

Nietzsche and the Limits of Subjectivity: The Theory of the Drives

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I

1. The Theory of the Drives. What I would like to discuss today is Nietzsche’s theory of what he calls the “drives” or “impulses” (terms we’re more familiar with from Freud, though he himself derived them from Nietzsche), and the relation of the drives to what we like to call “subjectivity.” The notion of the “death of the subject” has been a common theme in contemporary European philosophy, throwing off its Cartesian yoke. Nietzsche was no doubt the philosopher who carried this critique of the subject to its highest point, but he was also the thinker who *lived* the dissolution of the subject at its highest point as well—culminating in what we call Nietzsche “madness.” It is the theory of the drives that links together these two aspects—Nietzsche’s thought and Nietzsche’s life—and it is this trajectory of the thought of the drives that I’d like to explore together today. (With help along the way from Deleuze and Klossowski; and a strong debt throughout to Graham Parkes’s book *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology*).

Nietzsche famously proposed a new model for philosophy: the model of the body. “The body,” he wrote, “is a more astonishing idea than the old “soul” (WP 659), and it is less surrounded with superstition than the mind.¹ Nietzsche understood the body primarily as the locus of a system of what he called, using a highly varied vocabulary, drives (*Triebe*), impulses (*Reize, Impulse*), desires (*Begierden*), instinct (*Instincke*), power (*Mächte*), force (*Kräfte*), passion (*Leidenschaften*), feeling (*Gefühen*), affect

¹ “Essential: to start from the body and employ it as a guide. It is the much richer phenomenon, which allows of clearer observation. Belief in the body is better established than belief in the spirit” (WP, 489).

(*Affekte*), pathos (*Pathos*), and so on. It is primarily this system of the impulses or drives that I would like to examine today.

I'd like to begin by quoting a passage from *Daybreak* (1880), one of Nietzsche's early books:

Suppose we were in the market place one day and we noticed someone laughing at us as we went by: this event will signify this or that to us according to whether this or that drive happens at that moment to be at its height in us—and it will be a quite different event according to the kind of person we are. One person will absorb it like a drop of rain, another will shake it from him like an insect, another will try to pick a quarrel, another will examine his clothing to see if there is anything about it that might give rise to laughter, another will be led to reflect on the nature of laughter as such, another will be glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world—and in each case, a drive has gratified itself, whether it be the drive to annoyance, or to combativeness or to reflection or to benevolence. This drive seized the event as its prey. Why precisely this one? Because, thirsty and hungry, it was lying in wait" (D 119).

This is the source of Nietzsche's doctrine of *perspectivism* (his famous phrase: "there are no facts, only interpretations"), but what is often overlooked is that, for Nietzsche, it is our *drives* that interpret the world, that are perspectival—and not our egos, not our conscious opinions. All of us, as individuals, contain *within ourselves* "a vast confusion of contradictory drives" (WP 259), such that we are, as Nietzsche liked to say, multiplicities, and not unities. Nietzsche's point is not that I have a different perspective on the world than you; it is rather that each of us has multiple perspectives on the world within ourselves because of the multiplicity of our drives—drives that are often contradictory among themselves. "*Within ourselves*," Nietzsche writes, "we can also be egoistic or altruistic, hard-hearted, magnanimous, just, lenient, insincere, can cause pain or give pleasure" (Parkes, pp. 291-292).

Moreover, these drives are in a constant struggle or combat with each other: my drive to smoke and get my nicotine rush is in combat with (but also coexistent with) my drive to quit. This is where Nietzsche first developed his concept of the will to power—at the level of the drives. “Every drive is a kind of lust to rule,” he writes, “each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm” (WP 481).

2. The Combat Against the Drives. Now: to be sure, we can combat the drives, we can fight against them. Indeed, this is one of the most common themes in philosophy, a Platonic theme that was taken up by Christianity: the fight against the passions. In another passage from *Daybreak* (109), Nietzsche says that he can see only six fundamental methods we have at our disposal for combating the drives. For instance, Nietzsche says, (1) we can avoid opportunities for its gratification (for instance, if I’m combating my drive to smoke cigarettes, I can stop hiding packs of cigarettes at home, which I conveniently “find” again when I run out), or (2) we can implant regularity into the drive (having one cigarette every four hours so as to at least avoid smoking in between), or (3) we can engender disgust with the drive, giving ourselves over to its wild and unrestrained gratification to the point where we become disgusted with it (say, smoking non-stop for a month until the very idea of a cigarette makes me want to vomit) And Nietzsche continues with several other examples.

But then Nietzsche asks: But *who* exactly is combating the drives in these various ways? His answer is this: The fact “*that one desires to combat the vehemence of a drive at all, however, does not stand within our own power; nor does the choice of any particular method; nor does the success or failure of this method. What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of another drive which is a rival of the drive whose vehemence is tormenting us.... While ‘we’ believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive which is complaining about the other; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the vehemence [or violence] of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive, and that a struggle is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides*” (*Daybreak*

109). What we call thinking, willing, and feeling are all “merely a relation of these drives to each other” (BGE 36). In other words, there is no struggle of reason against the drives, as Plato, for instance, held. What we call “reason” is, in Nietzsche’s view, nothing more than a certain “system of relations between various passions” (WP 387), a certain ordering of the drives.²

What then do I mean when I say “I am trying to stop smoking”—even though that same I is constantly going ahead and lighting up cigarettes and continuing to smoke? It simply means that my conscious intellect is taking sides and associating itself with a particular drive. It would make just as much sense to say, “Occasionally I feel this strange impulse to stop smoking, but happily I’ve managed to combat that drive and pick up a cigarette whenever I want.” Instinctively, Nietzsche says, we tend to take our *predominant* drive and for the moment turn it into the *whole* of our ego, placing all our weaker drives perspectively *farther away*, as if those other drives weren’t *me* but rather something else, something other inside me, a kind of “*it*” (hence Freud’s idea of the “id,” the “it”—which he also derived from Nietzsche). “The ego,” Nietzsche writes, “is a *plurality of person-like forces*, of which now this one now that one stands in the foreground as ego and regards the others as a subject regards an influential and determining external world.”³ When we talk about the “I,” we are simply indicating which drive, at the moment, is strongest and sovereign. “The feeling of the ‘I’ is always strongest where the preponderance [*Übergewicht*] is,” Nietzsche writes, although the so-called “self-identity” I seem to experience in my ego is in fact a differential flickering from drive to drive.

The fundamental question, then, for Nietzsche, is to determine, among the complex constellation of our drives, which drives happen to be sovereign in me (or in a culture) at a given

² In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche considers the familiar example we have of becoming more reasonable, of “growing up.” “Something that you formerly loved as a truth or probability,” Nietzsche writes, “[now] strikes you as an error;” so you cast it off “and fancy that it represents a victory for your reason” (GS 307). But it is less a victory for reason, for *your* reason, than shift in the relations among the drives. “Perhaps this error was as necessary for you then,” Nietzsche continues, “when you were a different person—you are always a different person—as are all you present ‘truths’ . . . What killed that opinion for you was your new life [that is, a new drive] and not your reason: *you no longer need it*, and now it collapses and unreason crawls out of it into the light like a worm. When we criticize something, this is no arbitrary and impersonal event; it is, at least very often, evidence of vital energies in us that are growing and shedding a skin. We negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm—something that we perhaps do not know or see as yet” (GS 307).

³ KSA 9:6[70], 1880, as cited in Parkes, p. 292 and p. 447, note 34.

moment: which drives are strong and active, and which are weak and reactive or passive. “One must have a standard,” writes Nietzsche, speaking of the drives, “I distinguish activity and passivity” (WP 881 note). “What is ‘active’” in a drive? Nietzsche asks. He answers: “Reaching out for power” (WP 657). “Why is all activity...associated with pleasure?...Because doing is an overcoming, a becoming master, and increases the feeling of power” (WP 661). Every drive attempts to extend its power as far as it can, overcoming whatever obstacles stand in its way in the other drives. So Nietzsche will ask a complex set of questions about the drives within you: Which drives command, which drives obey? Which are vigorous, which are decadent? Which are healthy, which are morbid? Which drives act, and which react? And what kind of constellation do the drives compose when taken as a whole? (Already in the *Birth of Tragedy*, what Nietzsche called the Apollinian and Dionysian were simply two drives that expressed themselves simultaneously in tragedy.)

When Nietzsche turned his attention to characterizing the nature of philosophy, he would characterize the philosopher as someone whose most powerful drive is the drive to knowledge, the desire to know—and he recognized this as his own fundamental impulse, around which all his other drives were organized and subordinated. Philosophers like to claim that they are merely interested in “the truth”—but in fact the philosopher is only a kind of occasion and chance through which this particular impulse—the will to truth—is finally able to speak and make itself sovereign. “I have tried to show,” Nietzsche wrote, “what instincts have been active behind all these *pure* theoreticians—how they have all, under the spell of their instincts, gone fatalistically for something that was “truth” *for them*—for them and only for them. The conflict between different systems, including that between epistemological scruples, is a conflict between quite definite instincts” (WP 227).

Indeed, this was the basis of his critique of Socrates, and the kind of thinking Socrates introduced into philosophy. Socrates wandered about Athens asking a single question: “What is?” What is piety? What is justice? What is courage? He addressed these questions to those people he thought would most capable of answering them—a soldier who had proved himself in battle, for instance, would surely be able to tell us what courage is. But like almost all of Socrates’ interlocutors,

the soldier would be unable to answer the question adequately, and would instead be drawn, frustratingly, into a set of inextricable aporias. But the reason for this is clear: the soldier was courageous in battle because, in battle, that was his fundamental instinct, his overriding drive. People whose fundamental drive is to sit around discussing the nature and definition of courage are not necessarily the people who wind up being courageous in battle. This was what Nietzsche called “the inversion of the value-positing drive” that one finds in Socrates—a kind of critique of drives and passions that are not able to justify themselves “rationally.” As Nietzsche wrote in the *Birth of Tragedy*, “While in all productive men it is *instinct* that is the creative-affirmative force, and consciousness acts critically and dissuasively, in Socrates it is instinct that becomes the critic, and *consciousness* that becomes creator—truly a monstrosity *per defectum*” (BT 13, p. 88).

Yet Nietzsche had an extraordinarily double-edged relationship to Socrates, for he recognized that Socrates’ triumph was in fact *not* the triumph of reason over our passions or drives, but rather, the triumph of one particular drive over all the others—namely, the triumph of the drive to knowledge, the will to truth. And he recognized that this passion for knowledge was *his own* fundamental drive as well, which made him not all that different from Socrates, and made him experience his own life as a kind of *fatum*, a fate, a destiny or vocation that he had in no way chosen. At the same time, as he confessed in a letter, sometimes an hour of camaraderie with a total stranger was enough, for him, to call his entire philosophy into question. For who cares if one is right, and in possession of the truth, if it condemns one to isolation from other human beings, who are happily living out their lives steeped in illusion and error?

Nietzsche had a similarly complex relation to religion. The greatness of polytheism in religion, for Nietzsche, was that it was able to give expression to an extraordinarily wide variety of human impulses and drives in the form of gods and goddesses and demons. Monotheism, in turn, could appear only when only *one* of these impulses declared itself to be absolutely sovereign over all the others, and subordinated the other impulses to itself (which is why Nietzsche calls it, at one point, “monoto-theism”). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche presents a famous fable explaining the

transition from polytheism to monotheism (or what he elsewhere calls “monoto-theism”): when one of the gods declared himself to be the only god (the monotheistic god), the other gods (the gods of polytheism) laughed and laughed and slapped their knees and rocked in their chairs—until finally they laughed themselves to death!⁴ Polytheism died of laughter.

Nietzsche identified the drive that comes to the fore in monotheism: the impulse of *ressentiment*, my resentment against the suffering and pain in the world, which lay at the origin of what Nietzsche called *nihilism*. Nihilism is outcome of that drive that ultimate ascribes to life, to *this* life, to this world, a value close to zero, *nihil*, nothingness, in favor of another life, another world, a “truer” world. Despite his reputation of being the thinker of the “death of god” (the monotheistic God), Nietzsche is anything but anti-religious, and saw the creation of new gods and goddesses and demons as one of the highest of human activities. As he wrote to himself in one of his notebooks, “How many new gods are still possible?! [that is, how many new expressions of the impulses are possible!]. As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say, god-forming instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time” (WP 1039). Monotheism, for Nietzsche, is a wholesale impoverishment of the religious impulse (and it is not insignificant that three of the so-called “world religions” today is monotheistic). The fundamental religious question is: what new gods are possible, today, here and now?

Thus, Nietzsche is neither an egoist nor a subjectivist, since neither the ego nor the subject exist—or more precisely, they exist only as effects of the drives.⁵ For this very reason, however, the drives tend to remain largely unknown to the conscious intellect. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche concludes, “However far a man may go in self-knowledge [the Socratic ideal: know yourself!], nothing however can be more incomplete than his image of the totality of *drives* which constitute his being. He can scarcely name the cruder ones: their number and strength, their ebb and flood, their play and

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 201; Part 3, § 8, “Of the Apostates.” For a recent historical treatment of this theme, see Jonathan Kirsch, *God Against the Gods: The history of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York: Viking Compass, 2004).

⁵ See WP 370: “The ‘subject’ is only a fiction: the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all.”

counter-play among one another—and above all the laws of their *nutriment*—remain unknown to him” (*Daybreak* 119). Language does not help us here either: “Words really exist only for *superlative* degrees of these processes and drives; and where words are lacking, we are accustomed to abandon exact observation because there exact thinking becomes painful.... Anger, hatred, love, pity, desire, knowledge, joy, pain—all are names for *extreme* states: the milder, middle degrees, not to speak of the lower degrees which are continually at play, elude us, and yet it is they which weave the web of our character and our destiny” (*Daybreak* 115)

The task Nietzsche set himself—an almost impossible task—was to think without the ego, to think not from the viewpoint of his conscious intellect, but rather from the complex viewpoint of the drives. “*Stop feeling oneself as this phantastic ego!*” Nietzsche admonished himself in one of his notebooks. “*Learn gradually to jettison the supposed individual! Discover the errors of the ego! Realize that egoism is an error! But not to be understood as the opposite of altruism! That would be love of other supposed individuals! No! Get beyond ‘me’ and ‘you’! Experience cosmically!*” And again: “What is needed is *practice* in seeing with *other* eyes: practice in seeing apart from human relations, and thus seeing *objectively!*”⁶

Nietzsche thus used himself, his own body—his own subjectivity, if you will—as a kind of laboratory. For instance, he eventually had to leave his teaching position at Basel because of his failing health: intense migraines, bouts of vomiting, ocular disorders—all of which would not only keep him bedridden for days, unable to read or write, but would also prevent him from *thinking*. But his sickness allowed him to examine health from the viewpoint of his sickness (whereas the healthy are largely *unable* to see their health), and indeed to define what he called the “great health”: not simply the health of those who turns out well, but the even greater health of those who are able to sustain themselves through extraordinary sickness—like Nietzsche himself. Some of Nietzsche most revealing writings are found in his letters. “My existence [has become] a *dreadful burden,*” he wrote to one of his doctors. “I would have rejected it long ago had I not been making the most instructive

⁶ KSA 9:11[7] and KSA 9:11[10], as cited in Parkes, p. 300.

experiments in the intellectual and moral domain in just this condition of suffering and almost complete renunciation—this joyous mood, avid for knowledge, raised me to heights where I triumphed over every torture and almost all despair.”⁷

This is why Nietzsche is a relevant case study for the theme of this conference on the “limitations of subjectivity.” No one was a greater critic of the notion of the subject than Nietzsche, yet there was probably no other philosopher who made use of his subjectivity—which for him meant the body and its drives—as the basis for his philosophy. Nietzsche’s entire critique of traditional metaphysics—his critique of the illusions of the ego, of consciousness, of free will, his critiques of logic, of the categories, of religion, of morality, and so forth—is initially carried out from the perspective of the drives.

Out of this vast array of topics, I want to briefly look at Nietzsche’s analyses of just three phenomena, in order to give a sense of the role that the theory of the drives plays in each of them: his critique of the concept of the *will*, his analysis of *consciousness*, and his theory of the relationship between *morality* and the drives.

II

3. First Problem: The Concept of the Will. Let’s consider first the concept of the will. I can perform an extraordinary magic trick in front of you”: I tell you I am going to raise my arm in two seconds, and two second later, I actually raise my arm. What has happened in this act of magic? Philosophers have long had a name for this trick: it is called free will. I raise my arm in an act of the *will*. But here language again deceives us: we have a single name for what is a complex set of affects and drives. For what it really an act of my *will* that caused my arm to be raised before you? If so, is my talking to you right now an act of will as well? Does my will intervene in the way my lips are moving, the way my hands are gripping the podium, the way I’m shifting on my feet every now and then? The will doesn’t seem to intervene in my digestion, or the beating of my heart, or in the way my nerves are

⁷Letter to Doctor O. Eiser, as cited in Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, p. 20.

transmitting impulses to my brain. Does the will intervene when I absentmindedly scratch my head, or when I go to the bathroom, or when I shift my position when I'm sleeping in order to get more comfortable, or when I stretch my arms in the morning? In all these cases, what is at work is the body, and the conflict of the drives: a resistance builds up, for example, which is released when I shift positions in bed, or stretch, or shift the weight on my feet. At the level of the body, Nietzsche says, "*we are simultaneously the commanders and obeyers*" (38[8]), that is, there is a drive that commands and acts, and a drive that obeys and reacts. In fact, in a well-known text of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche notes that every so-called act of the will includes, at the very least, (1) a plurality of feelings (the feeling of the state "*away from which*," the feeling of the state "*towards which*"; the sensation of this "*from*" and "*towards*" themselves; the accompanying feeling of the muscles); (2) an act of thought, that is, a thought that commands *thus*; and finally (3) an *affect* that accompanies this command, a feeling of force, a feeling of superiority over that which must obey.

Willing is nothing other than this complex constellation of sensation, thought, and affect. But this complex is not the *cause* of my action; it is something that merely *accompanies* the action in consciousness. Willing appears whenever I can associate my "I"—or my "ego"—with the feeling of force that accompanies the action, the feeling of superiority over resistance, the affect of one drive commanding another. I could tell you that I will now make my heart beat, or push my breakfast through my intestines, but my ego hardly cares to associate itself *these* movements that the body likewise undertakes on its own, but are not accompanied by this affect of commanding. Strictly speaking, there is no will, and hence there is neither a weak will nor a strong will. What we call a "strong will" is simply a certain coordination of the drives under the dominance of a single impulse; and a "weak will" is a lack of a center of gravity among the drives, an oscillation or disaggregation among them.⁸

⁸ See N14[219] Spring 1888: "Multiplicity and disaggregation of the impulses, lack of system among them, results as 'weak will'; their coordination under the dominance of a single one results as 'strong will'—in the first case it is oscillation and the lack of a center of gravity; in the second precision and clarity of direction."

4. Second Problem: The Problem of Consciousness. Second problem: What is the role of consciousness? “We could think, feel, will, and remember, and we could also ‘act’ in every sense of that word,” Nietzsche writes, “and yet none of all this would have to ‘enter our consciousness’ (as one says metaphorically). The whole of life would be possible without, as it were, seeing itself in a mirror” (GS 354). What then is the use of consciousness for life, that is, for the drives—since in the main it would appear to be superfluous? “For the longest time, conscious thought was considered thought itself,” Nietzsche suggests. “Only now does the truth dawn on us that *by far the greatest part of our mind’s activity remains unconscious and unfelt*” (GS 333).

Here’s a non-Nietzsche example of this idea: we’ve all had the experience of forgetting a telephone number that we nonetheless call frequently. How do we finally recall the number to mind? We simply pick up the phone and start dialing, since we dial the number so often that our fingers remember how to dial it, and it’s only when our fingers start dialing that we recall the number consciously. As Dewey says somewhere, there’s a kind of knowledge, a kind of memory, which is lodged directly in our body, in our muscles. Another example: I presume most of us here know how to type, and we spend a good part of our days tapping away at our computers. Yet if I asked you, right now, to tell me which letters, on the keyboard, are immediately to the left and right of, say, the letter “V,” I suspect that only a small percentage of us would be able to give the correct answer—even if we closed our eyes and imagined typing at our keyboards in our heads. Does that mean you’re lying to me when you say you know how to type, since you clearly have a limited knowledge of the keyboard? On the contrary, you have an excellent knowledge of the keyboard, but that knowledge is lodged in your body, in your hands and fingers, and in this case I suspect most of us would have difficulty calling that information to consciousness even if we wanted to. (The sequence of letters, by the way, is C, V, B—but I know that only because I’m sitting at my computer typing this paper.).

Even if we recognize such knowledge as habit, or as a motor skill, this is nonetheless the type of knowledge possessed by, for instance, great musicians or great athletes, a knowledge, Nietzsche says, that has been *incorporated* (GS 11), in the literal sense of that term—knowledge that

has been made corporeal, that is, it has been made a fundamental drive of the body, even if, initially, it passed through consciousness, and was incorporated through discipline and training. It is knowledge that has become, so to speak, instinctual—knowledge that we no longer have to “think” about. And for this reason, as Nietzsche writes in the *Gay Science*: “‘Instinct’ is, of all the kinds of intelligence that have been discovered so far—the most intelligent” (GS 218). We stand amazed before consciousness, but “the truly surprising thing is rather the body.”

What about a thought, then, that does manage to make it to consciousness? “It comes up in me,” Nietzsche writes, “Where from? How? I simply don’t know. It comes, independently of my will, usually surrounded and obscured by a mass of feelings, desires, aversions, and also other thoughts....One pulls it [the thought] out of this mass, cleans it off, sets it on its feet, and then sees how it stands and how it walks—all of this in an astonishing *presto* and yet without any sense of hurry. Just *who* does all this—I have no idea, and I am surely more a spectator than originator of this process.”⁹ In other words, “‘Being conscious’ is not in any decisive sense the *opposite* of what is instinctive,” since most of our conscious thinking is itself secretly guided and forced into certain channels by our instincts (BGE 3).

Why then do we have consciousness? What role does consciousness play in relation to the drives? Nietzsche, of course, has a thesis about this. “It seems to me,” Nietzsche writes, again in the *Gay Science*, “that the subtlety and strength of consciousness always were proportionate to a man’s (or animal’s) *capacity for communication*, and as if this capacity in turn were proportionate to the *need for communication*.... Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to *consciousness* is only the smallest part of this—the most superficial and worst part—for only this conscious thinking *takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication*, and this fact uncovers the origins of consciousness....My idea is that consciousness does not really belong to man’s individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature....Fundamentally, all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual; there is no doubt of that. But as

⁹ KSA 11:38[1] = *Late Notebooks*, 38[1], p. 34.

soon as we translate them into consciousness *they no longer seem to be*....Consequently, given the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible, ‘to know ourselves,’ each of us will always succeed in becoming conscious only of what is not individual but ‘average’....Whatever becomes conscious *becomes* by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid....All becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization....We ‘know’ (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be *useful* in the interests of the human herd, the species.” (GS 354).

This equation of consciousness and language in the service of the existence of our herd or species existence is at the source of some of Nietzsche’s best-known analyses. Even at the level of perception, as Leibniz had already showed, what we become conscious of is not all perceptions in general (not perception of infrared or ultraviolet light); we have senses only for a selection of perceptions, “those with which we have to concern ourselves in order to preserve ourselves” (WP 505). Likewise, even our “inner experience”—that seemingly most personal and most immediate of experiences—is subject to the same falsification. “Inner experience,” Nietzsche writes, “enters our consciousness only after it has found a language the individual understands—i.e., a translation of a condition into conditions familiar to him—; ‘to understand’ means merely: *to be able to express something new in the language of something old and familiar.*” (WP 479). In other words, “the entire apparatus of [consciousness] is an apparatus for abstraction and simplification—directed not at knowledge but at taking possession of things” (WP 503). “Everything of which we become conscious is arranged, simplified, schematized, interpreted through and through” (WP 47). “One should not understand this compulsion to construct concepts, species, forms, purposes, laws (“a world of identical cases”) as if they enabled us to fix the *real world*; but as a compulsion to arrange a world for ourselves in which our existence is made possible” (WP 521).

“To this day the task of *incorporating* knowledge and making it instinctive is only beginning to dawn on the human eye and is not yet clearly discernible; it is a task that is seen only by those who

have comprehended that so far we have incorporated only our errors and that all our consciousness relates to errors” (GS 11).

(One of Nietzsche’s great phrases is to have said that we are entering a phase of the modesty of consciousness—despite the fact that people think that cognitive science is going to be the hot topic of the future.)

5. Third Problem: The Function of Morality. But this, thirdly, is where the question of morality enters the picture for Nietzsche, and intervenes in the theory of the drives. Even for Nietzsche, drives are different from instincts—instincts in animals, for instance, are largely predetermined (hawks fly, lions hunt, beavers build dams), whereas the drives are not: they are not predetermined. Humans, Nietzsche likes to say, are undifferentiated animals. Since the drives are not completely determined, one of the primary functions of what we call “morality” is to establish an order or ranking among our various drives. “Wherever we encounter a morality,” Nietzsche says, “we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses...Now one and now another human impulse and state held first place and was ennobled because it was esteemed so highly” (GS 116, 115). Consider any list of impulses—they are almost immediately categorized as virtues and vices: industriousness is a virtue, sloth is a vice; obedience is a virtue, defiance and insubordination are vices; chastity is virtuous, promiscuity a vice; these days, not smoking is a virtue, smoking is a vice. When Nietzsche inquires into the *genealogy* of morality, he is inquiring into the *conditions* of any particular moral ranking of the impulses: why certain impulses are selected *for* and certain impulses are selected *against*.

Now we know that Nietzsche argues that the *value* inherent in most moral rankings is the value of what he calls the “herd instinct,” that is, the impulses that were selected *for* were those that served the instincts of the community, the furtherance of the “species”: that is, ‘unegoistic,’ drives such as self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, and so on. More generally, Nietzsche would argue that herd morality is in fact an instinct *against Life*: a paradoxical situation in which Life turns against itself. But

there is no distinction between nature and artifice here: it is not as if we could simply remove the mechanisms of morality and culture and somehow allow the drives to exist in a “free” and “unbound” and “liberated” state: there is no such thing, except perhaps as an Idea (in the Kantian sense). The impulse toward the herd, toward the community, is itself a drive, in competition with the other drives: we never leave the domain of the drives. Kant liked to say that we can never get beyond our representations; Nietzsche surmises that what we can never get beyond is the reality of the drives (BGE 36). But in fact, the drives and impulses are always *assembled* or *arranged* in different ways, in different individuals, in different moralities—which is why Nietzsche always insisted that there are a plurality of moralities (and what he found lacking in his time was an adequate *comparative* study of moralities.)

I might note, in passing, that Deleuze and Guattari take up this Nietzschean schema in *Anti-Oedipus*, since what they call “desire” in that text is nothing other than the state of the impulses and drives. “The drives,” they tell us, “are simply the desiring-machines themselves” (AO 35). Moreover, it was in Pierre Klossowski’s book on Nietzsche, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, that Deleuze and Guattari found a way of solving a problem that had perplexed their predecessors—namely, the relation between Marx and Freud, the relation between political economy (which is social) and libidinal economy (which seems individual). As Deleuze and Guattari write: “Klossowski indicates to us the only means of bypassing the sterile parallelism where we flounder between Freud and Marx by discovering...*how the affects or drives form part of the infrastructure itself*” (AO 63). When Deleuze says that the drives are themselves economic, that they are already part of what Marx called the infrastructure, he is simply reiterating, in his own manner, Nietzsche’s thesis that our drives are always assembled—ordered and ranked—but morality. What Deleuze means by this is fairly easy to comprehend theoretically, I think, even if its practical consequences are highly complex.

There is a school of economics, for instance, that sees human beings as rational agents to who always seek to maximize their interests. But Deleuze distinguishes between our conscious interests and our unconscious drives. Someone may have an interest, say, in becoming an academic, so he or she

applies to the university, takes courses, writes an thesis, attends conferences, goes on the job market in hopes of securing a job, finding an academic position. You may indeed have an interest in all that, which you can pursue in a highly rational manner. But that interest exists as a possibility only within the context of a particular social formation—Marx would say, our current capitalist formation. If you are capable of pursuing that interest in a concerted and rational manner, it is first of all because your drives are determined by the social formation that makes that interest possible. Your drives have been constructed, assembled, and arranged in such a manner that your desire is positively invested in the system that allows you to have this particular interest. This is why Deleuze can say that desire as such is always positive. Normally, we tend to think of desire in terms of lack: if we desire something, it is because we lack it. But Deleuze this is how Deleuze reconfigures the old concept of desire: what we desire—that is, what our drives are invested in—is a social formation. Lack appears only at the conscious level of interest, because the social formation—the infrastructure—in which we have invested our desire has produced that lack.

This is the reason Deleuze argues that the fundamental problem of political philosophy is one that was formulated most clearly by Spinoza: “Why do people fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” (AO 29). “As Reich remarks, the astonishing thing is not that some people steal or that others occasionally go out on strike, but rather than all those who are starving do not steal as a regular practice, and all those who are exploited are not continually out on strike” (AO 29). The answer to this problem is simple: it is because our desire—that is, our particular drives and affects—are not our own, so to speak. They are, if I can put it this way, part of the capitalist infrastructure; they are not simply your own individual mental or psychic reality (AO 30). Nothing makes this more obvious than the effects of marketing, which are aimed entirely at the direct manipulation of the drives, such that at the grocery store—to use the most obvious example—I almost automatically reach for one brand of toothpaste rather than another, or more accurately, I have a fervent interest in having my teeth cavity-free and whiter than white, and my breath fresher than fresh.

(The same mechanism is evident in elections, where it is well known that people vote for a candidate based less on their interests than their desires, in this Deleuzian sense).

In Deleuze, the difference between interest and desire parallels the difference between the rational and the irrational. “Once interests have been defined within the confines of a society, the rational is the way in which people pursue those interest and attempt to realize them” (DI 262-263)—the interest for an academic job, or cavity-free teeth. “But underneath that,” Deleuze continues, “you find desires [or drives], investments of desire that are not to be confused with investments of interest, and on which interests depend for their determination and very distribution: an enormous flow, all kinds of libidinal-unconscious flows that constitute the delirium of this society” (DI 263). As Deleuze will say, “Reason is always a region carved out of the irrational—it is not sheltered from the irrational at all, but traversed by it and only defined by a particular kind of relationship among irrational factors. Underneath all reason lies delirium and drift. Everything about capitalism is rational, except capital...A stock market is a perfectly rational mechanism, you can understand it, learn how it works; capitalists know how to use it; and yet what a delirium, it’s nuts [it is determined by people’s drives]...It’s just like theology: everything about it is quite rational if you accept sin, the immaculate conception, and the incarnation,” which are irrational elements.”¹⁰

III

6. *Fatum* and the Eternal Return. So here we have three of Nietzsche’s most characteristic analyses—of the will, of consciousness, and of morality—all of which are carried out from the viewpoint of the drives. But there is a final theme in Nietzsche’s theory of the drives that takes us perhaps to the deepest point of our question about the limitations of subjectivity, and brings us to the question of Nietzsche’s madness, and what happened on the streets of Turin in January of 1889. (In turn, the question of Nietzsche’s madness will be tied to Deleuze’s interest in the question of

¹⁰ “On Capitalism and Desire,” interview with Deleuze and Guattari in *Actual*, reprinted in *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, ed. Sylvère Lotinger, trans. Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p.

schizophrenia.) By this time, Nietzsche had taken his theory of the drives and extended it to an interpretation of the physical world as well. In a crucial passage of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche asks: “Suppose nothing else were ‘given’ as real except our world of desire and passion, and we could not get down, or up, to any other ‘reality’ besides the reality of our drives....Is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this ‘given’ would not be *sufficient* for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or ‘material’) world?...In the end, not only is it permitted to make this experiment; the conscience of *method* demands it” (BGE 36). This would lead to Nietzsche to formulate his concept of the “will to power”: the idea that *all* phenomena could be understood in terms of the model of drives, that is, in terms of an inner nature defined by the will to extend its power as far as possible.

At the same time, however, Nietzsche own drives, so to speak, were continuing on their own trajectory. In another note in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche spoke of a kind of “recalcitrant core” that lies within each of us. “At the bottom of us, really ‘deep down,’” he wrote, “there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. Whenever a cardinal problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable ‘this is I’....At times we find certain solutions of problems that inspire strong faith in *us*; some call them henceforth *their* ‘convictions.’ Later—we see them only as steps to self-knowledge, signposts to the problem we *are*—rather, to the great stupidity we are, to our spiritual *fatum*, to what is *unteachable* very ‘deep down.’” (BGE 231).

What then was Nietzsche’s cardinal problem? If all our thoughts are the signs of a play and combat of our affects and drives, then the ultimate question for Nietzsche was to ask: What is the highest possible affect of the human soul, the healthiest and most vigorous impulse, the most affirmative drive? He found his answer in the *eternal return*, an active and affirmative impulse that stood opposed to the reactive and negative impulse of resentment that, for Nietzsche, lay at the origin of the movement of nihilism. Rather than an impulse that turned against the drives and *denied* life (in favor of another life), the eternal return is an impulse that *affirms* life, that wills to repeat this

same life, with its constellation of impulses, eternally, carrying life itself to the nth power. But the eternal return must not be understood simply as a doctrine in Nietzsche's philosophy. Rather, the eternal return was first of all a *lived experience*, which was revealed to Nietzsche in Sils-Maria, high in the Swiss Alps, in August of 1881, and experienced as an impulse, an intensity, a high tonality of the soul—and indeed as the *highest* possible tonality of the soul. But for this reason, the eternal return, as a lived experience, as a drive, was fundamentally incommunicable, or was communicable only on the condition of being fundamentally falsified. For was this not the result of all the Nietzschean analyses we have just examined—namely, that the drives find an expression in consciousness and in language only on the condition of being fundamentally inverted and falsified, reduced to what is common and average?

Pierre Klossowski has developed a specific terminology for analyzing this problem, proposing a complex distinction between what he calls impulses, phantasms, and simulacra. The impulses are the drives themselves, with their rises and falls in intensity—manias and depressions—which have no meaning or goal in themselves. Second, these impulses give rise to what Klossowski calls phantasms, which is a kind of *obsessional image* produced within us by the unconscious forces of our impulsive life, and which is what makes each of us a particular case, and constitutes the incommunicable depth and singularity of the individual soul. Third, what Klossowski calls “simulacrum” is simply a willed reproduction of a phantasm—in a literary, pictorial, or even conceptual form—that simulates this invisible agitation of the soul. What we know as Nietzsche's “philosophy,” for Klossowski, is nothing other than the simulacra Nietzsche created in order to express his own phantasms (whether in concepts such as the “will to power,” or figures such as Dionysus and the Crucified, or in literary productions like that of *Zarathustra*). What is the aim or goal of this three-fold circuit, its intention? “Nietzsche's unavowable project,” writes Klossowski, “is to act *without intention*: the impossible morality. The total economy of this intentionless universe creates intentional beings. The species ‘man’ is a creation of this kind—*pure chance*—in which the intensity of forces is inverted into *intention*: the work of morality. The function of the simulacrum is *to lead human*

intention back to the intensity of forces, which generate phantasms."¹¹ But what exactly does this mean: "to lead human intention back to the intensity of forces," the intensity of the drives?

7. The Euphoria at Turin. On this question, perhaps the most important texts in Klossowski's book on Nietzsche is the penultimate chapter entitled "The Euphoria of Turin," which examines Nietzsche's breakdown and madness through an analysis of the letters and notes Nietzsche dashed off during the week of December 31, 1888 through January 6, 1889, before Nietzsche's final collapse?

There are two obviously problematic readings of Nietzsche's madness. One would say that if you think like Nietzsche you will go mad, that madness is the logical outcome of his philosophy. The other would say, no, the madness was caused by a syphilitic infection, or some other cause external to the work itself, having nothing to do with his philosophy per se. Klossowski cuts a kind of middle path between these two extremes. No one, he says, was more aware than Nietzsche of the tension between the *incoherence* of the impulses and the *coherence* of the ego that makes these impulses a property of the self. This is, at least in part, what Nietzsche meant by the famous phrase of *Ecce Homo*, "Dionysus versus the Crucified." Dionysus is the god of metamorphoses, of affirmation, who affirms the healthy and strong impulses in all their incoherence. The Crucified is the god of the weak, of gregariousness, of the herd, the defender of the responsible self. This is why Klossowski emphasizes the importance of Nietzsche's migraines, for it was precisely when the lucidity of Nietzsche's brain was suspended that his self would be broken down into a kind of lucidity that was much more vast, but more brief (p. 31), a lucidity in which these mute forces and impulses of the body were awakened. By examining these alterations in the valetudinarian states of his illness, Nietzsche was searching for a new type of cohesion between his thought and the body as a *corporealizing* thought—that is, the body no longer as a property of the self or the ego, but rather as the fortuitous locus of the impulses or drives. Nietzsche, in other words, wanted to use his own

¹¹Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, p. 140.

lucidity in order to penetrate into the shadows of the impulses or drives. But this was the paradox: How can one remain lucid if, in order to penetrate the shadows of the impulses, one must destroy the very locus of lucidity, namely, the self or the ego? For a long time, Nietzsche was content to simply observe this to-and-fro movement between the incoherence of the impulses and drives (intensity) and the coherence of the self (intention).

What happened at Turin, then? It was the moment of apotheosis, where Nietzsche finally led “human intention back to the intensity of forces.” “Nietzsche,” writes Klossowski, “was never more lucid than during these final days in Turin. *What he was conscious of was the fact that he had ceased to be Nietzsche*, that he had been, as it were, emptied of his person.”¹² Given everything we have just analyzed, it would obviously be wrong to suggest that what happened to Nietzsche in Turin was that he suddenly lost his reason and began to identify his ego with personages such as Caesar, Dionysus, the Crucified, Carlo Alberto, Prado, Lessups, Astu, and others, since Nietzsche had already shown that the ego was a kind of illusion, a simulacrum, and that reason itself was simply a certain “system of relations between various drives. more precisely, Nietzsche the professor had had lost (or abrogated) his identity, and lucidly abandoned himself to the incoherence of the impulses, each of which now received a proper name of its own. The fact that he could sign several of his letters as “The Crucified,” that he choose the physiognomy of Christ to mask the loss of his own identity, shows the enormity of Nietzsche’s ecstasy: Dionysus and the Crucified are no longer in opposition, but were held in a tenuous equilibrium within Nietzsche himself, at least during that long week before his collapse. (Indeed, Nietzsche had already suggested, in a letter from the previous year, that he himself had passed through all the stages of nihilism, that he himself had experienced all the reactive drives that give rise to nihilism.) Nietzsche’s delirium, in other words, can be understood to have passed through a series of intensive states, in which each of his impulses and drives in turn received various proper names, some of which designate his allies, or manic rises in intensity (Dionysus, Prado, Lesseps, Chambie, “honest criminals”), and others of which designate his enemies,

¹²Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, p. 235.

or depressive falls in intensity (the Crucified, Caiaphus, William Bismark, the “antisemites”). The ultimate apotheosis appears in the final lines of his last letter, to Jakob Burckhardt: “The unpleasant thing, and one that nags my modesty, is that at root *every name in history* is I”—in other words, Nietzsche has become a chaos of pure oscillations invested by “all the names of history” (and not, as certain psychoanalysts would have it, by “the name of the father”).

The lucidity of Nietzsche’s madness is attested to by the witness of two of Nietzsche’s closest friends. On January 21, 1890, one year after Nietzsche’s collapse in Turin, Peter Gast (Nietzsche’s amanuensis) visited his friend at the asylum in Jena. “He did not look very ill,” Gast later wrote, “I almost had the impression that his mental disturbance consists of no more than a heightening of the humorous antics he used to put on for an intimate circle of friends. He recognized me immediately, embraced and kissed me, was highly delighted to see me, and gave me his hand repeatedly as if unable to believe I was really there.” But going for long walks with Nietzsche every day, Gast could see that he did not want to be “cured”: “it seemed—horrible though this is—as if Nietzsche were merely feigning madness, as if he were glad for it to have ended this way.” These observations correspond with Franz Overbeck’s feelings when he came to see Nietzsche a month later, in February: “I cannot escape the ghastly suspicion . . . that his madness is simulated. This impression can be explained only by the experiences I have had of Nietzsche’s self-concealments, of his spiritual masks. But here too I have bowed to facts which overrule all personal thoughts and speculations.”¹³

Although Klossowski, curiously, does not cite these observations by Gast and Overbeck, he nonetheless poses the inevitable question: Where does Nietzsche’s thought arrive at in this [simulation of] madness? “Nietzsche’s obsessive thought,” Klossowski suggests, “had always been that events, actions, apparent decisions, and indeed the entire world have a completely different aspect from those they have taken on, since the beginning of time, in the sphere of language. Now he [Nietzsche] saw the world beyond language: was it the sphere of *absolute muteness*, or on the contrary

¹³Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 340-341.

the sphere of *absolute language*?” (p. 251). Klossowski necessarily leaves the question unanswered. Earlier in the book, he cites a note from the spring of 1888 in which Nietzsche exhibited a certain guardedness about his own condition that obviously waned at the end of the year. It is entitled “The Most Dangerous Misunderstanding,” and it concerns those who are taken to be sick or mad. Does their intoxication stem from an over-fullness of life, Nietzsche asks, or from a truly pathological degeneration of the brain? How can one discern the *rich* type from an *exhausted* type? This was Nietzsche’s double fear as expressed in *Ecce Homo*: the fear of being for a prophet, but also the fear of being taken for a “buffoon for all eternity” (p. 86). A year after he published his book on Nietzsche, Klossowski would publish a book entitled *Living Currency* [*La Monnaie Vivante*], where he suggested that our modern industrial and capitalistic order is itself a kind of caricature of Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal return, insofar as the flows and metamorphoses of capital and commodities, with neither aim nor goal, are themselves a concrete form of the drives, but now placed entirely in the gregarious needs and desire of “the herd,” in malicious parody of political economy.¹⁴ And was this not the same point that was reached in Christian demonology, in which the demonic is not really the opposite of the divine, Satan is not the Other, the pole farthest from God, the absolute antithesis, but something much more bewildering and vertiginous: *the Same*, the perfect double, the exact semblance, the *döppelgänger*, the angel of light whose deception is so complete that it is impossible to tell the imposter (Satan) apart from the “reality” (God)? In this sense, the Jesus’ Temptation and the Spanish Inquisition were not episodes in the great antagonism of Good versus Evil, but variants on this complex insinuation of the Same: How does one distinguish a revelation from God from a deception of the devil, or a deception sent by God to tempt men of little faith from a revelation sent by the devil to simulate God’s test (God so closely resembling Satan who imitates God so well...).

Perhaps Spinoza reached a similar point in the *Ethics*, where a violent atheism becomes indiscernible from an unrepentant pantheism. In any case, it seems to me that this is the point where Nietzsche’s madness leaves us, at the end of this trajectory through his theory of the drives, a point that is

¹⁴Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, p. 171.

“beyond good and evil” because it renders them indiscernible and internalizes the difference between them. It is in this sense that Nietzsche is the thinker who has truly taken us the furthest in the exploration of the limits of subjectivity.

NOTES