

# Nietzsche on the Living, the Dead and the Inanimate

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There is, in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, a most striking image, which I believe, if interpreted properly, renders intelligible and coherent not only much of Nietzsche's later writings, but, perhaps more importantly, provides the key to understanding how Nietzsche's entire corpus, from early to late, can be read as being in the service of at least one unified aim. I am not claiming that it is desirable, nor even possible, to read Nietzsche's entire corpus as being entirely devoted to the service of only one aim; this would be grave injustice, as well as laughable scholarship. I am rather claiming that, as complex and Byzantine and haphazard as Nietzsche often appears, and as many different projects as he seems certainly to be engaged in at any one time, there is yet (at least this) one project which runs through Nietzsche's entire intellectual career, serving as touchstone and unifier for several of his other seemingly disparate projects. There might indeed be, and I believe that there are, other such foundational tasks in his work, but, for various reasons which I hope to elucidate, the task which is the topic of this paper appears to me to be the most foundational, in that all other problems can ultimately be reduced to it, or at least shown to have an inextricable internal relation with it. I also do not mean to suggest that Nietzsche had only one resolution to this problem, for I believe he toyed with several throughout his career. Rather the problem itself was his constant companion, shadow to the wanderer, serving to help order and categorize other problems and tasks.

... we good Europeans and free, very free spirits – we still feel it, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow. And perhaps also the arrow, the task, and—who knows?—the goal—— [BGE, preface]

This image of the spirit as a tensed bow, with which we can shoot for the “most distant goals” now that we have been prepared by our resistance to the pressure of a millenium and a half of Christianity, like all of Nietzsche's provocative and evocative imagery cries out for elucidation, for he is far too self-conscious an artist to allow even such beautiful imagery unless it performs a specific task. I suggest the following: Nietzsche is intentionally inverting a hallowed image from traditional philosophy, from one of the two fountainheads of Western philosophy, for there is another, more venerable work which also begins with the image of a bow: “Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what we should?”<sup>1</sup> avers Aristotle in Book I, chapter 2, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, discussing the impetus behind the search for the highest good. Here

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<sup>1</sup>Ross/Urmson translation.

the sense is of the overweening importance of the goal itself, in what direction it would be best to aim so as to hit the thing. There is no question about the possibility of being able to fire the bow, if only we know in which direction to fire it: what could be easier than firing the bow?

Nietzsche's urgency is of a more primitive kind, for he hopes merely to fire the bow, and, if this be done, the overriding concern is how far we shall get and hang the direction. The difficulty is not in finding the proper end, but in being such a one who is capable of setting ends and attaining them at all. Perhaps we shall find that the only proper ends for Nietzsche are precisely those set by a man truly capable of doing such in a way qualitatively distinct from what we normally consider as setting ends. The problem thus becomes one, to use jargon popular today, of being an agent, but I believe that Nietzsche's problem of agency is far different and, if I may say, far more subtle than what passes as the problem of agency today – for Nietzsche, as I shall argue, seems to believe that there are different types of human agency, by the possession of which men can be ranked, some being definitively better than others. It may even be that for Nietzsche, concerning what has been assumed to be the most unproblematic of problems by philosophers, that man is straightforwardly, qua man, capable of being an agent, there is a very profound problem, a questionable question right here at the door where no one has thought before to look, that most men are likely not agents at all – how is it possible for the few to overcome whatever obstacles might lie in the way, to be agents?<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that, if I am right, the concept of “agency” is for Nietzsche radically different than that common today. At least one way I shall suggest this is so is in Nietzsche's refusal to prise apart the logical conditions of agency from the actual lives and living conditions of men, his consideration that men's activities might be self-contradictory and incoherent enough to vitiate any potential they have as agents. Because the logical conditions are entangled with men's actual lives, the possibility arises that activity which at some period in history is life-affirming might in some other period become life-denying: this is a possibility I shall investigate in this paper apropos of the activity of modern men. The sense of the phrase ‘logical conditions of agency’ remains recondite at this point. In the course of this investigation I shall clarify what it might mean in the context of Nietzsche's works. I shall begin with ruminations on the will to power.

Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, without purposes and consideration... imagine indifference itself as a power—how could you live according to this indifference? Living—is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is not living—estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different?  
[BGE, §9]

The most striking feature of this passage is its opposition of life, not with death or non-being or whatnot, but with nature, with indifferent nature. Living is precisely the opposite of being indifferent; it is having purposes. It is the opposite of inanimacy. Against a tendency to read “nature” here as referring to verdant flora and savage fauna (and thus “living” as “human societal

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<sup>2</sup>It has been suggested to me in conversation by Jim Kreines that Aristotle, too, held similar views, that the *agathos anhr* was the only man truly capable of acting with *proairhesis*. While this is perhaps true (it is a disputed point in Aristotle scholarship), the problem I am pointing to that Nietzsche has discovered runs deeper than this. Even the *kakos anhr* can set ends and, in acting to achieve those ends, not undermine the possibility of his setting of ends.

living”), notice that Nietzsche elucidates nature as that without purpose. It is only in the most strained and *recherché* of philosophical discourse that one would talk of flora and fauna as being at odds and ends for purposes. They simply abound in purposes. Monsoons which swamp seven-tenths of the habitable land of Bangladesh do not have such purposes, and are indeed awesome in their profligacy. The obduracy of granite, while not so prodigal, is yet indifferent.

Four sections later: “A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength – life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results.”[BGE, §13] Will to power is having purposes, is precisely “estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different.” This is still an empty result as it stands, for we have as yet no notion of the status of this putative definition, whether it is an empirical observation, a bit of *Übermensch*-drenched psychology, a normative judgment, a metaphysical postulate, or, as I shall advocate, a logical principle. Such a reading can be strengthened by plausibility arguments and augmented by further citation, but ultimately it will stand or fall, I believe, on the coherence and sense it lends the entire reading I proffer. A few remarks appear in order, before I cite yet again, on what I take a logical principle to be. My debt to Michael Thompson will be obvious to any familiar with his paper “The Representation of Life” (in press).

I believe that Nietzsche is elucidating with what conceptual apparatus one must be equipped even to begin to get a grip on what “life” is. “Life” is not a notion that can be built up from or reduced to such disparate or otiose concepts as “physical nature” (which is wholly without purpose) or “self-preservation” (whence the ‘self’?). It is a notion of which one must already be in possession to make sense of such collateral ideas as estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different. These collateral ideas, furthermore, are precisely marks of life, not in the sense of necessary and sufficient conditions, but in the sense of that without which it would not even make sense to think of a being as “living”. When we attempt to eschew, if we so attempt, estimating, preferring, having purposes, we have slipped beyond the bounds of sense if still we try to think of life here. If this is accepted, Nietzsche’s opposition of life to nature, and not to death, becomes explicable, for death, being the complement of life, is itself a logical principle not determinable by any notions of mere inanimacy, and deeply emmiscs with our notion of life. Thus self-preservation is only a result of the will to power, an inconstant, contingent one at that, and not its ground, for the will to power aims at life as opposed to inanimacy, not life as opposed to death.<sup>3</sup>

“Nature”, though, as might be expected does more work for Nietzsche here than the single meaning I have so far granted it, for it is colored by other closely related usages throughout the work. Notably, consider, from a discussion of the “noble soul”:

... it honors itself in them [its equals, *viz.*, other noble souls] and in the rights it cedes to them; it does not doubt that the exchange of honors and rights is of the nature of all social relations and thus also belongs to the natural condition of things. [BGE, §265]

<sup>3</sup>Nietzsche’s views on death are subtle and not unrelated by a long shot to the topic of this paper, but I shall give them short shrift nonetheless here. A pregnant place to start a discussion of his views on death would be BGE, §96: “One should part from life as Odysseus parted from Nausicaa—blessing it rather than in love with it.” (Incidentally, this passage renders more plausible a rather more far out idea I have about the image of the bow in the preface, that it is also a reference to Odysseus, who was the only man capable of bending his own bow, and thus slaughtered all the offensive suitors, ridding his house of pollution.) It is instructive, I believe, to compare Nietzsche’s conception of death with the depiction of death in the first several chapters of the first book of Montaigne’s *Essays*, and its relationship to pity and reputation.

Man is the animal whose natural state is in society. This is certainly redolent of many philosophers, from Aristotle with his *polis* prior to man by nature (*phusei*), to Hobbes' Gordian state of nature, to Rousseau and the statue of Glaukon, but of course there is no clear consensus on what in the world any of these philosophers mean by claiming that man is "naturally in society". Nietzsche appears no less forbidding. I shall nonetheless argue that for Nietzsche man is "naturally" the purposeless animal, and it is only in society that it is sensible to begin to attribute goals to him in any full-blooded way. There is no analogous problem for other animals, or indeed for plants: the animal good is simple in a way that the human good is not, for there is no idea that animals can create new goods for themselves, and thus new purposes (though we perhaps might think of them as discovering new goods, but this will always be purely accidental).

For man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that—he is the sick animal: how has that come about? Certainly he has also dared more, done more new things, braved more and challenged fate more than all the other animals put together: he, the great experimenter with himself, discontented and insatiable, wrestling with animals, nature, and gods for ultimate dominion—he, still unvanquished, eternally directed towards the future, whose own restless energies never leave him in peace, so that his future digs like a spur into the flesh of every present moment—how should such a courageous and richly endowed animal not also be the most imperiled, the most chronically and profoundly sick of all sick animals? [GM, III.13]

Man is the indeterminate animal in that he has possibilities of which other animals cannot dream. Man's natural instincts are, as for all life-forms, domination, but unlike other life-forms how man will go about such activity is wholly underdetermined by nature, for man is the only animal who can override his natural drives. Even if we can imagine a cat's discovering a new good for itself, a good which no cat has ever before found, it will always be manifest how such a good could count as a good for any cat, how such a good is rendered intelligible as a good for cats by the notion of the life-form "cat". The life-form of cats, in fact, ensures that what can count as good for cats, the set of all possible goods, is determinate in a way which it is not for humans. Even if a completely new species of animal developed, merely by knowing certain things about the physiological structure of this new animal it would be relatively straightforward to determine whether it would be better for cats to hunt this new animal, avoid it as it might prey on cats, or whether the cat should simply ignore it, as it will not figure into the cat's good or ill at all.

This is not possible for humans for almost anything can be thought to be a good for a human, or, as Phillipa Foot would say, the philosopher can arrange it so – precisely because humans are naturally indeterminate. Our indeterminateness stems from our being able to experiment with ourselves, to be future-directed in ways inaccessible to other life-forms, to be self-consciously future-directed. Such knives, naturally, slice both ways. From too much future we are losing our present. The more subtle and incisive become our cognitive faculties, the further we move from possessing anything resembling "natural" purposes, in the way it is natural for birds of prey to hunt lambs. This is precisely the predicament of modern man – it is only now, when our thought has blossomed unprecedentedly, our spirit tensed with possibility, that we are capable of shooting for the farthest goals that we are also in the gravest danger of desuetude and decay. The possibility

remains open that we might have something like other animals' natural instincts, but not only can we override them, our "instinct" now is to do so.

To elucidate the connection between society and this lack of inherently determined purposiveness, allow me a final citation here:

... consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication. . . . Consciousness is really only a net of communication between human beings. . . . The human being inventing signs is at the same time the human being who becomes ever more conscious of himself. It was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness—which he is still in the process of doing, more and more. [GS, §354]

Nietzsche contends that consciousness arose concomitantly with the need for communication, from this need, and is in fact nothing more than the net of communication which sprang up between humans. As man becomes progressively more self-conscious, he becomes progressively more able, and indeed not able not to question, criticize, scheme and investigate to the point that almost anything might, and likely at some point will, be a purpose for him, with no unconditional postulates remaining unscathed by his conceptual fireworks to anchor him – he is indeterminate, and chronically sickened by the very same faculty which holds out his greatest promise. The ramifications of this doctrine are profound: thinking as we know it, conscious reasoning and calculating, is not an essential mark of being human. We are not humans because we think; we think because we are humans.

I do not intend to foster the notion that Nietzsche can be read piece-meal, picking and choosing among aphorisms and books as randomly as they themselves often appear to be juxtaposed. I firmly believe that Nietzsche was extraordinarily careful in the structuring of his works and the concatenation of sections within his works. The claim I am making is so broad, however, and Nietzsche so *gangasrotagati* [BGE, §27], that I have no other recourse. I hope that my explication of pieces of text far-removed from each other in his books, between his books, only serves to strengthen the impression of the internal coherence and beautiful structure his overall project.

There is perhaps a temptation here to cry halt, and ask – but is not this book entitled *Beyond Good and Evil*, and does it not begin with an attack on opposite valuations? And is this carving of being into living and inanimate not simply an opposite valuation, dressed up, ready to go to town? Against this it is prudent to remark that Nietzsche is not attacking opposite valuations *per se* but the faith in opposite values, the unreflective instinct to assume that precisely here no doubt or cogitating is required. (Cf. BGE, §2.) Nietzsche in fact often refers unironically to various notions having opposite perspectival values, *e.g.*, "The well-being of the majority and the well-being of the few are opposite viewpoints of value,"[GM, note to I.17] and my personal favorite: "... *Beyond Good and Evil*.— At least this does not mean 'Beyond Good and Bad.'—"[GM, I.17]

It is, I hope, clear too that such a dichotomy as I propose does not represent a valuation so much as a grounding upon which valuations can be made, the conceptual infrastructure within which values can be created. This might be misunderstood however – I do not mean to imply that "life" is something like a form and "values" something like content, in any way in which the form/content distinction is traditionally effected. Rather there is a circle here, life grounding the notion of values, values articulating and specifying the notion of life. They are inseparable in notion as in actuality.

I believe further selections are in order to strengthen my case, but I must pause to sum first. I claim that life is something akin to a logical category for Nietzsche, and the will to power the representation *par excellence* of life. Further, life is marked by having purposes, among plants and animals naturally determinate, while man floats free, unconstrained by naturally determinate purposiveness, able to override any “natural” instincts in ways forbidden to other animals. Citations which conjoin the will to power with the having of goals and purposes in general will *prima facie* support my reading, as will those which equate the denial of purpose with a will to the denial of life; those which do so specifically for man within the idiom of man outlined above, his indeterminateness, will support it that much more.

Refraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation and placing one’s will on a par with that of someone else— . . . as soon as this principle is extended, and possibly even accepted as the fundamental principle of society, it immediately proves to be what it really is—a will to the denial of life, a principle of disintegration and decay. . . . life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation—but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages? Even the body within which individuals treat each other as equals. . . —if it is a living and not a dying body, has to do to other bodies what the individuals within it refrain from doing to each other: it will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is living and because life simply is will to power. . . . everywhere people are now raving . . . about coming conditions of society in which ‘the exploitative aspect’ will be removed—which sounds to me as if they promised to invent a way of life that would dispense with all organic functions. ‘Exploitation’ does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to life.[BGE, §259]

A will to the denial of life is equated with the restraining of oneself from violence, exploitation and, best of all, with attempting to deny one’s own will any significance over and above anyone else’s. The obvious question for the critic of my view is why are these not goals or purposes: it certainly seems as if such people are aiming at something, and at a something moreover which preens with approbation in most parts of the world. In a shallow sense of the word, I think Nietzsche would assent that these people were aiming at something. The real question is whether this type of “aim” is coherent enough not to vitiate agency. I shall quite soon argue that these aims are not, and self-destruct, but for the moment I shall baldly state that such aspirations do not in fact count as purposes or goals. Indeed, they precisely constitute “a will to the denial of life” – why denying life constitutes denying agency will presently, I hope, become perspicuous.

I can immediately argue that setting one’s will on a par with everyone else’s is a denial of one’s own purposive-ness, and thus straightforwardly a denial of life. If one thoroughly succeeds in placing one’s will on a par with everyone else’s, as a principle of society, one will have succeeded in denying all of one’s own purposes, except perhaps in a merely contingent way if it just so happens that the “communal will” accords with them. Indeed, there seems to be no good reason but habit

even to talk of purposes that a specific individual might have, for, all wills being equal, they will be essentially indiscernible. If one once attempts to distinguish separate individuals' wills in any way whatsoever, those wills are eo ipso no longer on a par. "Separate but equal" is as out of place among wills as it is in the Supreme Court. This is a direct consequence of man's having no determinate purposes due to his consciousness, his "natural" state in society. To fix a purpose for oneself consciously and simultaneously to give way before everyone else's purposes, to ensure that no one's purpose has priority over one's own, is self-contradictory for any living being, but the problem is more acute for man who is not ensured by nature that his purposes will never collide with those of his fellows (as, say, bees are – and mark well that this holds only for bees of the same hive), indeed is essentially ensured that they will collide, for life is striving for domination. To see that the "common will" of such a society cannot be an adequate substitute for the individual's loss of idiomatic purposiveness, notice that the only way for this common will to have purposes and goals is in none but the most mechanistic of fashions, completely ignoring any purposes, goals or desires of the constituent individuals (else someone's will would be getting the upper hand). It can only operate according to something like a completely determinate utility calculus – and here there is no estimating, preferring, being unjust, only "something purely passive, automatic, reflexive, molecular, and thoroughly stupid." [GM, I.1] Here there is no life. We are back in the dimension of the monsoon sweeping majestically and dumbly across the Sub-continent. In the above passage we have another determination of 'life' by a concatenation of thick nouns: "appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker, suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation." How does this compare to our first example of such a litany (estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different - one can almost see Nietzsche ticking them off his fingers, sagely nodding his head)? The terms now are undeniably harsher, crueller – but they also undeniably fall into the same category of primitive notions which belong to living things, which mark life, which cannot be understood unless one has grasped in some way the notion of life. Inanimata do such things only insofar as we personate them. That the terms are so harsh surely is intentional, as evidenced by the plaintive question which immediately follows the list: "but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages?" Nietzsche, the great inverter of values, the one who requires masks lest the shallow, insipid and nihilistic comprehend him (as if they might try), lurks beneath these vicious and cold words, for they are truly no other thing than the first such list we have, the logical conditions of life slandered by nihilists for centuries. What is estimating if not suppression and imposition of one's own forms? What preferring if not appropriation and injury? What being unjust if not the overpowering of what is alien and weaker? And so on. By jolting us with the use of such heavily freighted words, Nietzsche perhaps intends to rouse us from our dogmatic slumber, to sting us into awareness that we might see that these words need not mean what they do in workaday language. Keep in mind that Nietzsche is constantly exhorting us to beware of being seduced by language and grammar, to keep in mind how the modern connotations of words do not denote the essence of the concepts represented by the words (cf., e.g., GS, §354; BGE, §16, 17, 20, 268; GM I.2, II.4, II.13). Nietzsche often does Wittgenstein better than Wittgenstein does Wittgenstein. It should be no surprise if the obvious reading of these words is a mere foreground estimate. This can be seen more clearly in a closely related section:

[The spirit's] needs and capacities are so far the same as those which physiologists posit for everything that lives, grows, and multiplies. The spirit's power to appropriate the foreign stands revealed in its inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the manifold, and to overlook or repulse whatever is totally contradictory— [BGE, §230]

These concepts, taken in abstraction from any moralistic coloring, merely indicate that what they refer to is alive, that it assimilates and appropriates and grows in a distinct way from everything inanimate, viz. purposively. Finally, notice that exploitation, like self-preservation, is a consequence of will to power, not its ground nor equivalent to it, is a “basic organic function.” Again, ‘power’ thus cannot straightforwardly equal ‘domination’ in any ordinary sense of the word. It merely refers to living things as those which are active, the logical condition under which we can think of living things, *qua* living, as acting. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the above-cited passage is the explicated possibility of predicating of human society itself that it is ‘living’ (and, a fortiori, perhaps ‘dying’). This is perhaps the strongest evidence so far that the will to power represents a purely logical principle, the category by which we make sense of certain types of phenomena, for a society *qua* society can be ‘alive’ in no other but a metaphorical way, and I do not hesitate to declare that Nietzsche is not speaking metaphorically here. Nietzsche with this usage has completely eliminated the possibility that “will to power” refers to some internal physiological will, and he nowhere intimates that it is only by a straightforward process of sublimation on the parts of the members of society that their drives to dominate are channeled outward, an explanation by no means foreign to him; certainly this happens when the members of a society “refrain from doing to each other,” and is a partial explanation, for the will of society is in some sense a congeries of the individual members’ wills, each of which must be expressed, and, since he is not doing so against those nearest at hand by mutual agreement will also, again by mutual agreement, do so to others. Recall though that, by the previous discussion, such a society cannot be one in which everyone’s will is on par, and thus there will still be, even in such societies which thrust outward in the mode of living things, struggles for domination within the society itself (there is one way which I shall take up later in the paper in which the struggle for domination over others can be eradicated from society without a general denial of life – if each struggles wholly to dominate himself). The will to power of a society cannot be wholly that which is sublimated from individuals into communal efforts, for Nietzsche asseverates that the society itself can be “incarnate will to power.” It is almost magical how a society can take on a life of its own, develop a will which is not strictly reducible to any simple sum of individual wills – it becomes an organism only comprehensible by the categories of life and purposiveness, for societies can assuredly be purposive in ways inaccessible to most lumps of granite, and they express their purposes in the same way as do humans and animals, by assimilation, appropriation, estimation, injury. Indeed a society from which “the exploitative aspect” has been extruded is one devoid of organic functions, the consequences of will to power, and this must go for the exploitative aspect of intra-society relationships as well as for the inter-society relationships. This ties in very well with the thought that society is the natural venue of man, for society as such is the vehicle for man’s idiomatic purposiveness – it is built to measure to be considered living itself, to be expressive of purpose. To demonstrate that this conception of the will to power is not idiosyncratic to Beyond Good and Evil, consider the following from the Genealogy:



... the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a becoming master, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous “meaning” and “purpose” are necessarily obscured or even obliterated. . . . But purposes and utilities are only signs that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function . . . . [T]he now prevalent instinct and taste. . . would rather be reconciled even to the absolute fortuitousness, even the mechanistic senselessness of all events than to the theory that in all events a will to power is operating. . . . to the detriment of life, as goes without saying, since it has robbed it of a fundamental concept, that of activity. . . . Thus the essence of life, its will to power, is ignored; one overlooks the essential property of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions.[GM II.12]

Purposes and utilities are the distinguishing marks of the presence of will to power, the fundamental principle of the organic world. In the example Nietzsche discusses here, the development of punishment, punishment did not develop for the purpose of punishing wrong-doers, but rather arose as the result of the drive for domination of one man over the next and only eventually developed the purpose it (arguably) possesses in deterring wrong-doing and extracting recompense for the wrong done. In an example Nietzsche does not explicitly discuss here, but I believe lurks in the background, is the purpose and utility of human consciousness. As we saw above, Nietzsche believes that consciousness developed under the pressure of the need for communication. By this passage, however, it is manifest that there was no ‘conscious teleology’ in the formation of language – rather, first consciousness and communication developed, and only later were they mastered and subdued, put to new uses and draped with interpretation. That our conscious thinking can be twisted and functionalized under various ‘interpretations’ by a vigorous enough will to power holds the key, as we shall see, to man’s ability to negate and deny the logical conditions of his own life in a manner inaccessible to other life-forms. Life is explicitly contraposed to “mechanistic senselessness”, the realm of the inanimate, again not to death (he actually says within the same passage that the loss of meaning and purposiveness caused by death is often among the conditions of “a will and way to greater power”), and for the most interesting reason that such mechanism robs us “of a fundamental concept, that of activity.” This perhaps more than any other passage manifestly explicates the logical role of the will to power in grounding our notion of ‘life’, and collateral notions such as ‘activity’. If we do not have a firm conceptual grasp on the will to power as the essence of what lives, we shall never be able to comprehend a living thing, qua living, as that which is active. ‘Activity’, however, is not merely a collateral notion to life, but is inextricably bound up with the “essence of life, its will to power.” I shall return to this when I begin discussing the logical conditions of agency, and their connection to the lives of actual men, but note already the explicit and thick relationship between life and agency: what lives a fortiori has agency. Agency expresses the will to power. To see that the will to power has a logical status more profound than any evaluative term, or conglomeration of them, I believe it suffices to note that Nietzsche avers,

when speaking of an animal's achieving its "maximal feeling of power," "I am not speaking of its path to happiness, but its path to power, to action, to the most powerful activity, and in most cases actually its path to unhappiness." [GM, III.7] Once again will to power is shown to have an inextricable internal relation to action and activity, and moreover to have no necessary relation to any sort of moral evaluation, for 'happiness' has been the favorite philosophical umbrella for good moral evaluations for centuries, and conversely for 'unhappiness'.<sup>4</sup> Before I move on to the second half of my discussion I must deal with a passage which looks initially foreboding for my reading of 'will to power' and its connection to 'life':

Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power, as my proposition has it. . . —then one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as—will to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined according to its "intelligible character"—it would be "will to power" and nothing else.— [BGE, §36]

Is Nietzsche suggesting that the entire world, both inanimate and animate, is best explained by ascribing will to power to all motive forces? Nietzsche only says that, if we succeed in explaining life as he would, by will to power, then we "would have gained the right" to ascribe will to power to all motive force, both animate and inanimate, not that we would be entailed to do so – what in the world could such a 'right' possibly be? I believe the clues to unraveling this riddle appear directly before this quote, in the same section:

Suppose nothing else were "given" as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other "reality" besides the reality of our drives— . . . is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this "given" would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or "material") world? I mean, not as a deception, as "mere appearance," an "idea" . . . but as holding the same rank of reality as our affect. . . . In the end not only is it permitted to make this experiment; the conscience of method demands it. Not to assume several kinds of causality until the experiment of making do with a single one has been pushed to its utmost limit (to the point of nonsense, if I may say so)—that is a moral of method which one may not shirk today. [BGE, §36]

He is not underwriting the notion that the entire world consists of will to power, only noting that, as the experiment has been tried for centuries by philosophers to reduce all causality to one type of causality (notably by the British Empiricists), that of the material world, so the attempt is demanded by philosophical method, now that a new principle is afoot, to try to explain the world entirely in terms of this.<sup>5</sup>

Nietzsche has already described method as "essentially economy of principles," [BGE, §13] which jibes well with my reading of him as engaged in conceptual analysis, which is why he declares that

<sup>4</sup>For you Greek scholars, note that I am making no claims about the status of 'eudaimonia'. Both Plato and Aristotle were subtler than most modern philosophers, which is one reason why Nietzsche takes them more seriously as opponents.

<sup>5</sup>Compare G. E. M. Anscombe's comments on Hume's treatment of causality in her *Intention*, §. Much, but by no means all, of what Nietzsche says concerning 'intention' is consonant with the Anscombian view.

one is only justified in assuming several different principles of causality after this experiment has failed. Such an experiment can only result in “nonsense,” for life and *inanimata* subsume wholly separate logical categories. This is why “will to power” occurs in scare-quotes at the end of the first quote above (“it would be “will to power” and nothing else”), for if the experiment were carried out thoroughly, we would completely have lost the notion of life as distinct from *inanimacy*, and *a fortiori* would no longer have the same notion of the will to power at work. This passage thus serves to emphasize the equivalent ‘objective’ status that Nietzsche’s category of life possesses with respect to the physical or natural sciences. His use of the logical category ‘life’ is every bit as justified as the use of the category of physical cause, and our reasoning concerning such matters will be every bit as ‘objective’ as scientific deductive reasoning – for they are both foundational logical categories, reducible neither to each other nor to any other category. It also is striking that a demand for such an experiment (“*versuch*”) appears only six sections before Nietzsche’s characterization of the new breed of philosophers he foresees as “attempters” (“*versucher*”). Again actual attempting, activity, is bound up with the conditions of life and agency, for as I shall soon argue it is precisely this new breed, these experimenters, who will be the ones capable of drawing and firing the bow of their spirit. The type of experiment to which Nietzsche refers here then is actually attempting in one’s diurnal activities to treat all comers, e.g. storms, hammers, dogs, insurance salesmen, as if they were purposive in the same way. This, he is certain, will as quickly be reduced to the absurd as should the modern attempt to reduce all life to pure mechanism. It is instructive to compare: “I favor any *skepsis* to which I may reply ‘let us try [*versuchen*] it!’ ”[GS, §51]

In closing my discussion of the logical conditions of life, I want to remark on a famous dictum of Nietzsche’s: “Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error.”[GS, §121] Nietzsche, I believe, is no skeptic about the possibility of what one might call pedantic knowledge, e.g. that water quenches fire, that night follows day, that the cat is on the mat. It is nonsensical to say of a skepticism concerning such things “*versuchen wir’s!*” This is perhaps why Nietzsche once referred to Descartes as “superficial.”[BGE, §191] The possibility assuredly remains that we might actually live in ignorance or error concerning such facts, and indeed that our particular way of life might essentially depend on such errors, for life is essentially estimating, preferring, etc. Life is no argument, for it is the ground for argument.

It is inconceivable that the Catholic Church would have bowed before Galileo’s telescope and renounced in one fell swoop its entire existence. The Catholic Church of the 16th Century was no doubt a quite healthy and vigorous animal when it came to asserting its will to power, and, if it had acceded to Galileo, it would have *a fortiori* denied the grounds for its own existence as an organism expressive of will to power, *viz.*, one which at that point was grounded upon a geocentric view of the universe and a literal reading of the Bible. This is no defense of the Catholic Church but an admission that as a healthy organism it could do no other than quash Galileo’s claims as quickly and thoroughly as possible. That the Church was able to adapt to the scientific revolution only underlines how powerful the will to life is, and stands as a first example of how the will to power, as a logical principle of life, depends in part on the actual conditions of the organism in question (“Not their love of men but the impotence of their love of men keeps the Christians of today from—burning us”[BGE, §104]).

It is time to discuss the logical conditions of man’s will to power and agency, and how they hook

up with the living conditions of actual men. Note first of all that life, as preferring, estimating, etc., already sounds familiar in the context of agency – for specified and qualified versions of these gerunds are precisely to what ‘agency’ apropos of humans is taken to refer, given appropriate ways of hooking these up to action. “That the ascetic ideal has meant so many things to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its horror vacui: it needs a goal—and it will rather will nothingness than not will.”[GM, III.1] The third essay of the Genealogy, whence this passage comes, is dedicated to explicating an aphorism from Zarathustra: “Unconcerned, mocking, violent—thus wisdom wants us: she is a woman and always loves only a warrior.”[Z, I, “On Reading and Writing”] There is an ambiguity in this passage. Is it wisdom or the warrior who is “unconcerned, mocking, violent?” The ambiguity, Professor Pippin tells me, is also in the German. Professor Pippin takes it that the adjectives apply to wisdom, the woman. ‘Truth’ is also referred to as a woman in the preface to Beyond Good and Evil, and the philosopher represented as pursuing her. Professor Pippin thus has suggested that a judicious study of Nietzsche’s remarks on women and seduction can illuminate Nietzsche’s views on truth and philosophy.

While I find the latter suggestion immensely plausible, and indeed fruitful, in reading Nietzsche, I find his suggestion that it is the woman, wisdom, who is unconcerned, mocking, violent, and not the warrior, to be unconvincing for two related reasons: while Nietzsche posits many things of woman throughout his writing, some more favorable than others, most of them do not jibe well with a picture of woman as unconcerned, etc; such a characterization does jibe well with his depiction of the free-spirits whom he foresees as winning truth, and is a nice contraposition to the “gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness,”[BGE, preface] of the dogmatic philosophers who have been quite inept at winning a woman’s heart so far. The third essay of the Genealogy being entitled “What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?”, we should expect some connection between ascetic ideals, the pursuit of wisdom, being unconcerned, mocking, violent, and preferring to will nothingness than not to will.

Here it behooves me to give a brief exposition of master and slave moralities, and what they have accomplished in human history. In a master morality,

the ruling group determines what is “good,” the exalted proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank. . . . The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, “what is harmful to me is harmful in itself”; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating.[BGE, §260]

Nietzsche illuminates this characterization when he declares, “It was out of the pathos of distance that they [the masters] first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values.”[GM, I.2] It was not from an immediately simple feeling of worth that the masters conferred rank upon themselves, but from a mediated conception of themselves in opposition to the rabble, the pathos, or impression, of themselves as at a distance from their chattel in a moral dimension. It is primarily, however, their conception of themselves which is the inspiration for their creation of values, and only secondarily their conception of themselves versus their conception of the *oi polloi*. On the other hand,

The slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the resentment of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of

deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. . . . This inversion of the value-positing eye—this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of resentment: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction.[GM, I.10]

The slaves need the masters, but in a more immediate way than the masters need the slaves, for the creation of their values, for slaves are essentially reactive as opposed to active. The slaves, being oppressed, unfree, are denied the opportunity to express their will to power uninhibitedly, but are the first who must channel and suppress it, most unnaturally, with resentment as the result. This is far easier said than understood; the next several pages of this paper will be dedicated to just such an understanding.

Nietzsche is far too subtle not to realize that one can admire where one does not wholly approve and can heap scorn and opprobrium on what secretly delights one. He has no straightforward relationship of like or dislike, respect or disrespect, to either master or slave morality, but sees them both as necessary forerunners to the free-spirits he hopes will appear.

The knightly-aristocratic value judgments presupposed a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with what serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity. [GM, I.7]

This is certainly all very romantic, but it does not require much brains, if there is such an abundance of physical health, to retain power and wage war. As a matter of fact, the masters are most often spoken of in the language which one would most naturally associate with high-spirited, self-confident children, not very reflective, inattentive to the future, oblivious to any form of duty not from a desire to rebel but only because living is too easy to imagine its being restricted. “Human history would be altogether too stupid a thing without the spirit that the impotent have introduced into it. . . .”[GM, I.7]

Nietzsche, for all his overt contumely against the impotent, against the slaves, never fails to speak of them without at least a tinge of (often grudging) respect. Here is the motive force in human history, if not in individual human’s deeds – if the masters had always held sway, can one imagine human society progressing beyond the technical achievements of the Roman Empire?

. . . it was on the soil of this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became an interesting animal, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire depth and become evil—and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts!

As we saw earlier, everything occurs on the same level for beasts; there is no reflection on or consciousness of their own actions, simply an instinctive doing which cannot be gainsayed or subverted by the beast. Only man has depth, for only man has a surface, consciousness, on which reflection and deliberation occur, and it is precisely this duality which renders man the indeterminate animal.

How did man acquire “higher” depth on the fertilizer laid by the priests? I shall suggest that the slave revolt in morality induced a sharpening and perfecting of man’s consciousness, flowering in a

sophisticated form of self-consciousness inaccessible to man before millenia of suppression under the slave ideals, which, when perfected, manifested themselves as ascetic ideals. The result is modern man, the most subtle and effete of creatures, so acutely self-conscious that he simultaneously has the capacity both to forget the role of actual activity in fleshing out his agency, the logical condition of the will to power, that life is essentially purposive, and so slipping into life-denying nihilism; and to rise above all past incarnations of man by utterly mastering himself and so making himself capable of being one who, by his activity, creates values and thus truly affirms the logical conditions of life, and only thus, as I hope it shall become clear, can one be an agent for Nietzsche.

... the priests are the most evil enemies—but why? Because they are the most impotent. It is because of their impotence that in them hatred grows to monstrous and uncanny proportions, to the most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred. [GM, I.7]

The impotent cannot strike back against ones like the masters who are so vigorous, overflowing with physical puissance, hardy, reckless and scornful of their own life in matters of honor; at least they cannot strike back physically. They have a far more malignant revenge at hand, if they are clever enough. They can turn the masters against themselves, the impotent setting themselves up as the paradigm of man, the weak, inoffensive, benign, sickly, the repudiation of health and vigor – if they succeed in erecting themselves as the standard, the masters will have no choice but to turn and wage war on themselves to control the primordial prodigality eager to burst forth at the slightest provocation.

... [the man of resentment] understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble. A race of such men of resentment is bound to become eventually cleverer than any noble race; it will also honor cleverness to a far greater degree: namely as a condition of existence of the first importance; while with noble men cleverness can easily acquire a subtle flavor of luxury and subtlety—for here it is far less essential than the perfect functioning of the regulating unconscious instincts or even than a certain imprudence. [GM, I.10]

The slaves have mastered themselves with awesome consistency and thoroughness in ways undreamt of by the masters. The slaves do not forget, know how to wait, to keep silent – they know how to plan for the future, prepare, calculate, beyond anything required or envisioned by the spontaneous and adolescent masters. Only here is possible a truly spiritual revenge. Note carefully, though, that the slaves do not intend to become cleverer, rather it is the condition of their existence in a way it is not for the masters – it would take far more cleverness available to them to intend to become clever.

Those who were clever, who could channel their lusts and regulating unconscious instincts into ways which would ensure their survival, viz. by serving instead of attacking the masters, were the most successful slaves, and were respected by the other slaves as such. They were not respected as being the ones best able to serve the masters, however, but as the ones who had the best chance of eventually overthrowing the masters. Even the slaves are not governed by the instinct of life as opposed to death, but they too strive for life as opposed to inanimacy, and in their situation the best available means for expressing their will to power, which would have its highest expression in dominating the masters, was in the intellectual and moral arena, the domain of the spirit. They

were going to paste a new interpretation on consciousness, and use this to subdue and bow the masters.

The masters at this point were essentially uninterested in theories of moral accountability and such, for nothing would have seemed more absurd to them than blaming someone for expressing their natural drives, the very expression of life itself.

To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength. [GM, I.13]

The noble man experienced himself as determining values; his very existence was valuable – it was only derivatively that moral designations were applied to actions (cf. BGE, §260). Actions were inextricably bound up with who did them. Actions were not classified qua actions independent of the doer, but were thought to be individual and distinct from each other in a way that language, which is expressive of what is common, what is shared, could not capture: the masters did not think that the worth of their actions was bound up with what other people thought of them, what other people could think of them, which was precisely codified in language. “. . . there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.”[GM, I.13]

For the masters, the human being was the totality of his action, the sum of his activities, and as such there was no notion of moral culpability, only those who were nobler, those who more fully and directly expressed their will to power, and those who were baser, who subverted and sublimated their will to power in submitting to the masters. Consciousness for the masters was used for planning war and conquest or devising more opulent and blood-thirsty ceremony and rituals; there was no thought that it could be used to control or temper the basic expressions of the natural instincts. This was an interpretation, a purpose and utility for consciousness, that was yet to come. If the slaves could turn the masters back on themselves, create the feeling of accountability for action, which was lacking thus far, and the notion that certain types of activity were evil in themselves regardless of who performed them, viz. those actions directly and physically expressive of the will to power, and instilled the thought that consciousness was precisely and only to be used for mastering oneself, and not others, then they would have wrought a tremendous victory. And they did.

Their tactic was simple enough: inculcate the belief in an independent, willing subject; separate the deed from the doer, and give it priority.

. . . this prudence of the lowest order. . . has, thanks to the counterfeit and self-deception of impotence, clad itself in the ostentatious garb of the virtue of quiet, calm resignation, just as if the weakness of the weak—that is to say, their essence, their effects, their sole ineluctable, irremovable reality—were a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a deed, a meritorious act. This type of man needs to believe in a neutral independent ‘subject’.  
[GM, I.13]

Again, they did not invent the independent willing subject for the purpose of dominating the masters: this interpretation was pasted on by their sublated will to power only after such changes

occurred as accorded with the new conditions of life which their situation demanded. The masters had a far more full-blooded notion of action, that it was not capturable by a few measly words, could not be pinned, squirming, against the cardboard of our mind with the needle of language, for too much was believed to be expressed by action, the very will to life itself. The slaves, to conquer the masters, were thus forced to intellectualize action to the point that only a few features or aspects of it were thought to capture it entirely and suffice for categorization, estimation, evaluation.

I have perhaps been slightly disingenuous up to this point, discussing masters and slaves as if they were always easily separable, each person, each culture either/or, but this is often not the case:

... in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other—even in the same human being, within a single soul. [BGE, §260]

There were, we may imagine, very few masters who were wholly noble and imprudent, even as there were very few slaves who were profoundly devious, clever and overtly submissive. The task of the more slavish, therefore, was to cultivate the bad conscience and guilt which were incipient in the more masterful, not create it *ex nihilo*. This, I take it, is the story which is told in the second essay of the *Genealogy*, which is too long and involved to explicate at length in this paper – my reading thus has the virtue of explaining why the discussion of the inculcation of guilt and the bad conscience follows the exposition of master and slave moralities in the first essay. I am, however, only interested now in the flowering of this new self-consciousness, and how this precisely occurred:

Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself. . . —all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics. In a certain sense, the whole of asceticism belongs here. . . —and ascetic procedures and modes of life are means of freeing [a few] ideas from the competition of all other ideas, so as to make them “unforgettable”. [GM, II.3]

The memory mentioned here is not memory simpliciter, but the particular type of memory implicated in the making and keeping of promises, the type of memory involved in the self-mastery of man necessary for his societal existence.<sup>6</sup> The few ideas which are to be emphasized to the exclusion of all else in most cases are the ones which will be used for classifying actions, for asseverating the independence of the will, the culpability of the subject. We are back to ascetic ideals, the subject of the third essay of the *Genealogy*, and thus my reading in fact explains the entire large-scale structure of the *Genealogy*, certainly a desirable feature of any reading of Nietzsche.

We have arrived at what I call the ‘paradox of consciousness’. Before the slave-revolt in morality effected a conception of ourselves as being independent, autonomously willing subjects, humans were incapable in any thick sense of acting against the natural expression of their will to power, of

<sup>6</sup>It would be fascinating to compare Nietzsche’s picture of the genesis of the practice of making promises here with Anscombe’s presentation of the modern institution of promising in her paper “Promising and Its Justice, and Whether It Need Be Respected In Foro Interno”.



not trying physically to dominate in the sense which I explicated above, viz. estimating, preferring, appropriating, etc. It was only with the advent of the independently willing subject that man acquired the purpose of rechanneling all life-instincts against himself, to master himself, temper his activity, force it into the restrictive and arbitrary templates supplied by the new categorization of actions produced by the slaves. It was also, however, only at this point that man first became able to embrace the conditions of life self-consciously, to create the idiomatically human expression of will to power, the one expressed by consciousness. This, however, would require a synthesis of the slave and master moralities, as I shall argue below, so as to have the self-conscious independent willing firmly affixed to the self-affirmation.

Humans were, in a sense, incapable of acting against their nature until the slave revolt occurred, for masters, as we saw, were guided largely by the “perfect functioning of the regulating unconscious instincts,” and slaves presumably before the revolution had less than perfect functioning of their natural instincts, or deformed physiologies, or some such – when the revolt culminated in the superannuation of the masters’ conditions of life, humans by and large acquired a “new nature”, one with distinct conditions of life from before. The old conditions of life, outward activity, expansion, growth and subsumption, were rejected, and new ones had to arise in their place. Because life is willing, they were forced to will nothingness rather than not will, if they were to deny the physical expression of their will to power, deny their body and the material world, deny in other words the activities of the master, and thus sprouted ascetic ideals. “That the ascetic ideal has meant so many things to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its horror vacui: it needs a goal—and it will rather will nothingness than not will.”[GM, III.1] The terms Nietzsche uses here are arresting: the basic fact of the human will is its horror vacui. By appropriating the terms of the physical sciences, I believe Nietzsche intends to emphasize again that this point is as scientific, as logical in character as anything in the ‘objective’ natural sciences. Man has progressed to the point that it is fully possible for him today to be without goals: he is too self-conscious to permit his will to power to manifest itself in any sort of straightforward physical way, and he has been conditioned by morality and society, via this consciousness which consists precisely in that which is shared and common, to the point that he can only accept their precepts as proper guides for life and action. As I stressed earlier, he has become so indeterminate with respect to what can count for him as purposes that he has none without either external imposition of them or self-conscious grasping of them. By taking the modern stance, which is essentially a passive stance, towards willing, we have denied the formal character of life, the will to power which is purposiveness.

I attempted to show earlier why a society in which every one’s will was exactly on par would be life-denying – this is not precisely the character of today’s society nor of Nietzsche’s society, but this is in many ways the ideal of these societies. So long as the ascetic ideals were regnant, and men had the goal of mastering themselves, men’s activities were not directly life-denying, for they were still acting with a purpose. As the self-mastery induced by the ascetic ideals crescendoed, bending the bow of the spirit, effecting a tension the like of which had never been seen, man came to the crossroads at which Nietzsche envisions us. One path meanders down the road of passivity, the eschewal of any purpose one has which might contravene anyone else’s purposes, the conception of life as being wholly reducible to codifiable and scientific explanations, and thus as being ultimately inanimate – this road stems from the thought that our activity can be precisely codified, that our

actions have value only insofar as our intentions do, some purely internal mental state, which is the logical culmination of the drive to comprehend ourselves as independently willing subjects. We have so embraced the notion of ourselves as independently willing subjects that we no longer act unless we specifically will ourselves to do so, which, given the precepts of modern moralities as Nietzsche envisions them (“Morality in Europe today is herd animal morality—”[BGE, §201]), we shall not do at the risk of impeding someone else’s rights. We are denying ourselves the having of purposes, for we have been taught from early childhood that no one’s purposes are better than another’s; once our life becomes the conscious effort to reduce our will to be on par with everyone else’s, we have embarked on the effort to reduce ourselves to inanimata.

The other path for Nietzsche strides to the antipodes of the first: we self-consciously embrace our will, recognize that living is precisely preferring, estimating, dominating, and embody the will to power in our activity. We choose to have purposes, we aim at aiming. We must rediscover the connection between doing and being, that they are the same. We must have the purpose of having purposes and acting on them: they will come to the same.

But when the opposition and war in such a nature have the effect of one more charm and incentive of life—and if, moreover, in addition to his powerful and irreconcilable drives, a real mastery and subtlety in waging war against oneself, in other words, self-control, self-outwitting, has been inherited or cultivated, too—then those magical, incomprehensible, and unfathomable ones arise, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and seduction. . . . They appear in precisely the same ages when that weaker type with its desire for rest comes to the fore: both types belong together and owe their origin to the same causes.[BGE, 200]

To complete my case, one final discussion is required, in what having a purpose actually consists. The most obvious way in which to carry out such a discussion is via the free-spirits whom Nietzsche envisions being the ones capable of doing such. It will perhaps help first to see who is the opposite of the free-spirits: “The worst and most dangerous thing of which scholars are capable comes from their sense of mediocrity of their own type—from that Jesuitism of mediocrity which instinctively works at the annihilation of the uncommon man and tries to break every bent bow or, preferably, to unbend it.”[BGE, §206] In the preface, from which I quoted at the beginning of the paper, Nietzsche already proclaimed that the two attempts to unbend the taut bow “in the grand style” have been Jesuitism and the Democratic Enlightenment. Modern scholars, with their drive to systematize and categorize everything, to see themselves as the tools of a larger program, nameless and faceless Science which would reduce the entire world to a few precise and lifeless principles, partake of the worst aspects of both the Enlightenment and Jesuitism. They are as far from Faust’s “In the beginning was the deed!” as can be imagined.

In the very next section the scholar is counterposed to one more interesting: “. . . [the objective man] is no goal, no conclusion and sunrise, no complementary man in whom the rest of existence is justified, no termination—and still less a beginning, a begetting and first cause, nothing tough, powerful, self-reliant that wants to be master.”[BGE, §207] The free-spirit is a goal, his own goal, his own purpose; one which, moreover, causes itself—which would be incoherent if ‘self’ referred to something distinct from the activity, and if Nietzsche were speaking of anything other than the free-spirit’s self-conscious affirmation of the logical conditions of life by his activity. The scholar’s is “a pessimism bonae voluntatis [of good will] that does not merely say No, want No, but—horrible thought!—does No.”[BGE, §208] The free-spirit does Yes – but it is still slightly unclear here why

the free-spirit's activity is purposive in a way that the scholar's is not. We have a partial answer in that the scholar's activity is aimed at a denial of the logical condition of man as a living being, and thus as a denial of agency, but what is not so clear yet is how the free-spirit's activity is actually an affirmation of these conditions.

That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, . . . its inventive-ness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness—was it not granted through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? In man creature and creator are united. . . [BGE, §225]

That tension of the soul, the tautness of the spirit's bow, arises from the suffering and cruelty of self-mastery, and thus is man both creature and creator, for he is the only man capable of constructing himself consciously through his activity. This is what he purposes, at this he aims. He must use his self-consciousness, the product of what is shared and common, to overcome the danger to which precisely this great faculty has exposed him: being born late, in a culture which cultivates his self-consciousness, he cannot escape the duty and the danger. Only thus can he embrace the conditions of agency as he finds them, living as an independent willing subject, and not negate them by trying to negate the very logical conditions of his being a living thing, viz. that he express the will to power in his activity. Since the human being qua agent is the sum of his activities, if his activities are directed towards denying his own purposiveness, to muting the expression of the will to power, he only succeeds in negating his own agency.

The ascetic ideals provided the impetus to this insofar as they provided the way in which man could justify his suffering and at the same time master himself:

Apart from the ascetic ideal, the human animal had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal. . . his problem was not suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, "why do I suffer?" Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does not repudiate suffering as such; he desires it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far—and the ascetic ideal offered man meaning! . . . man was saved thereby, he possessed a meaning. . . —he could now will something; no matter at first to what end, why, with what he willed: the will itself was saved. . . . man would rather will nothingness than not will.[GM, III.28]

Once having become aware of suffering, being conscious, man had to make it purposive, for his life is not only will to power, making others suffer, but being alive, it is suffering itself: he it is on whom the animate world expends its will to power in the form of suffering. Having any purpose at all was sufficient to alleviate this existential crisis, so long as one had a purpose, had meaning to one's life: for this is what it means to live. Nietzsche himself says, "I have learned to distinguish the cause of acting from the cause of acting in a particular way, in a particular direction, with a particular goal." [GS, §360]

What is most important for man today is that we do not undermine our ability to act at all – ascetic ideals which for so long have provided meaning for our suffering, purpose to our lives,

are now self-destructing; they have brought us to such a pitch of subtle self-consciousness that we can see the arbitrariness of these solutions, the apparent meaninglessness of it all. What we are in danger of forgetting, however, is that we, as living creatures, are ourselves inherently meaning-creating beings; there is no need for God or Absolute Right and Wrong, and indeed at this stage of the game such salves only exacerbate the illness by undermining man's faith in himself. All we need do is bend and dominate our will to the purpose of having purposes. Note how this will require constant self-questioning and probing to ensure that one is not being life-denying, that one has not fallen into the trap of taking anything as absolute or unconditional, which would lead one to passivity and eschewal of agency, the drive to be inanimate, nihilism.

The creation of meaning in this way, by self-consciously affirming the creation of meaning in one's own activity as a living being expressive of will to power, consists in the task which Nietzsche has labelled the "creation of values." The task of the new philosophers, the free-spirits whom Nietzsche prophesizes, "demands that he create values. . . . Genuine philosophers are commanders and legislators: they say 'thus it shall be!' . . . Their 'knowing' is creating, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is—will to power." [BGE, §211] How difficult such a task is we only now realize: the would-be free-spirit must come to terms with his surfeit of consciousness, deconstruct all extant values to determine whether or not they are expressive of the will to power or are secretly life-denying, and create his new set of values by embodying them in his actual activity. These men of tomorrow will be unconcerned with their own life, preferring pain or death to the denial of life; they will be mocking of everything absolute and unconditional, for "[o]bjections, digressions, gay mistrust, the delight in mockery are signs of health: everything unconditional belongs in pathology"[BGE, §154]; they will be violent for life is violence, the expression of the will to power.

To conclude, I want to give a reading of a passage which I found to be particularly obscure, and of which I could only make sense once I had an adumbration of this reading in place: it is a passage which I now believe particularly well lends itself to and supports my reading.

To translate man back into nature; to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*; to see to it that man henceforth stands before man as even today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the rest of nature, with intrepid Oedipus eyes and sealed Odysseus ears, deaf to the siren songs of old metaphysical bird catchers who have been piping at him all too long, "you are more, you are higher, you are of a different origin!"—that may be a strange and insane task, but it is a task—who would deny that? [BGE, §230]

The task which man has now is to translate himself "back into nature", back to the open and free expression of the will to power, now intensified and rarefied in the alembic of self-consciousness. The interpretations and scrawls that have been painted over the natural man are the ones that declare that his consciousness exists for the specific purpose of instantiating a particular morality, that he is higher only insofar as he knows the Absolute Good and Evil of the old metaphysicians. The wonderful inversion in the images of Oedipus eyes and Odysseus ears serves to underline what an inversion of traditional thought and life this will be for modern man, the tremendous difficulty for one who would attempt to grasp and uproot all of our deep prejudices about science, our urge

to reduce and simplify, and recognize that man himself, with no additional metaphysical frills, suffices for the having of purposes, the creation of meaning and values, even as we have been so successful in interpreting the “rest of nature”, the inanimata. This is a task – there is no denying it – and one which does not undermine and negate ourselves *qua* living things, and such tasks are precisely what is needed to affirm life today, or, as we might say, to be an agent.

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