

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND THE WILL TO MEANING

by David Leo Tracey

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Philosophy Department

Memorial University of Newfoundland

October, 2022

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

ABSTRACT

Friedrich Nietzsche argues that human beings are characterized by a need to believe that their lives are meaningful. This need explains our vast human history of religious theodicies and asceticism. Certain commentators (Danto, Casey) hold that, according to Nietzsche, this will to meaning is a purely harmful disposition of the human being. Others (Leiter, Gardner) hold that the will to meaning is only valuable because it eliminates meaningless suffering. In contrast to both readings, I propose that Nietzsche rediscovers the value of the will to meaning for human life. I argue that, for Nietzsche, the will to meaning is life's own solution to the threat of nihilism.

To be alive, for Nietzsche, is to be subject to the conditions of conflict and ephemerality. Under these conditions, one can lose faith in their values and fall victim to nihilism: the mentality for which life is not worth living. In the absence of foundational grounding values, the will to meaning encourages us to commit to some principle with which to ground the meaning of life. The will to meaning, however, can be expressed in many forms, and some of these, e.g., the ascetic ideal in its Christian form, can themselves perpetuate nihilism. But not all expressions of the will to meaning perpetuate nihilism, and to argue that Nietzsche condemns the will to meaning in its entirety is to overlook the possibility of its healthy and vitalizing expressions. I argue that Nietzsche presents us with at least three images of such vitalizing expressions of the will to meaning. These are the alternative form of theodicy that he identifies in Ancient Greece, the use made of the ascetic ideal by the philosopher, and the productive tension that belongs to modern humanity as a bridge to the *Übermensch*. In each case, the will to meaning guides the individual to structure their life as a quest in a way that is enhancing by Nietzschean standards.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this thesis has only been possible thanks to the support of many individuals and groups. Thank you to Memorial University, the School of Graduate Studies, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for academic and financial support.

Thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr. Joël Madore, who managed continually to reign me in from my constantly shifting interests, questions, and discoveries, and kept me on track. It was also Dr. Madore who sensed in me an interest in Nietzsche's thought, before even I myself was aware of it, and who encouraged me to explore this interest. I also thank my committee members, Dr. Shannon Hoff and Dr. Sean McGrath, whose instructive comments and feedback have been invaluable in improving this work.

I wish to thank Dr. Steve Lofts and Dr. Antonio Calcagno who guided my initial forays into scholarly philosophy and sparked my earliest philosophical interests. Thanks are also due to my professors at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Dr. Paul Moyaert and Dr. Rudi Visker, whose lessons still guide much of my writing to this day. Thanks also to my many colleagues and fellow graduate students at Memorial and at various institutions around the world. Our unending conversation has challenged me continually to improve myself and has been the spark of inspiration for several points in this work.

Thank you to my parents who never hesitated in their willingness to support this seemingly interminable endeavour. Thank you to Emerson for being my inspiration and for teaching me that our lives are meaningful. And finally, thank you to my partner, Ashley Harding: your support has been unwavering, and your patience has been heroic. I genuinely don't know how you did it, but I know I couldn't have done it without you. This work should bear your name next to mine.

For Brian

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
I. Methodology and Interpretive Framework.....	5
II. A Brief Survey of the Will to Meaning Thesis	15
III. Outline of the Project.....	24
1. WHAT IS MEANING?.....	30
1.1 “ <i>Sinn</i> ”	31
1.2 Appropriation, Exploitation, Possession.....	35
1.3 Force and Drives	40
1.4 Incorporation, Sublimation, Organization	45
1.4.1 Incorporation.....	45
1.4.2 Sublimation	46
1.4.3 Organization.....	49
1.5 Nietzsche’s Notion of Meaning	53
1.6 Meaning and Time	55
2. LIFE IN GENERAL: AGONISTIC DYNAMICS.....	58
2.1 The Different Senses of Life.....	60

2.2 The Dual Character of Becoming	64
2.3 Images of Agonistic Dynamics	68
2.3.1 Genealogy and the Impermanence of “The Good.”	68
2.3.2 Darwin and the Impermanence of the Species	75
2.3.3 The Dionysian Festival and the Impermanence of Identity.	80
2.3.4 Genealogy and the Agonistic Structure of Purpose.	84
2.4 Life and Dynamism	86
2.5 Conclusion	94
3. LIFE IN PARTICULAR: THE WILL TO POWER	98
3.1 To be Alive is to Will Power	99
3.2 Defining Power	101
3.3 Form-Creation	106
3.4 Will to Power	112
3.5 The Feeling that Power is Growing	117
3.6 Character Types	123
3.7 Effective and Affective Power	125
3.8 <i>Ressentiment</i> and the False Feeling of Power	130
3.8.1 First Technique: The Illusion of Self-Control	130
3.8.2 Second Technique: Exploitation of the Pathos of Distance	135
3.8.3 Third Technique: Imaginary Revenge	138
3.9 The Power of the “Weak”	141
3.10 Conclusion	143

4. LIFE AND SUFFERING	145
4.1 Schopenhauer and the Necessity of Suffering	148
4.2 Nietzsche and the Necessity of Suffering	152
4.3 Chronophobia.....	157
4.4 Disorientation and Despair	161
4.5 Conclusion	166
5. THE MEANING OF SUFFERING	168
5.1 The Human Response to Suffering	170
5.2 Suffering and the Early Greeks.....	173
5.3 The Meaning of Suffering for the Greeks.....	178
5.4 The Meaning of Suffering for the Christian Perspective	186
5.5 The Will to Meaning.....	192
5.6 What Exactly is the Will to Meaning?	196
5.7 Conclusion	202
6. NIETZSCHE'S STANDARD OF EVALUATION.....	204
6.1 The Value of Values	210
6.2 Enhancement.....	214
6.3 Excursus on the Will to Power.....	218
6.4 Representative Character-Types	224
6.5 Nobility and Affirmation	230
6.6 Ressentiment and Negation.....	236
6.7 The Affirmation of Life	239

6.8 The Paradox of Affirmation and Enhancement	242
6.9 Conclusion	246
7. THE USES OF MEANING FOR LIFE	247
7.1 The Unhistorical.....	249
7.2 “The Teachers of the Purpose of Existence”	253
7.3 Metaphysical Hope	260
7.4 Corrupted Meaning	265
7.5 Corruptive Meaning	272
7.6 Conclusion	278
8. THE VALUE OF MEANING FOR LIFE	280
8.1 Leiter and Gardner on <i>Ressentiment</i> and Meaninglessness	282
8.2 Casey and Danto on Nietzsche and Nihilism.....	287
8.3 Nihilism.....	291
8.4 The Philosopher and the Ascetic Ideal.....	296
8.5 Greek Theodicy.....	305
8.6 Emulation.....	311
8.7 Harmony, Tension, and Modernity	316
8.8 Conclusion	324
CONCLUSION.....	327
BIBLIOGRAPHY	334

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for Nietzsche's works are employed very sparingly throughout the text. On the rare occasion that they are used, the following is a key to their meaning:

BGE	Beyond Good and Evil
BT	The Birth of Tragedy
D	Daybreak
HH	Human, all too Human
GM	Genealogy of Morality
GS	The Gay Science
WP	The Will to Power
Z	Thus Spoke Zarathustra

The two texts to which I refer most frequently are the *Genealogy of Morality* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. I largely refer to them simply as “*Genealogy*” and “*Zarathustra*,” respectively, throughout.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his writings, Nietzsche identifies several human needs. He argues that human beings need to will some end or aim,¹ that we need to know the purpose of our lives,² and that we need to evaluate or esteem ourselves and the world around us.³ At the end of the *Genealogy of Morality*, one need in particular is brought to the fore: the need for meaning [*Sinn*]. Nietzsche argues that human beings need to believe that their lives are meaningful, and he attributes many of humanity's endeavors in the fields of religiosity and philosophy, such as positing the existence of a god or an underlying metaphysical reality, to attempts to fulfill this need. I call this need the *will to meaning*, and I call the claim that such a will is a characteristic of the human type, the *will to meaning thesis*. In this context, following the connotations of the German *Sinn*, which is also translated as "sense," meaning is synonymous with aim, direction, or purpose. The will to meaning thesis is a pillar of Nietzsche's psychology of the human being. This will, Nietzsche argues, has been profoundly influential upon the history of European culture, animating and motivating major strains of European philosophy, morality, and religion. The *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche's history of European values, builds to this claim on its final page. But despite the influential role in which Nietzsche casts this will, it remains undeveloped throughout his work and the related scholarship. This work analyzes Nietzsche's notion of the will to meaning, and thus aims to explicate a crucial branch of his philosophical psychology.

¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III, §28, 120 (Hereafter, *Genealogy*.)

² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, I, §1, 27

³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, First Part, "On a Thousand and One Goals," 42-43 (Hereafter, *Zarathustra*.)

One priority for this dissertation will be to articulate what exactly the will to meaning is. However, to take this as my guiding question would be to break with the general trajectory of Nietzsche's thinking. Across his works, Nietzsche analyzes countless phenomena, consistently emphasizing the importance of whether or not something is valuable for a human perspective.⁴ He privileges the question *Is it valuable?* over the question *What is it?*⁵ in his enquiries. Therefore, focusing on the value of meaning and whether our quest for meaning is valuable will keep this work much closer to the heart of Nietzsche's general project. In short, the Nietzschean question concerning the will to meaning is this: *is the will to meaning valuable for human life?* I will take this as the guiding question of this work.

My goal is to show that, for all his criticisms of the will to meaning, Nietzsche ultimately answers this question in the affirmative, though not without qualification. Specifically, the will to meaning is life's solution to the problem of nihilism, understood as the mentality for which life is not worth living. Meaning renders life worth living, and thus the will to meaning attains a certain value. However, depending on its expression, the will to meaning can render life worth living in a way which incites enhancement on the one hand, or degeneration on the other. In contrast to those who read Nietzsche as a nihilistic opponent of meaningfulness,⁶ and to those who say that he ascribes only a negative value to the quest for meaning,⁷ I argue that Nietzsche ascribes a positive value to this quest and to the human will to meaning as well. There is, however, a double ambiguity in his

⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §3, 4-5

⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §556, 301-302

⁶ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*; Casey, "Beyond Meaninglessness"

⁷ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*; Gardner, "The Disunity of Philosophical Reason"

evaluation of meaning. The first ambiguity stems from a lack of clarity as to whether Nietzsche's evaluations occur within a framework of consequentialism or virtue ethics. At times he evaluates something based on the effects it incites, while at other times he evaluates something based on the character-type it expresses or reflects, or in which it originates.⁸ In brief, he sometimes evaluates meaning based on its future, and sometimes based on its past. This ambiguity is clarified when one sees that, for Nietzsche, valuable character-types produce valuable effects. In other words, he does not ultimately distinguish virtue ethics from consequentialism: valuable consequences stem from valuable character-types, and *vice versa*.

The second ambiguity stems from the fact that the value of various quests for meaning will be different for distinct perspectives. There is a distinction between the will to meaning and the quest for meaning. The quest for meaning is itself what is willed by the will to meaning. The will to meaning names the need of the human will to situate itself along a quest or journey with a meaningful end. The will to meaning wants the process of striving toward an end; it is the need to structure one's life as a quest, or the need to be being-toward an end or aim. The quest for meaning is one's being-toward this end; it is the process of living a meaningful or goal-oriented life. Thus, in the phrase "the will to meaning," the word "meaning" acts as a shorthand for "the quest for meaning." One's life is meaningful inasmuch as one's life is a quest. Nietzsche does argue that certain types of people express their will to meaning in quests that are ultimately harmful and degenerative. However, while he is deeply critical of these degenerative expressions of the will to

⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §3 & §6

meaning, he rarely if ever criticizes from a place of total rejection. He does not criticize this or that, as such, across all boards and for all time. And more importantly, he does not criticize some habit or convention because he takes it to be worthless. Instead, Nietzsche becomes critical at the moment that he sees something valuable being mistreated, or at the moment that he sees something valuable, of which we have made something far less noble or dignified than it deserves. Nietzsche condemns our mistreatment of the valuable: “Of what is great one must either be silent or speak with greatness.”⁹ Hence, he does not condemn the will to meaning as such; he condemns the mode in which we have traditionally expressed the will to meaning, precisely because he thinks that this will can be expressed in alternative, enhancing, and elevating modes. Nietzsche does not condemn what is essential in meaning; he condemns what we have traditionally done with meaning, historically and contingently. And thus, for all his criticisms, Nietzsche leaves the door open for a life-affirming and enhancing expression of the will to meaning. This expression, it seems to me, has largely gone overlooked by that interpretive tradition which would call Nietzsche a nihilist, against which I hope to emphasize his affirmation of the value of meaning for life.

With the remainder of this introduction, I will, first, discuss the methodology of my engagement with Nietzsche’s texts and the relevant scholarship as well as my own interpretive lens; second, briefly survey the many formulations in which the will to meaning thesis has appeared so as to demonstrate what is unique to Nietzsche’s treatment of the topic; and third, offer an outline of this project as a whole.

⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, “Preface,” §1, 3

I. Methodology and Interpretive Framework

Textually, I will not restrict myself to an analysis of any one period of Nietzsche's writings, although I will give preference to his late published writings and to the *Genealogy of Morality* in particular, which is his most sustained treatment of the will to meaning. I make no pretense to claim that Nietzsche articulates a philosophical system. I do, however, suspect that his thinking at large is roughly coherent, particularly after it stabilizes in his later works, and it certainly contains coherent threads that run across most of his texts. Nietzsche's treatment of the will to meaning and the meaningful life is, I claim, one such thread, and it is this line in his thinking that I wish to make clear. Of course, there are points at which Nietzsche's thinking shifts throughout his career, the most obvious of which is his abandonment of a Schopenhauerian metaphysical system after *The Birth of Tragedy*.¹⁰ I will make clear any points at which these developments are pressing or consequential. As will be seen, however, Nietzsche's thinking on the idea of the will to meaning remains largely consistent, from *The Birth of Tragedy* until *Twilight of the Idols*, and there are very few points at which the development of his thinking will be directly relevant for this theme.

Bernd Magnus¹¹ distinguishes between "lumpers," who "lump" together Nietzsche's published and unpublished writings, treating both with equal import, and "splitters," who draw an unequivocal split between the two, privileging his sanctioned publications.¹² I hope to find a middle ground between these two options. My strategy when

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism"

¹¹ Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: The Will to Power and the *Übermensch*," 79-98. And see Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 16.

¹² There is, of course, a third option found in the Heideggerian reading: drawing an unequivocal split between the published and unpublished writings while granting superiority to the unpublished work. Heidegger writes: "Nietzsche's philosophy proper, the fundamental position on the basis of which he speaks... did not assume a final form and was not itself published in any book... between 1879 and 1889 nor during the years

it comes to Nietzsche's *Nachlass* materials is to take them into consideration up to the point that they can be used to clarify the works that Nietzsche chose to publish. These unpublished statements somehow made sense to Nietzsche when he wrote them down, or they were somehow – in his mind – compatible with his larger body of thought and its trajectory. It is worth trying to understand how exactly they are or were compatible with his thought in that moment, and thereby, whether they may lend clarification to this thought. Practically speaking, this means that I will make some use of the *Nachlass* materials to supplement my reading of the published works, but I will defer to the published works where possible. Further, I will refer to unpublished materials in conjunction with published materials from roughly the same time periods.

While very few interpreters deal directly with Nietzsche's notion of the will to meaning, the body of scholarly literature concerning Nietzsche in general is prolific and diverse. For this reason, I've decided not to confine my treatment of this scholarship to a single literature review. Instead, I will invoke and respond to various interpretations at individual points throughout the text as they become relevant. I can, however, briefly situate my interpretation against some macro trends. Broadly construed, there are three primary interpretive lines of Nietzsche scholarship.¹³ The metaphysical line (Heidegger, Richardson, etc.) sees Nietzsche as articulating a power ontology which casts the will to power as the metaphysical reality that exists independently of human beings and is

preceding. What Nietzsche himself published during his creative years was always foreground.... His philosophy proper was left behind as posthumous, unpublished work." (Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, V. I, 8-9)

¹³ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, xiii

represented in experience.¹⁴ For this tradition, Nietzsche parallels Schopenhauer by describing the experiential world as the apparent representation of one underlying will, i.e., the will to power: “things ‘really are’ will to power... whereas all their other properties are true of them only relative to some perspective.”¹⁵ Second, the postmodern reading (Derrida, Grondin, etc.) focuses on perspectivism and the supposed impossibility of establishing the definitive meaning of signs and phenomena.¹⁶ According to this line, Nietzsche inaugurates an intellectual tradition that “puts out of play” the “hope for a decidable meaning”¹⁷ by demonstrating that only perspectival knowledge is possible and that, therefore, the referent of any given signifier cannot be known objectively with absolute certainty. However, I claim, Nietzsche’s genealogical form of analysis is not practiced “at the expense of attempts to decipher sense and meaning.”¹⁸ Rather, it redefines meaning as something dynamic and in flux instead of absolute or unchanging and thus multiplies the many dynamic senses it attempts to decipher.¹⁹ This only occurs at the expense of attempts to decipher meaning if one presupposes that meaning must be absolute or unchanging. Nietzsche does therefore

¹⁴ Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 19-20. Heidegger writes: “As the name for the basic character of all beings, the expression ‘will to power’ provides an answer to the question ‘what is being?’” Also, Nietzsche is “a thinker who says that all being ultimately is will to power.” (Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, V.I, 3-4) Richardson writes: “Nietzsche has a metaphysics or ontology – ‘a theory of being,’” namely, a “power ontology,” and for Nietzsche “things ‘really are’ will to power.” (Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 16-17)

¹⁵ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 17. And see Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Volume I, 34-43.

¹⁶ Grondin, “Must Nietzsche be Incorporated into Hermeneutics?” 107: “the Nietzschean practice of interpretation” amounts to “the affirmation of the inevitably plural play of signs *at the expense of attempts to decipher sense and meaning*.” (My emphasis.) Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 19: “Nietzsche... contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the *logos* and the related concept of truth or the primary signified... Reading, and... writing... were for Nietzsche “originary” operations... with regard to a sense that they do not first have to transcribe or discover, which would not therefore be a truth signified in the original element.”

¹⁷ Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 108

¹⁸ Grondin, “Must Nietzsche be Incorporated into Hermeneutics?” 107

¹⁹ Thus, I agree with Richardson that Nietzsche does not render the analysis of meaning impossible but only much more complex. (Richardson, “Introduction,” 8)

do away with any attempt to decipher anything's eternal, "True," or "original" meaning precisely because, for Nietzsche, there is no such meaning or *x* does not *always* mean *y*. Instead, from certain perspectives and at certain times, *x* will sometimes mean *y*, sometimes *z*, and sometimes many other things at once. Finally, the Anglo-American/naturalist line (Leiter, etc.), which presently dominates English-language Nietzsche scholarship,²⁰ reads Nietzsche as committed to a scientific naturalism. These naturalistic interpretations are divisible into negative and positive formulations. In its negative construal, the naturalistic line interprets Nietzsche as attempting to account for phenomena without reference to the supernatural. In Lawrence Hatab's words, "naturalism, for Nietzsche, amounts to a kind of philosophical methodology, in that natural forces of becoming will be deployed to redescribe and account for all aspects of life, including cultural formations, even the emergence of seemingly antinatural constructions of being."²¹ Naturalism in its positive form adds to this by further claiming that Nietzsche commits to a methodology in line with the empirical sciences.²²

The popularity of these three interpretive lines can be explained. Perspectivism construed as an epistemological doctrine and the will to power construed as a metaphysical doctrine appeal to the expectations of scholars: we expect to see metaphysical and epistemological doctrines laid out in works of philosophy, at least in those that precede the deconstructive turn of the 20th Century, and so scholars flock to these themes out of familiarity. As a result, the amount of scholarship on the themes of perspectivism and the

²⁰ Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 9; Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, 34

²¹ Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 14. And see Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 9.

²² Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 2-3. Janaway, who does not subscribe to this interpretive line, offers a useful summary of Leiter's interpretation in Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, 34-39.

metaphysics of power in Nietzsche's thought vastly and disproportionately surpasses the amount of attention that Nietzsche himself grants these themes.²³ Scholars who prioritise attempts to delineate Nietzsche's supposed own epistemological and metaphysical doctrines²⁴ fail to emphasize that he is articulating a psychological critique of the human demand for epistemological and metaphysical doctrines²⁵ – a demand which will be discussed below. This demand arguably explains why scholars insist on reading Nietzsche in this way when there is little evidence that he commits to any one such doctrine and even so much evidence to the contrary.²⁶ Finally, the naturalistic interpretation was simply the right reading offered at the right time. Naturalism, particularly in its negative formulation, which is the disavowal of the supernatural, is a deeply palatable doctrine for post-theistic scholars, and so it is no surprise if this reading of Nietzsche should gain popularity in an ever-increasingly secular academy, even if this reading contradicts Nietzsche's writings.²⁷

Rather than committing to any one of these major readings, I contend that Nietzsche ought to be read primarily in a *psychological* framework. Looking back over his life's work, Nietzsche says that those who read him well, read him as a psychologist: "that a

²³ E.g., the term "perspectivism" [*Perspektivismus*] occurs *once* in *The Gay Science* (§354) and *once* in *Beyond Good and Evil* ("Preface"), and it does not appear a single time in the *Genealogy* or in any of Nietzsche's published works thereafter. Meanwhile, the term occurs *eleven* times in Rolf-Peter Horstmann's introduction to *Beyond Good and Evil* and a cursory search of the terms "Nietzsche" and "perspectivism" in any journal database yields hundreds of results.

²⁴ E.g., Welshon, "Saying Yes to Reality: Skepticism, Antirealism, and Perspectivism in Nietzsche's Epistemology"; Anderson, "Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism"; Hales, "Truth, Paradox, and Nietzschean Perspectivism."

²⁵ Of course, some are more subtle. Strong, e.g., sees that the problem is already that so many discuss perspectivism in Nietzsche by discussing epistemology. (Strong, "Texts and Pretexts: Reflections on Perspectivism in Nietzsche")

²⁶ E.g., to commit to a metaphysical doctrine seems incommensurate with his psychological critiques of metaphysicians. See §3.4 below. And see Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 3-4.

²⁷ E.g., his critiques of the scientific mentality at GM III §23-§26, of materialism and reductionist physicalism, (see Chapter 2 of Emden's *Nietzsche's Naturalism*) and of positivism at WP § 481.

psychologist without equal is speaking in my works... is perhaps the first thing a good reader will realize.”²⁸ And likewise, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes:

Never before have intrepid voyagers and adventurers opened up a *more profound* world of insight: and the psychologist who “makes sacrifices”... can at least demand in return that psychology again be recognized as queen of the sciences, and that the rest of the sciences exist to serve and prepare for it. Because, from now on, psychology is again the path to the fundamental problems.²⁹

Given that Nietzsche placed psychology at the core of his thinking, given his claim that we read him well when we read him as a psychologist, it is deeply problematic that, outside of Carl Jung and Karl Jaspers,³⁰ psychological readings of Nietzsche are so minor compared to these prominent interpretive lines: “the secondary literature, now burgeoning more than ever, has generally ignored the psychological dimensions of Nietzsche’s thought.”³¹

This work, I hope, is a contribution to the psychological interpretation of Nietzsche. Specifically, I am attempting to articulate a branch of a Nietzschean psychology by uncovering his theory of a human will to meaning. More precisely, I read Nietzsche as an existential psychologist where existentialism’s primary concern is the problem of human existence and its necessary conditions. Nietzsche identifies the necessary conditions of human existence – temporality and agonism – which I call the conditions of finitude, and his psychological project is to analyze, diagnose, and treat the ways in which human beings

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” §5, 105

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23, 23-24

³⁰ As Gaia Domenici recounts, “during the years 1934–1939, in Zurich, Jung gave a seminar entirely dedicated to a psychological reading of Zarathustra.” (Domenici, *Jung’s Nietzsche*, 11) And Jaspers writes: “psychological analysis becomes the medium of [Nietzsche’s] philosophizing,” (Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, 34) and, defining psychology as the observation of humanity’s existence, Jaspers claims that “Nietzsche undertakes an objective study of the *existence* of man as it undergoes constant psychological change within the larger theatre of the world.” (Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, 127-128)

³¹ Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 2. Parkes’ book is one of a few that focus on psychology in Nietzsche. Two more recent examples are Robert B. Pippin’s *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, and Paul Katsafanas’ *The Nietzschean Self*.

respond to and cope with life lived under these conditions. Jessica Berry distinguishes between interpretations of Nietzsche that organize his work around a positive doctrine and those that organize his writings around a response to a particular problem.³² My interpretation falls into the latter type in that I interpret Nietzsche's writings as centred around the question of how we respond psychologically to this life as we have it, under its necessary conditions. For Nietzsche, the will to meaning emerges as an aspect of the human psyche, encouraging us to persevere and even flourish under these difficult conditions. Nietzsche sees that we could easily respond to life with nihilism: the attitude that life is not worth living. The will to meaning is the antidote to nihilism; it is life's own solution to the problem of nihilism. If the will to meaning incites us to structure our lives as quests, these quests entice us to believe that life is worthwhile and to say "Yes" to life despite the suffering it entails.

There are two mis-readings in the literature to which this thesis will respond. The first and less grievous error, maintained by Brian Leiter and Sebastian Gardner, is that meaning for Nietzsche is only valuable in a negative way, in that it combats or acts as an antidote to meaninglessness.³³ Something is valuable in a negative sense if it is not valuable in itself but is valuable because it negates something undesirable. Leiter and Gardner each argue that, for Nietzsche, the value of meaning lies in its ability to negate meaningless suffering. On this reading, the will to meaning amounts to nothing more than an aversion to meaninglessness. Although meaning does combat meaninglessness, I aim to show that the value of meaning for Nietzsche is not only negative in this sense. Meaning also has its

³² Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 5-6

³³ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 207; Gardner, "The Disunity of Philosophical Reason," 24-25.

own positive value for Nietzsche that would hold outside of any need to combat meaninglessness. In short, Leiter's and Gardner's readings are more incomplete than they are inaccurate. Nietzsche does ascribe this negative value to meaning, but he also ascribes a further positive value to meaning in its own right.

The second and more grievous error is maintained first by Arthur Danto and later by M.A. Casey. Both Danto and Casey argue that Nietzsche sees nothing of value in the will to meaning – not even the negative value recognized by Leiter and Gardner. They each argue that, for Nietzsche, the will to meaning is a purely harmful disposition of human beings and that, if we are to elevate ourselves as individuals, it is a disposition that we must learn to overcome entirely. In *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, Danto writes:

It is a general tendency of the human mind, which, to Nietzsche, is ultimately a disastrous disposition, to imagine and to seek to identify a purposive armature, a basis for significance, in the world itself, something objective to which men may submit and in which they may find a meaning for themselves.³⁴

It is possible that Danto is only criticizing a certain kind of orientation toward meaning here, i.e., the mentality that posits an ultimate purpose given to life as a whole from outside of life. However, even if this is the case, Danto does not articulate a distinction between meaning given to life from its outside and meaning that emerges within life itself. While Nietzsche would indeed condemn the need for the former kind of transcendent meaning, he does not condemn the need for the kind of meaning that one creates oneself. If Nietzsche condemns the will to meaning in its degenerative expressions, he defends the value of the life-enhancing expressions of this will. By failing to make this distinction, Danto overstates Nietzsche's condemnation of the will to meaning.

³⁴ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 14

Likewise, in *Meaninglessness: The Solutions of Nietzsche, Freud and Rorty*, Michael Casey argues that “Nietzsche hoped” we would one day be “freed from the need for meaning.”³⁵ Nietzsche, Casey continues, hoped to be an inciting force in creating “a world where the need for meaning no longer occurs” and “a world where we no longer seek deeper and larger purposes for our existence and no longer suffer anxiety and despair in the absence of them.”³⁶

These are deeply problematic claims when set against Nietzsche’s own writings. Nietzsche writes after and in the wake of the death of God, announced well before his own time.³⁷ He depicts Zarathustra’s surprise upon encountering a hermit who “has not yet heard the news that *God is dead!*”³⁸ In this context, a central aspect of Nietzsche’s project has always been to find meaning in our lives after the traditional source of meaning has fallen victim to skepticism, i.e., after a generalizable loss of faith in the existence of God,³⁹ or as Charles Taylor puts this, after the shift “from a society in which it was virtually impossible

³⁵ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 74

³⁶ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 71

³⁷ Thomas Altizer tells us that “Hegel is the first philosopher to understand the death of God.” (Altizer, *The New Gospel of Christian Atheism*, 109) In 1802’s *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel quotes a Lutheran Hymn, saying that “God Himself is dead,” (see Anderson, *Hegel’s Speculative Good Friday*, xi) and Hegel refers to Pascal as expressing this “same feeling” that “nature is such that it signifies everywhere a lost God both within and outside man.” (Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 190-191) (And see Anderson, *Hegel’s Speculative Good Friday*, xi.) Frederick Beiser tells us that, after Hegel, Philipp Mainländer (Batz) “introduces a very modern and redolent theme: the death of God. He popularized the theme before Nietzsche.” (Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900*, 202) Josephson-Storm writes: “References to the death of God also occur in Heinrich Heine (1835), Bruno Bauer (1841), and Max Stirner (1844), all significantly before Nietzsche put pen to paper. Stirner’s version even evokes Nietzsche’s famous *decide* while blaming it on enlightenment.... Strikingly, it was among Hegelians of the 1830s and 1840s that we find the death of God shifting from the terrain of poetical abstraction into some of the earliest theorization about “alienation” and “secularization” as general patterns of history.... Moreover, there is good evidence that the first deployment of secularization to describe an epochal process of de-Christianization is in the writings of the Christian theosophist and right-Hegelian Richard Rothe.” (Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 75-76) See also von der Luft, “Sources of Nietzsche’s ‘God is Dead!’ and its Meaning for Heidegger,” 265.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, §2, 5

³⁹ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 15-17; Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 19-20 & 57.

not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others,” to one in which “belief in God is no longer axiomatic” and in which there will be many for whom “faith never even seems an eligible possibility.”⁴⁰ As Kaufmann sees, Nietzsche expresses a “profound concern whether... a meaningful life” is “at all possible in a Godless world.”⁴¹ Nietzsche makes this explicit at §357 of *The Gay Science*: “As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its ‘meaning’ as counterfeit, Schopenhauer’s question immediately comes at us in a terrifying way: *Does existence have any meaning at all?*”⁴² And elsewhere, Nietzsche writes: “I want to teach humans the meaning of their being.”⁴³ These are not the words of a man who longs for “a world where the need for meaning no longer occurs.” Hatab, with an ear much more finely tuned to Nietzsche’s thought, writes that “the question that preoccupies Nietzsche’s investigations runs: Is life as we have it meaningful, worthwhile, affirmable *on its own terms?*”⁴⁴ And, Hatab continues, “life-affirmation, in response to the question of meaning in life (and the danger of nihilism after the death of God), is the core issue in Nietzsche’s thought.... Nietzsche’s philosophical work always bears on the existential task of coming to terms with the meaning and value of life.”⁴⁵ And finally, “with the absence of God we are left with the choice of either a nihilistic collapse of meaning or a revaluation of meaning in different terms according to immediate life conditions. Nietzsche takes the latter option.”⁴⁶ In short, what Hatab correctly sees here is not only that Nietzsche still seeks out

⁴⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3

⁴¹ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 102-103

⁴² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §357, 219

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, §7, 12

⁴⁴ Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 20

⁴⁵ Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 20

⁴⁶ Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 6

meaning and thinks that others should as well, but that the importance of this project only grows within a post-theistic context which deprives us of a secure foundation upon which to ground the meaning of life. This project would be unintelligible if Nietzsche condemned unequivocally the search for meaning and its effects. Given the value he places on this search, Nietzsche must think that it is possible to fulfill the will to meaning in healthy and life-affirming ways, or in ways that are free of asceticism's ruinous effects – asceticism being “the only meaning” we Europeans have ever known.⁴⁷ Nietzsche cannot think that the ruinous effects of the ascetic manifestation of this will to meaning are the only and necessary effects of the will to meaning; he must think that an alternative, healthy, relation to meaning is possible, or he must think that the will to meaning can have healthy, advantageous, and life-affirming effects. Why else would he express this wish to teach humans the meaning of their being?

II. A Brief Survey of the Will to Meaning Thesis

Nietzsche is by no means alone in observing that human beings need to believe that their lives are meaningful. It is worth surveying some alternative formulations of this idea in order to set Nietzsche's own treatment of the will to meaning into contrast. Wolfgang Schirmacher writes that according to Schopenhauer⁴⁸ “there is a “metaphysical need” for meaning when death strikes, at any time, with no regard for circumstances.” And we have

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

⁴⁸ Schopenhauer, “On Man's Need for Metaphysics.” *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, ch. xvii. See Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, 9: “That Nietzsche refers constantly to “the metaphysical need” (in HH I 26 he actually places the phrase in quotation marks) shows the importance of this... background to understanding his own philosophy of religion.”

such a need because “life is not fair, and so human beings console themselves with tales of ‘eternal life’ where wrongs will be set right.”⁴⁹ Schopenhauer’s basic claim here is that human beings find it difficult to cope with the suffering that belongs inevitably to life, and so they console themselves by construing life as oriented toward an endpoint which outstrips this life and which will make up for the suffering endured in order to reach that end. Further, he argues, people ground this meaning or endpoint in metaphysical principles in order to guarantee its validity. These ideas helped Nietzsche to articulate the suspicions that he already harbored against Christianity: as Heinze Bluhm puts this, for Nietzsche, “Christianity refuses to let human life rest on its own merits by supplying a metaphysical framework.”⁵⁰ As will be discussed, Nietzsche hypothesizes that the motivating force behind the unending human tendency to construct various ontological, metaphysical, and theological systems, or the demand for metaphysical doctrines, is to solidify our knowledge that life is, in the end, meaningful. This points to a central feature of an endemic misunderstanding of meaning that Nietzsche thinks is common to human beings: we misunderstand meaning, he thinks, if we imagine that it is guaranteed or secured by an absolute or unchanging ground or foundation.

The idea that human beings need to believe that their lives are meaningful persists throughout existential literature and philosophy.⁵¹ In Camus’ telling of *The Myth of*

⁴⁹ Schirmacher, “Living Disaster: Schopenhauer for the Twenty-first Century,” 13-14

⁵⁰ Bluhm, “Nietzsche’s Final View of Luther and the Reformation,” 76

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, II, 375: “every human being... has a natural need to formulate a life-view, a conception of the meaning of life and of its purpose.” (Thomas Brobjer has shown that Nietzsche likely had some level of familiarity with Kierkegaard in “Notes and Discussions: Nietzsche’s Knowledge of Kierkegaard.”) Celine, (*Journey to the End of the Night*, 133) recognizes the value of distraction from meaninglessness: “he’d been touched in a way by their brand of music, where they, too, try to get away from the weight of routine and the crushing misery of having to do the same thing every day... While it’s playing, they can shuffle about for a while with a life that has no meaning.” Tolstoy (*A Confession*, 68-69) describes

Sisyphus, for instance, the author exploits the reader's own sense of a need for meaning. What renders Sisyphus so utterly pitiable to the reader, what makes it nearly impossible to "imagine Sisyphus happy,"⁵² is the aimlessness and fruitlessness of his endeavors, the complete purposelessness of his personal eternal return of the same, the fact that all his suffering is suffering in vain. Many people, Camus claims, stake the value of life on its meaningfulness: they "believe that refusing to grant a meaning to life necessarily leads to declaring that it is not worth living," while "in truth," he continues, "there is no necessary common measure between these two judgments."⁵³ Nietzsche too sees that many individuals stake the worthwhileness of life on its meaningfulness while there is in fact no necessary connection between the two, i.e., it could be that a meaningless life is worth living and it could be that a meaningful life is not worth living. An aspect of Nietzsche's project will be to demonstrate why individuals would imagine that a meaningless life cannot be worth living. For Nietzsche, whether or not one thinks that living is worthwhile is a more fundamental judgment than whether or not one thinks that life is meaningful. Some of those who judge that life is not worth living, he thinks, will use the belief that life is meaningful to persevere through life nonetheless. At the same time, some of those who judge that life is worth living will impose a meaning upon their life in order to achieve their "highest potential... splendor."⁵⁴

the sensation of being bombarded by questions "that would not wait," that "constantly repeated themselves" and "had to be answered at once," namely, "What is it for? What does it lead to?"

⁵² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 123

⁵³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 8

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §6, 8

The will to meaning thesis appears frequently in the history of psychoanalysis.⁵⁵

Erich Fromm, for instance, worries that the need for meaning will go unfulfilled:

will our children hear a voice telling them where to go and what to live for? Somehow they feel, as all human beings do, that life must have a meaning – but what is it?... Are we able to satisfy their longing? We are as helpless as they are. We do not know the answer... We pretend that our life is based upon a solid foundation and ignore the shadows of uneasiness, anxiety, and confusion which never leave us.⁵⁶

In this quotation, Fromm connects the idea of something “to live for,” i.e., a future, with a “solid foundation,” i.e., a secure ground that guarantees this meaning. For Nietzsche, nothing can be fully immutable, and this can rob us of our sense of just such a secure foundation. He thinks that the kind of meaning that often is best able to satisfy the will to meaning will not only provide us with a future aim, but will be accompanied by some sort of argumentation by which to ground or secure this aim, or, with which to prove that such an endpoint exists at all. Indeed, part of what makes the will to meaning so difficult to satisfy is the challenge of identifying an unchanging or secure foundation upon which to ground the meaning of life.

This idea that individuals need meaning in life continues to hold sway in contemporary psychoanalysis, and research concerning our relation to meaning is now also burgeoning in contemporary clinical psychology.⁵⁷ Clinical psychologist Raymond

⁵⁵ In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud tells us that individuals need to strive after a guiding ideal. As Johnathan Lear (Lear, *Freud*, 200) puts this, to protect “against a sense of utter vulnerability,” we postulate that “the world is ordered according to a higher purpose and we each have a proper role within it.” Paul Bishop (Bishop, *The Dionysian Self*, 197) argues that, if Freud identified the origin of this need, he did not offer anything that could fill it, and with the project of analytic psychology, it is Carl Jung who sets out to identify new modes for its fulfillment.

⁵⁶ Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, 3-4

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Michael F. Steger, Todd B. Kashdan, Brandon A. Sullivan, and Danielle Lorentz, “Understanding the Search for Meaning in Life,” 2008; Patrick E. McKnight and Todd B. Kashdan, “Purpose in Life as a System That Creates and Sustains Health and Well-Being,” 2009; Michael F. Steger, “Making Meaning in

Bergner states that it is “relatively common” for people to worry about the meanings of their lives, and that this concern often arises as “part of a broader clinical syndrome, such as depression, alcoholism, posttraumatic stress disorder, or obsessive-compulsive personality disorder.”⁵⁸ The psychoanalyst Darian Leader draws a causal link between depression and lack of purpose. Criticizing the purely pharmacological treatment of depression that has become commonplace, Leader writes: “as we read through paper after paper on depression considered as a brain disease, we totally lose any sense that at the core of many people’s experience of inertia and lack of interest in life lies the loss of a cherished human relationship or a crisis of personal meaning.”⁵⁹ And, he claims, depression not only occurs as the result of a loss or failure, but also

when we actually manage to attain our ideal: the athlete who breaks a world record, the seducer who finally makes his conquest, the worker who gets the long-awaited promotion. In these instances, our desire is suddenly removed. We might have striven for years to achieve some goal, but when there is no longer anything to attain we feel the presence of a void at the core of our lives. Most people will have experienced this in some form after finishing exams. The long-awaited moment has been reached, and now there is only the blues.⁶⁰

Life,” 2012; Todd B. Kashdan and Patrick E. McKnight, “Commitment to a Purpose in Life: An Antidote to the Suffering by Individuals With Social Anxiety Disorder,” 2013; F.R. Goodman, J.D. Doorley, and T.B. Kashdan, “Well-being and psychopathology: A deep exploration into positive emotions, meaning and purpose in life, and social relationships,” 2018. In her review of *The Human Quest for Meaning*, Dianne Vella-Brodrick suggests that the reason it has taken so long for the human relation to meaning to be taken seriously by the sciences is twofold. First, because the topic does not clearly lie within the jurisdiction of any one discipline, no discipline has seized upon the topic as “its” problem. And second, because “the meaning of life” is so seemingly personal to any given individual, the sciences in general have been skeptical that this topic can be treated objectively. (See Vella-Brodrick, 2014.)

⁵⁸ Bergner, “Therapeutic Approaches to Problems of Meaninglessness,” 73. There are two recently published English volumes on this topic: *Clinical Perspectives on Meaning* (2016), edited by Pninit Russo-Netzer, Stefan E. Schulenberg, and Alexander Bathyany, and *The Human Quest for Meaning* (2012), edited by Paul T. P. Wong. Both volumes take as their fundamental premise the notion that meaning is a basic condition for human health and well-being. These publications in particular provide us with a wealth of empirical evidence to suggest that this need to believe that life is meaningful is a common feature amongst a variety of peoples and cultures, to the point that we can say that it is widely shared across human beings.

⁵⁹ Leader, *The New Black*, 20-21

⁶⁰ Leader, *The New Black*, 21-22

While it is not yet clear whether any goal at all is able to give meaning to life, what Leader notes here – and attests to by recounting several stories of his patients’ personal experiences – is that maintaining a goal as a goal, as something yet to be achieved, is a condition for happiness and flourishing.

Outside of theory, the need for meaning is also explored in popular culture and comedy. James Tartaglia writes: “the popular image of the question ‘what is the meaning of life?’ within contemporary secular culture is a comic one. The comedy is tinged with embarrassment and disdain, and from Monty Python to Douglas Adams, has traded on the supposedly hopeless obscurity of the question.”⁶¹ Tartaglia’s point is not only that people find the question funny because it is obscure or unanswerable. His point is also that, in order to find this funny, one has to relate to the experience of asking this question, and of seeking its answer in vain. We find it humorous to ask about the meaning of life because we know from experience how difficult this question is to answer. Thus, Tartaglia claims, the fact that so many people find this question funny suggests that just as many people are asking themselves about the meaning of life. Then, in what strikes me as a brilliant observation, Tartaglia suggests that we laugh at this question as a defense mechanism in order to protect ourselves from the pain of being unable to find its answer: “the defensive strategy that has been developed is to laugh at it; which always works well when dealing with something that has touched a nerve.”⁶² His point is that the popularity of the question of meaning in comedy presupposes both that many people are asking this question, and that many are having trouble answering it.

⁶¹ Tartaglia, *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life*, 1

⁶² Tartaglia, *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life*, 1

Finally, one of the most sustained treatments of the observation that human beings need to believe that their lives are meaningful is offered in the work of Viktor Frankl, and the phrase “the will to meaning” more legitimately belongs to Frankl than to Nietzsche, as is revealed by the titles of his many works: *The Will to Meaning*, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, etc. The cover of my copy of *Man’s Search for Meaning* boasts “More than 12 million copies in print worldwide.” This basic fact alone, that there is such demand for a work entitled *Man’s Search for Meaning*, seems to me to indicate the extent to which the search for meaning in life is strikingly common. Frankl invented a form of existential therapy he termed “logotherapy,” the primary claim of which is that meaning is a condition for health and well-being. Frankl was also a Holocaust survivor, and his logotherapy is lent a certain validation by the role he ascribes its tenets in his own survival. He continually claims that retaining some sense of the meaning of his life is what allowed him to survive. And correspondingly, he recounts many stories of individuals who had lost all sense of meaning, and subsequently, their lives: “he describes poignantly those prisoners who gave up on life, who had lost all hope for a future and were inevitably the first to die.”⁶³ As Harold Kushner recounts, Frankl holds that these prisoners “died less from lack of food or medicine than from lack of hope, lack of something to live for,”⁶⁴ while, by contrast, “Frankl kept himself alive and kept hope alive by summoning up thoughts of his wife and the prospect of seeing her again, and by dreaming at one point of lecturing after the war

⁶³ Kushner, “Foreword,” ix

⁶⁴ Kushner, “Foreword,” ix

about the psychological lessons to be learned from the Auschwitz experience.”⁶⁵ While acknowledging that many who hoped desperately to survive did not, the question that Frankl invites is this: within this terror in which everyone could reasonably have died, how did *anyone* survive at all? Frankl credits the meaning-giving power of hope for his own survival, and that of many others. Frankl was inspired by Nietzsche’s claim that “He who has found his ‘why’ can endure almost any ‘how.’”⁶⁶ He never tires of quoting this dictum, taking it to mean that a person can bear all sorts of suffering provided that they believe that it is in the service of some higher aim. And finally, Frankl’s life’s work describes a parallel between himself and the character of Zarathustra: as Zarathustra says that his aim is to teach human beings the meaning of their existence, – the *Übermensch* – so too, says Frankl, was the meaning of his own life to help others find the meanings of theirs.⁶⁷

What differentiates Nietzsche’s treatment of the will to meaning from that of these various thinkers? In his foreword to *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Kushner writes:

Terrible as it was, [Frankl’s] experience in Auschwitz reinforced what was already one of his key ideas: Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life.⁶⁸

First, Nietzsche does not maintain this threefold distinction. While he will situate the will to power as the most basic motivating force in human beings, the quests for pleasure and meaning will be incorporated into this basic motivation. For Nietzsche, the feeling of pleasure involves the feeling of power, and individuals seek out meaning, he will argue, in

⁶⁵ Kushner, “Foreword,” ix-x

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Arrows and Epigrams, §12, 157. Quoted in Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 76 & 104.

⁶⁷ Winslade, “Afterword,” 165

⁶⁸ Kushner, “Foreword,” x

order to optimize their sensation of power. But more fundamentally, and with certain exceptions, the primary difference between Nietzsche and these various thinkers is that Nietzsche does not presuppose the value of meaning, and he is not only interested in identifying the conditions under which meaning can be created or discovered and in helping others to uncover the meanings of their lives. Nietzsche also reflects on the value or worthwhileness of the quest for meaning. He discredits the value of certain quests while defending the value of others. Thus, while recognizing that it can be abused, he defends the value of the quest for meaning in general, and correspondingly, the will to meaning. In Frankl's work, it is presumed as given from the outset that human beings *ought to* seek out meaning; his work largely constitutes an ongoing treatise on the benefits of and techniques for doing so. Nietzsche's approach, on the other hand, is more critical in that he recognizes the human desire for meaning, but he does not assume on the basis of this desire that it ought to be fulfilled. This feeling, or this desire, is not evidence of anything beyond itself; it is only evidence that we desire meaning and it is not an argument that this desire *ought to* be fulfilled. In other words, the fact that we value meaning is not an argument that meaning is inherently valuable. Nietzsche wants to know *why* we want our lives to be meaningful and whether or not it is valuable that we possess such a will at all. Given that we desire meaning, Nietzsche asks, what are the conditions of this desire? And is the search for meaning ultimately a valuable quest? Does it help us, or harm us, or some mixture of the two? Asking these critical questions differentiates Nietzsche from most of the above thinkers who largely presuppose the value of the quest for meaning.

The value Nietzsche ascribes to the will to meaning for life is ambiguous: the effects of the will to meaning can be life-affirming and empowering, or they can be life-negating

and disempowering. This ambiguity in Nietzsche's valuation explains why scholars have misinterpreted Nietzsche on this mark. The problem occurs when scholars take one side of his evaluation of meaning to be his entire evaluation of meaning. Nietzsche is indeed highly critical of the harmful and degenerative effects that can be caused by the will to meaning, but he sees that the will to meaning can have the opposite effect as well. In his discussion of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche argues that life would continually reproduce only what serves life's needs.⁶⁹ Hence, as partially harmful as it may be, the will to meaning would not continually emerge in living beings if it were only or totally harmful to life. Nietzsche, too, believes that there is value in meaning and the will to meaning for human beings and I will aim to uncover this position in his writings.

III. Outline of the Project

The first chapter of this work will be spent defining Nietzsche's notion of meaning, particularly as he understands it as the object of the will to meaning. Following the connotations of the German *Sinn* – it is this term that Nietzsche consistently uses when describing the human need to believe that one's life is meaningful – I'll argue that, for Nietzsche, the meaning of one's life is synonymous with life's aim, direction, or purpose. The chapter therefore gives way to a discussion of purpose for Nietzsche. Taking a guiding thread from Gilles Deleuze, I argue that something's purpose, and therefore its meaning, amounts to the drive or force which has instrumentalized that thing for its own expression. I'll also consider some popular but inaccurate interpretations of Nietzsche's definition of

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11 & §13

meaning; in particular, I'll show that meaning for Nietzsche is not identical with *power*, as some commentators claim, but power is the capacity to impose meaning, while the will to power is the motivation behind this imposition. That is, one imposes meaning in order to increase their sensation of power. Finally, I will dispense with the complication that arises from the ambiguity whereby meaning may refer, on the one hand, to purpose, and on the other, to signification or indication. These two senses prove compatible in that each is an instance of something's instrumentalization by some external force.

Both the second and third chapters are dedicated to explicating Nietzsche's understanding of life. I distinguish between life in general, which refers to being or existence, and life in particular, which refers to that which is uniquely common to living things or that which defines a living thing as living. The second chapter will explicate the necessary conditions of life in general, or of existence, according to Nietzsche. In other words, this chapter will describe the necessary conditions of the type of world in which the will to meaning emerges as a salient feature of human beings. These conditions are dynamism and agonism, and I refer to them as the conditions of finitude. Dynamism refers to life's temporality or susceptibility to the passage of time. Agonism refers to life's combativeness, which itself is both defensive and offensive. This is to say that agonism refers to life's vulnerability to external forces and to life's capacity to impose forces upon the external. The basic result of these conditions, Nietzsche argues, is that all aspects of life are susceptible to alteration and change, either due simply to the flow of time, or due to some imposition by an external force. There are three particular features of life lived under the conditions of agonistic dynamism that are crucial for the question of meaning. First, for Nietzsche, if agonistic dynamism is inescapable, then there is no life without pain and

suffering. This presupposes that pain and suffering correspond to change and the passage of time. Second, Nietzsche thinks that this omnipresence of suffering causes individuals to seek out a meaning or a reason for this pain. This, I'll argue, is based on his argument that meaning anesthetizes suffering, or that "reasons bring relief."⁷⁰ And third, if all aspects of life are continually in flux, Nietzsche describes our world as a place wherein it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to uncover a secure, authoritative, and unchanging ground for the meaning of life. The nature of life is both the reason why we search for meaning and the reason we cannot discover any ultimate meaning. We are destined, Nietzsche thinks, to take on a search for meaning that we cannot possibly fulfill.

The third chapter offers an interpretation of Nietzsche's understanding of the living thing and is therefore an excursus on the notion of the will to power. For Nietzsche, something is alive inasmuch as it wills power. If the second chapter describes the world in which the will to meaning can emerge, this chapter describes the type of animal, the human animal, of whom the will to meaning is a salient characteristic. I'll first provide textual evidence that Nietzsche defines living things according to the will to power. I'll then define both power and will to power before turning to a discussion of the experiential feeling of power. I'll demonstrate that there are points at which this feeling of power can be disingenuous, and I'll isolate a particular subclass of will to power, i.e., a pathological subclass as it is expressed by the character of *ressentiment*, which aims toward the false feeling of power. This excursus is necessary for three reasons. First, it supplements the previous discussion by further explaining why, according to Nietzsche, suffering is a

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §20, 104

necessary aspect of the experience of being alive. It is the nature of living beings, and their will to power in particular, that demands that the phenomenal experience of living necessarily involves suffering. Second, as I've alluded to above, Nietzsche will ultimately subordinate the will to meaning to the will to power, or in other words, he understands the will to meaning as an expression of the will to power. In brief, individuals search for meaning, he will argue, because it serves to increase their sensation of power. And third, the pathological subclass of will to power will ultimately prove central to the project of evaluating the will to meaning. This is because, for Nietzsche, meaning hinders human life at those points at which it provides us with a false feeling of power.

The fourth chapter presents Nietzsche's claim that life necessarily involves suffering. Specifically, Nietzsche thinks that we necessarily suffer because we are subject to the conditions of agonistic dynamism and the will to power. I'll also consider two further forms of suffering – namely chronophobia and the historical illness – both of which can arise as a direct result of our being subject to the conditions of finitude. Following this, the fifth chapter will survey Nietzsche's evidence for the existence of the will to meaning. If suffering belongs necessarily to life according to Nietzsche, it is upon analysis of the human response to suffering that he first encounters the will to meaning. His primary evidence for the existence of this will lies in his observation that suffering can be best endured by those for whom it is meaningful. Nietzsche's argument here amounts to a diagnosis by treatment. By determining that so many people are using meaning to render their suffering bearable, Nietzsche argues that what they were suffering from was the absence of meaning.

Next, I'll turn to the matter of evaluating the will to meaning. This requires a standard of value, and the sixth chapter aims to determine this standard. Nietzsche's

writings make it clear that his standard of evaluation is the enhancement of life, or that, for Nietzsche, the valuable is the life-enhancing. Enhancement, however, is one of many terms that Nietzsche never defined, and thus, the majority of this chapter will be spent attempting to extract a definition of *enhancement* from Nietzsche's works. I will do so by analyzing the different figures that Nietzsche describes as representative of enhancement and decline, respectively. I'll demonstrate that life-enhancing character types affirm the necessary conditions for life itself. This "Yes" to life, I argue, is the mark of the enhancing, and therefore, of the valuable, for Nietzsche. With his standard of value established, I'll then identify the value Nietzsche ascribes to various expressions of the will to meaning. A quest for meaning is valuable according to Nietzsche if it expresses a "Yes" to life.

The seventh chapter will continue with the evaluation of meaning by analyzing those quests for meaning which Nietzsche deems life-hindering. An expression of the will to meaning is life-hindering where it is intended to offer an individual a form of escape from the necessary conditions of existence. I'll isolate a category of the quest for meaning which I will call "metaphysical hope" and which is life-hindering according to Nietzsche. Hope is metaphysical when it is grounded outside the conditions of finitude, that is, either when what is hoped for, or else the conditions that make this hope possible, lie beyond temporality and agonism. Nietzsche's clearest example of such a life-hindering quest for meaning is that made by the various forms of Christian religiosity which ground the meaning of life in a transcendent endpoint. The chapter will close with a demonstration of how the ascetic ideal in its Christian form both stems from and incites corruption for Nietzsche. It stems from corruption in that the ascetic ideal presupposes the defamation of

this world and this earthly existence. It incites corruption by satisfying the individual will to power with a minimal level of resistance and overcoming.

Finally, the eighth chapter will analyze life-enhancing quests for meaning which allow individuals to flourish under the necessary conditions of existence, and it will respond to those theorists who claim that Nietzsche condemns the value of the will to meaning in its entirety. I'll consider three instances of life-enhancing quests for meaning. These are Nietzsche's discussion of the philosopher's use of the ascetic ideal; Nietzsche's privileging of a Greek form of theodicy and the notion of the transfiguring mirror presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*; and Zarathustra's wish to teach humanity the meaning of their existence, which is the *Übermensch*. In each case, I'll demonstrate that these quests for meaning are not only life-preserving but genuinely enhancing according to Nietzsche, and it is this life-enhancing aspect of his understanding of meaning that so often goes overlooked in Nietzsche scholarship. Those few scholars who do treat Nietzsche's notion of the will to meaning directly grant prominence to Nietzsche's discussions of the life-hindering uses of meaning over his discussions of its life-enhancing uses. As a result, these interpreters underestimate the value of meaning for Nietzsche, assuming that it is something that both stems from and encourages the decline of life. Thus, the dissertation closes by responding to these theorists and demonstrating that Nietzsche ultimately understands the will to meaning as valuable and enhancing for human life. Even if it is not always successful, the will to meaning has the capacity to save us from the threat of nihilism.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS MEANING?

As with so many of his concepts, Nietzsche never explicitly offers an unequivocal definition of meaning [*Sinn*], and very few scholarly works take the time to define meaning for Nietzsche. There is no entry for meaning or sense in Douglas Burnham's *The Nietzsche Dictionary*¹ or Carol Diethe's *Historical Dictionary of Nietzscheanism*, and *Sinn* has not yet been defined in De Gruyter's ongoing *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch* project.² Indeed, as far as I can tell, David Campbell seems to be generally correct when he writes that "commentators often take Nietzsche's notion of meaning for granted."³ All of this being said, however, I do think that it is possible to demonstrate that Nietzsche's understanding of meaning remains consistent across his discussions of the will to meaning in particular. This chapter aims to elucidate this understanding of meaning. Specifically, something's meaning, for Nietzsche, amounts to the force that is expressed by that thing.

I'll begin with a consideration of the German term *Sinn*, which Nietzsche uses to refer to the object of the will to meaning at GM III 28. Nietzsche consistently understands *Sinn* in this context as purpose, aim, or goal. Second, I'll take a guiding thread from Gilles Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. Deleuze observes that, for Nietzsche, something's meaning

¹ The closest Burnham gets is an entry on "goal, end, purpose, or *teleos*" in which he writes that a goal is "the function or meaning of some current state.... Goals are experienced as giving a meaning or value to activity." (Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, 152) However, in what sense can a goal both *be* a meaning and *give* a meaning? And, on what grounds does Burnham seemingly equate meaning with value?

² The first volume of the *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch*, edited by Paul van Tongeren, Gerd Schank, Herman Siemens, and Marco Brusotti, was published in 2004 and defines 67 of the full project's projected 300 terms. The remaining volumes are still forthcoming.

³ Campbell, *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Meaning*, 25

is always the product of the appropriation of that thing by an external force, and I will offer a reading of GM II 12-13 to support this interpretation. Third, I'll explicate Nietzsche's understanding of the drives, since he argues that these are the forces that impose meaning or purpose upon things. Fourth, I'll distinguish three techniques by which the drives impose purpose on a thing: incorporation, sublimation, and organization. This will clarify how exactly meaning can be imposed upon something by an external force according to Nietzsche. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that something's meaning, for Nietzsche, amounts to the dominating force that has made this thing into an instrument for its own expression, or the force that is expressed or signified by the thing.

1.1 “*Sinn*”

Across the English translations of Nietzsche's works, several distinct words are translated by “meaning.” Nietzsche uses the noun *Sinn* to refer to that which is willed by the will to meaning, and he generally uses the verb *bedeuten* to refer to the act of indicating, signifying, or referring.⁴ For instance, at GM II 28, both are used in a single sentence: “This is what the ascetic ideal meant:” humanity “suffered from the problem of what he meant.”⁵ [*Das eben bedeutet das asketische Ideal: ... er litt am Probleme seines Sinns.*] Since Nietzsche is consistent in his use of *Sinn* to refer to the object of the will to meaning, and my interest here is in Nietzsche's understanding of meaning as the object of this will, it is his understanding of *Sinn* that I will explicate.

⁴ See, e.g., GM I, §2; GM I, §4; GM III, §1; GM, III, §2.

⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

The term *Sinn* has many meanings. As Volker Gerhardt writes, “the German word *Sinn* has an exceptionally wide semantic field, covering ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ – both as the capacity to distinguish stimuli, and as discursive content,” but also “thought,” “consciousness,” and “understanding.”⁶ In English translations of Nietzsche’s works, *Sinn* is variously rendered not only as “meaning,” but also as “sense” and “idea,”⁷ while *Sinn* can also mean “point,” as in, the point or meaning of a statement, but also as in an endpoint or direction towards which one strives, like a purpose, aim, or goal.⁸ Again, in Gerhardt’s words, *Sinn* has a “vectorial connotation,” and thus, for example, “the *Uhrzeigersinn* or “clockwise direction” indicates in which *direction* something moves. Thus the specific direction of a body may indicate the particular *Sinn*” towards which that body strives.⁹ This connotation of purpose, aim, or intention is maintained in the English “meaning” as well,¹⁰ as in phrases like “I meant to do it” or “This is what I mean to do.”

When he is speaking of a will to meaning in particular, Nietzsche most often uses the word *Sinn* in this last sense, i.e., to refer to a purpose, aim, direction, or goal. For example, Nietzsche writes that human beings “will” suffering, and “even seek it out,” provided that they are “shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering.”¹¹ In this case, he lists these two provisions – meaning *and* purpose – as if they are two ways of saying the same thing, and he does this repeatedly throughout GM II, 12, discussed in detail below. For instance, Nietzsche claims that, in the process of re-interpretation, something’s “former

⁶ Gerhardt, “The Body, the Self, and the Ego,” 295

⁷ E.g., in GM II, §12 & §13, translated by Carol Diethe, “*Sinn*” is variously rendered as each of “meaning,” “sense,” and “idea” at least once.

⁸ Herdina, Philip and Waibl, Elmar, *German Dictionary of Philosophical Terms*, vol. 1, 266, & vol. 2, 236

⁹ Gerhardt, “The Body, the Self, and the Ego,” 284

¹⁰ Roochnik, *Retrieving Aristotle in an Age of Crisis*, 6

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

‘meaning’ [*Sinn*] and ‘purpose’ must necessarily be obscured.”¹² Or, on the topic of punishment, Nietzsche distinguishes between “its relative permanence, the custom, the act, the ‘drama’,” and “its meaning [*Sinn*], purpose and expectation.”¹³ Nietzsche lists meaning [*Sinn*] with purpose [*Zweck*] as though the two are interchangeable.

That Nietzsche does, at least at times, identify meaning and purpose becomes clearer upon comparing GM III, 1 to GM III, 28. In GM III, 28, Nietzsche claims to be repeating the same point from GM III, 1.¹⁴ In the opening passage, he states that the prominence of the ascetic ideal “reveals a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; it needs an aim.”¹⁵ While at GM III, 28, again, he writes that “this is what the ascetic ideal meant: something was missing, there was an immense lacuna around man, – he himself could think of no justification or explanation or affirmation, he suffered from the problem of what he

¹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12, 51

¹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 52-53

¹⁴ In the *Genealogy*’s preface, Nietzsche tells us that Essay III is “a commentary on the aphorism that precedes it.” (GM, Preface, §8, 9) There is a small controversy in the secondary literature as to whether Nietzsche means that the essay is a commentary on GM III, §1, or on the epigraph, taken from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that precedes essay III. Migotti (Migotti, “Not Your Grandfather’s Genealogy: How to Read GM III.”) writes: “Until 1997, when Christopher Janaway and John Wilcox independently reached the correct conclusion, no one knew what Nietzsche meant when he said that he had prefixed an aphorism to GM III, since no one knew that what he was talking about is the first numbered section of the essay. Before then, a dismaying amount of time had been ill-spent trying to explain the non-problem of how GM III could be read as an interpretation of the sentence from Zarathustra that serves as its epigraph.” (See Wilcox, “What Aphorism does Nietzsche Explicate in Genealogy of Morals, Essay III?”; Janaway, “Nietzsche’s illustration of the Art of Exegesis.”) Arthur Danto, for example, writes: “The third essay ... is, according to Nietzsche’s preface to the work, a gloss on its prefixed aphorism, which reads: “Unconcerned, mocking, violent—thus wisdom wants us. She is a woman, and always loves only a warrior.”” (Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 251) And Nehamas likewise holds the same position. (Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 108-115, especially 114.) For me, this view that the essay is a commentary on the epigraph from *Zarathustra* has never held any credence because GM III 1 so clearly lays out a program and outline for essay III, and Essay III follows that outline quite closely. GM III 1 is a list of what ascetic ideals mean for different character-types, and the essay as a whole is structured by discussions of what ascetic ideals mean for these different character-types. Hence it is clear that, in the essay’s closing section, Nietzsche is expanding, clarifying, and explicating the closing sentences of GM III 1. Indeed, he quite literally repeats the claim that the human will would rather will nothingness than will nothing at all; this same claim closes both sections. (Compare GM III 1 with GM III 28.)

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

meant.”¹⁶ In the former, we suffer for want of an aim; in the latter, we suffer for want of meaning. Thus, if Nietzsche is repeating the same point here, as he claims to be, then he does identify this need for an aim or a purpose with the need for meaning.

Furthermore, that Nietzsche identifies meaning with end, aim, or purpose is made particularly clear in a number of notebook entries. For instance, in an 1887 note published as WP 55, he claims that the loss of belief in God produces a belief “in aim- and meaninglessness” while “it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain.” He describes “duration ‘in vain,’ without end or aim” as “the most paralyzing idea,” and he gives this thought “its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim.”¹⁷ Likewise, in a notebook entry describing psychological nihilism as a failed search for meaning, Nietzsche writes:

This meaning could have been: the “fulfillment” of some highest ethical canon in all events, the moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal happiness; or even the development toward a state of universal annihilation—*any goal at least constitutes some meaning*. What all these notions have in common is that something is to be achieved through the process.¹⁸

This is the point at which Nietzsche is most explicit: he claims that “any goal at least constitutes some meaning.” It remains to be seen whether only certain types of goals are meaning-giving in relation to life itself. For now, these passages provide a working definition of meaning for Nietzsche. At least where he is speaking of a will to meaning in particular, we will not stray too far from his intentions if we think of “meaning” as “purpose,” “aim,” or “goal.” For Nietzsche, in this context, meaning is purpose, or

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §55, 35

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §12-A, 12, emphasis added

something is meaningful if it is purposeful. Thus, a will to meaning can be understood as a need for a purpose, or a need to have something to will or strive after.

This reveals the meaning of Nietzsche's claim that we prefer "to *will nothingness*" than to "*not will*."¹⁹ He means we would rather possess an illusory aim than proceed with no aim at all, or we would rather aim toward something that does not exist, something that amounts to nothing, than have no aim. As such, the will to meaning can also be conceived of as a will to will, a will to possess a will – an idea which has its roots for Nietzsche in Schopenhauer's notion of boredom.²⁰ After brief periods of satisfaction, Schopenhauer claims, human beings lapse into boredom and the will longs for an object after which to strive. Hence the aforementioned distinction between the will to meaning and the quest for meaning. The will to meaning is not the will to achieve or accomplish some end. Indeed, to achieve or accomplish one's end is to deny the will to meaning satisfaction. The will to meaning is a will to have an aim *as an aim*, to have a project or to be directed toward some end; it is the need of the human will to participate in a quest or journey toward an end. The *quest* toward meaning aims to accomplish its end; the will to meaning seeks out such a quest. The quest for meaning is what is willed by the will to meaning.

1.2 Appropriation, Exploitation, Possession

In striving to further clarify Nietzsche's understanding of meaning, I take a guiding thread from a remark made by Gilles Deleuze in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Using the

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

²⁰ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 164-165 & 312. See also Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 57

French “*sens*” in place of *Sinn*, Deleuze says that, for Nietzsche, “the sense of something is its relation to the force which takes possession of it.”²¹ Deleuze continues:

we will never find the sense of something (of a human, a biological or even a physical phenomenon) if we do not know the force which appropriates the thing, which exploits it, which takes possession of it or is expressed in it. A phenomenon is not an appearance or even an apparition but a sign, a symptom which finds its meaning in an existing force.... The history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggle for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon, changes sense depending on the force which appropriates it.²²

Deleuze’s reading is confirmed by GM II 12: Nietzsche argues that “every purpose and use” signifies that an external force has mastered something and “impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function,” and he claims that when something is “overpowered” or “dominated” its “former meaning and purpose” is “obscured” or “obliterated.”

GM II, 12-13, concerning the theme of punishment, is Nietzsche’s most sustained discussion of meaning and purpose. He notes that, in different times and places, punishment has had different purposes and has been meant to serve different ends, e.g., “as a means of rendering harmless, of preventing further harm... as payment of a debt to the creditor in any form (even one of emotional compensation)... as a sort of counter-balance to the privileges which the criminal has enjoyed... as a festival,” or, as “reform.”²³ Nietzsche wants to explain how this plurality of purposes is possible. These distinct purposes do not necessarily belong to distinct kinds of punishment, but rather, “one and the same procedure can be used, interpreted and adapted for fundamentally different projects.”²⁴ For instance,

²¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 8

²² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 3

²³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 53-54

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 53

he says that one and the same punishment may be used, on the one hand, as an “*aide mémoire*,”²⁵ – “a thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory”²⁶ – or, on the other hand, as the “most primitive and basic festive joys” of humanity: “at all events, not so long ago it was unthinkable to hold a royal wedding or fullscale festival for the people without executions, tortures or perhaps an auto-da-fé.”²⁷ Nietzsche interprets this plurality of purposes as evidence that something’s purpose is impermanent and transitory. Moreover, since any given purpose of punishment tends to benefit some particular group or perspective, Nietzsche hypothesizes that it is those who so benefit who also impose this particular purpose. For example, to render punishment a public spectacle could serve to incite fear and compliance, while conducting punishment secretly could serve to construct the image of a harmless or non-threatening society. Within one’s power, what one chooses to do with punishment, Nietzsche thinks, depends on one’s own interests. And the fact that a use of punishment serves some perspective, he thinks, suggests that the agents of that perspective imposed this use upon punishment. This presupposes the more general hypothesis that purposes can be continually re-imposed upon a thing by external forces.

These points – that something’s purpose is fluid and imposed by an interested perspective – are the key takeaways from GM II, 12. Nietzsche writes:

the origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate;... anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it;... everything that occurs in the organic world consists of overpowering, dominating, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former ‘meaning’

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 54

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §3, 38

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §6, 42

[*Sinn*] and ‘purpose’ must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.... But every purpose and use is just a sign that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function; and the whole history of a ‘thing’, an organ, a tradition can to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations.... The form is fluid, the ‘meaning’ [*Sinn*] even more so.²⁸

This passage again confirms that, for Nietzsche, something’s meaning is transitory and can change, meaning is imposed upon an element from the outside, and meaning is imposed by something that has, at least temporarily, achieved dominance over that upon which meaning is imposed. But moreover, Nietzsche is also saying that there is a certain mentality for which the notion of “reason” [*Grund*] is ambiguous or carries two meanings: for this mentality, something’s reason is both its *purpose* and its *explanation*. In GM II 12, Nietzsche variously uses “*Zweck*,” “*Sinn*,” or “*Nützlichkeit*” to speak of something’s purpose or utility, and he uses “*Ursprung*” and “*Entstehungsgrund*” to refer to something’s origin or to an explanation for its existence. Purpose, here, refers to the reason *for which* something exists, while explanation refers to the reason *that* something exists or the *how* that brought it into existence. Nietzsche is saying that it is a mistake to conflate these two distinct senses of reason. The belief that something’s reason is both its purpose and its explanation overlooks that new purposes can be continually imposed upon a thing in time.

This passage also provides a corrective to a popular interpretation of meaning for Nietzsche. In aphorism 590 of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says that “all meaning *is* will to power,”²⁹ and a number of commentators have adopted this definition. M. J. Bowles, for

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12, 51

²⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §590, 323, my emphasis. Aphorisms 587 – 617, which compose two subsections, oddly titled “Biological Value of Knowledge” and simply “Science,” contain a number of relevant references to meaning. (The section titles are not Nietzsche’s but are added by the editors.)

example, claims that “Nietzsche uses the term meaning as a synonym for power. Thus a concept, precept, or an idea has meaning if and only if it has power.”³⁰ Bowles offers no textual evidence for this claim, though he may of course have offered WP 590. As I’ve said, my strategy when it comes to the *Nachlass* materials is to attempt to understand how they are compatible with the larger trajectory of Nietzsche’s thought. Now, the claim that “meaning *is* will to power” is not, strictly speaking, consistent with GM II, 12’s claim that a “purpose” is “a sign that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function.”³¹ In the published work, meaning is not identical to power or the will to power; rather, power *impresses* meaning upon “something less powerful,” in the service of the will to power. GM II 12 and WP 590 can be reconciled if, when Nietzsche says that meaning is will to power, he means, first, that meaning ultimately stems from, originates in, or is given by power, and second, that meaning is always imposed to fulfill some will to power. If WP 590 is taken in combination with GM II, 12, it is clear that power is not precisely meaning. Power is what imposes meaning for the sake of will to power, or to increase one’s sensation of power. If power expresses itself in this imposition of meaning, this is not to say that this is the only mode in which power expresses itself. Rather, for Nietzsche, meaning is always an expression of power, or meaning is produced by a forceful imposition or appropriation.

GM II 12-13 states *that* something’s meaning is the product of an occupation or appropriation of that thing by an external force: something’s “meaning [*Sinn*]... was only inserted and interpreted into the procedure (which had existed for a long time though it was

³⁰ Bowles, *The Practice of Meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein*, 12

³¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12, 51

thought of in a different way).”³² I will think of this – i.e., that meaning is the product of an occupation or appropriation of something by an external force – as a structural or formal description, devoid of content. Meaning emerges where a real force appropriates a real thing. But what are the forces that impose meaning? And what is this imposition like? Determining Nietzsche’s understanding of meaning will require answering these questions.

1.3 Force and Drives

Force is a basic explanatory postulate for Nietzsche; it is necessary to account for the vast array of change and becoming that we constantly experience.³³ As Deleuze puts this, for Nietzsche, “all things reflect a state of forces.”³⁴ For instance, as discussed, an object’s purposefulness presupposes “the succession of forces which take possession of it.”³⁵ As Cliff Stagoll observes, Nietzsche provides no unambiguous definition of force, though he generally uses it to mean “any capacity to produce a change or ‘becoming.’”³⁶ And Nietzsche confirms this at WP §490 when he describes force as “a commanding of other subjects, which thereupon change.”³⁷

Nietzsche identifies many motivating forces acting on an organism from within and without. He uses “drive” [*Trieb*] to refer to a motivating force that originates within the

³² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 52-53

³³ See, e.g., BGE, §36; GM I, §13; WP §260, §266, §545, and especially the passages collected in the chapter entitled “The Will to Power in Nature,” e.g., §619-§642. However, Cf. WP §664.

³⁴ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, xvii; see also the section entitled “Sense” at 3-4.

³⁵ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 3

³⁶ Stagoll, “Force,” in Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 111

³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §490, 271. BGE 36 also supports this reading: “we must venture the hypothesis that everywhere “effects” are recognized, will is effecting will – and that every mechanistic event in which a force is active is really a force and effect of the will.” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §36, 36)

individual it motivates.³⁸ This internal origin is relative in that, while an expression of a drive-force comes from within, its trigger and even the explanation for why the individual possesses this drive may lie outside the individual.³⁹ This allows Nietzsche to retain the function of the drives as explanations for behaviour without rendering the drives innate, natural, metaphysical, or even transcendental givens. Nietzsche thinks that we experience the drives as affective compulsions to perform an action or seek out an aim,⁴⁰ although these manifest actions and aims may only be indirect means of achieving the drive's latent aim.⁴¹ Further, the event or action incited by a drive may not be an externally visible action; it may be as minor as a passing thought or the reinterpretation or revaluation of an object.⁴²

In brief, for Nietzsche, the drives are explanatory postulates, and their existence can be deduced from an analysis of the thoughts and behaviour of organisms. For instance,

³⁸ For Nietzsche's uses of "drive" (*Trieb*), see, e.g., HH I §32; GS §294; BGE §6, §12, §13, & §23; GM I §13; GM II §16; GM III §9, §18. As Pearson notes, "much ink has been spilt trying to clarify what exactly Nietzsche means by drive," (Pearson, "Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression," 10) and this remains a source of ongoing controversy in the secondary literature. (Useful summaries of this debate can be found in Pearson, "Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression," especially 9-12; Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self*, 79-88; and Stern, "Against Nietzsche's 'Theory' of the Drives.") I think that this is largely for three reasons. First, Nietzsche's thoughts on the drives respond to a tradition of drive-theory, dating to at least the 1770's, (Katsafanas, 88-89; Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 256) which he neither accepts nor rejects wholesale. A Nietzschean theory of the drives must explicate the aspects of this tradition with which Nietzsche was familiar and distinguish the parts he accepts from those he rejects. At a minimum, we can say that Nietzsche agrees with those theorists who understand the drives as explanatory of human behaviour, (Parkes, 252-267) and he appreciates that this tradition recognizes the irrational impulses as essential component parts of human beings. On the other hand, he criticizes the tendency of "naturalists" and "materialists" to cast the drives in purely mechanistic terms, (BGE, §21; Katsafanas, 78 & 90) and he objects to those who attribute the drives to a single, whole, or unitary "I." (Parkes, 267-272) The second difficulty, discussed below, is that Nietzsche does not clearly delineate the drives from various other internal motivating forces. The third difficulty, also discussed below, is that Nietzsche often ascribes opposing or contradictory qualities to the drives or to a single kind of internally motivating force.

³⁹ E.g., both GM II 2 and GM II 16-17 refer to drives or instincts that have emerged in the individual as a result of external influence. See also GS 190 where Nietzsche speaks of adding a "mass of second nature" to one's character.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §119, 74-76. And see also BGE §6, §19, & §20.

⁴¹ E.g., at GM II 16, the manifest aim of self-flagellation is a means to express cruelty, *to hurt something*.

⁴² E.g., at GM I 10, thoughts of imaginary revenge are said to express an unfulfilled drive to revenge. Likewise, at GM I 11-14, the weak's inverting the valuation of activity over inactivity – i.e., the slave revolt in morality – is said to be an expression of their underlying will to power.

in one of the most oft-quoted and quintessentially Nietzschean passages of his entire corpus, GM II 16 concerning the origin of bad conscience, Nietzsche argues that we can best account for ascetic and self-defamatory behaviours on the basis of an inverted drive to cruelty: “All instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards – this is what I call the internalization of man.”⁴³ By positing the existence of an instinct or drive to cruelty, Nietzsche is able to account for behaviours that otherwise remain difficult to explain: why should an organism feel guilt and shame over the type of thing that it is?⁴⁴ He hypothesizes that, deprived by social restriction of the opportunity for external discharge, the drive to cruelty discharges itself inwardly, back upon its own source: the “instincts” were “turned backwards,” and “cruelty... was pitted against the person who had such instincts.”⁴⁵ For Nietzsche, the shame and self-condemnation characteristic of bad conscience expresses the drive to cruelty; when outward discharge is forbidden, “after the *more natural* outlet of this wish to hurt has been blocked,”⁴⁶ it expresses itself inwardly as its last resort. Thus, for Nietzsche, bad conscience is evidence of the existence of a drive to cruelty.

One problem with Nietzsche’s theory of the drives is that, whether or not he intends to, he does not clearly delineate the drives from any other internally motivating forces, such as instincts, desires, or inclinations.⁴⁷ For instance, at BGE §10, he speaks of *instincts* that

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 57

⁴⁴ “How, then, did that other ‘dismal thing’, the consciousness of guilt, the whole ‘bad conscience’, come into the world?” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, 4, 39)

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 57

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §22, 63

⁴⁷ For uses of desire (*Begierde*), see BGE 24 & 26; for instincts (*Instinkt*), see BGE 3, 10, 22, & 26; GM P 5 & GM II 16; for inclinations or tendencies (*Hang*), see GS 294; BGE 60; GM II 20; for affects (*Affekt*), see BGE 23. (Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, 126-127; Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 279-280; Stern, 125-131. And see Pearson’s “Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression,” especially p. 10, for a discussion of the “conceptual overlap” of these terms, the “indeterminacy of the term ‘drive,’” and for a comparison of several passages in which Nietzsche uses these terms in overlapping and contradictory senses.)

drive individuals away from their modern reality (*“ihr Instinkt, welcher sie aus der modernen Wirklichkeit hinwegtreibt...”*). Hence, for Nietzsche, there may or may not be various classes of forces that motivate the individual from within, i.e., various drive-types. A second problem is that he ascribes seemingly contradictory qualities to a single drive-type. For instance, he sometimes speaks as if we are conscious of the drives (GM II 16), and sometimes not (D 119); sometimes the drives themselves seem to be conscious (BGE 6; HH I 32) and sometimes unconscious (D, 119); sometimes they are innate or “biologically encoded,” (D 119; GS 1), and sometimes learned or “culturally inculcated,”⁴⁸ (GM II, 2; GM II, 16).⁴⁹

Several interpreters attempt to solve both problems at once by supposedly demonstrating that Nietzsche delineates the various drive-types by ascribing these contested qualities to one drive-type in particular, e.g., desires are conscious whereas drives are unconscious, or instincts are innate whereas inclinations are learned, etc.⁵⁰ These scholars think that we can reconstruct Nietzsche’s true, latent, and consistent theory of the drives from the unclear and confused surface of his works. For my part, I find it safer to

⁴⁸ Pearson, “Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression,” 11

⁴⁹ The clearest example of a learned instinct is Nietzsche’s discussion of the origin of responsibility. He says of humanity: “the consciousness of this rare freedom and power ... has become an instinct, his dominant instinct,” which we will name our “conscience.” This “conscience” is the product of the “prehistoric labour” of proto-societies: i.e., this instinct is learned. (GM II 2) The same holds for his discussion of the origin of “bad conscience.” The “shaping of a population,” he tells us, was conducted by “the oldest ‘state’” which “emerged as a terrible tyranny” and forced the “instinct of freedom” in individuals to become “latent” and discharge itself in new ways, i.e., “against itself.” (GM II 16-17) Here, again, this instinct in its new form is clearly “culturally inculcated.”

⁵⁰ Conway argues that “drives” are inborn or innate impulses while “instincts” refer to drives that have been further augmented by some socializing process or learned experience. (Conway, *Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game*, 130-134) Richardson argues that drives emerge in individuals because of a biological process of evolution, and he opposes such drives to habits or dispositions that arise as a result of culturally or socially learned experience. (Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 35) For Stern, “some of the things described as ‘drives’ and ‘instincts’ by Nietzsche fit well into the category of the biological urge – sex, hunger, species-preservation (D 119; GS 1).” (Stern, 125)

assume that, if Nietzsche had wanted to clearly define and distinguish various drive-types, he would have done so.⁵¹ Instead, his willingness to conceive of these various drive-types interchangeably suggests that they share something, or that there is something that belongs to each of the drives, instincts, inclinations, etc., that makes them interchangeable in certain contexts. And further, the fact that a single drive-type is variously conscious or unconscious, learned or innate, etc., suggests that these are not essential or necessary features of any one drive-type. What basic feature is shared by these internally motivating forces and is able to take conscious and unconscious forms, learned and innate forms, etc.?

Each of these forces plays a functional, explanatory role in Nietzsche's thinking, namely, the role of explaining the behaviours of living organisms.⁵² The basic feature they all share is the capacity to incite or motivate action from within. What is essential to a drive is *that it drives*, i.e., it is a driving, inciting, or motivating force, and a drive is still able to explain behaviours whether it is conscious or unconscious, learned or innate, etc. This capacity to trigger and propel is what remains consistent across Nietzsche's various and

⁵¹ This is for two reasons. First, we cannot postulate that Nietzsche was unaware of the tensions in his presentation. Given, as Nadeem Hussain puts this, "Nietzsche's endless suspicions, ... his fine sense for psychological blind spots, ... his intense self-reflective curiosity," (Hussain, "The Role of Life in the Genealogy," 143) he does not suddenly lay all of this to rest when it comes to his statements on the drives. Indeed, these equivocations are simply too blatant to miss, for instance, at those moments in which he seems to be perfectly comfortable interchanging the various drive-types, or, where the instincts seem to waiver between learned and innate. As Katsafanas puts this, "it would be decidedly odd if Nietzsche's principal psychological concept bore such obvious inconsistencies. These are not arcane or deeply hidden inconsistencies of the sort that a philosopher might overlook; the tensions are palpable." (Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self*, 79) And second, as Stern recounts, Nietzsche was very familiar with the works of drive-theory that did offer unambiguous definitions of the drive concept. (Stern, 130) Nietzsche could easily have taken up one such received definition of the drives or modeled his own in their image, but, for some reason, he *chose* not to.

⁵² See, e.g., *Daybreak*, §119; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19 & §36. And see Katsafanas, 2016: "Nietzsche's principal explanatory token within psychology is the drive (*Trieb*, *Instinkt*.) He claims that all of our actions are products of drives and that our conscious motives are reflections of underlying drives." (Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self*, 77) See also Chapters 7 & 8 of Graham Parkes' *Composing the Soul* for further support of the same reading.

seemingly contradictory examples of the drives. Thus, for the purposes of this project, I will use the term “drive” in the widest possible sense: it refers to any force that arouses and stimulates an individual from within that individual, and it is interchangeable with other internally motivating forces. Further, as I’ll discuss, our drives according to Nietzsche drive us toward what is life-promoting for us; our drives promote our own form of existence.⁵³

1.4 Incorporation, Sublimation, Organization

Drives impose meaning on three types of things: objects (by incorporation), other drives (by sublimation), and other sets of drives (by organization). In each case, the dominating drive turns what is dominated into an instrument with which to express itself. This instrumentalization constitutes meaningfulness according to Nietzsche. Something is meaningful inasmuch as it is an instrument for the expression of some drive; its meaning is the drive or force that it expresses. I’ll discuss these three kinds of instrumentalization.

1.4.1 Incorporation

Incorporation occurs when a living being uses an object to facilitate the expression of their own drives, i.e., when an agent expresses a drive with or through their use of an object. In this case, the dominating individual incorporates the object into their own drive-set. Usually, the object increases or enhances the range, efficacy, or efficiency of the dominating individual’s expression of their drives. A clear example of this occurs in the

⁵³ “Every drive is reared as a temporary condition of existence.” (KSA §26, n.72, v.11, p.167) As Pearson writes, “the quality that Nietzsche most consistently predicates to the drives is a tendency to promote a particular form of life.” (Pearson, 11)

film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the opening act, entitled “The Dawn of Man,” two hominid tribes vie over a single water source. The “ape-humans”⁵⁴ are clearly expressing various aggressive, protective, and territorial drives. At a certain point, one of these hominids breaks a bone away from a carcass and realizes that he can use this bone as a weapon, vastly increasing the efficacy of his expression of these drives. As one theorist puts this, “the balance of power tips decidedly when one ape ... takes the human race’s first technological step by turning a bone into both a tool for killing prey and a weapon for bludgeoning enemies,” and this is the point at which people “begin to harness technology for the purposes of extending their inherent aggression.”⁵⁵ The aggressor thus turns the bone into a tool for the expression of his own drives. This, I think, is what Nietzsche means when he speaks of one who knows “how to put his will into things.”⁵⁶ Such an individual uses objects to conduct and amplify expressions of their own will. As in each case, the crucial element here is instrumentalization. The object has temporarily become an instrument that expresses a certain drive; temporarily, its function or purpose has become to express this drive. The object’s meaning is the force that expresses itself through the object.

1.4.2 Sublimation

Nietzsche seems to speak of sublimation in two senses. A drive can be suppressed or repressed, or its discharge can be forbidden entirely, due to social restrictions, personal

⁵⁴ Abrams, “Nietzsche’s Overman as Posthuman Star Child in *2001: A Space Odyssey*,” 249

⁵⁵ Barry Keith Grant, “Of Men and Monoliths,” 70

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Arrows and Epigrams,” §18, 158. However, in this quotation, Nietzsche actually *contrasts* this putting one’s “will into things” with meaning. We will discuss this complication below by distinguishing two modes of understanding meaning that can be ascribed to two distinct mentalities (eternal vs. temporal meaning.)

censuring, or a lack of ability. In psychoanalytic terms, the drive becomes, for some reason, incompatible with consciousness. In its first sense, sublimation refers to a moment of transformation in which a repressed drive learns to discharge itself with or upon a new object. In these cases, a direct expression of the drive upon its “*more natural*” object would be either socially or personally unacceptable, while the drive can be acceptably discharged upon a different object. Here, again, the paradigm is the discussion of the origin of bad conscience at GM II 16. The “*more natural* outlet” of the “wish to hurt” is “blocked” by social restriction, and one’s own self becomes an acceptable object upon which to discharge this drive. Or, to take another example, in various notes Nietzsche claims that a drive to hunt game or prey may discharge itself in the form of a hunt for knowledge.⁵⁷ Sublimation acts as the condition for the acceptable discharge of the drive; it allows the drive to instrumentalize an object: one’s self is the object upon which one discharges the drive to cruelty; knowledge is the object upon which one discharges the drive to hunt; etc. Thus, sublimation in this form is a first stage, allowing individuals to proceed to incorporation. Sublimation allows a drive to discharge itself with or upon a new object, and this drive becomes the meaning of this new object of which it takes possession.

In its second sense, sublimation explains why a drive would discharge itself upon a novel object. In this sense, sublimation occurs when a first drive appropriates a second drive to discharge the first drive. In particular, a suppressed or restricted drive will appropriate a second, socially acceptable drive, i.e., a drive that is free to express itself. Both drives demand to be discharged. Where the sublimation is successful, the suppressed

⁵⁷ KSA §11, n.47, v.9, p.459; KSA §14, n.142, v.13, p.326

drive A alters the free, socially acceptable drive B such that an expression of drive B is also an expression of drive A. Indeed, sublimation in this form too resembles incorporation in that the drive A uses drive B as a tool or instrument with which to express itself. In this case, what the drive incorporates is not an object but another drive. Thus, the restricted drive, demanding expression, finds an indirect but socially or personally acceptable means of discharge. A drive to aggression, for instance, may discharge itself within the expression of a more acceptable drive to compete. As Kaufmann puts this, “the barbarian’s desire to torture his foe can be sublimated into the desire to defeat one’s rival, say, in the Olympic contests,” or, in “the rivalry of the tragedians who vie with each other for the highest prize.”⁵⁸ Nietzsche’s own examples are less dramatic. At BGE 6 he speaks of the scholar’s “drive to knowledge,” and he says that “here as elsewhere,” “another drive” uses knowledge “merely as a tool,” i.e., another drive instrumentalizes this drive to knowledge. In this case, the meaning of one’s drive to knowledge is the force that discharges itself through this drive; it is the other drive that seeks satisfaction by instrumentalizing the drive to knowledge. More specifically, Nietzsche claims that “the scholar’s real interests” are not their studies, but rather “usually lie elsewhere entirely,” e.g., “with the family, or earning money, or in politics,” and he even claims that the scholar’s field of research is incidental. The scholar’s drive to knowledge is a means for them to discharge their drive to, e.g., security, comfort, power, etc. The scholar’s drive to knowledge serves their “real interests.” Here, these other drives are not so much socially unacceptable as they are simply difficult to discharge, at least for certain personality types.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 220

⁵⁹ See Nietzsche’s discussions of the origin of the *vita contemplativa* on earth. (GM III, 10; D 42)

1.4.3 Organization

Nietzsche also thinks that a drive can impose meaning upon an entire set of other drives. “Every drive craves mastery,” he writes, and “every single one of them would be only too pleased to present *itself*... as rightful *master* of all the other drives.”⁶⁰ At BGE 21, Nietzsche refers to a diversity of strong and weak wills or drives within the individual and the competition between them. This diversity could be conceived as a Nietzschean form of “thrownness”; we find ourselves thrown into this or that body and personality type, constantly beset upon by various internally motivating forces and urges. I refer to the set of internally motivating forces that belong to a single individual as that individual’s drive-set. All of these drives demand to be discharged, and yet, so often, to express one drive is to suppress another because the plurality of drives within an individual can include contradictory drives that pull us in opposing directions.⁶¹ Therefore, Nietzsche proposes, the expression of a drive at any given time signifies that this drive has overpowered the others in a competition for expression as plants vie among each other for access to sunlight in a forest. When Nietzsche speaks of the singular human will, i.e., the will that “needs an aim,” he seems to be referring to the human “act of willing,”⁶² which is always complex and, in any instance, signifies that one drive has won out in the competition for expression.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §6, 9. See also Parkes, 290-292.

⁶¹ At WP 46, he speaks of “the multitude and disgregation [*sic*] of impulses and the lack of any systemic order among them.” (Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §46) (“Disgregation” refers to the separation of molecules.) And elsewhere: “the instincts contradict, disturb, destroy each other.” (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes,” §41, 216) As Kaufmann puts this, for Nietzsche, “our impulses are in a state of chaos. We would do this now, and another thing the next moment—and even a great number of things at the same time. We think one way and live another; we want one thing and do another.” Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 227

⁶² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19, 18

To be pulled in opposing directions is to behave purposelessly or aimlessly, without a singular unifying purpose. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche claims that an individual becomes purposeful when one drive organizes the individual's drive-set. To become purposeful, Nietzsche recommends that one identify some particularly vital or resonant drive and subordinate one's other drives to this vital drive, the expression of which becomes one's governing aim. Some drives will be incompatible with this one central aim or master drive, and those incompatible drives must be either sublimated or eliminated – this process need not proceed by sublimation alone as some commentators would have it.⁶³ Nietzsche considers, for example, the philosopher who must learn to discipline those drives which compel them to distraction,⁶⁴ i.e., in the service of a drive to knowledge, which itself likely serves some other drive. As above, the crucial notion again is instrumentalization. In this case, a single drive attempts to instrumentalize the entirety of the drive-set to which it belongs, either by eliminating or sublimating the wayward drives. I call this process *organization*. Elimination refers to those strategies by which one forces a wayward drive to cease to make its demands.⁶⁵ Sublimation, in this case, refers to the transformation of a wayward drive into a form that is compatible with the individual's central aim, either by teaching it to discharge itself upon a new object, or by forcing it to express itself indirectly through another drive.

⁶³ Pearson, "Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression," 3-5.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §5-9

⁶⁵ Nietzsche enumerates a list of such strategies at *Daybreak* 109. For example, "one can avoid opportunities for gratification of the drive, and through long and ever longer periods of non-gratification weaken it and make it wither away." Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, II, §109, 64

I will use the term “form” to refer to the relatively static relationship that holds between a living thing’s drives. A living thing’s form is the rank-order or hierarchical organization of its drive-set. Specifically, this hierarchical form is the relatively stable ranking of the drives relative to one another in their performance in the competition for expression. This does not necessarily mean that the drives which are lower in rank are never expressed; rather, their expression may itself be an expression of a ranking drive. In other words, this hierarchy refers to an order of deference: the drive at the top is the drive which is most consistently victorious in the competition for expression, while the lower drives either defer their expression to the expression of the drives above or express themselves in a manner which actually expresses a ranking drive.

From this, Nietzsche extracts his understanding of the educator: the educator will “not only discover the central force, but also know how to prevent its acting destructively on the other forces,” and, the educator’s task is “to reorganize the entire human being into a vitally dynamic solar and planetary system.”⁶⁶ This strategy for imposing purpose begins with something that already contains a number of goal-oriented tendencies, namely, the drives. Then, those tendencies that would detract from the expression of the master drive must be pruned. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche writes that when or where the instincts contradict one another, a genuine education must “have *paralyzed* at least one of these instinct systems with iron pressure so that another could gain force, become strong, take control. Today the individual would first need to be made possible by being cut down and pruned: possible here means complete...”⁶⁷ At the same time, it is possible to treat a living

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, §2, 131

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes,” §41, 216

being as if they were a non-living being. That is to say, it is possible to incorporate, rather than reorganize, a living being. This is the difference between a tyrant and an educator. The tyrant uses living beings to expand or empower the range and efficacy of the tyrant's own will. In other words, the tyrant expresses their drives through their use of living beings as tools for this expression. Nietzsche gestures towards this in his discussion of "pain" as "the most powerful aid to mnemonics"⁶⁸ and the imposition of prohibitions: "A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory: only something that continues to hurt stays in the memory ... With the aid of such images and procedures, man was eventually able to retain five or six 'I-don't-want-to's' in his memory."⁶⁹ Thus, expressing certain drives is forbidden in certain circumstances. But who does the prohibiting? And what exactly will be prohibited? Nietzsche continues:

the shaping of a population, which had up till now been unrestrained and shapeless, into a fixed form,... happened at the beginning with an act of violence.... The oldest 'state' emerged as a terrible tyranny, as a repressive and ruthless machinery, and continued working until the raw material of people and semi-animals had been finally not just kneaded and made compliant, but shaped. I used the word 'state': it is obvious who is meant by this – some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race, which, organized on a war footing, and with the power to organize, unscrupulously lays its dreadful paws on a populace which, though it might be vastly greater in number, is still shapeless and shifting. In this way, the 'state' began on earth.... What they do is to create and imprint forms... – where they appear, soon something new arises, a structure of domination [*Herrschafts-Gebilde*] that lives, in which parts and functions are differentiated and related to one another, in which there is absolutely no room for anything that does not first acquire 'meaning' [*"Sinn"*] with regard to the whole.⁷⁰

This passage occurs alongside Nietzsche's discussion of bad conscience and the oppression of the drives, leaving little doubt that this *shaping, organizing, and imprinting of forms*

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §3, 38

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §3, 38-39

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §17, 58-59

refers to the suppression of certain drives and the strengthening of others. However, Nietzsche is also saying in this case that “whoever can command, whoever is a ‘master’ by nature, whoever appears violent in deed and gesture,”⁷¹ will be the one who decides which drives are suppressed in others and which are granted room for expression. The tyrant bases this decision on their own drives: the drives granted expression will be those that are compatible with the tyrant’s own drives. Thus, the dominated, by virtue of the organization of their drives, become tools for the expression of the drives of the tyrant. The organization of an individual’s drives is determined by such a “master,” and it is just such an organization that Nietzsche refers to above as the “meaning” acquired “with regard to the whole.” Meaning, in this last case, refers to something or someone’s function as sanctioned by the tyrant or master.

1.5 Nietzsche’s Notion of Meaning

Something’s meaning for Nietzsche is the force by which it is dominated; it is the drive which instrumentalizes the thing as a means to its own discharge. Any instance of meaning always exemplifies this underlying structure, namely, of an occupation or appropriation of something by an external force. The drive has a certain goal, even if this goal is no more than its own expression, and it uses an object to achieve this goal. Something is meaningful inasmuch as it is striving toward this goal, or, “being-toward” this aim; something is meaningful inasmuch as it expresses this instrumentalization by a dominating force. This further refines the definition of the will to meaning. On the basis of

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §17, 58

this understanding of meaning, the will to meaning amounts to a will to ensure that one's own life expresses, embodies, or signifies an underlying force; it amounts to the will to be an instrument or mouthpiece for the expression of a coherent, underlying force. One example is the wish to be an instrument for the will of God. However, one could no less wish to be an instrument for one's own will, i.e., for one's true underlying purpose, or one could wish to be an instrument of progress or of any number of possible values.

This understanding of meaning also solves the following problem. While Nietzsche most often uses *Sinn* to refer directly to purpose, *Sinn* can also refer to indication, reference, or signification. If *Sinn* is conceived of only as purpose, what becomes of its other meaning? Likewise, in English, meaning has two basic definitions: purpose and signification.⁷² Do these two definitions mark two distinct concepts? Or, if purposefulness and signification are distinct, in what sense is it possible to say that they are both instances of meaning as a single concept? In what sense do purpose and signification become identical? Where something functions as a signifier – a word, for instance – it has been incorporated into a drive-set. Most obviously, this can refer to the drive-set of the speaker or author: they use the word to facilitate the expression of some drive. At BGE 3 & 6, describing philosophy as an “involuntary and unself-conscious memoir,” Nietzsche argues that drives use words as tools to express themselves. This is why, for Nietzsche, “the greatest part of conscious thought must still be attributed to instinctive activity,” and “most of a philosopher's conscious thought is secretly directed and forced into determinate channels by the instincts.”⁷³ What a word signifies, or better, what signification in general amounts to, is

⁷² Roochnik, *Retrieving Aristotle in an Age of Crisis*, 6 & 152

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 6-7

the force directing the function of the signifier. The word is incorporated into the speaker's drive-set as is any other piece of equipment. This comes to clarity, for instance, in the manner in which Nietzsche speaks about ascetic ideals in the *Genealogy's* third treatise. Using the verb *Bedeuten*, Nietzsche asks: "What do ascetic ideals mean?"⁷⁴ [*Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?*] And yet, by asking what the ascetic ideal means, he is asking "what it indicates, what lies hidden behind, beneath and within it and what it expresses in a provisional, indistinct way."⁷⁵ Thus, as Huddleston has observed, in seeking an answer to this question, Nietzsche is seeking to determine the origin or possessive force which these ideals express.⁷⁶ In other words, what ascetic ideals refer to or signify is precisely the possessive force that dominates in them. Purpose and signification are both instances of meaning in that both are products of something's domination by an external force. The meaning of an object, practice, tradition, etc., reflects the forces that dominate or possess it, and this accounts for signification as much as it does purpose.

1.6 Meaning and Time

Since meaning is imposed upon a thing, something's meaning is always open or vulnerable to the possibility of change, and any permanence of meaning is short-lived and relative. This is why Nietzsche understands meaning as temporal, i.e., as given to something at a point in time, and he is critical of those who demand a-temporal or eternal

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §23, 109: "I do not want to bring to light what the ideal *did*; rather simply what it means, what it indicates, what lies hidden behind, beneath and within it and what it expresses in a provisional, indistinct way."

⁷⁶ Huddleston, "What is Enshrined in Morality? Understanding the Grounds for Nietzsche's Critique," 27.

meaning, that is, meaning which does not originate within time, but rather, that “must be put up, given... *from outside* – by some *superhuman authority*.”⁷⁷ He is critical of those quests where meaning is supposedly given to time from outside of time. Thus, one might imagine Nietzsche distinguishes two types of meaning, one temporal and the other eternal. This, however, is decidedly not the case: all meaning for Nietzsche is ineffaceably temporal. Instead of between two forms of meaning, the distinction is between two mentalities, one of which correctly interprets meaning as temporal, and one of which incorrectly interprets meaning as eternal. Here, as elsewhere, Nietzsche is a psychologist; he diagnoses and investigates the nature of each mentality.

Nietzsche disparages the mentality that understands meaning as something always already pre-given, and not as something that we create anew (interpret, shape, impose, etc.) in or for the thing, in the present and for the future. This distinction between mentalities explains a short aphorism from *Twilight of the Idols*, partially considered above. Nietzsche writes: “Whoever doesn’t know how to put his will into things can at least put meaning into them: that means, he has faith that a will is already there (principle of ‘faith’).”⁷⁸ It is surprising that Nietzsche would disparage those who “put meaning into things” since, in other passages, he praises the task of creating a meaning for the earth and for human beings.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, he disparages the evasion of creativity or the mentality which avoids the responsibility of putting “meaning into things.” What reconciles this apparent discrepancy is Nietzsche’s distinction between two mentalities and their two different ways

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §20, 16

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Arrows and Epigrams,” §18, 158

⁷⁹ E.g., Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, §7, 12

of conceiving of meaning, i.e., eternal or transitory. He disparages those who understand meaning a-temporally, but he will praise those who understand meaning itself as subject to time and as something one creates and affirms without reference to some pre-given standard. This is further evidence that meaning for Nietzsche is always conditioned on a temporal or historical event, i.e., something's appropriation by some force or drive. This will prove central to his evaluation of meaning and the will to meaning. A will to meaning proves most valuable for Nietzsche where it recognizes the transience of meaning itself, and least valuable where it seeks a pre-given and eternal meaning, impervious to the flow of time. With Nietzsche's understanding of meaning established, I now turn my attention to a consideration of the conditions under which a will to meaning could emerge.

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE IN GENERAL: AGONISTIC DYNAMICS

From his earliest to his latest texts, Nietzsche analyzes human *life* under the conditions of this “earthly existence.”¹ This notion of life [*Leben*] is central to his philosophy, but he speaks of it in a number of different senses which remain undefined in his writings.² As Vanessa Lemm writes, “what Nietzsche means by “life” on earth, and what the affirmation of such a life entails, is still very much up for discussion.”³ Further, as John Richardson has shown, the definition of life has received “widespread neglect” in the relevant literature,⁴ likely because Nietzsche does not speak about life with the kind of clarity or rigor that lends itself to scholarship. This is the first of two chapters devoted to clarifying Nietzsche’s understanding of life. I will distinguish between what I call *life in general* and *life in particular* in Nietzsche’s writings. Life in general is synonymous with being or existence, while life in particular refers to that which is uniquely shared by living things. The aim of this chapter is to explicate Nietzsche’s understanding of life in general.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I’ll explicate this distinction between life in general and life in particular, before discussing a third sense of life as well in Nietzsche’s writings, namely, life in the experiential sense. I’ll also demonstrate that Nietzsche believes that the basic condition of existence, or of life in general, is temporality,

¹ Nietzsche, *Homer’s Contest*, 53

² Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 759-760; Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “Life,” 202-203; Lemm, “Introduction” in *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, pp. 1-7.

³ Lemm, “Introduction” in *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, 1

⁴ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 756

transience, or becoming. Second, I'll explicate Nietzsche's definition of becoming and I'll argue that he defines it not only as the passage of time made visible in alteration, but also as antagonistic conflict and interaction among a plurality of forces. Third, I'll present four of Nietzsche's revelatory observations which he takes to demonstrate that everything in existence is fluid or temporal, or that everything is in a state of becoming in this redefined sense. These observations are the impermanence of "the good," of the human species, of individual identities, and of the purpose of punishment. Fourth, I'll discuss whether Nietzsche is justified in making the leap from a series of revelatory observations – i.e., what amount to particular examples of impermanence – to the claim that everything in existence is necessarily impermanent. I propose that uncertainty concerning whether anything is permanent can cause as much psychological distress as certainty that everything is impermanent. This uncertainty, Nietzsche thinks, is enough to incite a need to believe that life is meaningful. Thus, Nietzsche can explain the emergence of the will to meaning without making the full claim that everything in existence is necessarily impermanent. Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of the connection between this state of universal fluidity and the will to meaning. By arguing that all things are susceptible to alteration and change, Nietzsche describes our world as a place wherein it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to uncover a secure, authoritative, and unchanging ground for the meaning of life.

2.1 The Different Senses of Life

There are at least two senses in which Nietzsche employs the term “life.” These are *life in general* and *life in particular*. I do not object to the various classificatory schemes by which other interpreters distinguish Nietzsche’s many senses of life;⁵ I simply find that the distinction between life in general and life in particular is more relevant for a discussion of the will to meaning, and it is not a distinction that I have encountered previously in the literature. Nietzsche often uses the word “life” to mean *everything*, in the sense of being or existence. As Heidegger writes, “in Nietzsche’s thinking *life* is usually the term for what is and for beings as a whole insofar as they are.”⁶ It is this understanding that I name *life in general*. By contrast, Nietzsche also uses life to refer to that which is uniquely shared by *living things* in particular, and it is this sense that I name *life in particular*. These senses of life are not opposed; life in particular is a specific form of the larger genus of life in general.

As I’ve said, Nietzsche believes that the basic condition of existence, or life in general, is temporality. In Richardson’s words, “we and other beings are ‘in time.’”⁷ While Nietzsche recognizes that change and alteration presuppose temporality,⁸ he seems to think that we encounter temporality through alteration, or that the passage of time becomes visible in alteration. In other words, we infer the existence of time from the perception of change. Thus, when Nietzsche describes existence as ineffaceably temporal, what this

⁵ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 759-760; Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “Life,” 202-203; Lemm, “Introduction” in *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, 1-7

⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. III, 15. Examples from Nietzsche’s texts include *Twilight of the Idols*, “Morality as Anti-Nature,” §5, 174-175; & *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Problem of Socrates,” §2, 162.

⁷ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 13

⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1064, 547: “‘Change’ belongs to the essence, therefore also temporality.” And George Grant, in a series of lectures in which he claims to be “trying to follow Nietzsche’s thought,” (Grant, *Time as History*, 433) says that “words such as ‘time’ arise from the fact that existing is a coming to be and a passing away.” (Grant, *Time as History*, 403)

means for all intents and purposes to the human perspective is that all things in existence are impermanent; they are in a process of changing or becoming, a process which is best defined negatively as the absence of anything permanent or unchanging.⁹ Thus, for Nietzsche, to be is to be impermanent, or all things are ineffaceably temporal and therefore transient, meaning that they are susceptible to change. I'll discuss the precise nature of this change below. Human life occurs under these ephemeral conditions, and Nietzsche thinks that the will to meaning emerges because meaning serves to facilitate living under these conditions. Thus, transience is the condition for the emergence of the will to meaning. For Nietzsche, not only is transience ineffaceable from life, but this makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to ground any ultimate meaning of life. Transience is thus both the reason why we are burdened by the need for meaning, and the reason why we are incapable of satisfying this need:¹⁰ we are burdened by a will that cannot be fulfilled.

Since temporality is ineffaceable from life in general, and temporality is made visible in impermanence, Nietzsche claims that the experience of living necessarily includes encounters with impermanence. This, of course, is not a novel position. Many ancient thinkers had already held that to live is to encounter change and becoming,¹¹

⁹ Dries, "Towards A dualism: Becoming and Nihilism in Nietzsche's Philosophy," 113

¹⁰ In the same lecture series, (n. 8, above) Grant says that "'has been,' 'is now,' and 'will be' make possible our purposes but also direct us of them." (Grant, *Time as History*, 403)

¹¹ In a passage on Heraclitus, Frederick Copleston says that "the truth that things are constantly changing" was "a truth seen by the other Ionian philosophers" as well, and "hardly bearing the character of novelty." (Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, v1, 39) Harold Cherniss claims that "Parmenides saw ... that the opinions of all men were unconscious and unsystematic Heracliteanisms," which is to say, accounts of the world as ever-changing. (337) Copleston also tells us that "change and movement are most certainly phenomena which appear to the senses, so that in rejecting change and movement, Parmenides is rejecting the way of sense-appearance." (48) Likewise, Copleston argues that it only made sense for Zeno to formulate his "arguments to prove the impossibility of motion" because motion itself was such an "evident" and given aspect "of our sense-experience." (54) And finally, in the *Theaetetus*, we see that, "in regard to the objects of sense-perception," Plato agrees that they are "always in a state of flux: they never *are*, they are always *becoming*." (Copleston, 144)

although some explained becoming as the mere appearance of being.¹² Plato, Young reminds us, called “the world of everyday visibility – the world that we see, smell, hear, feel and touch,... the world of becoming” “because it is always changing.”¹³ What uniquely characterizes Nietzsche’s thinking on this matter is that he is interested specifically in how human beings *respond to* becoming or temporality. He will criticize those responses that attempt to escape becoming or deny its reality altogether, and that prefer to flee into the stability of being. As Richardson helpfully summarizes,

[Nietzsche] takes Plato [for example] to have recognized and experienced the world’s hard reality as becoming, but to have been too weak for this insight.... He retreats from properly facing this unsettling feature of reality, distracting and consoling himself by imagining another world that above all does not change or become.¹⁴

In Nietzsche’s own words, “Plato is a coward in the face of reality, - *consequently*, he escapes into the ideal.”¹⁵ By contrast, Nietzsche will defend those responses to life and reality which affirm temporality and becoming, i.e., which both accept that there is no life without temporality and which value and take joy in this condition: “saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems;... over and above all horror and pity, so that *you yourself may be* the eternal joy in becoming.”¹⁶

¹² “[Parmenides’] doctrine in brief is... that Being, the One, *is*, and that Becoming, change, is illusion.” (Copleston, 48) And Nietzsche writes: “People used to consider change, alteration, and becoming in general as proof that appearances were illusory, as a sign that something must be misleading us.” (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §5, 169)

¹³ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 3-4. And Richardson writes, “Plato agrees that the world about us merely becomes and never is, he posits another world whose unchangingness gives it the highest ontological status: it alone fully or really is. Nietzsche then denounces this timeless world as a fabrication, one that has infected, in various forms, all of Plato’s successors as well.” (Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 89)

¹⁴ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 90

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients,” §2, 226

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients,” §5, 228

This provides us with a third sense of “life” in Nietzsche’s works, namely, life as a living thing’s *experience* of being alive, from birth until death, or what Richardson calls Nietzsche’s “phenomenal” sense of life.¹⁷ In Richardson’s words, Nietzsche uses “life” in this sense to refer to “the experience of living,” or of “what it’s like to live,”¹⁸ and specifically, what it’s like to live as the kind of thing that one is, from one’s own perspective, under the conditions to which one is subject. Thus, life in the phenomenal sense is the experience of both life in general and life in particular. These various senses of life can only be separated in theory; in practice they always belong together. To experience life is to experience life as the kind of living thing that one is and under the necessary conditions of life in general. And, at least in the case of human beings, to be a living thing under these conditions is already to experience living. Life in the phenomenal sense is something’s ongoing and transitory experience of being alive, from birth until death. It is apparent that Nietzsche thinks of life in this experiential sense when, in his continual calls for us to say “yes” to life, he is clearly asking us to say “yes” to the experience of living, from birth to death, and with everything that comes along with this.¹⁹ This receives its clearest expression in the famous §341 of *The Gay Science* entitled “*The heaviest weight*”:

‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself.’... If this thought gained power over you,... how well disposed would you have to

¹⁷ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 759

¹⁸ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 759

¹⁹ See, e.g., GM I, §11; TI, “What I Owe the Ancients,” §4 & §5; EH, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “The Birth of Tragedy,” §2.

become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?²⁰

In this passage, Nietzsche uses the term “life” as something of a shorthand to refer to “this life as you now live it” and “everything unspeakably small or great in your life.” The question is, what are the necessary conditions that belong ineffaceably to the experience of living, or what will the experience of this life necessarily entail? What is this life that Nietzsche calls us to affirm? Both life in general and life in particular are two essential elements of life in the phenomenal sense. These two elements can be thought of as one’s world and one’s self. Life in general refers to the necessary conditions of existence to which one finds oneself subject; life in particular refers to the type of being that one is, and therefore, to the essential limitations of one’s own self. These are both inextricably bound aspects of life in the phenomenal sense.

2.2 The Dual Character of Becoming

Something is impermanent or temporally dynamic if its state is time-dependent or if its state depends upon the time at which it is considered. Simply put, that which is temporally dynamic changes over time, or its properties are nonidentical at different times. If something can become, grow, change, or even die, if something can be injured, violated, lost, or destroyed, then its state depends upon the time at which it is considered. While one may distinguish different kinds of change, I do not think that temporal dynamism is only made visible by any one form of change in particular: any alteration at all exemplifies

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §341, 194-195

becoming.²¹ However, some forms of change are more consequential than others for a given perspective. A supposedly eternal object could withstand certain changes without that object's eternality being called into question, e.g., an unchanging object could undergo a change of location while remaining unchanged itself. Nietzsche seems to suggest that a change in something's meaning or purpose is able to call this thing's supposed eternality into question. In short, for Nietzsche, the fluidity of meaning is a particularly revelatory instance of becoming. This is not due to any intrinsic property of meaning; rather, it is due to the common and incorrect human interpretation of meaning – common and incorrect according to Nietzsche – as something eternal and unchanging. If we mistakenly interpret meaning as eternal, encountering the fluidity of meaning calls this eternality into question.

At GM II 12, Nietzsche tells us that an object's purpose can be transformed, redirected, or reinterpreted. His discussion of the purpose of punishment inverts the “ship of Theseus” thought experiment: punishment's purpose, its form, can continually change, even while all of its parts (the drama, the sequence of events, etc.) remain entirely unchanged. By way of analogy, one can imagine a ship that is impervious to material change, damage, or decay, but which continually changes hands and is frequently repurposed. Nietzsche thinks that it is a human tendency – and one especially prominent among philosophers – to connect purpose and the traditional philosophical category of essence: he thinks that what philosophers have mistakenly called a thing's unchanging essence is merely that thing's contingent purpose which has been imposed upon that thing

²¹ Thus, I break with the reading offered by Richardson when he claims that we must isolate the particular “type of change” that Nietzsche claims is “essential to beings.” (Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 77)

in time.²² The error of a-historical thought, in Nehamas' words, is to assume that "the dominant sense of a word, the accepted interpretation of a value, or the current function of an institution is naturally appropriate to it,"²³ as opposed to having been imposed upon a thing in time. Nietzsche is suggesting that if an object is malleable in its meaning or purpose, then it is malleable through to what others might mistakenly call its eternal essence or its very core. Thus, for the perspective that mistakes purpose for eternal essence, a change to something's meaning or purpose calls the permanence of the supposedly eternal into question, or such a change lays bare its impermanence.

If all things are vulnerable to change and transformation, Nietzsche holds that these changes always result from some conflict or competition between at least two distinct forces. Thus, our various encounters with becoming reveal not only temporal dynamism, but also *agonistic dynamism*. The *agon* refers to a contest between struggling or competing forces²⁴ and, as Hatab writes, "Nietzsche spotlights the pervasiveness in ancient Greece of the *agon*, or contest for excellence, which operated in all cultural pursuits."²⁵ In general, I will call the relationship between competing or conflicting movements *agonistic*. I will call something *agonistically dynamic* if its state depends upon the effects of the forces that have overpowered it at the point of consideration.

The various movements and changes which reveal temporal dynamism do not occur in isolation. They are always the effect of some cause, and in particular, Nietzsche holds, they are always the outcome of some contest between multiple forces. A change reflects

²² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12

²³ Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 110

²⁴ Tuncel, "Nietzsche's Agonistic Rhetoric and its Therapeutic Affects," 82.

²⁵ Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 16.

the triumph of one force over another. Thus, if temporal dynamism refers to the condition under which something need not stay the same from one moment to the next, agonistic dynamism is the condition under which what will incite any given change in something is some agonistic or contesting force.

In brief, becoming for Nietzsche has a dual characterization: it is characterized not only by temporality, made visible in alteration, but also by conflict. Hatab has noted this dual quality of becoming. He writes: “A world of becoming, for Nietzsche, cannot simply be understood as a world of change” – although, of course, it is partially to be understood in this way – but furthermore, “movements are always related to other movements and the relational structure is not simply expressive of differences, but rather resistances and tensional conflicts.”²⁶ Or likewise, as Robin Small puts this, Nietzsche’s definition of becoming is “becoming as conflict.”²⁷ I agree with these interpretations, and I want to bring their meaning to greater clarity. What exactly is this “becoming as conflict”? Nietzsche thinks that we necessarily and constantly encounter it throughout the process of living. He argues that the experience of life continually brings us face to face with becoming and impermanence, both in the creative forms of birth, growth, maturation, and improvement, and in the destructive forms of loss, degeneration, and death. By contrast, he indicts our conceptual vocabulary and our grammar with expressing and perpetuating the error of permanence.²⁸ Where our grammar separates mutable predicates from enduring, permanent subjects, Nietzsche thinks that we err if we imagine that this separation accords with a

²⁶ Hatab, “Nietzsche, Nature, and Life Affirmation,” 37

²⁷ Small, “Being, Becoming, and Time in Nietzsche,” 636

²⁸ GS §354; BGE §12, §16, §17, §54; GM I, §13; TI, “Reason,” §5

language-independent reality.²⁹ If, however, in our language and our thinking, we disguise fluidity and impermanence, Nietzsche thinks that we can never successfully avoid them altogether, and life will always reveal its own impermanence. Thus, the encounter with dynamism is so often also disillusionment: it is the revelation that the supposedly eternal and unchanging is changeable and impermanent, in those experiences that reveal to us the fluidity or mutability of structures that we previously mistook for permanent or immutable. Small comes close to this point when he speaks of “Nietzsche’s hints about a possible awareness of becoming.”³⁰ What exactly is this “awareness”? Where, according to Nietzsche, does existence reveal its processes of becoming, change, and impermanence? I’ll now consider a series of Nietzsche’s revelatory observations.

2.3 Images of Agonistic Dynamics

2.3.1 Genealogy and the Impermanence of “The Good.”

Small has noted that these observations are basically of two kinds: the absence of “ongoing identities” and the absence of “discontinuities” in “the ceaseless flow of becoming.”³¹ The first example is of the first kind: Nietzsche observes the absence of an enduring identity of the good over time, or he observes that the definition of the good changes over time. He often uses genealogy to reveal the fluidity of the supposedly eternal and so to problematize notions that pretend to be immutable by revealing their ephemerality and their base, temporal origins. As Foucault notes, genealogy reveals, within “what is

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13, 26; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Reason in Philosophy,” §5, 169.

³⁰ Small, “Being, Becoming, and Time in Nietzsche,” 634

³¹ Small, “Being, Becoming, and Time in Nietzsche,” 627

given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory,” the place that is “occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints.”³² For example, Nietzsche repeatedly seizes upon the fact that a single word can have a wealth of differing meanings and purposes for different peoples across time and space,³³ thereby problematizing any individual’s claim that *their* meaning of a term is its one, true, eternal, and universal meaning. Nietzsche is critical of the human tendency to think in universal, a-historical, and a-temporal terms. Zarathustra tells us, “when I came to mankind, I found them sitting on an old conceit: they all conceited to have known for a long time what is good and evil for humanity.”³⁴ As an example, Nietzsche criticizes those “English psychologists” who unknowingly presuppose a permanent, eternal, or trans-historical definition of the good: they assume that altruism, compassion, and the unegoistic compose the one true definition of the good.³⁵ Thus, Nietzsche accuses these thinkers of what today is called *presentism* in historiography, namely, the presupposition that past individuals shared one’s present values. They assume, says Nietzsche, that *their good* has always been *the good*; they assume that *their* good is “good for all.”³⁶ To assume that goodness is universally defined by altruism, one must ignore both any historical alternatives, and the historical origins of goodness as altruism. This is why, as Leiter puts this, Nietzsche holds that these “English psychologists” suffer from a “historical blindness.”³⁷ Nietzsche thinks that genealogy

³² Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 45

³³ E.g., Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On a Thousand and One Goals,” 42; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12 & §13.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III, “On Old and New Tablets,” §2, 157

³⁵ These “English psychologists” remain unnamed, although a clear contender is David Hume who attempted to give a “naturalistic account” of the “genesis” of morality. (See Clark and Swensen, “Introduction,” in Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Hackett edition, xxiii.)

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III, “On the Spirit of Gravity,” §2, 155

³⁷ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 156

forces us to conclude that the good is not eternal, and that, instead, various forms of the good are created in time by individuals and groups across history.

This conclusion is based on two premises. First, Nietzsche observes that different peoples define goodness in different ways.³⁸ Roughly speaking, he seems to hold that “the good,” however it is defined, performs the same functional role for most peoples; the good, or whatever they take for the good, functions as the ultimate value against which a people measures whether or not anything else is valuable. So, if the good is defined as altruism, then patience and forgiveness are also good inasmuch as they participate in or express altruism, while revenge and wrathfulness are evil inasmuch as they fail to participate in, or even detract from, altruism. What differs from people to people is how the good is defined, or, what exactly plays the functional role of this ultimate value. Nietzsche’s second observation is that the definition of the good assumed by this or that people tends to correspond to the *needs* of that people.³⁹ This is what it means to say that the good is perspectival; any given notion of the good can be identified with the needs of some perspective. Nietzsche argues that we revere as good “precisely what is needed for the preservation of beings like us,”⁴⁰ and therefore, he defines valuations as “physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life.”⁴¹ A people’s understanding of the good reflects that without which they could not live, or they define the good according to their conditions for life. Nietzsche’s basic argument is that we can best account

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On a Thousand and One Goals,” 42

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On a Thousand and One Goals,” 42

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 7

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 7

for these two observations if, instead of an eternal form, various transitory forms of the good are created by individual perspectives throughout history.

As a particularly developed example, Nietzsche attempts to delineate the history of the creation of what I'll call the altruistic form of the good. He criticizes the assumption that the good is always defined by altruism. By contrast, where altruism and compassion require reference to an other, Nietzsche argues that we can point to past understandings of the good that make no such reference. This tells us that the good is not singular but multiple: some forms of goodness make reference to an other, while some forms do not. I will call the former kind altruistic, and the latter kind egoistic. These correspond to the distinct forms of the good that Nietzsche delineates in his history of the moral values: the altruistic good is the opposite of evil; the egoistic good is the opposite of bad. A term that has two distinct opposites, i.e., bad and evil, cannot itself be singular and must have "two distinct senses."⁴² Nietzsche argues that both of these notions of goodness can be traced to their two distinct points of temporal creation by individuals. He focuses on a historical point of transition: he wants to explain the fact that, at a point in history, European individuals at large transitioned from revering an egoistic notion of the good to revering an altruistic notion of the good – a pattern he sees both in the ascension of Christian values over aristocratic values in Rome,⁴³ and in the ascension of so-called "Socratic" values in Greece.⁴⁴ He claims that this transition is visible, e.g., in the shift from valuing immediate action and the ability to revenge, understood as expressions of egoism, to valuing patience and forgiveness,

⁴² Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 110. And see GM I, §11.

⁴³ See GM I, 16, especially 32-33.

⁴⁴ See GM III, 25, especially 114 where Nietzsche speaks of the opposition "Plato *versus* Homer."

understood as expressions of altruism. He wants to determine the historical conditions of this shift.

Nietzsche claims that a person's values are a reflection of that person.⁴⁵ What a person values, or what a person takes for good, is based on the nature of that person. This is, in fact, only a repetition of the claim that people understand the good as that without which *they* could not live. From this, it follows that what a person values implies or reveals something about the nature of that person. Accordingly, Nietzsche wonders what sort of person could hold *these* values, and what sort *those* values, or, as Tracy Strong writes, "the question becomes what kind of life has these values."⁴⁶ Given a particular value judgment, Nietzsche claims, this "is only a value judgment made by life," i.e., by a living thing, "but *which* life? Which type of life is making value judgments here?"⁴⁷ E.g., he wants to identify the sort of person that values patience and forgiveness; under what conditions could an individual revere patience and forgiveness as goods? It is easy enough to explain if an individual values, say, security, or access to a food source. However, certain values, including patience and forgiveness, are more difficult to explain because they are, in a certain sense, counter-intuitive or even paradoxical. This is because it would so often be self-serving to place value on revenge and immediate action, while to practice patience and forgiveness is to incur a certain amount of suffering for one's own self. Nietzsche wants to explain how individuals come to value patience and forgiveness given that this seems counter to their own interests, and he rejects that the origin of these values lies in their

⁴⁵ E.g., "the chivalric-aristocratic value judgments are based on a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even effervescent good health." (Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §7, 17)

⁴⁶ Strong, "The Optics of Science, Art, and Life: How Tragedy Begins," 30

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Morality as Anti-Nature," §5, 175

social utility or in facilitating a social contract.⁴⁸ To explain the origin of these values, Nietzsche offers the following explanatory hypothesis: it is precisely individuals who are unable to take revenge over others that choose to revere patience and forgiveness.⁴⁹ And they do so, he claims, for two reasons. First, as I'll discuss at length below, this allows them to procure for themselves a minimal sensation of power which, he argues, is always desirable for all living organisms. And second, if one is unable to defend oneself against the wrath of another, then valuing patience and forgiveness, and, crucially, disseminating these values amongst others, functions as a technique to avoid this wrath altogether, that is, if one can convince one's enemies to revere and practice patience and forgiveness as well.

This consideration of the various forms that goodness has taken across history reveals that goodness itself is temporally dynamic. However, for Nietzsche, it is a particular group of living beings that *forces* a new definition onto the notion of goodness. In the example of the altruistic good, Nietzsche claims, this new definition is the outcome of a contest between two factions competing for control of our moral values. Nietzsche tells us that Judea has “defeated” Rome.⁵⁰ He means that the Judeo-Christian “slave revolt” has successfully compelled the Roman nobility to adopt a new set of altruistic value standards. Thus, the definition of the good is not merely a function of time, or it does not only depend upon the time at which it is considered. The definition of the good, or anything that is agonistically dynamic, also depends upon the effects of the forces that control it at the point of consideration or, as Deleuze puts this, the force that dominates in the thing, “which

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §17

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13 & §14

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §16, 33

appropriates the thing,” “exploits it,” “takes possession of it,” or “is expressed in it.”⁵¹ Nietzsche’s basic argument for this is that there must be certain types of people for whom these values offer some sort of benefit or advantage, since it is difficult to imagine how else patience and forgiveness, e.g., could be considered valuable. He is saying that it only makes sense for the good to be defined by altruism if it is so defined by a certain type of person. In other words, the altruistic good is inseparable from a defining perspective. That the altruistic good provides some benefit to a particular perspective, and denies certain freedoms to others, suggests to Nietzsche that it was this benefiting perspective who created this notion of the good. Thus, he theorizes, the socially and politically meek, those who are unable to overpower or take revenge upon others, defined the good as altruism. In the language of the previous chapter, the agents of this perspective have incorporated the notion of goodness into the organization of their own drives; they are using the good as a tool by which to facilitate the expression of these drives.

If the good has been redefined, Nietzsche argues, then goodness cannot be understood as an a-historical, eternal, absolute, or unchanging given, but rather as the specific response of a particular type of individual: those who lack power and therefore benefit from defining the good as altruism.⁵² Thus, he continues, goodness itself is not an unchanging unity; instead, there are multiple forms of the good that have emerged at various points throughout history. This instance of genealogy is in some sense performative, in that it reveals the fluidity of something previously mistaken for permanent.

⁵¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 3

⁵² Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 110

Here, genealogy itself functions as the encounter with the agonistically dynamic. As Nehamas puts this,

Genealogy takes as its objects... those institutions and practices which, like morality, are usually thought to be totally exempt from change and development. It tries to show the way in which they too undergo changes as a result of historical developments.... As a result of this, genealogy has direct practical consequences because, by demonstrating the contingent character of the institutions that traditional history exhibits as unchanging, it creates the possibility of altering them.⁵³

And this is why the genealogical study of the origin “has value as a critique,” since it reveals the contingency of the supposedly necessary.⁵⁴

2.3.2 Darwin and the Impermanence of the Species.

A second image of agonistic dynamics concerns Nietzsche’s reading of Darwin and the recognition of “the fluidity... of all species,” and “the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal.”⁵⁵ Nietzsche was writing at a time when “Darwin’s doctrines were conquering the world”⁵⁶ and, as Richardson has shown, “his thinking is deeply and pervasively Darwinian.”⁵⁷ This does not suggest that Nietzsche subscribes to ideologies of racial superiority since he rejects, along with Darwin, that evolution is necessarily indicative of progress.⁵⁸ Nietzsche “writes after... Darwin, in persisting awareness of the

⁵³ Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 112

⁵⁴ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 81. Foucault cites “Reason in Philosophy” from *Twilight of the Idols*. See also Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 113.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, §9, 112

⁵⁶ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 96

⁵⁷ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 14

⁵⁸ “However high mankind may have evolved - and perhaps at the end it will stand even lower than at the beginning! – it cannot pass over into a higher order, as little as the ant and the earwig can at the end of its ‘earthly course’ rise up to kinship with God and eternal life.” (Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §49, 32)

evolutionary scenario”⁵⁹ which Richardson defines by two characteristics: the first aspect of Darwin’s insight “is just evolution itself: species “become,” are created and destroyed, including the human species.”⁶⁰ The second aspect is Darwin’s

account of what drives that evolution: a struggle or competition in which all organisms—ourselves included—are engaged. Darwin shows that organisms, in their types, are shaped by and for such struggle, and so pursue a basic selfishness.... Our species, and our special capacities, are the products of a long history of such selfish struggles, and are designed precisely and merely to struggle so into the future.⁶¹

Darwin’s account of the emergence of the human species, Nietzsche thinks, offers a deflationary view of the human type, and it does so in at least two ways, culminating in the revelation of the transience of the human species. First, Darwin demonstrates that humans are not of a distinct or discontinuous order or ontological kind than any other animal; human beings are continuous with the rest of animality. And second, on Darwin’s account, not only are individuals and groups transitory and mortal, but the human type itself, the very human species, is transitory and could pass out of existence. I’ll consider both points and show how they contribute to the argument that the human species is temporally dynamic.

(i.) The first point is that, on Darwin’s account, humans are continuous with animality at large; we can no longer maintain that human beings are of a distinct ontological kind than any other animal. Darwin identifies a common point between human beings and all other organisms: they each “pursue a basic selfishness” and adapt to their environments by virtue of this pursuit.⁶² For Nietzsche, Darwin shows that human beings share this basic

⁵⁹ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 14

⁶⁰ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 15

⁶¹ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 15

⁶² Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 15

selfishness with all other living organisms, or, that there is no univocal limit or border, no absolute or unbridgeable discontinuity, between two distinct and unchanging types, human and animal. As Richardson puts this, “we are organisms continuous with the rest, and our special capacities, above all our “reason,” are to be explained by the same natural and ultimately physical processes.”⁶³ This forbids us, Nietzsche thinks, from according humanity a unique or special status, “the grandeur of man,” distinguishing humanity from animality, especially if that grandeur is to be rooted in the *origin* of humanity. Nietzsche diagnoses a particularly human “way of judging,” according to which the “things of the highest value must have another, separate origin of their own, – they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, . . . Look instead to the lap of being, the everlasting, the hidden God, the ‘thing-in-itself’ – this is where their ground must be, and nowhere else!”⁶⁴ In other words, Nietzsche writes, “the highest should not grow out of the lowest.”⁶⁵ Darwin forecloses our ability to ascribe unique origins to humanity as he demonstrates that humanity shares its origin with the rest of animality. Nietzsche writes:

The new fundamental feeling: our conclusive transitoriness. – Formerly one sought the feeling of the grandeur of man by pointing to his divine origin: this has now become a forbidden way, for at its portal stands the ape, together with other gruesome beasts, grinning knowingly as if to say: no further in this direction!⁶⁶

Nietzsche preserves the form of Darwin’s argument that all organisms share something in common, if he rejects something of its particular content: he thinks that the common point between humans and other organisms is the will to power.⁶⁷ For Nietzsche, all organisms

⁶³ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, 14-15

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §2, 6

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §4, 168

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §49, 32

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On Self-Overcoming,” 90; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12, 52.

share a basic drive to maximize their sensation of power,⁶⁸ and this commonality implies that there is no absolute discontinuity between the human organism and all others.

(ii.) Second, what Darwin reveals, Nietzsche thinks, is that the human being and its capacities, such as consciousness and rationality, have become *in time*; their origin does not lie outside of time. Thus, like genealogy, evolutionary theory plays a performative role, since it functions as an encounter with dynamism, or it reveals the transitoriness of the human type. Crucially, if the human type came into existence as the result of contingent historical circumstances, then this implies that human beings could also have not come into existence, they need not exist at all, and they could pass out of being. It is no surprise if individuals come into and out of being, nor if individual bodies grow, change, and decay; life shows us this tirelessly. However, part of what Darwin demonstrates is that the species, type, or category of the human being itself has come into and could pass out of being. What Nietzsche adopts from Darwin is that, if there is a categorical type of the human being, then it too has a history. Thus, again, Nietzsche thinks that Darwin disproves the “way of judging” which maintains not only that “the highest should not grow out of the lowest,” but furthermore, that “it should not grow at all.... Being, the Unconditioned, the Good, the True, the Perfect – none of these could have become.”⁶⁹ In other words, for such a mentality, what is of the highest value should not be mutable, nor should it have a history; it should not be able to pass out of being, nor should it have ever come into being: things of the highest value should always already be.

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §4, 168

As Nietzsche sees things, Darwin deflates the human type by foreclosing its unique status as an enduring identity. Now, seeing that we have *become*, Nietzsche can write:

In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been poured, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the 'history of the world'; *but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die.* Someone could invent a fable like this and yet they would still not have given a satisfactory illustration of just how pitiful, how insubstantial and *transitory*, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature; *there were eternities during which it did not exist; and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened.*⁷⁰

The ephemerality of the human type, distinct from the ephemerality of any particular human being, is a particularly jarring image of dynamism. This revelation calls into question the possibility of fulfilling a will to immortality, both in the form of the eternal perpetuation of the human species, and in the form of honour, fame, or glory of the individual carried on by the species.⁷¹ Nietzsche tells us that the Greeks give "religious expression to the most profound instinct of life, directed towards the future of life, the eternity of life, – the pathway to life, procreation, as the holy path," and therefore offer a "triumphal yes to life over and above all death and change."⁷² We encounter here, Nietzsche claims, the will to the immortal perpetuation of humanity, over and above the mortality of any individual human being.⁷³ Likewise, when "the Greek sculptor... represent[s] again and again war and fights in innumerable repetition,"⁷⁴ and Homer aims to immortalize "the fighting scenes of the *Iliad*,"⁷⁵ we encounter the Greek will to be remembered in the form

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense," 141, my emphases

⁷¹ Avramenko, "Nietzsche and the Greek Idea of Immortality."

⁷² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe the Ancients," §4, 228

⁷³ See also the passage on fame at Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, §2, 69

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Homer's Contest*, 52

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Homer's Contest*, 52

of glorifying and heroizing tales.⁷⁶ As Hannah Arendt helpfully puts this, “by their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave nonperishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a “divine” nature.”⁷⁷ And, as Christa Acampora has shown, on Nietzsche’s telling, Homer “regard[s] struggle as inescapable” but he also makes of struggle “a route to glory.”⁷⁸ The ephemerality of the human type is such a jarring form of dynamism because it calls into question even this already compromised form of immortality. It is already given that the individual cannot be immortal, but now it is no longer even guaranteed that the individual can be immortalized, honoured, and glorified beyond, over, and above death by an unending human species.

2.3.3 The Dionysian Festival and the Impermanence of Identity.

A third example of the revelation of dynamism is that of the Dionysian festival or Bacchic chorus which, Nietzsche argues, reveals the impermanence of an individual’s own identity. Nietzsche claims that people tend to interpret their own selves and others as possessing an unalterable or unchanging set of essential properties, a fixed character, or an identity, and he claims that they are wrong in this interpretation. Nietzsche writes:

That the character is unalterable is not in the strict sense true; this favourite proposition means rather no more than that, during the brief lifetime of a man, the effective motives are unable to scratch deeply enough to erase the imprinted script of many millennia. If one imagines a man of eighty-thousand years, however, one would have in him a character totally alterable: so that an abundance of different individuals would evolve out of him one after the other.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ E.g., Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, §170.

⁷⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19. And see also the chapter on “Action,” especially pp. 196-198.

⁷⁸ Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, 43

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §41, 35

In his early works, character for Nietzsche refers to the concert or accord of one's interior and one's exterior.⁸⁰ In the middle works, it is the plan into which one fits "all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer."⁸¹ In the late works, it is the guiding or dominant principle that gives order to an individual's manifold elements or "incredible multiplicity."⁸² In each case, character, for Nietzsche, seems to refer to the guiding principle that determines an individual's actions, thoughts, choices, and behaviour. When Nietzsche describes the belief "that the character is unalterable" as a "favourite proposition,"⁸³ he means that this proposition is popular or commonly accepted. His claims here are largely a response to Schopenhauer. R.J. Hollingdale notes that "the view that character is unalterable was held insistently by Schopenhauer,"⁸⁴ and Christopher Janaway writes that "Schopenhauer maintains that each person's character is both constant and inborn. We can neither choose nor change what we are."⁸⁵ And Schopenhauer himself writes: "Under the changeable shell of his years, his relationships, and even his store of knowledge and opinions, there hides, like a crab under its shell, the identical and real man, quite unchangeable and always the same."⁸⁶ Moreover, Schopenhauer also understands character in terms of the relationship between what one is and how one acts. He claims that if someone acts in a manner that is counter to our perception of their character, "we never

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, §4.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §290, 163

⁸² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §9, 97

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §41, 35

⁸⁴ Hollingdale, "Notes," in Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §41, 35, fn. 3. Hollingdale cites Ch. 3 of Schopenhauer's *Essay on the Freedom of the Will* in particular.

⁸⁵ Janaway, "Schopenhauer," 280

⁸⁶ Schopenhauer, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 51. And see also Schopenhauer, WWR, vII, pp. 238-239 (Ch. XIX, "On the Primacy of the Will in Self-Consciousness," §10.)

say: ‘his character has changed,’ but, ‘I was mistaken about him.’”⁸⁷ In other words, he holds that a person’s actions are an expression of their character. As Janaway puts this, in one “of Schopenhauer’s beloved Latin tags, *operari sequitur esse*, ‘acting follows from being’: what we are partly determines how we act.”⁸⁸

Nietzsche argues that the Dionysian festival calls the belief in the unalterable character into question. He writes: “From all corners of the ancient world... we can demonstrate the existence of Dionysiac festivals,”⁸⁹ and during these festivals, “caste-like divisions... disappear; the slave is a free-man, the aristocrat and the man of lowly birth unite in the same Bacchic choruses.”⁹⁰ He continues:

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 his neighbour, but quite literally one with him.⁹¹

If the master and slave, the aristocrat and the man of lowly birth, can unite in a single unified chorus, then indeed “the slave” can do what “a freeman” can do and “a freeman” does what “the slave” does. In this case, the encounter with dynamism is the moment at which two supposedly opposed terms behave as equals. In this instance, it appears as if one character-type behaves in a way that expresses a different underlying character-type. There are at least three possible explanations for this, and Schopenhauer has already identified two. First, an individual’s character could change, or character could be changeable.

⁸⁷ Schopenhauer, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 52. Quoted in Janaway, “Schopenhauer,” 278.

⁸⁸ Janaway, “Schopenhauer,” 279

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §2, 20

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Dionysiac Worldview*, §1, 120

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, 18

Second, we could be mistaken about an individual's character. Or third, the very notion of character itself could be an illusion, such that an individual's actions do not actually express an underlying character-type. This third explanation seems to be most plausibly attributable to the wisdom of Dionysos: Dionysos is faceless, the indeterminate, neither man nor woman, and so the absence of underlying identity altogether.

Each of these possible explanations serves to reveal processes of becoming, change, and impermanence in life; or more precisely, they each have the result that the existence of static or unchanging entities is called into question. This is most clear in the first and third cases, which both reveal the absence of an enduring identity: if two distinct characters can be made "quite literally one" with one another, if a slave can become a master and a master a slave, then one's character is not given absolutely or unchangingly. In the first case, this is because, while there is a given character, whatever character is, it is changeable or impermanent. Were the self fixed and unchanging, the events of the Dionysiac festival would not be possible. Instead, these events reveal both that our very core, our supposedly unchanging identity, is malleable and that the very concept of identity as something permanently unchanging does not correspond to anything that exists outside of our imaginations. In the third case, this is because there is no atemporal or immutable character at all. In this case, an individual's actions may well express a contingently or temporally emergent character-type, but one's comportment is not an expression of one's immutable, underlying character. The festival reveals that our supposedly unchanging identity either can be lost entirely, or never existed to begin with. If there is no immutable character-type to be expressed, this severs any expressive relation between what one immutably is and

what one does. On this reading, individuals can express behavioral patterns, but these patterns are not expressions or unfoldings of pre-given or unchanging identities.

The second possible explanation – the possibility that we were mistaken about an individual’s character – is more complex; it reveals the absence of evidence for discontinuity or an immutable difference of kind between supposedly distinct character-types. In this case, our mistake would not be that we misidentified particular character types, as if we mistakenly thought that masters were masters when we failed to recognize that these masters were actually slaves. Rather, since the festival reveals that the two supposedly distinct types express *the same* character, our mistake would have been to have distinguished the two at all, and what is revealed is that the two character-types, if they even are two, are indistinguishable. In this case, it turns out that either the two are actually of the same character-type, since they behave in the same way, or, they are of two distinct character-types, but these types are so broadly defined that they can express indistinguishable behaviours. Either way, what is revealed is that a univocal, clear-cut, categorical distinction between these two types is inappropriate, since they are capable of acting in the same way. If the two were properly fixed contraries or opposites, then this becoming equal of distinct terms in the moment of the festival should be impossible.

2.3.4 Genealogy and the Agonistic Structure of Purpose.

Finally, Nietzsche notes that in different times and places punishment was meant to serve different ends.⁹² His first claim is that this plurality of purposes is evidence that a

⁹² “To at least give an impression of... how one and the same procedure can be used, interpreted and adapted for fundamentally different projects:... Punishment as a means of rendering harmless, of preventing further

thing's purpose is impermanent and transitory. This is because these distinct purposes do not necessarily belong to distinct kinds of punishment; rather, Nietzsche argues, a single, consistent procedure can take on a plurality of purposes. For instance, an identical procedure of punishment can be used both "as a means of inspiring ... fear," and "as a festival." Next, he distinguishes what is relatively permanent in an object – or a custom, act, etc. – from its fluid meaning and purpose. He writes:

we have to distinguish between two of its [punishment's] aspects: one is its relative permanence, the custom, the act, the 'drama', a certain strict sequence of procedures, the other is its fluidity, its meaning [*Sinn*], purpose and expectation, which is linked to the carrying out of such procedures.... the procedure itself will be something older, predating its use as punishment,... the latter was only inserted and interpreted into the procedure (which had existed for a long time though it was thought of in a different way.)⁹³

To explain the plurality of purposes in a single thing, Nietzsche hypothesizes that purposes are continually re-imposed upon a thing by an external force. The changes to punishment's purpose are products of external impositions by force. For Nietzsche, the evidence for this is the fact that something's purpose tends to serve the needs of some particular perspective. The fact that punishment in some particular form serves the needs of some group suggests that *this* group imposed *this* purpose upon punishment. For example, to render punishment a public spectacle could serve to incite fear and compliance, while conducting punishment secretly could construct the image of a harmless or non-threatening society. What one does with punishment depends upon one's own interests. The fact that it is possible to impose a

harm. Punishment as payment of a debt to the creditor in any form (even one of emotional compensation). Punishment as a means of isolating a disturbance of balance, to prevent further spread of the disturbance.... Punishment as a sort of counter-balance to the privileges which the criminal has enjoyed up till now... Punishment as a festival... Punishment as an *aide memoire*, either for the person suffering the punishment – so called 'reform,' or for those who see it carried out." (Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 53-54)

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §13, 52-53

novel use-value upon an already existing thing presupposes the more general point that this thing – i.e., punishment in this case – can be changed by an external force, or in other words, that this thing is agonistically dynamic. Its state depends upon the forces which dominate in it at the time that it is considered.

When Nietzsche distinguishes between punishment's procedure and its purpose, it is the procedure to which he ascribes a "relative permanence" and which he says is older than or predates the purpose. But, in fact, for any given perspective, is it not the procedure which is more obviously malleable and contingent in relation to the essential purpose? For instance, for one who believes that punishment is "a means of rendering harmless, of preventing further harm," surely there are many more-or-less effective procedures with which to accomplish this purpose: economic sanctions, incarceration, capital punishment, etc. Of course, certain aspects of the procedure will be malleable: a scaffold may be replaced, a new prison may be erected, economic sanctions have become digitized – but these changes are incidental insofar as the punishment is still able to function as "a means of rendering harmless." From an internal, practical perspective, the purpose is more permanent than the procedure. What I think Nietzsche shows us here is that even the aspect of punishment which, to any given perspective, seems most permanent, i.e., its purpose, is also malleable. He is suggesting that if an object is malleable in its purpose, then it is malleable through to its supposed core.

2.4 Life and Dynamism

On the basis of these observations, and others like them, Nietzsche argues that the experience of life always involves some encounter with agonistic dynamics, i.e., with

becoming, loss, or change. Nietzsche takes this point further when he seems to hold that *nothing* is invulnerable to dynamism, or, that everything is vulnerable to change or transformation. In other words, he seems to be saying not only that the experience of life will always involve agonistic dynamics, i.e., from some subjective perspective, but that all things actually are agonistically dynamic, or vulnerable to redetermination or reorganization of form from an external force. This, I think, is part of why he focuses on the examples that he does. Nietzsche chooses specifically those structures that various perspectives across history have mistaken for eternal. By showing that even *these* structures – e.g., the good, human being, our own identity, and purpose or essence – are susceptible to change, Nietzsche wants to show us that nothing is so powerful as to be invulnerable to the flow of time and becoming. In the encounter with dynamism, one senses that all elements of experience can be transitory, mutable, or changeable: “we are to recognize that everything which comes into being must be prepared for painful destruction.”⁹⁴

As Burnham notes, Nietzsche is critical of the notion of *being* when it is understood as “that which is, eternally, and does not become.”⁹⁵ According to Nietzsche, this understanding of being is inaugurated by Parmenides and Plato, and it is generally accepted by the philosophical tradition at large; he tells us that the notion of “being,” as philosophers have understood it, refers to that which could not “have become” and so “*must be causa sui*.”⁹⁶ Nietzsche thinks that we err inasmuch as we posit the existence of unending being in general, and, of enduring or eternal beings in particular. For instance, in *The Gay Science*,

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17, 80. And see GM, II, §12.

⁹⁵ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “being,” 41

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §4, 168

he includes the belief “that there are enduring things” among a list of “erroneous articles of faith ... passed on by inheritance.”⁹⁷ Instead, he says, “there are no eternally enduring substances; matter is as much of an error as the god of the Eleatics”⁹⁸ who, as Bernard Williams puts it, “argued that the world of change was a mere appearance of an underlying unchanging being.”⁹⁹ In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: “All that is everlasting – that is merely a parable! And the poets lie too much. But the best parables should speak about time and becoming: they should be praise and justification of all that is not everlasting!”¹⁰⁰

And, in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche writes:

People used to consider change, alteration, and becoming in general as proof that appearances were illusory, as a sign that something must be misleading us. These days, on the other hand, we see ourselves mired in error, drawn necessarily into error, precisely to the extent that the prejudice of reason forces us to make use of unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, objectification, being; we have checked this through rigorously and are sure that this is where the error lies.¹⁰¹

We err, he claims, when we presuppose permanence or eternity. By contrast, he tells us that “the senses are not lying when they show becoming, passing away, and change,”¹⁰² and so, he claims, we should understand the supposedly eternal as changeable and impermanent.

Philosophers in particular, Nietzsche claims, tend to think in these a-historical or a-temporal terms. This tendency, he claims, expels something essential from thought, namely, time, history, movement, or becoming, and it is in these criticisms that it becomes most clear that, for Nietzsche, all things are fluid, impermanent, or temporally dynamic. In other words, he criticizes other thinkers for expelling becoming, change, and

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §110, 110

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §109, 110

⁹⁹ Williams, in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 110, n1

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On the Blessed Isles,” 66

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §5, 169

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §2, 167-168

impermanence from their thinking not only because this “is a symptom of life *in decline*,”¹⁰³

but also because he believes in temporal dynamism. Nietzsche writes:

You want to know what the philosophers' idiosyncrasies are?... Their lack of historical sense for one thing, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticity. They think that they are showing respect for something when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni*, – when they turn it into a mummy. For thousands of years, philosophers have been using only mummified concepts; nothing real makes it through their hands alive. They kill and stuff the things they worship, these lords of concept idolatry - they become mortal dangers to everything they worship. They see death, change, and age, as well as procreation and growth, as objections, - refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not.... So they all believe, desperately even, in being.¹⁰⁴

And later, Nietzsche continues:

this is just their [the philosopher's] way of showing respect: the highest should not grow out of the lowest, it should not grow at all.... Moral: everything from the first rank must be a *causa sui*. It is an objection for something to come from something else, it casts doubt on its value. All the supreme values are of the first rank, all the highest concepts, Being, the Unconditioned, the Good, the True, the Perfect - none of these could have become, and so they must be *causa sui*.¹⁰⁵

To this kind of thinking, Nietzsche responds as follows: “What? Should time be gone, and all that is not everlasting be merely a lie?”¹⁰⁶ To think this way “makes crooked everything that is straight, and causes everything that stands to turn.”¹⁰⁷ And, he continues: “Evil I call it and misanthropic: all this teaching of the one and the plenum and the unmoved and the sated and the everlasting!”¹⁰⁸ In a passage reminiscent of Shelley's *Ozymandias*,¹⁰⁹ Zarathustra says:

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §6, 170

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §1, 166-167

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §4, 168

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On the Blessed Isles,” 66

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On the Blessed Isles,” 66

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On the Blessed Isles,” 66

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche refers to Shelly at BGE §245.

I told them to overthrow their old professorial chairs wherever that old conceit had sat; I told them to laugh at their great masters of virtue and their saints and poets and world redeemers.

I told them to laugh at their gloomy wise men and at any who ever perched in warning, like black scarecrows, in the tree of life.

I sat down alongside their great road of graves and even among carrion and vultures – and I laughed at all their yesteryear and its rotting, decaying glory.¹¹⁰

And finally, in the same passage, Nietzsche writes:

If timbers span the water, if footbridges and railings leap over the river, then surely the one who says “Everything is in flux” has no credibility.

Instead, even the dummies contradict him. “What?” say the dummies, “everything is supposed to be in flux? But the timbers and the railings are over the river!

Over the river everything is firm, all the values of things, the bridges, concepts, all ‘good’ and ‘evil’ – all of this is firm!” –

But when the hard winter comes, the beast tamer of rivers, then even the wittiest learn to mistrust, and, sure enough, then not only the dummies say: “Should everything not – stand still?”

“Basically everything stands still” – that is a real winter doctrine, a good thing for sterile times, a good comfort for hibernators and stove huggers.

“Basically everything stands still” – but against this preaches the thaw wind!

The thaw wind, a bull that is no plowing bull – a raging bull, a destroyer that breaks ice with its wrathful horns! But ice – breaks footbridges!

Yes my brothers, is everything not now in flux? Have all railings and footbridges not fallen into the water? Who could still hang on to “good” and “evil”?

“Woe to us! Hail to us! The thaw wind is blowing!” – Preach me this, oh my brothers, in all the streets!¹¹¹

On the one hand, it seems clear that Nietzsche is expressing a certain desire here for flux, change, and movement from the perspective of his relatively quiet life. On the other hand, as he presents it, it is neither Nietzsche nor Zarathustra who preach against permanence here; it is life itself, it is the “thaw wind” that reveals the ephemerality of the supposedly stable. In each of these claims, Nietzsche tells us repeatedly that our thinking errs whenever we impose enduring and unchanging beings. The correlate of these claims is that we would

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III, “On Old and New Tablets,” §2, 157

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III, “On Old and New Tablets,” §8, 160-161

do better to think in terms that reintroduce movement, becoming, and impermanence into our thinking. As Hatab puts this, “the finite, unstable dynamic of earthly existence—and its meaningfulness—becomes the measure of thought.”¹¹² In short, for Nietzsche, thinking in terms of impermanence and becoming more accurately reflects the necessary conditions of life in general and in the experiential sense than does thought which presupposes permanence and eternity.

At a minimum, it is clear that Nietzsche thinks that we should understand beings, including supposedly eternal beings, as changeable and impermanent. Both Burnham and Small cast this as Nietzsche’s fundamental theory of reality. Burnham claims that Nietzsche’s “account of becoming” “involves an attempt to investigate the nature of the real,”¹¹³ and he says that the account Nietzsche offers is the following:

what is real are... processes... which interact and produce temporary forms only to dissolve them again. Here there is no overall coordination of these processes, no ‘purpose’ or ‘end’, except perhaps for what human beings posit for themselves as purposes. There is indeed constant change, without stable entities (i.e. without beings, such as atoms or substances), but through process forms are realized only to then be replaced by new forms.¹¹⁴

Similarly, Small claims that Nietzsche adheres to a “doctrine of absolute becoming,”¹¹⁵ and he says that this is particularly clear when Nietzsche “declares his allegiance to the Heraclitean principle that the only reality is becoming: that is, continual change with no beginning or end, and no pause in its course.”¹¹⁶ And indeed, in the second *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche tells us that “the doctrines of sovereign becoming,” and “of the

¹¹² Hatab, “Nietzsche, Nature, and Life Affirmation,” 33

¹¹³ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “becoming,” 38

¹¹⁴ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “becoming,” 39

¹¹⁵ Small, “Being, Becoming, and Time in Nietzsche,” 631

¹¹⁶ Small, “Being, Becoming, and Time in Nietzsche,” 631

fluidity of all concepts, types and species,” are “doctrines which I consider true but deadly.”¹¹⁷ And likewise, at WP §1066, Nietzsche writes: “The world exists; ... it becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away – it maintains itself in both.”¹¹⁸

Is Nietzsche really making a basic claim about the fundamental nature of reality here? Is he jumping from the claim that *all living things experience becoming*, to the claim that *all things are always in a fundamental state of becoming*? The primary reason to be skeptical that he is doing this is his psychological criticism of the idea of absolute, objective knowledge, or “contemplation without interest,” of fundamental reality.¹¹⁹ Nietzsche attributes our desire for objective knowledge and our claims that we have achieved it to a defensive, psychological impetus. Famously, he claims that it is impossible to suppress the “interpretive powers” of knowledge, and thereby, to be in possession of “pure,” “will-less,” “timeless,” “knowledge as such” concerning the fundamental nature of reality.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, he observes that despite, or perhaps because of, skepticism’s rise to prevalence, humans continue relentlessly to use science to attempt to uncover absolute knowledge of reality. To explain *why we desire* this absolute knowledge, Nietzsche theorizes that, without the guidance of authoritative principles, human beings lack a guide by which to determine their actions and values, and this void can be paralyzing. Thus, he hypothesizes that our various philosophical systems outlining the mind-independent and fundamental structure of reality have ulterior motives: what we want is not simply

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, §9, 112

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1066, 548

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §12, 87

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §12, 87

knowledge of the world in-itself, but rather, the practical benefits that accompany this knowledge, namely, certainty and guidance. I'll explore this further in subsequent chapters. What is notable for now is that, given this psychological criticism of the demand for absolute and objective knowledge, and the fact that he labels the object of this demand "an absurdity,"¹²¹ it would be deeply strange if Nietzsche chose to commit to a supposedly objective thesis about the fundamental nature of reality.

There are two interpretive options: on the one hand, Nietzsche could be saying that all existing things are always necessarily in a state of becoming because becoming is the fundamental nature of existence; on the other hand, instead of describing what is essential and necessary in existence, Nietzsche could be merely describing a pattern, tendency, or oft-recurring characteristic of existence, i.e., existing things tend to be vulnerable to change, becoming, and the passage of time, as inferred through a series of examples revealed to experience. In other words, do we know absolutely that all things are always changing, or do we merely suspect, replacing "the improbable with the more probable,"¹²² that nothing is absolutely permanent or unchanging? By way of analogy, compare the difference between these two positions to that between atheism and agnosticism. The one is certain that there is no absolutely unchanging ground; the other is uncertain as to whether or not we are able to posit the existence of such a ground. Neither position can say with certainty that such a ground exists. In the same way, for Nietzsche, either we know definitively that this existence offers no immovable foundations, or else, even if our world does offer such foundations, we have no right to claim to know them. Either we know that everything is in

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §12, 87

¹²² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §4, 6

a constant state of change and becoming, or we are not sure if there is still some yet undiscovered immovable point that could guide our lives and our thinking. Either way, in this life, we are still living without an unshakable or immovable foundation, or in the words of Arendt, we are living “without a banister.”¹²³ This means that we are attempting to think and act and live without reference to a primary definitive foundation, or as Tracy Strong puts it, “that humans no longer could rely on any transcendental grounding to finalize their thinking – be that god, or nature, or history.”¹²⁴ Whether becoming is necessary or merely probable, we are deprived of knowledge of an unmoving ground, and this is the kind of world in which we must learn how to live.

2.5 Conclusion

By recognizing becoming, Nietzsche expresses what Foucault calls the attitude of modernity: “modernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment.”¹²⁵ This attitude recognizes that any given moment can be entirely discontinuous with what precedes or what follows it; anything can change entirely from one moment to the next, and nothing guarantees anything’s continuity through time. For Nietzsche, however, this is not a particularly modern attitude. It is, rather, an ancient mentality that European human beings have lapsed out of across the age of Christianity by virtue of the argument that becoming is merely the appearance of being. Intellectual accomplishments

¹²³ Arendt, “What is Existential Philosophy?”, 179

¹²⁴ Strong, *Politics Without Vision*, 1

¹²⁵ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 39

such as genealogy and the theory of evolution have served to reinstate this mentality in its modern form, but, Nietzsche argues, lingering forces (i.e., the so-called “shadows of God,”¹²⁶) still serve to preserve the opposed Christian mentality. Thus, for Nietzsche, there is a certain modern recognition of transience, but it is tainted by a lingering belief in the eternal. Part of Nietzsche’s aim is to bring us to a full awareness of the omnipresence of becoming while avoiding the nihilism that such an awareness could incite.

Nietzsche argues that, through a series of revelatory observations, the experience of living continually reveals that life in general presupposes processes of becoming, change, and impermanence. Transience, or temporal dynamism, is a necessary postulate to explain the ongoing experience of life. What makes this crucial for our purposes is the following: it is difficult to ground meaning in time since, if this ground can be washed away, then whatever meaning it grounds is only ever local, transitory, and relative. As Michael Russo writes, if, “in the end, all of our human projects will be swept away by time,... our species itself will disappear,... as will our planet, our solar system, and possibly even the very universe itself,” then, “confronted with... such oblivion, human life cannot help but seem a bit pointless.”¹²⁷ In keeping with this mentality, some go so far as to argue that meaning is only possible on the basis of a temporal endpoint, or, on the assumption that time is finite.¹²⁸ At a minimum, if the ground of meaning is temporal, then meaning itself is in

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §108

¹²⁷ Russo, *The Problem of God and the Meaning of Life*, 6

¹²⁸ A useful introduction to this notion is Löwith, “Nature, History, and Existentialism.” Löwith writes: “Without a purposeful will, divine or human, and without a prevision, there is no what-for, no purpose and end as *telos* and *finis* which together constitute an *eschaton*. The possibility of a philosophy of history and quest for an ultimate meaning stands or falls with eschatology.” (84-85) And, further: “Classical humanity never put itself into a vacuum with unconditional trust or faith, as Judaism and early Christianity daringly did. It is precisely such an adventure of faith which is demanded by the quest for an ultimate meaning of history, because the visible events do not show an ultimate fulfilment and an answer to such a radical question.

some way insecure, or cast in doubt and instability. This is Nietzsche's explanation for the fact that human beings tend to posit the existence of an a-temporal or permanent ground of meaning, outside of and invulnerable to the conditions of life. As Julian Young writes:

we used to be quite certain that we knew what [the meaning of life] was. We were certain about it because we thought we knew that over and above this world of doubtful virtue and happiness is another world: a world Nietzsche calls (somewhat ironically) the 'true world' or, alternatively expressed, 'God.'¹²⁹

Human beings, Nietzsche argues, posit the existence of an entity or state which is not subject to the passage of time and agonistic dynamics; they posit the existence of something outside of time, such as God, being, or the kingdom of heaven, to ground meaning.

By arguing that all things are susceptible to alteration and change, Nietzsche describes our world as a place wherein it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to uncover a secure, authoritative, and unchanging ground for the meaning of life. In §125 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche refers to the role of figures like Copernicus and Galileo, and the scientific method in general, in the death of God – “we unchained this earth from its sun.” The scientific method, Nietzsche sees, is increasingly unable to establish the existence of an a-temporal or permanent ground of meaning. Young writes: “To say, as Galileo did, that the earth is not the center of the universe, to say that the earth *moves*, is... not just to

Christian trust in a future fulfilment has been abandoned by modern historical thinking, but the perspective toward the future as such has been maintained. It pervades all European thought and all our concern with the whence and whither of the historical process. Together with the horizon of the future the quest for meaning as goal and purpose has persisted.” (86-87) Both for Löwith and for Frederick Beiser, a clear instance of this kind of thinking occurs with Hegel. Beiser writes: “Hegel was intent on reviving the traditional concept of providence not least because he saw it as the only viable solution to the grand existential question about the meaning or purpose of life.” (Beiser, *Hegel*, 276) And, Beiser continues, “Although Hegel purged the Christian concept of providence of its traditional transcendent meaning, he still retained its underlying thesis that the purpose or meaning of life came from fulfilling my place in the divine order. He did not accept the doctrine of modern existentialists that life could have a value or meaning even if existence were absurd, or even if there were no purpose to life. In his view, no individual had by himself the power to give his life meaning, to create the values by which he lived.” (276)

¹²⁹ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 1

propose a new theory of astronomy. It is to threaten an entire meaning-giving worldview.”¹³⁰ And Alexandre Koyré tells us,

I need not insist on the overwhelming scientific and philosophical importance of Copernican astronomy, which, by removing the earth from the center of the world and placing it among the planets, undermined the very foundations of the traditional cosmic world-order with its hierarchical structure and qualitative opposition of the celestial realm of immutable being to the terrestrial or sublunar region of change and decay.¹³¹

Each thinker’s point seems to be that, by demonstrating that “there is no reason to suppose that change and decay occur only here, on the earth, and not everywhere in the universe,”¹³² the modern scientific worldview has taken from us the necessary conditions for the kind of meaning that outstrips humanity. It is in this context, Nietzsche proposes, that we become aware of a will to meaning as a relatively stable characteristic of the human being.

¹³⁰ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 28

¹³¹ Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, 29. And see Koyré, *Metaphysics and Measurement*, 20

¹³² Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, 23

CHAPTER THREE

LIFE IN PARTICULAR: THE WILL TO POWER

In the second chapter, I demonstrated that agonism and dynamism constitute the necessary conditions of life in general for Nietzsche, meaning that all things are transient or impermanent and vulnerable to the impositions of external forces. I've distinguished between life in general, which is existence, and life in particular, which refers to the unique quality shared by living things. For Nietzsche, this quality that defines living things *as* living is the will to power [*Wille zur Macht*]: all living things strive to optimize their sensation of power [*Macht*].¹ This will prove a crucial component of the will to meaning: we desire meaning, Nietzsche claims, because it serves to increase our sensation of power. For this reason, the primary aim of this chapter is to explicate Nietzsche's notion of the will to power. Secondly, I'll demonstrate that the will to power explains why life in the phenomenal or experiential sense *necessarily* includes agonistic dynamics – a claim which, in the previous chapter, could not be fully justified with regards to life in general. Where the previous chapter discussed the necessary conditions of the world in which the living thing finds itself, I'll now explicate the second half of life in the phenomenal sense, namely, the living thing that experiences this world. To this end, I'll start by demonstrating that Nietzsche does indeed define living things according to the will to power. Second, I'll extract definitions of power and will to power from Nietzsche's writings. Third, I'll then demonstrate why the nature of living beings and their will to power demands that the

¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76

phenomenal experience of living necessarily includes agonistic dynamics. Following this, I'll transition to a distinct but related topic: I'll isolate a particular subclass of will to power, i.e., a pathological subclass as it is expressed by the character of *ressentiment*. This class of will to power uses self-deception to satisfy itself with *the feeling of* power alone, as opposed to *actual* power. This will prove central to the discussion of the will to meaning and of our common human uses of meaningfulness in subsequent chapters.

3.1 To be Alive is to Will Power

Katrina Mitcheson writes that “Nietzsche identifies the will to power with life,”² and she is correct that “Nietzsche’s claim that ‘life as such is will to power’ provides a key to understanding what life means in Nietzsche’s philosophy.”³ First, when Nietzsche makes claims such as these, I propose, he is speaking of *life in particular*, or the nature of living creatures. This comes through, for instance, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche writes: “I also want to tell you my words on life and on the nature of all that lives,” i.e., on the nature of living things. He continues, “I pursued the living,” “I walked the greatest and the smallest paths in order to know its nature,” and “wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power.”⁴ In this same passage, Nietzsche personifies life, and has Zarathustra speak directly to “her”: “Into your eye I gazed recently, oh life,”⁵ where he professes to

² Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 122

³ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 122

⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On Self-Overcoming,” 88

⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “The Dance Song,” 84

discover “this will itself, the will to power – the unexhausted begetting will of life.”⁶ And, he continues,

this secret life itself spoke to me: “Behold,” it said, “I am that *which must always overcome itself*....

I would rather perish than renounce this one thing; and truly, wherever there is decline and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself – for power!...

Whatever I may create and however I may love it – soon I must oppose it and my love, thus my will wants it....

Only where life is, is there also will; but not will to life, instead – thus I teach you – will to power!”⁷

While it will prove crucial, I must briefly put off a discussion of the relationship between the will to power and overcoming. For now, I simply note that Nietzsche is speaking of “the nature of all that lives” and, he claims, a will to power is shared by all living things.

Likewise, in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes: “I consider life itself to be an instinct for growth, for endurance, for the accumulation of force, for power.”⁸ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes: “Above all, a living thing wants to discharge its strength – life itself is will to power.”⁹ And, in *The Gay Science*, he claims that to expand or increase power is “the truly basic life-instinct”¹⁰ and that “the great and small struggle revolves everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power and in accordance with the will to power, which is simply the will of life.”¹¹ I’ve modified the Cambridge translation of this quotation slightly, which renders “*Wille des Lebens*” as “will to life,” when it should read “will of life.”¹² “Will to life” changes the meaning of the

⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On Self-Overcoming,” 88

⁷ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On Self-Overcoming,” 88-90

⁸ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §6, 6

⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §13, 15

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §349, 208

¹¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §349, 208.

¹² Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 763-764

statement, as if Nietzsche were saying that the will to life and the will to power are identical. If the will to power is the will *of* life, then Nietzsche means that life's will, or the will of the living, *is* a will to power; living things will power, they are "*incapable of renouncing*" this will "to be master over what is still weaker."¹³ In brief, Nietzsche's basic claim about life in particular is this: *all living things* strive to expand and increase their power, a living being is a being that wills power, or to be alive is to will power.¹⁴

3.2 Defining Power

A traditional interpretation claims that power for Nietzsche is the capacity for effectivity in the world, or in other words, that power is *the ability to cause effects*. Burnham, for instance, claims that Nietzsche uses the term power most commonly "to describe the capacity of a thing or event (for example, a drive) to bring about a significant change in something else."¹⁵ Clark, likewise, uses "power" and "effectiveness" as synonyms.¹⁶ She says that one ought to "define 'power' as the ability to do or get what one wants," and she describes the aim of the will to power as "a sense of one's *effectiveness* in the world."¹⁷ And Mitcheson claims that will to power should be understood as a will to actively assert oneself "against other wills to power" in such a way that they "are changed."¹⁸ In each case, power is clearly understood as the capacity to change or produce an effect in some other

¹³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, "On Self-Overcoming," 89, my emphasis.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76

¹⁵ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, 266

¹⁶ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 229

¹⁷ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 211

¹⁸ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 115

element. On this reading, in brief, power is the capacity to do what one wants, or, to effectuate change in the world as one sees fit.

I wish to add to this interpretation. Power, for Nietzsche, is not simply the ability to do what one wants; power is the capacity to make others do what one wants. “Others,” here, need not refer to other people but only to a distinction between any two or more elements. Most often, as I’ll show, power is expressed by one drive over another; it is the capacity of one drive to force another drive to perform or at least support its bidding. Even in cases of self-control, one part of the self expresses power over another part of the self. Power is the capacity to sanction or determine the purpose or function of others, whether other people or other things.¹⁹ In other words, power is the capacity to determine or redetermine meaning or purpose; it is the capacity to impose purpose. Of the above interpreters, it is Mitcheson who also sees this further element: “the will to power shapes the meaning of things, and it does so in an ongoing process, and it is thus inherently dynamic and active.”²⁰ Again, the passage on punishment at GM II §12 reads as follows: “every purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function.” And further, “anything in existence... is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it.”²¹ Here, Nietzsche conceives of power as that which is able to redetermine the meaning or purpose of something outside of itself and this is why all meaning is always “a manifestation of will to power.”²² The powerful

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §17, 59

²⁰ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 115

²¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12, 51

²² Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 152. See WP §556 & §643.

are those who differentiate “parts and functions,” allowing persons and objects to “acquire ‘meaning.’”²³

Power is the ability to participate in agonistic dynamism in the particular sense of imposing meaning or purpose. Agonistic dynamism characterizes an interactive field in which all elements are continually changing where these changes are produced by the interactions and struggles between competing forces. On this field, power refers to an element’s capacity to incite a change of purpose in another element, or to defend its own purpose against being changed by another element. Nietzsche describes power in its defensive mode when he writes that “the final test” and “real proof of strength” is “to stay in control, to keep the height of your task free from the many lower and short-sighted impulses,”²⁴ which is to say, to maintain one’s purpose despite whatever impulses call one to distraction. Power is the capacity to maintain or transform the meaning or purpose of a thing, and further, according to Nietzsche, we always impose upon something the meaning which will most benefit us²⁵ – a notion which will be clarified below in the discussion of how we perform evaluations. Thus, power is also the ability to effect in such a way that one benefits from these effects; it is the capacity to participate in agonistic dynamics in such a way that one is improved, enhanced, and strengthened by this participation. As I’ll demonstrate, however, there is still a question of what part of us this imposition will benefit. An imposition of meaning can strengthen or benefit what in us is life-negating or degenerative. From a broader perspective, this localized benefit can in fact be degenerative.

²³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, 17, 59

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Wise,” §4, 79

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §12 & §17.

While Nietzsche does not do so, I think that we can fruitfully distinguish between power and force. Force, again, is a basic postulate for Nietzsche which is necessary to explain change and becoming. I propose that power should be thought of as force under determinate conditions, specifically, where that force stands in a form-giving relationship to something beyond itself, or where that force protects itself against some other form-giving force. To give or impose form means to impose purpose or meaning as discussed in the first chapter: something's form is either the hierarchical organization of its own drive-set or of the drive-set into which it has been incorporated. An individual's level of power is the amount of force that they are able to direct toward this form-creating end. This, I suspect, explains why "*Kraft* is often used interchangeably with *Macht*" by Nietzsche, since, "depending upon context, both could reasonably be translated as power or force, and *Kraft* perhaps even as energy,"²⁶ and I am claiming that power simply is force or energy when it is directed toward the particular end of form-creation.

Power understood as the capacity to make others do what one wants presupposes certain desires, i.e., "what one wants." These desires reflect one's drives. I take it to have been sufficiently established by previous scholarship that power for Nietzsche is not something that we feel, express, or perform on its own or by itself.²⁷ Instead, for Nietzsche, an individual always expresses power in conjunction with the performance of some other

²⁶ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, 266

²⁷ In *The Affirmation of Life*, pp. 128-129, Reginster catalogues a number of interpretations that take this line. For Clark, for instance, will to power is a "second-order desire" which depends upon pre-given "first-order desires." The will to power is the will to or for the ability to satisfy these first-order desires. (Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 211) For Richardson, will to power is a will to a particular manner of satisfying given drives – i.e., a powerful manner of satisfaction. (Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 21-23) Reginster himself maintains that there is only a sensation of power where there is some resistance to overcome, which is to say, where an individual strives to accomplish some task or activity in spite of some obstacle. He writes: "the will to power cannot be satisfied unless the agent has a desire for something else than power." (132)

activity, i.e., in conjunction with attempting to do “what one wants.” The individual units that express power are not only human beings or other complex organisms, nor only larger organizations such as societies or states. More basically, for Nietzsche, power is demonstrated by the many diverse drives that precede and make up individuals, and I agree with Richardson that one understands Nietzsche better by starting from this premise rather than the premise that it is the whole complex individual that most basically demonstrates the capacity for power.²⁸ An expression of power is always an expression of a drive; even in cases where power comes to be expressed by a larger, complex body – a group, society, state, etc. – this is ultimately the expression of the drive that has temporarily gained mastery over this complex body, giving it its present form.

The various drives within a complex individual vie for expression amongst one another. This is why Nietzsche says that there are no “free” or “un-free” wills, but only “*strong* and *weak* wills.”²⁹ If a set of various impulses demand expressions which are incompatible with one another, it is the strongest will that succeeds in “commanding” the body to express its will instead of the others.³⁰ If, in a moment of anger, a person smashes some object at hand, one may imagine that this destruction is the effect produced by the drive on the field of agonistic dynamics – and, indeed, it is *one* such effect. However, Nietzsche claims, this destruction presupposes that some violent drive toward aggression has won out in the competition amongst the other drives for expression. Before changing, i.e., destroying, the object at hand, this drive has altered the hierarchical organization of the

²⁸ Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 20

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §21, 21

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19, 19

drives of a complex individual; it has, if only momentarily, gained the upper hand over the others, and this is its first effect, or its first victory on the field of agonistic dynamics. This drive to express one's anger has, if briefly, transformed the purpose of the body it inhabits into a tool for the expression of anger. It has reorganized the form of the body, i.e., the hierarchical organization of the drives, by momentarily asserting mastery or dominance over the others, such as over drives to impulse control, patience, etc. Although these drives all belong to one complex body, they remain distinct from one another, and within the body any one drive demonstrates power by suppressing or sublimating the others. Thus, for Nietzsche, self-control or power over oneself has a heterogeneous character whereby one drive commands mastery over the others. This heterogeneity of the individual allows us to conceive of the power dynamics within a single body as a demonstration of the capacity to make others do what one wants. One drive makes the other drives do what it wants.

3.3 Form-Creation

There are several modes in which something can demonstrate this capacity for form-creation. The mechanisms of this capacity are identical to the mechanisms for the imposition of purpose discussed above, i.e., organization and incorporation. For the sake of brevity, I'll treat sublimation as a subset of incorporation whereby one drive incorporates another for its own expression. Furthermore, any given demonstration of power can be categorized as internal, external, or synthetic. In the case of internal power, a force seeks mastery over other forces with which it cohabitates in the same body. In the case of external power, a force seeks mastery over forces that belong to other bodies distinct from its own. In the case of synthetic expressions, a force seeks mastery over another force outside of

itself either by causing an internal change within itself, or by taking that other force into itself. Thus, power can be expressed in six modes: organization in its internal, external, and synthetic modes, and incorporation in each of the same three modes.

In cases of internal incorporation, one drive forces another drive to perform its bidding. This is what is commonly called sublimation. As Andrew Huddleston puts this, “in repression a drive is pushed aside and denied expression, whereas in sublimation it is integrated into the rest of the agent’s projects by being channeled toward that aim.”³¹ In this case, the masterful drive, Drive A, does not suppress the expression of some Drive B; instead, A seeks to transform B in such a way that an expression of B is also an expression of A. Richardson writes: “drive A rules B insofar as it has turned B toward A’s own end, so that B now participates in A’s distinctive activity. Mastery is bringing another will into a subordinate role within one’s own effort, thereby ‘incorporating’ the other as a sort of organ or tool.”³² As Huddleston recounts, it is Freud who brings this Nietzschean idea to a pinnacle with his analysis of da Vinci. On Freud’s analysis, da Vinci “sublimated his homoerotic drive by channelling it toward artistic ends. Instead of having sex with beautiful young men, he produced idealized artistic depictions of their bodies.”³³ It is not definitively clear however, which drive is mastering which in this example. On Huddleston’s presentation, the artistic drive masters the homoerotic drive by forcing it to express itself via this artistic outlet. However, one could just as well say that the homoerotic drive masters the artistic drive by forcing it to express itself in this sexual outlet. B serves A by “setting

³¹ Huddleston, “Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul,” 19

³² Richardson, Nietzsche’s System, 33

³³ Huddleston, “Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul,” 19. And see Gemes, “Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation.”

its sights by reference to A's own project,"³⁴ but which drive is A and which is B? I think that Nietzsche's point is that there can be a perpetual back-and-forth between which drives are mastering the others, and both sides can benefit from this relationship. If a drive to hunt focuses its aim upon knowledge, the will to knowledge benefits from this focusing of energies, while the drive to hunt benefits in that it is allowed to express itself within the confines of civilization. Which of the two is actually in charge, I propose, could only be determined on a moment-by-moment basis, in accordance with extreme specificity. The key is that, for Nietzsche, our drives are constantly in a dynamic state of trying to master one another, whether by repression or sublimation, and that they are successful where they prevent other drives from expressing themselves, or where they force other drives to refocus their aim upon ends which are compatible with the mastering drive. In this latter case, an expression of the subordinate drive is *also* an expression of the mastering drive.

Examples of external expressions of power have already been considered in the first chapter, particularly in the cases of the teacher, the tyrant, and the use of tools. In cases of external reorganization, an individual re-orders the hierarchical rank-order of drives in someone or something else. The educator, for instance, must *paralyze* one set of drives in the student, "so that another could gain force, become strong, take control."³⁵ It is critical, however, that the educator will "discover the central force" within the individual, rather than force their own idea of a use-function upon them as the tyrant does. The tyrant uses the living individual as a tool to expand or amplify the expression of their own drives. This is external incorporation. The tyrant uses living beings the way that any person uses any

³⁴ Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 34

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Skirmishes," §41, 216

tool, i.e., in order to improve and expand the range and efficacy of the expression of one's own drives. Furthermore, the example of the educator implicitly includes an image of synthetic reorganization on the part of the student. In synthetic reorganization, one reorders the hierarchical rank-order of one's internal drives in response to some external stimuli. So, for instance, the student accepts and adopts the methods suggested by the teacher, or the novice adopts the techniques of the expert. Similarly, improvement as a response to competition or resistance also belongs in this category. For instance, the body of a training athlete allocates tremendous amounts of energy to strengthening the muscles that have encountered the greatest levels of resistance.

Finally, there is the case of synthetic incorporation. Nietzsche assumes an economy of energies or force in the self; an individual can only expend so much energy before having to replenish.³⁶ He counts among the "conditions for genius" a "rapid metabolism" as well as "the possibility of a constant supply of large, even enormous, amounts of energy."³⁷ In order to "become stronger," one must incorporate energies from some external source. An individual acquires energy, or becomes stronger, by appropriating another's energies for themselves or to their own ends. A clear example of this occurs in nutrition and the act of eating or metabolic interchange: one organism consumes another in order to strengthen itself.³⁸ In an 1888 note, Nietzsche writes:

Let us take the simplest case, that of primitive nourishment: the protoplasm extends its pseudopodia in search of something that resists it – not from hunger but from will to power. Thereupon, it attempts to overcome, appropriate, assimilate what it

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §2, 89

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §2, 89

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §1, 85

encounters: what one calls “nourishment” is merely a derivative phenomenon, an application of the original will to become stronger.³⁹

The image Nietzsche offers here is one of an organism that strives to incorporate other organisms into itself, to make them a part of itself, in order to grow, and thereby, “to become stronger.” As Richardson has shown, Nietzsche develops an understanding of “the organism” which “aims to “incorporate” other organisms ... in order to grow by overcoming.”⁴⁰ Richardson continues: “Eating is perhaps the most obvious ... way of growing by overcoming: the organism “incorporates” another’s tissue. But there are many other ways of incorporating other living things by subordinating their activity to one’s own (including our efforts with Nietzsche now).”⁴¹ In the act of eating, a first organism appropriates the caloric energies of a second organism to its own ends; the first organism is now able to recruit energies which the second organism was once able to recruit. Nothing can live without acquiring energies for itself.

With these considerations, incorporation now seems to be a more basic expression of power than reorganization. If it is technically possible for an organism to live without the capacity to reorganize its surrounding world, nothing can live that does not incorporate elements of its external world into itself. Here, Schopenhauer’s influence is apparent:

Everywhere in nature we see conflict, we see struggle, we see victory changing hands;... This universal struggle is most clearly visible in the animal kingdom... in which every animal in turn becomes food and prey for another; i.e. the matter in which its Idea presents itself must give way to the presentation of another, since every animal can maintain itself in being only by constantly destroying another. So the will to life constantly lives and feeds off itself in its different forms.⁴²

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §702, 373

⁴⁰ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 763

⁴¹ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 764

⁴² Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 2, §27, 146-147

This need to incorporate others, I propose, is the first and most basic sense in which the will to power should be understood for Nietzsche; it refers to a living thing's impulse to satisfy its need for energy. This is also one sense in which Nietzsche understands "the law of life." This law of life is "the law of *necessary* 'self-overcoming' in the essence of life,"⁴³ which is to say that life is "that *which must always overcome itself*."⁴⁴ A living thing cannot live without overcoming other living things, i.e., without appropriating the energies of other living things. In this process, life overcomes life inasmuch as one living thing overcomes another: life overcomes itself.

Based on all this, I think that Nietzsche's understanding of a living being can be clarified by contrasting it with Aristotle's understanding of the natural object. Aristotle says that a natural object contains its own principle of inner change: the natural object changes itself from the inside, or the origin of its change lies within itself.⁴⁵ I think that Nietzsche understands living beings as the opposite of Aristotle's natural objects. This does not mean that living beings contain an external principle of change, which is the type of being that Aristotle ascribes to the artefact. The artefact does not grow or change spontaneously but is only altered when it is affected by an external cause.⁴⁶ The artefact is changed from the outside; the origin of its change lies outside itself. By contrast, I think that, for Nietzsche, a living being contains an inner principle of external change. This is to say that something is alive inasmuch as it strives to change the world around it, or the world that is external to it. The origin of the change lies within the living being, but what is changed lies outside of

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "On Self-Overcoming," 89

⁴⁵ Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 16

⁴⁶ Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 16

the living being and may even be incorporated into the living being. This is why, according to Vanessa Lemm, this mechanism calls into question the distinction between the internal and the external: “life is something that stands in a relation of active form-giving to the outside to such an extent that it can no longer be conceived as something that actually has an inside.”⁴⁷ This forms my working definition of a living being for Nietzsche: a living being is that which strives to change its external world by imposing form using the techniques of incorporation and organization. This inner principle of external change is what he calls the will to power. Since one drive can strive to change other drives within a single body, this inner principle of external change applies even in cases of self-control.

3.4 Will to Power

One of the many controversies in Nietzsche scholarship concerns whether he intends the will to power to constitute a psychological or anthropological thesis on the one hand, or, something much broader such as an ontological or metaphysical thesis, on the other.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Lemm, “Introduction,” in *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, 4. See Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 12.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, 341-342; Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 12-13. Given his psychological criticisms of metaphysical projects, it would be deeply strange if Nietzsche himself chose to commit to a metaphysical thesis. However, whether or not, with the notion of the will to power, Nietzsche remains unintentionally but tacitly committed to either a metaphysical thesis or an ontology is a different, though in many ways more interesting, question. Richardson, for instance, often shows that a “power-ontological vision of the world” is presupposed or “implicit” in many of Nietzsche’s statements (Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 18, n.4) and he says that he tries “to justify attributing this power ontology to him [Nietzsche] even apart from his explicit statements of it, by showing how well the rest of his thought can be clarified by being organized systematically around this partly concealed core.” (Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 9) Answering this question, however, lies outside the scope of this work. Furthermore, perhaps someone could argue that the will to power constitutes a basic theory of reality without constituting a metaphysical theory. (Is the claim that all things *are* will to power necessarily a *metaphysical* claim? On the surface, this seems to be the kind of claim that Nietzsche thinks metaphysicists are trying to escape by formulating metaphysical theories.) This strikes me as a more plausible reading of Nietzsche than the claim that the will to power is a metaphysical thesis, but it would require a demonstration that not all universalizing theories of the basic essence of reality are metaphysical theories in Nietzsche’s sense, and such a demonstration again lies beyond the scope of this work.

While Nietzsche's language sometimes suggests that he takes this latter line,⁴⁹ his statements here are often vague, undeveloped, and imprecise, while his presentation of the will to power as a psychological thesis is far more robustly developed. In fact, almost the whole of the *Genealogy* amounts to a discussion of the effects and consequences of the will to power as a human psychological thesis. In the first treatise, Nietzsche demonstrates that the history and transformations of the common human understandings of goodness can best be explained if human beings will power. In the second treatise, he demonstrates that the phenomenon of bad conscience can best be explained if the human will to power has been prevented from expressing itself in its natural outlets and has turned inward. In the third treatise, he demonstrates that human asceticism and the history of this "ascetic planet *par excellence*"⁵⁰ can best be explained if we are using asceticism as a technique by which to satisfy the will to power. This will to power is not an anthropological thesis alone, since Nietzsche clearly attributes this will to all living organisms. It is possible to treat the will to power at the anthropological level however, by restricting one's focus to the will to power in its human manifestations. Similarly, it is possible to bracket the idea of a Nietzschean power-ontology by focusing on the will to power in its psychological manifestations. This will be my approach. I do not deny that Nietzsche may construe the will to power more broadly, i.e., as applicable beyond psychology. However, even if this is the case, he also at least intends the will to power as a psychological hypothesis. For now, I will bracket this possibility that Nietzsche intends to articulate a power-ontology, since the will to power as a psychological thesis is decisive for the will to meaning.

⁴⁹ BGE §36 is the most explicit example in the published writings.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 85

I agree with Richardson that it is “evident from the expression itself that ‘will to power’ is a potency for something, a directedness toward some end.”⁵¹ What it is directed toward is the *feeling* of power, and more precisely, the feeling that power is growing, or even, the sensation that one’s power is becoming optimized.⁵² Power is distinct from the feeling of power in Nietzsche’s thinking. Between the two, the feeling of power is more consequential for the will to meaning: meaning serves to increase our *sensation* of power, and not necessarily power itself. Terminologically, a will is a type of drive since it is a force which motivates from within. Nietzsche does not clearly delineate the qualities that he takes to define a will. However, it is clear that the will to power is more sustained and enduring than many of the other drives that Nietzsche identifies, and I also wish to invoke this sense of a sustained or enduring will with the expression will to meaning.

At both AC §6 and GS §349, Nietzsche appears to equate the will to power with a will to growth or expansion. And indeed, it is difficult to determine whether he distinguishes between a will to growth and the will to power, and, if so, then how exactly the two are distinct. I think that Nietzsche equates them in at least two compatible senses. First, this is because power itself involves expansion. An expression of power as the determination of meaning always involves an attempt at an increase or amplification of one’s own drives, or the incorporation of some external object into one’s own form. In other words, the will to power *is* a drive to expansion. This expansion can function in a bodily sense of incorporation, e.g., when one changes one’s surroundings by incorporating them into one’s self, or by expanding the reach of one’s influence, e.g., when *x* forces or

⁵¹ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 19

⁵² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76

convinces *y* to serve *x*'s aims. Thus, to will power is already to will one's own expansion. Second, Nietzsche is saying that the will to power is actually a will to the growth, increase, or expansion of the sensation of power. He is most clear about this in the *Genealogy*, when he states that *all* living animals continually strive to increase this feeling. He writes:

Every animal, including the *bête philosophe*, instinctively strives for an optimum of favourable conditions in which to fully release his power and achieve his maximum of power-sensation [*Machtgefühl*]; every animal abhors equally instinctively, with an acute sense of smell that is 'higher than all reason,' any kind of disturbance and hindrance that blocks or could block his path to the optimum (– it is not his path to 'happiness' I am talking about, but the path to power, action, the mightiest deeds, and in most cases, actually, his path to misery).⁵³

This claim, that all living creatures instinctively strive to maximize their feeling of power, is one of Nietzsche's most fundamental propositions. He repeats it often. For instance, at WP 702 he writes that "what man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants, is an increase of power,"⁵⁴ and at GS 349 he claims that "the truly basic life-instinct... aims at *the expansion of power*."⁵⁵ Thus, I agree with Huddleston when he writes that, for readers of Nietzsche, "it should be fairly uncontroversial to say that this [will to power] is one of the central motivational impulses in human beings."⁵⁶ Restricted to the register of the description of experience, and bracketing the question of a power-ontology, one can say that Nietzsche primarily understands the will to power as just this motivational impulse. In other words, will to power is the name Nietzsche gives to this tendency that he observes in living animals to strive to acquire and maximize the feeling of power. This will expresses the underlying law of life, the continual need to acquire energies for one's self.

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §702

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §349, 208. And see also BGE §13 & §230.

⁵⁶ Huddleston, *Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul*, 7

Nietzsche justifies his claim that all living creatures strive to maximize their sensation of power by arguing that certain common human behaviors, e.g. cruelty and asceticism, are best explained if it is the case that we consistently strive to increase our sensation of power.⁵⁷ Nietzsche proposes the will to power as an explanatory hypothesis;⁵⁸ he uses “the will to power to account for human beliefs and behavior.”⁵⁹ Mitcheson, again, is instructive:

For Nietzsche, the hypothesis of the will to power is taken to be the best interpretation of the way the world is, in so far as it... explains our experiences, including the activity of various perspectives which are revealed to us through both genealogical analysis and attention to the multiplicity of drives within us.⁶⁰

In short, Nietzsche gives “explanatory significance” to “our desire to feel power in action.”⁶¹ At WP 702 he describes the will to power as a correction to hedonism: it is difficult to explain behaviors like cruelty and asceticism on the presupposition that humans strive to maximize pleasure and minimize displeasure.⁶² As Reginster puts this, the will to power “is supposed to provide a *better* explanation of phenomena such as cruelty and asceticism than hedonism.”⁶³ A useful example occurs at §137 of *Human, All Too Human*,

⁵⁷ Reginster, “Nietzsche on Pleasure and Power,” 163. Clark, 208; Kaufmann, 204-206; Leiter, 115 & 201.

⁵⁸ Besides this psychological explanation of human behavior, Richardson has pointed out that there is another line of argumentation in Nietzsche’s works by which he justifies the claim that all living animals have a tendency to strive to maximize their sensation of power. One might call this an argument from biology. Nietzsche claims to observe this tendency at work in biological life, which he encounters in his voluminous reading of biological literature. In *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*, Richardson demonstrates the manner in which Nietzsche’s attentive reading of biological literature influenced his notion of the will to power. In “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” Richardson writes: “This claim that life is will to power appears to be a *biological* point, an account of the life of all organisms. Nietzsche purports to uncover life as such scientifically – not of course so much by his own observations of other organisms, as by reflection on the biological literature he read so attentively.” (763) One of Nietzsche’s most interesting examples is his claim that will to power is necessary in order to account for evolutionary adaptation. (I.e., he claims that adaption does not carry explanatory power in itself.) See Nietzsche’s comments on Herbert Spencer at GM II, §12.

⁵⁹ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 107

⁶⁰ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 111

⁶¹ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 107

⁶² Nietzsche discusses the commonality of these behaviors at GM, II, §6, and at GM, III, §11.

⁶³ Reginster, “Nietzsche on Pleasure and Power,” 163

where Nietzsche claims that we can account for the tendency towards ascetic behaviors if individuals are using asceticism as an opportunity to express their will to power, i.e., over their own selves, absent any other possible modes of expression. Nietzsche writes:

There is a *defiance of oneself* of which many forms of asceticism are among the most sublimated expressions. For certain men feel so great a need to exercise their strength and lust for power that, in default of other objects or because their efforts in other directions have always miscarried, they at last hit upon the idea of tyrannizing over certain parts of their own nature, over, as it were, segments or stages of themselves.⁶⁴

Nietzsche will repeat this idea often throughout his writings, and it reaches a certain pinnacle in the *Genealogy*'s second treatise. There, he argues that we can best account for the overwhelming presence of bad conscience in human beings on the basis of the will to power. Unable to express their will to power outwardly, Nietzsche argues that the final recourse open to such an individual is to express their will to power inwardly, upon their own self. Thus, he claims, the prominence of bad conscience itself, which is otherwise difficult to explain, is an argument for the will to power.

3.5 The Feeling that Power is Growing

Nietzsche defines “the feeling that power is growing” as the feeling of overcoming resistance.⁶⁵ He says that we only feel our power when we come up against some resistance or obstacle and strive to overcome it. In an 1888 note, he writes that the individual,

driven by that will [to increase power]... seeks resistance, it needs something that opposes it – Displeasure, as an obstacle to its will to power, is therefore a normal fact, the normal ingredient of every organic event; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event,

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §137, 73-74

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §2, 4

presupposes a resistance overcome.... – the obstacle is the stimulus of this will to power.⁶⁶

And elsewhere, he claims that “the will to power can manifest itself only against resistances.”⁶⁷ This is why, he continues, the will to power “seeks that which resists it”⁶⁸ and strength is “a thirst for enemies, resistance and triumphs.”⁶⁹ As Mitcheson puts this, “for Nietzsche, a lust for power involves a need to express a feeling of power in activity and the encounter with resistance, from within or without.”⁷⁰ Nietzsche does not clearly offer an argument for the claim that power can only be felt when it encounters resistance. It seems, instead, to be based on an intuition which can be gleaned through the following image: if one pushes against some immobile structure, one feels the muscular contractions that result from an expenditure of muscular power. By contrast, if one pushes their arms out in front of themselves, in the absence of some resisting force, one does not feel one’s own power as one’s limbs move through the air unobstructed.

The fact that Nietzsche maintains that power can only be felt where it encounters resistance can also be derived from “the strong paradox of will to power.”⁷¹ This is Nietzsche’s claim that the will to power is often not the individual’s path to “happiness” but rather “in most cases, actually, his path to misery.”⁷² If the feeling of power includes, in an essential way, the feeling of resistance, then this explains why a will to power leads to a certain form of suffering – i.e., either to the form of suffering that corresponds to a

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §702, 373

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §656, 346

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §656, 346

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13, 26

⁷⁰ Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*, 107

⁷¹ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 138

⁷² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76. And see also WP §696 & §702.

contest or an encounter with resistance (strife), or, to the form of suffering that corresponds to an absence of resistance (boredom). This is because, if the feeling of power involves resistance, then to surmount a resistance will eventually be to move beyond and possibly even lose the feeling of power, since to surmount a resistance is, at least temporarily, to no longer have a resistance to surmount. Or, as Reginster puts this, “the will to power is not a will to the *state in which resistance has been overcome*.” Rather, the will to power is “a will to the very *activity of overcoming resistance*.”⁷³

Interestingly, and I think correctly, Reginster goes on to argue that Nietzsche does not oppose the doctrine of the will to power to that of hedonism but only intends to provide a correction to hedonism by offering a more accurate definition of pleasure. Specifically, for Reginster, Nietzsche is ultimately a hedonist who understands pleasure as encapsulating displeasure and for whom traditional hedonism has misunderstood this aspect of pleasure. On this reading, Nietzsche understands pleasure to include resistance and the struggle to overcome obstacles, while traditional hedonism takes pleasure as the absence of resistance and struggle. For Nietzsche, a state of pleasure can never be a state that offers zero resistance. On this reading, it would be more accurate to say that the will to power provides a better explanation of phenomena such as cruelty and asceticism than does traditional hedonism, which misunderstands the nature of pleasure. There is evidence for this in Nietzsche’s notebooks. In one note, Nietzsche writes that “all pleasure includes pain.”⁷⁴ And, in another: ““Pleasure” – as a feeling of power (presupposing displeasure).”⁷⁵

⁷³ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 126-127

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §658, 347

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §657, 347

At the most basic level, resistance refers to the moment of encounter between opposing or incompatible forces. From the perspective of any given force, resistance is a second, distinct force which works to frustrate the movement or expression of the first force. The feeling of overcoming is experienced by an individual when they persist in performing some movement, i.e., expressing some drive, despite facing such resistance.⁷⁶ This understanding of resistance and overcoming presupposes certain desires on the part of the agent who strives to overcome some resistance. In any given case, an individual has some aim they wish to effect, and this wish is the manifest expression of a drive. The individual encounters some obstacle to accomplishing that aim, which they strive to accomplish nonetheless. A resistance is both an obstacle to the expression of a drive and simultaneously the condition for this expression since the drive needs something to push against or discharge itself upon.

In the example we considered above, a drive to express anger or aggression faces resistance from other drives to patience or self-control and the first drive overcomes these others in its demand for expression. Even if an individual fails to overcome some resistance successfully, they will have sensed their power in striving to overcome that resistance, and they will have overcome some partial aspect of that resistance up to the point of failure. For this reason, I think that Reginster goes too far when he claims that “power is what we experience in the successful overcoming of resistance.”⁷⁷ A successful overcoming is only one – albeit, likely the most effective – manner of feeling power. It is also possible to sense one’s own power in failing to overcome a resistance, so long as we strive to overcome it.

⁷⁶ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “Overcome,” 246-248

⁷⁷ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 126

On this basis, Nietzsche theorizes that individuals seek out enemies because an enemy is a resistance and therefore represents an opportunity to overcome a resistance, thus fulfilling one's need to increase the feelings of power. As Reginster puts this, "if power lies in the overcoming of resistance, then the commitment to the value of power implies that we must actively seek resistance."⁷⁸ Nietzsche writes:

Actual 'love of your enemies' is also possible here and here alone... How much respect a noble man has for his enemies! – and a respect of that sort is a bridge to love.... For he insists on having his enemy to himself, as a mark of distinction, indeed he will tolerate as enemies none other than such as have nothing to be despised and a great deal to be honoured!⁷⁹

Nietzsche claims that the noble character type will not only seek out enemies but the most honourable, or, powerful of enemies. In Zarathustra's words:

I love the valiant, but it is not enough to be a fierce combatant – one must also know whom to combat!
And often there is more valiance in someone controlling himself and passing by, so that he saves himself for the worthier enemy!...
you must be proud of your enemy...
For the worthier enemy, my friends, you should save yourselves, and therefore you must pass by much.⁸⁰

In other words, for Nietzsche, noble character-types will seek out those enemies that are most difficult to overcome, or the enemies that provide the greatest resistance.⁸¹ This is because an individual's feeling of power will grow proportionally with the strength of the opponents with which they engage. In Reginster's words, "the worthier the enemy, the greater – or... "nobler" – the achievement of vanquishing him."⁸² This is to say that

⁷⁸ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 183

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 20-22. And see Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, "On War and Warriors," 33: "You should be the kind of men whose eyes always seek an enemy."

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III, "On Old and New Tablets", §21, 168

⁸¹ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 183-184: "we must choose the sort of resistance that offers the greatest challenge, or, as Zarathustra urges his disciples, you must seek worthy enemies."

⁸² Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 184

powerful individuals can only achieve their greatest levels of power by further overcoming the most powerful – and increasingly powerful – resistances that they can find.

Thus, the will to power demands that life in the experiential sense must necessarily include agonistic dynamism. In other words, the will to power grounds the perpetual renewal of agonistic dynamism, which is therefore ineffaceable from the human condition and the human experience of life. This is because of the relationship between the living thing and the experience of being alive. It is clear that the nature of a living thing will effect that thing's experience of being alive. Specifically, for Nietzsche, the experience of life necessarily includes agonism because the living thing wills power and the will to power demands resistance and contest in order to satisfy itself. If will to power can only manifest itself against resistances, and the basic life-instinct is the will to the increased sensation of power, then Nietzsche claims that all living beings, in their most basic life-instincts, seek out confrontation, contest, and agonism – they seek out resistance which they can strive to overcome, in order to garner an increased sensation of power. If the will to power is the will to the “*activity of overcoming resistance*,”⁸³ then it is also the will to possess a will, the will to will, and it is the will to engage in the continual activity of striving to satisfy this will. If the will to power is the basic life-instinct of all living things, then the will to power grounds the perpetual renewal of agonistic dynamism in life.

When Nietzsche speaks of the “philosophers’ idiosyncrasies,” he says that “they *kill*” the “things they worship” by mummifying and dehistoricizing them, i.e., by separating them from their processes of becoming, or, by attempting to think them without these

⁸³ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 126-127

processes.⁸⁴ Here, Nietzsche clearly aligns life and the living with movement and becoming, while death is aligned with immobility and the unchanging, revealing a connection between life in general and in particular. The living being strives to change the world around it and is surrounded by other living beings who will the same. Thus, to be alive and to be surrounded by life is also to be surrounded by movement and becoming since they are the effects of this continual will to change. Likewise, to cease to participate in this process of effectuating movement and becoming is to cease to express the very will that is representative of life, i.e., the inner principle of external change.

3.6 Character Types

I come now to a transition in topic. The idea of the will to power presents an apparent paradox. On the one hand, Nietzsche says that all living organisms strive to optimize their sensation of power. On the other hand, he says that a great number of people come to prefer what is harmful to them, or what weakens them. How can this be explained? How can a being who strives to optimize its feeling of power actually come to prefer what weakens it? Nietzsche's answer is rooted in the notion of self-deception: a being who prefers what weakens it has deceived itself or been deceived into feeling this weakening as if it were a strengthening. This reveals a special class of will to power, i.e., the deceptive will to power, or more precisely, the will to deceptive power. Nietzsche holds that an organism will come to prefer that which weakens itself when this is the only remaining mechanism that allows this organism to increase its own feeling of power, and thereby, to at least garner some

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Reason in Philosophy," §1, 167

measure of fulfillment for its own will to power. This presupposes a distinction between *power* and *the feeling of power*.

Nietzsche distinguishes between the noble character-type and the character of *ressentiment*. One way to conceptualize this distinction is to understand the noble types as those who, by whatever means, are able to satisfy their own will, while the character of *ressentiment* tends to be unable to satisfy its will. The idea of an individual's singular will is a shorthand which refers to the complex of multiple drives and wills that belong to any one individual, and specifically, to what among this multiplicity happens to be dominant at any given time. Satisfaction of the will refers to the appropriation of an external element, either in the form of incorporation or reorganization. Nietzsche's claim is that the powerful are able to surmount the resistances that must be overcome in order to fulfill their desires, while the powerless are unable to do so, and he thinks that very few individuals actually have the power to consistently overcome such ongoing resistances. Thus, Nietzsche describes a basic state in which the majority of individuals exist in a perpetual state of frustration whereby they are unable to satisfy their wills and desires. Nietzsche argues that these individuals feel *ressentiment* towards the basic conditions of life, i.e., agonistic dynamics, because these conditions leave them unable to properly satisfy their will to power: *ressentiment* belongs to "an unfulfilled instinct and power-will that wants to be master, not over something in life, but over life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions."⁸⁵ And moreover, he claims, these same individuals feel *ressentiment* towards those who are best able to flourish under the conditions of agonistic dynamism:

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 86

*“the green eye of spite turns on physiological growth itself, in particular the manifestation of this in beauty and joy.”*⁸⁶

Nietzsche also isolates a sub-species of will to power as it is expressed by the character of *ressentiment*. This is not a second, distinct kind of will to power, but rather a particular development, branch, or class of the general category of will to power, as a species is a particular class of a genus, and, for Nietzsche, this is indeed a pathological class of will to power. Thus, the basic distinction here is between a healthy and noble will to power on the one hand, and a *decadent* or *corrupt* will to power on the other. What distinguishes the will to power of *ressentiment* is its mode of satisfaction. All living animals desire a maximized sensation of power. In its healthy form, an individual satisfies their own will to power through the activity of striving to overcome obstacles and resistances, and this striving serves to increase the individual's power as capacity for effectivity. By contrast, for Nietzsche, the character of *ressentiment* can satisfy their will to power even while avoiding genuine obstacles and resistances by, for instance, belittling the efforts and victories of the powerful. And in so doing, he continues, they can satisfy their will to increase their sensation of power without actually increasing their level of power as capacity for effectivity.

3.7 Effective and Affective Power

How can an individual satisfy their will to power without actually increasing their level of power? This can be explained by returning to a basic question: what exactly is the aim of

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 86, my emphasis

the will to power? The answer is more complex than power alone; Nietzsche includes the notions of feeling, sensation, affect, and experience in his definition of the will to power. The will to power is the will to *Machtgefühl*, to the feeling or experience of power, and to the increase or optimization of this feeling. Ivan Soll offers a brief but useful history of Nietzsche's development on this point:

When Nietzsche became engaged in developing a theory in which power was posited as the ultimate motivation of all behavior, the ultimate satisfaction of all desire, and consequently the source of all value, he initially argued simply that what we really want is power rather than pleasure and the avoidance of pain, without specifying whether it is the state of being powerful or the experience of our own power that we want. As he continued to develop his thesis, however, he became aware of this distinction, which he had initially ignored, and chose to refine his thesis by opting for the experiential variant. What we want, he claims, is power, but more precisely, the experience of power.⁸⁷

Several passages reveal that the will to power aims at the feeling of expanding power. At BGE §230, e.g., Nietzsche writes that “the basic will of the spirit... wants to be master in and around its own house and wants to feel it is master.”⁸⁸ And, he continues, “in a word,” the “intent” of this basic will is “growth... or, more precisely, the feeling of growth, the feeling of increased power.”⁸⁹ As Soll notes, “Nietzsche introduces two refinements here: the will to power is more precisely the will to (1) the feeling or experience of power and to (2) the experience of the growth rather than just the maintenance of one's power.”⁹⁰

None of this would be particularly consequential if power were identical to the feeling of power, or, if one's feeling of power always accurately represented one's level of power. However, it is clear that Nietzsche does not take power and the feeling of power to

⁸⁷ Soll, “Nietzsche's Will to Power as a Psychological Thesis,” 124

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §230, 121

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §230, 121

⁹⁰ Soll, “Nietzsche's Will to Power as a Psychological Thesis,” 124

be identical, and he claims that the feeling of power does not always accurately reflect power itself. For instance, in an 1888 note, he writes: “the experience of intoxication proved misleading. This increases the feeling of power in the highest degree – therefore, naively judged, power itself.”⁹¹ Here, he states clearly that there is a distinction between power and the feeling of power, and that it is naïve to assume that the two are identical. In another note, Nietzsche lists various “delusions” that make one “feel stronger” by providing “artificial strengthening.” For example, Nietzsche includes on this list “the feeling of security such as a Christian possesses; he feels strong in being able to trust, to be patient and composed: he owes this artificial strength to the illusion of being protected by a god.”⁹² Here again, one *feels* stronger, but this feeling does not necessarily correspond to an actual increase in strength, though it sometimes can as we’ll discuss momentarily. In broad strokes, Nietzsche cannot hold that strength and the feeling of strength are always identical.

Furthermore, the will to power really only functions as an explanatory hypothesis if power and the feeling of power are distinct, lending further weight to the claim that Nietzsche cannot see them as identical. This is because many of the actions and behaviors that Nietzsche attributes to an underlying will to power do not and could not reasonably be said to increase an individual’s power. These actions and behaviors do, however, increase the individual’s *feeling* of power. Asceticism, or at least Nietzsche’s account of it, is a clear example. He holds that individuals adopt ascetic ideals in order to increase their sensation of power, and yet he claims that “the ascetic priest,” by imposing ascetic ideals, “has ruined

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §48, 31

⁹² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §917, 485

spiritual health wherever he has come to rule.”⁹³ I suspect that this is why Clark holds that the will to power is not a plausible hypothesis, i.e., because people often seem to act in ways that could not reasonably be construed as intended to increase their power.⁹⁴ However, if the will to power aims at a feeling of power as distinct from power itself, this broadens the range of behavior for which the will to power can plausibly account, making the will to power a more plausible hypothesis. On this basis, I will call an individual’s actual or real level of power their *effective power*. I will call an individual’s experiential feeling of power their *affective power*.

Some commentators highlight this distinction between power and the feeling of power. Janaway correctly notes that, for Nietzsche, “will to power may result in the achievement of actual *power*, or only in the gratifying *feeling* of power.”⁹⁵ And Richardson adds to this that Nietzsche must be in some sense a “realist” about power,⁹⁶ i.e., since individuals have real levels of power which they can misinterpret or misrepresent, or about which they can be mistaken. If Nietzsche holds that individuals can be wrong about their levels of power, then he must also hold that there *is* such a real level of power for them to be wrong about. Huddleston, too, notices the same point. He claims that while Nietzsche does think that individuals will the feeling of power, contra certain interpreters, “it is important not to conflate power with the feeling of power. ... One can have the feeling of

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §22, 107

⁹⁴ Clark writes: “Nietzsche’s doctrine of will to power may be construed as an empirical hypothesis that all human behavior is motivated by a desire for power ... only at the cost of depriving it of all plausibility, which would mean that Nietzsche was less astute about psychological matters than many (including Freud) have thought. ... I resist, however, the idea that Nietzsche believed that all behavior is motivated by the desire for power because I do not see any way in which this could be a plausible or interesting hypothesis about human behavior.” (Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 211-212)

⁹⁵ Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, 145

⁹⁶ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 32

power without having power, and have power without the feeling of power.”⁹⁷ Huddleston then goes on to claim that, for Nietzsche, “the *will* to power is not a will *to a feeling only*.”⁹⁸ What I think Huddleston misses in this last claim is that power can be willed in different ways and, for Nietzsche, as I will show momentarily, an unhealthy expression of will to power precisely is a will to the feeling of power only.

Nietzsche seems to hold that, in a healthy organism, effective and affective power overlap or correspond to one another, or, affective power accurately reflects effective power. In other words, in a healthy body, affective power is nothing more than the experiential sensation or feeling of one’s own effective power, and whatever increases one’s feeling of power also increases one’s effective power. Both healthy and unhealthy individuals desire an increase in affective power. In a healthy individual, such an increase will also reflect an increase in effective power, while in an unhealthy individual there is no such reflection or correspondence. To employ one’s effective power towards the end of overcoming some resistance in the pursuit of some aim will translate into the experience of affective power, and even into the experience of the growth of affective power – even in cases where one fails in the act of overcoming. Hence, affective power need not necessarily be understood as false; it is sometimes the accurate feeling of effective power. However, affective power can also be the illusion of power. In an unhealthy or corrupt organism, effective and affective power no longer overlap or correspond to one another, or affective power does not accurately reflect effective power. In this case, what increases one’s feeling

⁹⁷ Huddleston, “Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul,” 7. Huddleston cites Ivan Soll and Reginster as interpreters who conflate power with the feeling of power.

⁹⁸ Huddleston, “Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul,” 7

of power does *not* increase one's effective power. On this basis, I will distinguish between *genuine* affective power on the one hand, and *false* affective power on the other. An individual's affective power is genuine where it reflects their level of effective power; an individual's affective power is false where it misrepresents their level of effective power. This distinction broadens even further the range of behavior for which the will to power can plausibly account, further addressing Clark's concerns.

3.8 *Ressentiment* and the False Feeling of Power

How is this kind of deception possible? How can an individual experience an increased feeling of power while their genuine capacity for effectivity remains static or is even decreased? Nietzsche accounts for this with a complex theory of self-deception. He argues that, although the character of *ressentiment* is unable to properly satisfy their will to power in the noble manner, i.e., by way of overcoming resistances, they do have some remaining techniques with which to accrue for themselves an increase in their sensation of power. I'll now enumerate some of these techniques.

3.8.1 First Technique: The Illusion of Self-Control

The first such technique involves constructing an imaginary sensation of overcoming a powerful resistance wherein the resistance that is said to be overcome is not an external imposing force, but rather, the pressure felt from one's own internal, base, and animalistic urges. For example, Nietzsche considers "the power to requite"⁹⁹ or the ability

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §45, 36-37

to repay “good with good” and “evil with evil”¹⁰⁰ to be a prerogative of the powerful. Thus, by way of contrast, he also speaks of the “inability to revenge” that characterizes the powerless. Here, an individual feels the impetus for a movement in the form of the urge to retaliate, and this movement meets a resistance, or the will is frustrated, e.g., by the superior power of the one against whom revenge is sought. For Nietzsche, the character of *ressentiment* responds to this situation by claiming that it is not that they are unable to retaliate, but rather it is that they freely choose to not retaliate. And they say that they choose this, Nietzsche continues, because inoffensiveness, patience, and a willingness to forgive are virtuous attitudes. Nietzsche writes: “the inoffensiveness of the weak man, even the cowardice... [are called] ‘patience,’ and are even called virtue itself; his inability to revenge is called unwillingness to revenge, perhaps even forgiveness.”¹⁰¹ For Nietzsche, according to the resentful type’s interpretation, their own desire to revenge is *not* frustrated by an external superior power – while, of course, for Nietzsche it really is. These characters of *ressentiment*, Nietzsche continues, admit the existence of this desire to revenge in themselves, but they denigrate its value, and they say that it is they themselves who willfully *choose* to frustrate or even crush this desire in themselves. Thus, they continue, the discomfort and resistance that they do genuinely feel is not brought on by some external obstacle or imposition. Rather, they claim, it is the discomfort and resistance encountered in the process of their own self-control or self-mastery whereby an individual is able to control and resist a basic urge. They claim that they successfully manage not to act on a basic instinct, or, not to express this urge to retaliate, “as though the weakness of the weak

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §45, 36-37

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §14, 28

were itself – I mean its essence, its effect, its whole unique, unavoidable, irredeemable reality – a voluntary achievement, something wanted, chosen, a deed, an accomplishment.”¹⁰² With a supposed or so-called show of strength, they claim, they manage to repress this powerful urge, and the resistance they feel in so doing is precisely this underlying basic urge striving to express itself against their repression. Thus, on the basis of this reinterpretation, these individuals are able to experience the feeling of overcoming a resistance, i.e., the feeling of overcoming their own urges. On their interpretation, they no longer suffer as a result of a frustrated will; they suffer as a result of the struggle for self-control, the struggle to resist their natural, animalistic inclinations, or, the struggle for virtue.

Nietzsche claims that, by virtue of this reinterpretation of suffering, the character of *ressentiment* manages to garner a sensation of power. Affective power requires resistance, and, on this reinterpretation, the resistance or obstacle encountered is one’s own underlying basic urge for revenge. This presupposes a split between an animalistic part of the individual that desires revenge, and the true, free, and intellectual subject who experiences this part of itself as an unfortunate obstacle or resistance to be overcome. Nietzsche writes:

This type of man needs to believe in an unbiased ‘subject’ with freedom of choice,... The reason the subject (or, as we more colloquially say, the soul) has been, until now, the best doctrine on earth, is perhaps because it facilitated that sublime self-deception whereby the majority of the dying, the weak and the oppressed of every kind could construe weakness itself as freedom, and their particular mode of existence as an accomplishment.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13, 27

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13, 27

What is growing, on this reinterpretation, is this free subject's virtue and patience and, in particular, its capacity for self-control, or, its capacity to repress its basic underlying and unfortunate urges. Thus, there is a difference between worldly strength on the one hand, which corresponds to the capacity to express one's drives, and spiritual strength on the other, which corresponds to the ability to repress or sublimate one's base urges, or, to freedom from the animalistic instincts. For Nietzsche, at times, this spiritual strength can be genuinely enhancing, as I'll discuss below.

To generalize from this example, Nietzsche is saying that where a *resentful* individual comes up against some resistance to their will or to the fulfillment of their desire, as a general rule they do not successfully overcome this resistance or fulfill their desire in spite of this resistance. Instead, he argues, this type creates various psychological and interpretive mechanisms with which to reinterpret their powerlessness, weaknesses, inabilities, and failures as free choices and successful achievements. They reinterpret or revalue their situation by creating a new set of standards against which to measure the value of phenomena. Thus, another way to distinguish between the noble type and the character of *ressentiment* is that they each evaluate phenomena according to a unique set of value standards: the former evaluates on the basis of an egoistic good in the sense established in Chapter Two, while the latter evaluates on the basis of an altruistic good. Now, the character of *ressentiment* claims that what they actually desire is not to achieve the object of their original desire. By placing value on something else, they recast their failure or inability to fulfill their first desire as the successful fulfillment of a different desire, namely, the desire to crush their animalistic impulses. As such, Nietzsche argues, this type of person responds to powerful resistances not by overcoming these resistances and thereby increasing their

effective power, but rather, by avoiding these resistances and finding alternative ways to increase their feelings of power, thereby providing some measure of fulfillment or satisfaction for their will to power. This increased *sensation* of power does not necessarily correspond to an increase in power as capacity for effectivity. This is because the weaker type avoids engaging with the powerful obstacle that actually resists them, while Nietzsche holds that it is this engagement which would have afforded them the opportunity to increase their effective power. Instead, they engage with a weaker and imaginary obstacle, thereby satisfying only their need for affective power.

As I've said, this increased capacity for self-control can represent a genuine increase of effective power. It is not easy to repress an urge demanding expression. However, Nietzsche thinks that when we employ our conscious rationality to repress various other instincts deemed bodily and animalistic, we are strengthening what is weakest in us, and weakening what is strongest in us. For Nietzsche, there is wisdom in the body in that our instincts have evolved as successful and flourishing developments of will to power.¹⁰⁴ He understands the instincts as a "familiar guide" used to navigate our world and as a set of "regulating impulses" that "unconsciously" lead us to "safety."¹⁰⁵ What is animalistic in us are the remnants of expressions of a deeply successful species, i.e., a species that has survived and flourished over thousands of years, under the conditions of agonistic dynamism, despite our bodily fragility and our protracted period of absolutely helpless infancy. It is when we repress these life-serving and animalistic instincts, Nietzsche claims,

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, "On the Despisers of the Body," pp. 22-24; Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, "Zarathustra's Prologue," §3, pp. 5-7

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 57

that humanity as a species becomes sickly: “comparatively speaking, humans are the biggest failures, the sickliest animals who have strayed the most dangerously far from their instincts.”¹⁰⁶ From this it follows, Nietzsche claims, that strengthening the instinct of conscious rationality, at the expense of our other instincts, results in an overall decrease of strength. Consciousness and reason can still be of great value, Nietzsche holds, but only where they are harmonized with the wisdom of the body. Consciousness is harmful when it operates *in place of* the other instincts, instead of *in concert with them*.

3.8.2 Second Technique: Exploitation of the Pathos of Distance

A second technique by which an individual can increase affective power independently of effective power involves the exploitation of a phenomenon that Nietzsche calls the pathos of distance. As discussed in the previous chapter, Nietzsche observes that different peoples create and revere different values. Nietzsche holds that noble types create their values spontaneously, from out of themselves, as an expression of egoism or self-affirmation. This, he claims, is in direct contrast to those characters of *ressentiment* who create their values in reaction to the noble types, i.e., by first defining the nobles as evil, and only then defining themselves as good in contrast to this evil. However, if Nietzsche claims that the nobles do not create their values out of a reaction to others, he does think that the nobles’ vantage over the weak or powerless serves them in constructing and affirming these values. Nietzsche writes:

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §14, 12

The pathos of nobility and distance, ... the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to those 'below' – that is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad.'¹⁰⁷

Nietzsche claims that the powerful and “the well-born” already “felt they were ‘the happy’”¹⁰⁸ and the good; they do not need to, as Nietzsche puts this, *lie themselves into it*.¹⁰⁹ However, their vision of a contrasting image of a weak or powerless character type serves to affirm these feelings and to encourage the powerful to continue living as they are, creating values without regard for what is beneath them. I’ve said above that Nietzsche claims that power can only be felt when it encounters some resistance or obstacle. However, what Nietzsche seems to suggest here is that there is a second way to feel power besides by virtue of encountering resistance, namely, through an encounter with a contrasting or differential power level. The nobles also become aware of their power when they encounter weakness and feel or see that they are stronger than those they perceive.

As with the overcoming of resistance, Nietzsche thinks that the character of *ressentiment* can construct an imaginary instance of this pathos of difference. They construct a contrasting image of weakness against which to understand themselves as the powerful and the good. An example of this was apparent in the contrast between worldly and spiritual strength. If spiritual strength corresponds to the ability to repress or sublimate one’s base urges, i.e., to freedom from the animalistic instincts, the resentful character-type can understand itself as spiritually superior to some other. They are able to claim, “you may be stronger in body, but I am stronger in spirit.”

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §2, 12

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 21

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 21

Another example appears in Nietzsche's interpretation of the Christian call to love thy neighbor. Nietzsche says that this call exploits the feeling of difference between multiple power capacities. He describes this call as "the prescription of a small pleasure" intended as a "means of fighting depression."¹¹⁰ Nietzsche writes:

The most frequent form in which a pleasure of this type is prescribed as a cure is the pleasure of giving pleasure (as doing good, giving gifts, bringing relief, helping, encouraging, comforting, praising, honouring); the ascetic priest thereby prescribes, when he prescribes 'love thy neighbour', what is actually the arousal of the strongest, most life-affirming impulse, albeit in the most cautious dose, – the will to power. The happiness of even the 'smallest superiority' such as that which accompanies all doing good, being useful, helping, honouring, is the most ample consolation used by the physiologically inhibited, provided they are well advised: otherwise they hurt one another, naturally in obedience to the same fundamental instinct.¹¹¹

Here, Nietzsche claims that, in small acts such as giving gifts or offering help, the one who gives pleasure is rewarded with a small dosage of an assertion of superiority, and correspondingly, the pleasure of feeling superior.¹¹² In this sense, the gift-giver constructs for themselves a sensation of the pathos of distance by virtue of asserting their supposed superiority over the one to whom they give pleasure. They do so by showing this other that *I have the power to do this for you*. Nietzsche even states explicitly that, in prescribing this small pleasure, what the priest really prescribes is "the will to power," – "albeit in the most cautious dose."¹¹³ This is why, says Nietzsche, we always find associations of support for the sick or the poor, among "the lowest level of that society, where the chief means to counter depression, that of the small pleasure, of mutual do-gooding, was deliberately

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §18, 100

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §18, 100

¹¹² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §13, 38: "On the doctrine of the feeling of power": "benefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power over them – that is all one wants in such cases!"

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §18, 100

nurtured,”¹¹⁴ since those providing the support receive their own kind of support from this arrangement.

3.8.3 Third Technique: Imaginary Revenge

The third technique Nietzsche considers is the character of *ressentiment*'s taking revenge upon the powerful by diminishing their power – even if this revenge is only in the imagination of the character of *ressentiment*. In his most dramatic example, Nietzsche writes: “These weaklings – in fact they, too, want to be the powerful one day, this is beyond doubt, one day their ‘kingdom’ will come too – ‘the kingdom of God’ *simpliciter* is their name for it.”¹¹⁵ Then, Nietzsche describes what he takes to be the nature of this kingdom and he wants to offer an account of the motivations of the sort of character type who would take this kingdom as their aim, or more precisely, as their “eternal recompense” for having lived this life. Nietzsche asks, what is this kingdom of God like, or, “what is the bliss of this paradise?”¹¹⁶ And, to answer this question, he draws on two authorities “in such matters.” First, he quotes Saint Thomas Aquinas who claims that “the blessed in the heavenly kingdom will see the torment of the damned *so that they may even more thoroughly enjoy their blessedness*.”¹¹⁷ And following this, Nietzsche quotes Tertullian:

that final and everlasting day of judgement, that day that was not expected and was even laughed at by the nations, when the whole old world and all it gave birth to are consumed in one fire. What an ample breadth of sights there will be then! At which one shall I gaze in wonder? At which shall I laugh? At which rejoice? At which

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §18, 100

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §15, 29

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §15, 29

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §15, 29. Nietzsche quotes the Latin text. The English translation and emphasis are given by Raymond Geuss. The attribution, also from Geuss, is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Supplement* to the *Third Part*, question XCVII, article i, ‘conclusio.’ Geuss notes that some modern editions do not contain this ‘conclusio.’

exult, when I see so many great kings who were proclaimed to have been taken up into heaven, groaning in the deepest darkness together with those who claimed to have witnessed their apotheosis and with Jove himself. And when I see those [provincial] governors, persecutors of the Lord's name, melting in flames more savage than those with which they insolently raged against Christians!¹¹⁸

In both cases, what Nietzsche emphasizes is that the kingdom of God includes a vision of the eternal suffering of those who had possessed worldly or earthly power. And on this basis, Nietzsche proposes that we ought to invert the motivation said to provide the impetus for the creation of the afterlife. He writes:

It seems to me that Dante made a gross error when, with awe-inspiring naïvety he placed the inscription over the gateway to his hell: 'Eternal love created me as well': – at any rate, this inscription would have a better claim to stand over the gateway to Christian Paradise and its 'eternal bliss': 'Eternal *hate* created me as well' –¹¹⁹

The impetus for the creation of such an afterlife, Nietzsche claims, is hatred of the victorious. This is "the *ressentiment* of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge."¹²⁰

For Nietzsche, all three techniques operate together in this hope for "eternal recompense" in "the Kingdom of God." It is most clear that the pathos of distance is in operation here, since both examples – i.e., Aquinas' and Tertullian's – include an image of the one character-type looking down upon the other, from the kingdom of God, into hell. Second, each image presupposes that the character of *ressentiment* is superior in virtue to the noble type; they have freely achieved for themselves a virtuous self-control over their evil, animalistic instincts, to which the nobles remain enslaved. This is presupposed by each

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §15, 30-31. Again, Nietzsche quotes the Latin and the English translation is given by Geuss. Nietzsche's attribution is *De Spectaculis*. Chs. 29ff.

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §15, 29

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 20

image precisely because this virtuous self-control is the prerequisite for entrance to the kingdom of God. And third, each example clearly provides an image of a weaker character-type – weaker in a worldly sense, as in, less capable of effectivity in this world – taking an imaginary form of revenge upon a more powerful character-type.

All of this presupposes another feature of power which I will call its *linear circularity* – a quality which, not incidentally, is also to be ascribed to health. Power is circular because it is its own condition, but this circularity is linear because it does not constitute a logical or chronological contradiction or impossibility. Power's linear circularity consists in this: the act of acquiring energy itself demands an expenditure of energy. Consider, by way of analogy, a training athlete. Where their exercises are intended to increase their strength, so too do those exercises demand a certain expenditure of strength. In this way, strength acts as its own condition; a baseline of available strength is the condition to further increase one's strength. Likewise, if some activity, e.g., going for a hike, is healthy, this activity also presupposes a certain level of health, i.e., one must be in adequate shape to actually go on the hike. But this activity, or any healthy activity of this sort or in general, is also the condition to increase the health of the one who performs it. Thus, health acts as its own condition. And indeed, at GM I §7, Nietzsche acknowledges this circularity when he links a "powerful physicality" to "good health that includes the things needed to maintain it."¹²¹ This allows us to distinguish between the strength and the intensity of one's will to power. The intensity of one's will to power is the depth, the desperation even, with which one wants power. The strength of one's will to power is the

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §7, 17

amount of force or energy that one expends in expanding one's power. An individual with an intense but weak will to power may satisfy this will with self-deceptive techniques that do not require them to expend much energy in overcoming resistances.

3.9 The Power of the “Weak”

Finally, to be clear, the character of *ressentiment* does at times express some effective power over itself and others and can even represent a certain genuine growth of effective power. For instance, the increased capacity for self-control discussed in the first technique represents a clear case of internal reorganization, and reorganization is always itself an expression of power, and sometimes even a condition for greater expressions of power. Likewise, Nietzsche argues that it is a class of resentful character-types who successfully compel the Roman nobility to adopt altruistic value standards. Indeed, if the character of *ressentiment* does express and even increase its effective power, this comes to its greatest point of clarity when Nietzsche writes the following:

The symbol of this fight, [between nobility and *ressentiment*,] written in a script which has hitherto remained legible throughout human history, is ‘Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome’... the Romans were the strong and noble, stronger and nobler than anybody hitherto who had lived or been dreamt of on earth;... By contrast, the Jews were a priestly nation of *ressentiment* par excellence, possessing an unparalleled genius for popular morality... Which of them has prevailed for the time being, Rome or Judea? But there is no trace of doubt: just consider to whom you bow down in Rome itself, today, as though to the embodiment of the highest values – and not just in Rome, but over nearly half the earth, everywhere where man has become tame or wants to become tame... This is very remarkable: without a doubt Rome has been defeated.¹²²

¹²² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §16, 32-33. And see also Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §8, 18-19.

Judea, Nietzsche never tires of reminding us, has “triumphed” over Rome.¹²³ If Judea is Nietzsche’s image of *ressentiment*, then it is clear that the character of *ressentiment* has increased its effective power over another. When Nietzsche says that Judea has conquered Rome, he has a very specific meaning in mind. He is referring to the shift in value standards discussed in the previous chapter, i.e., in the ascension of Judeo-Christian values over aristocratic values in Rome,¹²⁴ wherein general value standards shift from revering an egoistic notion of the good to revering an altruistic notion of the good. What the revolt in morality rejects is the definition of the good as egoism; its revolutionary act is to redefine the good as altruism. When Nietzsche says that Judea has conquered Rome, he means that the Judeo-Christian “slave revolt” has successfully compelled the Roman nobility to adopt a new set of altruistic value standards. Hence, the characters of *ressentiment*, as a collective, do express effective power inasmuch as they effectuate a change in the evaluative systems of the noble character types.

One group’s compelling another to adopt a novel evaluative standard is distinctly an expression of effective power. However, Nietzsche claims, what is essential in such cases is that “an attempt is made to use power to block the sources of power.”¹²⁵ In the same way that one must expend energy in order to acquire energy and increase one’s power, energy can be expended to the end of preventing the further accrual of energies and expansion of power, either in one’s self or in someone else. These are expressions of power which themselves serve to repress further expressions of power. In some cases of self-

¹²³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §8, 19

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §16, 32-33

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 89

control or spiritual power, this expression of power serves to repress further potential powers in one's own self, i.e., in one's own body. In the case of the slave revolt in morality, this expression of power serves to repress further expressions of power from external sources, i.e., from the powerful. The great danger, Nietzsche thinks, is that by imposing their new evaluative system that reveres weakness over strength, the weak repress future expressions of power by the nobles. In each case, a localized form of increase belongs to or is an element of a more general trajectory of decrease or decline in effective power.

3.10 Conclusion

Power is the capacity for form-creation; it is the ability to impose purpose upon something, and to defend against such impositions. For Nietzsche, living things are defined by their will to power, understood as a will to the sensation that power is growing. Power increases through encountering and overcoming resistances and obstacles, and such overcomings themselves demand an expenditure of energy. Those who do not have the power to overcome such obstacles have further recourse to self-deceptive techniques with which to satisfy their will to power; these include the overvaluation of self-control, the exploitation of the pathos of distance, and imaginary revenge, all of which presuppose the slave revolt in morality. Such techniques largely procure for individuals the feeling of power without genuinely increasing their effective power. Where these techniques do increase effective power, this is a localized expression which ultimately serves to decrease effective power from a more general perspective. As I'll demonstrate, meaningfulness, and the belief that life is meaningful, can be put to both sorts of end. Where meaning is understood as eternal and imposed upon life from outside of life, Nietzsche claims, it will serve to increase one's

feeling of power without increasing one's effective power, and it can serve to repress further expressions of power. In other words, it both stems from disempowerment, and it is further disempowering. By contrast, Nietzsche thinks, where meaning is properly understood to have its origin within life itself, in time, it can genuinely serve to increase one's effective power.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIFE AND SUFFERING

I've identified the necessary conditions of life in both its general and particular senses according to Nietzsche. Life in general refers to a field of interactive forces in which any force is always vulnerable to the effects of another force. On this field, living things express their power by inciting a change of purpose in other things, or by defending their own purpose against being changed by external forces. Thus, Nietzsche identifies what I think of as the two necessary conditions of finitude: first, all things are vulnerable to redetermination by external forces where redetermination refers to the imposition of a new meaning or purpose; second, all living things strive to optimize their sensation of power. These claims form two fundamental pillars of Nietzsche's thinking: to be alive, he claims, is necessarily to be subject to these conditions of finitude. For this reason, Nietzsche can be understood as a proto-existential thinker if existentialism's primary concern is the problem of human existence and its necessary conditions. If to live is to be subject to the conditions of finitude, Nietzsche's psychological-existential project is to diagnose how human beings respond to and cope with life under these conditions, or how they cope with becoming, impermanence, and temporality. As Hatab puts this, Nietzsche asks: "What is our existential and intellectual disposition toward natural life as we have it, toward a world ineluctably constituted by time, becoming, and limits?"¹ The will to meaning must be understood in the context of our being subject to these conditions.

¹ Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 2

Nietzsche thinks that we necessarily suffer because we are subject to the conditions of finitude, and it is in analyzing our rapport with suffering that he recognizes the human need to believe that our lives are meaningful. In brief, for Nietzsche, the common human response to suffering functions as the primary evidence from which he infers the existence of the will to meaning. The aim of this chapter is to explicate Nietzsche's claim that suffering is an ineluctable aspect of life before moving on, in the next chapter, to present Nietzsche's analysis of the common human response to suffering. To this end, this chapter will take the following form. First, I'll explicate Nietzsche's claim that suffering is a necessary aspect of life in the phenomenal sense. Since Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer in the structure of his argument here, I'll start by briefly summarizing Schopenhauer's own position. Following this, I will demonstrate that, for Nietzsche, suffering belongs necessarily to the experience of life because of the nature of the living thing, i.e., its will to power, and the conditions of agonistic dynamism to which it is subject. Our will to power, Nietzsche thinks, necessarily condemns us to suffering. This does not mean that all suffering is due to the will to power, but the will to power is the reason why we are condemned necessarily to suffer according to Nietzsche. Next, I will consider three further forms of suffering, namely chronophobia, disorientation, and despair. This sets the stage to demonstrate, in the next chapter, that a quest for meaning serves as a defense mechanism against these various forms of suffering.

A brief point of qualification for the discussion ahead: the claims that life necessarily involves suffering, and that pain and suffering are the "presuppositions" and

necessary conditions of life,² do *not* mean that *all* suffering is necessary, or that all forms of suffering produce or create life. As Acampora notes, there is a distinction between productive and non-productive forms of agonism: “productive agonism is one among many types of power relations” which “include a measure of what we might regard as violence.”³ The claim that suffering is a necessary condition for life amounts only to the claim that there is no life without pain and suffering; this does not mean that all forms of suffering are necessary, nor that all forms of suffering are conditions for life. It is unclear, however, not only how Nietzsche distinguishes between necessary and unnecessary suffering but also whether he recognizes this distinction at all,⁴ and I suspect that I break with Nietzsche on this point. For my part, I think that the small amount of suffering that is necessary for life can be determined by following a guiding thread offered by Arendt and her definition of labor, which amounts to energy expended toward subsistence.⁵ “By laboring,” Arendt writes, we “produce the vital necessities that must be fed into the life process of the human body.” Every European language, she writes, distinguishes between work and labor, and their various “equivalents for labor have an unequivocal connotation of bodily experiences, of toil and trouble, and in most cases they are significantly also used for the pangs of birth.” Beyond this, she continues, “the laboring activity never comes to an end as long as life lasts; it is endlessly repetitive. ... the end of its toil and trouble comes only with the end, i.e., the death of the individual organism.” And, because it produces the vital necessities of

² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients,” §4, 228

³ Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, 4. And see Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, 152.

⁴ Leiter actually claims that “Nietzsche, to be sure, does not distinguish between the genuinely existential causes of suffering (e.g., desire, physiological malady, bad conscience) and the contingent, social causes.” (Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 210)

⁵ Arendt, *Labor, Work, Action*, 32

the body, “labor, unlike all other human activities, stands under the sign of necessity, the “necessity of subsisting” as Locke used to say, or the “eternal necessity imposed by nature” in the words of Marx.” I think that if any suffering is genuinely *necessary for life*, it is the minimum amount of “toil and trouble” necessary to keep oneself and one’s dependents alive and to create life at all. But this life-preserving “labor” cannot exhaust the suffering that Nietzsche believes is necessary for life, since he understands life as that which must always overcome itself, and not that which subsists, which maintains itself or keeps itself alive.⁶ Or more precisely, to keep oneself alive for Nietzsche is to be continually engaged in the process of overcoming oneself. Thus, one of the first questions to address is this: just what kind of suffering does Nietzsche believe is an ineluctable aspect of the experience of being alive? In brief, regardless of the unavoidability of labor, Nietzsche thinks that the will to power necessarily condemns us to the struggle of continual overcoming.

4.1 Schopenhauer and the Necessity of Suffering

Nietzsche borrows the structure of Schopenhauer’s argument that suffering is a necessary aspect of living. For Schopenhauer, to live is to suffer because living is willing and all willing is suffering. His argument for this has four parts. First, for Schopenhauer, the experience of willing presupposes plurality or distinction between individuals since, in any act of the will, there is always an I who desires and something distinct about which I desire, e.g., something I covet, or something I want to change.⁷ If we are distinct from the objects around us, we can lack and desire those objects, or we can desire that those objects

⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §349

⁷ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 2, §20, 106

become otherwise than they are. Even if what I wish to change is an aspect of myself, there is an I who objectifies this aspect and desires its transformation.

Second, Schopenhauer thinks that all desire is rooted in lack and that all lack presupposes suffering: “All willing springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering.”⁸ He means that, if we desire something or wish for something to change, this is because we are unsatisfied with the present. In Young’s words, “suffering is a disjunction between subject and object, between the way I want the world to be and the way it is.”⁹ We judge that something is deficient, and we wish to fill in this deficiency. Further, awareness of privation presupposes suffering since we see ourselves as lacking only if we are suffering in a way that, we think, that which is lacking would alleviate. As Soll puts this, “while one is striving for something, one does not yet, by definition, have what one wants, and one experiences this lack of what one wants as a kind of suffering or pain.”¹⁰ Thus, for Schopenhauer, to will is to suffer since to lack presupposes suffering.

Third, a desire’s satisfaction only brings temporary relief since a new desire soon demands satisfaction. This is the “penal servitude of willing” or “the wheel of Ixion.”¹¹ Schopenhauer states:

Fulfillment brings this [suffering from deficiency] to an end; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied.... desiring lasts a long time, demands and requests go on to infinity; fulfillment is short and meted out sparingly. But even the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one;... No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given

⁸ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, 196

⁹ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 84

¹⁰ Soll, “Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life,” 111

¹¹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, 196

up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace.¹²

Schopenhauer claims that no satisfaction could ever suffice to satiate the individual will, or to quell its demands. This, he claims, is not because we have not yet found that which could satisfy the will, but is rather due to the structure of the will itself. Satisfaction always brings the possibility of further suffering, since the fulfillment of one desire frees the will to focus upon yet unfulfilled desires. Suffering is a necessary part of willing in that neither willing nor satisfaction can occur without inviting the possibility of further suffering. To will is to suffer because to will is to lack, and to be satisfied is to suffer because to be satisfied is to trigger a new desire, or at least, to open the space for a new desire's expression.

Finally, we know that living is necessarily willing because we have direct access to our own inner nature and the nature that we encounter there is will. For Schopenhauer, we never have access to the inner mechanism or motivating force animating the actions of our experiential objects: by observing objects in time and space, "we do not obtain the slightest information about the inner nature of any one of these phenomena."¹³ However, he claims, we do have this access when it comes to our own bodies and actions. As Janaway clarifies,

Schopenhauer means that when I act... my body moves; and my awareness of its movement is unlike my awareness of other events that I perceive. I am 'outside' other objects, or they are 'outside' me – but my own body is mine in a uniquely intimate way. This can be expressed by saying that other events are merely observed to happen, whereas movements of my body are expressions of my will.¹⁴

Schopenhauer's point is that we experience our own will as a practical, motivating force, while we experience most objects from a theoretical distance. And, while all other objects

¹² Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, 196

¹³ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, 97

¹⁴ Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 250

of experience are mediated through the forms of intuition, space and time, the immediate impression of our own will is not spatially or temporally mediated by the forms of experience. In other words, Schopenhauer claims, there is a non-representational form of intuition that bypasses the mediating forms of experience, namely, our intuition of our own will.¹⁵ This intuition, he thinks, provides direct access to the thing-in-itself, and what we encounter through this access is will.¹⁶

If space and time are the necessary conditions for plurality, this will-in-itself must necessarily be singular, since it is not mediated by the forms of space and time.¹⁷ Space and time are the necessary conditions for plurality according to Schopenhauer because distinct objects can only be individuated and differentiated under spatial-temporal conditions.¹⁸ As Janaway puts this, two objects can only be distinguished inasmuch as “they occupy distinct portions of space,” “time,” or “both,”¹⁹ and this is why “location in space and time” is “the principle on which the division of the world into individual things works.”²⁰ Hence, space and time actually are the *principium individuationis*;²¹ they are the conditions that make individuation possible and thus there can be no distinction nor plurality outside of space and time. Following Kant, Schopenhauer accepts that space and time cannot be given to experience because they are already the necessary forms of experience. If time and space

¹⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 2, §18, 100

¹⁶ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 2, §23. A useful summary of this position is given in Soll, “Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life,” 109-110.

¹⁷ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, v.1, 112. See Janaway 1997, 246; Soll 1988, 109-110.

¹⁸ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 2, §23, 113

¹⁹ Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 246

²⁰ Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 246

²¹ Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 2, §23, 113

are not given outside of experience, and they are the conditions for plurality, then plurality cannot exist outside of experience.²² Young helpfully summarizes as follows:

We know from Kant that the world of space-time is ideal, appearance merely, not reality 'in-itself.' And we know from Schopenhauer that plurality and individuality can only exist within space and time. It follows that ultimate reality is 'beyond plurality,' beyond individuality.²³

Therefore, Schopenhauer concludes, the will *qua* thing-in-itself cannot be plural, and so it is not only the thing-in-itself of the individual human being; will is the one, necessarily singular real, underlying all life and existence. From this it follows that all living is willing.

4.2 Nietzsche and the Necessity of Suffering

I posed the following question above: what are the necessary conditions that belong ineffaceably to the experience of living, or what will the experience of this life necessarily entail? In other words, what is this life that Nietzsche calls us to affirm? A central aspect of Nietzsche's answer is this: the experience of life necessarily entails suffering; "life itself requires hostility and dying and torture crosses."²⁴ Soll is correct to say that, in the early work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche presents "Silenus's wisdom, that existence is basically suffering... as a metaphysical truth about the world as it is 'in-itself.'"²⁵ In the later works, Nietzsche draws a conclusion about the experience of life based on his understanding of living beings since the nature of the living thing will be reflected in its

²² Soll, "Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life," 109: "Kant had argued that human beings, in perceiving the world, produce the structures of space, time, causality, and substance. From this, he inferred that these structures are consequently not true of reality as it is 'in-itself,' but imposed upon reality by the perceiver in the act of perception."

²³ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 84

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, "On the Rabble," 75

²⁵ Soll, "Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life," 109

experience of being alive. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche criticizes the hope for an imaginary future in which the experience of life does not involve injury, violence, or suffering, because this contradicts the necessary processes of life in particular: “these days, people everywhere are lost in rapturous enthusiasms... about a future state of society where ‘the exploitative character’ will fall away: – to my ears, that sounds as if someone is promising to invent a life that dispenses with all organic functions.”²⁶ If a body is “living and not dying,” Nietzsche writes,

it will have to be the embodiment of will to power, it will want to grow, spread, grab, win dominance, – not out of any morality or immorality, but because it is alive, and because life is precisely will to power... “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupted or imperfect, primitive society: it belongs to the essence of being alive as a fundamental organic function; it is a result of genuine will to power, which is just the will of life.²⁷

“Life itself,” i.e., the living thing’s being alive, “is essentially a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting,”²⁸ and “life functions essentially in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics.”²⁹ The meaning of these claims is that living things strive to dominate by imposing form to maximize their sensation of power.

The nature of the living thing, its will to power, implies that the experience of living necessarily involves suffering. Nietzsche borrows the structure of Schopenhauer’s

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259, 153

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259, 153

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259, 153

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §11, 50

argument here, but he replaces the Schopenhauerian notion of will with will to power. For Nietzsche, too, we are subject to a certain “penal servitude of willing,” but the will we are condemned to strive unceasingly to satisfy is the will to power. This servitude implies a structurally identical vicious circle of suffering whereby one is either suffering from the strife of overcoming obstacles or from the boredom of having no obstacles to overcome.

Assuming an economy of energies in the self, Nietzsche thinks that a living organism’s finite reserves of energy can only be exhausted so far before they must be replenished.³⁰ A living thing will acquire energies from various sources. In this acquisition, the organism re-appropriates energies which were being put to a different use. For instance, in the act of eating, a first organism appropriates the caloric energies of a second organism to its own ends; the first organism now controls energies which were once controlled by the second organism. This process is what I named the linear circularity of power above, since the act of acquiring energy demands an expression of energy. Although this process increases power for the acquiring organism, it also causes suffering in several ways.

Most obviously, this process results in suffering for that from which the energies are appropriated. In the act of eating, at least, this acquisition usually necessitates the death of the organism from which energy is taken. This is why Richardson describes the experience of being consumed as “brutal.”³¹ Dining, of course, can be the mark of culture and civility, and Frankl describes moments in Auschwitz when the miniscule crust of bread

³⁰ Nietzsche *Ecce Homo*, Why I Am So Clever, §2, 89

³¹ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 764

in his pocket was all that allowed him to retain his sense of humanity.³² And yet, as Schopenhauer says, if we “compare the respective feelings of two animals, one of which is engaged in eating the other,”³³ we will see that, *from the perspective of what is consumed*, the experience of *being consumed* is brutal, inciting extreme suffering and usually death. This need to reappropriate energy for oneself is why, as Hatab puts this, life for Nietzsche “is tragic in the manner of the self-consuming themes of Greek tragedy. Life both bears and destroys its offspring, and does so in terms of the very life process itself (for example, life forms must feed on other life forms to survive).”³⁴ In short, a living thing cannot live without incorporating and often destroying other living things.

On the other side, the strife of appropriating energies also involves suffering, because the appropriated will resist this appropriating. The “little lamb,” for example, will resist the “large bird of prey,” and the appropriating organism must struggle to acquire this source of energy.³⁵ The stronger an organism, the greater the energy sources it requires, and so the living organism must always struggle in this act of appropriation, and indeed, one may fail in their attempts to appropriate energies and suffer as a result of this failure.

The appropriation of energies also results in suffering in cases of incorporation other than simple consumption or nutrition. For instance, where a living individual is coerced into expressing the will of another, or the will of the dominated is incorporated into the will of the dominating, this too both incites and presupposes suffering. “Tyrants,”

³² Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 93-94: “One day a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human “something” which this man also gave to me.” And see pp. 28-32.

³³ Schopenhauer, “On the Sufferings of the World,” 5

³⁴ Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 1

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13, 25-27

Nietzsche hypothesizes, use pain to coerce populations into expressing certain drives and repressing others;³⁶ they use the technique of inflicting pain to force weaker individuals (to remember) to act in certain ways and *not* to act in other ways.³⁷ Such prohibitions already incite suffering in themselves, i.e., inasmuch as agitation results when the expression or fulfillment of various bodily instincts is restricted or forbidden and yet these instincts continue nonetheless to demand to be discharged.³⁸ The result of this situation, Nietzsche claims, is “bad conscience.” Some individuals suffer from a sense of guilt, or “bad conscience,” because their forbidden instincts continue to demand to be discharged. Then, he claims, individuals capitalize upon this opportunity to discharge their instinct for cruelty. Nietzsche claims that, unable to express this instinct outwardly, individuals discharge this instinct inwardly by punishing themselves for the fact that the forbidden instincts continue to demand to be discharged. And again, the result of this self-punishment is suffering.³⁹

Additionally, one may suffer from the boredom of a satisfied will to power. This refers to “the strong paradox of will to power,”⁴⁰ i.e., Nietzsche’s claim that the will to power leads to misery rather than happiness,⁴¹ and it is here that Nietzsche most clearly parallels Schopenhauer on the necessity of suffering. Since power can only be felt where it encounters resistance, the will to power must lead to suffering in the form of either strife or boredom. Strife is the form of suffering that corresponds to “the activity of overcoming a resistance;” boredom is the form of suffering that corresponds to “the state in which

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §17, 58

³⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §3, 39

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 57

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 57

⁴⁰ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 138

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76. And see also WP §696 & §702.

resistance has been overcome.”⁴² One either suffers in the contest of surmounting some other force, or suffers from the boredom that results after successfully surmounting this force and no longer having an obstacle to overcome. Thus, the experience of life for the living thing, in its unyielding demand for power, is necessarily characterized by an ongoing dialectical pattern of strife or failure on the one hand, and boredom on the other. This experience of life reflects the living being’s will to power.

4.3 Chronophobia

The living thing’s will to power is Nietzsche’s basic explanation for why suffering is a necessary condition of the experience of life: to live is to suffer from either strife or boredom. Beyond this, Nietzsche points to forms of suffering that, while not strictly necessary, make up a great portion of the human experience of suffering. These are largely forms of mental anguish, including chronophobia or the fear of impermanence and becoming, disorientation or the absence of universal values, and despair or the conviction that our values cannot be realized in this world.⁴³ I’ll now examine chronophobia, disorientation, and despair, all of which are adverse reactions to this life as we live it.

Nietzsche claims that many individuals are repulsed and even devastated by their awareness of the fluidity or transience of the individual forms that populate their experience. It is this repulsion, or “aversion to time and becoming,” that Hatab cogently labels “chronophobia.”⁴⁴ The chronophobic awareness of becoming can take three forms,

⁴² Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 126-127

⁴³ The concepts of disorientation and despair are developed in Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 25-28.

⁴⁴ Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 2

corresponding to the three temporal ecstases: awareness of impermanence in the past can cause guilt, mourning, and regret; in the present, fear; and in the future, apprehension and anxiety. Remembrance of impermanence in the past is a unique case. One's memories may refer to moments in which impermanence was revealed, e.g., a memory of a death, a loss, etc., or to nostalgia for some one-time success not to be repeated, around which one's fantasies now center. At the same time, the perspective of the present now grasps those moments as permanently and irrevocably inscribed in history. From the perspective of the present, "the past cannot be changed."⁴⁵ Zarathustra describes the human will as "impotent against that which has been" and "an angry spectator of everything past." He says that the will's "loneliest misery" is that "it cannot break time."⁴⁶ This itself is already a form of suffering, embodied in the sense of impotence that belongs to this experience.⁴⁷

The encounter with impermanence destabilizes those structures in our lives that we mistook for eternal and unchanging. The psychoanalyst Robert D. Stolorow makes this experience of destabilization the hallmark of trauma: "It is in the essence of emotional trauma that it shatters" the "absolutisms" which we experience as "stable and predictable." "Deconstruction of the absolutisms of everyday life exposes the inescapable contingency of existence on a universe... in which no safety or continuity of being can be assured."⁴⁸ Nietzsche largely holds the same position. His interpretation of Hamlet, which I'll detail below, rests on the claim that Hamlet is petrified by his awareness of the ephemerality of

⁴⁵ Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 161

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On Redemption," 111

⁴⁷ I suspect that one could follow this line of reasoning to demonstrate that, even for Nietzsche, the experience of being alive necessarily includes a direct encounter with the genuinely permanent and immutable in the form of the unchangeable past. Unfortunately, I won't be able to explore the implications of this notion here.

⁴⁸ Stolorow, *Trauma and Human Existence*, 16

all things.⁴⁹ We carry this awareness forward with us, the mark of our past losses and what could have been, persistently aware that our present and future are no less vulnerable to the destabilization we've encountered in the past.

This awareness can produce fear of an immediate object in the present. Due to the relationship between impermanence and power, i.e., because change can be forced by power, impermanence presents individuals with two sorts of challenges in the present, one active and the other reactive. First, individuals are faced with the challenge of actively striving to instantiate those conditions without which they could not live or flourish, with failure inciting feelings of powerlessness and impotence. This incites suffering due to the dynamic between strife and failure or strife and boredom: one suffers either from the strife involved in striving to satisfy the will to power, from failing in this striving, or from the boredom of having no obstacles to overcome. Second, if anything can be redetermined by some force, and any force can attempt to redetermine any element, then this implies that a weaker will can be continually frustrated and dominated by a superior will, and even denied its own expression altogether. Thus, individuals are faced with the challenge of reactively defending themselves against those forces that would dominate them, i.e., of preventing this domination, or else of submitting to this domination at the cost of bad conscience. This need to defend oneself can also produce fear of an immediate object in the present.

Nietzsche also emphasizes the human orientation toward the future, even defining humanity as “an animal with the prerogative to *promise*,”⁵⁰ or an animal with the ability to will or to fear various future possibilities and who acts in such a way as to attempt to

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §1, 35

actualize certain possibilities. However, none of these capacities provide humanity any absolute control over the future; despite our awareness, and futural orientation, the spontaneity of the passage of time and agonistic dynamics implies that we never have certainty of or control over what will happen next. Thus, our awareness of the future, and our finite capacity to exercise some level of control over future events, can invoke apprehension and anxiety. This is largely because, for Nietzsche, we experience impermanence as disempowering since any given organism requires a certain set of circumstantial conditions under which it can survive and potentially flourish, or under which it can feel powerful and feel its power increasing. Moreover, it often happens that these conditions without which a particular kind of living creature could not live⁵¹ result from forces and events beyond the control of those living creatures: we need events beyond our control to play out in certain ways if we are to survive. Nietzsche writes:

Every individual... feels how his existence, his happiness, that of the family and the state, the success of any undertaking depends on these arbitrarinesses of nature: certain natural events must occur at the right time, others fail to occur. How can one exercise an influence over these terrible unknown powers, how can one fetter the domain of freedom? thus he asked himself, thus he anxiously seeks: are there then no means of regulating these powers through a tradition and law in just the way you are regulated by them?⁵²

If all things are susceptible to change, then this includes the conditions that allow any given creature to live. Hence, if we are, as Hatab puts it, “always subject to forces of becoming, change,” and “variation,” then we are also potentially subject to “conflict, negation and ruin”⁵³ since the future could always bring the loss of one’s conditions for life. This is

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 7

⁵² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, §111, 64

⁵³ Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 1-2

Nietzsche's basic explanation for his claim that individuals tend to have a hatred of becoming. We react to instability with fear and nausea, Nietzsche says, because our organism has learned to prefer stability – either the stability of the conditions for our own livelihood, or at least a stable set of circumstances in which we could learn to flourish.

To live in this world of agonistic dynamics is to live with a radical lack of absolute security because this undying, eternal change means that the future could always bring tragedy or devastation. There is a paradox at the heart of life: life is essentially active and unstable, it is changing and becoming and overpowering, but to recognize this can incite exhaustion, inaction, paralysis, and a drive to stability. If living creatures strive to optimize their feelings of power, then correlatively, for Nietzsche, individuals develop aversions to what decreases their feelings of power. An individual that experiences impermanence as disempowering will develop an aversion to impermanence and becoming. In short, an awareness that life is essentially active and unstable can incite mental anguish in the form of an aversion to life itself. For Nietzsche, there are multiple ways to respond to this awareness, and this anguish is the response of one particular perspective. He will praise those who are able to respond to this awareness with joy, affirmation, and worldly hope.

4.4 Disorientation and Despair

On Nietzsche's telling, living in a world of impermanence can also incite mental anguish. Borrowing Reginster's language, two forms of this mental anguish that Nietzsche considers are disorientation and despair. Disorientation names a mindset bereft of guiding values or principles, while despair is the belief that one's values cannot be instantiated or

realized in this world.⁵⁴ Stated otherwise, disorientation is the inability to identify what would count as progress, while despair is the belief that progress is ultimately impossible. To clarify these two mentalities, it is useful to situate them within the context of what Nietzsche calls “the historical illness.” This illness is driven by the “cultural philistine” who, while understanding meanings and values as historically conditioned, demands to remain apprised of them across a diverse range of cultural, political, artistic, and intellectual realms, both past and present. If different peoples revere different “tablets” of values, or canons of what they deem good and evil,⁵⁵ the cultural philistine accumulates a wealth of knowledge of these many diverse peoples and their canons, without regard for how this study affects their own “life and action”⁵⁶ and acts “on our time.”⁵⁷ Such a character-type treats the monuments of history as consumable curiosities, demanding to be apprised of the supposedly curious and exotic values of countless societies.⁵⁸ Nietzsche thinks that this program of study, so to speak, has become the mechanistic memorization and regurgitation of facts,⁵⁹ and that it is harmful and “injurious,” and fails to act “for the benefit of a time to come.”⁶⁰ Disorientation and despair can each be caused by this historical illness.

⁵⁴ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 25-28

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On a Thousand and One Goals,” 42

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” Foreword, 59

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” Foreword, 60

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §2, 68

⁵⁹ “The uniform canon is that the young man has to start with a knowledge of culture, not even with a knowledge of life and even less with life and experience itself. And this knowledge of culture is instilled into the youth in the form of historical knowledge; that is to say, his head is crammed with a tremendous number of ideas derived from a highly indirect knowledge of past ages and peoples, not from direct observation of life.” (Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §10, 118) “[One] must... rebel against a state of things in which he only repeats what he has heard, learns what is already known, imitates what already exists.” (Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §10, 123)

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” Foreword, 60

Through this approach to history, one is bombarded by countless principles and evaluative systems different from one's own; indeed, one demands to be apprised of these very systems and principles. Thus, the cultural philistines are continually brought face-to-face with "the passing away of generations and the transitoriness of things,"⁶¹ e.g., the loss of this or that evaluative system, or the transformation of one principle into another. There are multiple senses in which this situation could be harmful. One possibility is that an individual could find it difficult to maintain faith in the value of one's own values when these are set against the countless possibilities offered by history. An individual's study of history can call the value of their own values into question by revealing that all values have their origins in historical contingency and are therefore malleable. Presented with so many changing and transient values, such an individual can come to "doubt... all concepts and all customs" and therefore become "homeless," bereft of faith in one's own orienting values and principles.⁶² In acknowledging this possibility, Nietzsche is not succumbing to the genetic fallacy by disavowing something's value based on its origin.⁶³ Instead, he is diagnosing this fallacy in the thought of others by saying that, for some, an awareness of the ephemerality of all things can cause one to lose faith in one's own values.

This awareness can incite disorientation by destabilizing or calling into question the orienting values that guide one's actions. Orientation requires a comparison between a variable and a fixed or absolute value. For example, a pathway's variable directions are

⁶¹ Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §2, 69

⁶² Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §7, 98

⁶³ Geuss, "Nietzsche and Genealogy," 338: "Nietzsche asserts very clearly that nothing about the history or the emergence or development of a set of valuations could have direct bearing on its value (GS 345, WP 254) – neither can support or legitimize such value claims... nor can any historical account in any way undermine a form of valuation. A form of valuation has the value it has... and its origin or history is a separate issue."

compared to the absolute cardinal directions, a lost ship's possible routes are compared to the unchanging stars, or the ethicality of an action is compared to some authoritative doctrine. If these supposedly absolute values prove susceptible to change and destruction, it is no longer clear that one ought to orient their life or their actions in relation to these poles. This situation in which an individual is unmoored from any given values or grounding foundation is what Nietzsche calls chaos.⁶⁴ This chaos or unmooring has a potentially creative side as well, apparent in Nietzsche's discussion of the lion which unmoors itself from the values imposed upon it in order to free up the space in which to create new values. In the short term, however, this unmooring, or the realization that one's orienting values and principles are vulnerable to change, can be paralyzing, depriving one of an authoritative guide or fundamental principle by which to determine one's actions. Nietzsche's primary concern here is the practical, psychological effects of this realization, and specifically, its capacity to incite paralysis or, in George Grant's words, a "stultifying relativism."⁶⁵ As Emil Cioran puts this, "the mind that puts everything in question reaches, after a thousand interrogations, an almost total inertia."⁶⁶

Beyond this, Nietzsche is also saying that even if one manages to maintain their personal faith in the value of their values in modernity, the study of history still teaches us that these values could only ever be instantiated in the most precarious of senses, since these instantiations are always vulnerable to destruction by external forces. Thus, even with

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §10, 116-123

⁶⁵ Grant, "Time as History – Part 1," The 1969 CBC Massey Lectures, audio, 24:30 – 25:00, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-1969-cbc-massey-lectures-time-as-history-1.2946812> (The audio recordings differ from the version published in *More Lost Massey Lectures*, which does not include the expression "stultifying relativism.")

⁶⁶ Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, 35

faith in our own values, it is difficult to maintain faith in the value of one's own actions when we recognize that the effects of our actions will always be undone in time. Likewise, our actions may be forgotten, or even one day reinterpreted as evil according to some unforeseen and newly adopted evaluative standards. Bombarded by continual images of ephemerality and change, individuals can lose the ability to imagine that anything could ever be permanent or immutable, potentiating the mentality of despair: the conviction that our values cannot be realized in this world.⁶⁷ Nietzsche presents an image of this mentality in his interpretation of Hamlet. He argues specifically that what prevents Hamlet from acting is *not* disorientation or "an excess of possibilities."⁶⁸ It is not that his values have been rendered neutral or indifferent to him because of their relativity or historical contingency, i.e., because they have been set in contrast against too many other possibilities. For Nietzsche, what prevents Hamlet from acting is the definitive knowledge that all things are continually in a process of becoming and that all effects will be undone in time, or the consequences of his actions will always be overturned by some greater force: the future will always overturn the present. In other words, for Nietzsche, Hamlet sees that his values cannot be realized in this world, at least not in any enduring sense: if he acts, there will always be someone else to come along and undo the effects of his actions. Thus, he "finds action repulsive" because he has "acquired" the "knowledge" that his "actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things."⁶⁹ Nietzsche's reasoning for this in *The Birth of Tragedy* will be discussed in the next chapter. In the later works, this is because

⁶⁷ Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 25-28

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

of the nature of living things and their will to power: whatever progress we instantiate, in the name of whatever values, there will always be someone else who will attempt to undo this progress in order to satisfy their own will to power. The future will always overturn the present, rendering sustained progress an impossibility.

As above, Nietzsche's concern here is the paralysis potentially engendered by the belief that nothing can be permanently instantiated. Accurate as such a belief may be for Nietzsche, it poses a number of psychological difficulties: truth can be harmful to life, or stated the other way around, "untruth" can be a "condition of life" and false judgments can be "indispensable to us."⁷⁰ Nietzsche speculates: we may need to believe in the possibility of permanence if we are to believe that living and acting is worthwhile. What paralyzes Hamlet is the realization that, whatever he does, some future moment will one day undo his actions. If he believed he could make a permanent mark on this world, or that he could "set to rights a world so out of joint,"⁷¹ this, Nietzsche claims, would allow him to act. And yet, to believe this would be to believe that one's "actions" have the power to "change the eternal essence of things."⁷²

4.5 Conclusion

Nietzsche maintains that suffering belongs necessarily to the experience of life. This is because of the nature of the living thing, and specifically, its will to power and the conditions of agonistic dynamism to which it is subject. Nietzsche's primary interest when

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §4, 7

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

⁷² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

it comes to suffering is how we respond to it. As I put this above, Nietzsche's psychological-existential project is to diagnose how human beings respond to and cope with life under these conditions, or how they cope with impermanence, temporality, and suffering. With Nietzsche's understanding of the necessity of suffering established, I'll now move on to discuss his presentation of the human response to suffering. This response, as it turns out, is Nietzsche's primary evidence for the very existence of the will to meaning.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

Nietzsche thinks that we necessarily suffer because we are subject to the conditions of finitude, and it is in analyzing our rapport with suffering that he recognizes the human need to believe that our lives are meaningful. In brief, for Nietzsche, the common human response to suffering functions as the primary evidence from which he infers the existence of the will to meaning. The primary aim of this chapter is to present Nietzsche's analysis of this human response to suffering, and therefore, to present his evidence for the existence of the will to meaning. Furthermore, Nietzsche comes to see that the will to meaning is, in a certain sense, beneficial or advantageous for human beings: it incites them to seek out some ground of meaning in their lives, and this meaning renders them better disposed not only to tolerate the suffering that belongs of necessity to living, but also in some cases, to flourish. However, beneficial and advantageous do not necessarily mean valuable in the sense that Nietzsche understands it. The valuable for Nietzsche, as I'll argue below, is the life-enhancing. Something is advantageous, beneficial, or useful for a certain lifeform if it, in some way, solves a problem for that lifeform or helps it achieve some goal, but this does not mean that it is always life-enhancing. Upon demonstrating that the will to meaning is advantageous for humanity, it will remain to be determined whether it is valuable or life-enhancing. The secondary aim of this chapter is to introduce some of the ways in which Nietzsche thinks that the will to meaning is advantageous for human beings.

To this end, this chapter will take the following form. First, I will present Nietzsche's understanding of the human response to suffering. I will demonstrate that Nietzsche judges an individual's character based on whether they condemn the value of a life that necessarily includes suffering. I'll also show that, for Nietzsche, nihilism constitutes the mentality that this life as we have it is not in-itself worth living without some transcendent supplementation, given the inescapability of suffering and loss. Next, I will consider two mentalities that, Nietzsche claims, manage to believe that life *is* worth living despite the necessity of suffering. These are the mentalities of the Pre-Socratic Greeks on the one hand, and the Christian perspective on the other. In each case, Nietzsche argues, life is deemed worthwhile or worth living inasmuch as suffering is interpreted as meaningful. He claims that neither for the Christian, nor for the early Ancient Greeks, was there any "senseless suffering,"¹ or suffering without a purpose. The difference between these two perspectives, Nietzsche will argue, is that the Christian interpretation of suffering does not escape nihilism since it renders suffering meaningful by virtue of its relation to the transcendent where transcendence refers to the other-worldly and not a transformation within this world. Finally, I will explicate Nietzsche's argument that, if meaningfulness renders life worth living in the face of unavoidable suffering, this reveals that human beings need to believe that their lives are meaningful, and I will offer an initial formulation of a definition of this need, or the will to meaning.

¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44

5.1 The Human Response to Suffering

As I've shown in the previous chapter, life according to Nietzsche presents no shortage of opportunities for suffering, and it does so necessarily, inasmuch as it is agonistically dynamic, and inasmuch as we are condemned to strive to fulfill our will to power. Part of Nietzsche's project is to evaluate both how and how well human beings cope with this life under these conditions, and he determines that many react to life with fear, aversion, disgust, and nausea. Nietzsche claims that human beings ultimately tend to denigrate the value of life *because* it involves suffering, even if this is a latent denigration belied by a manifest and supposed affirmation of the value of life. Nietzsche writes: "suffering is always the first of the arguments marshaled *against* life,"² and elsewhere, "the wisest men in every age have reached the same conclusion about life: *it's no good* Even Socrates said as he died: 'living – that means being sick for a long time.'"³

The attitude that life under its necessary conditions is not worth living is the primary sense in which nihilism should be understood for Nietzsche. Nietzsche always believes that all life involves suffering, while he condemns those nihilistic mentalities that would defame the value of life on this basis. Nihilism is the mentality that *this life*, as we live it here and now, cannot be worth living as it is or on its own, at least without some kind of external or transcendent supplementation. Nietzsche thinks that we see this nihilistic mentality expressed by various individuals and character types, and one of his most developed examples is its expression in the thought of Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, Nietzsche

² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 43

³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," I §, 162. And, see also GM, III, §17.

argues, life itself is not worth living, and we ought to strive to escape its basic conditions.⁴ Schopenhauer holds that to live is to suffer because all living is willing, and all willing is already suffering. On this basis, Schopenhauer reaches the verdict that the only way to avoid suffering is to escape the individuated will, and therefore, our own lives. Or, as he echoes Silenus, “it would be better for us not to exist.”⁵

Due to the suffering and the challenges entailed by life, human beings, Nietzsche claims, have the potential to become rampant nihilists, and he notes that at certain times the nihilistic mentality has become dominant among certain peoples. He argues that, facing the continual frustration of their own wills, whether by the powerful or by the events of life, individuals become exhausted by and fed up with the very prospect of living if life is nothing more than submission to dominance and the frustration of the will. He describes “the tired, pessimistic outlook, mistrust of life’s riddle, the icy ‘no’ of nausea at life,”⁶ and he refers to this as “the sickliness of the type of man who has lived up till now, at least of the tamed man, the physiological struggle of man with death,”⁷ “with disgust at life, with exhaustion and with the wish for the ‘end.’”⁸ Nietzsche claims that we can point to periods in history wherein entire communities entered states of being “fed up” with life, and indeed, states of wanting life to end: “Man is often enough fed up, there are whole epidemics of this state of being fed up (– like the one around 1348, at the time of the Dance of Death) ...

⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5, 7. And see Soll, “Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life,” 113.

⁵ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, V.2, 605. And see Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, v.1, bk. 4, §57.

⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 43

⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

this nausea, this weariness, this fatigue, this disgust with himself ...”⁹ In this state,

Nietzsche claims, humanity

finds... that life itself is distasteful: – so that every now and again, he is so repelled by himself that he holds his nose and disapprovingly recites a catalogue of his offensive features, with Pope Innocent the Third (‘conception in filth, loathsome method of feeding in the womb, sinfulness of the raw material of man, terrible stench, secretion of saliva, urine and excrement’).¹⁰

This list of the body’s offensive features does not amount to the opinions of one man; rather, what must be emphasized here for Nietzsche’s point is the popularity and general acceptance of this text.¹¹ Raymond Geuss writes: “This short treatise, written in 1195 by Cardinal Lotario dei Segni (who in 1198 acceded to the Papacy as Innocent III) was extremely popular in the late Middle Ages, sizable chunks of it turning up, for instance, in *The Canterbury Tales* (particularly in the Man of Law’s ‘Prologue’ and ‘Tale’).”¹² Nietzsche’s point here is that this manifest disgust with life expresses an underlying overall weariness with the experience of living and the suffering entailed therein. Those who succumb to this mentality, Nietzsche claims, are disgusted by their own needs and weakness because they are suffering either inasmuch as these weaknesses frustrate their

⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 89. The theme of the danse macabre “was to become popular all over Europe.” (Oosterwijk, “Of Dead Kings, Dukes and Constables,” 131; Freytag, *Mixed Metaphors*, xxi) Broadly speaking, the dance in its various manifestations acts as a *memento mori*: it reminds “viewers that Death takes all — even a conquering king in the prime of life.” (Oosterwijk, *The Deep Conceived Fantasy of Death*, 45) The height of its popularity is actually much later than 1348, which itself refers to the height of the “Black Death” that “first hit Europe in 1347.” (Oosterwijk, *Fro Paris to Ingland*, 7)

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 43. Raymond Geuss notes that this list of offensive features “is not a quotation, but rather Nietzsche’s own summary of the topics discussed in the first few sections of *De miseria humanae conditionis* (also known as *De contemptu mundi* and by various other titles).” (Geuss, in Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, n.51, 43)

¹¹ John C. Moore writes: “the *De Miseria Humanae Conditionis*, written around 1196 by Pope Innocent III when he was still Cardinal Lotario, enjoyed a remarkable popularity in the centuries after it was written. It survives in nearly 700 manuscripts, and it had undergone more than fifty printed editions by the middle of the seventeenth century.” (Moore, “Innocent III’s *De Miseria Humanae Conditions*: A *Speculum Curiae*?” 553)

¹² Geuss, “Notes,” in Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, n.51, 43

will and their needs are unfulfilled, or, inasmuch as fulfillment of one's worldly needs never leads to ultimate, unending satisfaction.

5.2 Suffering and the Early Greeks

Nietzsche also notices that there are peoples and cultures for whom the basic fact of suffering does not incite this same negative evaluation of life; there are peoples for whom suffering is not an argument *against* the value of life. He calls on us to “remember the times when people made the opposite assessment, because they could not do without making people suffer and saw first-rate magic in it, a veritable seductive lure to life.”¹³ In the *Genealogy*, he refers to the Pre-Socratic Greeks and Athenian tragedians as examples. Nietzsche turns to the Greeks for two reasons here. The first is because, he argues, they knew suffering so well, while the second is that, despite their continual proximity to suffering, Nietzsche claims, the Pre-Socratic Greeks did not fall victim to nihilism or the denial of the value of life.

As to the first reason, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims to discover a far darker history of Greece than other historians had recognized. *The Birth of Tragedy* presupposes a highly speculative timeline. Broadly, Nietzsche divides the history of Greece into three periods:¹⁴ the Archaic (i.e., Pre-Homeric, which he also calls the “Iron” age¹⁵);

¹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 43

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, 28. There are further subdivisions among these three periods, and each corresponds to a change in regime brought on by “the to-ing and fro-ing” of the Apolline and Dionysian forces, i.e., during certain periods, Apollo is dominant, and during others, Dionysus is dominant. Burnham and Jesinghausen, e.g., say that *The Birth of Tragedy* divides the history of Greece into five periods. (Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy*, 60) However, this broadly construed tripartite division will be sufficient for our purposes.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, 28

the Tragic, (roughly from Homer until Euripides, and especially referring to Aeschylus and Sophocles and the performance of tragedy in Athens); and the Socratic (inaugurated by Euripides¹⁶ and supposedly ongoing if Christianity really is Platonism for the masses.¹⁷) Nietzsche argues that it was the Archaic Greeks who knew suffering particularly well, and that it was the Greeks of the Tragic age who found the healthiest and most effective methods to cope with this suffering and avoid the nihilism that it could so easily incite. Nietzsche rejects the claim that Archaic Greek culture was essentially optimistic and that the Greeks felt themselves to be securely and harmoniously at home in their universe.¹⁸ Nietzsche claims that German scholars and antiquarians – Winckelmann, in particular – identify an archaic “Greek harmony,” “Greek beauty,” and “Greek cheerfulness,”¹⁹ and Silk and Stern write that this “notion of ‘Greek serenity’ had dominated the German understanding of Greek culture since Winckelmann's days,” up until Nietzsche’s time.²⁰ Jessica Berry writes:

Nietzsche’s denunciation of classical scholarship focused in large part on the delusions modern scholars fostered about the civility of the Greeks.... Homer, to whom Nietzsche refers explicitly more times than to any other single Greek figure,... became a corrective to what had been the imposition upon [the Greeks] of modern ideals—those captured in Winckelmann’s formula of “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” and in the notion that the Hellenes enjoyed a harmonious existence and oneness with nature that had subsequently been lost. Using the Homeric epics as a lens, Nietzsche claimed to have recovered evidence of a far longer and more brutal past than his contemporaries were pleased to admit.²¹

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §11-13, and see also Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §14-15 on Socrates.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Preface,” 4. And see Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §15, 71: “Socrates’ influence has spread out across all posterity to this very day, and indeed into the whole future, like a shadow growing ever longer in the evening sun.”

¹⁸ Burnham & Jesinghausen write: “*The Birth of Tragedy* puts an end to classicist and romantic historicist visions of Greece as a paradise lost whose nostalgic revocation was meant to counterbalance or alleviate the misery of existence under conditions of modernity.” (Burnham & Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy*, 159)

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §9, 46-47 & §20, 95-96

²⁰ M.S. Silk & J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 355

²¹ Berry, *Nietzsche and the Greeks*, 89

In place of this “harmonious existence and oneness with nature,” Nietzsche argues that the Archaic Greeks in particular were intimately familiar with suffering and loss and were deeply aware of the necessity of death, destruction, and change in life. He praises their visual acuity,²² claiming that they saw life as it is; they understood its necessary conditions, or they recognized that life *necessarily* includes loss and change: “the Greeks,” writes Nietzsche, “knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence.”²³

According to Nietzsche, this Greek awareness of the horrors of existence is made clear in several ways. He emphasizes, for instance, the widespread awareness of the wisdom of Silenus: “Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation ... the very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon.”²⁴ Nietzsche ascribes this “bitter popular philosophy” to the pre-Homeric Archaic age during which, he claims, the wisdom of Silenus amounted to “popular Greek wisdom”²⁵ and “the philosophy of the people.”²⁶ Raymond Geuss writes:

this ‘wisdom’ [of Silenus] was not necessarily expressed in propositional form – it was a kind of non-theoretical, non-discursive knowledge, as Aeschylus puts it in *Agamemnon* (line 1 77) a ‘*pathei mathos*,’ a knowing in and through experiencing/suffering, a knowing embodied perhaps tacitly in one’s attitudes and behaviour even if one never formulated it clearly.²⁷

For Nietzsche, if there is an “archaic equivalent” of a central “biblical claim,” it is “the wisdom of Silenus,” i.e., “that never to have been is the best state ... for humans.”²⁸ The

²² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §2, 19

²³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 23. See Soll, “Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life,” 109 & 113.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 23

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 22

²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Dionysiac World View*, §1, 124

²⁷ Geuss, “Introduction,” in Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, xvii-xviii

²⁸ Geuss, “Introduction,” in Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, xvii

key is not only what Silenus said; the key for Nietzsche is that what Silenus said was so widely known and accepted.

Nietzsche can only identify this supposedly generalizable mindset of the Pre-Homeric Greek in the most speculative of senses, and it is claims like this that rendered *The Birth of Tragedy* suspect for classicists.²⁹ He does, however, have an argument: Nietzsche thinks that the very existence of the Greek pantheon and artistic creations like the *Iliad* provide evidence that the Greeks were veiling something terrible: if the Greeks knew the “horrors of existence,” then “in order to live at all they had to place in front of these things the resplendent, dream-born figures of the Olympians” which “veiled” these horrors, withdrawing them from view.³⁰ These Apolline creations, Nietzsche claims, “are the necessary result of gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature – radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night.”³¹ He looks back into the pre-Homeric world to see the life and existence the Greeks recognized and veiled with this “artistic middle world.”³²

What do we behold when... we stride back into the pre-Homeric world? Only night and terror and an imagination accustomed to the horrible. What kind of earthly existence do these revolting, terrible theogonic myths reflect? A life ruled only by the children of Night: strife, lust, deceit, old age, and death.³³

²⁹ Burnham & Jesinghausen write: “with this first of Nietzsche’s outings as a philosophical writer he cuts himself off from those who had predicted (and aided) his brilliant future as professor of philology. Nietzsche’s first book is also his last in terms of contemporary public recognition. The book shocks his ‘friends’ and makes him many enemies. Upon publication, the philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff delivered a searing polemic and tore the book to pieces: in several areas he demonstrates how Nietzsche gets the philological facts wrong or distorts them, and how he belittles the high standards of recent German philological achievement.” (Burnham & Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy*, 154) And see also Gründer, *Der Streit um Nietzsches Geburt der Tragödie*.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 23

³¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §9, 46

³² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 23

³³ Nietzsche, *Homer’s Contest*, 34

Here, Nietzsche claims that “the suffocating atmosphere of Hesiod’s poem, ... thickened and darkened,”³⁴ reflects a kind of life and earthly existence that is necessarily characterized by suffering (“strife” and “lust”), antagonism (“deceit”), and change (“old age” and “death”).

There are also less speculative ways in which this awareness is visible in Greek myths and tragedies. In a text entitled “Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Man,” Cornelius Castoriadis writes that Aeschylus recognizes a “limit” on humanity’s capacity for achievement, namely, death: “The only thing he will not find is the means to flee Hades.”³⁵ Likewise, Castoriadis continues,

[Prometheus] taught the mortals that they are mortal... [I]t is impossible to attribute to Prometheus the extravagant idea that he would have made these mortals... no longer know that they are mortal. If there is something certain for men, and in any case for the Greeks, it is their mortality: from Homer until the end of Athenian tragedy, this basic characteristic of existence (*ousia*) is repeated on every occasion. Prometheus taught men the truth: they are mortal and, according to the true ancient Greek view, definitively and insurmountably mortal.³⁶

And Castoriadis continues: “Sophocles’ man knows that he is mortal and that this basic determination is insurmountable.”³⁷ Further, Castoriadis emphasizes that Greek tragedy expresses a certain collective mentality, or “spirit” of the times, common to the Athenian people.³⁸ This is revealed inasmuch as “someone could think” what is expressed and embodied in these tragedies “in the Athens of 460-440 B.C.E.,” someone “could present it to the public, and—at least in the case of Antigone—could win for himself the laurel wreath

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Homer’s Contest*, 53 (Mügge trans.)

³⁵ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 33

³⁶ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 21

³⁷ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 38

³⁸ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 8

for having thought, formulated, and expressed it.”³⁹ Thus, these tragedies reveal “the effectively actual presence in the Athenian social-historical space of certain complexes of significations,”⁴⁰ above all the signification that we are definitively and insurmountably mortal.⁴¹ Or, as “Prometheus taught men the truth,” so too with the answer to the riddle of the sphinx does Oedipus see that to be alive is to be a changing, dynamic being. He sees that human beings change, their minds and bodies change, they grow and mature, they gain skills and abilities; but all of this change is also the loss of youth, health, energy, and vitality. What is called “maturation” from the human’s social perspective can be breakdown and degeneration from the perspective of the body, and anything can break down, degenerate, or be overpowered, consumed, and destroyed. Lastly, the dramatic narratives of tragedy continually reveal this recognition of the horrors of existence. The fall from grace, e.g., continually exhibited throughout tragic drama, reveals that no form is so solid as to be invulnerable to time: even kings can fall.

5.3 The Meaning of Suffering for the Greeks

Terry Eagleton offers a useful summation here. In the Ancient Greeks and the tragedians in particular, we encounter a

culture in which life is fragile, perilous, and sickeningly vulnerable.... men and women find themselves languishing in the grip of brutally vindictive forces which threaten to tear them to pieces. Only by keeping your head down as you pick a precarious way through the minefield of human existence can you hope to survive, paying homage to cruelly capricious gods who often enough scarcely deserve human respect, let alone religious veneration. The very human powers which might allow you to find a foothold in this unstable terrain continually threaten to spin out

³⁹ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 8

⁴⁰ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 8

⁴¹ Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 21

of control, turning against you and bringing you low. It is in these fearful conditions that the Chorus of Sophocles' Oedipus the King delivers its final gloomy judgement: 'Count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.'⁴²

Nietzsche thinks that, because of this constant awareness of the horrors of existence, the Greeks, like all human beings, faced the psychological danger of resignation, or the danger of abandoning the desire to live. Nietzsche writes:

The Hellene, by nature profound and uniquely capable of the most exquisite and most severe suffering... has gazed with keen eye into the midst of the fearful, destructive havoc of so-called world history, and has seen the cruelty of nature, and is in danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does.⁴³

He means that, because of their deep awareness of suffering, loss, and change in life, the Hellene is in danger of preferring not to live, or, of preferring not to continue on within this "wheel of Ixion," eternally willing, and so eternally unsatisfied.⁴⁴ The danger of denying the will is a reference to Schopenhauer. This was precisely the strategy he advocated for individuals to escape or overcome suffering.⁴⁵ Since individuated willing necessarily invites suffering, and life is nothing but will itself under determinate conditions, Schopenhauer thus reaches the verdict that the only way to avoid suffering is to escape the individuated will, and therefore, our own lives. For Nietzsche, this strategy represents such a profound danger because to cease to will is to cease to will to create the future and to create greatness. This is no less than to give up on the very meaning of humanity and the earth that Zarathustra wishes to teach us.

⁴² Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life*, 11

⁴³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 39-40

⁴⁴ Young writes: "the Greeks ... knew that life is suffering," and they "knew the powerful inclination to move from pessimism to nihilism, to the conviction that life, human life, is not worth living." (Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 76)

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §6, 73-75

And yet, says Nietzsche, despite inheriting this archaic awareness of the horrors of existence, the Pre-Socratics of the Tragic age did not fall victim to the danger of succumbing to nihilism. Despite their constant awareness of suffering and loss, Nietzsche claims, they still judged life to be worth living. In *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche proposes that these Greeks of the Tragic age succeeded in “saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems,”⁴⁶ and managed to reverse the archaic Wisdom of Silenus, such that “one might say” that, for them, “the very worst thing ... was to die soon, the second worst ever to die at all.”⁴⁷ Nietzsche even considers that “*Hellenism and Pessimism*” may have made a better title for *The Birth of Tragedy*, since the work constitutes “the first lesson in how the Greeks put pessimism behind them, – how they *overcame* it.”⁴⁸ The Greeks, Nietzsche argues, are a people for whom the brute fact of suffering does not incite a negative evaluation of life.

So, Nietzsche wonders, what is the difference between a people in whom suffering incites a devaluation of life, and a people in whom it does not? He offers at least two answers to this question, and these answers can be thought of as two distinct forms of theodicy, understood as a demonstration that “the world, despite appearances to the contrary, really was in essence... good for us,” and therefore, “potentially worthwhile for those living it.”⁴⁹ In each answer, in a certain sense, Nietzsche claims that those who affirm the value of life use art to redeem the value of life: “art saves [the Hellene], and through art

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “The Birth of Tragedy,” §3, 109

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “The Birth of Tragedy,” §1, 107-108

⁴⁹ Geuss, “Introduction,” in Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, xxii

life saves him – for itself.”⁵⁰ I’ll consider the first form now before considering the second form in the discussion of the value of meaning for life below.

The first form of theodicy Nietzsche considers is discussed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He argues that the comfort offered the Hellenes in the form of tragedy, i.e., by the aesthetic justification of the “Tragic Chorus,” allows them to judge life to be worth living in the face of continual suffering. In this early text, endorsing a Schopenhauerian metaphysics, Nietzsche understands reality as singular and he understands distinct individuals as semblances of that singular reality.⁵¹ He speculates that this singular reality, which he alternately names the primal or primordial unity, must have some need to appear in this pluralized, individuated form.⁵² Nietzsche postulates this need in order to explain why a world that is supposedly composed of a singular unity appears so fragmented and multifaceted. For the early Nietzsche, this need, or the primal unity’s lust to appear in individuated forms, explains the continual reproduction of apparent forms of individuality, or the world of becoming and changing individuals which we experience.⁵³ In *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is because the primordial unity needs to appear in this individuated form that all apparent individuals are necessarily fated to “painful destruction.”⁵⁴ The primordial unity, Nietzsche claims, continually recasts itself in the appearance of individual forms,

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

⁵¹ See BT §4; §8; §16; & §21. Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 77: “The metaphysics of *The Birth* is identical with that of [Schopenhauer’s] *The World as Will*. ... [F]or Nietzsche, too, the world of individuals is ideal and the reality behind it, the ‘thing in itself’, is ‘beyond plurality’.” Soll, “Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life,” 109: “The emphasis upon the world of things as they really are in themselves as being a “primal unity” is almost a sure sign that Nietzsche had accepted and was working with Schopenhauer’s revision of Kant’s theory.”

⁵² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, 26: The “goal of the primordial unity” is “its release and redemption through semblance.”

⁵³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, 25-26; §17, 80-81

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17, 80-81

which come in and out of apparent existence.⁵⁵ Therefore, to be an individual is to have been cast into relief and semblance as a part of this process, and likewise, it is to be fated to be reabsorbed into the unity and recast in some new form. What Nietzsche calls the Dionysiac insight in *The Birth of Tragedy* is the realization that individuals are necessarily transitory because they are semblances of a primordial whole that longs to continually set itself into relief through an “uncountable excess” of apparent forms. This is why, for the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the truth that existence is suffering is “a metaphysical truth about the world as it is “in-itself.””⁵⁶ The Dionysiac insight is just this revelation that all forms of individuality are necessarily transitory and ephemeral, and therefore, fated to “painful destruction.”

According to this first form of theodicy, distinct individuals come in and out of existence in time, while the underlying singular reality persists eternally. This underlying reality will play the role of *Theos* in this theodicy. Taking a stance he will later reject, the early Nietzsche argues that both the performance of tragedy and Dionysiac festivals offer participants a glimpse of the singular, underlying real, thereby revealing that whatever is lost or destroyed in the world of individuation, all individuals participate in and belong to the one eternal underlying reality or community. Tragedy and the festival offer this glimpse, Nietzsche claims, by inciting the experience of the disillusion of one’s individual boundaries and the sensation of merging with a community. As discussed in Chapter 2,

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §16, 80: “In Dionysiac art ... nature speaks to us in its true, undisguised voice: ‘Be as I am! – the primal mother, eternally creative beneath the surface of incessantly changing appearances, eternally forcing life into existence, forever satisfying myself with these changing appearances!’”

⁵⁶ Soll, “Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life,” 109

Nietzsche claims that during Dionysiac festivals “caste-like divisions... disappear,” “the aristocrat” and “the man of lowly birth” behave identically, they “unite in the same Bacchic choruses.”⁵⁷ “Now all the rigid, hostile barriers... between human beings... break” and “each person feels himself to be... united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour,” and “quite literally one with him.”⁵⁸ Nietzsche does not make this explicit, but his argument seems to be that if two individuals can behave in identical manners, then the distinction between them which would forbid this moment of identity must be illusory or merely apparent. The festival, he claims, reveals that these two are equals before they are distinct individuals, allowing them to revert to a more fundamental unity. Likewise, with the performance of tragedy, spectators are able to identify with the chanting chorus: “in their theatres it was possible, given the terraced... concentric arcs, for everyone quite literally to overlook the entire cultural world around him, and to imagine... that he was a member of the chorus.”⁵⁹ Thus, Nietzsche claims, the spectator experiences their becoming unified with the chorus and fellow spectators. Further, as a communal activity, the music or chanting unifies all participants. Again, Nietzsche’s argument seems to be that by behaving identically, supposedly distinct individuals disprove this distinction, revealing their fundamental unity. Thus, one experiences the disintegration of their boundaries by merging with supposedly distinct individuals. Nietzsche claims, “the first effect of Dionysiac tragedy” is that “all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature.”⁶⁰ This glimpse

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *The Dionysiac Worldview*, §1, 120

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, 18

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §8, 42

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 39

of an earlier state that precedes individuation is what Nietzsche calls, in patronizing hindsight, the “metaphysical solace” [*metaphysische Trösterei*] of tragedy.⁶¹ This comfort or consolation is the realization that whatever may become of this world of individuation, every individual belongs to the perennially undying and eternal heart of reality. It is even, in extreme cases, a brief return to such a state.⁶²

If the primordial unity has been fragmented, this explains the human tendency to subject ourselves to “the sight of the catastrophic,”⁶³ in theatrical tragedy and Dionysiac festivals in which “the very wildest of nature's beasts were unleashed.”⁶⁴ As Young observes, Nietzsche asks an ancient question: why do we continually choose to watch “the destruction of ... human beings?”⁶⁵ Nietzsche’s answer is that such moments provide opportunities for reconciliation with the primordial unity from which we are alienated. “In those Greek festivals,” Nietzsche writes, “there erupts... a sentimental tendency in nature, as if it had cause to sigh over its dismemberment into individuals.”⁶⁶ Reprise from daily life explains many aspects of festivity and theatrical entertainment, but does not successfully explain the continual return to this “overwhelming feeling of unity.” The shattered primordial unity explains this apparent need to momentarily forget or abandon one’s individuality and merge with a singular unity.

This is why “tragedy... proves that the Greeks were *not* pessimists,”⁶⁷ i.e., if pessimists judge that life is only suffering and so unredeemable. Nietzsche argues that

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” §7, 12

⁶² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17

⁶³ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 80

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §2, 20

⁶⁵ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 80

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §2, 21

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “The Birth of Tragedy,” §1, 108

tragedy is what the Greeks used to redeem life, revealing that they saw something worth redeeming in life itself. Tragedy does not express an underlying condemnation of the value of life; it is rather what allows the Tragic Greeks to carry on living this life, and to affirm the value of this life. The Greeks created tragedy, Nietzsche claims,

not in order to escape fear and pity, not in order to cleanse yourself of a dangerous affect by violent discharge – as Aristotle mistakenly thought –: but instead, over and above all fear and pity, in order for *you yourself to be* the eternal joy in becoming, – the joy that includes even the eternal *joy in negating*.⁶⁸

Here, the existence of tragedy functions for Nietzsche as an argument for the Archaic Greek proximity to suffering. This “metaphysical solace”⁶⁹ is one of the “radiant patches,” meant “to heal a gaze seared” by “the inner, terrible depths of nature.”⁷⁰ It reveals that one and the same underlying reality guarantees that this world of individuation will be lost, or will give way to an entirely new world of individuation – i.e., it inspires horror or terror – while also guaranteeing that every existent individual belongs to the eternal. This comfort, Nietzsche argues, allows them to go on living in this world of individuation and suffering, i.e., with the sustaining knowledge or practical faith that, at base, they belong to this undying reality, despite all else. Under the light of this first form of theodicy, existence is rendered worthwhile inasmuch as the destruction of individuals is reduced to mere appearance and we are shown that we, too, are part of the eternal.

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “The Birth of Tragedy,” §3, 109-110

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “An attempt at Self-Criticism,” §7, 12

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §9, 46

5.4 The Meaning of Suffering for the Christian Perspective

For Nietzsche, the Greeks faced the psychological danger of giving up the desire to live because of their constant awareness of the horrors of existence. In fact, however, everybody faces this danger, while Nietzsche's point is that the Greeks responded to it with particularly instructive techniques to which he will contrast the Judeo-Christian response. Nietzsche thinks that, like the Greeks, the Judeo-Christian tradition is persistently aware of the horrors belonging ineluctably to life. If these two traditions both recognize the same nature of life, they embody two opposed evaluative attitudes toward this life. The difference will be that, for Nietzsche, the Judeo-Christian tradition ultimately reacts to this awareness with pessimism and nihilism.⁷¹ In Exodus, Ecclesiastes, Job, etc., one encounters suffering and the inescapability of ephemerality again and again:

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. (Ecclesiastes. 1.1-4)

No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them. (Ecclesiastes. 1.11)

When Job speaks, he tells us

"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again. The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more. As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so one who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more. (Job. 7.6-10)

I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning.... "But as a mountain erodes and crumbles and as a rock is moved from

⁷¹ Notice, we could draw the same opposition between the Greeks and Schopenhauer, and in the *Genealogy's* preface Nietzsche aligns Schopenhauer's value system with that of Christianity. (GM P 5)

its place, as water wears away stones and torrents wash away the soil, so you destroy a person's hope. (Job. 14.18-19)

And likewise, *The Imitation of Christ* reads as follows: "Very soon your life here will end... Today we live; tomorrow we die and are quickly forgotten.... If you have ever seen a man die, remember that you, too, must go the same way."⁷² Where the Greeks understood this inescapability as a necessary condition of life or creation, Nietzsche argues, the Judeo-Christian tradition will come to deplore or lament this tragic reality, and posit the metaphysical idea of God to overcome it.

At GM II 7, Nietzsche refers to both the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions. He writes:

What actually arouses indignation over suffering is not the suffering itself, but the senselessness of suffering: but neither for the Christian, who saw in suffering a whole, hidden machinery of salvation, nor for naïve man in ancient times, who saw all suffering in relation to spectators or to instigators of suffering, was there any such senseless suffering.⁷³

Nietzsche identifies a type of individual that, he claims, continually emerges throughout history and across the globe: the ascetic priest. At least in the Christianized form, this figure of the ascetic priest, says Nietzsche, provides Christians with a particular interpretation of suffering, namely, an interpretation that allows individuals to see in suffering "a whole hidden machinery of salvation." What exactly is this interpretation, or, how is suffering made meaningful for the Christian perspective?

This interpretation presupposes two common elements of the human condition: the first is the givenness of suffering resulting from agonistic dynamics. The second is

⁷² Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. II, ch. 23

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44

something briefly considered above: the givenness of the feeling of guilt. The affect of guilt is a given fact of human existence, Nietzsche argues, because of the social repression of the instincts and the body. Nietzsche accepts that individuals restrict or prevent the fulfillment of various bodily instincts at various times and places in order to construct societies.⁷⁴ However, despite the fact that the discharge of the old instincts is disallowed, or, that they have become relatively useless in the new social-human order, these instincts continue nonetheless to demand to be discharged. Therefore, Nietzsche argues, and admitting for some exceptions,⁷⁵ there exists a roughly common feeling of guilt or “bad conscience” among most citizens of most civilizations: we feel guilty, or we harbor bad conscience, over the fact that our forbidden instincts continue to demand to be discharged. This feeling may not be literally universal, but it is sufficiently common and widespread, Nietzsche thinks, to play the causal and explanatory role he ascribes to it. This “bad conscience” is a basic attitude of self-denigration: we are ashamed of ourselves and our bodily instincts; we are ashamed of what is irrepressible in us: “the animal ‘man’ is finally taught to be ashamed of all his instincts.”⁷⁶ The ascetic priest is going to make use of these two basic aspects of human life, i.e., suffering and the feeling of guilt.

The priest provides an explanation for this feeling of guilt. Nietzsche emphasizes that the fact that we feel guilty does not mean that we are guilty. The feeling of guilt is only evidence of this feeling; it is only evidence that one *feels* guilty. The fact that our forbidden

⁷⁴ Nietzsche differs from the social contract theorists in that he does not think that human beings willingly enter into contracts by which they choose to repress their instincts. Rather, he claims that individuals are forced or coerced into such situations by the strength of others. See GM II, §17, 58.

⁷⁵ E.g., chivalry, knightly morality, or the “chivalric-aristocratic method” of valuation. (GM I, 7)

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 43

instincts demand discharge is not evidence that we have done something “wrong” or “evil,” though it is likely to make us feel this way. “The fact that someone feels ‘guilty,’ ‘sinful,’ by no means proves that he is right in feeling this way; any more than someone is healthy just because he feels healthy.”⁷⁷ The priest reverses this claim, saying that we feel guilty because we *are* guilty. Nietzsche writes:

‘Someone or other must be to blame that I feel ill’ – this kind of conclusion is peculiar to all sick people.... ‘I suffer: someone or other must be guilty’ – and every sick sheep thinks the same. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest, says to him, ‘Quite right, my sheep! Somebody must be to blame: but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame for it, you yourself alone are to blame for yourself.’⁷⁸

Of what is an individual guilty? What act have they committed that has caused them to *feel* this way? Here, Nietzsche comes to the heart of the ascetic priest’s interpretation: “from... the ascetic priest, [man] receives the first tip as to the ‘cause’ of his suffering: he should look for it within himself, in guilt, in a piece of the past, he should understand his suffering itself as a condition of punishment.” With the notion of sin, the Priest offers an explanation for suffering: we are guilty of having *sinned* in our past and we suffer as penance for having sinned: the sufferer “should understand his suffering” as punishment for their guilt over “a piece of the past.” The priest reinterprets one’s bad conscience, one’s feeling of guilt for their sensuous and bodily instincts, as awareness of one’s past sins. Notice, the priest does not have to have any actual awareness of an individual’s past sins. Instead, the priest not only relies on the nearly universal fact that most individuals will be able to locate something in their past that they regret, but finally, individuals are told that the son of God has given

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §16, 95

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §15, 94

his life in exchange for ours, to atone for *our* sins. Thus, the depth of sin an individual can unearth in their past is infinitely supplemented by the death of Christ, specifically in the form of the atonement. This ensures that we owe an infinite, humanly unredeemable debt – since, even if we give up our own life, this is not enough to repay the life of the Son of God; a human life cannot be exchanged for a divine life. The atonement ensures that every individual can find something in their past over which to feel guilty; at an absolute minimum, we can always feel guilty for our inability to repay this infinite debt that we owe this son of God.

Nietzsche argues that the Priest transforms the *cause* of suffering (“The past regurgitated, the deed distorted”). He writes:

The main contrivance which the ascetic priest allowed himself... was... his utilization of the feeling of guilt. The previous essay [GM II] indicated the descent of this feeling briefly – as a piece of animal-psychology, no more: there we encountered the feeling of guilt in its raw state, as it were. Only in the hands of the priest, this real artist in feelings of guilt, did it take shape – and what a shape! ‘Sin’ – for that is the name for the priestly reinterpretation of the animal ‘bad conscience’ (cruelty turned back on itself) - has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul up till now: with sin, we have the most dangerous and disastrous trick of religious interpretation.⁷⁹

Nietzsche argues that we suffer because our will is physiologically overpowered, while the priest tells us that we suffer because of our sins.⁸⁰ The priest reinterprets or distorts the cause of suffering: “‘sinfulness’ in man is not a fact, but rather the interpretation of a fact, namely a physiological upset.”⁸¹ For Nietzsche, the priestly interpretation ignores or

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §20, 104

⁸⁰ “In sum, the ascetic priest exploits a fact about our existential situation – namely that most humans suffer – by concocting a fictional explanation for this suffering: we suffer because we violate the ascetic ideal.” (Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 210)

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §16, 95

overlooks the repression and oppression of the bodily will, and foregrounds, emphasizes, or exaggerates any moment of the past over which one feels guilty.

Inasmuch as it is cast as penance, suffering is given a purpose: the aim of penance is redemption, and thus, the aim of suffering is, likewise, redemption and salvation. Christ's atonement for humanity's sins worsens the believer's feelings of guilt, but this introduces hope and the opportunity for repentance. Everyone suffers, everyone feels guilty, and therefore, anyone can repent and achieve salvation through piety. But how do we repent? Nietzsche argues that the priest offers humanity a life-model, a form to imitate, in the image of asceticism and the ascetic ideal. As an initial formulation, Nietzsche defines asceticism as the denial of fulfilling sensual desires. His first example is that Wagner "pays homage to chastity in his old age,"⁸² but the denial of any sensory desire could do as well. Examples include fasting as the denial of fulfilling the desire for food, or self-isolation as the denial of fulfilling the desire for companionship and sensory stimulation. Accordingly, if an ethical ideal denotes a goal to be pursued, to hold ascetic ideals is to pursue the denial of fulfilling sensual desires. On Nietzsche's telling, for the Christian mentality, the path to salvation and redemption is the pursuit of the ascetic ideal. For instance, *The Imitation of Christ* offers this advice:

The present is very precious; these are the days of salvation;... How sad that you do not spend the time in which you might purchase everlasting life in a better way.... Try to live now in such a manner that at the moment of death you may be glad rather than fearful. *Learn to die to the world now*, that then you may begin to live with Christ. *Learn to spurn all things now*, that then you may freely go to him. *Chastise your body in penance now*, that then you may have the confidence born of certainty.... Gather for yourself the riches of immortality while you have time. Think of nothing but your salvation.⁸³

⁸² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §2, 69

⁸³ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. II, ch. 23, my emphases

This adherence to the ascetic ideal demands “a love for discipline, the works of penance, readiness to obey, self-denial, and the endurance of every hardship.”⁸⁴ Since this adherence patently brings with it its own new forms of suffering for believers, Nietzsche argues that, in order for individuals to have accepted it, this interpretation must also offer these believers something of value in return.⁸⁵ What it offers believers, I will now demonstrate, is the certainty that their suffering is meaningful.

5.5 The Will to Meaning

Nietzsche frames the *Genealogy*'s third treatise as an attempt to explain why, historically, so many human beings have adopted ascetic practices and ideals, or why this ideal has developed such a commanding authority. He asks: “what does the *power* of that ideal mean, the *monstrosity* of its power? Why has it been given so much space?”⁸⁶ Or, why has it “meant so much to man”? Despite the variable manifestations of asceticism that Nietzsche distinguishes, his explanation for the power of the ascetic ideal is singular: he claims that each form of asceticism ultimately expresses a singular need for an aim, purpose, or meaning: “That the ascetic ideal has meant so much to man reveals a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; it needs an aim –, and it prefers to will nothingness rather than not will.”⁸⁷ By asking what the ascetic ideal means, Nietzsche is asking about the force that dominates and discharges itself through the ascetic ideal and in any one particular

⁸⁴ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. II, ch. 23

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 77

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §23, 109

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

instance, i.e., “what it indicates, what lies hidden behind, beneath and within it and what it expresses in a provisional, indistinct way.”⁸⁸ His explanation is that asceticism is the manifest expression of the underlying will to meaning, or in other words, it is a will to meaning that dominates and discharges itself through commitment to the ascetic ideal.

His argument for this runs as follows. Adherence to the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche claims, is “paradoxical in the extreme” and “the ascetic life is a self-contradiction” because we are faced with a lifeform “that wills itself to be conflicting [*zwiespältig*], which relishes itself in this affliction and becomes more self-assured and triumphant to the same degree as its own condition, the physiological capacity to live, decreases.”⁸⁹ Nietzsche wants to explain this paradox: why would a lifeform relish in the decimation of its own physiology and capacity to live? To explain this, he first hypothesizes that the ascetic life receives something of value in exchange for adherence to the ascetic ideal. Given that we are made to feel “*as sinful as possible*”⁹⁰ by our adherence to the priestly interpretation of suffering, and given the additional suffering that this feeling entails, Nietzsche writes that “if man has failed to find this feeling *pleasant* – why should he have engendered such an idea and adhered to it for so long?”⁹¹ Human beings would accept this interpretation of suffering, at the cost of further suffering, only if it offers us something of value, something that *we will*, in return. And the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche claims, “offered man a meaning!”⁹² Again, cast as penance, suffering’s purpose becomes redemption and salvation. For Nietzsche, what

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §23, 109

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 86

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 77

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 77

⁹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

we are really doing in adhering to the ascetic ideal is rendering our suffering meaningful. Thus, at a minimum, the power of the ascetic ideal reveals the value of meaning for humanity; it reveals that we want meaning and that we will voluntarily increase our levels of suffering in exchange for meaning. If human beings possess a will to meaning, then this explains “the *monstrosity* of” the “power” of the ascetic ideal or why it has “meant so much to man.” The ascetic ideal, the authoritative power allotted to it across history, is Nietzsche’s basic evidence from which he infers the existence of the will to meaning.

The will to meaning explains what is paradoxical in the extreme about the ascetic life: “man, the bravest animal and most prone to suffer, does not deny suffering as such: he wills it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering.”⁹³ Human beings, Nietzsche claims, relish in the decimation of their own physiology because this decimation grants them meaning. In short, if the earth is “the ascetic planet *par excellence*,”⁹⁴ Nietzsche claims that this is because human beings need to believe that their lives are meaningful. Thus, the final page of the *Genealogy* reads:

Except for the ascetic ideal: man, the animal man, had no meaning [*Sinn*] up to now. His existence on earth had no purpose; ‘What is man for, actually?’ – was a question without an answer; there was no will for man and earth; behind every great human destiny sounded the even louder refrain ‘in vain!’ This is what the ascetic ideal meant: something was missing, there was an immense lacuna around man, – he himself could think of no justification or explanation or affirmation, he suffered from the problem of what he meant. Other things made him suffer too, in the main he was a sickly animal: but suffering itself was not his problem, instead, the fact that there was no answer to the question he screamed, ‘Suffering for what?’ ... The meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind, – and the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning! Up to now it was the only meaning, but any meaning at all is better than no meaning at all; the ascetic ideal was, in every respect, the ultimate ‘*faute de mieux*’ *par excellence*. Within it, suffering was interpreted; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 85

was shut on all suicidal nihilism. The interpretation – without a doubt – brought new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought all suffering within the perspective of guilt.... But in spite of all that – man was saved, he had a meaning, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of ‘non-sense’; from now on he could will something, – no matter what, why and how he did it at first, the will itself was saved.⁹⁵

To “save the will” means to ensure that the will has some object after which to strive. Recall that a will to meaning can be understood as a need to have something to will or strive after, as a will to will, or a will to possess a will.⁹⁶ The ascetic ideal saves the will, Nietzsche argues, by allowing individuals to strive to escape life and the human condition, i.e., one’s subjugation to the conditions of finitude. This is why he says that the ascetic ideal expresses a will to nothingness, or indeed, a death drive, since, for Nietzsche, only death lies beyond these conditions. Nonetheless, he concludes, “man still prefers to *will nothingness*, than *not will*”⁹⁷ and thus, the ascetic ideal saves the will, allowing it to strive after just this nothingness. Strictly speaking, this “nothingness” is interchangeable with other possible objects of the will, i.e., other objects which could “save the will” just as well. However, what is unique to this “nothingness” according to Nietzsche is that it remains a viable object of the will for all people at all times. No matter the events that befall us under the conditions of finitude, whatever weakness or inability we find ourselves beset by, we are always able to express this will to nothingness and thus the will can always be saved.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

⁹⁶ See Ch. 1, §1 above.

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

5.6 What Exactly is the Will to Meaning?

Sebastian Gardner presents the will to meaning as a *transcendental* postulate. He writes that “the need for meaning” has, according to Nietzsche, “the kind of status that is properly called transcendental.”⁹⁸ For Nietzsche, on Gardner’s reading, the human history of asceticism demands an explanation, and Nietzsche postulates the human need for meaning as the condition that explains this history: “we are thereby invited ... to see the history of man traced in the *Genealogy* as a gradual unfolding of this need, a quasi-teleological process explained at the ground level by the need for meaning.”⁹⁹ What makes this need transcendental, Gardner argues, is that for human beings it is “ineluctable,”¹⁰⁰ or it cannot be escaped: no mental or theoretical exercise could allow a human being to overcome their need for meaning. Further, Gardner claims that the need for meaning does not have the kind of natural history that Nietzsche ascribes to his various other objects of analysis.¹⁰¹ Gardner writes: “when the need for meaning is introduced... no attempt is made to naturalize it: it is not treated at the physiological level, not historicized or made to seem a product of history, and nothing is said about its origin—rather it is presented as standing outside the foregoing historical side of the *Genealogy*.”¹⁰²

Despite the apparent antipathy between Nietzsche’s thought and the notion of the transcendental, there is something legitimate in Gardner’s descriptions of the will to meaning. At the end of the *Genealogy*, the will to meaning clearly functions as an

⁹⁸ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 28

⁹⁹ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 25

¹⁰⁰ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 28

¹⁰¹ Note that Gardner means specifically that the need for meaning is not historicized in the *Genealogy*, i.e., in contrast to how it is treated in *The Gay Science*, §1.

¹⁰² Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 25

explanatory postulate: Nietzsche does claim that humanity's commitment to the ascetic ideal is a manifest expression of an underlying will to meaning. Nietzsche postulates the will to meaning to account for real-world phenomena; asceticism is the unfolding and fulfillment of this will. When this explanation is given on the *Genealogy's* final page, Nietzsche's reader really is left wondering: this need for meaning may very well account for the prominence of ascetic ideals throughout human history, but from where does this need spring? What accounts for the will to meaning? The absence of answers to *these* questions, and in particular the absence of any natural or historical answers of the kind that we have come to expect from the *Genealogy*, leads Gardner to cast the will to meaning as transcendental. It is not given as a will with a natural history, he argues, but is a necessary condition for the unfolding of the human history of asceticism as we have seen it.

Gardner argues that at GM III 28, the will to meaning "is viewed and taken up from the *inside*,"¹⁰³ or the perspective taken on the need for meaning is "internal" and "practical." Instead of understanding the will to meaning as an objective trait of the human species, from the internal perspective the will to meaning is experienced as a practical need of one's own; it is one's own pressing or affective need for meaning. At GM III 28, we "confront" the need for meaning "practically and not theoretically, directly and not from a distance."¹⁰⁴ Gardner contrasts this with the external, theoretical, or natural perspective embodied at GS 1, which understands the will to meaning as a characteristic of the human species: "its existence is recorded as a further fact of human history."¹⁰⁵ From this perspective of the

¹⁰³ Gardner, "Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason," 25

¹⁰⁴ Gardner, "Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason," 26

¹⁰⁵ Gardner, "Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason," 25

“natural historian,”¹⁰⁶ the human need for meaning is “nothing but another drive or accidental by-product of such,”¹⁰⁷ and it is an object of theoretical or scientific analysis. Gardner claims that the internal conception of the will to meaning offered at GM III 28 cannot be adequately treated by the perspective of the natural historian or scientist, i.e., by a framework of naturalism. Gardner’s contention is that “Nietzsche concludes the *Genealogy* with the affirmation that we have a need which points beyond nature and which renders a non-naturalistic self-conception inescapable for us.”¹⁰⁸ At GM III 28, Nietzsche cannot understand the will to meaning as an emergent product or effect of an evolutionary process, Gardner claims, because this would be incompatible with “Nietzsche’s commitment to the integrity of the demand for *Sinn*.”¹⁰⁹ If Nietzsche understood the will to meaning as a product of nature, then he would be forced to take the line that “the need for *Sinn* cannot be taken with philosophical seriousness” and, as a result, “his practical philosophy would crumble.”¹¹⁰ Gardner’s point seems to amount to the claim that Nietzsche takes the will to meaning too seriously to cast it as a product of nature.

Leiter responds briefly to Gardner, arguing that Nietzsche’s conception of any need for meaning can be adequately conceived within a framework of naturalism. On Leiter’s reading of Nietzsche, the need for suffering to be meaningful is a natural given trait of human beings which he calls a “psychological primitive.” Leiter writes:

Gardner... doubts whether such an explanation is compatible with a naturalist reading.... Gardner’s core challenge is whether the naturalist, in order to make his psychological story about the triumph of ascetic ideals work, is entitled to posit as a kind of primitive psychological need the need for suffering to be meaningful. What kind of natural

¹⁰⁶ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 25

¹⁰⁷ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 28

¹⁰⁸ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 26

¹⁰⁹ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” fn. 41, 27-28

¹¹⁰ Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 28

psychological fact would that be?... The answer to that question... turns on whether Nietzsche's explanatory framework is one that can justify its ontology of psychological needs, not only for meaningful suffering, but for feelings of power, as well as the operations of *ressentiment*. That is a hard question, that turns ultimately on what the competing accounts for the triumph of asceticism look like. At least as things stand now, though, no one... has a competing account for the triumph of asceticism. If there is one that can dispense with psychological primitives like "the need for meaningful suffering," then the Nietzschean naturalist loses. But Gardner has no intelligible alternative, and no one else does either.¹¹¹

On Leiter's interpretation of Nietzsche, the need for meaning as a psychological primitive or a natural given offers an "account for the triumph of asceticism" or makes sense of our human history of ascetic ideals. Leiter holds that, given its function, Nietzsche is entitled to posit the existence of this need, at least so long as no one offers a better explanation for asceticism which requires fewer explanatory postulates. Leiter is content to leave the need for meaning as a primitive postulate, so long as that postulate is termed natural and not transcendental. This response, however, is insufficient. Leiter's "psychological primitive," i.e., the will to meaning itself, still requires an explanation. Both Gardner and Leiter correctly understand the will to meaning as an inescapable aspect or "basic fact"¹¹² of the human will according to Nietzsche. But just what is the nature of this basic fact? I don't think we have to settle for an understanding of it as either a transcendental condition or a psychological primitive. Instead, I propose that there is an explanation in Nietzsche's writings for the emergence of the will to meaning as a salient feature of the human being – and this explanation, as always, amounts to the will to power.

The status of the individual is difficult to pin down in Nietzsche's thinking. On the one hand, he argues that all things are continually susceptible to change and transformation,

¹¹¹ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 210n.

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1

while on the other hand, he speaks of individuals as if they have immutable qualities and characteristics.¹¹³ The key to this puzzle is that if agonistic dynamism precludes absolute stability, it does not preclude the possibility of emergent and relatively stable individuals and types. With this, Nietzsche gestures toward an understanding of human beings and their qualities that occupies a middle ground between the absolutely a-temporal and unchanging character-type described by Schopenhauer,¹¹⁴ and the unceasingly temporal. How exactly these relatively stable forms emerge according to Nietzsche is a daunting, open question. However, at BGE 23, he provides a hint as to how he understands the stabilization of the will to meaning as a character trait of the human type: Nietzsche states that he understands “psychology as morphology and the *doctrine of the development of the will to power*.”¹¹⁵ Psychology is morphology inasmuch as it studies the various shapes, manifestations, and developments of the plastic, morphological will to power as it expresses itself in human beings. One way to understand these shapes is as drives. As Richardson demonstrates, drives are modes of expression of the will to power.¹¹⁶ Individuals do not express the will to power directly; they express the will to power by discharging other drives. To borrow a phrase from a different context, the will to meaning is a “living crystallization” in that it is one of “the recurring and more frequent shapes”¹¹⁷ or drives assumed by the morphological will to power – recalling that a will is a drive in the broad sense, i.e., a force that motivates from within. Certain developments or expressions of the will to power, i.e., drives, occur

¹¹³ E.g., noble types vs. the character of resentment. See GM I throughout, especially §2, §7, §9-§11, & §13.

¹¹⁴ Schopenhauer, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 51. And see “III. The Dionysiac Festival Reveals the Impermanence of Identity” in §3 of Ch. 2 above.

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23, 23

¹¹⁶ Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 20-28

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §186, 75

more often than others, and some may occur so consistently that they appear static or permanent. Human qualities are relatively stable, emergent, morphological developments or expressions of the will to power.

This understanding offers a better account of the will to meaning than that offered by Gardner or Leiter. This is because it accords with both the inescapable dynamism that Nietzsche ascribes to all forms of life, and with the seemingly a-temporal givenness that he seems to ascribe to the will to meaning. The will to meaning is not genuinely a-temporal. It emerges in time before garnering a relative permanence, giving it the appearance of the a-temporal from the perspective of any given human being. Another way of framing this is to say that not every depth psychology need be a metaphysical depth psychology. There are depths of the individual for Nietzsche, but these depths are not the true a-historical self, they are not the *homo noumenon* to some apparent *homo phaenomenon*. The will to meaning is an explanatory postulate that explains the human history of asceticism, and it thus plays the kind of role so often ascribed to the drives by depth psychologists. However, the fact that this will is cast as an explanatory condition does not necessarily render it a metaphysical or transcendental condition. This will can be treated entirely at the ontic level, without recourse to the ontological inasmuch as this will is an expression of the will to power. Nietzsche thus retains the explanatory function of wills or drives without making those wills the transcendental conditions or the metaphysical real of an interpretive system. Whether the will to power itself is a metaphysical presupposition is an open question.

5.7 Conclusion

For both the Greeks and the Christians, Nietzsche claims, suffering was meaningful, *and*, the Greeks and the Christians were able to go on with life, or, for them, “the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism.”¹¹⁸ Nietzsche judges the Judeo-Christian tradition nihilistic, of course, but he sees that this tradition allowed people to go on living in spite of this nihilism. This, I will argue below, points to a distinction between a livable or tolerable form of nihilism, and fully consummate, suicidal nihilism. These traditions managed to escape “suicidal nihilism,” and what these traditions share is that they each serve to give meaning to life; they each understand suffering, and indeed life itself, as *meaningful*. Therefore, Nietzsche reasons, while there is always suffering, those for whom this suffering is meaningful are able to judge that life is worth living despite or in the face of this suffering. Thus, the belief that life is meaningful is advantageous and life-preserving. This, Nietzsche claims, is what is unique to a people in whom suffering does not incite a complete devaluation of life: for them, suffering is meaningful. In other words, those who feel that life’s suffering is meaningless or purposeless also feel that life itself is not worthwhile; those who feel that suffering is meaningful affirm that life is worthwhile. What would explain all of this is that the human type “needs an aim,” it needs a purpose or a meaning after which to strive. This need for meaning, Nietzsche claims, would account for a plethora of historical phenomena; it would account for the lengths that human beings go to, to prove that life and suffering are meaningful. This would explain the general prominence of ascetic practices, including above all the fact that individuals accept the priestly interpretation of

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

suffering, even while it serves to increase suffering. Finally, the will to meaning can best be understood as an instantiation of the will to power in a crystalized or relatively stable form. If the will to power is morphological, the will to meaning is one of its most persistent shapes. How the will to meaning expresses and satisfies the will to power will be seen in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER SIX

NIETZSCHE'S STANDARD OF EVALUATION

In the previous chapter, I examined Nietzsche's evidence for the existence of a will to meaning in human beings. The core of his argument is that the will to meaning would account for the great lengths to which individuals go in order to make themselves feel as if their suffering is meaningful. In brief, Nietzsche demonstrates that the human need to believe that life is meaningful is so powerful that people will voluntarily undergo great personal suffering in order to fulfill it. Granting the existence of this will to meaning, I've adopted as my general line of inquiry the question of whether or not Nietzsche thinks that the quest for meaning is valuable for human life. Or, in a more developed formulation, since the will to meaning necessarily belongs to human beings, is it possible to channel this will so that it is life-affirming and valuable? But what exactly does he mean by valuable? One cannot judge something's value without some criterion of measurement or standard of evaluation. As Richard Schacht says of Nietzsche's revaluation of values, it "involves the employment of a standard of value by reference to which the value of things taken to be 'values' can be assessed."¹ Likewise, understanding Nietzsche's evaluation of meaning requires a grasp of the standard by which he will measure this value.

Nietzsche's standard of evaluation is the enhancement of life, or the valuable is the life-enhancing, but it is difficult to determine what exactly he means by enhancement. He

¹ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 349

never offers a clear definition of the term,² and the use he makes of it is counter-intuitive. Enhancement, or more precisely *the enhancing*, usually has the connotation of being future-oriented: the process of enhancement makes reference to a future in which some variable is enhanced relative to its present state. Frequently, however, Nietzsche describes something as enhancing by making reference to its origin rather than its future, or to what it expresses rather than to its effects.³ For instance, as Huddleston notes, Nietzsche's evaluation of ascetic ideals requires that he determine the origin or possessive force which these ideals express.⁴ I will argue that what is life-enhancing for Nietzsche is that which has its origins in and expresses the love of life, or in Nietzsche's final language, *amor fati*, where fate refers to what is absolutely necessary in life. This provides a standard by which to judge whether something is life-enhancing: the affirmation of life is the mark of enhancement, and so of the valuable. Life, here, refers to the conglomeration of all three forms discussed above; to affirm life is to affirm the experience of being a living thing that wills power under the conditions of agonistic dynamism. This provides a marker for each end of the evaluative scale which I ascribe to Nietzsche: the love of life on the one hand, and an aversion toward life on the other. For Nietzsche, our values are life-enhancing, or genuinely valuable, where they have their origin in the affirmation of life. Life and its necessary conditions are Nietzsche's source of normative guidance. My aim here is to show

² May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality*, 25-26

³ E.g., Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism," §5; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §1-§8; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §18.

⁴ Huddleston, "What is Enshrined in Morality? Understanding the Grounds for Nietzsche's Critique," 27. And see GM III, §23: "I do not want to bring to light what the ideal *did*; rather simply what it means, what it indicates, what lies hidden behind, beneath and within it and what it expresses."

that the affirmation of life plays this role in Nietzsche's thought. I will, for now, reserve judgement as to whether Nietzsche is justified in ascribing this normative power to life.

The first section will clarify two distinct uses Nietzsche makes of the term "value." By values, Nietzsche means that which is manifestly "called good" or "praised as holy" by a people,⁵ e.g., in Nietzsche's Europe, altruism, pity, and compassion.⁶ Generally, Nietzsche uses the term "morality" to refer to his society's collective valuing of altruism, pity, and compassion. When he speaks of these values, he is speaking descriptively from an external perspective about what others esteem as good. By contrast, when he speaks of *the value* of these values, he himself is normatively evaluating – e.g., pity or altruism – based on whether they are life-enhancing. In the second section, I'll consider textual evidence, primarily from the *Genealogy's* preface, for the claim that the enhancement of life is Nietzsche's standard of evaluation. The third section will begin the search for the definition of enhancement. I'll first consider the popular claim that Nietzsche's definition of enhancement, and therefore his standard of value, is the growth of will to power. While there is some truth to this, i.e., in that to affirm life is to affirm the will to power, I'll demonstrate that this claim cannot be true in an unqualified manner since Nietzsche continually shows that all character-types, including those to which he ascribes a low value, strive unceasingly to maximize their sensation of power. Following this, I'll change course and attempt to isolate a definition of enhancement by analyzing the different figures that Nietzsche describes as representative of enhancement and decline, respectively. I'll show that enhancement is inseparable from the genuine affirmation of this life, as opposed to the

⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, "On a Thousand and One Goals," 42

⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §5, 6-7

false or merely apparent affirmation of life that Nietzsche sees in figures like the priest. Correspondingly, decline is inseparable from negation. For this reason, I'll analyze more rigorously the exact nature of these respective affirmations and negations. I'll show that both what the life-enhancing type affirms and what the life-hindering type negates is agonistic dynamism and the will to power, or the necessary conditions for life itself. This is the fundamental distinction between the two types: the one says "Yes" to life's necessary conditions, while the other says "No" to those conditions. I clarify this distinction by reference to the notion of escape: those who say "No" to life are those who wish to escape life's necessary conditions, and above all, those who wish to escape the certainty of death. With the distinction between these two character-types established, I propose that this "Yes" to life is the mark of the enhancing, and therefore, of the valuable, according to Nietzsche. With this marker of his standard of value established, I'll be able to identify the value Nietzsche ascribes to various uses of meaning.

In endeavoring to extract this standard of value from Nietzsche's writings, I challenge the claims of interpreters who hold that Nietzsche does not posit any of his own value standards. Kaufmann, for example, writes:

Does Nietzsche offer us new values? It would of course be easy to show that the virtues praised by him are all to be found in previous writers.... Hence we should change our question and ask... whether it was his intention and his own conception of the "revaluation" to pour us new wine. The answer is: No.⁷

Kaufmann's point is not only that Nietzsche's values are not historically novel. His point is that Nietzsche's revaluation of values is a fundamentally negative endeavor that aims primarily to destroy or negate prevailing values. For Kaufmann, the revaluation is not

⁷ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 110

creative or productive; he claims that the revaluation “does not mean a table of new virtues, nor an attempt to give us such a table.”⁸ It is rather, he claims, an “internal criticism,”⁹ which reveals the underlying hypocrisy and immorality of existing values: “the revaluation is... the alleged discovery that our morality is, by its own standards, poisonously immoral.”¹⁰ On Kaufmann’s reading, Nietzsche does not offer any positive value standard against which to revalue existing values; rather, he revalues existing values by revealing what is already inherently broken within them according to their own standards, thereby tearing them down. By contrast, I will demonstrate that Nietzsche’s critique of our existing values presupposes a value standard of his own: he critiques existing values by demonstrating that they fall short of his own value standard, which I propose is *amor fati*.

Since I claim that Nietzsche evaluates according to this standard, I also challenge those readers who interpret Nietzsche as an uncritical and unqualified proponent of individualism or of an individualistic moral relativism.¹¹ While Nietzsche calls us to create our own, new values,¹² this call can be heard in two distinct senses. On the one hand, it can be heard from the perspective of individualism as a call to create one’s own values no matter what those values may be. From this perspective, what matters is *that one’s values are one’s own*, that they originate within one’s own self, no matter what one actually values. This position can be understood as moral libertarianism. This perspective privileges the form of freedom or autonomy of the values over their content; it assumes that any value

⁸ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 110

⁹ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 111

¹⁰ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 113

¹¹ These interpretations are catalogued and summarized in Young (ed.), *Individual and Community in Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, and in Young, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*.

¹² E.g., BGE §211, §260, §261.

which originates in the individual is more valuable than a value imposed upon the individual by a community or collective. On the other hand, Nietzsche could call us to create our own values not because he privileges the individual as such, nor condemns all collectives as such, but because he condemns *this* collective in particular, or because he condemns the values of his contemporary European society. On this reading, Nietzsche calls us to create our own values not because he prefers individual values over societal values as such, but because he judges the societal values he sees to be poisoned, and he is calling individuals to create new, healthier values in contradistinction to existing societal values. In this way, Nietzsche would not simply call us to create values no matter what those values may be, but rather, it matters what kind of values we create: Nietzsche is calling us to create life-affirming values in contrast to a society that has come to privilege life-negating values. I support the second of these two readings. I do not see Nietzsche as a proponent of a brute individualism across all boards and for all times. Nietzsche becomes a proponent of individualism in response to his own society, which he condemns. But this condemnation, too, presupposes the value standard of *amor fati*. Society's values, he claims, are rooted in an aversion to life, and he is calling us to create values rooted in the affirmation of life. Thus, it is not impossible that Nietzsche could support communal values, so long as one could demonstrate that those values were genuinely life-affirming.

6.1 The Value of Values

By values, or a people's values, Nietzsche means that which a people upholds or reveres as good,¹³ and he observes that different peoples maintain different "tablets" of values, or different canons or lists of what is considered good.¹⁴ As Nietzsche reads it, the tablet of the good hanging over his contemporary European landscape lists the values of pity, compassion, and altruism: these, he claims, are *our* values.¹⁵ Nietzsche observes that the different "things taken to be 'values'" by a given people tend to be things that *benefit* that people. For instance, Nietzsche argues that the socially, politically, and physiologically meek tend to esteem altruism as good and that they benefit from this estimation.¹⁶ As discussed, certain values are difficult to explain, and Nietzsche hypothesizes that we can best account for the fact that some individual reveres what they do if what they revere is "what is needed for the preservation of" this individual.¹⁷ On this basis, Nietzsche argues that we value what we need in order to preserve "beings like us."¹⁸ In other words, we value, or revere as good, that without which we could not live; we value the conditions for life.¹⁹ For this reason, he defines values as "physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life."²⁰ On this basis, Nietzsche criticizes those who conceit to know what is good for all of humanity.²¹ There can be no common good for the whole of humanity, he argues, since individual types of life will have their own particular

¹³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, "On a Thousand and One Goals"; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §5.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, "On a Thousand and One Goals," 42

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §5

¹⁶ See the subsection entitled "Genealogy reveals the impermanence of the good" in Chapter 2 above.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 7

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 7

¹⁹ May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality*, pp. 9-10

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §3, 7

²¹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III, "On Old and New Tablets," 157

requirements. This is why he calls upon each of us to say “This is *my* good and evil,” and thereby to silence “the mole and dwarf who says: “Good for all, evil for all.””²²

And yet, across his writings, Nietzsche seems to cast judgments according to what appears to be a universalizable value standard. This is one of the great paradoxes of reading Nietzsche. On the one hand, by demonstrating that value judgments always belong inextricably to a particular perspective, he seems to destroy the intellectual infrastructure that individuals once used to produce judgments and evaluations with any kind of objective certainty. And yet, on the other hand, he continues to judge and evaluate with seeming impunity. Nietzsche does not write like a man who has lost his standard of value. This comes to one of its clearest points of expression in §26 of *The Anti-Christ*, wherein there can be no doubt that Nietzsche employs an evaluative measure that seems to enjoy some level of objectivity in his thinking. He writes:

There is one thing you need to understand: the parasitism of the priests (or the ‘moral world order’) takes every natural custom, every natural institution (state, judicial order, marriage, care for the sick and the poor), everything required by the instinct of life, *in short, everything intrinsically valuable*, and renders it fundamentally worthless, of negative value: these things now require some extra sanction, - a power is needed to lend value to things, to negate what is natural about them and in so doing create value.... The priest devalues nature, he desecrates it: this is the price of his existence.²³

Here, Nietzsche claims that the priest corrupts intrinsically valuable customs and institutions by demanding that their value derives from some transcendent or supernatural supplement. In this quotation, Nietzsche relies on his idea of the vast history – “the longest epoch of the human race” – of the morality of custom that, he claims, precedes the dawn of

²² Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III, “On the Spirit of Gravity,” 155

²³ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §26, 24, my emphasis

the priestly age.²⁴ During these Ancient periods, Nietzsche claims, these various natural customs and institutions existed in healthier or more life-affirming forms. Thus, the priest is not, e.g., opposed to marriage entirely or as such. However, marriage precedes Christianity, for instance, with the Greeks, while, for Nietzsche, the priest later corrupts marriage from a healthy to an unhealthy form.²⁵ For Nietzsche, the priest is opposed to the healthy form of marriage, which is marriage understood as valuable without requiring “some extra sanction” or “power” “to lend value to things.” What interests us here, however, is this: how does Nietzsche determine that which is already intrinsically valuable, i.e., prior to this process of corruption? How can Nietzsche measure value? How does he understand the valuable? And finally, is this notion of the intrinsically valuable somehow compatible with his demand that we each determine our own good and evil? What answers these questions, I argue, is the distinction presupposed in the phrase “the value of values.”

It is pity, compassion, and altruism of which Nietzsche is speaking when he tells us that “we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values* [*der Werth dieser Werthe*] *should itself, for once, be examined*.”²⁶ With this phrase, Nietzsche clearly uses the term “value” [*Werth*] in two distinct senses. On the one hand, he isolates “*these values*,” our values, or that which is considered good by this or that individual, group, or perspective. Nietzsche treats these values externally, or he discusses them from an external perspective; these are not Nietzsche’s own values, or at least, he is not speaking about them as if they are his own values. Rather, he speaks of them as the values esteemed by others. He

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §2

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §245, 141

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §6, 7

observes, in the scientific or descriptive sense, that others esteem altruism, pity, and compassion for the sake of their own self-preservation. On the other hand, when Nietzsche speaks of the value of altruism, pity, and compassion, he is actively engaged in a project of evaluating and he is employing a standard of value against which he measures the value of others' values. Nietzsche's evaluative project is to determine whether or not it is life-enhancing for us to esteem altruism, pity, and compassion. Nietzsche's understanding of the valuable, or his standard against which he will determine whether he esteems the evaluative projects of others as valuable, is the enhancement of life.

If Nietzsche evaluates our values on the basis of whether they are ultimately life-enhancing or life-hindering, this interpretation explains how Nietzsche's value relativism can co-exist with his seeming commitment to a standard of evaluation. On my interpretation, Nietzsche holds that individuals are free to claim that this is my good and this is my evil, and yet he simultaneously retains a distinct scale, beyond good and evil, by which to evaluate whether it is good or bad *that* this is your good and this is your evil, i.e., the scale of enhancement and decline. The scale of enhancement is the scale upon which Nietzsche measures others' goods and evils. What is beneficial and life-preserving, and even what is genuinely life-enhancing, will be different for any given individual. What Nietzsche is ultimately judging is whether or not an individual is behaving in life-enhancing ways. Thus, an individual's good can be good or bad, and an individual's evil can be good or bad. Or, more precisely, it can be either good (valuable) or bad (anti-valuable²⁷) that an

²⁷ The term "unvalue" comes from Heidegger: "strictly speaking, life-hindering conditions are not values but *unvalues*." (Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. III, 17) I've modified "unvalue" to anti-value to emphasize that anti-values are not only *not* valuable but also actively hinder and undermine what *is* valuable.

individual considers x to be good, and it can be either good or bad that an individual considers y to be evil. An individual's good is valuable where the fact that x is taken for good promotes human enhancement; an individual's evil is valuable where the fact that y is taken for evil promotes human enhancement. Furthermore, my interpretation also explains Kaufmann's insistence that Nietzsche postulates no values of his own. Kaufmann is correct if we ask whether or not Nietzsche postulates values along the scale of good and evil. But he is wrong if we ask whether or not Nietzsche postulates values against which to measure others' tablets of good and evil. This is one sense in which Nietzsche's standard of value lies "beyond good and evil," since enhancement is not a possible candidate for a new tablet of the good, but rather, it is the standard against which Nietzsche evaluates others' tablets of the good.

6.2 Enhancement

Throughout the *Genealogy's* preface, it becomes clear that Nietzsche's own standard of value is a measurement of something's contribution to humanity's flourishing, enhancement, and elevation. For instance, Nietzsche writes:

Under what conditions did man invent the value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves have?* Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing? Are they a sign of distress, poverty and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?²⁸

There are two key points in this passage which must be explicated. First, Nietzsche claims that if we are to determine something's value, we must know whether it promotes or

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §3, 5

obstructs human flourishing: something is valuable from Nietzsche's own normative perspective if it promotes human flourishing and anti-valuable if it obstructs human flourishing. In other words, for Nietzsche, the value of our values is a measure of the extent to which they are enhancing. This places me in agreement with a claim made by Heidegger: "as a condition of life, value must ... be thought as that which supports, furthers, and awakens the enhancement of life. Only what enhances life, and beings as a whole, has value – more precisely, *is* a value."²⁹ This presupposes a distinction between the enhancing on the one hand and the beneficial and life-preserving on the other. While a people's values are always beneficial or life-preserving for that people, they are not always life-enhancing. A value can preserve a life-hindering or life-denying form of life. This is what Nietzsche is getting at when he calls us to question the value of our values: given that we esteem altruism, pity, and compassion, what sort of life do our values preserve? Do they preserve a life-enhancing form of life, or do they preserve a life-hindering form of life? And therefore, given that we value what we do, is it genuinely life-enhancing for us to do so? Or are our values merely life-preserving?

The second crucial element in the above passage is the duality that will characterize Nietzsche's understanding of the valuable, namely, in that it makes reference both to something's origin and future. On the one hand, Nietzsche asks whether our values will obstruct or promote flourishing, i.e., into the future, while on the other hand, he asks whether our values are signs of, i.e., express or stem from, either degeneration or enhancement. Thus, it seems that something can be valuable if it promotes, or serves to

²⁹ Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. III, 15-16

incite, human flourishing, but also if its origin lies within human flourishing. Stated otherwise, it seems as if something can be valuable because of its past or because of its future, because it stems from enhancement or because it incites enhancement. Nietzsche states this most explicitly when, after calling for an examination of the value of moral values, he goes on to say that “we need to know about the conditions and circumstances under which the values grew up, developed and changed (morality as result, as symptom, as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, remedy, stimulant, inhibition, poison.)”³⁰ Thus, the evaluation of values will take into account both the origin of our values, i.e., what has caused them, or, that of which they are a symptom, and, the future of our values, i.e., that which they will yet cause, remedy, stimulate, inhibit, or poison. Nietzsche evaluates our tablet of the good on two fronts: on the basis of whether or not it helps us in striving towards our “highest potential power and splendor,”³¹ and, whether or not it grows from splendor. He finds not only that our tablet grows from impoverishment, but also that it pulls us further in this direction. Nietzsche identifies a causal relation between the two terms of this duality: what incites enhancement also has its origins in enhancement. The correlate of this point is that when Nietzsche condemns something’s value, he does not necessarily do so because of its effects, i.e., its hampering “the flourishing of great individuals,”³² as a certain interpretation would have us believe.³³ He also condemns something’s value on the basis of its origin.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §6, 7-8

³¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §6, 8

³² Huddleston, “What is Enshrined in Morality? Understanding the Grounds for Nietzsche’s Critique,” 1

³³ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 103-110

Finally, before turning to the definition of enhancement, it is important to ask if Nietzsche evaluates all phenomena according to the same standard. If enhancement is the criterion by which he evaluates our values, is it also the criterion by which he will judge the value of meaning? In fact, the enhancement of life provides the criterion by which he will judge the value of countless phenomena, including our values, judgments, customs, institutions, art, science, religion, education, the study of history, and indeed, our quests for meaning. An example occurs at §4 of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here, Nietzsche claims, if we are to evaluate, e.g., a judgment, what we must ask “is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves and perhaps even cultivates the type.”³⁴ He explicitly articulates his standard of evaluation here: to be of high value is to promote and improve life, and to be of low value is to degrade life. Since Nietzsche is clear elsewhere that he does not value preservation very highly, I think he must mean that he values human preservation as far as it is a condition for human elevation and flourishing.³⁵

Likewise, the enhancement of life provides a criterion of value across a variety of Nietzsche’s texts. His primary concern in the second *Untimely Meditation* is whether or not we are using the study of history in such a way as to enhance our lives in the present.³⁶ And, in the *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche attempts to “look at art” in the optic “of life”³⁷ and he is burdened by the question of “the significance of morality” when “seen in the optic of life.”³⁸ In each case, he means to ask whether art and morality enhance or hinder life.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §4, 7

³⁵ See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §349. (And see Z, II 12; WP 688.) Also, Heidegger writes: “Since the essence of life is seen as life-“enhancement,” all conditions that simply aim at life-preservation are downgraded to the level of those that basically hinder or even negate life...” (Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, V. 3, 17)

³⁶ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 757

³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Attempt at Self-Criticism, §2

³⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Attempt at Self-Criticism, §4

Furthermore, if the valuable is the life-enhancing, then this explains why, in §26 of *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche equates the natural customs and natural institutions “required by the instinct of life” with “everything intrinsically valuable.” That is, because what is valuable is nothing more than what enhances or elevates life; what is valuable is what allows life to flourish. In each of these texts, the enhancement of life provides a standard of evaluation that Nietzsche continually relies upon.³⁹

6.3 Excursus on the Will to Power

Nietzsche measures value along a scale that runs from the life-enhancing to the life-hindering. The enhancement of life is Nietzsche’s good; the decline of life is Nietzsche’s bad. But what exactly is meant by enhancement? Nietzsche offers no clear-cut definition of the flourishing or enhancement of life. Since will to power is what is essential to life, one could speculate that life is enhanced where will to power is strengthened, and that life is hindered where will to power is weakened. Such an evaluative scale would hold that something is more valuable the more it enhances or strengthens one’s will to power, and less valuable the more it hinders one’s will to power.

Many commentators argue that Nietzsche’s standard of evaluation is to be understood in this way.⁴⁰ Schacht, for instance, claims that, for Nietzsche, will to power is “the ‘principle’ to be employed” in carrying out the revaluation of values.⁴¹ Reginster

³⁹ Richardson, “Nietzsche on Life’s Ends,” 757. As evidence, Richardson cites several of the passages that I have noted here. He also cites WP §266 and BGE §2, §19, & §23.

⁴⁰ Leiter summarizes this ongoing discussion in Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 110-118. He tells us that many interpreters “think that Nietzsche’s doctrine of will to power provides some objective criterion of value.” (111)

⁴¹ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 349

argues that “Nietzsche declares that the “principle [*Prinzip*]” or “standard [*Maßstab*]” of the revaluation of values is the *will to power*.”⁴² Likewise, Janaway proposes that will to power provides “a criterion for his [Nietzsche’s] own evaluations.”⁴³ And Richardson says that this criterion is not only will to power, but power itself; he says that Nietzsche “seems to fix level of power as the true standard for value”⁴⁴ and that “Nietzsche very often names power as the good.”⁴⁵ Indeed, in a series of notebook entries dating from 1885 to 1888, Nietzsche does seem to say that either power or will to power is the standard by which value should be determined. Most explicitly, at WP §391, he writes: “Standard by which the value of moral evaluation is to be determined. ... *Homo Natura*. The “will to power.””⁴⁶ Likewise, in an oft-quoted passage of *The Anti-Christ*, he seems to say the same thing: “What is good? – Everything that enhances people’s feeling of power, will to power, power itself.”⁴⁷ And he goes on to say that “when there is no will to power, there is decline.”⁴⁸ Given these passages, there must be some truth to the claim that will to power is Nietzsche’s standard of value, or, enhancement must somehow be marked by the will to power.

However, the claim that will to power is Nietzsche’s standard of value must be treated with great care. This is because, based on several other passages from his published works, neither power nor the will to power alone can act as sufficient indicators of value for Nietzsche. He does not hold in an uncritical or unqualified sense that all growth of will to power is enhancing. Rather, it is clear that for Nietzsche power can grow and be

⁴² Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 148

⁴³ Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, 143

⁴⁴ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 19

⁴⁵ Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, 149

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §391, 210. And see also WP §55; WP §674; WP §710; WP §858.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §2, 4

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §6, 6

expressed in the wrong sorts of ways – in priestly ways, in resentful ways, etc. As Janaway correctly notices, “will to power may manifest itself in healthy or unhealthy ways.”⁴⁹ For instance, Nietzsche writes that “the type of person who wields power inside Judaism and Christianity, a priestly type,... has a life-interest in making humanity sick and twisting the concepts ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ ‘true’ and ‘false’ to the point where they endanger life and slander the world.”⁵⁰ Here he states clearly that power can be put to anti-valuable uses, with anti-valuable results and effects. And, at AC §26 he says that these same types also want to acquire more power: the priestly class used “revelation” to divulge and impose “the conditions for maintaining power in the hands of the priests” – which conditions they named “the will of God.”⁵¹ Nietzsche cannot call this particular form of will to power enhancing, since it is precisely the will of those with “a life-interest in making humanity sick.” And, at GM III, §14, Nietzsche condemns “the will of the sick to appear superior in any way,” and he continues, “where can it not be found, this will to power of precisely the weakest!”⁵² And likewise, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes:

Wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the serving I found the will to be master.
The weaker is persuaded by its own will to serve the stronger, because it wants to be master over what is still weaker: this is the only pleasure it is incapable of renouncing.⁵³

These quotations show that a will to power is neither necessarily valuable nor an expression of a valuable type. This clearly problematizes Nietzsche’s claim that everything that

⁴⁹ Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, 146

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §24, 21. A structurally similar point is also made at GM III, §11.

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §26, 23-24

⁵² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 90-91

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On Self-Overcoming,” 89

enhances will to power and the feeling of power is also life-enhancing; he simply cannot mean this in an uncritical or unqualified sense. If all animals strive to increase their feelings of power, then both life-enhancing and life-hindering character-types do so. Therefore, a will to increase one's feelings of power cannot by itself be a sufficient indication of life-enhancement. Life-hindering types also strive to increase their feelings of power, and this is why any claim that Nietzsche's standard of evaluation is the will to power, even if true, must be subject to the proper qualifications which are not made explicit by several of the aforementioned commentators. These qualifications have not yet been determined precisely, except to say that there will be a distinction between life-enhancing and life-hindering expressions of will to power. Such a subtlety is lost in the claim that Nietzsche's standard of value is will to power alone.

Finally, I've encountered a number of positions in the relevant scholarship concerning the will to power as Nietzsche's value standard to which I wish to respond briefly. Since it is clear that will to power alone is an insufficient indicator of value for Nietzsche, some commentators have attempted to distinguish between valuable and anti-valuable, i.e., enhancing and hindering, expressions of will to power. One option, offered by Huddleston, is that an enhancing character type expresses their will to power directly while the hindering type does so indirectly.⁵⁴ Now, there does seem to be some truth to this claim, e.g., the noble types engage directly with powerful resistances while the resentful types do not and find indirect and subterranean modes by which to increase their feeling of power. However, in his discussion of the subtleties of the various forms of asceticism,

⁵⁴ Huddleston, "Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul," 142

Nietzsche is clear that an individual can express their power in an indirect way to ultimately life-enhancing effect. Therefore, an indirect expression of power is not by itself a sufficient indicator of *ressentiment*, or thereby, of the denigration and negation of life.

A second option is that, for Nietzsche, life-enhancing types exercise their power externally while life-hindering types exercise their power internally. Again, it is clear that there is some truth to this, but it cannot be entirely correct. Nietzsche does sometimes describe life-enhancing character types as individuals who express their will to power outwardly, particularly with regard to the need to overcome some external resistance. However, he also claims that it can take great strength to gain control over one's internal drives. And moreover, in his discussion of the slave revolt in morality, he argues that the life-hindering types have exercised what collective power they have externally, upon the more powerful, in order to alter their behavioral patterns. In other words, an enhancing expression of power can be internal, and a hindering expression of power can be external. Thus, the distinction between the external and the internal cannot sufficiently reflect the distinction between enhancing and hindering expressions of will to power.

Two further related options, each offered by a number of commentators, are that expressions of will to power are life-enhancing where they are sublimated or where they are unified into a coherent whole or form. Simon May, for instance, argues that "the degree to which power is 'sublimated' constitutes" one of Nietzsche's "criterion of life-enhancement."⁵⁵ And Huddleston discusses but ultimately rejects the view that, for Nietzsche, health and flourishing amounts to having "one's drives in a certain integrated

⁵⁵ May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality*, 27

unity,” i.e., under “a dominant master drive ... that reins the other drives in and turns them toward its purpose.”⁵⁶ Sublimation [*Sublimierung*] is not a term that Nietzsche uses very frequently⁵⁷ and I suspect that, if it is often discussed in English-language Nietzsche scholarship, this stems from the fact that Kaufmann devotes two entire chapters to this theme and makes sublimation the cornerstone of his interpretation of power.⁵⁸ When Nietzsche does use the term, sublimation seems to refer to the process whereby an impulse or drive is transformed to adopt a new object upon which to discharge itself, or, to bypass its original direction in order to jump to a new one.⁵⁹ This process can be beneficial in that it can force drives which may otherwise distract from one’s governing aim to facilitate the achievement of this aim. As James Pearson puts this, “rather than striving to repress such impulses, Nietzsche wants us to master and exploit them in such a way as to press them into the service of our higher objectives.”⁶⁰ Thus, sublimation and integration are related in that it is by virtue of sublimation that a series of potentially divergent expressions of will to power can cohere in a unified form. However, a drive, which is itself an expression of will to power, is not life-enhancing simply because it is sublimated or a functioning part of a coherent whole. As May himself recognizes, “sublimation can be employed either to suppress life ... or to invigorate it.”⁶¹ The sublimation of the instinct for cruelty from an

⁵⁶ Huddleston, “Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul,” 151-152

⁵⁷ In BGE, for instance, arguably Nietzsche’s “most comprehensible and detached account of the major themes that concerned him throughout his life,” (Horstmann, “Introduction,” vii) the term occurs twice, at §58 and §189, neither time with any particular emphasis placed upon it. The term occurs five times in GM, once at II, §7; twice at II, §10; and twice at III, §27. Again, in each case, the term is used largely in passing, save for GM III, §27 in which its meaning is ambiguous.

⁵⁸ See Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, Ch. 7 & Ch. 8.

⁵⁹ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, “Sublimation,” 316-317. Examples include: HH, I, §1; HH, I, §107; BGE §189; GM, II, §7; GM, III, §15.

⁶⁰ Pearson, “Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression,” 2

⁶¹ May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on Morality*, 28

external to an internal object, Nietzsche argues, is largely degenerative, giving rise as it does, he claims, to bad conscience.⁶² Furthermore, as Ken Gemes has shown, it is difficult to distinguish between sublimation and symptom formation since both name the process whereby an instinct adopts a new object upon or with which to discharge itself.⁶³ Ultimately, Gemes argues that sublimation is a means to the unification of the drives while symptom formation allows a wayward or divergent drive to express itself. Even unification, however, cannot mark the distinction between the enhancing and the degenerative since Nietzsche argues that the religious character-type, even at its most anti-valuable, forms a coherent and unified whole. Disciplining one's instincts into a coherent form is not inherently valuable or life-enhancing for Nietzsche since it is possible to discipline oneself into a life-hindering form.⁶⁴ Thus, it cannot be the case that the sublimation and unification of expressions of power are always indicative of enhancement.

6.4 Representative Character-Types

Since power alone is not sufficient, even where one distinguishes between its healthy and unhealthy expressions, I must continue the search for a marker of enhancement in Nietzsche's writings. Nietzsche offers exemplary images of life-enhancing and life-hindering character-types. I will now change course and attempt to extract a definition of enhancement from these images. Nietzsche writes:

In my *Genealogy of Morality* I introduced a psychology of the opposing concepts of *noble* morality and *ressentiment* morality; the latter originating *out of a no* to the former: but this is the Judeo-Christian morality through and through. The instinct

⁶² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 56-58

⁶³ Gemes, "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation"

⁶⁴ Poellner, "Nietzschean Freedom," 154

of *ressentiment* said no to everything on earth that represented the *ascending* movement of life: success, power, beauty, self-affirmation.⁶⁵

Here, Nietzsche claims that the noble character type represents the ascending movement of life, i.e., life's enhancement, while the character of *ressentiment* represents the negation of this ascension, the decline of life, or a life-hindering movement. Both types, like all animals, strive to increase their feelings of power – but what exactly is the difference between the two types, or, how does Nietzsche distinguish them? If the difference between life-enhancing and life-hindering character types could be isolated, this would provide a standard by which to distinguish what does and does not promote flourishing and enhancement.

As to how the two types are distinct, Nietzsche is clear: the noble type represents a movement of affirmation or “yes-saying,” while the character of *ressentiment* represents a movement of negation or “no-saying.” He writes:

Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying ‘yes’ to itself, slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside’, ‘other’, ‘non-self’: and this ‘no’ is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance – this essential orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself – is a feature of *ressentiment*: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, – its action is basically a reaction. The opposite is the case with the noble method of valuation: this acts and grows spontaneously, seeking out its opposite only so that it can say ‘yes’ to itself even more thankfully and exultantly, – its negative concept ‘low’, ‘common’, ‘bad’ is only a pale contrast created after the event compared to its positive basic concept, saturated with life and passion, ‘we the noble, the good, the beautiful and the happy!’⁶⁶

At a minimum, there is an initial clue here: a life-enhancing character-type expresses a movement of affirmation; a life-hindering character-type expresses a movement of

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §24, 21

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 20

negation. More specifically, then, the noble type says “yes” to or affirms its own self, while the character of *ressentiment* negates or says “no” to something beyond or other than itself – although, at other points, Nietzsche will also claim that the character of *ressentiment* says “no” even to its own self.⁶⁷ The nobles create their own value system independently, without regard either for its effect upon others, or for any pre-established system of values, whereas if the resentful type becomes creative, they do so in reaction to the values of others. This provides an initial formulation of Nietzsche’s standard of evaluation: does what is under evaluation operate on a platform of affirmation or negation?

This, however, is still not enough. It is apparent from Zarathustra’s three metamorphoses that one can say “yes” to the wrong sorts of things or in the wrong sorts of ways. This is because, for Nietzsche, a manifest “yes” can be the expression of a latent “no” to the general conditions of life. Zarathustra says that “the spirit becomes a camel, and the camel a lion, and finally the lion a child.”⁶⁸ Both the camel and the child say “yes,” but the child’s “yes” is an expression of a genuine affirmation of life, where the camel’s “yes” is a manifest expression of a latent “no” to life. The individual, Nietzsche claims, “kneels down like a camel and wants to be well loaded,”⁶⁹ and what they are loaded with, or what they say “yes” to, are prescribed values: the camel accepts the values prescribed for it. We affirm in ultimately negative ways when the values to which we say “yes” are themselves life-negating, or when we affirm a negative. This is Nietzsche’s critique of the European tablet of the good:

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §16, 56-58

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On the Three Metamorphoses,” 16

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On the Three Metamorphoses,” 16

the value of the ‘unegoistic,’ the instincts of compassion, self-denial, self-sacrifice which Schopenhauer had for so long gilded, deified and transcendentalized until he was finally left with them as those ‘values as such’ on the basis of which he said ‘no’ to life and to himself as well. But against these very instincts I gave vent to an increasingly deep mistrust.... Precisely here I saw the great danger to mankind, its most sublime temptation and seduction – temptation to what? to nothingness? – precisely here I saw... mankind... turning its will against life.... I understood the morality of compassion as the most uncanny symptom of our European culture, ... as its detour to... nihilism?⁷⁰

Here, Nietzsche argues that to say “Yes” to the unegoistic is to say “No” to life, since the unegoistic is itself a life-negating value. In this case, a manifest “Yes” expresses a latent “No.” This distinction between the latent and the manifest finally reveals the full meaning of the phrase *the value of values*. A value’s *value* is not only Nietzsche’s perspectival estimation of a people’s good; it is also the latent value expressed in that people’s good. When Nietzsche evaluates another’s values, he is purporting to uncover the latent evaluation presupposed by and expressed within a character-type’s manifest values, and it is the latent value which he ultimately submits to his own evaluation.

The distinction between latent and manifest values also explains how, according to Nietzsche, the character of resentment can be convinced that they are affirming life. Take the “Priestly type,” for instance: they “love humanity *for the sake of God*,”⁷¹ they “make the most of suffering,”⁷² and they possess “a justification for everything common place.”⁷³ And sometimes Nietzsche even thinks that this “Yes” expressed through a manifest theism is genuine, i.e., is *not* an expression of a latent “No.” He writes:

A people that still believes in itself will still have its own god. In the figure of this god, a people will worship the conditions that have brought it to the fore, its virtues,

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5, 7

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §60, 54

⁷² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §61, 55

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §61, 55

- it projects the pleasure it takes in itself, its feeling of power, into a being that it can thank for all of this. Whoever has wealth will want to give; a proud people needs a god to sacrifice to.... On this supposition, religion is a form of gratitude. People are grateful for themselves: and this is why they need a god.⁷⁴

And in the case of Israel, Nietzsche claims,

Yahweh expressed a consciousness of power, Israel's joy in itself and hope for itself: Yahweh allowed people to expect victory and salvation, he allowed people to trust that nature would provide what they needed - above all, rain.... Festival cults express these two sides of a people's self-affirmation: they are grateful for the magnificent destiny that elevated them to their present position, they are grateful for the yearly cycle and all the luck they have had in agriculture and breeding cattle.⁷⁵

At the same time, so often for Nietzsche, this manifest “Yes” to life *is* an expression of a latent “No.” In such cases, he thinks that to posit the existence of another world, beyond this one and superior in value, is to defame this world and its conditions, and the belief in god or any transcendent realm, he thinks, is an expression of this defamation: we “pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception” by inventing “a world beyond it, a true world.”⁷⁶ Nietzsche means that positing a “better world,” a “true world,” or a “world beyond,” sets *our* world into negative contrast, inasmuch as a “better world” implies a worse world. Therefore, Nietzsche claims, positing a “better world” functions as a form of “world-defamation,”⁷⁷ or it allows us to defame *this* life in *this* world, thereby expressing our resentment toward it and taking some imaginary revenge upon it: “to imagine another, more valuable world is an expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §16, 13

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §25, 22

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §12A, 13

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §708, 377. And see Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §7, §18, §27, §30, & §43.

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §579, 311

Correlatively, for Nietzsche, there are life-enhancing manners in which one can negate or say “no.” As discussed in the chapter on the will to power, the noble character-type also negates, but as a secondary consequence of a primary affirmation of self. The noble type expresses a drive to overcome resistance: “strong natures need resistance, that is why they look for resistance: an aggressive pathos is an essential component of strength.”⁷⁹ In affirming and expressing this need to seek out resistance, the individual is affirming the type of being that it is, since it is in overcoming resistance that they are able to express their will to power: resistance potentiates this expression. Here, a manifest “no” expresses a latent “yes.”

We also negate in life-affirming ways when we destroy what is life-hindering so that we may replace it with what is life-enhancing. Here, we destroy not for the sake of destruction itself, but rather, in order to create or free up space for a new, life-enhancing creation. Nietzsche writes:

the spirit becomes lion, it wants to hunt down its freedom and be master in its own desert. Here it seeks its last master, and wants to fight him and its last god....
To create new values – not even the lion is capable of that: but to create freedom for itself for new creation – that is within the power of the lion. To create freedom for oneself and also a sacred No to duty: for that, my brothers, the lion is required.⁸⁰

If life-enhancing negations and life-hindering affirmations are possible, then affirmation and negation cannot be Nietzsche’s standard of enhancement in a straightforward or unqualified way. Rather, it must somehow matter either what we say “yes” or “no” to, or how we do so. It is possible to say “No” to a specific or local aspect of life in a manner that ultimately expresses a “Yes” to life’s conditions more generally, and it is possible to say

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Wise,” §7, 82

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “On the Three Metamorphoses,” 17

“Yes” to a specific and local aspect of life in a manner that ultimately expresses a “No” to life’s conditions, broadly construed. Nonetheless, since the two character-types distinguished above represent the ascension and the descension of life, respectively, and the essential distinction between them is that the ascending type is affirming and the descending type is negating, affirmation and negation must play some essential role in Nietzsche’s standard of enhancement. Thus, I will consider more closely what exactly the two types affirm and negate, respectively.

6.5 Nobility and Affirmation

What exactly does the noble type affirm? In a chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled “What is Noble?” Nietzsche provides further detail on this theme of affirmation. He says that “egoism belongs to the essence of the noble soul”⁸¹ and “*the noble soul has reverence for itself*.”⁸² With this egoism or self-reverence, the noble type affirms their own self or what they are; they say “yes” to what they are, namely, an animal that wills an increased sensation of power. Nietzsche sees the self-reverence of the nobles in their evaluative systems or their tablets of the good. The second chapter discussed the altruistic good, but I have not yet considered its alternative, i.e., the egoistic good. Nietzsche provides a speculative history of the term “good,” theorizing that, traditionally, the socially and politically powerful, by virtue of their power, procure the power to name things as they wish. And on the basis of this power-to-name, the powerful name themselves the good. Their understanding of the good is not a reaction to something external, Nietzsche claims,

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §265, 162

⁸² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §287, 172

but an expression of their own affirmation of themselves. Nietzsche's argument for this is that, in the linguistic patterns of a host of languages, noble types *affirm themselves*, and correspondingly, that characters of *ressentiment* strive to *negate* the other and parts of themselves. Nietzsche considers the meaning of the words used for "good" [*gut*] and "bad," [*schlecht*] "as used in different languages," "from the etymological point of view,"⁸³ and he finds that their respective meanings are fundamentally ambiguous; they often convey two distinct meanings. He finds that the various words for "good," in their earlier and starting forms, often refer both to the virtuousness of one's character or soul, but also to political, aristocratic, or physiological power, superiority, or nobility. Likewise, he finds that, in various languages, the designation for "bad" often expresses both moral degeneracy of character, and also political, social, and physiological weakness and inferiority, as well as the idea of the common or base. An example "is the German word '*schlecht*' (bad) itself: which is identical with '*schlicht*' (plain, simple) – compare '*schlechtweg*' (plainly), '*schlechterdings*' (simply) – and originally referred to the simple, the common man with no derogatory implication, but simply in contrast to the nobility."⁸⁴ An example of this in the English language is the word "naughty," which is etymologically related to the word "naught," meaning "nothing" or "zero." There is a clear connection here between moral degeneracy on the one hand, and one who is impoverished or possesses little or nothing or holds no social standing or position, on the other.

Nietzsche finds that the distinction between good and bad does not only express a moral distinction between character types, but also a *class distinction* in social, political,

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §4, 13

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §4, 13

physiological, and even economic standing. In support of his view, Nietzsche considers a series of Greek terms at GM I, §5: “*agathos*,” “*esthlos*,” “*deilos*,” and “*kakos*.” Mark Migotti has surveyed the manner in which these ambiguities are apparent in the meanings of each of these terms. He writes:

The Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon [L&S] gives four primary meanings for *agathos*: (1) well-born, gentle, (2) brave, valiant, (3) good, serviceable, and (4) good in a moral sense; two for *esthlos*: (1) brave, stout, noble, and (2) morally good, faithful; three for *deilos*: (1) cowardly, hence vile, worthless, (2) low-born, mean, (3) miserable, wretched, with a compassionate sense; and five for *kakos*: (1) ugly, (2) ill-born, (3) craven, base, (4) worthless, sorry, unskilled, (5) morally evil, pernicious.⁸⁵

So, *agathos* and *esthlos* mean both noble or well-born *and* morally good; *deilos* and *kakos* mean both base or low-born *and* vile or morally corrupt. Likewise, Nietzsche says that “in most cases they [‘the good’] might give themselves names which simply show superiority of power (such as ‘the mighty,’ ‘the masters,’ ‘the commanders’) or the most visible sign of this superiority, such as ‘the rich,’ ‘the propertied’ (that is the meaning of *arya*; and the equivalent in Iranian and Slavic.)”⁸⁶ As Migotti sums this up, “what today might seem a grossly tendentious yoking of disparate senses was once, according to Nietzsche, the unhesitating fusion of elements regarded as natural brethren.”⁸⁷ The original meanings of these terms suggest that the morally good were once also those who possessed power, riches, and property, while the morally inferior were the powerless, the disenfranchised, and the impoverished.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Migotti, “Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen,” 768-769

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §5, 14

⁸⁷ Migotti, “Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen,” 768

⁸⁸ Migotti has also surveyed to some extent the manner in which these ambiguities persist across modern European languages. He writes: “The Oxford English Dictionary [OED] has as the second entry under “noble”: “illustrious by rank, title, or birth; belonging to that class of the community which has a titular pre-eminence over the others,” and as the fourth: “having high moral qualities or ideals; of great or lofty

Then, Nietzsche identifies what he calls a “*conceptual transformation*.”⁸⁹ He writes: “everywhere “noble,” “aristocratic” in the social sense, is the basic concept from which “good” in the sense of “with aristocratic soul,” “noble,” “with a soul of a high order,” “with a privileged soul” necessarily developed.”⁹⁰ He means that these words which were once used to refer to an individual’s noble or aristocratic class come to be used to refer to an individual’s inner or essential character, to their spirit or their soul: as a rule, “a concept denoting political superiority always resolves itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul.”⁹¹ In other words, these words came to refer to an aspect of this person which would supposedly persist, even if this person fell from their class position: “later, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ develop in a direction which no longer refers to social standing.”⁹² For instance, Nietzsche highlights *esthlos*, claiming that

it becomes the slogan and catch-phrase of the aristocracy and is completely assimilated with the sense of ‘aristocratic,’ in contrast to the deceitful common man, as taken and shown by *Theognis*, – until, finally, with the decline of the aristocracy, the word remains as a term for spiritual noblesse, and, as it were, ripens and sweetens.⁹³

character.” Under “common,” the OED has twenty-three entries, divided into three main groups. The first group (of nine) entries rings changes on the general sense “belonging equally to more than one,” the second group (of six) is introduced with the phrase “of ordinary occurrence and quality, hence mean, cheap,” while the final grouping contains various technical senses, ... The homonymy covering the first two groups is pretty clearly not accidental, but conforms to the following logic: nothing that is too common, in the sense of shared equally by many, can be very distinguished(!) or desirable. The most revealing of entries in the second group is sense fourteen, according to which, “common” when predicated of “ordinary persons, life, language, etc.” means “lower class, vulgar, unrefined.” ... the same ambiguity occurs in other European languages; in, for example, the German “*vornehm*” and “*gemein*” and the French “*noble*” and “*commun*.”” (Migotti, “Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen,” 767-768)

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §4, 13

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §4, 13

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §6, 15

⁹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §6, 15

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §5, 14

Terms, Nietzsche claims, which once meant noble in a social or aristocratic sense came to mean noble in a moral or virtuous sense.

Nietzsche's basic argument here is that it is far too convenient that "the morally good" also happen to be the rich and the powerful and that the various terms for "good" in a moral sense happen to refer simultaneously to an aristocratic upper class. As Migotti asks, "why should single words yoke together, on the one hand a politico-genealogical conception of superiority with a meritocratic, characterological one..."⁹⁴ Why should a single word combine "an evaluatively innocuous concept of being shared with an evaluatively charged term of moral and social opprobrium?"⁹⁵ This yoking together, Nietzsche argues, is no mere coincidence. Instead, this ambiguity or duality of meaning, i.e., the fact that "good" means both *morally good* and *upper class*, is easily explained if it is the noble and mighty themselves "who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good."⁹⁶ This judgement constitutes for Nietzsche a quintessential instance of self-affirmation.

In sum, the designation for good in general is etymologically connected to notions of political or aristocratic superiority or nobility, while the designation for bad is etymologically connected to notions of political, social, and physiological weakness and inferiority, as well as to the idea of the common or base. This linguistic pattern, Nietzsche argues, reveals that it is an upper aristocratic class who first defined the notion of the good since it is they who benefit from such an understanding. And further, he argues that this

⁹⁴ Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen," 768

⁹⁵ Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen," 768

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §2, 11

particular understanding of the good reveals the nobles' egoism and self-reverence, since the good is defined as the qualities and characteristics of they themselves. Nietzsche also claims that the act of naming is itself an expression of will to power; it is an expression of the power to name, regardless of who or what is named and what they are called: "The seignorial privilege of giving names even allows us to conceive of the origin of language itself as a manifestation of the power of the rulers: they say 'this is so and so,' they set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it."⁹⁷ With this expression of will to power in the act of naming, the noble type expresses their own self or what they are, i.e., an animal that strives to maximize its sensation of power. Nietzsche believes that we feel life make its demands within ourselves in the form of the will to power, "the truly basic life-instinct."⁹⁸ The noble soul defers to this point within itself at which it most clearly hears life making its demands; it defers to its own innermost life, its own most basic life instinct, its will to power. Nietzsche emphasizes that the nobles could not deny this call to action that they feel within themselves; they "knew they must not separate happiness from action, – being active is by necessity counted as part of happiness."⁹⁹ But beyond expressing and deferring to these demands, the noble type actually reveres this most basic life instinct within itself, or, the noble reveres and affirms the type of being that they are. This is apparent, Nietzsche thinks, in that they conceive of themselves as "we the noble, the good, the beautiful, and the happy!"¹⁰⁰ In revering these demands of life within themselves, the noble type affirms life by affirming itself. The noble

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §2, 12

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §349, 208

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 21

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §10, 20

type affirms the will to power they feel within their own self, and therefore, they affirm life; they affirm the necessary conditions of life itself.

6.6 Ressentiment and Negation

What does the character of *ressentiment* negate? While this type also capitulates to its inner will to power, it satisfies this will primarily by *negation*. First, with a process I'll call *external negation*, the character of *ressentiment* negates the other's expression of will to power. Second, with a process I'll call *internal negation*, within the character of *ressentiment* itself, one expression of will to power can strive to negate another of that character's own expressions of will to power. In both cases, the character of *ressentiment* attempts "to use power to block the sources of the power."¹⁰¹ Thus, what both the noble type affirms and what the character of *ressentiment* negates is an expression of will to power. This is more complex in the case of *ressentiment* because this negation is itself an expression of will to power. The life-hindering type satisfies its own will to power either by destroying the will to power of others, or, by crushing the will to power of a different part of its own self.

As discussed in the section on self-deception, internal and external negation are both premised on the "slave revolt" in morality: the character of *ressentiment* condemns others as well as parts of their own self on the basis of declaring them *evil*. The revolt in morality revolts against the definition of the good as egoism; its revolution is to redefine the good as altruism. Thus, this definition of the good has its origins in the negation of the

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 86

nobles' egoistic definition of the good. Nietzsche argues that the Judeo-Christian "slave revolt" successfully compels the Roman nobility to adopt altruistic value standards. This imposition of a new set of value standards is how "those who suffer" will revenge themselves upon the "successful and victorious," and it is in this way that "the sick are the greatest danger for the healthy."¹⁰² This revolt, Nietzsche argues, constitutes "the conspiracy of those who suffer against those who are successful and victorious, here, the sight of the victorious man is *hated*."¹⁰³ If the noble type affirms and reveres their own self and their own will to power, Nietzsche says that the greatest act of revenge against the nobles would be to crush this reverence and to make them ashamed of their own self: this is *external negation*. Nietzsche writes:

when will they actually achieve their ultimate, finest, most sublime triumph of revenge? Doubtless if they succeeded in shoving their own misery, in fact all misery, on to the conscience of the happy: so that the latter eventually start to be ashamed of their happiness and perhaps say to one another: 'It's a disgrace to be happy! There is too much misery!'... But there could be no greater or more disastrous misunderstanding than for the happy, the successful, those powerful in body and soul to begin to doubt their right to happiness in this way.¹⁰⁴

The nobles' egoism is in direct contrast to the character of *ressentiment* who is "fed up with" and ashamed of their own self."¹⁰⁵ It is in this sense that Nietzsche draws a parallel between revenge and infection. The great danger, he thinks, is that by imposing their new evaluative system that reveres weakness over strength, the sick will infect the healthy with the shame of being what one is: the type of thing that wills power. It is through this

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 89

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 90

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 91

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 91

infection, Nietzsche thinks, that the life-hindering type is able to corrupt the will to power of the nobles, i.e., by teaching them to be satisfied with the false feeling of power.

In the case of internal negation, Nietzsche argues that the life-hindering type also satisfies its will to power by crushing another of its own expressions of will to power. Thus, the character of *ressentiment* even strives to repress essential aspects of its own self, and in particular, those aspects that it understands as its own base, animalistic, and *evil* urges. These aspects are cast as evil according to the value standards of slave morality. This is roughly the same mechanism to which Nietzsche attributes bad conscience: the will to mastery, unable to express itself outwardly, turns inward instead and chooses to become master over what weakened remnants of will to power it finds there, so that it can at least have power over something. The character of *ressentiment* conceives of or imagines an individual who would restrain themselves or hold themselves back from acting, i.e., who would repress the expression of this or that drive. Nietzsche speaks of “the oppressed, the downtrodden,” and “the violated,” i.e., those third parties who suffer the consequences of the noble’s actions. Finally, the downtrodden “say to each other with the vindictive cunning of powerlessness:”

‘Let us be different from evil people, let us be good! And a good person is anyone who ... does not attack, does not retaliate, who leaves the taking of revenge to God, who keeps hidden as we do, avoids all evil and asks little from life in general, like us who are patient, humble and upright.’¹⁰⁶

In short, as Deleuze interprets this passage, from the perspective of *ressentiment*, “the one who is good is now the one who holds himself back from acting,”¹⁰⁷ i.e., the one who

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, §13, 26-27

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 121

represses the expression of the *evil* instincts. On Nietzsche's telling, to demand that a person *not act*, or, to demand that a person "separate itself from what it can do,"¹⁰⁸ is to call for the negation of the self's most vital instincts. The character of *ressentiment*, Nietzsche claims, makes this demand both of others and of itself. This is the exact opposite of the noble type's affirmation of life within itself: the resentful type condemns life within itself or within the other. In both cases, internal and external, the life-hindering type strives to negate an expression of power, i.e., by the nobles, or, by their own animalistic urges. This negation of one expression of will to power is itself an expression of a different and weaker will to power.

6.7 The Affirmation of Life

While the nobles' aggression negates as the unintended consequence of a primary affirmation, Nietzsche claims that the character of *ressentiment* becomes affirmative as the secondary consequence of a primary negation; they affirm a novel definition of the good as a consequence of their taking revenge upon the victorious. Such *ressentiment*, Nietzsche claims, is the expression of

an unfulfilled instinct and power-will that wants to be master, not over something in life, but over life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions; here, an attempt is made to use power to block the sources of the power; here, the green eye of spite turns on physiological growth itself, in particular the manifestation of this in beauty and joy; while satisfaction is *looked for* and found in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 123

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 86

This passage, I think, is crucial. What the character of resentment is really taking revenge against is not this or that so-called successful or victorious individual; they are revenging themselves upon the very conditions of life that have allowed for this disproportionate state of affairs in the first place: they turn against life itself. Both internal and external negation, or the repression of the instincts and the oppression of the nobles at the hands of the character of resentment, constitute what Nietzsche calls in a different context “a rebellion against the most fundamental prerequisites of life.”¹¹⁰ The resentful type condemns the conditions of finitude and the will to power as such; they condemn the necessary conditions of life. By contrast, in seeking out enemies and resistances as an expression of self-affirmation, the noble type says “yes” to life; they affirm the conditions of finitude: they affirm dynamism, agonism, and the will to power. The fundamental distinction between the two types is that one says “Yes” to life, while the other says “No” to life.

While both the noble and resentful types strive to maximize their sensation of power, only one expresses a wish to escape the conditions of finitude. Nietzsche describes “the ascetic priest” as “the incarnate wish for being otherwise, being elsewhere,”¹¹¹ and he claims that the character of resentment likewise expresses such a wish: “If only I were some other person! ... How could I get away from myself? And oh – I’m fed up with myself!”¹¹² This, it seems to me, is the key: the character of resentment longs to escape the very kind of being that they are and the very kind of life that they are living. They do not defame this or that aspect of life; they defame the fundamental conditions of life itself.

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §14, 89-90

It is they who say, *if only I were someone else*, and, *if only this were a different world*. It is apparent that this is Nietzsche's position from his understanding of a world beyond: "one longs for a condition in which one no longer suffers: life is actually experienced as the ground of ills; one esteems unconscious states, without feeling, (sleep, fainting) as incomparably more valuable than conscious ones."¹¹³ This longing for escape, I propose, is the heart of Nietzsche's understanding of a "No" to life. Those who say "Yes" to life embrace the conditions of finitude as opportunities for growth, improvement, and experimentation. Those who say "No" to life judge that life, if it must be lived under these conditions of finitude, is not worth living. This "No" to life, Nietzsche argues, expresses a "temptation" to "nothingness," which is to say, a preference for death.¹¹⁴ To say "No" to life is to accept the wisdom of Silenus: "The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon."¹¹⁵ Since the fundamental distinction between the two character-types is that one says "Yes" to life while the other says "No" to life, and these two types represent the enhancement and the degeneration of life, respectively, I propose that this provides a marker of enhancement: enhancement incites or stems from the affirmation of life, or more precisely, the affirmation of life's basic conditions; degeneration incites or stems from the negation, defamation, or condemnation of these same fundamental conditions.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §44, 27

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §5, 7

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 23

6.8 The Paradox of Affirmation and Enhancement

Simon May argues that life-affirmation and life-enhancement are not necessarily reconcilable for Nietzsche and that they certainly cannot be understood as identical.¹¹⁶ This is because life includes decline and life-hindering forms, and to say “Yes” to life is also to say “Yes” to what is life-hindering and to life’s decline. The crucial move in this argument, it seems to me, is the assumption that to say “Yes” to life means to say “Yes” to *all of* life in all of its forms and permutations and all events and occurrences as they play out, whether enhancing or hindering. In other words, that saying “Yes” to life means saying “Yes” to “this life as you now live it and have lived it ... every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life.”¹¹⁷ And indeed, this does seem to be how Nietzsche understands the affirmation of life. Most clearly: “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity.”¹¹⁸ Likewise, at GS §276, he writes:

I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them... *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let looking away be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer!¹¹⁹

Here, Nietzsche casts the “Yes-sayer” as one who wages war on nothing, accuses nothing, negates nothing, and says “Yes” to everything, “saying yes to life, even in its strangest and harshest problems; the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the sacrifice

¹¹⁶ May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on Morality*, 96

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §341, 194

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Clever,” §10, 99

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §276, 157

of its highest types.”¹²⁰ This is “an unreserved yea-saying even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything questionable and strange about existence ... Nothing in existence should be excluded, nothing is dispensable.”¹²¹ In brief, Nietzsche casts the affirmation of life as saying “Yes” to *everything*, including that in life which is most difficult to bear.

Beatrice Han-Pile identifies the same problem. She observes that the notion of *amor fati* presents a paradox: we value that which we love, and yet, if we are asked to love fate then this “requires us to love something which is difficult, if not impossible, to value in relation to our needs and desires.”¹²² She continues:

Fate is bound to entail at least some suffering and unhappiness for each of us. We shall lose loved ones, or see them hurt. We shall be harmed ourselves. And even if our life was as devoid of suffering as possible, fate will inevitably lead us to aging and death.... In order to love fate, then, one would have to accept the paradoxical possibility of loving a repellent object.¹²³

All of this calls into question “the status of *amor fati* as an ideal.”¹²⁴

Of course, what is repellent to us, and what is repellent to Nietzsche, are not the same. Nietzsche’s great personal difficulty is that he can only say “Yes” to everything in this all-encompassing way if he also says “Yes” to the decline of life and to life-hindering character-types. Nietzsche recoils against the idea that he must affirm the decline of life. For us, on the other hand, what is repellent is the call to affirm evil and the most abhorrent events. But, structurally, we face the same paradox. Our problem is this:

Is loving fate the right thing to do when it comes to morally challenging situations? In particular, what about the suffering of others?... Is *that* something that we should love as fated?... This connects to an objection which is often made in relation to

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients,” §5, 228

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “The Birth of Tragedy,” §2, 109

¹²² Han-Pile, ““Let that be my love”: Fate, Mediopassivity, and Redemption in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 219

¹²³ Han-Pile, ““Let that be my love”: Fate, Mediopassivity, and Redemption in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 218

¹²⁴ Han-Pile, ““Let that be my love”: Fate, Mediopassivity, and Redemption in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 229

the eternal return: to will the recurrence of all things entails willing the return of some of the most abhorrent events in human history.... What then?¹²⁵

By contrast, and from the perspective of a quiet, provincial, and privileged existence, Nietzsche says that “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!’”¹²⁶ Here, Nietzsche relies upon his belief that greatness will require acts deemed to be evil from the perspective of resentment.¹²⁷

While I do not equate life-affirmation and life-enhancement, I am claiming, against May, that for Nietzsche life-affirmation is the mark of the enhancing and that the two are indeed reconcilable in that the life-affirming type will act in life-enhancing ways. However, I do not disagree with either May or Han-Pile’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s texts. Instead, I think that Nietzsche himself makes a conceptual error here, in that he understands *amor fati* and the “Yes” to life as the affirmation and embrace of *all* of life’s events. There are aspects of life that, for Nietzsche, are absolutely ineffaceable and unavoidable. These are, of course, the necessary conditions of life, or the conditions of finitude: all things are impermanent and all living things strive to maximize their sensation of power. To say “Yes” to life is to say “Yes” to that which is necessary and unavoidable in life. However, under the conditions of finitude, not all events need to have played out exactly as they have; it is only these conditions that are absolutely ineffaceable. This or that occurrence is dispensable and unnecessary and therefore, one can say “No” to such an occurrence and yet say “Yes” to what is necessary in life without contradiction. We cannot say “No” to the conditions

¹²⁵ Han-Pile, ““Let that be my love”: Fate, Mediopassivity, and Redemption in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 230

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “The Convalescent,” §2, 176

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “The Birth of Tragedy,” §2, 109

that make such an event possible without turning against life itself, but we can say “No” to the actual occurrence of this or that event while still affirming the conditions that made it possible. Thus, my solution to the problem identified by Han-Pile is the following. To affirm life is not to affirm every event that has played out in human history. It is only to affirm what is absolutely necessary in life, the conditions of finitude, and admittedly, the conditions that have made such events possible. In other words, while the affirmation of life must affirm the conditions for the possibility of evil, it need not affirm the actualization of evil itself in any particular instantiation. This is not to sanitize Nietzsche’s thinking of death or violence. Death, and not only in the abstract, but real death is an absolutely ineffaceable element of life in his thinking. But this does not mean that any one particular death in this or that way, for this or that reason, is necessary. Again, if there is no life without suffering, this does not mean that all forms of suffering are necessary for life. We can affirm that which is ineffaceable from life without affirming unnecessary forms of suffering and violence. We cannot condemn their possibility without condemning the conditions of life itself, but, in affirming these conditions, so too do we affirm the same conditions that make possible the prevention of unnecessary forms of suffering. In other words, if we must affirm the conditions for evil, this is also to affirm the conditions for the destruction of evil. In brief then, for my part, the affirmation of life does not mean the affirmation of “everything unspeakably small or great in your life.” The affirmation of life means the affirmation of the necessary conditions of finitude.

6.9 Conclusion

Nietzsche's standard of value is the enhancement of life where what is life-enhancing either incites or stems from the love or affirmation of life, or *amor fati*. Our values, i.e., pity, altruism, and compassion, are not actually valuable for Nietzsche, since their origins lie in the negation or condemnation of life's most basic requirements, will to power and the conditions of finitude. Nietzsche calls for us to create new values that express a genuine affirmation of life. Those who say "No" to life are those who wish to escape life's necessary conditions, while those who say "Yes" to life have no such wish. This provides a properly Nietzschean, twofold standard by which to evaluate particular quests for meaning: first, when we posit a meaning of life, when we say that the meaning of life is x , does this claim express an affirmation or defamation of life's basic conditions? Where such a claim expresses an affirmation, we will be able to say that this quest for meaning is genuinely valuable for life. Second, when we claim that the meaning of life is x , what effect does this claim have upon life itself? Does it serve to remedy and stimulate life, or, does it serve to inhibit and poison life? If it serves to stimulate the enhancement of life, Nietzsche will understand it as valuable; if it only serves to preserve life without enhancement, Nietzsche will condemn its value. With this marker of the standard of evaluation established, I am now in a position to determine the value for life Nietzsche ascribes to the various human uses of meaning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE USES OF MEANING FOR LIFE

In Nietzsche's works, the will to meaning functions as an explanatory postulate which makes sense of at least three aspects of human existence. First, it explains why we find the senselessness of suffering intolerable, rather than the suffering itself. Second, it accounts for the various forms of redemptive theodicy that populate human history. And third, and most prominently in Nietzsche's account, the will to meaning explains the "monstrosity" of the power of the ascetic ideal, the fact that it has "meant so much" to humanity, that it has "been given so much space" or that we have seen such widespread adherence to this ideal.¹ On this point, Nietzsche speaks with conviction: all of this reveals that it is "a basic fact of human will" that "it *needs an aim*."² My goal now is to evaluate this "basic fact" according to Nietzschean standards: given that we will meaning, is the will to meaning life-enhancing or life-hindering?

As a common feature of the human will, the need for an aim is singular.³ Indeed, alongside the will to power, this need is one of the points at which Nietzsche is closest to identifying something like a universal structural feature of the human being. However, in actual human beings, this need for an aim can be expressed in various manifestations, and this need itself can express various underlying dispositions. Thus, the will to meaning can rarely if ever be treated in general; it must be evaluated in its particular and actual

¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §23, 109

² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

manifestations.⁴ Further, to evaluate any given instantiation of this “basic fact” by Nietzschean standards, one must analyze both its origin and its effects: does it stem from the affirmation of life, and does it incite further affirmation of life? Thus, in any given person or people, what must be determined is whether *this* expression of the will to meaning incites enhancement or decline, *and* whether *this* expression stems from an attitude that affirms or negates life and the conditions of finitude.

It is clear that a will to meaning can be, in a certain sense, beneficial or advantageous for human beings since meaning helps us to tolerate suffering. However, the opposition advantageous versus disadvantageous is not identical to the opposition life-enhancing versus life-hindering. A quest for meaning, and therefore the will to meaning, can be useful and life-preserving, but is it also life-enhancing? When something is advantageous, it may yet be life-hindering if the organism it benefits is a life in decline. For instance, Nietzsche’s standard criticism of most moderns is that we anesthetize suffering either with distraction and entertainment or by interpreting its meaning. This anesthesia provides a palliative benefit to the individual organism, but according to Nietzsche this “yearning” to “anesthetize” “pain of any kind”⁵ reflects a mentality that is no longer willing to suffer for the sake of enhancement.⁶ Thus, if something is useful or advantageous, the kind of life for which it is advantageous is consequential.

For Nietzsche, the will to meaning can enhance or diminish life, depending on its particular expression. In this chapter, I will explicate the sense in which, for Nietzsche, a

⁴ Poellner, “Nietzschean Freedom,” 153

⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §15, 93

⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5, 7

quest for meaning can be life-hindering. *De facto*, this means that I will explicate the sense in which a quest for meaning is useful and life-preserving for a life in decline according to Nietzsche. To begin, I will examine the notions of disorientation and despair and I will demonstrate how the will to meaning pushes us to commit to some “unhistorical” point that can ground us through the chaos of the historical illness. Such a point, however, can take two forms, and I will isolate a particular type of quest for meaning which I will call metaphysical hope. Hope is metaphysical when either what is hoped for, or its ground, lies beyond the conditions of finitude. As Nietzsche construes it, the ascetic ideal in its Christianized form, or the Christian interpretation of the meaning of life, is an instance of metaphysical hope. Then, I’ll evaluate this particular quest for meaning, the Christianized ascetic ideal, on the basis of both its origin and its effects. I’ll show that while the ascetic ideal in this form is advantageous and life-preserving according to Nietzsche, it nonetheless stems from and incites corruption. In other words, for Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal in its Christian form preserves a corrupt form of life where corruption refers to the preference for what is harmful and anti-valuable over what is valuable.⁷ The ascetic ideal in its Christian form is Nietzsche’s primary example of a life-hindering expression of the will to meaning.

7.1 The Unhistorical

As discussed, the awareness of historical contingency can dampen action and vitality by inciting disorientation and despair. Disorientation is the absence of a guiding pole or “north star,” so to speak, to guide our actions. Despair is the belief that our life and

⁷ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §6, 6

actions are inconsequential at best since what effects we cause will always be undone in time or at worst re-evaluated or reinterpreted as evil. Thus, Nietzsche diagnoses a potential harm of one's awareness of historical contingency encapsulated in the historical illness. And yet, at the same time, he claims that the encounter with becoming is unavoidable and even desirable; indeed, he calls for the *affirmation* of becoming.⁸ Hence, it cannot be only this awareness of ephemerality that Nietzsche understands as pathological in the historical illness. Instead, what is pathological here, and what makes this specifically the *historical* illness, is the individual's inability to retain any sense at all of "the unhistorical" and "the suprahistorical." By "unhistorical," Nietzsche means "the art and power of forgetting and of enclosing oneself within a bounded horizon."⁹ By "suprahistorical," he means "the powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable."¹⁰ Those afflicted by the historical illness have lost their capacity to forget history and becoming; they have lost the powers to see anything at all that is stable and eternal. It is surprising that Nietzsche should privilege these powers when he condemns these same capacities for falsifying the appearance of impermanence and becoming.¹¹ Nietzsche's claim in the *Second Untimely Meditation* is that, in order to avoid the paralysis and inactivity that belongs to the historical illness, individuals need to create something secure to hold onto through the "shattering and dismantling of all foundations" as they "climb upon the sunbeams of knowledge," i.e., of history, "down to

⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, "On the Blessed Isles," 66: "the best parables should speak about time and becoming: they should be praise and justification of all that is not everlasting!"

⁹ Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §10, 120

¹⁰ Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §10, 120

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "'Reason' in Philosophy," §5, 169: "we see ourselves mired in error, drawn necessarily into error, precisely to the extent that the prejudice of reason forces us to make use of unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, objectification, being."

chaos.”¹² The absence of absolute, enduring values forces individuals to create and legislate transient values through perpetual, repetitive acts of grounding values.

Nietzsche argues that “when the historical sense reigns without restraint,” this “destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live.”¹³ Aligning “science” with the study of history, he writes:

science considers the only right and true way of regarding things... as being that which sees everywhere things that have been, things historical, and nowhere things that are, things eternal;... it hates forgetting, which is the death of knowledge, and seeks to abolish all limitations of horizon and launch mankind upon an infinite and unbounded sea of light whose light is knowledge of all becoming. If only man could live in it! As cities collapse and grow desolate when there is an earthquake and man erects his house on volcanic land only in fear and trembling and only briefly, so life itself caves in and grows weak and fearful when the concept-quake caused by science robs man of the foundation of all his rest and security, his belief in the enduring and eternal.¹⁴

Nietzsche traces the history of this “concept-quake” to the scientific mentality.¹⁵ The scientific method’s failure to prove the existence of, e.g., God, or a real world beyond our known world, dethroned these grounding principles,¹⁶ robbing humanity of the “foundation” of their “rest and security.” The difficulty of living in a purely historical, ephemeral world, the difficulty of thinking, living, and acting without a banister and without guiding principles, is a near constant theme in Nietzsche’s works. For all of our historical sense, he says, we must keep faith in some unquestioned aim; there must be something unhistorical, the value and givenness of which we *forget* to question. Nietzsche proposes that if one were to imagine someone “who did not possess the power of forgetting”

¹² Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §9, 108

¹³ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §7, 95

¹⁴ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §10, 120-121

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125, 119-121

¹⁶ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 28

and who sees “everywhere a state of becoming,” such a person “*would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger,*” and this is because, as in the case of Hamlet, “forgetting is essential to action of any kind.”¹⁷ What we must forget is either the contingency of some principle on the one hand, or that the effects of some effort or action will be undone or reinterpreted in time on the other. This specific form of forgetfulness, Nietzsche claims, disposes us to action, and therefore to life. Faced with the void of nothingness, i.e., the absence of enduring or absolute values, how can we convince ourselves that this void does not actually exist? We must not only create some transient value, but also forget its mutability.

One of Nietzsche’s projects is to identify that which has variously occupied this role across human history, i.e., the role of that which we forget to question. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche develops a useful example which was briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The people of Israel, he claims, were allowed “to expect victory and salvation,” and “to trust that nature would provide what they needed.”¹⁸ In this history, Nietzsche discerns the people’s faith in their own unique dignity, or in their status as the chosen people. This faith, he claims, grounds an understanding of nature as something that will always provide what is needed; it grounds a definition of nature as existing for their sake or serving their ends. All human animals—indeed, all organisms—need certain forces and elements beyond their control to play out in certain ways. What Israel’s people need “above all,” Nietzsche claims, is “rain.”¹⁹ And yet, of course, belief in one’s unique dignity does not necessarily make it true that rain will always fall when it is needed. This faith allows one to expect victory and

¹⁷ Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §1, 62, my emphasis

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §25, 22

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §25, 22

salvation and to trust that nature will provide what is needed. Thus, what this faith protects against is the paralysis and inaction that can belong to apprehension and uncertainty. The faithful are able to trust or believe that the future will continue to be in their best interest, and so—in the case of Israel—they act as if the future will be as the past, and rain will continue to fall. Thus, believers are liberated from the paralysis of anxiety elicited by the anticipation of an unknown future, and hence rendered free to act. Nietzsche's claim is that, secure in their faith, the people of Israel are able to will the future itself; the aim of their will is to go on living in this temporal world. This faith in one's dignity and security, Nietzsche claims, is taken to be secured or legitimated by the divine authority of its origin: "The authority of the law is grounded in the theses: God gave it, the ancestors lived by it."²⁰ The idea of God has the power to act as the ground of this faith; it functions as the unquestioned ground, or the "something unhistorical," the value and givenness of which one "forgets" to question. On this ground, a people find the "foundation" of their "rest and security"²¹ or a defense against the anguish of chronophobia, disorientation, and despair.

7.2 "The Teachers of the Purpose of Existence"

According to Nietzsche, human beings need something secure, something that behaves as if it were unhistorical to the human eye. Likewise, he has demonstrated that the human will needs an aim toward which to strive; we need to structure our lives as a quest. Thus, one could hypothesize that what human beings need to believe is "unhistorical" is this aim, or at least a secure foundation with which to ground this aim. Afflicted by either

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §57, 58

²¹ Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," §10, 120-121

disorientation or despair, the will finds itself without an aim simply because there is nothing stable at which to aim or no good reason to launch a quest toward this aim since it will be undone or reinterpreted in time. Nietzsche makes this connection between one's aim and the eternal explicit in the first passage of *The Gay Science*, entitled "The teachers of the purpose of existence." Here, he claims that what we need to perceive as immutable is either our purpose or its ground; we need to believe that our purpose is always on the horizon.

Outside of the *Genealogy*, "The teachers of the purpose of existence" is the most direct formulation of the will to meaning thesis in Nietzsche's works. Nietzsche asks: "What is the meaning of the ever-new appearance of these founders of moralities and religions, of these instigators of fights about moral valuations, these teachers of pangs of conscience and religious wars?" What is revealed, he asks, by the ceaseless appearance of teachers of diverse moralities and religions across history, or by the unending emergence of those who teach that life has an ultimate purpose? His answer runs as follows:

human nature on the whole has surely been altered by the recurring emergence of such teachers of the purpose of existence – it has acquired one additional need, the need for the repeated appearance of such teachers and such teachings of a 'purpose.' Man has gradually become a fantastic animal that must fulfil one condition of existence more than any other animal: *man must from time to time believe he knows why he exists*; his race cannot thrive without a periodic trust in life – without faith in the reason in life! And ever again the human race will from time to time decree: 'There is something one is absolutely forbidden henceforth to laugh at.'²²

The purpose of life could mean the purpose of any one individual life or the purpose of all life as such. Generally speaking, Nietzsche casts the will to meaning as the individual's need to believe that their own singular life is purposeful: it is the individual human will that needs an aim. However, one way to prove that an individual life is purposeful is to

²² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §1, my emphasis

demonstrate that all lives are purposeful. Such a demonstration allows untold numbers of individuals to believe that their individual lives are purposeful. What is essential to the will to meaning, Nietzsche thinks, is that the individual knows why they exist as an individual, or that they have an aim. If fulfilling this need involves the detour of establishing the meaning of all life as such, this too tells the individual why they exist as a single person.

How does the continual re-emergence of these “teachers” reveal that human beings “need” to know the purpose of their existence? Pre-empting his claim in the *Genealogy of Morality* that life would not continually reproduce that which is harmful for itself,²³ Nietzsche’s argument is that life would only continually reproduce what serves it in some way. “It is obvious,” Nietzsche says, that these teachers “work in the interest of the species” precisely because they keep appearing. “They, too, promote the life of the species by promoting the faith in life.” GS §1 opens with the claim that “each and every” human being is always “engaged in a single task,” namely, “to do what benefits the preservation of the human race.” “Within them,” Nietzsche continues, “nothing is older, stronger, more inexorable and invincible than this instinct – because this instinct constitutes the essence of our species and herd.” The need to believe that life is meaningful, he is going to argue, is an expression of this instinct for self-preservation. After *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche subordinates the drive to preservation to the will to power; he casts the instinct for self-preservation as an expression of a more fundamental will to power: if a living being wants “above all,” “to discharge its strength,” “self-preservation,” Nietzsche argues, “is only one

²³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11 & §13

of the indirect and most frequent consequences of this.”²⁴ However, at GS §1, Nietzsche seems to be thinking of “preservation” beyond its most limited sense. While in his later texts Nietzsche thinks that humanity’s most fundamental drive is not toward preservation but toward enhancement, at GS §1 his idea of preservation seems to include connotations of enhancement. He describes one who expresses the life-preserving instincts as “a promoter and benefactor of humanity,” i.e., not merely as one who preserves humanity as it is. And he speaks not only of life being preserved, but of its being “promoted,” “loved,” and “advance[d]” and its learning to “thrive” “by promoting the faith in life.”

Nietzsche says that the drive to preservation has no reason to strive after survival and it does so only from “instinct, stupidity, lack of reasons.” What the teachers of the purpose of existence do, says Nietzsche, is supplement this drive with a reason for preservation, with a “why” or a “because” to go on living: the question “Why?” *finds* an answer, or one’s will finds an aim. They tell us that “life ought to be loved, because -! Man ought to advance himself and his neighbour, because -!” When Nietzsche says that “the drive for the preservation of the species... erupts from time to time as reason and passion of mind,” he means that, as reflexive beings, we are pushed not only to survive, but also to consider a reason why we ought to survive, i.e., a “for the sake of” or an “in the name of” which is not given by the instinct for self-preservation alone. The reason allows the drive to preservation to express itself more successfully by rendering suffering, chronophobia, etc., tolerable. Nietzsche refers to this situation as tragic because whatever reason the drive seizes upon, this reason is only ever one possibility among others, and therefore necessarily

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §13, 15. See also Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II, “On Self-Overcoming,” 90; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §651, 345.

mis-valued if it is called the one and only purpose of existence. It too will eventually be overturned or revealed for what little it really is: “in the long run each of these great teachers of a purpose was vanquished by laughter, reason and nature: the brief tragedy always changed and returned into the eternal comedy of existence.”

The teachers of the purpose of existence, Nietzsche writes, “shout” that “‘Life is worth living,’” because “‘there is something to life, there is something behind life, beneath it; beware!’” This “something behind life” is the key; it is the ground on which one can argue that life is indeed meaningful. In the example of Israel above, this “something” is the idea of God and one’s unique dignity which is legitimated thereby. From an internal perspective, the more supposedly secure and immutable is this “something behind life,” the less malleable is the meaning of life that it grounds. This follows Nietzsche’s logic concerning the relation between Christian morality and Christianity’s other tenets:

When you give up Christian faith, you pull the rug out from under your right to Christian morality as well.... Christianity is a system.... If you break off a main tenet, the belief in God, you smash the whole system along with it.... Christian morality is a command; it has a transcendent origin;... it has truth only if God is the truth, – it stands or falls along with belief in God.²⁵

Nietzsche’s point is not that modernity has abandoned Christian morality on the basis of the death of God. He is saying that if we continue to celebrate Christian values – charity, love for the victim and thy neighbour, care for the weak, etc. – we do so without any genuine foundation for these values. Just so, one’s right to the conviction that life is meaningful in the sense laid out by the ascetic ideal stands or falls with one’s faith in Christianity’s other presuppositions. This is why GS §1 draws a connection between

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes,” §5, 193-194

purpose and the unchanging or immutable, between our “why” and that which “one is absolutely forbidden henceforth to laugh at.” To “laugh at” is to ridicule, deride, and defame, and Nietzsche thinks that, for much of humanity, to recognize that something is mutable is to defame that thing.²⁶ The practice of genealogy itself, demonstrating that the supposedly eternal has a history, is to mock or scoff or to deflate what appears to be eternal.²⁷ It can be inferred that, for Nietzsche, what a given perspective is unwilling to ridicule, “to laugh at,” is also what that perspective understands as eternal or immutable. Nietzsche is claiming that if we must believe we know why we exist, then this purpose must be interpreted as immutable if it is to securely satisfy this need. If our purpose can be lost, we are in danger of not knowing *why* we exist.

The result of this, Nietzsche thinks, is that human beings strive to satisfy the will to meaning with forms of meaning that either are eternal themselves or are somehow grounded in or legitimated by the eternal. The teachers of the purpose of existence identify a ground, something which supposedly is not itself susceptible to decay and the conditions of finitude, which “one is absolutely forbidden henceforth to laugh at,” without which we could succumb to paralysis and petrification. The great advantage to this form of meaning is that it cannot be lost or undone by the events that play out under the conditions of finitude because it is given from outside these conditions. If all meaning for Nietzsche is irrefutably temporal, he distinguishes between two mentalities, one which interprets meaning as

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §2, 6: “things of the highest value... cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world,... Look instead to the lap of being, the everlasting, the hidden God, the ‘thing-in-itself’ – this is where their ground must be.” Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” §4, 168: “the highest should not grow out of the lowest, it should *not* grow at all.”

²⁷ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 3-4

temporal, and one which interprets meaning as non-temporal. The distinction is between a mentality for which meaning emerges under the conditions of finitude and one for which meaning “must be put up, given... *from outside* – by some *superhuman authority*,”²⁸ ordained from beyond the conditions of finitude. Once again, one who is unable to impose a meaning upon their own life still has recourse to this latter mentality and to the belief that their life is already meaningful, that it has always been and will always be meaningful. This is what Nietzsche means when he writes that “whoever doesn’t know how to put his will into things can at least put meaning into them: that means, he has faith that a will is already there.”²⁹

The need for an aim explains why we constantly lapse into first philosophy, and why we place such value on epistemic and metaphysical certainty. For Nietzsche, our tendency towards metaphysics has an ulterior motive: what we want is not simply definitive knowledge of the world in-itself, but the practical benefits of this supposed knowledge. On this point, I do think that Danto reads Nietzsche quite well: “Nietzsche’s critique of other philosophies rests upon a psychological thesis that each metaphysical system ever advanced was due, in the end, to a need to find order and security in the world.”³⁰ We benefit practically from postulating the existence of otherworldly, metaphysical, necessary, and universal truths, because they can offer life an aim. This, for Nietzsche, is why we postulate first principles of reality, i.e., those principles which are supposedly necessary for reality to be what it is. These principles function as guarantors of the will. They guarantee that a

²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §20, 16

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Arrows and Epigrams,” §18, 158

³⁰ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 17

human will can persist by grounding, legitimizing, or validating the object of the will. By committing to some set of first principles, we are rewarded with an enduring will. Thus, Nietzsche argues, the tendency to establish first principles is a symptom of an underlying drive in human beings, namely, a drive to possess a will. Under the guise of inference and deduction, we create the first principles that act as such a ground and satisfy the will to meaning.

7.3 Metaphysical Hope

Nietzsche delineates several temporal orientations: individuals can become primarily oriented toward the past, present, or future, and in healthy or unhealthy manners. Health refers to a preference for the valuable, while its opposite, also called corruption, refers to a preference for the anti-valuable. Nietzsche focuses on one temporal orientation in particular: an unhealthy orientation towards the future indicative of an individual who hopes for a world that has escaped our conditions of becoming and agonistic dynamics. I will call this temporal orientation metaphysical hope. Metaphysics for Nietzsche is any system of thought that distinguishes a real world from a merely apparent world.³¹ Thus, I call hope metaphysical when what is hoped for lies outside of the apparent here and now and is attributed to the real, or when it is grounded in the real, outside of the apparent here and now. In this work's terms, hope is metaphysical when either its ground or its aim lies outside of the conditions of finitude. There are two senses in which the Christian form of hope can be characterized as metaphysical. From the temporal perspective of the finite

³¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, §9, 15-16; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable," §18, 158.

human animal, according to Nietzsche, the Christian's goal is located in an afterlife. Thus, because it is set beyond life, the goal of salvation is always and forever available to life, it remains continually on the horizon, an eternal and unwavering pole in the minds of believers, signifying the infinite possibility of hope. This hope is metaphysical because both its object (heavenly salvation) and its ground (God) transcend the conditions of finitude.

Second, there are modes of eschatological thinking which understand the end or aim of history to be the transformation of this world rather than an escape into an other world. A Christian could value brotherly love and love of thy neighbour over heavenly salvation, and they could understand the ultimate aim of life as the transformation of this world into a world of brotherly love. To this, Nietzsche would have at least two responses. First, hope for the future in this world is also metaphysical if it stems from faith in the immutability of some value, e.g., the faith that some organization of society, once instantiated, will hold eternally since all people will eternally value the values that this organization embodies. Or stated otherwise, in this latter case, the meaning of the individual's life is guaranteed to persist indefinitely into the future because what I value today will always be valued in an unending tomorrow. Second, Nietzsche would claim that the world one seeks to instantiate in this image is so radically distinct from our current world that this new possible world would indeed constitute an other world or a beyond. This is because a world that has transcended the presence of conflict in exchange for brotherly love has escaped the conditions of finitude.

Metaphysical hope is a manner of satisfying one's will to meaning. As Nietzsche presents it, people tend to express metaphysical hope in the form of religiosity, and in particular, in those forms of religiosity that postulate an eternal or a-temporal endpoint

which transcends our finite conditions. According to Nietzsche, one generalizable expression of chronophobia lies in the general phenomenon of religiosity itself and the metaphysical hope that religiosity tends to express. More specifically, he thinks, Christianity and the hope that it embodies represents an expression of an underlying chronophobic mentality, and this expression is largely generalizable across the European context. On Nietzsche's telling, the aim of Christianity stands outside of the conditions presupposed by life in this world. In short, as Nietzsche presents it, salvation whether in Heaven or earth is the meaning of life for the Christian, and salvation lies outside of agonistic dynamics. I'll now recount Nietzsche's understanding of the relevant aspects of the Christian mentality and understanding of the meaning of life in order to demonstrate how this understanding functions as an expression of both metaphysical hope and chronophobia. It is important to keep in mind that this conversation is bound by a double qualification: this is Nietzsche's description of Christian thinking. In this context, the theoretical meaning of salvation, e.g., as bequeathed by theological exegesis, is not as important as Nietzsche's account of the Christian psychology behind the concept. This is, in other words, Nietzsche's psychology of the Christian, his "psychology of 'faith,' of 'the faithful,'" ³² or his description of the supposedly generalizable mentality of the average Christian. Further, references to the ascetic ideal in the remainder of this chapter refer specifically to the ascetic ideal in its Christian form which, according to Nietzsche, is how meaning is ascribed to life by the Christian.

³² Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §50, 48

For Nietzsche, the Christian ascribes “an imaginary teleology” or goal orientation to life; life’s goal is “‘the kingdom of God,’ ‘the Last Judgment,’ ‘eternal life.’”³³ In other words, Christianity offers life an aim: eternal salvation in God’s kingdom of heaven. Nietzsche argues that metaphysical hope in this Christian form is life-preserving in that the doctrine of judgment, which is a doctrine of hope, and the promise of the kingdom of God sustain individuals through the struggle and anxiety of impermanence. As Young writes,

A true world is... a destination such that to reach it is to enter... a state of ‘eternal bliss,’ a heaven, paradise or utopia. Hence true-world philosophies... give meaning to life by representing it as a journey; a journey towards ‘redemption’, towards an arrival which will more than make up for the stress and discomfort of the travelling.³⁴

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche invokes Ernest Renan as an exemplary expression of the Christian mentality. On Nietzsche’s telling, Renan believes that the religious “man” is “assured of an infinite destiny,” “wants virtue to correspond to an eternal order,” and “finds death revolting and absurd,” – death understood as the antithesis of the eternal and everlasting.³⁵ Under the conditions of this earthly existence, i.e., agonistic dynamics, death and loss are constant and inescapable possibilities; they haunt life unceasingly. And yet, in contrast to this finite earthly existence, the Christian is promised “personal immortality”³⁶ and, “as immortal souls,” “the ‘salvation’ of *each* individual lays claim to an eternal significance.”³⁷ It is in this sense that “Christianity” is “completely out of touch with reality” for Nietzsche,³⁸ in that reality is temporal and Christianity posits and promises the

³³ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §15, 13

³⁴ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 1

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §48, 46-47

³⁶ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §41, 38; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §43, 39

³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §43, 39

³⁸ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §15, 13

atemporal. This aim is said to be achieved through repentance for one's past sins; repentance in suffering allows for salvation in the future. The individual is thus temporally situated between past (guilt or sin) and future (salvation), in the present (suffering and repentance.) The mechanism of this situation was discussed in Chapter Five.

The Christian is able to experience salvation eternally on the basis of the doctrine of "the *atomism of the soul*,"³⁹ an expression which signifies "the belief that the soul is something indestructible" and "eternal."⁴⁰ On this telling, there is a dual character of humanity: the individual is both the mortal animal and the immortal soul. According to the Christian mentality, as Nietzsche presents it, only our finite human perspective forces us to understand the Kingdom of God as something promised or yet to come. It is only what is animal in us that casts salvation as belonging to the future. For the Christian, Nietzsche argues, the notion of the temporal future, and indeed all notions of time, are inapplicable to the Kingdom of God:

The 'hour of death' is not a Christian concept – 'hours,' time, and the physical life with its crises just do not exist for the teacher of the 'glad tidings'... The 'kingdom of God' is not something that you wait for; it does not have a yesterday or a day after tomorrow, it will not arrive in a 'thousand years.'"⁴¹

What Nietzsche means is that, for the Christian mentality, salvation may still be to come for what in us is temporal and finite, but salvation is here already for the immortal soul:

What are the 'glad tidings'? That the true life, the eternal life has been found - *it is not just a promise*, it exists, it is in each of you: as a life of love, as a love without exceptions or rejections, without distance.... 'The kingdom of God is in each of you.'⁴²

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §12, 14

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §12, 14

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §34, 32

⁴² Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §29, 26-27

Here, Nietzsche casts salvation as an eternal or a-temporal state: if the finite human animal must wait for the promise of salvation, the eternal human soul knows this salvation already, or what is eternal in us is already with God. Moreover, the dual character of humanity also explains how the Christian can “feel as if we are in ‘heaven,’ feel as if we are ‘eternal,’ given that we do not feel remotely as if we are ‘in heaven.’”⁴³ Nietzsche asks: how can the doctrine that eternal life has already been found be compatible with our daily experiences that essentially and necessarily include suffering, loss, ephemerality, and death? Once again, the duality of humanity is the key: what suffers this world of becoming is the mortal animal; what already walks with God is the immortal soul.

7.4 Corrupted Meaning

Something can be anti-valuable because it has its origins in life-denial, or, because it leads to, incites, or causes life-denial. Corrupted meaning is a quest for meaning that has its origins in a life-denying mentality. In this case, corruption precedes the quest for meaning as its cause, and this quest has its roots in the corrupted organism. By contrast, a corruptive quest for meaning incites life-denial. In this latter case, corruption follows meaning as its effect, and a particular form of corruption has its origin in some particular quest for meaning. The two are not mutually exclusive, and a single form of meaningfulness can be both corrupted and corruptive. This section will demonstrate how, according to Nietzsche, the meaning ascribed to life by Christianity in the form of the ascetic ideal stems

⁴³ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §33, 31

from corruption; the next section will show how, for Nietzsche, this same meaning incites further corruption.

It is useful here to think of Nietzsche as a psychologist or even as a proto-psychoanalyst. The analyst attempts to explain why a person acts in some way, especially where these actions are difficult to explain, e.g., when they incite displeasure or are counterproductive.⁴⁴ Nietzsche is largely doing the same thing; he wants to explain why the Christian adopts the ascetic ideal as the meaning of life. This is the same method he employs in analyzing people's values. As he asks, *what sort of person could value x and y?* now he asks, *what sort of person is convinced that the ascetic ideal is the meaning of life?* What does this conviction reveal about this person? Nietzsche makes this method explicit at BGE §187 on the topic of morality. He writes: "Apart from the value of claims like 'there is a categorical imperative in us,' the question remains: what do claims like this tell us about the people who make them?"⁴⁵ Thus, Deleuze rightly describes Nietzsche's method as symptomological⁴⁶ where a symptom expresses an underlying condition. Nietzsche treats the Christian's beliefs as symptoms, and he argues that these symptoms express an underlying condition of life-denial and chronophobia. In other words, for Nietzsche, these beliefs and the meaning they provide have their origin in the denial of life, or a life-denying person is the kind of person who could believe these things and ascribe this meaning to life.

⁴⁴ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure principle*, 7

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §187, 77

⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 3 & 75. See Reginster, "The Psychology of Christian Morality," 703.

Nietzsche is explicit that the Christian mentality, including its beliefs and the meaning it ascribes to life, stems from life-denial. He writes: “we have recognized the instinct of hatred against every reality as the driving, the only driving element, at the root of Christianity.”⁴⁷ And further, he claims that “*the instinct of hatred for reality*” and “*the instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all boundaries and distance in feelings*” are “the two *psychological realities* on which, out of which, the doctrine of redemption has grown.”⁴⁸ Ultimately, Nietzsche’s claim is that the impetus to posit the existence of the Kingdom of God is best explained by a desire to slander and repudiate life in this world: “the concept of ‘God’ has been the biggest objection to existence so far.”⁴⁹ Correspondingly, for Nietzsche, the Christian meaning of life, or, the idea that life is meaningful inasmuch as it is “a bridge to that other existence,”⁵⁰ is an expression of that same underlying desire to defame life. It is, therefore, an example of corrupted meaning in that it stems from a life-denying mentality. Why does Nietzsche take this to be the case?

If the kingdom of God is eternal, Nietzsche claims, it is a world “that has broken off contact with every type of reality.”⁵¹ Nietzsche lays bare his diagnosis of the Christian mentality at §34 of *The Anti-Christ*. He writes: “The concept ‘son of man’ is... an ‘eternal’ facticity, a psychological symbol that has been *redeemed from the concept of time*,” and “the same holds true... for the ‘kingdom of God,’ for the ‘kingdom of heaven,’ and for the filial relation to God.”⁵² This notion of redemption from time is the crucial element. Time

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §39, 36

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §30, 27

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Four Great Errors,” §8, 182. And see Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §245, 141; and Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Clever,” §3, 91.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11, 85

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §29, 27

⁵² Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §34, 31

functions for Nietzsche as a shorthand for becoming and agonistic dynamism; time is a basic condition for life in every sense. This, ultimately, is why I've cast the Christian form of hope as metaphysical; what is hoped for, what makes life meaningful, lies outside time and becoming, beyond the conditions of finitude, in the eternal. Nietzsche wonders where this idea of the permanent or the a-temporal has its origins, and he argues that it originates in the human aversion to time and becoming. His argument is quite straightforward: why should we need to be redeemed from time? This need presupposes chronophobia: the desire for redemption from time and becoming presupposes the condemnation of the value of transience, and so, life itself. In other words, for Nietzsche, the Christian understanding of the meaning of life, which is grounded in the a-temporal, has its roots in an attitude of life-denial. The crux of metaphysical hope, as a form of the relationship with time, is that it strives in its primary aim to escape from time and so condemns the processes of becoming. This is to restate what was seen in the previous chapter, namely, that in the resentful character type one encounters a corrupt form of hope, i.e., the hope to escape the conditions of finitude or "the incarnate wish for being otherwise, being elsewhere."⁵³

A crucial premise here is that, for Nietzsche, God is an unnecessary postulate to explain life as we have it.⁵⁴ He thinks that there are simpler and so more probable ways to account for life as we have it than by attributing life to a transcendent God. This is distinct from a definitive claim that God *does not* exist. What Nietzsche says of his atheism is this:

I have no sense of atheism as a result, and even less as an event: for me it is an instinct. I have too much curiosity, too many doubts and high spirits to be happy with a ridiculously crude answer. God is a ridiculously crude answer, an

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §1, 85. And see Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 100-101

undelicatesse against us thinkers —, basically even a ridiculously crude ban on us: thou shalt not think!⁵⁵

Nietzsche means that his instinct to question is too powerful, and the hypothesis of God is too questionable, for this hypothesis to be allowed to stand as the ground of a philosophical system. Thus, George A. Morgan is incorrect when he writes that “beyond question the major premise of Nietzsche’s philosophy is atheism.”⁵⁶ Nietzsche’s point is more subtle: he means that belief in God is unnecessary and facile, and we have no unquestionable reason to hold such a conviction. Kaufmann is closer to Nietzsche’s intention when he writes the following:

It may yet seem that Nietzsche assumes as a premise what is merely a growing belief—or disbelief—in Western society. He may appear to accept as an absolute presupposition the claim that there is no God.... This... too, is untenable.... Nietzsche did not start with any premises that he consciously failed to question, he could not base his philosophy on the assumed existence of God.... Nietzsche's atheism is thus a corollary of his basic commitment to question all premises and to reject them unless they are for some reason inescapable.⁵⁷

Whether or not there is a God, Nietzsche takes belief in God as an object of analysis. Given that the existence of God is so questionable, Nietzsche wants to know why individuals are so utterly convinced of God’s existence. Since there are other ways to account for life, Nietzsche thinks that belief in God *en masse* did not emerge through the process of logically explaining life and the world around us. Instead, for Nietzsche, people first believe in God, and then formulate arguments for why God must exist or “defend it with rationalizations after the fact,”⁵⁸ such as Leibniz’s argument that God is necessary to explain why there is

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Clever,” §1, 85

⁵⁶ Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means*, 36

⁵⁷ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 100-101

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §5, 8

something rather than nothing. For Nietzsche, believers first believe in God for some reason other than because God is the best explanation for life; those who prove the existence of God by logical deduction do so, Nietzsche claims, in the service of an ulterior motive or as an excuse by which to secure their convictions.

Belief in God, Nietzsche claims, is better explained by an expression of *ressentiment*. Chronophobia, or the aversion to life and the passage of time, incites *ressentiment*. Nietzsche argues that individuals feel *ressentiment* towards the conditions of life because these conditions prevent them from properly satisfying their will to power. He focuses on *ressentiment* as it is expressed by the ascetic priest. The priest, Nietzsche claims, relates “this [life] (together with all that belongs to it, ‘nature’, ‘the world’, the whole sphere of what becomes and what passes away), to a quite different kind of existence that it opposes and excludes.”⁵⁹ The priest, says Nietzsche, derives the value of this life and this world from its relation to a “different kind of existence,” and in so doing, denigrates *our life*. Nietzsche writes: “When the emphasis of life is put on the ‘beyond’ rather than on life itself – when it is put on nothingness –, then the emphasis has been completely removed from life. ... To live *in this way*, ... this now becomes the ‘meaning’ of life.”⁶⁰ This line of thought reaches a pinnacle in the “Attempt at Self-Criticism” published with the 1886 edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*. There, Nietzsche writes the following:

Behind this way of thinking [the Christian doctrine]... I had always felt its hostility to life, a furious, vengeful enmity towards life itself... From the very outset Christianity was essentially and pervasively the feeling of disgust and weariness which life felt for life, a feeling which merely disguised, hid and decked itself out in its belief in ‘another’ or ‘better’ life. Hatred of the ‘world,’ a curse on the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a Beyond, invented in order better to defame

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §43, 39

the Here-and-Now, fundamentally a desire for nothingness, for the end, for rest, for the ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths’ – all this, together with the determination of Christianity to sanction only moral values, seemed to me the most dangerous and uncanny of all possible forms of a ‘will to decline,’ at the very least a sign of the most profound sickness, tiredness, distemper, exhaustion, impoverishment of life - for before the court of morality (especially Christian, which is to say unconditional, morality) life must constantly and inevitably be proved wrong because life is essentially something amoral; life must eventually, crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal ‘no!,’ be felt to be inherently unworthy, undeserving of our desire.⁶¹

Most basically, Nietzsche is saying that by positing the existence of a transcendent world one necessarily devalues our world in contrast to this transcendent beyond. Thus, Nietzsche claims that the devaluation of our world is the motivation behind the positing of the existence of the transcendent world: the Christian posits the “Beyond” in order to escape the here and now, which presupposes the defamation and devaluation of our world by contrast. This is why, for Nietzsche, only a nihilistic people could create the Christian God in the first place, and Christianity itself is already an expression of nihilism, i.e., because Christianity for Nietzsche condemns the value of *this* life.⁶² This is what Nietzsche means when he claims that “*the instinct of hatred for reality*” forms the root of Christianity. This is the first pillar of Nietzsche’s condemnation of metaphysical hope and the ascetic ideal in its Christian form: they express a hope to escape the necessary conditions of life as we know it, i.e., to live outside of these conditions.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” §5, 8-9

⁶² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §10, 11; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §346, 203-204; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” §5, 8-9; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5, 6-7; Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “On the Despisers of the Body,” 23-24.

7.5 Corruptive Meaning

On the one hand, for Nietzsche, the meaning ascribed to life by the Christian is corrupt inasmuch as it is an expression of a fundamentally chronophobic and life-denying mentality; it expresses the hope of escaping the necessary conditions of life, or the hope of being a different sort of person, an immortal, and living a different sort of life, free from agonistic dynamics. On the other hand, Nietzsche also thinks that the Christian meaning of life – the Christianized ascetic ideal – is corrupt inasmuch as it incites further corruption; it encourages further chronophobia and the ongoing denial of life. This is what it means to say that the Christian meaning of life is corruptive: it corrupts, and it actively sustains a state of corruption.

If Nietzsche condemns the Christian expression of metaphysical hope, he does not condemn the mentality of hope outright. Not all forms of hope are metaphysical, and one finds in Nietzsche a different sort of hope. He speaks frequently of our greatest possible futures,⁶³ calling us to create and achieve our “*highest potential power and splendor*”⁶⁴ and criticizing the possibility that we are living “at the expense of the future.”⁶⁵ The very subtitle of *Beyond Good and Evil* is “A Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,” [*Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*], and therein he calls the philosopher to create the strongest possible values for our strongest possible futures.⁶⁶ There can be no doubt that Nietzsche hopes to incite a certain future. But, while Nietzsche hopes for greatness and future

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §203, §211, §212; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5, §6; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §24, §25.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §6, 8

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §6, 8

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §211, 105-106

splendor under the necessary conditions of finitude, the mentality he condemns is one that hopes to escape these conditions.⁶⁷ Nietzsche hopes to incite a new revaluation of values in the name of the affirmation of life. Christianity, he thinks, prevents this future revaluation of values, or at least, it slows, restrains, or holds back this revolution; it maintains the devaluation of the will to power. This is how the Christian interpretation of the meaning of life sustains and incites corruption, i.e., by preventing the future revaluation of values. It does this, Nietzsche believes, by allowing individuals to satisfy their will to power with a minimal level of enhancement or overcoming. The ascetic ideal proffers individuals an increased sensation of power even for those who are unable to engage with any act of overcoming. This presupposes the “slave revolt” in morality. Further, the ascetic ideal serves to eternalize this corrupt mode of valuation, foreclosing the possibility of revaluation and experimentation with healthier, life-affirming, and enhancing values.

Chapter Three discussed several ways in which individuals can satisfy their will to power with a minimal level of overcoming. These largely amount to two kinds: reinterpretation and suppression. In the first case, one reinterprets their failures or incapacities as abilities or free choices: they claim that they choose not to act when, Nietzsche claims, in reality they could not act at all. This increases one’s sensation of power, first, with the feeling that one has overcome some pesky, internal animal impulse, and second, with the sensation of moral superiority that accompanies this so-called overcoming: the individual now knows that they, “the one who holds himself back from acting,”⁶⁸ have the moral high ground relative to those who would freely express their

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259, 152-153

⁶⁸ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 121

drives. In the case of suppression, which encompasses both internal and external negation, one imposes an evaluative system on themselves and others to prevent the expression of the drives considered evil. Internally, the character of resentment strives to repress their own drives; externally, they strive to repress the drives of others. This is part of why, for Nietzsche, “faith does not move mountains but *sets mountains down* where there aren’t any.”⁶⁹ Faith sets down imaginary Sisyphean mountains and thereby a series of imaginary obstacles to surmount. If we must imagine Sisyphus happy, this is why: every day he has an obstacle, and therefore a purpose.

These are general mechanisms by which the first revaluation of values – the “slave revolt” in morality – allowed individuals to fulfill the will to power without surmounting resistances. But how does the Christian interpretation of the meaning of life in particular allow individuals to do this? This question has a two-part answer. The first part is the more-or-less tautological observation that the Christian’s belief that life is ultimately meaningful satisfies the will to meaning. It is, in other words, Nietzsche’s claim that the ascetic ideal saves the will by allowing individuals to strive after something, namely, to strive to escape life and the human condition.⁷⁰ As Nietzsche presents it, the ascetic ideal offers life a meaning by structuring life as a quest or representing life as a journey. The manifest aim of this quest diverges from its latent aim. The manifest aim is salvation which, from the perspective of the finite human animal, amounts to entrance into the kingdom of Heaven, and, from the perspective of the eternal soul, amounts to walking this life with God. The latent aim of this quest, Nietzsche claims, is to escape the necessary conditions of finitude.

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §51, 49

⁷⁰ See Ch. 4, §IV above.

The key is that structuring life as a quest allows us to increase our sensation of power. Recall that power is always sensed in conjunction with the performance of some other activity or some other striving.⁷¹ One can only sense their power if they have an aim and there is an obstacle they strive to overcome in the way of achieving that aim. As a result, “strong hope” is an intense “stimulus to life” and sufferers are “sustained by a hope”⁷² because this hope, which amounts to an aim, is a condition of the sensation of increasing power. This, I think, is the ultimate reason why purposefulness renders suffering, chronophobia, etc., tolerable.

The second part of the answer runs as follows. Strictly speaking, any purpose could at least potentially play this role of increasing one’s sense of power. What is ineluctable is the need for meaning, but the goals that can fulfill this need are variable and interchangeable. However, according to Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal is a uniquely effective solution to the problem of the meaning of life, or it is uniquely successful in providing individuals with an aim that satisfies the will to meaning. This is because, set in the afterlife, the goal of eternal salvation cannot be invalidated by the events of this life and agonistic dynamics. Thus, an individual can maintain the aim of eternal salvation as their aim indefinitely, across any given lifetime, on an indeterminate, ongoing basis. The Christian meaning of life is invulnerable to the events of agonistic dynamics: it cannot be disproved by time or change, or by suffering, ensuring that this interpretation of the meaning of life will always remain universally accessible to all people, and in particular, to those who have truly been battered by the conditions of finitude. For Nietzsche, from the temporal

⁷¹ See Ch. 3, §II above.

⁷² Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §23, 19

perspective of the finite human animal, the Christian's goal is located in an afterlife. That this aim is beyond life ensures that no moment of worldly change or contingency can take this goal away from life. If everything is susceptible to change and destruction, this one aim, the kingdom of heaven, is not, for it is beyond the realm of the ephemeral and agonistic dynamics. Invulnerable to change, this aim stands as an eternally meaningful goal for any individual who so chooses to strive after it. Since this aim is set beyond life, after life, any living person can always and forever strive after the goal of salvation or structure their life as a quest for salvation. Nothing in this world could invalidate a goal that sits in another world. Thus, there can always be hope, or life can always be meaningful. It is crucial that the aim is never achieved and even that it is literally unachievable within one's lifetime. This is why Nietzsche writes that "Christianity promises everything and delivers nothing."⁷³ Indeed, the promise must not be fulfilled, or the goal must not be achieved, for then life would lose its aim. The goal here provided to life remains continually on the horizon, always and forever beyond life. Thus, the aim of salvation in the kingdom of God can act as an eternal and unwavering pole in the minds of believers, forever signifying the possibility of hope.

Moreover, concerning suffering, it is essential that suffering be interpreted as an indication of guilt and the process of repentance, which allows for one's future salvation. For Nietzsche, ascetic Christianity ensured that "suffering was interpreted" in that "it brought all suffering within the perspective of guilt."⁷⁴ "I suffer: someone or other must be guilty"—and every sick sheep thinks the same. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest, says

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §42, 38

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

to him ... you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame for it.”⁷⁵ Now suffering is always already more evidence either of one’s virtue or one’s guilt, and so of the process of repentance, and the promise of salvation. Thus, for the Christian mentality, the suffering that belongs necessarily to life can always be reinterpreted to support one’s eternal hope that salvation lies ahead on the horizon. For Nietzsche, two basic beliefs characterize this Christian mindset: first, that life’s aim is invulnerable to agonistic dynamics, and second, that suffering is evidence that one’s hopes for salvation are well founded. With these two beliefs, no instance of worldly change or worldly suffering could ever be an argument against the Christian interpretation of the meaning of life. This is what makes the Christian interpretation of life such a profoundly effective tool in the war on nihilism: it cannot be dismantled by the events of our world; it will hold fast through the full wrath of agonistic dynamism.

This presents yet another apparent paradox. The character of resentment really does crush expressions of will to power both externally, in the nobles, and internally, within their own selves. But this is just their way of participating in agonistic dynamism, their way of overcoming the obstacles they encounter and of maximizing their sensation of power within the conditions of finitude. How exactly does this expression of will to power, which is an expression of life itself, say “No” to life? As a general *modus operandi*, the character of *resentiment* aims to prevent the growth of effective power, and they do so because this is what allows them to increase their affective power, and thereby, garner some measure of fulfillment for their will to power. By contrast, the noble type strives to maximize effective

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §15, 94

power in itself, and therefore also in its enemies and the world around it. The one uses power to increase power; the other uses power to diminish power. For Nietzsche, if Christians see themselves as empowered in the face of suffering, the power they gain is only the false feeling of power.

While resentful individuals strive to increase their feelings of power, they do so not by strengthening themselves, but rather, by knocking others down. If the noble types too knock others down, Nietzsche claims, they do so in the service of their primary aim, which is to increase their feelings of power by strengthening themselves. The resentful types, Nietzsche claims, increase their feelings of power by weakening others or other parts of their own selves. I take Nietzsche's point to be that, at this moment in which we see "life *against* life,"⁷⁶ or as he puts it elsewhere, "nature against something that is also nature,"⁷⁷ this instantiation of life is self-undermining in that it strives to negate the very conditions for life itself. Thus, the corrupt or resentful mode of expression of will to power lives "at the expense of the future"⁷⁸ or expresses a "will to nothingness"⁷⁹ in that it undermines the very conditions for life itself.

7.6 Conclusion

Nietzsche recognizes that meaning is a condition for survival: the will needs an aim. And yet, he also recognizes that we adopt certain aims which are themselves harmful to us or else expressive of an underlying corrupt mentality. In particular, I've isolated both a

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 87

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §228, 132

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," §6, 8

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120; & see GM, Preface, §5.

corrupt and corruptive type of aim in what I've called metaphysical hope. Hope is metaphysical when either what is hoped for, or its ground, lies beyond the conditions of finitude. This type of aim is corrupt in that it presupposes the condemnation of reality, or that reality needs to be redeemed, and it corrupts in that it prevents the future revaluation of values that Nietzsche hopes to incite. Nonetheless, if we need an aim, and metaphysical hope both corrupts and is corrupt, then what is that goal toward which Nietzsche would have us strive? It is to this question that I will turn my attention in the final chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE VALUE OF MEANING FOR LIFE

As Nietzsche understands it, a quest for meaning often preserves a corrupt form of life where corruption is the preference for the life-hindering over the enhancing. This preservation, however, does not exhaust Nietzsche's thinking on the human relation to meaning. He also thinks that certain quests for meaning can genuinely encourage flourishing; they can benefit and preserve enhancing forms of life. Thus, the will to meaning cannot be exhaustively understood as corrupt according to Nietzsche. As Nietzsche defends the value of the bodily drives supposedly condemned by the Christian tradition,¹ so too does he reclaim the value of the will to meaning, demonstrating once more that life would not continually reproduce that which is ultimately harmful to itself.²

While the will to meaning incites us to structure our lives as a quest, the sort of quest we will embark upon, hindering or enhancing, remains an open question. As I've shown, for Nietzsche, individuals tend to structure their lives as a quest in the life-hindering sense because this requires a minimal expenditure of power and because such a quest is sustainable through the storm of agonistic dynamics. Because Nietzsche focuses so extensively on this one life-hindering expression of the will to meaning, some interpreters conflate it with the will to meaning in general.³ The will to meaning, however, has many possible modes of expression; it need not become manifest in this life-hindering expression,

¹ Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 222-223

² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §11 & §13

³ Casey, "Beyond Meaninglessness." Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. Gardner, "The Disunity of Philosophical Reason." Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*.

or it is not corrupt all the way down. As a feature of the human type in general, the will to meaning can serve life-hindering or life-enhancing ends, depending on the character type by which it is expressed. Just as the effects and underlying motives of asceticism are different in “artists,” “priests,” “saints,” “philosophers,” and “the majority,”⁴ so too can the effects and underlying motivations of an expression of the will to meaning differ between the religious type, the philosopher, the ancient Greeks, etc. In contrast to those interpreters who hold that the will to meaning expresses only a “No” to life and incites only decline,⁵ I will now demonstrate that, for Nietzsche, a quest for meaning can also express a “Yes” to life and is often a condition for life’s flourishing and enhancement.

I’ll begin by summarizing the two scholarly positions to which I wish to respond. The first, held by both Leiter and Gardner, is the position that the will to meaning is only valuable because meaning anesthetizes suffering.⁶ On this reading, meaning derives its value for us from the fact that it negates something to which we are averse. This interpretation overlooks the fact that Nietzsche ascribes a further positive value to certain quests for meaning. The second position, held by both Danto and Casey, is that the will to meaning is an exclusively life-hindering feature of the human being that we should strive to overcome.⁷ This interpretation overlooks not only the positive value that Nietzsche ascribes to the will to meaning but even its negative value recognized by Gardner and Leiter. Following these summaries, I will consider how, according to Nietzsche, the will to meaning guides us in responding to chaos and nihilism. In the absence of foundational

⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

⁵ Casey, “Beyond Meaninglessness.” Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*.

⁶ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 207; Gardner, “The Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 27.

⁷ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 75 Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13-14.

grounding values, the will to meaning encourages us to commit to some principle with which to ground the meaning of life. However, if our traditional commitments have both stemmed from and incited corruption, Nietzsche will consider alternative, healthier modes of grounding the meaning of life. He develops several examples: these include the alternative forms of theodicy that he identifies in Ancient Greece and the use made of the ascetic ideal by the philosopher. I will also offer a third possible example based on my interpretation of a remark Nietzsche makes concerning the “tension” in the “bow” that belongs to modern humanity. In each case, the will to meaning guides the individual to structure their life as a quest in a way that is genuinely enhancing by Nietzschean standards.

8.1 Leiter and Gardner on *Ressentiment* and Meaninglessness

The first position I’ll examine is the argument that the will to meaning is only valuable because meaning anesthetizes suffering. This argument takes two forms: in their respective interpretations of Nietzsche, Leiter argues that meaning anesthetizes pain through the discharge of a violent emotion, i.e., blame, while Gardner argues that meaning prevents “suffering” from being “unbearable” by removing the “threat of its *meaninglessness*.”⁸ The two differ on what exactly meaning alleviates: for Leiter, meaning assuages “the painfulness of pain,” while for Gardner, meaning prevents the “meaninglessness” of pain.⁹ Thus, both agree that meaning’s role is to negate some torment, and both agree that we value meaning because of this negation. This negative value, I claim, does not exhaust Nietzsche’s evaluation of meaning for life.

⁸ Gardner, “The Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 27

⁹ Gardner, “The Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 27

On Leiter's reading, meaning provides the sufferer with an object to blame for their suffering and upon which to vent anger. Leiter writes: "only with a meaning attached can the sufferer discharge his emotions properly and deaden the pain, for it is the meaning that gives direction to the discharge of resentment, by identifying whom to blame."¹⁰ Here, the meaning of suffering is roughly synonymous with the explanatory cause of one's suffering, which is something or someone to blame for one's suffering. Nietzsche does say that the discharge of emotion acts as a form of anesthesia: we "anaesthetize" one "pain" by discharging "a more violent emotion of any sort," and blame is "the first available pretext" to discharge "the wildest possible emotion," and thereby temporarily "rid the consciousness" of the first pain.¹¹ And Nietzsche claims that "reasons bring relief"¹² and that finding a meaningful explanation for our suffering, i.e., someone to blame, effectively vitalizes us through suffering. Again, this is because the discharge of a "violent emotion" occupies the forefront of one's mind or takes prominence in one's consciousness, forcing the mind to focus on this emotion over the original pain.¹³ On Nietzsche's telling, this expression of blame occupies our consciousness, temporarily expelling the initial pain from awareness, and therefore providing a form of anesthesia.¹⁴

Leiter makes this anesthesia by discharge of "a more violent emotion" the latent aim of the will to meaning.¹⁵ On Leiter's telling, the will to meaning is satisfied so long as

¹⁰ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 207

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §15, 93

¹² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §20, 104

¹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §15, 93

¹⁴ See Berkowitz, *Causes and Consequences of Feelings*, 167-181, for a discussion of the empirical evidence for the existence of a human tendency to react to painful stimuli by expressing anger via blame.

¹⁵ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 207

the individual uncovers an object upon which to discharge blame,¹⁶ i.e., the cause of one's suffering – which, after the intervention of the ascetic priest, is the sinner found within one's own self.¹⁷ In short, for Leiter, the reason why we need meaning is so that we will have someone or something to blame for our ills, and the meaning of suffering should be understood as the explanatory cause of suffering. Thus, for Leiter, the human need to blame, and so ultimately the human need to anesthetize pain, explains the emergence of the will to meaning as a feature of the human type. On this reading, the will to meaning exists in order to dampen feelings of suffering; this makes the will to meaning a means to the end of the anesthetization found in the discharge of violent emotions.

But meaningfulness is not always a means to the end of blame for Nietzsche; it does not need this function to become valuable for human beings. According to Nietzsche, we value meaning whether or not it provides us with something to blame for our suffering. I say this for at least two reasons. First, throughout the *Genealogy's* third treatise, Nietzsche casts the will to meaning as a character trait of human beings in general: it is the human will in general that “needs an aim.” Thus, the will to meaning is not only a trait of the resentful character type, or of a narrower character type that needs to anesthetize suffering through blame. It is a feature of all human beings, including of those who accept and live with pain and suffering bereft of anesthesia. And second, the notions of blame and revenge are absent from Nietzsche's discussions of other expressions of the will to meaning. For instance, they do not appear in his discussion of the meaning of life for the Greeks. On

¹⁶ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 207

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §15, 94

Nietzsche's telling, as I'll discuss below, the meaning of life revealed to the Greeks in their transfiguring mirror incites enhancement without expressing blame for one's suffering.

Leiter's explanation of the will to meaning also equivocates between two senses of meaning or "reasons," i.e., between purpose and explanation. These are the two categories of answer to the ambiguous question "Why?" "Why are we here?" could mean "For what end or purpose are we here?", or it could mean "How did we get here? Who or what has put us here?" "Why am I suffering" or "For what reason am I suffering?" could mean "For what purpose or end am I suffering?", or else, "What has caused my suffering?" or "What is the origin or source of my suffering?" If "reasons bring relief,"¹⁸ such a reason could be an explanatory cause, but it could also refer to the fruits of one's labour, i.e., to the purpose or aim of one's suffering. The will to meaning does not only seek causal explanations for suffering; it seeks projects, quests, purposes, and future-oriented reasons to persevere through suffering. On Leiter's telling, this future-orientation is lost, since the will to meaning is satisfied so long as it identifies the past cause to blame for one's suffering as opposed to the future reason for which one is suffering. At points, Nietzsche does seem to suggest that the discharge of violent emotions can constitute a goal or project.¹⁹ However, even if one can make of their life a quest to vent anger or blame upon one's enemies, including one's internal enemies, it is clear that such a quest does not exhaust the possible forms of the human relationship with meaning, nor does it exhaust all possible aims of the will to meaning as Nietzsche construes it. Identifying who to blame for one's suffering is only one of meaning's many achievements for human beings. The mistake is to imagine

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §20, 104

¹⁹ E.g., his remarks on Schopenhauer at Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76.

that this is the only value that meaning can provide. Meaning's value for humanity does not lie only in its function for the anesthesia found in blame.

In other passages, Leiter seems to take the broader – though still too narrow – line that the valuable function of meaning for human beings is to render suffering meaningful and therefore tolerable.²⁰ This is also the reading offered by Gardner. On this interpretation, the value of a quest for meaning amounts to its capacity to negate the meaninglessness of suffering. Nietzsche argues that the human capacity to endure meaningful suffering is greater than our capacity to endure meaningless suffering. Thus, the result of rendering suffering meaningful is to increase one's tolerance for suffering, and so for life itself. Gardner's argument is that, if we are averse to meaninglessness, this aversion is “non-hedonic,” or it is not measured on the scale of pleasure and suffering.²¹ Instead, we want meaning, we are averse to meaninglessness, and this disposition holds independently of its relation to or effects upon our pleasure or our pain. However, it seems to me that our adverse reaction to meaninglessness is itself a form of suffering. And Gardner himself seems to recognize this when he casts our experience of meaninglessness as either “unbearable” or not. Regardless, even if we will meaning for some reason that is entirely independent of our own pleasure and pain, Gardner still derives the value of meaning for human beings negatively, i.e., from its capacity to negate this “unbearable” “threat” of “meaninglessness.”²² But this capacity to allay or dampen that to which we are averse is

²⁰ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 207, n. 17; Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 210.

²¹ Gardner, “The Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 27

²² Gardner, “The Disunity of Philosophical Reason,” 27

only another among many of meaning's possible accomplishments. Meaning can do much more than assuage the intolerable.

8.2 Casey and Danto on Nietzsche and Nihilism

Arthur Danto and M. A. Casey both argue that Nietzsche sees nothing of value in the will to meaning. For Nietzsche, they claim, the will to meaning is a purely harmful disposition of human beings which we must learn to overcome entirely if we are to elevate ourselves. In his book *Meaninglessness: The Solutions of Nietzsche, Freud and Rorty*, and his article "Beyond Meaninglessness," Casey argues that "Nietzsche hoped" that we would one day be "freed from the need for meaning."²³ Nietzsche, Casey continues, hoped to be an inciting force in creating "a world where the need for meaning no longer occurs," and "a world where we no longer seek deeper and larger purposes for our existence and no longer suffer anxiety and despair in the absence of them."²⁴

Casey attributes the will to meaning to Judaism and Christianity; he claims that the emergence of the will to meaning as an attribute of humanity is an effect of these forms of religiosity: "the culture of the west... with its origins in Judaism and Christianity, created a human type that "needs" transcendent meaning."²⁵ This need persists, says Casey, even as religious faith wanes. After "the decline of Christianity," and when the "various surrogates for faith in the transcendent such as *reason*, *history*, and *nature* were themselves becoming unbelievable," then "the need for meaning persisted, but the culture that created

²³ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 74

²⁴ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 71

²⁵ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 74

this need was no longer able to meet it.”²⁶ A first issue here is that, on Nietzsche’s account, the will to meaning clearly precedes Christianity, which corrupts but does not produce this need. Nonetheless, it is true that, for Nietzsche, the scientific method’s inability to establish the existence of an absolute ground of meaning “threatens,” in Young’s words, “an entire meaning-giving worldview.”²⁷ The “consequence” of this inability, Casey argues, “was the crisis of meaninglessness,” while the “solution to this crisis in Nietzsche’s judgement is to overcome the old character type of the West and create one that does not need meaning.”²⁸ In other words, according to Casey, Nietzsche’s proposed solution to the absence of meaning is not to discover a new grounding foundation for meaning or to learn to create meaning ourselves. Rather, it is to learn to get along with this absence or to get on with our lives without meaning by overcoming this basic need. According to Casey, Nietzsche’s project is to incite us to create a human type that no longer has this need for meaning and thus no longer experiences the absence of meaning as a torment. Such a type would supposedly overcome the crisis of meaninglessness since meaninglessness is only a crisis for those who need meaning.

In *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, Danto describes what Nietzsche sees as a habitual human attitude: the belief that “there *ought* to be some order or external purpose in the world.”²⁹ This habitual attitude presupposes that “purposes are established from without”³⁰ and “that there is an external authority to whom or to which we must appeal in order to

²⁶ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 74-75

²⁷ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 28

²⁸ Casey, *Beyond Meaninglessness*, 5

²⁹ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13

³⁰ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13

determine the purpose of life.”³¹ “The nihilism of emptiness” “expresses a disappointment that there is no such purpose,”³² while “the nihilism of negativity,” “having learnt not to believe in one authority, sought to find another.”³³ And this is because people “find it difficult to function in this world without supposing one or another external source of authority and significance,” “if not God or Science, then Conscience, Reason, Social Instinct, or History” where history is understood as “an immanent spirit with a built-in purpose, to which one may surrender.”³⁴

Up to this point, it seems to me that Danto’s reading of Nietzsche is basically correct. Nietzsche thinks that human beings largely assume that the purpose of life must be imposed from the outside and that they suffer grave difficulties in navigating their realities without presupposing such an external authority. However, Danto then takes a further step. Speaking of the nihilism of emptiness, he claims that, according to Nietzsche, instead of expressing “a disappointment that there is no such purpose... the state of mind that demands that there be one *ought to be overcome*.”³⁵ And even more directly:

It is a general tendency of the human mind, which, to Nietzsche, is ultimately a disastrous disposition, to imagine and to seek to identify a purposive armature, a basis for significance, in the world itself, something objective to which [people] may submit and in which they may find a meaning for themselves.³⁶

I cannot accept this qualification of the will to meaning as an ultimately “disastrous disposition,” nor can I accept that, according to Nietzsche, the demand for a purpose “ought

³¹ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13

³² Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13

³³ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13

³⁴ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13. Danto quotes Nietzsche, referring to p. 554 of *Aus dem Nachlass der Achtzigerjahre* from *Nietzsches Werke in Drei Bände*, edited by Karl Schlechta.

³⁵ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13

³⁶ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 13-14

to be overcome.” As I’ve said above, just as Nietzsche positively re-evaluates the bodily instincts, so too does he reclaim the value of the will to meaning.

Danto takes his interpretation furthest with his claim that Nietzsche’s philosophy amounts to an expression of nihilism. Danto describes “Nietzsche’s Nihilism” as “a thoroughly disillusioned conception of the world” as “devoid” of “meaning.”³⁷ Then, strangest of all, Danto says that Nietzsche wants us to embrace and say “yes” to this nihilism and, again, to overcome our need for meaning and significance.³⁸ Thus, according to Danto, Nietzsche is a nihilist not only because he claims that life is meaningless or because he tells us to overcome our need for meaning, but because he tells us to embrace and affirm this fundamental meaninglessness of existence. This, of course, is the same Nietzsche who says that “the *great* danger to mankind” is the “temptation” to “nothingness” and to “nihilism,”³⁹ and that it is “from nihilism” that we must be redeemed.⁴⁰ Nietzsche does not ask us to embrace nihilism; he sees nihilism as a genuine threat to humanity and the will to meaning functions as a defense against this threat: when we structure our lives as a quest, we feel that this life is worth living. Thus, Nietzsche does not want humanity to overcome the will to meaning. Nihilism is the great threat to humanity as Nietzsche understands it, and he sees the will to meaning as a solution to the crisis of nihilism. I’ll now demonstrate how this is so.

³⁷ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 15

³⁸ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 15

³⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5, 7

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §24, 66-67

8.3 Nihilism

Since it is set in the afterlife, eternal salvation is a lasting, meaningful goal in this life for the Christian mentality. The events that occur under the conditions of finitude could never invalidate this goal since it is not submitted to the ephemeral. As a result, the pursuit of this aim always remains a valid or legitimate quest, or the Christian's faith in the meaning of life cannot be shaken by events within the conditions of finitude. And yet, Nietzsche also describes the modern mentality as the mindset of those who have suffered the death of God. This mentality realizes that Christianity's principles are malleable, and therefore that it is not clear that the meaning of life which they legitimate is sustainable. In other words, the modern individual is unmoored from their orienting principles. Nietzsche connects this unmooring to the history of Christianity, which he claims is self-undermining. Indeed, for Nietzsche, the only thing strong enough to overcome Christianity is Christianity itself: "All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation: that is the law of life, the law of *necessary* 'self-overcoming' in the essence of life."⁴¹ Christianity "dissolves itself,"⁴² Nietzsche claims, because its valuation of truth, confessional honesty, and "Christian truthfulness"⁴³ have encouraged the development of an unrestrained will to truth until this "two-thousand-year discipline in truth-telling... finally forbids itself the lie entailed in the belief in God."⁴⁴

Nietzsche claims that the Christian "concept of truthfulness" and the "confessional punctiliousness of Christian conscience" eventually became the "scientific conscience" that

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119

⁴² Geuss, "Nietzsche and Genealogy," 339. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §357.

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119

demands “intellectual rigour at any price.”⁴⁵ Thus, for Nietzsche, Christianity brought about its own demise because it encouraged the production of a scientific method that itself could not prove the existence of God or any basic tenets of Christianity, thereby dethroning the classic first principles of philosophy like God or the soul. In Grant’s words,

From the long history of disciplined truth-seeking in Christianity, there came forth at last the great modern scientists who, in their pursuit of truth, showed that the human and non-human things can be fully understood without the idea of final purpose, or that human nature is properly directed toward rationality. The very greatness of Christianity was to produce its own grave-diggers.⁴⁶

Of course, science existed before Christianity. What stems from Christianity, Nietzsche suggests, is the demand that “truth” and “intellectual rigor” be pursued “at any price,” i.e., independently of consideration for its effects upon life, or rather under the assumption that truth is always more valuable for life than untruth. The ancient skeptics set everything into question and suspended judgment in “the hope of becoming tranquil.”⁴⁷ Their goal was “a life characterized by freedom from psychological disturbance.”⁴⁸ By contrast, Nietzsche claims, the “Christian conscience” sets everything into question out of a duty to intellectual rigor, regardless of its consequences. The result of questioning the truth value of everything “at any price,” Nietzsche claims, is that Christianity incites “the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be ‘divine’ or morality incarnate. This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of ‘truthfulness.’”⁴⁹ Thus, Nietzsche writes, modern man “knows not which way to turn; I am everything that knows

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §357, 219; quoted again at Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119.

⁴⁶ Grant, “Time as History,” 446

⁴⁷ Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 36

⁴⁸ Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 36

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §3, 9

not which way to turn,”⁵⁰ since the will to truth requires us to admit that we cannot be certain of the immutability of our values. If our values guide our actions, or tell us “which way to turn,” dethroning these values can lead to inaction and paralysis.

This dethroning incites the historical crisis of nihilism.⁵¹ Nihilism, for Nietzsche, cannot simply be the absence of transcendent values or of a true world beyond the merely apparent, which is how some interpreters seem to understand it.⁵² This is because, for Nietzsche, only a nihilistic people could create the idea of a true world in the first place. According to Nietzsche, Christianity defames this life by setting it into contrast with a more valuable eternal life. Thus, for Nietzsche, Christianity itself is already an expression of nihilism⁵³ since nihilism condemns the value of this life. If the Christian believes in a true world and absolute values, and yet is also nihilistic, nihilism cannot be the absence of a true world or of transcendent values. However, if the Christian defames this life on Nietzsche’s telling, they still ultimately believe that this life is worth living, though only because it is redeemed by eternal salvation. This position is itself nihilistic, since it presumes that this life is not worthwhile on its own without some external salvation or redemption.

Thus, the death of God does not represent a transition from a non-nihilistic to a nihilistic mentality. Instead, a Christian people is already nihilistic, and the idea of God is the safeguard, or the psychological defense mechanism, which has up until now prevented this nihilistic mentality from reaching an outright rejection of life. Nietzsche distinguishes

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §2

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, “Preface,” §2, 3

⁵² Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 29-31

⁵³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §11; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §346; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Preface,” §5; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, “Preface,” §5; Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “The Despisers of the Body.”

degrees of nihilism. All forms of the nihilistic mentality share in the judgement that this life as we have it is not worth living without some external or transcendent supplementation. But there is a difference between a livable form of nihilism, which could be called high-functioning nihilism, in which individuals are able to persist or live on despite their nihilism, and a consummate, undiminished “suicidal nihilism.”⁵⁴ Nietzsche recognizes the benefits of Christianity; he sees Christianity as the enabler, allowing individuals to live on with their nihilism: within the Christian imposition of the ascetic ideal, “the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism.”⁵⁵ The death of God wipes away this safeguard which had prevented this high-functioning nihilism from becoming an exhaustive and thoroughgoing nihilism. Thus, the death of God has the potential to mark a transition from this livable form of nihilism to a consummate suicidal nihilism, and this transition is the crisis of nihilism that the death of God incites. In other words, the crisis is not the advent of nihilism, which had been there all along. Indeed, the death of God cannot mark the beginning of nihilism since Nietzsche locates the origins of the idea of God in the nihilistic mentality. Instead, the crisis refers to the loss of one of the most effective defenses against suicidal nihilism that history has had to offer. If Christianity has successfully prevented the nihilist from becoming suicidal, Nietzsche’s fear is that, unrestrained by this defensive mechanism, nihilism will become free to take its final, consummate form.

But we cannot go back; the death of God is the modern tree of knowledge, and its damage has been wrought by an unrelenting will to truth at any cost. As Altizer writes, “modern consciousness” is itself “a consequence of the death of God” and it understands

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

“all critical thinking as an atheistic thinking.”⁵⁶ If this will to truth undermines the authority of those principles which once guided our actions, we are left to live and act without a banister, without an unshakable or immovable foundation and the guidance it provides, including the meaning of life it grounds. Nietzsche writes:

The belief... in aim- and meaning-lessness is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable.... One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain.⁵⁷

If Christianity’s principles prove malleable, the meaning of life conditioned on those principles can become unsustainable. The death of God leaves us with two options: attempt to live with no permanent ground whatsoever, or create or commit to some transitory ground of our own. As Paul Loeb has observed, according to “the usual ‘existentialist’ reading,” Nietzsche thinks that strong individuals will take the former line and learn to live without any unshakable foundation which could ground the meaning of life. On this reading, Nietzsche wants “the human animal to become strong and healthy enough to accept, affirm, and even thrive on this meaninglessness.”⁵⁸ Leiter, for example, calls this “the attitude of existential commitment.” He claims that one who embodies such an attitude, is able “through brute force of will, to carry on in the absence of such a meaning or vindication, to give up, in effect, asking “Suffering for what?””⁵⁹

Crucially however, and “contrary to Leiter and the usual existentialist reading,” Loeb notes that “Nietzsche nowhere says that the superhuman accepts, affirms, or thrives

⁵⁶ Altizer, *The New Gospel of Christian Atheism*, 102

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §55, 35

⁵⁸ Loeb, “Suicide, Meaning, and Redemption,” 183

⁵⁹ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 230

on meaninglessness.”⁶⁰ In fact, Nietzsche’s point seems to be very much the opposite: he recognizes that meaning is a condition of survival – the will *needs* an aim – and so he calls on us to impose meaning upon our existence: “It is time that mankind set themselves a goal. It is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope.”⁶¹ And further, “uncanny is human existence and still without meaning... I want to teach humans the meaning of their being.”⁶² But what meaning will we impose? Meaning is a condition for survival, and yet the meaning of life which has effectively protected against suicidal nihilism and taken root in the civilization Nietzsche denounces is itself nihilistic and life-negating. Where, as he asks, is the counter-ideal?⁶³ What is the life-affirming meaning that Nietzsche calls us to impose upon our own lives?

8.4 The Philosopher and the Ascetic Ideal

Nietzsche provides one image of an enhancing meaningful life in his discussion of asceticism in philosophy. Ultimately, he claims that asceticism allows the philosopher to devote the entirety of their energies toward a singular, central aim, rather than expending it toward countless diverse ends, and he privileges those tasks which demand the whole of one’s energies.⁶⁴ Broadly speaking, Nietzsche understands asceticism as both abstinence from fulfilling one’s sensual desires as well as the attempt to lessen, weaken, crush, and even deaden one’s desires. In a self-defeating sense, the ascetic wills to not will, to cease

⁶⁰ Loeb, “Suicide, Meaning, and Redemption,” 184

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §5, 9. And see Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” §10, 123; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §585 (A), 318.

⁶² Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §7, 12

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §23, 109

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Wise,” §7, 82

willing or desiring: Schopenhauer, for instance, *desires* to escape from his enslavement to his own individuated will. This already suggests that the philosopher adopts ascetic practices as an indirect route by which to fulfill some other will; they deny one will to fulfill another. Nietzsche is perennially interested in why people think and behave as they do,⁶⁵ and he observes a pattern in the thought and behavior of philosophers: he claims that they consistently denigrate the value of the senses and sensuality, and he wants to uncover the reasons behind this. Nietzsche frames this discussion as an example of one of the diverse and variable manifestations of asceticism, more often speaking of plural “ascetic ideals” than of the singular “ascetic ideal.” What motivates asceticism is one thing, he claims, in “artists,” something else in “the majority,” and still something else in the “priest,” the “saint,” and the “philosopher.”⁶⁶ For instance, in the Saint, he argues that asceticism constitutes “an excuse to hibernate,” and therefore, to achieve the conditions for thought and the *vita contemplativa*.⁶⁷ In the majority, Nietzsche claims that asceticism constitutes a condemnation of this life and its conditions and a preference to escape these conditions, “a will to nothingness” which “is and remains a *will*.”⁶⁸ Why would a philosopher turn against sensuality? What does this signify? Or, as Nietzsche asks, “what does it mean if a genuine *philosopher* pays homage to the ascetic ideal?”⁶⁹ Nietzsche argues that asceticism is a means to an end for the philosopher: it allows them to focus the whole of their energy upon a single, daunting challenge, namely, the task of creating “what is growing inside

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Preface, §3

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §1, 68

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §5, 73

him.”⁷⁰ The philosopher does not adopt asceticism as the full meaning of their life; rather, they pay homage to asceticism in order to live a meaningful life. Asceticism is the tool the philosopher uses to structure their life as the quest to create “what is growing inside” of them. The philosopher uses asceticism to create the space and the silence in which to create philosophy.

Nietzsche claims that the philosopher “abhors” marriage as a “hindrance and catastrophe on his path to the optimum,”⁷¹ and that “every philosopher” would understand a child as a “fetter.”⁷² The Buddha, Nietzsche says, experienced a “thoughtful moment” in which “he thought ... ‘living in a house, that unclean place, is cramped; freedom is in leaving the house’”⁷³ Likewise, Nietzsche continues, Heraclitus was known to “withdraw” into “the courts and colonnades of the immense Temple of Artemis.”⁷⁴ And “no philosopher,” Nietzsche says, “can refrain from inwardly rejoicing ... on hearing ... of all those who ... decided to say ‘no’ to any curtailment of their liberty, and go off into the desert.”⁷⁵ This aversion to sensuality and worldly connections typifies the philosopher-type according to Nietzsche:⁷⁶ this “peculiarly withdrawn attitude,” characterized by “denying

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 80

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 77. “Which great philosopher has been married? Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer – were not; indeed it is impossible to even think about them as married. A married philosopher belongs to comedy, that is my proposition.”

⁷² “Every philosopher would say what Buddha said when he was told of the birth of a son: ‘Râhula is born to me, a fetter is forged for me’ (Râhula means here ‘a little demon.’)” Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 77. Geuss notes that Nietzsche’s source for this quotation is Oldenburg, *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde*, 122ff.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 77

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 79. Geuss notes that Nietzsche’s source is Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Philosophers*, bk. ix.

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 77

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76: “Undeniably, as long as there are philosophers on earth and whenever there have been philosophers, ... there exists a genuine philosophers’ irritation and rancour against sensuality; ... similarly there exists a genuine partiality and warmth among philosophers with regard to the whole ascetic

the world,” “hating life,” and “doubting the senses,” “has been maintained ... to the point where it almost counted for the philosophical attitude as such.”⁷⁷ Even if Nietzsche is wrong concerning his characterization of a general philosophical type, his point stands as a description of some philosophers. While it is quite unlikely that *all* philosophers abhor sensuality, many remain entirely silent about such a fundamental aspect of existence, presupposing its lack of importance, and some philosophers do seem to genuinely abhor it. This latter mentality is visible, for instance, in Schopenhauer, who “treated sexuality as a personal enemy” and referred to “woman” as an “*instrumentum diaboli*.”⁷⁸ In brief, some philosophers do set up asceticism as an ideal, and this phenomenon can be analyzed.

Nietzsche argues that, by turning against sensuality, philosophers must be garnering themselves what is advantageous while avoiding what is harmful, and he compiles a list of each. The philosopher, he claims, suffers from “an aversion to noise, admiration, news, influence,”⁷⁹ while what is “absolutely indispensable” for the philosopher is “freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, business, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, bounce and flight of ideas; good, thin, clear, free, dry air.”⁸⁰ And, Nietzsche continues, the philosopher also needs “peace in every basement” – he means a healthy body, and digestive system in particular, “basement” being a metaphor for the body and its base functions he uses elsewhere – and he needs his “bowels regular and under control, busy as a milling mechanism but remote.”⁸¹ The word “remote” here is crucial; for Nietzsche, the

ideal... Both these features belong... to the type; if both are lacking in a philosopher, he is always just a ‘so-called’ philosopher.”

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 84

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 76. The reference is to Schopenhauer’s “Über die Weiber.”

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 78

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 77-78

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 78

philosopher's body must function well so as to not call their attention, and in this functioning it must remain remote, or, far away from their attention. Next, the philosopher needs "every dog nicely on the lead."⁸² He means both external and internal "dogs" – nothing can run up to or jump out at the philosopher, demanding their attention, but also the philosopher's own thoughts, instincts, and desires should not be running off unchained from some central node; the philosopher must not be accosted at random by their own wayward thoughts or instincts. Again, the thought process must be left at liberty to flow free from distraction. This indicates that distraction is not defined by exteriority. Rather, the thread that links these varied forms of distraction is that each is wayward in relation to the philosopher's governing project, whether the distraction originates inside or outside of the philosopher. Finally, Nietzsche continues, there must be "no hostile barking and shaggy *rancune*," and "no gnawing worms of wounded ambition."⁸³ The philosopher must learn to forget those moments of the past over which they feel shame or for which they desire revenge, or anything that distracts from the "future" with which they are "pregnant."⁸⁴

When Heraclitus withdrew to his solitude, Nietzsche claims, he was "trying to avoid... the noise and democratic tittle-tattle of the Ephesians, their politics, news of the 'Empire,' ... their market affairs of 'today.'"⁸⁵ And this is because "philosophers need a rest from one thing above all: anything to do with 'today.'"⁸⁶ In the practice of withdrawing, Nietzsche is describing a defense against what could be called the philosopher's version of

⁸² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 78

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 78

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 80. And see also Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §846, 446.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 79

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 79

the historical illness: overwhelmed by an excess of possibilities, the philosopher risks exhausting their energies in responding to various distractions, thus accomplishing little of note. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche states that “the task is not to conquer all obstacles in general but instead to conquer the ones where you can apply your whole strength.”⁸⁷ He does not want people spending their energies overcoming many small obstacles; he would rather a person overcome a single daunting obstacle. An unfocused individual, Nietzsche claims, may face innumerable tiny resistances throughout their day, inciting the cycle of innumerable “small expenditures” and “superfluous impoverishment.”⁸⁸ Nietzsche’s claim is that one who expends their energies against a thousand minor resistances will accomplish no great overcoming, which stems instead from spending one’s energies in overcoming fewer but greater obstacles. An individual can overcome greater levels of resistance by concentrating their total energies on a single task than by spreading their energies across many different aims. Nietzsche assumes an economy of energies in the individual; only so much energy can be spent before it must be replenished.⁸⁹ What is detrimental for philosophers are distractions and demands or encroachments on their liberty, or anything that calls their focus away from their creation and causes their energies to be exhausted in the service of other ends. This, says Nietzsche, is why the philosopher withdraws from the world, since worldly commitments place demands on their finite energy reserves while by contrast, “the ascetic ideal points the way to so many bridges to *independence*.”⁹⁰ On Nietzsche’s reading, philosophers have an ulterior motive for adopting the ascetic ideal;

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Wise,” §7, 82

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I Am So Clever, §8, 95

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I Am So Clever, §2, 89

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §7, 77

they adopt it not because the ascetic ideal is the path to a virtuous life, but because it allows them to live the life that best suits them and to divert and focus their energies away from many daily miniscule expenditures and towards their guiding aim.

Nietzsche is arguing that to “withdraw from the world” is to take preemptive measures in the battle with distraction; to withdraw is to prevent the possibility of certain distractions from even arising in the first place.⁹¹ However, it is immediately obvious that preventing distractions from arising is an unrealistic picture of life. This is not only because the events of the future are unknowable – i.e., a distraction could always arise by chance or by accident – but also because, from within, human beings will intentionally seek out these very distractions. Nietzsche is always aware that philosophers are not only minds, but entire human beings. What is defined as distraction from the perspective of the philosophizing part of a whole person may be defined as essential aspects of life by other parts of that same person. For instance, where a relationship may be defined as a hinderance or distraction to the philosophizing part of a whole person, what remains a social animal in that same person may define a relationship as an essential element of life. What is called “distraction” by one part of an individual is called “necessary” and “essential” by a different part of that same individual. This does not amount to a Kantian dualism, i.e., *homo phaenomenon* vs *homo noumenon* whereby the latter must learn to control the former, since Nietzsche is describing the self as a multiplicity of competing and conflicting drives, none of which are any more real than any others. Strangely, in discussing this supposed tension between

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I Am So Clever, §8, 95

philosophy and the social drives, Nietzsche does not seem to consider the possibility that fulfilling these drives may in fact support and encourage one's creativity.

As Nietzsche presents this, any philosopher can be drawn to what hinders their productivity: an individual may feel a drive towards companionship to combat loneliness, a drive towards socialization to combat boredom, a drive towards intoxication and anesthetization to escape pain, etc. For such an individual, if they are pulled both to fulfill these desires and to nurture their burgeoning philosophical creation, they are pulled in multiple conflicting or opposing directions, both to what encourages and discourages their productivity. Nietzsche's primary concerns here are the consequences of living in this way; such an individual, he argues, exhausts its energies in the service of various miniscule and contradictory aims without overcoming any one great obstacle or achieving any one great accomplishment. Such an individual would be nonproductive since their energies would be expended towards wildly disparate aims. As Parkes puts this, a life "pulled in many different directions," which "attempts to sustain an outflow of its energies among too many branches at one time,... fails to thrive."⁹²

Nietzsche imagines a unified or whole individual in whom all parts and wills serve a single aim rather than branching off into various disparate aims. He proposes that mastering, organizing, or reconciling a multiplicity of conflicted or opposing wills into some sort of unified or harmonious totality will allow us to live as purposeful or goal-oriented beings. For Nietzsche, a creative philosopher must become a unified whole or force their wills to serve a single aim. "To do this," he writes, the philosopher will often

⁹² Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 201. See BGE §200.

have to “bridle their unruly and tetchy pride or their wanton sensuality,” or else they may have to “struggle hand and soul to maintain their will to the ‘desert,’” that is, to isolation and solitude, while other drives call them to return to the home or to society.⁹³ Again, Nietzsche claims that the philosopher encounters desires and impulses inside of their own self, the fulfillment of which would detract from their “finest productivity” – for instance, an “inclination towards luxury” or “finery.” In this case, Leiter is correct when he writes that “gratification of the sensual and rapacious desires, Nietzsche argues, distracts one from the cultivation of the intellectual or spiritual life.”⁹⁴

Nietzsche thinks that these impulses can be brought under the control of a central aim by sublimation or elimination. At *Daybreak* §109, he offers several practical strategies for bringing a wayward desire under control. For example, he writes that “one can avoid opportunities for gratification of the drive, and through long and ever longer periods of non-gratification weaken it and make it wither away.”⁹⁵ Or, one can “impose upon” the wayward drive “strict regularity in its gratification” by “enclosing” its expression “within firm time-boundaries,” thereby gaining “intervals during which one is no longer troubled by it.” “From there,” Nietzsche continues, “one can perhaps go over to the first method.”⁹⁶ These strategies represent asceticism in practice; *Daybreak* §109 is a how-to guide for the ascetic philosopher, providing techniques with which to subordinate the wayward drives to the one central drive. By concentrating an individual’s total energies on a singular task, that individual can overcome greater resistances than if their energies were dispersed across a

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §8, 78

⁹⁴ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 199

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, II, §109, 64

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, II, §109, 64

series of unrelated aims. Nietzsche holds that noble character-types will seek out those obstacles that provide the greatest level of resistance. This is why the philosopher's use of the ascetic ideal is ultimately life-enhancing, since it allows the philosopher to maximize the resistance with which they engage.

8.5 Greek Theodicy

Alternatively, turning to history out of “honest hunger and thirst”⁹⁷ for guidance and advice, Nietzsche argues that the Greeks structured their lives as quests in life-affirming and enhancing ways. The above discussion of the Greek response to suffering introduced a first form of theodicy according to which existence is rendered worthwhile because the destruction of individuals is reduced to mere appearance and individuals are shown that they belong to the eternal.⁹⁸ This is Nietzsche's first answer, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, to the question of how the Greeks overcame nihilism, escaping the belief that it would be better not to exist. Nietzsche, however, became unsatisfied with this answer as his thought developed, primarily due to its reliance upon an underlying Schopenhauerian metaphysics;⁹⁹ this first form of theodicy presupposes the existence of a singular, unifying reality underlying all individuation.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it is not clear that this theodicy actually escapes nihilism since it redeems the necessity of loss and change in life with the faith that, underlying that change, there is something that remains consistently the same, namely, the primordial unity. In other words, it justifies life lived under these conditions by

⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, §2, 68

⁹⁸ See section 5.3 above.

⁹⁹ See Nietzsche, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, §6 & §7.

¹⁰⁰ See section 5.3 above.

supplementing this life with something that transcends or escapes these conditions or something that persists outside of conflict and time.

Nietzsche hints at a second explanation as to how life was justified and redeemed for the Greeks in *The Birth of Tragedy*, which he develops further in the *Genealogy*. For the Greeks, Nietzsche claims, human suffering is offered up as an aesthetic festival for the gods and, in this second form of theodicy, “All evil is justified if a god takes pleasure in it.”¹⁰¹ While this is still an aesthetic justification for life’s sufferings, the spectators are no longer those attending the tragic chorus; the spectators are now the gods looking down upon the earth: “Homer made his gods look down on the fortunes” of humanity with “the Trojan War and similar tragic atrocities.” These were “intended to be festivals for the gods” since there was “no more acceptable a side-dish to their happiness than the joys of cruelty.” The “Greek moral philosophers” continue this line of thought, Nietzsche says, with their belief that “the gods... looked down on moral struggles,” “heroism,” and the “self-inflicted torture of the virtuous.” Thus, Nietzsche claims, the Greeks understand human life and suffering as “essentially visible”¹⁰² since there is always a god to perceive one’s sufferings.

How does this visibility redeem or justify evil and suffering? If the Greek’s sufferings and “tragic atrocities” were “intended to be festivals for the gods,” this implies a commonality between divinity and humanity. As spectators, humanity and divinity share a station: both are the sorts of beings who enjoy festivities, and in particular “the joys of cruelty.” Just as “a god takes pleasure in” these joys, so “cruelty” is “an ingredient in nearly

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 45

every pleasure” and “festive joy” for the ancients.¹⁰³ It is true for both gods and human beings, Nietzsche claims, that “to see suffering does you good.”¹⁰⁴ And further, “essentially visible” and “essentially public,” as actors or performers, humanity and divinity again share a station: both suffer before the public eye, the gods in their myths, and the Greeks in their daily lives. Just as Hercules performs his labours “on stage,” Nietzsche argues that the Hellenes perform their sufferings as a public spectacle, before the all-seeing gods. Since most suffering occurs in relative privacy, Nietzsche speculates that human beings invented all-seeing gods to guarantee that all suffering could be visible: “people were... obliged to invent gods... which could see in the dark and which would not miss out on an interesting spectacle of pain” in order to “rid the world of concealed, undiscovered, unseen suffering.”¹⁰⁵ No matter how alone an individual may be, an all-seeing god guarantees that there is always a spectator for one’s suffering. It is in this sense in particular, says Nietzsche, that “people in antiquity form an essentially public, essentially visible world,”¹⁰⁶ since, at a minimum, a god always perceives one’s suffering.

In sum, for Nietzsche, the Greek Gods and the Greek people share two points of identity: as spectators and as performers. Thus, there is no insurmountable opposition, irreconcilable distinction, or absolute difference between the members of these two sets. At a minimum, they have these positions in common, spectator and performer, and so bare some resemblance to one another.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §6, 42

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44-45

Nietzsche takes this point further when he says that, like human beings, the Greek “gods, too, are subject to *Ananke* [necessity].”¹⁰⁷ In her dissertation on the concept of necessity in Greek literature, Alison Claire Green demonstrates that, in many “mythical scenarios,” “a god... is compelled to perform a physical action,”¹⁰⁸ while “necessity” and “the violent coercive power of divine compulsion” can force “anyone (even the gods) into a course of action.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, she argues, one could reasonably interpret “necessity” for the Greeks as an “agent for fate that physically compels” both “gods and mortals” “to comply with what is ordained.”¹¹⁰ Admittedly, Nietzsche overstates his case when he claims that the Hellenes “took care never to attribute the existence of the world, and hence responsibility for the way it is, to the gods.”¹¹¹ As Green shows, sometimes the gods are subject to forces of necessity, while at other times they seem to control, e.g., the weather, humanity, or nature itself.¹¹² However, as above, Nietzsche’s basic point here is that there are moments in which the Greek gods resemble the Greek people. These gods, Nietzsche claims, can be subject to recognizably human limits and they can participate in recognizably human affairs. For instance, “sexual desire and the subsequent sexual urge is something that even drives the action of the gods.”¹¹³ As Plato quotes Sophocles in the *Symposium*, “‘not even Ares can stand up to’ Love! For Ares has no hold on Love, but Love does on Ares.”¹¹⁴ And, Plato continues, “he who has hold is more powerful than he who is

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, “The Dionysiac World View,” §2, 125

¹⁰⁸ Green, “The Concept of Ananke in Greek Literature Before 400 BCE,” 13 & 14

¹⁰⁹ Green, “The Concept of Ananke in Greek Literature Before 400 BCE,” 208

¹¹⁰ Green, “The Concept of Ananke in Greek Literature Before 400 BCE,” 204

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, “The Dionysiac World View,” §2, 125

¹¹² Green, “The Concept of Ananke in Greek Literature Before 400 BCE,” 67-70

¹¹³ Green, “The Concept of Ananke in Greek Literature Before 400 BCE,” 52

¹¹⁴ Plato, “Symposium,” 196d, 479. The editor (John M. Cooper) notes that the reference is to Sophocles, fragment 234b, which Dindorf translates as follows: “Even Ares cannot withstand Necessity.”

held,”¹¹⁵ admitting that the force of love is more powerful than the god of war: “because Love has power over the bravest of the others, he is bravest of them all.”¹¹⁶

From this, Nietzsche concludes that if such traditionally human struggles and compulsions belong to the Greek gods as well, alongside their shared stations as performers and spectators, these gods cannot be understood as set at an unbridgeable, transcendent distance from humanity. Indeed, there are moments in which the Greek gods themselves live the same lives as human beings, or at a minimum their lives include recognizably human elements.¹¹⁷ Therefore, Nietzsche claims, the Greeks were able to recognize themselves, their mirror images, in a glorified or beautified form in “the world of the Olympians in which the Hellenic ‘Will’ held up a transfiguring mirror to itself.”¹¹⁸

This transfigured self-recognition is Nietzsche’s developed answer to the question of how the Greeks overcame nihilism. Young writes: “In their tales of gods and heroes, says Nietzsche, the Homeric Greeks erected, not a non- or anti-human ideal... but rather a ‘transfigured’ *self*-portrait, a glorification of *human* existence. In this way they ‘seduced’ themselves into continued existence.”¹¹⁹ “How else,” Nietzsche asks, “could that people have borne existence given their extreme sensitivity, their stormy desires, their unique gift for suffering, if that same existence had not been shown to them in their gods, suffused with a higher glory?”¹²⁰ Rather than denigrating and reproaching the value of ourselves and

¹¹⁵ Plato, “Symposium,” 196d, 479

¹¹⁶ Plato, “Symposium,” 196d, 479

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 23-24

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

¹¹⁹ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 77

¹²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

our world,¹²¹ Nietzsche claims that the Olympic Pantheon allows the Greeks “to feel themselves to be worthy of glorification.”¹²² In order to accomplish this, Nietzsche writes,

[the Greeks] had to recognize a reflection of themselves in a higher sphere without feeling that the perfected world of their vision was an imperative or a reproach. This is the sphere of beauty in which they saw their mirror images, the Olympians. With this reflection (*Spiegelung*) of beauty the Hellenic ‘Will’ fought against the talent for suffering and for the wisdom of suffering.¹²³

These gods, Nietzsche claims, “justify the life of men by living it themselves – the only satisfactory theodicy!”¹²⁴ Thus, “under the bright sunshine of such gods existence is felt to be worth attaining,”¹²⁵ and it is at this point that the wisdom of Silenus is reversed and “the real pain of Homeric man refers to his departure from this existence.”¹²⁶ Now, “the very worst thing for them was to die soon, the second worst ever to die at all.”¹²⁷

Thus, Nietzsche argues, the pantheon serves to convince the Greeks of their own glory, and therefore, to protect them from nihilism, pessimism, and paralysis. This life, and the suffering it inescapably carries with it, is proven to be worth living because the divine live and suffer this life: suffering is justified inasmuch as the gods also suffer. In the Olympic World, Nietzsche thinks, there is a validation of *this* life, which ineluctably includes suffering, not by virtue of transcendent supplementation, but because the divine, too, live *this* life. With this awareness, Nietzsche claims, the Ancient Greek feels that existence is worth attaining, or, that this life is worth living. This, Nietzsche argues, proves

¹²¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” §5.

¹²² Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 25

¹²³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 25

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24.

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

¹²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

that the Greeks were not nihilists, in that they want to go on living this life and they therefore see this life as worthwhile.

8.6 Emulation

In what sense does this transfiguring mirror give meaning to life? In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the meaning of life said to be revealed here is metaphysical. Nietzsche argues that with “the Greeks the ‘Will’ wanted to gaze on a vision of itself as transfigured by genius and the world of art.”¹²⁸ That is to say, the purpose of life for the Greeks is to allow this underlying will to gaze upon itself. After *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche abandons this metaphysical line¹²⁹ and by the time of *Twilight of the Idols*, he claims that the meaning of life revealed in this mirror is to go on living and to carry on striving for excellence in this life and its future, just as the gods do.¹³⁰ On this view, the meaning of life is not the transcendent future beyond the conditions of finitude, i.e., the kingdom of heaven, but the immanent, worldly future. Future greatness is the Theos of this theodicy, and life itself, in its essential and necessary conditions, is worthwhile inasmuch as it is exhausted toward this end. This is why Zarathustra says that he will grant the honour of burying with his “own hands” those who “perish” of their own “vocation,”¹³¹ i.e., in the search for greatness.

There is a bridge to this later position in *Human, All Too Human*. Nietzsche argues that “poetic power” should not be spent representing the present or recreating the past, but in signposting “the future.” An artist who succeeds in this, he claims, will

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 25

¹²⁹ Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 135

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe the Ancients,” §4, 228

¹³¹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §6, 12

emulate the artists of earlier times who imaginatively developed the existing images of the gods and imaginatively develop a fair image of man; he will scent out those cases in which, in the midst of our modern world and reality and without any artificial withdrawal from or warding off of this world, the great and beautiful soul is still possible, still able to embody itself in the harmonious and well-proportioned and thus acquire visibility, duration and the status of a model, and in so doing through the excitation of envy and emulation help to create the future.¹³²

If the gods live our life, Nietzsche argues, then we too can live something of theirs. Thus, images of the gods and of the great and beautiful soul, having acquired “the status of a model,” provide human beings with a goal to emulate, (“through the excitation of envy and emulation”) and that goal is “to create the future,” a future of greatness or excellence, in *this* life (i.e., “in the midst of our modern world and reality... without any artificial withdrawal from or warding off of this world.”) The artist, Nietzsche continues, will create just these very models. This model, through the excitation of envy and emulation, calls the spectator to structure their life as a quest, namely, a quest to live up to the standards of greatness embodied in “the harmonious and well-proportioned” “great and beautiful soul.” It calls them to change their life.

Harmony, proportion, and beauty will be discussed below. For now, I’ll show how this meaning of life differs from metaphysical hope. The project of emulation is in some sense hopeful, i.e., one hopes to successfully emulate some model. In striving to change oneself in the future, one is condemning some aspect of reality in the present and “longing for self-transcendence.”¹³³ As stated in the discussion of Schopenhauer, if we hope for something to change, this is because we are somehow unsatisfied with the present situation. Zarathustra praises this form of contempt: “I love the great despisers, because they are the

¹³² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, v. II, “Assorted Opinions and Maxims,” §99, 236

¹³³ Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 163

great venerators and arrows of longing for the other shore.”¹³⁴ And, he maligns, “the time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself.”¹³⁵ How is this contempt distinct from the shame that characterizes *ressentiment* and life-negation, i.e., the shame of being what one is? How does this project of emulation not stem from the condemnation of life if it presupposes some condemnation of the present? What is essential here is that the model, too, is subject to the conditions of finitude. In the form of self-contempt that Nietzsche praises, one does not despise what is necessary in oneself, or one does not despise one’s necessary conditions and limitations. Instead, one despises one’s failures within those limitations and strives to actualize a model of flourishing within them. This is distinct from the metaphysical hope to escape the conditions of finitude and death in particular. Healthy forms of hope long to transcend the present by making the conditions of finitude work for them, i.e., by using the malleability of this world to reformulate it, rather than condemning and attempting to escape these conditions altogether. This healthy contempt is also the meaning that Nietzsche ascribes to the word “untimely” [*Unzeitgemässe*.] He says that “untimely types *par excellence*” are “full of sovereign contempt of everything around them,” which in his case is everything “called ‘Reich,’ ‘culture,’ ‘Christianity,’ ‘Bismarck,’ ‘success,’”¹³⁶ i.e., of contempt for the culture that Nietzsche condemns. Healthy or untimely contempt is not contempt for the necessary conditions of finitude but rather for the life-hindering structures which have somehow managed to flourish under these conditions.

¹³⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §4, 7

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §5, 9

¹³⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I Write Such Good Books,” “The Untimely Ones,” §1, 112

One of the key advantages to the object of metaphysical hope is its ability to stand continually on the horizon, akin to Tantalus' fruit. It is essential to the ongoing nature of this hope that it is never actually achieved so that life can be continually and indefinitely structured as a quest. The process of emulation possesses a similar structure: one rarely if ever emulates an ideal model with absolute perfection, and so emulation is a continually ongoing temporal process, and its aim stands continually on the horizon. This is not because perfect emulation is impossible, but rather because we idealize our models. We are continually and dynamically reinterpreting our ideals and we are so rarely satisfied that an actual particularity has genuinely actualized or realized an ideal. Should the model itself somehow fracture, as Nietzsche's own idols continually fell from grace in his eyes,¹³⁷ one begins the search again to be excited by "envy and emulation." In short, the project of emulation can be made temporally inexhaustible, and in at least this aspect it is able to match this advantage of metaphysical hope.

This temporal inexhaustibility, I propose, is one of many meanings that Nietzsche intends to ascribe to the image of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche is famously unclear about his precise understanding of the *Übermensch*,¹³⁸ although he is clear that humanity must be a bridge or a path forward toward this goal. Nietzsche writes: "What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge... what is lovable about human beings is that they are a

¹³⁷ Wagner and Schopenhauer are the two most obvious examples. Geuss writes: "By 1886, when he was preparing a second edition of [*The Birth of Tragedy*], Nietzsche claimed to have long since changed his mind about Wagner (and about Schopenhauer). As he would later put it, he had eventually overcome these two youthful enthusiasms, exchanging Schopenhauerian pessimism for a fully affirmative attitude towards life and coming to see Wagner as a decadent and the embodiment of everything that was to be rejected in modern culture." (Geuss, "Introduction," vii)

¹³⁸ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, 248-249

crossing over...”¹³⁹ He praises those who “launch the arrow of their longing beyond the human,”¹⁴⁰ and he professes that “Human being is something that must be overcome.”¹⁴¹

What humanity is a bridge toward, for Nietzsche, is the *Übermensch*:

The *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the *Übermensch* shall be the meaning of the earth!¹⁴²

Uncanny is human existence and still without meaning... I want to teach humans the meaning of their being, which is the *Übermensch*, the lightning from the dark cloud ‘human being.’¹⁴³

Like the gods or models in the transfiguring mirror, the *Übermensch*, it seems to me, can stand continually on the horizon, exciting envy and emulation. Burnham offers a similar interpretation. In Nietzsche’s discussions of the *Übermensch*, Burnham writes,

what is at stake is a further development of the human type, physiologically, culturally and spiritually. The overhuman should be thought of not as an end point, a final evolutionary stage or a new fixed species. Any state of the human that refused further growth would, by that very fact, not be the overhuman (‘Life is an instinct for growth’, AC6). Rather, the overhuman is a perpetual ideal of human development, continual self-overcoming.¹⁴⁴

Whatever events befall an individual, including their achievements in striving for emulation, the human being can still act as a bridge to a further aim. Thus, Nietzsche casts humanity itself as a means to a greater goal and as a being-toward this aim. I’ll now turn my attention to what this aim may entail.

¹³⁹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §4, 7

¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §5, 9

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §3, 5

¹⁴² Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §3, 6

¹⁴³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §7, 12

¹⁴⁴ Burnham, *The Nietzsche Dictionary*, 248

8.7 Harmony, Tension, and Modernity

I won't offer a full interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, but rather one possible interpretation of the aim at which Zarathustra calls us to "launch" our "arrow."¹⁴⁵ As Nietzsche presents the Greek theodicy, spectators are called to emulate the standards embodied in "the harmonious and well-proportioned" "soul." Nietzsche describes this harmony in a self-aggrandizing description of his personal history. He writes:

The task of revaluing values might have required more abilities than have ever been combined in any one individual, and in particular contradictory abilities that could not be allowed to disturb or destroy one another. Rank order of abilities; distance; the art of separating without antagonizing; not mixing anything, not 'reconciling' anything; an incredible multiplicity that is nonetheless the converse of chaos.¹⁴⁶

Individuals are beset upon by a variety of drives, many of which can oppose one another. For Nietzsche, the harmonious individual is one in whom these opposing drives are not reconciled or made non-oppositional, but rather, are able to persist simultaneously as opposing without inciting disintegration in the individual. An individual who is "pulled" by their drives "in many different directions" can fail to thrive.¹⁴⁷ If everyone is beset upon by conflicting drives, it is possible to respond to this situation in multiple ways, and Nietzsche will privilege those who can mold this conflict into something productive.

Nietzsche claims that conflict and resistance can be productive.¹⁴⁸ At base, he seems to mean simply that forces produce effects by colliding with other, resisting forces: a bird flies because the air resists the force of its wings; a hiker leaps over a stream only if the ground resists the force generated from their legs. Tension is a particular kind of conflict;

¹⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue," §5, 9

¹⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §9, 97

¹⁴⁷ Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 201

¹⁴⁸ Siemens, "Nietzsche on Productive Resistance," 23-30

it is the relation between two drives that pull in opposing directions. There is tension in a harmonious individual in that they are beset upon by opposing drives. This tension too, for Nietzsche, can be productive: he invokes the metaphor of archery and the “tension” in the “bow” that is necessary to launch the arrow;¹⁴⁹ the arrow can only be launched because the bowstring is under tension. Various opposing drives can create productive tensions in harmonious individuals according to Nietzsche. In particular, he speaks of a tension that belongs uniquely to the modern human being: “the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia... has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe.... With such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals.”¹⁵⁰

How exactly should this modern form of tension be understood? I propose that it amounts to the tension between the will to truth, which begets chaos, and the will to meaning, which begets purpose and stability. On Nietzsche’s telling, we find ourselves in a unique position, due to this tension, that allows us to “shoot at the furthest goals” or structure our lives as a quest to life-enhancing effect. The *Genealogy*’s penultimate section closes with the following:

Without a doubt, from now on, morality will be *destroyed* by the will to truth’s becoming-conscious-of-itself: that great drama in a hundred acts reserved for Europe in the next two centuries, the most terrible, most questionable drama but perhaps also the one most rich in hope...¹⁵¹

Here, Nietzsche diagnoses what I referred to above as the historical crisis of nihilism: when this “two-thousand-year discipline in truth-telling... finally forbids itself the lie entailed in

¹⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Preface,” 4

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Preface,” 4

¹⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119

the belief in God,”¹⁵² we lose the values, the system of morality, and meaning of life which were all grounded by this belief.¹⁵³ Therefore, Nietzsche continues, we lose one of the most effective defenses against suicidal nihilism that humanity has known.¹⁵⁴ Here, it is important to remember that Christianity is not the ultimate cause of nihilism for Nietzsche. Nihilism, in fact, is the cause of Christianity, while Christianity protects and preserves nihilistic lifeforms, which allows nihilism to persevere on earth without dying out as suicidal. Nihilism begets Christianity, as it were, and Christianity preserves and cares for nihilism into its old age. With the death of god, Nietzsche says, we have “outlived” or “lived past” the “old morality,” and “the ‘individual’ is left standing there, forced to give himself laws, forced to rely on his own arts and wiles of self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption.”¹⁵⁵ At the same time, Nietzsche claims, we still want what we have lost: we carry on valuing Christian values even in the absence of their definitive ground, and we still need to believe that life is meaningful. This is the tension: the will to meaning demands that life be structured as a quest, while the will to truth continually demolishes any foundation upon which to ground that quest.

Clark and Dudrick claim that “Nietzsche pins his hopes for the future of philosophy on properly relaxing the tension of the bow that constitutes contemporary philosophy.”¹⁵⁶ This strikes me as a misinterpretation. Nietzsche thinks that this tension is potentially productive: he describes the period of historical nihilism as “perhaps also the one most rich

¹⁵² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27

¹⁵³ “The belief... in aim- and meaninglessness is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable.” Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §55, 35

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §262, 159

¹⁵⁶ Clark and Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil*, 30

in hope,”¹⁵⁷ and he states that “with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals.”¹⁵⁸ Further, at BGE 206, Nietzsche claims that “the worst and most dangerous thing that a scholar is capable of doing comes from his type’s instinct for mediocrity” which “tries to break every taut bow or – even better! – to unbend it.”¹⁵⁹ The worst we could do, Nietzsche claims, is waste the potential productivity of this tension.

How can this tension be productive? The image of either drive unchecked by the other helps to present an answer. A will to truth run rampant, unchecked by any will to meaning, begets a state of chaos. Nietzsche invokes figures like Copernicus and Galileo to explain the death of God: the scientific method cannot establish an absolute ground of meaning, and the collapse of geo-centrism threatens “an entire meaning-giving worldview.”¹⁶⁰ Nietzsche sees two extreme responses to this chaos: suicidal nihilism on the one hand, and contentedness or the “collective failure of desire”¹⁶¹ on the other. Because this latter response represents the death of overcoming, these two responses amount to different formulations of one response if life is that which must always overcome itself. This failure of desire represents the wrong sort of self-contentedness, or the absence of the valuable self-contempt discussed above. By contrast, for Nietzsche, a will to meaning run rampant, unchecked by any will to truth, produces a Don Quixote-like figure: one who structures their life as a quest, but without reflecting upon the source and validity of that quest. Here, again, Nietzsche thinks that the result is a life-hindering form of contentedness:

¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §27, 119

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Preface,” 4

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §206, 97

¹⁶⁰ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 28

¹⁶¹ Pippin, “Introduction,” xx

the will to meaning, and by extension the will to power, are both satisfied with minimal levels of genuine overcoming.

The opportunity we are bestowed in the historical period of nihilism is rooted in the fact that we demand both meaning and truth. The will to truth restrains the will to meaning, undercutting its capacity to ground meaning in the unchanging or the absolute. But the will to meaning continues nonetheless to make its demands, enticing us to uncover alternative forms of satisfaction. Contrary to the readings offered by Danto and Casey, Nietzsche does not call us to overcome this need and create a new version of humanity that no longer wills meaning. In fact, I propose that Nietzsche offers a template for one such alternative form of satisfaction for the will to meaning in the idea of the eternal return [*der ewigen Wiederkunft*], which also explains why he confers such prestigious value upon this notion.¹⁶² Eternal, here, does not refer to timeless eternity but to the eternally ongoing in time. Specifically, I claim that, for Nietzsche, the eternal return represents an aim that stimulates life or that calls us to go on living without inciting the degeneration of metaphysical hope. The eternal return can become our “why” which allows us to get along with life and its sufferings. If metaphysical hope stimulates life at the cost of corruption, one who wills the return of life eternally in time avoids this trap.

There are at least two possible meanings that could be ascribed to the idea of the eternal return of life. On one interpretation, suggested by the formulation at GS §341, the eternal return of life refers to the continual, cyclical repetition of the lifecycle of a living

¹⁶² “For your animals know well, oh Zarathustra, who you are and must become; behold, *you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence* – that now is *your* destiny!” (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Third Part, “The Convalescent,” §2, 175)

being: “This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again.”¹⁶³ Alternatively, the eternal return of life could refer to the continual, cyclical repetition of life’s processes of overcoming within an individual’s experience of a single lifetime. Life is that which must continually overcome itself, and these cyclical overcomings are an eternally repetitive aspect of life. In this latter case, a single lifetime already includes experientially the eternal, cyclical repetition of overcoming. This results from the nature of the will to power; satisfaction begets boredom, restarting the cycle: we overcome some obstacle, we rest, and we must overcome again. Furthermore, chaos, or the absence of absolute, enduring values, forces individuals to create and legislate transient values through perpetual, repetitive acts of grounding values eternally in time. In this latter sense, the eternal return already characterizes or belongs internally to a single cycle of life in the experiential sense. Thus, for Nietzsche, a single lifetime necessarily includes the eternal return of life, which is the need to overcome, and to ground, instantiate, and defend one’s values. This is the meaning suggested by a reading of *Zarathustra*:

Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally.¹⁶⁴

I will think of the eternal return in this latter sense, i.e., as the idea that a single lifetime already includes within itself the eternal return of life’s need to overcome itself. This is because the eternal return refers to *at least* this, since even if it also refers to the eternal

¹⁶³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §341, 194

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Third Part, “The Convalescent,” §2, 175

cyclical repetition of particular lifecycles, these cycles themselves will include this internal form of eternal recurrence.

In order to ensure that human beings have something to will, the dominant strategy, Nietzsche claims, has been to postulate the existence of transcendent terms which resist the worldly forces of change, becoming, and loss. Christian doctrines, he says, have constructed the illusion of eternity from the temporally finite experience of human life. From the human perspective, the affective experience of guilt is given an explanation from the indefinite past, and hope is given an object in the infinite future, or literally after life, in salvation. Thus, the temporal world is situated within a greater, eternal order. This hope remains inexhaustible in that its object lies beyond life. What Nietzsche wants is an equally inexhaustible or eternal source of will, without the corresponding degeneration. This will demand an alternate understanding of eternity.

There are two forms of the eternal. On the one hand, the eternal can mean the unchanging, the timeless, the absolutely static, stasis, that which exists outside of time. This eternal is a noun; it is the presence of the metaphysics of presence. On the other hand, the eternal can mean the unending, the ongoing, or the continuous in time. This eternal is a verb; it is not a static unchanging entity, but a never-ending activity in time, an eternal temporal process, the eternally ongoing. In short, there is the timeless eternal, and the temporal eternal. The eternity Nietzsche refers to with the notion of the eternal return is the temporal eternal, which is distinct from his understanding of the timeless eternity he claims characterizes the kingdom of heaven. To will the eternal return is to will time eternally; it is to will the eternal return of the temporal processes of overcoming; it is to

will the continual processes of the overcoming of life by life, and of the continually repetitive act of creating, grounding, and instantiating new meanings and values.

The will to life's eternal repetition has a structural similarity with the Christian will to redemption. From a human perspective, the object of the will exists in an indefinite future, in the ongoing repetition of innumerable future overcomings. Hence, this will is no more exhaustible in this life than is the will saved by the Christianized ascetic ideal. What Nietzsche finds in the affirmation of the eternal return is a source of will that is inexhaustible, but also immanent, an inexhaustible source of will that does not require us to posit a static, transcendent world. Therefore, such a commitment does not ask us to turn away from, or deny, the worldly here and now, or its conditions, even when we find these conditions nauseating. The demon asks "do you want this again and innumerable times again?"¹⁶⁵ In responding affirmatively, or in committing to the eternal return, we ask that this process of overcoming go on eternally, precisely as something temporal. We ask to go on as the type of being that we are: a living being that must continually overcome itself and which must unceasingly ground, create, instantiate, and defend new meanings and values. This, I think, is why Nietzsche speaks of the idea of the eternal return with such a level of grandeur. If we must commit to something to live, the eternal return represents the commitment that will ground the healthiest and most creative lives and projects.

¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §341, 194

8.8 Conclusion

In each of these instances, Nietzsche understands the quest toward meaning as not only life-preserving but also as life-enhancing. This is in contrast to the readings discussed above. Both Danto and Casey cast Nietzsche's ideal world as one in which human beings no longer pine for meaningful lives. This, it seems to me, is to miss the very heart of Nietzsche's thinking, which strives to find meaning in our lives when its traditional sources have fallen victim to skepticism. The misreading offered by both Danto and Casey is rooted in the presupposition that all meaning amounts to the idea of transcendent meaning, which is life-hindering according to Nietzsche. Because they presuppose that meaning is always understood as transcendent, they assume that any quest for meaning always aims at nothingness and incites degeneration. In other words, they assume that a quest for meaning is always a manifest expression of an underlying death-drive, a preference for death. By contrast, as I've shown, the will to meaning is not corrupt to its core. Rather, like any human quality, the will to meaning can be corrupted by life-denying forces, but it can also express life-affirming forces and incite enhancement.

Casey and Danto make the mistake of conflating meaning in general with the idea of transcendent meaning in particular. Whenever they speak of meaning, they seem to be referring to something given from the outside of life, an "external purpose" or "external authority." This is meaning given to the conditions of finitude from outside of the conditions of finitude. Nietzsche understands certain quests for meaning, such as metaphysical hope, as ruinous. It does not follow from this, however, that Nietzsche wishes for a form of humanity "that does not need meaning" whatsoever. Nietzsche distinguishes between a mentality which correctly interprets meaning as arising temporally within the

conditions of finitude, and one which incorrectly interprets meaning as eternally imposed upon these conditions from the outside or which interprets meaning itself as located outside of the conditions of finitude. What renders metaphysical hope life-hindering for Nietzsche is the fact that it expresses the hope to escape the necessary conditions of finitude. A mentality which demands meaning, i.e., which wants to structure its life as a quest, and which understands meaning as created in time under the conditions of finitude is not at all life-hindering in this same sense. Indeed, such a will to meaning is not only acceptable to Nietzsche, but also a constitutive element of a life-enhancing human type, since the human will needs an aim. Casey and Danto do not take this latter mentality into consideration. For them, to will meaning is to will meaning that is imposed from without, and therefore, they understand the will to meaning in general as degenerative.

For both Leiter and Gardner, as for Nietzsche, the will to meaning is a given fact of human beings; it is what Leiter calls a “psychological primitive” and what Gardner calls a “transcendental” condition. In each case, it is the condition that accounts for the human tradition of asceticism. But these interpreters reify the will to meaning at just its most degenerative point, i.e., the point at which it expresses only an aversion to meaninglessness and at which it strives to render suffering more tolerable. This is one corrupt form in which the will to meaning can be expressed, but both theorists interpret this one specific expression of the will to meaning as the necessary form of the will to meaning in general. They imagine that, for Nietzsche, the life-denying, ascetic, and Christian quest for meaning in particular exhausts the whole possible range of the will to meaning in general. By making a natural, psychological primitive, or unchanging given of the Christianized need for meaning, as both interpreters do, one overlooks precisely what is hopeful in Nietzsche’s

discussion here, namely, that there are other possible ways, i.e., life-affirming ways, of relating to meaning. Our relation to meaning is not permanently locked into its degenerative mode; this is simply the form of our relation to meaning that has become historically dominant. The very lesson of the *Genealogy*, the very lesson of the passages on meaning in the *Genealogy*, is that we can always strive to transform the meaning, function, purpose, use, and value of any element – including, even, our own drives, and in this case, our own relationship to meaning. If the need for meaning in the sense described by Leiter is a given, immutable, and unchanging fact about human beings, then we would be deterministically consigned, by our very nature, to this degenerative, life-denying form of fulfillment of the will to meaning. However, what is given, according to Nietzsche, is that we need meaning; it is not given that we are condemned to express this need in life-hindering ways. We could learn to relate to meaning in life-affirming and ascendant ways, and in particular, by learning from those other cultures that have managed to avoid this unhealthy dependency.

CONCLUSION

I'll briefly summarize what has been demonstrated here. First, something's meaning for Nietzsche is the force that takes possession of and expresses itself through that thing. Something is meaningful inasmuch as it is the instrument of a possessive force. Thus, the will to meaning amounts to a will to be the instrument of some possessive force, e.g., to be an instrument for God's will, for one's own or supposedly "True" self, or for some value such as justice or progress. Something's expression of a possessive force most often takes the form of purpose: a force's possession of something is usually expressed by that thing's serving a particular purpose or role. Since meaning emerges through the process of possession or instrumentalization, meaning emerges in time and is necessarily temporal. Therefore, something's meaning is always susceptible to transformation.

For Nietzsche, the general conditions of human existence to which we are ineluctably subject are dynamism and agonism or becoming and conflict. Time, for Nietzsche, is revealed by dynamic changes in and around us which are the effects of conflicts between colliding and competing forces. Nietzsche pays particular attention to changes in meaning or purpose because, he claims, philosophers have traditionally equated purpose with essence understood as immutable and unchanging. Thus, a change in meaning or purpose reveals that the supposedly unchanging is in fact mutable. Further, if everything is in flux, this makes the will to meaning difficult if not impossible to satisfy in an enduring sense since meaning is subject to flux as well.

Living beings are defined by a will to power which amounts to the will to the feeling of overcoming resistances. Illusory forms of this feeling can satisfy the will to the feeling

of power without increasing genuine power levels. Suffering is a necessary part of life according to Nietzsche because the will to power condemns us either to strife or to boredom. Strife is the suffering that corresponds to the struggle of overcoming while boredom is the suffering that corresponds to the absence of obstacles to overcome.

Nietzsche claims that many condemn the value of life because of the necessity of suffering. By contrast, he considers the early Greeks and the Christians as examples of peoples who recognize the necessity of suffering and yet believe that life is worth living. In each case, Nietzsche claims, the belief that life is meaningful allows these respective peoples to accept their suffering without calling the value of living into question. To explain why those for whom life is meaningful are also those who judge life to be worthwhile, Nietzsche posits the existence of a human will to meaning. If human beings are characterized by a will to meaning, this would explain why we are willing to take on increased levels of suffering in exchange for the certainty that life is meaningful.

Such a will to meaning can be evaluated according to Nietzsche's standard of enhancement. Enhancement is defined by the affirmation of the conditions of finitude i.e., agonism and dynamism. Thus, an expression of the will to meaning must be evaluated on the twofold basis of whether it stems from and whether it incites this affirmation. Many expressions of the will to meaning stem from and incite negation of the conditions of finitude. I've used the term *chronophobia* to refer to those mentalities which defame and long to escape finitude and death. Expressions of the will to meaning are implicated in this defamation and longing when their meaning or its origin lies beyond the conditions of finitude. I call these expressions "metaphysical hope." This hope is invulnerable to agonistic dynamics, solving the problem that the will to meaning is difficult to satisfy if

everything is in flux. Metaphysical hope posits a meaning which is not subject to the conditions of agonistic dynamics. This meaning can lie outside of this world in a transcendent beyond, or it can refer to the future transformation of this world into a new world that has escaped the conditions of agonistic dynamics, i.e., a future in which we have “set to rights a world so out of joint.”¹⁶⁶ By contrast, some expressions of the will to meaning stem from and incite affirmation of the conditions of finitude. Examples include the philosopher’s use of asceticism, forms of Greek theodicy, and Zarathustra’s notion of the *Übermensch*. In each case, the will to meaning guides the individual to structure their life as a quest in a way that is genuinely enhancing by Nietzschean standards.

In his book *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, Thomas Ligotti argues that the determining characteristic of pessimistic thinking is the recognition that “behind the scenes of life there is something pernicious that makes a nightmare of our world.”¹⁶⁷ Ligotti invokes Schopenhauer as the quintessential pessimist who renders “discernible” this “signature motif.” What “makes a nightmare of our world,” for Schopenhauer, is the will and its inability to be satisfied, our unending cycles of longing, suffering, and dissatisfaction. In the same vein, for Nietzsche, we are condemned to suffer by virtue of agonistic dynamics and the will to power. To strive to eliminate suffering from life, Nietzsche claims, is to strive to undo what belongs essentially to live itself.

If suffering is unavoidable, it could be reasonable to call the value of life into question. And yet, across humanity the feeling that life is worth living continually reasserts itself. When Nietzsche writes that “the wisest men in every age” judge life to be “*no*

¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 40

¹⁶⁷ Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, 38

good,”¹⁶⁸ he likely means the wisest few in contrast to the majority, for he speaks of *all* Christians when he says that for them all suffering is meaningful and so life is worth living. How, in the face of this life, do we judge life to be worth living? How do we avoid succumbing to nihilism? Nietzsche continually sought answers to these questions: what are the techniques that people use to escape the dangers of nihilism? How do we sense that life is a nightmare while still judging life to be worth living? In Frankl’s words, how do we say yes to life in spite of everything? Nietzsche offers at least three major answers to this question. First, we do so with art and aesthetics: “the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon”¹⁶⁹ and “without music life would be a mistake.”¹⁷⁰ Second, we do so with faith and religiosity: “under the bright sunshine of such gods existence is felt to be worth attaining.”¹⁷¹ And third, we do so with meaning: if “the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning” then “the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism” and humanity “was saved.”¹⁷² With these “inventions,” Nietzsche claims, “life then played the trick it has always known how to play, of justifying itself, justifying its ‘evil.’”¹⁷³ From the perspective of the average mortal, Nietzsche claims, the nightmare is worthwhile because of or for the sake of some redemptive moment which makes up for the trouble of living.

It is in this sense that the will to meaning is life’s own solution to the problem of suicidal nihilism. The ascetic ideal, which closes the door on “suicidal nihilism,” also “springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life.”¹⁷⁴ It is “a trick for

¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Problem of Socrates,” 1§, 162. And, see also GM, III, §17.

¹⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, “An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” §5, 8

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, “Arrows and Epigrams,” §33, 160

¹⁷¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, 24

¹⁷² Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §28, 120

¹⁷³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II, §7, 44

¹⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

the preservation of life”¹⁷⁵ and the “ascetic priest... actually belongs to the really great *conserving* and *yes-creating* forces of life.”¹⁷⁶ Again from the perspective of the average mortal, according to Nietzsche, when the will is saved or life is felt to be meaningful, one is able to say “Yes” to life in spite of everything.

Thus, Nietzsche defends the value of the will to meaning in the same sense that he defends the value of any other instincts that stem from life itself. As Nietzsche reinterprets the value of the drives defamed by the society he condemns, so too does he reclaim the value of the will to meaning. There is, however, an immediate complication: the will to meaning can express itself in either life-enhancing or life-hindering forms. Hope sustains us; it is life-preserving, and so the will to meaning too is always life-preserving. But what sort of life will it preserve? In the form of the ascetic ideal, the will to meaning reflects the “instincts of a degenerating life.” The question of what is hoped for, of the source and validity of the quest for meaning, is what will determine whether hope is life-enhancing. Do we hope to flourish in this life, or do we “wish for being otherwise, being elsewhere,” and to escape this life and its necessary conditions? The former is a life-enhancing expression of the will to meaning, where the latter is a life-hindering expression.

Nietzsche thinks that the Christian quest for meaning causes degenerative effects: the ascetic ideal has “ruined spiritual health,” “taste in *artibus et litteris*,”¹⁷⁷ and “a third, fourth, fifth, sixth thing as well” – he claims that he “would never reach the end” and that he can only offer “a glimpse of the monstrosity of [the ascetic ideal’s] effects, and of how

¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §13, 88

¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §21

calamitous those effects are.”¹⁷⁸ But, his condemnation of these ruinous effects does not exhaust Nietzsche’s position on the human relation to meaning. Nietzsche is deeply critical of the effects of this ‘Christianized’ quest for meaning in particular, but this does not mean that he is critical of the will to meaning as such and for all time.

The calamitous effects of our ascetic expression of the will to meaning, Nietzsche claims, are, generally speaking, historically and geographically localized to the history of Europe after Socrates, though he says that other traditions, e.g., Buddhist traditions, are also afflicted. But Nietzsche also claims that various traditions have related to meaning in a different way and escaped these degenerative effects. These include the Ancient Greeks and Ancient Israelis.¹⁷⁹ This makes Gardner and Leiter’s choice to ignore the historical dimension of the will to meaning especially problematic, since this choice prevents them from acknowledging these alternative historical life-affirming expressions of the will to meaning in pre-Christian cultures. Nietzsche claims that these cultures did not construct transcendent sources of meaning that devalue the immanent here and now. According to Nietzsche, the Greeks, for example, did not construct their Gods and heroes as wholly transcendent and inhuman figures, but rather, as exaggerated expressions of themselves and their own immanent life forces. Young writes: “In their tales of gods and heroes, says Nietzsche, the Homeric Greeks erected, not a non- or anti-human ideal... but rather a ‘transfigured’ *self*-portrait, a glorification of human existence.”¹⁸⁰ This is one reason why Nietzsche takes up such an interest in the Ancient Greeks. In keeping with his claim that

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III, §22

¹⁷⁹ Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence*, 24 & 28-29; Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 77

¹⁸⁰ Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*, 77

history ought to be studied for the purposes of life in the present and its futures,¹⁸¹ Nietzsche thinks that we have lessons to learn from the ancients and their rapport to meaning. Specifically, if we must fulfill our need for meaning, he thinks that it is far more advantageous for us to ground the meaning of our lives in such glorifications of our own immanent existence than in ideas of a transcendent beyond.

¹⁸¹ “For I do not know what meaning classical studies could have for our time if they were not... acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.” (Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 60)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Nietzsche

Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden. ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, (15 vols). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Translated by Marianne Cowan. Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1962.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Homer's Contest." In *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays: The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Volume Two*, edited by Oscar Levy, 49-62. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, 1-116. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Dionysiac World View." In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, 117-138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." In *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, 57-123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Schopenhauer as Educator." In *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, 125-194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Anti-Christ." In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Ecce Homo." In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Twilight of the Idols." In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

Other Works Cited

Abrams, Jerold J. "Nietzsche's Overman as Posthuman Star Child in *2001: A Space Odyssey*." In *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick*, edited by Jerold J. Abrams, 247-265. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

Acampora, Christa Davis. *Contesting Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Altizer, Thomas J. J. *The New Gospel of Christian Atheism*. Aurora: The Davies Group Publishers, 2002.

Anderson, Deland. *Hegel's Speculative Good Friday: The Death of God in Philosophical Perspective*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996.

Anderson, R. Lanier. "Truth and Objectivity in Perspectivism," *Synthese*, no. 115, (1998): 1-32.

Ansell-Pearson, Keith. "'Holding onto the Sublime': On Nietzsche's Early 'Unfashionable' Project." In *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson, 226-251. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Arendt, Hannah. "Labor, Work, Action." In *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, edited by James W. Bernauer, 29-41. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

Arendt, Hannah. "What is Existential Philosophy?" In *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1945: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, by Hannah Arendt, 162-186. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Avramenko, Richard. "Nietzsche and the Greek Idea of Immortality." Presentation delivered at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 31-September 3, 2006.

Beiser, Frederick C. *Hegel*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Beiser, Frederick C. *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *Modernity, Pluralism, and the Crisis of Meaning*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1995.

Bergner, Raymond M. "Therapeutic Approaches to Problems of Meaninglessness," *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, no. 52, 1, (1998): 72-87.

Berkowitz, Leonard. *Causes and Consequences of Feelings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Berry, Jessica. "Nietzsche and the Greeks." In *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson, 83-106. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Berry, Jessica. *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Bishop, Paul. *The Dionysian Self*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995.

Bluhm, Heinz. "Nietzsche's Final View of Luther and the Reformation," *PMLA* 71, no. 1 (1956): 75-83.

Bowles, M. J. "The Practice of Meaning in Nietzsche and Wittgenstein," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 26 (Autumn 2003): 12-24.

Brobjer, Thomas. "Notes and Discussions: Nietzsche's Knowledge of Kierkegaard," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41, no. 2 (2003): 251-263.

Burnham, Douglas. *The Nietzsche Dictionary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Burnham, Douglas, and Martin Jesinghausen. *Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

Campbell, David. "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Meaning," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 26, (Autumn 2003): 25-54.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Carr, Karen L. *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth Century Responses to Meaninglessness*. Albany: SUNY, 1992.

Casey, M. A. *Meaninglessness: The Solutions of Nietzsche, Freud, and Rorty*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002.

Casey, M. A. "Beyond Meaninglessness," *Society* 41, (2004): 71-74.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. "Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Man." In *Figures of the Thinkable*, translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service.

Céline, Louis-Ferdinand. *Journey to the End of the Night*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2006.

Cherniss, Harold. "The Characteristics and Effects of Presocratic Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 12 no. 3 (June 1951): 319-345.

Cioran, E.M. *The Trouble with Being Born*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2013.

Clark, Maudemarie. *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Clark, Maudemarie, and David Dudrick. *The Soul of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Clark, Maudemarie, and Alan J. Swensen. "Introduction." In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.

Conway, Daniel W. *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy, Volume I: Greece and Rome from the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus*. New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1993.

Danto, Arthur C. *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Diethe, Carol. *Historical Dictionary of Nietzscheanism*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014.

Domenici, Gaia. *Jung's Nietzsche*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Dries, Manuel. "Towards Adualism: Becoming and Nihilism in Nietzsche's Philosophy." In *Nietzsche on Time and History*, edited by Manuel Dries, 113-145. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Meaning of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Emden, Christian J. *Nietzsche's Naturalism: Philosophy and the Life Sciences in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Fieser, James, and John Powers, eds. *Scriptures of the World's Religions*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2015.

Foucault, Michel. "What is Enlightenment?" In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 32-49. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 76-99. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." In *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922)*. Translated under the general editorship of James Strachey, 7-64. London: Vintage Books, 2001.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Future of an Illusion." In *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931)*. Translated under the general editorship of James Strachey, 5-56. London: Vintage Books, 2001.

Freytag, Hartmut. "Preface." In *Mixed Metaphors: The Danse Macabre in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Sophie Oosterwijk and Stefanie Knöll, xxi-xxiii. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

- Fromm, Erich. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. New York: Bantam Books, 1967.
- Gardner, Sebastian. "The Disunity of Philosophical Reason." In *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, edited by Ken Gemes and Simon May, 1-32. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Gemes, Ken. "Freud and Nietzsche on Sublimation," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 38, (Fall 2009): 38-59.
- Geuss, Raymond. "Introduction." In *The Birth of Tragedy*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, vii-xxx. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1999.
- Geuss, Raymond. "Notes." In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Geuss, Raymond. "Nietzsche and Genealogy." In *Nietzsche*, edited by John Richardson and Brian Leiter, 322-340. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Gerhardt, Volker. "The Body, the Self, and the Ego." In *A Companion to Nietzsche*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson, 273-296. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Goodman, F. R., J. D. Doorley, and Todd B. Kashdan. "Well-being and psychopathology: A deep exploration into positive emotions, meaning and purpose in life, and social relationships." In *Handbook of Well-Being*, edited by E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay. Salt Lake City: DEF Publishers, 2018.
- Grant, Barry Keith. "Of Men and Monoliths: Science Fiction, Gender, and 2001: A Space Odyssey." In *Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey*, edited by Robert Kolker, 69-86. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Grant, George. "Time as History – Part 1," The 1969 CBC Massey Lectures, audio, 24:30 – 25:00, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-1969-cbc-massey-lectures-time-as-history-1.2946812>
- Grant, George. "Time as History." In *More Lost Massey Lectures*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2008.
- Green, Alison Claire. "The Concept of Ananke in Greek Literature Before 400 BCE." Diss., University of Exeter, 2012.
- Grondin, Jean. "Must Nietzsche be Incorporated into Hermeneutics? Some Reasons for a Little Resistance." *Iris. European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate* 2, no. 3 (2010): 105-122.

Gründer, Karlfried. *Der Streit um Nietzsches Geburt der Tragödie: Die Schriften von E. Rohde, R. Wagner, U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1989.

Hales, Steven D., and Robert C. Welshon. "Truth, Paradox, and Nietzschean Perspectivism." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11, (Jan, 1994): 101-119.

Han-Pile, Béatrice. "'Let that be my love': Fate, Mediopassivity, and Redemption in Nietzsche's Thought." In *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Culture*, edited by Horst Hutter and Eli Friedland, 217-234. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Hatab, Lawrence J. "Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning." *The Personalist Forum* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 91-111.

Hatab, Lawrence J. *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Hatab, Lawrence J. "How Does the Ascetic Ideal Function in Nietzsche's Genealogy?" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 35-36 (Spring/Fall 2008): 106-123.

Hatab, Lawrence J. "Nietzsche, Nature, and Life Affirmation." In *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, edited by Vanessa Lemm, 32-48. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Faith and Knowledge*. Translated by Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977.

Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche Volume III*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, and Frank A Capuzzi. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Herdina, Philip and Elmar Waibl. *German Dictionary of Philosophical Terms Volume 1*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Herdina, Philip and Elmar Waibl. *German Dictionary of Philosophical Terms Volume 2*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Hollingdale, R. J. "Notes." In *Human, All Too Human*, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Horstmann, Rolf-Peter. "Introduction." In *Beyond Good and Evil*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, vii-xxviii. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Huddleston, Andrew. "What is Enshrined in Morality? Understanding the Grounds for Nietzsche's Critique." *Inquiry* 58, no. 3 (2015): 281-307.

Huddleston, Andrew. "Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul." *Inquiry* 60, no. 1-2 (2017): 135-164.

Hussain, Nadeem J. Z. "The Role of Life in the Genealogy." In *The Cambridge Guide to Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*, edited by Simon May, 142-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Janaway, Christopher. *Beyond Selflessness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997

Janaway, Christopher. "Nietzsche's illustration of the Art of Exegesis," *European Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (1997): 252–268.

Janaway, Christopher. "Schopenhauer." In *German Philosophers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Jaspers, Karl. *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity*. Translated by Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Josephson-Storm, Jason A. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017

Kashdan, Todd B., and Patrick E. McKnight. "Commitment to a Purpose in Life: An Antidote to the Suffering by Individuals with Social Anxiety Disorder," *Emotion* 13, no. 6 (December, 2013): 1150-1159.

Katsafanas, Paul. *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.

à Kempis, Thomas. "The Imitation of Christ." In *The Problem of God and the Meaning of Life*, edited by Michael S. Russo, 50-53. SophiaOmni, 2019.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Part II*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Koyré, Alexandre. *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957.

Koyré, Alexandre. *Metaphysics and Measurement*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1968.

Kushner, Harold S. "Foreword." In *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor E. Frankl, ix-xii. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

Leader, Darian. *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Lear, Johnathan. *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Lear, Johnathan. *Freud*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Lemm, Vanessa. "Introduction." In *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, edited by Vanessa Lemm, 1-15. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche on Morality*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Ligotti, Thomas. *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*. New York: Penguin, 2018.

Löwith, Karl. "Nature, History, and Existentialism," *Social Research* 19, no. 1 (March 1952): 79-94.

Loeb, Paul S. "Suicide, Meaning, and Redemption." In *Nietzsche on Time and History*, edited by Manuel Dries, 163-190. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008.

Magnus, Bernd. "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: The Will to Power and the *Übermensch*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (January 1986): 79-98.

May, Simon. *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

McKnight, Patrick E. and Kashdan, Todd B. "Purpose in Life as a System That Creates and Sustains Health and Well-Being," *Review of General Psychology* no. 13, (September 2009): 242-251.

Migotti, Mark. "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen: A Reading of the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58, no. 4 (December 1980): 745-779.

Migotti, Mark. "Not Your Grandfather's Genealogy: How to Read *GM III*," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 49, (2015): 329-351.

Mitcheson, Katrina. *Nietzsche, Truth and Transformation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Moore, John C. "Innocent III's *De Miseria Humanae Conditions*: A *Speculum Curiae*?" *The Catholic Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (October 1981): 553-564.

Morgan, George A. *What Nietzsche Means*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Oosterwijk, Sophie. "Of Dead Kings, Dukes and Constables: The Historical Context of the *Danse Macabre* in Late Medieval Paris," *Journal of the British Archeological Association* 161, no. 1 (2008): 131-162.

Oosterwijk, Sophie. "'Fro Paris to Ingland'? The danse macabre in text and image in late-medieval England." PhD Diss., Leiden University, 2009.

Oosterwijk, Sophie. "The Deep Conceived Fantasy of Death: The History and Character of the Dance of Death in Medieval and Renaissance Europe," Museum Tinguely Exhibition Catalogue, (2017): 42-49.

Parkes, Graham. *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Pearson, James S. "Nietzsche on the Necessity of Repression," *Inquiry*, (October 2018): 1-30. DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2018.1529618

Pippin, Robert B. *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Pippin, Robert B. "Introduction." In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, viii-xxxv. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Plato, "Symposium." In *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, 457-505. Indianapolis: Hacking Publishing Company, 1997.

Poellner, Peter. *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Poellner, Peter. "Nietzschean Freedom." In *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, edited by Ken Gemes and Simon May, 151-179. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Reginster, Bernard. "Nietzsche on Pleasure and Power," *Philosophical Topics* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 161-191.

Reginster, Bernard. *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Reginster, Bernard. "The Psychology of Christian Morality: Will to Power as Will to Nothingness." In *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson, 701-726. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Richardson, John. *Nietzsche's System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Richardson, John. *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Richardson, John. "Nietzsche on Life's Ends." In *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson, 756-784. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Richardson, John. "Introduction." In *Nietzsche*, edited by John Richardson and Brian Leiter, 1-39. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Roochnik, David. *Retrieving Aristotle in an Age of Crisis*. Albany: State University of New York, 2013.

Russo, Michael S., ed. *The Problem of God and the Meaning of Life*. SophiaOmni, 2019.

Pninit, Russo-Netzer, Stefan E. Schulenberg, and Alexander Batthyany, eds. *Clinical Perspectives on Meaning: Positive and Existential Psychotherapy*. Cham: Springer, 2016.

Safranski, Rüdiger. *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. Translated by Shelley Frisch. London: Granta Books, 2003.

Schacht, Richard. *Nietzsche*. New York: Routledge, 1983.

Schirmacher, Wolfgang. "Living Disaster: Schopenhauer for the Twenty-first Century." In *The Essential Schopenhauer*, edited by Wolfgang Schirmacher. New York: Harper, 2010.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*. Translated by Konstantin Kolenda. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation Volume I*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation Volume II*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. "On Man's Need for Metaphysics." In *The World as Will and Representation Volume II*, by Arthur Schopenhauer. New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. "On the Suffering of the World." In *Essays and Aphorisms*, edited by R. J. Hollingdale, 41-50. New York: Penguin, 1970.

Schrift, Alan D. *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Ozymandias." In *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, 103. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977.

Siemens, Herman. "Nietzsche on Productive Resistance." In *Conflict and Contest in Nietzsche's Philosophy*, edited by Herman Siemens and James Pearson, 23-43. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

Silk, M. S., and J. P. Stern. *Nietzsche on Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Small, Robin. "Being, Becoming, and Time in Nietzsche." In *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson, 629-644. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Soll, Ivan. "Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life." In *Reading Nietzsche*, edited by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Marie Higgins, 104-131. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Soll, Ivan. "Nietzsche's Will to Power as a Psychological Thesis," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 118-129.

Stagoll, Cliff. "Force." In *The Deleuze Dictionary*, edited by Adrian Parr, 110-112. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Steger, Michael F., Todd B. Kashdan, Brandon A. Sullivan, and Danielle Lorentz. "Understanding the Search for Meaning in Life," *Journal of Personality* 76, no. 2 (May 2008): 199-228.

Steger, Michael F. "Making Meaning in Life," *Psychological Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (October-December 2012): 381-385.

Stern, Tom. "Against Nietzsche's 'Theory' of the Drives," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 121-140.

Stolorow, Robert D. *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections*. New York: The Analytic Press, 2007.

Strong, Tracy B. "Texts and Pretexts: Reflections on Perspectivism in Nietzsche," *Political Theory* 13, no. 2 (May 1985): 164-182.

Strong, Tracy B. *Politics Without Vision: Thinking Without a Bannister in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Strong, Tracy B. "The Optics of Science, Art, and Life: How Tragedy Begins." In *Nietzsche and the Becoming of Life*, edited by Vanessa Lemm, 19-31. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

Tartaglia, James. *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Tolstoy, Leo. "A Confession." In *The Problem of God and the Meaning of Life*, edited by Michael S. Russo, 66-76. SophiaOmni, 2019.
- van Tongeren, Paul, Gerd Schank, Herman Siemens, and Marco Brusotti, eds. *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch Band I*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011.
- Tuncel, Yunus. "Nietzsche's Agonistic Rhetoric and its Therapeutic Affects." In *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Culture*, edited by Horst Hutter and Eli Friedland, 81-96. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Vella-Brodrick, Dianne. "Review of The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications," edited by Paul T. Wong. *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 24, no. 1. (August 2014): 122-123.
- Ure, Michael. "Nietzsche's "View from Above."" In *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Culture*, edited by Horst Hutter and Eli Friedland, 117-140. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Von Der Luft, Eric. "Sources of Nietzsche's "God is Dead!" and its Meaning for Heidegger," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 263-276.
- Welshon, Rex. "Saying Yes to Reality: Skepticism, Antirealism, and Perspectivism in Nietzsche's Epistemology," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 37, (Spring 2009): 23-43.
- Wilcox, John T. "What Aphorism does Nietzsche Explicate in Genealogy of Morals, Essay III?" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (October 1997): 593-610.
- Wilcox, John T. *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1982
- Williams, Bernard. "Notes." In *The Gay Science*, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001
- Winslade, William J. "Afterword." In *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor E. Frankl, 155-165. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.
- Wong, Paul T., ed. *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Young, Julian. *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Young, Julian. *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Young, Julian, ed. *Individual and Community in Nietzsche's Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.