soul. Initially confused with this *Stimmung* it gradually emerged as a thought; nonetheless, it preserved the character of a revelation - as a *sudden unveiling*."<sup>187</sup> The thought of the eternal return was thus just a "*lived fact*," not a concept or "representation," and was marked out by its singular *intensity*: "in Nietzsche's mind, it had not yet achieved a doctrinal form - the secret experience remained an experience whose only evidence lay in its *intensity*."<sup>188</sup>

Klossowski details, using Nietzsche's private correspondence with Lou Salome, his desire to give the thought of the Eternal Return a *scientific* basis, transforming it into a doctrine:

At that time, the recurrence idea had not as yet become a conviction in Nietzsche's mind, but only a suspicion. He had the intention of heralding it when and if it could be founded scientifically. We exchanged a series of letters about this matter, and Nietzsche constantly expressed the mistaken opinion that it would be possible to win for it an indisputable basis through physics experiments. It was he who decided at that to devote ten years of exclusive study to the natural sciences at the University of Vienna or Paris. Then, after ten years of absolute silence, he would - in the event that his own surmise were to be substantiated, as he feared - step among people again as the teacher of the doctrine of eternal recurrence.<sup>189</sup>

Klossowski speculates that not only would a scientific basis for the idea have the advantage of presenting the eternal return in a form compelling to others, but, also, "the verification of the lived fact by science would reassure him of his own lucidity."<sup>190</sup> The project of scientific verification was doomed to failure, even irrespective of the actual scientific aspect, because the real significance of the doctrine, its "revelatory ecstasy," was "*undemonstrable*."<sup>191</sup> For Klossowski, the personal significance of the thought of the eternal return for Nietzsche is that it revealed the *fortuitous* nature of his existence.<sup>192</sup> Before thoughts of proving it scientifically, before interpreting it as a selective doctrine, and before thoughts of it as a conspiracy of the "vicious circle," as a founding principle for a new elite, the thought of the eternal return called

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<sup>187</sup> Klossowski, p. 56.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72 & 94.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96 (Klossowski quoting Lou Salome).

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

into question the “once-and-for-all” of the subject, revealing “*innumerable times*”: the eternal return is a “mode” in which a certain feeling is “deployed”:

The Eternal Return is merely the mode of its deployment. The feeling of vertigo results from the *once and for all* in which the subject is surprised by the dance of *innumerable times*: the *once-and-for-all* disappears. The intensity emits a series of infinite vibrations of being, and it is these vibrations that project the individual self *outside of itself* as so many *dissonances*. Everything resounds until the consonance of this single moment is re-established, where the dissonances are once again resolved.<sup>193</sup>

Klossowski makes it clear that the thought of the eternal return calls into question the identity of the subject, revealing that it is contingent. The logic behind this move is not self-evident, since the idea of the *same* self occurring infinite times does not in itself seem to undermine the identity of *this* self that I now am at all. But we must remember that the idea is merely the mode by which the ‘feeling of vertigo’ is ‘deployed’; the feeling is more important than the idea itself. And yet the image of the circle does play an important role, although it could perhaps be substituted for another: at the moment of the highest intensity, provoked by the thought, an image of the circle was formed, which seemed to preclude the very self that was thinking of it. This image rent asunder the coherence of the one that thought it, but nonetheless contained its own internal coherence. Klossowski’s account of this experience is worth quoting at length:

Now in a *Stimmung*, in a tonality that I will designate as the highest feeling, and that I will aspire to *maintain* as the highest thought - what has happened? Have I not surpassed my own limits, and thereby depreciated the everyday code of signs - either because thought abandons me, or else because I can no longer discern the difference between fluctuations from without and those from within?

Up to now, in the everyday context, thought was always referred back to me in the designation ‘myself.’ But what becomes of my own coherence at that degree of intensity where thought ceases to refer back to me in the designation ‘myself,’ and instead invents a sign by which it would designate its own coherence with itself? If this sign is no longer my own thought, does it not signify my exclusion from all possible coherence? If it is still mine, how could it conceivably designate an absence of intensity at the highest degree of intensity?

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.



Let us now suppose that, during such a high tonality of the soul, an image of the Circle is formed. Something happens to my thought in this sign, it regards itself as dead, as no longer my own: it enters into such a strict coherence with it that the invention of this sign, this circle, takes on the power of all thought. Does this mean that the thinking subject would lose its own identity in a coherent thought that would itself exclude identity? There is nothing here to distinguish the designating intensity from the designated intensity, to re-establish the coherence between the self and the world, as constituted by everyday designations.<sup>194</sup>

The high tonality of the soul in which Nietzsche experienced the vertigo of Eternal Return created the sign of the Vicious Circle. What was instantaneously actualized in this sign was both the highest intensity of thought, self-enclosed in its own coherence, and the absence of any corresponding intensity in the everyday designations; by the same token, the designation of the *self*, to which everything had heretofore led, was itself emptied.<sup>195</sup>

This feeling of ‘vertigo’ and ‘highest intensity,’ should sound familiar, since it describes exactly the same type of experience I have been criticising throughout: an idea of intoxication that involves losing the coherence of the everyday subject. But Klossowski’s strength is that, unlike so many others, he recognises not only the allure that this feeling exerted on Nietzsche, but also his *fear* of the threat it posed to the coherence of his identity. Nietzsche’s *experience* of the thought of the eternal return, whatever its actual content and whatever meanings he would *later* put into the concept, was one of an intense delirium, the total intoxication of losing his self and his identity. The brilliance of Klossowski’s passage (above) is that he draws a tangible link between the idea of the eternal return and the experience of desubjectification which has so often been touted as the meaning of Nietzsche’s work. Nietzsche’s experience of the eternal return problematises the coherence and identity of the everyday self, but nonetheless reveals a monstrous and ecstatic vision of the character of the world beyond human existence:

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end... 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, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and flood of its forms.. blessing itself as that that which must return eternally, as a

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-4.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my *Diomysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal. (*WP* 550/KSA 12:2[83])

Klossowski's charting of the ambiguity of the experience of the eternal return, its attraction and its repulsion, provides a richness and charm to his text, so often lacking in Nietzsche scholarship, finally concluding at the dramatic point whence Nietzsche breaks down in Turin and the ambiguity is resolved by the complete collapse of his everyday coherence. In calling into question the absoluteness of identity and coherence, the eternal return does not make these ideas obsolete, but, as Nietzsche would also write about sickness, *it makes existence a problem*. In undermining coherence, it makes consciously acquiring and maintaining coherence an important issue. While the thought of the eternal return may have seemed ecstatic, it was also the experience of “Chaos,” and of the emptying of the self.<sup>196</sup> Nietzsche, who increasingly feared losing his strength and coherence, now had an image, a particular thought that came to personify these fears. But what it did reiterate was the importance of re-establishing his identity and coherence, and creating himself in such a way as to maintain these in the face of the thought. It reinforced his belief in creating his own identity, in assuming responsibility for maintaining his coherence, and thus for adopting a role as master of chaos. By constructing character he could retain the ecstasy the thought of the eternal return involves, whilst guarding against its worst excesses. Thus he could strip the ecstasy he found in the eternal return of its ambiguous nature, and locate it in the triumph of the self over chaos, as the feeling of overcoming and holding firm against forces threatening its dispersal. Thus while the eternal return began as a thought ‘throwing Nietzsche outside of himself,’ he tried to transform it into a thought that one could only bear and affirm by fortifying the strength of one's everyday self. We can note, in conclusion, that there is nothing of unique importance about the thought of the eternal return in this regard, its importance is instead in its role as a *transgressive* thought that shatters the everyday self.

Nietzsche first put the thought to use in his published writings in *The Gay Science*, in the famous passage “*The greatest weight*”, where he proposes a thought experiment where “a demon” proclaims: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in our life will have to return to

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<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64-66.

you, all in the same succession and sequence.” (GS 341) Nietzsche then argues that: “If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you” (GS 341). This first use of the thought, then, clearly implies that the thought should have some kind of transformative effect on the life of the one to whom it is presented. The most straightforward interpretation of the idea of the eternal return is thus as a thought that can be *taught*, and that will affect a man’s attitude to his life and behaviour. Many interpret it in some such way. Danto, for instance, interprets it as an *imperative*. “Stated as an imperative: So act (or so be) that you would be willing to act exactly the same way (or be exactly the same thing) an infinite number of times over. Heeding this, men might stop feeling *ressentiment*. In existentialist terms, it is a plea for authenticity.”<sup>197</sup> Robert Solomon also interprets the eternal return as an “existential imperative,” which “is a welcome counter to Christian mythology,” and can be used to provide an “existential kick of inspiration.”<sup>198</sup> He discusses, however, a number of problems in using it in this way, not least that there are a number of different interpretations of how it can be used, none of which seem wholly satisfactorily. He concludes that “it does seem to me a pretty slim and abstract support for such a weighty matter as life-affirmation.”<sup>199</sup> This seems to me to be correct. The problem with the eternal return, if we conceive of it primarily as an existential imperative, a thought experiment designed to force us to reevaluate our lives, is that it just does not seem to be a very good one. In general, Nietzsche scholarship tends to be at best lukewarm to the idea, and, despite Nietzsche’s popularity, I am not aware that it has had any significant cultural impact.<sup>200</sup> While it might be a welcome alternative to a Christian denial of *this* world, it does not seem to have any more intuitive appeal - or deeper appeal - that I can fathom, than a popular cliché like ‘You only live once, make the most of it.’ The problem, which will be a recurring one with Nietzsche’s uses of the idea, is that once it becomes divorced from its nature as a lived experience, it feels rather hollow and banal.<sup>201</sup> I do not think it is particularly useful as an existential imperative, and, in any case, while this idea might be a plausible description of the way Nietzsche tries to use the idea in *The Gay Science*, I do not think it captures the way that he tries to use it in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* adequately. Furthermore, in a moment, I will argue that using the eternal return as an existential imperative also runs into the same problem that befalls

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<sup>197</sup> Danto, p. 194.

<sup>198</sup> Solomon, p. 201 & 206.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>200</sup> Milan Kundera does discuss it at the beginning of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, but only to introduce his speculations about whether heaviness is better than lightness. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, pp. 3-5.

<sup>201</sup> There is little need to produce another lengthy discussion on the (in-) effectiveness of the eternal return as a thought experiment or existential imperative. There are good discussions in, for example, Solomon, pp. 201-207 and Nehamas, pp. 141-169.

any attempt to use it to ‘transform’ the one who thinks it: it tends to detract from the actual processes involved in achieving greatness.

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is Nietzsche’s most sustained and, in fact, only real attempt to explicate the idea; developing the figure of Zarathustra was a chance for him to convey the intensity that lay at the centre of the experience – Klossowski suggests that Zarathustra would “mime” Nietzsche’s ecstasy: “The need to provide a ‘systematic’ commentary to his prophecy became even more imperative. The unintelligible evidence of the Sils-Maria ecstasy, the implicit intensity of the vertigo of the Return - in a word, the *high tonality of the soul* - was no longer Nietzsche’s alone, but would be *mimed* by Zarathustra’s *bombastic gesticulations*.”<sup>202</sup> Was this attempt to convey the meaning of the eternal return successful? Judging by the sheer variety of contradictory interpretations of the eternal return, and the almost total lack of consensus over any aspects of the idea, it would appear not. While Nietzsche would never cease praising *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, often declaring it his greatest book (and sometimes *the* greatest book), Klossowski certainly doubts whether Nietzsche considered his enunciation of the eternal return a success: “Zarathustra’s miming of the *high tonality* seemed to ridicule Nietzsche’s distress and make a mockery of it.”<sup>203</sup>

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is about the narratives that Zarathustra uses to interpret himself and develop into a great man. We must therefore interpret the idea of the eternal return as just such a narrative, *i.e.*, as constructed by Zarathustra to produce certain effects on himself. Its importance is the role it plays in Nietzsche/Zarathustra’s development, and it is important in direct proportion to its success in this capacity. Thus only by establishing the role that it plays can we evaluate the extent of its success, and determine to what extent it might be interchangeable with other narratives that can fulfil the same purpose(s). To interpret the eternal return in this way is to reject the view that its significance is ontological, and that it is intrinsically bound up with other Nietzschean ideas, such as the will to power (Lampert) or the *Übermensch* (Kaufmann).<sup>204</sup> The difficulties in explicating the idea are clear enough in the text itself. The most extended discussion occurs in ‘*The Convalescent*,’ but Nietzsche only allows Zarathustra’s animals to try to define the idea and Zarathustra immediately chastises them for trivialising the experience by making “a hurdy-gurdy song of it,” as he does several pages later, when they again try to summarise the idea (Z, III, 13). The animals’ attempt to describe Zarathustra’s experience of the eternal return entirely fails to capture its ecstatic nature, mirroring the entire book’s attempt to capture Nietzsche’s experience. Much has been written about how accurate the

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>204</sup> Lampert, p. 260 and Kaufmann, p. 316-7.

animals' account is supposed to be; White argues that the animals' words have often problematically been taken to be authoritative, and that even those who stress "the unreliability of the animals' first accounts" tend to accept the second: "The animals' final account of the eternal return is generally taken to express Nietzsche's own deepest thoughts."<sup>205</sup>

The most common type of interpretation of the eternal return in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – a type of approach that can incorporate the idea of it as an existential imperative, is to refer to its *transformative* role in the text. In particular, in 'The Comalescent' thinking the thought of the eternal return apparently 'cures' Zarathustra of his problem of disgust. I want to suggest that this account is entirely misleading. The 'transformation' is actually merely the end of a long process of self-development. Firstly, after initially conceiving of the idea of the eternal return, Zarathustra finds it impossible to speak about the idea or even think through its repercussions. The main reason appears to be that it exacerbates his constant problem of *disgust* at mankind, a problem which preoccupies him from the outset. In 'On the Rabble' he identifies the presence of 'the rabble' as the fundamental obstacle to his joy, which he could only 'solve' by taking refuge in solitude: "And the bite I gagged on most was not the knowledge that life itself requires hostility and dying and torture crosses -. Instead I once asked, and almost choked on my question: What? Does life also *require* the rabble?" (Z, II, 6). The most pronounced immediate effect that the thought of the eternal return has on him is that it intensifies his suffering at the thought of the small man; it was already almost unbearable that he should exist, but the idea that he might return eternally *nauseates* Zarathustra to the point of nihilism:

The cross on which I suffered was not that I know human beings are evil - instead, I cried as no one yet has cried:

'A shame that their most evil is so very small! A shame that their best is so very small!'

My great surfeit of human beings - *that* choked me and crawled into my throat; and what the soothsayer said: 'All is the same, nothing is worth it, knowledge chokes.'

A long twilight limped ahead of me, a tired to death and drunk to death sadness that spoke with a yawning mouth:

'Eternally he returns, the human of whom you are weary, the small human being' - thus my sadness yawned and dragged its foot and could not fall asleep.

For me the human earth transformed into a cave, its chest caved in; everything living became human mold and bones and crumbling past.

My sighing sat upon all human graves and could no longer stand up; my sighing and questioning croaked and choked and gnashed and lashed day and night:

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<sup>205</sup> White, p. 91-2.

- 'alas, human beings recur eternally! The small human beings recur eternally!' - (Z, III, 13)

Upon conceiving of the idea of the eternal return, he cannot bring himself to speak of it to his disciples: "Now you have heard everything, and why I must return to my solitude. I withheld nothing from you, my friends. But hear this from as well, *I* who am still the most tightlipped of human beings - and want to be so! Oh my friends! There is still something I could tell you, there is still something I could give you! Why do I not give it? Am I stingy?" (Z, II, 22). Indeed, the "hunchback" notices that Zarathustra cannot even speak of it to himself: "But why does Zarathustra speak otherwise to his pupils - than to himself?" (Z, II, 20), and in a bitter conversation with his "*stillest bou*" Zarathustra uncharacteristically complains that affirming the eternal return is "beyond my strength", even hiding behind his projected figure of the *Übermensch*: "I am waiting for one more worthy" (Z, II, 22). He speaks of the thought of the eternal return as a "challenge" that must be prepared for and overcome: "Oh abysmal thought, you who are *my* thought! ... One day I shall yet find the strength and the lion's voice to summon you up!" (Z, III, 3), and then when he eventually confronts the thought it is not an accident, but a deliberate *act of will*: "I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle - you I summon, my most abysmal thought!" (Z, III, 13). Finally, having developed *in other aspects of his existence, which have nothing to do with the eternal return*, Zarathustra feels ready to call up the thought, endures it, is transformed, and awakes, convalescing. Thus while the idea does play a pivotal role in the *text*, it does not play a pivotal role in his *development*; the idea is not itself transformative, but merely the final moment of a longer transformation. This of course merely continues Nietzsche's thesis, already discussed, that pain and pleasure are not opposites, but intrinsically linked: authentic joy is the constant overcoming of resistance, the Will 'thrusting itself forward' again and again. The eternal return as a selective doctrine really just operates as a way of ascertaining whether this thought and its repercussions have been understood properly. We have seen that in the experience of authentic joy all distinction between pleasure and pain breaks down, as the abundant Will seeks out resistance to overcome. Great men seek out the 'questionable and terrifying aspects of existence' as challenges and resistances to be overcome. When Nietzsche lists the attributes required to be able to affirm the notion of the eternal return, he just restates the principles that define authentic joy: "To *endure* the idea of the recurrence one needs: freedom from morality; new means against the facts of *pain* (pain conceived as a tool, as the father of pleasure; there is no cumulative consciousness of displeasure); the enjoyment of all kinds of uncertainty, experimentalism" (WP 1060/KSA

11:26[283]). Anyone experiencing authentic joy, and experiencing the world as *perfect*, will presumably have no difficulty affirming the idea of the eternal return, rendering it rather superfluous for great men. It is only the weak, who still interpret happiness and joy as the absence of pain, that will fail the test of the eternal return, making a utilitarian judgement that the ‘pleasure’ they experience (which is really nothing other than repose) cannot compensate for the pain and suffering they also feel. At times in Nietzsche’s notes it seems that he cannot find any better use for the idea of the eternal return than to use it to drive a further wedge between the weak and strong - as if one were needed. He apparently believes, probably somewhat optimistically, that the weak will be unable to bear, firstly, that the eternal return implies losing the consoling idea of an afterlife, and secondly, that their suffering will return eternally. The “philosopher” can thus use it as “mighty pressure and hammer with which he breaks and removes degenerate and decaying races to make way for a new order of life, or to implant into that which is degenerate and desires to die a longing for the end” and, apparently, “the races that cannot bear it stand condemned” (*WP* 1055/KSA 11:35[82] & *WP* 1053/KSA 11:26[376]). Nietzsche dreams that a *doctrine* of the eternal return, made public, could paralyse the weak, and galvanise the strong, marking them out and affirming their superiority.

Thus it should be obvious that the important thing is not the test of the eternal return itself, but the process by which one creates oneself in such a way as to be able to pass the test. Immediately after apparently transforming, Zarathustra is evidently keen to dismiss his animals’ vulgar summaries, and settles down instead to converse with his soul. In “*On Great Longing*” he enters into a dialogue with his soul where he lists all the gifts that he has given to it. These gifts are none other than narratives by which he has redefined and restructured his soul. The result of these narratives is the ever-increasing abundance of his soul: “Oh my soul, super-rich and heavy you stand there now, a grapevine with swelling udders and crowded, brownish gold grapes” (*Z*, III, 14). Every time commentators overvalue the eternal return as a concept, positing it as the meaning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, they tend to lose sight of all of the narratives that the great man employs to create himself; *it is the whole process that is transformative*.

If Zarathustra’s actual transformation owes little to the eternal return, then we must look deeper for the normative role it plays in his existence. Staten argues that the eternal return’s significance does not become clear until near the end of part four - and even here only partly clear. He singles out the following passage in particular as especially rich in depth and ambiguity.

You grapevine! Why do you praise me! I cut you! I am cruel, you bleed - what does your praise want of my drunken cruelty?

“What become perfect, everything ripe – wants to die!” so you speak. Blessed, blessed be the vintner’s knife! But everything unripe wants to live, alas!  
 Pain says “Refrain! Away, you pain!” But everything that suffers wants to live, to become ripe and joyful and longing,  
 -longing for what is farther, higher, brighter. “I wants heirs,” thus speaks all that suffers,  
 “I want children, I do not want *myself*” –  
 But joy does not wants heirs, not children – joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same. (Z, IV, 19)

This is a remarkable passage, often neglected, because commentators have tended to focus on the use of the eternal return in part three of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, no doubt because it is here that he is apparently ‘transformed.’ Stanley Rosen’s *The Mask of Enlightenment*, one of the only commentaries/expositions of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, does not even mention it, or any of the ideas it contains.<sup>206</sup> Staten argues that this passage captures the ambiguity of the meaning of the eternal return to Zarathustra: “The tensions in the language of this passion, both internal and contextual, are extraordinary. There is a straightforward sense here, and also something that destabilizes the sense.”<sup>207</sup> The ambiguity stems from the fact that these passages invert Nietzsche’s standard formula, where sufferers want to turn away from life and to deny existence, whereas the strong can confront its terrible and questionable aspects. Here, rather, “it is the sufferers who want to live and procreate and the joyous ones who want to die.”<sup>208</sup> These sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are some of the most obscure and esoteric passages Nietzsche wrote, as he asserts that the man who has become perfect, ‘ripe,’ who has reached the peak of abundance, want to die.

What is happening in these passages, and what is necessary for Zarathustra to get to the idea that abundance eventually means wanting to die, is that Nietzsche is breaching the wall between the *personal* and the *impersonal* (Staten calls this distinction the “internal or micro-economy” and the “grand economy”).<sup>209</sup> The great man’s will to power dissolves into the universal will to power. The great man has learnt to desire and affirm all of *his* suffering, but Nietzsche now transforms this into a desire for *all* things, eternally. In a note from the *Will to Power* Nietzsche attempts to link the eternal return and the Dionysian, and make it appear that the Dionysian tendencies conclude in the idea of the eternal return:

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<sup>206</sup> Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment; Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, Yale University Press, London, 2004.

<sup>207</sup> Staten, p. 179.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.



The word “*Dionysian*” means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. (*WP* 1050/KSA 13:14[14])

We might conclude that this passage reinforces Zarathustra’s apparent contention that the state of ‘ripeness,’ of wanting to die, is the final conclusion of the process of becoming abundant, the highest state, where a man redeems his energy in the whole. The Dionysian desire for greater and greater unity eventually leads the great man to reconcile with death through the image of the eternal return, through a desire to redeem his energy in the Universal. Nietzsche, who consistently rebukes the consolations of the weak, who criticises any *narvotisation*, any *anaesthesia*, any attempt to deny the conditions of existence, is seeking to be *consoled* from the fact that the *highest joy* is, in itself, transitory. This is the one questionable aspect of existence that Zarathustra cannot overcome, but must reconcile himself with. Thus Staten argues that, while we might interpret the thought as hard to bear, it is actually: “the *most economical thought*, the most consoling one, the one that recuperates absolutely all of the squandering that goes on in the grand economy of the whole.”<sup>210</sup> In a note collected in the *Will to Power*, and which, I suspect, was unlikely ever to be published willingly, Nietzsche reflects on the eternal return’s *consolatory* role:

A certain emperor always bore in mind the transitoriness of all things so as to not take them too seriously and to live at peace among them. To me, on the contrary, everything seems far too valuable to be so fleeting: I seek an eternity for everything; ought one to pour the most precious salves and wines into the sea?— My consolation is that everything that has been is eternal: the sea will cast it up again. (*WP* 1065/KSA 13:11[94])

Thus it appears Nietzsche has found a use for the idea of the eternal return, which, Zarathustra has us believe, still maintains the depth, drunkenness and lucidity of the original lived experience. There are, however, tremendous problems with this idea, which must be solved if the eternal return is going to play the role that he apparently desires for it. We must fall back on his criteria

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<sup>210</sup> Staten, p. 181.

for evaluating values and narratives. Nietzsche is not immune from his own criticisms, and just as he is so keen to diagnose psychological weakness in others, we must probe where his values might betray weakness. We must therefore submit Nietzsche to his own criteria, and ask: does the idea of the eternal return reflect want or abundance? Exhaustion or plenitude?

Klossowski insightfully recognises that the thought of the eternal return revealed to Nietzsche that he might have fallen into the trap he identified in others, of conflating exhausted fervour and nervous mysticism with abundance and joy: “Another motif seemed to have intervened in Nietzsche’s hesitation. Did not the very experience of the Eternal Return bear witness, in Nietzsche, *to what he himself had denounced as exhaustion?* Was he or was he not a victim of what he called *the most dangerous misunderstanding* - namely, that the *symptoms* of exhaustion would be confused with those of an excess or overabundance of life?”<sup>211</sup> The thought initially designates *incoherence*, or, at best, a coherence that forms around the idea of the circle, and excludes the one that thinks it. It is certainly reasonable to suppose that it was the result of exhaustion, of irritability, nervousness, of a desire to be intoxicated *by losing himself*. *We know that the exhausted fail to perceive themselves as such*. To the extent that thinking the eternal return led to Nietzsche losing himself, it seems likely that its origins *did* lie in exhaustion, not abundance. The *origins* of the thought thus certainly appear to be, at the very least, suspect. While the initial thought of the world as eternally recurring energy overwhelms Nietzsche, we have seen that he tries to tame this thought in a variety of ways, to put it to use, to form a doctrine, to use it as a teaching, a useful narrative to inspire others to greatness, and finally, to reconcile with death. We must determine if this final manifestation finally liberates the eternal return from the shadow of exhaustion.

We should immediately recall that Nietzsche has consistently criticised using ideas as *consolations*, when they are attempts to anaesthetise and narcotise the terrifying and questionable aspects of existence, and we must consider whether the eternal return escapes these criticisms. The reason he criticised consolatory ideas is that they represent an unhelpful and regressive attitude to the problem of suffering. Rather than focus on the physiological causes of his suffering, and the places where he is complicit in his suffering, the sufferer focuses on imaginary spiritual and psychological causes, and thus perpetuates his misery. What he should really be doing is focusing on strengthening his Will, creating an abundance of energy, of plastic power, that will enable him to deal with his problems, to affirm his suffering, and so on. Now, it might be objected that the problem of death is different in kind than many other causes of suffering, in that it does not appear to have a readily available solution, *i.e.*, it is not clear that focusing

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94-5.

properly on the cause of suffering will help. This is, however, rather misleading. The idea is not to 'solve' all problems, in the sense of removing the suffering. It is rather to be able to affirm the suffering, to discipline the suffering, to use it to elevate oneself. Thus it is easy to imagine that the monster of energy, with his abundance of plastic, healing power, *should* be able to affirm, or at the very least *accept*, the idea of death and the transitory, the once and for all of his deeds, which are, after all, perhaps the most terrifying and questionable aspects of existence *as it is*. There is no reason to suppose, then, that desiring to be consoled about death, about the loss of all the most valuable things, about the transitoriness of existence, is any more helpful than desiring to be consoled over any other form of suffering. In both cases, the proper thing, if Nietzsche is to be true to his own writings, is to increase one's strength, not to blame existence and fictionalise it. It is not at all clear, then, that the eternal return is a desirable response to the problem of death and the transitory, and, as a 'solution,' it suggests inadequate strength and energy in the one who desires such a consolation. But there are more problems with the way Zarathustra uses this version of the eternal return, which extend beyond its relationship with death. We can assess these problems by contrasting the eternal return with two general principles that I have developed about the sorts of narratives that are conducive to greatness. Whilst these are not infallible rules, they are significant patterns in Nietzsche's discussions of how we *should* think about ourselves.

*The eternal return violates Nietzsche's general principle that we must emphasise long processes of training and self-cultivation over shortcuts or sudden transformations.* We have seen Nietzsche argue again and again that the narratives we use to structure ourselves and our existence should emphasise the necessity of long processes of *habitualisation*, of rigorous asceticism, of self-mastery. I have criticised a number of approaches because they propose *shortcuts* to the highest experiences, but only end up *aping* Nietzsche's ideal. Whenever a commentator proposes an account of Nietzschean intoxication that does not depend upon possessing abundant energy, or an account of creation that does not depend upon possessing the ability to assimilate experience and make it conform to oneself, or an idea of happiness based on passively receiving all stimulus, we should be suspicious about whether there is residual *resentiment* in such claims, and an attempt to make states available to all, *with no regard for effort*. Likewise, whenever commentators use the idea of the eternal return to explain a sudden transformation of Zarathustra in book three, they fall into this trap, of eschewing a long process in favour of a sudden and easy solution. And is Nietzsche not falling into this same trap with the way he uses the eternal return in book four? Nietzsche has grappled with the problem of what to do with the eternal return ever since its first 'revelation,' and Zarathustra grapples in 'On Free Death' with the question of how to know when to die

(“victorious, surrounded by those who hope and promise”) (Z, I, 21). Then, suddenly, in an esoteric revelation, which inverts his normal thesis that sufferers want to turn away from life and the strong want to confront it, he reveals that the eternal return, understood properly, makes one want to die. The problem of death, of when to choose one’s death, is resolved not through a long process of training and habitualisation, but through a sudden feeling of ‘over-ripeness,’ an urge to die, to recuperate oneself in the whole. And finally Nietzsche seems to have found something for the eternal return to do, a role for it that matches the privileged place that he intuitively feels it deserves. It feels rather too convenient.

Now, it could be objected that the eternal return, as Zarathustra employs it, does not violate the principle of emphasising long term, difficult, and effort-driven processes over ‘shortcuts’ as much as I am suggesting, because he suggests that one only reaches the feeling of wanting to die when one has *already reached the peak of abundance*. Thus, if we believe this claim, then the whole process of creating oneself, of becoming stronger, giving oneself a strong Will, *etc.*, is required so that we can truly appreciate this experience of being overripe, over-abundance, wanting to die. Even if we accept this, I nonetheless think that it still violates the principle of emphasising long-term processes and self-development over instant solutions. In the midst of narratives that emphasise returning our focus to the body, ignoring spiritual and metaphysical illusions in favour of physiological solutions, we get a bewildering esoteric narrative which Nietzsche cannot make up his mind what to do with, let alone how to convey it to his readers. If we take the thought only to apply to the one who is already abundant, even more problems arise. If we take this idea seriously it creates a paradox about the thought which makes it wholly unsuitable as a narrative of greatness. If the point of constructing narratives is to cultivate greatness, what good is one that we can only make sense of once we achieve the highest state? If it is a *feeling* which we will acquire anyway, when we achieve the required level of abundance, what good can it do to impart it as a teaching? As a feeling and an idea it is only relevant to those who have already acquired the highest states, since the notion that once we achieve a long process of self-mastery and cultivation we will feel so overripe that we will want to die hardly seems particularly aspirational. But those who access these highest states will not need the feeling explained to them.

*The eternal return violates Nietzsche’s general principle that the narratives of the self should promote greater unity and self-mastery.* Throughout I have emphasised that the idea of authentic joy hinges upon reinforcing the boundaries of the self, increasing the coherence of the mind, increasing the feeling of self and the feeling of power, and cultivating the ability to resist stimulus. Can we really believe that the whole process of developing character, of self-mastery, of developing

abundance, really leads Zarathustra to want to die as he becomes perfect? We can well understand that his moment of perfection, where the world is transformed aesthetically into a mirror of this perfection, that his joy “wants itself” and “wants everything eternally the same” (Z, IV, 19). But the presence of his joy is wholly down to his understanding of the necessity of overcoming resistance, and his readiness to confront the fearful and questionable aspects of existence. And yet, we are led to believe, all of a sudden he desires the absolute dispersal of his self, the destruction of his boundaries and his cohesion, indulging in “lust for eternity and for the nuptial ring of rings – the ring of recurrence!” (Z, III, 16). If we accept that this desire is the natural conclusion of abundance, as Nietzsche seems to do, it cannot help but undermine the emphasis on greater unity and self-mastery through the rest of his work. It is impossible to emphasise the importance of unity and strength of will, while simultaneously idolising a narrative that destroys them.<sup>212</sup> The eternal return thus detracts from the significance of his underlying project, becoming the great man.

Throughout all of Nietzsche’s attempts to make the importance of the thought of the eternal return clear, it never loses its connotations with a form of intoxication that involves loss of coherence and the feeling of self. Despite Nietzsche’s claim that he was a “*psychologist* who has not his equal,” he could not avoid the *most dangerous misunderstanding*, that of confusing exhausted intoxication with abundant intoxication (EH III, 5). Thus the fine line between the two and the relentless need to investigate the physiological sources of our values and thoughts. We must resist any attempt to breach the personal and the impersonal, because joy belongs to the monster of energy, who reposes in his ability to resist and overcome stimulus, and transforms the world aesthetically until it mirrors his perfection. While the eternal return might be an interesting insight into Nietzsche’s psychology, it is useless as a narrative for achieving greatness, whatever mould he tries to force it into. But where the eternal return fails, his method for evaluating values succeeds.

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<sup>212</sup> Nathan Widder, for example, takes Zarathustra’s final account of the eternal return seriously, and argues that it solves the problem of what he meant when he claimed that the will needs “something higher than reconciliation” to deal with its problems with the past. The eternal return completes the process of “redemption,” which “culminates with the ego’s dissolution.” Thus, “the eternal return is inseparable from this kind of death or “going under.”” When Widder considers the normative repercussions of this, he demonstrates the problem I am describing, where the eternal return leads us to devalue the unity of the self: “The ethical sensibility required for overcoming is a consciousness of the ego’s superficiality, of its being a façade.” Nathan Widder, ‘A Semblance of Identity: Nietzsche on the Agency of Drives and Their Relation to the Ego,’ 2011, *forthcoming*, p. 25-6.

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