

## NIETZSCHE ON THE SOUL AS A POLITICAL STRUCTURE

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*A critic of metaphysically robust accounts of the human self, Nietzsche means not to do away with the self entirely, but to reimagine it. He pursues an account according to which the unity of the self is born out of a coherent organization of drives and yet is not something other than that organization. Readers of Nietzsche have pointed to a so-called "lack of fit" between this theoretical account of the self, according to which the self is nothing apart from the organization of drives, and Nietzsche's practical account of human agency, which often seems to require that the self be something more than mere drives. I suggest Nietzsche's interest in Greek agonistic norms of contest sheds light on this apparent incongruity. Agonistic relationships, insofar as they cultivate contest among diverse forces, are for Nietzsche one appropriate model for the subjectivity of beings whose psychology is similarly characterized by contest among diverse forces—that is, beings like us.*

*Nietzsche est un critique des théories métaphysiques de l'ego. Cependant, il a l'intention de ne pas entièrement éliminer l'ego, mais de le réinventer. Selon Nietzsche, l'ego est le produit d'une organisation cohérente des pulsions et pourtant il n'est pas autre chose que cette organisation. Certains ont souligné une contradiction entre ce récit de soi et le récit de l'action humaine de Nietzsche, qui semble souvent exiger que le soi soit autre chose que de simples pulsions. Je suggère que l'intérêt de Nietzsche pour le concours grec soit important pour cette discussion. Selon Nietzsche, la contestation, parce qu'elle organise diverses forces, est un modèle approprié pour la subjectivité des personnes, dont la psychologie est caractérisée de la même manière par la lutte entre diverses forces.*

This article seeks to explicate Nietzsche's conception of the self or soul, and more specifically to make sense of Nietzsche's project in terms of analogies he identifies between political organization and the organization of drives that he understands as giving rise to the self. Of course, the political is a diverse field; thus I suggest that by attending to Nietzsche's interest in norms prevalent in Greek agonistic culture, we gain important insight into precisely what sort of political organization Nietzsche understands as analogous to the self. Agonistic relationships, insofar as they cultivate contest among diverse forces, are for Nietzsche one appropriate model for the subjectivity of beings whose psychology is similarly characterized by contest among diverse forces—that is, beings like us. In particular, Nietzsche's focus on the *agon's* ability first to forge a unified city by harnessing the competing strivings of multiple warring parties, and then to maintain that unity through cultural practices of contest which reinvigorate the consensus concerning value and achievement that define a community's shared horizon. This helps us to see how Nietzsche could have understood the unity of the self as born out of a political arrangement of drives—his embattled constituents of the self.

To analyze Nietzsche's view of the unity of the self, this paper engages in the debate over an apparent "lack of fit" between Nietzsche's frequent claims that there is no unified or metaphysically robust self, and his account of practical agency which often seems to require that the self exists as a unity and functions as an effective cause of action and belief. Certain readers of Nietzsche have, in varied ways, claimed that Nietzsche, given the sorts of activities he describes selves as capable of performing, must believe in a robust self, and that we therefore ought to ignore or soften Nietzsche's claims that there is no such self.<sup>1</sup> On such an account, the tension created by the lack of fit between Nietzsche's theoretical and practical accounts of the self is overcome by privileging the latter over the former. Extending recent work by Christa Davis Acampora on agonism and contest in Nietzsche, I argue that the tension between the practical and theoretical dissolves if we understand the unity of the

<sup>1</sup> Such interpretations are offered in John Richardson, "Nietzsche's Freedoms," in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, (ed.) K. Gemes and S. May (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as NF. Similar interpretations are offered in Christopher Janaway, "Autonomy, Affect, and the Self in Nietzsche's Project of Genealogy," and in Sebastian Gardner, "Nietzsche, the Self, and the Disunity of Philosophical Reason," both also found in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*.

subject along the lines of the unity of the city forged in the *agon*—that is, as a product of contest which remains indelibly contestable.<sup>2</sup> Unity does not represent an escape from the multiple; instead it is a particular and precarious achievement of harnessing and marshaling multiple forces into the shared service of an emergent unity. This helps to make sense of Nietzsche's view of selfhood as what might be deemed an honorific, as he claims that not everyone amounts to a self, but only those who succeed for a time in mastering the diverse forces that move through them, and so become who they are.

The first section discusses a latent distinction in Nietzsche between ascetic and experimental self-relations. Nietzsche is interested in the ability of experimentalism—a practical commitment according to which the self is an activity of development, growth, and overcoming rather than the logical basis of such activities—to threaten the power of a self-relation rooted in the ascetic ideal that asks us to identify ourselves with those aspects of our nature taken to transcend our finitude. Although Nietzsche's focus on the *agon* fades as his life progresses, my view is that those traits he finds distinctive and valuable in the *agon* resurface in his later and enduring praise for experimentalism.<sup>3</sup>

The second section argues that Nietzsche posits our present conception of the self as rooted in a particular type or form of life that, upon examination, serves lamentable human needs, and thus is in need of interrogation and revision. The revision he has in mind involves the recovery of some aspect of the experimental desire for life, which Nietzsche understands as exemplified in Greek agonistic culture and lost through slave morality's ascetic reinterpretation of the human being and her world; and, as I argue in the third and final section, we can gain a sense of what in particular about agonistic culture interested Nietzsche by paying attention to how his approval of certain political norms and practices in the Greek *agon* is transfigured into approval for certain kinds of souls.

## 1. Asceticism and Experimentalism

Before I demonstrate that experimentalism's emergence as an ideal and agonism's waning as a topic of explicit attention occur synchronously during Nietzsche's middle and later periods, it is important to distinguish between asceticism and experimentalism in his thought. Experimentalism captures much of what interested Nietzsche in agonism, most notably the role of contest in creating and sustaining values and the type of affirmation of human finitude and fallibility that structures healthy human striving. Both agonism and experimentalism are conceived of as opponents of the ascetic ideal: it was the ascetic ideal that defeated and suppressed agonism, and it is experimentalism that holds the promise of surpassing the ascetic ideal in the future, of reclaiming some aspect of the affirmation of the value and self-sufficiency of those human practices characteristic of agonistic contest.

Nietzsche is fascinated by the ascetic ideal—its origins, scope, and the prospects for overcoming or transforming it. In ascetic practices, aspects of our being are strictly divided and rank-ordered, and we come to identify ourselves with some set of aspects against others. Paradigmatically, the religious ascetic sets her body apart from her soul and identifies with the needs of the latter at the expense of those of the former. It is important to note that, for Nietzsche, ascetic practices themselves are amoral, and have indeed often served human beings well.<sup>4</sup> Any person committed to some pursuit can benefit from prioritizing some parts of herself over others in the service of most fully developing certain capacities, such as an athlete who forgoes certain food and drink in order to flourish in her sport. However, the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche suggests, has had largely deleterious effects on human beings. The ascetic ideal represents the coopting of ascetic practices by an other-worldly morality; and when that part of ourselves which we value highest is understood as other-worldly, we become increasingly unable to value our finitude, our this-worldly nature, and thus our very manner of valuing comes to

<sup>2</sup> Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche's concern in investigating these questions, it should be noted, is not merely to offer a descriptively satisfactory account of the human self. Questions of fact are, for Nietzsche, always intertwined with questions of value. Nietzsche is also interested in the interplay between a culture's conception of self and the sort of lives thus possible within that culture.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche writes in a note, "In themselves, ascetic habits and exercises are still far from indicating an anti-natural attitude, a hostility to existence, or degeneration and sickness." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, (ed.) R. Bittner, (tr.) K. Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), §7[5]. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as WLN. He writes elsewhere, approvingly, of an "asceticism of the strong" (WLN, §15[117]).

negate “this world, our world.”<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche understands slave morality as instantiating just such a commitment, as devaluing becoming in the name of an ostensibly higher reality of God or truth or being, and thus as valuing those elements of the human condition that serve as markers of our relationship to these ideals, and against those that follow from the elements of our nature that are susceptible to change.

Nietzsche’s answer to ascetic practices is experimentalism. Although Nietzsche does not discuss experimentalism as itself an ideal, his frequent use of “experiment” in noun form has led commentators to explicate Nietzsche’s implicit praise for a virtue of curious engagement with the world and self, freed from dogmatic adherence to convention.<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Bamford argues that, for Nietzsche, “our efforts at experimentation lead us away from dogmatism, especially of the sort engendered by customary morality, and toward more critical, reflective, and creative or imaginative engagements with how we acquire knowledge of the world, and with the moral values that we accord to our actions and behaviors.”<sup>7</sup> Although Bamford’s focus is Nietzsche’s middle-period depiction of free spirithood, Bernard Reginster has shown that experimentalism remains valuable to Nietzsche into his final works insofar as it is an aspect of the intellectual honesty and curiosity championed there. Reginster suggests that experimentalism is “more than subjecting one’s beliefs to the test of empirical evidence. It is ‘trying out’ new views, exploring new perspectives, venturing into new fields of inquiry.”<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche praises this type of pursuit throughout the varied stages of his writing career.

I suggest that Nietzsche’s praise for experimentalism engenders an appreciation on his part not just for certain kinds of activity, but for certain kinds of selves. Whereas the ascetic identifies herself with something taken to transcend her finitude, to be an experimental self is to be whatever the world would make of us. That means that the

experimental self affirmatively understands herself as a process of unfolding inseparable from the world in which that process occurs. The ascetic is like the dishonest scientist who, when conducting an experiment, omits results or interprets them selectively in an attempt to confirm his hypothesis, to hold onto something over and above what the world tells him, while the experimenter holds nothing back. Nietzsche writes in *Twilight of the Idols*, “Let us not be cowardly in face of our actions! Let us not afterwards leave them in the lurch!”<sup>9</sup> The idea is that we are just what we have done; it is cowardly to believe otherwise, to disown our actions as not really ours once tides have turned, and it is courageous to identify oneself precisely with what has been revealed through one’s actions.

Nietzsche often plays with the connections in the German *Versuch* among experimenting, tempting, and attempting, suggesting that to be an experiment is also to have a stance of desire or temptation toward life. The “genuine philosopher,” Nietzsche writes, “feels the burden and the duty of a hundred attempts and temptations [*Versuchen und Versuchungen*] of life—he risks himself constantly.”<sup>10</sup> The experimenter seeks out new experiences and tests out different ways of living, different ways of relating to the world and to others. This requires that she allow different parts of herself to come to the fore and to recede. She allows herself to be up for grabs in an important sense, exposing the self to a sort of constitutive, unsettling risk through which the experimenter chooses to align herself not with this or that aspect of her being, not her body or her soul, but rather with her capacity to overcome any one such alignment, to allow the parts of her being to form new and evolving constellations. Importantly for Nietzsche, this does not merely require resigning oneself to such a state, but achieving a certain stance toward it, to be tempted. “We are experiments,” he writes: “let us also want to be such!”<sup>11</sup>

Nietzsche writes of Dionysus as the tempter god (*Versucher-Gott*) (BGE, §295); of philosophers of the future as “experimenting people” (*ibid.*, §210) and “attempters” (*ibid.*, §42); of the human being as “the

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), §344.

<sup>6</sup> On experimentalism in Nietzsche, see Rebecca Bamford, “The Ethos of Inquiry: Nietzsche on Experience, Naturalism, and Experimentalism,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2016): 9–29; Bernard Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2013): 441–63; Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Lester Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Bamford, “Ethos,” 25.

<sup>8</sup> Reginster, “Honesty,” 458–59.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex: Penguin, 2003), “Maxims,” §10. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as TI.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), §205. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as BGE.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dawn*, (tr.) B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), §453. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as D.

great experimenter with himself";<sup>12</sup> and of the free spirit's "temptation and experiment."<sup>13</sup> He claims that the true test of ideals is experimental rather than theoretical (D, §163), and he writes that "I favor any *skopsis* to which I may reply: 'Let us try it!' But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment."<sup>14</sup> In a note, Nietzsche writes, "*The tempter*. There are many different eyes" (WLN, §34[230]). There is no answer to the question "how ought we to live?" apart from a comparison of what in fact it is to live in this or that particular way, no answer apart from an attempt, an experiment, that takes human beings as capable of inhabiting diverse affective orientations to the world. And so Nietzsche himself will make suggestions for such attempts, writing of experimental (*versuchsweise*) practices of, for example, anticipating the Europeans of the future (BGE, §256) and of calling truth into question.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. The Lack of Fit Argument

Having established asceticism and experimentalism as opposing self-relations, this section analyzes three accounts of an apparent lack of fit between Nietzsche's practical and theoretical accounts of the self to demonstrate that understanding experimentalism helps us to respond to this apparent lack of fit. Nietzsche, I suggest, is interested in getting this question right not just because he is interested in some fact of the matter concerning what human beings are. Instead, a culture's commitments concerning such facts matter because they help to determine what sorts of lives are possible within that culture. Nietzsche's positive account of the self is inseparable from his normative commitments about what would be good for contemporary human beings given the particular history of their struggles over the question of who and what they are—a struggle described above as between ascetic and experimental self-relations. Nietzsche advocates a drive psychology according to which the self is a constellation of drives; a successful self is one for whom that constellation is worked on experimentally rather than ascetically in such a way that drives are integrated, and a unified self emerges from a multitude of drives.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, (tr.) M. Clark and A. J. Swenson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), III: §13.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), P: §4.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §51.

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III: §24.

The self is, then, both one and many. Proponents of the lack of fit reading do point to a real ambivalence in Nietzsche; however, I suggest that the ambivalence is best resolved not by downplaying Nietzsche's claims that there is no robust self, but by conceiving of the unity of the self in such a way that the self can be conceived of as both unified and multiple.

The ascetic and the experimenter represent for Nietzsche opposing models for conceiving of how the human being is connected to her world. In particular, they give voice to two opposed valuations of our finitude. Importantly, as human possibilities, the ascetic and the experimenter grow out of particular cultures, owing their possibility and gaining their sense from particular cultural conditions.<sup>16</sup> The particular retelling of our cultural development to which Nietzsche most often returns involves the eclipse of affirmative elements of Greek morality by the life-denying force of slave morality, and he means especially to highlight the product of that eclipse—namely, us: beings embodying diverse and divisive cultural traditions, who are constitutionally conflicted, tenuous, full of both promise and risk. Calling the human being an "experiment," he writes of our varied and conflicted inheritances: "All this delusion and all these mistakes still dwell in our body: they have there become body and will."<sup>17</sup>

Central to slave morality's success has been its ability to install a conception of the self appropriate to it: the self as substratum separable from its actions, a doer behind the deed.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche's criti-

<sup>16</sup> As Robert Pippin writes, for Nietzsche "views of the soul and its capacities vary with beliefs about and commitments to norms; normative commitments are subject to radical historical change; and so what counts as soul or psyche or mind and their psychology also changes." Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3. In a similar vein, Robert Guay writes that "subjectivity, tied to explanation, concerns how we characterize actions and mental states in general, and how we do this engages not only theoretical norms, but a wide range of cultural facts and practical considerations as well. Our explanations of ourselves take their shape from the historically emergent ways in which persons have come to view themselves." Robert Guay, "The 'I's Have it: Nietzsche on Subjectivity," *Inquiry*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2005): 218–41, here 233.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1954), "Gift Giving," §2.

<sup>18</sup> See Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I: §13. For more on Nietzsche's critique of this division between self and action, see Bernard Williams, "Nietzsche's Minimalist Moral Psychology," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1994): 4–14; R. Lanier Anderson, "What is a Nietzschean Self?" in *Nietzsche, Naturalism, & Normativity*, (ed.) C. Janaway and S. Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

cisms of such an account are well known, yet he clearly means not to do away with the notion of the subject entirely, but to reimagine it. He writes, for instance, that in ridding ourselves of a metaphysical notion of soul, there remains room to rework the concept, suggesting that we might conceive of the soul as “subjective multiplicity” or “a social structure of the drives and affects” (BGE, §12). Elsewhere, Nietzsche speaks of the “drives taken together that constitute [a person’s] being” (D, §116).<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Nietzsche is keen both to rehabilitate the notion of self or soul, and to do so through a drive psychology that understands drives as the ultimate ground of subjectivity. Nietzsche has little interest in outlining an account of human nature that transcends particular *types*. Types are ways of being human, forms of life. More specifically, types consist in relatively robust and enduring rank-orderings of drives. This rank-ordering gives rise to a system of value judgments and dispositions that functions to enable and sustain its type, so that values are “physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life” (BGE, §3). If types concern drives, then drives, for Nietzsche, are the fundamental units of subjectivity. Drives are goal-oriented dispositions to act, discrete agencies which seek to colour perception in such a way as to enable their gratification. Thus a jealous person is, for example, quick to perceive in the world occasions for jealousy whereas a sensual person is quick to perceive occasions for the gratification of the sex drive.<sup>20</sup> Every drive “wants to rule” (BGE, §6).<sup>21</sup>

Nietzsche pursues an account according to which the unity of the self is born of a coherent organization among the drives but importantly is not something other than that organization. Insisting that there is no self or doer that acts on or organizes drives, that

<sup>19</sup> In the notebooks, Nietzsche writes that “The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary: perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? ...*My hypothesis: The subject as multiplicity.*” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, (ed.) W. Kaufmann, (tr.) W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), §490. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as WP.

<sup>20</sup> As Paul Katsafanas writes, “drives generate affectively charged, selective responses to the world, which incline the agent to experience situations in evaluative terms.” Paul Katsafanas, “Nietzsche’s Philosophical Psychology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, (ed.) K. Gemes and J. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 727–55, here 745.

<sup>21</sup> In *D*, Nietzsche writes of a drive that “observes each of the day’s occurrences with a view as to how to make use of them for its own end” (D, §119).

there is just drive activity, he writes, “The will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or of several other, affects” (BGE, §117). And though it is often the case that “‘we’ believe ourselves to be complaining about the vehemence of a drive,” Nietzsche insists that “it is, at bottom, one drive *that is complaining about another*” (D, §109). If the self is not something apart from the drives but a name we give to an organization of drives, then the question of “*who he is*” is answered not by appealing to who or what organizes drives, for there is no such entity, but instead by observing “in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other” (BGE, §6).

There are only drives and their activity; however, we do indeed experience ourselves as doers—not as complexes of drives but as subjects who *have* drives. What Nietzsche calls the “affect of command” (BGE, §19) is the feeling of effective agency that attends a coherent organization of drives. Although we are just the total struggle of drives that constitute us, we align ourselves with ruling drives and so experience ourselves as agents, even though in willing we are just as much the obeying party as the commanding one: when I overcome my desire for a second piece of cake, I am just as much the desire as its overcoming. As Nietzsche puts it, “We are accustomed to disregard this duality, and to deceive ourselves about it by means of the synthetic concept ‘I’” (*ibid.*).<sup>22</sup>

The danger in attempting to come to terms with Nietzsche’s view here is that we end up reifying this organizing activity and the unity of drives it works toward in a way that fails to take proper account of Nietzsche’s aversion to the picture of a doer behind the deed. Such reification moves too quickly from an account of the self as a unified order of drives, to positing a true, robust self as the unifier, the force that brings together disparate elements into a whole. If there is unity, we presume there must be a unifier. To paraphrase Nietzsche, proponents of such a reading still believe in a robust self because they still believe in grammar (TI “Reason,” §5). It is grammar, and not deep insight into ourselves or into nature, that leads us to believe

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in writing of the self, I sometimes unavoidably use grammar which implies that the self is something robust and something over and above drives. Nietzsche was alive to this problem, and wrote, “Language belongs in its origin to the age of the most rudimentary forms of psychology: we find ourselves in the midst of a rude fetishism when we call to mind the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language—which is to say, of *reason*. It is *this* which sees everywhere deed and doer; this which believes in will as cause in general; this which believes in the ‘ego,’ in the ego as being, in the ego as substance” (TI, “Reason,” §5).

that where there is activity, there must be an I who acts. Readers of Nietzsche who posit such an account appeal to what Sebastian Gardner calls a “lack of fit” between Nietzsche’s theoretical account of the self, which reduces the self to an organization of drives, and his account of practical agency, which seems to require that the self be something over and above mere drives.<sup>23</sup> Given the lack of fit, they claim, Nietzsche cannot be committed to his claim that there is no robust self because he must conceive of the self as robust enough to ground the ethical and value-creating abilities Nietzsche clearly values.

Exploring this apparent lack of fit, John Richardson understands Nietzsche as putting forward an account of the self as a unity of drives in order to naturalize an otherwise bankrupt, because metaphysical, conception of the subject and freedom (NF, 129–30). Richardson suggests that Nietzsche, to be consistent with what he says elsewhere about practical agency, needs an account of a conscious, deliberating subject. Richardson writes of Nietzsche’s claims that no such subject exists: “But this account isn’t enough for the explanations Nietzsche wants to give us.... In the end he means not to dismiss consciousness and deliberation, but to naturalize and demoralize them” (*ibid.*, 136). Richardson writes that “even the story he tells about the drives often depends on an account of agency. And so we must not take those outright rejections of any such thing as conclusive” (*ibid.*, 137). He continues, “There really is *something* there, something important” (*ibid.*, 142), and “there seems to us—doesn’t there?—to be a self or I that has this new ability” (*ibid.*, 141).

Gardner argues that Nietzsche’s repudiation of a robust self is at odds with the account of valuing that Nietzsche attributes to his exemplars. For Nietzsche, value is conferred upon the world by a creative act of the self. Thus, Gardner suggests, Nietzsche must commit himself to a view of the self as robust enough to be the ground of such conferral of value. To bestow value, the self must be the kind of thing which can itself be valued; but valuing oneself is impossible if one understands oneself to be nothing more than a conglomeration of drives. Since Nietzsche clearly advocates valuing oneself, he is committed to an account of the self as distinct from drives: “Nietzschean man must set value on *himself*, not on some psychological structure.”<sup>24</sup>

In each case of the lack of fit argument, Richardson and Gardner use the tension between Nietzsche’s seemingly contradictory claims

about the self is used as a reason to discount Nietzsche’s claims that the self is only drives. These three commentators choose the ethical, creative self rather than the self as assemblage of drives because, they argue, Nietzsche is not entitled to both versions of the self without contradiction. I argue that this is a false dilemma however. Rather than finding a deep contradiction in Nietzsche’s view of the self, we should conceptualize the self in a way that does not lend itself to such contradiction, and the norms prevalent in Greek agonistic culture can help us to do so. Nietzsche is adamant that the self is not something other than its organization. He writes, for instance, that “nowadays we’ve forbidden ourselves to spin yarns about ‘unity,’ the ‘soul,’ the ‘person’: hypotheses like these make one’s problem more difficult, that much is clear” (WLN, §37[4]). The problem Nietzsche identifies and, crucially, does not want to see covered over or explained away is to account for a self that is both drives and their organization, both unified and multiple.<sup>25</sup> To be a self is to mould the disparate aspects of one’s being—what is given to us—into something whole; and we are asked to make sense of this process without appeal to a separate will, force, or activity that moulds.<sup>26</sup> A descriptively satisfactory account of the self must accommodate this tension rather than erase it. My suggestion is that Nietzsche’s interest in Greek agonistic norms of heroic contest allows for such accommodation. Agonistic practices, because they marshal diverse and divisive individual competitive forces, are for Nietzsche one model of how human subjectivity may arise out of contest among diverse and divisive drives. The sort of organization of disparate forces that Nietzsche understands as giving rise to the self is analogous to political organization, and the best sort of organization in either case shares certain features.

<sup>25</sup> On these themes in Nietzsche, see John F. Whitmire Jr., “The Many and the One: The Ontological Multiplicity and Functional Unity of the Person in the Later Nietzsche,” *The Pluralist*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2009): 1–17. See also, especially about the place of contradiction in Nietzsche’s thought, Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of his Philosophy*, (tr.) D. Parent (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> In a notebook, Nietzsche asks, “But who feels pleasure? ...But who wills power? ...Absurd question, if the essence is itself will to power and thus feeling pleasure and unpleasure. Nevertheless, there must be oppositions, resistances, and thus, relatively, overarching unities” (WLN, §14[80]). See also WLN, §38[1], §2[152].

<sup>23</sup> Gardner, “Nietzsche, the Self,” 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

### 3. The Soul as a Political Structure

This final section brings together ascetism, experimentalism, and the lack of fit arguments. I make sense of Nietzsche's conception of the self through his analogies between the political organization characteristic of agonistic society and the organization of the self or soul. Both in his account of the self and in his account of the *agon*, Nietzsche is concerned with outlining processes through which unity first emerges from contest among multiple, divided forces, and with how unity is then maintained by continual, curated strife among those forces motivated by a certain stance of experimental desire toward life. So motivated, great human beings represent some hope against the ascetic ideal. The values of experimentalism help to resolve concerns about the lack of fit between the theoretical and the practical Nietzsche insofar as they help us to understand that unity is not the opposite of the multiple, but is instead one possible tenuous expression of it.

Nietzsche often appeals to political language when describing human beings. The soul is a "social structure of the drives and affects" (BGE, §12). The body is "but a social structure composed of many souls" (*ibid.*, §19).<sup>27</sup> And Nietzsche turns to political imagery to address our problem in conceiving of unity as emerging from a relationship among diverse drives without becoming something other than that relationship: "All unity is unity only as organization and co-operation—just as a human community is a unity—as opposed to an atomistic anarchy, as a pattern of dominations that *signifies* a unity but *is not* a unity" (WP, §561).

Nietzsche's early interest in agonistic culture, especially but not only in *Homer's Contest*, makes sense against the more general background of his lasting interest in the relationship between cultures and the individuals they produce. Slave morality, for example, is derided chiefly for its toll on individuals, for the sorts of mediocre lives which predominate within it and the sorts of extraordinary lives it makes increasingly impossible (BGE, §62). Nietzsche's interest in Greek agonistic political culture suggests more precisely which sort of political norms and values Nietzsche understands as analogous to organization within the soul.<sup>28</sup>

As Acampora has argued, in *Homer's Contest* Nietzsche praises the precarious achievement of burgeoning Greek city-states in harnessing the individual, diverse, and destructive forces of heroic combatants with the cultivating and organizing power of the contest. Prior to the contest's emergence, Nietzsche suggests there is only a "pre-Homeric abyss," which is "a horrible wildness of hatred and lust to annihilate."<sup>29</sup> The cultural achievement of the contest is to reorient drives of hatred and destruction into productive channels: rather than having combatants destroy each other in battle, contests provide a forum for drives of aggression and destruction to be expressed in ways conducive to, rather than destructive of, the emergence of community.

As Acampora notes, *Homer's Contest* suggests that there are two versions of Eris—the goddess of chaos, strife, and discord—in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche describes one as "evil, namely that one which leads human beings to hostile wars of annihilation against one another," while a second is described "as good, who as jealousy, resentment, envy entices human beings to action, but not to the action of a war of annihilation, rather to the action of the *contest*" (HC, 86).<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche is concerned to show how contest, as the good Eris, revalues drives of aggression as potentially creative by providing a new forum for their expression, turning destructive hatred into productive envy that motivates contestants to surpass their opponents in contest—to win by overcoming rather than destruction.<sup>32</sup>

For Nietzsche, this ability of contest to harness and make productive previously destructive drives creates a culture where there was not one before. Nietzsche emphasizes how it is through the organizing, curatorial force of contest that we see emerge a shared sense of taste and of measure, values which form the limit of a community's shared horizon. Contests are fora in which a community comes into

no. 24 (2002), particularly Herman Siemens, "Agonal Communities of Taste: Law and Community in Nietzsche's Philosophy of Transvaluation," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 24 (2002): 83–112.

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in *Prefaces to Unwritten Works*, (tr.) M. W. Grenke (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2005), 91. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as HC.

<sup>30</sup> Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, 19–22, 53, 75–76.

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.* See also Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, (ed.) O. Murray, (tr.) S. Stern (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> It is distinctive of the *agon* that competitors hold their opponents in high esteem, seeking to surpass rather than to destroy them. See Joe Ward, "Nietzsche's Value Conflict," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 41 (2011): 4–25, here 11.

<sup>27</sup> See also WP, §660; WP, §492.

<sup>28</sup> On agonism in Nietzsche, see Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*; Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995); Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and a special issue of *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*,

being around shared appraisals of achievement, shared understandings of what is worth doing and what counts as doing well (HC, 89). At the same time, as warriors become contestants, they come to desire victory not solely for personal gratification but in order to honour their communities. Nietzsche writes, “For the ancients the goal of the agonal education was the welfare of the whole.... The youth thought of the well-being of his mother city when he, for the sake of the contest, ran or threw or sang; he wanted to increase its fame in his own” (*ibid.*, 89). Thus, contestants come to identify the needs of the community with their own needs just as the community comes to understand itself as one, as whole, through shared identification with the achievements of its victorious parts. The whole and its parts, the one and the many, are co-primordial, and the logic of one or many, unity or multiplicity, is frustrated by a phenomenon that intertwines the two.<sup>33</sup>

The contest, then, is for Nietzsche one model of how unity can emerge from the multiple, how out of the divisive strivings of individual forces a whole can come into being. This interest in contest informs his positive account of the self, according to which curated contest among individual drives gives rise to an organized, political soul.<sup>34</sup> We can see this interest in the harnessing of diverse drives in those places where Nietzsche praises personalities that are both diverse and unified complex wholes. He locates greatness in the human soul in its “being capable of being as manifold as whole, as ample as full” (BGE, §212), and he commends personalities that have both “a centre and a periphery.”<sup>35</sup> Achieving such wholeness requires a kind of experimental self-relation in which drives are organized into a coherent whole without sacrificing their number and variety, such that the force, value, and perspective of a large and

varied body of drives find expression in us.<sup>36</sup> It is, notably, the same sort of drawing into service of individual, warring drives wrought by contest at the level of culture that allows for expression of the individual in ways conducive to an emerging whole.

This work of harnessing one’s drives is difficult, and success is rare. The breeding of slave morality has produced us as beings infused with a sometimes terrible but sometimes hopeful “magnificent tension of the spirit” (BGE, “Preface”) that, if worked on, could allow for the development of new forms of life. While most of us suffer from such tension and seek to escape it through ascetic practices which extinguish parts of our being, such tension can also enable those strong enough to harness it to feel the self as many different kinds of beings, to inhabit diverse perspectives on life.<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche writes of the contemporary human being in whom we find

opposite, and often not merely opposite, drives and value standards that fight each other and rarely permit each other any rest.... [For weaker human beings] their most profound desire is that the war they *are* should come to an end.... But when the opposition and war in such a nature have the effect of one more charm and incentive of life—and if, moreover, in addition to his powerful and irreconcilable drives, a real mastery and subtlety in waging war against oneself, in other words, self-control, self-outwitting, has been inherited or cultivated, too—then those magical, incomprehensible, and unfathomable ones arise, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and seduction. (BGE, §200)

Note Nietzsche’s insistence that, whether we are weak or strong, we are just drives and their attendant value standards. What distinguishes the weak from the strong is the stance taken toward this

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that, once established, culture can and does exercise influence over the development and redirection of drives (see, for example, Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II: §17). But such cultural work on the individual is itself fueled by the achievement and creation of value of great individuals. Nietzsche’s point in *HC* is that in the chicken-and-egg problem of cultures and individuals, there is no satisfying answer except that the two arise together.

<sup>34</sup> For discussions of the soul as a political structure in Nietzsche, see Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, 161; Christa David Acampora, “In What Senses are Free Spirits Free?” *Pli*, vol. 25 (2014): 13–33; Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), here 346–52; Thiele, *Politics of the Soul*; Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche’s “Beyond Good and Evil”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in *Untimely Meditations*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), §2.

<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche writes in a note, “*Overcoming the affects?* —No, not if it means weakening and annihilating them. *Instead, drawing them into service*” (WLN, §1[122]). Elsewhere, he writes, “The ‘great man’ is great through the free play he gives his desires and the even greater power that is capable of taking these magnificent monsters into its service” (*ibid.*, §9[139]). He writes elsewhere, “The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, where the plant ‘man’ shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully” (WP, §966).

<sup>37</sup> In a note, Nietzsche writes that ordinary men “perish when the multiplicity of elements and the tension of opposites, i.e., the preconditions for greatness in man, increases” (WP, §881). Describing such a state as diseased, he writes, “A single individual contains within him a vast confusion of contradictory valuations and consequently of contradictory drives. This is the expression of the diseased condition in man” (WP, §259).



self-understanding, whether one longs for peace or for war, whether one is ascetic or experimental. The achievement of the strong is to want curated struggle between otherwise destructive forces and to see such struggle as an incentive of life. And their achievement is not merely victory, but seduction, not merely overpowering the enemy, but doing so in a way that seduces oneself and others into a desirous attachment to life. Just as Greek city-states were impressive for using contest to transform a destructive war between opposing forces into an engine productive of an emerging community's solidarity, great individuals harness powerful and irreconcilable drives, emerging as enigmatic, incomprehensible, and unfathomable selves. Goethe, one such enigma, is celebrated insofar as he "took as much as possible upon himself, above himself, within himself. What he aspired to was *totality*...he disciplined himself to a whole" (TI, "Expeditions," §49).

Nietzsche calls this healthy experimental self-relation "mastery," and he contrasts it with a tyrannical self that achieves unity only through the ascetic extirpation and denial of some set of its drives, and so at the expense of fullness and variety—which, though it makes the tyrannized soul a whole, it is a narrow and impoverished one.<sup>38</sup> So the religious ascetic contrives his drives into a stable, coherent order, but his self is a tyrannized one insofar as his body and its needs, fundamental aspects of human beings, are ignored or worse. For Nietzsche, Socrates represents an extreme case of what "had at that time begun to be the universal exigency: that no one was any longer master of himself, that the instincts were becoming mutually *antagonistic*" (TI, "Socrates," §9). Nietzsche continues, "To *have* to combat one's instincts—that is the formula for *decadence*: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness and instinct are one" (*ibid.*, §11). To say that the instincts had turned against each other is to say that agonism had been displaced by antagonism, mastery by tyranny, opening the door for ascetic practices that would divide human beings against themselves. The tyrannized self represents the end of contest, the end of that sense of self as an organized community containing and marshalling multitudes. Importantly, Nietzsche uses the language of competition when writing of this process:

A couple of ideas are supposed to be made indelible, omnipresent, unforgettable, "fixed" for the purpose of hypnotizing the whole nervous and intellectual system through these "fixed ide-

as"—and the ascetic procedures and forms of life are means to free those ideas from competition with all other ideas in order to make them unforgettable.<sup>39</sup>

The emergence of the ascetic self-understanding requires the end of contest. The ascetic self represents the ascendance of a sense of self as settled and secure, a substratum beyond experience, uncontestable. And this, precisely, is the horrible achievement of Christianity, the archetypal instantiation of the ascetic ideal, which, for Nietzsche, it is Christianity that is responsible for "soul atomism": the view of the self as whole and indivisible, which supplants the political model of the soul of the ancients (BGE, §12). Attempting to align itself with something transcendent, the Christian self has been made to despise everything natural in its condition. For example, in reference to Christianity's burdening of the erotic with feelings of guilt and shame, Nietzsche rhetorically asks whether it is "not hideous to transform necessary and normal sensations into a source of inner misery and, in so doing, to want to make inner misery necessary and normal *for every human being!*" (D, §76). Nietzsche adds elsewhere that "the church combats the passions with excision in every sense of the word: its practice, its 'cure' is *castration*. It never asks: 'How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?'" (TI, "Morality," §1) That is, it is never asked how the facts of what we are, the drives that work through us, can be affirmed and integrated into a unity made stronger by its multiple parts.

Nietzsche is, then, interested in the ability of contest—among human actors at the level of culture and among individual drives at the level of the self—to provide a forum for unity to emerge from multiplicity. In addition, Nietzsche stresses that healthy agonistic practices are ones that seek to maintain the conditions for continued contestation, and we see an analogous concern for the maintenance of contest in Nietzsche's conception of the soul. Nietzsche writes approvingly of the early roots of ostracism among the Greeks, where the ostracized were not criminals or outcasts but those so strong and unsurpassable that their continued presence would bring about an end to competition (HC, 88). The Greeks chose to expel the tyrant because they wanted continued contest among diverse forces. The Greek victor, Nietzsche writes, "was not able to bear fame without

<sup>38</sup> On mastery and tyranny in Nietzsche, see Bernard Reginster, "What is a Free Spirit?" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 85, no. 1 (2003): 51–85, here 76.

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II: §3.

further contest" (*ibid.*, 91).<sup>40</sup> The Greeks presupposed that "in a natural order of things, there are always *more* geniuses who reciprocally incite [each other] to deeds, as they also reciprocally hold [each other] within the borders of measure" (HC, 89). Conceiving of power as fluid and dynamic rather than settled and inert, it was through the contest that the Greeks worked to foster the social preconditions for the free movement of power. In this concern for the maintenance of the conditions of contest, Nietzsche identifies the sort of desire for life he so applauds. To choose contest is to choose the continual overcoming of value and achievement rather than the staleness of an unimpeachable standard, which is to say that what human beings can do matters quite apart from whether it measures up to some ideal that ostensibly transcends us.

We see an analogous concern for maintaining the conditions of contest in Nietzsche's account of the self. Nietzsche lauds the kind of person who bears a "spiritualized enmity" toward himself, who is "rich in contradictions" (TI, "Morality," §3). The spiritualization of enmity consists in "profoundly grasping the value of having enemies" (*ibid.*). Thus, Nietzsche's preferred type "grasps that it is in the interest of its own self-preservation that the opposing party should not decay in strength (*ibid.*). Gesturing toward an analogy between the city and state in comparing such a person to a political state that feels itself to be necessary "only in opposition," Nietzsche describes the person as, like victors in the contest, someone who "does not relax, does not long for peace" (*ibid.*).

Elsewhere, Nietzsche emphasizes that a healthy, unified soul is one which understands itself to be importantly multiple, and thereby contestable; the most comprehensive or spacious (*umfänglichste*) soul, Nietzsche says, is one that "can run and stray and roam farthest within itself; the most necessary soul, which out of sheer joy plunges itself into chance; the soul which, having being, dives into becoming; the soul which *has*, but *wants* to want and will."<sup>41</sup> Here, what is celebrated is a kind of unity that enjoys its multiple, competing parts and the range of perspectives that contest and experiment among them make possible. The comprehensive soul achieves wholeness: it "has being"; but it is also multiple: it "dives into becoming," and does so out of temptation, because it "*wants* to want and will." Elsewhere, he uses the language of experimentalism in writing of the same spirit's

inner spaciousness and indulgence of superabundance which excludes the danger that the spirit may even on its own road perhaps lose itself and become infatuated and remain seated intoxicated in some corner or other, to that superfluity of formative, curative, moulding and restorative forces which is precisely the sign of *great* health, that superfluity which grants to the free spirit the dangerous privilege of living *experimentally* and of being allowed to offer itself to adventure.<sup>42</sup>

And here we can locate a response to Gardner's concern about value, and to lack of fit arguments more generally. Gardner denies that one can both understand oneself as a unity of drives and as a ground of value; but, as I have shown, this is precisely the kind of dual affirmation Nietzsche credits to his exemplars, who work to harness the multiple strivings within themselves, to express rather than extirpate them, and thus understand themselves as both multiple and whole, as a kind of battlefield that is one without ceasing to be many. Nietzsche's claim is not just that the self is unified drives, but that the best selves understand themselves as such. Nietzsche speaks not just of being, but of wanting and choosing—activities animated by experimentalism rather than asceticism, by affirmation rather than withdrawal.

While Nietzsche indeed celebrates the achievement of a unified self, he reminds his readers that the self in question is strong and unified only in proportion to the risk it takes—the risk of the experiment, of allowing something new to move through it. It is a self that is "happy to harbor in himself, not 'an immortal soul', but *many mortal souls*."<sup>43</sup> There is then no lack of fit between Nietzsche's theoretical and practical accounts of the self so long as we pay attention to the kind of unity he champions: one that is a precarious achievement, an artifact of processes of contest, and so itself contestable—something that can be overcome. The unified self is like the unified community that expels the tyrant—unified not because all voices but one have been silenced, but because its many voices have, through contest, forged an enduring yet impeachable consensus. In the experimental self, as in the agonistic contest, Nietzsche locates health in self-risking activity and sees strength in exposure to forces that would undo that strength. While Nietzsche's explicit interest in contest declines as his writing progresses, this is not because he

<sup>40</sup> As Thiele writes, "it is the *achieving* of fame, not its *achievement*, that constitutes heroism." Thiele, *Politics of the Soul*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III: "Tablets," §19.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, P: §4.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Assorted Opinions and Maxims," in *Human, All Too Human*, §17.

grows uninterested in the sort of creation of value that contest can create. Instead, he comes to doubt that his own culture can support such contest, and locates it instead within certain human souls, strokes of luck who succeed in creating a self where there wasn't one before.

The danger Nietzsche means to avoid is that one "remain seated intoxicated in some corner or other," rather than give oneself over to the "formative, curative, moulding" forces of life.<sup>44</sup> This, in the language I have used thus far, is to risk, which for Nietzsche is to want—to want to become what one is, to love one's fate, or to will the recurrence of one's life. He understands this self-risking activity as fundamental, writing, "And life itself confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am *that which must always overcome itself*.... That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends—."<sup>45</sup> To be both an end and an opposition to ends is to be one and many, a fixed point and its overcoming, as manifold as whole. Here, what Nietzsche is after is a desire, a way of wanting the world. Nietzsche is interested in those who affirm this desire, who take this risk, which is to inhabit the ambivalence between one and many—the ambivalence which we are—in a way that allies itself with what lives; and he applauds this spirit wherever he finds it—in the city, and in the soul.

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<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, P: §4.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II: "Self-Overcoming."

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

**Robin Celikates, *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*, (tr.) N. van Steenberghe. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018; 230 pages. ISBN: 978-1786604620.**

*Reviewed by Maxwell Kennel, McMaster University*

[<https://www.c-scp.org/2019/03/21/robin-celikates-critique-as-social-practice>]

**Christophe Charle, *Birth of the Intellectuals: 1880-1900*, (tr.) D. Fernbach and G. M. Goshgarian. Cambridge: Polity, 2018; 200 pages. ISBN: 978-0745690353.**

*Reviewed by Christina Rawls, Roger Williams University*

[<https://www.c-scp.org/2018/11/14/christophe-charle-birth-of-the-intellectuals-1880-1900>]

**Drew M. Dalton, *The Ethics of Resistance: Tyranny of the Absolute*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018; 224 pages. ISBN: 978-1350042032.**

*Reviewed by Tyler Tritten, Gonzaga University*

[<https://www.c-scp.org/2018/11/06/drew-m-dalton-the-ethics-of-resistance>]

**Susan M. Dodd and Neil G. Robertson eds., *Hegel and Canada: Unity of Opposites?* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018; 408 pages. ISBN: 978-1442644472.**

*Reviewed by Robert Burch, University of Alberta*

[<https://www.c-scp.org/2019/03/06/susan-m-dodd-and-neil-g-robertson-eds-hegel-and-canada-unity-of-opposites>]

**Andrew Feenberg, *Technosystem: The Social Life of Reason*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017; 233 pages. ISBN: 978-0674971783.**

*Reviewed by Richard Westerman, University of Alberta*

[<https://www.c-scp.org/2018/11/07/andrew-feenberg-technosystem-the-social-life-of-reason>]

**Thomas Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain. The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018; 336 pages. ISBN: 978-0199646883.**

*Compte rendu de Stefan Kristensen, Université de Heidelberg*

[<https://www.c-scp.org/fr/2018/06/04/thomas-fuchs-ecology-of-the-brain>]