

HUMANITY AS THE WILL TO POWER

Affirmation and Danger in the Eternal Return

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Abstract: I present an image of humanity as the will to power expressed in context of affirmation and danger in the eternal return. Nietzsche argues the death of God not as a theological argument but as an existential challenge for humanity to be re-experienced. It is read in light of the eternal return: without ontological references or quasi-transcendentals, how is life to be lived? Deleuze contextualizes Nietzsche's critique of nihilism qua a typology of active and reactive modes of being, however I go beyond to provide what I consider an anthropological account. I do this by differentiating the will to power from individual willing and present the danger that an affirmation of life entails. Nietzsche challenges us with the eternal return. With this, one is led to realize that she is her own destruction (*Untergehen*) at the same time as her overture (*Übergehen*). She has the ability, power, capacity to overcome and self-create. With this realization one ought to remain truthful to this in form of truth-telling (*Redlichkeit*). Nietzsche projects humanity as a perilous crossing over from nihilism to affirmation with an embrace of an ethics of danger. This crossing over is a mark of life as the will to power. It is an overcoming of nihilism and the assurance amidst nihilism's farce that the godhead is dead and that the eternal return is a daunting challenge we cannot escape from. With these, we are afforded an image of humanity as the will to power.

Keywords: life-affirmation, eternal return, ethics of danger, will to power.

In this essay, I present an image of humanity as the will to power expressed in context of affirmation and danger in the eternal return. My presentation takes great influence from Gilles Deleuze's own reading of Nietzsche's philosophy. Paolo Bolaños provides a useful commentary: «With Deleuze, Nietzsche's ideas become alive» in that «they are put to *use*, thus restoring their very own philosophic dignity». ¹ Deleuze contextualizes Nietzsche's critique of nihilism qua a typology of active and reactive modes of being, however what I do here is to go beyond Deleuze's typological conception to provide what I consider an anthropological account. I do this by differentiating the will to power from individual willing and present the danger that an affirmation of life entails. «Modernity is losing, in addition to its feeling of vitality, the distinction between crisis

¹ Paolo A. BOLAÑOS, *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014, p. 4.

and stability».² Against the backdrop of the nihilistic culture's decay and degeneration, Nietzsche supposes living dangerously as an expression of the will to power, accepting the perils of proclaiming the truth of God's death, stemming not from reactivity but from affirmation and creativity. One suffers to further twine life, to further strengthen one's will, to ultimately live life dangerously. To present how an image of Nietzsche's view of humanity as the will to power, this essay is divided into five sections: 1) affect and the difference between a will and the will to power; 2) an image of freedom in humanity as both *Übergang* and *Untergang* through an analysis of a fragment (1885 38[12]) of Nietzsche; 3) the ethics of danger and nihilism qua Sloterdijk's enlightened false consciousness; 4) transition from *becoming-affirmative* to *becoming-dangerous* through *Redlichkeit*; and 5) life as a game constantly played.

Nietzsche considers his philosophy as a form of psychology which roots out life's decadent element as a widespread nihilism in that the sight of humanity makes us weary.³ This perpetuates as a state of weariness that banks on the emptiness of hope, the barrenness of life. I follow Kaityln Creasy in understanding nihilism from a psychological standpoint, «not merely the life-denying content of the nihilist's claims, but also the psychophysiological basis of the nihilist's negative evaluation of life».⁴ Nietzsche explains that morality was previously an antidote to our distraught conditions yet eventually entailed life-negation that caused a psychophysiological futility.⁵ This affectivity of nihilism is profoundly personal for it is us who choose how to live life following the metaphysical bankruptcy of our idols penned by Nietzsche through God's death.⁶ With Nietzsche's declaration of God's death, we are brought to see a perversion of the will – a lust for the same, a subscription to a pathological desire, and a reversal

² Peter SLOTERDIJK, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1983, tr. Michael Eldred, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis 1987, p. 124.

³ Cfr. Jacob GOLOMB, *Nietzsche's "New Psychology"*, in J. GOLOMB, W. SANTANIELLO, and R. LEHRER (eds.), *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, State University of New York, Albany 1999, p. 1 and Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, C. G. Naumann, Leipzig 1887, tr. Carol Diethe, *The Genealogy of Morality*, in K. ANSELL-PEARSON (ed.), *The Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 25.

⁴ Kaityln CREASY, *On the Problem of Affective Nihilism*, "The Journal of Nietzsche Studies", 49, 1, 2018, p. 32.

⁵ Cfr. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Nachlass*, tr. Kate Sturge, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Rüdiger Bittner (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 116-121 and Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, E. W. Fritsch, Leipzig 1887, tr. Walter Kaufmann, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Vintage Books, New York 1974, pp. 283-285.

⁶ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.

of values.⁷ Plainly put, if God, religion, and truth no longer provide ontological foundations, then the main question is «*Has existence any meaning at all?*».⁸ He heralds the state of nihilism that deceives us of its passivity; we are brought to reckon our powerlessness in face of our dead idols. Nietzsche responds to this by supplying not an antidote but a challenge:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, an in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!” [...]⁹

Responding to nihilism, Nietzsche presents the eternal return not to offer consolation but to will not preservation but life’s overcoming.¹⁰

Deleuze’s framework in reading Nietzsche consists of a typology of active or of reactive force, in Nietzschean terms as affirmative or reactive drive, emulated through the difference of the mythical masters and slaves.¹¹ With this, he considers the eternal return as a practical rule of reason likened to Kant’s Categorical Imperative, «*whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return*»;¹² the first application as a rigorous challenge while it is secondly the implementation of an ethical thought. The eternal return for Deleuze is the return of difference for it is a selection of what is to return done by she in face of this ethical challenge. This commentary I opine is inadequate to conjure an anthropology for the tug between affirmation and negation does not constitute the human condition and to demand such from him is beyond the scope of his own philosophical project. I draw attention to fragment 8, notebook 38 of

⁷ Cfr. CREAMY, *On the Problem of Affective Nihilism*, p. 36, citing NIETZSCHE, *The Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 87-92, 101-105, and Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, C. G. Naumann, Leipzig 1889, tr. Judith Norman, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*, in A. RIDLEY and J. NORMAN (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 161.

⁸ NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, p. 308, and cfr. Keith ANSELL-PEARSON, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p. 45.

⁹ NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, p. 273.

¹⁰ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, pp. 116-121 and ANSELL-PEARSON, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, pp. 49 and 109.

¹¹ Cfr. BOLAÑOS, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, pp. 15-23.

¹² Gilles DELEUZE, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1962, tr. Hugh Tominson, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Continuum, London 1983, p. 68.

1885 where Nietzsche challenges our assumptions with an “I” behind every action. He admonishes us by saying that this “I” represents three distinct actions of willing, feeling, and thinking. He says,

Every willing unites a multiplicity of *feelings*: Feeling, then, in fact many ways of feeling, must be recognised as an ingredient of the will, and so, secondly, must *thinking*. In every act of will, a thought commands – [...] Thirdly, the will is not only a complex of feeling and thinking, but above all also an *affect*: that affect of command. What is called freedom of the will is essentially a feeling of superiority over the one who must obey[.]¹³

Implicit in every will is thought and affect. This is something evident too in the presentation of the eternal return. Nietzsche is quite explicit with how pains, joys, thoughts, and sighs are to return. Nietzsche prizes feelings and affects.¹⁴ These neurophysiological changes are vital for confronting the return and the loneliest loneliness prefigures a negative response for the weak spirited: bearing the pain, the greatest weight, of loneliness, shame, guilt, regret numerable times again for eternity.¹⁵ Nietzsche points to the primal fact of a confrontation within each person. The interbreeding among masters and slaves creates an admixture of drives within each person that creates contradicting typologies of active and reactive, of affirmation and negation.¹⁶ What remains for each is to overcome these different drives within, to channel one’s energies through a certain *willing* geared for life. The “I” therefore is nothing but another of our truths that we have forgotten are illusions for it stands in place of the competition of drives within, the attainment of a dominant perspective, one’s willing qua legislating, and its eventual enactment; a person who wills is one who feels and who thinks. Through her willing, she legislates and is free. She becomes, in Nietzsche’s playful thought, a god who knows how to dance—it is knowing how to

¹³ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, p. 36. Italics maintained.

¹⁴ Although Nietzsche uses *Gefühl* and not *Affekte*, I follow Erika Kerruish in that Nietzsche uses «affect [affekte], passion [Leidenschaft, Passion] and feeling [Gefühl, Empfindung] interchangeably» (Erika KERRUISH, *Interpreting Feeling: Nietzsche on the Emotions and the Self*, “Minerva - An Internet Journal of Philosophy”, 13, 2009, p. 2, (accessed November 25th, 2020), <http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol13/Nietzsche.pdf>).

¹⁵ Cfr. Justin REMHOF, *Nietzsche on Loneliness, Self-Transformation, and the Eternal Recurrence*, “The Journal of Nietzsche Studies”, 49, 2, 2018, pp. 196-197.

¹⁶ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, C. G. Naumann, Leipzig 1886, tr. Judith Norman, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R.-P. Horstmann and J. Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 87.

dance with different opponents, knowing how to handle contests. Willing is creating; willing is liberating.¹⁷

This competition of the various drives ends with a feeling of power (*Machtgefühl*) when one is able to will (supposing her eventual enactment of this maxim). Nietzsche gives much emphasis to power for «There is nothing to life that has value except the degree of power – assuming, precisely, that life itself is the will to power».¹⁸ This conveys another important idea (that the world is the will to power) which I will return to in a later section, but for now what suffices is the understanding that power plays a crucial role in the confrontation of drives within. This feeling of power is an exercise of individual will in alignment to the will to power. We may therefore render the ethical challenge in a Kantian tone in another sense: «Act so as what you will increases power especially in its return».¹⁹ To differentiate the will to power from the activity of willing, we ought to remember that the will to power stands as our interpretative and evaluative tool as it is what propels us to confront and affirmatively select the return.²⁰ The will to power is in fact the totality of wills insofar as oppositions create this advancement of power. It is the only ontological fact is life since it is the basis of moral valuations and a precondition for life's expenditure through the will to power.²¹ In other words, the difference between individual willing and the will to power is that the former is our individual capacity or power (*Leistung*) while the latter serves as a backbone or, put explicitly, a metaphysical totality for «reality consists of contextual perspectives willing power».²² The notion of willing power though must not be reduced to domination.

As long as the will to power is interpreted in terms of a “desire to dominate,” we inevitably make it depend on established values[...] We then cannot recognize the nature of the will to power as an elastic principle of all of our evaluations, as a hidden principle for the creation of new values not yet recognized. The will to power, says Nietzsche, consists not in coveting or even in taking but in creating and giving.²³

¹⁷ Cfr. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, E. W. Schmeitzner, Chemnitz 1883, tr. Adrian Del Caro, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, A. Del Caro and R. B. Pippin (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 29, 65-67.

¹⁸ NIETZSCHE, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, pp. 119.

¹⁹ Cfr. John RICHARDSON, *Nietzsche's System*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002, p. 149.

²⁰ Cfr. DELEUZE, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 1.

²¹ Cfr. BOLAÑOS, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, p. 12 and Gilles DELEUZE, *L'Immanence: Une Vie*, “Philosophie”, vol. 47, Editions de Minuit, Paris 1995, tr. Anne Boyman, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, MIT Press, New York 2001, p. 27.

²² Cfr. RICHARDSON, *Nietzsche's System*, p. 286.

²³ DELEUZE, *Pure Immanence*, p. 73.

Insofar as domination and destruction are present, willing turns perverted as it is dependent upon established values, failing to break free from the old metaphysics. Willing though becomes manifest of the will to power in supposing a vitality in creating and giving qua legislating for oneself not lording it over others.

In this sense, we may view nihilism not as the bankruptcy of life but simply of one's willing.²⁴ It is not life that is nil but simply the reactivity, the failure of realizing one's power (*Leistung*) for willing, or reducing power to simply domination. Nietzsche ramifies this in the *Zur Genealogie der Moral* for what made the masters superior – and he explicitly states this – is not their physical strength but their psychic determination. It was through a supremacy in their willing that «they were *more complete* people»²⁵ This wholeness stresses that life is made complete by their type of willing and not the sheer act of willing. This psychic determination meant an adaptation of the will to power as a living organ rather than an ascendance to worldly or political power.²⁶ What we may trace to the master ascendancy is the capacity for emotive determinacy in face of trials as the will to power stood as their evaluative tool. Their willing was not directed *to* power but rather their willing was guided *by* that exact power qua evaluation of the will to power. Overcoming nihilism thus requires «a profound personal transformation, enacting fundamental changes in one's constitution as a complex of drives» to recognize a peculiar harmony within.²⁷ One needs a “naturalized” humanity to regain anew control of our moral judgements and to see life from this «most dangerous point of life[,]»²⁸ a reminder of that parallelism that was forgotten in favor of a synthetic “I”.

To confront this impoverishment of willing that nihilism expresses, Nietzsche supplies the eternal return to exacerbate it in hope of an immanent affirmation. I return to the passage I mentioned above (fragment 10, notebook 5, 1886-1887) that supposes the world as the will to power. Nietzsche reminds us this and says in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* to «remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!»²⁹ maintained in a fragment as, «This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!».³⁰ In this (fragment 12, notebook 38, 1885), Nietzsche is radical

²⁴ This is contrary to Deleuze's view expounded in DELEUZE, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 147-148.

²⁵ NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 152.

²⁶ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 152-153.

²⁷ CREAMY, *On the Problem of Affective Nihilism*, p. 45.

²⁸ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, pp. 167-169.

²⁹ NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 6.

³⁰ NIETZSCHE, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, p. 39.

enough not simply for an epistemic revaluation but an ontological independence.³¹ Realizing the twilight of one's idols ought to create a dynamic overture in the individual.

To stress this point, we can return to Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in which he says: «was geliebt werden kann am Menschen, das ist, dass er ein Übergang und ein Untergang ist».³² We may consider that what the greatest weight of the eternal return signifies is the tremendous capacity of being human as being one's own *Übergang* and *Untergang*. Though translated literally as over-going and under-going, we better come to understand the human condition with the poetic presentations of overture and sunset. This shift in translation provides us a glimpse of the radicality of Nietzsche's consideration. Among the translations, Kaufmann's "overture" and Tille- and Appelbaum's "transition" for *Übergang* while Tille's "destruction" for *Untergang* exhibit my point.³³ What can be loved in humanity is that it is its own transition and sunset, overture and destruction, a rope tied between animal and the *Übermensch*.³⁴ Humanity is a going across, a crossing over. *Übergang* is literally above-going – going beyond/across or passing by or over – thus signifies a form of transition or migration, a crosswalk or checkpoint. Conversely, *Untergang* is under- or down-going that conveys destruction, decline, and ruin through the symbolism of the setting or sinking sun, the dusk that anticipates twilight. What is humanity? One's own splendor and failure, one's overcoming and destruction.

This admixture of overture and destruction in the human person bears affinity with what Paolo Bolaños provides us of Deleuze's reading by stressing the image of the world as chaosmos: «to stop thinking that chaos and cosmos are incompatible».³⁵ Nietzsche chastises us and provides us a glimpse of the world.

The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos – in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order [...] Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites [...] When will we complete our de-deification of nature?

³¹ Cfr. Maudmarie CLARK and David DURKDICK, *Nietzsche and Moral Objectivity: The Development of Nietzsche's Metaethics*, in M. CLARK, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, p. 99.

³² Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1994, p. 12.

³³ NIETZSCHE, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, tr. Alexander Tille, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, T. Fisher Unwin, London 1908, tr. Walter Kaufmann, Penguin Books, Middlesex 1966, and tr. Stanley Appelbaum, Dover Publications, Mineola 2004.

³⁴ NIETZSCHE, tr. Adrian Del Caro, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 7-9.

³⁵ Cfr. BOLAÑOS, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, p. 61ff.

When may we begin to “naturalize” humanity in terms of a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?³⁶

With this we are brought to see what I meant earlier by saying that it is not life that is nil but the reactive type of willing. Life comprises willing and everything outside, viz. the world. Willing vis-à-vis the chaos of the world provides an opportunity for us to de-deify nature (our logical, anthropomorphic attributions) and naturalize our concept of humanity. An initial step towards this de-deification and naturalization is through re-understanding life qua *Lebensformen*.³⁷ These are the sensibilities we find ourselves in daily, our social, cultural, and physical conditions that intensify life’s most dangerous view. We become aware of our conditionality, our materiality. It is a mindfulness of the exact situations we find ourselves in as being our splendor and destruction – our ability and power to overcome and self-create at the same time as our failures and struggles.

In context of *Lebensformen*, freedom arises through a recognition of the plurality of drives within and without for only through a confrontation of these drives is a creative element of legislating possible, not the reduction of chaos to order but the recognition of an immanence to chaos.³⁸ As Nietzsche posits the absence of ontologically necessities (the idols we reified), he presents a horizon of freedom for us. This freedom though is not the absence of restrictions but is «measured by the resistance that needs to be overcome, by the effort that it costs to stay on top» for «the highest type of free human beings [is] where the highest resistance is constantly being overcome[.]».³⁹ Nietzsche’s own qualification of freedom shows us that our horizons of freedom are the immediate boundaries that we seek to overcome, the daily problems we face, the struggles in almost all situations we confront. Nietzsche highlights struggles’ vitality in that this is necessary for freedom to be realized; the more pain is endured, the greater one’s auto-plasticity becomes.

Thus, considering *Lebensformen* from this vantage do we realize a parallelism of willing, feeling, and thinking, i.e. «a naturalized, de-moralized notion of freedom [that is] so radically different from metaphysical freedom».⁴⁰ Nietzsche does not invoke freedom in a liberal sense, but the contrary since he likens liberalism and democracy to

³⁶ NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, pp. 168-169.

³⁷ Richard SCHACHT, *Nietzsche’s „Naturalizing“ Philosophical Anthropology*, “Internationales Jahrbuch für philosophische Anthropologie”, 7, 2017, p. 58.

³⁸ Cfr. Razvan IOAN, *Nietzsche’s Spinoza and Nietzsche on Freedom Empowerment and Affirmation*, “European Journal of Philosophy”, 25, 4, 2017, p. 9, (accessed November 26th, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12283>.

³⁹ NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 212-213.

⁴⁰ Razvan IOAN, *Nietzsche’s Spinoza and Nietzsche on Freedom Empowerment and Affirmation*, p. 8.

the decadent condition.⁴¹ Freedom for him means not just the absence of *any* normative condition but of *empty* normative ones. One's *Lebensformen* allow one to realize the immediate conditions to be overcome, to test the quality of one's will in face of these, and to hopefully break free from the old metaphysics. It is the realization of power – not as domination but as interpretation and evaluation in form of a creative struggle.

With the forgoing, we ought to confront how we should live. Nietzsche underscores that when the reigning morality is proved false, it becomes impossible to return to traditional virtue.⁴² Since this is improbable, what must be done according to him is a total revaluation of values. While reminiscing the greatness of antiquity, we must confront our present reactive scenario and make the best of it. We must strive to «grow more honest towards oneself».⁴³ This type of honesty is *Redlichkeit*, a truth-speaking condition which «the process of becoming [is reflected in] Nietzsche's affirmation of the pursuit of truth as an open experiment through which one simultaneously discovers and creates new forms of life».⁴⁴ Nietzsche points to this particular dangerous way of living, for that childlike innocence to play the game of life anew. What I seek to bring to fore is what I borrow from Tobias Kuehne as Nietzsche's ethics of danger. This type of danger is «the threat of unexpected decline, dissolution, or the destruction of a previously stable structure» especially in the face of «any reassuring worldview[.]».⁴⁵ Nietzsche's declaration of God's death shakes metaphysical stability. It challenges our long assumed ontological references or quasi-transcendentals. This conversely conveys the notion that every person's life-journey is lived under constant threat that at any moment one's values may suddenly decline or dissolve. It is a way of living to constantly challenge oneself to find better meaning for the present.

The ethics of danger is a step forward from an ethics of affirmation for a dangerous mode of living is one which constantly tries to break free from nihilism and strives to be affirmative as opposed to what Deleuze would consider as the *becoming-reactive* of forces manifest of a nihilistic age.⁴⁶ This reactivity may be better contextualized through Sloterdijk's enlightened false consciousness which resounds life's reduction to passivity.

⁴¹ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 214-216.

⁴² Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, E. W. Fritzsche, Leipzig 1874, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, *Untimely Meditations*, D. Breazealy (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, pp. 67-72.

⁴³ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Morgenröte. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile*, E. Schmeitzner, Chemnitz 1881, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁴ Vanessa LEMM, *Truth, Embodiment, and Probity (Redlichkeit) in Nietzsche*, in M. DRIES (ed.), *Nietzsche on Consciousness and the Embodied Mind*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2018, pp. 300-301.

⁴⁵ DELEUZE, *Pure Immanence*, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁶ Cfr. *ivi*, p. 75.

[The] psychic (seelisch) apparatus [of present-day cynics] has become elastic enough to incorporate as a survival factor a permanent doubt about their own activities. They know what they are doing, but they do it because, in the short run, the force of circumstances and the instinct for self-preservation are speaking the same language, and they are telling them that it has to be so.⁴⁷

Following Sloterdijk, we may read in Nietzsche's eternal return a return of the cynical conditions of modern life. Though I wish not dwell here on Sloterdijk's account of cynicism, what is thoughtful to consider is the ambivalence of our contemporary situation: We modern cynics work instinctively, not understanding existence between the value judgements of good-bad or even good-evil but as mere participation in collectivity, in herd-mentality. Bridging this to Nietzsche, we recognize how the masters acted because they knew they can, while interpreting this in today's time would afford a strength in character stemming from a more resolved will. The reactivity of the slaves is gravely evident in a peculiar mode of non-thinking: «all thinking has become strategy; this impulse shows a disgust for a certain form of self-preservation».⁴⁸ Whereas the masters' good-bad was simply descriptive, the slaves' good-evil was evaluative; to conjure this table of valuation makes one falsely enlightened and in the current age indeed reactivity's triumph over activity.

Confronting this contemporary condition means a confrontation of our very selves. Today's enlightened false consciousness «has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, [it] no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered».⁴⁹ Nietzsche challenges the eternal return as a terrifying idea to shake us out of this melancholy that nihilism engulfs us in. One frets in face of life eternally returning because of the lack of a determined disposition to face life. However, the eternal return should rekindle not a telos of the Enlightenment, but a critical test of actual enlightenment.⁵⁰ What is needed is a great transvaluation of values: «an active becoming of forces, a triumph of affirmation in the will to power»⁵¹ of having adapted this new metaphysical condition.

From Deleuze's reading, we get a disposition of *becoming-affirmative* in face of life as a transvaluation of values which is «the affirmative NO that paves the way for the relentless YES».⁵² In the eternal return, we open ourselves to danger for the demon

⁴⁷ SLOTERDIJK, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. xxix.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Cfr. Andreas HUYSEN, *The Return of Diogenes as Postmodern Intellectual*, forward to *ivi*, p. xvi.

⁵¹ DELEUZE, *Pure Immanence*, 82.

⁵² BOLAÑOS, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, p. 46.

chases us to our loneliest loneliness in which we are vulnerable «because we feel that something about our lives is missing or unfulfilled».⁵³ Loneliness makes us recognize that we live our lives contrary to what we aspire for, how we have become reactive. The eternal return makes one vulnerable to the past – to the inability to change what has transpired – yet it also opens one to the future, of what one *can* do, of the things we must say NO to. It opens us to the possibility of changing ourselves in a radical sense: «So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we have to misunderstand ourselves».⁵⁴ This type of painful strangeness is how I capture the radicality of Nietzsche’s ethical challenge. It is not simply about an ethics of affirmation but a realization of that primal immanence to life that conjures an implicit danger. From Deleuze’s *becoming-affirmative*, we ought to embrace a *becoming-dangerous* as a confrontation of our very selves and the eventual step of *Redlichkeit*.

An ethics of danger thus builds upon an ethics of affirmation. This presupposes a strength in spirit reminiscent of the masters yet mindful of one’s insecurities and difficulties that stem from the reactive drive, «only those who have the courage, fortitude, and truthfulness to endanger themselves stand a chance of being ethical, while success in this endeavor is all but guaranteed».⁵⁵ Dangers therefore accompany this in testing one’s strength of character to fully overcome nihilism and finding normative commitments to life after God’s death; for today, «self-preservation must be approached in the same language as those of self-destruction (*Selbstvernichtung*)».⁵⁶ As the degree of life-negation increases, so too must one’s will to affirm life intensify.

Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage that offers an opportune moment to question one’s strength: «to have all the morbid traits of the century, but to balance them through a superabundant, recuperative strength».⁵⁷ To confront the decadence of the current situation, one must *have* the strength to do so, one must be resolved to confront the loneliness that accompanies the revaluation. We have to experience the loneliness to confront the demon’s laughter; we have to experience the pain of a transvaluation to live in joy of life lived affirmatively. Nietzsche challenges us the eternal return with the hope of unleashing an extreme love for life in us – a great degree of resentment to a great degree of love. The «*highest* affirmation of the relationship of self and world involves the love of the fate of the world. Another way of putting this point is simply to say that *amor fati* represents our *maximal* possible feeling of

⁵³ REMHOF, *Nietzsche on Loneliness*, p. 195.

⁵⁴ NIETZSCHE, *The Genealogy of Morality*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Tobias KUEHNE, *Nietzsche’s Ethics of Danger*, “The Journal of Nietzsche Studies”, 49, 1, 2018, p. 89.

⁵⁶ SLOTERDIJK, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ NIETZSCHE, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, pp. 74, 146-147.

power». ⁵⁸ The embrace of the entire world *is* freedom: it is the affirmation of the will to power, the maximization of *Machtgefühl*. This entails the selection of the return and an active remembrance to not repeat the same mistakes; not a toleration of wrongs done in society, but a mindfulness that they must not happen again.

Nietzsche exacerbates nihilism with the eternal return for us to understand nihilistic distresses to transform ourselves. ⁵⁹ Humanity is the rope between ape and *Übermensch*, and Deleuze rightly concludes that in each exists a plurality of forces of both active and reactive. ⁶⁰ What makes a rope durable is the quality of the twine that I opine as the quality of love one has for fate, the continual testing of reactive forces – the plurality twines the rope on itself and fortifies it. With this strength of will, each person can conclude: «What doesn't kill me makes me stronger». ⁶¹ The greater the will, the greater the love the individual endures. Only by loving oneself, accepting all that one is, can overcoming even be possible. This is why *amor fati* must be read in conjunction with the eternal return. Nietzsche's «formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity». ⁶² As Nietzsche depicts this love, we ought to infer not a love for one's personal ambition but an embrace of his entirety – culture, history, and even humanity. ⁶³ It is a love of what happens, of what ought to happen to one's life, culture, and society. In accepting conditions for living, one's *Lebensformen* – especially through religion, culture, history – one gets a prized position and selects the return. It requires an intense amount of love to criticize what one loves (to realize our idols' death). It requires an intense amount of love to point out the errors of the things one clings the most to.

This challenge that Nietzsche presents to us is a view of what it means to be human. It is a challenge to become a child of second innocence and to love the world anew. Seeing the world afresh is similar to Zarathustra's descent from the cave: dangerous. What makes Zarathustra's journey peculiarly dangerous is the gift he brings humanity – *Redlichkeit*, truthfulness, probity. He reminds us that we have killed God and the revaluation has begun. This ought to awaken us from our epistemic slumber, to shackle

⁵⁸ Cfr. David OWEN, *Nietzsche, Modernity, and Politics: A Critique of Liberal Reason*, Sage Publications, London 1995, p. 110.

⁵⁹ Cfr. REMHOF, *Nietzsche on Loneliness*, p. 197.

⁶⁰ Cfr. DELEUZE, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 40.

⁶¹ NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 157.

⁶² Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo*, C. G. Naumann, Leipzig 1907, tr. Judith Norman, *Ecce Homo*, in A. RIDLEY and J. NORMAN (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 99.

⁶³ Cfr. OWEN, *Nietzsche, Modernity, and Politics*, p. 110.

our reactive ontology, and to see the enormous possibilities of living dangerously.⁶⁴ One's life-journey ought to be like Zarathustra's – personal wandering replete with dangers.⁶⁵ Speaking of truth in this context thus requires one to create: «To create is to lighten, to unburden life, to invent new possibilities of life. The creator is legislator – dancer».⁶⁶ One tests the dangerous dance on the tightrope to traverse nihilism; one becomes affirmative in learning which ascetic ideals are in service to life-affirmation. One goes beyond the will to know and adapts the will to power; one learns through a certain discipline how to distinguish truth from untruth – *and is not this what wisdom is?* Loving wisdom is achieved by incorporating elements of one's historicity to expand the economy of the soul.⁶⁷

A philosopher (lit. lover of wisdom) in this regard is the child after nihilism, i.e. «necessarily a person of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow».⁶⁸ To qualify this, a philosopher in Nietzsche's exact sense here means not just having a degree in the field, but rather she with a conscious decision to become affirmative. To differentiate thus, I maintain Nietzsche's depiction of these freed individuals as “new” or “real” philosophers vis-à-vis “normal” philosophers. To be a real philosopher is not something taught but something experienced. These are the individuals who have learned

to follow hunches, to think at a “presto” pace (VI:213), to embark on experiments both intellectual and existential (V:203, VI:211) to transform and to create values (V:205, VI:210), to put forward hypotheses that are risky: in short, to be interested in what he calls “dangerous perhapses” (I:2).⁶⁹

These philosophers of the future live with dangerous *perhapses*: *perhaps* truth is an illusion, *perhaps* life is to return, *perhaps* God is dead. Than a *becoming-reactive* because of these perhapses, the new philosopher sees these moments as immanent glimpses of affirmation and exposes herself to that constant struggle of breaking free from old metaphysics.

Comparing the two types of philosophers, Nietzsche characterizes “normal” philosophers or in other instances “scholars” those who precisely fail to understand what it means to live dangerously, those who merely follow the necessities of dialectics or syllogisms.⁷⁰ Those who have freed themselves from the shackles of a reactive

⁶⁴ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, pp. 197-198 and 228-229.

⁶⁵ Cfr. KUEHNE, *Nietzsche's Ethics of Danger*, p. 86.

⁶⁶ DELEUZE, *Pure Immanence*, p. 69.

⁶⁷ Cfr. CONWAY, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 69.

⁶⁸ NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 106.

⁶⁹ Rolf-Peter HORSTMANN, Introduction to *wi*, p. xix.

⁷⁰ Cfr. *wi*, pp. 107-108.

morality, who can face life dangerously, are the real philosophers, the real lovers of wisdom. They do not have the gravity of the spirit tied to necessities but knows how to live beyond the reactive valuation of good and evil. The ability of this new philosopher, the *becoming-dangerous* individual, is to legislate how to live her life after having ascertained that pain and joy are of the same coin. This is something entirely different from what the ascetic priests valued – a *pathos* than an *ethos*. Kaufmann supplies a brief understanding to this distinction: «*Pathos* is defined as “literally, the more transitory and passive experiences of life, as contrasted with *ethos*, the more permanent and active disposition and character”». ⁷¹ The emphasis of the ascetic priests was the pathological element of life: life is transient and is directed towards the afterlife. A true philosopher breaks free from this decadence in morality and embraces the lightness of spirit, living affirmatively yet dangerously.

Nietzsche wishes us to realize how the «ascetic ideal is a paradox». ⁷² The Christian response is an ascetic practice of enduring suffering for the sake of an afterlife, which earns Nietzsche’s criticisms; the main issue at stake is how oblivious we are to the enormous reservoir of power the ascetic ideals have! ⁷³ We remember Nietzsche’s reverence for the ascetic ideals *in so far as they are true*. ⁷⁴ This shows their paradoxical character: on the one hand they make life bearable, yet on the other the endurance is for an afterlife. *Becoming-dangerous* is that disposition of the real philosopher to adopt good asceticism, i.e. ascetic practices that makes life bearable not through domination over others but through certain self-exercises.

Good asceticism requires immense discipline and is an art in itself. It is a play, the eternal drama of the dice game and the affirmation of both chance and necessity when faced with the dice throw. The «Will to power depicts in dynamic and existential terms the idea that each affirmation is also a negation[.]». ⁷⁵ It is the affirmation of what falls to my lot and a negation of the possibility that I cheated by loading the dice. This willing manifests itself through divergences, variances, nuances – only through opposition does it surface; the will to power does not synthesize – it overcomes! It is necessary that something passes away and not merely is incorporated. There must be a downfall for an overture to appear. «*[W]e ourselves, we free spirits, are nothing less than a “revaluation of values”, an incarnate declaration of war and triumph over all the ancient conceptions*

⁷¹ James Mark BALDWIN, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, cited in NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, note 43.

⁷² OWEN, *Nietzsche, Modernity, and Politics*, p. 77.

⁷³ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *The Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 109-110.

⁷⁴ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 116-118.

⁷⁵ Lawrence J. HATAB, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment to Postmodern Politics*, Open Court Publishing, Illinois 1995, p. 8.

of “true” and “untrue”. [...] We have learned to think differently».⁷⁶ The freed spirits have relearned, have died to themselves yet was born anew. They have become recreations in themselves, “plays” with morality, tests to relearn the game and play it again. This can only happen through a childlike innocence after the whole process of revaluation, after confronting one’s loneliness and great suffering. This ought to be understood in the most radical sense: the creation of an entirely “new” second nature as a second naivete. This new nature allows us to recreate and to play the game of life again; we need to learn the rules afresh. This is the only way to recreate. This is the only way to play. «I do not know any other way of associating with great tasks than play: as a sign of greatness, this is an essential presupposition».⁷⁷ The freed spirit legislates like a child. Her childlike innocence is necessary to play the game of life once more – *as life is to return eternally*. It is a radically fresh start to life. It is the importance of one’s innocence than one’s sin, of one’s capacity rather than one’s gravity.⁷⁸ It is the beginning of a new game – do the dice fall to my favor?

Humanity is a dangerous game of moral perfectionism. We need to constantly roll the dice but without loading them at the two dice throws as two moments of revaluation.⁷⁹ Then again, midnight and noon, the two hours of revaluation, present us a game of chance, a game to affirm oneself, a game of danger. «It is Dionysus who throws the dice. It is he who dances and transforms himself, who is called “Polygethes”, the god of a thousand joys».⁸⁰ Through the dice throws is one constantly born *into* joy, into innocence. It is Dionysus who overlooks this game and who promises that life «will eternally be reborn and come home out of destruction».⁸¹ Concerning this game, Zarathustra expresses his love for those who play fairly: «I love the one who is ashamed when the dice fall to his fortune and who then asks: am I a cheater? – For he wants to perish».⁸² This play entails me to affirm existence, not just the greatness of moments but even the most minute ones. This is to embrace our current capacity to love our fate and embrace the necessity of being but also of becoming. It is a game of chance, yet

⁷⁶ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Der Antichrist*, C. G. Naumann, Leipzig 1895, tr. Judith Norman, *The Antichrist*, in A. RIDLEY and J. NORMAN (eds.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁷ NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo*, p. 99.

⁷⁸ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, pp. 44-45.

⁷⁹ I differentiate here Zarathustra’s dice throw from that of the Scholars who embrace the virtues that make small, that pontificate these virtues on others (Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 97-99). Cfr. DELEUZE, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 25.

⁸⁰ *Ivi*, p. 18.

⁸¹ NIETZSCHE, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, p. 249.

⁸² NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 7-9.

the child is surprised upon receiving her lot while the scholars are surprised if they do not receive theirs.

This game forms the good asceticism that a true philosopher engages in. Lawrence Hatab reminds us that «the higher types of creative individuals are those who serve and enact the process of “aesthetic” forming that gives humanity its meanings, purposes, values, and truths».⁸³ Nietzsche’s presentation of an *ethos* is holistic without any divide between thinking and acting: «Once I have said I will do a thing, I do it».⁸⁴ The epistemic-ethical gap between thoughts and actions is overcome for one’s great love (for oneself) bridges this gap: “I want to live a life that is to return. I therefore should live a life I desire”. This type of truth-telling is fundamental to living a life of affirmation, but even further, a life of danger. It is a humanity lying open to the dangerous realization that my life’s successes and failures are solely based on how I choose to approach life. Nietzsche’s prescription is an ascetic practice of denying the No- and affirming the Yes-saying principle. It is the danger of treading intellectual honesty and truth-telling, and the constant re-appropriation of self-directing principles. It is a dynamicity within to overcome the tensions and conflicts of the spirit. It further strengthens the twine.

Finally, through this *ethos* do we observe the dynamic recreation of the freed spirit. With one eye to the future, one endures suffering not for the sake of a better tomorrow but because of love. It is a dynamic overcoming of one’s condition, the godlike feeling of humaneness.⁸⁵ We have to remember we are products of our own historicity. This is the reason why nihilism ought to be exacerbated for a new way of living «can only emerge in the new ways of seeing and feeling that come from thinking through the old ideal and its role in making us who we are now».⁸⁶ Breaking off from the former into a recreation of the spirit; for only at the breaking of twilight does the owl of Minerva take its flight, does philosophy make sense, that the Athenian tetradrachm flips. Taking our historicity into consideration, self-overcoming «exploits the plasticity of the human soul to engender internal difference and variegation. The greater the distances created within the soul, the greater the range of perspectives the real philosopher can entertain and command».⁸⁷ The lover of life, the true philosopher, the freed spirit, achieves this paramount purview of existence through her recreation. It becomes a pinnacle or

⁸³ HATAB, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ NIETZSCHE, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, p. 304.

⁸⁵ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, pp. 267-269.

⁸⁶ Maudemarie CLARK, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, p. 73.

⁸⁷ CONWAY, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 69.

(un)reason; I need to reeducate myself and relearn higher ideals, to love myself even more, for even love has to be learned.⁸⁸

* * *

Nietzsche aids his presentation of the idols' twilight with the eternal return as the extreme form of nihilism. In face of widespread nihilism, we are left to consider what it means to be human. Nietzsche's response to this is not a form of moderation but its exacerbation. He challenges the eternal return to elicit from his readers a particular way of living – only if the spirit is strong enough to endure such suffering then a new image of humanity ensues. If life is to eternally return, then one is left to choose how she wishes to live. Envisioning humanity is a primal recognition of one's capacity for affirmation, but even greater of opening oneself to danger. Through an ontological restructuring by realizing the will to power does this challenge reveal what a new humanity means: I play the game anew; I learn the rules again. Both chance and necessity present themselves as constitutive elements of playing. In face of the crudest form of nihilism, one confronts oneself and makes the decision: Am I willing to play this game again? Am I willing to lose? To win? What am I willing to give up to play again if it is to return? Lastly, if the eternal return is indeed to be taken seriously, one ought to become someone entirely new. The game is the same but entirely new; humanity is the same but entirely new.

Thus, living life from this vantage point effects an ethics of danger, a wary approach to nihilism and a fervent desire to become affirmative. One needs to be open to affirm but also to open herself to the danger this presents. To be open to the dangers that this lays out for me is not something I shy away from but should accept fully – after all, we get our complete bliss when we are in most danger.⁸⁹ I must remain faithful to the earth, faithful to myself – faithful to the will to power. In this sense, humanity becomes a lover of wisdom, a truth-teller of the need to remain faithful to the will to power. Due to the presence of multiple forces within each person, it is clear that no one is consistently affirmative or reactive. To overcome this struggle, one recognizes the antagonism within that is triumphed by the affirmative force, manifested externally as a “No” to the nihilistic triad. Overcoming nihilism by *becoming-dangerous* ought to be a constant disposition, and such makes one a true philosopher, living dangerous due to the ‘truth-speaking’ capacity to proclaim the revaluation of values. The freed spirit in this case has the «mature freedom of spirit which is equally self-mastery and discipline of the

⁸⁸ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *The Gay Science*, p. 262.

⁸⁹ Cfr. NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 114-116.

heart and permits access to many and contradictory modes of thought».⁹⁰ Living with these new values of *becoming-affirmative* and *Redlichkeit* is what an ethics of danger means, what humanity as the will to power signifies.

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⁹⁰ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister*, E. Schmeitzner, Leipzig 1878, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, R.-P. Horstmann and J. Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 8.

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