

Nietzschean Monism? A Pandispositionalist Proposal.

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1. Introduction¹

Monism about items in a certain domain is the view that when one counts those items in that domain the result one gets is one. If the domain is reality *überhaupt*, then the view is that there really is just one item. What it amounts to depends on the kind of items in question. A version of monism says that there really is just one thing: just one concrete token entity. Famous defenders of this view are Spinoza—who thought that there really is just one substance, i.e. God—and Schopenhauer—who thought that there really is just (what he calls) the Will. Call this token monism. Another version of monism says that what there really is are things of the same sort. Materialism is such a view, for it doesn't claim that only one material thing really exists, but rather that all things that really exist are material. Idealists like Berkeley are another example: they don't claim that only one mind really exists, but rather that all things that really exist are mental. Call this type monism.²

Nietzsche has been traditionally understood as a token monist holding that there really is just (what he calls) the Will to Power. However, as shown—among others—by Müller-Lauter (1974) and Abel (1998), this reading is incorrect. When he talks about the will to power, Nietzsche doesn't have in mind one concrete token entity, but rather a plurality of such entities. Thus, as Abel puts it, we should rather talk of *wills* to power—or, more simply, of powers. This

¹ Here I build on Riccardi (2009) and (2010), though the resulting reading isn't quite the same.

² "Token monism" corresponds to what Schaffer (2018) calls "existence monism", whereas "type monism" corresponds to what he calls "substance monism".

means that the only kind of monism one could possibly ascribe to Nietzsche is a version of type monism—roughly, the view that what there really is are powers or, as Galen Strawson (2015:32) puts it, that “all being is power being”. In this paper, I shall argue that this is indeed the kind of view emerging from Nietzsche’s “metaphysical sketches”, as Peter Poellner aptly calls them (see Pollner 2013). (I shall explain in due course why this characterization is appropriate.) More precisely, I shall argue for a pandispositionalist reading according to which Nietzsche is best understood as endorsing that (i) powers are the basic constituents of reality and that (ii) the only properties things possess are relational *qua* dispositional.³ (Hopefully, the paper will succeed in spelling out in more details what these two claims amount to.)

Here is an overview of the paper. As I believe that Nietzsche’s pandispositionalism is, at least in part, motivated by his rejection of Kant’s notion of things in themselves, I start by sketching the metaphysics of Kant’s transcendental idealism (section 2) and by presenting Nietzsche’s critical reaction to it (section 3). After that, I start to work out Nietzsche’s view that reality is essentially constituted by powers, by considering first the case of physical reality (section 3) and second that of psychological reality (section 5). I then argue that whereas Nietzsche’s core pandispositionalism is compatible with his overall philosophical project—more specifically, with his naturalism—(section 6), a straightforward conflict arises when we supplement it with the further claim that the will to power is a fundamental physical force (section 7). Fortunately, and despite several unpublished notes putting forward such a claim, Nietzsche’s commitment to it remains dubious. Or so I argue in the concluding section 8.

Before I start pursuing this plan, there is a textual issue that needs to be mentioned. As it is well known to Nietzsche scholars—and as it will clearly emerge from the following discussion—, the vast majority of the passages where Nietzsche puts forward the kind of power metaphysics I shall be dealing with here are unpublished notes scattered across his late *Nachlass*. This is the reason why it is appropriate to describe it as one of his “metaphysical sketches”, as Poellner does. Whether these unpublished materials should be at all considered as reliable evidence for his considered views has been debated for decades, in part due to their controversial editorial history. As my interest here is theoretical rather than purely exegetical, I shall simply

³ For a helpful introduction to the current debate about powers see Marmodoro (2010), from which this terminology is borrowed.

explore them with the aim of working out an interesting monist outlook. Nonetheless, in the last part of the paper I shall take into account concerns about the status of the available textual evidence.⁴

2. A Kantian Argument

Scholars still struggle to make sense of Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves. There are two main ways of seeing things. On the one hand, one can take appearances and things in themselves to be the same items. Versions of this reading are labeled One World (or Object) Views.⁵ On the other hand, one can take them to be different items. Versions of this other reading are labeled Two Worlds (or Objects) Views.⁶ However, and independently of where one's sympathy lies in this dispute,⁷ there seems to be a purely conceptual side to Kant's distinction too. First, it is part of the meaning of the concept "thing in itself" that an object *O* satisfies it if and only if *O* only possesses intrinsic properties. Second, it is part of the meaning of the concept "appearance" that an object *O* satisfies it if and only if *O* only displays relational properties. The debate about Kant's transcendental idealism can thus be seen as a dispute about the extension of the two concepts thus defined. According to the One World View, the extension of the two concepts is the same set of items. According to the Two Worlds View, the extension of the two concepts is two sets of distinct items. I shall not assume any position about this metaphysical dispute. I shall only assume that Kant takes the notions of "thing in itself" and "appearance" to have the meaning specified above. (I do not mean to suggest that those characterizations are exhaustive, but only that they capture an essential part of the concepts' meaning.)

Now, Kant sometimes argues that empirical objects—i.e. the objects of perceptual experience—only display relational properties (see CPR B66-67). One argument he provides to that effect can be formulated as follows:

1. All properties of empirical objects are spatiotemporal.

⁴ Insufficient attention to this problem now seems to me a major weakness of Riccardi (2009).

⁵ Langton (1998) and Allais (2004)—among many others—defend this view.

⁶ Guyer (1987) and Van Cleve (1999)—among many others—defend this view.

⁷ Langton (1998) and Van Cleve (1999) agree on this point, for instance.

2. All spatiotemporal properties are relational properties.
3. Thus, all properties of empirical objects are relational properties.

Accepting (3) together with the concepts of “thing in itself” and “appearance” in the proposed characterization leads one immediately to the following further claims:

4. Empirical objects (objects of perceptual experience) are not things in themselves.
5. Empirical objects (objects of perceptual experience) are (mere) appearances.

This is, of course, no surprising result. Indeed, it is just a way of putting the basic claim of Kant’s transcendental idealism: we do not cognize things in themselves, but (mere) appearances.⁸

The key move in Kant’s reasoning—at least for this paper’s purpose—is aptly captured by James Van Cleve:

The primary properties all distill down to spatial (and presumably also temporal) relations, either of part to part within a whole or of the whole to other wholes outside it. So, if bodies have the primary properties only, they have relational properties only (plus dispositions to have relations). How can anything be like that—all form and no matter, all structure and no stuffing? ... Kant’s response is to hold that although no thing in itself can be like that, an appearance can be, thus converting the difficulty into one more proof of the ideality of bodies. (Van Cleve 1999:170)

As we shall see, Nietzsche does not seem to share Kant’s intuition when it comes to ascertain the metaphysical status of something that is “all structure and no stuffing”. The next section will work out his own view of the matter.

3. Nietzsche’s Argument against Kantian Things in Themselves

In BGE 16, Nietzsche claims *en passant* that Kant’s thing in itself amounts to a “*contradictio in adjecto*”. Unfortunately, he does not say why. The reader is thus left with the task of figuring out which argument, if any, he might have in mind. This is what I shall attempt to do in this section.⁹

⁹ For a thorough treatment, see Riccardi (2009, ch. 6) and Riccardi (2010).

Some unpublished notes help us unpack what I believe is the reasoning underlying Nietzsche's claim.

The 'thing in itself' nonsensical (*widersinnig*). If I take away all relations, all 'properties', all 'activities' of a thing, the thing does *not* remain left. (1887 10[202] KSA12:580)

the 'in itself' is even a nonsensical (*widersinnige*) conception: a 'constitution in itself' is nonsense: we have the concept 'being', 'thing' always only as a relation concept (*Relationsbegriff*)... (1888 14[103] KSA13:280).

The properties of a thing are effects (*Wirkungen*) on other things: if one abstracts away from the other 'things', then a thing has no properties, i.e. there *is no thing without other things*, i.e. there is no 'thing in itself'. (1887 2[85] KSA12:104)

Three main claims emerge from these passages. First, Nietzsche argues that a thing's properties consist in the "effects" it has on other things. This means, in turn, that a thing's properties are relational (*qua* dispositional). Second, and relatedly, he argues that there are no other properties a thing has above its relational ones: things do not display any intrinsic nature—a "constitution in itself". Things are relational all way down. This means, as he also puts it, that if one takes away from a thing all its relational properties, nothing remains. Its relational properties exhaust a thing's nature.¹⁰ Third, and again relatedly, the concept of thing in itself, i.e. of a thing characterized solely in terms of its intrinsic constitution, turns out to be nonsensical in something like the Tractarian sense: it is an empty concept lacking any reference in the real world of human experience. As Nietzsche puts it in another note, the world "does *not* exist as a world 'in-itself', but is "essentially a world of relations (*Relations-Welt*)" (1888 14[93] WLN: 250; KSA13:271, translation changed).

Remarkably, Kant agrees with much of what Nietzsche holds here. In particular, he not only accepts that whatever properties we may discover things to possess, they will be relational (*qua* spatiotemporal) ones, but also that the concept of thing in itself is empty, since no possible

¹⁰ Friedrich Albert Lange already makes a similar claim: "A 'thing' is known to us through its properties; a subject is determined by its predicates. But the 'thing' is, in fact, only the resting-place demanded by our thought. We know nothing but properties and their concurrence in an unknown something, the assumption of which is a *figment of our mind*" (Lange 1925 v3:390).

object of experience could fall under it. Nevertheless, he does not take this to imply that it is a nonsensical concept. Indeed, he suggests that we are in some sense *required* to apply it even in the theoretical domain. The main motivation for this move comes from his endorsement of (5), i.e. that empirical objects are (mere) appearances. Here is how Kant puts things:

if we view the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is fitting, then we thereby admit at the very same time that a thing in itself underlies them, although we are not acquainted with this thing as it may be constituted in itself, but only with its appearance, i.e., with the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something. (Kant 1783 §32:66)

Now, one may ask why we should think it is “fitting” to treat the “objects of the senses as mere appearances”, as Kant maintains. In fact, support for this last claim—which is, of course, claim (5) above—only seems to come from (the relevant part of) Kant’s conceptual stipulation about the meaning of the term “appearance”. More precisely, from the stipulation that if an object only displays relational properties, then it is a (mere) “appearance”.¹¹ By why should we accept *that*?

Van Cleve nicely articulates Kant’s intuition here. If we can show of a certain thing that it is “all structure and no stuffing”, isn’t it natural to conclude that it can’t really be a thing at all, but only a mere appearance at best? Maybe this is indeed a natural conclusion. However, I think Paul Guyer (1987:350) is right in pointing out that it rather reveals a “prejudice against the ultimate reality of relations”. At least, Nietzsche did not share Kant’s intuition (or prejudice). As he writes in an unpublished note, that “a thing dissolves in a sum of relations does prove nothing *against* its reality” (1881 13[11] KSA 9:620). Quite to the contrary, “it’s only relations that constitute entities” (1888 14[122] WLN:258).

Poellner denies the coherence of the sort of position I am here ascribing to Nietzsche. As he puts it: “Relations require relata, and there can only be such if they have some intrinsic properties” (Pollner 2013:692). However, this objection seems to beg the question, as it simply

¹¹ The conceptual stipulation as formulated in section 2 is, in fact, a biconditional. Here I consider only the direction that proves relevant to the present discussion.

restates the Kantian intuition (or prejudice) that it cannot be the case that things are relational all way down. More should be said to vindicate it against Nietzsche's own view.¹²

4. Nietzsche's Pandispositionalism: Physical Reality

So far, I've only attributed to Nietzsche the claim that things only possess relational properties. His late *Nachlass* adumbrates a power metaphysics that can be seen as a positive way of fleshing it out. The emerging picture—which is admittedly based on some very sketchy notes—amounts to a version of pandispositionalism. In particular, I shall argue that Nietzsche's power metaphysics is best understood not as a description of what there is at the most fundamental level, but rather as a way of capturing a basic pattern that surfaces at different levels of explanations. In other words, the dispositional nature of reality is not something that we (only) discover by hitting its bedrock, so to speak. Rather, it is common to and becomes manifest through phenomena of (apparently) different nature, from physical ones to psychological ones. These will be the two examples I shall focus on to illustrate and support my interpretive claim. The present section explores how Nietzsche's pandispositionalism applies to physical reality, whereas the next one deals with psychological reality.¹³

Let us start with how Nietzsche formulates his own pandispositionalist metaphysics with regard to physical reality. As noted by many interpreters, he appeals to the dynamic tradition in physics, which he identifies with the work of dalmatian polymath Roger Boscovich. Aphorism 12 from *Beyond Good and Evil* voices an explicit praise:

As far as materialistic atomism goes: this is one of the most well-refuted things in existence. In Europe these days, nobody in the scholarly community is likely to be so unscholarly as to attach any real significance to it, except as a handy household tool (that is, as an abbreviated figure of speech). For this, we can thank that Pole, Boscovich, who, together with the Pole, Copernicus, was the greatest, most successful opponent of the visual evidence. While Copernicus convinced us to believe, contrary to all our senses, that the

¹² Note that—given the dialectic of Kant's own view—the burden of proof hardly lies on Nietzsche. For Kant himself holds—indeed, claims to know a priori—that every possible object of perceptual experience will only display relational properties (see claim (3) above). Thus, Kant would agree that Nietzsche's relational metaphysics constitutes a complete and true description of the world as we cognize it.

¹³ Nietzsche similarly speculates also about biological reality. I leave that aside.

earth does *not* stand still, Boscovich taught us to renounce belief in the last bit of earth that *did* “stand still”, the belief in “matter”, in the “material”, in the residual piece of earth and clump of an atom: it was the greatest triumph over the senses that the world had ever known. (BGE 12)

As alluded to by this passage, according to Boscovich’s dynamic theory the most basic constituents of physical reality are not the corpuscula posited by early-modern physics, but rather “centers of force”. More precisely, the properties of material bodies are explained as resulting from the activity of primitive forces (see Buroker 1972:155). Contrary to the corpuscular notion of atom, reality’s most basic elements are conceived simply as the loci in which the activity of such fundamental forces becomes manifest.

Remarkably, a major representant of the dynamic tradition is Kant himself, who takes material bodies to result from the interaction of two fundamental forces, the attractive one and the repulsive one, thus developing a model strikingly similar to the one due to Boscovich (see, again, Buroker 1972; Holden 2004, ch. 6; Hanna 2006:148-149). Of course, that the properties of material bodies can be ultimately explained by appeal to primitive forces nicely fits with Kant’s further view that those bodies only display relational properties. For claiming that the properties of material bodies result from the interaction of certain forces means explaining them in dispositional, i.e. relational terms.

Given this, it should be less surprising that Nietzsche’s similar endorsement of the claim that things only display relational properties leads him to sympathize with the dynamic conception. The most representative passage is the following one: “[once we have purified our worldview from a range of anthropomorphisms], what remains are not things but dynamic quanta in a relationship of tension with all other dynamic quanta, whose essence consists in their relation to all other quanta, in their ‘effects’ on these” (1888 14[79] WLN:247). As we saw, Nietzsche had already written that the “properties of a thing are effects (*Wirkungen*) on other things”. He now suggests that the best candidates to count as “things” of this sort cannot be properly conceptualized as “things” at all, but—in line with the dynamic tradition—as some sort of forces or powers. In another note he describes them as “Quanta of force whose essence consists in exerting power on all other quanta of force” (1888 14[81] KSA 13:263; see also: “A quantum of power is defined by the effect it exerts and the effect it resists” (1888 14[79]

WLN:246)). Contrary to Kant, who at different times engaged in the project of working out a detailed dynamic model of physical reality, Nietzsche just wrote down a dozen of notes merely gesturing towards such a conception. Nonetheless, they suffice to show that the acceptance of the claim that things only display relational properties made him sympathetically entertain a pandispositionalist view according to which powers of a certain sort are the most basic constituents of physical reality.¹⁴

5. Nietzsche's Pandispositionalism: Psychological Reality

Psychology is the second realm I want to explore to show that Nietzsche's pandispositionalism is supposed to describe a basic pattern shared by phenomena of (apparently) different nature. A good place to start is again aphorism 12 from *Beyond Good and Evil*—the one beginning with Nietzsche's praise of Boscovich. It goes on as follows:

But we must go further still and declare war—a ruthless fight to the finish—on the “atomistic need” that, like the more famous “metaphysical need,” still leads a dangerous afterlife in regions where nobody would think to look. First of all, we must also put an end to that other and more disastrous atomism, the one Christianity has taught best and longest, the *atomism of the soul*. Let this expression signify the belief that the soul is something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, that it is a monad, an *atomon*: this *belief* must be thrown out of science! (BGE 12)

Nietzsche's target is again a conception of a certain item—this time, the “soul”—as having a purely intrinsic constitution. Leibniz's monad, to which Nietzsche explicitly refers, is just that: all internal determinations and no external relations. Such a picture of the soul, he suggests, should be abandoned. This does not mean, however, that we should “give up ‘the soul’ itself” (BGE 12). Rather, we should substitute the monadic conception “with new versions and sophistications of the soul hypothesis”. Among those proposed by Nietzsche, I want to focus on the following one: “soul as a society constructed out of drives and affects”.

¹⁴ I do not think such a pandispositionalist view is incoherent, as Strawson (2015:32) argues. In fact, it seems to me there is no substantial difference between it and the view Strawson ascribes to Nietzsche.

Scholars agree that drives are the most basic explanatory items in Nietzsche's philosophical psychology (see, for instance, Richardson 1996 and Katsafanas 2013). They also agree that drives are to be understood as active dispositions (toward distinct patterns of behavior). In that respect, they play a role analogous to that of active forces at the level of physical reality: when we have to explain the behavior of physical entities, the most basic explanatory items will be (dispositional) forces. Similarly, when we have to explain the minded behavior of human beings, the most basic explanatory items are (dispositional) drives. Furthermore, as we shouldn't conceive of forces as grounded in purely intrinsic features of physical entities, we shouldn't conceive of drives as grounded in purely intrinsic features of mental entities.¹⁵ Rather, as a material body results from the interaction of the forces constituting it, a soul results from the interaction of the drives constituting it.

This—including the analogy between the physical case and the psychological one—is precisely the point Nietzsche makes in one of most famous passages from the *Genealogy of Morality*:

A quantum of power is just such a quantum of drive, will, effect—more precisely, it is nothing other than this very driving, willing, effecting, and only through the seduction of language (and the basic errors of reason petrified therein), which understands and misunderstands all effecting as conditioned by an effecting something, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise. (GM I 13)

The question Nietzsche is addressing here is the nature of human agency, more precisely the idea of free agency. Therefore, the relevant realm is that of psychology. The point he makes in the quoted passage is that it is a mistake to postulate an “effecting something”—such as a Leibnizian monad—over and above the “quantum of power”, i.e. the active disposition responsible for the relevant instance of behavior. For “there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything” (GM I 13). This sort of reasoning is strikingly similar to that displayed by some of Nietzsche's later unpublished notes concerning the nature of physical quanta of power. On the one hand, a “quantum of power”—be it a physical force or a psychological drive—can only be

¹⁵ The kind of parallel I draw here between physical reality and psychological reality is not meant to suggest that Nietzsche takes them to be two separate realms.

individuated by appeal to its effects. On the other hand, and relatedly, it lacks any kind of purely intrinsic ground—it has no “substratum”, as Nietzsche puts it. Thus—and as we already saw—, as it is a mistake to postulate a material atom as the bearer of physical dispositions—for, quite to the contrary, material bodies (including microscopic ones) are *constituted* by such dispositions, it is equally a mistake to postulate a soul or self as the bearer of psychological dispositions—for, quite to the contrary, the soul or self is *constituted* by such dispositions. (As you may recall, Nietzsche offers a “new” characterization of the soul as the “social structure” of one’s drives (and affects).) Remarkably, it is Nietzsche himself who—in the very passage from the *Genealogy* we are considering—stresses the analogy between the case of psychological explanation and that of physical explanation:

Natural scientists do no better when they say “force moves, force causes,” and so on—our entire science, despite all its coolness, its freedom from affect, still stands under the seduction of language and has not gotten rid of the changelings slipped over on it, the “subjects” (the atom, for example, is such a changeling, likewise the Kantian “thing in itself”). (GM I 13)

Crucially, Nietzsche here also mentions Kant’s concept of thing in itself as analogous to that of material atom—traditionally, i.e. non-dynamically conceived—and to that of monadic soul. What these three notions have in common is that they are obtained by abstracting away all the dispositional properties of the relevant item. What remains is then conceived as the purely intrinsic bearer of those very properties. In all three cases, Nietzsche argues that this sort of reasoning is mistaken. As Boscovich taught, the best picture of physical reality dispenses with the notion of material atom. As Nietzsche himself argues, the best picture of psychological reality dispenses with the notion of monadic soul. Finally, the best picture of reality *überhaupt* dispenses with the Kantian notion of thing in itself.

6. A Problem for Naturalism?

Some scholars—most notably, Maudemarie Clark (1990) and Brian Leiter (2002; 2013)—have argued that Nietzsche’s avowed naturalism clashes against the will to power metaphysics traditionally associated with his thought. Thus, they attempt to free his naturalist project from

such a “crackpot metaphysics”, as Leiter (2013:594) puts it. I agree that if we take some of his claims—in particular, some of those to be found in the *Nachlass*—about the will to power at face value, serious problems arise for his overall philosophical project. This is an issue I shall address in the next section. What I want to argue now is rather that the kind of pandispositionalism I have spelled out so far does not pose any serious threat to Nietzsche’s naturalism. Thus, the claim I shall defend is modest: there is at least a dimension of Nietzsche’s power metaphysics—its core pandispositionalism—that proves internally unproblematic.

To show this, we first need to have a clearer picture of Nietzsche’s naturalism. Here, I shall follow Clark and Leiter. As Clark writes, Nietzsche’s later works show a “uniform and unambiguous respect for facts, the senses, and sciences” (Clark 1990:105). More precisely, both Clark and Leiter agree that Nietzsche’s naturalism is “methodological”, i.e. the view that philosophical theories should aim at explain the relevant phenomena in a way continuous with the methods and results of the empirical sciences (see Leiter 2002; Clark and Dudrick 2012:130).¹⁶

To my knowledge, nobody has argued that Nietzsche’s drive psychology poses any internal threat to his naturalism, at least not in virtue of the pandispositionalism it entails for positing the drives *qua* behavioral dispositions as the fundamental constituents of the soul and, consequently, as the most basic items in psychological explanations.¹⁷ On the contrary, Nietzsche’s naturalism is usually taken to be in tension with his power metaphysics understood as a view about physical reality. Here I want to argue that—as long as the kind of pandispositionalism worked out so far is at issue—such a worry is ill founded.

To start with, note that Nietzsche takes his pandispositionalism to be largely in agreement with the dynamic tradition in modern physics. Importantly, this tradition became preeminent in late 19th century physics. Thus, his view here displays enough continuity with the results of the empirical sciences to be compatible with the kind of methodological naturalism Clark and Leiter

¹⁶ Though they agree about what Nietzsche’s naturalism is, Clark and Dudrick, on the one hand, and Leiter, on the one other hand, disagree about its scope. Whereas Leiter defends that it applies across the board, Clark and Dudrick argue that Nietzsche takes human agency to be normative and thus impossible to be made sense of in naturalistic terms.

¹⁷ There is, in fact, a serious problem for Nietzsche’s drives psychology, but one of a different sort altogether, namely the problem of homuncularism. I propose a way to solve it in Riccardi (2018).

attributes to Nietzsche. To make my case, I shall consider Faraday's speculations about the nature of physical reality, which are also presented as an articulation of Boscovich's insights. Most importantly, they put forward the same sort of reasoning underlying Nietzsche's pandispositionalism.

Faraday describes Boscovich dynamic atoms as follows:

His atoms, if I understand aright, are mere centres of forces or powers, not particles of matter, in which the powers themselves reside. If, in the ordinary view of atoms, we call the particle of matter away from the powers *a*, and the system of powers or forces in and around it *m*, then in Boscovich's theory *a* disappears, or is *a* mere mathematical point, whilst in the usual notion it is a little unchangeable, impenetrable piece of matter, and *m* is an atmosphere of force grouped around it. (Faraday 1844:290)

Faraday accepts the idea that most fundamental *posita* in physics should not be material atoms, but rather field-like "systems of powers or forces". Given this, the atom *qua* "particle of matters" is thus either reduced to such systems—and thus "disappears"—or is identified with a mere "mathematical point". Faraday himself draws the first conclusion:

To my mind, therefore, the *a* or nucleus vanishes, and the substance consists of the power or *m*; and indeed what notion can we form of the nucleus independent of its powers? all our perception and knowledge of the atom, and even our fancy, is limited to ideas of its powers; what thought remains on which to hang the imagination of an *a* independent of the acknowledged forces? (Faraday 1844:290-91)

The analogies with Nietzsche's *Nachlass* speculations should be obvious. If similar thoughts converge towards the conclusions drawn by one of the greatest physicists of his time, there is no reason to think they break with his commitment to continuity with the methods and results of empirical science.¹⁸

Of course, that Nietzsche's pandispositionalism about physical reality is continuous with late 19th century empirical science does not show it also coheres with the results of contemporary physics. What can we say here? As I lack any knowledge of contemporary physics, I don't know.

¹⁸ For more on this see Riccardi 2009, ch. 7.4, where besides Faraday I also discuss some possible direct sources—both scientific and philosophical—of Nietzsche's speculations.

Matthew Meyer argues that Nietzsche’s relational metaphysics—what I have been calling his pandispositionalism—comes very close to the ontic structural realism developed by contemporary philosophers of science such as James Ladyman and Jon Ross. According to Meyer, ontic structural realism holds that “science does not offer true descriptions of things-in-themselves, i.e. the intrinsic properties of things insofar as they are considered independently of their relations to other things” (Meyer 2018:367). This view contrasts with epistemic structural realism, which can be seen as a contemporary articulation of the Kantian position. For though it too maintains that we only have cognitive access to structural features of reality, it includes the “commitment to the existence of unknowable objects and properties upon which structures supervene”.¹⁹ This commitment, on the contrary, is given up by the ontic version of structural realism, which simply holds—in Nietzschean fashion indeed, and contrary to Kant’s intuition (or prejudice)—that “there are no ‘things’ and that structure is all there is” (Ladyman 2014, quoted in Meyer 2018). If it is true that Nietzsche’s pandispositionalism is a “proto-version” of contemporary ontic structural realism and that the latter is continuous with today’s picture of physical reality, then the case can be made that the former too is.^{20,21}

7. Will to Power: the Power of all Powers?

I shall finally reward the reader’s patience and start looking at the notion that most famously pops up in Nietzsche’s metaphysical speculations—the notion of will to power. More precisely, the main question I am interested to pursue in this section is how that notion fits into the sort of pandispositionalism I have attributed to him. That, I suggested, should not be understood as a

¹⁹ A late paper by David Lewis also articulates such a neo-Kantian position. As he writes, “to the extent that we know of the properties of things only as role-occupants, we have not yet identified those properties. No amount of knowledge about what roles are occupied will tell us which properties occupy which roles” (Lewis 2009:204). As I understand it, Lewis says that as long as we know a property only through its relations—its “effects”, Nietzsche would say—, we still do not know its intrinsic nature. This, Lewis argues, is precisely the cognitive situation we are in. (Meyer (2018:369) briefly discusses Lewis, though not this paper.)

²⁰ Robert Hanna argues that the Boscovich-Kant dynamic model of physical reality already counts as a “*metaphysical structuralism*” of this sort, according to which “material things ... are not ontologically independent things-in-themselves, each defined by a set of intrinsic non-relational, mind-independent, non-sensory, unobservable properties, but instead are essentially *determinate positions* or *determinate roles* in a maximally large relational structure or system of empirical nature as a whole” (Hanna 2006:149).

²¹ Strawson (2015) also argues that Nietzsche’s power metaphysics is fully compatible with the picture provided by contemporary physics.

description of what there is at the most fundamental level, but rather as a way of capturing a basic pattern that surfaces at (apparently) different levels of explanations. Then, assuming that the notion of will to power plays some crucial role in Nietzsche's power metaphysics, my reading implies that it finds application at some—maybe all—of these different levels of description. This is, indeed, what happens.²² To illustrate it, I shall again consider the case of physical reality and that of psychological reality, starting this time from the latter one.

Nietzsche self-ascribes an understanding of “psychology as morphology of and the *doctrine of the development of the will to power*” (BGE 23). It is not clear how to make sense of this suggestion. Given that drives are the basic items of Nietzsche's philosophical psychology, it is natural to think that the psychological notion of will to power is supposed to capture a fundamental feature of all drives. This is indeed an idea that has been pursued by several Nietzsche scholars. For instance, Clark (1990:210-212) argues that the will to power is a second-order drive to satisfy one's first order drives.²³ Richardson (1996:21-27) argues that Nietzsche's notion is designed to describe the way in which all drives tend to satisfy their own goal. Thus, “to will power” doesn't mean to “will” a goal different to a drive's own goal, but simply to “will” to satisfy the drive's own goal. Arguably, interpretive proposals like these provide a way to make sense of the “will to power” *qua* fundamental feature of human psychology without producing any unresolvable tension with Nietzsche's overall naturalism.

Serious worries, on the contrary, arise as soon as we turn to how the will to power notion applies to physical reality. The following unpublished passages vividly illustrate the problem:

The triumphant concept of ‘force’, with which our physicists have disposed of God once and for all, needs supplementing: it must be ascribed an inner world which I call ‘will to power’, i.e. an insatiable craving to manifest power; or to employ, exercise power, as a creative drive, etc. ... There is no help for it: one must understand all motion, all

²² A clear statement appears in a *Nachlass* note: “all driving force is will to power, ... there is no physical, dynamic or psychological force apart from this” (1888 14[21] WLN:256).

²³ Clark talks of “desires” instead of “drives”. This should not bother us here.

‘appearances’, all ‘laws’ as mere symptoms of inner events, and use the human analogy consistently to the end. (1885 36[31] WLN:27, translation modified)²⁴

I need the starting point “will to power” as the origin of motion. Consequently, motion must not be conditioned from outside—not caused. I need beginnings and centres of motions, starting from which the will reaches out. (1888 14[98] WLN:251)

Of course, these passages do pose an immediate threat to a naturalist worldview, for they arguably entail some form of panpsychism (see Loeb 2015 on this). So why did Nietzsche repeatedly come to entertain such a view?

To my knowledge, the best answer to this question is provided by Poellner (2013:680-681).²⁵ His main line can be summarized as follows. On the one hand, Nietzsche holds that physical explanation go as far as positing certain fundamental forces. However, within the framework of physics itself there is no evidence for accepting the existence of such forces apart from the explanatory role they play in that very framework. For we have no direct sensory experience—the only kind of evidence there is when it comes to natural science—of such forces themselves, but only of their effects. Thus, as Nietzsche puts in another note, physical explanations turn out to have a “gap”, for even the “dynamic world-interpretation” requires that we conceive the fundamental forces as having “an internal quality” (1885 36[31] KSA11:564-565). This quality, however, remains undisclosed to empirical investigation. On the other hand, and relatedly, as sensory experience does not acquaint us with any forces, the only available content for the force concept must come from elsewhere. This is, Nietzsche argues, the experience we have of ourselves as willing agents. But then, if the only concept of force available to us is derived from the subjective experience of willing, the most natural thing to do is to assume that the “internal quality” of physical forces is the very same one disclosed by volitional experience. In both cases, it thus turns out to be the will to power.

²⁴ I corrected the translation according to the text established by KGW IX.4:26. The *erratum* printed in KSA corresponds to the following portion of text: “und die Welt geschaffen”. The correct reading is: “aus der Welt geschaffen”.

²⁵ Riccardi (2009, ch. 5.2) provides a similar answer, though not quite as pointedly formulated as in Poellner’s paper.

The problem with this argument is that it is in tension with other central aspects of Nietzsche's mature thought. Even leaving aside the issue of naturalism, there are at least three major troubles.

First, the epistemic role this argument ascribes to subjective experience clashes with Nietzsche's skepticism about the deliverances of conscious introspection. In particular, aphorism 19 from *Beyond Good and Evil* argues forcefully against the epistemic credential of volitional phenomenology, by claiming that what willing consists in differs considerably from how it looks to the conscious agent. Even more strikingly, in the same note 14[98] quoted above—where Nietzsche says that we “need the starting point ‘will to power’ as the origin of motion”—he writes that we “have absolutely no experience of a cause”, for “calculated psychologically, we get the whole concept from the subjective conviction that we are a cause, namely, that the arm moves . . . *But that is an error*” (1888 14[98] WLN:251). Thus, though Nietzsche does claim here that our picture of causation as involving forces is derived from our volitional experience, he stresses—in agreement with BGE 19—that such experience is illusory. So how could it serve to fill in the explanatory “gap” allegedly burdening the physical worldview?

Second, the kind of reasoning worked out by Poellner suspiciously resembles the one appealed to by Schopenhauer in order to establish his own metaphysics of the will. Nietzsche, however, was well aware of the internal shortcomings of such a view. Let me briefly address these two points in turn. Schopenhauer argues that scientists have succeed “in reducing the many and manifold appearances in nature to particular original forces” (WWR I 24:149). However, from the point of view of the empirical science, such original forces will always remain “occult qualities”, for science has no way to penetrate their “inner essence” (150). However, Schopenhauer argues that the philosopher can do gain cognitive access to such “inner essence” as soon as she realizes “that the unfathomable forces manifesting themselves in all natural bodies are identical in kind to what in me is the will” (151). Now, the problem is that Nietzsche *rejects* this sort of reasoning. First, he considers Schopenhauer's idea that the “will” is “the most familiar thing in the world” to be a mistaken one (BGE 19), for what the will in fact consists in is quite different from how it appears in volitional phenomenology. Second, Schopenhauer's reasoning presupposes that the philosopher's task is that of penetrating a supposed veil of

appearances in order to grasp something like the world's inner essence, a picture that Nietzsche had already abandoned in *Human, All Too Human*.²⁶

Third, the argument worked out by Poellner is clearly in tension with the austere pandispositionalism that—as I have tried to show in the previous sections—seems to tun through Nietzsche's various "metaphysical sketches". For to say that a description of physical reality solely in terms of dispositional forces proves incomplete because we would still lack knowledge of those forces' "internal quality" contradicts the claim that the fundamental physical items are "dynamic quanta, whose essence consists in their relation to all other quanta, in their 'effects' on these".

To accommodate this tension, Tsarina Doyle argues that Nietzsche understands "relationality and intrinsicity as compatible rather than mutually exclusive" (Doyle 2009:174). This would allow complementing the pandispositionalist conception of fundamental physical forces by positing some sort of "internal quality" grounding their external manifestation. Accordingly, Doyle attributes to Nietzsche a "moderate dispositionalism" according to which "fundamental constituents of empirical reality are both relational and intrinsic" (191). A clear merit of this proposal is that it fuses the seemingly incompatible strands of thought one finds in Nietzsche's notes into a coherent picture. Nonetheless, I do not find it convincing. First, Doyle's moderate dispositionalism amounts to the claim that "powers are intrinsic because they exist independently of their manifestation whilst their relationality resides in their possible or potential manifestation" (189). This, however, doesn't fit with the textual evidence we have surveyed. For Nietzsche *insists* that powers do *not* exist independently of their manifestation and, in general, that "things" do *not* exist independently of their relations to other things, i.e. of their effects on these. Second, Doyle presupposes that Nietzsche unequivocally accepts the "argument from analogy" we have considered above (see pp. 187-188). However, such an assumption is moot at best.

My conclusion is that Nietzsche's *Nachlass* displays an ultimately unresolved conflict between, on the one hand, the metaphysically sober and internally coherent pandispositionalism I

²⁶ See HUH I 16. Compare also: "Dialectics is the only way of attaining the divine being and getting behind the 'veil of appearances'—this is asserted by Plato as solemnly and passionately as Schopenhauer asserts it of the antithesis of dialectics—and both are wrong. For that to which they want to show us the way does not exist" (D 574).

have sketched above and, on the other hand, the panpsychist-entailing and internally incoherent view that reality is essentially constituted by fundamental forces whose “internal quality” is the same sort of will to power we grasp in volitional experience. Though these two views appear constantly intertwined in his notes, I think Nietzsche somewhat managed to distinguish between them. This is suggested by the fact that in his published works he was much more cautious in putting forward the latter than the former one. Or so I shall argue in the next section.

8. Public Sobriety

Most of the passages where Nietzsche speculates about the will to power as a fundamental feature of physical reality are to be found in his *Nachlass*. There are, however, some notable exceptions, such as aphorisms 22 and 36 from *Beyond Good and Evil*. *Prima facie*, they look as textual evidence that he did endorse the pandispositionalism-cum-panpsychism view. However, as Clarke (1990) argues, this first impression doesn’t hold up to scrutiny.

In BGE 22, Nietzsche contrasts two different “interpretations” of the same “set of appearances”, i.e. the phenomena studied by physics. He makes three points. First, those phenomena underdetermine the appeal to universal physical laws, for the regularities observed in the physical domain are compatible with there being no such laws. This shows that the very conception of “conformity of nature to law” is an anthropomorphic projection. Second, this projection merely reflects a normative attitude: it is “a naive humanitarian correction and a distortion of meaning that you use in order to comfortably accommodate the democratic instincts of the modern soul” (BGE 22). Third, someone with an opposite normative viewpoint could “read from the same nature ... a tyrannically ruthless and pitiless execution of power claims”, thus arguing for “the unequivocal and unconditional nature of all ‘will to power’”. Thus, both claims go beyond the available appearances. However, they do so *not* by grasping a supposed “internal quality” of the physical world, but simply by projecting contrasting values into it.

BGE 36 presents a version of the “argument from analogy” Doyle takes Nietzsche to embrace. Leaving aside many details, the final formulation of the “hypothesis” Nietzsche says “we must venture” is that “everywhere ‘effects’ are recognized, will is effecting will—and that every mechanistic event in which a force is active is really a force and effect of the will” (BGE 36). To vindicate this hypothesis, Nietzsche says, one would have to reduce all forces to “one

basic form of will”. His candidate notion for such a “basic form of will” is, of course, the will to power, as he explicitly claims here. If such a reductive strategy were to succeed, one would then have proved that “*all efficacious force is: will to power*”. Now, as Clark (1990) points out, it is doubtful that Nietzsche actually believed some of the assumptions one would have to make in order for this hypothesis to be accepted *qua* hypothesis. Consider, for instance, the assumption that the will is causally efficacious. As we saw, Nietzsche denies that our experience allows us to draw this conclusion. Of course, much more should be said here. My point is just that the most famous published aphorism traditionally taken to show that Nietzsche fully endorsed something like a will to power physics does not, in fact, allow such a straightforward conclusion.²⁷

A deflationary reading of BGE 22 and 36 naturally raises the following question: if Nietzsche doesn’t believe the will to power to be a fundamental force of physical reality, why does he put forward that idea in his published work at all? An answer is again suggested by Clark (1990). As she points out, in the very same book Nietzsche maintains that philosophical views are but unconscious projections of philosophers’ normative views (BGE 6), whereas philosophical arguments are but post hoc rationalizations of those views (BGE 5). Accordingly, BGE 22 and 36 should be read as the explicit (and ironic?) projection and post hoc rationalization of Nietzsche’s own normative views. This reading is directly supported by the BGE 22’s closing remark. For after introducing his own will to power “interpretation” of physical phenomena, he writes: “Granted, this is only an interpretation too—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well then, so much the better” (BGE 22). Here, and contrary to what philosophers typically do, Nietzsche expresses his full recognition that the “interpretation” he has just sketched is no more than that: the projection of his own normative viewpoint. Similarly, the “argument from analogy” presented in BGE 36 should be understood as mimicking the kind of reasoning philosophers typically supply to ground their normative viewpoints. Thus, in BGE 22 and 36 Nietzsche opts for playing the philosophers’ game, though by making at the same time clear that he finds it kind of pointless.

Whereas it is contentious that published passages such as BGE 22 and 36 license ascribing to Nietzsche the panpsychism-entailing view that the will to power is a fundamental physical force, passages such as BGE 12 and GM I 13 seem to provide evidence of his

²⁷ Loeb (2015) provides a detailed discussion of BGE 36. Though he disagrees with the Clarkian line I’ve taken here, he agrees that BGE 36 shouldn’t be read as an argument aiming at establishing a panpsychist picture.

straightforward endorsement of the austere pandispositionalism worked out in the previous sections. This asymmetry not only indicates that he distinguished between these two views, but also that he (rightly) felt much more confident about the latter than about the former.²⁸

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²⁸ Of course, Nietzsche goes on entertaining whether the will to power is a fundamental physical force. Indeed, many of the notes elaborating on a pandispositionalist-cum-panpsychist view date from 1888, i.e. his last year of intellectual activity. Poellner (2013:698) plausibly takes them to manifest Nietzsche's “residual unease with his ‘official’ metaphysical indifferentism”.

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