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Nietzsche on the necessity of repression

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ABSTRACT

It has become orthodox to read Nietzsche as proposing the ‘sublimation’ of troublesome behavioural impulses. On this interpretation, he is said to denigrate the elimination of our impulses, preferring that we master them by pressing them into the service of our higher goals. My thesis is that this reading of Nietzsche’s conception of self-cultivation does not bear scrutiny. Closer examination of his later thought reveals numerous texts that show him explicitly recommending an eliminatory approach to self-cultivation. I invoke his theory of the will to power in order to explain why he persistently valorises both elimination and sublimation as preconditions of healthy subjective unity. I conclude that which of these two approaches he recommends in a given situation depends on whether or not the impulse in question can be put to use within the overall economy of our drives.

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For all the [classical] schools of philosophy, mankind’s principal cause of suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness was the passions [...]. Philosophy thus appears, in the first place, as a therapeutic of the passions (in the words of Friedmann: ‘Try to rid yourself of your passions’).¹

Pierre Hadot famously commended ancient thinkers for approaching philosophy as an ‘art of living’ instead of an exercise in ‘abstract theory’ or ‘the exegesis of texts’. As our epigraph indicates, this is an art that aims at ridding us of our passions through the diligent practice of specific spiritual exercises. According to Hadot, rational knowledge of the world was not sought by the antique philosophers as an end in itself; rather, they approached such knowledge as a means by which they could achieve

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¹Hadot (1995, 83) (amended translation); quoting Friedmann (1970, 359).

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an understanding of themselves *sub specie aeternitatis* – that is to say, a psychological state that quieted their troublesome passions and thereby enabled them to lead a more authentic existence. Though philosophy lost its way for a lengthy period of time, Hadot avers that Nietzsche heralded the return of this conception of philosophy, namely *qua* ‘concrete attitude, a way of life and of seeing the world’.²

But to what extent can we justifiably situate Nietzsche in this lineage? To be sure, Hadot is quite right to interpret Nietzsche as someone who fought against scholarly abstraction and strove to retrieve the lived, existential dimension of classical philosophy.³ What might strike contemporary readers of Nietzsche as problematic with Hadot’s reading, however, is the idea that Nietzsche would have assented to the goal of getting ‘rid of your passions’. After all, what about those oft-cited texts in *Twilight of the Idols* in which he denigrates the Christian desire to ‘castrate’ oneself through the excision of one’s passions (TI ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’ 1). In line with these texts, it has become orthodox to read Nietzsche as sanctioning a far more moderate attitude towards troublesome behavioural impulses, such as, for example, an overactive sex drive. *Ex hypothesi*, rather than striving to repress such impulses, Nietzsche wants us to *master* and *exploit* them in such a way as to press them into the service of our higher objectives. In contrast to the eliminative Stoic approach to the passions, we ought to refine, transfigure and elevate our behavioural impulses. I will call this the *sublimational* reading of Nietzsche’s project of self-cultivation. From Jaspers onwards, a host of influential Nietzsche scholars have defended some variation of this reading, though its foremost proponents are undoubtedly Walter Kaufmann and, more recently, Ken Gemes.⁴

Yet, as I will argue below, closer scrutiny of Nietzsche’s thought reveals a slew of published and unpublished texts that contravene this reading. In these texts he entreats his readers to adopt a more excisionary practical attitude towards their impulses. While commentators focussing on his political philosophy have been alert to his affirmation of exclusion and annihilation as practical methods for improving the human condition, this has been largely suppressed or neglected by commentators

²Hadot (1995, 108).

³This is particularly pronounced in the 1870s. See e.g. Nietzsche’s essay ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’, where he criticises ‘contemporary scholars and philosophers’ on account of the fact that they ‘do not employ the wisdom of the Indians and the Greeks so as to grow wise and calm within themselves: the sole purpose of their work is to create for the present day an illusory reputation for wisdom’ (UM, ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’ 6 [220]).

⁴See Kaufmann (1974, chapters 7 and 8), Gemes (2009), Jaspers (1981, 134f.), Nehamas (1985, 217f.), Schacht (1983, 323–6), and Haberkamp (2000, 114–30).

working on his philosophy of the self.⁵ As such, my principal thesis will be that the sublimational reading does not adequately capture how Nietzsche thinks we should undertake the project of self-cultivation.

Foregrounding Nietzsche's valorisation of repression, however, prompts the question as to the wider coherence of his thoughts concerning self-cultivation. Does he want us to 'rid' ourselves of our passions, as Hadot claims, or to sublimate them, as Gemes and Kaufmann maintain? While we should of course never presuppose that there is some underlying systematicity to Nietzsche's thought, I will contend that a rapprochement of these two interpretations can be achieved if we quite heavily *qualify* the sublimational reading. We will see that Nietzsche prescribes a discerning struggle to sublimate serviceable drives and eliminate those of a detrimental ilk. While there is undoubtedly much to be said on this topic in relation to the early and middle phases of Nietzsche's thought, I intend to focus largely (though not exclusively) on the later writings (*viz.* from 1883 onwards). My reason for doing so is that much of my argument will build upon his notion of the world as will to power, which he only begins to fully articulate in 1883.

I begin by giving a précis of the sublimational reading as we find it expressed by Walter Kaufmann and Ken Gemes. I then reconstruct Nietzsche's general vision of how synthetic unities are formed according to his conception of the world as will to power – namely, as in the case of digestion, through the dual process of incorporating serviceable entities *and* excluding harmful ones. Subsequently, I outline how, congruent with this, we find that he conceives of the healthy, unified individual as being necessarily characterised by *both* of these processes. In the final section, I examine how he theorises that this can be concretely achieved through the practice of value critique.

1. The sublimational reading

Based on his reading of 'On Self-Overcoming' (Z), Kaufmann describes Nietzsche's conception of the world as will to power as consisting in the idea that 'all that exists strives to transcend itself and is thus engaged in a fight against itself. The acorn strives to become an oak tree, though this involves its ceasing to be an acorn and, to that extent, self-overcoming'.⁶

⁵On this aspect of his political philosophy, see Detwiler (1990, esp. 37–67). Andrew Huddleston is one of the few commentators to precede me in my questioning the unconditionality of Nietzsche's derogation of repression. See Huddleston (2017, 157–60).

⁶Kaufmann (1974, 242). See 206–7 and 248 for Kaufmann's reading of 'On Self-Overcoming'.

At the specifically human level, however, it is through the exercise of rationality that man achieves self-mastery and enacts the process of self-overcoming. Rationality allows man ‘to develop foresight and to give consideration to all the impulses, to organise their chaos, to integrate them into a harmony – and thus to give man power: power over himself and over nature.’ But crucially, for Kaufmann, this process of overcoming subjection to the caprice of our impulses is *non-repressive* in nature:

Our impulses are in a state of chaos. We would do this now, and another thing the next moment – and even a great number of things at the same time. [...] No man can live without bringing some order into [the] chaos [of his impulses]. This may be done by thoroughly weakening the whole organism or by repudiating and repressing many of the impulses: but the result in that case is not a ‘harmony,’ and the *physis* is castrated, not ‘improved.’ Yet there is another way – namely, to ‘organize the chaos’: sublimation allows for the achievement of an organic harmony [...].⁷

On Kaufmann’s reading, the modern human is divided against herself – a hydra-like tangle of contradictory impulses – and the remedy for this is sublimation. Reason is then the tool by which this remedy can be administered, he tells us. This is because rational thought enables the individual to conceive of ways in which her base impulses can be put to novel, advantageous ends instead of being repressed. In this way, ‘a sexual impulse, for example, [can] be channelled into a creative spiritual activity, instead of being fulfilled directly’, and ‘the barbarian’s desire to torture his foe can be sublimated into the desire to defeat one’s rival, say, in the Olympic contests’.⁸

To substantiate his reading, Kaufmann refers us to texts from TI (particularly ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’ 1–4), where Nietzsche censures Christianity for seeking to extirpate, rather than exploit, the affects. In addition to this, he explicitly cites KSA 1[122] 12.39 (WP 384)⁹:

Overcoming of the affects? – No, if what is implied is their weakening and destruction [*Vernichtung*]. But putting them into service: which may also mean subjecting them to a protracted tyranny (not only as an individual, but as a community, race, etc.). At last they are confidently granted freedom again: they love us as good servants and go voluntarily wherever our best interests lie. [Amended translation.]

⁷Ibid., 227.

⁸Ibid., 220.

⁹For fragments from Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* (notebooks) that are contained in WP, I will use Kaufmann’s translations; however, for those not in WP, I will use my own translations of the original German in KSA. References to KSA give the notebook number followed by the fragment number in square brackets, and then the volume number and page range. Thus, KSA 1[122] 12.39 = fragment no.1, notebook no.22, vol.12, 39.

This text certainly seems to vindicate Kaufmann's reading of Nietzsche as stating that 'the impulses should be "overcome": not by extirpation, but by sublimation.'¹⁰ Indeed, Ken Gemes has also invoked this very same text to argue that Nietzschean self-cultivation is most adequately described as a non-destructive process of sublimation, which is to say a process by which 'weaker drives are not suppressed or shackled. Rather, they are to be harnessed to allow their expression in service to a higher aim.' On Gemes's interpretation, 'sublimations involve integration or unification, while pathological symptoms involve splitting off or disintegration'.¹¹ As such, whereas '[s]ublimation, for Nietzsche, is the primary means to a unified self', repressive spiritual exercises involve 'splitting off' and therefore invariably foster pathological disintegration. To evidence this claim, Gemes points out that denying a passion release often leads to a proto-Freudian return of the repressed for Nietzsche; hence, trying to eradicate a drive often only serves to render the drive more disruptive.¹² Where Gemes really differs from Kaufmann, however, is that he does not think of Nietzschean sublimation as a process directed by the rational ego; rather, on Gemes's reading, sublimation can occur among the drives themselves, independent of what we consider to be our conscious self.¹³

Let us now turn to Nietzsche's general account of how healthy unity arises. This will enable us to assess whether it is really true that, for Nietzsche, a healthy unified self is achieved by means of sublimation, whereas repressive spiritual exercises only serve to pathologically weaken the self.

2. The will to power and the struggle for organisation

Even at first glance, notwithstanding the host of texts that support the sublimational reading, it seems to jar with Nietzsche's recurrent affirmation of destruction. This is exemplified in EH, where he speaks of 'the joy that includes even the eternal joy in negating [...]. The affirmation of passing away *and destruction* that is crucial for a Dionysian philosophy, saying yes to opposition and war' (EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 3). Moreover, if we examine his conception of the will to power – the dynamic through which *all* extant unities are formed according to the later Nietzsche – we

¹⁰Ibid., 226.

¹¹Gemes (2009, 47–8).

¹²Ibid., 46; see also 55, fn.12. Drawing on GM, Gemes underscores how Nietzsche thinks that stifling aggressive drives can engender a pernicious condition of *ressentiment*, where one agonizingly directs this aggression towards oneself.

¹³Ibid., 50–1.

can clearly see that exclusion and annihilation are just as necessary for the construction of any unity as are incorporation and sublimation.

The will to power hypothesis conceives of existence as a plurality of internally hierarchically organised power-quanta each seeking to augment their power. They pursue this by struggling to overpower other power organisations and subordinate them within their own hierarchy:

The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances [...]. *Appropriation [Aneignung] and assimilation [Einverleibung] are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor [...].* (KSA 9[151] 12.424; WP 656; emphasis added)¹⁴

The formative activity of the will to power is remarkably plastic and, according to Nietzsche, is able to express itself in myriad ways:

The will to power specializes as will to nourishment, to property, to tools, to servants (those who obey) and masters; the body as an example. – The stronger will directs the weaker. (KSA 35[15] 11.514; WP 658)

Around 1885, Nietzsche extends this idea to cover *all* forms of unity alike (e.g. organic, inorganic, cultural, etc.). However, its origins indubitably lie in a vision of *organismic* unity that he develops out of the biology of his day, particularly that of Wilhelm Roux and his book *Der Kampf der Theile im Organismus* (hereinafter KTO).¹⁵ The influence of Roux on Nietzsche's thought has been well documented; however, it is worth foregrounding a pertinent point of convergence between Roux and Nietzsche that has not yet received sufficient attention. This concerns their shared view that incorporative processes are conditioned by *eliminatory* or *excretive* processes.¹⁶

Wilhelm Roux figures the body as a struggle of various physiological parts – namely, molecules, cells, tissues and organs. These vie amongst themselves for space and nutrition. He conceives of this as a struggle to overcompensate for energetic losses and use the resulting surplus to grow or reproduce.¹⁷ On Roux's analysis, the consumption of nutrients involves a process of assimilation, which consists in the ability of the part in question 'to uniformly transform foreign objects within itself, to

¹⁴See also Aydin (2007).

¹⁵See Roux (1881). All translations of KTO are my own.

¹⁶For studies of the influence of Roux on Nietzsche, see e.g. Müller-Lauter (1999, 161–82), Moore (2002, 37–47).

¹⁷KTO, 226.

uniformly regroup different groupings of atoms within itself, and thus to qualitatively appropriate foreign entities, and to produce that which is necessary when only the raw materials are available.¹⁸ Yet, for Roux, this process is inextricably intertwined with the need to excrete the waste products of such metabolic activity; indeed, ‘the elimination [*Beseitigung*] of metabolic by-products belongs among the most important general conditions of life; for their accumulation would be harmful.’¹⁹

Despite rejecting much of Roux’s account of how organismic unity emerges and is subsequently maintained, Nietzsche retains his conviction that assimilation is inseparable from exclusion and elimination.²⁰ We first find this abstractly formulated in his description of attraction and repulsion as activities that are equally fundamental to both organic and inorganic organisations alike:

The drive to approach [*sich anzunähern*] – and the drive to thrust something back [*etwas zurückzustoßen*] are the bond, in both the inorganic and the organic world. [...] The will to power in every combination of forces [...]. (KSA 36[21] 11.560; WP 655)

While repulsion should not be construed as coextensive with excretion, excretion can certainly be interpreted as a species of repulsion, a process of shunning that which is useless or potentially harmful. In the context of Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power, this process of repulsion takes a number of key forms. In the cited note, for example, he holds that weaker organisations strive to repel stronger ones that are striving to overpower and exploit them, but then he also maintains that stronger organisations must often repel weaker ones seeking to parasitically exploit their strength.²¹ Beyond this note, such exclusionary activity is also given a fundamental role within his account of the will to power *qua* interpretation. In order to exploit that which has been overpowered, Nietzsche holds that a will to power organisation has to be able to ‘reinterpret’ it into an organ, to impose a new meaning and function on it and fit it into a new command structure. This act of isolation and reinterpretation demands the exclusion of those parts of the vanquished organisation that are perceived as harmful or useless to the dominant power

¹⁸KTO, 216.

¹⁹KTO, 95.

²⁰See Müller-Lauter (1999, 171–82).

²¹See KSA 36[21] 11.560 (WP 655):

The weaker presses to the stronger from a need for nourishment; it wants to get under it, if possible to become one with it. The stronger, on the contrary, drives others away; it does not want to perish in this manner.

organisation: previous interpretations that were imposed on the power organisation to be assimilated must be 'obscured' (*verdunkelt*) or even obliterated (*ganz ausgelöscht*).²² As Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, "development" in every sense is always a loss (*Verlust*), an injury (*Schädigung*)' (KSA 34[194] 11.486).²³

But echoing Roux far more clearly, Nietzsche also frames the excretion of accumulated waste materials, which assimilation and growth *necessarily* generate, as a vital life process: 'Waste [*Abfall*], decay, elimination [*Abschuss*] need not be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life' (KSA 14[75]13.255; WP 40). But disposing of these waste materials is not a matter of merely passively allowing the decaying or superfluous to wither away and perish. Nietzsche often favours a decidedly active approach:

Life itself recognizes no solidarity, no 'equal rights,' between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism: one must excise [*ausschneiden*] the latter – or the whole will perish. – Sympathy for decadents, equal rights for the ill-constituted – that would be the profoundest immorality, that would be antinature itself as morality! (KSA 23[1] 13.600; WP 734).²⁴

In such texts, Nietzsche is overtly drawing on biological models of unity (of the sort we found in Roux) as a naturalistic justification for some sort of eugenic social programme. While his social philosophy is not our concern here, what is pertinent in this passage is Nietzsche's unequivocal assertion that attempting to forego excision is *widernatürlich*, pathological, and even suicidal. One must separate the wheat from the chaff, gathering up the former and burning up the latter. For Nietzsche, healthy organisation and the process of power augmentation are therefore indissociable from the struggle to exclude, annihilate and excrete that which is redundant or harmful to the organisation in question.

This also sheds light on the logic of self-overcoming that, for Nietzsche, characterises all life. As any power organisation grows and has to reorder its own internal hierarchy, it has to break out of its own *self*-interpretation –

²²See GM II 12: '[O]verpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their [the subordinate power organisations'] former "meaning" [*Sinn*] and "purpose" [*Zweck*] must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.'

²³See also KSA 7[9] 12.297 (WP 644): 'Greater complexity, sharp differentiation, the contiguity of developed organs and functions with the disappearance of the intermediate members – if that is perfection, then there is a will to power in the organic process [...]'. KSA 40[38] 11.647:

That the organs have everywhere evolved [*sich herausbildet*] [...], can certainly also be used as a metaphor for the spiritual [*das Geistige*]: so that something 'new' is always only grasped through the separation [*Ausscheidung*] of an individual force from a synthetic force.

²⁴See also EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy' 4; KSA 11[414] 13.192: 'The weak and the failures (*Mißrathenen*) should perish: first principle of society. And one should help them achieve this end.'

it has to restructure *itself* and, imperatively, exclude those parts of itself that are disadvantageous to the new augmented hierarchy. This is why, in Z, 'Life' tells Zarathustra that it is 'that which must always overcome itself: 'Whatever I may create and however I may love it – soon I must oppose it and my love, thus my will wants it' (Z, 'On Self-Overcoming' 90). It is a condition of possibility for growth that a previous organisation or hierarchy is broken out by means of a dynamic comparable to ecdysis (skin-shedding). This is Nietzsche's own cosmological brand of creative-destruction, or what he also refers to as his 'Dionysian' view of reality.²⁵

We can now grasp why, at the most abstract level of the will to power, Nietzsche describes healthy unity as being conditioned by: 1. the isolation and co-option of weaker, useful entities; and 2. the elimination (i.e. excretion or exclusion) of extraneous or harmful entities. This is the dual logic of what I have previously labelled the *struggle for organisation*.²⁶ The question we now have to ask is whether, for Nietzsche, this logic holds for the organisation of one's self.

3. The self as will(s) to power

Nietzsche conceives of the 'soul as a society constructed out of drives [*Triebe*] and affects [*Affekte*]' (BGE 12), and he maintains that both of these constituent sub-units of the self are 'reducible to the will to power' (KSA 40[61] 11.661).²⁷ He also calls psychology a mere 'morphology' and 'doctrine of the development of the will to power' (BGE 23). Given our exposition of the will to power, then, it stands to reason that Nietzsche would affirm the exclusion of certain drives and affects as a precondition of the higher unity of the self. Let us now examine whether this is in fact the case.

3.1. Defining 'drive'

Before inquiring as to whether Nietzsche endorses repression, it behoves us to take a closer look at how he conceptualises the component parts of the self. Where Kaufmann employs the generic term 'impulse', Nietzsche prefers the terms 'drive' (*Trieb*) and 'affect' (*Affekt*). Yet surveying texts

²⁵See GS 371; see also EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy' 3 and 4. We find an interesting precursor of this in WS 323.

²⁶For an analysis of the struggle for organisation in the context of Nietzsche's earlier work, see Pearson (2018).

²⁷See also KSA 6[26] 12.224.

from 1883 onwards, one cannot help but notice the conceptual overlap and woolliness of these terms. As commentators have remarked, Nietzsche does not neatly parse the self into behavioural compulsions and emotions. He often characterises our affects as driving us towards particular forms of behaviour and frequently refers to emotions such as hatred as both drives *and* affects.²⁸ The indeterminacy of the term ‘drive’ is then exacerbated by the fact that it is often used in close conjunction, or even interchangeably, with terms such as ‘feeling’ (*Gefühl*),²⁹ ‘instinct’ (*Instinkt*),³⁰ ‘desire’ (*Begierde*),³¹ and inclination (*Hang*).³²

Much ink has been spilt trying to clarify what exactly Nietzsche means by drive. For instance, Peter Poellner has argued that Nietzsche’s drives are akin to homunculi with much the same kind of agency and consciousness as the higher self.³³ John Richardson, taking an evolutionary-biological tack, has then presented the case for interpreting drives as *genetically* ingrained behavioural dispositions, sharply distinguishing them from culturally acquired habits, customs and practices, which he argues Nietzsche treats ‘as less securely or solidly or deeply settled [...] than our animal inheritance; they can go as quickly as they came.’³⁴ Tom Stern has in turn contested this, showing that Nietzsche does often equate drives with culturally inculcated habits.³⁵ Stern then goes on to reject all existing definitions, remonstrating that the lack of consistency in Nietzsche’s usage renders the concept devoid of any determinate meaning.³⁶

Pace Richardson’s specific definition, it is patent from Nietzsche’s perpetual slippage between ‘drive’ and related concepts such as ‘affect’, ‘inclination’ and ‘instinct’ that his usage of this constellation of terms eludes strict demarcation. Yet this does not mean that we have to resort to Stern’s defeatism. For the purposes of this study, it will suffice to adopt a working notion of a ‘drive’ as a heuristic device that Nietzsche uses to

²⁸See Stern (2015, 126). See also BGE 23, for example, where Nietzsche refers to the ‘affects of hatred, envy, greed, and power-lust’ as drives.

²⁹See e.g. KSA 25[413] 11.120.

³⁰See e.g. KSA 14[92] 13.270 (WP 433), where Nietzsche speaks almost synonymously of ‘the ferocity of the drives’ and the ‘ferocity and anarchy of the instincts’.

³¹See e.g. KSA 17[81] 10.564.

³²See GS 294, where Nietzsche censures the ‘slanderers of nature’, who ‘have seduced us into the belief that the inclinations and drives of humans [*die Hänge und Triebe des Menschen*] are evil’ (amended translation).

³³Poellner (1995, 215). Against this, Paul Katsafanas (2013, 745) has argued that we can minimally describe a drive as that which generates a particular ‘evaluative orientation’ within our mind, and that we can therefore account for them ‘without treating [them] as homunculi’.

³⁴See Richardson (1996, 38, 2004, 35, 79, and 81–2).

³⁵Stern (2015, 125).

³⁶Thus, Stern (2015, 121) asserts that ‘Nietzsche did not in fact have anything like a coherent account of “the drives” [...]’.

discuss the often-obscure plurality of forces that constitute the self. I will therefore use the term drive to loosely refer to the power wills out of which our self is composed, and which manifest themselves as engrained impulses towards particular patterns of behaviour, irrespective of whether these impulses are biologically encoded or culturally inculcated.

The quality that Nietzsche most consistently predicates to the drives is a tendency to promote a particular form of life: '[E]very drive is reared [*angezüchtet*] as a temporary condition of existence' (KSA 26[72] 11.167).³⁷ This said, it is important to remark that the entity whose existence is furthered by those compulsions is not necessarily the individual in whom said compulsions reside – it might also be the community or one's family (even at the expense of the individual agent).³⁸

The drives are themselves will to power organisations that seek to take control of an individual's intellect and thereby direct the cognition and behaviour of the organism in such a way as to provide the drive in question with what it requires to augment its power: the sex drive pushes us towards sexual activity, the drive for truth impels us to pursue truth, and so on.³⁹ It goes without saying that this deeply problematises Kaufmann's claim that for Nietzsche rationality can be used to control our impulses. According to Nietzsche our rationality is not a faculty that stands over and above our impulses; rather, he considers it a mere *tool* of our impulses.⁴⁰

But the drives do not just strive to control our intellect, they also endeavour to command *each other*: 'Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm' (KSA 7[60] 12.315; WP 481).⁴¹ For Nietzsche, this command consists in the lower drive having to act as a stimulus (*Reiz*) for the superordinate drive.⁴² For instance, when a scholar thinks he is exercising his disinterested and objective drive for truth, he might actually be discharging his drive to hunt (in *hunting* out the truth), or merely

³⁷See also KSA 25[460] 11.135; KSA 26[72] 11.167; KSA 27[29] 11.283.

³⁸See KSA 26[72] 11.167:

There is a good whose purpose is the preservation of the individual; a good whose purpose is the preservation of one's family or one's community or one's tribe – a struggle can [thus] emerge within the individual, [that is, between these] two drives [*Triebe*].

³⁹See KSA 26[72] 10.274: 'The most general picture of our nature is as an association [*Vergesellschaftung*] of drives, with continual rivalries and alliances among one another. *The intellect is the object of the competition*' (emphasis added). As Katsafanas (2013, 470) has observed, drives often achieve this by making certain features in our environment more salient than others.

⁴⁰As Detwiler (1990, 158–9) has remarked.

⁴¹See also BGE 6. For an earlier example of this, see also KSA 11[119] 9.483.

⁴²See KSA 27[59] 11.289 (WP 966): '[A] drive as master, its opposite weakened, refined, as the impulse that provides the stimulus for the activity of the chief drive.'

fulfilling his financial, familial or political interests (BGE 6).⁴³ Our drives are therefore in a state of relentless contention insofar they strive to force one another to become means to their ends. The healthily integrated self is thus composed of a tense and shifting federation of drives ordered into relations of command and obedience.⁴⁴ This struggle of the drives to overcome one another is considered healthy by Nietzsche on account of the fact that it persistently promotes the strongest possible organisation by Darwinistically granting command to whichever drives, or conglomerate of drives, happens to be strongest at a given moment in time. This said, he also emphasises that this internal struggle must be *restrained* (*gebändigt*) by the dominant drives. Hence, ‘where the plant “man” shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully [...], but are controlled’ (KSA 27[59] 11.289; WP 966).⁴⁵ But does this mean that, ideally speaking, the possibility of drives eradicating or wholly repressing each other ought to be foreclosed according to Nietzsche?

3.2. Repression qua precondition of the unified self

Despite his at times deflationary critique of the notion of agency, Nietzsche certainly wants ‘us’ to ‘do’ something. What he wants us to do, broadly speaking, is follow the example of Goethe, whom he lauds for having ‘disciplined himself to wholeness [*Ganzheit*]’ (TI ‘Skirmishes’ 49). How, though, according to the later Nietzsche, can ‘we’ actively organise ‘our’ drives into a vibrant hierarchy, a *Ganzheit*? I do not intend to give a comprehensive answer to this question; rather, what I quite minimally wish to elucidate is how, as a means to the desideratum of healthy subjective integration, Nietzsche consistently commends repressive spiritual exercises.

So far, our description of the drives broadly stands in support of Gemes’s sublimational reading. Properly functioning drives strive to *co-opt* their counter-parts instead of seeking their repression or destruction. Yet, as Andrew Huddleston has astutely remarked, already in GS and D – N.B. before his formulation of the will to power thesis, and while his

⁴³We find the hunting example in an earlier note from 1881, KSA 11[47] 9.459: ‘[T]he drive for property (*der Eigentumstrieb*) – continuation of the drive for nutrition and hunting [...]’. See also KSA 14[142] 13.326: ‘The so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive for acquisition and overpowering’. As Richardson (1996, 33) has succinctly put it: ‘Drive A rules B insofar as it has turned B towards A’s own end, so that B now participates in A’s distinctive activity’ (quoted in Gemes [2009], 48).

⁴⁴Nietzsche refers to this as the ‘[d]istinction of lower and higher functions: A hierarchy of organs and drives, manifested through commanding and obeying’ (KSA 25[411] 11.119).

⁴⁵On the relation of drive integration and health in Nietzsche, see Richardson (2009, 134–5). See also KSA 1 [4] 12.11.

drive psychology is still in the early stages of its evolution – Nietzsche sanctions what can be considered an eliminatory practical attitude towards our drives:

One thing is needful. – To ‘give style’ to one’s character – a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; *there a piece of first nature removed* [abgetragen] [emphasis added] – both times through long practice and daily work at it. (GS 290)

Again, in D 109, in wholly uncritical terms, Nietzsche informs the reader of the following strategy for ‘combatting the vehemence of a drive’ and thereby attaining ‘[s]elf-mastery and moderation’: ‘one can avoid opportunities for gratification of the drive, and through long and ever longer periods of non-gratification weaken it and make it wither away [abdorren machen].’⁴⁶ We can therefore see that even during his middle period, where we find Nietzsche laying the foundations for his mature drive psychology, excision and elimination are already allocated an integral role within his conception of self-cultivation.

But what about during Nietzsche’s later period, which is our current focus? As we might expect given our preceding analysis, in BGE 36, Nietzsche describes the life of our drives (our *Triebleben*) as being characterised by more than just co-optive processes, such as that of assimilation. That is to say, he also figures *eliminatory* processes, such as that of ‘excretion’ (*Ausscheidung*), as being fundamental to the dynamic structure of our psychological constitution. In his later writings, we find two principal explanations for why Nietzsche might conceive of *Ausscheidung* as a psychological necessity – namely, insofar as we have either inherited or been infected by drives and instincts that are antagonistic to our flourishing, even though they may facilitate, or have once facilitated, the flourishing of other individuals or groups. As was intimated above, we may have had drives foisted upon us that serve the interests of a particular social group but that are injurious to us as individuals. For example, in GM, he describes the process by which the sick and the weak infect the strong with a predilection for pity, guilt and resentment (GM III 14–15). But further, as we also witnessed earlier, ‘every drive is reared as a *temporary* condition of existence’, and Nietzsche tellingly adds to this that every drive ‘is inherited long after it has ceased to be [a condition of existence]’ (KSA 26[72] 11.167). Impulses become ingrained because they promote our

⁴⁶See Huddleston (2017, 157).

flourishing; but since the conditions for such flourishing change with time, our impulses end up becoming redundant or even counterproductive vestiges.

In response to this last problem, at one point Nietzsche indicates that drives are automatically streamlined: the useless aspects of inherited drives simply wither away as a result of neglect. Thus, having ‘preservation potential in relation to other drives, a certain degree [*Grad*] of the drive is always passed on; an opposed [degree] disappears [*verschwindet*]' (KSA 26[72] 11.168). Though this by no means amounts to an endorsement of repression, as we turn to TI we will see that Nietzsche goes on to argue that we ought to *consciously* perform this streamlining activity, and moreover, that this often involves the outright repression or excision of certain drives.

To be sure, in TI, Nietzsche disparages the ascetic Christian strategy of controlling the passions (*Leidenschaften, Passionen*) ‘by cutting them off’ and eradicating them (i.e. through *Ausschneidung* and *Ausrottung*), or, in other more visceral words, by means of self-castration (*Castratismus*). But let us take a closer look at what exactly Nietzsche is objecting to in these texts. In TI ‘Morality’ 1, he complains that the church

never asks: ‘how can a desire be spiritualized, beautified, deified?’ – it has always laid the weight of its discipline on eradication [*Ausrottung*] (of sensuality, of pride, of greed, of the thirst to dominate and exact revenge). – But attacking the root of the passions means attacking the root of life: the practices of the church are hostile to life ...

In TI ‘Morality’ 2, his criticism then runs as follows:

The same methods – castration, eradication – are *instinctively* [emphasis added] chosen by people whose wills are too weak and degenerate to exercise any restraint in a struggle against a desire: [...] they need some sort of definitive declaration of hostilities, they need a *gap* between themselves and the passion.⁴⁷

Prima facie, these texts might have the appearance of an unqualified rejection of repressive spiritual exercises. But closer scrutiny reveals that he is *specifically* criticising the following:

- (1) Those who *unreflectively* resort to castration – that is, who *instinctively* resort to this method, *without first asking* ‘how can a desire be spiritualised’ (which does not entail that a desire *can* always be spiritualised).

⁴⁷On Nietzsche’s criticism of the church’s destructive impulse, see also AC 58 and KSA 10[157] 12.545 (WP 204). In this fragment, Nietzsche outlines a number of ways by which this act of spiritual castration can be performed. For a different reading of TI ‘Morality’ 2 that similarly positions itself against the sublimational reading, see Huddleston (2017, 159).

- (2) Those who *only* resort to castration in the face of troublesome passions – i.e. for whom this method is in *all* circumstances ‘indispensable’ (*unentbehrlich*).
- (3) Those who try to eradicate impulses that are fundamental to life, such as the acquisitive drives (e.g. ‘greed’), and the sexual (or ‘sensual’) passions, which are necessary for reproduction.

Contrary to the generalising sublimational reading, the qualified nature of these criticisms implies that there might be conditions under which we may, after deliberation, decide that a given impulse is *not* necessary for life and *cannot* be sublimated into the conglomerate of our drives (though let us recall that for Nietzsche this deliberating ‘I’ is not a rational ego distinct from our impulses, but a dominant drive, or alliance of drives⁴⁸).

A further issue for unqualified sublimational readings is the fact that Nietzsche often openly valorises ascetic practices, asserting that ‘all the virtues and efficiency of body and soul are acquired laboriously and little by little, through much industry, self-constraint, limitation, through much obstinate, faithful repetition of the same labours, *the same renunciations* [*Entsagungen*]’ (KSA 26[409] 11.260; WP 995; emphasis added).⁴⁹ But while here Nietzsche is arguably only advocating *temporary* suppression with a view to long-term control, at other times he affirms a far more radical breed of asceticism. In TI for example, the very same book in which he censures the excision of impulses, he encourages a manifestly more aggressive and unmeasured approach to problematic instincts. Thus, having defined the modern individual as a ‘physiological self-contradiction’ of instincts, he states that

A rational education would have *paralysed* at least one of these instinct systems with iron pressure so that another could gain force, become strong, take control. Today the individual would first need to be made possible by being *cut down and pruned* [*beschneidet*]: possible here means *complete* [*Ganz*] [. . .]. (TI ‘Skirmishes’ 41)

Forming the self into a holistic organisation is therefore not just a matter of *controlling* the instincts and pressing them into the service of higher goals on Nietzsche’s view. Where those instincts are simply harmful or

⁴⁸See BGE 117: ‘The will to overcome an affect is, in the end, itself only the will of another, or several other, affects.’ See also D 109.

⁴⁹See also D 109. This is reminiscent of GM II 3, where it is implied that the reliability of the sovereign individual (as described in GM II 2) is the fruit of many centuries of brutal punishment (as well as brutal self-punishment and asceticism):

the harshness of the penal law gives a measure of how much trouble [man] had in conquering forgetfulness, and *preserving* a few primitive requirements of social life in the minds of these slaves of the mood and desire of the moment. [. . .] In a certain sense, the whole of asceticism belongs here: a few ideas have to be made ineradicable, ubiquitous, unforgettable, ‘fixed’.

incompatible, we should strive to *paralyse*, and even excise them – the individual must be ‘cut’ (*beschneidet*), says Nietzsche. We need to ‘prune’ entire instincts, and even instinct ‘systems’. His topiatic trope efficiently illustrates how, within any growing organisation, splitting-off (which, recall, is the term Gemes uses to define repression) is a *precondition* of maintaining a harmonious form.⁵⁰ This call for eradication is then reiterated in AC where he advocates the excision of the injurious impulse towards *Mitleid*:

In the middle of our unhealthy modernity, nothing is less healthy than Christian pity. To be the doctor here, to be merciless here, to *guide the blade here* [*hier unerbittlich sein, hier das Messer führen*] – this is for us to do, this is our love for humanity, this is what makes us philosophers, we Hyperboreans! - - - (AC 7; emphasis added)

We then find further texts in the *Nachlass*, where Nietzsche calls for an ‘eradication’ or ‘destruction’ of certain impulses:

One day we will barely need *denial* and *slander* in order to deal with certain of our drives [*Triebe*] as *enemies*; [...] to destroy [*vernichten*] undisturbed and with godly eye. (KSA 1[81] 12.31)

The eradication [*Ausrottung*] of the ‘drives’ [*Triebe*] the virtues, which are not possible or the virtues, which among slaves, dominated by priests, are most highly prized. (KSA 25[349] 11.104)

Though the quotation marks in the second citation indicate that Nietzsche does not consider the life-denying impulses he seeks to eradicate to be genuine drives, there are no such shudder quotes in the first citation. In any case, in both fragments we find him unambiguously inciting us to an eliminative struggle with respect to our behavioural impulses.

We should also note that this destructive impetus is not confined to Nietzsche’s notebooks and the published texts from 1888, in which it might be argued that his thought tends towards hyperbole in a manner that is generally out of sync with the poise of his mature philosophy. In the second essay of GM, for instance, he advises that we turn our self-mortifying sense of guilt or ‘bad conscience’ – what he describes as an inwardly turned ‘[a]nimosity, cruelty, [...] pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying [*Zerstörung*]’ (GM II 16; emphasis added) – onto our life-denying, ‘perverse inclinations’ (*unnatürliche Hänge*) (GM II 24; original emphasis). These are the inclinations, Nietzsche tells us, which have

⁵⁰For a relevant and more expansive study of Nietzsche’s gardening metaphors, and particularly his conception of pruning, see Ridley (2017).

been imposed on humankind by Judeo-Christian morality and (what he considers to be) its secular variants (*viz.* Platonic, Kantian and utilitarian moral theory). (For simplicity's sake, I will hereinafter follow Nietzsche in referring to this cluster of overlapping moral frameworks with the umbrella term *slave morality*.)⁵¹

For too long, man has viewed his natural inclinations [*Hänge*] with an 'evil eye', so that they finally came to be intertwined with 'bad conscience' in him. A reverse experiment should be possible *in principle* [...] – by this, I mean an intertwining of bad conscience with *perverse* inclinations [*Hänge*], all those otherworldly aspirations, alien to the senses, the instincts, to nature, to animals, in short all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life and have defamed the world.

(GM II 24)

In this way, Nietzsche hopes that a key set of impulses that constitute the ascetic ideal can be conscripted to undermine another set of impulses that comprise that very same ideal. This is intended to facilitate the pursuit of Nietzsche's counter-ideal of 'great health' (*grosse Gesundheit*). What we bear witness to in the above text is how Nietzsche marries his ideal of sublimation to a destructive impetus – he thus calls for the mastery of the useful impulses associated with 'bad conscience' but only in order to purge ourselves of inclinations that are entirely incompatible with his vision of the wholesome self. While he often (though not always) avoids labelling these life-denying dispositions 'drives', it is nonetheless incontrovertible that he seeks the complete eradication of certain ingrained behavioural impulses, and not merely their sublimatory transformation.

What is nevertheless not clarified by Nietzsche is how his peculiar brand of excision circumvents the 'return of the repressed' problem, which he himself underscores. As he writes elsewhere, entrenched impulses that are denied external release are prone to discharge themselves internally in surreptitious and harmful ways.⁵² How can we verify whether we have successfully 'excised' a drive, instinct system, or impulse? We might charitably speculate that Nietzsche's policy of amputation is impervious to this risk due to the fact that it is only impulses that are *indispensable* to life that are forced to return, and that these are not Nietzsche's

⁵¹My reason for adopting this terminology is that Nietzsche conjectures that these frameworks, in contrast to master morality, similarly originate in, and are particularly endemic to, the slavish-minded masses (the rationale informing this conviction will be expanded upon below). This is what Leiter has dubbed 'morality in the pejorative sense'. See Leiter (2002, 74). Nietzsche also often refers to this as 'herd' morality.

⁵²See WS 83; GS 292; KSA 8[4]12.334 (WP 376). See also Caro (2004, 124).

target. On the contrary, he endorses the destruction of life-denying impulses. Within this set we can include impulses that may once have been useful but have now become antagonistic to the end of flourishing, as well as those drives that are the result of the culturally formative processes to which an indispensable life drive may be subjected and thereby become life-denying. In this way, one might successfully eliminate a drive for pederasty without sublimating it into a drive to draw beautiful depictions of young boys (as Da Vinci did, according to Freud) or excising the higher vital drive for sexual contact, of which the drive for pederasty may be viewed as an offshoot.⁵³ We might similarly excise the drive for a meat-free diet (which Nietzsche holds to be harmful [GM III 17]) without sublimating it or thereby eliminating the vital drive for nutrition. This hermeneutic approach crucially enables us to make sense of what Nietzsche means in GS 290, where he explicitly indicates that we ought to remove (*abtragen*) parts of our 'first nature' (*erste Natur*).⁵⁴

The final pressing issue with Nietzsche's model of self-cultivation, and the problem that will concern us in the following section, concerns the degree of epistemological access that he thinks we have to our drives and impulses. Nietzsche (in opposition to Descartes, for example) did not think that individuals enjoy self-transparency, which accordingly affects the degree to which we can practically engage with our drives. If the self is opaque, how can we organise it? As Paul Katsafanas has emphasised, Nietzsche's drives should not be equated with the behavioural compulsions that we *consciously* feel. This is because the drives are often conceived by Nietzsche as *pre-conscious* – presenting our consciousness with motives like carrots on a stick (as we just saw, a scholar might *consciously* believe that the drive for truth is fundamentally propelling her behaviour, when in reality this motive may just be a façade for the activity of deeper drives hidden from conscious view).⁵⁵ Indeed, Nietzsche unambiguously informs us that, 'the household of our drives is [...] far beyond our insight' (KSA 7[268] 10.323).⁵⁶ How can we hope to distinguish and excise our impulses when they are so often obfuscated, both in themselves and in their entanglement with other drives?

⁵³See Gemes (2009, 41). It should be noted that Nietzsche himself does not necessarily view pederasty as life-denying (see e.g. KSA 9[21] 12.347).

⁵⁴For an instructive account of how Nietzsche's theory of self-cultivation is compatible with his claim in BGE 231 that there are certain ineradicable parts of the self (the 'unteachable [...] granite of spiritual *fatum*' that exists within each of us), see Ridley (2017).

⁵⁵See also KSA 1[20] 12.15: '[A]ll our conscious motives are surface-phenomena: behind them stands the struggle of our drives'. KSA 39[6] 11.621: 'Behind consciousness work the drives.'

⁵⁶See Katsafanas (2013, 733–5). Haberkamp (2000, 88–92). Compare D 119: '[N]othing however can be more incomplete than [man's] image of the totality of drives which constitute his being. [...] [A]bove all, the laws of their *nutriment* remain wholly unknown to him.'

Though this remains a persistent issue for Nietzsche's conception of self-cultivation, it can be at least partially addressed by turning to his project of *revaluation*.

4. Organisation through value critique

It is worth our while commencing this section by stating that we should not confuse limited epistemological access for no access at all; Nietzsche often states that our drives *do* frequently manifest themselves to our consciousness. For example, we have seen that Nietzsche sometimes identifies drives with conscious affects such as hatred.⁵⁷ But another important route via which we can gain a more penetrating view into the self is through our *values*. As he says in BGE 268, '[a] person's valuations (*Werthschätzungen*) reveal something about the structure of his soul and what the soul sees as its conditions of life, its genuine needs.' In this final section, I first briefly delineate how values are related to drives for Nietzsche before illuminating how the species of value critique that he propounds is tantamount to an endorsement of repressive spiritual exercises.

4.1. Values and drives

Our 'valuations' (*Werthschätzungen*), says Nietzsche, 'correspond [*entsprechen*] to our drives [*Triebe*]' (KSA 40[61] 11.661); they are the 'sign-language' of our affects (BGE 187). Drives in some sense express themselves *as* an evaluative stance towards the world: '[E]very "drive" is the drive to "something good" viewed from some standpoint; it is a valuation [*Werthschätzung*] only insofar as it has been incorporated' (KSA 26[72] 11.162).⁵⁸ Drives lead us toward 'goods', but it is only when these drives have been incorporated into the command structure of the self, that their 'good' is recognised as an end for the individual and thereby becomes a (positive) 'valuation.'⁵⁹ We can thus glean at least *some* insight into the underlying ordering of our drives by analysing our values. More importantly, as Nietzsche already intimates in 1882, our (moral) values offer us *practical*, as well as epistemological, access to our

⁵⁷Indeed, Nietzsche states that our conscious feelings and thoughts reflect the 'overall condition' (*Gesamtzustand*) of our underlying drives (KSA 1[61] 12.26).

⁵⁸KSA 27[28] 11.283: 'The varying feeling of value [*das verschiedene Werthgefühle*] with which we distinguish [*von einander abheben*] these drives is the consequence of their greater or lesser importance, [that is,] their actual ranking, with respect to our preservation [*Erhaltung*].'

⁵⁹Compare D 38.

behavioural impulses: '[O]ur opinions, valuations [*Werthschätzungen*], and tables of what is good are certainly some of the most powerful levers in the machinery of our actions' (GS 335).

Contrary to moral objectivists, and sounding more like an expressivist, Nietzsche holds every value to be the contingent expression of a particular power organisation, its particular perspective on the world and the particular conditions under which it flourishes.⁶⁰ On this understanding, our values are irreducibly man-made; as he states in Z, '[h]umans first placed values [*Werthe*] into things' (Z, 'Goals' 43), and they created these values to serve the power augmenting needs of particular human organisations (e.g. individual, family, state, etc.).⁶¹ Through the propagation of moral values, the dominant members of these organisations augment their power by regulating the other drives out of which these federations are composed: 'Moralities are the expression of locally limited orders of rank in this multifarious world of drives, so man should not perish through their contradictions' (KSA 27[59] 11.289; WP 996). By disparaging harmful drives and promoting those that are expedient to its power-augmenting needs, the master drive, or conglomerate of drives, promotes a hierarchy of behavioural impulses able to harmoniously serve its higher ends.⁶² In this way, the leaders of a nation-state might strive to suppress seditious impulses by branding them morally reprehensible (i.e. of negative moral value).

We now have a sufficient picture of what Nietzsche means by 'value' and how he thinks our values are related to our drives.⁶³ What we should now ask is: How does Nietzsche think we should concretely go about restructuring our drives by means of value critique?

⁶⁰See KSA 11[96] 13.44-5 (WP 675):

'To have purposes, aims, intentions, willing in general, is the same thing as willing to be stronger, willing to grow – and, in addition, willing the means to this. [...] All valuations [*Werthschätzungen*] are only consequences and narrow perspectives in the service of this one will: valuation itself is only this will to power.'

⁶¹As with the drives, a given value does not necessarily serve the ends of the individual: 'all evaluation [*Werthschätzung*] is made from a definite perspective: that of the preservation of the individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a faith, a culture' (KSA 26[119] 11.181; WP 259). See also BGE 224.

⁶²See KSA 10[10] 12.459:

'The economical denigration of former ideals. The law-givers [...] select a number of states [*Zustände*] and affects, whose activity guarantees a regular [social] benefit [...] Supposing that these states and affects strike [people] as ingredients of that which is painful, then a means must be found to overcome this pain through a value judgement [*Werthvorstellung*]: the pain must be made *valuable* [*werthvoll*], it must be felt as honourable, that is, pleasurable.'

See also BGE 188 and KSA 10[57] 12.490.

⁶³For a far more comprehensive account of the relation of drives and values, and an overview of the Anglo-phone debates on this topic, see Katsafanas (2015).

4.2. Revaluing our values

It is worth highlighting that what Nietzsche wishes to deflate in renaturalising the notion of value is slave morality's conception of values as transcendent, objective and universal.⁶⁴ Moreover, he rejects altruistic moral values as being hypocritically grounded in selfish interests.⁶⁵ However, far from being *opposed* to the will to power, the universalising and altruistic values we find in slave morality are in fact posited as part of a rear-guard power-winning strategy of weaker individuals; hence, 'the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life, which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence' (GM III 13).⁶⁶ It is through such values that the weak (i.e. the slavish, oppressed masses) suppress both the dangerous social conflict associated with excessive individualism, and the painful inner havoc of their drives. Universal values reduce the pluralism that conditions social struggle, and altruistic values encourage individuals to focus on others in a way that allows them to avoid confronting their own state of inner disgregation (what Nietzsche calls a process of 'depersonalisation' [*Entpersönlichung*]).⁶⁷ Where social and subjective conflict is out of control, slave morality therefore offers a prudent last resort, one that Nietzsche sometimes approximates to hibernation (GM III 17).⁶⁸

Nonetheless, Nietzsche warns that such values are at best short-term palliatives, being profoundly harmful when adopted indefinitely or imposed upon those who are not already sick, as he believes has happened in modernity.⁶⁹ The problem, however, is not just that we have inherited and been infected by values that preserve the interests of the weak at the expense of the healthy, but that these values have become *ossified*. Accordingly,

we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined* – and so we need to know about the conditions and circumstances under which the values grew up, developed and changed (GM Preface 6).

⁶⁴See e.g. BGE 43: "Good" is no longer good when it comes from your neighbour's mouth. And how could there ever be a "common good"! The term is self-contradictory: whatever can be common will never have much value.'

⁶⁵As Nehamas (1985, 113) has succinctly put it, Nietzsche's project of revaluation is based on 'the alleged discovery that our morality is, by its own standards, poisonously immoral'. See also KSA 10[154] 12.542 (WP 272).

⁶⁶See AC 10.

⁶⁷KSA 17[6] 13.527-8 (WP 44).

⁶⁸See also BGE 262 and BGE 200.

⁶⁹See GM III 14.

As he accents here, one of the first steps towards formulating a remedy to excessive social or subjective struggle is to distinguish those values that *preserve pathological* organisations from those that foster the *flourishing* of *healthy* ones. This, he conjectures, can be at least partially achieved by formulating a genealogy of the multitude of different moralities in existence. This genealogy is not a mere catalogue, however. Rather, it is a ‘rank-order of “higher” and “lower” moralities (“more important, more essential, more indispensable, more irreplaceable”)’ (KSA 25[411] 11.119).⁷⁰

But what criterion can Nietzsche use to establish such a rank-order? In his own laconic words: ‘What is the objective measure of value [*Werth*]? Solely the quantum of *enhanced* and *organised power* ...’ (KSA 11[83] 13.40; WP 674).⁷¹ Since it is the human richest in (controlled) opposition that flourishes most vibrantly according to Nietzsche, he sets this individual as the ultimate gold standard: ‘[T]he greatest force, as command over opposites, sets the standard’ (KSA 25[408] 11.119). But it should be well noted that this is not a question of simply identifying those values that conflict with the principle of will to power. *All* values are formulated as power-augmenting strategies, they are *all* expressions of will to power – as we just saw, even slave morality is a kind of last-resort hibernational stratagem employed by the weak in the struggle for power. The task of the genealogist is therefore that of distinguishing between the values that support weaker and stronger power organisations.

There are of course some fundamental values that, in Nietzsche’s eyes, tend to engender the strongest individuals, and which, having been hitherto denigrated by slave morality, he is eager to redeem. For example, he promotes values that esteem social and subjective struggle (e.g. in BGE 259 and 200, respectively) since, as we have seen, such struggle and tension is requisite for social and subjective health according to Nietzsche. He also affirms those values that further the impulse towards exploitation, since this is requisite, he tells us, for the breeding of great individuals (see BGE 257). The list could go on, but this should amply illustrate how Nietzsche employs his conception of life as will to power as a metric by which to rank certain values and value-systems over others. However, having discerned the life-denying values of slave morality and

⁷⁰See also GM Preface 3. KSA 7[42] 12.308. BGE 260.

⁷¹See also KSA 5[71] 12.215: ‘There is nothing in life that has value (*Werth*) except the degree of power’. KSA 11[414] 13.192: ‘What is good? – Everything that increases the feeling of power, the will to power, the power itself in humans.’ KSA 2[131] 12.132 (WP 391). For an earlier example of this thought, see KSA 4[104] 9.126.

the behavioural impulses that are upheld by those values, the following question now confronts the Nietzschean self-cultivator: How is she supposed to practically engage with these?

4.3. Sublimation and repression via value critique

To what extent does Nietzsche want to abolish the values and behavioural impulses associated with slave morality? Take the value of altruism, which is a value that Nietzsche associates with the disintegrating self. According to Nietzsche, individuals often only adhere to an ethic of altruism on account of having lost the capacity to care for themselves: they no longer know ‘how to find [their] own advantage’. But this ‘remedy’ is in fact a poisoned chalice. Altruism actually exacerbates the problem of self-disintegration since it leads people to neglect themselves – in choosing to help one’s Other, one ‘choose[s] instinctively what is harmful’ (TI ‘Skirmishes’ 35).

Notwithstanding, it is not immediately obvious that Nietzsche wants to nullify the values or ideals promoting such behaviour. As KSA 10[117] 12.523 (WP 361) makes plain, his declaration of war against Christian values is in a certain sense limited:

I have declared war on the anaemic Christian ideal (together with what is closely related to it), not with the aim of destroying it but only of putting an end to its tyranny and clearing the way for new ideals, for *more robust* ideals [...]: our drive of self-preservation wants our *opponents* to retain their strength – it only wants to become *master over them*.

Nietzsche assures us that he only seeks to *dominate* Christian ideals (i.e. *desiderata*, which we may read as synonymous with the notion of ‘values’). Since he envisions a society in which the slavish herd is preserved and exploited, and since altruistic slave morality is a condition of existence for the herd, it is unsurprising that he thinks that ‘[t]he ideas of the herd should rule in the herd – but not reach out beyond it’ (KSA 7[6] 12.280; WP 287).⁷² He also argues that it is preferable for higher individuals to remain in conflict with slave morality *within themselves*. The reason for this is, as we have repeatedly seen, that such inner struggle is a necessary precondition of health for Nietzsche: ‘The price of fertility is to be rich in contradictions; people stay young only if their souls do not stretch out

⁷²On Nietzsche’s desire for the preservation of Christian morality within society, see also KSA 35[9] 11.511-2 (WP 132), or KSA 10[2] 12.454 (WP 1021), where Nietzsche describes himself only as struggling ‘against the predominance of the herd instincts’.

languidly and long for peace' (TI 'Moral' 3). This explains why Nietzsche holds that every higher culture is defined by the struggle of slave and master morality 'inside the same person even, within a single soul' (BGE 260).

If we turn to EH, we can see what kind of struggle Nietzsche might be concretely advocating within this apology for slave morality. Here he vies to appropriate the Christian value of neighbourly love (*Nächstenliebe*). In encouraging 'forgetting yourself, misunderstanding yourself, belittling, narrowing yourself, making yourself mediocre', altruistic practices can distract one from oneself, and allow one's drives to organise themselves organically without the disruption of conscious interference, which is usually misguided and counter-productive on Nietzsche's view. In this way,

neighbourly love, living for other people and other things, can be a form of precautionary discipline for maintaining the toughest selfishness. Here I make an exception to my rule and conviction, and side with 'selfless drives': in this case, they are working in the service of selfishness [*Selbstsucht*] and self-discipline [*Selbstzucht*]. (EH 'Clever' 9; amended translation)

Nietzsche therefore condones the drive to care for others at the temporary expense of one's own wellbeing as a long-term tactic for achieving the egoistic goal of self-cultivation. He thereby places an interpretation on the drive for, and valuation of, altruistic behaviour that robs it of its unconditional status and subordinates it to the higher value of individual health. Some Christian values, and their corresponding impulses, *can* therefore be retained within a healthy subjective organisation so long as their *Herrschaft* over healthy values is overturned. By this act of revaluation, altruism is reconceived as instrumentally valuable – that is, it is valued to the extent that it functions *as a means to* health, which now represents the intrinsically valuable *summum bonnum*. This is a patent example of how our Christian impulses can be sublimated by means of revaluation.

Yet there remain copious texts that suggest that Nietzsche's value critique often takes a more destructive form. In AC, for instance, he declares a '[w]ar to the death [*Todkrieg*] against vice', where 'the vice is Christianity' (AC 'Law against Christianity'). This is prefigured in Z, where he repeatedly rallies his readers to a destructive battle against (what he considers to be) the moribund Christian moral order: 'Break [*zerbrecht*], break me these old tablets of the pious, my brothers! Gainsay me the sayings of the world slanderers!' (Z, 'Tablets' 164).

What Nietzsche has in mind is of course not wanton nullification. What he is rather proposing is the unmeasured critique of life-denying values

to the extent that this is a precondition of creating new, healthy and life-affirming moral orders. We should conceive of this as *creative-destruction*:

[I]n order for a shrine to be set up, a shrine has to be destroyed [*zerbrochen*]: that is the law – show me an example where this does not apply! (GM II 24; emphasis added; amended translation)

[W]hoever must be a creator in good and evil – truly, he must first be an annihilator [*Vernichter*] and break [*zerbrechen*] values. (Z, 'Self-Overcoming' 90)

[N]egation [*Verneinen*] and destruction [*Vernichten*] are conditions of affirmation. (EH, 'Destiny' 4; emphasis added)⁷³

This raises a number of questions – for instance: What could it possibly mean to 'destroy' a value? And how is this a prerequisite of creativity? And doesn't destroying moral values entail the suppression of the behavioural impulses associated therewith?

With respect to the first of these queries, we might say that the destruction of which Nietzsche speaks consists in merely negating the *unconditionality* of moral values: it is their tyrannous claims to transcendence and universality that should be nullified and thereafter substituted with an affirmation of their contingent and malleable nature. This avowal of the plasticity of moral values enables us to imagine and pursue the formation of new hierarchies of values. Indeed, Nietzsche asserts that 'the unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*] cannot be the creative [*das Schaffende*]' (KSA 26[203] 11.203). On the one hand, he achieves this through his naturalisation of values by denuding the *falsity* or even logical incoherence of the notion of unconditional values.⁷⁴ On the other hand, he further contests such universality by highlighting the injuriousness of such a belief. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that an inability to adapt our values to our ever-changing power-augmenting needs would inevitably lead to our death:

Were there an absolute morality, it would demand that the truth was followed unconditionally: thus, I and humankind [would] perish due to morality. – This is my interest in the destruction [*Vernichtung*] of morality. In order to be able to live

⁷³See KSA 13[13] 10.462: 'The truth should shatter [*zerbrechen*] the world in order for the world to be constructed! [...] I love life: I despise man [*den Menschen*]. [...] [F]or the sake of life, I will destroy [*vernichten*] him.'

⁷⁴See e.g. KSA 34[28] 11.429: '[S]uperstition: to believe in being [*das Seiende*], in the unconditioned, [...] in absolute value, in the thing in itself! Everywhere, these formulations conceal a *contradictio*' (emphasis added).

and advance – in order to satisfy the will to power, every absolute command must be eradicated [*beseitigt*]. (KSA 7[37] 10.252)

Little wonder, then, that Nietzsche gives those wishing to spurn destructive conflict a blunt ultimatum: 'Either abolish [*abschaffen*] your venerations or – yourselves!' (GS 346). On the logic of these texts, however, the value, and the underlying drives sanctioned by that value, are not themselves necessarily abolished but merely qualified; thus, the creativity affirmed by Nietzsche would appear to be enabled by minimally negating a certain formal quality or modality predicated to those values.⁷⁵

This interpretation of the destructive aspect of Nietzsche's programme of revaluation may on the face of things seem perfectly compatible with the sublimational reading. Yet it is difficult not to read this as amounting to a *total* rejection of the value of universality and the impulse we have to make unconditional axiological claims. In addition to this, other texts suggest that he seeks a far more substantive repression of slave morality (and the behavioural impulses served by those values). In some texts he seems to suggest that *no* part of slave morality is compatible with his model of thriving life; for example, in KSA 7[6] 12.274 (WP 343):

My insight: all the forces and drives [*Triebe*] by virtue of which life and growth exist lie under the ban of morality: morality as the instinct to deny life. One must destroy [*vernichten*] morality if one is to liberate life.

This text implies that morality (by which he means *slave* morality) is an expression of the 'Instinct' (*Instinkt*) to deny life, and that both this form of morality and the underlying instinct must be wholly destroyed if life is to be able flourish. We can soundly assume that by this he means that the existing moral values associated with slave morality must be subjected to *unrestrained* critique – i.e. criticised to the point that they are wholly emptied of value – and the behavioural impulses promoted by these values should be indefinitely suppressed.⁷⁶

I do not wish to claim that Nietzsche's meaning here is entirely lucid or coherent. On the contrary, it is frustratingly resilient to anyone seeking specifics. For example, it is unclear how we might go about distinguishing values that *can* be placed in the service of the higher goal of

⁷⁵See Leiter (2002, 60ff) for an overview of Nietzsche's attempt to undermine the universal claims of slave morality.

⁷⁶After calling for the destruction of morality in KSA 7[6] 12.273-83, Nietzsche then lists a number of different ways in which he envisions this mode of radical critique proceeding; for example, by showing how such morality is a 'work of error', 'harmful to life', and a 'work of immorality' (insofar as it relies on the very egoistic drives that it condemns).

health from those values that *cannot* (on account of their being intrinsically life-denying) and which accordingly merit eradication. Moreover, as in the case of drives, it is unclear how we could ever be certain that this destruction had actually taken place. In one note, Nietzsche even maintains that ideological destruction is altogether impossible, stating that ideas (*Vorstellungen*) that are 'overcome are not *annihilated* [*vernichtet*], only driven back [*zurückgedrängt*] or subordinated. There is no destruction [*Vernichtung*] in the sphere of spirit [*im Geistigen*]' (KSA 7[53]12.312; WP 588). Nonetheless, despite their discordance, the above texts quite consistently betray a lack of fit between Nietzsche's project of revaluation and the sublimational reading. This is because the texts we've examined either directly or indirectly call for the unrestrained repression – i.e. splitting off, as Gemes puts it – of certain behavioural impulses through the radical critique of the values that support those impulses.

5. Conclusion

We are now in a position to answer our opening question as to whether Nietzsche can justifiably be situated in a lineage of philosophers concerned with ridding us of our passions. Tracing a line through his general theory of organisation, his drive psychology, and axiology (i.e. theory of value), I have tried to explicate how in his later writings he persistently valorises the eliminative processes of repression, eradication, exclusion and excretion as necessary preconditions of incorporation and unification. My objective throughout has been to demonstrate the shortcomings of the sublimational reading. This has been achieved by foregrounding just how intrinsic repressive spiritual exercises are to Nietzsche's later model of self-cultivation. Notwithstanding his critique of Christian asceticism, he presents us with compelling arguments as to why repressive spiritual exercises are essential to our well-being. He further demonstrates why to neglect or suppress the impulse to destructive struggle, as we might accuse his sublimational readers of doing, is to be guilty of a denial of life. As we have seen, within his philosophy of the self, Nietzsche draws a distinction between commendable and deplorable forms of destructive struggle.⁷⁷ We should therefore take care not to misread his criticisms of particular forms of destructive conflict as a general disavowal.

⁷⁷Nietzsche notably also draws such a distinction between healthy and harmful destruction, albeit in a far more general manner, in GS 370: 'The desire for destruction, for change and for becoming can be the expression of an overflowing energy pregnant with the future [...]; but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted [...] who destroys and must destroy because what exists [...] outrages and provokes him.'

Nonetheless, it should be emphatically stated that far from attempting to wholly vitiate the sublimational reading, my aim has been more modest in kind: I have only sought to *qualify* Kaufmann's and Gemes's claims that Nietzsche exclusively recommends the sublimation of our drives and is, conversely, wholly opposed to their repression. I have thus endeavoured to defend the thesis that he recommends sublimation *under certain conditions* – namely, when the impulse in question is deemed serviceable. Likewise, while he may often be critical of repressive spiritual exercises, he again endorses them *under certain conditions* – specifically, where deliberation has established that an impulse is recalcitrant and of zero or even negative value. We can therefore conclude that, congruent with the digestive (i.e. the incorporative–excretive) logic of the will to power, *both* sublimation *and* repression are equally essential to a Nietzschean account of self-organisation; consequently, if we neglect either side of this organisational dynamic, we do so at great risk to our personal flourishing.

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