

# Unity in Strife: Nietzsche, Heraclitus and Schopenhauer

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## Introduction

At first sight, it seems perfectly natural to associate love with unification and, conversely, strife with disunification. Perhaps epitomizing this tendency, Empedocles tells us that ‘... things never cease their continual exchange, now through Love all coming together into one, now again each carried apart by the hatred of Strife’ (quoted in Kirk et al. 1983: 287). Against this popular intuition, however, the general aim of this chapter is to illustrate how unity can in fact supervene on conflictual relations. I demonstrate how unity and conflict can both be predicated to a given state of affairs without necessarily generating any contradiction. In order to do so, I invoke Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Heraclitus. More specifically, I examine how the form of conflictual unity that Nietzsche endorses as symptomatic of health both converges with, and diverges from, the conceptions of conflictual unity that he locates in Heraclitus and Schopenhauer.

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (hereafter PTG), Nietzsche claims that in every philosophy we encounter a peculiar ‘metaphysical conviction’ (*metaphysischer Glaubenssatz*), ‘together with ever-renewed attempts to give better expression to this conviction: the proposition that “all things are one”’ (PTG 3, KSA 1.813).<sup>1</sup> Congruent with this characterization of philosophy, the notion of universal unity is given a fundamental role within Nietzsche’s readings of both Heraclitus and Schopenhauer. In the case of Heraclitus, Nietzsche frames universal unity as essential to his conceptions of fire and *logos*; in the case of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche figures such unity as integral to his notion of the world as will. Moreover, Nietzsche construes both thinkers as having given conflict a universal extension. In the first two sections of this chapter, I will therefore contend that Heraclitus and Schopenhauer develop universal theories of conflictual unity – that is, theories according to which *all* phenomena (from the organic to the inorganic) are constituted through relations that are at once conflictual and unificatory. I contend that while Nietzsche appropriates certain aspects of these theories, he largely rejects them on the grounds that they misconceive of conflictual unity as metaphysically guaranteed.

While various commentators have scrutinized Nietzsche's repudiation of Schopenhauer, there has as of yet been no comparative analysis of the notions of unity developed by the two thinkers. Existing studies tend to focus on Nietzsche's rejection of the metaphysical unity, or simplicity, of the will in Schopenhauer.<sup>2</sup> But this has meant that the affinities between their thoughts on unity have gone largely unexamined. Conversely, with respect to the critical literature on Nietzsche and Heraclitus, it is far more common to focus on the convergence of the two thinkers – particularly the way in which Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus prefigures his perspectival epistemology and his rejection of substance-based ontologies in favour of an affirmation of becoming.<sup>3</sup> In attempting to foreground the differences between the two, I therefore continue the effort to construct a more balanced picture of Nietzsche's philosophical debt to Heraclitus.<sup>4</sup>

In Section I, I reconstruct Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus as it stands in his early treatise PTG (1873) and his lectures on the philosopher in *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* (*Die Vorplatonischen Philosophen*, KGW II/4.209–362; hereafter VPP) (1872–6). I contend that on Nietzsche's interpretation a form of conflictual unity resembling the ancient Greek agon is metaphysically guaranteed for Heraclitus – namely, in his account of objects (including the universe taken as a whole) as being constituted through an internal struggle of opposed properties. Section II then turns to Schopenhauer, arguing that, like Heraclitus, his description of the metaphysical unity of both the will and the Platonic Ideas also metaphysically guarantees a form of conflictual unity. However, unlike Heraclitus, this unity bears less similarity to the agon, having more in common with the struggle taking place within functional hierarchies (e.g. a military corps). This subspecies of conflictual unity can then be found both (a) universally, at the level of nature in toto, and (b) locally, at the level of individual organisms. I explicate in the final section how Nietzsche deflates the Schopenhauerian–Heraclitean idea of the universe as an ordered conflictual unity along with, moreover, Heraclitus' thesis that agonistic relations universally inhere. I conclude that he denies metaphysical guarantors of conflictual unity, seeking to reconceive it as a contingent and hard-won phenomenon.

## I Heraclitus and the unity of fire and the *logos*

Two of the most fundamental ways in which existence is conceived as unified for Nietzsche's Heraclitus is under the notions of 'fire' (*pyr*) and '*logos*': '[...] the *logos* in things is just that One, the fire. Therefore the *one* universal Becoming [*Werdende*] is itself the law [*Gesetz*]' (VPP, KGW II/4.270).<sup>5</sup> But what do fire and *logos* signify? And how is existence unified under these two concepts? Let us first consider the meaning of the former.

Nietzsche opens both VPP and PTG by underscoring the novelty of Heraclitus' conviction that all things exist in a state of flux or becoming (*Werden*), and his corresponding renunciation of the belief (which has dominated the history of Western philosophy according to Nietzsche) that there is an unchanging and ontologically foundational substratum out of which existence is composed. But what exactly is it that

becomes? The answer to this is not matter, as we might expect a traditional substance ontology to posit; rather, Heraclitus inverts Thales' claim that 'everything is water', suggesting instead that everything is *fire*. Fragment 37, which Nietzsche himself cites in VPP, sheds some light upon this hermetic thesis:

The ordering (*kosmos*), the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire ever living, kindled in measures and in measures going out. (Kahn 1979: 45)<sup>6</sup>

Nietzsche takes Heraclitus to be stating that everything in existence is quite literally reducible to different states of fire or degrees of warmth (with earth and water being cooler, and air being warmer, than fire). This elemental fire is constantly moving between these different states as it 'kindles' or 'goes out' ('sich entzündend nach Maßen und verlöschend nach Maßen', in Nietzsche's own words).<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, reality is described as fire insofar as it shares characteristics with the everyday kind of fire that accompanies combustion. Just as fire is constituted through the two opposed processes of kindling and extinguishing (as parts of a fire are always igniting, while others are dying out), all entities must come into existence and subsequently die away: 'The eternally living fire, the *aión*, plays, builds and destroys' these entities (VPP, KGW II/4.278).<sup>8</sup> In this way, his conception of the world *qua* fire describes reality as intrinsically processual, protean and marked by transience. But rather than taking the relation Heraclitus indexes between fire and existence to be of a metonymic-symbolic sort, Nietzsche reads him as citing these shared characteristics in order to demonstrate a relation of *equation*: reality *is* fire.<sup>9</sup> It is in this sense that all aspects of reality are unified as 'one' (*Eins*). The philosophical consequence of this is crucial to understanding the import of Heraclitus' philosophy for Nietzsche: the claim that fire *qua* becoming exhaustively describes existence reneges upon the dualistic *Weltanschauungen* proffered by Parmenides or Anaximander, which posit the existence of a static world of being existing behind or beyond the world of becoming in which we live. *Everything* is becoming for Heraclitus.

Bracketing out the question of how the illusion of static being arises according to Heraclitus (since this would lead us too far astray from the task at hand), we should return to the opening quote of this section: 'the logos in things is just that One, the fire'. What does it mean for the cosmic fire to be coextensive with what Heraclitus calls the *logos*? What Nietzsche lauds as Heraclitus' tremendous conception of unity ('ungeheure Einheitsvorstellung') is not first and foremost his conception of the world as fire or becoming, but 'the unitary lawfulness of the world' ('die einheitliche Gesetzmäßigkeit der Welt') (VPP, KGW II/4.267) – what we might otherwise call the *logos* of existence. But what kind of lawfulness is it that unites the world *qua* fire? In short, the *logos* signifies the rational order governing the activity of fire, and in both VPP and PTG, this lawfulness is interpreted by Nietzsche as something akin to natural-scientific law.<sup>10</sup> Rather than being imposed from an external locus of transcendence (e.g. God), this law is described (in the plural) as the '*immanent laws*' in accordance with which all occurrences proceed ('nach [...] dem Kampfe *immanenten* Gesetzen'; emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> However, while this law is immanent to the universal flux of becoming, it is not itself subject to the change and fluctuation over which it legislates. In PTG,

Nietzsche thus speaks of 'eternal, unwritten laws' (*ewige ungeschriebene Gesetzen*).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, picking up on this aspect of Heraclitus' thought, some classical scholars maintain that, far from exclusively propounding universal flux or becoming, there is a strong essentialist vein running through his thought.<sup>13</sup>

So far two forms of unity have been identified in Nietzsche's account of Heraclitus: (1) the underlying unity, or homogeneity, of the fundamental element of the universe – namely, fire; and (2) the unity of the world under the cosmic law enacted by the *logos*. These unities are pervasive: *all* things are fire, and *all* things obey the single same inexorable law. How, though, does conflict play an integral role in these unified conceptions of existence? Based on the preceding analysis, it might seem as though these conceptions of unity are monistic in a way that negates the possibility of real difference, opposition and conflict. Such a conclusion, however, would be premature.

### 1.1 Bellicose harmony

Close examination reveals that the conception of lawfulness operating in Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus is inextricably bound up with another concept – namely, justice (*dikē*). Nietzsche quotes Heraclitus as stating that 'were there no law, one would not know the name of *dikē*' (VPP, KGW II/4.271).<sup>14</sup> The law or *logos* gives us the heuristic key needed to comprehend justice. The centrality of justice within Nietzsche's reading is indicated by the fact that he calls it the 'second major concept' (*zweite Hauptbegriff*) of Heraclitus' thought (after that of becoming). The connection of the *logos* and justice is straightforward: since the universe is pervasively law-governed, existence within that universe is inherently just (i.e. proceeds in accordance with the law). The counterposition is Anaximander's (and Schopenhauer's) pessimistic interpretation of life as both penance and evidence of our having committed some injustice (*adikia*). *Ex hypothesi*, these points are proven by the painful fact that we are forced to live in the stream of becoming that condemns us to death. Within the Heraclitean realm of natural law, however, it makes no sense to talk of guilt, deserts or punishment. Moral interpretations of life overlook the absolute order of existence.

But where does conflict come into this picture of a universe united under the jurisdiction of the *logos*? In order to address this question, it behoves us to take a closer look at the concept of justice. This will lead us to yet another conceptual elision made by Nietzsche's Heraclitus – namely, that of justice with war (*polemos*), the 'third principle concept' (*dritte Hauptbegriff*) in Heraclitus' thought. Nietzsche, paraphrasing Fragment 82, depicts Heraclitus' position as follows: '[...] one must know that war [*Krieg*] is common to all [*gemeinschaftlich*] and *dikē* is strife [*Streit*] and that everything occurs in accordance with strife' (VPP, KGW II/4.272).<sup>15</sup>

There are two main theses in this citation: (1) war is universal (common to all things) and (2) war is justice. These two claims directly associate conflict with the two forms of unity expounded in Section I: First, the unity of the world *qua* fire, which now appears to be a process of war, and second, the unity of the world under the just order of the *logos*, which is now represented as ensuring and governing the universal strife of fire (though we must remember that this 'governance' is strictly immanent to the strife and not enacted from a position above or outside said strife).

In order to unpack how Nietzsche's Heraclitus justifies these *prima facie* unorthodox theses, let us begin by considering the argument for the universality of war. This is perhaps best elucidated through the Heraclitean notion of *harmony*, specifically as it is outlined in Fragment 75 (again a fragment to which Nietzsche himself directly refers):

The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes the finest attunement (*harmonia*), and all things come to pass through conflict. (Kahn 1979: 63)<sup>16</sup>

This idea of harmony as a product of oppositional attunement construes the cosmos as a multitude of dichotomous antagonisms. The primary two metonyms Heraclitus employs to illustrate this are the two defining instruments of Apollo: the archer's bow and the lyre.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, the two ends of a bow, in their opposition to one another, generate a productive tension – one that allows for the loosing of arrows, while the other enables the playing of music.

But the opposition that most interests Nietzsche's Heraclitus is that which inheres between contradictory qualities. For example, being alive or dead, and awake or asleep are opposed qualities that Heraclitus holds to be contained within every individual at all times. A very sick person, for example, though alive, expresses more of the quality of being dead; and a person sleeping lightly, though asleep, expresses more of the quality of being awake. These examples illustrate the struggle that Heraclitus, according to Nietzsche, envisages covertly taking place within all objects. For example, says Nietzsche, even 'honey is simultaneously bitter [and] sweet'; and the world itself, moving from day to night, from light to dark, coming into being and disappearing, dying and decaying, is a 'mixing-jug' (*Mischkrug*) of opposed qualities (VPP, KGW II/4.273; cf. PTG 5, KSA 1.825).<sup>18</sup>

Nietzsche employs the image of a pair of wrestlers to illustrate how these opposed predicates then eternally struggle with one another for expression. On this theory, every quality that we could possibly predicate to an object or state of affairs is in contest with an opposite quality that lies hidden, in *potentia*, within that object or state of affairs. Crucially, no conclusive victory or reconciliation is ever attainable.<sup>19</sup> Objects are characterized by, and even constituted through, this eternal struggle. Even existence as a whole – *qua* fire, in which the qualities of kindling and going out constantly pull against one another – embodies this enduring dynamic. Indeed, Nietzsche's Heraclitus conceives of existence as an all-pervading harmony of antagonistic opposites. If we think of war as a synonym for antagonism, it becomes clear why Heraclitus grants war a universal status.

The process presided over by both the universal *logos* and *dikē* is precisely this strife of opposites, upon which the existence of all objects supervenes. Heraclitus' equation of justice and conflict ('*dikē* [is] strife') is misleading, then; rather, conflict is necessarily just, and justice only manifests itself immanently within and through this universal conflict.

It is imperative that we observe that the cosmic war unveiled by Heraclitus is not the mutually destructive form of war that Nietzsche rebukes in HC, that is, the 'struggle of annihilation' or *Vernichtungskampf*. It is rather a productive mode of struggle taking

place in accordance with immanent laws. As such, Nietzsche views it as analogous to the form of conflict found in the ancient Greek agon or *Wettkampf*:

It is a wonderful idea, welling up from the purest springs of Hellenism, the idea that strife embodies the everlasting sovereignty of strict justice, bound to everlasting laws. [...] [I]t is the contest-idea [*Wettkampfgedanke*] of the Greek individual and the Greek state, taken from the gymnasium and the palaestra, from the artist's agon, from the contest between political parties and between cities – all transferred into the most universal realm [*in's Allgemeinste übertragen*] so that now the wheels of the cosmos turn on it. Just as the Greek individual fought as though he alone were right and an infinitely sure measure of judicial opinion were determining the trend of victory at any given moment, so the qualities wrestle with one another, in accordance with inviolable laws and standards that are immanent in the struggle. (PTG 5, KSA 1.825)

But what kind of unity is it that unites both the cosmos and each of the objects contained therein? If Nietzsche understands this cosmic, metaphysical unity as being analogous to the unity born out of the ancient Greek agon, we should briefly examine the latter in order to shed light on the former. Following Burckhardt, then, Nietzsche views the Greek contest as a means to uniting competing parties. He directly refers to the 'unity of the Greeks in the norms of the contest' (NL 1871 16[22], KSA 7.402).<sup>20</sup> As Burckhardt observes, the pan-Hellenic games brought ordinarily warring *poleis* together, giving them a neutral locus in which to peacefully mingle and thereby discover their shared Hellenic identity. This cohesive activity took the form of participating in, or spectating, non-mortal forms of contest, such as boxing, chariot racing and dramaturgy.<sup>21</sup> This unity, however, was conditioned by the *measure* – that is, moderation or restraint – inherent to the contests. The gathered parties did not seek to annihilate one another and all equally obeyed shared rules ('the norms of the contest').<sup>22</sup> In the absence of such restraint, there would simply be fractious tribes engaged in murderous conflicts. The agon allowed a transformation of fractious war into socially cohesive competition. Nietzsche also underscores the fact that these moderating norms were neither generated nor imposed from a position external to the contest; instead, he conceives of them as immanent to the agonistic contest itself:

[...] in a natural order of things, there are always *several* geniuses to incite each other to action, just as they keep each other within certain limits, too. That is the kernel of the Hellenic idea of competition [*Wettkampf-Vorstellung*]: it loathes a monopoly of predominance and fears the dangers of this, it desires, as *protective measure* against genius – a second genius. (HC, KSA 1.789)

The ideal is a situation in which the strongest powers ('geniuses') mutually balance and restrain one another. This forecloses the absolute or enduring predominance of one party and maintains dynamic plurality. Note that, congruent with his reading of Heraclitus, Nietzsche thinks that for the Greeks, this mutual limitation represents the 'natural order of things'. It was then in order to prevent the perversion of this natural order, says Nietzsche, that the Greeks instituted the practice of ostracism, which expelled excessively dominant competitors from the field of contest. The strength

and unity of the Greeks was premised on the agonistic 'play of forces' (*Wettspiel der Kräfte*) (ibid.) thereby maintained.

With his transformation of this dynamic into a cosmological principle, Nietzsche's Heraclitus universalizes agonistic unity – that is, the immanently lawful, and thereby productive, conflict of opposites. This makes it clear why this account of unity is for the most part *descriptive* – he is not prescribing that we foster the unity of ourselves or our communities, he is rather encouraging us to remark the pre-extant harmony inhering within the cosmos and the totality of objects contained therein. Agonistic unity is already omnipresent. As such, on Nietzsche's reading, there is no normative aspect to Heraclitus' treatment of unity.<sup>23</sup>

One might object that the qualities at variance with one another in Heraclitus' model can be conceived as permanent, atomistic or even substantial and, as such, are not themselves defined by the aforementioned agonistic dynamism. However, Nietzsche offhandedly rejects this conclusion as sophistic, rejoining (somewhat unsatisfyingly) that Heraclitus' meaning simply cannot be deduced with 'dialectical detective work [*Spürsinn*]', it being an 'unexpected cosmic metaphor' (PTG 6, KSA 1.828). Setting our logical demands aside, however, we can begin to see that the unity of fire and law (i.e. the *logos* or *dikē*) are inextricable from conflict, multiplicity and heterogeneity. It is in this sense that Heraclitus claims that 'the many is the one':

All qualities of things, all laws, all coming into being [*Entstehen*] and passing away [*Vergehen*] is a continuous manifestation of the One in existence: for Heraclitus, multiplicity is vestment, the form of appearance [*Erscheinungsform*] of the One, and in no way a deception [*Täuschung*]: the One does not appear in any other way. (VPP, KGW II/4.270–1)<sup>24</sup>

The reading of Heraclitus that we find in PTG and VPP does not present us with a monistic or substantial conception of unity. Multiplicity is *not* a deception beneath which there lies a singular, simple and static true reality (as Parmenides is wont to claim). Oneness and multiplicity are ontologically interdependent insofar as without multiplicity and conflict, neither fire nor the *logos* have any concrete reality, and vice versa. From a Heraclitean perspective, reality can be viewed both synthetically and analytically, with neither viewpoint enjoying ontological priority over its counterpart. As we will see presently, neither the cosmic fire nor the *logos* are comparable to Schopenhauer's will, which, while needing the realm of representation and individuation to appear, is ontologically prior to appearance (i.e. subsists without it). Heraclitus' conflictual unities have more in common with scientific laws, which would be void not just of appearance, but also of sense and existence without a world of multiplicity and change in which to realize themselves.

## II Schopenhauer

At the end of §5 of PTG, Nietzsche invokes Schopenhauer's picture of the world as a universal yet law-governed struggle in an effort to demonstrate just how up-to-date



Heraclitus' worldview has remained. For Nietzsche, it is only the pessimistic undertone ('Grundton') of Schopenhauer's *Weltanschauung* that distinguishes it from that of Heraclitus. To be sure, in contrast to Schopenhauer, Heraclitus openly affirms the world as universal conflict. Yet as I will now bring into relief, the difference between the two thinkers runs deeper than Nietzsche acknowledges in PTG.

## II.1 Unity in Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will

In the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer claims that we have experiential access to one object *in itself* – that is, how that object exists beyond all appearance. This object is our own body. We experience our body not just as one mere object or phenomenon among others, but also from the inside, so to speak, as an indivisible striving, or willing. Schopenhauer submits that this gives us an insight into the interior, noumenal aspect of all other objects; thus, Schopenhauer concludes that all things in themselves are likewise defined by this indivisible striving.<sup>25</sup>

Within Schopenhauer's quasi-Kantian metaphysics, space and time represent conditions of plurality. As opposed to being properties of the world in itself, he conceives of space and time as a structural framework that we project into the noumenal world as will, thereby transforming it into the world as representation. Consequently, the world in itself, being outside of space and time, is 'free of all *multiplicity*, notwithstanding its innumerable appearances in time and space. It is itself one [...]': (Schopenhauer 2011: 138). Schopenhauer distinguishes this form of unity from the unity of a concept – which is formed by abstracting from an ontologically prior plurality of particulars – or the unity of an individual object, which exists in space and time and 'is known in contrast to a possible multiplicity' (ibid.). In contrast to these species of unity, all things-in-themselves are *numerically* identical to one another and their unity is ontologically prior to all plurality. Strictly speaking, we cannot speak of *things* in themselves in the plural since there is only *one* thing in itself: the world as will. Schopenhauer uses the simile of the magic lantern to illuminate the relation of plurality and unity informing his dualistic conception of the world (i.e. as will and representation):

Just as a magic lantern exhibits many different images while one and the same flame makes them all visible, so too in all the diversity of appearances that fill the world alongside each other, or (as events) follow each other and push each other out of the way, there is just *the one* will that appears; everything is its manifestation, its objecthood, and it remains unmoved in the midst of that change: it alone is the thing in itself [...]. (Schopenhauer 2011: 178)

In contrast to Heraclitus' *logos*, the Schopenhauerian will can subsist in simple, non-composite unity with itself – that is to say, in complete independence from the sphere of multiplicity and representation. Indeed, the world as representation only appears with the emergence of the human intellect (Schopenhauer 2011: 52–3).

Nevertheless, we should not be drawn into reading this simplicity of the will as tranquillity. Georg Simmel points out how Schopenhauer's conception of the



metaphysical unity of the will is 'fully opposed' (*völlig entgegengesetzt*) to any vision of nature as halcyonic harmony. It follows from the unity that Schopenhauer predicates to the world in itself

[...] that the will, which moves, or more correctly speaking, constitutes, the world from within, that this will has no definitive end [*Ziel*] and is at no point able to attain real satisfaction. The will, because it is the absolute One [*das Eine*], has nothing outside of itself with which it could quench its thirst, with which it could bring an end to its unrest. (Simmel 1907: 58–9)

Since the world-will is understood in terms of pure striving, but can only strive against itself, it is condemned to self-division (*Selbst-Entzweiung*) and self-laceration (*Selbst-Zerfleischung*). Schopenhauer's pessimistic and hydra-like vision of existence consuming itself is, according to Simmel, entailed by the fact that the world as will is (a) substantially unified, and (b) willing or striving. As Schopenhauer himself puts it: 'the will needs to live off itself because there is nothing outside of it and it is a hungry will. Thus, pursuit, anxiety and suffering' (Schopenhauer 2011: 179).<sup>26</sup>

A similar notion of unity can be attributed to Schopenhauer's quasi-Platonic conception of 'Ideas' within his system. These represent an intermediary between the absolute unity of the world as will, and the plurality of the world as representation. Like Plato, Schopenhauer holds that for all the individuals of a given species of phenomena (i.e. for every natural kind), there exists a timeless prototype from which all individual instantiations of that species are copied. The unity of these forms, like that of the will, is not generated by abstracting from a plurality of particular objects or instances, as is the case with concept formation. On the contrary, the individually unified forms are the very source of all objectivity, and are consequently ontologically prior to all such objectivity. The unity of the forms is therefore said to exhibit a *unitas 'ante rem'* ('before the fact') in contrast to the *unitas 'post rem'* ('after the fact') of concepts (Schopenhauer 2011: 261).

The more complex the species, the higher the Idea, or as Schopenhauer expresses it, the higher the degree of objectification of the will. The lowest degrees are forces, the highest degree is the human being. There is a plethora of Ideas according to Schopenhauer; yet, like the world as will, these exist outside of space, time and all plurality.<sup>27</sup> Both the Platonic Ideas and the will therefore exhibit a substantial form of unity that exists *beyond* and *before* all relationality.

These ideas are described as being engaged in a ferocious and unrelenting struggle at the level of representation. First, they must vie with one another over matter, which they require in order to become manifest phenomena. This issues in what Schopenhauer calls 'universal conflict'. What is particularly pertinent with respect to our current study is that Nietzsche quotes Schopenhauer's poetically brutal description of this conflict in order to illustrate the proximity of the Heraclitean and Schopenhauerian worldviews:

The underlying, persisting matter must constantly change form as mechanical, physical, chemical and organic appearances, following the guiding thread of causality, all crowd around, greedy to emerge and tear the matter away from

the others so they can each reveal their own Idea. This conflict can be traced through the whole of nature, indeed nature exists only through this conflict [...]. (Schopenhauer 2011: 171–2; see also PTG 5, KSA 1.826)

Within the animal kingdom, the battle of the Ideas is most clearly played out in the struggle for survival as individuals vie over nutrition. But for Schopenhauer, this battle for matter even takes place in the inorganic domain insofar as forces are always opposed when acting on matter (Schopenhauer 2011: 168). As Nietzsche remarks, the pessimistic thrust of Schopenhauer's whole philosophy ultimately springs from this vision of existence 'as a thoroughly frightful and by no means blessed phenomenon' (PTG 5, KSA 1.826). It is for these reasons that Schopenhauer places such high value on the denial of the will to life and the halting of the cycle of destructive desire that underpins this will – in other words, on *quietism*.

But, notwithstanding this difference, does this quote soundly demonstrate the proximity of Schopenhauer and Heraclitus? Certainly, like Heraclitus, Schopenhauer describes the world in which we live (*viz.* that of representation) as an eternal conflict taking place in accordance with inexorable laws (*viz.* the principle of sufficient reason). But, whereas Heraclitus conceives of universal conflict as a largely hidden process (*i.e.* of opposed qualities struggling to express themselves in objects), for Schopenhauer, it is readily observable in the natural world. Furthermore, the universal notions of unity elaborated by Heraclitus (*i.e.* fire and the *logos*) were seen to exist only *through* conflictual multiplicity, whereas for Schopenhauer the unity of the will and the Ideas were found to subsist in complete independence of such multiplicity.

## II.2 Purposiveness and conflictual unity

We have now exposed how the concept of unity plays a fundamental part in Schopenhauer's metaphysics; but it remains to be seen precisely how this unity is *conflictual* in kind: the metaphysically unified will and its degrees of objectification (the Ideas) appear to lack the internal plurality that would be necessary for them to be considered conflictual in any conventional sense of the word. So what form does conflictual unity take in Schopenhauer's thought?

We discover Schopenhauer's unique conception of conflictual unity in his analysis of what he calls inner and outer purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). Contrary to appearance, Schopenhauer does not think that the aforementioned conflict of Ideas at the level of representation means that we live in a disintegrated chaos. Universal struggle is, for Schopenhauer, the matrix out of which ever higher Ideas enter the world of representation – a process culminating in man, the 'clearest and most perfect objectivation' (Schopenhauer 2011: 178). For man to come into being, however, all of the lower grades – including all the animals, plants and inorganic forms – need to be realized, since the emergence of man demands a ready-made world furnished with the materials requisite for his survival. As such, all the Ideas 'supplement one another for the complete objectification of the will' (*ibid.*). The Ideas form a pyramidal hierarchy, with man at its peak, says Schopenhauer. All appearing forms appear strikingly

integrated, all fitting together for the attainment of this end. To express this thought, Schopenhauer talks of an *outer* purposiveness among nature's phenomena.

According to Schopenhauer, outer purposiveness is found in the coordination of all the various types of phenomena in such a way as to allow the whole of nature to function as a cohesive whole. The global food web could be taken as a case in hand – almost all flora and fauna supporting one another in a vital symbiosis, even as they struggle to consume one another, with animals at the 'top' of the web dying and re-entering at the bottom in providing nutrients for microbes. It is vital to note that this outer purposiveness – as a form of unity arising out of an antagonism internal to the system – emerges because phenomena must reflect or embody the unity of the will, which is defined by an inner antagonism (a 'primordial schism [*Zwiespalt*]') (Schopenhauer 2011: 359–60). Like Heraclitus, Schopenhauer compares this state of coherence in dissonance to that arising between the various elements which together compose a musical harmony (Schopenhauer 2011: 178).

The outer purposiveness of nature as a whole is then to be distinguished from inner purposiveness, which is expressed *within* individual organic entities as 'an agreement between all the parts of an individual organism which are arranged so that the maintenance of the organism itself as well as its genus results, and thus presents itself as the goal of the arrangement' (Schopenhauer 2011: 179). Just as outer purposiveness is formed from the conflict *between* individuals, so inner purposiveness emerges from the conflict of the parts *within* individuals. Like outer conflict, this conflict between parts allows for the realization of new Ideas. Higher Ideas only emerge and prevail in the struggle by pressing the lower Ideas of which they consist into the service of their higher aim. As such, a 'more perfect Idea will result from such a victory over several lower Ideas or objectivations of the will; and by absorbing an analogue of higher power from each of the Ideas it overpowers, it will gain an entirely new character' (Schopenhauer 2011: 170). In the case of an organism, Schopenhauer gives the example of the digestive organs competing against the rest of the body for energy. It is the ability of the body to contain these various conflicts and subordinate them to the higher purpose of the individual that makes it a functioning organism. It is the resultant inner hierarchy that gives rise to the feeling of health. Just as outer purposiveness was a reflection of the metaphysical unity of the will, so Schopenhauer thinks that the inner purposiveness of any organism reflects the unity of its Idea.

For Schopenhauer and Heraclitus alike, then, unity and conflict are very much compatible and their combination serves a fundamental ontological function. Indeed, we have also established that Nietzsche is correct to associate Heraclitus and Schopenhauer insofar as they both propound a theory of universal conflict. That said, there are distinct discrepancies between their descriptions (and not just their evaluations) of this conflict. For Nietzsche's Heraclitus, the unity of both existence as a whole and individual objects is an agonistic one, in which subordinated qualities are not pressed into the service of the victorious qualities, but are merely suppressed until they eventually secure a new victory and thereby attain expression. Hot water will eventually turn cold and sweet honey will spoil and taste bitter, but in their

subordination, neither the coldness nor the bitterness serves the ascendant qualities, just as defeated athletes and artists do not serve the victors of an agonistic contest. This can be distinguished from Schopenhauer's notion of conflictual unity, since purposiveness is a functional form of unity: subordinated Ideas serve the ends of victorious Ideas.

One also finds a notable point of divergence from Heraclitus in Schopenhauer's substantial conceptions of unity *ante rem* – that is, in his figurations of the will and the Ideas. These are simple and preclude plurality for Schopenhauer, whereas for Heraclitus oneness and plurality are ontologically interdependent categories (i.e. there is no Parmenidean simple or non-composite unity). This point of divergence is tied up with the fact that, whereas Heraclitus is a thoroughgoing monist, for whom the whole of existence is immanent to the world of becoming, Schopenhauer is an archetypal dualist, for whom transcendent, simple and unchanging unities are not only a possibility, but an ontological necessity.

In spite of these disparities, Schopenhauer and Heraclitus similarly agree that the unity of appearing objects is metaphysically underwritten by a deeper metaphysical form of unity. The conflictual unities that make up nature as a whole, and the individual organisms that it contains, have their constitutive ground in the metaphysical unity of the will and its Ideas. They must simultaneously embody both the oneness and the internal discord of the will and its Ideas, and thence arises their peculiar conflictual unity. Schopenhauer's Ideas further guarantee the future emergence of particular (conflictually unified) species; as a result, thanks to the Idea of man, conflictually unified humans will necessarily always arise without any concerted effort on the part of the humans themselves. Just like the *logos* and *dikē* in Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus, the one key effect of the will and its Ideas is therefore that it metaphysically guarantees the conflictual unity of both nature as a whole, and the objects therein. As with Heraclitus, we see that his philosophical thoughts concerning conflictual unity are therefore primarily *descriptive* since he does not need to teach people how to forge conflictual unities: conflictual unity is always bound to be realized due to the internal metaphysical structure of existence.

### III Nietzsche

Though Nietzsche understands conflict as omnipresent just like Schopenhauer and Heraclitus, his thoughts concerning unity have a far stronger *normative* dimension. For Nietzsche, the vibrant conflictual unity of human beings (at both a social and individual level) is contingent upon human effort, and is by no means metaphysically guaranteed. However, a precondition of this philosophical project is that he rejects the idea that we identified in Heraclitus and Schopenhauer that unity is in any way metaphysically pre-given. I will now examine how Nietzsche rejects both of these species of unity before dissecting his own unique thoughts regarding how, in the absence of any such metaphysical assurance, we can actively cultivate the most valuable kinds of conflictual unity.

### III.1 Rejecting *unitas ante rem*

Nietzsche deflates all conceptions of substantial unity, that is to say, forms of unity that are simple and non-composite, or what Schopenhauer described as *unitas ante rem*. Nietzsche's first extended attack on the logical coherence of Schopenhauer's conception of the unified world-will is to be found in his early notebooks under the heading 'On Schopenhauer' (1868; hereafter OS). Nietzsche's criticism is that unity, along with freedom and eternity, is a category of *human* experience, and so cannot be soundly predicated to the world in itself, which is supposed to signify the world independent of all human experience:

[...] [unity, eternity, and freedom] are all indivisibly knotted together with our organization, so that it is completely doubtful whether they have any meaning outside of the human sphere of knowledge. (OS, KGW I/4.424–5)

Although Schopenhauer is at pains to emphasize that the unity of the will is incomparable to worldly unities, Nietzsche's argument is that beyond the world of appearance, the concept of unity has no real sense and is misleading in its anthropomorphism. Schopenhauer simply makes too many inductively inferred, positive claims about the world in itself, which Nietzsche maintains is just an 'ungraspable X' (OS, KGW I/4.423). In HH 16, for instance, Nietzsche asserts that '[...] what appears in appearance is precisely not the thing in itself, and no conclusion can be drawn from the former as to the nature of the latter'. The idea that the unity of nature is in any way related to any possible unity of the world in itself is an incoherent position as far as Nietzsche is concerned.

Furthermore, Nietzsche criticizes Schopenhauer's conception of Ideas for being just as 'dark, uncertain, and full of vague presentiments' as that of Hegel or Schelling (CW 10, KSA 6.36).<sup>28</sup> And already in TL (1873), Nietzsche contests the belief that natural kinds have any existence independent of the specifically human world. Nature, he argues, is a conglomeration of irreducibly *unique* cases. Humans then abstract from the differences between cases to create natural kinds:

Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the 'leaf': the original model according to which all the leaves were perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled, and painted – but by incompetent hands, so that no specimen has turned out to be a correct, trustworthy, and faithful likeness of the original model. [...] We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species, but only with an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us. For even our contrast between individual and species is something anthropomorphic and does not originate in the essence of things [...]. (TL, KSA 1.880)

For Nietzsche, in contrast to Schopenhauer, the belief that there exist *Urformen* is a fallacious inference, and there is only *unitas post rem*. Individual objects are not copies

(‘Abbilde’) but unique instances, though these often bear points of resemblance to one another.

In a similar fashion, Nietzsche later comes to view humans as subjecting their multifarious experiences of their own will to the same process of simplification and elision. According to Nietzsche, an individual’s will is irreducibly composite – involving the complex activity of muscles and the nervous system, as well as the existence of an internal command structure split between obeying and commanding: ‘Willing strikes me as, above all, something complicated, something unified only in a word’ (BGE 19). Yet, thanks to clumsy introspection, there arises not just the myth of the substantial soul, such as we find in Descartes’ notion of *res cogitans*, but Schopenhauer’s erroneous supposition that the act of willing is intrinsically simple in its unity.<sup>29</sup>

Insofar as Nietzsche associates the category of unity with the metaphysical notions of *unitas ante rem* found in Schopenhauer (and Plato), Nietzsche takes an eliminativist stance towards it. For him, as the following quote demonstrates, there exist *only* composite forms of unity constructed *post rem*, what Nietzsche calls unity as *organization*:

All unity is *only* unity [*Einheit*] as *organization and co-operation* [*Zusammenspiel*] – no different from the way in which a human community is a unity – therefore the *opposite* [*Gegensatz*] of an atomistic *anarchy*; as a *complex of domination* [*Herrschafts-Gebilde*] that *signifies* one [*Eins*] but *is not* one [*eins*]. (NL 1886 2[87], KSA 12.104)<sup>30</sup>

So there are *only* composite unities for Nietzsche, whether this be within the conceptual, material or subjective domain. This not only denies the possibility of Schopenhauer’s forms and the unity of the will, but also the idea of atomistic materialism, the substantial self, Leibnizian monads, Humean atomistic perceptions, and so on. The pertinent consequence of this repudiation of non-composite unity is that, for Nietzsche, partite unities cannot be metaphysically guaranteed by an ontologically antecedent form of substantial unity.

Nietzsche does not only reject the notion of *unitas ante rem* on the grounds of its logical invalidity; he also attacks it on account of its negative practical consequences. The aforementioned process of hypostatizing *post rem* unities into *ante rem* Ideas – the defining move of Platonic idealism on Nietzsche’s account – also engenders a fictitious world beyond that in which we live, one that is perceived as being more perfect than our own. This process, carried to its extreme by Christianity, though also evident throughout the history of philosophy, has the effect of devaluing reality insofar as it (fallaciously) recasts the world as a conglomeration of imperfect simulacra.<sup>31</sup> By rebuking the reality of *ante rem* unities such as the will and the Ideas, Nietzsche bestows upon the world in which we live a greater degree of reality and value.

### III.2 Refuting the unity of nature

Having rejected these metaphysical guarantors of composite unity, it is unsurprising that Nietzsche also discards the conception of the phenomenal world as a unified,

harmonious whole – an idea that we find in both Schopenhauer's notion of outer purposiveness and Heraclitus' vision of existence *qua* lawfully burning fire. Nietzsche's argument against such theories is most clearly articulated in GS 109:

The astral order in which we live is an exception [...]. The total character of the world, by contrast, is for all eternity chaos, not in the sense of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, organization, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else our aesthetic anthropomorphisms are called. Judged from the vantage point of our reason, the unsuccessful attempts are by far the rule; the exceptions are not the secret aim, and the whole musical mechanism repeats eternally its tune, which must never be called a melody [...]. In no way do our aesthetic and moral judgements apply to it [the universe]! It also has no drive to self-preservation or any other drives; nor does it observe any laws. Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature. (GS 109)

Nietzsche's contention hinges on two premises: (1) even if there is a discernible order and harmony in our corner of the universe, it is an unsound, inductive inference to project this beyond our corner, and (2) as with Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer's Ideas, the concept of law and order (and, correspondingly, orderlessness) are anthropomorphic concepts, which do not apply to non-human nature – and indeed *should* not, since they lead to the thought of a transcendent being (i.e. God) creating and administering law and order. In this way, Nietzsche tacitly indicts Schopenhauer for committing the anthropomorphic fallacy with his postulation of outer purposiveness. But with its rejection of nature as a harmonious, law-governed whole, this aphorism also represents a thinly veiled assault on the aesthetic vision of existence that Nietzsche identifies in Heraclitus' conception of 'the unitary lawfulness of the world' ('*einheitliche Gesetzmäßigkeit der Welt*') (VPP 2, KGW II/4.266).<sup>32</sup> The corollary of this rejection of universal law is that Nietzsche renounces that which ensured the internal agonistic unity defining every object for Heraclitus – namely, the *logos*, and its partner concept, *dikē*.

Again, though, Nietzsche rejects this form of unity not only on purely logical grounds, but also on account of its negative practical implications:

Nihilism as a psychological state is reached [...] when one has posited a *totality* [*Ganzheit*], 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 [...]. Some sort of unity [*Einheit*], 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 ... [...] 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; i.e., he conceived such a whole [*Ganzes*] *in order to be able to believe in his own value*. (NL 1887 11[99], KSA 13.47)<sup>33</sup>

Nietzsche thus strongly recommends against artificially imbuing existence with value by situating it within an illusory vision of the universe *qua* whole. His reason for doing so is that when this idealistic notion of wholeness inevitably loses credibility and collapses, we are unable to value existence at all. As such, we descend into a state



of nihilism. On his account, we should therefore abandon such holistic conceptions of unity not only because of their logical dubiousness, but also owing to their negative *practical* value – namely, insofar they have a detrimental effect upon our ability to proficiently value existence.

### III.3 Will to power and inner purposiveness

The question remains as to the type of unity Nietzsche himself endorses. As we have already seen, he construes all unity as organization. But this remains fairly abstract and needs to be properly fleshed-out. I will now consider three ontological levels at which Nietzsche develops his understanding of unity and its inextricability from the notion of conflict: first, at the general level of the will to power; second, at the individual or psychological level of human subjectivity; and third, at the collective level of the body politic.

In a manner that may at first glance seem to be at odds with his repudiation of universal holism, Nietzsche hypothesizes that the world ‘*is the will to power – and nothing besides*’ (NL 1885 38[12], KSA 11.611).<sup>34</sup> As Ciano Aydin has noted, this universalizing theory homogenizes reality – *everything* is a striving for power and there is no fundamental difference between the organic and inorganic.<sup>35</sup> The universe is at any moment a multiplicity of ‘force-centres’ (‘Kraftcentren’) (NL 1888 14[188], KSA 13.376) or ‘power-quanta’ (‘Machtquanta’) (NL 1888 14[79], KSA 13.257), each of which is striving for more power. In this way, ‘every occurrence is a struggle’ (‘alles Geschehen ist ein Kampf’) (NL 1885 1[92], KSA 12.33) since power struggle stands as a universal principle of existence. It is nonetheless important to bear in mind that Nietzsche puts this forward as a *hypothesis*, as *his* interpretation of existence, not as a categorical truth.<sup>36</sup> As such, Nietzsche’s discussion of the formal unity of existence is distinguished from both Heraclitus’ and Schopenhauer’s respective views of universal unity, which claim to reveal the objective truth of reality.

In this struggle for power, the way in which power is augmented is by overcoming resistances.<sup>37</sup> This means that all entities exist in relation (relations of resistance) to other entities: ‘The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances’ (NL 1887 9[151], KSA 12.424).<sup>38</sup> There is therefore no such thing as substantial unity for Nietzsche. These power-quanta should not be thought of as fundamental, atomistic units; rather, he conceives of these as themselves being composed of yet another organization of wills to power – it is wills to power all the way down, so to speak.<sup>39</sup> On these grounds, Müller-Lauter has argued against monistic or substantial readings of the notion of the will to power. There is no will to power, he contends, but only *wills* to power, in the plural. Any unity a particular will to power might exhibit is composite and supervenes on an organization of internal forces.<sup>40</sup>

But how is power won by means of overcoming resistance? By analysing Nietzsche’s accounts of the will to power, we can identify a number of paradigmatic forms of activity that further power augmentation:

1. The *incorporation* of weaker power-quanta by, and within, a stronger power structure in such a way as to preserve, command and exploit that entity for the sake of the stronger power’s ends.<sup>41</sup>

2. The *destruction* of opposed power-quanta (and, if possible, the subsequent incorporation of their constituent parts).<sup>42</sup>
3. *Cooperation* with approximately equal power-quanta. Should neither (1) nor (2) be open as possibilities then, unless the opposed power-quanta engage in an internecine struggle, or merely part ways, they can also enter into an alliance – for example, by productively competing (*wettstreiten*) with one another rather than engaging in a struggle of destruction.<sup>43</sup>

Though we must be careful not to read the later notion of will to power back into HC, the agon would appear to fit best into the third option. It fails to fit into (1) because it does not establish functional, exploitative hierarchies (one does not incorporate or command defeated parties). Then, due to its non-destructive nature, it also fails to fit into (2). Rather, it is most convincingly a case of (3): a cooperative unity of approximate equals who construct and maintain the agon together as a means of exercising their power. This cooperation is nevertheless still defined by a tense struggle for power, but, as Nietzsche describes the agon in HC, the resultant hierarchies or rankings are flexible and non-functional.

It should be observed that even within cooperative alliances and functional hierarchies, conflict remains ever-present. In the case of the former, cooperating parties still vie for dominance even if they cannot destroy their counterpart(s) or press them into service.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the latter, the subordinated party always struggles to dominate those parts still weaker than it. In addition, it constantly endeavours to preserve itself against *complete* assimilation at the hands of the ascendant force.<sup>45</sup> These modes of organization are therefore best characterized as internally conflictual unities.

The cooperative, agonistic manifestation of will to power is just one among a selection of other modes of activity. Indeed, it even seems to be the exception, as Nietzsche often describes the activity of the will to power in chiefly brutal, exploitative and even destructive terms. Not only can this conclusion be brought to bear on Heraclitus, as we will see, but it can be used to contest Lawrence J. Hatab's agonistic reading of the will to power.<sup>46</sup> In its simplest formulation, his position runs as follows:

Since power can *only* involve resistance, then one's power to overcome is essentially related to a counterpower; if resistance were eliminated, if one's counterpower were destroyed or even neutralized by sheer domination, one's power would evaporate, it would no longer *be* power. Power is *overcoming* something, not annihilating it [...]. (Hatab 2005: 16)

It seems, however, that at the basis of Hatab's interpretation lies a type-token fallacy. To destroy enmity *altogether* (i.e. as a type), which Nietzsche accuses Christianity of having done, would indeed be to destroy the grounds of a power-quantum's existence (i.e. according to the logic of the will to power). To destroy individual (i.e. token) counterforces, though, would in no way jeopardize the existence of a power-quantum, so long as there was a fresh supply of new adversaries to take their place – a condition analogous to Hegel's portrayal of the state of desire in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There must be opposition, relation and conflict for there to be life (understood as will to

power), but this does not entail that power-quanta cannot and do not act destructively in their pursuit of power.

The agonistic measure that Hatab ascribes to the will to power (on account of its necessary relationality) is in fact an exceptional state, where the norm is quite the opposite:

[...] life functions essentially in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics. [...] One has to admit to oneself something even more unpalatable: that viewed from the highest biological standpoint, states of legality can never be anything but *exceptional states*, as partial restrictions of the true will to life, which seeks power and to whose overall purpose they subordinate themselves as individual measures, that is to say, as a means of creating greater units of power. (GM II 11, KSA 5.312–13)

The imposition of measure or law onto the activity of the wills to power that make up a given organization is instrumentally necessary to maintain this organization – be this an agonistic cooperative or an exploitative, functional hierarchy. Laws are principles of self-regulation, which apply *within* an organized unity.<sup>47</sup> As we saw above, it was the measure within the agon that gave it unity; but such measure or restraint certainly does not apply universally.<sup>48</sup>

This argument against Hatab's reading of Nietzsche can further be sallied against Nietzsche's earlier reading of Heraclitus, which framed the agon – as well as the lawfulness, measure and conflictual unity inherent to the agon – as a universal-cosmological principle. As we have seen, though, this generalization of measure and law is rebutted by Nietzsche in his later conception the will to power. Certainly, for Nietzsche, in a way recalling both Schopenhauer and Heraclitus, conflict is universal and in some sense necessitated by the structure of the will to power. However, what has been brought to light is that, *pace* both Hatab and Nietzsche's Heraclitus, agonistic conflictual unity is not universal and not metaphysically guaranteed by the ontological structure of existence.

### III.4 Social and subjective organization

For the later Nietzsche, the most efficient, preferable, and frequently employed path to power augmentation (the goal of every power-will) is the exploitative incorporation of opposed entities into an existing internal hierarchy – annexing the opposed organization rather than simply sacking it and razing it to the ground, to use a martial analogy.<sup>49</sup> The activity of the will to power can be viewed as a mode of activity perpetually directed towards the establishment of new and ever-more-expansive functional hierarchies. As Ciano Aydin has noted, 'an important implication of the ontological status of the will to power is that reality is always necessarily organized to some degree [...]. Organization is inherent to life.'<sup>50</sup> Every existing thing is an organization, a conflictual unity of wills to power. This would indicate that for Nietzsche conflictual unity is in some sense metaphysically guaranteed.

In contrast to Schopenhauer, however, the unity of particular natural kinds (say human beings) is not guaranteed. Humans, along with all other species, could die out – there are no Platonic Ideas to ensure their continued existence. For Nietzsche, human existence is an insignificant occurrence within the universe.<sup>51</sup> Humans are not the fulfilment of any teleological process; they are a chance occurrence. Our being internally well-organized (i.e. powerful, vibrant and capable) humans who exist in well-organized communities is then even more precarious and in no way metaphysically guaranteed by the ontological structure of the world as will to power. Yet Nietzsche's ideal vision of both the human and her social organization still strongly recalls Schopenhauer's notion of inner purposiveness, in which a number of conflictual elements are hierarchically organized such that they are directed towards the attainment of a single goal. However, for Nietzsche, this is only achieved by an arduous process of organization. For example, in an aphorism from 1883, admittedly when the notion of the will to power was still inchoate, he states the following regarding human collectives:

*The purification of the race.* – There are probably no pure races but only races that have become pure, even these being extremely rare. What is normal is crossed races, in which, together with a disharmony of physical features [...], there must always go a disharmony of habits and value-concepts. [...] In the end, however, if the process of purification is successful, all that energy formerly expended in the struggle of the dissonant qualities with one another will stand at the command of the total organism: which is why races that have become pure have always also become *stronger* and *more beautiful*. The Greeks offer us the model of a race and culture that has become pure: and hopefully we shall one day also achieve a pure European race and culture. (D 272)

This process of purification is one that overcomes the antagonistic conflict of physical and cultural characteristics by forcing them into a coherent structure that can function as a single organism working towards a single goal. But this composite unity should not be understood as being free of conflict. Within Nietzsche's early and late portrayal of ancient Greek society, we have already seen that conflict was maximized, rather than extinguished under the institution of the agon (cf. HC and TI Ancients 3, KSA 6.157). In this excerpt from D, though also in others from his later period, we see that Nietzsche himself is concerned with synthesizing modern Europe in just this way.<sup>52</sup> His goal was to create vibrant, composite organizations in which conflict and diversity are preserved. What must also be remarked is that this kind of strong organismic unity is, far from being metaphysically underwritten, a rare and difficult achievement.

Nietzsche not only promotes functional wholeness at the level of social organization, but also at the level of the subject. Recalling Plato's *Republic*, he argues that there exists both a structural symmetry and a causal connection between the disaggregation of society and the psychological disintegration of individual Europeans. Nowhere is this more salient than in BGE 200:

In an age of disintegration where the races are mixed together, a person will have the legacy of multiple lineages in his body, which means conflicting (and often not merely conflicting) drives and value standards that fight with each other and

rarely leave each other alone. A man like this, of late cultures and refracted lights, will typically be a weaker person: his most basic desire is for an end to the war that he *is*. His notion of happiness corresponds to that of a medicine and mentality of pacification (for instance the Epicurean or Christian); it is a notion of happiness as primarily rest, lack of disturbance, repletion, unity at last and the ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths’ [...]. (BGE 200)

Here Nietzsche suggests that the mixing of races gives rise to a disempowering mixture of cultures and habits within the individual, just as it does within the wider social whole. The thrust of the argument is that an internal chaos of desires and moral values leads individuals to experience a painful inner antagonism to the point of *akrasia* (weakness of the will) and even *aboulia* (paralysis of the will). Recall that the will is a composite phenomenon, the health of which depends upon the concerted operation of its parts for the sake of a single end. Those pathologically lacking such inner order are led, Nietzsche thinks, to crave just the kind of monadic unity we found in Schopenhauer’s conception of the Ideas – one existing outside of time (i.e. an eternal, heavenly state), development, dynamism, and most importantly, *conflict*: ‘unity at last and the “Sabbath of Sabbaths.”’ Such a condition is synonymous with death for Nietzsche.<sup>53</sup> He also argues that the pursuit of this unattainable goal leads individuals into a pathological struggle to repress their passions.<sup>54</sup>

Modern social collectives and individuals are, according to Nietzsche, more often than not weak functional unities – aggregates that are not integrated into effective functional wholes. Nietzsche strives to propagate healthy functional unity in a way that implies that it is in no way necessitated by the ontological structure of existence. On his view, this kind of unity is something for which we must fight. This is reflected in his description of Goethe, who wanted ‘totality; he fought against the separation of reason, sensibility, feeling, will [...], he disciplined himself to wholeness, he created himself’. Through this ordering Goethe *became* free; hence, Nietzsche dubs him a ‘spirit [...] who has *become free*’ (*freigewordner Geist*) (TI Skirmishes 49, KSA 6.151–2). Being a ‘wholeness’ (Ganzheit) of the kind Nietzsche celebrates in Goethe is therefore not a metaphysical given. It must be fought for through the cultivation and ordering of our drives, our desires, passions and pursuits.<sup>55</sup> For the drives to exhibit an orderly command structure takes a great effort on the parts of both the individual and society.

## Conclusion

What this inquiry has brought to light is that there is a range of ways in which unity and conflict can be predicated to a single state of affairs. We have also seen that Nietzsche’s peculiar account of this compatibility both incorporates and discards aspects of Schopenhauer and Heraclitus. We should briefly summarize the main points of convergence and divergence that this study has brought into relief. First, Nietzsche reprises the Heraclitean idea that conflict and plurality are universal. In their shared rejection of dualism, both thinkers discount the notion of a world in itself existing

independently of multiplicity and conflict. For both, any unity that arises in the world has an immanent origin, since it cannot have its ground in a transcendental realm of substantial unity; consequently, *all* real unity is composite. Nonetheless, Nietzsche tends to reject the Heraclitean thesis that this cosmic conflict is harmonious and law-governed in such a way as to universally ensure agonistic relations.<sup>56</sup> In his account of the will to power, Nietzsche clearly rejects the claim that every discernable 'thing' is an *agonistic* conflictual unity; agonistic coherence is a rarity, only inhering under conditions of approximate equality.

With respect to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche very explicitly rejects the conceptions of substantial unity that are integral to his predecessor's metaphysical system. Within Schopenhauer's account of conflictual unity, the unity of the will metaphysically necessitates the conflictual unity of nature as a whole (i.e. outer purposiveness), and the Ideas likewise necessitate the emergence of conflictually unified organisms (i.e. inner purposiveness). As we have seen, though, Nietzsche rebuffs the idea of outer purposiveness as anthropomorphic speculation. Despite this, however, Nietzsche's picture of existence as a plurality of hierarchically organized unities (what I have called functional unities), strongly resembles Schopenhauer's description of the inner purposiveness of organisms, though now applied more universally (i.e. to the organic and inorganic alike). Yet, on account of his deflation of the notion of Platonic Ideas, the continued existence of particular species of conflictual unity (e.g. humans) is no longer metaphysically assured for Nietzsche as it is for Schopenhauer.

Though every existing entity must be a conflictual unity or organization for Nietzsche, humans and their communities tend to exist as *weak* functional unities. The history of modern civilization is the history of *dis*-organization on his account. Strong, effective organization demands active, conscious effort. His ideal is a form of unity in which all the parts of a whole are integrated – though nonetheless in tension with one another – working in unison towards a common end. At the level of human existence, such unity is a contingent phenomenon, and it is this very contingency, which is lacking in Schopenhauer and Heraclitus, that opens up a novel normative space within Nietzsche's thoughts on conflictual unity. Where Heraclitus and Schopenhauer merely encourage us to align ourselves with, or resign ourselves to, metaphysical knowledge of the ways in which the world is metaphysically unified, Nietzsche constructs a transformative ethical philosophy.

What we see emerging is a strong connection between ontologies of unity and certain ethical orientations: the way that we normatively approach life is profoundly connected to our manner of conceptualizing and explaining unity in the world. What is ultimately at stake is our ability to stave off nihilism and forge new vibrant values for ourselves as individuals and societies. Schopenhauer's life-denying pessimism, for example, can be directly traced back to his conception of the world as will, the substantial unity of which condemns it to eternally will against itself.<sup>57</sup> According to this logic, the pursuit of anything but resignation and denial of the will only serves to intensify human suffering.

As Ken Gemes has noted, Nietzsche also criticizes belief in a metaphysically pre-given unity of the self on account of the fact that such a belief breeds complacency, leading people to assume themselves to be already in possession of something for

which they must in fact fight.<sup>58</sup> In addition to this, he warns us that vainly yearning for a homogeneously unified self, free of conflict and inner tension, can lead to other more actively life-denying practices such as the repression of natural desires and vital inner struggle.

Finally, Nietzsche censures the idea of a harmoniously whole universe. On the one hand, he thinks this belief gives our personal existence an imaginary and precarious value, leaving us vulnerable to nihilism should it collapse. On the other hand, I have also contended that the notion a unitary *logos*, guaranteeing agonistic unity, can lead to a Heraclitean disdain for practical life (in favour of a detached, theoretical and asocial appreciation of the *logos*).<sup>59</sup> However much we might wish to philosophically uphold the fact-value distinction, there appears to be a *de facto* connection between descriptive philosophies of unity and particular ethical outlooks.

This is by no means an exhaustive account of the distinct practical consequences that tend to arise from the multitudinous ontologies of unity. Here is not the place for such an account, which is at any rate perhaps better suited to empirical investigation. It is clear, however, that Nietzsche has broken the path for us. To be sure, an overview of his thoughts concerning unity reveals various problematic tensions, yet the overall effect of his many-fronted critique of unity is to shake any faith we might have had in imaginary metaphysical supports. In so doing, he forces us to acknowledge and act upon the fact that effective human organization is the fruit of conscious and concerted human endeavour.

## Notes

- 1 '[...] [W]ir bei allen Philosophien, sammt den immer erneuten Versuchen, ihn besser auszudrücken, begegnen: der Satz "Alles ist Eins"' (KSA 1.813).
- 2 See for example Müller-Lauter (1971: 23–4).
- 3 To be sure, Nietzsche certainly endorsed Heraclitus, in whose presence he said he felt 'warmer and in better spirits' than elsewhere (EH Books BT 3, KSA 6.312). For readings of Nietzsche's Heraclitus that arguably over-emphasize the affinity with Nietzsche's later works, see for example Richardson (1996: 78), Müller (2005: 142–3), Cox (1999: 184–204) and Meyer (2014: esp. Ch. 1).
- 4 This can be found in Hershbell and Nimis (1979); and also, to some extent, in Berry (2013: 91–8); see also Jensen (2010).
- 5 '[...] [D]er λόγος in den Dingen, ist eben jenes Eine, τὸ πῦρ. Also das / eine überhaupt Werdende ist sich selbst Gesetz.'
- 6 Kahn (1979: 45) (quoted in VPP, KGW II/4.272–3).
- 7 See VPP, KGW II/4.272–3, 275. See also PTG 6, KSA 1.828–30. Heraclitus follows Anaximander in proposing that existence is characterized by 'world-cycles', or periodic cosmic conflagrations, in which the universe swings between the completely unified state of pure fire back into the state of multiplicity, in which fire exists in its various other possible states (viz. water and earth) (see VPP, KGW II/4.276–7; PTG 6, KSA 1.829).
- 8 'Das ewig lebendige Feuer, der αἰὼν, spielt, baut auf und zerstört.'
- 9 Kahn has convincingly argued, however, that Heraclitus employs the notion of fire metaphorically (Kahn 1979: 23).



- 10 See VPP, KGW II/4.267, where Nietzsche views this ancient thesis as the intuition of a scientific truth. See also PTG 5, KSA 1.826, where Nietzsche, citing Schopenhauer, implicitly draws a connection between the *logos* and the law of causality. Indeed, Nietzsche sees such lawfulness as amounting to a theory of predeterminism. As he states in VPP: 'the paths of every thing, of every individual, are prewritten' ('die Bahnen jeder Sache, jedes Individuums sind vorgeschrieben') (VPP, KGW II/4.272). Berry (2013: 96–7) has illuminated the probable influence of Zeller's *Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1844–52) in which Zeller argues that Heraclitus' thought is defensible from a contemporary scientific perspective.
- 11 See PTG 5, KSA 1.826.
- 12 See PTG 5, KSA 1.823.
- 13 See Jessica Berry, for example, who argues that the flux motif is 'overshadowed by the theme of *logos*, and by themes of measure (*metron*), regularity, order, design, law, and necessity' (2013: 97). This reflects the opinion of other readers of Heraclitus – McKirahan and Kahn, for example, who claim that, owing to the universal validity of Heraclitus' 'account', the *logos* can be described as a 'general principle' or a 'universal law'. See McKirahan (2010: 128–9) and Kahn (1979: 99).
- 14 '[...] [M]an würde den Namen der Δίκη nicht kennen, wenn es nicht Gesetze gäbe.'
- 15 '[...] [M]an muß wissen, daß der Krieg gemeinschaftlich ist und die Δίκη Streit ist u[nd] daß alles gemäß dem Streite geschieht.' Kahn's translation of the original Greek runs as follows: 'One must realize that war is shared and Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass in accordance with conflict' (1979: 67).
- 16 Nietzsche quotes this fragment at VPP, KGW II/4.274: 'Aus dem sich Entzweierenden entsteht die schönste Harmonie.'
- 17 VPP, KGW II/4.274; cf. Fragment 78 (Kahn 1971: 65).
- 18 See also Kahn's (1971: 276–81) commentary on Fragment 123 for a contemporary interpretation of the role of opposition in Heraclitus' thought.
- 19 See VPP, KGW II/4.273: 'Wirksam sind immer beide Kräfte zugleich, da ihr ewiges Streiten weder Sieg noch Unterdrückung auf die Dauer zuläßt.'
- 20 'Einheit der Griechen in den Normen des Wettkampfes.'
- 21 Jacob Burckhardt (1998: 168–9): 'The establishment of these Panhellenic sites [...] was uniquely decisive in breaking down enmity between tribes, and remained the most powerful obstacle to fragmentation into mutually hostile *poleis*. It was the agon alone which united the whole nation as both participants and spectators [...]. The extraordinary thing is that different sections of the nation not only competed together at these famous sites but also mingled with each other, so that during the truce that reigned for their duration even the citizens of warring *poleis* could meet in peace. About Olympia in particular there was a special sacredness for the whole nation, and the games there, which had been largely Peloponnesian at the start, slowly became the unique revelation of Greek unity [*Einheit*] in the true sense of the word, whether of those living in the motherland or in the colonies.'
- 22 For a detailed examination of Nietzsche's conception of agonal measure, see Pearson (2018). Note that these immanently established norms of the contest also determine what counts as excellent performance. As he states in PTG 6: '[...] the judges themselves seemed to be striving in the contest and the contestants seemed to be judging them' (PTG 6, KSA 1.826–7). See also Acampora (2013: 24).
- 23 In Heraclitus' work itself, one can identify such a normative dimension; however, the only type of unity he promotes is our coming to appreciate these cosmic facts by bringing ourselves into conscious agreement (*homologeîn*) with the *logos*. See Fragment 36 in Kahn (1979: 45).

- 24 'Alle Qualitäten der Dinge, alle Gesetze, alles Entstehen [und] Vergehen, ist [die] fortwährende Existenzoffenbarung des Einen: die Vielheit [...] ist für Heraclit das Gewand, die Erscheinungsform des Einen, keineswegs eine Täuschung: anders überhaupt erscheint das Eine nicht.'
- 25 See Schopenhauer (2011: §§19–21).
- 26 Nietzsche shows himself to be very much aware of this in his reading of Schopenhauer. See for example PTG 5, KSA 1.826: '[...] strife for Schopenhauer is a proof of the internal self-dissociation of the Will to Live, which is seen as a self-consuming, menacing and gloomy drive, a thoroughly frightful and by no means blessed phenomenon.'
- 27 Schopenhauer (2011: 154–5): 'Thus I understand by *Idea* every determinate and fixed level of the will's objectification, to the extent that it is a thing in itself and thus foreign to all multiplicity [...].'
- 28 See also NL 1879 41[59], KSA 8.592, where Nietzsche critiques the Platonic notion of Ideas: 'A thing to which a *concept* precisely corresponds would be *without* origin. Plato's error of the *eternal Ideas*.' 'Ein Ding, dem ein *Begriff* genau entspricht, wäre *ohne* Herkunft. Plato's Irrthum von den *ewigen Ideen*.'
- 29 See also BGE 16 and GS 127.
- 30 'Alle Einheit ist *nur* als *Organisation und Zusammenspiel* Einheit: nicht anders als wie ein menschliches Gemeinwesen eine Einheit ist: also *Gegensatz* der atomistischen *Anarchie*; somit ein *Herrschafts-Gebilde*, das Eins *bedeutet*, aber nicht eins *ist*.'
- 31 See for example EH Preface 2.
- 32 For Nietzsche's aesthetic reading of Heraclitus, see VPP, KGW II/4.279. Drawing on BGE 22, Hershbell and Nimis (1979: 30–1) have also argued that this idea of the universe as a law-governed unity is a key factor that distinguishes Nietzsche's later philosophy from the *logos*-inspired thought of Heraclitus.
- 33 See NL 1886 7[62], KSA 12.317: 'It seems to me important that one should get rid of the all, the unity, some force, something unconditioned; otherwise one will never cease regarding it as the highest court of appeal and baptizing it "God." One must shatter the all; unlearn respect for the all; take what we have given to the unknown and the whole and give it back to what is nearest, what is ours.' 'Es scheint mir wichtig, daß man das All, die Einheit los wird, irgend eine Kraft, ein Unbedingtes; man würde nicht umhin können, es als höchste Instanz zu nehmen und Gott zu taufen. Man mu<ß> das All zersplittern; den Respekt vor dem All verlernen; das, was wir dem Unbekannten <und> Ganzen gegeben haben, zurücknehmen für das Nächste, Unsre.'
- 34 See also BGE 13 and 36.
- 35 Aydin (2007: 25–6, 29). In my reading of the will to power as organization, I am indebted to both Aydin and Müller-Lauter (1971; esp. Ch.1).
- 36 BGE 22: 'Granted, this [conception of the world as will to power] is only an interpretation too – and you will be eager enough to make this objection? – well then, so much the better.'
- 37 See e.g. NL 1888 14[82], KSA 13.262, where Nietzsche describes 'the internal fact-world' ('die interne Thatsachen-Welt') as one of 'struggling and overcoming will-quanta' ('kämpfender und überwindender Willen-Quanta').
- 38 On the necessary relationality of will to power, see for example NL 1888 14[79], KSA 13.259, where Nietzsche describes all 'dynamic quanta' ('dynamische Quanta') as standing 'in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their *relation* to all other quanta' ('in einem Spannungsverhältniß zu allen anderen dynamischen Quanten: deren Wesen in ihrem *Verhältniß* zu allen anderen Quanten besteht').
- 39 On Nietzsche's opposition to atomism, see for example BGE 12 and 17.

- 40 See Müller-Lauter (1971: 19).
- 41 See Z II Self-Overcoming, KSA 4.147–8: 'Wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the serving I found the will to be master. / The weaker is persuaded by its own will to serve the stronger, because it wants to be master over what is still weaker': See also BGE 259: '[...] life itself is *essentially* a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting.'
- 42 See for example GM I 11 and also 13, where Nietzsche characterizes the activity of the violent, murderous blonde beasts and also predatory animals as exemplary manifestations of the will to power. See also GM II 11.
- 43 NL 1881 11[134], KSA 9.491: 'Growth and generation follow the unlimited *drive for appropriation*. This drive brings it [the organism] to the exploitation of the weaker, and to competition with those of similar strength [...]. 'Dem unbegrenzten *Aneignungstriebe* folgt Wachstum und Generation. — Dieser Trieb bringt es in die Ausnützung des Schwächeren, und in Wettstreit mit ähnlich Starken [...]. See also Nietzsche's discussion of *Gleichgewicht* in NL 1886 5[82], KSA 12.221. See also GM II 2, KSA 5.294, where Nietzsche describes the sovereign individual as someone who 'will necessarily respect his peers [*die ihm Gleichen*], the strong and the reliable (those with the prerogative to promise), – that is everyone who promises like a sovereign. For pre-will-to-power texts that foreshadow this thought, see also WS 22 and HH 92.
- 44 See Gerhardt (1983: 124–5). Though he focusses on HH, Gerhardt explains how within cooperative alliances of approximate equals, conflict is very much preserved for Nietzsche.
- 45 See for example NL 1884 26[276], KSA 11.221–2: '*Commanding* means bearing the counterweight of the weaker force, [it is] therefore a kind of *continuation* of struggle. *Obedience* [is] likewise a *struggle* – enough force to resist *remains*.' '*Herrschen* ist das Gegengewicht der schwächeren Kraft ertragen, also eine Art *Fortsetzung* des Kampfs. *Gehorchen* ebenso ein *Kampf*: so viel Kraft eben zum Widerstehen *bleibt*.' See also NL 1885 36[22], KSA 11.560–1.
- 46 See Lawrence J. Hatab: 'The Greek *agōn* is a historical source of what Nietzsche later generalized into the dynamic, reciprocal structure of will to power. And it is important to recognize that such a structure undermines the idea that power could or should run unchecked, either in the sense of sheer domination or chaotic indeterminacy. Will to power implies a certain measure of oppositional limits, even though such a measure could not imply an overarching order or a stable principle of balance' (Hatab 2005: 17).
- 47 See also BGE 188.
- 48 See TI Ancients 3, KSA 6.157.
- 49 See for example BGE 259 or GM II 12.
- 50 Aydin (2007: 30).
- 51 See TL, KSA 1.875: 'After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star [the sun] cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts [humans] had to die.'
- 52 See also BGE 256, where Nietzsche states that '*Europe wants to be one*', or BGE 208 where he asserts that it needs to '*acquire a single will*'. He also laconically states in one note, '*Goal*: the unity of the most multiple'. '*Ziel*: die Einheit des Vielfachsten' (NL 1883 20[3], KSA 10.589); see also Z I Goals.
- 53 See NL 1881 11[32], KSA 9.490: 'Ein Grundirrhthum ist der Glaube an die Eintracht und das Fehlen des *Kampfes* – dies wäre eben *Tod!*'
- 54 See for example TI Morality 1–2 KSA 6.82–3.

- 55 Though cf. EH Clever 9, KSA 6.293–5, where Nietzsche recommends against consciously trying to order one's self.
- 56 NL 1885 38[12], KSA 11.610–11 might be taken as an exception to this statement.
- 57 As Simmel has observed (1907: 71–3).
- 58 As Ken Gemes puts it: 'The dogma of a pre-given unified self generates certain complacency and that is the core of Nietzsche's objection. Assuming a world of ready-made beings allows for the suppression of the problem of becoming' (Gemes 2001: 342).
- 59 Nietzsche states at the end of his study of Heraclitus in PTG that 'A lack of consideration for what is here and now lies at the very core of the great philosophical nature. He has hold of truth: let the wheel of time roll where it will, it can never escape truth' (PTG 8, KSA 1.833–4).

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