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Thinking Differently, Feeling Differently: Nietzsche on Nihilism and Radical Openness

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THINKING DIFFERENTLY, FEELING DIFFERENTLY:

NIETZSCHE ON NIHILISM AND RADICAL OPENNESS

By

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B.A., Philosophy, New York University, 2006
M.A., Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2016

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Philosophy**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July, 2017

Dedication

To my grandmother, Marilyn Macco, my first and longest source of inspiration. Your open-heartedness, unfailing charity, and expansive mind showed me from an early age what a philosopher should look like.

Acknowledgements

Ashley: Your unwavering care, support, and sense of humor helped me get through this project in more ways than you could ever know.

And, finally, to Justin: Thank you for your endless conversation, your patience, your support, your intellect, and your love. Oh, and thanks for doing the dishes. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to offer a comprehensive account of the problem of nihilism in Friedrich Nietzsche, both as a cognitive phenomenon involving a set of beliefs about one's world (as "European nihilism") and as a feeling-based phenomenon (as affective nihilism). After introducing these two varieties of nihilism, I look to potential resources in Nietzsche's thought for overcoming them. First, I argue that the European nihilist can think truth, purpose, and value in new and life-affirming ways by coming to understand Nietzsche's account of the drives — as wills to power with affective, and therefore evaluative, orientations — and by applying this account not only to human life, but to non-human life and the inorganic world (as Nietzsche intended). For this reason, I look to Nietzsche's drive ontology as a resource for overcoming European nihilism, while acknowledging that Nietzsche did not necessarily intend it for this use. Next, I argue that personal narrative can serve as a Nietzschean resource for overcoming affective nihilism. Since affective nihilism is a psycho-physiological condition — consisting in a weakness of the will and a disruption of one's end-directedness and engagement in the world — this is a particularly difficult problem to overcome. By

attending to Nietzsche's own practices and recommendations, however, the development of — and reflection upon — a personal narrative emerges as a promising treatment. As I go on to argue, this process of self-narration not only offers the potential for personal transformation; it also enables one to recognize the importance of an attitude of openness — or affirmative receptivity — for the authentic creation of new values. Although Nietzsche does not explicitly say that self-narration can be used to overcome nihilism as a feeling-based phenomenon, and although there could be no guarantee that this treatment would work for each individual nihilist, the transformative power of self-narration offers one a potential means to "feel differently" about oneself and about the world to which one belongs.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used for references to Nietzsche's texts. See the bibliography for information about translations used. Any selections from the following list of published writings and authorized manuscripts not taken from the translations included in the bibliography have been noted.

A   *The Antichrist*

BGE   *Beyond Good and Evil*

BT   *The Birth of Tragedy*

D   *Dawn*

EH   *Ecce Homo*

GM   *On the Genealogy of Morality*

GS   *The Gay Science*

HH   *Human, All Too Human*

TI   *Twilight of the Idols*

TSZ   *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

UM   *Untimely Meditations*

WP   *The Will to Power*

References to Nietzsche's unpublished writings refer to the print edition of Nietzsche's notebooks and publications: *Kritische Studienausgabe* (*KSA*), compiled and edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. All translations of Nietzsche's unpublished writings are mine unless otherwise noted. See the bibliography for more information.

Introduction

0.1 Nihilism and Its Overcoming

Philosophers have long acknowledged that the problem of nihilism is an issue with which

Nietzsche is, at least in his later works and notebooks, supremely concerned. Yet Bernard

Reginster's recent treatment of the problem in nihilism in Nietzsche — found in *The*

Affirmation of Life — both re-ignited and re-focused contemporary engagements with

Nietzsche's thoughts about nihilism. In this work, Reginster investigates a variety of

Nietzsche's "philosophical doctrines" with an eye to the role they play in affirming life

and overcoming nihilism, arguing that readers of Nietzsche ought to "regard Nietzsche's

philosophy as a systematic response to the problem of nihilism."[1] This work has inspired

a number of critical responses from contemporary scholars.[2] In critical responses from

Ken Gemes and John Richardson, both scholars point out that while Reginster presents

nihilism as a purely cognitive issue, involving a variety of beliefs about meaning and

value, it is just as frequently (and perhaps, Gemes suggests, more significantly) presented

by Nietzsche as a feeling-based phenomenon, a weariness with one's world which

comports one negatively towards the world of which one is a part. How, then, should

Nietzsche's reader understand the problem of nihilism in his thought?

      This dissertation aims to show that a satisfactory account of the problem of

nihilism in Nietzsche will not only recognize European nihilism as a cultural

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[1] Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*. (Boston. MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 4.
[2] Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster." *European Journal of Philosophy.* 16:3 (2008). Maudemarie Clark, "Suffering and the Affirmation of Life." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies.* 43:1 (2012). Nadeem J.Z. Hussain, "Metaethics and Nihilism in Reginster's *The Affirmation of Life.*" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies.* 43: 1 (2012). Ivan Soll, "Nietzsche's Will to Power as a Psychological Thesis: Reactions to Bernard Reginster." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies.* 43: 1 (2012). John Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.

phenomenon, but will also acknowledge that which Gemes and Richardson call an

"affective nihilism," or nihilism as a feeling-based phenomenon. In this project, I

especially utilize Nietzsche's account of drives, affects, and the relations he establishes

between them to show that affective nihilism should be interpreted as a psycho-

physiological condition, originating in the nihilistic individual's drives and affects. This

dissertation thus benefits from Gemes and Richardson's critique of Reginster's "overly

cognitive" account, yet goes beyond their brief critical remarks to outline in what

affective nihilism consists for Nietzsche.[3]

This project, while responding to issues in contemporary Nietzsche scholarship, is

also influenced by my engagement with Martin Heidegger's account of Nietzsche's own

nihilism, especially as treated in the work of Iain Thomson. In his *Nietzsche* lectures,

given between 1936 and 1939, Heidegger conducts an in-depth investigation into

Nietzsche's thought in order to identify and discern the significance of some of

Nietzsche's most well-known ideas. In the final volume of this lecture series, Heidegger

argues that Nietzsche's metaphysics — which understands the world and its constituents

as empty force, recurring eternally — is profoundly nihilistic and traps Nietzsche in the

very problem which he aims to overcome. For Heidegger, the nihilism in which

Nietzsche remains ensnared results from thinking and experiencing all being as

nothing, as he claims Nietzsche's metaphysics encourages his reader to do.[4]

Insofar as Heidegger uses his reading of Nietzsche's metaphysics to demonstrate

that Nietzsche's thought traps him in the very problem he diagnoses and seeks to

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[3] Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming. Also: Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of
Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster."
[4] See especially Iain Thomson, "Understanding Ontotheology as the Basis for Heidegger's
Critique of Technology" in *Heidegger on Ontotheology.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

overcome — nihilism — this dissertation can be understood as engaged in quite the opposite endeavor. In this project, I utilize Nietzsche's metaphysics — a metaphysics of drives as wills to power, understood quite differently from Heidegger's world of empty force, eternally recurring — to demonstrate that there are resources in Nietzsche's metaphysical thought and elsewhere for addressing and potentially overcoming the problem of nihilism, both as a cognitive and affective phenomenon. It is important, of course, to recognize differences between Nietzsche and Heidegger's conceptions of nihilism: overcoming nihilism for Heidegger will look different than overcoming nihilism for Nietzsche. In this dissertation, I present an historical-interpretive account of Nietzschean nihilism, and then look to his metaphysics and other aspects of his thought as resources for overcoming nihilism as Nietzsche characterizes it. In the course of this investigation, however, those familiar with Heidegger's Nietzsche will come to recognize Heidegger's answer to the problem of nihilism— a world of "inexhaustible richness" which exceeds and informs the machinations, values, and purposes of human life— as a profoundly Nietzschean account of the world which serves as a resource for the overcoming of nihilism in Nietzsche.[5]

0.2 Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, "The Problem of Nihilism," I orient the problem of nihilism in Nietzsche by arguing for nihilism [*Nihilismus*] in Nietzsche as both an affective condition and an historical phenomenon of which Nietzsche offers his reader a developmental account. After a summary of the historical development of European nihilism according to Nietzsche, I summarize his accounts of two nihilistic tendencies of Western

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[5] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track.* Translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 25.

philosophy: 1) the tendency which Western philosophy has to accord a higher value to a stable world of being than to an ever-changing world of becoming and 2) Western culture's belief in a "true" world, separate from and superior to the world of earthly existence. Finally, I introduce both affective nihilism and three different facets of European nihilism as a cognitive, cultural phenomenon: epistemological nihilism, nihilism of purposelessness, and ethical nihilism. On my account, affective nihilism for Nietzsche (as a psycho-physiological condition) both motivates the development of *nihilistic* conceptions of truth, purpose, and value and is alleviated in part by these conceptions. The moment of European nihilism, on the other hand, results when such *nihilistic* conceptions of truth, purpose, and value become unbelievable, leaving man in a vacuum of meaning upon their collapse. With the advent of European nihilism comes the return of that affective nihilism which nihilistic conceptions of the world had temporarily eased.

In the second chapter, "Affective Nihilism and European Nihilism," I utilize both Nietzsche's published works and his unpublished notes to argue for the existence of these fundamentally different kinds of nihilism in Nietzsche: affective nihilism and European nihilism. In this section of the project, I both locate textual bases for these varieties of nihilism and offer detailed accounts of these kinds of nihilism. While affective nihilism is a psycho-physiological condition which consists in will-weakness and disrupts both one's end-directness and engagement with one's world, European nihilism involves three different kinds of cognitive nihilism: epistemological nihilism, nihilism of purposelessness, and ethical nihilism. After offering an account of affective nihilism, I go on in this chapter to describe the three kinds of nihilism comprising European nihilism

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and situate them in the landscape of Nietzsche scholarship, with an eye especially to points of difference with other scholars' characterizations of nihilism.

In this dissertation, however, I aim not only to explicate the problem of nihilism in its affective and cognitive/cultural components; I also hope to demonstrate that Nietzsche's thought offers resources for overcoming these kinds of nihilism. In my analysis of Nietzsche's ontology in the third chapter of this project, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics and The Problem of Nihilism," I demonstrate the importance of a largely untreated and thoroughly under-appreciated aspect of Nietzsche's thought — a critically affirmative openness or receptivity to sources of value external to the self — which comes to light as we recognize how a permeability between individuals and the world of which they are a part comprises an essential component of Nietzsche's metaphysics. Here, I present Nietzsche's positive metaphysical vision after I detail his critiques of conventional metaphysics. In this chapter I utilize John Richardson's seminal account of drives as wills to power, while also including Katsafanas's more recent treatment of Nietzschean drives, their role in human behavior, and their tendency to induce both evaluative and affective orientations. Since I read Nietzsche's account of the drives as a metaphysics and not merely as a "philosophical psychology," my account goes on to explain how even the drives comprising non-human life and inorganic objects have certain evaluative and affective orientations.

In the fourth and final chapter of this project, "Overcoming Nihilism: Radical Openness and Personal Transformation," I identify resources in Nietzsche's thought for responding both to the problem of European nihilism and the problem of affective nihilism. For responding to European nihilism as a set of beliefs about a lack of truth,

purpose, and value in the world, I look to Nietzsche's ontology and the potential it holds for founding new conceptions of truth, purpose, and value in this-worldly existence. In this chapter, I argue that Nietzsche's metaphysics of drives in particular allows for his readers to recognize their participation in this-worldly sources of value, the creation and disclosure of truth (as perspectival), and immanent purposiveness. In this way, Nietzsche's metaphysics allows one to recognize that one is embedded in a meaningful world.

In the final sections of the fourth chapter, I look to Nietzsche's accounts of self-knowledge and personal transformation as resources for treating — and perhaps overcoming — affective nihilism as a psycho-physiological condition. Given the previous chapter's explication of the details of Nietzsche's metaphysics and the various features of Nietzschean drives, I am able to go into more detail about affective nihilism here. Given that affective nihilism is a condition which results in the inefficacy of one's end-directedness and a lack of engagement in the world, the overcoming of this condition must involve both the exercise of agency (as the abilities to have goals, increase one's activity, and play a part in one's own transformation) and an affirmation of the world in all its complexity.

Since the overcoming of affective nihilism requires the affective nihilist to undergo a profound personal transformation which enacts fundamental changes in their constitution as a complex of drives, affective nihilism is a difficult problem to solve. My goal in the last section of the fourth chapter, then, is to envision one potential treatment, rooted in Nietzsche's thought and practices, for the problem of affective nihilism: the development and reflection upon a personal narrative in Nietzsche as a practice of self-

knowledge. Self-narration of this kind can be understood as one potential treatment which might function to re-engage the affective nihilist with herself and her values, to facilitate a strengthening or growth in the activity of her drives, and thus to allow her to regain some measure of agency. Importantly, however, this practice of self-knowledge also allows an individual to recognize her fundamentally receptive nature, as a complex of drives embedded in a driven world. When this happens, the individual is no longer "estranged" from her receptive nature and becomes able to recognize her participation in a value-laden world of immanent purposiveness which allows for a new, perspectival conception of truth. This way of thinking differently about oneself and one's world — thinking the world as a condition of purpose, value, and truth and oneself as inseparable from this meaningful world — allows one to re-engage in one's world and affirm this-worldly existence as a condition of her positive transformation.

Chapter One: The Problem of Nihilism

1.1 Introducing Nihilism in Nietzsche

An incredibly large number of themes fall under the purview of Nietzsche's body of

work; his insights are far-reaching and the topics he treats are enormously varied. In

Nietzsche's work, one can locate philological insights about the ancient world just as

easily as a recommendation for uplifting music. Reading Nietzsche can be a disorienting

experience for the reader in part because of this breadth of his thought. His work jumps

from topic to topic, and the relations among these topics often appear opaque. Rather than

constructing comprehensive treatises like philosophers before him, in which a grand

philosophical system unfolds, Nietzsche often writes in a short, aphoristic style. Scholarly

attempts to understand "what Nietzsche *really* thinks" are plagued with the task of

untangling his (often explicitly) contradictory propositions.

Nevertheless, there is one theme around which one may orient many seemingly

divergent threads of Nietzsche's thought: nihilism and the problem of meaninglessness in

modern Europe.[6] Nietzsche's discussion of the problem of nihilism is rich, complex, and

surprisingly difficult to pinpoint. Though one happens upon possible symptoms or

consequences of this problem in nearly every one of Nietzsche's works — one senses the

specter of nihilism at every turn — there are very few comprehensive accounts of the

problem of nihilism in Nietzsche. This is almost certainly because, while the problem of

nihilism permeates so many of Nietzsche's most critical works, he rarely calls it by name

[*Nihilismus*].

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[6] It seems particularly significant that this is the unifying topic selected for Nietzsche's proposed
text, *The Will to Power.* See "Book I" of *Will to Power,* a compilation of Nietzsche's unpublished
notes.

Although there is mention of nihilism [*Nihilismus*] in Nietzsche's earliest published work, *The Birth of Tragedy,* as well as in an early notebook written at the same time as the first four books of *The Gay Science* (in which Nietzsche explicitly but briefly problematizes nihilism in two consecutive aphorisms) and an early letter to a dear friend, Nietzsche's explicit mentions of nihilism occur with much more frequency in his private notes from 1885 onwards. While he discusses the problem of nihilism in some of his late published works including *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), the fifth book of *The Gay Science* (1887)*, The Genealogy of Morality* (1887), and *The Antichrist* (1888)*, the problem of nihilism in Nietzsche is one which he often examines and hashes out in private spaces reserved for the working out of his thoughts.

These features of Nietzsche's analysis of *Nihilismus* — its generally late appearance, its relegation to personal notebooks — might lead one to believe that Nietzsche deals with the problem of nihilism only in his philosophical maturity, and that his thoughts on the matter were not considered by himself to be sufficiently mature as to warrant publication or promotion. This is an interpretation which must be resisted. As Charles Andler notes, the increase in explicit mentions of *Nihilismus* in Nietzsche's late work is less a sign of a new interest or emphasis, and more a result of Nietzsche's increased familiarity with the term following from his reading of Paul Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine.*[7] Indeed, Nietzsche's adoption of *Nihilismus* in his later works allows him to designate a particular set of phenomena which he has been attending to all along. In other words, the problem of nihilism animates much of Nietzsche's philosophical work; even when *Nihilismus* is not explicitly mentioned, Nietzsche deals

[7] Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of his Philosophy.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 41.

with it in his analyses of the struggle between life-denial and life-affirmation and the world-denial implicit in what he calls (in a note written between 1885/6) the *christlich-moral* interpretation of the world.[8]

Nihilismus in Nietzsche has many senses. As an historical phenomenon, nihilism is "European nihilism [*Der europäische Nihilismus*]:" the historical denigration of earthly or this-worldly existence by European culture, either explicitly stated or implicitly represented by particular belief systems.[9] As we will see, European nihilism involves two moments: 1) the development of a belief in a meaningful world which involves *nihilistic* conceptions of truth, purpose, and value and 2) the collapse of these conceptions and, therefore, the new belief in a world absent of meaning.

As an affective phenomenon, on the other hand, Nietzsche describes nihilism as an instinct [*Der nihilistische Instinkt*] (in particular, an existence-failing instinct [*eines Instinktes für Mißrathen-sein*]) and a "feeling of worthlessness" [*das Gefühl der Werthlosigkeit*].[10] It is from out of these feelings and instincts that those nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value comprising the preliminary stage of European nihilism develop. European nihilism, as a broad cultural phenomenon, has various epistemological, ethical, and metaphysical manifestations; Nietzsche categorizes these manifestations as nihilistic when they result from a more basic life-denial or facilitate the continuation of life-denial.

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[8] KSA 12: 2 [27].
[9] KSA 12: 2 [131] and elsewhere.
[10] KSA 13:17 [7]; KSA 13:14 [29]; KSA 13:11 [99].

In both of these senses, nihilism is characterized by what Nietzsche calls life-denial, or a negation of life [*die Verneinung des Lebens*].[11] As Richardson notes, Nietzschean life-denial involves a negative judgment of the world based in one's psycho-physiological constitution (more specifically, based in one's drives and affects).[12] A principle, ideal, or concept is life-denying when it involves this sort of negative judgment (either being generated from or leading to such a judgment). For Nietzsche, life-denial can be expressed in implicitly or explicitly life-denying judgments of one's world; these judgments involve the "radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability."[13] As Nietzsche remarks, a nihilist "judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of that the world as it ought to be that it does not exist."[14] What Nietzsche here calls this "radical repudiation" of meaning is what I refer to as European nihilism, a belief in the meaninglessness of one's world resulting from one's disbelief in truth, purpose, and value.[15] This set of beliefs about the meaninglessness of existence is problematic for Nietzsche because it is life-denying: it denies and denigrates this-worldly existence.

Life-denial in Nietzsche also refers to the hindrance of the growth or advancement of life in its higher forms. This occurs through the generation of conditions hostile to

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[11] BGE 4, 208, 259; A 7, 56; KSA 13:10 [137], 13:15 [13]; and elsewhere.

[12] This is similar to what John Richardson calls "no-to-life nihilism," or "a 'bodily' stance occurring beneath the level of consciousness and language [in which] one's 'physiological' condition rejects or disvalues life" (Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming). See also WP 586.

[13] WP 1.

[14] WP 585. Although Nietzsche alternates between describing life-denial as 1) an (implicit or explicit) evaluative stance which denigrates this-worldly existence and 2) a psycho-physiological condition, as we will see directly below, it is important to recognize that the negative evaluations involved in a life-denying stance will necessarily have their basis in one's psycho-physiological constitution.

[15] I refer to this as "European nihilism" to refer to this belief system, as Nietzsche does, but the belief system need not be limited to continental Europe.

life.[16] Importantly, it is often life-denying judgments of the type mentioned above — negative evaluations (either explicit or implicit) of life and this-worldly existence — that generate such hostile conditions. These hostile conditions serve to weaken once-strong drives and complexes of drives.[17] We see this in Nietzsche's notes, where he claims that it is "The nihilistic instinct [*Der nihilistische Instinkt*] [which] says no; its mildest claim is that it would be better not to exist than to exist; that the will to nothingness has more value than the will to life; its more severe manifestation arises when nothingness is of the most supreme desirability [and] this life, as its opposite… becomes objectionable."[18] In this sense, then, life-denial is also a condition of the drives and affects.

In *On the Genealogy of Morality,* Nietzsche calls the nihilistic instincts which cause man to deny life and himself a "great danger to mankind" and notes that nihilism marks "the beginning of the end, standstill, mankind looking back wearily, turning its will *against life*."[19] In *On the Genealogy of Morality,* life-denial is the "will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life."[20] In *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche describes it as the "degenerate instinct that turns against against life with subterranean vindictiveness [*den entartenden Instinkt, der sich gegen das Leben mit unterirdischer Rachsucht wende*t]."[21] This echoes his description of the men of *ressentiment* from the *Genealogy* as "worm-eaten physiological casualties [*diese physiologisch Verunglückten und Wurmstichigen*]" which serve as "a whole

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[16] What Nietzsche calls "ascending" life, or life as will to power. More on this later.
[17] As Nietzsche notes in the *Genealogy,* the genius of the life-denial of slave morality is that this exerts a covert weakening influence on strong life, raising the status of the weak in comparison.
[18] KSA 13:13 [7].
[19] GM, Preface, 5.
[20] GM III:28.
[21] EH, "The Birth of Tragedy," 2.

shivering soil of subterranean revenge" [*ein ganzes zitterndes Erdreich unterirdischer Rache*].[22]

This degenerate instinct or "instinct of decadence" characterizes those pessimistic individuals who suffer from a reduction of life [*die an der Verarmung des Lebens Leidenden*], those poor in life [*Lebensärmste*].[23] Nietzsche contrasts these individuals with "those richest in vitality" [*der Reichste an Lebensfülle*].[24] As an example of those suffering from such a reduction in life, Nietzsche cites the skeptics; he describes their "physiological condition" [*physiologischen Beschaffenheit*] as "weak nerves and ill health" [*Nervenschwäche und Kränklichkeit*].[25] This is the paralysis of the will [*Willenslähmung*] and the "will to the actual, violent negation of life" [*einem Willen zur wirklichen thätlichen Verneinung des Lebens*] which Nietzsche associates with the nihilism of the skeptics in *Beyond Good and Evil*.[26] Affective nihilism is characterized by these psycho-physiological kinds of life-denial.

As a drive-based illness of the will [*Die Krankheit des Willens*], affective nihilism is that "European illness" [*der europäischen Krankheit*] diagnosed by Nietzsche. We see Nietzsche propose this in his notes, when he asks whether nihilism is not "before all physiological [*Vor allem physiologisch?*]" and asserts that the "unhealthiest man in Europe (at all levels) is at the ground of this nihilism" [*Die ungesundeste Art Mensch in Europa (in allen Ständen) ist der Boden dieses Nihilismus*]."[27] While European nihilism

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[22] GM III:14. Translation of the latter mine.
[23] EH, "The Birth of Tragedy," 2.
[24] GS 370. Nietzsche characterizes nihilism as the most extreme version of pessimism (WP 112); both nihilism and pessimism involve a life-denial.
[25] BGE 280.
[26] Ibid.
[27] KSA 12: 5 [71].

as an historical phenomenon involves a series of life-denying beliefs, it originates in this affective nihilism. This affective nihilism is fundamentally a bodily phenomenon, situated in the drives and affects.

The relationship between affective nihilism and European nihilism, however, is more complicated than this. On Nietzsche's picture, European nihilism (as a series of beliefs in meaninglessness) originates from out of affective nihilism (as a psycho-physiological condition of will weakness). Yet insofar as the development of nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value alleviated affective nihilism, their collapse in the moment of European nihilism leads one back into affective nihilism.

On my account, the negative, life-denying evaluations involved in European nihilism characterize both 1) the nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value ascribed to by European culture when Nietzsche is writing and 2) a belief in a total lack of meaning which results as nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value collapse. In the first case, the negative evaluation of life is implicit, insofar as what is positively, explicitly valued is some version of truth, purpose, or value which does not exist *in reality*. In the case of these otherworldly focuses, one's drives turn towards aims and purposes which allow them to continue baseline activity but stultify life as growth and development (as will to power). In the second case, the negative evaluation of life is explicit. It is this explicit, conscious belief in the complete worthlessness of existence that plunges one back into the affective nihilism from out of which nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value originated. This explicit belief in the worthlessness of existence leads to the weakening or inhibition of the drives' activity. In either case, however, the negative, nihilistic evaluations of life — manifest either in implicitly life-denying

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conceptions of meaning or in explicitly life-denying beliefs — are rooted in the workings

of the drives and affects, and thus in one's psycho-physiological constitution.

On my account, the overcoming of nihilism in general requires one to first

overcome European nihilism as an historically developed series of beliefs which leave

humanity without value, purpose, or truth. Only when we come to recognize immanent

foundations for truth (as perspectival), value (as valuing drives and perspectives), and

purpose (as driven life) may we start to regain a sense of vitality which affirms the world

as it is. In *Dawn,* Nietzsche claims that in order to overcome nihilism, Europe must "learn

to *think differently* — in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: to *feel*

differently."[28] While overcoming European nihilism requires a shift in beliefs,

overcoming nihilism as an affective illness requires a transformation of the felt weariness

of nihilism into a strength and vitality which enables one to affirm this life and this

world.

1.2 An Abbreviated History of Nihilism

In unpublished reflections on the nature of nihilism, Nietzsche specifies that nihilism is

"rooted" in "one particular interpretation, the Christian-moral [*christlich-moral<ischen>*]

one."[29] This picture, according to which there is an interpretation of the world

characteristic of Christianity and pejorative morality which dominates the cultural

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[28] D 103. Ken Gemes and Chris Janaway (2012) offer a nuanced take on life-affirmation as either reflective life-affirmation or naïve affirmation. They make the case that humanity at Nietzsche's time is capable of reflective affirmation but not of naïve affirmation; perhaps, they contend, a practice of reflective affirmation can lead once more to the naïve affirmation of the noble, powerful individuals of early humanity. Ken Gemes and Christopher Janaway, "Life-Denial versus Life-Affirmation: Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on Pessimism and Asceticism" in *A Companion to Schopenhauer.* Edited by Bart Vandenabeele. (Marden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 280-299.
[29] KSA 12: 2 [127].

landscape of Europe at the time of Nietzsche's life — and which is characterized by a sense of the meaninglessness, worthlessness, and undesirability of the world — provides us with our first glimpse into the cultural phenomenon which Nietzsche calls European nihilism, here and elsewhere. As Nietzsche's reflections demonstrate, this is a historical phenomenon and, as such, it is historically contingent; its development depends on certain sociocultural factors. Put simply, without the specific historical developments which lead to the birth and eventual predominance of Christian-moral ways of interpreting the world, nihilism *as the particular manifestation of European nihilism* [*der europäische Nihilismus*] that Nietzsche treats at such length in his work might have been avoided.

In the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* and elsewhere in his work, Nietzsche offers an account of the development of European nihilism and its historical conditions. According to Nietzsche, this phenomenon of nihilism arises when Europe becomes conscious of the implausibility of certain fundamental beliefs that have historically provided extraordinary value to that society. Since a society's fundamental beliefs serve as foundations for its systems of valuation (what that society finds "good" or "bad"), when these beliefs are undermined the society experiences a crisis of value. After this moment of crisis, the society is left without new values, and a general sense of the meaninglessness of existence and the worthlessness of the world permeates all areas of culture. This turns individuals against the world in which they live, leading them to deny the world.

Nietzsche's analysis of European nihilism tells a very specific story of the crisis that catalyzes it, beginning with Plato's theory of the Forms and continuing through the

emergence and expansion of Christianity in Europe. Plato's theory of the Forms proposes a transcendent world over and beyond the world of earthly experience. This theory claims that this transcendent world is the only world of value, and that the immanent world has value only insofar as it participates some way in the transcendent world. This transcendent world — the world of the Forms — manifests eternal perfection.

In short, the world of the Forms is the "true" and "best" world; the immanent world of earthly experience is inferior and gives rise to false and harmful beliefs and behaviors. In this world of Platonic Forms, one lives a meaningful and good life when one dedicates oneself to knowledge of the Forms, and knowledge of the Forms is a necessary prerequisite for the living of a good life. The world of the Forms, in this sense, is the "best" world. Furthermore, the immanent, sensible world of Becoming is a misleading shadow-world; it is only "real" insofar as it participates in the world of the Forms.[30] The world of the Forms — not the sensible world of earthly existence — functions as the sole source of knowledge for mankind. In this sense, Plato denies the reality of the world of Becoming. Thus, Plato's worldview is life-denying insofar as it both disvalues and denies the reality of the world of Becoming. (For Plato, this is the sensible realm of earthly existence.)

According to Nietzsche, European Christianity develops from out of Plato's theory of the Forms.[31] Christianity re-inscribes the Platonic divide between a superior, transcendent realm and an inferior, earthly realm which human beings must inhabit for a time. The goal of Christianity is to reach this transcendent heavenly realm; one does so

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[30] Plato, *Republic,* 509b-511e.
[31] BGE, Preface, BGE 191; GM III:24; TI, "True World"; TI, "What I Owe to the Ancients," 2; A 55.

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by living a meaningful and good life, which requires one to 1) acquire knowledge of good and evil (according to Christian standards) and 2) live according to a particular moral code. Christianity also adds an omnipotent and all-knowing creator-God to this picture; this transcendent God creates a purposeful universe and has a plan for each individual. The Christian claims that this picture of life is true and accurate; as such, he does not think it to be "anti-life" in any sense.

In Nietzsche's analysis of the problem of nihilism in Europe, the fundamental beliefs which European societies took for granted involved the existence and nature of an all-powerful and all-knowing Christian god, a transcendent and superior world (the heavenly realm) beyond the world of everyday experience (life on Earth), the inherent purposefulness of the universe and those in it, and the essence of good and evil. As scientific developments began to offer humanity explanations for things which they could previously only speculate about, and as rationalist philosophers such as René Descartes and Immanuel Kant began to emphasize mankind's extensive capacity for knowledge, the need for a transcendent deity to explain earthly phenomena and bless human beings with divine wisdom began to disappear. Eventually, according to Nietzsche's picture, Europe's belief in the Christian God becomes unnecessary and unbelievable.

The death of God as the unbelievability of the Judeo-Christian God in the wake of Enlightenment advancements has devastating consequences. According to Nietzsche, the disbelief in the Christian God which spreads through Europe convinces the modern, educated European that otherworldly aspirations are empty and hopes for a better realm beyond this world are futile. Individuals continue to adopt Christian standards of good and evil out of convention, but the foundations of these standards have been undermined

and the educated individual recognizes the insignificance and meaninglessness of moral action. The idea that there is a purpose to the universe or to human action is thrown into doubt. Since the notion of a meaningful life in Christian Europe was formulated in relation to some greater purpose of the universe beyond the individual and her individual life, the death of Christianity in Europe leads many to reject the possibility of a meaningful life. This leads man to despise his existence and to become sick of himself and the world to which he belongs. Just as hoping for transcendence leads the European Christian to denounce the immanent world of experience, so coping with the impossibility of transcendence after the collapse of Christianity (Nietzsche's famous "death of God") leads man to condemn the immanent world of existence. The former is anti-life insofar as it affirms transcendent, otherworldly existence as "real life" instead of this-worldly, earthly existence; the latter is anti-life insofar as it devalues this-worldly, earthly existence after transcendent sources of value are pulled out of the world (after all, these transcendent sources were understood as the *only sources* of value by pre-Enlightenment Europe). Nietzsche offers a rather concise summary of the latter phenomenon in *Beyond Good and Evil,* where he describes nihilism as a cultural (and, eventually, individual) attitude of "contempt for that existence which is knowable by us" which results from Europe's realization that "the world is not worth what we thought it was."[32] Insofar as humanity historically found justification and value for its existence in transcendent sources of value, the death of God leaves humanity in a devalued world; humanity is left with scorn for this apparently meaningless world.

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[32] BGE 346.

For Nietzsche, European nihilism results from a devaluation of the highest values. When the Christian-moral longing for other possible worlds and for transcendental values which justify this-worldly human existence is undermined, European humanity is thrown into a crisis of meaning. Nietzsche describes nihilism in his notes as the conviction that our highest values cannot be defended or justified, "plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or in-itself of things that might be divine."[33] This latter realization leads us to reject the Christian-moral hypothesis [*christliche Moral-Hypothese*] which "granted man an absolute value, as opposed to his smallness and accidental occurrence in the flux of becoming and passing away," "posited that man had knowledge of absolute values," and prevented man from "taking sides against life [and] despairing of knowledge."[34] As European nihilism, nihilism is 1) a crisis of knowledge and our expectations for absolute, objective knowledge of our world, 2) a crisis of meaning and purpose, and 3) a crisis of value. Insofar as Judeo-Christianity is invented by the ascetic priest out of his own powerlessness as a proposed treatment to justify the existence of the weak and suffering, this European nihilism is borne from out of affective nihilism: a physiological life-denial and illness of the instincts and affects which gives rise to harmful, life-denying behaviors and beliefs.[35]

European nihilism results when post-Enlightenment Europe witnesses the collapse of those absolute, otherworldly values in which its understanding of the world was fundamentally rooted, and it continues because of humanity's continued inability to honestly confront and affirm this-worldly existence — and discover immanent values —

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[33] WP 3.
[34] KSA 12: 5 [71].
[35] GM I.7.

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in the face of this collapse. In large part, European nihilism as a cultural phenomenon results when human beings realize the contingency of their most fundamental beliefs about the world: the contingency of their belief in truth and drive towards knowledge, the contingency of their belief in some ultimate *telos* or purpose of the universe*,* and the contingency of traditional moral systems in the West. This leads humanity back into an affective nihilism, in which humanity becomes weary of the world and desires revenge against this world.

Humanity — once so sure of a necessary, absolute sources of meaning, value, and truth and justification for existence — despairs of this contingency. All human pursuits of knowledge and truth presupposed the existence of objective, non-contingent truth (first Platonic truth, then scientific truth, initially thought to be non-contingent) which Nietzsche believes European culture must come to reject (ironically, he comes to this realization by way of his own will to truth as an "impulse to knowledge" or "knowledge drive").[36] The religious, philosophical, and scientific systems of thought which dominate European culture are founded on a picture according to which the universe unfolds along a specific trajectory, progressing towards some ultimate goal; yet human truthfulness reveals no such trajectory and no such thing as progress. Various systems of morality purport to represent universal and timeless values, but as we look back on society, we notice that these values evolved out of a noxious combination of weakness and cleverness: in fact, these values were invented by man and grew out of contingent

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[36] BGE 6. It is worth noting how science manifests this impulse, namely that "in the case of scholars, in the case of really scientific men, it may be otherwise--"better," if you will; there there may really be such a thing as an "impulse to knowledge," some kind of small, independent clock-work, which, when well wound up, works away industriously to that end, WITHOUT the rest of the scholarly impulses taking any material part therein."

historical circumstances. European culture at the time of Nietzsche locates the value of everyday life and human purpose in humanity's pursuits of truth, of progress, and of morally correct action. Once the contingency of these various values is revealed, humanity's self-understanding is seriously compromised.

As these various schemas of truth, meaning, and value collapse, human beings (who have by this point developed a certain psychological need for teleology) struggle to locate other phenomena which enable us to understand ourselves as valuable, identify values, and live accordingly. The transcendental unifying subject in philosophy and objective, scientific truth in science are two examples of these. Since the original problem of religion and morality is that it prioritizes and values the otherworldly (otherworldly goals, aspirations, purposes) over the this-worldly (immanent life and the world of experience), this is hardly a solution. Instead, it serves to defer nihilism's affective manifestations and merely manifests a new expression of the same fundamentally dishonest, deluded, harmful, *yet entirely human* tendency to find ourselves the centers of our universe and to search for value or meaning in our lives wherever possible. The problem with our ways of doing this after Judeo-Christian (and Buddhist) religious influences is that our valuations — which become unknowingly put in the service of the preservation of declining life — deny and desecrate life, vitality, and immanence: in short, all of the conditions of our existence.

According to Nietzsche, the history of man's relation to meaning is a history of misunderstandings which have yet to be identified and addressed in a deep way. In the sections that follow, I will explain these various misunderstandings and elaborate on the different types of nihilism which spring forth from them.

1.3 Manifestations of Nihilism in European Culture

Nietzsche frequently introduces the concept of nihilism [*Nihilismus*], as the historical denigration of earthly existence, in two contexts which make its structure clear: in the denial of a world of flux (the world of becoming) in favor of a world of stability (the world of being) and in the opposition instituted by philosophers, religious figures, and others between a "true world" and the (merely) apparent world. By examining these two contexts, the reader is better able to understand the structure of nihilism.

In his work, Nietzsche persistently insists that the world is "not being, but becoming." According to Nietzsche, the Platonic picture of existence which understands real entities and ideas as fixed or stable falsifies the world as it actually "is": continually in flux, continually transforming. In *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche notes that "all [philosophers] believe, desperately even, in what *is*."[37] By Nietzsche's lights, however, this stubborn belief in being and substance is a mere illusion and mistake of interpretation: it is only our rational interpretation and simplification of empirical experience which gives the appearance of permanence, stability, and *being*. Indeed, "What we *make* of [the senses'] testimony is what first introduces the lie… of unity, of thinghood, of substance, of duration… 'Reason' is what causes us to falsify the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses display becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie."[38] Differently put, "precisely insofar as the prejudice of reason forces us to posit unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being, we see ourselves… compelled into error."[39] Nietzsche makes a similar point in his 1887 notes, where he

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[37] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 1.
[38] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 2.
[39] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 5.

remarks that "in a world of becoming, 'reality' is always only a simplification for practical ends, or a deception through the coarseness of organs, or a variation in the tempo of becoming."[40] He then goes on to tie this simplification and deception with nihilism and world-denial: "Logical world-denial and nihilation follow from the fact that we have to oppose non-being with being and that the concept 'becoming' is denied."[41] Over time, humanity has come to value the stability of being over becoming; becoming, as being's opposite, is implicitly devalued on this picture. On Nietzsche's view, however, the world is a world of becoming; the denial of becoming, then, is a denial and denigration of this world and this-worldly existence.

In Plato's invention of a world of being which transcends the world of experience or "becoming," he betrays his prejudice in favor of being by assigning the world of being a higher value and presenting it as a "true" and nobler world. This prejudice is passed along to from philosopher to philosopher in the West and taken up by Christianity; according to Nietzsche's analysis in *Twilight of the Idols,* we see this same prejudice in Kant's distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms.[42] In European religions and philosophy, a "condemnation of and discontent with becoming" proceed "from the values attributed to being… after such a world of being had first been invented."[43] Nonetheless, when Nietzsche writes, that nihilistic value system which assigns being a positive value (while assigning becoming and flux a negative value) is "on the point of changing suddenly into nihilism — into the belief in an absolute

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[40] WP 580.
[41] Ibid.
[42] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 6.
[43] WP 617.

worthlessness, i.e., meaninglessness."[44] When Nietzsche is writing, humanity understands the world as valuable only insofar as it is a manifestation of being. Once this conception of the world as pure being becomes unbelievable — as humanity comes to realize both the contingent origin *and falsity* of this interpretation — the world appears to be emptied of value and meaning, and nihilism follows.

The denial of the world of becoming and change — which, as Nietzsche makes clear, is the only world there is — in favor of some higher world of being and stability results in a nihilistic conception of the world.[45] Humanity's yearning for permanence and aversion to flux is life-denying and nihilistic because it causes human beings to feel as though the world as it actually is — in flux — is of little to no value in comparison with the unchanging world that philosophers and religious figures supposed it to be. In reality, the world that human beings occupy is constantly in flux; it is composed only of "dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta [and] their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta."[46] If we deny and condemn this flux, we deny and condemn this world and this life. A non-nihilistic response instead would affirm this world and this life as it is: as a world of ceaseless becoming.

The opposition drawn by Plato between a world of becoming and a world of being relates closely to the opposition which philosophers such as Plato and Kant draw between a "true" world and a merely apparent world. In the former case, nihilism manifests itself as a denial of becoming; in the latter, it can manifest either in a belief and hope for an

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[44] Ibid. Here, I count on a difference between a "nihilistic conception" and "nihilism" proper, as European nihilism. More on this below. Note also that Nietzsche calls this value system "contradictory to life," since life is becoming.
[45] Again, there is a difference between a nihilistic conception of the world and nihilism proper. European nihilism follows when nihilistic conceptions collapse.
[46] WP 635.

actually "true" world or a condemnation of the world humans occupy as merely apparent.

Still, there is an important difference here. While Nietzsche wants to affirm the world as

becoming and completely discard the world of being as a mere invention, he wants to

undermine the false opposition between a "true" and an "apparent" world and discard

both concepts. By Nietzsche's lights, the true world is a myth: "Man projects his drive to

truth, his 'goal' in a certain sense, outside himself as a world that has being, as a

metaphysical world, as a 'thing in itself,' as a world already in existence. His needs as

creator invent the world upon which he works, anticipate it; this anticipation (this 'belief'

in truth) is his support."[47] Yet insofar as the possibility of a merely apparent world hinges

on the existence of a "true" world, the merely apparent world is a myth as well.

Perhaps the most succinct summary of the progression of nihilism in Nietzsche is

in "How the 'True World' Became a Fiction."[48] In this section of *Twilight of the Idols,*

Nietzsche recounts the philosophical invention of the distinction between a true and

merely apparent world and its conceptual progress through developments in European

philosophy and religious interpretation. Nietzsche here recounts the development of an

idea; in the following section, I will elaborate on the development of nihilism as an

historical phenomenon. On my account, the first five stages represent stages in the

development of what Nietzsche calls European nihilism [*der europäische Nihilismus*],

while the last stage represents a stage beyond European nihilism.

> 1. The true world — attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives
> in it, he is it. (The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and
> persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, "I, Plato, am the truth.")

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[47] WP 552.
[48] TI, "How the True World Became a Fiction."

2. The true world — unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents"). (Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible — it becomes female, it becomes Christian.)

3. The true world — unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it — a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.)

4. The true world — unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also unknown. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us? (Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cockcrow of positivism.)

5. The "true" world — an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating — an idea which has become useless and superfluous — consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it! (Bright day; breakfast; return of bon sens and cheerfulness; Plato's embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

6. The true world — we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one*. (Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)[49]

The opposition between the true world and the apparent world is invented in the first step by Plato; according to this picture, the true world can be known and requires the development of knowledge and virtue. This "true world" is Plato's intelligible realm: the realm of the Forms. In the second step, the true world is given a Christian interpretation. The "true world" here is heaven, a divine afterlife promised either to those who live virtuous, Christian lives or to those who profess faith in the Christian God. Kant's permutation of this Platonic/Christian ideal can be found in the third step: the "true world" as the noumenal realm. Although human reason can not attain knowledge of this

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[49] Ibid.

realm, it provides the largely Christian population of Europe with some measure of comfort (what Nietzsche elsewhere calls "metaphysical consolation") as they attempt to square their faith with the values and discoveries of the Enlightenment.

In essence, Nietzsche claims, Kant's Enlightenment response to skepticism *a la* David Hume results in metaphysics of transcendence which secularizes Platonism and Christianity. The fourth step represents the post-Enlightenment advancement of positivism and scientific thought; European culture at this stage understands science as the only means to attaining real knowledge. According to this paradigm, only that which can be attained by the means of reason and scientific investigation is certain; since we cannot attain knowledge of some "true world" separate from the world of empirical experience, we cannot be certain of any such world. Since we cannot be certain of this world, we ought not to feel comforted, redeemed, or obligated by any such world. This stage is the first moment of nihilism: Here one sees the first glimmers of a skepticism which supposes that ideal of the "true world" might be mere human invention. If it were mere invention, then recommendations for human action could not be derived from this world; in such a case, those in this cultural moment recognize, the ideal of a "true world" could collapse.

Nietzsche is writing during a transitional period between the fourth and the fifth step: during the time of the actual collapse of the "true world," the death of God. Scientifically-minded, educated men at this stage find no evidence of a "true world"; they take this as evidence against a "true world" and laugh at the old ideal as an invention, a comfort, and an embarrassment. The cultural moment represented by the fifth step is the moment in which European nihilism proper emerges from out of the collapse of a

nihilistic conception of the world: any notion of a true world is widely recognized as a mere construct which, due to its falseness, must be abolished.[50] Any metaphysics of transcendence must be rejected and the notion of a "true world" loses its supreme value. This is the moment of European nihilism, in which humanity experiences a complete loss of value and meaning.

In "'Reason' in Philosophy" from *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche notes that when one "[invents] fables about a world 'other' than this one," one "[avenges oneself] against life with a phantasmagoria of 'another,' a 'better' life."[51] Given both modern science's straightforward interest in acknowledging and exploring *this* world and its a rejection of the "true world" as a false construct and mere human invention, one might think modern science facilitates a movement away from world- and life-denying practices and instincts. In fact, according to Nietzsche in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality,* this is hardly the case. In scientific assumptions of 1) completely objective knowledge, 2) the effectiveness of human reason for coming to know **objective truths** about the universe, and 3) the comprehensibility of reality, Nietzsche locates a lingering wish and hope for a "true" world apart from the world we occupy. We see this, too, in Book Five of *The Gay Science:*

> those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than the world of life, nature, and history; and insofar as they affirm this "other-world" — look, must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, *our* world? — But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests — that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith

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[50] More on this later.
[51] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 6.

that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of
Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.[52]

A nihilistic conception of the world, as both the source of previous ideals and the

celebration and hope for some higher world in the face of the collapse of these ideals, is

preserved in the assumptions of modern science. Remember Nietzsche's claim that the

nihilist "judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be."[53] Given the impossibility of

objective knowledge, the ineffectiveness of human rationality (both in general and for

accessing "objective" truths), and the incomprehensibility of the universe, both scientific

inquiry and the world it seeks are nihilistic. An objective and objectively ascertainable

world is simply a post-Enlightenment version of the "true world" — a world that does not

exist — and belief in this world still requires the faith of previous religious traditions. It

is, as Nietzsche puts it, "the faith with which so many materialistic natural-scientists rest

content nowadays, the faith in a world which is supposed to have its equivalent and

measure in human thinking and human valuations, a 'world of truth' at which we might

be able ultimately to arrive with the help of our insignificant, four-cornered human

reason!"[54] In fact, the world human beings occupy is known differently to different

individuals depending on the various perspectives occupied by the various drives of

which they are composed.[55] Insofar as the science insists on the existence of a "true

world" known only through scientific inquiry, the scientist is a nihilist who denies both

the perspectival nature of knowledge and the world of becoming in all of its variety and

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[52] GS 344.
[53] WP 585.
[54] GS 373.
[55] GM III:13. More on this later.

richness.[56] In short, the scientist degrades existence and "divest[s] existence of its rich ambiguity [*seines vieldeutigen Charakters*]."[57] The subtle deception of modern scientific nihilism makes this version of nihilism all the more dangerous, insofar as it is all the more difficult to recognize for what it is.

As noted above, Nietzsche finds himself in the midst of this new incarnation of nihilism; the post-Enlightenment culture he belongs to ascribes a high value to scientific inquiry and seems to wholeheartedly accept the promise of science and human reason. This is why readers can understand Nietzsche as writing between the fourth and fifth steps of the excerpt above. Science both exposes the improbability of the "true world" previously conceived and presents a new version of this ideal. The scientist faces up to the collapse of the "true world" previously conceived as an obligating or redeeming ideal (step four); he also understand the superfluity of the "true world" as its refutation (step five). Yet the model of the world and knowledge presented by science, as another instantiation of a "true world," fails to provide post-Enlightenment Europe with a non-nihilistic alternative to the old conception. In other words, the crucial work of the fifth step in Nietzsche's progression - the abolition of the "true world" - is yet to come.

In the sixth step of the progression, at some future time beyond the cultural moment occupied by Nietzsche, both explicit and implicit beliefs in any "true world" above and beyond the world of human existence are rejected. With this rejection comes the rejection of any merely apparent sector of reality. When European culture at large comes to 1) recognize the nihilism inherent in scientific inquiry and reductive scientific pictures of the world and 2) understands and affirms this world as a world of becoming,

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[56] See section on epistemological nihilism below for more.
[57] GS 373.

force, interpretation, and perspective, the distinction between a "true" and "apparent" world will be undermined. Nietzsche's solution to nihilism requires this, and we can see Nietzsche as the first exemplar of this affirmation. Yet this must become a more widespread affirmation in order to effect cultural change; it is only this "end of the longest error" which brings about the "high point of humanity."[58]

1.4. Kinds of Nihilism

Now that we have understood the relationships between life-denial and nihilism, as well as a variety of examples cited by Nietzsche as historical manifestations of nihilism, we must investigate a number of different kinds of nihilism which are present in Nietzsche's thought. In his 1887/1888 notes, compiled into the *Will to Power* anthology, Nietzsche offers a detailed account of nihilism according to which nihilism results from three different ways of interpreting of the world and the eventual loss of faith in, and devaluation of, these three categories.[59] Nietzsche explains: "the belief in the categories of reason [*die Vernunft-Kategorien*] is the cause of nihilism [*die Ursache des Nihilismus*] — we have measured the value of the world by these categories, which refer only to a purely fictitious world [*wir haben den Werth der Welt an Kategorien gemessen, welche sich auf eine rein fingirte Welt beziehen*]."[60]

The concepts which Nietzsche names here are purpose [*Zweck*], unity [*Einheit*], and truth [*Wahrheit*]. While the concept of purpose [*Zweck*] insists on some higher purpose or *telos* towards which the world aims, the concept of truth invents a world of

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[58] TI, "True World."
[59] KSA 13: 11 [99].
[60] Ibid.

objective truth beyond the transitive and chaotic world of earthly existence.[61] The

concept of unity [*Einheit*], on the other hand, ascribes an underlying moral unity or

system to the world of earthly existence.[62] As one comes to understand that there is no

"infinitely valuable whole" [*unendlich werthvolles Ganzes*] which works through him,

he is no longer able to believe in his own value. All of these lead to nihilism as a

psychological condition [*als psychologicher Zustand*]; Nietzsche describes this later as

the "feeling of valuelessness" [*Das Gefühl der Werthlosigkeit*] which results from the

collapse of these dominant concepts and the interpretation of the world of earthly

existence according to these concepts.[63]

In other words, over the course of history, humanity develops notions of

truthfulness, purposefulness, and absolute value which it projects onto the world.

Contemporary humanity forgets the origin of these human inventions, and it believes that

truth, purpose, and morality actually inhere in the world of earthly existence separate

from the perspectives of the drives and affects which are responsible for their inception.[64]

Nihilism as a cultural phenomenon, or European nihilism [*europäische Nihilismus*],

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[61] Lawrence Hatab characterizes this as *global* purpose, rather than transcendent purpose (Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 62.) What is perhaps most important is that nihilistic conceptions of purposiveness on Nietzsche's view project a single purpose and end goal, the aim of which all of life is to achieve. A much more extensive discussion is to follow in the chapter on a nihilism of purposelessness.

[62] As to the importance of nihilism as a problem of values, remember also Nietzsche claim that nihilism results when "the highest values devalue themselves" (WP 2).

[63] KSA 13: 11 [99]. It is important to remember here that European nihilism *leads back* into the affective nihilism which made it possible in the first place. European nihilism's leading to affective nihilism is essentially a "leading back" or a *return* to affective nihilism as a previous condition.

[64] It is worth noting that these concepts originate from an affective nihilism. Nihilism as an widespread affective condition in Nietzsche results from the moment of contemporary nihilism [as a European phenomenon], but the nihilistic conceptions of purpose, truth, and value - the collapse of which brings about a new nihilism - were ultimately rooted in nihilistic affects.

arises when contemporary culture comes to realize that the world is not inherently

truthful, purposeful, or moral. This crisis of meaning results because, over time, humanity

has acquired a need for certain kinds of truth, purpose, and value.[65] Once they realize that

these needs are not — and cannot — be met by the world they belong to, they rebuke this

world.

Yet nihilism in Nietzsche also has a psycho-physiological component: that which

I will call, after Gemes and Richardson, affective nihilism.[66] As Nietzsche suggests here,

affective nihilism as a physiological condition manifests in part in a feeling of

valuelessness and results from the human projection of these categories of reason onto

the world and their subsequent implausibility. Yet, importantly, is also this affective

nihilism which motivates the development of nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and

value which become unbelievable in Nietzsche's time (in the wake of scientific

developments and the primary role for human reason post-Enlightenment).[67]

As an attempt to present a comprehensive account of nihilism in Nietzsche which

treats both nihilism as both an historical and psycho-physiological condition, my

interpretation is unique. Nietzsche characterizes the "problem of nihilism" as a cultural

and historical occurrence (this version of nihilism is Nietzsche's European nihilism

which "stands at the door" [*steht auf den Tur*]), but he also refers with regularity to an

affective condition characteristic of nihilism, a "world-weariness" or "weakness of will"

rooted in one's physiology which Müller-Lauter, Gemes, and Richardson all recognize,

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[65] See below for more details.

[66] Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming. Also: Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation
of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster," 459-71.

[67] This will be argued more extensively in the following chapter.

yet do not examine at sufficient length.[68] Nietzsche's account of this affective version of nihilism is just as important as his account of the former, more popular understanding of nihilism as a cultural phenomenon. This becomes especially evident as we see the ways in which Nietzsche relates these two basic senses of nihilism.

On my account, the problem of European nihilism in Nietzsche results from the collapse of particular widespread conceptions of purpose, truth, and value. These nihilistic conceptions of purpose, truth, and value were invented by early humanity to save man; with them, "man had saved himself, he had found a meaning for himself."[69] Rather than remaining suffering, "diseased" animals lost in a "tremendous void" of meaning, humankind found a way to justify its suffering and a source of meaning. This development of these nihilistic conceptions of purpose, truth, and value as cultural paradigms of meaning is an expression of the drives and affects of weak and suffering individuals. Through such nihilistic conceptions preclude these drives from growing in activity, it enables them *preserve* their weak activity.

Although these nihilistic conceptions are originally borne as expressions of a particular set of affects and drives, the ascetic ideal (as it comes to be legislated generally by the ascetic priest) "permits no other interpretation, no other goal; it rejects, denies, affirms, and sanctions solely from the point of view of *its* interpretation."[70] These nihilistic interpretations of truth, value, and purpose, then, present themselves as the *only* interpretations; it is a testament both to the power and cleverness of the priest and to the

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[68] Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions,* 41, 64. Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster." Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.
[69] GM III:28.
[70] GM III.28.

prevalence of weak, life-denying drives and affects that these nihilistic interpretations come to dominate European culture.[71] This is the first stage of the problem of European nihilism.

The second stage of European nihilism is the collapse of these interpretations, as the will to truth uncovers their implausibility and, ultimately, their falsity: as I explained earlier (and will include more detail on below), these nihilistic conceptions become unbelievable after the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment developments of science and reason.[72] At the point in time during which Nietzsche is writing, humanity is once again left without a justification for itself and its suffering. Humanity acquires a new set of beliefs about truth, purpose, and value: they do not exist. Since humanity's previous belief in truth, purpose, and value allowed them to find meaning in the world, their disbelief in these leads them now to the conclusion that life is meaningless. Furthermore, since the justification for their weak drives and ineffective wills (which also allowed them to continue a baseline level of willing and a sense of engagement in the world) has been removed, they are left once again with weak and ineffective wills, with suffering "in vain." This profound moment of meaninglessness which results from the collapse of earlier paradigms of meaning is emblematic of European nihilism after the death of God.

This essential moment of nihilism shares similarities with Reginster's nihilism of despair, which results when humanity acquires the "conviction that [our highest values] cannot be realized."[73] Reginster characterizes nihilism as "an ethical claim about the

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[71] GM III.13-15, 18.
[72] More on this in the section on epistemological nihilism below.
[73] WP 701.

world, and our existence in it: 'it would be better if the world did not exist.'"[74] Although

the European nihilist holds certain beliefs about the world, and might make ethical claims

about this world, nihilism itself does not wholly consist in the ethical content of claims

about the world and earthly existence. What makes this moment of European nihilism

properly nihilistic is not the content of any claim, but the response — a life-denying,

negative evaluation of life which facilitates the stagnation of weak life and a

disengagement from the world — to the absence of meaning and justification for human

existence in light of the dearth of purpose, truth, and value.[75] As we see in Nietzsche's

notes from 1888, the nihilistic instinct first says no to life [*Der nihilistische Instinkt sagt*

Nein]. From out of this nay-saying affective condition, the nihilist makes certain claims

about the world: her "mildest claim [*mildeste Behauptung*] is that it would be better not

to exist than to exist; that the will to nothingness has more value than the will to life; [her

nihilism becomes] most severe when nothingness is of the most supreme desirability

[and] this life, as its opposite, is absolutely valueless [and] becomes objectionable."[76]

European nihilism, then, results from mankind's interpretations of the world as

aim-driven, absolutely valuable, and true. These interpretations arose from out of the

weak drives and life-denying affects of humanity as a means of facilitating the continued

activity of these drives: they enabled such weakened drives to continue willing, even

though this willing aimed at goals inconsistent with the drives' *growth* in activity (thus

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[74] Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, 28.
[75] This is not to say that Nietzsche eschews any belief in purposiveness, truthfulness, and value; we will see that his account of the drives as will to power serve as resources for his readers to understand immanent purposiveness, perspectival truth, and perspectival valuation. This is the trick to avoiding nihilism, on my interpretation of Nietzsche.
[76] KSA: 13: 17 [7].

remaining anti-life insofar as life is will to power).[77] Since these interpretations are

fundamentally life-denying, however, they serve as *nihilistic* conceptions of purpose,

value, and truth.

Yet such nihilistic interpretations "have been falsely projected into the essence of

things." Nietzsche elaborates on this in his notes:

> All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world
> estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore
> devaluated the world — all these values are, psychologically considered, the
> results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human
> constructs of domination — and they have been falsely projected into the essence
> of things. What we find here is still the hyperbolic naiveté of man: positing
> himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things.[78]

As we will see in the following chapter, humanity's recognition of the implausibility of

these nihilistic conceptions leads to the modern European's denigration and

disparagement of this world. If the world is not valuable in the way humanity believed it

to be for much of human history, European culture assumes, then it must not be valuable

at all. This is what Nietzsche refers to when he claims that nihilism results when "[the]

highest values devalue themselves."[79]

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[77] More details on these developments are forthcoming in the second chapter, in discussions of
the specific kinds of nihilism comprising European nihilism. Müller-Lauter hints at this when he
claims that "it can be said that the birth of the moral man marks the beginning of Western
nihilism." My more detailed interpretation of this phenomenon shows that the affective nihilism
resulting from humanity's integration into societies leads to European nihilism and underlies
nihilistic interpretations of purpose, value, and truth.

[78] KSA 13:11[99]/WP 12, Kaufmann's translation. The original German reads: "…*alle Werthe,
mit denen wir bis jetzt die Welt zuerst uns schatzbar Zu machen gesucht haben und endlich
ebendamit entwerthethaben, als sie sich als unanlegbar erwiesen — alle diese Werthe sind,
psychologisch nachgerechnet, Resultate bestimmter Perspektiven der Niitzlichkeit zur
Aufrechterhaltung und Steigerung menschlicher Herrschafts-Gebilde: und nur falschlich projicirt
in das Wesen der Dinge. Es ist immer noch die hyperbolische Naivetat des Menschen, sich selbst
als Sinn und WerthmaB der Dinge. . .*"

[79] WP 2.

Below, we will examine three different kinds of European nihilism which parallel the three different categories of reason and their interpretations of existence: epistemological nihilism, ethical nihilism, and a nihilism of purposelessness. Although I distinguish these types of nihilism by the beliefs they express, these three different kinds of nihilism are rooted in the development of particular nihilistic conceptions of human existence, which were developed as a means for treating affective nihilism. Insofar as the collapse of these nihilistic conceptions leaves modern man without meaning, they leave man without justification for his weak will and ineffective drives, which causes man to suffer, disengage from the world of which he is a part, and deny life. The cognitive components of nihilism that I discuss — in this case, those nihilistic beliefs about the nature of purpose, truth, and value which collapse under the scrutiny of the will to truth — are nihilistic insofar as they involve a negative, life-denying evaluation of life which denigrates this-worldly existence and leads to a stagnation of life as the will to power.

A nihilism of purposelessness results when an individual or culture comes to believe that there is no higher purpose or *telos* at which the world aims.[80] According to Nietzsche's analysis, a nihilism of purposelessness results when:

> we have sought a "meaning" in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long waste of strength, the agony of the "in vain," insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and to regain composure — being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had deceived oneself all too long. — 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

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[80] Hatab's distinction between global and local purposes in *Nietzsche's Life Sentence,* proves especially helpful for analyzing this version of nihilism. As Hatab points out, "Nietzsche endorses the creation of *local* forms of purpose while denying any *global* purpose in existence" (2005 61-2).

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some meaning. What all these notions have in common is that something is to be achieved through the process — and now one realizes that becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing.— Thus, disappointment regarding an alleged aim of becoming as a cause of nihilism: whether regarding a specific aim or, universalized, the realization that all previous hypotheses about aims that concern the whole "evolution" are inadequate (man no longer the collaborator, let alone the center, of becoming).[81]

Any interpretation of the world which posits a higher *telos* and claims that earthly existence advances towards this *telos* falsifies earthly existence as a world of becoming which unfolds without an end goal in sight. As a culture comes to recognize this truth of becoming, this telic conception of the universe is undermined.

Epistemological nihilism results when an individual or culture comes to believe that there is no truth. Although Enlightenment Europe adopts the belief that the universe is systematic and unified and that only man, in virtue of his reason, has access to such objective truths about the universe (or "absolute knowledge" about the universe), in the moment of epistemological nihilism he realizes that this is a misunderstanding.[82] Nietzsche describes how this kind of nihilism results:

> Given these two insights, that becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a true world. But as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a true world.[83]

Mankind's belief in a "true world" about which humanity may come to know objective truths through the use of his reason is epitomized in Nietzsche's time by mechanistic and scientistic thinking. Yet eventually, Nietzsche believes, scientists will discover that this

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[81] WP 12.
[82] BGE 16
[83] WP 12.

world of objective truth is not a "real" world, but a human fabrication, invented out of psychological need.

Ethical nihilism results when an individual or culture comes to believe that there is no value to the world. The ethical nihilist believes that there is no such thing as real, absolute value in the world (this meta-ethical claim characterizes nihilism as value privation):

> when one has posited a totality, a systematization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events, and a soul that longs to admire and revere has wallowed in the idea of some supreme form of domination and administration (— if the soul be that of a logician, complete consistency and real dialectic are quite sufficient to reconcile it to everything). Some sort of unity, some form of "monism" : this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a mode of the deity. —"The well-being of the universal demands the devotion of the individual"— but behold, there is no such universal! At bottom, man has lost the faith in his own value when no *infinitely valuable* whole works through him [emphasis mine].[84]

As this belief combines with his deeply rooted need for absolute value in the world, the ethical nihilist forms a normative judgment: the "world ought not to exist" (this ethical claim characterizes nihilism of worthlessness).[85] Ethical nihilism is perhaps the most familiar sense of nihilism in Nietzsche, though the other two kinds of nihilism play just as important of a role.

In ethical nihilism, the nihilist comes to believe that her world is valueless. Since she finds her value only as part of an inherently valuable world that works through her, this realization that the world is valueless results in the feeling of worthlessness [*Das*

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[84] WP 12.
[85] See below for a much more extensive discussion of this.

Gefühl der Werthlosigkeit].[86] On my reading, Nietzsche designates this as the "last" form

of nihilism because the affective experience of worthlessness follows the first three kinds

of nihilism: "The feeling of worthlessness is produced by the realization that the overall

character of human existence [*Gesammtcharakter des Daseins*] may not be interpreted

with the concepts "purpose," "unity," or "truth."'[87] The feeling characteristic of affective

nihilism — a weariness and depression resulting from the ineffectiveness of one's drives,

which disengages oneself from one's world — returns as the concepts with which

humanity has interpreted the world are pulled out and the world seems meaningless.

Nietzsche explains the relation among European nihilism and affective nihilism in the

following way:

> The feeling of valuelessness [is] reached with the realization that the overall
> character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of "aim,"
> the concept of "unity," or the concept of "truth." Existence has no goal or end; any
> comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of
> existence is not "true," is false. One simply lacks any reason for convincing
> oneself that there is a true world. Briefly: the categories "aim," "unity," "being"
> which we used to project some value into the world--we pull out again; so *the
> world looks valueless* [emphasis mine].[88]

Affective nihilism — as a psycho-physiological condition of the drives and affects which

leads to a negative evaluation of (and disengagement from) one's world, resulting in a

stagnation of life's growth — returns as the significance of European nihilism for one's

own situation comes to be understood.

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[86] KSA 13: 11[99]: "*Im Grunde hat der Mensch den Glauben an seinen Werth verloren, wenn durch ihn nicht ein unendlich werthvolles Ganzes wirkt.*"
[87] Ibid.
[88] WP 12.

Most broadly, nihilism as both an historical condition (as European nihilism) and as an affective condition (as a feeling of worthlessness) involves a denial of life.[89] While European nihilism involves the adoption of certain life-denying beliefs (as either implicitly or explicitly negative evaluations of this world and life), affective nihilism (as an inefficacy of the drives and a sickness of the will) is life-denying insofar as it involves the hindrance of life's growth and advancement. The collapse of certain nihilistic paradigms of meaning in the moment of European nihilism (objective truth, higher purpose, and absolute value developments) returns humanity to a state of affective nihilism in which the "nihilistic instinct" characteristic of affective nihilism — a *feeling* of worthlessness which "says no" and contends that "it would be better not to exist than to exist [*das Nicht-sein besser ist als Sein*]" — returns.[90]

Although he identifies nihilism as a particularly onerous problem which characterizes his age, Nietzsche also claims that nihilism "represents a pathological transitional stage" [in which]… what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all."[91] He goes on to insist that "this extreme nihilism in modern culture can still be overcome."[92] Thus, although Nietzsche frequently emphasizes the gravity of the problem of nihilism, the bleakness of the set of beliefs comprising the outlook of the European nihilist, and the severity of the feelings which result from this set of beliefs, Nietzsche's suggestion that nihilism is merely a "transitional stage" suggests that it is a problem which can eventually overcome. In order to understand how it might be overcome, however, we must review Nietzsche's analyses

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[89] Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.
[90] KSA 13: 17 [7].
[91] WP 13.
[92] WP 13.

of the different kinds of nihilism and better come to understand the problem. Only after

doing so will we be able to look to Nietzsche's thought for resources which facilitate a

potential overcoming of this problem.

Chapter Two: Affective Nihilism and European Nihilism

2.1 Distinguishing Affective and Cognitive Nihilisms

In his text *The Affirmation of Life,* Bernard Reginster describes the problem of nihilism in Nietzsche as the problem of a nihilism of despair, according to which nihilism involves both "the recognition of a defect not in our values but in the world itself" and "the conviction that our existence in this world cannot realize our 'highest values and ideals.'"[93] On Reginster's view, as Gemes and Richardson point out, nihilism is a cognitive phenomenon involving certain beliefs about the world and one's values. One finds support for this interpretation in Reginster's claim that "we must treat nihilism as a rational position."[94]

As demonstrated at the end of the previous chapter, Reginster has good reason to ascribe a set of beliefs to Nietzschean nihilism; this is well-supported by Nietzsche's own descriptions of the phenomenon. Yet any account which asserts nihilism can be characterized primarily as a rational position presents nihilism as an "overly cognitive" crisis of belief.[95] Insofar as Nietzsche consistently describes nihilism [*Nihilismus*] as a "disgust and weariness with life" which involves one's "resistance to life" [*voll Widerstand gegen das Leben*], Reginster's picture of nihilism does not sufficiently account for nihilism as an affective phenomenon, or what both Gemes and Richardson call "affective nihilism."[96]

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[93] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 31.
[94] Ibid., 37.
[95] Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming. Also: Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster."
[96] BT, "Attempt at a Self Criticism," 5; TI, "Socrates," 1. I follow Gemes and Richardson in referring to this component of Nietzschean nihilism as "affective nihilism."

In his response to *The Affirmation of Life,* Gemes indicates this disagreement with Reginster's account.[97] Nietzsche, according to Gemes, characterizes nihilism as the hostility of the drives to their own expression: "the most profound nihilism" is "affective nihilism" as a "disorder of drive suppression."[98] Nihilism here has more to do with the interaction of one's embodied drives than the adoption of particular beliefs. According to Gemes's account, affective nihilism is a "wholesale repression of the drives:" a condition in which the activity of the drives is suppressed or eliminated.[99] Other formations of nihilism — including "more cognitive nihilisms" such as Reginster's — grow out of this kind of nihilism.[100] Although Gemes acknowledges Pippin's influential definition of nihilism as an affective phenomenon, as a "failure of desire, the flickering out of some erotic flame," he rejects Pippin's account as one which eschews erotic desire altogether, a condition which Gemes convincingly argues is impossible to square easily with Nietzsche's notion that human beings, as driven animals, are always willing.[101]

Richardson agrees with Gemes's characterization of nihilism as an affective disorder, but offers a more nuanced account. Richardson treats the affective component

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[97] We see this also in Gemes's encyclopedia article on nihilism, where his analysis of Nietzschean nihilism includes allusion to a "deeper form of nihilism… evidence by his repeated claim that Christianity itself is nihilistic… Nietzsche argues that this very proclamation of the value of the world to come serves to disvalue this, our worldly existence." This "deeper form of nihilism" is what Gemes labels "affective nihilism." As will become clear below, I follow him in this basic assessment while offering a more substantial account. Ken Gemes, Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences, vol. 2, Ed. Bryan Kaldis, SAGE Press, 2013, 271-4.)

[98] Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster," 462.

[99] Gemes and Sykes, "Nihilism" in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences.* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013), 673.

[100] Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster," 461.

[101] Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 54.

of nihilism as a contracted illness of feeling, the "feeling that 'life is too much.'"[102] This is what Richardson characterizes as "no-to-life nihilism." In Richardson's words, this "affective response" is a "bodily judgment regarding the inefficacy of one's drives."[103] On this picture, then, Nietzsche does not characterize the general ineffectiveness of one's drives as nihilism, but a negative evaluation of this ineffectiveness on the behalf of one or more of one's drives. It is a "despair [and] disgruntlement" with life due to the inefficacy of the drives; it is not this inefficacy in itself.[104]

Importantly, the critiques and alternatives which Gemes and Richardson pose in response to Reginster's conception of nihilism are preceded in certain aspects by the interpretation of Müller-Lauter, who interprets nihilism as a "disease" with a physiological basis.[105] According to Müller-Lauter, the "'weak, delicate, and morbid effects of the spirit' are for [Nietzsche] ultimately merely the *symptoms* of physiological processes."[106] In particular, as Nietzsche notes, "the nihilistic movement is merely the expression of physiological *decadence*."[107] Insofar as affective nihilism for both Gemes and Richardson is based in the psycho-physiological constitution of the affective nihilist— her drives — this can be read as a predecessor to their views. In Müller-Lauter, we even see the critique of overly cognitive interpretations of nihilism which precedes Gemes and Richardson's accounts of nihilism as a psycho-physiological phenomenon. As Müller-Lauter notes, "Nihilism [is] detectable even prior to all reflection and speculation

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[102] Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Richardson also acknowledges, and hopes to pay more attention to, that which he characterizes as "no-values nihilism": the position that "nothing is valuable" (Ibid.).
[105] Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: The Contradictions of his Philosophy*, 41. Reginster also interprets Müller-Lauter this way.
[106] WP 899.
[107] Cited by Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche,* 42. WP 38.

[and] cannot be refuted by merely rational arguments."[108] In support of his claim here, Müller-Lauter quotes Nietzsche's assertion that "The real refutations are physiological [*Die richtigen Widerlegungen sind physiologische*]."[109] Müller-Lauter utilitizes the influence of Paul Bourget on Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism to make the case for Nietzschean nihilism as physiological decadence, emphasizing especially Bourget's introduction of a "spirit of the negation of life, which darkens Western civilization more and more each day."[110]

In what follows, I offer a complementary account to those of Müller-Lauter, Reginster, Gemes, and Richardson. With Reginster, I agree that there is plentiful evidence in Nietzsche for the existence of nihilistic conceptions of, or beliefs about, one's world. Insofar as human beings are cognitive beings, nihilism will involve a cognitive stance which involves certain beliefs or theses about one's world. Yet the full story of Nietzschean nihilism is not captured merely by cognitive features of the nihilistic individual, as the life-denying beliefs and worldview of the nihilist. Rather, as Müller-Lauter, Richardson, and Gemes point out in different ways, nihilism also involves life-denying configurations of one's drives and affects.

2.2 Affective Nihilism

Although Gemes and Richardson explicitly make the case for an affective component to Nietzschean nihilism in response to Reginster's cognitive understanding, many other contemporary scholars characterize nihilism as either a will-based or affective phenomenon: either a faulty condition of one's will or the manifestation of particular

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[108] Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche,* 42.
[109] KSA 10: 26 [316].
[110] Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche,* 41. Quoted from Paul Bourget, *Essais I* 1887, 15.

negative affects. In a co-authored chapter, Christopher Janaway and Gemes insist that "Nihilism for Nietzsche is fundamentally an affective disorder involving what he calls the 'the will turning against life' (GM, Preface, §5)."[111] In her discussion of the ways in which political engagements destroy opportunities for the manifestation of individual talents, Babette Babich characterizes "spiritual impoverishment [as]… the wastage of nihilism."[112] Tracy Strong calls "a situation where persons would rather 'will the void than be void of will,' the condition of nihilism."[113] As we saw earlier, Robert Pippin characterizes nihilism as a "failure of desire." Furthermore, in "Nihilism and the Free Self," Simon May presents presents Nietzschean nihilism as a particular directedness of the will: "full-blooded nihilism is to will — often passionately — what is nothing."[114] This "all-consuming will…repudiates what is constitutive of living."[115] Thus, while a number of scholars recognize that nihilism in Nietzsche is characterized by a set of affects and some condition of the will, an extended treatment of the affective nihilism in Nietzsche is lacking.

On my account, affective nihilism involves a world-denying and life-denying evaluative stance rooted in one's drives and affects: that of the "Nay-saying [*neinsagenden*] spirit."[116] In the *Nachlass,* Nietzsche refers to "the nihilistic instinct [*Der*

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[111] Ken Gemes and Chris Janaway, "Life-Denial versus Life-Affirmation," 290.
[112] Babette Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers.* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 35.
[113] Tracy Strong, "Genealogy, the Will to Power, and the Problem of a Past" in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays.* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), 101.
[114] Simon May, "Nihilism and the Free Self," in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy.* Ed. Ken Gemes and Simon May. (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 89.
[115] Ibid.
[116] EH, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," 6.

nihilistische Instinkt] [which] says No [*sagt Nein*]."[117] For Nietzsche, such a nihilistic

instinct is 1) expressed in particular negative affective responses. Yet these negative

affective responses are 2) rooted in an underlying psycho-physiological condition — a

condition of one's drives — which Nietzsche characterizes as "weakness of the will

[*Willensschwäche*] and as life turned "against itself and deny[ing] itself."[118]

In order to understand in what affective nihilism consists and how it involves both

affective responses and one's physiological constitution as a complex of drives, it is

important to see what Nietzsche means by affects and the connection he establishes

between drives and affects. In his notes, Nietzsche describes the activity of those drives

and affects which make up the physiological constitution of the individual as those

"actual happenings" operating "underneath our consciousness… [and] the occurring

series and succession of feelings, thoughts, and so forth are symptoms of [these]!"[119]

Nietzsche goes on:

> Under every thought there is an affect [*Affekt*]. Every thought, every feeling,
> every will is not born from ONE particular drive, but an overall condition… and it
> results from the momentary determinations of power of all the constituting drives
> — that is, the ruling instinct as well as those obedient or resistant ones.[120]

Although human beings are fundamentally composed of Nietzsche calls drives [*Triebe*],

affects for Nietzsche operate alongside these drives, interacting with the drives to

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[117] KSA 13: 17 [7].

[118] GM III:11. It is worth mentioning that in his notes, Nietzsche points to an ambiguity in nihilism: it can either be "a sign of increased power of the spirit: as active nihilism" or "decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as passive nihilism" (WP 22). Affective nihilism of the type described here would thus serve as an example of *passive nihilism.*

[119] KSA 12: 2 [103].

[120] Ibid.

produce feelings, thoughts, desires, actions, and beliefs.[121] We also see this elsewhere, where Nietzsche characterizes affects as "*reactions of the will,*"[122] as "inclinations and aversions" which play a "powerful" role in producing one's actions[123] and coloring or "painting" the world of experience.[124] In referring to affects [*Affekte*], then, Nietzsche refers to particular feelings, emotions, or orientations — most basically described as inclinations and aversions — which shape experience and constitute the individual through their interactions with Nietzschean drives.

What, then, constitutes a *nihilistic* affective response of the kind we find in affective nihilism? Let us look more closely both at the features of affects in Nietzsche and specific examples of nihilistic affects. In "Nietzsche on Taste: Epistemic Privilege and Anti-Realism," Jonathan Mitchell helpfully characterizes affects in Nietzsche as "evaluative sensibilities" involving both "a first-person qualitative character" and "an intentional object at which they are directed ('aboutness')."[125] Furthermore, Mitchell points out, "affective experience is typically pre-reflective, since although I can reflect on my affects, reflection is not an essential part of affective experience."[126] On this picture, inspired by Peter Poellner, an affect has a first-personal character: there is "something it

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[121] It is worth noting also that beliefs produce affect. Nietzsche even describes "the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in purposelessness and meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable" (KSA 12:5 [71]).

[122] KSA 13:11 [71].

[123] D 34.

[124] GS 152.

[125] Jonathan Mitchell, "Nietzsche on Taste: Epistemic Privilege and Anti-Realism" in *Inquiry* Vol. 60, Issue 1-2 (2017): 3.

[126] Ibid.

is like" to be an individual having a particular affective experience.[127] Furthermore, affects for Nietzsche have representational content: as Poellner persuasively argues in "Nietzschean Freedom," affects for Nietzsche are "co-constituted in their phenomenal, experienced character by representations of the world or aspects of it."[128] Importantly, this does not mean that the representation of the world to oneself through the lens of one's affects corresponds with the world as it actually is; just that there is something at which an affect is directed which necessarily shapes the content of that affect.[129] Finally, although one can become conscious of one's affects through reflection, affects often remain beneath one's consciousness, yet still shape one's comportment. This is a pre-conscious feature of affects in which Nietzsche is particularly interested.

Although there are a number of affects which occur in affective nihilism, Nietzsche never attempts or intends to provide a full taxonomy of these. Furthermore, although my analysis of affective nihilism will investigate certain affects in particular which Nietzsche conceives of as features of a nihilistic or world-denying stance, I will first aim to characterize these affects more broadly. On my account, the affects comprising the first-personal character of Nietzsche's affective nihilism are comprised of a variety of broad, generalized negative responses to and evaluations of a number of phenomena.

As mentioned above, on Nietzsche's picture, affective nihilism involves a first-personal character. As first-personal experience, nihilism for Nietzsche is characterized

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[127] See especially "Nietzschean Freedom" in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy.* Ed. Ken Gemes and Simon May. (New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

[128] Ibid., 160.

[129] This helps us make sense of Nietzsche's claim that "A condemnation of life by the living remains in the end a mere symptom of a certain kind of life" (TI, "Morality as Anti-Nature," 5).

by exhaustion [*Ermüdung*] and disgust [*Ekel*] and said to involve feelings of weariness or fatigue [*Müdigkeit*], disappointment with one's self [*Verdruss an sich selbst*],[130] and a great nausea with man [*der grosse Ekel vor dem Menschen*].[131] Later in the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche describes the first-personal character of nihilism as a "dull, debilitating, long-drawn-out painfulness [*die dumpfe lähmende lange Schmerzhaftigkeit*]."[132] Not only is nihilism a "lethargy, heaviness, and depression [*Depression, Schwere und Müdigkeit*];" it is a "slow sadness [*der langsamen Traurigkeit*]," a "dull pain" [*dumpfen Schmerz*], and a "lingering misery [*zögerndes Elend für Zeiten*]."[133] In *Twilight of the Idols,* it is experienced as a "resistance to life" [*voll Widerstand gegen das Leben*].[134] In this range of affects, we notice an overwhelmingly negative valence — sadness, heaviness, and misery dominate here — coupled with a feeling of impediment, obstruction, inhibition, or motion arrested. This is felt as exhaustion, heaviness, debilitation, and depression.[135]

Nietzsche does not merely describe the qualitative, first-personal character of these nihilistic affects. There is also a clear sense that these affects are directed towards a relatively limited range of phenomena (all-encompassing as these phenomena might be): there is a particular intentionality of those affects which characterize affective nihilism.

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[130] GM III:13.
[131] GM III:14.
[132] GM III:19.
[133] GM III:20.
[134] TI, "Socrates," 1.
[135] By attending to Spinoza's notion of affect [*affectus*] and its influence on Nietzsche, it also becomes possible to read Nietzsche's account of affects is, in part, an explanation of ways one can affected and be affected. Affective nihilism, as impediment, inhibition, and exhaustion, thus involves an inability of some kind to affect and be affected. A more detailed account of this notion of affect — as connected to the affective orientations of drives — will be included in the third chapter on Nietzsche's drive ontology.

Such affects are directed towards a telling set of intentional objects: life, human existence or humanity, and the world of earthly existence.

Life, as one intentional object of those responses characteristic of affective nihilism, recurs throughout Nietzsche's body of work.[136] In his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" which precedes *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche describes a nihilistic attitude of "disgust and weariness with life;"*[137]* this is echoed in the *Genealogy,* where Nietzsche describes nihilistic man's "disgust at life."[138] In *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche describes a pessimistic, nihilistic stance "full of weariness with life, full of resistance to life" [*voll Müdigkeit am Leben, voll Widerstand gegen das Leben*]."[139]

In the *Genealogy of Morality,* both the individual and humanity as a whole are identified as intentional objects of nihilistic affects. Nietzsche speaks of man's "disgust with himself"[140] and a "great nausea of man" which leads to "'last will' of man, his will to nothingness, nihilism."[141] We see Nietzsche speak of a nihilism which denies and degrades human existence,[142] including one's own existence, both in the body of the work and in the Preface to the *Genealogy.*[143] In this Preface, Nietzsche also ascribes this direction of the passions to Schopenhauer, finding it in his praise of the "'unegoistic'…

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[136] GM, Preface, 5; GM III:28 [described as *einen Willen zum Nichts, einen Widerwillen gegen das Leben*].
[137] BT, "Attempt at a Self Criticism," 5.
[138] GM III:13.
[139] TI, "Socrates," 1.
[140] GM III:13.
[141] GM III:14.
[142] GM III:20.
[143] GM, Preface, 5.

instincts of compassion, self-denial, [and] self-sacrifice [*der Mitleids-, Selbstverleugnungs-, Selbstopferungs-Instinkte*]."[144]

Finally, Nietzsche also identifies the world of earthly existence as an intentional object of those nihilistic affective responses. Negative affects, on this picture, function as negative evaluations of this world. In a discussion from *Dawn* on the harmfulness of spiritual intoxication — a close cousin of the excess of feeling the ascetic priest utilizes in the third essay of the *Genealogy* — Nietzsche remarks that those who utilize such intoxication are "insatiable sowers of the weeds of dissatisfaction with oneself and one neighbor, of contempt for the age and the world [*Weltverachtung*], and especially of world-weariness [*Weltmüdigkeit*]."[145] In "On the Otherworldly," Zarathustra describes how the invention of an eternal afterlife as a justification of suffering arose from weariness with one's own world, a "weariness that wants to reach the ultimate with one leap, with one fatal leap, a poor ignorant weariness that does not want to will any longer: this created all gods and afterworlds…. it was the body that despaired of the earth — it heard the bowels of existence speaking unto it."[146] This describes those "world-weary ones" of "On Old and New Tablets:" "Out of weariness he yawns at the path and the earth and the goal and himself: not one step further will he go."[147] Later, in the Fourth Book, Nietzsche identifies the teaching of "the proclaimer of the great weariness" as the belief that "All is alike, nothing is worthwhile, the world is without meaning, knowledge

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[144] GM, Preface, 5. Nietzsche's association of Schopenhauer with nihilism runs through his work, appearing as early as 1880, where Nietzsche claims that "Nihilists have Schopenhauer as a philosopher [*Die Nihilisten hatten Schopenhauer als Philosophen*]" (KSA 9: 4 [103]). In the Third Essay of the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche uses the adjectives "nihilistic [nihilistisch]" and "Schopenhauerian [*Schopenhauerisch*]" interchangeably.
[145] D 50.
[146] TSZ, "On The Otherworldly."
[147] TSZ, "On Old and New Tablets," 18.

strangles."[148] This weariness towards the world of earthly existence is manifest in humanity's invention of "afterworlds," of worlds beyond the world of earthly existence and eternal life beyond this life,[149] such as Christian-moral interpretations of the world. (We see this, for example, when Nietzsche notes that "The moral world interpretation ends in world negation (criticism of Christianity) [*Die moralische Welt-ausdeutung endet in Weltverneinung (Kritik des Christenthums)*]."[150] This is the closest to what Müller-Lauter calls nihilism as the "total denial of the world."[151]

These intentional objects of affective nihilism — life, human existence, and the world of earthly existence — are used fairly interchangeably by Nietzsche. The key in these cases is that affective nihilism manifests a host of negative affects directed towards this-worldly human existence, which is, for Nietzsche, all that we know of life. In short, affective nihilism is an illness which comports one unfavorably towards the world of which one is a part. In his analysis of affects and emotions, Poellner notes that "what is characteristic of the emotions we are inclined to describe as love, admiration, or contempt, is that they are normally experienced not merely as *caused* by their objects, but as *merited* by them."[152] In the case of affective nihilism, the weariness or disgust that the suffering individual experiences towards life, the world, and human existence appears to this individual not only as caused by the world, but as a justified response to an unjust

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[148] TSZ, "The Cry of Distress."
[149] GS 344; EH, "Why I am a Destiny," 4: "…in God we see the "deadly enmity toward life brought together into one hideous unity! The concepts "other world," "true world" invented in order to devalue the only world there is."
[150] KSA 12: 2 [117]
[151] Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: The Contradictions of his Philosophy,* 82.
[152] Poellner, "Nietzschean Freedom," 162.

world.[153] Since the world is understood by those "weary ones" as the cause of their

suffering — yet these individuals find nothing in the world to provide them with a

justification or meaning for this suffering — the disgust and weariness with the world felt

by these suffering individuals is experienced as *warranted* by the world. Thus, the world

is understood as inherently weary-making, nauseating, and meaningless. This comprises

the nihilistic interpretation of the world from the affective stance of the Nietzschean

nihilist. In this way, affective nihilism manifests a world-denying or life-denying

stance.[154]

2.3 The Psycho-Physiology of Affective Nihilism and End-Directedness

In reflecting upon the range of nihilistic affective responses which are detailed by

Nietzsche, one notices a striking, though not surprising, similarity among such responses:

the negative responses characteristic of the affective nihilist function as inhibitory,

obstructive, depressive, and debilitating. By looking more closely at the physiology of

affective nihilism — and especially the way in which nihilistic affective responses

involve disruptions in the activity of one's drives and affects with one another (thus, a

disruption in one's physiological constitution which Nietzsche calls "weakness of the

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[153] Poellner discusses this feature of affectivity in Nietzsche in more detail, as well: "a subject experiences an affective attraction or repulsion which seems to be exercised upon her by the object itself in virtue of some property the object has, such that the essential nature of the emotion could not be adequately specified without reference to this (apparent) property of the object… the affective response is itself experienced as an *appropriate* response to some feature of the object, as a picking up on some value-   aspect pertaining to the object — Nietzsche warns against misconstruing this type of affective experience of apparent objective evaluative properties of an object… as having any metaphysical significance" (Poellner, "Nietzschean Freedom," 162).
[154] In the Preface to his *Genealogy,* Nietzsche speaks of a "great danger to mankind" and "temptation…to nothingness" consisting in humanity's "looking back wearily, turning its will against life, and the onset of the final sickness becoming gently, sadly manifest." This sickness and reversal of one's will against life, as a symptom of European culture, points Europe towards a "new Euro-Buddhism" and "nihilism." Thus, we see that affective nihilism — as a condition affecting one's psycho-physiological constitution and consisting in a world-weariness — is connected to Nietzsche's account of European nihilism as well.

will") — we are better able to see why affective nihilism may be characterized as a problem of "suicidal nihilism," why Nietzsche insists that suicide is "the deed of nihilism."[155] I will also argue that affective nihilism must be characterized as a protracted mood characterized by a cluster of affects, not merely the momentary experience of a will-weakening affect: in short, the affective nihilist for Nietzsche is "infected" by affective nihilism at the level of her psycho-physiological constitution.[156]

In the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche characterizes individuals suffering from affective nihilism as "physiological casualties."[157] Later in this work, Nietzsche describes "the feeling of the sick [as] a 'physiological feeling of obstruction'"[158] and a "deep physiological depression."[159] Affective nihilism, then, is a condition marked by "physiological inhibition and exhaustion [*physiologische Hemmung und Ermüdung*],"[160] in which life "turn[s] against itself and den[ies] itself." This physiological condition manifests in sick individuals as a "deep disgust for themselves, for the world, for all

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[155] WP 247.

[156] R. Lanier Anderson, "What is a Nietzschean Self?" in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity*. Edited by Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson. (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 227.

[157] GM III:14. See more on the importance of physiology in the Preface to *The Gay Science:* "One may always primarily consider these audacious freaks of metaphysic, and especially its answers to the question of the worth of existence, as symptoms of certain bodily constitutions; and if, on the whole, when scientifically determined, not a particle of significance attaches to such affirmations and denials of the world, they nevertheless furnish the historian and psychologist with hints so much the more valuable (as we have said) as symptoms of the bodily constitution, its good or bad condition, its fullness, powerfulness, and sovereignty in history; or else of its obstructions, exhaustions, and impoverishments, its premonition of the end, its will to the end. I still expect that a philosophical physician, in the exceptional sense of the word one who applies himself to the problem of the collective health of peoples, periods, races, and mankind generally will some day have the courage to follow out my suspicion to its ultimate conclusions, and to venture on the judgment that in all philosophizing it has not hitherto been a question of "truth" at all, but of something else, namely, of health, futurity, growth, power, life…" (Preface 2). Remember also the importance of physiological "elucidation and interpretation" in GM I:17 and the importance of physiological remedies in *Ecce Homo*'s "Why I Am So Clever."

[158] GM III:17.

[159] Ibid.

[160] GM III:13.

life."[161] In other words, affective nihilism is a physiological condition which weakens life through the obstruction or inhibition of one's end-directedness. Insofar as this disruption of one's end-directedness must be explain in terms of one's drives and oneself as a complex of drives (since drives dictates those ends towards which human beings propel themselves for Nietzsche), affective nihilism is an affliction of the will, based in the activity of the drives and affects.

In *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche identifies the source of a life-denying stance in a "degenerative instinct [*entartenden Instinkt*], which turns itself against life with a subterranean vengefulness."[162] For a form of life suffering from affective nihilism, this "turn[ing] against itself and [denying] itself"[163] is a "sickliness" described by Nietzsche as "the physiological struggle of man with death (to be more exact: with disgust at life, with exhaustion and the wish for the 'end');"[164] here, "man [is] suffering from himself in some way, at all events physiologically."[165] Nietzsche remarks upon the case of an "ill-bred instinct" which serves as the source of the affective nihilist's world- and life-denying evaluative stance, identifying a "value judgment [which] most basically says here: 'I'm not worth much'" and describing this as "a merely physiological value judgment, even explicitly: the feeling of powerlessness, the lack of great affirmative feelings of power (in muscles, nerves, motor centers)."[166] As we see, then, those negative valuations characteristic of affective nihilism — as evaluations which emerge from out certain kinds and configurations of one's drives and affects — are fundamentally rooted

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[161] GM III:11.
[162] EH, "The Birth of Tragedy," 2.
[163] Ibid.
[164] GM III:13.
[165] GM III:20.
[166] KSA 13: 14 [29].

in a physiological affliction of the will, a powerlessness and inefficacy of the will which

Nietzsche characterizes as will-weakness [*Willensschwache*].[167] We see further evidence

for the physiological basis of affective nihilism in Nietzsche's critique of Herbert

Spencer's notion of the organism in the second essay of the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche

characterizes Spencer's denial of the organism as a being in which "the life will is active

and manifests itself" as an example of nihilism.[168]

Once we understand the psycho-physiology of affective nihilism in Nietzsche, it

is clear that this condition is inextricably tied to his discussion of active and reactive

individuals from the *Genealogy*. After all, the distinction between active and reactive

individuals necessarily involves a difference in the efficacy and directedness of the will.

In *Nietzsche's System*, Richardson notes that the active "drive wills power itself, whereas

the reactive has somehow turned aside from its essential end."[169] This same idea is

present in Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, wherein Deleuze claims that the

reactivity of man limits man because it diminishes his power to act.[170] Such reactivity is a

manifestation of a stunted or paralyzed will; this weakness of will results in world

weariness and that life-denying attitude towards this-worldly existence characteristic of

those suffering from affective nihilism. On my account, the reactivity of drives, as a

turning away from their essential end, must be a results of their interactions with

particular depressive affects: affects which weaken the drives with which they interact.

We see evidence for this in the second essay of the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche notes

that reactive affects and the evaluative frameworks which arise from out of them (here,

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[167] KSA 13: 14 [74]; KSA 13: 14 [182].
[168] GM II:12.
[169] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 39.
[170] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1962).

Nietzsche critiques notions of "justice as such") are "hostile to life, an attempt to assassinate the future of man, a sign of fatigue and a secret path to nothingness."[171] This is contrasted with the "true will to life" facilitated by active affects. As Nietzsche is at pains to demonstrate in the *Genealogy*, the man of his time has become infected with *ressentiment* as a result of his being *reactive* and weak instead of active and powerful.[172]

As an example of how depressive affects disrupt the function of an individual's drives, one need only look to the case of the criminal from *Twilight of the Idols.* In the case of the criminal "made sick" and "anemic" by society, Nietzsche finds "almost the recipe for physiological degeneration [*physiologischen Entartung*]": his "most lively drives [*Triebe*], which he has brought with him, soon grow together with depressive affects [*Affekte*], with suspicion, fear, and dishonor… [thus,] his feelings turn against his instincts."[173] In this case of the physiological degeneration of the criminal — as an individual who has lost her vitality and finds her most lively drives to be inefficacious, dampened by her depressive affects — Nietzsche provides one of the clearest cases of how depressive affects disrupt the function of one's drives. In this example, Nietzsche describes how the bringing together of "lively, strong" drives with depressive affects leads to a war waged on one's drives by one's affects. With this in mind, we can understand the negative affective responses to one's world which characterize affective nihilism as leading to a weakness of the will insofar as they produce oppressive affects which dampen or weaken the activity of the drives.

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[171] GM II:11.
[172] In Nietzsche's time, reactivity has become the norm and activity has become an exception.
[173] TI, "Raids of an Untimely Man," 45.

One example of this mechanism — the obstruction or depression of a drive by an affect which turns it away from its end — can be found in Nietzsche's characterization of pity [*Mitleid*] as a "depressive" affect. In *Dawn,* Nietzsche calls pity "a weakness, like every loss of oneself through a damaging [*schädigenden*] affect." In *Ecce Homo*, we see why pity, as a "loss of oneself," is damaging: it is a "particular case of being unable to withstand stimuli."[174] Insofar as compassion weakens one's ability to act — for Nietzsche, an ability which is inseparable from the efficacy of one's drives — it damages the "compassionate" individual by lessening their vitality and turning them away from their ends. This same picture of pity appears in *The Antichrist,* where Nietzsche remarks that "pity stands in opposition to… emotions which augment the energy of the feeling of life [die Energie des Lebensgefühls erhöhn]: it has a depressive effect. One loses force [*verliert Kraft*] when one pities."[175] Here, Nietzsche remarks that there are emotions which "augment" one's energy and feeling of life and emotions "in opposition to" those, which function to depress one's activity and inhibit one's feeling of life. The affects which dominate the individual suffering from affective nihilism, and which I detail at length above, are examples of the latter kind.

Affective nihilism is characterized by negative, depressive affects which weaken life and either obstruct or hinder its growth. Such affective responses to the world comprise essentially physiological judgments (what Richardson calls those "values… built into our bodies"[176]), made on the behalf of one's drives and affects. As we saw above in our discussion of the intentional objects of nihilistic affects, such physiological

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[174] EH, "Why I am So Wise," 4.
[175] A 7.
[176] John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)*, 74.

judgments are judgments made against life, existence, and the world of which we are a part. Yet since human beings — as complexes of drives in constant struggle, interacting with affects — experience a range of affects in any given day which depress certain drives and excite others, it is important to remark upon the difference between a fleeting negative affect or temporary bad mood and affective nihilism.

On my account, affective nihilism is an exceptional case of a very particular kind of drive suppression and will-weakness, involving both 1) the domination of a nihilist's psycho-physiological constitution by depressive affects (those which have life, existence, or humanity as the object of their (supposedly justified) negative assessment) and 2) the relative stability of this domination, resulting in the continuous inhabitation of a life-denying stance and experience of depressive affects. In R. Lanier Anderson's account of moods from his article "What is a Nietzschean Self?" Anderson distinguishes between simple affects in Nietzsche — feelings and emotions — and certain "higher order affects" which he calls "global moods." While affects can be fleeting, changing moment to moment, global moods are "standing dispositions for some first-order affect (or characteristic range of affects), to be activated."[177] A global mood, then, disposes one to a particular range of affects. Such a mood, according to Anderson, pervades one's existence and necessarily shapes the way one experiences oneself and one's world: indeed, a global mood "operates as a kind of collective condition within which my other attitudes have to operate and with which they have to contend — a kind of 'weather system' influencing my other attitudes."[178] Thus, while one might experience nihilistic

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[177] R. Lanier Anderson, "What is a Nietzschean Self?" in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity*. Edited by Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson. (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 227.
[178] Ibid.

affects (unreflective emotions with a particular first-personal character and set of

intentional objects) in a particularly bad mood without being characterized as an affective

nihilist, affective nihilism is a protracted mood or "higher-order affect" which holds sway

over the range of affects available to the individual, leading to the perpetuation of

negative, depressive affects and the continuation of the will-weakness characteristic of

the affective nihilist.

It is particularly relevant for my case here that Anderson cites depression as an

example of such a global mood, since a parallel between major depressive disorder and

affective nihilism is particular apt. As we saw above, the affective nihilist is characterized

by exhaustion and disgust; she experiences feelings of weariness or fatigue,

disappointment with herself, and a great nausea with humanity.[179] Nietzsche describes

affective nihilism as "lethargy, heaviness, and depression:" it is a "slow sadness" and

"dull pain," experienced as a "resistance to life."[180] These descriptions, as well as

Nietzsche's description of the will-weakness characteristic of the affective nihilist, square

with a number of the characteristics required for a diagnosis of major depressive disorder:

1) a "depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by… subjective

report (e.g., feels sad, *empty*, hopeless [emphasis mine]); 2) "markedly diminished

interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day;" 3)

"fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day;" 4) "feelings of worthlessness or excessive or

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[179] GM III:13
[180] GM III:20; TI "Socrates" 1

inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day;" and 5) a "diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day."[181]

It is not hard to see a parallel here between depression and the condition experienced by the affective nihilist: after all, affective nihilism is a condition which involves the ineffectiveness of one's drives, or an inability of one's drives to achieve their ends. Just as the depressed individual feels worthless, so too does the affective nihilist manifest consistently negative evaluations of herself and humanity. Just as one's goals and purposes are unclear, unattainable, unachieved, undervalued, or absent when one is in a depressed state, so too does the affective nihilist find herself unable to act, accomplish goals, or affect the world around herself. Just as the symptoms experienced by the depressed individual prevent her from staying engaged and interested in her world — depression consists not only in the inability to effect action, but an inability to be moved by one's world or surroundings — so too, I argue, will those depressive and obstructionist affects experienced by the affective nihilist lead to a disruption in one's potential both 1) to stay engaged in her world (in a way which would enable the affirmation and appreciation of existence) and 2) to be inspired by the world around her (in the sort of way which would allow for the overcoming of her condition and the development of a truly creative spirit). Insofar as affective nihilism is a global mood which weakens one's will and disposes an individual negatively towards life, the world, and existence in general, it narrowly circumscribes the ways in which the world can inspire, stimulate, or energize the affective nihilist.

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[181] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC. (2013).

This comparison allows us to more concretely understand why affective nihilism, as with major depressive disorder, should be characterized as a disorder of end-directedness. Furthermore, this parallel between the depressed individual and the affective nihilist allows us to understand the connection between a drive-based account of the nihilist's condition and Nietzsche's descriptions of its outward manifestations.

2.4 Intersections between Affective and European Nihilism

Although affective nihilism and European nihilism (comprised of nihilism of purposelessness, epistemological nihilism, and ethical nihilism) are separate phenomena, in Nietzsche's account, they are entangled with one another insofar as nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value (the collapse of which leads to European nihilism) arise from out of a more basic affective nihilism. In other words, affective nihilism — as a physiological affliction of the will which leads to the will's inefficacy and manifests as a felt weariness and nausea with humanity, existence, and the world — leads to the creation of notions of absolute truth, transcendental purpose, and real, higher values.[182] These notions alleviate humanity from the suffering and weariness of affective nihilism either by encouraging humanity to suspend their will or through anesthetizing and distracting humanity with an excess of feeling.[183] Although these conceptions of the world are fundamentally life-denying, they deferred a contemporary crisis of affective nihilism for as long as they "[offered] man a meaning…[and] the door was [thereby] shut on all suicidal nihilism."[184]

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[182] We will see how this occurs directly below, in the account of Nietzsche's ascetic priest and the trick he employs to excite the will through excess of emotion, thus preserving (rather than growing) life. See GM III:20.
[183] GM III:19.
[184] GM III:28.

Yet as individuals — and eventually, European culture at large — begin to realize that these nihilistic conceptions of the world are *false,* these conceptions become unbelievable. With this collapse of man's main sources of meaning, the problem of a "suicidal nihilism" returns. We find evidence for this in Nietzsche's characterization of a "weary nihilism that no longer attacks…[as] a sign of weakness" and his speculation that in this kind of nihilism, "The strength of the spirit may be worn out, exhausted, so that previous goals and values have become incommensurate and no longer are believed."[185] When dominant theories of meaning no longer provide meaning to either the individual or humanity, both the individual and humanity at large are confronted with an experience of suicidal nihilism. This experience of suicidal nihilism is the experience of affective nihilism.[186]

The relationship between these three kinds of nihilism and an affective nihilism which proves both more basic and more significant for Nietzsche is roughly the same in each case. Nietzsche traces the source of the nihilistic conceptions of life offered by each kind of cognitive nihilism to an original affective nihilism.[187] For example, the nihilistic conception of real, higher values invented by the ascetic priest, according to which good and evil exist independently of the valuing perspectives of various life-forms' drives and affects, is a manifestation of the powerless ascetic priest's attempt to gain power over the noble and strong warrior caste. With this nihilistic conception of value, the priest's weak

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[185] WP 23.

[186] Thus nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value (as conceptions of meaning) both originally arise from out of affective nihilism and lead back into affective nihilism upon their collapse.

[187] John Richardson puts this point more generally: these nihilistic conceptions of life as anti-life are "made 'in the body', i.e. in one's drives and affects…[and] can 'say no to life' whether or not one ever becomes conscious of being 'anti-life'" (Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming).

will takes revenge on higher forms of life by assigning a negative value to their form of life and actions; his clever invention, as an attempt to preserve his own weak form of life, is a nihilistic conception of life with its origin in his largely impotent and ineffective will.[188] In *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche attributes the development of a belief in absolute truth to those who experience "fatigue with life" and "hostility to life."[189] We see this same pattern with the development of a notion of some higher purpose to existence, which Nietzsche attributes to a physiological weakness and a "psychology of error" later in the *Twilight of the Idols.* As Nietzsche goes on to note, "we have invented the concept of 'end'… [when] in reality there is no end."[190]

According to Nietzsche, however, there is a cleverness to the development of these various conceptions of truth, purpose, and value: they allow the individual struggling from the weariness, nausea, fatigue, and powerlessness of affective nihilism to preserve her life.[191] In essence, nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and values — these *ascetic ideals —* are methods which humanity has used in an attempt to treat the illness of affective nihilism. These conceptions not only give a meaning to a humanity suffering from its own meaninglessness; they are also utilized to anesthetize one's

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[188] GM I:7. See also WP 586: "General insight: the instinct of life-weariness and not of life has created the other world."

[189] TI, "The Problem of Socrates," 1. It is worth thinking also about Nietzsche's characterization of truthfulness as a "force" cultivated by life-denying morality (WP 5).

[190] TI, "Four Great Errors," 8. Note: This development of nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value will be covered in greater detail in the following chapters on European nihilism.

[191] In *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* Gilles Deleuze argues this point, insisting that "nihilism is the principle of conservation of a weak, diminished, reactive life" (Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy.* (New York: Columbia UP, 1962), 69). See also: "The one who repudiates life is also the one who wants a diminished life, the conservation of his type and moreover its power and triumph" (96).

suffering via the excessive incitement of emotion.[192] While affective nihilism involves a

psycho-physiological life-denial which threatens to destroy life (as "suicidal nihilism"),

nihilistic conceptions facilitate the preservation of declining forms of life.

Nietzsche connects the anesthetic function of nihilistic conceptions of truth,

purpose, and value with the first-personal character of affective nihilism in the

Genealogy. In the third essay, Nietzsche claims that in attempts to "anesthetize pain

through emotion," one find the "actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*, revenge,

and their ilk…. [to] anesthetize a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unbearable

with a more violent emotion of any sort, and at least rid the consciousness of it for the

moment."[193] The tormenting pain characteristic of affective nihilism and caused by a

physiological condition of the will which also gives rise to feelings of *ressentiment* and a

desire for revenge is alleviated by the ascetic priest first when one is excited to an "excess

of feeling" in fanaticism.[194] As Brian Leiter mentions in his "Commentary on the Third

Essay" in *Nietzsche on Morality,* "the crucial premise here is that the discharge of

strong emotion has an anesthetic effect" on the pain and suffering felt by the suffering

individual.[195] In the fifth book of *The Gay Science,* in his suggestion that Buddhism and

Christianity originate in something close to what I am here calling affective nihilism,

Nietzsche again describes religious fanaticism as a treatment for a diseased will:

> the two world religions, Buddhism and Christianity, may have owed their origin
> and above all their sudden spread to a tremendous collapse and disease of the will.
> And that is what actually happened: both religions encountered a situation in
> which the will had become diseased, giving rise to a demand that had become
> utterly desperate for some "thou shalt." Both religions taught fanaticism in ages in

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[192] GM III:28 and elsewhere. See also GS 347.
[193] GM III:15.
[194] GM III:19.
[195] Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 209.

which the will had become exhausted, and thus they offered innumerable people some support, a new possibility of willing, some delight in willing. *For fanaticism is the only "strength of the will" that even the weak and insecure can be brought to attain*, being a sort of hypnotism of the whole system of the senses and the intellect for the benefit of an excessive nourishment (hypertrophy) of a single point of view and feeling that henceforth becomes dominant—which the Christian calls his faith.[196]

Here, we see religious fanaticism — an excess of feeling made possible only as the will (turned away from its original ends) can be re-directed towards a new end — as that which allows weak, suffering humanity to experience some minimal amount of strength of will and enables the preservation of declining life by providing the will with a new object.

Although nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value offered by science and world religions such as Buddhism and Christianity temporarily preserve life, they are no cure for affective nihilism. We see this in the third essay of the *Genealogy:*

you can now guess what… the healing instinct of life has at least *tried* to do through the ascetic priest… to make the sick harmless to a certain degree.. to exploit the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-medication. It goes without saying that…mere affect-medication… cannot possibly yield a real cure of the sick in the *physiological sense* [emphasis mine].[197]

If all sources of meaning in the world henceforth known to Europe — absolute, objective truths, higher purposes, and absolute values — are withdrawn, yet these sources of meaning allowed for man to experience the alleviation of affective nihilism by offering a justification for existence and anesthetizing suffering, the withdrawal of these leads humanity without alternative sources of meaning back into the original illness: affective nihilism. We see this in Nietzsche's assessment of the ascetic priest as the potential

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[196] GS 347.
[197] GM III:16

doctor, with his various Judeo-Christian methods, for existential suffering: "is he really a doctor, this ascetic priest? … it is only suffering itself, the discomfort of the sufferer, that he combats, not its cause, not the actual state of being ill — this must constitute our most fundamental objection to priestly medication."[198] As mentioned earlier, this illness is the affective component of nihilism in Nietzsche, a psycho-physiological condition known as a "physiological inhibition and exhaustion [*physiologische Hemmung und Ermüdung*]"[199] in which life "turn[s] against itself and den[ies] itself" and manifests in sick individuals as a "deep disgust for themselves, for the world, for all life."[200] This illness is a sign of "degenerating life."

Although nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value provide man with a justification for existence in the short term, with the development of the will to truth post-Enlightenment, they must collapse. In this way, the treatment of the ascetic priest ultimately makes man sicker: as attempts to "alleviate and anesthetize" affective nihilism by offering man a justification, Nietzsche believes ascetic ideals (which, importantly, include particular nihilistic conceptions of purpose, value, and truth from Judeo-Christian systems of thought *as well as* nihilistic conceptions of purpose, truth, and value from scientistic approaches to the world) ultimately make man sicker by turning him against himself and making himself guilty for the gift of divine purpose and value which transcendental sources have bestowed upon him:

> …man, suffering from himself in some way, at all events physiologically, rather
> like an animal imprisoned in a cage, unclear as to why? what for? and yearning
> for reasons — reasons bring relief — yearning for cures and narcotics…. and lo

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[198] GM III:17.
[199] GM III:13.
[200] GM III:11.

and behold! from this magician, the ascetic priest, he receives the first tip as to the 'cause' of his suffering: he should look for it within *himself*.[201]

In short, although the development of nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value allow for relief of the symptoms of affective nihilism, they do not address the underlying cause: such remedies do not treat the underlying condition, the psycho-physiological sickness of the drives and affects. This is why we see Nietzsche questioning the status of the ascetic priest as doctor in the third essay above.

2.5 Summary of Affective Nihilism

As mentioned in the first chapter, with the forward march of the will to truth and its advanced manifestation in the contemporary science of Nietzsche's day, those conceptions of objective truth, higher purpose, and absolute values which offer humanity relief from the suffering of affective nihilism become unbelievable.[202] Yet it is these very frameworks for understanding which had anchored European humanity in a meaningful world.[203] The collapse of these "[wipes] away the entire horizon" of meaning and leaves humanity "wandering through an infinite nothing [*irren wir… wie durch ein unendliches Nichts*]." The advent of European nihilism thus plunges Europe back into nihilism as a psychological state [*Der Nihilism als psychologischer Zustand*]; this is the long-delayed return of a life-denying affective nihilism. Although nihilistic conceptions of purpose value, and truth allowed those in Europe to preserve some limited amount of vitality as willing beings over the course of much of European history, at the time during which

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[201] GM III:20.

[202] For an extensive treatment of this advancement of the will to truth, see Katrina Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[203] When Nietzsche is writing, he believes that the highest will to truth will recognize science as supporting a nihilistic picture of the universe; unlike with the purposeless and valuelessness of the world, however, this is not yet a widespread recognition.

Nietzsche is writing, these conceptions are undermined and this vitality is more seriously compromised than ever before.

As argued above, affective nihilism is a life-denying psycho-physiological condition, and may be characterized as a disorder of end-directedness. One might expect, then, that in order to overcome affective nihilism, certain individuals will need to overcome or alter their physiological condition. On Nietzsche's view, this is the task of those few noble individuals who experience this affective nihilism yet possess the ability to move beyond it and affirm life even down to the evaluative stances of their drives and affects. For this reason, overcoming affective nihilism will require a kind of deep personal transformation. For Nietzsche, the affirmation of life is not a matter of merely changing one's belief about the world; it is about changing oneself.

We get a sense of what this life-affirming individual will look like in the second essay of the *Genealogy,* where Nietzsche calls for strong, healthy, and powerful human beings: individuals who are "strengthened by wars and victories, for whom conquest, adventure, danger, and even pain have actually become a necessity" and who possess a "very self-assured willfulness of insight which belongs to great health."[204] Nietzsche goes on to detail certain features of this redeeming individual. He is:

> the redeeming man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit who is pushed out of any position 'outside' or 'beyond' by his surging strength again and again, whose solitude will be misunderstood by the people as though it were flight *from* reality —: whereas it is just his way of being absorbed, buried, and immersed in reality so that from it, when he emerges into the light again, he can return with the redemption of this reality: redeem it from the curse which its ideal has placed on it up until now. This man of the future will redeem us, not just from the ideal held up till now, but also from those things *which had to arise from it,* from the great nausea, the will to nothingness, from nihilism, that stroke of midday and of great decision that makes the will free again, which gives earth its purpose and man his

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[204] GM II: 24.

hope again, this Antichrist and anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and of nothingness — *he must come one day.* —[205]

This excerpt equates nihilism with both a "great nausea" and "the will to nothingness"; the individual who Nietzsche here hopes for the appearance of is the "anti-nihilist," which means, to Nietzsche, the "Antichrist,… the conqueror of God… [and the conqueror] of nothingness." The individual who overcomes nihilism overcomes her sickness with herself and the accompanying world- and life-denial. It is a deep engagement in earthly existence and celebration of her natural inclinations and instincts which characterizes this strong and noble individual in Nietzsche. Mankind's life-denying, nihilistic tendency to view "natural inclinations with an 'evil eye,' so that they finally came to be intertwined with 'bad conscience'" calls for a response which involves a "great health" which rejects "other-worldly aspirations, alien to the senses, the instincts, to nature, to animals, in short all he ideals which have been hostile to life and have defamed the world."[206]

Finding resources for this sort of personal transformation in Nietzsche's thought will be one orienting goal of the second half of this work. Before we get to that point, however, we must also come to a deeper understanding of nihilism as a cognitive cultural phenomenon involving a very particular set of beliefs. This will be the aim of the next three sections.

2.6 Epistemological Nihilism

In this section, I will introduce epistemological nihilism as an element of European nihilism. Unlike affective nihilism, European nihilism — and those elements of which it

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.

is composed — is a cognitive phenomenon, involving beliefs about the nature of truth, purpose, and value. In particular, epistemological nihilism results from a loss of faith in the human ability to know and comprehend the world. The "nihilistic belief" associated with this manifestation of nihilism in Nietzsche is the "belief that there is no truth at all."[207] This type of nihilism results when the culturally dominant conception of truth and what it means to know is rejected. This leaves a culture both skeptical about the existence of truth and despairing as to the nature of truth and knowledge. This collapse of dominant theories of truth renders "truth" and "knowledge" meaningless for a culture; thus, it results in epistemological nihilism.

The dominant conception of truth which Nietzsche's epistemological nihilist rejects is *objective truth*: truth as something which 1) exists apart from or independently of human attempts to ascertain it (apart from human attempts at knowing), 2) can be apprehended in a disinterested way, without the interference of a knowing subject's interests or inclinations and thus is 3) identically intelligible to all (often through the use of reason or via pure contemplation, although religious notions of objective truth may also allow for divine revelation).[208]

In the *Genealogy of Morality,* Nietzsche defines objectivity as "contemplation without interest" involving a "pure… knowing subject" and aiming at "knowledge as such."[209] If that objectivity which the epistemological nihilist rejects aims at knowledge as such, then the rejection of objectivity will also include a rejection of "knowledge as such" or what I will henceforth refer to as *absolute knowledge.* Nietzsche explicitly

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[207] WP 598.
[208] For this reason, objective truth can understood as "extra-perspectival" truth.
[209] GM III:12.

connects a rejection of objective truth with his rejection of absolute knowledge in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he calls "absolute knowledge" a "contradiction in terms," rejecting accounts which talk about knowing "as though cognition here got hold of its object purely and nakedly as 'the thing in itself.'"[210] The alleged object of "absolute knowledge," in this case, is objective truth.

The collapse of a dominant conception of truth — objective truth — has disastrous and nihilistic consequences for Western culture.[211] After all, as Nietzsche describes in *On the Genealogy of Morality,* contemporary Western culture developed to value objective truth and orients itself largely around various pursuits of absolute knowledge. The story of this development is the story of the development of the will to truth.[212]

2.7 The *Will to Truth*

Nietzsche offers his reader two accounts of the origin of the will to truth: first, the development of a will to truth from the conflict of drives and conceptions of utility in "Origins of Knowledge" from *The Gay Science*, and second, the will to truth's origin in morality. According to the former account, in the beginning of Western culture, something was considered true only insofar as it was useful for life. The critical moment

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[210] BGE 16.

[211] Katrina Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation,* 61. See also Richardson, *Nietzsche's System.* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 243.

[212] This subject has been treated at length by Katrina Mitcheson in her seminal text *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation.* My analysis of the development of the will to truth has benefited greatly both from her detailed interpretation of the will to truth and from Richardson's reflections on the genealogy of the will to truth in *Nietzsche's System.* It is also worth noting that what Nietzsche finds problematic about truth as contemporary scientific culture (objective, absolute) conceives it is that it does not make room for other conceptions of truth. As Richardson notes, "we can't expect any simple or single definition for 'truth'", which is why "Nietzsche both rejects and embraces (the will to) truth: he distinguishes different such aspects, or different historical (and psychological) phases or roles. This shows the importance of detailing his genealogy for truth."

for the will to truth's development arrives when two different drives or complexes of drives present contradictory notions of what is truly useful to life. Since both notions appeared equally useful for life, it became "possible to argue about the higher or lower degree of utility for life," and these drives or complexes of drives came into conflict.[213] Although disagreements about notions of utility begin as "intellectual play," the separate drives or complexes of drives eventually recognize that only their conception of utility has the *value* of potentially helping them to achieve their aims. Each baptizes its own conception of utility as the only absolutely "good" and "true" conception. In essence, the will to truth results from this becoming-absolute of these conflicting conceptions of utility.

In short, the free intellectual play mentioned above turns into the struggle for objective truth when each drive or complex of drives wills the domination of its own conception, its own "truth," over all others. As the needs of various drives (or complexes of drives) conflict with the needs of other drives (or complexes of drives), each attempts to employ its own "truth" to subjugate and dominate the other.[214] Eventually, Nietzsche describes:

> …the human brain became full of such judgments and convictions, and a ferment, struggle, and lust for powers developed in this tangle. Not only utility and delight but every kind of impulse took sides in this fight about "truths." The intellectual fight became an occupation, an attraction, a profession, a duty, something dignified-and *eventually knowledge and the striving for the true found their place as a need among other needs* [emphasis mine].[215]

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[213] GS 110.

[214] In essence, the will to truth, like the ascetic ideal, originates out of a principle of "life against life." What should we make of this?

[215] GS 110.

Although the will to truth begins as the mere instrument of other drives, it eventually establishes itself as an independent drive: Nietzsche's "drive to knowledge" or "knowledge drive."[216]

Nietzsche's account of the origin of the will to truth in morality from *On the Genealogy of Morality* fits with this picture from *The Gay Science:* after all, it is when the human brain develops certain convictions or value judgements that the power struggle among the drives intensifies. In the *Genealogy,* as mankind begins to develop a need for morality and moral understanding (from out of his need to give meaning to his suffering), he also develops a drive to attain knowledge of objective truths qua facts about the world around him. The will to truth first awakens as a desire to know moral facts; after all, traditional morality and its enforcement requires knowledge of what counts as *truly* good or bad. In this way, as Katrina Mitcheson notes, "our search for truth has been driven by something other than a pure desire for the goal of truth."[217]

Nietzsche gives an example of this phenomenon in the ascetic priest from his *Genealogy,* where Nietzsche explains the relation between the ascetic ideal held by weak, declining humanity and a life-denying manifestation of the will to truth. The ascetic priest exploits weak individuals' need to understand their suffering: as Mitcheson explains, the ascetic priest "presents God as truth and presses the ultimate asceticism in human guilt and self-hatred towards our sinful nature, turning humanity against itself and against life.

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[216] BGE 6. It is worth noting how science manifests this impulse, namely that "in the case of scholars, in the case of really scientific men, it may be otherwise--"better," if you will; there there may really be such a thing as an "impulse to knowledge," some kind of small, independent clock-work, which, when well wound up, works away industriously to that end, WITHOUT the rest of the scholarly impulses taking any material part therein [Nietzsche's emphasis]."
[217] Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation*, 60.

Truth in this sense… is willed by the priest's sickly flock."[218] Notice that in this example, just as in the more abstract account from *The Gay Science,* there are two competing conceptions of utility: one according to which it is useful to affirm humanity and this world, and one according to which it is useful to deny or denigrate humanity and this world. As morality comes to dominate Western culture, so too does the will to truth.[219]

On my reading, there are two moments of epistemological nihilism in Nietzsche. The first moment of epistemological nihilism is brought about by the age of the Enlightenment and modern science during which Platonic idealism and Christian morality are rejected. The second moment of epistemological nihilism is the present moment, or our contemporary age: an age in which Nietzsche helps us to begin rethinking scientific conceptions of objective truth (and knowledge as absolute, where to have absolute knowledge of x is simply to ascertain the objective truth of x). In both of these moments, Western culture's rejection of a particular conception of truth is understood broadly as a rejection of truth altogether.[220] This brings about the nihilistic belief that "there is no truth." Such a belief is nihilistic because it leads the individual who holds this belief to devalue and denigrate the world to which she belongs: since human beings have developed a need for truth (in the will to truth), the world as devoid

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[218] Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation,* 62.

[219] "The dominance of this form of the will to truth is the dominance of the ascetic ideal" (Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation,* 62). See Mitcheson's exceptional treatment of this in her work. Note: It is important to note that this not a necessary development of human culture, nor is it an evolutionarily advantageous development for human beings as a whole. As Nietzsche notes, "There is no pre-established harmony between the pursuit of truth and the welfare of mankind." 53. GS 344; 3:575. This was merely a development brought about by the cleverness of a weaker class of individuals in their attempt to assert a kind of intellectual and moral power over those with more brute, physical strength.

[220] In the first moment, this belief dissipates as the scientific conception of absolute, objective, and empirical truth comes to dominate; in the second moment, this belief sticks around for much longer. Perspectival truth is a completely different sense of truth; it is also not widely accepted. Thus, it fails to sufficiently replace objective scientific truth and give "meaning" back to "truth."

of truthfulness is a devalued world. Such a belief results in a return to affective nihilism because of a distinctly human need for truth which places a high value on truth and its pursuit: that is, the will to truth. Below, we will see how this occurs in more detail.

Importantly, however, Western culture's different conceptions of objective truth — either as divine and transcendent (in the Platonic-Christian tradition) or as empirical and this-worldly (in the scientific tradition)— are also *nihilistic conceptions of truth.* This is because, as we will see, Nietzsche believes that both the Platonic-Christian conceptions of truth and scientific conceptions of truth result fundamentally from a life-denial, or a devaluation of this-worldly existence. The collapse of these conceptions of truth results in the moment of epistemological nihilism, but any prior belief to either the Platonic-Christian or scientific conceptions of objective truth is still rightfully called a *nihilistic* belief which implicitly devalued this life and this world by insisting upon an unattainable notion of truth.[221] Getting beyond epistemological nihilism in the contemporary world thus requires an overcoming of scientific truth through a new conception of truth which acknowledges its perspectival nature.[222]

2.8 Epistemological Nihilism after the Platonic-Christian Tradition

The first moment of *epistemological nihilism* is rooted in Platonic-Christian conceptions of knowledge or truth and the alleged means by which one attains such knowledge. It is critical for Nietzsche that the possibility of epistemological nihilism begins with Plato's Theory of the Forms and the primary role he assigns reason and rationality in the pursuit

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[221] See Iain Thomson's connection between unattainability and otherworldliness in Nietzsche in his article "Transcendence and the Problem of Otherworldly Nihilism" in *Inquiry.* Vol. 54, No. 2 (2011) 140–159.
[222] Again, see the final chapter in Mitcheson's *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation* for her account of new "practices of truth."

of truth and acquisition of knowledge.[223] According to Plato's two-world view, reality is composed of two separate, though related realms: the realm of empirical experience, or the "world of becoming," and the realm of intelligibility, or the "world of being." The world of empirical experience is not strictly "real"; it is a mere copy or imitation of a separate, transcendent world: the world of the Forms, which is a world comprised of paradigms for knowledge. It is this world of the Forms, according to Plato, which constitutes reality proper, or the "true" world.[224] Mankind can only come to know reality and objective truth by becoming familiarized with the world of the Forms, a world entirely separate from his own. One comes to know the Forms in Plato so that one may come to live a virtuous life. The transcendental goals and life-denying practices of this Platonic system — the becoming-virtuous and potential apotheosis of the individual through the quieting of the body and the acquisition of knowledge about the world of being — requires the individual to rebuke this-worldly existence (the world of becoming) in favor of a "true" world of being. In Plato, as in the ascetic priest, the will to truth is used in the service of morality; it is a mere instrument for other drives.

     Christianity borrows heavily from Plato, and Nietzsche has a specific interpretation of this Platonic inheritance. The supposed innovations of the ascetic priest from the *Genealogy* — especially God as divine truth and a divine realm of eternal life — essentially parallel Plato's metaphysical and epistemological framework.[225] According to

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[223] It may be rooted further back in Parmenides, and Nietzsche gestures at this, but he so frequently begins his account of the decline of Western philosophy and thought with Plato's idealism that it is uncontroversial to make this claim.

[224] Plato calls this world the world of the "really real." Nietzsche speaks directly to the notion of the world of the Forms as "true" in *Twilight of the Idols,* with the section "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable."

[225] We will talk more about ethics in the section on ethical nihilism.

Christianity, there is a divine, heavenly world above and beyond the world of earthly existence; only those individuals who deny the pleasures of this world and profess faith in God and divine truth have access to this world.[226] The morality of the ascetic priest thus builds on Plato's notion of virtue, as attainable only through knowledge of otherworldly truths. The priest's invention of a system of morality — which allows weak and suffering individuals both to give meaning to their suffering and to revenge themselves on those who are strong by labeling them "evil" — denies human life and this-worldly existence in favor of some higher, nobler existence. The ascetic priest "juxtaposes [human life] (along with what pertains to it: 'nature,' 'world,' the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a quite different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, unless it turn against itself, deny itself: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence."[227] According to Nietzsche, both the Platonic and Christian traditions advance nihilistic conceptions of truth insofar as their interpretation of truth as transcendent, or existing outside of the world of human experience, devalues and denigrates life and this-worldly existence. According to Nietzsche, both the Christian and Platonic alternatives deny life by focusing human pursuits of knowledge and truth on a transcendental realm, thus encouraging

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[226] GM III.11. See also the 1886 preface to *The Birth of Tragedy:* "Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life's nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in "another" or "better" life. Hatred of "the world," condemnations of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented the better to slander this life, at bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end, for respite, for "the sabbath of sabbaths" -- all this always struck me, no less than the unconditional will of Christianity to recognize only moral values, as the most dangerous and uncanny form of all possible forms of a "will to decline" -- at the very least a sign of abysmal sickness, weariness, discouragement, exhaustion, and the impoverishment of life. For, confronted with morality (especially Christian, or unconditional, morality), life must continually and inevitably be in the wrong, because life is something essentially amoral -- and eventually, crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal No, life must then be felt to be unworthy of desire and altogether worthless…"
[227] GM III.11.

disengagement from this world in pursuit of knowledge about some world beyond our own. According to these traditions, the mortal world is a false world in which one ought not to base their beliefs; objective truth is acquired only through knowledge of some world beyond our own (as in Plato) or through the transmission of such truth from a deity (as in Christianity).

With Plato and early Christianity, however, the will to truth has not yet been "translated and sublimated into scientific conscience, into intellectual rigor at any price."[228] With the scientific advancements of the Enlightenment, however, the will to truth gains some independence from its origin in morality. Eventually, its new, generalized aim leads it to undermine that from which it originates: Platonic idealism and Judeo-Christian morality.

Nietzsche describes this process in the *Genealogy,* where he asks the reader: "*What,* strictly speaking, has actually *conquered* the Christian God?… 'Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness which was taken more and more seriously… translated and sublimated into scientific conscience, into intellectual rigor at any price… All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation.'"[229] As Christian morality continues to emphasize the importance of identifying truly moral actions, the will to truth's drive for knowledge intensifies. Eventually, the will to truth achieves a certain independence from moral aims and manifests as the will to acquire all forms of knowledge, including moral and nonmoral knowledge; in other words, the aim of the will to truth becomes generalized from a striving after moral truths to a striving after truth in general. By following its generalized aim of truth at any cost, however, the will to truth

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[228] GS 357.
[229] GM III:27; Quote from GS 357.

"ultimately begins to expose its own partial origins."[230] In his notes, Nietzsche offers an

abbreviated history of this moment of epistemological nihilism and its resulting

disorientation:

> …among the forces cultivated by morality was truthfulness: this eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its partial perspective… Now we discover in ourselves needs implanted by centuries of moral interpretation — needs that now appear to us as needs for untruth.[231]

In its current permutation, the will to truth is a "*will* to stand still before the factual, the

factum brutum": it no longer aims at the acquisition of moral facts, instead aiming at truth

in general.[232] This is the essential movement of the will to truth's translation and

sublimation into "scientific conscience" and "intellectual rigor."

This is also the first moment of epistemological nihilism during which Western

culture comes to the conclusion that there is no truth, for it is in this moment that

Western culture's Platonic-Christian conception of truth becomes unbelievable.[233] The

collapse of this dominant Western conception of truth is a direct result of the "steady and

laborious process of science [which] will in the end decisively have done" with

otherworldly notions and conceptions of truth.[234] In light of these scientific

developments, Western culture denies the possibility of absolute knowledge qua

transcendent knowledge and halts its pursuit of objective truth qua transcendent truth.

With the domination of scientific conceptions of truth, the "nihilistic belief" that "there is

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[230] Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation,* 64.
[231] WP 5.
[232] GM III:24.
[233] GS 125. Indeed, this is one result of Nietzsche's death of God.
[234] HH I:16. It is noteworthy, however, that "rigorous science is capable of detaching us from this ideational world [the world of appearance as separate and caused by a transcendent world of things-in-themselves] only to a limited extent." Even more interesting is Nietzsche's early suggestion that "more is certainly not to be desired."

no truth" becomes possible for the first time in the West.[235] In a culture which only acknowledges absolute truth, a genuine and unresolved rivalry between different conceptions of truth brings about epistemological nihilism.

2.9 Epistemological Nihilism after the Modern Scientific Tradition

Although Western culture's loss of its dominant conception of truth results in a moment of epistemological nihilism, the new conception of objective truth as scientific truth soon comes to dominate and offers Western culture a new sense of truth. During the time at which Nietzsche writes, the will to truth is stronger than ever, and this knowledge drive is now aimed at scientific facts about our world.

One of Nietzsche's most memorable early accounts of Western culture's increasing faith in science is his account of the theoretical man from *The Birth of Tragedy*.[236] According to Nietzsche, modern culture is hyper-rational, and the "highest ideal" of "our whole modern world" is that of the theoretical man, who makes the acquisition of scientific knowledge his utmost priority.[237] This man wishes to "penetrate to the ground of things and to separate true knowledge from illusion and error" and his faith in the "highest powers of [human] understanding" ensure Western culture that such

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[235] WP 598.

[236] As John Richardson pointed out in comments on an earlier draft, it is worth noting that Nietzsche's account of the theoretical man is actually an account of Socrates' influence in the ancient Greek world (BT 15). But insofar as Nietzsche himself even seems to be reading this influence anachronistically through the lens of the scientific tendencies of his day, this need not complicate the picture I present. Nietzsche's point in this section of *The Birth of Tragedy* seems to be to trace the history of truth as objective truth in the West back to its origins in "Plato's Socrates" ("Socrates' influence has spread out across all posterity to this very day"), and indeed, this is something which is firmly in the spirit of what I do in this chapter. His characterizations of knowledge and hyper-rational culture is clearly shaped by his understanding of the "science" of his day as "hurrying unstoppably to its limits, where the optimism hidden in the essence of logic will founder and break up."

[237] BT 18.

a pursuit is possible.[238] According to Nietzsche, modern Western humanity understands scientific investigation and analysis as the only means by which one may acquire knowledge. Truth, on this picture, is objective and non-perspectival. Western culture, under the ideal of the theoretical man, makes "existence appear comprehensible and thus justified" and "ascribes to [rational] knowledge and insight the power of a panacea."[239] Thus, in the eyes of modern Western culture, scientific analysis is the "only truly human vocation" and the ultimate goal of education is the pursuit of scientific knowledge (as the ascertainment of objective truth) and rational insight.[240] Western culture aims to master the world through scientific reasoning and theorizing.[241] Modern mankind attempts to fit the world into its categories of rational concepts and judgments by insisting on the existence of objective truth and then employing empirical means in order to discover such objective truth in the world.[242]

In *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche specifically pinpoints the faith which underlies our modern culture: "Nothing is more necessary than truth; and in relation to it, everything else has only secondary value.''[243] This faith manifests the value of the most recent development of the will to truth: as "the concept of truthfulness… was taken more and more seriously" the knowledge drive is "translated and sublimated into scientific

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[238] BT 15.
[239] BT 15.
[240] Ibid. Nietzsche refers to modern Western culture both as "Socratic culture" and "Alexandrian culture" here.
[241] Ibid.
[242] If one feels inclined to dismiss this as an "immature" and "early" version of Nietzsche's thought on the matter, one need only to read Nietzsche's 1886 "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," in which he explicitly remains supportive of his critique of "science" from *The Birth of Tragedy* while skewering other features of this early text.
[243] GS 344.

conscience, into intellectual rigor at any price."[244] This manifestation of the will to truth

leads mankind to "[seek] 'the truth'… a true world […] He does not doubt that a world as

it ought to be exists; he would like to seek out the road to it."[245] The theoretical man in

the post-Enlightenment West assumes that the world is both comprehensible and

identically intelligible to all seekers of objective truth; he also assumes that human reason

is the tool by which one comprehends the world. The "objective spirit" is praised; along

with it, people celebrate "the desubjectivization and depersonification of spirit, as if this

were some sort of goal in itself, some sort of redemption or transfiguration."[246]

Western culture's belief in the redemptive value of science and the objective spirit

is founded in its faith in the "true" world of scientific observation and analysis, of which

humanity can discover objective truths. Nietzsche's groundbreaking insight in *On the*

Genealogy of Morality, as well as elsewhere, is that this conception of truth — as

objective and absolute — is *just as nihilistic as Platonic-Christian conceptions of truth:*

> these pale atheists, Antichrists, immoralists, nihilists, these skeptics… these last
> idealists of knowledge in whom, alone, intellectual conscience dwells and is
> embodied these days — they believe they are all as liberated as possible from the
> ascetic ideal, these "free, very free spirits": and yet, I will tell them what they
> themselves cannot see - because they are standing too close to themselves — this
> ideal is quite simply *their* ideal as well, they themselves represent it nowadays,
> and perhaps no one else, they themselves are its most intellectualized product, its
> most insidious, delicate and elusive form of seduction… They are very far from
> being *free* spirits: *because they still believe in truth.*[247]

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[244] GS 357.
[245] WP 585.
[246] BGE 204.
[247] *GM* III.24.

Rather than offering a new, non-nihilistic, and life-affirming ideal, modern science

preserves ascetic, nihilistic ideals.[248] In "To What Extent Even We too are Still Pious,"

Nietzsche remarks that "those who are truthful in the audacious and ultimate sense that is

presupposed by the faith in science thus *affirm another world than the world of life,*

nature, and history [emphasis mine]."[249] Modern culture's scientific belief in a world of

objective truth — identically intelligible to all those who access it via disinterested

empirical observation and rational thought — denigrates this world just as much as the

Platonic/Christian belief in objective truth as transcendent truth: after all, Nietzsche

claims, there is no such thing as objective, extra-perspectival truth and no possibility that

the world could be identically intelligible to all of human life through disinterested

investigation or reason.[250] In short, scientific truth is a nihilistic, life-denying conception

of truth because such objective, extra-perspectival truth does not exist and thus can never

be apprehended; furthermore, there is no such thing as disinterested knowledge. Insofar

as science roots the value of human existence in the pursuit of absolute knowledge (as the

apprehension of objective truth), it roots the value of existence in something outside of

this world and unattainable within this life, thus devaluing this life and this-worldly

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[248]In "We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," Ken Gemes also points out that "In the context of Christianity and the modern scholarly spirit [Nietzsche] sees the will to truth as slandering life" (Ken Gemes, "We Remain of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves" in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays.* Edited by Christa Davis Acampora. (Lanham, USA, Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 197.).
[249] GS 344
[250] This is because human knowing is always-already interested in the world in particular ways, grounded in the perspectives through which an individual knows the world. See *TSZ,* "On Immaculate Perception." Nietzsche also critiques objectivity and "the objective man" in BGE 207, where he calls the objective man "an instrument, a precious, easily injured and clouded instrument for measuring and, as an arrangement of mirrors, an artistic triumph that deserves care and honor; but he is no goal, no conclusion and sunrise (going out and going up), no complementary man in whom the *rest* of existence is justified, no termination — and still less a beginning, a begetting, and first cause." We will see more of this later in the dissertation.

existence.[251] Just as Plato's realm of the forms and the Christian afterlife give mankind a means of retreat from everyday existence, "science can act as a means of withdrawal from the world."[252] Thus, Nietzsche asks: "science [*Wissenschaft*] as a means of self-anesthetization: are you acquainted with that?"[253] This anesthetizing function served by science is characteristic of those nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value which both originate in a need to alleviate the suffering and despair characteristic of affective nihilism and bring about a return of affective nihilism as they become unbelievable and the anesthetic effect they provide wears off.

How then does this scientific conception of the world develop? The knowledge drive, in its current strivings towards objective, non-perspectival truth, fails to recognize that the conflict from out of which the will to truth originated generated a number of errors which still underpin much of our scientific understanding. These errors include our beliefs "that there are enduring things, that there are equal things, that there are things, substances, and bodies, that a thing is what it appears, that our will is free [and] that what is good for me is also good absolutely."[254] Modern science claims to found the theoretical man's beliefs in duration, identity, and substance, but in fact these beliefs are the

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[251] In his article titled "Nietzsche's Questions Concerning the Will to Truth," Scott Jenkins gives a detailed account of science's otherworldly asceticism. (Scott Jenkins, "Nietzsche's Questions Concerning the Will to Truth." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2012) 265–289.

[252] Gemes, "We Are of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," 194.

[253] GM III:23. See also GS 344.

[254] GS 110.

assumptions upon which science rests.[255] They are also the mere projections of modern

man onto the world around him.[256] Nietzsche elaborates on this notion in his 1887 notes:

> Will to truth is a making firm, a making true and durable, an abolition of the false
> character of things, a reinterpretation of it into beings…. Logicizing, rationalizing,
> systematizing [may be understood] as expedients of life. Man projects his drive to
> truth, his "goal" in a certain sense, outside himself as a world that has being, as a
> metaphysical world, as a "thing in itself," as a world already in existence. His
> needs as creator invent the world upon which he works, anticipate it; this
> anticipation (this 'belief' in truth) is his support.[257]

In order to gain absolute knowledge by staking out "objective truths" about the world,

human reason interprets the world as a world of stable, enduring substances; in short, it

interprets the world as a world of being rather than becoming. Yet, as Nietzsche claims,

both the world we occupy and our frameworks for understanding this world (which shape

our interpretations) are always and essentially in flux. In his discussion of human

knowledge as a holding-firm in one's mind, Nietzsche emphasizes the transitional nature

both of human understanding and the world, insisting that: "A becoming cannot be

mirrored in [another] becoming as [something] firm and enduring, as a 'that.'"[258] Insofar

as science aims to fix a world of enduring substances into absolute knowledge of

objective truth, it falsifies the world of becoming and aims at an ideal which is not of this

world. Scientific truth, Nietzsche claims, is simply not "true" in the way it believes itself

to be. It is not objectively, extra-perspectivally true: it is a mere perspective on the

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[255] And we moderns are *all* "theoretical men."

[256] According to Nietzsche, science does not enrich our understanding of the world; it impoverishes it, by limiting the world through the application of human concepts and categories on a world inexhaustibly rich in meaning. This theme occurs at several points in Nietzsche's work. See especially his early work on the critic/theoretical man, as cited above.

[257] WP 552.

[258] HH II.19.

world.[259] Insofar as modern culture denies this and makes claims to objective truths on the behalf of science, it is trapped with another nihilistic conception of truth and cannot authentically participate in the critical second moment of epistemological nihilism, which Nietzsche strives to bring about: the moment at which an attitude of scientific certitude as to the nature and existence of objective truth and the means by which such truth is acquired (empirical observation) is undermined, and culture can come to the realization that there is no objective truth.[260]

This is not to say that Nietzsche completely disavows science. Just as there are active and passive forms of nihilism — nihilism, respectively, of "increasing strength or of increasing weakness" — there are different kinds of scientific attitudes.[261] After describing nihilism's ambiguity as "a symptom of increasing strength or of increasing weakness," Nietzsche goes on to ask: "What does science mean in regard to both

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[259] Yet Nietzsche still seems to hold beliefs which he claims are true from all perspectives, such as "there is no such thing as objective truth" and the "world is will to power." In the case of these sorts of claims, we should understand these claims not as objectively true but, following Hales and Welshon (2000), as true across all perspectives. In *Nietzsche's Perspectivism,* Hales and Welshon argue that "…in characterizing absolute human truths it is not claimed that they are true outside of perspectives or true extra-perspectivally. Rather, the claim is that there are truths that are truths within all human perspectives, that is, that there are cross-perspectival truths." (Steven D. Hales and Rex Welshon, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 33-34.) While it seems correct that some things for Nietzsche must be true across all perspectives — such as those claims I represent him holding above — it also seems misleading to call this "absolute truth." For Nietzsche, truths can only be known though the perspectives of the drives and complexes of drives. This seems to be a very different kind of truth than what is conventionally called "absolute truth," that which is true despite the epistemic perspective. Indeed, for Nietzsche, that which is true is true *only with reference to* the perspective from which it is true.

It is important to note, also, that this cross-perspectival truth is something which the epistemological nihilist does not yet recognize as a candidate for "truth"; this positive picture grows from out of the epistemological nihilist's rejection of absolute truth, conventionally understood (as extra-perspectival).

[260] Although he rejects both of these developments in favor of a theory of knowledge with a broader conception of truth as perspectival and human knowledge as partial, it is worth noting that Nietzsche does retain some empiricism in his approach to truth and knowledge.

[261] WP 585.

possibilities? 1. As a sign of strength and self-control, as being able to do without healing, comforting worlds of illusion; 2. as undermining, dissecting, disappointing, weakening."[262] While the former interpretation acknowledges a critical role for scientific honesty, the latter describes the troublesome potential of science as modern scientism. Scientific honesty makes possible the first moment of epistemological nihilism and allows modern culture both to get beyond old conceptions of truth and to see the value in a this-worldly conception of truth. Scientism, on the other hand, reifies the world into a realm of stable being in which objective truths can be ascertained by human rationality. Insofar as such a world does not actually exist, Nietzsche interprets modern culture's scientistic conception of truth as a new manifestation of the same instinct of life-denial inherent in old Platonic-Christian conceptions of truth. Although modern scientific conceptions of knowledge and truth reject Platonic-Christian conceptions, they fail to replace them with a meaningfully different option. Although modern science attempts to overcome transcendent sources of justification, insofar as it orients itself completely around objective truth and insists upon the importance of the tools of human reason for knowing this truth, it remains fundamentally nihilistic and unable to do justice to the richness of human experience. Indeed, Nietzsche insists that "it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests — that even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year-old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth; that truth is

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[262] WP 585.

divine."[263] Thus, just as Christianity relied on a metaphysical faith in the existence and divinity of a god, science relies on a metaphysical faith in the existence of objective truth.

This acknowledgement of science's hidden foundation is that which Nietzsche believes can usher in a second stage of epistemological nihilism: that stage at which objective, extra-perspectival truth qua scientific truth becomes unbelievable and must be rejected just as transcendental truth before it. The second moment of epistemological nihilism only becomes possible when modern culture comes to recognize 1) the continuity of Platonic, Christian, and scientific conceptions of truth and 2) the nihilistic ramifications of these beliefs.[264]

Although European culture more broadly has not adopted the belief characteristic of epistemological nihilism post-Enlightenment — that there is no absolute truth — Nietzsche harkens the impending onset of this belief.[265] As the will to truth presses forward, so will the science-critical epistemological nihilist, in her denial of the existence of objective truths, come to reject the viability of scientific conceptions of truth. To explain why a disbelief in objective truth results in epistemological nihilism — and to explain why there are psycho-physiological, affective effects of this nihilism — Nietzsche appeals to the human need for knowledge. As we recall, Nietzsche describes the will to truth as "[strife] for the true" and "a need among other needs."[266] This human need for knowledge and truth at the time during which Nietzsche writes is a *will to*

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[263] GS 344.

[264] Nietzsche's account of both stages of epistemological nihilism demonstrates the contingency of this phenomenon on historical circumstance. After all, without particular historical developments of Western culture, such nihilism would not have been possible.

[265] The onset of disbelief in objective, absolute truth is a result of the development and forward movement of the will to truth, which eventually discovers an inconvenient truth about truth itself!

[266] GS 110.

objective truth. The pursuit of absolute knowledge and objective truth in science gives humanity a meaning for its existence; for modern humanity, to be is to know. As Nietzsche acknowledges, this makes a belief in objective truth a prerequisite for a meaningful (or non-nihilistic) life. Any post-modern disbelief in absolute knowledge and scientific objectivity would lead to a second nihilistic cultural impasse, in which a widespread belief in the meaninglessness of modern pursuits takes hold. If modern culture were to reject the viability of scientific conceptions of truth, its current pursuits and values would show up as meaningless. The absence of objective truth as that which serves to justify human pursuits and human existence, combined with a long-developed need for objective truth, would plunge man back into the affective nihilism for which scientistic conceptions of the world served as an anesthetic.[267]

Although Nietzsche insists upon the necessity of this second moment of epistemological nihilism, heralds its impending arrival in light of advances in the will to truth, and attempts to think beyond nihilistic conceptions of truth in his work, modern culture has not yet overcome its scientism. This is why epistemological nihilism remains a cultural problem, even as Nietzsche is writing. In his notes, Nietzsche presents a version of what the "most extreme" epistemological nihilism would look like:

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[267] This insistence on the impossibility of objective truth by the epistemological nihilist has far-reaching ramifications for conceptions of knowledge and the scope of human knowing. Nietzsche's interpretation of epistemological nihilism in Europe recognizes the optimism faith that Enlightenment thinking engendered in the possibility of all-encompassing human knowledge, and he dedicates much of his thought to his own loss of faith in this regard. According to Nietzsche, knowledge of reality can never be complete and all-embracing. Nietzsche's rejection of rational-scientific knowledge is thus also a rejection of humanity's capacity to fully comprehend the world of which we are a part. Insofar as modern science optimistically pursues the possibility of making the world fully comprehensible to the human mind, it aims at yet another impossibility. Epistemological nihilism, in Nietzsche's view, isn't just a possible result of this realization of the impossibility of the aims of scientific analysis; it is a necessary consequence.

> The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that every belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no true world. Thus, a perspectival appearance whose origin lies in us (insofar as we continually need a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world) — That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely apparent character, the necessity of lies. — To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a divine way of thinking.

Indeed, this "most extreme form of nihilism" is that which Nietzsche encourages his reader to think through. A scientific conception of truth is incompatible with the world as becoming. It is also incompatible with Nietzsche's perspectivism, which claims that "There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be."[268] Unlike a perspectival conception of truth, scientific truth is unable to do justice to the various kinds of meaning one encounters in the course of human life. According to Nietzsche, "'Truth' is… not something there, that might be found or discovered, but something that gives a name to a process… [it is] an active determining — not a becoming-conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the 'will to power.'"[269] This is a radically different view of truth which Nietzsche presents as a viable alternative to scientific truth. Although the rejection of objective truth which must precede this alternative will plunge one first into epistemological nihilism, by recognizing the perspectival nature of truth and its rootedness in the instincts and drives of life, modern culture might become able to re-conceptualize truth, seeing it as a perspectival projection rather than something inherent in the world independent of the

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[268] GM III:12.
[269] WP 298.

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evaluation and interpretation of life. In the final chapter of this project, we will envision

what this alternative to objective truth might look like for Nietzsche.

2.10 Nihilism of Purposelessness

In this section, I will introduce nihilism of purposelessness as an element of European

nihilism, as well as Nietzsche's critique of certain conceptions of purpose as false and

nihilistic. When European culture comes to understand nihilistic conceptions of higher

purpose as unbelievable, the result is nihilism of purposelessness: the belief that there is

no purpose at which the world aims. The nihilistic belief in a higher purpose to which

Nietzsche refers is the belief in 1) a purpose (qua final cause or *telos*) to the world as a

whole, towards which the universe develops and 2) in which humanity participates, in

which seemingly divergent human pursuits are unified, and towards which human

pursuits either *are* or *ought* to be directed.[270] Thus, this belief in a higher purpose

involves a belief in a global or all-encompassing purpose which unifies human pursuits in

one goal.[271] A higher purpose also 3) conditions the value of human pursuits in the same

way: those who believe in a higher purpose understand their actions, thoughts, principles,

and purposes as valuable (or not) only with reference to this purpose, and one individual's

actions can be judged valuable (or not) by the same standard as another's.[272] On my

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[270] Such human pursuits can be knowingly or unknowingly directed towards such a purpose.
[271] See also Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*. (New York: Taylor and Francis Books, 2006).
[272] "We have, from an early age, placed the value of an action, of a character, of a being, into the purpose [*den Werth einer Handlung, eines Charakters, eines Daseins in die Absicht gelegt, in den Zweck*] for the sake of which it was done, for the sake of which we acted, lived: this ancient idiosyncracy of taste finally takes a dangerous turn" (KSA 12: 7 [1]). Here we can imagine one example of such a higher purpose: an understanding of "social progress" such as that subscribed to by 19th century ethnologists. On a 19th century picture of social progress, "primitive" societies advanced through a number of stages to eventually become "civilized" societies, and this progression or advancement involved increases in social complexity and cultural sophistication.

account of higher purpose, finally, 4) the ways in which individuals participate in this

higher purpose will often look the same. In many examples offered by Nietzsche, such

purposes are transcendent purposes (especially as in Plato or Christianity), projected

beyond the world of this-worldly existence. But a higher purpose of the kind the nihilist

of purposelessness comes to reject need not be transcendent; they need not involve the

projection of ideals into a world beyond our own, towards which we ought to be directed.

This alleged purposiveness of the universe retains the sense intended by

Aristotle's notion of *telos* in the doctrine of the four causes from his *Metaphysics.* In

Metaphysics V, Aristotle defines a final cause, or telos, as "the end, i.e. that for the sake

of which a thing is done."[273] Aristotle goes on to give health as an example of a final

cause or *telos* for walking:

> For 'Why does one walk?' we say; 'that one may be healthy'; and in speaking thus
> we think we have given the cause. The same is true of all the means that intervene
> before the end, when something else has put the process in motion, as e.g.
> thinning or purging or drugs or instruments intervene before health is reached; for
> all these are for the sake of the end, though they differ from one another in that
> some are instruments and others are actions.[274]

In Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* the *telos* or final cause of *x* is that at which *x* ultimately aims.

To say that there is a *telos* or final cause of the world is to say that there is something at

which the world ultimately aims. This teleological way of thinking about the world,

Nietzsche points out, enables man to find meaning both in the world and in himself. On

this picture, both the world and humanity are meaningful because they plays a functional

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On such a picture of social progress, the purpose of society is ever greater civilization, and
societies are understood as more or less valuable with reference to this higher purpose: "more
civilized" societies are "better," more valuable societies than "more primitive" ones. Furthermore,
civilization is the purpose at which these "more primitive" societies knowingly or unknowingly
aim.
[273] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1013a.
[274] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1013a.

role in the higher purpose of the universe. Mankind has meaning insofar as it, too, can be directed towards this purpose.[275]

As Richardson points out in *Nietzsche's System* and Hatab discusses in *Nietzsche's Life Sentence,* Nietzsche is a strong critic of teleological conceptions of the universe which appeal to certain kinds of purposefulness to explain facts about the world or humanity.[276] Although he most frequently critiques these teleological conceptions for being false, we will see that he also decries them as nihilistic insofar as they find value in our world only as a means to a higher world, thus leading to an implicit denial and denigration of this-worldly existence. The projection of a higher purpose onto the world — as a purpose in terms of which humanity understands its pursuits and their value, and which orients their actions and strivings — allows humanity to engage and find meaning in this world and themselves, insofar as they participate in a higher purpose. Yet the falsity of this projection — the facts that higher purposes do not, in fact, *exist* for Nietzsche — means in the pursuit of such higher purposes, one is *in fact* disengaged from the world in which she lives and implicitly participating in a denigration of this-worldly existence in favor of a "better" purpose which, as false, is unattainable. According to Nietzsche, even accounts of the world which insist upon some global, this-worldly purpose towards which the world aims — as in the progressivist accounts offered by scientists in Nietzsche's day — can be interpreted as examples of nihilistic conceptions of the world, insofar as they posit a subsequent world outside and above of our own as a higher stage of advancement, thereby drawing our attention and hopes towards that false

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[275] Here I will use *telos,* "final cause," and "purpose" interchangeably.

[276] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System.* Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence.* (New York: Taylor and Francis Books, 2006). While Hatab makes this a matter of global purpose, Richardson examines the problematic role of purposiveness more generally.

ideal and away from our world.[277] Importantly, this interpretation of scientific notions of progress as nihilistic hinges on Nietzsche's understanding of a deeper problem with notions of scientific progress: because scientific interpretations of progress necessarily understand the value and purpose of this world and humanity in terms of a single standard of progress — yet one such standard does not *in fact* exist — these interpretations devalue this life and this world as they are *in actuality*.[278]

So far, we have discussed what makes particular conceptions of higher purpose nihilistic. Yet Nietzsche believes not only that humanity has historically subscribed to nihilistic *conceptions* of higher purpose; he also describes a particular kind of nihilism — which I here call a nihilism of purposelessness — in which the nihilist fails to believe in any purpose whatsoever. According to Nietzsche, "the philosophical nihilist is convinced that all that happens is meaningless and in vain; and that there ought not to be anything meaningless and in vain" [*daß alles Geschehen sinnlos und umsonstig ist; und es sollte kein sinnloses und umsonstiges Sein geben*].[279] Elsewhere, Nietzsche notes that nihilism arises "when we have sought a 'meaning' in that happens which is not there: so the

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[277] We see this in his critiques of "progress" understood as a movement towards as rational, scientific enlightenment. In WP 62, Nietzsche enacts a "critique of modern man" which involves a critique of "reason as authority; history as overcoming of errors; the future as progress." In WP 1, Nietzsche remarks upon the "nihilistic consequences of contemporary natural science (together with its attempts to escape into some beyond)." See also progress as nihilistic in WP 12, "progress" as decadence in WP 44, a general critique of progress in WP 90. Nietzsche's critique of this-worldly permutations of a "higher purpose" is also in the background of Nietzsche's critiques of "scientific optimism" in his early notes — where he calls that "the *laisser aller* of our science" a "national-economic dogma" involving "faith in an absolutely beneficial success" (KSA 7: 19 [28]) — and in later reflections (BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism, 4).
[278] Again, the importance of the unattainability of the purposes which nihilistic interpretations offer is emphasized in Thomson, "Transcendence and Otherworldly Nihilism," 151.
[279] WP 36.

seeker eventually becomes discouraged."[280] The problem of nihilism as it relates to a

telos or purpose is the first kind of nihilism that Nietzsche discusses in *KSA*

13:11[99]/*WP* 12. The meaning [*Sinn*] which man seeks in everything that happens [*alles*

Geschehen] in the above excerpts is a single, animating purpose which drives the

universe and propels it forward towards some higher version of itself.

   A lack of belief in higher purposes — the characteristic belief of the nihilist of

purposelessness — understands the world and humanity as devoid of purpose altogether.

This belief explicitly denies and denigrates this-worldly existence: a life without some

higher purpose is no longer seen as worth living, since higher purposes served to

condition the value of our lives (and individual purposes). Otherwise put, the belief in a

higher purpose understands the value of the world and human pursuits purely

instrumentally: as mere means for achieving a higher purpose. When one comes to reject

the existence of this higher purpose, one rejects the value of the world and human

pursuits. Thus, a nihilism of purposelessness follows when certain nihilistic conceptions

of higher purpose become unbelievable.

2.11 The Trouble with Teleological Thinking

2.11.1 It is false.

On Nietzsche's view, the belief in an alleged higher purpose of the universe is

problematic firstly because the assumption that human life participates in some higher

purpose or *telos* fails to recognize that this conception of *telos* is a human invention and

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[280] Alan White also treats the relationship between nihilism and purpose in "Nietzschean Nihilism: A Typology," 30/1. While While discusses "three levels of nihilism," I instead treat three kinds of European nihilism which, while related, are not necessarily progressively ordered. (Alan White, "Nietzschean Nihilism: A Typology." *International Studies in Philosophy.* Volume 19, Issue 2, 1987, 9-44.)

projection which falsifies reality. According to Nietzsche, there is no such *telos,* no higher goal at which the universe as a whole aims or purpose towards which it advances. As Arthur Danto notes in his famous monograph on Nietzsche, "the world must give lie to the proposal that it had a goal or a purpose… or end-state of any kind… [as] there is no ultimately higher condition for which we may hope or to which we may aspire."[281]

As Elaine Miller points out in her article "Nietzsche on Individuation and Purposiveness in Nature," Nietzsche's critique of particular teleological pictures of the universe begins early in his academic career.[282] Indeed, a dissertation draft contained in Nietzsche's notes between Fall 1864 and Spring 1868 which deals with Kant on teleology and the organism calls belief in a higher purpose the "illusion" of "outer purposiveness."[283] In this same draft, Nietzsche notes that "the question 'why is [anything]' … belongs to outer teleology."[284] When one asks *why* the universe is as it is, one essentially asks after a purpose or *telos* of the universe. The answer to this typically human question, which is thought to imbue humanity with meaning, is all-too-often thought to be found in some higher purpose of the universe to which humanity belongs. On Nietzsche's view, this search for the meaning of human life in some purpose over and above human life is typical of modern Europe, due to the influence of Plato and Christianity on Europe at the time during which Nietzsche writes. But it is, above all, a misguided search, and one with nihilistic consequences.

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[281] Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher.* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965), 211.
[282] Elaine Miller, "Nietzsche on Individuation and Purposiveness in Nature" in *A Companion to Nietzsche.* Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson. (New York: Blackwell Reference, 2008).
[283] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Introduction to "Friedrich Nietzsche: On the Concept of the Organic since Kant." Translated by Th. Nawrath. *The Agonist.* March 2010. (http://www.nietzschecircle.com/AGONIST/2010_03/PDFs/AgonistMAR2010NawrathTranslation.pdf.)
[284] Ibid.

It is a misguided search because, according to Nietzsche, "We have invented the concept 'purpose:' in reality, purpose is absent."[285] By this, Nietzsche means that there is no higher purpose or *telos* at which the world aims.[286] This theme recurs again and again in Nietzsche's early and late works, in both his published works and his notebooks. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche notes that "it is we alone who have devised cause, sequence, reciprocity, relativity, constraint, number, law, freedom, motive, and *purpose* [emphasis mine]; and when we interpret and intermix this symbol-world, as 'being-in-itself,' with things, we act once more as we have always acted— mythologically."[287] On this picture, any notion of some purposiveness which unifies the aims of all the world in a single purpose posits a final cause to the universe and consists in mere human invention and myth. This projection of a final cause onto the world is cited as an example of one of the "four great errors" from the *Twilight of the Idols:* what Nietzsche calls the "error of imaginary causes."[288] In *On the Genealogy of Morality,* Nietzsche explains that conceptions of God's plan as a divine, higher purpose towards which the world was directed — and eternal afterlife as a divine, higher purpose towards which human life was directed — developed and flourished because humanity sought out an explanation for suffering (an answer to "why" human beings suffer). This is but one example of an erroneously posited imaginary cause. Nietzsche's prolonged examination of this error is worth examining here. He begins by investigating the explanatory force of human projections of purpose onto their world:

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[285] TI, "Four Great Errors," 8.
[286] In a later chapter, we will see that there are different forms of purposiveness which Nietzsche will accept (in drives as wills to power).
[287] BGE 21.
[288] TI, "Four Great Errors," 4.

The whole realm of morality and religion belongs in this category of imaginary causes or "explanations" for disagreeable feelings. These feelings are produced by beings that are hostile to us (evil spirits: the most famous being the labeling of hysterical women as witches). They are aroused by unacceptable acts (the feeling of "sin" or "sinfulness" is slipped under a physiological discomfort; one always finds reasons for feeling dissatisfied with oneself). They are produced as punishments, as payment for something we should not have done, for something we should not have desired… [On the other hand,] We explain agreeable general feelings as produced by our trust in God, and by our consciousness of good deeds…

In fact, all these supposed causes are actually effects, and as it were, translate pleasant or unpleasant feelings into a misleading terminology. One is in a state of hope because the basic physiological feeling is once again strong and rich; one trusts in God because the feeling of fullness and strength gives a sense of rest. Morality and religion belong entirely to the psychology of error: in every single case, cause and effect are confused; or truth is confused with the effects of believing something to be true; or a state of consciousness is confused with its physiological origins.[289]

Nietzsche explains in this excerpt how human beings invent various causes in order to give a sense to their actions, feelings, and lives. The invention of an "imaginary cause" — and, in particular, higher purposes as final causes — answers the question "why" and therefore provides humanity with a reason for their experiences. Yet this invention of such causes misleads humanity. This is what qualifies it as an error.

Nietzsche's remarks from *Twilight of the Idols* on the fatality of human existence further indicate his rejection of this nihilistic conception of the world and his attempt to redeem humanity by correcting such harmful errors about the world:

No one is responsible for a man's being here at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in this environment. The fatality of his existence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be. Human beings are not the effect of some special purpose, or will, or end; nor are they a medium through which society can realize an "ideal of humanity" or an "ideal of happiness" or an "ideal of morality." It is absurd to wish to devolve one's essence on some end or other. We have invented the concept of "end": in reality there is no end.

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[289] TI, "Four Great Errors," 6.

> A man is necessary, a man is a piece of fatefulness, a man belongs to the whole, a man is in the whole; there is nothing that could judge, measure, compare, or sentence his being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole. But there is nothing besides the whole. That nobody is held responsible any longer, that the mode of being may not be traced back to a primary cause, that the world does not form a unity either as a sensorium or as "spirit" — that alone is the great liberation.

On Nietzsche's view, as we see here, any picture of the universe which includes a higher purpose towards which the universe is directed is a confused picture of the universe. Nietzsche's "redemption" of the world rejects humanity's role as a medium through which eternal ideals might be achieved, thereby rejecting the Christian understanding of humanity as participants in divine planning or purposiveness. Here, we can also hear Nietzsche's critique of a nihilistic Christian conception of this-worldly existence as a means to a divine afterlife, as humanity's only opportunity to repay the infinitely large debt which its existence has incurred. For Nietzsche, there is no single justification for human existence; there is no reason that explains either the existence of humanity or the world in which we live. Mankind is embedded in his world and can be explained only in the same terms as the world to which he belongs. There is no explanatory cause for mankind, no will that willed man's creation, no goal towards which mankind aims or progresses.

According to Nietzsche, the human need for some justification for existence historically results in a number of other metaphysical interpretations which falsify the world by inventing or projecting a goal or purpose onto this world. Nietzsche explicitly describes such interpretations as misleading in *The Gay Science,* where he derides 1) interpretations of the world which "reinterpret the emphatically derivative, tardy, rare and accidental, which we only perceive on the crust of the earth, into the essential,

universal and eternal;" 2) those who believe in a goal towards which existence aims have not yet realized that the world "is assuredly not constructed with a view to one end;" and 3) those who anthropomorphize in their justifications of the world by establishing some commanding and law-giving entity which directs the workings of the world and thus can be praised or blamed for the agreeable or disagreeable nature of these workings.[290] These interpretations share the feature of providing a reason for human existence in the form of a universally applicable justification for *why* things are the way they are. We see this even in Nietzsche's critique of progress from his 1888 notes, where he rejects notions of "progress" and "development" as illusions which assign a *telos* to the world and humanity which simply is not there. Nietzsche's interpretation of "progress" as an ideal according to which "everything that is in [time]… marches forward" — elsewhere called the "future as progress" — reveals that even in this supposedly immanent interpretation of purpose, we fail to escape the nihilistic structure of a higher purpose: "progress," after all, posits a better, more advanced world beyond our own, towards which our world aims and through which our existence is justified.[291]

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[290] GS 109.

[291] WP 62, 90. Nietzsche's own presentation of the overman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* should give us pause here. After all, he insists that "the overman shall be the meaning of the earth" (TSZ, Prologue, 3) and remarks that "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss … *what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end.*" Nietzsche goes on to praise "[he] who justifies future and redeems past generations" (TSZ, Prologue, 4). Nietzsche's call for the overman in *Zarathustra* certainly sounds like his proposal of a better, more advanced world which justifies our current aims and existence! Indeed, Zarathustra even remarks that "I will teach man the meaning of their existence — the overman, the lightning out of the dark cloud of man" (TSZ, Prologue, 7). What might make his account of the overman different than the accounts of higher purpose which he critiques as false and life-denying? One thought is that what separates accounts of higher purpose from Nietzsche's account of the overman is the ambiguity of the overman's values and purposes. If the overman is to justify existence, Nietzsche is famously vague about how he will do so. Unlike nihilistic conceptions of progress which measure positive, forward-moving development with reference to one standard (for example, social progress involves the becoming-civilized of societies, scientific progress involves the acquisition of ever

In contrast to such teleological pictures of the world, Nietzsche characterizes humanity — and the world which we occupy — as a "tremendous experimental laboratory in which a few successes are scored, scattered throughout all ages, while there are untold failures, and all order, logic, union, and obligingness are lacking."[292] In short, there is no unified purpose to the universe which humanity occupies and in which human beings may participate; Nietzsche's picture of the universe is neither progressive nor purposive in the sense of there being one final cause or *telos* to the world. These falsifying accounts of the world and of this-worldly existence ignore "the general character of the world [as]… to all eternity chaos; not by the absence of necessity, but in the sense of the absence of order, structure, form, beauty, wisdom."[293] According to Nietzsche's mature view of the universe, as mentioned above, there is no transcendental guiding purpose to the universe: the universe unfolds in chaos, as necessity. This picture of the world as "nature… undeified" strips the world of any transcendental teleology and

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more knowledge, etc.), Nietzsche's vagueness about the content of the values the overman will create allows for a multiplicity of realizations and standards, such that we cannot justify our current actions with reference to any *one* or unify our pursuits in any one standard. Striving toward the overman will never involve striving towards a pre-established standard, as it does in the cases of higher purpose. We see this also when Nietzsche remarks in this same section of Zarathustra that "my happiness should justify existence itself!" (TSZ, Prologue, 3). Here, one understands existence as justified by standards and values which emerge from out of one's own engagement in the world, one's own "happiness." If we read idea together with Nietzsche's emphasis on the overman as the justification of existence, we see the importance of actively justifying existence through the creation of *new* values situated in one's own interests and engagements. Yet on Nietzsche's picture, this can only happen through this-worldly engagements. On this picture, any future-oriented goal or purpose emerges from out of the immanently grounded process of value creation; no one purpose can be firmly fixed as "the purpose" which justifies all of existence. In short, Zarathustra's teaching of the overman as the "meaning of existence" does not involve the fixation of a pre-established and unchanging standard for the justification of existence.
[292] WP 90.
[293] GS 109.

strips humanity accordingly of traditional sources of justification for their existence and their world.[294]

2.11.2 Conceptions of purpose as higher purpose are nihilistic, and their collapse characterizes European nihilism as a nihilism of purposelessness.

As described above, Nietzsche rejects a picture of the world which includes higher purposes because he believes that such a picture is fundamentally misguided and falsifies reality. Another way of putting this is that Nietzsche is opposed to teleology in the sense of some "inevitable fulfillment of a plan or a 'purpose' in nature, history, or society" because there is no plan or purpose in nature which corresponds to this notion.[295] But Nietzsche also wants to problematize this picture as a nihilistic conception of the world which understands the world we occupy as a mere means to some higher end — and, upon its becoming unbelievable, plunges Europe into a nihilism of purposelessness.

In Nietzsche's discussion of the bad conscience and its origin from the second essay of the *Genealogy,* we see how this particular nihilistic conception of the world comes about. Early man develops what Nietzsche calls the bad conscience first and foremost when he is forced to live within a society and to maintain peaceful relations with those around him. The limitations this new situation places on expressions of his instincts and desires which might be potentially injurious to other in society, coupled with his continued physiological need to discharge these instincts and desires, forces early man to internalize his violence and turn against himself: "Lacking external enemies and obstacles, and forced into the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, man

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[294] Ibid.
[295] George Stack, *Lange and Nietzsche*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 166.

impatiently ripped himself apart, persecuted himself."[296] With the advent of this bad

conscience comes a feeling of profound weariness and exhaustion: "the worst and most

insidious illness… [and] one from which mankind has not yet recovered; man's sickness

of man, of himself."[297] Otherwise put, man's incorporation into society stunts his will and

leads to affective nihilism as a physiological condition.

This affective nihilism and the attendant suffering — characterized by Nietzsche

above as "man's sickness with himself"— leads him to posit other worlds and purposes

as higher and nobler than his own, so that his newfound suffering can be justified and he

can be redeemed. It is perhaps unsurprising that this "fundamental change" in mankind's

understanding of his existence and the world he occupies — this *nihilistic* conception of

man's world — results from affective nihilism, or man's sickness with himself:

> …here was now an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself,
> provided this earth with something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic,
> contradictory, and portentous, that the picture of the earth was fundamentally
> changed. In fact, it required divine spectators to approve the dramatic
> performance which then began and whose conclusion is not yet in sight… In
> himself he arouses a certain interest, tension, hope, almost a certainty, *as if
> something is announcing itself in him, is preparing itself, as if the human being
> were not the goal but only the way, an episode, a great promise* [emphasis
> mine]...[298]

This invention of gods in whose divine plan humanity participates understands human

existence as a mere means to some higher end; on this picture, humanity is justified only

as a means to a goal.[299] Christianity develops this notion and couples it together with an

[296] GM II.16.
[297] Ibid.
[298] GM II:16.
[299] Here, it is clear that Nietzsche is gesturing towards his notion of the human being as a bridge
to the *Übermensch,* but the analysis here stands also for humanity as a bridge to some afterlife.
Nietzsche's great task involves affirming this-worldly existence, but as I hope to argue, this will

understanding of the Christian God as divine creditor and human beings as lowly debtors, unable to repay the debt incurred by the fact of their existence alone. On this picture, "existence in general… is left standing as *inherently worthless* (a nihilistic turning-away from existence, the desire for nothingness)" and humanity seeks relief through the promise of a higher existence after their death.[300]

In a note from 1887, Nietzsche remarks that "the nihilistic question 'for what?' is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded from outside."[301] According to Nietzsche, the asking of this "nihilistic question" need not only involve humanity's hope for a higher purpose to be established by some "*superhuman authority,*" but also "the authority of reason… or the *social instinct* (the herd)… or *history* with an immanent spirit and a goal within, so one can entrust oneself to it."[302] Although humanity's nihilistic ask after a transcendent justification for existence in Christianity most obviously involves a devaluation of this-worldly existence as it is, Nietzsche's point here, however, is that any attempt to find a higher purpose which justifies existence — a purpose in which human pursuits are unified and the value of these pursuits conditioned in the same way — is an attempt to locate a purpose in existence which does not exist in actuality. When we direct ourselves towards such a purpose or understand our lives as meaningful with reference to such a purpose, we implicitly denigrate the world as it actually is and fail to engage meaningfully with the world to which we belong. The question "for what?" already supposes that some

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involve an affirmation not only of future versions of humanity but also an affirmation of great contemporary individuals.
[300] GM II:21. It is worth noting here that Nietzsche is speaking especially of *transcendent* purposes, of higher purposes projected beyond the world of human existence.
[301] WP 20.
[302] WP 20.

justification must come from outside our the individual purposes and goals of embodied, this-worldly life; in short, this question belies a habitual and common understanding of a "higher purpose" as that which is able to justify this-worldly existence.[303]

We see Nietzsche's rejection of a higher purpose in his 1886 critique of his own early work, *The Birth of Tragedy.* In this retrospective critique, Nietzsche recognizes *The Birth of Tragedy* as a youthful attempt to present an amoral picture of the world which still justifies humanity, or bestows humanity with a meaning, through a higher purpose.[304] Nietzsche's early notion that the "existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" presents the world as "at every moment the attained manifestation of God, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the person who suffers most, who is the most rent with contradictions."[305] According to *The Birth of Tragedy,* the world is an artistic creation of this "amoral artist-God" who creates world in order to "[rid] himself of the strain of fullness and superfluity, from the suffering of pressing internal contradictions."[306] As an expression of the contradictions and chaos of this artist-God, the suffering of humanity and the chaos of the world of earthly existence is given some sense, and man can be consoled by this fact. Nietzsche's late interpretation of his attempt at metaphysical consolation in *The Birth of Tragedy,* which understands the

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[303] This otherworldly hope ignores the fact that, for Nietzsche, we have a perfectly good explanation for why things are the way they are in the *will to power.* As Matthew Meyers notes in *Reading Nietzsche through the Ancients,* "the idea is that there is a kind of naturalized or immanent teleology divorced from theology, and this kind of teleology explains the organization, behavior, and movement of organic and even inorganic entities in terms of goal-directed forces at work within nature" (Matthew Meyer, *Reading Nietzsche through the Ancients.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 247).

[304] "The entire book recognizes only an aesthetic sense and a deeper meaning under everything that happens, a "God," if you will, but certainly only a totally unthinking and amoral artist-God." (BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5).

[305] BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5.

[306] Ibid.

artist's metaphysics as an attempt to resist Christian interpretations of the purposefulness

of the universe, acknowledges that this attempt still results in a nihilistic conception of

the world (albeit an amoral one, distinguished from Judeo-Christian conceptions of

higher purpose). Nietzsche himself interprets his artist's metaphysics as a system which

"would sooner believe in nothingness or the devil than in the here and now."[307] This

nihilistic conception of the world is what Nietzsche ultimately rebukes in his "Attempt at

a Self-Criticism." His early "artist's metaphysics" both posited a higher purpose to the

universe that was not there, and found a justification for human existence in this purpose

alone. This worldview, like those Judeo-Christian worldviews which young Nietzsche

had hoped to supplant with *The Birth of Tragedy,* denigrates this worldly existence and

leaves man without immanent sources of meaning through which he might affirm his life.

     In "On the Otherworldly" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche places this-

worldly purposiveness and higher purposes (as sources of meaning) in beautiful

juxtaposition, as Zarathustra describes the way in which his rejection of higher purposes

as sources of meaning led him to find meaning in his "body and this earth." Here, we get

our first hint at the possibility of a kind of immanent purposiveness which allows one to

find meaning in one's world and oneself while avoiding the life-denying, nihilistic

pitfalls of higher purposes. In this section, Nietzsche describes how Zarathustra

unconsciously invented a divine creator and purpose for the world as a justification of his

existence in light of his suffering, weakness, and despair: "Once upon a time, Zarathustra

also cast his fancy beyond man, like all afterworldsmen. The work of a suffering and

tortured God, did the world then seem to me… [as] the eternally imperfect, an eternal

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[307] Ibid.

contradiction's image and imperfect image."[308] It is only after he recognizes the origin of

his invention (the backworld or afterworld [*Hinterwelt*] as a source of meaning founded

in a higher purpose) in his own bodily suffering and despair does Zarathustra recognize

himself (as body) and this-worldly existence (as earth) as full of immanent purposes

which affirm this life rather than implicitly deny or denigrate this life. According to

Nietzsche, in humanity's invention of higher purposes:

> It was the body which despaired of the body—it groped with the fingers of the infatuated spirit at the ultimate walls… It was the body which despaired of the earth—it heard the bowels of existence speaking unto it. And then it sought to get through the ultimate walls with its head—and not with its head only—into "the other world." But that "other world" is well concealed from man, that de-humanized, inhuman world, which is a celestial naught; and the bowels of existence do not speak unto man, except as man…. A new pride taught me mine ego, and that teach I unto men: no longer to thrust one's head into the sand of celestial things, but to carry it freely, a terrestrial head, which giveth meaning to the earth!… More uprightly and purely speaketh the healthy body, perfect and square-built; and it speaketh of the meaning of the earth.—[309]

Nietzsche's task, his proposal for a solution to the problem of nihilism, emphasizes the

importance of recovering immanent meaning, as Zarathustra's "meaning of the earth," in

the immanent purposiveness of embodied existence. Yet this recovery can only come

after a moment of profound nihilism of purposelessness. It is only when Zarathustra

"[carries his] own ashes to the mountain" of his solitude that he can identify the meaning

of the earth: after all, Zarathustra asks rhetorically, "how could you wish to become new

unless you had first become ashes?"[310] It is only after a period of convalescence — a

recovery from the affliction of nihilistic conceptions of the world — that one can return

to this world with a new understanding of meaning as immanent and of organic bodies as

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[308] TSZ, "On the Otherworldly."

[309] TSZ, "On the Otherworldly."

[310] TSZ, "On the Way of the Creator." See another mention of the importance of destruction/ashes in the Prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 2.

meaning-makers. In "On the Otherworldly," Zarathustra goes on to explain that once one rejects the metaphysical consolation of higher justifications of humanity, one lapses into illness.[311]

In other words, when one comes to realize that any picture which justifies existence by appeal to higher purposes is an illusion, this leads to nihilistic consequences, especially a return to affective nihilism. The nihilism of purposelessness which results from this is characterized by the belief that there is no purpose at which the world aims. This kind of nihilism involves a further assessment of the world as worthless, since the various interpretations of higher purpose which humanity had projected onto the world to give it a meaning are "pulled out" once they become unbelievable. In this way, a sense of the worthlessness of humanity and thus of oneself grows out of the nihilism of purposelessness which presents itself as the first source of meaning to absence itself after the death of God.

Simply put, nihilistic teleological conceptions of the world imply that if we are to find value in humanity, there must be a higher purpose — a final cause of existence in which the multifarious purposes and pursuits of humanity are unified and with reference to which such pursuits can be understood as more or less valuable — in which humanity participates. Upon coming to the conclusion that there are no such higher purposes, the nihilist of purposelessness concludes that we cannot find value in humanity.[312] Otherwise

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[311] "Gentle is Zarathustra to the sickly. Verily, he is not indignant at their modes of consolation and ingratitude. May they become convalescents and overcomers, and create higher bodies for themselves!" TSZ, "On the Otherworldly."

[312] In his article "Transcendence and the Problem of Otherworldly Nihilism," Iain Thomson supports this interpretation with his argument that the problem of otherworldly nihilism in Nietzsche is that the unattainability of otherworldly goals or purposes posited by humanity leads

put, since Western thought has historically appealed to some higher purpose for the justification of humanity and the provision of meaning, a culture or individual which recognizes the falsity of this worldview also must come to terms with the lack of a justification for existence and the lack of meaning. Thus Nietzsche describes "goal-lessness as such" as a "principle of [nihilists'] faith."[313] In Nietzsche's 1887 notes on European nihilism, Nietzsche explicitly ties European nihilism to a lost belief in higher purpose as a goal-directedness of the universe:

> nihilism… must arrive first when we search for a meaning/sense [*Sinn*] in events that is not there, so that the seeker finally loses his courage… This meaning/sense [*Sinn*] 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 — and now one realizes that becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing.[314]

In this excerpt, Nietzsche makes it clear that nihilism results from the collapse of a belief in the directedness of the universe towards a higher purpose of the kind I identify above. The nature or content of this purpose, for Nietzsche, is of no consequence; as he points out, nihilism of purposelessness results when *any* notion of higher purpose is revealed to be false. After all, all of the pictures of purposiveness presented here posit some ultimate future fulfillment [*Erfüllung*], world order [*Weltordnung*], loving and harmonious intercourse [*Verkehr*], or state [*Zustand*] — unknown and unknowable *a priori*, but posited and believed nonetheless — as purposes which condition the value of human

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to "nihilistic dissatisfaction with life on earth in general." On my account, this unattainability can be explained by Nietzsche's claim that such goals or purposes do not, in fact, exist.
[313] WP 25.
[314] WP 12.

pursuits in the same way, in which the divergent end-directedness of human beings can be unified.[315]

Whether the end goal or final cause of the universe is understood as "the moral world order" or "a state of universal annihilation," any widespread realization that the universe does not aim towards such a goal and possesses no such higher purpose could have brought about that nihilism of purposelessness which characterizes European nihilism. Nietzsche hints at the reason why in this excerpt: when a higher purpose is posited towards which the world is directed, humanity is provided with a meaning by which they can justify their existence. Otherwise put, higher purposes give a sense [*Sinn*] to human existence as a means towards some future fulfillment. Since humankind has long made sense of itself by appeal to such teleological pictures, the falsity and eventual unbelievability of this teleological picture leaves humankind unable to make sense of itself. In this nihilistic moment, humankind finds itself in a vacuum of meaninglessness.

European nihilism thus involves a widespread belief in the meaninglessness of human existence, resulting not only from the absence of objective truth but also from the unbelievability of teleological pictures of reality which project higher purposes onto this world and human existence. We see more evidence for this in Nietzsche's characterization of nihilism as that which follows from the realization that "The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer."[316] In his plan for *Will to Power* — a book on the problem of nihilism which he never published — Nietzsche notes that "What is dawning is the opposition of the world we revere and the world we live and are. So we can abolish

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[315] By "unknown" here, I refer to the lack of any solid basis in this-worldly experience. See more on this question of the knowability of transcendent purposes in Thomson, "Transcendence and the Problem of Otherworldly Nihilism: Taylor, Heidegger, Nietzsche," 151.
[316] WP 2.

either our reverences or ourselves. The latter constitutes nihilism."[317] On my

interpretation, this world which we are and in which we live is the world of embodied

experience, while the world we revere is the world as guided by higher purposes. These

two pictures, Nietzsche suggests in the above excerpt, are incompatible, and if we are not

to abolish ourselves, we must abolish the world of our reverences and affirm the world

"we live and are."

As I note above, scientific advancements in post-Enlightenment Europe reveal the

picture of the universe as directed towards some higher purpose as unbelievable, since

those aspects of existence which might have previously been attributed to a divine or

transcendent purpose can now be explained in empirical, this-worldly terms. The

unbelievability of any worldview which includes some transcendent purpose follows

from the widespread adoption of a scientific worldview; in this way, post-Enlightenment

Europeans experience the abolition of certain of their reverences. Even as this occurs,

however, these same individuals still remain attached to higher purposes such as

scientific progress and moral progress, understanding themselves and their pursuits as

justified through such purposes. Yet just as the will to truth which brought about

scientific advancements undermined transcendent purposes, so too will it undermine the

higher purposes and scientific values subscribed to by post-Enlightenment thinkers. Since

humankind has long identified itself as valuable insofar as it participates in some world

driven towards a higher purpose, the abolition of higher purposes is experienced as an

abolition of humanity's value and results in a loss of identity.

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[317] WP 69n.

Thus, although nihilism of purposelessness necessarily involves a belief about the world — that there is no purpose at which the world aims and thus it is meaningless — the critical role it plays for Nietzsche lies in its conclusion that humanity is worthless. This is why, in particular, the unbelievability of an end goal (qua higher purpose) to the world — understood as a superfluous teleological principle of the kind Nietzsche warns about — leads to affective nihilism.[318] We see further evidence of this picture in Nietzsche's discussion of the development of the ascetic ideal as a way to fill the void of purposelessness from his *Genealogy of Morality.* On Nietzsche's account, without man's fidelity to the ascetic ideal:

> …then man, the animal man, has had no meaning up to this point. His existence on earth has had no *purpose*. [Emphasis mine] "Why man at all?" was a question without an answer. The will for man and earth was missing. Behind every great human destiny echoes as refrain an even greater "in vain!" That's just what the ascetic ideal means: that something is missing, that a huge hole surrounds man. He did not know how to justify himself to himself, to explain, to affirm. He suffered from the problem of his being.[319]

Later in this same section, Nietzsche notes that it is not man's pain or suffering which leads him into despair, but the fact that such suffering was senseless, or meaningless [*Sinnlos*]. To be left in a vacuum of meaninglessness is to have no reverences, but it also risks one's life: "the *deed of nihilism*… is suicide—."[320] Without a sense that one's existence is meaningful, Nietzsche argues, there is a risk that one will not want to continue living at all.

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[318] BGE 13. In this aphorism, Nietzsche lists a drive to self-preservation as such a "superfluous teleological principle," but we can also read his warning against such principles in general as one reason why we should find higher purposes unbelievable.
[319] GM III.28.
[320] WP 247.

But there is another option. We can come to realize, as Nietzsche hopes to show his reader, that we are capable of revering that world which we are and in which we live instead of some world justified only be appeal to a higher purpose. The abolition of our reverences need not lead to nihilism in the long run, but it will take a revaluation of our world and ourselves to get beyond a preliminary "moment" of nihilism. This is what Nietzsche refers to when he suggests that "every fruitful and powerful movement of humanity has also created at the same time a nihilistic movement. It could be the sign of a crucial and most essential growth, of the transition to new conditions of existence, that the most extreme form of pessimism, genuine nihilism, would come into the world."[321] Although Nietzsche critiques scientism, he praises the honesty of science; this new scientific honesty forces humanity to rethink its understanding of its world. As Babich notes, Nietzsche praises science "not for the sake of its truths or facts, but rather for the sake of its 'honesty'… For Nietzsche this integrity constitutes the most redeeming legacy of the scientific turn."[322] The fruitful movement brought about by scientific honesty is a sign of "a crucial and most essential growth," and while it leads us into the realm of a "genuine nihilism," humanity need not remain stuck there. To get beyond the nihilism associated with the dearth of any higher purpose, man must become able to affirm a world in the absence of any such *telos.* In Zarathustra's teaching of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche invites us to such an affirmation. In "The Convalescent," Zarathustra remarks that he returns "eternally to this identical and selfsame life, in its greatest and its smallest, to teach again the eternal return of all things." It is the teaching of the eternal return

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[321] WP 112.
[322] Babette Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life.* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 131.

which allows Zarathustra to escape his convalescence; on my interpretation, it is also that which allows those affirmative individuals the means by which to overcome nihilistic teleological thinking and affirm a world without any purposiveness beyond the driven purposes of the drives of life forms.[323]

Any conception of the world which includes some higher purpose at which the world aims relies on a *global* conception of purposiveness — which assigns one purpose to the world and all of humanity — for the founding of a meaningful human life. On Nietzsche's view, this way of thinking about meaning and purpose blocks humanity from recognizing a localized, immanent purposiveness which is present in all living beings, and finding meaning and purpose therein. The global teleological interpretation characteristic of the idea of a higher purpose understands all of the universe in terms of one goal or purpose and implies that the aims and purposes of a variety of objects and diversity of life forms can be understood only with reference to this one goal. Although it provided human beings with a justification both for their existence and for the constitution of the world, this was at the expense of eliding this-worldly purposiveness. Insofar as such an interpretation of higher purposes blocks humanity from locating localized, immanent purposes and thus discovering meaning in this world alone, the collapse of such conceptions of higher purpose in the moment of nihilism of purposelessness is necessary for re-thinking immanent purposiveness in a life-affirming way.

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[323] See appendix on the eternal recurrence and purpose.

2.12 Ethical Nihilism

In this section, I will introduce ethical nihilism as an element of European nihilism, involving both what I call a nihilism of value privation and a nihilism of worthlessness. Nihilism of value privation consists in the meta-ethical claim that are no absolute values. One who believes in the existence of absolute values believes that there are 1) real, objective values (values which lie outside of the individual and do not depend on one's own subjective perspective) which 2) condition the value of human actions, principles, and thoughts in the same way (we understand our action, thoughts, principles, and purposes as valuable with reference to these values) and 3) are equally binding for all human beings. Nihilism of worthlessness, on the other hand, makes an ethical claim: the world, as worthless, ought not to exist. After I introduce these two aspects of ethical nihilism, I will demonstrate differences between my account and Reginster's account in *The Affirmation of Life*.

In this section on ethical nihilism, as with the sections on epistemological nihilism and nihilism of purposelessness, it is important to note that Nietzsche recognizes both nihilistic conceptions of value (in absolute values) and a "moment" of nihilism in which such nihilistic values collapse and leave humanity disbelieving in value altogether. In the case of ethical nihilism, absolute values are nihilistic insofar as they find value in human actions and principles only with reference to absolute, identically binding standards for all. Nietzsche argues that a belief in absolute values (as values which prescribe one thing for all) denies and denigrates this-worldly existence, since attempts to adhere to such values (in the face of immense social pressure to do so) turn the individual against the aims of her drives, instincts, and interests, in which what is actually valuable for her can

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be found.[324] The belief is absolute values is also life-denying or nihilistic in another way: since such values do not actually exist, one's belief in and pursuit of these values leads one to find value outside of the world to which they belong.

2.12.1 Nihilism of value privation

Ethical nihilism results when an individual or culture comes to believe that there are no absolute values in the world.[325] As Ken Gemes helpfully explains, and as we see above, this version of nihilism first involves the "metaphysical claim that there are no objective moral values."[326] This is a metaphysical claim because it makes a claim about existence: that existence is devoid of objective moral values.[327] Nietzsche's ethical nihilist comes to this broader conclusion after realizing that nothing is absolutely ethical or unethical.[328] Yet this claim — that "there are no objective moral values" — is also a meta-ethical claim, since its denial of the existence of absolute values (what Gemes calls objective moral values) is essentially a claim about the nature of values: as Gemes succinctly remarks, "the will to truth…having destroyed the metaphysics that underpinned our values, is slowly bringing belated recognition that those values themselves now lack any coherent foundations. Thus we are inevitably led to a void of values."[329] In other words,

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[324] Of course, Nietzsche also identifies a number of individual absolute values as life-denying, such as pity [*Mitleid*] (A 7).

[325] Bernard Reginster presents this as one possible interpretation of nihilism in Nietzsche in his recent work (Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006)) and Harold Langsam makes an even stronger claim according to which "nihilism is equivalent to the claim that there are no legitimate values" (Harold Langsam, "How to Combat Nihilism." *History of Philosophy Quarterly.* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Apr., 1997), 235.

[326] Ken Gemes, "Nihilism" in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences,* 271.

[327] This basic definition accords with Richardson's definition of "no-values" nihilism from his *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.

[328] This phrasing is important, since Nietzsche's later development — that there is no value "independent of the valuing drives and affects" — makes a place for real value in the world, even though there is no absolute value, universally valuable for all of life in the same way.

[329] Gemes, "We are of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," 203.

after the knowledge drive undermines the metaphysical foundations of our values, humanity must come to terms with the groundlessness of their moral beliefs.

This meta-ethical aspect of ethical nihilism is nihilism as value privation. When Nietzsche defines nihilism as "the belief in absolute worthlessness, i.e., meaninglessness [*an die absolute Werthlosigkeit das heißt Sinnlosigkeit*]" which he calls "the annihilation of ideals [*Vernichtung der Ideale*]," it is this version of nihilism — as a belief in the total absence of value — to which he refers.[330] On my account, nihilism as value privation in Nietzsche is the result of two historical moments: first, the loss of Judeo-Christian standards of valuation with the death of God and then, more radically, the loss of Enlightenment values and ideals as scientistic values are revealed to be a new form of ascetic, or life-denying, values.[331] Although the dominance of Enlightenment values after the death of God averts the first moment of the nihilistic crisis by replacing Judeo-Christian values with scientific ones, these scientific values are eventually revealed as human constructs without any metaphysical foundation. Gemes's discussion of nihilism as the "uncanniest of guests" illustrates this nicely:

> …why does [Nietzsche] call nihilism an uncanny guest and the uncanniest of monsters? Presumably because he realizes that for his audience nihilism is, on first approach, rather different and unfamiliar, and yet in some deep, perhaps, as yet, unarticulated sense, profoundly close and familiar. It is unfamiliar to his audience because, valuing truth, objectivity, science, education, progress, and other Enlightenment ideals, they would regard themselves as having firm, deeply held values. It is somehow familiar because they would have an inchoate sense that the demand central to the Enlightenment ideal, the demand that all assumptions must face the test of reason, is a test that consistently applied would put those values, indeed, all values, into question.[332]

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[330] *KSA* 12:7[54]

[331] On Nietzsche's analysis, the first moment has already occurred when he writes, while the beginnings of the second moment are only just arising.

[332] Gemes, "We are of Necessity Strangers to Ourselves," 203.

On this picture, although modern Europeans are not as aware of nihilism as the privation of scientific or Enlightenment values, there is a sense that the full embrace of Enlightenment values leads one to reject such values. This uncomfortable in-between is where modern Europe finds itself when Nietzsche is writing. Those already rejecting Enlightenment values, such as Nietzsche himself does in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, are nihilists of value privation, consciously subscribing to the metaphysical, meta-ethical claim that there are no absolute values. Yet even those who do not yet subscribe to these claims explicitly might sense that the absolute values they espouse are haunted by such claims. As Nietzsche argues, the development of the will to truth which led to the rejection of Judeo-Christian values will also eventually reveal the absence of scientific values as well.[333]

2.12.2 Nihilism of worthlessness

Nihilism as value privation — that is, nihilism as a metaphysical or meta-ethical stance which can be captured in the claim that there are no absolute values — results from a rejection of previous systems of valuation on Nietzsche's picture. Yet Nietzsche's account of ethical nihilism also involves a normative assessment, or an ethical claim about the world: the world is worthless, devoid of all value, and as such, it "ought not to exist."[334] This second aspect of ethical nihilism is that which I will call nihilism of worthlessness.

On Nietzsche's account, this nihilism of worthlessness — as a "madness of the will showing itself… [as a] will to set up an ideal" — is manifest in particular nihilistic

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[333] See previous chapter on epistemological nihilism. There is one important
[334] WP 585.

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system of thought, and the clearest exemplar of this nihilism is Christianity.[335] In

"Attempt at a Self-Criticism," Nietzsche argues that:

> Christianity was from the start essentially and thoroughly disgust and weariness with life, which only dressed itself up, only hid itself in, only decorated itself with the belief in an "other" or "better" life. The hatred of the "world"… a world beyond created so that the world on this side might be more easily slandered, at bottom a longing for nothingness, for extinction… all that, as well as the absolute desire of Christianity to value only moral worth, has always seemed to me the most dangerous and most eerie form of all possible manifestations of a "Will to Destruction," at least a sign of the deepest illness, weariness, bad temper, exhaustion, and impoverishment in living… in the eyes of morality (and particularly Christian morality, that is, absolute morality) life must be seen as constantly and inevitably wicked, because life is something essentially amoral… [this leads life to finally] be experienced as something not worth desiring, as something worthless.[336]

We see this analysis of Christian morality's suppressed or implicit belief in the worthlessness of earthly existence also in Nietzsche's discussion of the debtor-creditor relation inherent to Christian thought in *On the Genealogy of Morality.* According to this picture, since mankind was created by the Christian god, mankind incurs a debt to this god simply by existing. This debt can never be repaid, especially after the creditor (the Christian god) takes the debt upon himself. Nietzsche calls this "Christianity's stroke of genius… the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of love …. for his debtor."[337] According to Nietzsche's version of Christian doctrine, before this moment of sacrifice, "existence in general… is left standing as inherently worthless" and humanity experiences "a nihilistic turning-away from existence, the desire for nothingness or desire for the anti-thesis, to be other."[338] After the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, humanity is made whole again and the world becomes valuable as a means to a higher end in heaven.

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[335] GM II:22.
[336] BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5.
[337] GM II:21.
[338] GM II:21.

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Nietzsche's key insight here is that on such a picture, earthly existence is understood as valuable only insofar as it is a means to heaven. In heaven, Christianity posits an afterlife as the goal of this life and as the goal of morality; heaven is the highest good, capable of redeeming and justifying humanity and existence. On this picture, this-worldly existence is devoid of inherent worth or value. Thus, Christianity morality denigrates the world. On this picture, the normative claim of nihilism of worthlessness — the claim that the "world ought not to exist" — is obscured, but not rejected.

Yet a more explicit nihilism of worthlessness follows historically from the combination of a nihilism of value privation (following the death of God, or the rejection of Christianity and Judeo-Christian values) with a deeply ingrained need for real, higher values which manifestations of declining and decadent life forms have developed over the course of time.[339] This deeply ingrained need for absolute values develops 1) out of our nature as valuing beings and 2) out of long-established habits of valuation.

When Nietzsche establishes human beings as essentially valuing beings, he does not mean that we are merely capable of valuing or that we do in fact value certain things. Rather, human beings for Nietzsche are life forms essentially characterized by their drivenness and this necessarily involves valuation. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche establishes an identity between "living" and "evaluating."[340] In *Twilight of the Idols,*

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[339] Further evidence for nihilism of value privation as a meta-ethical stance after which a normative assessment of life follows is found in Nietzsche's 1883 note which states that "the worthlessness of life is known to cynicism, but it has not yet turned against life [*Die Werthlosigkeit des Lebens ist erkannt im Cynismus, aber hat sich noch nicht gegen das Leben gewendet*]" (KSA 10: 7 [222]). Here, we see the two stages of "ethical nihilism" laid out: 1) a nihilistic meta-ethical belief in the absence of real, absolute values and 2) a negative normative stance against life which follows from this belief.
[340] BGE 9.

Nietzsche notes that valuation is a symptom, a byproduct, of life itself,[341] and claims that "When we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values."[342] In its essence, life as driven life posits values; as life forms and embodied complexes of drives, human beings express values. Condemnations and affirmations are "value judgments of life."[343] As Richardson remarks, "the judging that life constantly does [is] valuing."[344]

As Nietzsche points out in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, human beings have long "suffered from the problem of what [they mean]."[345] In this essay and elsewhere in the work, Nietzsche argues that human beings have a deep need to make sense of themselves: to find a meaning for their life, and in particular, their suffering.[346] According to Nietzsche's genealogical account, this search for meaning results in the acquisition and establishment of certain habits of valuation: in particular, mankind acquires a habit of locating absolute values ("absolute good" and "absolute evil") in reality.[347] As valuing beings historically situated in 19th century Europe, human beings develop this habit due to the widespread influence of Christianity and the myriad Judeo-Christian practices in which they engage. In short, European individuals have found

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[341] "…the value of life cannot be estimated. Not by the living, for they are an interested party." TI, "The Problem of Socrates," 2.

[342] TI, "Morality as Anti-Nature," 5.

[343] TI, "The Problem of Socrates," 2.

[344] John Richardson, "Nietzsche's Value Monism" in *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature.* Edited by Manuel Dries and P.J.E. Kail. (New York: Oxford UP: 2015), 93.

[345] GM III:29.

[346] See also GS 1: "…founders of moralities and religions… promote the interests of the species, even if they should believe that they promote the interest of God or work as God's emissaries. They too, promote the life of the species, by promoting the faith in life. 'Life is worth living!' every one of them shouts: 'there is something to life, there is something behind life, beneath it, beware!'"

[347] See the account of the development of the will to truth below.

meaning in the establishment and adherence to Judeo-Christian values and other ascetic ideals: put succinctly, "the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning."[348] These ascetic ideals, developed by the ascetic priest (and, as shown in the chapter on epistemological nihilism above, manifest in the ideals of scientism) claim that life – with its sensory pleasures and distractions – must be turned against itself. According to Nietzsche, ascetic ideals are the defining features of Judeo-Christian morality.

Even post-Enlightenment and after the death of God, as human beings continue to claim that absolute good and evil exist and that humans can "know 'intuitively' what is good and evil" without the guidance of Christianity, in this phenomenon Nietzsche believes that "we are merely witnessing the effects of the dominion of the Christian value judgment and an expression of the strength and depth of this dominion."[349] Indeed, even when the Christian faith is rejected in favor of rational Enlightenment ideals after the death of God, faith in a new ascetic ideal — truth — comes to dominate. Although scientists renounce religious faith, they renounce religious faiths only in favor of a different faith: the faith in *truth* qua objective truth. Science's obsession with truth leads it to only value facts and, in particular, "pure," un-interpreted facts, the belief in which results from a faith in objective truth. Science, just like the ascetic ideal, prescribes one thing for all, but instead of repentance and belief in a divinity, it is a belief in objective truth. This belief in objective truth is what Nietzsche characterizes as "immaculate perception" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra:* it is a belief in the possibility of the world as identically intelligible to all.[350] Thus although science appears to be opposed to religion,

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[348] GM III:29.
[349] TI v.5
[350] TSZ, "On Immaculate Perception."

it simply replaces God with *objective truth* as an absolute ground that justifies and explains existence. Science, like the ascetic ideal, interprets all reality with reference to one goal: the goal of reaching objective truth. Thus, science is simply another version of the ascetic ideal; it is a new manifestation of the same habits of absolute valuation which the development of the ascetic ideal in the Judeo-Christian priest began.

As the source of a new ascetic ideal, scientism also offers humanity a meaning. Yet as a perspective involving an absolute valuation which purports not only to have a monopoly on truth but also unquestionable certainty in the absolute value of objective truth, the scientific worldview becomes untenable post-Enlightenment with the forward march of the will to truth.[351] During the time in which Nietzsche writes, human beings still experience a need for a meaning as a need for absolute values which justify human existence. While they originally attempted to fill the void of value left after the death of God with scientific, Enlightenment values, this attempt, too, is bound to fail and humanity is again left without scientific values as a source of meaning.[352]

When long-standing foundations of meaning [*Sinn*] in particular historical conceptions of truth, purpose, and value are undermined, humanity is left with the belief that the world is meaningless. Given humanity's continued need for meaning, the apparent meaninglessness of the world indicates to humanity that the world ought not to exist. In short, humanity's need for meaning, combined both with its belief in the world as devoid of value and its equation of meaning with absolute value, infects man with nihilism of worthlessness. Thus, nihilism as worthlessness is that nihilism which

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[351] Again, see chapter above on epistemological nihilism for a fuller account.
[352] Of course, as the preceding chapters demonstrate, this is only one dimension of European nihilism.

Nietzsche calls "the necessary consequence of recent value estimates."[353] Modern

Europe's belief in the necessity of absolute good and evil for a meaningful life, coupled

with their discovery that this is not the case, leads humanity to the belief that the world is

meaningless and, therefore, worthless: it ought not to exist.

2.13 Reginster and *The Affirmation of Life*

Any account of ethical nihilism in Nietzsche would be remiss to exclude a discussion of

Reginster's analysis of Nietzschean nihilism in *The Affirmation of Life.* Indeed, Reginster

offers certain resources for pulling apart the two aspects of ethical nihilism which I treat

above, although his account differs in important ways from my own. In this section, we

will look to Reginster to see similarities and differences between the two versions of

nihilism he identifies and the two versions of ethical nihilism (as value privation and

worthlessness) for which I argue. It is worth noting, as Gemes and Richardson point out

and as I mention above, that Reginster's account treats nihilism mainly as a "cognitive

stance."[354] By this point, it should already be obvious that any such treatment

oversimplifies Nietzsche's treatment of nihilism and, most importantly, misses out on the

psych-physiological features of nihilism which are so important for identifying nihilistic

attitudes and stances.[355] Yet insofar as ethical nihilism on my view is a version of

cognitive nihilism, my account must be brought into dialogue with Reginster's account.

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[353] KSA 9: 2 [100].

[354] Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard
Reginster." Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.

[355] In Gemes's encyclopedia article on nihilism, his analysis of Nietzschean nihilism includes
allusion to a "deeper form of nihilism… evidence by his repeated claim that Christianity itself is
nihilistic… N argues that this very proclamation of the value of the world to come serves to
disvalue this, our worldly existence." This "deeper form of nihilism" is what Gemes labels
"affective nihilism," and as discussed above, I follow him in this assessment while offering a
more substantial account. (Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Social Sciences, 271-4).

In his work, Reginster distinguishes between what he calls nihilism of despair and nihilism of disorientation. While nihilism of disorientation makes certain claims about our values, nihilism of despair involves value judgements about our world. In some ways, these two types of ethical nihilism parallel, respectively, nihilism as value privation and nihilism as worthlessness. But there are important differences between Reginster's account and my own.

For Reginster, nihilism as disorientation "results from the endorsement of normative objectivism (the normative authority of a value depends on its objective standing) and the rejecting of descriptive objectivism (there are no objective values)."[356] Otherwise put, insofar as the highest values of European culture were understood to be valuable insofar as they were objective and absolute standards of good and evil, the notion that such objective and absolute standards of good and evil do not exist plunges Europe into a nihilism of disorientation in which there is a "lack of normative guidance."[357] On such a view, "there is nothing wrong with the world and something wrong with our values."[358] This version of nihilism, as both Reginster and Hussain point out, makes a meta-ethical claim about the nature of values.[359]

In the case of Reginster's nihilism of despair, on the other hand, "there is nothing wrong with our values but something wrong with the world."[360] According to Reginster, the problem in this case is that the world is inhospitable to the realization of our highest

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[356] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 98.
[357] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 8.
[358] Ibid., 34.
[359] Ibid., 55. Nadeem J.Z. Hussain, "Metaethics and Nihilism in Reginster's The Affirmation of Life," 3.
[360] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 34.

values;[361] Nietzsche's despairing nihilist supports "an ethical claim about the world, and our existence in it: 'it would be better if the world did not exist' (WP 701)."[362] Thus, the despairing nihilist advances a negative evaluative judgment about the world in which she lives.

In the early chapters of Reginster's monograph, he rejects an interpretation of nihilism in Nietzsche as disorientation on the basis that it is incompatible with what Reginster believes to be the real problem of nihilism in Nietzsche: nihilism as despair. According to Reginster, nihilism as disorientation (as a claim about values) and nihilism as despair (as a claim about the world) are incompatible because "the devaluation of values appears to undermine despair, since we have no reason to trouble ourselves over the world's being inhospitable to the realization of values we consider devaluated."[363] In other words, one cannot be both a disoriented nihilist and a despairing nihilist. If one is a despairing nihilist on Reginster's view, one finds the world inhospitable to her values and is thrown into despair by this fact. Yet if she also believed, as the disoriented nihilist does, that her values are worthless, there would be no reason for her despair. As Gemes neatly points out, nihilism as disorientation involves the belief that "there are no ultimate values," whereas nihilism as despair insists that "there are ultimate values" and that these values are unattainable and unrealizable, given the constitution of the world.[364] Given this incompatibility, Reginster ultimately settles on nihilism of despair as characteristic of Nietzsche's overarching project of overcoming nihilism and affirming life after

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[361] Ibid., 31.
[362] Ibid., 28.
[363] Ibid., 34.
[364] Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster," 462.

demonstrating possible resources for overcoming nihilism as disorientation in Nietzsche. On Reginster's account, then, the "primary form of Nietzschean nihilism is despair over the unrealizability of our highest values."[365]

Although the incompatibility of nihilisms of disorientation and despair described above drives Reginster's attempt to adjudicate and decide between two kinds of nihilism — one which involves a claim about values, and one which involves a normative claim about the world — it seems that this forced choice is a result mainly of the way Reginster frames these two types of nihilism. If we frame these two versions of ethical nihilism instead as nihilism of value privation (or the absence of absolute values) and nihilism of worthlessness (as involving the normative claim that the world ought not to exist), respectively, we can capture the way in which Nietzsche's treatment of the ethical aspects of nihilism is equally concerned with claims about values and claims about the value of the world. In particular, there seems to be insufficient reason to treat "nihilism of despair" (or any ethical nihilism involving claims about the world, for that matter) as "primary" to Nietzschean nihilism, especially given the mature Nietzsche's extensive treatment of nihilism as a meta-ethical *devaluation* of values.[366]

2.13.1 Reginster's nihilism of disorientation vs. nihilism as value privation

Nihilism as value privation, on my account, is nearly identical to what Reginster calls nihilism as disorientation. As such, it involves a meta-ethical claim: There are no absolute values. This means, especially, that there is no value to those moral values historically recognized by the the Judeo-Christian tradition. As a "radical repudiation of

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[365] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 54.
[366] KSA 12:2[127]. "What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves." See below.

value, meaning, and desirability," nihilism involves very particular beliefs about values: namely, that values are absent from the world to which we belong.[367] This is the kind of nihilism which results when "The highest values devalue themselves [*die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen*]."[368] We see a clear example of the highest values' self-devaluation in the way that Judeo-Christian morality (as requiring and valuing honesty) comes to undermine the widespread Judeo-Christian belief in objective, universal morality: "among the forces cultivated by morality was truthfulness: this eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its partial perspective."[369] The result of the devaluation of one's highest values is nihilism as value privation, or as Nietzsche would put it, nihilism as "the belief in absolute worthlessness, i.e., meaninglessness [*an die absolute Werthlosigkeit das heißt Sinnlosigkeit*]" which Nietzsche calls "the annihilation of ideals [*Vernichtung der Ideale*]."[370]

The main difference between my account of nihilism as value privation and Reginster's account of nihilism as disorientation is the greater emphasis that I place on the importance of meta-ethical nihilism as a denial of absolute values.[371] To see just how extensively Nietzsche treats European nihilism as a meta-ethical concern — and, more particularly, as value privation — one must look both to his published works and beyond them. In the *Nachlass,* Nietzsche claims that "skepticism about morality" is the key to understanding nihilism [*Skepsis an der Moral ist das Entscheidende*].[372] Elsewhere, he

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[367] Ibid.
[368] KSA 12:9[35].
[369] KSA 12:5 [71]. See above on epistemological nihilism in GS 357 for another account.
[370] KSA 12: 7 [54].
[371] After all, Reginster finds nihilisms of despair and disorientation incompatible, and then claims that the more important form of nihilism in Nietzsche is a nihilism of disorientation.
[372] KSA 12: 2 [127].

notes that unless mankind can "recognize" valuations or estimations [*Werthschätzungen*] as "presuppositions" rather than facts, nihilism will be inevitable.[373] Nihilism, on this picture, involves a belief about values: namely, that there are no real values. Already here we see nihilism as value privation in Nietzsche emerging; as meta-ethical nihilism, this involves claims (characterized by repudiations and refusals) about values.[374]

In 1886, Nietzsche defines nihilism as the "demise of a total valuation (namely the moral)" which is "lacking in new interpretative powers."[375] Nihilism occurs here as the demise of a value system which has not yet been replaced by new interpretations of value; in short, as a lack of value, or as value privation. This definition does not identify nihilism with a belief in the inhospitality of the world. Instead, nihilism is the demise of moral valuation; in this sense, the problem of nihilism is the problem of a dearth of values and our impotency to interpret and create values anew, not merely a problem about the mismatch between our values and the potential of our world to actualize such values.

Later reflections from 1887 offer more substantial evidence for this claim. In one note, Nietzsche explicitly connects moral valuation with nihilism: "Every purely moral value-setting/scale of values ends with nihilism [*Jede rein moralische Werthsetzung endet mit Nihilismus*]… One believes one can get along with a moralism without

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[373] KSA 12: 2[118].

[374] Nietzsche also characterizes nihilism as a "necessary consequence of previous estimates of value [*nothwendigen Consequenz der bisherigen Werthschätzungen*]" and presents "perfect nihilism" as "a necessary consequence of previous ideals [*die nothwendige Folge der bisherigen Ideale*]"). Insofar as nihilism arises in response to previous valuations, nihilism involves beliefs "about" values and valuations.

[375] KSA 12: 5 [70].

religious backgrounds: but with this is necessarily the way to nihilism."[376] Here, nihilism

is a result of the activity of a certain kind of value-setting and valuation: a "purely moral"

value setting, or a version of "moralism." The emphases here on a "pure" morality or

"moralism" which leads to nihilism lends support for nihilism as a value privation which

results from the collapse of absolute standards of right or wrong which function as

universal guides for behavior. When Nietzsche insists in another note that "the attempt to

escape nihilism without revaluing those values… brings about the opposite and

intensifies the problem," we see even more clearly that the problem of nihilism is, at least

in part, a problem of valuation and values.[377] If the overcoming of nihilism must involve

a revaluation of values, then the overcoming of nihilism can not just involve the

revaluation of our world (or the affirmation of life), but learning to interpret values and

valuation anew in the face of the absence of absolute values.[378]

We see this borne out also in selections from Nietzsche's published work. In

Book Five of *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche suggestively frames nihilism as an abolition of

mankind's "reverences [*Verehrunge*n]." Examples of such reverences here are false

interpretations of the world which revere transcendent sources of absolute value, such as

the worldviews of Buddhism and Christianity.[379] If we combine this notion that nihilism

is the abolition of our reverences in light of their falsehood with the excerpt from the

Nachlass directly above, we see the suggestion that while nihilism involves the collapse

of false interpretations and valuations, overcoming nihilism requires the formation of new

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[376] KSA 13: 7 [64].
[377] WP 28.
[378] My solution to this aspect of ethical nihilism (as meta-ethical) will involve interpreting value
and valuation as the practice of all forms of life. Valuation is always from a perspective.
[379] GS 346.

interpretations and valuations. If, as is suggested by the above excerpts, overcoming

nihilism involves changing *how* we value, not just *what* we value, then the problem of

nihilism is not, as Reginster argues, primarily our problematic assessment of our world

and whether or not it reaches our expectations; it is just as much of a problem with the

actual values we hold.

In a number of other places, the published work further bears this out. In the

Preface to the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche reads Schopenhauer's transformation and

"transcendentaliz[ation]" of ascetic ideals into "'values as such' on the basis of which he

said 'no' to life and to himself as well" as mankind's "temptation… to nothingness."[380]

According to Nietzsche, the absolutization of ascetic values both in Schopenhauer and in

Judeo-Christians before him is a symptom of mankind "looking back wearily, turning its

will against life… the onset of the final sickness becoming gently, sadly manifest: as

[European culture's] detour" to nihilism.[381] Thus, absolute ascetic ideals pave the path for

European nihilism. As we come to see throughout the rest of the *Genealogy,* the birth and

universal legislation of ascetic ideals is the result of a power-hungry priestly caste's

capitalization on a widespread physiological condition: weakness of will, impotence,

powerlessness.[382]

We see this same life-denying structure implicit in nihilistic valuations explicated

in *The Anti-Christ,* where Nietzsche details the structure and mechanism of "nihilistic

values":

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[380] GM, Preface, 5.
[381] GM, Preface, 5.
[382] We see this also in BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5: "…the most dangerous and most eerie form of all possible manifestations of a "Will to Destruction," at least a sign of the deepest illness, weariness, bad temper, exhaustion, and impoverishment in living."

Life itself appears to me as an instinct for growth, for survival, for the accumulation of forces, for power: whenever the will to power fails there is decline (or: decadence) [*wo der Wille zur Macht fehlt, giebt es Niedergang*]. My contention is that all the highest values of humanity have been emptied of this will—that the values of decline (or: decadence), of nihilism, now prevail under the holiest names [*dass Niedergangs-Werthe, nihilistische Werthe unter den heiligsten Namen die Herrschaft führen*].[383]

In this excerpt, Nietzsche clearly refers to nihilistic values [*nihilistische Werthe*] as values which facilitate the decline of life and power from which they originated; he further suggests an identity between these "highest values of humanity [*obersten Werthen der Menschheit*]" and absolute religious values. Nietzsche's claim here that there are properly nihilistic values — and not merely nihilistic worldviews or attitudes towards one's world — suggests that if there is a problem of nihilism, it is in some large part a problem of values and valuation.

European nihilism as the collapse of contemporary Europe's systems of morality, or absolute value — as value privation — is characterized by Nietzsche as nihilism because it leaves Europe in a vacuum of valuelessness or worthlessness [*Werthlosigkeit*] which leads to a sense of meaninglessness. Yet insofar as earlier moral systems offered life-denying or nihilistic conceptions of good and evil — conceptions which resulted from and responded to life-denial as an affective condition and physiological weakness of the will — European nihilism as value privation is a precondition for learning how to value from a position of strength. The importance of understanding previous valuations and better ways to value for understanding Nietzsche's interpretation of nihilism and its overcoming indicates that Reginster's relative lack of attention to nihilism as a "problem

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[383] A 6.

with our values" is an oversight. Nihilism is characterized in part by Nietzsche as a problem with the way we value; as such, it involves meta-ethical concerns.

Nietzsche's discussion of nihilism, then, introduces the devaluation of values as a separate phenomenon from a nihilism of worthlessness, which involves a negative normative assessment of the world. Insofar as he recognizes a role for that which he calls nihilism of disorientation in Nietzsche, Reginster would acknowledge that one should isolate nihilism as value privation from that which I call nihilism of worthlessness in Nietzsche.[384] Yet in his treatment of this kind of nihilism as a mere "side-path one takes [while] trying unsuccessfully to escape from the nihilism of despair," Reginster's reliance merely on 1) the incompatibility of nihilisms of disorientation and despair and 2) the lack of a consistent and systematic meta-ethical stance in Nietzsche remains unconvincing evidence for Reginster's lack of emphasis on nihilism as value privation.[385] Just as one should not argue that an individual does not hold a belief simply because it was either 1) actually inconsistent with some other belief that individual holds or 2) not systematically developed and explicated by the individual, Reginster concludes too quickly that nihilism involving beliefs about the value of the world more properly captures Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism than a version of nihilism involving a disbelief in absolute values.[386]

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[384] Even Reginster would acknowledge this, insofar as he recognizes an (albeit insignificant) role for that which he calls nihilism of disorientation in Nietzsche.

[385] Richardson, *Nietzsche Values,* forthcoming.

[386] For what I expect will be more on this topic, see John Richardson's forthcoming work, *Nietzsche Values.*

2.13.2 Distinguishing Reginster's "nihilism of despair" from nihilism of worthlessness

The second aspect of ethical nihilism which Nietzsche explicitly treats is the notion that the world is worthless. Since there are no absolute values, our world appears to be a valueless world.[387] Since the nihilist had previously found her value only as part of an inherently valuable world that worked through her, this realization that the world is valueless results in a feeling of the worthlessness [*Das Gefühl der Werthlosigkeit*] both of the world and of oneself: "At bottom, man has lost the faith in his own value when no infinitely valuable whole works through him [*Im Grunde hat der Mensch den Glauben an seinen Werth verloren, wenn durch ihn nicht ein unendlich werthvolles Ganzes wirkt*]."[388] Although this nihilism of worthlessness provokes despair, it is different from that which Reginster characterizes as "nihilism of despair."

As mentioned above, Gemes nicely frames the incompatibility remarked upon by Reginster in *The Affirmation of Life* between nihilisms of despair and disorientation. While nihilism as disorientation involves the belief that "there are no ultimate values," nihilism as despair insists that "there are ultimate values" and that these values are

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[387] Again, Nietzsche describes how this assessment of the worthlessness [*Werthlosigkeit*] of the world arises in his notes on European nihilism: "the categories 'Purpose,' 'Unity,' and 'Being,' with which we have insert value into the world, are again pulled out [*werden... herausgezogen*] — and now the world appears worthless [*und nun sieht die Welt werthlos aus*]." This aspect of ethical nihilism involves an "insight" [Einsicht] after which "the world begins to become worthless for us [*die Welt für uns werthlos zu werden anfängt*]" (*KSA* 13:11[99])." It is worth noting also that this emptying of the world of value is closely related to an experience of nihilism of purposelessness. Reginster gestures towards this notion in his work on nihilism with his claim that "both versions of nihilism [detailed by Reginster] share one basic claim: there is no goal in the realization of which our existence finds meaning" (*The Affirmation of Life,* 33).
[388] WP 12.

unattainable and unrealizable, given the constitution of the world.[389] On my account, instead, both nihilism as value privation and nihilism as worthlessness involve the belief that there are no absolute values. The critical issue for a version of nihilism which judges the world negatively is not that the world is inhospitable to certain absolute values, such that some fact about the world as it is makes such values unrealizable. The issue is that absolute values, deeply rooted in the human psyche though they may be, are mere human constructs. The resulting meta-ethical realization that the world is devoid of value, combined with humanity's deeply rooted human need (established as a long habit) for absolute valuation, leads to humanity's condemnation of the world: its nihilistic belief that "the world ought not to exist."

Unlike Reginster's account of Nietzsche on nihilism as despair, then, the condemnation of the world (characteristic of this version of nihilism) is not merely a negative judgment that results from my previous expectations for the actualization of my highest values in the world and my current recognition that such values are unrealizable in this world.[390] Rather, the condemnation of the world characteristic of nihilism as worthlessness, as an assessment that "the world ought not to exist," results when humanity comes to the meta-ethical realization that there are no absolute values yet still retains a deeply rooted — and now frustrated — *need* to assign absolute values to the world. It is not a mere matter of expectation; the problem is not that I *expect* the world to be hospitable to my highest values, and I realize it is not. The problem is that I have developed a *need* for the world to be hospitable to a certain set of highest values —

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[389] Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster," 462.
[390] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 37.

absolute values — but I recognize that there are no such values. In nihilism as worthlessness, absolute valuation is undermined as a source of justification and meaning for myself and human existence; any "ultimate values" are rejected. Thus, when humanity recognizes that there are no absolute values, something humanity experiences as a fundamental *need* becomes impossible for it. The frustration here is not merely a theoretical one, a "conclusion of an implicit reasoning," a mismatch of my meta-ethical assessment of the world and belief as expectation, resulting in a form of cognitive dissonance; it is a frustration of the will, resulting from the *felt* need to will in a direction which becomes impossible for us.[391]

Against Reginster, I do not believe that Nietzsche's presentation of the life-negating ethical stance that "our world ought not to exist"[392] presupposes some real, higher standard to which one holds the world. It is not the case, on my account, that "the core notion of a life-negating value remains that of a value that cannot be realized under the conditions of life in this world."[393] Rather, the "core notion" of a particular value which determines its life-negating tendency lies in that value's tendency to turn life against itself; whether or not it is "*hostile to life*" and "uses power to block the sources of power, [turning] the green eye of spite on… physiological growth itself" and becoming "more self-assured and self-triumphant to the same degree as its own condition, the physiological capacity to live, *decreases*."[394] In other words, a value tends to life-negation insofar as it diminishes or weakens the activity of the drives as wills to power, thus turning life against itself. This is the sense in which Nietzsche intends when he

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[391] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 49.
[392] KSA 12: 9 [60].
[393] Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life,* 45.
[394] GM III:13.

claims that "moral value judgments are condemnations, negations" and "morality is the renunciation of the will to existence."[395] The most dangerous repercussions of this version of nihilism lie in the *affective* life-negation in which it was originally rooted and to which it returns.

2.14 Affective Nihilism and Ethical Nihilism

Ethical nihilism, as in the cases of epistemological nihilism and nihilism of purposelessness, both originates from out of affective nihilism and initiates its return. In short, certain sources of meaning (objective truths, higher purposes, and absolute values) allowed for humanity to alleviate affective nihilism by offering a justification for human existence. Post-Enlightenment, these sources of meaning are withdrawn, and humanity is left without alternative sources of meaning. This plunges humanity back into the depths of its original, yet long-forgotten, illness: affective nihilism. We see this in Nietzsche's assessment of the ascetic priest as the potential doctor, with his various Judeo-Christian methods, for existential suffering: "is he really a doctor, this ascetic priest? … it is only suffering itself, the discomfort of the sufferer, that he combats, not its cause, not the actual state of being ill — this must constitute our most fundamental objection to priestly medication."[396] As mentioned earlier, this illness is the affective nihilism in Nietzsche, a physiological condition best characterized as a life-denying global mood resembling depression. Affective nihilism results in the "physiological inhibition and exhaustion [*physiologische Hemmung und Ermüdung*]"[397] of the drives, in which life "turn[s] against itself and den[ies] itself" via depressive affects. This condition, as involving the

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[395] WP 11.
[396] GM III:17.
[397] GM III:13.

dominance of depressive affects in an individual, manifests in the affective nihilist as a

"deep disgust for themselves, for the world, for all life."[398] Although nihilistic

conceptions of truth, purpose, and value provide man with a justification for existence in

the short term, with the development of the will to truth post-Enlightenment, they must

collapse and ultimately make man sicker:

> man, suffering from himself in some way, at all events physiologically, rather like an animal imprisoned in a cage, unclear as to why? what for? and yearning for reasons — reasons bring relief — yearning for cures and narcotics…. and lo and behold! from this magician, the ascetic priest, he receives the first tip as to the 'cause' of his suffering: he should look for it within *himself*.[399]

In the *Genealogy of Morality,* we see the ascetic ideal — which, importantly, includes

particular nihilistic conceptions of purpose, value, and truth from Judeo-Christian

systems *as well as* nihilistic conceptions of purpose, truth, and value from a scientistic

approach to the world — as an attempt to "alleviate and anesthetize" man's affective

nihilism by offering man a justification for his suffering. Yet the ascetic ideal ultimately

makes man sicker, turning him against himself and making him feel guilty for the gift of

divine purpose and value which transcendental sources have bestowed upon him.[400] We

see this idea also in Nietzsche's 1886 "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," which describes

Christianity and Christian morality as "disgust and weariness with life, which only

dressed itself up, only hid itself in… the belief in an 'other' or 'better' life. The hatred of

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[398] GM III:11.

[399] GM III:20.

[400] GM III:20. Perhaps this explains Nietzsche's self-reported early attempts to "make a stand against the moralistic interpretation and moral meaningfulness of existence" (BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5).

the 'world'…[and] a world beyond created so that the world on this side might be more easily slandered, at bottom a longing for nothingness, for extinction, for rest."[401]

In *Zarathustra,* we see again how an affective nihilism served as the original motivation for those ideals which temporarily preserved life.[402] There, Nietzsche argues that humanity's belief in absolute morality functioned mainly as a palliative for feelings of powerlessness, allowing for the self-preservation of humanity; as Nietzsche claims in *Zarathustra*, "humans first placed values into things, in order to preserve themselves."[403] Humanity's attempt to "place value" in the world in order to preserve life manifests an affective nihilism, merely preserving a sick form of life. The subsequent loss of absolute value in ethical nihilism as value privation and worthlessness, however, leads to circumstances in which even a weak, sick will cannot even be preserved. This is how the collapse of nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value above leads to the various moments of epistemological, purposeless, and ethical nihilisms— moments in which projections of meaning become unbelievable, are unable to preserve life, and lead to a deterioration of life which destroys the will to existence and leads to a felt weariness with the world.

In short, with Europe's post-Enlightenment disbelief in absolute values — with nihilism as value privation — the will turns against itself once again. This physiological deterioration of the will is life turned against itself.[404] The ethical stance "our world ought not to exist" arises from European individuals' senses that *they* ought not to exist; this sense is nothing more than the will turned against itself. Thus, while nihilism as

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[401] BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5.
[402] This theme is also mentioned in GM III:13.
[403] TSZ, "On the Thousand and One Goals."
[404] A6

worthlessness as an ethical stance can be represented by the belief that "our world ought

not to exist," it is fundamentally rooted in one's affective, psycho-physiological

constitution.

Chapter Three: Nietzsche's Metaphysics and the Problem of Nihilism

3.1 Metaphysical Resources for Responding to Nietzschean Nihilism

How might post-Enlightenment Europe move beyond European nihilism and towards a

"high point of humanity?"[405] In this chapter, I offer an interpretation of Nietzsche's

ontology, with a special emphasis on an essential permeability between the individual as

subject-unity and the world of which she is a part (also referred to below as the "porosity

of the self"). In the final chapter, I will utilize this ontology as a resource for responding

to the problem of European nihilism (as a belief-system involving a series about beliefs

about truth, purpose, and value) and the personal transformation required to overcome

affective nihilism. Although my picture of Nietzsche's metaphysics will stay true to the

"metaphysical sketches" from his published works and his notes, I will extrapolate from

these sketches to demonstrate how one might utilize his metaphysics to re-conceive truth,

purpose, and value in a way that enables one to overcome European nihilism.

3.2 Nietzsche against Metaphysics: Substance, Atomism, and Mechanistic Physics

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that Nietzsche provides an account of the

constitution of reality which can be characterized as a metaphysics. My case for this point

will become clearer later in this chapter, as I outline the particular ontological framework

which Nietzsche presents in his work. On the way to understanding what kind of

metaphysical picture Nietzsche offers, however, it is helpful to first see the kinds of

metaphysics he rejects. In order to aid my case for the kind of metaphysics which

Nietzsche sketches in his work, I will focus especially on his critique of 1) Being and a

metaphysics of substance; 2) atomistic interpretations of the world; and 3) mechanistic

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[405] TI, "How the True World Became a Fiction."

accounts of reality. Nietzsche's rejection of these metaphysical frameworks will help us to better understand the positive metaphysical picture which he formulates, for in his critical remarks on a metaphysics of substance, atomism, and mechanism, we find evidence supporting a metaphysics of interpenetrative, ever-changing force. This positive metaphysical picture — Nietzsche's drive ontology — disrupts the boundaries between self and world, thus results in an ontological porosity between individuals as driven beings and the driven world in which they are embedded. This picture of Nietzsche's drive ontology will allow us to see how individuals can find themselves situated in a meaningful world of truth, purpose, and value while still rejecting nihilistic conceptions of objective truth, higher purpose, and absolute value.

Nietzsche's crusade against these particular metaphysical interpretations turns up very early in his writings, as early at least as 1873, and continues throughout both his body of work and in his unpublished notes.[406] Here, I will establish this lifelong tendency by tracing it genealogically through the development of Nietzsche's thought. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche supports Heraclitus's denial of the stability and permanence of existence, or the belief that the world "nowhere shows a tarrying, an indestructibility, a bulwark in the stream."[407] He also praises Heraclitus's genius for recognizing that any supposed stability ascribed to reality by human beings is a result or consequence of the falsifying function of human experience and language.[408] In

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[406] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1962).

[407] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,* 51.

[408] "It is the fault of your myopia, not of the nature of things, if you believe you see land somewhere in the ocean of coming·to-be and passing away. You use names for things as though they rigidly, persistently endured; yet even the stream into which you step a second time is not the one you stepped into before" (Ibid., 51/2).

this same section of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age*, Nietzsche gestures towards his support

of an anti-atomistic account which he deems equally Heraclitean and Schopenhauerian:

that "everything which coexists in space and time has but a relative existence, that each

thing exists through and for another like it, which is to say through and for an equally

relative one."[409] Although this early support by Nietzsche for what seems like a relational

ontology can not be taken as evidence that for the continuation of such a picture in his

later projects, it allows us to identify a strong anti-substantivist tendency even in early

Nietzsche.[410]

   In *Human, All too Human,* this tendency continues. Early in the first book,

Nietzsche argues that a genealogical account of the development of the idea of substance

and being ("that all the rest of the world is one thing and motionless") reveals that "belief

in unconditioned substances and in like things [*gleiche Dinge*] is… a primordial and

equally ancient error of everything organic."[411] In short, and as Nietzsche makes clear at

the end of this section, human belief in substance is a fundamental error of organic life,

and "insofar as all metaphysic has concerned itself particularly with substance and with

freedom of the will, it should be designated as the science that deals with the fundamental

errors of mankind as if they were fundamental truths."[412] Metaphysics, for Nietzsche,

will not be a metaphysics of substance. Nietzsche argues that our understanding of a

"very object by itself, as in essence a thing unto itself, therefore as self-existing and

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[409] Ibid, 53.
[410] As Matthew Meyer explains, the relational ontology which Nietzsche seems to support here is a picture of reality according to which "everything exists and is what it is only in relation to something else." (Matthew Meyer, *Reading Nietzsche through the Ancients* (Boston: DeGruyter, 2012), 8.).
[411] HH I.18.
[412] Ibid.

unchanging, in short, as a substance"[413] reveals certain necessary features of human

cognition, *not* certain features about the world. This idea is repeated in notes from 1881,

in which Nietzsche again remarks that the very activity of thinking "must assert

substance and the same, because knowledge of the fully fluxional is impossible."[414] In

other words, the fixing of flux into stable substances is an activity of the mind which

makes the world comprehensible to human beings. There is, in actuality, no such thing as

a metaphysical substance.[415]

In "'Reason' in Philosophy" from *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche rejects notions

of permanence, being, and substance more straightforwardly perhaps than anywhere else

in the corpus: "precisely insofar as the prejudice of reason forces us to posit unity,

identity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being, we see ourselves somehow

caught in error, compelled into error."[416] He begins this critique of substance metaphysics

again with reference to Heraclitus, this time explaining in more detail that human

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[413] Ibid.

[414] KSA 9:11 [330]. See also Nietzsche's indictment of science's unjustified faith in substance KSA 9:11 [156].

[415] GS 111. Nietzsche's conclusion here is influenced by the thought of Lange and Boscovich. In a letter to a friend from 1866, Nietzsche claims that "The most meaningful philosophical work which has appeared in the past ten years is undoubtedly Lange's *History of Materialism...* Kant, Schopenhauer, and this book of Lange's — I don't need anything else" (BVN-1866, 526). George Stack demonstrates how the rejection of substance in Nietzsche was influenced by his reading of Lange's 1866 *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Meaning* (George Stack, "Kant, Lange, Nietzsche: Critique of Knowledge" in *Nietzsche and Modern German Though*t, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. (New York: Routledge, 1991). As Stack remarks, for Lange "the assumption of absolute unities is fictitious" (Ibid., 38). As Keith Ansell-Pearson points out, "Nietzsche first read Boscovich's *Theoria Philosophiae Naturalis redacta ad unicam legem virium in natura existentium* in March 1873" (Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche's Brave New World of Force," *Pli* 9 (2000): 7.). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche explicitly states that "Boscovich has taught us to abjure the belief in the last thing that "stood fast" of the earth--the belief in "substance" (BGE 12). Nietzsche had already acknowledged this influence explicitly in an 1882 letter to a friend: "If anything is well repudiated, it is the prejudice of the 'substance,' not by an idealist, but by a mathematician, by Boscovich" (BVN-1882, 213).

[416] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 5.

attempts to interpret the testimony of the senses with the use of reason falsifies reality.[417]

Later in this section, Nietzsche goes on to explain *how* rational beings get it wrong:

through the translation of the world into language, by explaining the world in the same

terms we employ to explain our own first-personal experience.[418] As Nietzsche notes,

"Everywhere [reason] sees a doer and doing; it believes in will as the cause; it believes in

the ego, in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-

substance upon all things--only thereby does it first create the concept of "thing.""[419] A

metaphysical interpretation of the world as containing unified, discrete substances is

merely a result of human beings' first-personal experience of themselves as unified egos

and their mistranslation of this experience into reality.[420] As we see also in his 1887

notes, this role for language and first-personal experience in metaphysical interpretations

(which understand the world as composed of unified substances) is why Nietzsche

identifies the Cartesian ego as the sources of this mistaken metaphysics of substance:

"our belief in 'ego' as a substance [is] the sole reality from which we ascribe reality to

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[417] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 2.
[418] This is yet another influential idea which Nietzsche gets from Lange: the "process of expressing judgments about what we perceive is a simplification and metaphorical transformation of our immediate experience of unique particulars" (Stack, "Kant, Lange, Nietzsche: Critique of Knowledge," 34.). It is likely Lange's "repeated uncovering of the use of metaphors in philosophy and the frequent reliance on anthropomorphic projection and transference in scientific language" which leads Nietzsche to insist that language fundamentally falsifies reality.
[419] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 5.
[420] As should be clear at this point in time, the influence of Lange on Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics of substance cannot be overemphasized. This idea — that our mistaken understanding of ourselves as unified egos results in a mistaken interpretation of the world — is yet another point of Lange's influence on Nietzsche's thought, as Lange that unity at "at best... is a relative concept, one that has practical use but which does not pertain to the complexity of material or organic multiplicities. Lange speculates that we derive the concept of unity from our fallacious notion that we are a unified 'ego.'" (Stack, "Kant, Lange, Nietzsche: Critique of Knowledge," 38).

things in general."[421] We see Nietzsche emphasize this role for our first-personal experience as unified through an ego-substance also in his assertion that "the concept of substance is a consequence of the concept of the subject: not the reverse! If we relinquish the soul, 'the subject,' the precondition for 'substance' in general disappears."[422] According to Nietzsche, without the unity of the subject first proposed by Descartes and his *cogito,* humanity would not have internalized the concept of metaphysical substance and interpreted the world primarily by employing this concept.

Along with a metaphysics of substance (or "being"), Nietzsche also rejects atomistic interpretations of the world, according to which the world is composed of countless discrete pieces of matter called "atoms."[423] In an excerpt from his notes entitled "*Against* the physical *atom,*" Nietzsche remarks:

> to comprehend the world, we have to be able to calculate it; to be able to calculate it, we have to have constant causes; because we find no such constant causes in actuality, we invent them for ourselves— the atoms. This is the origin of atomism. The calculability of the world, the expressibility of all events in formulas — is this really "comprehension?"[424]

The last question, of course, is rhetorical. Just as with substance, the atomistic conception of reality is an invention and projection of human beings. What Nietzsche calls elsewhere

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[421] WP 487. See also WP 484.

[422] WP 485. See also KSA 12: 9 [62]: "In a world of becoming, 'reality' is always a simplification for practical purposes, a deception on the basis of the coarseness of the organs, or a difference in the tempo of becoming." This excerpt introduces a new idea — that our idea of substance might come from a chance in the "tempo of becoming." Since this is not Nietzsche's dominant or usual interpretation of the origin of metaphysical substance, I leave it in this footnote.

[423] As Steven Burgess notes in his dissertation "Nietzsche and Heidegger on the Cartesian Atomism of Thought" (PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2013), Nietzsche's critique of atomism includes not only physicalist/materialist atomism, but also what he calls "soul atomism [*Seelen-Atomistik*]" as that "which regards the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomon*" (BGE 12). For our purposes here, we attend now only to his critique of materialist atomism as a mistaken interpretation of the basic constitution of reality. His critique of "soul atomism" will come into play later.

[424] KSA 12: 7 [56].

the "atomistic hypothesis [*der atomistischen Hypothese*]" is a hypothesis "with which we humanize the world… and make the world accessible at the same time to our eye and our calculation."[425] In other words, the formation of an atomistic worldview for Nietzsche is merely a translation of reality into discrete substances — atoms — which allow us to calculate and measure our world. Yet as Nietzsche remarks in his 1887/88 notes, "there are no durable ultimate units, no atoms, no monads: here, too, 'beings' are only introduced by us (from perspective grounds of practicality and utility)."[426] This projection of an atomistic interpretation onto the world, formulated as a useful way for humans to understand the world around them, falsifies the world. There are no discrete and stable pieces of matter; in this sense, there are no "atoms" for Nietzsche.[427]

As we see in the above excerpts — and as H. Caygill asserts in "Nietzsche and Atomism" — Nietzsche "constantly aligns his critique of atomic doctrine with his critique of the subject."[428] This parallel between a critique of the subject and a critique of

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[425] KSA 11: 25 [371].

[426] WP 715.

[427] In the same 1882 letter to his friend mentioned above, Nietzsche's rejection of an atomistic picture of reality on these grounds is also attributed to his reading of Boscovich: "If anything is well repudiated, it is the prejudice of the "substance," not by an idealist, but by a mathematician, by Boscovich. He and Copernicus are the two greatest opponents of the appearance: since there is no longer any substance, except as a popular relief. He has finished the atomistic theory" (BVN-1882, 213).

[428] H. Caygill, "Nietzsche and Atomism," *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 203 (1999): 28. It is worth noting that Nietzsche does say that there are such things are "useful fictions" — where to be "useful" is to be useful for life and its furtherance — and, for Nietzsche, the belief in substance is certainly an historical candidate for such a useful fiction. After all, Nietzsche's insistence that the world *is* a world of Becoming means that metaphysical substance is false, and he does remark that the concept of substance historically helped humanity make sense of its world. What is important to ask here is: Did this concept of substance assist in furthering life? While this is a topic for a different project, I think one answer lies in Nietzsche's repeated calls to affirm the world as Becoming, since this would require one to give up belief in metaphysical substances. We can imagine, given that Nietzsche hopes for the affirmation of life, that a belief in metaphysical substance may no longer be "useful" for life and its advancement. See also the excerpt from *Beyond Good and Evil* on the following page.

a metaphysical interpretation reminds us of Nietzsche's reflections on substance metaphysics above: "the concept 'reality,' 'being,' is taken from our feeling of the subject."[429] As Caygill notes, Nietzsche believes that we "[transpose]… the feeling or belief that 'the ego counts as a substance, as the cause of all *deeds,* as a doer" into the 'belief in substance, accident, attribute, etc.'"[430] This translation of the belief in a unified ego into a belief in unified substance is most evident in *Beyond Good and Evil:*

> With regard to the superstitions of logicians, I shall never tire of emphasizing a small, terse fact, which is unwillingly recognized by these credulous minds — namely, that a thought comes when "it" wishes, and not when "I" wish; so that it is a *perversion* of the facts of the case to say that the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate "think." *One* thinks; but that this "one" is precisely the famous old "ego," is, to put it mildly, only a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an "immediate certainty." After all, one has even gone too far with this "one thinks" — even the "one" contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself. One infers here according to the usual grammatical formula— "To think is an activity; every activity requires an agency that is active; consequently" . . . It was pretty much on the same lines that the older atomism sought, besides the operating "power," the material particle wherein it resides and out of which it operates — the atom. More rigorous minds, however, learnt at last to get along without this "earth-residuum," and perhaps some day we shall accustom ourselves, even from the logician's point of view, to get along without the little "one" (to which the worthy old "ego" has refined itself).[431]

In this selection, Nietzsche claims that human beings reason by analogy from our experience as agents to the way substances cause, on an atomistic view.[432] Just as the human being deduces a unified, underlying mental substance (the Cartesian ego) from the activity of thinking alone, so, too, does atomism deduce material substance from the operations of the universe. (Whether or not this is convincing, this does seem to be Nietzsche's argument.) These mistaken deductions are mere interpretations of the

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[429] WP 488.
[430] Caygill, "Nietzsche and Atomism," 28. WP 488 quoted in Cargill.
[431] BGE 17.
[432] Thank you to John Richardson for clarification on this point.

workings of thought and the universe shaped by certain grammatical conventions. Human attempts to communicate action via spoken language, in particular, always involve positing some *agent* behind the action: one never simply says "thinking" or "thinks," but "she is thinking" or "one thinks." As Nietzsche points out, this is merely a function of grammar; still, on this picture, this grammatical formulation affects the way our minds interpret the world. In short, this leads individuals to posit a unified substance beneath or behind activity when, in fact, there is none.

As mentioned above, Nietzsche also rejects mechanistic interpretations of the world.[433] His critique here is closely connected to that of atomism; in fact, he even speaks of "the development of mechanical-atomistic [*mechanistisch-atomistischen*] modes of thought."[434] We see also in his notes that he contrasts a "dynamic interpretation of the world" with a mechanistic interpretation, since the dynamic interpretation includes a "denial of 'empty space' and its little clumps of atoms."[435] It should not be surprising, then, that certain of Nietzsche's critiques of the mechanistic worldview echo his critique of atomism. We see Nietzsche insist that "the mechanistic explanation of the world is an ideal: to explain as much as possible as little as possible, that is, in formulas."[436] In its attempts to simplify our explanations of reality, we falsify reality by projecting on it a mere ideal.

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[433] While he rejects mechanistic interpretations of the world as a whole, in *The Gay Science* we see him still referring to the workings of the human mind as "ancient mechanism" in action. "The course of logical thoughts and conclusions in our present brain corresponds to a process and struggle of instincts, which in themselves are all very illogical and unjust; We usually only experience the result of the struggle: so quickly and so hidden is now this ancient mechanism in us" (GS 111).

[434] KSA 12 2: [61].

[435] WP 618.

[436] KSA 11: 34 [56].

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Nietzsche more specifically claims that, as with atomism, purely mechanistic interpretations of the universe project falsifying human categories — such as "regularity" — onto the world. In 1885, he argues that "'attraction' and 'repulsion' in a purely mechanistic sense are complete fictions" attributable to the fact that human beings "cannot think of an attraction divorced from an *intention...* In short, the psychological necessity for a belief in causality lies in the inconceivability of an event divorced from intent."[437] This excerpt echoes earlier critiques of atomism, according to which a particular mistaken understanding of the world is deduced from our experience as causal agents. Because we experience ourselves and our intentions as causes which bring about certain effects in the world, we understand the world in terms of these same kinds of causes and effects.

We can understand more about the connections between Nietzsche's critique of a certain conception of cause and effect and his critique of mechanistic science in *Beyond Good and Evil,* where Nietzsche's rejection of a *causa sui* (self-caused cause) turns into a rejection of a mechanistic interpretation of the world:

> One should not wrongly *materialize* "cause" and "effect," as the natural philosophers do (and whoever like them naturalize in thinking at present), according to the prevailing mechanical doltishness which makes the cause press and push until it "affects" its end; one should use "cause" and "effect" only as pure *conceptions*, that is to say, as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation and mutual understanding, — *not* for explanation. In "being-in-itself" there is nothing of "casual-connection," of "necessity," or of "psychological non-freedom"; there the effect does *not* follow the cause, there "law" does not obtain. It is WE alone who have devised cause, sequence, reciprocity, relativity, constraint, number, law, freedom, motive, and purpose; and when we interpret and intermix this symbol-world, as "being-in-itself," with things, we act once more as we have always acted — *mythologically*.[438]

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[437] WP 27.
[438] BGE 21.

In this selection, Nietzsche calls an interpretation of causality which separates some cause A from its effect B insofar as it understands the cause A as a discrete entity or event which brings about some other discrete entity or event B "the prevailing mechanical doltishness." Nietzsche's main issue with this picture seems to be the positing of a cause as an "ontologically independent existent" which brings about certain effects.[439] As Poellner points out with the aid of Richardson in "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," for Nietzsche there are no "ontologically independent existent[s]": everything is constituted in part by its relations to other processes in the world around it.[440] In Nietzsche's view, anything we can pin down as an entity is both a cause and effect, both caused and always-already affected: cause and effect, then, cannot be separated in the superficial way mechanistic interpretations of reality attempt to separate them. Insofar as a mechanistic conception of causality forces us to think a separation between cause and effect as two discrete entities or events, this conception presents a falsified picture of reality.[441] As Nietzsche puts this in his late notebooks, a picture of causality which posits "two successive states, the one 'cause' and the other 'effect'" is "false."[442] Instead, for Nietzsche, "the concept of cause and effect is reduced to equations of proportion [or relation], with the ambition to prove that on each side the quantum is of force, [and that] the driving force is wanting: we consider only results." In other words, what humanity conventionally calls "causes" and "effects" are simply outcomes of the relations of forces — and, in particular, the drives. When we understand

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[439] Peter Poellner, "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches" in the *Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 692.

[440] Ibid., 692.

[441] As Poellner nicely points out, and as we will discuss later, "Nietzsche's particulars are non-discrete events or processes involving… modification from instant to instant" (Ibid., 693).

[442] WP 633.

Nietzsche's critique of mechanistic interpretations of the world as, in part, a critique of a particular picture of causal relations — of discrete causes bringing about effects — this also helps us to see how Nietzsche's rejection of a purely mechanistic interpretation of the world is connected to his rejection of enduring substance as a projection of our own experiences as unified agents onto the world around us.

In a reflection on causality from 1885, Nietzsche notes that "The separation of the 'deed' from the 'doer,' of the event from someone who produces events, of the process from something that is not process but enduring, substance, thing, body, soul, etc… this ancient mythology established the belief in 'cause and effect' after it had found a firm form in the functions of language and grammar."[443] Here, as before, we see Nietzsche locating individuals' understanding of cause and effect in ways of speaking about human agency and the grammatical constructions that posits a subject under the action (as in the example before of "thinking" vs. "she is thinking"). Earlier in this same fragment, Nietzsche notes that the "mechanistic world-view" reduces such a "mode of thinking [about cause and effect] which only and everywhere feels the will to act… to a mathematical formula with which, as we must constantly underline, something is never apprehended, but is designated, recorded."[444] For Nietzsche, mechanistic worldviews attempt to capture the motions and workings of the universe by describing the world with formulas and appealing to natural laws. As we see here, however, Nietzsche understands this as a mere interpretation and translation of the world, a picture formed through the habitual lens of human agency, focused and sharpened by human language.

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[443] KSA 12: 2 [139].
[444] Ibid.

Nietzsche's critique of atomism is echoed in his critique of mechanistic interpretations which posit unified, discrete substances in this kind of causal interaction with one another. This corpuscular picture is what Poellner rightly identifies Nietzsche as rejecting when he rejects the mechanists' picture of the physical world.[445] We see this also in a fragment entitled "*Critique of the mechanistic theory*," in which Nietzsche notes that in attempting to comprehend the world, we translate the world "into a visible world — a world for the eyes — [with] the concept 'motion.'" He goes on:

> This always carries the idea that *something* is moved — this always supposes, whether as the fiction of a little clump of atom or even as the abstraction of this, the dynamic atom, a thing that produces effects — i.e., we have not got away from the habit into which our senses and language seduce us. Subject, object, a doer added to the doing, the doing separated from that which it does: let us not forget that this is mere semiotics and nothing real. Mechanistic theory as a theory of motion is already a translation into the sense language of man.[446]

Here we see Nietzsche's notion that the corpuscular picture of causal relations put forth in mechanical explanations of reality is a result of the projection of an understanding of the efficacy of discrete human subjects, or ego-substances, onto the non-human world. His claim that this is a matter of "mere semiotics" and a result of a "translation" of the world "into the sense language of man" emphasizes the role of grammatical constructions in language in shaping our understanding of the world around us; in this particular case, of course, the issue is a mechanical understanding of the world.

In Nietzsche's rejection of substance and critiques of atomistic-mechanistic interpretations of the world, we see that he views these conceptions as falsifying insofar as they involve the projection of stable, discrete entities — whether those be substances,

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[445] Poellner, "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," 680. As Poellner points out, this rejection is heavily influenced by Boscovich.
[446] WP 634.

atoms, or discrete causes — onto a dynamic, fluxional world comprised not of discrete

entities or isolated events in succession, but interpenetrating forces.[447] Furthermore, in

each of these cases, Nietzsche describes the ways in which the projection of a particular

kinds of human experiences — feelings of agency and the causal efficacy of intentions —

onto the non-human world falsifies this world.[448] A well-known example of this kind of

falsification is the lightning example found both in his notes (A) and in the *Genealogy*

(B)*:*

> A. If I say "lightning flashes," I have posited this flash once as an activity and a
> second time as a subject, and thus added to the event a being that is not one with
> the event but is rather fixed, *is,* and does not "become." — To regard an event as
> "effecting" and this as being, that is the double error, or interpretation, of which
> we are guilty.[449]
>
> B. A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, will, action, in fact it is
> nothing but this driving, willing and acting, and only the seduction of language
> (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified within it), which construes and
> misconstrues all actions as conditional upon an agency, a "subject," can make it
> appear otherwise. And just as the common people separates lightning from its
> flash and takes the latter to be a deed, something performed by a subject, which is
> called lightning, popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of

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[447] KSA 12: 2 [139]. In another note, Nietzsche discusses the extrapolation of a particular kind of
causality from "inner experience," noting that our "'inner experience' has to contain within it the
consequences of all previous causal fictions. Our 'outer world' as we project it every moment is
indissolubly tied to the old error of the ground: we interpret it by means of the schematism of
'things,' etc… 'to understand' means merely: to be able to express something new in the
language of the old and familiar" (WP 479).

[448] In "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," Poellner takes a different tack. On his view, since
Nietzsche thinks that "we can only make sense of ('imagine') *being acted upon* in terms of a
phenomenal content being acted upon by a will (James's volition) or in terms of the will being
acted upon by a phenomenal content… the 'inner,' 'intelligible' character of [the interaction of
force] has to involve representing and willing, if it is to be comprehensible at all" (689). Poellner
gets from this claim to a claim that, for Nietzsche, "mentality is the basic intrinsic character of the
real" (689). Although we will see, as Richardson pointed out in *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, that
Nietzsche attributes a 'thin intentionality' to even non-human forms of life, Poellner's claim is
much broader than this, as he derives Nietzschean panpsychism merely from Nietzsche's remarks
about ways of knowing the world for human beings, or the comprehensibility of the world (John
Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.).

[449] KSA 12: 2 [84].

strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person…[450]

In these excerpts, we see Nietzsche describe our understanding of the workings of the world in terms of human agency as a "double error," as the result of "the seduction of language" and "fundamental errors of reason." The idea here seems to be that the workings of the universe and our notions of causes and effect, understood in this way, allow us to rationally comprehend the world of which we are a part. But by forcing the world into a pre-existing, rational framework of action which we have acquired through the phenomenological experience of agency, we falsify the world. This is the case when we understand of cause and effect in mechanistic terms; it is also the case, as we saw above, for our understanding of substance and atomism's conception of unified substances as the basic constituents of reality: "'beings' are part of our perspective… The fictitious world of subject, substance, 'reason,' etc., is needed [for our comprehension] —: there is in us a power to order, simplify, falsify, artificially distinguish" although the "world in a state of becoming [is] incapable of formulation."[451]

In short, our concepts of substance and discrete, ontologically independent beings are projections, attempts to place the world into a formula or a context which we can

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[450] GM I:13.

[451] WP 517. We see this also in a note from 1887, in which Nietzsche discusses the projection of human inventions and our "metaphysical-logical dogmatism" onto the world: "Form, species, law, idea, purpose — in all these cases the same error is made of giving a false reality to a fiction, as if events were in some way obedient to something — an artificial distinction is made in respect of events between that which acts and that toward which the act is directed (but this 'which' and 'toward' are only posited in obedience to our metaphysical-logical dogmatism: they are not 'facts.') One should not understand this compulsion to construct concepts, species, forms, purposes, laws… as if they enabled us to fix the *real world;* but as a compulsion to arrange a world for ourselves in which our existence is made possible: — we thereby create a world which is calculable, simplified, comprehensible, etc. for us… It is we who have created the 'thing,' the 'identical thing,' subject, attribute, activity, object, substance, form, after we had long pursued the process of making identical, coarse and simple. The world seems logical to us because we have made it logical" (WP 521).

understand, when in fact the world as it *truly* is — as continual flux — cannot be understood in terms of such formulas or conceptions of agency which separate an acting subject from that upon which a subject acts.

Rather than understanding nature and the workings of the natural world in terms of human experience, Nietzsche aims to understand human experience (morality being the most familiar phenomenon under investigation — in terms of nature (and, in particular, the play of forces in nature). On my reading, this is a different version of what Nietzsche calls "translating the human back into nature."[452] In "Nietzsche's Socio-Physiology of the Self," Herman Siemens discusses Nietzsche's critique of the "moralization of nature" and insists that we must not only "translate values and the human being back into nature… [but also] translate morality out of (human) nature."[453] Just as morality results from a "psychological misunderstanding [*psychologisches Mißverständniß*]" which understands "the false independence of the 'individual,' as an atom" and moral subject as "an opposition to [the natural world of] striving forces,"[454] the above metaphysical interpretations of the world results from a mistranslation of our own experience, projected onto the world.[455] This view of "the 'real world' as a spiritual world, as accessible through the facts of consciousness" is called a "tremendous blunder" by Nietzsche.[456]

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[452] BGE 230.
[453] Herman Siemens, "Nietzsche's Socio-Physiology of the Self" in *Nietzsche and the Problem of Subjectivity,* Eds. João Constâncio, Maria João Mayer Branco, and Bartholomew Ryan. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 631.
[454] KSA 12: 10 [57].
[455] The only problem is that this is the only way in which the world becomes intelligible to us!
[456] WP 529.

As we see Nietzsche emphasize again and again, however, such substantivist, mechanistic, and atomistic ways of seeing the world have been "needed" for intelligibility and comprehensibility of the world. Does Nietzsche's identification of these metaphysical interpretations as essentially erroneous and falsifying mean, then, that knowledge of the world is impossible for human beings? In short, no: as Nietzsche notes, these particular metaphysical interpretations have been required for the *kind* of knowledge after which philosophers, scientists, and other thinkers the world over have been chasing: knowledge as "objective," "taking possession of things" with "concepts" which take possession of discrete "'things' that constitute the process[es]" of the universe.[457] Since what this kind of knowledge thinks it *knows* is fundamentally mistaken, Nietzsche believes we can understand humanity's attempts as knowing as attempts to fix the world and make it comprehensible. As Nietzsche notes, "the character of the world in a state of becoming [is] incapable of formulation… Knowledge [KC: traditionally understood] and becoming exclude one another. Consequently, 'knowledge,' must be something else: there must first of all be a will to make knowable, a kind of becoming must itself create the deception of beings."[458] When we realize that what we understood as absolute, objective knowledge is merely a result of our will imposing itself on reality, this allows for us to think of new ways of knowing the world. What Nietzsche hopes for instead is to broaden what it means *to know* one's world, so that what one "knows" will not falsify the essence of the world as becoming.[459] It is from this that

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[457] WP 503, 583.

[458] WP 517.

[459] We see this already in Nietzsche's perspectival understanding of knowledge (GM II:13), which we will touch upon later.

Nietzsche's perspectivism and the world as will to power — as composed of drives and forces — originates.

3.3 Nietzsche's World: Forces, Drives, and the Will to Power

At this point, we are familiar with Nietzsche's critiques of metaphysics of substance, atomism, and mechanistic interpretations of the world. These critiques were made clearer by the recognition of certain points of influence in two thinkers whose work preceded and influenced Nietzsche: Lange and Boscovich. Lange's *History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Meaning* (1866) influenced Nietzsche's account of the way in which human attempts to know and describe the world around them thus far have fixed and therefore falsified reality. Boscovich's rejection of the corpuscularian account of "absolutely impenetrable extended particles" was thought by Nietzsche to be proof positive of the untenability of mechanistic-atomistic interpretations.[460]

Up to this point, my characterization of Nietzsche as a critic of metaphysical systems is uncontroversial: no Nietzsche scholars reject the idea that Nietzsche rejects certain more conventional approaches to metaphysics. What is more controversial, however, is the idea that Nietzsche himself presents a positive metaphysical view.[461] Although there is disagreement among Nietzsche scholars as to whether or not Nietzsche presents such a metaphysics, I argue that his accounts of forces [*Kräfte*], drives [*Trieben, Instinkte*], power-quanta [*Kraft-Quanta*], will-quanta [*Willens-Quanta*], centers of force [*Kraftzentrum*], and constellations of force [*Kraftconstellationen*] function throughout his corpus — but especially in his late work — as descriptions of underlying components

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[460] BGE 12.

[461] As Poellner points out in "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," Alexander Nehamas (1985), Richard Rorty (1989), and Maudemarie Clark (1990) all claim that Nietzsche does not offer a metaphysics.

which comprise reality. In "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," Poellner notes that Nietzsche's status as a metaphysician can be decided by whether or not he "asserts a view about the basic characteristics or properties of reality."[462] With Poellner and others, I insist that Nietzsche *does* offer such a view, and that it is this view which enables his reader to recognize the inherence of value, purposiveness, and perspectives as truth-conditions in the world of earthly existence, albeit in a very unique and particular way.[463]

In this section, I will look to Nietzsche's account of the drives, individual human beings as driven "subject-unities," and the will to power as resources for founding truth, purpose, and value in this-worldly existence. My claim will not be that Nietzsche himself intends these concepts to function in this way, although we will see that sometimes he hints at this. Rather, I claim that Nietzsche's thought offers us resources for re-conceiving truth, purpose, and value and allows us to think of a world in which the discovery of specific kinds of truth (as perspectival truth), purpose (as purposiveness immanent in the driven world), and value (as always-already from the perspective of a drive or driven being) is possible. In other words, since Nietzsche's picture of this-worldly existence presents a purposeful and value-laden world which conditions our participation in truth, Nietzsche's account of this-worldly existence offers his readers hitherto untapped resources for re-thinking the world as meaningful. There are four features of Nietzsche's metaphysics which I outline in this section:

1. **The doctrine of Becoming**: Reality is in flux, dynamic, and ever-changing.

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[462] Poellner, "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," 675.
[463] See also Heidegger (1979) and Richardson (1996) for arguments that Nietzsche provides a metaphysics.

2. **Drives**: Reality is composed of what Nietzsche calls drives [*Triebe*], forces, or power-quanta.

3. **The will to power**: Nietzsche's "will to power" is inseparable from his account of drives, insofar as will to power only describes the operations or workings of these drives. Drives are, therefore, wills to power.[464]

4. **Permeability:** There is a fundamental permeability between human beings as complexes of drives and the driven world in which they are embedded. Driven beings, as complexes of drives, are porous beings; human beings, as subject-unities, are porous selves.[465]

3.3.1 Nietzsche's doctrine of Becoming

One of the theories for which Nietzsche is most well-known is his doctrine of Becoming. For Nietzsche, reality is dynamic, in flux, and undergoing constant change. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche praises "the affirmation of flux and destruction… the yea-saying to contradiction and strife, the notion of Becoming, along with the radical rejection of even the concept, 'Being'" as "that which is closest to [him] of all that has previously been thought."[466] Here, we see Nietzsche emphasizes the affirmation of flux, destruction, contradiction, and strife of Becoming while rejecting Being.[467] In "On Self-Overcoming" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Zarathustra speaks of "the river of becoming" and exclaims that he must be "struggle, and becoming, and purpose, and cross-purpose;" in "On Old and New Tablets," Zarathustra describes becoming as the "dancing of gods, and

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[464] This idea is heavily influenced by Richardson's interpretation in *Nietzsche's System.*
[465] Although the features here describe the same phenomenon — reality — I split them into separate features so that I may discuss each in more detail.
[466] EH, "Books," *The Birth of Tragedy*, 3.
[467] One must affirm contradiction and strife, since these arise in the world (as Becoming) and Nietzsche aims to affirm this world.

wantoning of gods, and the world unloosed and unbridled and fleeing back to itself."[468]

In a fragment on nihilism, Nietzsche explicitly rejects a unified world of Being when he

remarks that "any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking."[469] Indeed,

this account of reality is repeated again and again, both throughout Nietzsche's notes and

in his published works.[470]

Furthermore, in his notes Nietzsche contrasts "absolute reality" and "being-in-

itself" with "a world of becoming" and describes how the same projection of our

phenomenological experience of ourselves as unified agents which gives us a mistaken

notion of substance results in our mistaken imposition of stability and permanence — or

being — onto a world of becoming.[471] This emphasis on impermanence and critique of

Being both harkens back to and supplements Nietzsche's rejection of substance

metaphysics from above: unified substances do not exist, since the existence of these

requires some degree of permanence and stability which is absent in the world as

Becoming. We see this also in an 1887 fragment, in which Nietzsche notes that our

insistence on Being and stability — as with our insistence on the existence of discrete,

unified substances — is an anthropomorphic projection onto reality, not a fact about

reality: "because we have to be stable in our beliefs if we are to prosper, we have made

the 'real' world not of change and becoming, but one of being."[472]

Nietzsche's doctrine of Becoming is directly influenced by his interpretation of

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[468] TSZ, "Old and New Tablets," 2.
[469] WP 12.
[470] WP 520: "Continual transition forbids us to speak of 'individuals,' etc; the 'number' of beings is itself in flux." See also WP 538.
[471] WP 580, 581, 616, 617, 715.
[472] WP 507. In WP 517, Nietzsche characterizes logic as "the attempt to comprehend the actual world by means of a scheme of being posited by ourselves; more correctly, to make it formulable and calculable by us."

Heraclitus and his reading of Boscovich's dynamic conception of reality.[473] In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,* Nietzsche notes that Becoming for Heraclitus consists in an "everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is" and heralds this account of reality as a "divine stroke of lightning."[474] In an 1885 note, Nietzsche describes Becoming as "Heraclitean Becoming [*Heraklitische Werden*]" and in *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche notes that he "takes the name of Heraclitus with great respect" since while others "rejected the testimony of the senses, because they showed the same multiplicity and change, [Heraclitus] rejected their testimony, because they showed things as if they had permanence and unity."[475] In short, becoming as the truth of reality ascertained via the senses was first ascertained, in Nietzsche's view, by Heraclitus. We see this also later in this same section, where Nietzsche notes that "Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie at all."[476]

The influence of Boscovich on Nietzsche's conception of becoming is also critical, since Boscovich offers Nietzsche a more precise way to think becoming as the flux of force. As Poellner points out, Boscovich offers a "dynamist conception… of the physical world as constituted by real, attractive and repulsive, forces centered on

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[473] Note also that in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks,* Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus is supplemented with excerpts from Schopenhauer, so while Heraclitus might be a more obvious influence, it seems that Heraclitus's account was made more convincing to the young Nietzsche by Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will and its emphasis on the strife which can "be followed throughout the whole of nature" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Vol. I,* (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 147).
[474] Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 54.
[475] KSA 11: 36 [27]; TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 2.
[476] TI, "Reason in Philosophy," 2.

unextended physical points" according which matter "consists intrinsically of forces."[477] In other words, the world for Boscovich is constituted by ever-changing interactions of forces which, through their relations, effect changes in other forces. In 1884, Nietzsche refers to Boscovich's "dynamic world view" as an alternative to the flawed "mechanistic-atomistic world-view," and in 1888, we see Nietzsche offer his own account of relations of force (here, "power quanta") after rejecting a mechanistic conception of cause and effect:[478]

> Two successive states, the one "cause" and the other "effect": this is false… It is a question of a struggle between two elements of unequal power: a new arrangement of forces is achieved according to the measure of power of each of them. The second condition is something fundamentally different from the first (not its effect): the essential thing is that the factions in struggle emerge with different quanta of power.[479]

In the dynamic struggle among forces, there is no discrete cause which brings about an effect: there is only the play of forces (or power-quanta) which, in their struggle with one another, are configured and re-configured in various arrangements.

This idea, influenced by Boscovich's dynamism, is also found in Nietzsche's account of process and the flux of events from *The Gay Science:*

> We have discovered a manifold succession [*ein vielfaches Nacheinander*] where the naïve man and investigator of older cultures saw only two things, "cause" and "effect," as it was said; *we have perfected the conception of becoming*, but have not got a knowledge of what is above and behind the conception. The series [*Reihe*] of "causes" stands before us much more complete in every case; we conclude that this and that must first precede in order that that other may follow but we have not grasped anything thereby… We operate only with things which do not exist, with lines, surfaces, bodies, atoms, divisible times, divisible spaces how can explanation ever be possible when we first make everything a conception, our conception! It is sufficient to regard science as the exactest humanizing of things that is possible; we always learn to describe ourselves more

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[477] Poellner, "Nietzsche's Metaphysical Sketches," 680.
[478] KSA 11: 26 [410].
[479] WP 633.

accurately by describing things and their successions. Cause and effect: there is likely no such duality; in fact there is a continuum [*ein Continuum*] before us, from which we isolate a few portions; just as we always observe a motion as isolated points, and therefore do not properly see it, but infer it. The abruptness with which many effects take place leads us into error; it is however only an abruptness for us. There is an infinite multitude of processes [e*ine unendliche Menge von Vorgängen*] in that abrupt moment which escape us. An intellect which could see cause and effect as a continuum [*der Ursache und Wirkung als continuum*], which could see the flux of events [*den Fluss des Geschehen*s] not according to our mode of perception, as things arbitrarily separated and broken, would throw aside the conception of cause and effect, and would deny all conditionality.[480]

In this rich selection of text, Nietzsche again rejects a picture of causality which isolates two discrete moments, events, or substances — cause and effect — the former of which directly brings about the latter. Instead, Nietzsche speaks here of a "manifold succession," a "series of 'causes,'" a "continuum," and "infinite multitude of processes" which comprises "the flux of events."[481] The flow of Becoming dissolves substance, bodies, and atoms in its wake, as well as determinate space and time, leaving only an ever-changing manifold or complex of processes. In a fragment, Nietzsche characterizes this manifold of becoming: "All events, all motion, all becoming, as a determination of degree and relations of force, as a struggle [*Alles Geschehen, alle Bewegung, alles Werden als ein Feststellen von Grad- und Kraftverhältnissen, als ein Kampf]*."[482] The universe is in constant flux, and the struggles and relations of force comprise this fluxional universe. Thus, the Nietzschean account of Becoming is inseparable from his account of forces and drives, as well as his account of the characteristic workings of these

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[480] GS 112.
[481] Ibid.
[482] WP 552.

forces and drives, or the various "pattern[s] of effort" manifest by the drives: will to power.[483]

3.3.2 Drives as ontological constituents

As we see above, Nietzsche's world of becoming is a world of forces, drives, power-quanta, and constellations of force. In short, Nietzsche's fluxional world is fundamentally composed of drives. With the help of textual selections from Nietzsche's published and unpublished work, Richardson's seminal interpretation from *Nietzsche's System*, and Katsafanas's detailed explication of the nature of drives, we will come to understand what characterizes Nietzschean drives.

For Nietzsche, the terms "forces," "drives," "centers of force," and "power-quanta" all designate the same thing: the basic "units" of reality, constantly in motion, always becoming and undergoing change.[484] These basic constituents of reality are what I will refer to as Nietzschean drives. Although thinking of these drive as basic "units" of reality is helpful, we must be careful not to think these drives in an atomistic way, as discrete and separate substances; instead, Nietzsche's account of the drives encourages his reader to understand the interactions of drives as a matter of "not of succession — but of interpenetration/interlocking, a process [*nicht um ein Nacheinander, — sondern um ein*

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[483] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 28.

[484] Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism,* 35. Nietzsche frequently uses these terms interchangeably. See D 109, on using "different methods to combat the vehemence of a drive [*die Heftigkeit eines Triebe*]," in which Nietzsche also refers to drives as forces [*Kräfte*] and as quantities of forces [*Kraftmengen*]. See also BGE 36, in which Nietzsche refers interchangeably to force [*Kraft*] and drives [*Triebe*]. In the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality,* Nietzsche refers to both instincts [*Instinkte*] and drives [*Triebe*] interchangeably. In eKGWB/NF-1888,14[81], Nietzsche refers to "centers of force [*Kraftcentrum*]" and "power-quanta [*Kraft-Quanta*]." In KSA 13: 14 [184], Nietzsche notes that "Every power center *[Kraftcentrum]* has its perspective, i.e., Its very definite value, its mode of action, its mode of resistance,"which echoes an earlier fragment in which he noted that "every one of our basic drives *[Grundtriebe]* has its own perspective assessment [*perspektivische Abschätzung*]" (KSA 12: 1 [58]). We see this interchangeability all over Nietzsche's body of work.

Ineinander, einen Prozeß] in which the individual successive moments are not related to one another as cause and effect."[485] The world of becoming is a manifold of process, a continuum of force brought about by the interaction of drives which penetrate one another, incorporate one another, assimilate others, and cannot be separated into discrete beings.

As Graham Parkes demonstrates, Nietzsche's treatment of drives begins as early as his student writings, when he remarks in an Emerson-inspired essay "On Moods," "How often the will sleeps and only the drives and inclinations are awake!"[486] In this context, as in many others throughout Nietzsche's corpus, drives are *psychological* forces which constitute or comprise the human being and shape our perspectives, values, and behaviors.[487] In 1871, Nietzsche introduces the concept of the individual's drive-life [*Triebleben*] as "the play of feelings, sensations, affects, [and] acts of will,"[488] noting elsewhere that an individual's "character" appears as a pouring out of our "drive-life," a "representation [*Vorstellung*]… in the midst of which all the expressions of these drive-lives come to light."[489] This concept of the drive-life of human beings recurs also in Nietzsche's later notes, first in an 1880 fragment in which Nietzsche notes that "Our [human] knowing is the most weakened form of our drive-lives: therefore [it is] most powerless against the strong drives [*Triebe*]." In another fragment, Nietzsche notes that "Every person, whom we encounter, excites certain drives [*Triebe*] within us" and refers

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[485] WP 631.
[486] Cited by Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 273.
[487] See below for a more extensive discussion of this.
[488] Translation Graham Parkes. KSA 7: 12 [1].
[489] KSA 7: 9[105].

also to the "uninterrupted movement of our drive-lives through the external world (Nature)."[490]

Nietzsche also characterizes both *types* of individuals (such as the scholar, artist, etc.) and *particular* individuals (such as Wagner) in terms of the drives which manifest in them and the arrangement of these drives. In *Schopenhauer as Educator,* Nietzsche describes the scholar as a "complex network of very different drives and stimuli… and a result of "a pouring together of a host of small, very human drives and drivelets [*Triebchen*]."[491] In *Human, All too Human,* Nietzsche notes that just as the scholar "'consists of a tangled network of very various motives and stimuli,' the same likewise applies to the artist, the philosopher, the moral genius."[492] This idea that particular arrangements of drives create particular types of individuals is explicitly echoed in Nietzsche's account of the philosopher from *Beyond Good and Evil: "Who the philosopher is* [depends on] the order of rank in which the innermost drives of his nature are placed in relation to one another."[493]

Nietzsche also gives examples of particular individuals and the arrangement and workings of their drives. Most notably, in "Wagner in Bayreuth" Nietzsche remarks that "each of [Wagner's] drives strove into the immeasurable, and each of his talents — from joy in its own existence — wanted to tear itself away from the others to attain its own satisfaction; the greater the abundance, the greater was the tumult and the greater their

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[490] KSA 10: 8 [22].
[491] UM, "Schopenhauer as Educator," 6. Cited and translated by Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 275.
[492] HH I: 252.
[493] BGE 6.

hostility when they crossed one another."[494] Here, we see Nietzsche utilize drives as explanatory mechanisms for Wagner's many talents; he also attributes to Wagner a "ruling passion" able to "bring his entire nature together" to the famous composer.[495] As Parkes points out, Nietzsche also makes a broader point about the drives here: the importance of a "coordination among competing drives to avoid destructive chaos" in the individual.[496]

Nietzsche does not only discuss drives in the context of types of individuals or particular individuals; he also claims more broadly that every human being is composed of drives and can be understood as a complex of drives. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche offers an alternative to the human being as unified soul, proposing that we think the soul as "subject-multiplicity [*Subjekts-Vielheit*]" or as "social structure of the drives and affects [*Gesellschaftsbau der Triebe und Affekte*]."[497] In a later aphorism, Nietzsche characterizes willing as a "something complex, something that is a unity only as a word" and the soul or the will as containing many "under-wills" or "under-souls," noting that "our body is but a social structure composed of many souls."[498] In these selections, human beings are described as embodied complexes of drives and affects, as structured multiplicities of force. Such multiplicities, as social structures, are not unified through the power of a sovereign or any one drive with supreme power or authority over

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[494] UM, "Wagner in Bayreuth," 3. Cited and translated by Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 278.
[495] UM, "Wagner in Bayreuth," 2. Cited and translated by Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 278.
[496] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 278.
[497] BGE 12.
[498] BGE 19. It is important to note here that Nietzsche's reference to the soul remains only so that the conventional understanding of the soul as "ego-substance" — and the conventional sense of the unified will — might be replaced by this idea of soul as multiplicity and the body as the site in which the multiple drives and affects engage and struggle with one another.

the other drives; rather, they have the structure of a regency [*Regentschaft*].[499] This

picture of the human being as an embodied complex of drives best described as a regency

is echoed in a fragment from Nietzsche's 1885 notes:

> The body and physiology the starting point: why? — We gain the correct idea of the nature of our *subject-unity* [*Subjekt-Einheit*], namely as regents at the head of a communality (not as 'souls' or 'life forces'), also of the dependence of these regents upon the ruled and of an order of rank and division of labor as the conditions that make possible the whole and its parts. In the same way, how living unities continually arise and die and how the 'subject' is not eternal... The relative ignorance in which the regent is kept concerning individual activities and even disturbances in the communality is among the conditions under which rule can be exercised... The most important thing, however is: that we understand that the ruler and his subjects are of the same kind, all feeling, willing, and thinking...[500]

The picture of the individual human being which emerges here is the human being as a

dynamic multiplicity, composed of myriad drives which are dependent on one another for

their continued existence. Nietzsche's notion of the subject-unity is that of a "regent at

the head of a communality" which rules over the drives of which one is composed. This

regent is not some fixed, constant *cogito*, functioning as ruler over the drives; it does not

exert sovereign power over the drives which it organizes. Instead, Nietzsche speaks of a

"dependence of these regents upon the ruled," and crucially emphasizes "the ruler and his

subjects are of the same kind." If the subject-unity here is thought as an embodied

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[499]It seems important to note here that a regent is most usually installed over a social body because of the incapacitation of a monarch; thus, we can at the very least oppose a regency to a monarchy, in which one individual (the monarch) has complete control and power over those she rules. Yet it seems Nietzsche also intends for this concept of a "regency" to refer to a multiplicity which, while lacking a totalizing unity (as total unification of the aims of all drives and affects), still allows for some degree of unity under the "regent." See especially, "It depends on the proper characterization of the unity that comprises thinking, willing, feeling and all the affects: clearly the intellect is only a *tool*, but in whose hands? Certainly in the hands of the affects: and these are a multiplicity behind which it is not necessary to establish a unity: it is enough to regard it as a regency" (KSA 11: 40 [38]). Translated by Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 354.
[500] KSA 11: 40 [21].

complex of drives situated in power relations to each other, then the regent here must be a drive as well, albeit a dominant or organizing drive which compels the other drives in a certain direction. In any case, the human being, as composed of drives, is a driven being.

In *Human, All too Human,* we see a prefiguration of the human being as a dynamic and embodied complex of drives. Nietzsche speaks of an individual who experiences "two heterogenous powers holding sway" in him- or herself:

> Supposing someone lives as much for love of the visual arts or of music as he is enraptured by the spirit of science, and he regards it as impossible to resolve this contradiction by annihilating one of the powers and giving the other completely free rein: the only alternative is for him to make himself into a large enough hall of culture that the two powers can dwell in him, even if at different ends of the building, while beside them reside conciliatory mediating powers that possess sufficient strength to resolve any conflict that might break out.[501]

Here, an individual with two competing drives finds a way to successfully incorporate two very strong powers into himself. Yet it is significant that this is made possible only by the mediation of other, weaker drives. As Parkes notes, "the conflict between two predominant powers is not resolved by a third superior party, but by an assemblage of lesser forces situated between them."[502] We see this feature — characteristic of a regency without a sovereign power — at the end of this aphorism, where Nietzsche draws an analogy between culture in the individual and culture more broadly: the "mission" of a "great architecture of culture" is to "compel opposing powers to harmony, by means of an overwhelming assembly of other, less irreconcilable powers, without thereby oppressing and placing them in fetters."[503] The goal both of cultural creation and self-fashioning for Nietzsche is to achieve some level of harmony. This harmony is made

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[501] HH I:276. Translated and cited by Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 278.
[502] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 280.
[503] HH I:276, translation mine.

possible only by the structure of the drives which compose the individual. To harmonize the drives is to hold these drives temporarily in tension.

This harkens back to Heraclitus's comparison between a harmonized world of opposites and the holding-in-tension of a bow or lyre. In a fragment, he insists that the common men "do not understand how that which differs with itself in is agreement: there is a harmony in opposing tension, like that of the bow and the lyre."[504] This is similar to Nietzsche's point: just as Nietzsche's cultured individual is must harmonize her drives by holding them in tension, so too must the lyre be held in tension to make a sound, or the bow to function efficiently. This idea is treated by Kirk, Raven, and Schofield in *Presocratic Philosophers:*

> the tension in the string of a bow or lyre, being exactly balanced by the outward tension exerted by the arms of the instrument, produces a coherent, unified, stable, and efficient complex. We may infer that if the balance between opposites were *not* maintained… the unity and coherence of the world would cease, just as, if the tension in the bow-string exceeds the tension in the arms, the whole complex is destroyed.[505]

Although Nietzsche will not claim that the human being, as an embodied complex of ever-changing drives should be understood as a "unity" or "stability" in the conventional (substance-oriented) sense, he will claim that the "unity" of the subject-unity or subject-multiplicity can be found in the structure of the drives and the tension in which these drives are held from moment to moment.[506] Indeed, Nietzsche even uses this Heraclitean

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[504] Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. (*Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 28.

[505] G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 192.

[506] We should remember here that since the human being, as complex of drives, changes moment to moment, this tension is likely reconfigured moment to moment — and may even sometimes be absent, in cases of disunity.

language explicitly — without mention of Heraclitus — in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche discusses the impact that European cultural developments have had on individuals. Indeed, Nietzsche remarks that Europe's struggle against Christianity (as well as Platonism) made possible a "magnificent tension of soul, such as had not existed anywhere previously" and remarks that "with such a tensely strained bow one can now aim at the furthest goals." In sum, if one is a cultured individual — what Nietzsche calls a "free spirit" — one is able to hold one's drives in tension, achieving a sort of harmony.[507]

The human being, then, is conceived by Nietzsche as a complex of drives. Yet Nietzsche also believes that animals, plants, and all forms of life — all organisms — are complexes of drives. In a note from 1883, Nietzsche notes that:

> Animals follow their drives and affects: we are animals. Do we do something different Perhaps it is only an appearance, when we follow morality? In truth we follow our instincts [*Trieben*], and morality is only a sign language of the drives [*Triebe*]? What is 'duty,' 'right,' the 'good,' the 'law,' — which drives correspond to these abstract signs [*Zeichen*]?[508]

In this excerpt, Nietzsche straightforwardly asserts that animals are composed of drives and affects, just as humans are. And just as we appeal to the drives, affects, and instincts of animals to explain their behaviors, so too can we appeal to the drives, affects, and instincts of human beings to explain their behaviors, beliefs, and cultural practices. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche suggests that humans ought to "recognize the animal,

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[507] BGE, Preface. It is worth remarking that this tension of spirit, according to Nietzsche, causes widespread "distress" of which Europe attempts to rid itself. Yet the strong and free-spirited individuals which Nietzsche praises "have it still, all the distress of spirit and all the tension of its bow! And perhaps also the arrow, the duty, and, who knows? THE GOAL TO AIM AT. . . ." Higher individuals are those able to utilize this tension of the spirit to transform themselves and culture by creating new values and goals. See below for much more on this.
[508] KSA 10: 7 [76].

the commonplace and "the rule" in themselves."[509] In *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche notes

that man "wants to forget with all his power that he is basically impulse [*Trieb*], instinct

[*Instinct*], folly [*Thorheit*]" although he is no more than a "fantastic animal

[*phantastischen Thiere*]."[510] Later in this same work, Nietzsche refers again to this error,

remarking that the human "[feels] himself in a false position in relation to the animals

and nature."[511] In short, for Nietzsche, animals are constituted by drives, just as human

beings are. Daniel Conway notes that, for Nietzsche, "human psychology is merely "a

more complicated instance of 'animal psychology'… as animal activity… is always the

encrypted surface expression of the operation of primal drives and impulses."[512] Conway

here quotes the third essay of the *Genealogy,* in which Nietzsche emphasizes that all

animals seek to expend strength and "achieve [their] maximal feeling of power."[513]

　　　Human beings and animals, however, are not the only driven beings. Plant life is

also explained in this way in a fragment, where Nietzsche claims that "In order to

understand what life is, what kind of striving and stretching life is, the formula must

apply as well to tree and plant as to animal."[514] In "What We Can Learn from Plants

About the Creation of Values," Vanessa Lemm persuasively establishes that plant life

and human life are, indeed, similar forms of life, both with the capacities to measure,

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[509] BGE 26.

[510] GS 1, translation mine.

[511] GS 115, translation mine.

[512] Daniel Conway, "Psychology in Nietzsche" in *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology.* Eds. Jacob Golomb, Weaver Santaniello, and Ronald L. Lehrer. (Albany, NY: SUNY University Press, 1999), 53.

[513] GM III:7.

[514] WP 704. Translated by Richardson. For more on similarities between plant life and human life, see Vanessa Lemm's "What We Can Learn from Plants about the Creation of Values" in *Nietzsche-Studien.* Volume 44, Issue 1, Pages 78–87, ISSN (Online) 1613-0790, ISSN (Print) 0342-1422, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/nietzstu-2015-0112, November 2015.

incorporate, and create values.[515] Lemm's argument relies on Nietzsche's view that anything living necessarily participates in valuation: she cites his view that "to live means to judge, measure, evaluate"[516] as well as his claim that life is a "normative force" which can be found even in the "moral character of plants and animals."[517] As Lemm argues, this moral character of all life — plants, animals, and human beings — is made possible by the capacity of life forms to respond creatively "to conditions of life and growth as they pertain to the entire species and not just the individual."[518] Thus, value creation involves the creative response of a life form to the conditions in which it finds itself embedded and within which it either transforms itself or other forms of life, often through what Lemm calls the "creative transfiguration of forms of life."[519] In other words, the value creation of the plant for Nietzsche will always already take into account the ecosystem to which it belongs as a determinant of what values it can create, just as value creation for human beings is always already situated with in a culture or a species. It is thus "from the consideration of the life of plants" that Nietzsche shows "that the ways of evaluating of animals and plants continue within the human being."[520] On the picture I advance here, these similar capacities of plants, animals, and human beings result from their similar constitution: all forms of life are embodied complexes of drives, though some forms are more complex than others.[521]

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[515] Vanessa Lemm, "What We Can Learn from Plants about the Creation of Values," in *Nietzsche-Studien.* Volume 44, Issue 1, Pages 78–87, ISSN (Online) 1613-0790, ISSN (Print) 0342-1422, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/nietzstu-2015-0112, November 2015.
[516] HH I:32, as cited by Lemm, "What We Can Learn…" 79.
[517] KSA 11 40 [54], as cited by Lemm, ibid.
[518] Lemm, "What We Can Learn…" 85.
[519] Ibid., 84.
[520] Ibid.
[521] See the section below for more on the possible drive-life of plants.

Indeed, Nietzsche explains all of life — *and, not only life, but all of reality* — in terms of drives. Parkes' *Composing the Soul* persuasively argues that both artifacts of life (such as texts, artworks, and beaver dams) as well as socio-cultural principles and practices (such as different philosophies, moralities, and behaviors) manifest the drives of those who created them. In "The Wanderer and His Shadow," Nietzsche notes that "[philosophers] lack all *impersonal* interest in problems of knowledge: just as they themselves are persons through and through, so all their knowledge and insights grow together again into a person, into a living multiplicity whose individual parts are interdependent and interpenetrating and communally nourished."[522] Parkes shows in his work how these "personality-infused structures of knowledge" constitute dynamic multiplicities held in tension "just as an organism gets its structural unity from the life that animates it."[523] In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche explicitly remarks that various philosophical systems, as well as the various moralities they might present, express "the rank ordering in which [one's] innermost drives of his nature are placed relative to each other."[524] In short, philosophical systems and reflections disclose the drives of the philosopher composing them. The same is true of an artist's artwork, or a text: as Nietzsche remarks, "the book becomes almost human" and "takes on a life of its own."[525] Nietzsche describes this in much more detail:

> That author has drawn the happiest lot who as an old man can say that all of life-engendering, strengthening, elevating, enlightening thought and feeling that was in him lives on in his writings… If one now goes on to consider that, not only a book, but every action performed by a human being becomes in some way the cause of other actions, decisions, thoughts, that everything that happens is

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[522] HH II, "Wanderer and the Shadow," 171. Translated by Parkes.
[523] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 285.
[524] BGE 6.
[525] HH I: 208.

inextricably knotted to everything that will happen, one comes to recognize the existence of an actual immortality, that of *motion*: what has once moved is enclosed and eternalized in the total union of all being like an insect in amber.[526]

In this excerpt, we see the way in which artifacts of life manifest and preserve the drives of the individual who creates that artifact. We also see the way in which these artifacts of life offer opportunities for other individuals, as complexes of drives, to continue to be moved by the drives of those who no longer exist, yet left artifacts in their place. Even in what may seem like a moment of solitude, one is surrounded by "form[s] and mode[s] of life," by other life forms and the artifacts they leave behind:[527] "The past of every form and mode of life, of cultures which earlier lay right next to or on top of each other, now streams… into us 'modern souls,' our instincts now run back everywhere, we are ourselves a kind of chaos."[528] In short, the human being is a driven "being" embedded in a driven world, a complex of assimilated and incorporated cultures and forms of life held in tension, just like Heraclitus's lyre and bow.

Indeed, in a famous passage from *Beyond Good and Evil,* we see that all of reality is composed of drives — and that this is what Nietzsche intends to capture when he remarks, as he does with some frequency, that life is will to power:

> If we assume that nothing is "given" as real other than our world of desires and passions and that we cannot access from above or below any "reality" other than the direct reality of our drives — for thinking is only a relationship of these drives to each other —: are we not allowed to make the attempt and to ask the question whether this given is not a sufficient basis also for understanding the so-called mechanical (or "material") world on the basis of things like this given. I don't mean to understand it as an illusion, an "appearance," an "idea" (in the sense of Berkeley and Schopenhauer), but as having the same degree of reality as our affects themselves have - as a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything is still combined in a powerful unity, something which then branches off and develops in the organic process (also, as is reasonable, gets softer and weaker—), as a form of drive-life in which the collective organic functions,

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[526] Ibid.
[527] BGE 224. Translated by Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 333.
[528] Ibid. Translated by Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 333.

along with self-regulation, assimilation, nourishment, excretion, and metabolism, are still synthetically bound up with one another — as an early form of life? In the end making this attempt is not only permitted but is also demanded by the conscience of the method… Of course, "will" can work only on "will" - and not on "stuff" (not, for example, on "nerves"—). Briefly put, we must venture the hypothesis whether in general, wherever we recognize "effects," will is not working on will — and whether every mechanical event, to the extent that a force is active in it, is not force of will, an effect of the will.— Suppose finally that we were to succeed in explaining our entire drive-life as a development and branching off of a single fundamental form [*Grundform*] of the will — that is, of the will to power, as my principle asserts — and suppose we could trace back all organic functions to this will to power and also locate in it the solution to the problem of reproduction and nourishment — that is one problem — then in so doing we would have earned the right to designate all efficient force unambiguously as will to power. Seen from inside, the world defined and described according to its "intelligible character" would be simply "will to power" and nothing else.[529]

Nietzsche rejects a purely mechanical world of matter in favor of a world in which change, growth, and decay are understood as results of the interactions of drives.[530] This is what Nietzsche means when he claims that "'will' can work only on 'will' — and not on 'stuff.'" Alongside his above account of non-living artifacts as manifestations of drives, this excerpt extends the notion that drives for Nietzsche are at work even in the realm of the non-living, even in what appear to be mechanical interactions.

3.3.3 Features of drives

Drives for Nietzsche, then, are the basic units of reality; even the inorganic world is composed of drives. To understand Nietzsche's metaphysics, then, requires one to understand the various features and workings of Nietzschean drives. As we saw at the beginning of the previous section, and as Richardson persuasively argues, Nietzsche believes that drives are essentially *processes* or *becomings;* that is to say, they are "how a

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[529] BGE 36.

[530] Nietzsche puts "will" in quotation marks here to undermine the notion that there is one unified will rather than innumerable drives with different aims and ends. The will to power which Nietzsche mentions here is not a single, unified will which manifests itself in different aims, but a way of describing the workings of the drives, as we will see below. This is why Nietzsche describes it as a *Grundform* of the will: as a basic form, mode, or shape of all drives.

future is being approached from a past."[531] Thus, insofar as reality is "[stretched] out as processes," [532] drives have a temporal structure: they are thrust from out of a past and towards a future. The basis for this temporal structure of drives is their end-directedness, or their nature as purpose-driven. This purposiveness "lays out the temporal structure of [drives as] processes: these [processes] aren't just valueless fluctuations, but *becomings*" which are directed at certain aims.[533]

Nietzschean drives are essentially *purposive* or *purposeful* forces: as Richardson makes clear, "each drive is identified in terms of a certain outcome it is 'to,' so that Nietzsche speaks of drives 'to' knowledge, life, etc."[534] As early as 1870, Nietzsche introduces a "drive to learn [*Trieb zu lernen*]," in *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche mentions a "drive to musical discharge [*Trieb zu musikalischer Entladung*]." There is a "drive to ever new metaphors" which is discharged [*er entladet sich*] in the poet.[535] In *Human, All too Human,* Nietzsche notes that "A drive to something or for something [*Ein Trieb zu Etwas oder von Etwas*], without a feeling that one wants to be promoted…. a drive without a kind of appreciable estimate of the value of the goal [*den Werth des Zieles*], does not exist in human beings."[536] Here Nietzsche presents the end-directedness of drives in as pared down a description as we see anywhere: a drive is a drive "to something" or "for something" which possesses and values its goal. In a fragment from 1880, Nietzsche refers to a drive "to envy, to hate, [or] to fear [*zu neiden, zu hassen, zu*

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[531] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 103.
[532] Ibid., 103.
[533] Ibid., 108.
[534] Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 35.
[535] KSA 7: 19 [230].
[536] HH I:32.

fürchte]."[537] In *Dawn,* Nietzsche mentions drives "to annoyance or to combativeness or

to reflection or to benevolence [*des Ärgers oder der Kampflust oder des Nachdenkens*

oder des Wohlwollens]."[538] In all of these excerpts, Nietzsche explicitly describes the

end-directedness of drives.

The outcome towards which a particular drive aims is its "distinctive activity" and

this outcome or "result" can be conceived as a drive's "individuating goal, which

explains [a drive's] presence and character."[539] On Nietzsche's account, then, drives are

end-directed forces which can be individuated or distinguished from one another on the

basis of the different ends towards which they are directed. With this concept of force,

"one takes doing *something,* the 'goal,' the 'aim,' the 'end' back into the doing, after

having artificially removed this from it and thus emptied the doing."[540] Thus, as

Richardson is sure to point out, the goal, aim, or end of a drive is not merely an outcome

that the drive has a tendency to produce or reach; instead, the end towards which a drive

is directed explains "what the drive concretely does:"

> Drives are more than just plastic dispositions, because their outcomes are more
> than just tended results. When Nietzsche names a drive by citing the outcome it is
> 'to,' he means that outcome to explain what the drive concretely does. It's
> because of what eating is that the drive to eat performs the specific behaviors it
> does (e.g., hunting and killing). By contrast a mere disposition's outcomes don't
> explain it: a stream has a disposition to erode its bed, but this eroding doesn't
> explain why the stream does it… It's not because they all result in eating that we
> collect those behaviors together under a "drive to eat," but because eating is *why*
> those behaviors occur.[541]

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[537] KSA 9: 6 [398].
[538] D 119.
[539] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 35. Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 39.
[540] WP 675. Cited by Richardson. It seems that this is also the point that Nietzsche makes in WP
84, when he says "the will is precisely that which treats cravings as their master and appoints to
them their way and measure." Here, those cravings would be the ends or aims towards which the
drives, as units of the will to power, are directed. See below for more on this.
[541] Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 36.

In this excerpt, Richardson makes clear that, for Nietzsche, the end or aim of a drive is not just an outcome a drive tends to produce; rather, the end of a drive explains the actions or behaviors that follow from a particular drive. In one example, Richardson notes that insofar as the love of mankind is a sublimation of the sex drive for Nietzsche, this love of mankind can only be explained with reference to the sex drive.[542]

Even as drives interact with, struggle with, assimilate, and incorporate other drives — and although they are always becoming, or undergoing constant change — every drive still retains its essential telic thrust towards its distinctive end. This is the nature of incorporation [*Einverleibung*] for Nietzsche. We see this in Nietzsche's late notebooks, in which Nietzsche remarks that "in commanding there is a concession that the opponent's absolute power has not been vanquished, not incorporated, dissolved. 'Obeying' and 'commanding' are forms of martial art."[543] We see here that when one drive incorporates another, something of the other's telic power remains: in other words, if drive D incorporates drive R into its striving, then there will be something of drive R's end retained. We see this also in Nietzsche's note describing how "all thinking, judging, perception as comparison has as a prerequisite an 'equalizing,' even earlier a 'making the same.' This *making the same* [emphasis mine] is the same as the incorporation of acquired material in the amoeba… [and] difference is preserved."[544] In another late note,

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[542] Ibid., 23.

[543] Translated by Kate Burge in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks.* Edited by Rüdinger Bittner. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 25.

[544] KSA 12: 5 [65]. We see Nietzsche's talk of the incorporation of drives (as will to power, we will see below) and his analogy between the incorporation of the drives and a organic incorporation on the behalf of an amoeba or a cell. In KSA 13: 14 [174] (trans. Burge, ibid.), Nietzsche describes incorporation as the overcoming of a resistance in the case of "protoplasm" which "stretches out pseudopodia to seek something that resists it — not out of hunger but out of

Nietzsche remarks on how that which is incorporated *augments* that which incorporates it. Such an augmentation is not a merely quantitative augmentation of the incorporating drive's will to power. Instead, it is a *qualitative* augmentation, a broadening of the means by which the incorporating drive can achieve its aims. This is best described by Richardson, when he remarks that since:

> Nietzschean power lies chiefly… in enriching the effort at those ends [of an incorporating complex of drives], and so also [enriching] those ends themselves. Incorporation must work in a different way than marshaling 'efficient servants' [or] functionaries to its ends… To help to the more important sort of power or growth, the forces subjected must keep their own characters and not be utterly made over into mere facilitating tools: they must add their own telic patterns and viewpoints to its fabric.[545]

As Richardson makes clear here, the incorporation of one drive D by another R is not the negation of R's end; it is the taking of R's end into itself such that D learns a new way to attain its original end — a way that necessarily preserves some aspect of R's original end-directedness. Later in *Nietzsche's System,* Richardson puts this straightforwardly: "The goal [of incorporation] is not to suppress the foreignness of the other will but to use its difference to enrich one's own… To master is not to negate the different but to incorporate it as other into oneself."[546]

As an example, imagine a drive to combativeness which expresses itself in explicitly aggressive and unkind remarks and actions. If this drive to combativeness were

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a will to power. Then it tries to overcome what it has found, to appropriate it, incorporate it." In KSA 13: 9 [161], this same expression of the will to power against a resistance (Nietzsche specifically says here that "will to power can only express itself against *resistances"*) is described as "assimilation and incorporation," an "original tendency of protoplasm in sending out pseudopodia and feeling its way" (trans. Burge, ibid.) which absorbs that which is incorporated into that which incorporates. (As Nietzsche remarks here, "if this incorporation fails, the formation will probably fall apart; and duality appears…")

[545] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 34.
[546] Ibid., 157.

to incorporate a drive to underhandedness, the subsumption of the latter drive's end under

the former's end will result in a different expression (here, in the drive to combativeness)

which has adapted the end of the incorporated drive (here, the drive to underhandedness).

We can imagine what the new expression of this drive might look like if we imagine

remarks made or actions performed by a passive-aggressive individual: remarks or

actions which remain unkind and combative, yet are covertly or underhandedly so.[547]

Imagine a case in which a particular individual is angry at their next-door neighbor

because they haven't cut their grass in ages. Whereas an individual dominated by the

drive to combativeness *before* the incorporation of the drive to underhandedness might

hurl an aggressive insult at their neighbor, the individual dominated by a drive to

combativeness which has incorporated a drive to underhandedness might instead blast

music loudly early in the morning to wake their neighbors and enrage them.[548]

      Another feature of Nietzschean drives is what Richardson calls their *plasticity.*

While the telic structure of drives dictates the movement and directedness of the drives,

they are constantly changing the ways in which they approach their goals as other

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[547] Incorporation does not just occur at the level of the drives; it also occurs at the level of complexes of drives. In *Nietzsche's System,* Richardson offers both the ideal Nietzschean friendship and the ideal relationship to one's enemy as paramount examples of the incorporation of one complex of drives by another. When one has either a friend or a "good" enemy, one absorbs the interests or "concerns" of the friend or enemy, so that these interests, concerns, and views become those of the incorporating individual (190). In this act of incorporation, one absorbs the end-directedness of the friend or enemy, understood as ways in which the friend comports himself teleologically (that is, the way he is driven by his drives to engage in the world), "weaving (some of) his cares and pursuits into my own by living through some of my life as he does his" (190). Given that this is still an act of incorporation, it will still involve an "express[ion of] my difference from [the friend]," as the "situating and subordinating" of the friend's pursuits and interests under my own, resulting in an assimilation of these pursuits and interest with my own and on my own terms (190).

[548] I should note: Although the example of being angry at one's neighbor for failing to take sufficient care of their lawn is one gleaned from my experience (Thanks, Gary Creasy), the aggressive/passive aggressive responses thankfully are not.

processes of reality change around them.[549] Richardson describes it thusly: "if one route

[for a drive] is blocked, it shifts to another. The [plastic] disposition [of a drive]

bifurcates (trifurcates, and so on) but then reconverges: it is a tendency to respond

differently in different contexts, in such a way that the same result ensues."[550] In other

words, if the expression of a drive is prevented in some way, the drive will find a new

means to reach its end. As Alfano points out (with the help of Janaway and Richardson),

this will sometimes require the shift of the intentional object of the drive.[551] When the

drive to aggression, as a drive "to inflict suffering" is prevented from expression (as it is

during the original socialization of man), it finds a new object and a new means of

expressing itself: as Janaway notes, "when the instinctive drives of a socialized human

individual are prevented from discharging themselves outwardly, they discharge

themselves *inwardly, on the individual him- or herself*."[552] Drives, then, are purposive

forces which comprise the continuum of becoming and serve as the basic elements or

constituents of reality.[553] In Nietzsche's work, these drives have other important qualities

which are essential to the functional role they have in Nietzsche's metaphysics: they

produce behaviors and interpret the world through the lens of their particular

perspectives, which are also crucially *evaluative* perspectives.

The first, and most obvious, feature of Nietzsche's drives is that certain drives

produce certain behaviors. In *Dawn*, Nietzsche makes this point explicitly:

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[549] Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 28-9.
[550] Ibid., 28.
[551] Mark Alfano, "The Tenacity of the Intentional Prior to the *Genealogy*." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 40: 42.
[552] Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy*. (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 125.
[553] As before, these elements or constituents must be thought against a conventional notion of substance, as processes or becomings rather than beings.

Suppose we were in the market place one day and we noticed someone laughing at us as we went by: this event will signify this or that to us according to whether this or that drive happens at that moment to be at its height in us - and it will be a quite different event according to the kind of person we are. One person will absorb it like a drop of rain, another will shake it from him like an insect, another will try to pick a quarrel, another will examine his clothing to see if there is anything about it that might give rise to laughter, another will be led to reflect on the nature of laughter as such, another will be glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world - and in each case a drive has gratified itself, whether it be the drive to annoyance or to combativeness or to reflection or to benevolence.

Here, we see that the different behaviors manifest by different individuals — whether they bristle, reflect, or laugh — are produced by a variety of different drives and their expressions as comprising the "kind of person" one is.

In this excerpt, drives are described as explanatory factors for differences in behavior. But it is also important to note both that events are interpreted in quite different ways depending on which drives are doing the interpreting and that an action will have a "very different significance depending on which drive is 'behind' it."[554] We see this again in a selection from Nietzsche's notes: "It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their for and against. Every drive is a kind of attempt to dominate; each has its own perspective."[555] This characterization, which sees the drives as constituting interpretative perspectives, is repeated in other notes. In a fragment from 1885, Nietzsche claims that "from each of our basic drives there is a different perspectival assessment [*perspektivische Abschätzung*] of all events and experiences."[556] Each drive has a perspective on the world which shapes how events are interpreted, what shows up as

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[554] Thank you to John Richardson for suggesting the importance of this point on revisions to an earlier draft.
[555] WP 481.
[556] Cited and translated by Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 745. KSA 12: 1 [58].

valuable, and more. In a later note, Nietzsche echoes this fragment: there is a "necessary perspectivism, by virtue of which every center of force — and not only those of man — constructs the rest of the world and measures, feels, shapes it."[557] For Nietzsche, every drive has a perspective which affects the way the world shows up. Indeed, Nietzsche describes these perspectives as wearing "party colors," "taking sides."[558] As Clark notes, this makes the perspectives "partial or one-sided." Clark goes on to sum up the selectivity (or partiality) of perspectives in her claim that "different affects makes different aspects of reality salient and focus our attention on them, so that other features disappear from view."[559]

This important idea —that different drives show the world differently and shape the perceptions and experiences of certain driven beings — is more recently treated in Katsafanas's work. Katsafanas speaks of an "evaluative orientation" of the drives conditioned by an "affective orientation" induced by the drives.[560] Katsafanas's account of the way in which drives lead to selective perspectives on and experiences of the world is connected to his claim that Nietzschean drives inspire certain "affective orientation[s]," with affective orientations treated as the emotional reactions or expressions of human agents. (In "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," Katsafanas mentions love, hatred, and jealousy as affective orientations.) Nietzschean drives explain the selectivity of the experience of driven beings because, as Katsafanas convincingly demonstrates, "having

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[557] KSA 13: 14 [186].
[558] HH I: 371.
[559] Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 77.
[560] Paul Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology" in the *Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 74.

an end or harboring an affect" makes "certain features [of the world] *salient.*"[561] An

example will help us to see what is meant here. Imagine I inhabit a cruel perspective on

the world I am encountering (that is, a perspective shaped by a drive to cruelty and

accompanied by various cruel affects). If I were to see a starving man on the street whilst

inhabiting such a perspective, I might be inclined to view him as weak and deserving of

his plight. If, on the other hand, I inhabit a compassionate perspective on the world (that

is, a perspective shaped by a drive to compassion and accompanied by various

compassionate affects) then when I see this same man on the street, I might instead be

prone to see him as undeserving of his position and making a claim on my assistance and

care. From these two different perspectives, the world appears in completely different

ways. These examples show how my perspective — as shaped by my interests and affects

— shows the world to me in a particular way and excludes other ways of seeing.

    According to Katsafanas, our drives "generate" selective perspectives because

these drives structure "the agent's perceptions, affects, and reflective thought."[562] This

happens even though the drives and their operation remain unconscious or unknown to

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[561] Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 740. This account of the drives is heavily influenced by Nietzsche's reading of Emerson on moods. In "Experience," Emerson claims that "It depends on the mood of the man, whether he shall see the sunset or the fine poem" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience" in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2009), 310). in If a man is in an artistic or creative mood, he may see the sunset as an occasion for poetic reflection. If this man is in a scientific or analytic mood, however, he may see the sunset simply as an illusion caused by the Earth's rotation on its axis. This indicates that whether the man sees a sunset as a scientifically-explainable illusion or an aesthetic experience depends on his mood. No quality of the world itself or the sunset itself needs to change for the world to appear differently to the man in question; a change in mood is enough. This means that for Emerson, "moods must be taken as having at least as sound a role in advising us of reality as sense experience has" (Stanley Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson" in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003), 11.).
[562] Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 752.

the being under their influence.[563] Katsafanas offers a compelling example of jealousy in

The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious which

emphasizes the way in which the interpretation activity of the drives, while remaining

largely unconscious, still shapes conscious experience and reflective thought:

> ...agents often fail to grasp the ways in which they are being moved by their attitudes. An agent who is moved by jealousy is rarely an agent who consents to be moved by his jealousy; indeed, an agent moved by jealousy need not even recognize a fully-formed attitude of jealousy… the agent experiences herself as having a reflective distance from the attitude, as scrutinizing the attitude and asking herself whether there is a reason to act on it; but, all the while, the attitude influences the agent's reflective thought in ways she does not grasp. The jealous agent sees the phone call as furtive, the lateness as suspicious, the handkerchief as damning: and these perceptions, were they accurate, would indeed justify the jealousy… This type of influence is easiest to detect when we consider an action retrospectively… Looking back on my jealous spat… the problem was not that I deliberately yielded to jealousy: the problem was that, in the grip of jealousy, I took harmless factors to vindicate my jealous behavior. The problem was that I saw my rage as *warranted* by the fact that she arrived a few minutes late. I now see that the rage was entirely unwarranted, that I was driven to rage in a way that I did not comprehend.[564]

A driven being's experience is constituted by the interpreting activity of her drives and

the affective orientations they induce. This is why, for Nietzsche, experience is always

perspectival: one's perspective is a result of the interpreting activity of the drives and the

affective experiences they generate (as they foreground certain aspects of reality while

other features of reality recede into the background of the experience).[565] In the above

example from Katsafanas, my jealous affect is induced in some way by a particular drive

or set of drives, and these drives and affects offer me a particular interpretation of the

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[563] See D 119, especially: "However far a man may go in self-knowledge, nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of drives which constitute his being. He can scarcely name even the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and counter-play among one another, and above all the laws of their nutriment remain wholly unknown to him."

[564] Paul Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 146.

[565] Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 740.

world. A partner's lateness which would have gone unnoticed if I were in another affective state is foregrounded and interpreted as grounds for suspicion when I am in a jealous mindset. Indeed, the world and phenomena in the world are differently revealed depending on the different perspectives one occupies.

In order to better understand the interactions of affects and drives, we must look not only at the way that drives structure one's affects, but the ways that affects, too, bring about changes in the drives. This is consistent with drives' inducing affective orientations, but is something which Katsafanas does not treat. As we saw in the section on affective nihilism from the second chapter, the affects which one experiences also shape the strength and directionality of the drives alongside which they occur. We saw this in the second chapter's section on affective nihilism, in Nietzsche's example of the criminal from *Twilight of the Idols,* whose "most lively drives [*Triebe*], which he has brought with him, soon grow together with depressive affects [*Affekte*], with suspicion, fear, and dishonor… [thus,] his feelings turn against his instincts."[566] As we saw, Nietzsche remarks that this turning of the feelings against the instincts of the criminal is "virtually the *recipe* for physiological degeneration," for the weakening of one's drives.[567] Furthermore, these individual affects arise in relation to the perceived affects and evaluations of others — in this example, the "[deprivation] of public approval" or the "[knowledge] that they are not perceived as beneficial, as useful."[568] By looking carefully at this example, we can add more detail to Katsafanas's preceding analysis (and, it's worth noting, there is certainly room in his account for the picture I now present).

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[566] TI, "Raids of an Untimely Man," 45.
[567] TI, "Raids of an Untimely Man," 45.
[568] TI, "Raids of an Untimely Man," 45.

Indeed, although drives induce affective orientations, there is a "feedback loop" of sorts: drives induce certain affective orientations, but those affective orientations also exert influence on the drives, either 1) enhancing or weakening a drive's activity or 2) changing the directionality of the drives, depending on whether they are positive or negative affects, or whether they lead one to "feel" either positively or negatively.[569] Furthermore, the influence which affects exert over the drives can even involve an affective appraisal made on the behalf of another individual, based in drives which do not belong to the individual being appraised.[570]

As we see in the example of the criminal above — and as Katsafanas argues — these "affective orientations" which drives inspire are also "evaluative orientations."[571] The tendency of drives to inspire certain affects and emotions thus enables Nietzsche to explain and elaborate upon the wealth of evaluative perspectives manifest by driven life, as manifest even in instances and circumstances which we would not conventionally associate with valuing or valuation. In his notes, for example, Nietzsche claims that "all sense perceptions are wholly permeated with value-judgments."[572] Although one would not typically associate perception with an evaluative perspective, Nietzsche argues that even perceptual experiences are evaluative experiences. This is supported by an remark of Richardson's, in which he suggests that valuation is a function of affective orientation: valuation "lies in how things 'matter' to the will and so depends on that deep

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[569] This fits nicely with Nietzsche's account of affects as inclinations and disinclinations.
[570] I argue that this can be understood as an example of ontological permeability: the way in which my constitution is permeated and shaped by the activity of others' drives and affects.
[571] Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 740.
[572] WP 505. Cited by Katsafanas.

receptiveness of will that Nietzsche calls 'affect' [*Affekt*] or 'feeling' [*Gefühl*]."[573]

Katsafanas expands this analysis, emphasizing that due to drives' propensity to induce affects, "the world does not present itself as an indifferent array of inert facts. The world tempts and repulses, threatens and charms… Our *experience* of the world is fundamentally value-laden."[574] Another way to put this is the following: since drives induce positive and negative affects which shape a driven being's perspective on the world and these affects arise in response to features of the world which driven beings experience as having a certain value (including, as I point out in the preceding paragraph, the affective responses of others), drives lead the driven being to "experience situations in evaluative terms."[575]

While this is an influential and critically important account for understanding the more complex evaluative and affective orientations of life forms, Nietzsche's desire to expand the realm of drives beyond life forms as those capable of affective orientations as emotional affectations suggests that he likely conceived of affective orientation more broadly than Katsafanas does in his work. Although Nietzsche most frequently refers to human emotions and feelings when he refers to affects, in order to understand the affective orientations of non-human drives, we must conceive of affect in Nietzsche more broadly.[576] Here, I suggest reading the transformative potential of Spinoza's notion of "affect" in a non-mechanistic way in order to more broadly characterize the affective orientations that driven beings possess for Nietzsche. In his *Ethics,* Spinoza defines affects as "*affections* [emphasis mine] of the body by which the body's power of acting is

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573 Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 37.
574 Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 744.
575 Ibid, 745. Yet importantly, these values are crucially rooted in something *real:* the drives.
576 HH I: 214.

increased or diminished, aided or restrained."[577] Most broadly, since the manifestation of

a particular affect or emotion for Spinoza determines a set of possibilities for interacting

with one's world, a change in affect change the way in which one is situated in one's

world. On Spinoza's account, this is due to the role affects or emotions play in changing

one's potential to affect or be affected. An indication that Nietzsche himself might be

influenced by these thoughts of Spinoza on affect shows up in a letter he wrote to a

friend, in which he enthusiastically describes Spinoza as his "precursor" and remarks that

he shares an "overtendency" with Spinoza: namely, "namely to make all knowledge the

most powerful affect [*Affekt*]."[578] Yet since affects as feelings or emotions for Spinoza

are types of *affections,* Spinoza offers an undeniably mechanistic account of the sort

Nietzsche consistently critiques.

Still, I suggest that an understanding of affect which makes sense of Nietzsche's

extension of his drive ontology to non-human life can preserve Spinoza's broader point

about the transformative potential of affects while rejecting his mechanistic framework:

an individual's affects, or a being's affective orientation, puts this individual or being in a

determinate sort of relation to the world, such that certain interactions are open for it and

others are closed off. Affects, then, shape a being's relational possibilities, thus shaping

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[577] Benedictus de Spinoza. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Trans. Edwin M. Curley. (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press: 1994), 154.

[578] BVN-1881, 135. This letter was written to Franz Overbeck, and Nietzsche's enthusiasm is apparent: "I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted! I have a precursor, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just now, was inspired by "an instinctive act [*Instinkthandlung*]." Not only is his overtendency like mine— namely to make all knowledge the most powerful affect [*Affekt*]— but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world-order, the unegoistic, and evil. Even though the divergencies are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the difference in time, culture, and science. In summa: my lonesomeness, which, as on very high mountains, often made it hard for me to breathe and make my blood rush out, is now at least a twosomeness."

the potential that the world has to transform that being and the potential that being has to

transform the world. For a being to have an affective orientation in Nietzsche, then,

means that this being is situated in the world in some determinate way, such that it can be

influenced and transformed by certain things and not others, in certain ways and not

others (what Spinoza's causal account would call a capacity for being affected).

Furthermore, the affective orientation of the being in question enables it to influence or

transform its world in certain determinate ways and not others (what Spinoza would think

of as a capacity for affecting).[579] Understanding affects or affective orientations as the

potential or capacity to transform and be transformed — as that which situates one in

one's world in a particular way and influences the interactions between oneself and one's

world — allows us to extend affective orientations to animal life, plant life, and even to

drives constituting the inorganic world (such as those Nietzsche suggests are present in

chemical interactions and the cosmic order).[580]

     This account of the affects enables us to see how affective orientations — as

determinate potentials both to transform and to be transformed by the world of which one

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[579] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 62. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* Deleuze calls this Spinozist interpretation of Nietzsche the "double aspect" of will to power, arguing that each drive (in Deleuze's language, each force comprising Nietzsche's will to power) "determines the relation between forces… [and], from the standpoint of its own manifestations… is determined by relating forces… the will to power is always determined at the same time it determines, qualified at the same time it qualifies" (62). Understanding the identity Nietzsche establishes between drives and will to power (as wills to power) will allow us to understand this a bit more clearly. This will come in the following section.

[580] Again, my account here draws heavily from Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza on affect [*affectus*]. As Brian Massumi points out in his notes on *Ten Thousand Plateaus,* for Deleuze/Guattari, "*L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected… [and] a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act (Brian Massumi in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1987), xvi.).

is a part — can be extended to non-human life and the inorganic by Nietzsche. It is important to remember, however, that a drive's affective potential is inseparable from the end at which the drive manifesting such an affect is directed (or: a being's affective potential is inseparable from the ends towards which that being, as a complex of drives, are directed). Drives are dispositions to affective orientations because the characteristic activity of a particular drive, fixed by its individuating aim or goal, orients this drive in the world such that it will transform and be transformed in some ways and not others. The most basic sense in which affective potential in Nietzsche can be read, then, is as a potential which conditions the excitation or inhibition of drives. This fits nicely with Nietzsche's characterization of affects as inclinations and disinclinations.

There is a danger here — especially evident in Spinoza's language of "affecting" and "being affected" — that we will fall back into the kind of atomistic metaphysics that Nietzsche rejects, involving discrete substances in causal relations. It is therefore crucial to keep in mind that this relationship among affects and drives must be understood as an "interpenetration/interlocking, a process."[581] An affect, for Nietzsche, most basically situates an individual or object in this "interpenetration of process" in a certain determinate and determining way, such that something about oneself — one's affective orientation — shapes the way that one exerts and feels force. When I say that an affect for Nietzsche is most basically a drive's determinate potential for influencing or being influenced by interactions with other drives, this non-mechanistic sense must be kept in mind.

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[581] WP 631.

In sum, even the drives of non-human life and the inorganic world can be said to have affective orientations which are connected to the evaluative perspective of those drives. After all, as Richardson points out, the evaluative perspectives of drives can be explained as an emergence of values from out of the end-directedness of drives which "polarizes" the world:

> Each drive's end-directed activity already 'polarizes' the world toward it, giving everything a significance relative to it. So, for example, the sex drive views the world as inspiring or requiring a sexual response, the world appears with erotic potential as its meaning or sense.[582]

This "polarization" of the world is possible only insofar as a drive has an affective orientation, or a determinate potential to transform and be transformed. As Richardson insists, the fact that every drive can only approach the world around it through its own goal-directed activity means that the world is never "experienced" as a neutral world for a drive; it is experienced, rather, as a world that aids or hinders a drive's end (or, perhaps, does neither). This is what Nietzsche means in *Human, All too Human* when he connects a drive's "feeling that one wants to be promoted" with its "estimate of the value of the goal."[583]

This account of affect in Nietzsche allows us to understand the affective orientation of a drive in broader terms than Katsafanas, allowing for all driven beings to manifest affects — and thus evaluative orientations. Although the complex, emotion-laden activity of human valuation described by Katsafanas cannot be something in which all complexes of drives and individual drives participate, even these drives and complexes of drives have affective orientations. It is also worth noting that the kinds of

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[582] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 36.
[583] HH I:32.

affective orientations (love, hatred, and jealousy) mentioned by Katsafanas fit neatly into my broader definition of affect.

On this picture, not only is the experience of the world from the perspectives of driven beings value-laden, as Katsafanas suggests: indeed, the whole world is value-laden, insofar as the world is nothing but the play of forces and drives which have their own affective and thus evaluative orientations. As we saw in *Human, All too Human,* Nietzsche insists that "A drive to something or for something [*Ein Trieb zu Etwas oder von Etwas*], without a *feeling* that one wants to be promoted…. a drive without a kind of appreciable estimate of the value of the goal [*den Werth des Zieles*], does not exist in human beings."[584] Again, we see here that a drive for Nietzsche both possesses and values its goal. After all, in later notes, Nietzsche remarks that "every center of force has its perspective, i.e., its very definite value, its mode of action, its mode of resistance."[585] This essentially evaluative component to the activity of the drives or "center[s] of force" helps us to understand to what Nietzsche refers when he describes a "necessary perspectivism, by virtue of which every center of force — and not only those of man — constructs the rest of the world and measures, feels, shapes it ... They have forgotten to include this perspective-fixing power into 'true being.'"[586] In this selection, we see that drives establish perspectives which give the world to a drive or a driven being in a way that always already includes some valuation. All drives, or centers of force, "measure" in some way; even drives which do not induce complex emotional responses on behalf of

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[584] HH I:32
[585] KSA 13: 14 [184]
[586] KSA 13: 14 [186]

the driven beings to which they belong, such as those comprising inorganic life, will have evaluative perspectives, due to their affective orientations.

Let us first imagine a simple form of plant life and the kind of evaluative perspectives they can be said to possess. Imagine, for example, a sunflower as possessing a drive to photosynthesis. Because of this drive, the sunflower has a particular affective orientation, in the broad sense I introduce above: it is capable of being transformed in certain ways (in this case, by the presence or absence of light) and of transforming its world in certain ways (in this case, either using sunlight to "split" water — separating hydrogen from carbon dioxide, and turning carbon dioxide into sugars for energy — or failing to split water in the absence of sunlight). In this case, sunlight allows for the sunflower to flourish insofar as it enables the sunflower to split water and utilize carbon dioxide for energy (in virtue of the sunflower's drive to photosynthesize); for this reason, the plant can be said to have a positive evaluative orientation towards sunlight in virtue of the affective orientation afforded to it by the drive to photosynthesis.

To imagine the kinds of evaluative perspectives which drives of inorganic objects might possess, we can take photosynthesis as an example of a chemical interaction in which a particular drive might be manifest: the drive to split water.[587] The drive to split water present in the chemical interaction of photosynthesis affords a plant cell which undergoes this process the potential to split the water molecule into hydrogen and carbon dioxide. This end-directedness is a determinate way in which such a drive may transform other drives constituting the world in which it is embedded. On the other hand, there are

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[587] It is especially apropos to investigate a chemical interaction here, as Nietzsche identifies chemical reactions as consisting in interactions of drives. See his claim that "The chemical world is ruled by the keenest perception of differences in force" (KSA 11: 35 [58]). See also KSA 13: 14 [81].

determinate ways in which the world interacts with the drive to split water: such a drive to split water increases in activity only with the proper amount of sunlight and at the proper temperature. If there is not enough light, or if the temperature is sub-optimal, then the process of photosynthesis: the drive to split water is foiled in its attempt. Thus, the affective orientation of the drive to split water — its determinate potential for transforming and being transformed by its interactions with other drives — results in an evaluative orientation which positively values warm temperatures and full sunlight and negatively values extremely cold or hot temperatures and a lack of sunlight.

In sum, Nietzschean drives are disposed towards certain outcomes; these drives dispose driven beings to particular behaviors and thoughts. The perspectives from out of which these behaviors and thoughts are generated are fundamentally evaluative, insofar as they involve affective orientations of the kind I argue for above. As Richardson reminds us, a drive can not be separated from the behaviors, interpretations, experiences, or thoughts it induces. Indeed, a drive's outcomes are not simply "tended results."[588] Instead, a drive's outcome can only be understood and explained in terms of the particular drive which incites that outcome, that drive's characteristic aim, and its affective orientation (and thus what it values). A drive's characteristic aim, its affective orientation, what the drive values, and its outcomes in thought and action are essentially connected.

3.3.4 Drives as wills to power

Given Nietzsche's assertion in *Beyond Good and Evil* that will to power is a fundamental *shape* or *form* of the development of drive-life, understanding Nietzsche's metaphysics

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[588] Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, 36.

requires us to understand not only his account of the drives, but also his account of the will to power [*Wille zur Macht*].[589] References to this concept in Nietzsche's works are numerous. His treatment of the will to power begins in a note from 1876 and continues through the end of his working life.[590] In his earliest treatments, he introduces the will to power as an alternative to Schopenhauer's account of the will to life, remarking that "at center, I always only find the will to power."[591] In "On Self-Overcoming" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* Nietzsche calls the will to power "the unexhausted procreative will of life" and suggests that which is usually characterized as "a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold" can be understood instead in terms of the will to power.[592] In these remarks from Nietzsche's early and middle periods, only living things are characterized by the will to power: he specifically locates the will to power "in the functions of the organic."[593]

In his later work, Nietzsche continues describing the activities of living things in terms of the will to power while also extending the domain of the will to power past organic life to inorganic life. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche mentions the will to power in nearly a dozen separate aphorisms. In this work, he claims note only that "life itself is will to power"[594] but also remarks that if we can explain all life in terms of will to power (which he believes we can), then we "would thus have acquired the right to define

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[589] BGE 46.
[590] In a note from 1876, Nietzsche notes that "Fear (negative) and will to power (positive) explain our strong respect for people's opinions" KSA 7: 23[63].
[591] KSA 10: 5[1].
[592] TSZ, "On Self-Overcoming."
[593] KSA 11: 26 [273].
[594] BGE 13.

all active force (emphasis mine) unequivocally as will to power."[595] In this case, "the

world seen from within, the world defined and designated according to its 'intelligible

character'… would simply be 'will to power,' and nothing else."[596] In *On the Genealogy*

of Morality, written in 1887, Nietzsche calls the will to power the "essence of life" while

also describing the activity of the will to power present in the "development of a thing" or

a "tradition" [*„Entwicklung" eines Dings, eines Brauchs*].[597] Nietzsche's later works

(including the *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Antichrist*) and several sections of the

posthumously published *Will to Power* are dedicated to characterizing the nature of

reality itself — and not only living beings — as will to power.[598] In his notes, Nietzsche

calls the will to power "a new interpretation of *all happenings* (emphasis mine)" and

characterizes it as a metaphysical account: it is "the real and the only reality of things."[599]

Indeed, an 1885 remark published in *The Will to Power* announces that "This world is the

will to power — and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power —

and nothing besides!"[600]

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[595] BGE 36.

[596] Ibid.

[597] GM II:12.

[598] In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche discusses manifestations of the will to power in the work of architects and the battles of the Ancient Greeks. In *The Antichrist,* Nietzsche claims that "Life itself appears to [him] as an instinct for growth, for survival, for the accumulation of forces, for power: whenever the will to power fails there is disaster" (A 6).

[599] KSA 11: 40 [53]. It is worth mentioning that this is also how Heidegger interprets Nietzsche in his famous *Nietzsche* lectures (See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 1: The Will to Power as Art.* Trans. David Farrell Krell. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1979), 3.), although Heidegger utilizes this features of Nietzsche's thought to draw the opposite conclusion about the potential of Nietzsche's thought for overcoming nihilism (See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 4: Nihilism.* Trans. David Farrell Krell. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 202-203.).

[600] WP 1067.

As we already saw in an excerpt from *Beyond Good and Evil* above, Nietzsche also explicitly connects drives and the will to power.[601] In an 1885 fragment, Nietzsche locates the "will to power in every force-combination [*Kraft-Combination*]."[602] In another remark, the world as will to power is described as:

> force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces [*als Kraft überall, als Spiel von Kräften und Kraftwellen*], at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back… with an ebb and a flood of its forms…[603]

The picture of reality as will to power here is the ever-changing interactions and manifestations of drives (the "play of forces and waves of forces"). The drives which comprise the world are "many" insofar as there are innumerable drives with innumerable aims; they are "at the same time one" insofar as the workings of all of the drives can be described in terms of the will to power. In another fragment, Nietzsche identifies the will to power as an instinct to assimilate or incorporate which results in growth.[604] This description of will to power is identical to Nietzsche's description of the activities and workings of the drives. We see this connection between the drives and the will to power also in a very late note, in which Nietzsche suggests that the will to power as "the desire to become stronger" is "the only reality from every center or force."[605] Elsewhere, Nietzsche describes the will to power as the "primitive affective form [*die primitive Affekt-Form*]" and remarks that all configurations of affects result from the will to

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[601] BGE 36.
[602] KSA 11: 36 [21].
[603] WP 1067.
[604] KSA 11: 40 [7].
[605] KSA 13: 14 [81].

power.[606] In this same excerpt, he remarks that "all driving force [*alle treibende Kraft*] is will to the power" and that "there is no physical, dynamic, or psychic power besides [*es keine physische, dynamische oder psychische Kraft außerdem giebt*]."[607] In this excerpt, Nietzsche notes the will to power does not describe only the "phenomenon of life" but also non-living phenomena, such as chemical interactions and the cosmos. Thus, just as Nietzsche insists that inorganic phenomena are comprised of drives, he insists that the workings of the drives comprising these inorganic phenomena can be captured by his understanding of the will to power.

For Nietzsche, as we have already begun to see, the will to power describes the characteristic activity of the drives. As Richardson points out, Nietzsche means something quite specific by this: drives "are 'wills to power' in that they essentially pursue the continual enhancement of their distinctive activities."[608] As we saw above, Nietzschean drives are characterized by the particular aims and ends at which they are directed. Drives are always drives "to something" or "for something," and that drive's "to" or "for" is what Richardson calls its distinctive activity.[609] Since a drive is characterized and individuated from other drives by the particular end towards which it is directed, an increase in "power" for a particular drive must take this particular end into account. Thus drives, as will to power, aim to enhance the achievement of their

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[606] KSA 13: 14 [121]. Remember that Nietzsche believes that affects are produced by the drives of life forms.
[607] KSA 13: 14 [121].
[608] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 33. The will to power is described as a continual enhancement in *Zarathustra,* where Nietzsche refers to the will to power as that which "of its own accord must ever surpass itself anew" (TSZ, "On Self-Overcoming").
[609] HH I:32.

characteristic ends in some way: "as will to power, a drive aims at ongoing growth in its distinctive activity."[610]

Nietzsche's will to power, then, does not refer to a unified will underlying all of the drives and aiming at power; rather, there are innumerable drives, all of which are *wills* to power insofar as they retain an instinct for growth.[611] This instinct for growth results in what Nietzsche characterizes as the "mutual struggle of that which becomes with each other [*der Kampf der Werdenden mit einander*]."[612] In other words, drives are in a continuous struggle with other drives because each wants to enhance its own characteristic activity, even at the expense of other drives.

Nietzsche's metaphysics of drives is inseparable from his account of the will to power, then, because drives *are* simply wills to power: they are "power-wills" which Nietzsche also designates "power quanta."[613] Furthermore, for Nietzsche "there remain no things but [these] dynamic quanta in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta" and the "essence" of these power quanta "is in its relation to all other quanta, in its 'action'" on other dynamic quanta.[614] Reality is fundamentally comprised of drives and

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[610] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 35.

[611] For some context here, we must attend to the influence of Ernst Rolph and his 1882 work *Biologische Probleme,* which Nietzsche "probably acquired during mid-1884" (Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology, and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 47.). As Moore goes on to point out in *Nietzsche, Biology, and Metaphor,* Nietzsche's idea that a "ceaseless accumulation and expenditure of energy… governs all events at all levels of existence… [and serves as] the motor of Nietzschean evolution" (46) is influenced by his reading of Rolph. Moore points out that Rolph, like Nietzsche, is interested in problematizing Darwinian evolution and therefore "proposes a novel mechanism by which to explain the origin of variation and diversity in nature…[he] denies the existence of an instinct for self-preservation… [and insists] rather, that life seeks primarily to expand itself" (47). This idea — that expansion, and not mere preservation, is the goal of all driven life — is a familiar theme in Nietzsche and tied explicitly to his idea that "life simply is will to power" in *Beyond Good and Evil* (259).

[612] KSA 12: 7 [54].

[613] KSA 13: 14 [79].

[614] Ibid.

their relations to one another, and drives themselves are shaped by the other drives with which they interact. This claim — that reality is fundamentally comprised by drives and their relations to one another — is inseparable from Nietzsche's claim that the world is will to power, and both are *ontological* claims.

Without the end-directed striving of the drives, there would be no world as will to power. In his characterization of the will to power as "the drives striving for expression," Ken Gemes persuasively continues Richardson's argument that "the drives are for Nietzsche the physical embodiment of the will to power" and that "in emphasizing the (explanatory and causal) primacy of the will to power, Nietzsche is expressing the (explanatory and causal) primary of the drives."[615] This is made all the more convincing by looking at the similar (and often identical) ways in which Nietzsche talks about the drives and the will to power: as perspectival, as interpretative, as evaluative.

In his notes, Nietzsche remarks that "the will to power interprets," just as drives do.[616] He also notes "from all of our basic drives [*Grundtriebe*] come different perspectival evaluations of all happenings and experience… Man as a complexity of 'wills to power.'"[617] Nietzsche here equates the basic drives of human beings with wills to power and remarks that such wills to power comprise different perspectives, especially evaluative perspectives. This is emphasized also in *Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche notes that "out of esteeming itself speaks the will to power."[618] Although an individual taking an evaluative stance is not conscious of it, the will to power underlies and motivates

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[615] Ken Gemes, "Life's Perspectives," in the *Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 571.
[616] KSA 12: 2 [148]. See also KSA 12: 2 [190].
[617] KSA 12: 25 [6]. Cited and translated by Gemes.
[618] TSZ, "On Self-Overcoming," "1001 Goals."

every act of valuation. In a late fragment, Nietzsche notes that all "value estimations are only results and narrow perspectives in the service" of the will to power.[619] The evaluative perspectives formed by drives, in their end-directedness, are manifestations of the will to power insofar as they are formed by the drives as *wills* to power.

Although Nietzsche claims elsewhere that "all 'ends,' 'purposes,' 'senses,' are only expressions and metamorphoses of one will, which inheres in all events, the will to power," it is clear that he wants to dissociate the activity of the drives as wills to power from an account which relies on a unified, purposeless will which underlies reality.[620] Instead, Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of putting "the *something-done* (emphasis mine), the 'aim,' the 'goal,' the 'purpose,'… back into the deed, after having been artificially taken out of it, and the deed emptied therewith."[621] Here, Nietzsche distinguishes the will to power from empty willing or mere striving. That which is willed by the various drives as wills to power cannot be separated from the will to power; the end of a drive cannot be separated out from the drive itself. In these remarks, Nietzsche separates his view from what he understands as Schopenhauer's projection of the felt unity of the will of psychological experience onto reality itself. Instead, Nietzsche dissociates the will to power from psychological accounts which rely on a unified will, remarking that "the will of the former psychology is an unjustified generalization" which "does not exist at all" and instead "removes" or "subtract[s] out" the character of the will" (or, in our case, the drives as *wills* to power):[622]

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[619] KSA 12: 2 [190].
[620] Ibid.
[621] Ibid.
[622] KSA 13: 14 [121]. We see this in Nietzsche's claim that the "will to power *specializes* [emphasis mine] as a will for food, for property, for tools, for servants" (KSA 11: 35 [15]). In a

Is 'will to power' a kind of "will" or identical with the concept "will"? Is it the same thing as desiring? or *commanding?* Is it that "will" of which Schopenhauer said it was the "in-itself of all things"? My proposition is: that the will of psychology hitherto is an unjustified generalization, that this will does not exist at all, that instead of grasping the idea of the development of one definite will into many forms, one has eliminated the character of the will by subtracting from it its content, its "whither?" — this is in the highest degree the case with Schopenhauer: what he calls "will" is a mere empty word. It is even less a question of a "will to live"; for life is merely a special case of the will to power; — it is quite arbitrary to assert that everything strives to enter into *this* form of the will to power.[623]

In short, the world as will to power for Nietzsche is the world as composed of complexes of drives, as a world of purposiveness without one concrete purpose unifying them. Even the drives' attempts at "power" does not unify them, since what power "looks like" (the "content" of power) differs depending on the drive. Thus, Nietzsche rejects any attempt to separate the will to power from the characteristic purposes and activities of the drives.[624]

Nietzsche's description of the world as the manifold of Becoming also supports his picture of the world as will to power. As we saw above, Nietzsche's fundamental principle of reality is that everything becomes: nothing is; nothing rests. That such a picture of flux supports drives as wills to power is clear enough by the way that Nietzsche talks about will to power: the play of force as will to power is constant. Resistance, overcoming, and creation are ever ongoing. The play of force as will to power does not stabilize or reach neutral states of equilibrium. While there may be moments of forces

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slightly later note, Nietzsche characterizes the "will to truth… will to justice, will to beauty, will to help" as "all will to power" (KSA 11: 38 [12]).

[623] WP 692.

[624] It is also worth mentioning that since drives function as "Nietzsche's principal explanatory token within psychology" (Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self*, 77) and Nietzsche designates psychology the "morphology and doctrine of the development of the will to power" (BGE 23) we see the inseparability of the drives and the will to power in Nietzsche's ontology also in his characterization of psychology.

held in tension, even tension requires movement. This relation between the will to power, drives, and Becoming is nicely captured by Richardson's discussion of Becoming in *Nietzsche's System*, where he remarks that "being [for Nietzsche] occurs only as a temporal spread."[625] This "temporal spread" of Being is manifest in drives, or the "constituting forces [of] wills to power… [which] serve… as an ever-running engine for change insofar as they inherently tend or try to change, to overcome their present."[626] In other words, the basic constituents of our reality are always in motion, trying to overcome and develop themselves through constant change, while still retaining their characteristic telic thrusts and thus their essential nature.

3.4 Permeability, Porosity, and Receptivity in the World as Will[s] to Power

As we saw above, Nietzsche's ontology of drives as wills to power characterizes events, existents, and their interactions as a matter of "not of succession — but of interpenetration, a process [*nicht um ein Nacheinander, — sondern um ein Ineinander, einen Prozeß*] in which the individual successive moments are not related to one another as cause and effect."[627] Unlike on the atomistic-mechanistic picture, the world for Nietzsche is not comprised of stable substances and there are no discrete causes which bring about particular effects. Rather, as we see in his account of the drives as wills to power, the world is a process of growth, decay, and stages in-between, brought about by the interaction of drives which incorporate one another, assimilate others, and cannot be separated into discrete beings. We might be reminded here of Nietzsche's claim that "the separation of the 'deed' from the 'doer,' of the event from someone who produces events,

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[625] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 103.
[626] Ibid., 85.
[627] WP 631

of the process from something that is not process but enduring, substance, thing, body, soul" is "ancient mythology."[628] In these selections, we see that any picture which attempts to separate moments, substances, objects, life forms, or individual human beings from the driven world in which they are necessarily embedded falsifies this world and its constituents.

As we see in his conception of humans as driven beings in a driven world, Nietzsche firmly situates human beings within his interpenetrative drive ontology, along with plants, animals, and inorganic beings. As driven beings in a driven world, humans incorporate and assimilate the drives of other driven beings into themselves and vice-versa: their drives are vulnerable to incorporation or assimilation by the drives of other beings. This is echoed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* when Zarathustra asks "How should there be an outside-myself? There is no outside."[629] This feature of human existence — the permeability of the border between an individual and the world of which she is a part — is what I will call either a fundamental permeability established between oneself and one's world or, alternatively, the porosity of the self in Nietzsche.

This concept of permeability — as a fluid interchange between some "outside" world and some "internal" self — is featured in Charles Taylor's work *A Secular Age,* in which he discusses porosity in relation to selfhood and subjectivity.[630] Taylor contrasts

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[628] WP 631.

[629] "The Convalescent," 2.

[630] I employ Taylor's account of porous selves here to sharpen our understanding of that in which porosity consists. It is worth keeping in mind that I am speaking of porosity as an ontological feature of complexes of drives in this chapter, while Taylor speaks of porosity as a kind of subjective trait which selves either do or do not possess. It is worth keeping in mind here that Nietzsche's account of what it is to be a self (as subject-unity, as "social structure of the drives and affects," as a complex of drives) relies on his drive ontology, and so Taylor's account is still illuminating for our purposes here.

two different kinds of selves: a pre-modern, "porous" self and a modern, "buffered" self. The buffered self, in contrast with the porous self, experiences a boundary between the self and the world outside the self; it supposes that this "clear boundary [allows] us to define an inner base area, grounded in which we can disengage from the rest."[631] For the buffered self, "ultimate purposes are those which arise within me [and] the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them."[632] In other words, the buffered self in Taylor experiences a boundary between the self and the world around that self *and* sees the inner realm as something over which it has complete control.[633] Although the buffered self can not control certain features of the external world around it, it is free at least to control the way it reacts to the external world and thus is able to delude itself into thinking that the external world must be defined and understood in relation to itself as an entity separate from that world in some important way.

The porous self, on the other hand, experiences itself both as part of the world in which it finds itself and as subject to the forces of that world.[634] For the porous self, "the boundary between agents and forces is fuzzy… and the boundary between mind and world is porous, as we see in the way that charged objects can influence us."[635] The porous self is open to the world around it and recognizes that it is subject to the forces of the world; therefore, it understands itself as vulnerable to that world and thus *not* in

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[631] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press,* 2007)*, 38.
[632] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 38.
[633] Furthermore, the buffered self understands the split between self and world as a split between mind and the physical world. I will not get into a discussion of the details here; what is important for now is the form or structure of the split as internal vs. external.
[634] Ibid., 38. "…the porous self is vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces."
[635] Ibid., 38.

control of that world. While the buffered self is characterized by an "interiorization,"[636] the porous self does not recognize any boundary between "interior" (the inner world of the buffered self) and "exterior" (the external world as something separate from oneself).

Importantly, for Taylor, the buffered self is a development of the porous self which ultimately negates any interchange between the self and the world that the self finds itself in.[637] That is to say, as Taylor puts it, that "to be a buffered subject [is] to have closed the porous boundary between inside (thought) and outside (nature, the physical)."[638] The porous self is a pre-modern phenomenon which lost its force when individuals began to understand themselves as disengaged, rational subjects.[639] According to Taylor, this "disengaged, disciplined stance to self and society" which the buffered self adopts "has become part of the essential defining repertory of the modern identity."[640]

When Taylor remarks upon the difference between porous and buffered selves, both porosity and a lack of porosity are described as existential conditions. To be a porous self is to live in an enchanted world in which one experiences oneself as "vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers:" to *experience* oneself as embedded and enmeshed in a world of interpenetrative forces which permeate one's being.[641] Porosity is an existential condition, a feature of one's experience which leads one to experience oneself in a particular way. When Taylor speaks of "porous" selves and "porousness," he

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[636] Ibid., 539.
[637] Such development can be discussed at length in the actual project; for now, I simply aim to account for the similarity between Taylor's understanding of porosity and my understanding of porosity in Nietzsche.
[638] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 300.
[639] Ibid., 136/7.
[640] Ibid., 137.
[641] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 27.

is not making ontological claims about how the world used to be in reality, but instead offering an existential description of pre-modern human experience.

Although I employ one of Taylor's basic concepts from *A Secular Age* — porosity as a feature of individuals (and permeability as an openness to one's world which enables an interchange) — I identify porosity as an *ontological* condition. Porosity or permeability, on my view, is a fact about the way the world — and individuals in it — *actually are.* It is a feature of Nietzsche's drive ontology, whether or not driven beings recognize this ontological feature. This is especially important to note, for in my attempt to conceive of permeability ontologically, I do not intend for those who recognize such a permeability to be in the same existential condition as Taylor's "porous selves," who experience a world enchanted by magical forces.[642] Rather, I hope to show that Nietzsche's metaphysics contains a post-modern variety of ontological permability, the recognition of which allows an individual to re-conceive truth, purpose, and value in a life-affirming way. Indeed, Nietzsche's porous individual — as a complex of drives — might come to be re-enchanted by the world in which she finds herself, but this will be an immanent enchantment, without any belief or experience of some a suprasensory world of spirits and demons.[643]

Nietzsche introduces ontological permeability — as a feature of driven beings — very early on in his writings. Although he does not use this particular term, we see an inseparability of the individual human being from the driven world of which she is a part evidenced by excerpts from Nietzsche's notes (which Vanessa Lemm treats in her essay

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[642] Ibid., 38.

[643] I believe that this is what Nietzsche refers to when he lauds a "return to the earth."

on plant life and value-creation).[644] As we saw above, in Nietzsche's early notes on perspectives in human knowledge, he draws a close parallel between plant life and human life and "extends the capacity of evaluating and measuring to other living beings, in particular to plants: 'The plant is also a measuring being.'"[645] One fundamental difference between plant life and human life, however, is the following:

> …whereas humans come to the illusory presupposition of an outside world due to vision and hearing (which Nietzsche understands as internal perceptions, images and sounds we form within ourselves), plants do not perceive an outside world because they live without the illusory distinction between outside and inside (KSA 7: 19 [217]). They are an inseparable part of their environment, and, vice versa, *their environment is an inseparable part of them* [emphasis mine]. Hence, plants do not suffer like the human beings from the illusion of their higher distinction and separation from nature and their environment (A 14).[646]

According to these very early remarks (1872/3), the experience of plants gets something right that human experience continually gets wrong: the inseparability of one from one's environment. Plants do not see themselves as separate from their world; they "understand" themselves as a part of their world, and "understanding" themselves in this way leaves plants free of illusion. The wisdom of plants in this excerpt is that they do not deny a permeability between themselves and their world in a way that modern humans do. Although this feature of existence often goes unrecognized by human beings, one is inextricable from one's world and changes in one's world frequently result in changes in oneself.[647]

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[644] Lemm, "What We Can Learn about Plants from the Creation of Values."

[645] Ibid., 81. KSA 7:19 [156] cited and translated by Lemm.

[646] Ibid., 81.

[647] We must be careful here not to accidentally import a characterization of Herbert Spencer's work which Nietzsche rejects in the *Genealogy:* a driven being as a mere adapatation of one's inner world to changes in one's outer world. Indeed, any driven being will have perspectives, purposes, and values to contribute to their own development.

This formative role that the world plays in the case of individuals is continually present in Nietzsche's work, from early works through later fragments. For Nietzsche, we do not simply shape the world with our drives; we are also shaped by the drives of other individuals, texts, life forms, and entities which we encounter. In *Human, All too Human,* Nietzsche remarks that the individual is the artistic object created out of necessity by the world.[648] This recalls *The Birth of Tragedy,* where Nietzsche notes that "man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: all nature's artistic power reveals itself here."[649] Nietzsche's mature picture of personal development matches this description surprisingly well, although any formative power is located in natural forces and socio-cultural circumstances rather than a purposeful artist-god. In *Dawn*, Nietzsche emphasizes the active role played by the world in an individual's formation in his response to the skeptic who cries out: "'I have no idea how I am acting! I have no idea how I should act!" Nietzsche responds by saying "You are right! — but do not doubt this: you are being acted upon! In every moment! Mankind has at all times confused the active and the passive: it is their perpetual grammatical blunder."[650] In this excerpt, Nietzsche again attributes a misunderstanding of the nature of the human being — as agent characterized *solely* by self-directed activity — to a confusion of grammar and the ways we speak about agents.[651] A proper understanding of the human being for Nietzsche requires understanding both the active contribution that an individual makes to her experiences and the world (through her drives) *and* the contribution that the world makes to an

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[648] *HH* I: 292.

[649] *BT* 14.

[650] *D* 120.

[651] It is important to remember here that the human being for Nietzsche still manifests agency; my point here is simply that the picture of agency and engagement in one's world to which Nietzsche will subscribe is more multi-faceted than this (as it should be).

individual. The human being as subject-unity for Nietzsche is both an active generator of its own experience as well as a receptive conduit through which its own drives and the drives of other life forms and elements of reality work.

In *Ambiguity and the Absolute: Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty on the Question of Truth,* Frank Chouraqui supports this notion when he argues that "Nietzsche links man and the world in an ontological manner… overcoming [subjectivity] through the co-substantiality of man and 'nature.'"[652] On my account, the co-substantiality of man and world which we see in Nietzsche's work — characterized more typically as a *consubstantiality*, as a sharing in the same essence — is made possible by Nietzsche's ontology of the drives as wills to power. As we have seen, this ontology is worked out mainly in Nietzsche's later work and his late notes. But as Chouraqui points out in "Nietzsche's Science of Love," an early excerpt from "Schopenhauer as Educator" helps set the stage for this consubstantiality of man and world in Nietzsche:

> There are moments and as it were bright sparks of the fire of love in whose light we cease to understand the word 'I' [*wir nicht mehr das Wort „ich" verstehen*], there lies something beyond our being which at these moments moves across into it [*was in jenen Augenblicken zu einem Diesseits wird*], and therefore we desire from the bottom of our hearts bridges between here and there [*den Brücken zwischen hier und dort*].[653]

In moments of the kind Nietzsche describes — in moments of "love" — one's understanding of oneself as a unified, discrete ego-substance dissipates.[654] In such a moment, one comes to see how the world which seems to be fundamentally separate from oneself in fact plays a fundamental, constitutive role in what one is and becomes: something which seems to be "beyond our being" effectively "moves across" the porous

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[652] 103.
[653] UM III 5.
[654] See next chapter for more on this.

boundary between the self and the world and moves "into" one's "being," expanding

one's affective and evaluative ranges. (Alternatively, something which seems to belong

exclusively to oneself also has the potential to move across this boundary.) Chouraqui

characterizes this movement as the incorporation of some element of the world into

oneself (and vice-versa); such an incorporation, however, "takes place between

organisms as well as within them" and "transforms both the incorporator and the

incorporated." [655] We see also that in a fragment discussing human experience as always-

already involving an "incorporation of the outer world."[656] This activity of incorporation,

assimilation, or appropriation — Nietzsche frequently uses these interchangeably — is

characteristic of the driven world, whether that which Nietzsche addresses is an the

organic or inorganic being. In his notes, Nietzsche remarks upon the will to power as "the

instinct of assimilation" as the "fundamental organic function on which all growth

rests."[657] Elsewhere, he also will suggest that "suggests that "the body assimilates

inorganic matter."[658] This identity between the inorganic and organic world suggested by

Nietzsche's ontology of the drives as will to power is also argued for by Chouraqui, who

notes that Nietzsche "presents the pre-organic and the organic, the mineral and the

intellectual as consubstantial."[659]

     Nietzsche's account of the world as wills to power, as fundamentally constituted

by drives, explains this mechanism of incorporation. And indeed, as we have already

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[655] Frank Chouraqui, "Nietzsche's Science of Love" in *Nietzsche-Studien*. 44:1 (2015), 285.
[656] WP 500
[657] NF-1885,40 [7]. See also BGE 230.
[658] WP 511.
[659] "Being," Fn13, *Ambiguity and the Absolute*. Chouraqui looks to WP 499 and GS 109 to make this point.

seen, Nietzsche often speaks of the drives as incorporating or assimilating other drives.[660]

Furthermore, as Chouraqui points out, since "incorporation is continual… identity is

impossible."[661] In other words, for Nietzsche, there is no way to fix my identity as an

ego-substance or the identity of other life forms or texts as unchanging and stable. Any

"identity" is dispersed into the world in which one is embedded.[662]

In an 1881 note, Nietzsche speaks of always striving to "understand becoming, to

deny ourselves as individuals, to see the world with many eyes as possible, to live in

instincts and engagements and to make eyes with these, to intermittently let ourselves

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[660] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 34. In his notes, Nietzsche refers to the "appropriation of history under the guidances of impulses and drives [*Die Aneignung der Geschichte unter der Leitung der Reize und der Triebe*] (eKGWB/NF-1883,7[268]); he speaks of instincts of "appropriation [*der Aneignung*" (NF-1884,25[488]); and claims that the drives "either mutually oppose or subjugate (also unite in synthesis) or change in domination [*sich gegenseitig entweder anfeinden oder unterwerfen (synthetisch auch wohl binden) oder in der Herrschaft wechseln*] (eKGWB/NF-1886,7[3]).

[661] Chouraqui, "Nietzsche's Science of Love," 286. Chouraqui claims that this activity of incorporation is what Nietzsche calls "love." I will not argue against or in support of this point. I will note, however, that in significant places where Nietzsche explicitly discusses love, an attitude or comportment of love seems to *disclose something actual about the thing one loves* to the individual (HH 621: love as a "method" for luring forth the soul of a thing; GS 334: love as that which allows the object of love to "[shed] its veil"). Since one of the characteristic activities of drives is incorporation, if love is this incorporation, then maybe the attitude of love can be thought of as an exceptionally significant and disclosive comportment which allows us some access to the world "as it really is:" as fundamentally composed of drives. It goes without saying that characterizing this access in terms of "immaculate perception" for Nietzsche will be a problem, but is worth thinking about nonetheless.

[662] 1) It is worth noting here that the broadly de-individuating effect of the Dionysian from *The Birth of Tragedy* (understood as de-individuation into a primordial unity, which Nietzsche later rejects) is preserved in a later conception of the Dionysian which understands this as the "expression of overflowing power" (GS 370) or, in our terms, the world as drives and wills to power, ever-changing and interpenetrating one another. 2) It is also worth noting that this looks similar to the Humean picture of identity which Kant intends to reject with his transcendental unity of apperception. Although my aim here is to interpret Nietzsche and not to argue for or against any theory of identity, it is important to note that there are likely differences between Hume and Nietzsche on this point: although Nietzsche thinks that one's identity "dissolves" into the world through the blurring of boundaries between oneself and one's world in incorporation, he will also argue for a minimal unity of the self, as unified under a ruling drive as a "regent" over the others.

over to life, in order to intermittently hold the eye in abeyance to life thereafter."[663] In

this pregnant excerpt, Nietzsche connects the world of becoming with a de-individuated

world in which one lives in and understands oneself as seeing through our drives and

their engagement with the world. This "[living] in instincts and engagements" allows for

human beings to recognize a permeability between themselves and the world to which

they belong, which allows them to see themselves as letting themselves over to life and

intermittently suspending their individuality to the flux and flow of the driven world.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* this theme of metaphysical porosity also appears. In

"On Neighborly Love," Zarathustra talks especially about the importance of

understanding how to be a sponge:

> I teach you the friend and his overfull heart. But one must understand to be a
> sponge if one wants to be loved by overfull hearts…
>
> I teach you the friend in whom the world stands complete, a capsule of the good,
> — the creating friend, who has always a complete world to bestow.
>
> And as the world unrolled itself for him, so it rolls together for him in rings…

In this short but rich selection, Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of the porosity of

human beings for befriending and being transformed by others with "overfull hearts…

who always [have] a complete world to bestow."[664] In what serves also as a lesson on

friendship, Zarathustra also offers an account of a creative and active individual, one

whose self as subject-unity is permeated by the world in which she is embedded, in which

the world unfolds itself and is folded back in on itself by the individual's driven nature.

This folding/unfolding harkens back to an excerpt from Dawn, in which Nietzsche claims

that "Every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and

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[663] KSA 9: 11[141].
[664] TSZ, "On Neighborly Love."

others of them wither, all according to the nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it."[665] As complexes of drives embedded in a driven world, individuals, life forms, and events are excited or inhibited — they unfold themselves in certain directions and fold back into themselves like polyp-arms — in accordance with their constitution and the ways in which they interact with other complexes of drives.

To be a true friend for Zarathustra — and for Nietzsche — is to recognize and affirm this porosity, and especially the permeability between human beings as two complexes of drives with the potential to transform one another. What separates the creative and active individual here from other kinds of individuals is an attitude of affirmative openness and recognition of the permeability between oneself, one's world, and others. These features allow for one to engage more authentically with transformative sources from without. The individual who does not recognize this porosity and understands herself (even unconsciously) as closed off from the world (as Cartesian notions of selfhood encourage one to do) is less likely to be nourished and authentically transformed by her world.[666] This individual is likely to overemphasize a role for her own will in the creative process and close herself off from a plurality of creative acts which require engagement with drives and complexes of drives not her own.[667]

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[665] D 119.

[666] We will see more of this in the final chapter, where I treat Nietzsche's idea of "learning to love."

[667] While Taylor rejects the idea that porous selves — individuals who experience themselves as porous, as permeated and influenced by powers from without — can exist in the modern age (since we can no longer experience ourselves as porous after the development of the buffered self), I insist that Nietzsche believes ontological permeability (as an essential porosity of the individual as a driven being) is something which we both *can* come to recognize and which we also *must* recognize if we are to create new values.

In "The Three Metamorphoses" and the references to the various stages of the camel, lion, and child through *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* the attentive reader finds Nietzsche again emphasizing the significance of recognizing the permeability between oneself and one's world and cultivating receptivity for becoming truly creative. In *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism,* Robert Gooding-Williams persuasively argues this point. As we saw above, in the lion stage, one is destructive: one rejects old values and worldview and aims to bring about their destruction. The lion's orientation in the world consists in a Nay-saying which leads to the moment of European nihilism as a denial of objective truth, higher purpose, and absolute values. In the final stage of the child, on the other hand, one becomes creative. This creativity is made possible by the lion's destruction, but involves a critical move beyond the reactive attitude of the lion. As the "child," one creates values of one's own and learns to affirm the world: one says Yes to existence.

For Gooding-Williams, being stuck in the stage of the lion consists in nothing other than "disowning [the] power of receptivity" and "obscur[ing] the reality of… [one's] body and one's passions."[668] In the lion stage, according to Gooding-Williams, the individual feels her power to destroy old values as a power which arises from the "absolute independence" of her will.[669] Yet in this insistence on her will's absolute independence, the leonine individual remains unable to see that the creation of new values and perspectives requires a receptivity to values and perspectives external to her will: this individual "disowns [her] power of receptivity and disclaims [her] ability to go-

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[668] Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001), 163.
[669] Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, 224.

under to a chaos of uncreated passions… [because] acknowledging [this] ability… would involve admitting that his will depends on factors other than itself to create new values."[670] This leonine individual, in her denial of the power of receptivity for creating new values and perspectives out of one's engagement and interaction with a world beyond herself (as subject-unity), remains impotent and reactive. A critical component of the creation of new values in *Zarathustra* is a going-under which "involves both a destruction of particular values *and* of the individual self these values produce [emphasis mine]."[671] While the leonine individual can affirm the destruction of old values, she is not willing to undergo the destruction of her individual identity required for the creation of a new self and new values. After all, as Gooding-Williams persuasively argues, life as composed of wills to power involves "[squandering] an established form of life and [embracing] the body's capacity to be affected by passional chaos."[672] It is in the "reasserting" of new wills to power after this initial destruction of established forms of life and identities which makes a new life, perspectives, and values possible. On this picture, although all driven beings have a "receptive power to be affected by unmastered, passional chaos," this receptive power can be obscured or lessened, however, if one rejects the permeability between oneself and one's world and disallows "the reality of uncreated, living passions.. [to] affect the body independently."[673]

This disallowal becomes possible when one's attachment to the idea of oneself as an freely determining and determined ego-substance "engenders… illusions [such as]… permitting bodily acts to appear as direct, unmediated manifestations of an ego

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[670] Ibid.*,* 224.
[671] Ibid., 174.
[672] Ibid.
[673] Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, 175.

substance's acts of willing."[674] The nature of reality as composed of drives, and an

understanding of oneself as a complex of drives (among others) embedded in a driven

world, can be forgotten or obscured — and the necessity of porosity for the creation of

new perspectives and values can be ignored — if one remains attached to traditional

concepts of the subject and the will. While a leonine individual believes in the limitless

power of his own will to create new values and thinks that "willing to create new values

will suffice by itself to create them," the childlike individual discards any belief in an

ego-substance fundamentally separate from the world of which it is a part and

"acknowledges… [her] vulnerability… to Dionysian chaos, which Nietzsche [in his later

works] interprets as a chaos of uncreated, bodily passions."[675] In short, the childlike

individual — and the individual able to create truly new perspectives and values out of an

active spirit — recognizes the necessary permeability between herself as a driven being

and the world of drives with which she is engaged. We will see more about how this

works in the next and final chapter.[676]

As Gooding-Williams remarks, we see this in "The Night Song," where the

"creation of new values involves both giving and receiving."[677] This theme reappears

throughout *Zarathustra*, especially at moments of great significance. In "On the Great

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[674] Ibid., 300.
[675] Ibid., 301.
[676] On Gooding-Williams' picture, as opposed to Taylor, the receptive individual possesses an actual capacity for receptivity (what Gooding-Williams calls the "power" of receptivity). Receptive individuals (as opposed to Taylor's porous selves) are possible even today, and they are not incompatible with an understanding of oneself as an embodied individual, who also engages actively in the world and understands herself as playing a role in meaning creation and her own interests and values as integral ingredients even in the creation of meaning which exceeds these interests and values. Although it is important to emphasize a role for receptivity or porosity in value creation for Nietzsche, a truly Nietzschean account of the creation of value and meaning will involve the engagement of an active self, even if only as "subject-unity."
[677] Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism,* 176.

Longing," in which Zarathustra enters into conversation with his soul, Zarathustra recounts his spiritual transformation and all that he has "given" to his soul.[678] After listing everything that he has given to his soul – contempt that loves, wisdom, his silence and longing, etc. – Zarathustra tells his soul, "I have given you all, and even the last I had… *that I bade you sing,* behold, that was the last I had. That I bade you sing – speak now, speak."[679] Here, we see that after Zarathustra has completed willing everything that he was capable of willing his soul to do – after he has become truly empty – he must hand over the reins to some aspect of himself or his reality beyond his own conscious will and listen for what this aspect of his has to "say" to him. It is worth noting that given Nietzsche's understanding of the porous nature of existence and the extension of the boundaries of the self, this aspect of Zarathustra's soul might in some sense come "from without."

In the following sections, it becomes increasingly clear that his soul speaks to him by encouraging him to create in a *poietic* way. In "The Other Dancing Song," Zarathustra's realization is one of the "creative breath… [as] heavenly need."[680] Here, Zarathustra recognizes that beyond his own power of willing is the soul's need to create from out of itself. That this is to be a poietic endeavor appears when Zarathustra claims shortly thereafter that "the earth is a table for gods and trembles with creative new words."[681] Since so much of the earlier portion of the work is concerned with finding the "meaning of the earth,"[682] we can come to recognize the significance of this claim about

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[678] TSZ, "On the Great Longing."
[679] Ibid.
[680] TSZ, "The Other Dancing Song."
[681] TSZ, "On the Seven Seals," 3.
[682] TSZ, "On the Gift-Giving Virtue," 2.

poetry and its tie to the earth. As we see in Nietzsche's picture of the child above, giving meaning to the earth in one's own unique way ultimately requires both a giving and a receiving. This language of receptivity is stressed earlier on when Nietzsche suggests that one must sacrifice oneself to the earth and to one's greatest virtue.[683] Since this greatest virtue is the gift that one "gives" to the soul until one is empty, it must be that the creation of a new virtue — a new value or perspective — will involve taking the world into the newly-emptied soul and creating from out of this receiving.[684]

On Gooding-Williams' picture, as opposed to Taylor, the receptive individual possesses an actual capacity (or "power") of receptivity. Receptive individuals (as opposed to Taylor's porous selves) are possible even today, and they are not incompatible with an understanding of oneself as an embodied individual, who also engages actively in the world and understands herself as playing a role in meaning creation and her own interests and values as integral ingredients in the creation of meaning which exceeds these interests and values. Although it is important to emphasize a role for receptivity or porosity in value creation for Nietzsche, a truly Nietzschean account of the creation of value and meaning will involve the engagement of an active self, even if only as "subject-unity."

Nietzsche's re-thinking of what Parkes calls the "interplay between the inner and outer that is set up by the operations of the drives," or the interaction between oneself as a subject-unity composed of drives and the driven world, continues also in selections from *Beyond Good and Evil.* In one earlier aphorism, Nietzsche describes how philosophical

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[683] TSZ, Prologue, 4.
[684] TSZ, "On the Great Longing."

ideas develop from out of "a distant collective household of the soul:"[685]

> [Such ideas] develop connected to and in relationship with each other… no matter how suddenly and arbitrarily they may appear to emerge in the history of thinking, they nevertheless belong to a system just as much as do the collective members of the fauna of a continent… [although] they may feel they are still so independent of each other, with their critical or systematic wills.[686]

This account of the development of ideas in the history of philosophy shows how perspectives emerge from out of the interactions and engagements of various drives and complexes of drives with one another. In particular, Nietzsche claims here that allegedly novel ideas emerge from out of a collective history of the interactions of various wills to power. This echoes a later remark, in which Nietzsche notes that "The past of every form and mode of life, of cultures which earlier lay right next to or on top of each other, now streams [*strömt*]… into us 'modern souls,' our instincts [*Instinkte*] now run back everywhere, we are ourselves a kind of chaos [*wir selbst sind eine Art Chaos*]."[687] This "streaming [*strömen*]" of forms and modes of life into our souls and the flowing out of our instincts in all directions is made possible only because of the porosity of our existence. In another aphorism, Nietzsche talks about how "spiritual glance and insight" allows for the expansion of the space around the individual:

> with the power of [man's] spiritual glance and insight the distance and, as it were, the space around man expands: his world becomes deeper; new stars and new riddles and pictures always come into his view. Perhaps everything on which the eye of his spirit practiced its astuteness and profundity was just an excuse for exercise, a matter of play, something for children and childish heads. Perhaps one day the most solemn ideas, the ones over which we have fought and suffered the most, the ideas of "God" and "sin," will seem to us no more important than a children's toy or childish pain appears to an old man — and perhaps then "the old man" will need again another children's toy and another pain — still sufficiently a child, an eternal child!

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[685] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 298.

[686] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 298.

[687] BGE 224. Cited and translated by Parkes 333.

This selection, as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* connects the creativity and play of the child — the creation of new perspectives, purposes, and values from out of the destruction of the old — with the expansion of the individual into the world around herself, a deepening of her world which allows her to see and engage with the "new riddles and pictures" which stream forth from other complexes of drives and wills to power.

As might be expected, the world plays an important role not only in the formation of new perspectives, purposes, and values, but in the formation of human beings as subject-unities. This formative role for the world in the creation of the subject-unity is possible because, for Nietzsche, the boundaries between self and world are not firmly fixed and closed off, but *permeable*. Nietzsche captures this porosity of the self in his notes, when he claims that the self is "a multiplicity of affects, with an intellect, with uncertain boundaries."[688] Twentieth century philosopher Gilles Deleuze echoes this same notion in his interpretation of Nietzsche, according to which "the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities."[689] This is also the account which Chouraqui offers:

> …[an individual is] determined only by the lines of conflict that surround it, lines that are not only always contingent, but further, whose unending motion…signify that it (or some of it) incorporates or becomes incorporated. Consequently, bearing in mind that nothing defines the individual but these lines, a change in lines means a change in the identify of the individual.[690]

On my view, it is the metaphysical permeability inherent in Nietzsche's drive ontology which enables the subject-unity to incorporate new perspectives "from without" in the

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[688] KSA 11: 25[96]

[689] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* New York: Continuum Books, 2002), 275.

[690] Chouraqui, "Nietzsche's Science of Love," 285.

way Chouraqui describes, and this, in turn, leads to new affects, interpretations, and

values. It is only in virtue of my interaction — as a subject-unity and complex of drives

embedded in a driven world — with other complexes of drives that I can extend and

expand my perspectives, interpretations, values, purposes, and my affective range.

Insofar as this reciprocal shaping of self and world is continuously ongoing, "the sphere

of the subject [is] constantly growing or decreasing, the center of the system constantly

shifting."[691] Thus, the human being participates in the creation of meaning in the world

through her interaction with other sources of meaning: new drives and driven beings with

diverse purposes, values, and perspectives. Yet the world (previously misunderstood as

merely as a world of passive objects) also plays an active a role in creating the subject-

unity (previously misunderstood as the unified, active subject or "ego-substance"). This

is what Nietzsche refers to as the "felt text" of the world which one experiences and with

which one's engages in *Dawn.*[692] Nietzsche describes one's interaction with this felt text

of reality in the following way:

> Suppose we were in the market place one day and we noticed someone laughing
> at us as we went by: this event will signify this or that to us according to whether
> this or that drive happens at that moment to be at its height in us and it will be a
> quite different event according to the kind of person we are. One person will
> absorb it like a drop of rain, another will shake it from him like an insect, another
> will try to pick a quarrel, another will examine his clothing to see if there is
> anything about it that might give rise to laughter, another will be led to reflect on
> the nature of laughter as such, another will be glad to have involuntarily
> augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world and in each case

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691 *KSA* 12: 9 [98]. A forerunner of this picture can also be found in earlier notes, in which
Nietzsche describes the ego as "a *plurality of personlike forces,* of which now this one now that
one stands in the foreground as ego and regards the others as a subject regards an influential and
determining external world… Within ourselves we can also be egoistic or altruistic, hard-hearted,
magnaminous, just, lenient, insincere, can cause pain or give pleasure: as the drives are in
conflict, the feeling of the I is always strongest where the preponderance is" (KSA 9 6: [70],
Translated by Parkes).
692 D 119.

a drive has gratified itself, whether it be the drive to annoyance or to combativeness or to reflection or to benevolence. This drive seized the event as its prey: why precisely this one? Because, thirsty and hungry, it was lying in wait… What then are our experiences? Much more that which we put into them than that which they already contain! Or must we go so far as to say: in themselves they contain nothing? *To experience is to invent?*[693]

For Nietzsche, then, one's experience and what one becomes is a product of the interaction between one's constitution and certain external influences with the ability to change one's constitution. The self as a subject-unity — as an embodied complex of drives — is constantly held open to an essential shaping by the aims of the forces and drives of other life forms, artifacts of life, and non-living entities which comprise the world as wills to power. For the mature Nietzsche, one is constantly being shaped by one's world and the interaction between one's constitution and this world: indeed, this is part of what it means to be a subject-unity. In the same aphorism from *Dawn* as above, Nietzsche describes the activity of "the totality of drives which constitute [one's] being" as an "ebb and flood… play and counterplay among one another," a process of nourishment and starvation by the world which remains unknown to the subject-unity. Nietzsche goes on:

> This nutriment is therefore a work of chance: our daily experiences throw some prey in the way of now this, now that drive, and the drive seizes it eagerly; but the coming and going of these events as a whole stands in no rational relationship to the nutritional requirements of the totality of the drives: so that the outcome will always be twofold the starvation and stunting of some and the overfeeding of others. Every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others of them wither, all according to the nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it. Our experiences are, as already said, all in this sense means of nourishment, but the nourishment is scattered indiscriminately without distinguishing between the hungry and those already possessing a superfluity. And as a consequence of this chance nourishment of the parts, the whole, fully grown polyp will be something just as accidental as its growth has been. To express it more clearly: suppose a drive finds itself at the point at which it desires

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[693] D 119.

> gratification or exercise of its strength, or discharge of its strength, or the saturation of an emptiness… it then regards every event of the day with a view to seeing how it can employ it for the attainment of its goal.[694]

In this selection, Nietzsche gives an account of the subject-unity as a polyp with drives as a "polyp-arms of our being" which find occasions for discharge in interactions with some drives and starvation from a lack of opportunities in interactions with others. Nonetheless, the nutriment of our drives is a feature of one's being embedded in her world and a "work of chance" which depends on what experiences one has and the drives which one comes into contact with at any given moment. The world thus plays a critical role in shaping the subject-unity.

In *Ecce Homo*, we see Nietzsche remark on the formative role of seemingly small and insignificant aspects of one's world, such as the natural environment in which one's thought is conducted, one's dietary habits, and one's physical condition. In this work, Nietzsche consistently refers to what might seem to be insignificant aspects of the world in which he found himself as conditions in which his work and thought necessarily developed, conditions which advanced his projects in certain directions rather than others. In one excerpt, Nietzsche remarks that "The Wanderer and His Shadow" developed in a period of his most intense blindness, in which his vision was often limited to shadows.[695] Even as Nietzsche wrote in the midst of various physiological ailments, his work retained its life-affirming quality because of his "choices of climate and locality."[696] On my account, these seemingly small or insignificant aspects of Nietzsche's world were able to play such a significant, formative role in Nietzsche's work, thought,

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[694] D 119.
[695] EH, "Why I Am So Wise," 1.
[696] EH, "Why I Am So Clever," 1-2.

and identity because of the fundamental permeability between Nietzsche, as an embodied complex of drives, and the driven world.

The permeability between oneself and one's world (the porosity of the self) as a feature of Nietzsche's metaphysics is also treated by Graham Parkes in *Composing the Soul.* In his final chapter, Parkes characterizes the embedded nature of the subject-unity in an extremely descriptive account of what he characterizes as "the soul" in Nietzsche:

> …for Nietzsche the answer to the question of what the soul is like is that ultimately it is like everything: galaxies, solar systems, minerals from rocks to metals, bodies of water, dances of fire and wind… Not only natural worlds but the worlds of human community move and have their beginning within as well as without. As Aristotle said, the soul is in a way all things, and so *the boundaries between inner and outer are dissolved* [emphasis mine]. This was a major theme in *Zarathustra* — as announced in the protagonist's prologue: "I love him whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself, and all things are in him: thus all things become his going under" (TSZ, Preface, 4). If all things are in the soul, there is no longer any outside; which means the perishing of the separate self. And yet the ideal is no static condition, but rather one of overflow, downpour, and uprush — flows of *eros* in Dionysian *Rausch,* a constant arising and abating of drives.[697]

When Parkes claims here that for Nietzsche, "the soul is in a way all things," I argue that his concept of "soul" is best understood as the constitution of reality as drives or wills to power. Since all things are composed of drives or wills to power, and since there is a fundamental permeability between these "things" insofar as any boundaries which seem to go between these things dissolve into the interactions of drives, any attempt to isolate discrete ego-substances or substances, subjects or objects, falsifies the world as the ever-changing flux of drives as wills to power, or what Parkes calls the "flows of *eros*… [as the] constant arising and abating of drives."[698] This point will be developed at more length in the following chapter.

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[697] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 358/9.
[698] Parkes, *Composing the Soul,* 358/9.

Chapter Four: Overcoming Nihilism: Radical Openness and Personal

Transformation

4.1 Active Nihilism, Passive Nihilism, and the "first step towards sobriety"

In this final chapter of my project, I look to resources in Nietzsche for overcoming the problem of nihilism. Before we get to these resources, however, we must understand an important distinction which Nietzsche makes between two kinds of nihilism in his notes from 1887: "Nihilism. It is ambiguous: A. Nihilism as a sign of increased power of the spirit: as active nihilism. B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as passive nihilism."[699] On my view, this basic distinction between a powerful, active nihilism and a weak, passive nihilism is critical for understanding a "way out" of nihilism in Nietzsche. In order to overcome nihilism, a culture or individual must both find a way out of passive nihilism while also fully manifesting — and then moving *beyond* — active nihilism. On my view, then, passive nihilism involves a continued personal or cultural need for absolute sources of meaning; it arises in the return to affective nihilism which follows European nihilism. Active nihilism, on the other hand, involves both thinking and feeling a need for meaning anew; although it arises after European nihilism, it comprises a necessary transitional stage rather than an end-point: it is the first step on the path to overcoming nihilism, that stage which is characterized by the "leonine individual" mentioned later in this chapter.

In passive nihilism, the loss of one's highest values and orienting goals leaves one devoid of value and goals, and this traumatic loss is paralyzing. Passive nihilism is "a sign of weakness" and a "weary nihilism that no longer attacks;" in short, passive

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[699] WP 22.

nihilism involves the manifestation of affective nihilism, either in an individual or in a general cultural tendency towards affective nihilism.[700] A passively nihilistic culture, in its weariness and eventual paralysis, looks back longingly on old ideals and paradigms and wishes for their return. Such a culture retains its need for meaning in the form of objective truths, higher purposes, or absolute values; when they find this lacking, they become incapable of "believing in a 'meaning,'" and are instead dominated by "unbelief."[701] In such a culture, "the creative strength to create meaning has declined and disappointment becomes the dominant condition."[702] In short, the passive nihilistic individual or culture is weak and rejects its own role in the dynamic creation of meaning. Since such a passively nihilistic individual or culture remains blind to its role (or the role of its members) in meaning-creation while rejecting the possibility of its participation in some external, transcendent meaning, the dominant belief is one of meaninglessness and, ultimately, worthlessness. Passive nihilism, if it remains, blocks a culture from overcoming nihilism; this makes it a particularly malignant version of nihilism.

With active nihilism, a culture takes what Nietzsche calls the "first step toward sobriety: to grasp to what extent we have been seduced" by certain ideals or world-views.[703] The actively nihilistic culture resents this seduction and no longer believes or *requires* the kind of meaning provided by absolute interpretations of reality (i.e. the world as that in which we can discover absolute values, objective truths, or higher purposes); the active nihilist has learned to accept hard truths. Active nihilism wishes for and brings about the destruction of these deceptive ideals; it is a "violent force of

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[700] WP 23.
[701] WP 585.
[702] Ibid.
[703] WP 586.

destruction" which recognizes the necessity of destroying old ideals and paradigms for the dominance of a new understanding and this-worldly affirmation.[704] An actively nihilistic culture has not yet come to affirm this world as it actually is, but it wills the large-scale destruction of misleading pictures of reality. This is a "positive" kind of nihilism, and a potential sign that "the spirit may have grown so strong that previous convictions have become inadequate."[705]

If we look to "The Three Metamorphoses" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* wherein Nietzsche offers an outline of the progression and overcoming of nihilism in the individual human being, we see a manifestation of active nihilism in the lion stage. In this section, Nietzsche describes 1) a preliminary stage in which one reveres values and carries old values with oneself (the camel), 2) a transitional stage in which one rejects and destroys those values (the lion), and 3) a final stage during which one affirms the world devoid of those old values and freely creates values of one's own (the child). During the lion stage, a culture or individual "[creates] freedom for oneself" from old systems of value and previous nihilistic frameworks for understanding. The lion learns to issue "a sacred No even to duty."[706] This moment of active nihilism is a necessary stage for overcoming nihilism. Thus, active nihilism is a positive phenomenon for Nietzsche, although overcoming nihilism requires moving beyond active nihilism.[707]

We might remember at this point that Nietzsche insists that "nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage" in which "what is pathological is the tremendous

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[704] WP 23.
[705] Ibid.
[706] TSZ, "Three Metamorphoses."
[707] See remarks on Gooding-Williams at the end of this chapter to see the connection to the lion and the child return in the context of resources for overcoming nihilism.

generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all."[708] That Nietzsche notes the

transitional nature of nihilism demonstrates that he supposes it possible to get beyond, or

overcome, nihilism. When a culture is pervaded by nihilism, as Richard Schacht

summarizes, "The world *looks* valueless. But that does not mean it *is* valueless… With

the collapse of our traditional world view, a period of nihilism must follow. But that is

not, for Nietzsche, the end of the line."[709] Although the world appears devoid of value to

the European nihilist, that does not mean it is *in fact* devoid of value. And, as Schacht

suggests, Nietzsche seems to hint at a moment beyond the period of European nihilism.

Both Heidegger and Deleuze also make this distinction between active and

passive nihilism central to their accounts, but offer different interpretations of this

distinction. Heidegger argues that with the destructive negation inherent in active

nihilism, there is an affirmation of the will to power as the "pure" will-to-will, as the

continual overcoming of blind and contentless force, as growth towards ever and ever

more power over other forces. As Thomson notes in *Heidegger on Ontotheology,*

Heidegger's Nietzsche understands the world as consisting in the mere "disaggregation

and reaggregation of forces without any purpose or goal beyond the self-perpetuating

augmentation of these forces through their continual self-overcoming."[710] Active

nihilism for Heidegger's Nietzsche is thus an affirmation of the *self-surpassing nature* of

the will to power (as will-to-will). Inherent to this active nihilism for Heidegger, as we

see, is a negation of that which is and which came before. When Nietzsche makes the will

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[708] WP 13.

[709] Richard Schacht, *Making Sense of Nietzsche.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 38/9.

[710] Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology,* 56. As Thomson notes, this characterization results from Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's metaphysics as "eternally recurring will to power" (55).

to power (as the continual overcoming of blind force) the "ground and measure of all valuation," nihilism "complete[s] itself." Thus, active nihilism, on Heidegger's reading, is simply a terminus point of nihilism: there is no transition beyond this point possible for Heidegger's Nietzsche. For Heidegger, passive nihilism is an earlier stage in which one "rests content" with the idea that "'there is no eternal truth in itself'" and "merely observes the decline of the highest values hitherto."[711] In other words, Heidegger's understands the passive nihilist as a passive observer of the death of God and the consequences of that death, whereas the active nihilist wills this negation and, even more, wills the negation of that which *is* as she wills power. In my account, unlike Heidegger's, I take Nietzsche's seriously when he claims that nihilism is a "pathological *transitional* stage [emphasis mine]" and look to potential resources in his thought for the overcoming of this nihilism.[712] Interestingly, I look to the same place as Heidegger to find these resources: Nietzsche's metaphysics as will(s) to power.

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* Deleuze traces an alternative history of nihilism in Nietzsche as the progression from a negative nihilism, through a reactive nihilism, to passive nihilism. Negative nihilism consists in the "will to deny," the denial of prior values and the "supersensible" which turns into a denial of "life" from the "height of higher values" and "in the name of these values."[713] For Deleuze, negative nihilism manifests as the denial of transcendence and the destruction of all values which resulted from a world which found its meaning only in transcendent ideals and purposes. Reactive nihilism, on the other hand, is the negation not only of values and weak life, but of all

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[711] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 3.* Translated by David Ferrell Krell. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1991), 206-208.
[712] WP 13.
[713] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy.* (New York: Columbia UP, 1962), 148.

willing: the world continues to be meaningless to the reactive nihilist and this leads the

nihilist to a weakened form of life, in which life itself becomes depreciated as purely

reactive life.[714] In reactive nihilism, life continues on only as this reactive and weak form

of life; reactive nihilism is a "pessimism of life" which has lost the ability to affirm and

create. On this picture, "there is no longer any human or earthly will," since reactive

forces take the place of active, denying forces.[715] Passive nihilism, then, is the "final

outcome of reactive nihilism: fading away passively rather than being led from

outside."[716] Deleuze also characterizes this transition — from negative to reactive to

passive nihilism — as the transition "from God to God's murderer, from God's murderer

to the last man," and Nietzschean nihilism "not as an event in history but the motor of the

history of man as universal history."[717] In other words, Deleuze understands this

progression of nihilism as a *necessary progression* of mankind.

    In my view, there are two main issues to take with Deleuze's account of nihilism.

The first is Deleuze's claim about the prevalence of reactive forces in reactive nihilism.

As we see here, Deleuze believes not only that individuals, behaviors, or principles can

be considered "active" or "reactive," but that forces themselves can be characterized as

such. This is a controversial claim, based on a possible conflation of active and reactive

types or *phenomena* (which are actually remarked upon by Nietzsche, see especially GM

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[714] Deleuze believes not only that individuals and principles can be considered "active" or "reactive," but that forces themselves can be characterized as such. This is a controversial claim, based on a possible conflation of active and reactive *types* or *phenomena* (which are actually remarked upon by Nietzsche, see especially GM I:10, GM II:11) with active and reactive forces (Paolo D'Iorio, "The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation" in *The Agonist* Vol. 4 Issue 1, 2011).

[715] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 148.

[716] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 149.

[717] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 151/2.

I:10, GM II:11) with active and reactive forces.[718] Whether or not this is in fact a case of conflation, there is not sufficient evidence in Nietzsche for an account which relies on active and reactive forces. Furthermore, Deleuze's presentation of the progression of nihilism as a *necessary* progression injects a global *telos* into the world which, as we saw in previous chapters, Nietzsche is at pains to reject. In other words, although Nietzsche warns against "superfluous teleological principles," Deleuze employs such a principle to explain the phenomenon of nihilism in Nietzsche. Insofar as Nietzsche believes the projection of a universal purpose onto the world to be a nihlistic conception of the world, Deleuze presents an essentially *nihilistic* conception of the world in his account of nihilism! For these reasons, I believe we must reject Deleuze's thought-provoking account of Nietzschean nihilism along with Heidegger's account, although I agree with Deleuze broadly insofar as he, unlike Heidegger, believes there are resources in Nietzsche's thought for *overcoming* nihilism.

What might a world in which nihilism as a cultural phenomenon is overcome look like? In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we find an answer: a world in which nihilism has been overcome is one in which human beings have learned to "remain faithful to the earth."[719] As Laurence Lampert points out, Zarathustra's command to remain faithful to the earth "means that the earth is not to be disparaged by otherworldly dreams, but is rather to be won back from the hatred expressed in the judgement that it is inferior to heaven… The earth to which Zarathustra commands loyalty is the earth that was regarded as merely the

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[718] Paolo D'Iorio, "The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation" in *The Agonist* Vol. 4 Issue 1, 2011. See also Ashley Woodward, "Deleuze, Nietzsche, and the Overcoming of Nihilism" in *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 46, Issue 1 (2013), 115–147.
[719] TSZ, Preface, 3.

'apparent world' by those who believed in a "true world" beyond it."[720] Of course, such

an earthly affirmation requires the destruction of unattainable, otherworldly ideals; there

is a destruction inherent to nihilism's overcoming, and this is the role that active nihilism

must play. But if human beings can afterwards come to affirm and love the world of

becoming even in the face of the destruction of objective truth, absolute values, and

higher purposes, then they will have learned to remain faithful to the earth *as it is*.[721] This

is our first signpost pointing the way out of nihilism.

In order to affirm the earth and move beyond nihilism, human beings must

recognize — and revel in — the ambiguous and multi-faceted character of this-worldly

existence. This requires acknowledging varied ways of coming to know and interpret the

world around us, which in turn requires human beings to move beyond reductive

scientific interpretations of the world as "a world which is supposed to have its equivalent

and measure in human thinking and human valuations."[722] In the fifth book of *The Gay*

Science, Nietzsche describes the failure of scientific reasoning in his example of the

interpretation of a piece of music's value: "Supposing we valued the worth of a music

with reference to how much it could be counted, calculated, or formulated - how absurd

such a "scientific" estimate of music would be! What would one have apprehended,

understood, or discerned in it! Nothing, absolutely nothing of what is really "music" in

it!"[723] Not only does science covertly propagate the nihilistic ideals of a "true" world; it

also robs potentially meaningful encounters and experiences of their potential to affirm

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[720] Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986), 21.
[721] For more on this, see Iain Thomson's "Transcendence and the Problem of Otherworldly Nihilism."
[722] GS 373.
[723] GS 373.

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and celebrate the innumerable aspects of life which cannot be categorized by human reason.

What is required for Western culture to arrive at a place where it can issue the sacred Yes of the child and affirm this-worldly existence? In his 1888 notes, Nietzsche notes that the fact that the "notion of another world has always been unfavorable for, or critical of "this" world" indicates an "instinct of life-weariness, and not that of life, which has created the 'other world.'"[724] This other world has different permutations: as we saw in the first chapter, it can be the rational world of the philosopher, the "divine, denaturalized" world of religious individuals, or the "good, perfect, just, holy" world of moral individuals.[725] Insofar as these permutations of the world are the consequences of a life denial and weariness, a robust, healthy, and life-affirming individual or culture would reject them. To acknowledge and affirm the natural world (a world without absolute moral values which exceeds the categories of human reason) from a place of strength, in all its this-worldly splendor, would be to affirm the world of becoming and overcome the problem of nihilism. If the "other world" is truly a "synonym for nonbeing, nonliving, not wanting to live," then this world must become a synonym for a Yea-saying superabundance of life: the affirmation of the world as wills to power, in all of its richness and inexhaustibility, with purposes, values, and truths which exceed an individual's own.[726] Such an outcome is only possible, however, "for a people proud of itself, whose life is ascending."[727] To overcome nihilism, a strength which results in the love of earthly existence must reign in individuals and come to dominate a culture. As we

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[724] WP 586.
[725] A 26.
[726] WP 586.
[727] Ibid.

will see later, such love becomes possible only if the personal transformations of certain individuals can be brought about by a change in the way these individuals understand the world as a source of truth, purpose, and value.

Up until this point in my project, I have aimed to faithfully present elements of Nietzsche's thought and offer a coherent interpretation of the problems of European and affective nihilism, as well as his vague proposals for resolving or overcoming such nihilisms. In the following chapters, however, my goal will not be to present Nietzsche's own proposed solutions to these nihilisms. Rather, I hope to find resources in his thought — in particular, in a reading of the role that drives play in Nietzsche's metaphysical picture — which offer a way out of the kinds of nihilism Nietzsche describes.

In the first two chapters, we saw that European nihilism — and the return of affective nihilism in Nietzsche's age — results from the collapse of nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value which had been "falsely projected into the essence of things." We saw also that Nietzsche called this the "*hyperbolic naiveté* of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things."[728] The first error of European nihilism (as a series of beliefs about the world) was the falsification of the world through the projection of our own categories onto the world itself: a (mis)translation of nature into something comprehensible by mankind. This project fails as those categories — objective truth, transcendent purpose, and real, higher value — become unbelievable. Although Nietzsche remarks that this is a mere stage in nihilism which might be passed through, he does not give a detailed account of how this might be done.

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[728] WP 12.

In the next section, I will try to show that Nietzsche's drive ontology (as presented in the third chapter) can serve as a resource — whether Nietzsche intends for it to or not — for finding immanent sources of truth, purpose, and value. This drive ontology allows human beings to translate ourselves and our experiences back into nature as will to power, thus reversing humanity's prior nihilistic mistranslation. Nietzsche's metaphysics — the world as the ever-changing flux of a multitude of drives as wills to power — thus offers a potential resource for thinking beyond European nihilism. It is my view, furthermore, that Nietzsche's drive ontology — and the recognition that any boundary between oneself and one's world is a *permeable* one — might also be utilized in the fight against affective nihilism. After all, I will argue, re-thinking the world as wills to power enables one to *"learn to think differently... in order perhaps, even very late on, to attain even more: to feel differently."*[729]

4.2 Overcoming European Nihilism: "All meaning is will to power"

As we saw in the work of Gooding-Williams, Nietzsche believes the European man suffers from an "estrangement from receptivity."[730] In our scientific, rational, and anthropocentric age in which external, transcendent sources of truth, purpose, and value become unbelievable, human beings forget their nature as porous subject-unities and become estranged from the importance of this receptivity for living a meaningful human life and creating new values. In this section, I will argue both that European nihilism is characterized by this estrangement and that overcoming European nihilism requires individuals and cultures to overcome this estrangement. In the nihilistic age during which Nietzsche writes, a belief in the limitlessness of human reason and willing (which

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[729] D 103.
[730] Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism,* 261.

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understands the human as a freely determined and determining substance-subject, as ego-substance) leads to the unbelievability of sources of truth, purpose, and value which come to us from without.[731] Thus, human beings become estranged from their nature as receptive subject-unities, constituted not only by themselves (as complexes of drives) but also by the driven world in which they are embedded.

In a note from 1885, Nietzsche sets up the possibility of the world as will to power to solve the problem of nihilism. In this fragment he asks: ""Is there meaning in itself? Is not meaning necessarily *relations* of meaning and perspectives?" He then proposes an answer to this second rhetorical question: "All meaning is will to power (all relations of meaning can be dispersed into it).[732] Although Nietzsche himself does not explicitly utilize his metaphysics of the will to power to formulate a positive solution to the problem of meaningless inherent in European nihilism, I hope to show that his drive ontology — and the relations of meaning it makes possible — can be used to do just this.

4.2.1 Overcoming European nihilism

The problem of European nihilism, as described in the first chapter of this work, results from the collapse of particular widespread conceptions of purpose, truth, and value. As we saw, European nihilism is composed of three different types of nihilism: ethical nihilism, a nihilism of purposelessness, and epistemological nihilism. In ethical nihilism, the nihilist comes to believe that her world is valueless; in a nihilism of purposelessness, the nihilist comes to believe that her world is without purpose; and in epistemological nihilism, the nihilist comes to believe that her world is without truth. Since value, purpose, and truth have historically serves as sources of meaning for human beings, a

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[731] This is similar to Taylor's account of the modern self as the the "buffered self." See above.
[732] WP 590.

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disbelief in value, purpose, and truth results in a belief that the world is "meaningless."

These beliefs held by the European nihilist and nihilistic cultures — the total disbelief in value, purpose, and truth— importantly follow from the unbelievability of *specific* or *particular* conceptions of value, purpose, and truth. Nietzsche argues this explicitly in his notes:

> Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind. Thus the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim- and meaninglessness… once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable. Nihilism appears at that point… because one has come to mistrust any "meaning" in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed, but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it now seems as if there were no meaning in existence, as if everything were in vain.

The European nihilist believes the world is valueless because she comes to believe that there are no absolute values in the world; she believes the world is purposeless because there is no higher purpose or *telos* at which the world aims; and she believes that the world is false because there is no such thing as objective truth or absolute knowledge. In these cases, the collapse of the dominant interpretations of value, purpose, and truth is understood as the impossibility of these, full stop, and this understanding leads to the nihilistic beliefs about which Nietzsche writes.

My attempt to utilize Nietzsche's drive ontology as a resource for overcoming European nihilism does not attempt to re-discover these same conceptions of truth, purpose, and value in the world and reinstate belief in them, so that these old conceptions of truth, purpose, and value are "revived" in some way. Instead, I propose that Nietzsche's metaphysics of the world as wills to power offers alternative ways of conceiving of truth, purpose, and value which avoid the pitfalls of the nihilistic conceptions, and especially the otherworldly belief in non-existent and unattainable

conceptions of objective truth, higher purpose, and absolute value which give meaning to human beings "from without."[733]

Nietzsche's drive ontology first offers the European nihilist a world full of value and valuing. As composed of drives and complexes of drives, the world is essentially *value-laden*, since "Every power center [*Kraftcentrum*] has its perspective, i.e., its very definite value, its mode of action, its mode of resistance."[734] As demonstrated above, this value which drives (or "power centers") have is not their value *for* other beings; it is not a merely instrumental value. Rather, it is a value which emerges from out of the affective orientation of the drive as a determinate potential for transforming or being transformed by those drives that constitute one's world. This affective orientation is fixed by the characteristic aim or goal of the drive in question.

Put differently: The characteristic activity of a particular drive, as essentially connected to that drive's individuating aim or goal, orients this drive in the world such that it will transform and be transformed in some ways and not in others. Insofar as different drives and complexes of drives in the world have the potential for positive and negative interactions with this drive — interactions which either increase or decrease this drive's activity, either facilitating or hindering the achievement of its aim — the world is "polarized" in relation to the drive. This polarization results in certain aspects of the world having a positive value and other aspects having a negative value in relation to the drive in question. As Richardson notes, "Each drive's end-directed activity already 'polarizes' the world toward it, giving everything a significance relative to it."[735] This

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[733]This will be treated in extensive detail below.
[734] KSA 13: 14 [184].
[735] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 36.

significance given to the world around a drive means that the world is never neutral for any particular drive; the drive always has an evaluative orientation.

These drives and their evaluative orientations are always situated in relation to and in engagement with other drives comprising the world of which they are a part, and this engagement involves the interaction between drives as "largely stable types" with "way[s] of pursuing power in a project whose overall lines were drawn beforehand."[736] Since the evaluative orientation of a drive emerges from out of a drive's end and the affective orientation a drive has in virtue of its end, we can imagine that the values a particular drive is disposed to having will look the same across complexes of drives: for example, the evaluative orientation of my hunger drive will look very similar to your hunger drive, but different than your drive to knowledge. But, importantly, if my drive to knowledge for some reason incorporates my drive to combativeness, there will be something of my drive to combativeness's characteristic activity — and its evaluative orientation — which is preserved. The activities of incorporation and sublimation, as Richardson observes, always involve preserving some aspect of the essential end of the drive which is incorporated: as Richardson notes, "drive change… by their amendment, not their replacement."[737]

Insofar as the basic relations of Nietzschean drives to one another — incorporation, sublimation, and even resistance — fundamentally involve bringing what is "outside" in, we would seem to be justified in saying that even at most basic level of Nietzsche's drive ontology, existence necessarily involves relating to and being shaped by something outside, something which exceeds that which we conventionally assign

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[736] Ibid., 23.
[737] Ibid., 25.

independent existence.[738] This is even clearer in the case of human existence, insofar as the human is a complex of drives constantly interacting and engaging with other complexes of drives. On this picture, part of what it means for a human being to exist is to participate and be shaped by a world which exceeds oneself. Given that every drive possesses an evaluative orientation, it is easy to move from this claim to a claim that human beings (as driven beings) are always situated in a world of evaluative orientations — "values" — which shapes and informs their own evaluative orientations. Otherwise put: human beings, as complexes of drives, inhabit a value-laden world, and their values are shaped in some basic way by the values "out there" in the world of which they find themselves a part.

In sum, drives comprise evaluative perspectives in virtue of their affective orientations, which result necessarily from the concrete end at which a drive aims. Insofar as drives value the ends at which they are aimed and have evaluative orientations in the world, driven beings (as complexes of drives) essentially value a plurality of ends and harbor a plurality of inherent values in the form of their drives' evaluative orientations.[739] By emphasizing a permeability between driven beings and the driven world of which they are a part, one comes to see that one does not merely project the evaluative

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[738] This is part of what makes for the permeability between complexes of drives a basic feature of Nietzsche's drive ontology.

[739] For human beings, as Katsafanas demonstrates, there is a particular experience of value which results from the more complex activity of valuation in which they are engaged. Thus, human experience is "fundamentally value-laden." We experience the world in evaluative terms, not as an "indifferent array of inert facts" but a world that "tempts and repulses, threatens and charms; certain features impress themselves upon us, other recede into the periphery" (Katsafanas, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Psychology," 744). As both Richardson and Katsafanas rightly emphasize, the world as value-laden is not usually *consciously* experienced as value-laden; although our orientation in the world is essentially evaluative due to our affective orientations in the world, Nietzsche believe we typically think of our engagements in the world as fairly objective and valueless.

orientation of her drives onto the world, but also is permeated and transformed by other complexes of drives and the various evaluative orientations of the drives of which those "others" are constituted.[740]

The European nihilist, stuck in her culturally inherited habit of identifying a value-laden world with a world in which absolute values exist — a world in which all beings should be measured according to the same absolute values — believes that the world is valueless because values (qua absolute) do not exist. Thus, the European nihilist is an ethical nihilist. In agreement with the European nihilist qua ethical nihilist, Nietzsche insists that absolute, higher values do *not* exist in reality. But Nietzsche hints, in his remarks that nihilism is a transitional stage, that we can move beyond this belief and learn to re-think value and found values in this-worldly existence. On my view, his drive ontology allows us to do just that, even if we cannot claim that he intended it to do so.

If the European nihilist accepts this new understanding of values — as evaluative orientations, their intersections, and their engagements — she becomes able to re-think that culturally established conception of value (as absolute value) which led to her belief that the world is devoid of value. If she comes to understand the world as value-laden and, through a deeper understanding of Nietzsche's drive ontology, recognizes the permeability between human subjects and the world in which they are a part, she becomes able to think of herself as embedded in a value-laden world. In this way, she might move beyond her (mistaken) belief that the world is valueless.

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[740] It is worth mentioning that the human experience of value, for Nietzsche, involves both interactions between ourselves and other life-forms *and* interactions between ourselves and those drives comprising the inorganic world. (For example, human beings are subject to the end-directedness of chemical reactions and "the ordering of the cosmos [*der kosmischen Ordnung*].")

Because the human being is a complex of drives embedded in a driven world which extends beyond us, we are always already in a value-laden world. Because there there is a fundamental permeability between separate driven subject-unities, as well as a permeability between particular subject-unities and the world of which they find themselves a part, the creation of new values and valuations is also possible. The potential for interactions, clashes, and conflicts between evaluative perspectives — and the incorporation or assimilation of new values and valuations which this makes possible — is inherent to the driven world as wills to power. The world as wills to power is thus fertile ground for the participation in and the creation of value and meaning.

In Acampora's account of *agon* as a mechanism of meaning production, we see a version of this idea. According to Acampora, *agon* — as a contest or struggle between two parties — is significant for Nietzsche because of "the link between agonism and meaning-making… [as] the perpetual creation and re-creation of value and significance."[741] Insofar as Nietzschean drives are in constant interaction — and, not infrequently, struggling in resistance against one another — they are constantly generating new values from out of the meeting of their divergent evaluative orientations and giving new meanings to those values which they encounter. Since reality is the world as wills to power, it is part of Nietzsche's fabric of reality that new values and significances are always being created.[742] This is something we can imagine when we think the incorporation of one drive by another, as seen earlier in my example of the

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[741] Christa Acampora, *Contesting Nietszche.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 6.
[742] The notion of permeability between individuals as complexes of drives which I employ is intended to enables one to understand how such meaning-making works at the level of human interactions, both as two interpenetrating subject-unities or as a subject-unity and other beings in the driven world of which one is a part.

passive-aggressive individual. When my drive to combativeness incorporates a drive to underhandedness, that drive to combativeness takes on a new meaning and evaluative stance, shaped in part by the aim of the drive to underhandedness which it incorporates. This new drive to combativeness will positively value underhandedly unkind behaviors and negatively value obviously cruel and aggressive behaviors.

Acampora's understanding of "*agon* as a mechanism or means for creating other values" thus fits neatly with the account of Nietzsche's metaphysics which I offer.[743] In two short excerpts, Acampora describes specific instances of this mechanism in Nietzsche's work. The first is in the *agon* between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy,* and the second is the slavish revaluation from the *Genealogy.* In the latter case, Acampora describes the following:

> what one prospectively undergoes in the aesthetic experience afforded by tragedy is essentially *the play of meaning and measure...* the tragic work of art offers appreciation of the claims of measure, intelligibility, the comfort that comes from having a compass for our actions and our pursuits of knowledge, while at the same time affording the sense that the claims of measure are malleable, capable of relocation, and admit of being reissued in light of a reorganization of desirable ends…

On my account, Nietzsche's account of the *agon* between the Apollinian and the Dionysian in a tragic work serves as one example in which old values and perspectives are dislocated and transformed via the interactions of the evaluative perspectives of the drives. What results is a new value (or set of values) which establishes a new and previously impossible significance in the world. This creation of value is possible only

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[743] Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, 51. I should note that Acampora and I have different understandings of Nietzsche's metaphysics, however, with Acampora claiming that "knowledge of the world as it is shows that it lacks inherent value, [although] it does not necessarily follow from this that life is worth living. (68). As seen above, I make the case of "inherent value" in the world insofar as the world is composed of nothing more than drives as wills to power, which have essentially evaluative orientations.

through the interactions of the particular drives which create it through their interactions or struggles with one another, and any new value importantly preserves elements of both of the drives involved in the exchange.

In the case of Nietzsche's *Genealogy,* Acampora describes "slavish revaluation…[as] a distinctive and distinguishing possibility of human creativity in value production, in meaning-making, that was previously unrealized."[744] In the case of slavish revaluations of values from the *Genealogy,* weak, slavish individuals label the practices of powerful, masterful individuals "evil." This creative possibility — the possibility to create a new value — arises from out of the evaluative orientation of the slavish individuals (which understands the masters as "bad" in relation to themselves), rooted in a complex affective orientation (a reactive, vengeful orientation) which Nietzsche calls *ressentiment.* As Acampora rightly notes, the slaves engage in meaning-making by creating new values and a new evaluative perspective. This is possible on my account because of the slaves' constitution — as a complex of drives — and the interaction of this driven constitution with other forces and drives.[745] This is a particularly noteworthy innovation because the incorporation involves an evaluative perspective with an evaluative orientation which is remarkably distinct from that which it incorporates.

In sum, if the European nihilist can come to "think differently" about value and understand themselves as valuing beings embedded in a value-laden world, their nihilistic belief (which understands the lack of absolute values as a complete lack of value) can be overcome. Not only are human beings, as complexes of drives embedded in a driven

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[744] Ibid., 124.

[745] It is worth noting that the slave's uniquely reactive stance allows for drives and forces "from without" to dictate the terms of the value creation more than in other cases: after all, the value created by the slave is possible only as a rejection of the values of the master.

world, always already held open to the evaluative orientations of other drives and complexes of drives; they also play a role in the dislocation of old values and the subsequent creation of new values in virtue of this openness. After all, as we saw earlier, it is because Nietzsche was in the first case receptive to Schopenhauer's work and found it to be of profound value that he was able to productively engage with Schopenhauer's thought; because he had first taken on or inhabited the perspectives of Schopenhauerian values, Nietzsche could authentically engage with and eventually dislocate these values, creating new values from out of this interaction.

For example, Nietzsche's emphasis in *The Birth of Tragedy* on the need for "illusions of organic unity and thus of enhanced beauty and meaningfulness" ("the world justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon"[746]) reveals his early, profoundly Schopenhauerian assumption that life as it actually is — as suffering *qua* endless, unfulfilled striving — is unbearable, and must be redeemed even if only by employing consoling illusions.[747] Yet Nietzsche's occupation of this Schopenhauerian perspective — his incorporation of this perspective which he lived as his own — was only temporary. In Nietzsche's "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," he characterizes the "artists' metaphysics" which he presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* as a "deep hatred against modernism, reality, and modern ideas… which would sooner believe in nothingness or the devil than in the here and now" and as "practical nihilism."[748] In contrast to Schopenhauer, the mature Nietzsche finds it necessary for himself to "[acquire] hardness as a habit to be cheerful

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[746] BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 5.
[747] Ivan Soll, "Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's 'Great Teacher' and 'Antipode'" in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy.* Edited by Ken Gemes and John Richardson. (New York: Oxford UP, 2015), 166.
[748] BT, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," 7.

and in good spirits in the midst of nothing but hard truths."[749] In my view, Nietzsche's

eventual rejection of the life-redeeming value of metaphysical illusions (and any

"metaphysical consolation" that such illusions might provide), as well as the value he

places in an affirmation of this-worldly existence which includes a profound honesty and

ability to face "hard truths," were made possible by his engagement with Schopenhauer's

worldview, to which he was in the first instance receptive and affirmative.

In the case of nihilism of purposelessness, the European nihilist — stuck in her

culturally inherited habit of identifying a purposeful world with a world in which there is

a higher purpose or *telos* at which the world aims — believes that the world is

purposeless. Nietzsche accepts the latter belief: there is no higher purpose or *telos* at

which the world aims. But he also hints that we can move beyond this belief and learn to

re-think purpose. As we will see below, his drive ontology allows us to re-think

purposiveness in a non-nihilistic way, just as it did for value.

In remarks from his notebooks, Nietzsche suggests that any notion of a single,

higher purpose ought to be rejected in favor of a view according to which all

purposiveness can be explained as the manifestation of will to power:

> [Theses.] That apparent 'purposiveness' ("that purposiveness which endlessly
> surpasses all the arts of man") is merely the consequence of the will to power
> manifest in all events… Against apparent 'purposiveness' — the latter only an
> expression for an order of sphere of power and their interplay.

Given Nietzsche's drive ontology, we can read this excerpt as involving both 1) an

explanation of the appearance of a world with a single, higher purpose in terms of the

world as wills to power, which order the world in similar ways (in drives' attempts to

achieve their characteristic aims) and 2) an explanation of purposiveness in actuality as

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[749] EH, "Why I Write Such Good Books," 3.

present only in the expressions of drives and their interactions. Given Nietzsche's drive

ontology, this makes perfect sense: the defining feature of all Nietzsche drives, after all,

is their end-directedness, which can be explained with reference to the particular goal or

end at which the a drive aims. There is no one, higher purpose at which the world aims,

but as many purposes as there are drives.

Since the world for Nietzsche is composed of drives as wills to power, the world

is a world of innumerable purposes. There is not one purpose towards which the world

aims, but instead, countless purposes towards which drives aim. There is no one purpose

to life, but myriad purposes of life insofar as life is nothing more than driven life (life as

wills to power, as drives and complexes of drives in relation to one another).[750] If

European nihilists can come to "think differently" about purpose in this way and

understand themselves as complexes of drives — and, as such, complexes of purposes

and loci of immanent purposiveness — their nihilistic belief (which understands the lack

of a higher purpose at which the world aims as a complete lack of purpose) can be

overcome.

Nietzschean drives, as purposeful forces and the most basic units of reality, create

a texture of reality which is ever-changing yet still inherently meaningful insofar as it is

inherently purposeful. As Richardson notes, "only with and in [drives'] structures and

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[750] Although our drives are most basically wills to power and so can be said to be directed towards their own growth in activity, *what this activity looks like* will vary from drive to drive, such that it makes little sense to identify "power" as a higher purpose of the sort we identify above. After all, although all drives manifest as wills to power, the purposes towards which they are directed distinguish and differentiate their activity, and so every drive's participation in the will to power will look different from the next. Furthermore, Nietzsche also rejects a notion of higher purpose because he rejects the existence of a final cause to the world as a whole, towards which the world develops. Although drives are wills to power and the world is constituted by drives, Nietzsche would not say that the world develops in any one, unified direction — and so he would not say that the world develops towards power as a higher purpose.

meanings does the world get structure and meaning; they give it its 'joints.'"[751] The

structure of which Richardson here speaks is the telic or end-directed structure of the

drives, that which dictates the purpose or goal towards which a drive moves and situates

the drive as a *process*, as a becoming rather than a being. Drives are always in motion,

always attempting to subdue, incorporate, and assimilate other drives, while still retaining

their essential telic thrusts and thus their inherent meaning. What Richardson calls the

"telic structure" of a given drive dictates the purpose or goal towards which it moves. Yet

these drives are always in flux, in that they change the ways in which they approach their

goals as other processes of reality change around them.

The nature of the drives as interpenetrative forces, incorporating purposeful

processes means that the "things are connected… by giving meaning to one another, as

voices in a conversational web:"[752] this is the "relational being" of drives. Each drive has

a number of permutations available for it, and these permutations are a result both of a

drive's own individuating goal and the relation that this goal has to the goals of the drives

with which it engages, or interacting through resistance, incorporating, or being

incorporated.[753] Otherwise put, the telic structure of individual drives dictates the drive's

activity and *essentially* influences the forms that a drive's incorporation or assimilation of

another drive takes. This relational feature of the drives is a function of the permeability

between two drives or complexes of drives, and this relational nature serves to remind

one that although one always harbors a plurality of purposes, one is also embedded in a

purposeful world in relation to which one's own drives get significance or meaning. In

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[751] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 108.
[752] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 108.
[753] Ibid., 120.

this way, the human being as subject-unity always participates in a world of purpose and meaning which exceeds her own existence.

As Richardson points out, there is a "general richness of drives" internal to human beings, insofar as persons "enact within themselves the interweaving of perspectives…[and] encompass and embody the diversity and conflict of viewpoints": each individual is a "wealth of interlocking projects."[754] Every individual already contains countless perspectives and purposes within herself insofar as she is a complex of drives; yet each individual is also constituted by the interactions which she has with other driven beings, each of which is also a more or less rich configuration of purposeful drives. In virtue of their constitution as complexes of drives, as well as their embeddedness in a driven world, human beings are always already held open to the purposes of other drives and complexes of drives. We always already engage with and therefore participate in purposes "greater than ourselves," where "greater than" refers to an extension beyond one's own complex of purposeful drives. There is no lack of purpose in the world, as the nihilist of purposelessness believes, but quite the opposite: the world is excessively purposeful, with countless purposes in which one (even unknowingly) participates and with which one can (even unknowingly) engage. There is no one higher purpose at which the world aims, but countless purposeful forces —-drives as wills to power — of which the world is comprised: not a higher purpose, then, but a purposiveness immanent to the world as wills to power.

As should already be quite clear, this new conception of purposiveness will require the nihilist of purposelessness to think very differently about a purposeful world.

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[754] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 120.

Nietzsche's purposeful world is a world of always-transforming immanent purposiveness, in which there is no higher purpose which justifies the actions or behaviors of all beings. This view of purpose, as immanently unfolding and situated in the world as wills to power (as the interactions and relations of drives) offers the nihilist of purposelessness a genuine alternative to higher purpose (as a single purpose towards which the world aims and in which the aims of all driven beings are unified). Indeed, given the activity of the drives as wills to power, participating in a world of immanent purposiveness necessarily involves one's constant engagement with novel purposes which come "from without." Although the end-directedness of particular drives will be fixed (given the individuating end or goal which that drive has), since the incorporation and assimilation of drives results in a reshaping of the means by which the purposes of drives or complexes of drives are reached, one's participation in an immanently purposeful world will be transformative.

Nietzsche's drive ontology, finally, offers the European nihilist the possibility of truth, albeit a very different kind of truth. Instead of absolute, objective truth, truth for Nietzsche is always *perspectival* truth, and knowledge consists in the differential disclosure of the world as wills to power, filtered through the lenses of the perspectives of our drives. This view of truth is Nietzsche's perspectivism, which he formulates perhaps most clearly in the third essay of the *Genealogy:*

> precisely because we seek knowledge, let us not be ungrateful to resolute reversals of accustomed perspectives and valuations…. to see differently in this way for one, to want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity' — the latter understood not as a 'contemplation without interest' (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to *control* ones's Pros and Cons… so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge.

> Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a 'pure,' will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"…. There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity' be.[755]

For Nietzsche, every perspective or way of knowing a phenomenon reveals different aspects of that phenomenon; every new perspective is a new interpretation. The more perspectives one has on a phenomenon, the more one knows about that phenomenon. This is what Nietzsche refers to when he speaks in this excerpt of a future notion of "objectivity."

Insofar as these perspectives are the perspectives of drives or complexes of drives, understanding Nietzsche's ontology allows us to reach a better understanding of his perspectivism. We see a connection between Nietzsche's drive ontology and perspectivism as an alternative account of knowledge in Nietzsche's notes, where he calls for "a theory of the perspectivism of the affects (to which a hierarchy of affects belong)" to replace a "theory of knowledge."[756] We also see this connection in Nietzsche's unpublished claim that "From all of our basic drives [*Grundtriebe*] come different perspectival evaluations of all happenings… Man as a complexity of 'wills to power'… thoughts are merely symptoms."[757] If our thoughts are merely the symptoms of our drives, then all knowing and thinking is fundamentally rooted in our nature as driven beings. In other words, "the perspectival, deceptive character belongs to existence [*der perspectivische, täuschende Charakter gehört zur Existenz*]" because existence is nothing

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[755] GM III:12.

[756] KSA 12: 342. Translated by Ken Gemes, "Life's Perspectives," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche,* 574.

[757] KSA 12: 25-6. Translated by Ken Gemes, ibid.

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but wills to power.[758] This realization — that perspectivism is a feature of human existence — not only enables us to re-conceive what counts for "truth" or "knowledge," but forces us to do so.

As Mitcheson persuasively argues in her detailed treatment of Nietzsche on truth, "knowledge is to be found in the manifold of embodied perspectives [and] not in an attempt to transcend them."[759] So, by recognizing the contingency of our conceptions of truth, as the European nihilist does — we may "gain new habits and engage in a practice of truth" which emerge from out of our drives and our embeddedness in a driven world.[760] Nietzsche's drive ontology allows us to understand knowledge and knowing not as the acquisition of absolute, objective truth, but as embodied practice in which we come to know the world in different ways, as it is differently disclosed to our drives, which always already have evaluative orientations in the world.[761] Since truth emerges from out of the drives and their evaluative orientations, truth will not be value-neutral. Knowledge will not be uniform among human beings, even if the mechanism of knowledge (the filtering of one's world through the drives) is. Although this conception of truth is unconventional, Nietzsche's perspectivism still allows the epistemological nihilist to re-conceive truth and knowledge in a way that allows them to reject their total disbelief in the existence of truth. In fact, for Nietzsche, it is part of our constitution that we participate in truth; in virtue of our constitution as complexes of drives which compose a variety of perspectives, we are able to come to know the world in myriad ways.

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[758] KSA 11: 34 [120]. In this same note, Nietzsche straightforwardly says there is "no absolute knowledge."

[759] Mitcheson, *Nietzsche, Truth, and Transformation*, 88.

[760] Ibid.

[761] Indeed, Mitcheson even connects this new practice of truth to the overcoming of nihilism (161).

Nietzsche's grounding of knowledge and truth in the drives makes knowledge a fundamental feature of existence. To exist, as a complex of drives, is to "know" the world in Nietzsche's sense.

Let's return to the fragment with which I started this section, and especially Nietzsche's claim that "All meaning is will to power (all relations of meaning can be dispersed into it)."[762] Some might read Nietzsche here as claiming that all meaning is mere human projection, as a way of individuals' asserting power over their world. On this reading, there would be no "meaningful world" of which I am a part, which resists my willing.[763] As should be clear at this point, I read this claim in the exact opposite way. On my reading, the participation and creation of meaning (as truths, purposes, and values) is made possible by Nietzsche's drive ontology. Nietzsche's claim that all "relations of meaning" can be "dispersed" into Nietzsche's wills to power can be read as a positive response to the problem of nihilism: since I am always already a complex of wills to power embedded in a world of wills to power, I always already participate in relations of meaning. This participation is made possible by a permeability between myself as a complex of drives and the driven world of which I am a part.

In the moment of European nihilism, as argued above, we become estranged from our nature as receptive beings, open to the world around us. Yet recognizing this receptivity is required for understanding the world as meaningful. We must learn not to be estranged from this any longer; in this way, we can learn that we are embedded in — and participate in — a meaning-full world. In short, Nietzsche's ontology, and the

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[762] WP 590.

[763] This is Heidegger's characterization of Nietzsche's metaphysics, which Iain Thomson investigates at length in his work *Heidegger on Ontotheology*.

fundamental receptivity on which it relies, enables us to recognize that we are embedded in a world of purpose, value, and truth. Insofar as Nietzsche's drive ontology enables us to return to ourselves and our nature as receptive beings, it allows us to understand our participation in truth, purpose, and value anew and thus serves as a resource for overcoming European nihilism.

4.3 The Diagnosis: Affective Nihilism

Nietzsche's metaphysics, then, serves as a corrective for European nihilism as a set of beliefs about meaning. Yet nihilism for Nietzsche is not merely a cognitive problem: as we have seen, it is also a feeling-based, affective phenomenon. So we must think at this point whether Nietzsche also provides some resources for treating — or overcoming — nihilism as a feeling-based, affective condition.

As described at length above, affective nihilism involves a "Nay-saying [*neinsagenden*] spirit" which belongs to the affective nihilist at the level of her physiology, or her basic constitution as a complex of drives.[764] The affective nihilist is characterized as such *not* because she holds a series of beliefs about meaning, but because her drives manifest a "nihilistic instinct [which] says No."[765] For Nietzsche, affective nihilism is 1) expressed in particular negative emotional responses and 2) rooted in an underlying physiological condition — for Nietzsche, a condition of the will — which Nietzsche characterizes as "weakness of the will [*Willensschwäche*]" and as life turned "against itself and deny[ing] itself."[766]

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[764] EH, "Why I Write," *Zarathustra*, 6
[765] KSA 13: 17 [7].
[766] GM III:11

Given Nietzsche's drive ontology, we can now sharpen our understanding of that in which affective nihilism consists. The life-denying spirit of the affective nihilist is a feature of his or her basic constitution. Since all human beings are most basically constituted by drives and can be understood as embodied complexes of drives, affective nihilism must be understood as a condition of the drives.[767] As a "weakness of the will" and life turned "against itself and deny[ing] itself," affective nihilism is an illness of the drives as wills to power which is characterized by some weakness or inefficacy of these wills to power which distorts their characteristic pattern of activity as will to power.[768] According to Nietzsche, drives (as wills to power) aim to enhance the achievement of their characteristic ends in some way.[769] The weakness of the will characteristic of affective nihilism to which Nietzsche refers, however, consists in the *inefficacy* of drives, as their inability to increase their characteristic activities. As Richardson notes, in the case of affective nihilism, the "drives… [are] not strong enough to advance against the forces arrayed around them."[770] Richardson also refers to an "an incapacity in one's drives, an inability to enact them."[771]

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[767] It is interpreted in this way by Gemes (2008 11): as "wholesale repudiation of the natural drives." My account, though inspired by Gemes and his response to Reginster, will diverge from his project.

[768] GM III:11

[769] Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, 35.

[770] Richardson, forthcoming.

[771] Richardson, forthcoming. Richardson also interprets affective nihilism in Nietzsche as involving the development of a new kind of drive: a "drive that opposes life" (ibid). Richardson's interpretation of the development of this drive means that he understands affective nihilism in Nietzsche as "not merely an affective assessment of life, but a will or drive hostile to it" (Richardson, forthcoming). Those selections of text which Richardson appeals to for this point, however, involve Nietzsche not describing a drive with a positive aim, but describing an "aversion [*Widerwillen*]" to life, a "resistance" or "opposition" to life [*Widerstand*], a "revolt against" life [*Auflehnung gegen das Leben*], and a "deadly hostility towards life" (Richardson, forthcoming). None of these selections require a drive specifically against life; instead, I insists that the affective orientations which quash those ineffective drives characteristic of affective

As Nietzsche remarks, the inability of a drive to grow in its characteristic activity most usually results in the *mere* self-preservation of the drive. Thus Nietzsche will often connect mere self-preservation to that weakness of the will characteristic of affective nihilism: "the wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a *limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life* [emphasis mine] which aims at the *expansion of power,* and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation."[772] The distress in which the various drives of the affective nihilist find themselves results from an involuntary constriction of their activity, as opposed to the expansion of their activity at which they aim. As wills to power, drives will always aim at their own growth, but this characteristic pattern of activity can be disrupted. Although those weakened drives which characterize the affective nihilist have no possibility but to continue willing power and attempting to increase their activity, they find themselves unable to achieve this expansion or increase.

As we saw earlier, the affective nihilism which returns in Nietzsche's age results from European nihilism insofar as it those nihilistic conceptions of truth, purpose, and value which alleviated this affective illness become unbelievable in the moment of European nihilism. Since it was these frameworks for understanding which led human beings to feel engaged in a meaningful world, when such frameworks collapse one becomes unmoored. The collapse of such conceptions of truth, purpose, and value which her to preserve some limited amount of vitality as a driven being results in a weakening

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nihilism can be understood as "opposed" or "averse" to life insofar as healthy life involves growth in a drive's characteristic activity. The "revolt against" life which Nietzsche speaks of in *Twilight of the Idols* is even referred to as a "mere symptom of life" as "declining, weakened, weary condemned life" (TI.V.5): a symptom of ineffective drives. There is no reason, in my view, to claim that affective nihilism also involves the development of a new drive.

[772] GS 349

of the individual: as her drives — without opportunities for discharge — wither and weaken, she becomes disengaged from her world. The problem of affective nihilism does not only consist in the ineffectiveness of one's drives; it also consists in a felt sense that one is disengaged (or closed off) from the world in which she previously felt herself meaningfully engaged.

By attending to the essential affective (and thus evaluative) orientations which drives have, we can describe the above condition of affective nihilism more precisely. For Nietzsche, affective nihilism is a loss of one's capacities — rooted in their drives and their constitution as a complex of drives — both to actively and effectively will *and* to stay engaged in the world in a way that allows the world to inspire or move one. This loss leads to a disruption of one's evaluative orientation, such that one is unable to find value in the world. As we saw in the previous chapter on affective nihilism, the weariness or disgust that the suffering individual experiences towards life, the world, and human existence appears to this individual not only as caused by the world, but as justified. In short, the condition in which one finds one's drives manifests itself in certain feelings, behaviors, thoughts, and evaluations.

We can image a concrete case which will make this more intuitive, if we recall the parallel between affective nihilism and depression from the second chapter. We recall that the affective nihilist is characterized by exhaustion and disgust; she experiences feelings of weariness or fatigue, disappointment with herself, and a great nausea with humanity.[773] Nietzsche describes affective nihilism as "lethargy, heaviness, and depression:" it is a "slow sadness" and "dull pain," experienced as a "resistance to

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[773] GM III:13

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life."[774] These descriptions, as well as Nietzsche's description of the will-weakness characteristic of the affective nihilist, square with a number of the characteristics required for a diagnosis of major depressive disorder: 1) a "depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by… subjective report (e.g., feels sad, *empty*, hopeless [emphasis mine]); 2) "markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day;" 3) "fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day;" 4) "feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day;" and 5) a "diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day."[775] If we so conceive the affective nihilist, we can understand the connection between a drive-based account of her condition and descriptions of its outward manifestations.

As noted in the second chapter, major depressive disorder is, in part, a disruption of one's end-directedness: in a depressive state, one's goals and purposes are unclear, unattainable, unachieved, undervalued, or absent. It is not difficult to see how Nietzsche might describe this in terms of an inefficacy or weakness of the drives, as an inability of end-directed processes to reach their ends and grow in their activity. By comparing the affective nihilist to one experiencing depression, then, one might *concretely* imagine how affective nihilism, as a more general condition involving more complex emotional responses, can result from disruptions in the operations of one's drives.

In order to overcome affective nihilism, then, the affective nihilist will have to undergo a profound personal transformation which enacts fundamental changes in their

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[774]GM III:20; TI "Socrates" 1

[775] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author. (2013).

constitution as a complex of drives. This makes affective nihilism in Nietzsche a difficult problem to solve. By combining elements of Nietzsche's account of personal transformation with the metaphysical resources he offers for addressing European nihilism, however, I believe we can formulate at least one potential treatment. This potential treatment will not be a definitive solution to the problem of affective nihilism, but it might allow us to point towards a way in which this condition might be overcome.[776]

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, re-thinking the world as wills to power enables one to recognize a permeability between oneself as a subject-unity and the world of which one is a part. An account of personal transformation which takes this porosity into account, on my view, can help to point us towards a Nietzschean treatment for affective nihilism. In this way, Nietzsche's drive ontology, recognized as a response to European nihilism, enables one to *"learn to think differently... in order perhaps, even very late on, to attain even more: to feel differently."*[777] On Nietzsche's view, this is the task of those few individuals who experience this affective nihilism yet possess the ability to move beyond it and come to affirm life.

Given that affective nihilism is a condition which disrupts one's capacities both to will and to stay engaged in one's world, the overcoming of this condition must involve both the exercise of agency (as the abilities to have goals, increase one's activity, and play a part in one's own transformation) and an affirmation of the world in all its

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[776] The comparison with major depressive disorder also helps to support the lack of any "guaranteed" solution to affective nihilism. As with major depressive disorder, it is likely that a particular treatment might work for some and not for others, and it is also possible that no treatments will alleviate the condition for some.
[777] D 103

complexity.[778] On my account, the individual who overcomes nihilism first comes to play a role in her own self-transformation. This process — which critically involves constantly taking stock of oneself via the reflection upon a personal narrative — offers the potential for both a reactivation of the end-directed activity of the drives and an increase in their activity. Otherwise put, it allows for the individual to achieve a measure of *agency.*

This process also allows an individual to recognize her fundamentally receptive nature, as a complex of drives embedded in the driven world. When this happens, the individual is no longer "estranged" from her receptive nature and becomes able to recognize her participation in a world of immanent purposiveness, inherent value, and perspectival truth. This way of thinking differently about oneself and one's world — as the world as a condition of purpose, value, and truth and oneself as inseparable from this meaningful world — allows one to re-engage in one's world and affirm this-worldly existence as a condition of her positive transformation. This overcoming of one's sickness with oneself, as well as the accompanying life-denial, results when one learns both to play a role in her own transformation and, as Gooding-Williams suggests, to recognize their fundamentally receptive nature in a way which allows the individual to create new values from out of the old. Such value creation requires a certain measure of activeness in the drives, but also requires a deep engagement in earthly existence and celebration of one's natural inclinations and instincts.

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[778] As Richardson notes, the perspective of the highest type of individual for Nietzsche — Nietzsche's *Übermensch* — affirms his world and other wills in this world not "as means appropriated to his own end" but "as they inherently are… as contributing to an overall process made not just more efficient but richer for their distinctive presence" (Richardson, *Nietzsche's System,* 71).

4.4 Nietzsche's Treatment: Self-Narration

As we see above, the problem with overcoming affective nihilism in Nietzsche is that the affective nihilist, suffering from the incapacity or ineffectiveness of her drives, is disengaged from her aims and goals, out of touch with herself, and feels helpless to change her condition. She is unable to exert her will or engage with the world in meaningful ways, and this leads to a negative valuation of life.[779] Since the problem of affective nihilism, then, is a problem of agency, its overcoming requires one to become an agent with goals at which she is directed and towards which she moves. The person who moves beyond affective nihilism must reestablish goals towards which she is directed by stimulating the activity of her drives; to become effective, she must move towards those goals in action.

In the course of our investigation into self-narration as a means of establishing agency in Nietzsche, we must be careful here to not misunderstand the agent as an ego-substance with a unified, rational will which causes actions. Indeed, Nietzsche rejects this conventional picture of agency, calling it a "fable" and an "error." In an aphorism entitled "The Fable of Intelligible Freedom" from *Human, All Too Human,* Nietzsche claims that "we are not the work of ourselves."[780] Elsewhere, he suggests that humans wrongly suppose that "the deed of a free will (is) the fundamental cause of the existence of an individual" and that "man becomes that which he wishes to be [*der Mensch werde Das, was er werden wolle],* his willing precedes his existence [*sein Wollen sei früher, als seine*

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[779] To remember this dual nature of affective nihilism — that it is a problem not only with the efficacy of one's drives but also a failure to engage with one's world in inspiring and productive ways — one need only remember the analogy drawn between the affective nihilism and the depressed individual in the second chapter.

[780] HH I:588.

Existenz]."[781] In his excoriation of the human tendency to think that we act and determine

ourselves freely according to certain prior intentions or principles, Nietzsche notes that

we often suppose that "our thinking and judgment…[is] the cause of our nature… but in

fact it is our nature that is the cause of our thinking and judging thus and thus [*aber*

thatsächlich ist unser Wesen die Ursache, dass wir so und so denken und urtheilen]."[782]

This "confusion of cause and effect" appears later as the first great error in *Twilight of the*

Idols.

       Yet in spite of these critiques of conventional agency, Nietzsche still calls on his

readers to transform themselves and insists upon the possibility of self-transformation.

Nietzsche famously calls on his readers to "become what [they] are" in *The Gay*

Science.[783] Nietzsche's remarks later in that same work describing the potential to "'give

style' to one's character…[as] a grand and a rare art" requiring one to "[survey] all that

his nature presents in its strength and in its weakness" and "[fashion] it into an ingenious

plan."[784] In these excerpts, Nietzsche either calls for self-transformation or implies that

certain human beings, at the very least, have the potential to transform themselves.

Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* serves in part as as *Bildungsroman* about the

edification and personal transformation of the title character. In a section from this text,

on "self-overcoming [*Selbst-Überwindung*]," Nietzsche speaks of the process of personal

transformation as involving a revaluation and rejection of prior values, as well as the

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[781] HH I:39.

[782] HH I:608.

[783] GS 270.

[784] GS 290. Indeed, in his work *Nietzsche: Life as Literature,* Nehamas interprets this quote as the ideal picture of self-creation in Nietzsche, which involves "accepting everything we have done and, in the ideal case, blending it into a coherent whole" (Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche*: *Life as Literature.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 188-9.).

individual's active role in identifying and creating new values unique to herself.[785] He

also refers, at various times, to certain individuals, such as Goethe, who have created

themselves.[786]

In sum, although Nietzsche speaks of the importance — and possibility — of self-

transformation, he also rejects traditional accounts of agency. The account of personal

transformation which we look to as a resource for overcoming affective nihilism, then,

must allow for one to play a role in one's own "creation," while rejecting a more

conventional, active role for the individual as freely self-determining agent. To solve this

puzzle, we will look to the role of self-knowledge — and, especially, personal narrative

— in Nietzsche's thought, as a resource which allows for one to transform oneself

through the excitation and inhibition of one's drives. This account will combine the

transformative power of personal narrative with Nietzsche's drive ontology in order to

envision a possible treatment for moving beyond affective nihilism.

4.4.1 Self-knowledge as self-narration

In this section, I argue that the process of acquiring self-knowledge has to potential to

play an important role in the kind of personal transformation which facilitates a

strengthening or growth in activity of one's drives, thus allowing one to potentially

overcome affective nihilism. Given Nietzsche's skepticism about a certain kind of self-

knowledge — namely, introspection — this might appear a strange avenue to pursue.

After all, Nietzsche frequently insists on the inaccessibility of the self to itself. In *Human,*

All Too Human, Nietzsche remarks on the "natural ignorance of mankind as to his

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[785] TSZ, II, "On Self-Overcoming."
[786] Twilight of the Idols, "Skirmishes."

interior [*sein Inneres*]."[787] Later in this text, in an aphorism critiquing the use of

introspection [*Selbstbeobachtung*] for self-knowledge, he compares one's interiority to an

inaccessible fortress: "Man is very well-defended against himself, his spying and sieges;

usually he is able to make out no more of himself than his outer fortifications. The actual

fortress is inaccessible [*unzugänglich*] to him, even invisible [*unsichtbar*]."[788]

Human beings on Nietzsche's account are usually unable to access their inner

world, much less understand its constitution. In *Dawn,* Nietzsche claims that "however

far a man may go in self-knowledge [*Selbstkenntniss*], nothing however can be more

incomplete than his image of the totality of his drives [*das Bild der gesammten Triebe*]…

their play and counterplay among one another and above all the laws of their nutriment

remain entirely unknown to him."[789] This same sentiment is echoed in the *Nachlass*,

where Nietzsche calls introspection "essentially erroneous [*die wesentlich fehlerhafte*

Selbstbeobachtung]" after remarking that "the balance of our drives [*der Haushalt*

unserer Triebe] is meanwhile far beyond our understanding."[790]

Nietzsche continues to level his critique of introspection as a means of acquiring

self-knowledge throughout his published work.[791] In *Ecce Homo,* he even insists that "to

become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is."[792] When

introspection is mentioned in the *Nachlass*, it is almost always preceded by a description

of its deceptive or falsifying nature.[793] Nietzsche titles one note "Mistrust of

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[787] HH I:160.
[788] HH I:491.
[789] D 119.
[790] KSA 10: 7 [268].
[791] See GS 335; HH II:223.
[792] EH, "Clever," 9.
[793] See KSA 10: 7[268]; 11: 34[243]; 13: 11[113].

Introspection [*Mißtrauen gegen die Selbstbeobachtung*];" in two subsequent notes from 1888, he offers a detailed critique of introspection as a method of psychological investigation.[794]

In spite of Nietzsche's insistence on the "inner opacity" of human beings, I will argue that self-knowledge plays a critical role both in Nietzsche's account of the self-transformation of rare human beings and in stimulating drive-life (and thus treating affective nihilism).[795] We see Nietzsche hint at the former in *Human, All too Human,* where he connects self-direction and self-discipline in certain noble human beings with self-knowledge: "self-knowledge [*Selbst-Erkenntniss*] becomes universal knowledge [*All-Erkenntniss*] as regards the entire past, and, by another chain of observation… self-direction [*Selbstbestimmung*] and self-discipline [*Selbsterziehung*] in the freest and most far-seeing spirits."[796] As we see here, a certain kind of backward-looking self-knowledge allows for one to play a role in disciplining oneself and directing one's actions: activities which are hallmarks of healthy individuals with well-functioning drives. We should be reminded here of Nietzsche's remark from *Ecce Homo* that his account of Schopenhauer's influence from the third of his *Untimely Meditations* was an example of self-narration (Nietzsche remarks here that "looking back from a certain distance upon the conditions of which these essays [from the *Untimely Meditations*] bear witness, I do not wish to deny that they speak only of me").[797] This reflection upon the impression which Schopenhauer made on Nietzsche "functioned as "a new concept of self-

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[794] See KSA 12:2[103]; 13: 14[27]; 13: 14[28].
[795] Mattia Riccardi uses this helpful term in his article "Inner Opacity: Nietzsche on Introspection and Agency," in: *Inquiry,* Vol. 58, No. 3, (2015), pp. 221-243.
[796] *HH* II:223
[797] EH*, "Untimely Ones."*

discipline" in which "[his] innermost history [*Geschichte*], [his] *becoming…* [was] inscribed. [And] above all, [his] promise!"[798] By recounting those features of Schopenhauer which inspired and moved him, Nietzsche was able to identify values and "fasten upon" himself a "chain of fulfillable duties."[799] In short, Nietzsche's identification of values in the process of self-narration enabled him to direct his actions towards those values.

Nietzsche enables us to envision this kind of self-knowledge and its role in self-transformation in an aphorism entitled "A segment of our self as artistic object [*Ein Ausschnitt unseres Selbst als künstlerisches Object*]." In this passage, Nietzsche notes that higher individuals are "necessary, but alterable [*veränderlich*]."[800] The question then becomes: How is man alterable? How can man, as necessary, be transformed? Nietzsche offers us a clue at the end of this same aphorism: higher individuals are alterable only because they have a special ability to "segregate parts of [their] own development and exhibit these parts in isolation [*in unserer eigenen Entwickelung Stücke heraustrennen und selbständig hinstellen können*]."[801]

Higher individuals establish a narrative of their lives which includes significant moments as milestones in their development and concrete circumstances which they identify as conditions of their personal development. The reflection on one's personal narrative is a unique manifestation of one's historical sense; the development of this sense here allows one to see herself and others as "determined by… systems and

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[798] EH, *"Untimely Ones."*
[799] UM III:5.
[800] HH I:274.
[801] HH I:274.

representatives of different cultures, that is to say as necessary, but alterable."[802] It is this

construction of a personal narrative — this reflection on one's life thus far, during which

one attempts to understand previous experiences as conditions of one's development —

which counts for self-knowledge in Nietzsche. One comes to know oneself, in other

words, by constructing and reflecting on a picture of one's own development. We see

self-knowledge described this way in *Dawn,* where Nietzsche claims that insofar as the

animal learns "to look back upon itself, to take itself 'objectively;' it, too, has its degree

of self- knowledge [*Selbsterkenntniss*]."[803] This backward-looking reflection which

enables the higher individual to fashion a uniquely individual personal narrative — which

allows this individual, in some sense, to know herself, or to take herself 'objectively' —

is what Nietzsche elsewhere in *Dawn* calls "setting up a real ego, accessible to him and

fathomable to him."[804]

In "Kant and Nietzsche on Self-knowledge," Paul Katsafanas attempts to offer an

account of self-knowledge in Nietzsche via an extended analysis of the "intrinsic limits"

of introspection in Nietzsche and its corresponding inefficacy for self-knowledge. On

Katsafanas's view, self-knowledge in Nietzsche requires "looking away from oneself."[805]

Katsafanas nicely demonstrates the relevance of genealogy for self-knowledge: "history

and genealogy can help to reveal the presence of certain drives, in part by showing how

these drives motivate patterns of behavior that might be visible only in the long

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[802] HH I:274.

[803] D 26.

[804] D 105.

[805] Paul Katsafanas, "Nietzsche and Kant on Self-Knowledge" in *Nietzsche and the Problem of Subjectivity.* Eds. João Constâncio, Maria João Mayer Branco, and Bartholomew Ryan. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 129.

term…genealogy helps us discover unnoticed aspects of the conceptual scheme through which we experience and interpret the world."[806]

Katsafanas's analysis of the relevance of genealogy for self-knowledge is inspired by Nietzsche's claim that "direct self-observation [*unmittelbare Selbstbeobachtung*] is not nearly sufficient for us to know ourselves: we need history [*wir brauchen Geschichte*], for the past flows on within us in a hundred waves."[807] While it seems plausible that a genealogical practice facilitates self-knowledge in the sense that humanity may come to access prior conceptual schemes according to which the world was interpreted, Katsafanas does not elaborate on the importance of understanding one's *personal* history for individual self-knowledge and, eventually, self-transformation. This is the function which self-knowledge as self-narration performs on my account; this is the sense in which "we need history" for self-knowledge.[808]

Given the ineffectiveness of introspection for recognizing how "the past flows on within us in a hundred waves," Nietzsche's remark that "we need history [*wir brauchen Geschichte*]" for self-knowledge can just as easily refer to the need of a personal narrative as the need of history more broadly: *Geschichte* can also be translated as *narrative*. Even in the broader context of this aphorism, which demonstrates how "self-knowledge becomes universal knowledge as regards the entire past," the meaning of *Geschichte* remains ambiguous, as Nietzsche relates a picture of the constancy of personal transformation and self-knowledge to our "most peculiar and personal development":

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806 Ibid., 126.
807 HH II: 223.
808 For more on narrative and genealogy, see Alexander Nehamas, *Life as Literature*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985), 104.

> We ourselves are, after all, nothing but our own sensation at every moment of this continued flow. Even here, when we wish to step down into the stream of our apparently most peculiar and personal development, Heraclitus's aphorism "You cannot step twice into the same river" holds good.[809]

Thus, while Katsafanas's analysis of self-knowledge as "looking away from oneself" remains at the level of culture or society and reads *Geschichte* as a more traditional notion of history, my analysis treats individual self-knowledge and personal transformation, reading *Geschichte* instead as narrative, without thereby excluding the importance that historical developments may play in one's personal narrative. As mentioned above, self-knowledge on my picture calls for the "setting up of a real ego" on the behalf of the *individual;* it calls for the formation of a narrative of one's own personal development.

That the formation of a personal narrative plays an important role in personal transformation is also evidenced by the biographical details scattered throughout Nietzsche's work and the connection that he draws between their necessity for his personal development. Not only does Nietzsche employ extensive personal narrative in *Ecce Homo,* a work subtitled "how one becomes what one is;" we also see Nietzsche offer accounts of his personal development and the development of his thought elsewhere in his body of work, often in stray references to the circumstances in which a particular idea developed. In the first volume of *Human, All Too Human,* Nietzsche recognizes that growing wise in later life requires an authentic engagement and confrontation with both religion and art. More specifically, he notes that "one must have loved religion and art like mother and wet nurse — otherwise one cannot grow wise."[810] In "Schopenhauer as

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[809] HH II: 223.
[810] HH I:292.

Educator," Nietzsche discusses the importance of his "great teacher" and "antipode" Schopenhauer for his own growth. As we saw above, Nietzsche's engagement and original adoption of Schopenhauer's pessimistic worldview transformed Nietzsche's understanding of the world and himself, leading to the acceptance of an illusory metaphysics (the world as the work of a world-artist) in *The Birth of Tragedy* as "metaphysical consolation" for the unbearable nature of existence. His later reaction to and eventual rejection of Schopenhauer's pessimism — as well as the ascetic method of will suppression Schopenhauer recommends for overcoming the suffering and despair which leads to pessimism— transformed Nietzsche's worldview and self-understanding yet again.[811]

Nowhere is this formation of a narrative as evident as in *Ecce Homo*. In the preface, Nietzsche explicitly notes that "[I]t seems indispensable to [him] to say *who* [he] is" in light of the great task which he hopes to accomplish.[812] Though the biographical details Nietzsche offers in this text are varied, all of them serve as explanations for his development. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche notes that he could not have survived his youth without Wagner's music.[813] Later in this work, even as he remarks with ambivalence on his relationship with Wagner, Nietzsche notices ways in which his favorable assessment of Wagner and Wagnerian music in *The Birth of Tragedy* discloses something crucial about himself as a young thinker who had not yet become what he was.

We see this disclosure of Nietzsche to himself via his encounter with Wagner in the details of their relationship, as recounted by Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche

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[811] See section 4.2.1 above.

[812] Towards the end of the preface, he also hints that *Ecce Homo* is an exercise in gratitude for the life he has lived thus far. Thus, not only a description or narrative, but an affirmation as well.

[813] EH, "Clever," 6.

interpreted Wagner's music as an exemplar of the "power" of German music which arose "out of the Dionysian root of the German spirit"[814] in *The Birth of Tragedy,* he later interprets Wagner as a "fanatic of expression,"[815] one whose expressive music ends up serving the same function as the ascetic priest in a society: anesthetizing suffering through an excess of emotion.[816] Yet the way Nietzsche describes even this early encounter with Wagner — and interpretation of the elevating function of Wagnerian music — is telling. As Nietzsche remarks, "what I heard as a young man listening to Wagnerian music really had nothing to do with Wagner… when I described Dionysian music I described what *I* had heard — that instinctively I had to transpose and transfigure everything into the new spirit that I carried in me."[817] According to Nietzsche here, his early interpretation of the significance of Wagner's music tells more about Nietzsche than it does about Wagner. In Wagner's music, Nietzsche found something of himself, something which inspired him and drew him aloft, something which facilitated his interpretation of Dionysian intoxication and tragedy. Even when Nietzsche refers to his misplaced "practical application of Wagnerism [in *The Birth of Tragedy*]… [as] a symptom of *ascent,"[818]* he remarks upon what this prior interpretation disclosed about himself: his own early tendency to life-affirmation as the "ultimate, most joyous, most wantonly extravagant Yes to life" which strengthens life and believes that "nothing in existence may be subtracted, nothing is dispensable."[819] The critical response which

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[814] BT 19.
[815] EH, "Clever," 5. See also BGE 256.
[816] Adrian del Caro, "Nietzsche and Romanticism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 126.
[817] EH, *BT*, 4.
[818] EH, *BT*, 2.
[819] Ibid.

Wagner and Wagnerian music eventually provoked in Nietzsche, furthermore, seems to have enabled Nietzsche to establish his unique point of view: it enabled him, that is, to develop an independent direction of his thought and become what he was. This point is clearest when we attend to the parallel which may be drawn between the anesthetizing functions of Wagner and the ascetic priest.

Just as Nietzsche details the influence of various thinkers in this work, he also includes details such as the natural environment in which his thought was conducted, dietary habits, and his physical condition. These biographical details are consistently expressed in *Ecce Homo* as conditions in which his work and thought developed. "The Wanderer and His Shadow," for example, developed in a period of his most intense blindness, in which his vision was often limited to shadows.[820] Even as Nietzsche wrote in the midst of various physiological ailments, his work retained its life-affirming quality because of his "choices of climate and locality."[821] All of these details are aspects of Nietzsche's self-understanding, presented as his personal narrative.

Daniel Blue's work offers further evidence for self-knowledge as self-narration in Nietzsche. As Blue points out, by the age of twenty-four, Nietzsche had written at least six separate autobiographies.[822] Although the autobiographical content and philosophical problems addressed in these autobiographies varied widely, in every case Nietzsche "took these narratives seriously."[823] Blue goes on to suggest that these autobiographical narratives

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[820] EH, "Wise," 1
[821] EH, "Clever," 2
[822] Daniel Blue, *The Making of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2016), 3.
[823] Ibid., 3.

>…attempted an overview, a bid to plot the course of his existence… as the sequent development of an autonomous self… Sometimes [Nietzsche] seems to have treated autobiography as a kind of report card, to assess his progress… All allowed him to sketch a somewhat objective representation of himself, an externalized portrait… [824]

Nietzsche's practice of autobiographical reflection in his published works, then, was preceded by a long and committed practice in his youth of reflecting on his personal development and attempting to view himself "objectively."[825] Just as history should be utilized in the service of life, then, autobiographical reflection should be utilized in the service of personal transformation.

The transformative force of personal narrative is not only something which we see Nietzsche practice; it is also something which Nietzsche explicitly acknowledges in "Schopenhauer as Educator," where he remark that while "there may be other means of finding oneself, of coming to oneself out of the bewilderment in which one usually wanders… but I know none better than to think on one's true educators and cultivators."[826] This process of self-knowledge, as the development of a personal narrative and reflection thereupon, allows individuals to extrapolate from this narrative and imagine not only who they have been, but who they want to become. We see Nietzsche engaged in this process when he remarks that his account of Schopenhauer offered in the second section of this essay

>[describes] nothing but the first, as it were physiological, impression Schopenhauer produced upon me, that magical outpouring of the inner strength of one natural creature on to another that follows the first and most fleeting encounter; and when I subsequently analyze that impression, I discover it to be

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[824] Ibid., 3.
[825] D 26.
[826] UM III:1.

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compounded of three elements: the elements of his honesty, his cheerfulness, and his steadfastness.[827]

In Nietzsche's reflection upon Schopenhauer's influence, he identifies certain features of Schopenhauer which stand out as having a special significance to him, as having a particular *value* to him. By reflecting upon certain significant circumstances and influences, or milestones in their development, then, one might identify values towards which they should strive and, in this striving, be transformed. As Nietzsche remarks, "from my own experience I am sure of only one thing: that from that ideal image it is possible to fasten upon ourselves a chain of fulfillable duties."[828] For Nietzsche, this must involve identifying a "lofty goal" and bringing it "so close to us that it *educates* us while it draws us aloft," allowing us to "proceed towards so extravagant a goal through a practical activity."[829] In short, one's development of a personal narrative and reflection upon points of influence and milestones in one's development (either in certain circumstances or certain influential individuals), allows one to identify certain values which they hold.

This narrative practice affords an individual the potential to be inspired and move towards these values which one identifies — and especially values which have hitherto gone unrecognized. Personal transformation, as self-culture, is "the child of each individual's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction with himself:" when one "is ashamed of oneself without any accompanying feeling of distress" and "come[s] to hate one's

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[827] UM III:2.
[828] UM III:5.
[829] UM III:5.

narrowness and shriveled nature," one takes the first step towards transforming oneself.[830]

Although self-narration as the reflection upon one's influences and milestones of one's development offers the opportunity for transformation, we see in Nietzsche's characterizations that such a practice is no guarantee of personal development or transformation, when he describes the process in detail:

> Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has elevated your soul, what has mastered it and at the same time delighted it? Place these venerated objects before you in a row, and *perhaps* they will yield for you, through their nature and their sequence, a law, the fundamental law of your true self. Compare these objects, see how one complements, expands, surpasses, transfigures another, how they form a stepladder upon which you have climbed up to yourself as you are now; for your true nature lies, not hidden deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you normally take to be yourself [emphasis mine].

In this excerpt, Nietzsche remarks that while it is possible to identify one's values, desired goals, and inspire directions for one's striving through a practice of self-narration, it is by no means a guarantee. We see that this potentially transformative practice merely offers the *possibility* for personal development even in Nietzsche's above remark that "it is possible to fasten upon" oneself a "chain of fulfillable duties" in this way; this outcome, however, is by no means certain.[831]

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[830] UM III:6.

[831] In fact, we see in *Ecce Homo* that the practice of personal reflection and self-cultivation which Nietzsche recommends in "Schopenhauer as Educator" is actually that practice in which Nietzsche himself was engaged while writing both that particular essay and the other *Untimely Meditations.* In Nietzsche's reflection upon the set of essays contained in the *Untimely Meditations* — on Strauss, history, Schopenhauer, and Wagner — from *Ecce Homo,* he remarks that he wrote these essays as a way of cultivating himself: "What I was fundamentally trying to do in these essays was something altogether different than psychology: *an unequaled problem of education, a new concept of self-discipline*….Now that I am looking back from a certain distance upon the conditions of which these essays bear witness, I do not wish to deny that they speak only of me…" (EH, "Untimely Ones"). This "new concept of self-discipline" in which one reflects

4.4.2 The transformative power of self-narration

We see, then, that self-knowledge as self-narration plays a role in personal development for Nietzsche. At this point, it is critical to investigate both 1) what makes this role possible and 2) how self-narration transforms the self, stimulating the activity of the drives in a way that allows for self-narration to serve as a treatment of affective nihilism. On my account, self-transformation is made possible by the space which self-knowledge as self-narration opens for one to see oneself anew, since every new instance of self-narration afford the opportunity for a new interpretation of oneself. In other words, self-knowledge as self-narration calls for reflection on "how things are" with oneself this time around, and the reflective distance which this practice opens up enables one to interact with one's constitution in transformative new ways.

In Nietzsche's terms, the formation of a personal narrative is what allows one to engage in a stocktaking of oneself [*Selbstbesinnung*]. In his work, Nietzsche uses this term in two different ways. Although he most frequently uses it to refer to mankind's taking stock of itself, he also speaks of personal *Selbstbesinnung* — and, importantly, the structure of this stocktaking remains the same whether it is described as a practice of personal or supra-personal reflection.[832]

In *Beyond Good and Evil,* we see Nietzsche connect "a stock-taking [*Selbstbesinnung*] of human beings" with their "growth in profundity."[833] It is a particular sector of humanity's ability to take stock of itself which allows it to realize that "the

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upon figures and circumstances in a way that allows these figures and circumstances to "speak of" oneself is just the development and reflection upon one's personal narrative which facilitates a personal transformation, inspiring certain directions of personal development.
[832] See KSA 12: 9[60], 13: 11[119].
[833] BGE 32.

decisive value of an action lies precisely in what is *unintentional in it...* the intention is only a sign and a symptom, something which still needs interpretation, and furthermore a sign which carries too many meanings and, thus, by itself alone means almost nothing."[834] Although Nietzsche here specifically discusses the potential of those higher individuals for undermining and overcoming morality, the structure of personal *Selbstbesinnung* — as that reflective moment during which one takes stock of oneself and learns to interpret or see oneself anew — remains. Perhaps most interesting is Nietzsche's description of the revaluation of all values as "my formula for an act of the highest self-reflection [*Selbstbesinnung*] of mankind, that became in my flesh and genius."[835] Although Nietzsche's use of *Selbstbesinnung* here refers to mankind's taking stock of itself, this supra-personal reflective practice became possible only in Nietzsche's own flesh and genius [*Fleisch und Genie*]: that is, as his personal practice of reflection on the origin of values in one's drives.[836]

On my account, those higher individuals capable of taking stock of themselves are those who reflect on their narrative and interpret themselves anew with every subsequent narrative. In a section in the *Nachlass* on phenomena ruined by the church's misuse, Nietzsche cites *Selbstbesinnung* as a practice of personal self-reflection which opens up the space in one's soul for spontaneous growth and activity. Nietzsche describes this tendency as:

> …temporary isolation, accompanied by strict refusal, e.g., of letters; a most profound stock-taking of oneself [*Selbstbesinnung*] and self-recovery that desires to avoid, not "temptations," but "duties"; an escape from the daily round; a

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[834] BGE 32.
[835] EH, "Destiny," 1.
[836] This foreshadows the necessity of self-knowledge and personal transformation on the behalf of higher individuals for a transformation of culture.

detachment from the tyranny of stimuli and influences that condemns us to spend our strength in nothing but reactions and does not permit their accumulation to the point of *spontaneous activity.*[837]

This "profound stock-taking of oneself" which inspires the spontaneous activity of the spirit demonstrates the critical importance of reflection on one's narrative for personal transformation. This reflective moment — that moment in which one asks the "question 'for what?' after a terrible struggle, even victory… is a hundred times more important than the question of whether we feel well or not [and the] basic instinct of all strong natures."[838] The higher individual's ability to look back on life and form a narrative which interprets the significance of points of influence is the "basic instinct of all strong natures" who review the past in order to look towards the future. As Nietzsche notes, "you possess in yourself a ladder with a hundred rungs upon which you may climb to knowledge;" this is the way in which "your own life acquires the value of an instrument and means of knowledge."[839] It is one's ability to identify and review milestones of personal development in one's life — the "hundred rungs" of the ladder of life that appear as particularly significant parts of one's development only in retrospect — that leads one to the kind of self-knowledge which can provoke both self-transformation and the spontaneous activity of the drives.

When one reflects on elements of one's personal narrative, whether it be an earlier event, circumstance, or feeling, this moment of reflection always presents one with the opportunity for a new interpretation of that event, circumstance, or feeling. After all, since the self as subject-unity — as an embodied complex of drives — is a dynamic,

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[837] KSA 12:10 [165].
[838] KSA 12:9 [107].
[839] HH I:292.

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ever-changing self, and different drives bring different interpretations to bear on the phenomenon under consideration, any difference in the constitution of the self can make for a new interpretation. In this sense, one can read Charles Taylor's account of human beings as "self-interpreting animals" as another way of putting Nietzsche's proposal that "the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself under its perspectival forms, and *solely* in these. We cannot look around our own corner."[840] Accordingly, the formation of a narrative is always a formation from a perspective (or, more accurately, from multiple perspectives, insofar as the subject is composed of a multiplicity of drives). Insofar as the self as subject-unity is dynamic, the perspectives of this subject-unity are in constant flux. Self-narration as a process of *Selbstbesinnung*, then, makes self-transformation possible because forming and reflecting upon one's personal narrative gives one the opportunity to find oneself in a different relation to oneself. In short, the reflective space opened up in the act of narrative and reflection on one's narrative allows for one to "become other" to oneself.

The transformative power of self-knowledge — as possible only via the expression of a personal narrative to oneself and reflection upon this narrative— is expressed in Taylor's notion that "the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feelings… In being able to express our feelings, we give them a reflective dimension which transforms them."[841] In essence, the formation of a personal narrative offers a new mode of expressing what one is. This adds a new, reflective dimension to what one is; on my account, this reflection dimension allows for one to transform the self

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[840] *GS* 374. Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1985), 45.

[841] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language,* 233.

through the excitement or inhibition of one's drives and affects. One's reflective review of certain milestones in one's personal development will provoke particular affective responses in the individual reflecting, after all, and these responses will encourage the vitalization of some drives and the withering of other drives. In short, one's reflection on particular milestones in her personal narrative provokes affective responses, and these affective responses function as excitatory, inhibitory, or some combination of the two, emboldening certain drives and diminishing others.

When one reflects on one's life in order to construct a narrative, one's dominant drives interpret her past and string together a narrative. This narrative interpretation is the farthest one can go in self-knowledge. Upon the expression of her narrative to herself — the individual's taking-stock of herself [*Selbstbesinnung*] — the subject-unity comes to know herself in some new way. This stock-taking as self-knowledge provokes negative or positive affects, which function as excitatory or inhibitory for other drives (the same affect may function as excitatory for one drive and inhibitory for another). Upon reflection, one might be positively inclined towards certain milestones in one's life, and negatively inclined toward others, given the current arrangement of her drives and their relative strength and weakness. The affective responses made possible by self-narration and reflection thus potentially encourage the flourishing of certain drives (and thus the pursuits of certain ends, manifesting in certain behaviors) and discourage others. In other words, these affective responses have the potential motivate one's drives in particular directions. The laws given by these affects and drives are laws of one's own; even as one "gives herself" these laws and is transformed, she is given these laws by her drives.

Perhaps the best account of this interaction between one's world, drives, and affects in Nietzsche can be found in *Dawn*:

> Every moment of our lives sees some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others of them wither, all according to the nutriment which the moment does or does not bear with it… Take some trifling experience. Suppose we were in the market place one day and we noticed someone laughing at us as we went by: this event will signify this or that to us according to whether this or that drive happens at that moment to be at its height in us and it will be a quite different event according to the kind of person we are. One person will absorb it like a drop of rain, another will shake it from him like an insect, another will try to pick a quarrel, another will examine his clothing to see if there is anything about it that might give rise to laughter, another will be led to reflect on the nature of laughter as such, another will be glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world and in each case a drive has gratified itself, whether it be the drive to annoyance or to combativeness or to reflection or to benevolence. This drive seized the event as its prey: why precisely this one? Because, thirsty and hungry, it was lying in wait… What then are our experiences? Much more that which we put into them than that which they already contain![842]

The most important observation here is Nietzsche's claim that one's interpretation of the event at hand is a result of "which drive happens at this moment to be at its height in us"; this drive-based interpretation gives rise to a particular affective response, which motivates our behavior. My account here relies on the excitatory and inhibitory potentials of the affective responses which arise in the reflective moment. As a result of my drives' current configuration, reflection upon my narrative gives rise to the excitement of certain drives and inhibition of others, and "I" am thus motivated in certain directions, to change certain things about myself or to continue on in certain ways as I am. My affective responses to the elements of the narrative I recount motivate me to act in certain ways, encouraging the waxing or waning of certain drives.

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[842] D 119.

Of course, this does not make me a freely acting agent: we cannot say that some conscious intention has directed my action, or that I have some formed an intention to act and transform myself which does, in fact, cause a transformation in me. Quite the opposite: I do not freely choose to be transformed in a certain way. Instead, when I recount my life thus far, a particular feeling arises in me in response to that which I recount. This affective response is possible only because of my reflective distance. Since it changes the configuration of my drives, it changes me, and because the affective response is wholly mine — a result of my constitution as a subject-unity — this transformation counts as a *self*-transformation. The picture of agency that Nietzsche contrasts with this is one which understands our actions as shaped by our intentions; on this traditional picture of self-determination, we form an intention to develop in a particular direction and then *will* ourselves to develop in accordance with this intention. This is exactly the kind of personal transformation that we can expect to be inaccessible to the affective nihilist, as an individual with ineffective drives. Thus, the significance of the reflective moment of *Selbstbesinnung* for self-transformation in Nietzsche helps us envision an alternative account of agency in Nietzsche which might still be available to the affective nihilist.

It is important to note that on this picture, an individual must meet some minimal threshold of drive function in order for affective responses to be provoked in the first place by reflection upon one's personal narrative. If one's drive functioning does not meet this threshold, it is not clear that self-narration will be able to increase the activities of one's drives or result in self-transformation, since both of these require the motivating force of affective responses. Thus, self-narration as a practice of self-knowledge remains

a mere potential treatment for affective nihilism, and can not serve as a guaranteed treatment for this condition.

To see why this account of personal transformation — as initiated by a process of self-narration — counts as *self*-transformation, consider the following example. Imagine the case of a high-achieving nursing student named Sally. Sally has consistently achieved high marks in high school and in her college career. In her everyday, pre-reflective state, Sally does not recognize that she achieves these marks in large part because of her grade-motivated attitude: she aims to get good grades, regardless of whether she learns the material. This motivation leads Sally to spend long nights cramming for exams, after which she largely forgets the material she has studied but manages to score high marks on her exams.

Imagine Sally comes to a crisis point after cramming for a nursing exam on which she received an A. After the exam, she realizes that although she earned a high mark, she has not retained any information about actual nursing practices. Upon reflection on her personal narrative, she recognizes that she has been grade-motivated rather than learning-motivated. Imagine that this reflection incites her to despair. Such an emotion can encourage the vitalization of certain drives — perhaps the drive to knowledge — and the weakening of others — perhaps the drive to obtain external rewards.[843] Sally's formation and reflection upon her personal narrative, as well as her affective response, not only

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[843] It is also possible that Sally will embrace this identity upon reflection, and aim at getting good grades all of the time. There are a few points to make here. 1. Sally's embrace of her identity as grade-motivated would involve a very different sort of affect than despair in response to her recognition of this feature of herself. 2. The transformative potential of self-reflection is not a guarantee; it is only a possible opportunity for self-transformation. If Sally remains the same after this moment of reflection — and even after experiencing despair — this need not speak against the transformative potential of narrative in general.

reveals a hitherto unrecognized desire to be learning-motivated; it also brings about a

change in her constitution, or a transformation. Her despairing emotion, brought about by

reflection on a significant part of her personal narrative, is something wholly hers: she

alone experiences this affect and she experiences this *particular* affect because of the

particular embodied multiplicity that she is. This affective response enacts a

transformation of her drives, therefore, it transforms her. Yet since this affective response

belongs uniquely to her and arises from who she is, her transformation is crucially a *self-*

transformation.[844]

This transformation also results in an expansion in the range of affections — the

determinate ways in which one can influence or be influenced by the world — which are

available to the individual, insofar as it brings new drives (and their affective

orientations) to bear on one another. As we saw above, drives inspire affective

orientations. When drives engage with one another, the affective orientations they induce

have the potential to change and transform, depending on the drives' activities and

relations of resistance, assimilation, and incorporation. The practice of self-narration and

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[844] At this point, it is worth acknowledging that self-knowledge as self-narration presents one with an unconventional kind of knowledge: after all, in recounting one's narrative, one might not "get it right" about previous events, influences, motivations, or desires. What we come to "know" about ourselves is not necessarily the fact of the matter. Sally might think she has been grade-motivated all along, when in fact she was motivated by something else entirely. For Nietzsche, with his unconventional understanding of knowledge as the acquisition of ever more perspectives, this is not a problem. In the absence of introspection, narrative remains the only means of accessing possible influences, motivations, and desires: since it is the only sense in which one can know oneself, self-narration counts as self-knowledge. Whether or not one correctly identifies one's true desires or motivations — whether or not one "gets it right" — the narrative still provokes an affective response, which forms an evaluative stance of the subject-unity, which results in the individual's self-transformation. Even if Sally characterizes herself in her personal narrative as grade-motivated in years past when she *actually* wasn't, she can still reflect on this characterization, and that reflection could provoke a negative affective response in her which could discourage her from being grade-motivated. In short, one's narrative doesn't have to be factually true to result in the kind of self-transformation for which I am arguing.

subsequent reflection upon one's narrative affords one a range of affects and affective

orientations which would have remained unavailable to the individual, since self-

narration enables the reflective individual to bring her drive-based perspective on herself

into an interaction with the drives of which she is composed.

Thus, the reflection on one's personal narrative which constitutes self-knowledge

for Nietzsche becomes a condition of transformative self-critique. Without a narrative of

the self with which to engage, and without the affective responses which demonstrate

one's taste or distaste for particular moments of personal development, critical

engagement with oneself — and the potential for transformation that creates — would

remain impossible.[845] In Nietzsche's 1886 preface to the second volume of *Human, All*

Too Human, Nietzsche notes that he had to inhabit a critical stance on his previous

instincts and beliefs in this work in order to become free to develop and think beyond

these instincts.[846] There Nietzsche notes that he was "sorely mistrustful… [and] took

sides against [himself] and for everything painful and difficult precisely for [him]

[*dergestalt Partei gegen mich und für Alles, was gerade mir wehe that und hart fiel*]."[847]

This, Nietzsche claims, showed him "the way to '[himself]', to [his] task."[848] We see

examples of this "taking sides against oneself" throughout Nietzsche's work. One such

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[845] In the specific case of affective nihilism, the nihilist might come to an awareness of her will-weakness in the development and reflection upon her personal narrative. The stocktaking of herself which occurs in the process of self-narration and reflection can then serve as a means to developing affects which motivate one to move beyond affective nihilism. Thus, consciousness of oneself as suffering from a world-weariness, as one suffering from affective nihilism (even if one does not call it that), will be an important part of overcoming affective nihilism. We might even wonder if this is why Nietzsche so frequently brings his reader's attention to such a condition.
[846] Self-narration thus facilitates the development of a critical, interpretative stance, enabling one to bring to light previously unrecognized values or drives in oneself. This stance, however, will always be a perspective which arises from out of oneself as a complex of drives.
[847] HH II P:4.
[848] HH II P:4.

example is Nietzsche's critique of his prior Romantic sensibility. Without constructing a personal narrative which identified a significant predisposition to a "dangerous form of romanticism" — and without developing a distaste for this moment in his personal history — Nietzsche might not have had the impetus to form such a strong attack on the decadence of romantic ways of thinking.[849] In other words, Nietzsche would have been a very different thinker and person.[850]

Nevertheless, there is no one agent of transformation on this picture; no unified Cartesian subject directing one's actions, but instead, the subject-unity as ever-changing multiplicity. This version of self-transformation is consistent, then, with Nietzsche's critiques both of the "ego-substance" and conventional conceptions of agency. At this point, it bears asking: if my account of personal transformation in Nietzsche's mature conception is correct, how ought one to think about Nietzsche's positive conception of agency? Although Nietzsche's remarks on agency seem to me to remain mainly critical, and his project here mainly negative, Frankfurt's account of agency serves as a helpful supplement to my account of self-knowledge and self-transformation.

In "Freedom of Will and Concept of a Person," Frankfurt insists that human beings are the only animals "capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are."[851] Another way to put this is that human beings are capable of developing second-order desires: they can develop desires *about* their desires. Imagine one has the desire for a sweet dessert after dinner. This is a first-order desire. Yet human beings are also able to develop desires about their desires. I might wish — if I

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[849] HH II P:2.

[850] For more on this, see Adrian del Caro's "Nietzsche and Romanticism," cited above.

[851] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (1971), 7.

were on a diet, for example — that I did not have the desire for dessert. But I might also wish to continue having this desire. (Perhaps I just enjoy dessert!) In both of these cases, my wishes are second-order desires: desires *about* more basic desires.

Let us think back to Sally. While Sally's (unconscious) first order desire before her transformation is to earn a certain grade, the second-order desire which initiates her transformation is a desire *not* to be motivated by grades. This desire, produced in the moment of self-reflection by an interaction between Sally's affective response and particular drives of which she is composed, has transformative force.[852] Thus, this second-order desire might result in the development of a new first-order desire — in her case, a desire to truly *learn* the material she studies. If she were to reflect approvingly on this new desire at a later time, we might say that she has then developed a new second-order desire: a desire to be (or to stay) learning-motivated.

Frankfurt attributes this development of second-order desires to man's capacity for "reflective self-evaluation," and suggests that this capacity for self-evaluation as a "becoming critically aware of [one's] own will"[853] — what Nietzsche might call *Selbstbesinnung* — gives human beings the capacity for freedom of the will (as distinguished from freedom of action). Without committing Nietzsche to Frankfurt's general view, I want to suggest here that what Nietzsche calls the self-transformation of the higher individual is made possible by a reflective self-evaluation of the kind Frankfurt suggests which opens up new possibilities for the will: the formation of a personal

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[852] Here it is important to recall that, for Nietzsche, one's conscious and unconscious desires result from the directedness and strength of one's drives, as well as the force of one's affects. Here, I rely especially on the role that affects have in changing the directions of desires and the potential for a variety of different affects which conscious reflection upon one's desires — and the role such desires play or might play in one's development — makes possible.

[853] Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 12.

narrative (as self-knowledge) and the moment of *Selbstbesinnung.* In this way, the inextricability of the human potentials both for self-knowledge and agency advanced by Frankfurt is prefigured in Nietzsche's concept of self-knowledge both as self-narration and as a necessary condition of self-transformation. Taylor's complementary suggestion (inspired by Frankfurt) that "the capacity for second-order desires, or evaluating desires, is essential to human agency"[854] translates (on my account) to Nietzsche's suggestion that the presentation of a personal narrative to oneself, and the potential for evaluation it makes possible, is a necessary precondition for a kind of agency. In more concrete terms, the ability to form and reflect upon a narrative reveals second-order desires and changes first order desires by exciting or inhibiting certain of one's drives through one's affective responses.

Of course, neither Nietzsche nor Frankfurt would suggest that one's desire to be different than she is or was, expressed through affective means, allows for freedom of action. Furthermore, Nietzsche would likely insist that what Frankfurt calls the self's "second-order desires" — desires to be differently than one is — usually remain unconscious desires, and at bottom are comprised of nothing more than perspectives of certain drives in conflict with the perspectives of other drives. Yet such desires, manifest in affective responses, can still be influential, even potentially steering one towards a conformity between these "second-order" desires with one's current self as a configuration of power-relations (or, as Frankfurt would say, a "conformity of [one's] will to [one's] second-order volitions").[855]

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854 Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 27.
855 Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 15.

Self-narration as a practice of self-knowledge which facilitates a personal transformation is not a guaranteed solution to affective nihilism. Instead, I argue that we must understand it as one potential treatment of the condition which might function to re-engage the affective nihilist with herself and her values, as well as allow her to regain some measure of agency. This is because this account of self-transformation neither requires a conscious choice to change nor brute force of will (both of which might be impossible for the affective nihilist suffering from the ineffectiveness of her drives), yet still enables one to bring about a transformation in the constitution of one's drives — and thus one's affective orientations. As I mentioned above, the overcoming of affective nihilism must involve the exercise of agency as the abilities to have goals, increase one's activity, and play a part in one's own transformation.[856] Self-knowledge as self-narration allow for one to exercise agency through the development of second-order desires with the potential to change one's constitution. These second-order desires orient the individual towards particular goals and prompt the activities of one's drives, all while preserving a role for the individual in her own personal transformation. Insofar as it affords the possibility of reactivating and increasing the end-directed activity of one's drives without the need for brute force of will, self-narration might serve as a treatment for overcoming affective nihilism.[857]

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[856] This is a compatiblist picture, insofar as it finds a role for agential freedom even in a deterministic universe.

[857] It is worth noting, also, that narrative therapy is often successfully used to treat depression. Its success is attributed to the sense of agency one gains simply from recalling a personal narrative in a controlled, therapeutic setting.

4.4.3 The next step: Beyond the lion, the child

The individual able to overcome affective nihilism through the use of personal narrative is the individual who has learned to will again: the individual whose drives are, once again, growing in their characteristic activity. At this stage, one becomes able again to impose one's will on the world through their drives as wills to power. As we saw above, this capacity is characteristic of Zarathustra's leonine individual. Yet there is, of course, a further stage for Nietzsche: the child-like individual. As Gooding-Williams persuasively argues in his interpretation of Zarathustra, this final stage of development, the child-like individual is the individual who recognizes her receptive nature. This child-like individual allows for the free play of value creation which results from the reception of values other than her own (those evaluative orientations, on my interpretation, resulting from the world as wills to power) and bringing her drives to engage with and transform these old evaluative orientations. In this final section, I argue that the practice of forming and reflecting upon a personal narrative also enables one to recognize the importance of an affirmative receptivity for one's own transformation and the creation of new values. Thus self-narration is not only useful as a preliminary treatment for the lack of agency characteristic of affective nihilism; this practice also has the power to enable one the individual's recognition of her receptive nature and her participation in a world of immanent purpose, value, and truth — a world which conditions her transformation and the creation of new values.

Let us recall elements from Nietzsche's personal narrative above. In recounting this narrative, we see the emergence of a pattern. Nietzsche was able to see the truly harmful effects of Christianity because his very early reverence for Christianity allowed

him to observe the psychological effects that a serious belief in Christianity could produce. Schopenhauer became Nietzsche's "first and only educator" because in his youth, Nietzsche was able to recognize something of himself in Schopenhauer and something of his own view in Schopenhauer's pessimism. Nietzsche was able to critique Wagner's music so effectively only because he first felt deeply enamored with Wagnerian music; the same story can be told about his critique of the Romantic sensibility. Nietzsche's personal development involved eventually occupying a critical stance towards these ideas and figures, but his critical observations were as sharp and penetrating as they were because he was in the first case receptive and vulnerable to the influence of these ideas and figures. In essence, Nietzsche was able to create new values from out of the older values represented by Christianity, Schopenhauer, and Wagner because he could acknowledge the way the ideas and principles of these influences permeated his being while also bringing his own drives to bear on them.

In other words, Nietzsche's acknowledgement of his own vulnerability to the above influences and the variety of drives they manifested, coupled with his active engagement with these influences, allowed him not to move on from a purely destructive, leonine stance to a child-like one in which he acknowledged his embeddedness in the world as wills to power as a condition of his transformation and the free play requisite for value creation. Just as the child does in Zarathustra, Nietzsche "acknowledges… his vulnerability… to Dionysian chaos… as a chaos of uncreated, bodily passions."[858] Put more broadly, as the child able to create truly new perspectives and values out of an active spirit, Nietzsche both recognizes the necessary permeability between himself as a

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[858] Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, 175.

driven being and the world of drives with which he is engaged and affirms this, thus occupying a stance of affirmative receptivity which, as we will see, enables him to affirm existence and his world.

Nietzsche speaks explicitly of the critical significance of an affirmative receptivity for knowledge in a number of other noteworthy — and strikingly similar — passages. In *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche claims that "one who really wants to get to know something new (be it a person, an event, a book) does well to entertain it with all possible love."[859] This loving attitude is described here by Nietzsche as an affirmation of the matter beforehand and an hermeneutical openness to what a person, event, or book might disclose.[860] In *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche issues his reader a similar command: "one must learn to love [*Man muss lieben lernen*]."[861] Loving consists, in both of these passages, in adopting an attitude of affirmative receptivity, by which we may coax forth that which we are attempting to understand. To come to know something, "we need to exercise effort and good will in order to endure it in spite of its strangeness; we need patience towards its aspect and expression."[862] The final place where we see this sort of attitude mentioned as an expedient to knowledge is in *Twilight of the Idols.* In this late work, Nietzsche claims that:

> to learn to see — to accustom the eye to composure, to patience, to letting things come to it [*An-sich-herankommen-lassen angewöhnen*]; to put off judgment [*das Urtheil hinausschieben*]… is the first preliminary schooling in spirituality: not to react to a stimulus right away, but to keep in check the instinct to restrict and

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[859] HH I:621.

[860] This characterization of love as "hermeneutical openness" is indebted to Duncan Large and his presentation at the 2014 Meeting of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society in Birmingham, UK.

[861] *GS* 334.

[862] *GS* 334.

> exclude… What is essential [in learning to see] is precisely *not* to "will," to be able to put off a decision [*nicht „wollen", die Entscheidung aussetzen können*].[863]

After one learns to overcome affective nihilism by re-activating one's drives and increasing their characteristic activities, one must learn to exert more control over one's drives — and, in particular, one must learn *not* to will when the situation requires it.

Another way to put the significance of love as affirmative receptivity (especially in light of Chouraqui's account of Nietzschean love as involving the incorporation of one drive by another) is that those who have learned to love — those who have learned to practice an affirmative receptivity to new perspectives, in which one makes a mindful and concentrated effort to charitably and broadly interpret that which one encounters — are those best situated to participate in the active creation of new values. After all, the process of value creation for Nietzsche — as opposed to value destruction — requires one to become intimately acquainted with the perspectives of a new variety of drives. The affirmative receptivity required for value creation and life-affirmation is possible in virtue of the individual value creator's ontological status as a porous subject-unity, but it is distinct from this ontological status.[864]

Without adopting the attitude of receptive affirmation that Nietzsche describes in the above passages, Nietzsche would have been unable to have an authentic engagement with those ideas which changed him most profoundly and led to his own acts of value creation. Without the affirmative attitude which allowed him to adopt a favorable stance and receptivity to the influences of Schopenhauer's works or the climate in Sils-Maria,

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[863] TI, "What the Germans Lack," 6.

[864] We see, then, that openness in Nietzsche will refer both to an ontological feature of driven beings — permeability — and a practice (love as affirmative receptivity/hermeneutical openness) in which some beings engage, while others do not.

Nietzsche might have remained unmoved by them: in the language of *Dawn,* the "polyp-arms of his being" that these influences vitalized might have withered, while others grew.[865] Quite simply, both *what Nietzsche was* and *which values he created* would have been drastically different had he not been receptive to very particular figures, ideas, and places. Put more broadly: while an affirmative, open attitude allows for one to be fed by certain influences, a lack of openness or affirmation blocks this nutriment and thus blocks these potential avenues for growth.[866] These potential avenues for growth in the characteristic activities of the drives are those same avenues required for an expansion of one's affective range and capacities — and, therefore, an expansion of one's evaluative orientations. An attitude of affirmative receptivity that recognizes one's vulnerability to sources of meaning outside of the self is a necessary pre-condition for the authentic and active creation of new values. It is this affirmative receptivity which separates the lion from the child.

Seeing self-knowledge in Nietzsche as narrative construction therefore also allows us to recognize the important role that an openness which makes one vulnerable plays in personal transformation and value creation for Nietzsche. Nietzsche's emphasis on an openness with the potential to transform is crucial and, in a field of Nietzsche scholarship focused on warlike and agonistic attitudes, often overlooked. Indeed, given Nietzsche's role as a relentless critic of society and culture, we might find any emphasis on receptivity or openness in his thought surprising. The open and affirmative attitude that Nietzsche finds so crucial, however, is not an attempt at total objectivity, or

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[865] D 119.

[866] It is worth mentioning that this nurturance which facilitates the growth of something strange shares a comportmental similarity to the ideal egoism mentioned above. Both "learning to love" and practicing an ideal egoism require the self to function as a midwife of knowledge.

"immaculate perception" of phenomena, such that certain perspectives will appear the same to all who remain open to them. Indeed, as Nietzsche notes in *Twilight of the Idols*, his affirmative attitude is "the opposite of a tolerant taste, is… very far from saying Yes indiscriminately."[867] This is because, for Nietzsche, one's constitution at any given time plays a critical role in determining the certain specific ideas, figures, or locations which will move the individual who holds herself open to them. In Nietzschean terms, we must remember that the arrangement of one's particular complex of drives makes one more likely to affirm certain sources and to deny others, even as we realize that practicing an attitude of affirmative openness affords the opportunity to be moved in new directions.

In sum, coming to know oneself by means of constructing a personal narrative demonstrates the significance of openness as affirmative receptivity for self-transformation and value creation. Indeed, Nietzsche's own particular manifestation of self-knowledge as self-narration allows us to see that those moments which offer the most potential for transformation are those moments in which we are most open and vulnerable to that which we are encountering. One's encounters with what one loves "like mother and wet nurse," enables one to "look beyond [and] outgrow" these influences in an authentic and creative way, when it comes time to pass these influences by.[868] Yet it is only by practicing an affirmative openness towards sources of meaning outside of ourselves that we can incorporate the aspects of those sources which seem worth keeping and create new values.

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[867] TI, "What I Owe to the Ancients," 1.
[868] HH I:292.

4.4.4 Self-knowledge, going-under, and overcoming

Nietzsche refers to himself as "the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself."[869] On my account, Nietzsche's practice of formulating and reflecting upon a variety of personal narratives likely served to catalyze his self-transformation and thus played a critical role in enabling him to leave affective nihilism behind and affirm life. Of course, Nietzsche does not explicitly claim that reflection upon one's personal narrative allows one to overcome nihilism as an affective condition. Thus, as mentioned above, we must think of ourselves here not as presenting Nietzsche's own solution to affective nihilism, but as utilizing Nietzschean resources to address a problem which Nietzsche introduces.

Although Nietzsche does not explicitly claim that self-narration plays a role in the overcoming of nihilism, he does remark to his reader that self-knowledge plays a crucial role in moving ahead and beyond a culture plagued by nihilism. In *Human, All Too Human,* Nietzsche suggests that "When your sight has become good enough to see the bottom in the dark well of your being and knowing, perhaps you will also behold in its mirror the distant constellations of future cultures."[870] By recognizing the conditions of one's own positive development, one might also become acquainted with the conditions for developing and moving-forward one's culture.

We see just how easy it is to miss out on this connection between self-knowledge and the transformation of oneself and one's culture when we look back to a potentially damning excerpt from *Ecce Homo,* in which Nietzsche claims that "to become what one

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[869] WP, Preface, 3.
[870] *HH* I:292

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is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is."[871] In this passage, Nietzsche notes

that becoming what one is often requires an ideal selfishness and self-preservation. In

situations where coming to know oneself might lead to one's demise or destruction, one

ought to "forget oneself, misunderstand oneself, [and] make oneself smaller, narrower,

mediocre."[872] After all, Nietzsche calls the injunction "*nosce te ipsum* [know thyself]" a

"recipe for ruin."[873] What some readers might miss is the specificity of the context in

which the above course of action is recommended. Self-preservation of the kind

described above is for those who cannot follow "the recipe for ruin" — more helpfully

translated as "the recipe for going-under [*das Recept zum Untergang*]." If one is not

prepared to embark on such a journey to know oneself, one should forget or

misunderstand oneself in the interest of self-preservation. The reasons for this self-

preservation may vary, but in this specific case Nietzsche is describing an early stage in

the development of an individual whose highest task is greater than she can imagine.

Since an awareness of the individual's task could destroy her if it is premature, her

ignorance is of practical benefit.

There comes a time, however, when all higher individuals who will be

transformed by their task and bring their task to fruition *must* go under. This familiar

notion from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* presents going-under [*untergehen*] as a critical stage

in Zarathustra's *Bildung*. Zarathustra emphasizes this when he declares "I love those who

go under with my entire love: they are those who will go beyond."[874] Only those who "go

under" have the potential to go over. In other words, one may transform oneself and

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[871] TI, "Clever," 9.
[872] Ibid.
[873] Ibid.
[874] TSZ III, "Tables," 6.

culture in one's unique way *only after* one comes to know oneself. Nowhere does Nietzsche state this connection as clearly as in the excerpt from *Human, All Too Human* already mentioned above, where he claims that one must come to know oneself before one can behold in oneself and one's own transformation the "distant constellations of future cultures."[875] In order to transform culture, then, one must first be transformed and prepared for that task which is uniquely one's own. This requires self-knowledge as reflection upon one's personal narrative. One's self-transformation may lead to a cultural transformation, but this process importantly begins with self-knowledge as a kind of going-under on the behalf of the individual.

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[875] HH 1: 292.

Conclusion

"We must think differently so that—perhaps very late in the day—we may achieve something more: to feel differently." Nietzsche, *Dawn*, 103

In the first and second chapters of this project, I hope to have offered a sufficiently detailed and nuanced account of Nietzsche's interpretation of the problem of nihilism, both as a cognitive phenomenon involving a set of beliefs about one's world (as "European nihilism") and as a feeling-based phenomenon (as "affective nihilism). In the third chapter, in order to show how Nietzsche's drive ontology enables his reader to re-think purpose, truth, and value in a life-affirming and non-nihilistic way, I offer an extended interpretation of Nietzsche's metaphysics. This interpretation is informed both by the metaphysical pictures he rejects and his positive descriptions of the world.

It is in the fourth and last chapter, however, that I begin to suggest ways in which Nietzschean nihilism might be overcome. In this chapter, I argue that the European nihilist can think truth, purpose, and value in new and life-affirming ways by coming to understand Nietzsche's account of the drives — as wills to power with affective, and therefore evaluative, orientations — and by applying this account not only to human life, but to non-human life and the inorganic world (as Nietzsche intended). In this way, I look to Nietzsche's drive ontology as a resource for overcoming European nihilism, while acknowledging that Nietzsche did not necessarily intend it for this use. This overcoming of European nihilism requires one to think differently about truth, purpose, and value as sources of meaning and about the world as a meaningful world in which one participates.

In the final sections of the fourth and final chapter, I aim to find resources in Nietzsche's thought for overcoming affective nihilism. Since affective nihilism is a psycho-physiological condition — consisting in a weakness of the will and a disruption

of one's end-directedness and engagement in the world — this is a particularly difficult problem to overcome. Yet in Nietzsche's own practices and recommendations as "the first perfect nihilist of Europe who… has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself," we find one potential treatment: the development of, and reflection upon, a personal narrative.[876] Self-knowledge as self-narration not only offers the potential for personal transformation; it also enables one to recognize the importance of an attitude of openness — or affirmative receptivity — for the authentic creation of new values. Although Nietzsche does not explicitly say that self-narration can be used to overcome nihilism as a feeling-based phenomenon, and although there could be no guarantee that this treatment would work for each individual nihilist, the transformative power of self-narration offers one a potential means to "feel differently" about oneself and about the world to which one belongs.

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[876] WP, "Preface."

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